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COMMENT

An End to Grazing Lease Litigation:
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in the Western United States

JAMIE RYAN POOL*

I. INTRODUCTION

Ranching of cattle and other animals in the western United States (U.S.) has traditionally been considered the “backbone” of many rural areas and communities.¹ Ranchers have grazed their livestock on vast rangelands since the 1500s in the southwestern U.S. and since the 1800s elsewhere in the West.² Until 1891, the federal government primarily sought to “dispose” of public lands through “[giving] or [selling] millions of acres of the public domain to homesteaders, railroads, and new states, among others.”³ Even with this disposal of lands, a rancher could generally graze his livestock wherever he wished, as long as it was on public land.⁴ In 1934, Congress passed the Taylor Grazing Act,⁵ which regulated grazing on public rangeland by requiring that ranchers first obtain exclusive grazing permits for

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3. Id. at 519.
4. Andersen, supra note 1, at 1273.
portions of federal land.6 The Taylor Grazing Act, along with the later Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 19767 and the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978,8 granted the Secretary of the Interior the authority to develop and promulgate these regulations on public rangeland.9 Because of the former federal land disposal policy and the later regulation of grazing on public land, modern grazing generally takes two different forms: (1) grazing on state owned land; and (2) grazing on federal land administered by the Bureau of Land Management or the U.S. Forest Service.

In the western U.S., ranching often requires large areas of public rangeland because landowners collectively own only a small portion of each state as private property. As a result, ranchers often lease or obtain permits for additional portions of public rangeland to augment the land area that will support their livestock. As of January 1, 2006, in Arizona for example, 86% of the state was suitable for livestock grazing and only 16% of this land was privately owned.10 However, in order to increase profitability and compete with others, ranchers have tended to increase their herd sizes to the point that they overgraze and damage the rangeland ecosystem.11 Consequently, public land’s ability to sustain native flora and fauna has decreased.12 Environmental organizations, observing this decline in the ecosystem, argue that grazing causes significant environmental damage. They want livestock either removed from public land that has been overgrazed or at least reduced in number.13 On both state and federally owned rangeland, environmental

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6. Andersen, supra note 1, at 1273.
9. See generally Pendery, supra note 2, at 515, 519-22.
12. Id.
13. Andersen, supra note 1, at 1274.
organizations have pursued a strategy of both participation in grazing lease auctions and, when that does not work, litigation to remove or reduce livestock from public land. This litigation has tended to be time-consuming, is costly to the administrative agencies managing public lands, and has created an extremely hostile public and legislative reaction to the environmental organizations and their interests.

This comment will discuss the litigation associated with environmental organizations’ attempts to out-bid ranchers and ranching associations for public grazing leases on state and federally owned rangeland in the western U.S. Section II of this comment will examine the history of state and federally owned rangeland and its auction process. Section III will discuss several environmental organizations and their interests in rangeland protection, and Section IV will describe the grazing lease litigation problem in detail. Section V will analyze the negative legislative and agency reactions to environmental organizations’ legal victories. Finally, in Section VI, this comment will propose state and federal legislation and agency regulatory changes designed to encourage the adoption of alternative dispute resolution techniques to reduce or eliminate western grazing lease litigation.

II. HISTORY AND PURPOSE OF PUBLIC GRAZING LAND

There is a great deal of public rangeland throughout the western U.S. that is used by ranchers and ranching associations to graze livestock. The U.S. granted some of this rangeland to individual states when they were admitted into the Union. The


federal government owns the rest, which is administered by various federal agencies.

A. State Managed Rangeland

It was federal policy to dispose of public domain land until 1891, when the federal government shifted to retaining much of it for internal management and administration. When expanding the Union westward, Congress had to determine whether the federal government or new state governments should retain ownership of the public domain land comprising much of the western territories. In the end, millions of acres of public domain land were granted to the new states so that any sale or lease revenues generated from them would support the establishment and maintenance of state public schools. Two states in particular are home to prodigious litigation by environmental organizations regarding grazing leases on these school lands—Arizona and Idaho.

In Arizona, state owned rangeland is any land entrusted to the state under the Arizona New Mexico Enabling Act (Enabling Act). As mentioned above, Congress reserved much of this land to support state public schools. Historically, Arizona accomplished this objective through the sale or auction of grazing leases on the land. The Enabling Act prohibited any sale or lease of the school-trust land unless it was to the “highest and best bidder at a public auction.” In light of the dissipation of

17. Pendery, supra note 2, at 519.
18. Id. at 520.
20. Id.
22. Id. § 25.
land assets granted to other states after their admission into the Union. Congress specifically wrote the Enabling Act so that it would “severely circumscribe the power of the state government to deal with the assets of the common school trust.” Members of Congress were upset that corrupt state legislatures had permitted the disposal of school lands in ways that did not raise the money necessary to support public schools. The Arizona Constitution adopted by reference large sections of the Enabling Act, and the Arizona Legislature drafted laws that provided for the administration of the school-trust lands by the Arizona State Land Department (SLD) pursuant to the Arizona Constitution.

Under Section 37-102 of this legislation, the SLD was tasked with administering “all laws relating to lands owned by, belonging to, and under the control of the state.” Therefore, the SLD is in charge of the school-trust land granted to the state under the Enabling Act. In performing its administrative duties, the SLD subsequently classified much of the school-trust land as land suited only for grazing because it had “no other practicable use.” In order to support the public schools of Arizona, the SLD leases the land classified for grazing to ranchers through a public auction process, which raises revenue for the maintenance of the schools. The Commissioner of the SLD, as provided by statute, awards the leases to the “highest and best bidder.”

Idaho state rangelands have a similar history to those of Arizona. Congress granted these rangelands to Idaho in the Idaho Admission Act (Admission Act), mandating that the rangelands be “disposed of only at public sale, the proceeds to constitute a permanent school fund, the interest of which only
shall be expended in the support of said schools.” 35 These lands could, however, be leased for ten-year periods. 36 As in Arizona, the Idaho Constitution incorporated the school land grants specified in the Admission Act. 37 Idaho mandates that any earnings from the school-trust lands be used to maintain state schools. 38 The Idaho State Board of Land Commissioners (SBLC), as provided for by Section 7 of the Idaho Constitution, 39 is charged with providing for “the location, protection, sale or rental of all the lands” of the public school land endowment. 40

B. Federally Managed Rangeland

For grazing lease litigation purposes, federal public land can be divided into two general categories—that administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and that administered by the U.S. Forest Service (Forest Service). The BLM is an administrative unit of the Department of the Interior, 41 and the Forest Service is an administrative unit of the Department of Agriculture. 42 Each agency is responsible for vast expanses of land owned by the federal government. 43

The BLM is “responsible for the majority of federally-managed rangeland,” 44 and even though some grazing occurs on National Forest System land, “grazing is most commonly associated with the BLM.” 45 The Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 (TGA) was the first federal legislation that substantially regulated grazing on most non-Forest Service federal public land.

35. Id. § 5.
37. Id. at 359-60.
38. Id.
39. IDAHO CONST. art. IX, § 7.
40. Id. § 8.
43. Id. See also Bureau of Land Management, supra note 41.
45. Id.
The TGA authorized the Secretary of the Interior to establish grazing districts and issue “permits to graze livestock on such grazing districts.” However, the regulation and adjudication processes under the TGA were unwieldy and somewhat limited the Act’s effectiveness. The Interior Department created the BLM itself in 1946 to streamline some of this regulation and adjudication.

Thirty years later, Congress rectified some long-standing problems with the TGA by passing the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) to provide the BLM with the statutory authority to manage public rangeland within its jurisdiction similar to that enjoyed by the Forest Service. In addition, Congress required in FLPMA that the BLM manage public rangeland “under principles of multiple use and sustained yield” so that many types of scientific, recreational, and environmental non-use values could be protected.

Concerned that FLPMA did not do enough to protect rangeland resources, Congress in 1978 enacted the Public Rangelands Improvement Act (PRIA). Under PRIA, Congress determined that “vast segments of the public rangelands [were] producing less than their potential for livestock, wildlife habitat, recreation, forage, and water and soil conservation benefits, and for that reason [were] in an unsatisfactory condition.” Congress then reaffirmed the national policy of managing, maintaining, and improving the condition of federal public rangelands so that they would “become as productive as feasible for all rangeland

46. Andersen, supra note 1, at 1274 (citing LYNN JACOBS, WASTE OF THE WEST: PUBLIC LANDS RANCHING (1992)).
47. Id. at 1277.
48. See id. at 1278.
49. See Bureau of Land Management, supra note 41.
51. Andersen, supra note 1, at 1279.
52. 43 U.S.C § 1732(a) (2006).
53. Id. § (a)(8).
55. Id. § 1901(a)(1).
values in accordance with management objectives and the land use planning process established" under FLPMA.  

Forest Service rangeland, like that administered by the BLM, has a complicated regulatory history. In 1891, Congress passed the Forest Reserve (Creative) Act, which granted then-President Harrison authority to establish Forest Reserves out of the public domain land. Harrison used the authority to reserve about thirteen million acres, although the designations only amounted to largely ceremonial map demarcations because Congress provided no funding for federal management. In 1897, Congress finally provided this funding and stated that “[national forests shall not be established except to] protect the forest within the boundaries, or for the purpose of securing favorable conditions of water flows, and to furnish a continuous supply of timber for the use and necessities of citizens of the United States.” In 1905, Congress, at the urging of European-trained forester Gifford Pinchot, “transferred the forest reserves to the Department of Agriculture, named them national forests, and created the Forest Service to manage them.” Under Pinchot, one of the Forest Service’s central purposes became the commercial sale of timber to avoid potential future timber shortages. The practice of encouraging commercial timber sales continued until 1960 when Congress passed the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act (MUSY). MUSY was designed to promote the protection of “recreation, wildlife, and fish and range

56. Id. § 1901(b)(2).
59. Id.
61. Tuholske & Brennan, supra note 58, at 58.
63. Tuholske & Brennan, supra note 58, at 58.
64. Id.
resources” in addition to general timber management. In 1976, Congress passed the National Forest Management Act (NFMA). Under NFMA, Congress required that the Forest Service begin a “nationwide forest planning process for each of the 156 separate units of the National Forest System.” The forest plans resemble zoning maps, and they are used to divide all of the National Forests into different “Management Areas.” Forest plans also contain many procedural “standards and guidelines that control the types of activity that may occur” within each Management Area. Some areas are zoned for “wildlife winter range, riparian areas, semi-primitive recreation, and timber production/wildlife,” in addition to other uses. One of those other uses happens to be livestock grazing.

Contrary to what one might expect, the Forest Service has long considered livestock grazing a legitimate and reasonable use. Since 1897, Congress has allowed the Forest Service to control the permits, herd size, allotments, and season of use in order to prevent any monopolization of rangeland by large commercial grazing operations. Current Forest Service regulations recognize that it continues to be the “policy of Congress that the National Forests are established and shall be administered for outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, and wildlife and fish purposes,” and that the policy requires that the Forest Service “develop, administer and protect the range resources and permit and regulate the grazing use of all kinds and classes of livestock on all National Forest System lands and on other lands under Forest Service control.” Currently, the Forest Service divides land available for grazing into

66. Tuholske & Brennan, supra note 58, at 59.
68. Tuholske & Brennan, supra note 58, at 65.
69. Id.
70. Id.
71. Id.
73. Id. (citing WILLIAM D. ROWLEY, FOREST SERVICE GRAZING AND RANGE-LANDS: A HISTORY (1985)).
74. Id.
75. 36 C.F.R. § 222.1(a) (2009).
“Grazing Allotments” and permits grazing on them only after the development of an “Allotment Management Plan” (AMA). These plans “prescribe the manner in and extent to which livestock operations will be conducted in order to meet the multiple-use, sustained yield, economic, and other needs and objectives as determined for the lands involved.” Each AMA takes into account what uses are both appropriate and feasible, and any subsequent grazing is “planned and managed taking into consideration all the other uses of the area.”

III. ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR INTERESTS IN PUBLIC RANGELAND

Because of the perceived environmental damage caused by overgrazing, many organizations have formed to promote healthy grassland ecosystems by litigating issues involving grazing leases. These organizations operate predominately in the western U.S. where overgrazing is most prevalent. Especially successful organizations include WildEarth Guardians, the Western Watersheds Project, the Center for Biological Diversity, and the Oregon Natural Desert Association.

A. Rangeland Protection Organizations

WildEarth Guardians is a nonprofit organization based out of Santa Fe, New Mexico. Once known as Forest Guardians, it merged with Sinapu, another regional environmental organization, and changed its name in 2008. The new organizational structure enabled WildEarth Guardians to expand its activities to areas in the western U.S. outside of Arizona and New Mexico, and it now maintains offices in Arizona, Montana, Colorado, and

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76. Id. § 222.2(a).
77. Id. § 222.2(b).
78. Id. § 222.1(a)(2)(i).
79. Id.
82. Id.
WildEarth Guardians, in its mission statement, purports to “[protect] and [restore] wildlife, wild rivers, and wild places in the American West.”\(^84\) WildEarth Guardians’ wildlife program aims to “[prevent] extinction and [promote] recovery of imperiled native plants and animals in the West,”\(^85\) and the organization advocates federal endangered species listing for those species at risk because of habitat loss caused by “logging, mining, livestock grazing, [and] oil and gas extraction.”\(^86\) WildEarth Guardians monitors federally listed species to ensure that any protective measures are effective.\(^87\) The organization’s wild places program is dedicated to protecting “public and private land from destruction and restores previously damaged areas throughout the West.”\(^88\)

The Western Watersheds Project (WWP) is a “non-profit conservation group founded in 1993 with 2000 members and field offices in Idaho, Montana, Utah, Wyoming, Arizona and California.”\(^89\) WWP began as the Idaho Watersheds Project (IWP) and is based in Hailey, Idaho.\(^90\) IWP was so successful in grazing lease litigation in Idaho during the 1990’s that it changed its name to WWP and expanded operations to other states. The organization’s goal is to “influence and improve public lands management in [eight] western states with a primary focus on the negative impacts of livestock grazing on 250,000,000 acres of western public lands.”\(^91\) To accomplish this goal, WWP has actively participated with WildEarth Guardians, the Center for Biological Diversity, and the Oregon Natural Desert Association
in jointly bringing lawsuits to prevent overgrazing and grazing lease awards for individuals that habitually permit overgrazing.\textsuperscript{92}

The Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) is a non-profit membership organization based in Tucson, Arizona.\textsuperscript{93} It has approximately 200,000 active members\textsuperscript{94} and has field offices in Alaska, California, Illinois, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington, D.C.\textsuperscript{95} CBD has used evidence of “cattle-grazing abuses on the public lands where they lived” to obtain judicial orders to “remove cows from hundreds of miles of vulnerable desert streams” in order to protect species like the southwestern willow flycatcher.\textsuperscript{96} CBD also successfully ended “major timber operations through-out Arizona and New Mexico and brought an end to large-scale industrial logging in the heritage public lands of the arid Southwest” in order to protect threatened goshawks and owls.\textsuperscript{97}

Finally, the Oregon Natural Desert Association (ONDA) is a “1,200-member grassroots organization”\textsuperscript{98} that works to protect and restore the biological integrity of Oregon’s desert ecosystems.\textsuperscript{99} This has been accomplished by advocating that desert ecosystems receive congressional wilderness designations and protection pursuant to the Wilderness Act of 1964.\textsuperscript{100} When the BLM refuses to propose such designations, ONDA litigates to force the issue.\textsuperscript{101}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Id. See also Oregon Natural Desert Ass’n v. Bureau of Land Mgmt., 531 F.3d 1114 (9th Cir. 2008).
\item Center for Biological Diversity, About the Center, Contact Us, http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/about/contact/index.html (last visited Oct. 26, 2009).
\item Center for Biological Diversity, About the Center, Contact Us, supra note 93.
\item Center for Biological Diversity, About the Center, Our Story, http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/about/story/index.html (last visited Oct. 26, 2009).
\item Id.
\item Id.
\item See generally Oregon Natural Desert Ass’n v. Rasmussen, 451 F.Supp.2d 1202 (D. Or. 2006) [hereinafter ONDA v. Rasmussen].
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
B. Environmental Organization Interests in Public Rangeland

Rangeland protection organizations consider overgrazing such a problem because it greatly damages grassland flora and fauna. For CBD, the increased defoliation and plant trampling that leads to soil erosion and water sedimentation threatens many species of grassland herbivores, avian predators, and fish. For ONDA, overgrazing damages an already delicate high desert ecosystem. Overgrazing depletes desert grasses and vegetation, and the lack of moisture serves as an impediment to their quick renewal. Once the vegetation is removed, what little nutrients exist in the soil are quickly lost to wind erosion. For some organizations like WildEarth Guardians, the interest in overgrazing is twofold: (1) prevent loss of habitat for native flora and fauna; and (2) prevent the degradation of a resource designed and dedicated to the continuing maintenance of public schools.

If overgrazing is such a major environmental problem, one might ask why ranchers and ranching organizations allow it to happen since it affects them too. There is no easy answer, but the principles outlined in the “Tragedy of the Commons” concept may explain why ranchers and ranching organizations have allowed overgrazing.


103. See generally Oregon Natural Desert Association, Public Lands Grazing, supra note 11.

104. Id.


107. See generally Garrett Hardin, The Tragedy of the Commons, 162 Science 1243, 1243-48 (1968). The “Tragedy of the Commons” is a process by which multiple individuals will independently and rationally act in their own interests to destroy a finite public resource, even if this destruction damages everyone in the long-term. Id.
western U.S.,108 so ranchers may believe that they could always move their herds onto another grazing allotment if the one they use becomes overgrazed and can no longer sustain large herds.109 Because the ranchers do not own the public land, there may be no real incentive to prevent degradation.110

IV. GRAZING LEASE LITIGATION PROBLEM

Even though overgrazing is a serious environmental problem, rangeland protection organizations’ litigation to take grazing leases away from those who allow overgrazing has arguably become a bigger problem because it has created a public relations nightmare.111 On state owned rangeland, environmental organizations have litigated to prevent overgrazing and to ensure that school-trust land is healthy enough to support the public schools into the distant future.112 On BLM land, ranching organizations have litigated furiously to prevent any reform of federal rangeland management, and environmental organizations have responded with lawsuits to remove livestock to protect ecosystem health.113 Finally, on Forest Service land, environmental organizations have litigated to simply prevent any grazing leases from going to ranchers who overgraze.114

110. Id. at 2.
111. See generally ARIZ. CATTLEMEN’S ASS’N, BIDDING WARS, supra note 16.
A. Arizona School-Trust Land Grazing Litigation

In Arizona, environmental organizations historically have not had much success in preventing ranchers’ livestock from overgrazing on school-trust land. This pattern of failure changed dramatically in 2001 with the landmark Arizona Supreme Court ruling in *Guardians v. Wells*. In this case, Forest Guardians and Jonathan Tate applied for two different grazing leases of school-trust land. Forest Guardians applied for a “ten-year lease on approximately 5,000 acres of school-trust grazing land” in Coconino County, Arizona, and 162 acres in Santa Cruz County, which was at the other end of the state. Tate applied for almost 16,000 acres of school-trust grazing land in Pinal County, Arizona, north of Tucson. Both Forest Guardians and Tate offered to pay double the amount offered by the then-current lessees when the leases came up for renewal. Both parties informed the Commissioner of the SLD that the leased land would not be grazed; instead, it would be “rested” for the entire period of the lease so that it could recover from apparent overgrazing by the then-current and previous lessees. The Commissioner subsequently denied both of these applications. After an arduous appeals process, the Arizona Supreme Court concluded that the Commissioner had ignored his constitutional duty to consider whether the high bids were in the best interest of the trust and determined that environmental organizations in Arizona could bid on and be awarded grazing leases with the intention of letting the land rest for the entirety of the lease.

116. *Id.* at 366.
117. *Id.*
118. *Id.*
119. *Id.*
120. *Id.*
122. *Id.* at 367.
123. *Id.* at 372.
124. *Id.* at 371-73.
B. Idaho Public School Land Endowment Grazing Litigation

The environmental litigation over grazing leases in Idaho is much more complicated than that in Arizona. IWP and later WWP have undertaken much of the litigation.125 In Idaho, litigation over grazing leases on public school land functionally began in 1993.126 On Sept. 23 of that year, rancher William E. Ingram filed an application with the Idaho SBLC to renew his 640-acre grazing lease.127 At the same time, IWP filed an application to lease the same land subdivision.128 After a contentious auctioning process, in which IWP was the high-bidder for the lease, the SBLC awarded the lease to Ingram.129 IWP appealed, and the Idaho Supreme Court eventually held that the SBLC failed to “provide for the location, protection, sale, or rental of all the lands . . . in such manner as will secure the maximum long-term financial return to the institution to which granted or to the state if not specifically granted.”130 The court also used the legislature’s authority, as granted by Section 8 of the Idaho Constitution, and case law to determine that any bids on grazing leases must be for the “greatest possible amount for the lease of school lands for the benefit of school funds.”131 Subsequently, the court reversed the decision of the SBLC and ordered that new bid auctions take place so that the high-bidder could be awarded the lease.132

In 1999, IWP was again involved in litigation because it was prevented from bidding on grazing leases.133 After IWP’s victory in 1996, the Idaho Legislature amended the Idaho Code by adding a provision that required that the SBLC weigh the benefit

126. IWP I, supra note 14, at 1206.
127. Id. at 1207.
128. Id.
129. Id. at 1208.
130. Id. at 1209 (quoting I D A H O C ONST. art. IX, § 8).
131. Id. at 1209-10 (citing I D A H O C ONST. art. IX, § 8, also citing East Side Blaine County Livestock Ass’n v. State Bd. Land Comm’rs, 198 P. 760 (Idaho 1921).
132. IWP I, supra note 14, at 1211-12.
133. IWP II, supra note 106, at 367-69.
of lease bids for the schools, the state’s interest in a healthy ranching industry, and the increased tax revenue from such industry.\textsuperscript{134} The Idaho Supreme Court held that this provision was unconstitutional with Article IX, Section 8 of the state constitution\textsuperscript{135} and ordered that new auctions be held so that IWP could participate.\textsuperscript{136}

\subsection*{C. BLM Litigation}

Grazing lease litigation on BLM land took a markedly different path from comparable litigation on state rangeland because BLM is a federal agency. On BLM land, ranching organizations brought roughly half of the major lawsuits in response to federal rangeland regulatory reforms. Environmental organizations brought lawsuits largely in response to the eventual failure of these regulatory reforms and focused on removing livestock from BLM land that the organizations believed should receive wilderness designations. In order to understand why the litigation occurred, one must be thoroughly familiar with the rangeland management reform process undertaken during the 1990s.

\subsubsection*{1. Rangeland Reform ’94}

Although Congress passed both FLPMA\textsuperscript{137} and PRIA\textsuperscript{138} in order to improve rangeland management, these Acts were only modestly successful. The BLM has consistently “failed to exercise its modest authority to limit the ecological damage inflicted by intensive grazing.”\textsuperscript{139} In 1993, the Clinton Administration Secretary of the Interior, Bruce Babbitt, attempted to address this continuing environmental damage through the development

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{134} Idaho Code Ann. § 58-310B(2)(a) (2008), \textit{invalidated by IWP II, supra note 106.}
\item \textsuperscript{135} \textit{IWP II, supra note 106, at 369.}
\item \textsuperscript{136} \textit{Id. at 371.}
\item \textsuperscript{139} Nicoll, \textit{supra note 44, at 50-51.}
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
of Rangeland Reform '94, the "first significant proposal to reform grazing practices since the enactment of PRIA in 1978." Rangeland Reform '94 was designed to implement regulations whereby domestic livestock would be "managed to minimize their detrimental impact on federal rangeland." The proposed regulatory changes purported "(1) to improve administration of the BLM grazing program, (2) to restore and improve the ecological condition of the rangeland, and (3) to establish a ‘fair and equitable grazing fee.’" Rangeland Reform '94’s proposed implementation of national standards and guidelines were designed to ensure that "grazing did not interfere with properly functioning ecosystems," and the proposed increase in grazing fees "attempted to establish a fee structure that would result, over the course of three years, in a fee that more closely represented the fair market value of the forage on federal land.”

Ranchers and ranching organizations reacted negatively to the proposed reforms and believed that they would end private grazing on BLM land. Babbitt successfully negotiated a compromise with Congressional Democrats in order to pass Rangeland Reform '94 as part of an appropriations bill. Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives easily passed the bill, but western Senators, frustrated and angered by the proposed regulations, "successfully filibustered and prevented the Senate from considering the range reforms attached to [it].” On November 9, 1993, the western Senators removed the rangeland reforms from the appropriations bill, and Babbitt was forced to pursue an administrative reform solution.

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140. Id. at 52.
141. Id. at 52-53.
142. Id. at 59-60.
143. Id. at 62.
144. Id. at 64.
147. Nicoll, supra note 44, at 66.
148. Id. at 66-7.
149. Id. at 67.
150. Id.
The BLM promulgated the proposed administrative rangeland reform regulations on March 25, 1994, in a somewhat weaker form than they had appeared in the defeated legislative effort.\(^{151}\) After extensive public comment, the BLM promulgated the final rangeland reform regulations on February 22, 1995.\(^{152}\) The final regulations were quite different than the proposed rules. First, the “proposed grazing-fee increase was eliminated from the final version.”\(^{153}\) In addition, the effective date of the regulations was delayed by six months, ensuring that “[they] would not apply to the 1995 grazing season.”\(^{154}\) This meant that ranchers and ranching associations had almost a year to persuade the friendlier Republican Congress to pass a legislative override of the rangeland reform regulations.\(^{155}\) However, the Fundamentals of Rangeland Health (FRH), a key component of Rangeland Reform ’94,\(^ {156}\) were part of the final regulations. The FRH allowed the BLM to “modify grazing practices” to restore and protect proper watershed function, endangered species habitat, and ecological processes.\(^ {157}\) Finally, “the authorized officer [would] take appropriate action”\(^ {158}\) whenever “ecological conditions [were] not being met.”\(^ {159}\) After prospects faded for a legislative override of the rangeland reform regulations,\(^ {160}\) ranching interests prepared to overturn them through the judiciary.\(^ {161}\)

2. Ranching Organization Litigation Over

\(^{151}\) Id. at 70; see also Grazing Administration—Exclusive of Alaska, 59 Fed. Reg. 14,314 (proposed Mar. 25, 1994) (to be codified at 43 C.F.R. pts. 4, 1780, 4100).


\(^{153}\) Nicoll, supra note 44, at 73.

\(^{154}\) Id. at 74.

\(^{155}\) Id.

\(^{156}\) Id.


\(^{159}\) Nicoll, supra note 44, at 75.

\(^{160}\) Id.

\(^{161}\) Id. at 75-76.
Regulatory Reform

The Public Lands Council, a ranching association, and several other grazing organizations filed suit against Babbitt in order to declare that ten provisions of the rangeland reform regulations were an arbitrary and capricious exercise of Babbitt’s authority as Secretary of the Interior.162 The District Court in Wyoming upheld six of the ten challenged provisions—including the FRH provision—as valid exercises of Babbitt’s statutory authority163 under the TGA.164 Babbitt appealed to the Tenth Circuit, which held that three of the four provisions ruled unconstitutional by the District Court were, in fact, also valid exercises of his authority.165 When Public Lands Council appealed to the Supreme Court, the court “unanimously rejected [the appeal] and affirmed the Tenth Circuit.”166 After nearly five years of litigation, almost all of the Rangeland Reform ‘94 regulations went fully into effect on May 15, 2000—just a few months before President Clinton left office. As will be discussed in greater detail in Section V(C) below, these regulations were eventually overturned during the George W. Bush Administration.

3. Environmental Organization Litigation Over BLM Grazing Rights

Since the failure of Rangeland Reform ‘94, environmental organizations like ONDA and WWP have attempted to meet the principles outlined in the FRH through litigation to remove livestock from portions of BLM land.167 In Oregon Natural Desert Association v. Bureau of Land Management,168 ONDA filed a

162. Public Lands Council III, supra note 113, at 744, 748, 750, 752; see Nicoll, supra note 44, at 76.
163. See generally Public Lands Council I, supra note 157, at 1451.
166. Nicoll, supra, note 44, at 787; See Public Lands Council III, supra note 113, at 750.
167. See generally ONDA v. Rasmussen I, supra note 101, at 1202; see also Western Watersheds Project v. Bennett, 392 F. Supp. 2d 1217, 1220 (D. Id. 2005).
lawsuit against the BLM, the Secretary of the Interior, and several local BLM managers to stop a proposed riparian remediation construction project on BLM rangeland in Oregon.\textsuperscript{169} In 1998, the BLM determined that the East-West Gulch in the Beaty Butte Allotment was “failing to meet federal rangeland health standards.”\textsuperscript{170} The BLM concluded, however, that livestock grazing in the area did not significantly affect the declining rangeland health.\textsuperscript{171} The BLM subsequently developed an action plan that was designed to restore the East-West Gulch through the construction of a series of livestock improvements and road relocation from the riparian floodplain to a nearby ridge.\textsuperscript{172} ONDA objected to the construction and preferred that livestock grazing be reduced or ended as an alternative method for riparian restoration.\textsuperscript{173} ONDA performed a wilderness inventory of the area pursuant to agency protocols, determined that multiple wilderness resources might be jeopardized by the construction projects, and submitted it to the BLM. When the BLM refused to alter or halt the action plan, ONDA filed suit. Important to this comment is ONDA’s contention that the BLM violated its National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)\textsuperscript{174} requirements when it “did not consider the full range of alternatives to its proposed action”\textsuperscript{175} and when it “failed to consider new information on wilderness resources.”\textsuperscript{176} The District Court held that the BLM was “obligated under NEPA to consider whether there were changes in, or additions to, the wilderness values within the East-West Gulch and whether the proposed action in that area might negatively impact those wilderness values.”\textsuperscript{177} However, the District Court also ruled that the BLM had not acted in an arbitrary and capricious manner by not considering in greater detail the reduction of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{169} Id. at 1205, 1207.
\item \textsuperscript{170} Id. at 1206.
\item \textsuperscript{171} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{172} Id. at 1207.
\item \textsuperscript{173} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{175} ONDA v. Rasmussen I, supra note 101, at 1207.
\item \textsuperscript{176} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{177} Id. at 1213.
\end{itemize}
grazing in the East-West Gulch.\textsuperscript{178} Once the District Court had ruled in its favor, however, ONDA was able to request and receive a judicial stay on any additional BLM construction in the East-West Gulch until such time as a proper environmental assessment and wilderness inventory had been performed.\textsuperscript{179} This meant that in a new assessment and inventory, the BLM could potentially consider reduction in livestock grazing as an alternative method for riparian restoration that would preserve wilderness resources.

**D. U.S. Forest Service Litigation**

Unlike that on state or BLM rangeland, environmental organization grazing lease litigation with regard to Forest Service land is often unsuccessful.\textsuperscript{180} Occasionally, however, environmental organizations do find some success when pursuing Endangered Species Act (ESA)\textsuperscript{181} claims. In Forest Guardians v. U.S. Forest Service,\textsuperscript{182} Forest Guardians brought suit against the Forest Service, alleging violations of the ESA for failure to adhere to a 1993 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Recovery Plan for the threatened Mexican spotted owl\textsuperscript{183} in parts of eleven national forests in Arizona and New Mexico.\textsuperscript{184} In response to the FWS Recovery Plan, the Forest Service in 1996 “developed

\textsuperscript{178} Id. at 1214.


\textsuperscript{180} See generally League of Wilderness Defenders v. U.S. Forest Serv., 549 F.3d 1211 (D. Or. 2008) (holding that the Forest Service’s Final Environmental Impact Statement for allowing commercial logging adequately evaluated the cumulative effects of past and present grazing); see generally Oregon Natural Desert Ass’n v. U.S. Forest Serv., 550 F.3d 778 (9th Cir. 2008) (holding that effluents from livestock were not a point source within the meaning of the Clean Water Act and, therefore, no state certification was required for issuance of livestock grazing permit).


\textsuperscript{183} Id. at *5.

amendments . . . to their Forest Plans for the eleven national forests in the Southwest Region.”185 The amendments required that the Forest Service “monitor forage use by livestock and other animals in ‘key forage monitoring areas’ and to ensure that forage use does not exceed forage utilization standards during the growing season.”186 The Forest Service intended to modify its management practices prior to the 1996 amendments, so it consulted with the FWS in order to determine whether the new practices would negatively affect the owl.187 The FWS then issued two biological opinions whereby it determined that the 1996 amendments would comply with the ESA and that the pre-1996 practices would not.188

The District Court held that the Forest Service subsequently did not implement the standards outlined in the 1996 amendments and was in violation of the ESA because it failed to alert the FWS that implementation would not proceed immediately.189 Because the Forest Service was not in compliance with the ESA, the court subsequently ordered all livestock removed from the eleven national forests and ordered the Forest Service to “consult with the [FWS] to determine whether the federally protected owls need additional protections.”190

As demonstrated above, environmental organizations have achieved some great successes in removing or limiting livestock on state owned, BLM, and Forest Service rangeland. Because of this success, grazing lease litigation has increased. As a result, the ranching industry, the public, and legislative bodies have developed an extremely negative perception of environmental organizations.

186. Id.
187. Id.
188. Id. at *5.
189. Id. at *21.
V. REACTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS’ LITIGATION

While reduction of overgrazing is a laudable goal, the litigation employed by rangeland protection organizations to achieve it has created a publicity nightmare. Ranchers and other landowners have become increasingly hostile to the environmental organizations’ interests and activities because they have been excluded from the public land they have used for generations, and the legislatures in several states have been pressured by ranching associations to help protect them from unwanted assault by environmental organizations.191 This pressure usually results in state legislatures passing either laws that make it financially more difficult for environmental organizations to outbid ranchers on grazing leases192 or constitutional amendments or laws that prevent environmental organizations’ bids from being considered in the first place.193

Finally, ranching associations have pressured federal agencies like the BLM to dismantle much of the regulatory reform that enabled environmental organizations’ legal victories on federal rangeland.

A. Landowner Reaction

The ranchers who have lost grazing leases are understandably very upset by environmental organizations’ success194 because their families generally have grazed their livestock for generations on public rangeland grazing leases.195 Ranchers have had to increase the size of their herds just to compete and earn a living.196 Unfortunately, as described above, increasing

194. See ARIZ. CATTLEMEN’S ASS’N, BIDDING WARS, supra note 16.
195. Id.
herd size leads to overgrazing and rangeland degradation.\textsuperscript{197} Often, the court-ordered removal of livestock from a grazing lease will jeopardize ranchers’ entire livelihoods.\textsuperscript{198} Once a court grants an environmental organization a legal victory as in \textit{Guardians v. Wells},\textsuperscript{199} in Arizona, it sets a legal precedent that could cause more ranchers to lose their leases.\textsuperscript{200}

\textbf{B. Legislative Reaction}

In Arizona, the SLD has sided with ranchers throughout its existence,\textsuperscript{201} and although the Arizona Supreme Court has since held that environmental organizations like WildEarth Guardians may bid on grazing leases, the decision has not radically changed the policies or preferences of the SLD.\textsuperscript{202} The court’s holding definitely did not change the “political environment in which the agency operates,” and the Arizona Legislature is “even more adverse to change than [the SLD].”\textsuperscript{203} In 2002, the legislature amended several sections of the Arizona Revised Statutes in response to \textit{Guardians v. Wells}\textsuperscript{204} so that successful bidders have to pay for improvements installed by previous lessees.\textsuperscript{205} For environmental organizations like WildEarth Guardians, this legislation presents a problem with bidding on grazing leases because the improvements can be prohibitively expensive and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{197} See generally Oregon Natural Desert Association, Public Lands Grazing, \textit{supra} note 11; see generally General Concepts Related to Overgrazing, http://people.oregonstate.edu/~muirp/genconce.htm (last visited Oct. 26, 2009); see generally \textit{NAT’L RES. DEFENSE COUNCIL & EARTHJUSTICE, supra} note 102, at 1; see generally \textit{NAT’L RES. CONSERVATION SERV., RANGELAND SOIL QUALITY—WIND EROSION, supra} note 105, at 1.
\item \textsuperscript{199} Guardians v. Wells, 34 P.3d 364 (Ariz. 2001).
\item \textsuperscript{200} See \textit{ARIZ. CATTLEMEN’S ASS’N, BIDDING WARS, supra} note 16, at 2.
\item \textsuperscript{201} Fairfax & Issod, \textit{supra} note 36, at 359.
\item \textsuperscript{202} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{203} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{204} An Act Amending Sections 37-284, 37-322.01 and 37-322.03, 2002 Ariz. Legis. Serv. Ch. 204 (S.B. 1274) (West); Fairfax & Issod, \textit{supra} note 36, at 359; \textit{Guardians}, 34 P.3d at 364.
\item \textsuperscript{205} \textit{ARIZ. REV. STAT. ANN. § 37-284(C) (2002), amended by 2002 Ariz. Legis. Serv. ch. 204 (West).}
\end{itemize}
make it impossible to obtain the lease. If an environmental organization is not able to pay for the cost of non-removable improvements installed by the previous lessee, then the lease is awarded to the next best bidder, which would be the other party contesting the lease—the current lessee.

As mentioned above, the Idaho Legislature amended the Idaho Code to prevent organizations like IWP from obtaining grazing leases in order to let the land “rest.” After the Idaho SBLC used this provision to reject IWP’s grazing lease high bid for the second time, IWP was forced to file another lawsuit to acquire the lease. The Idaho Legislature adopted a resolution in 1998 that proposed to amend the section of the Idaho Constitution that allowed IWP to prevail in 1996. The amendment changed the word “disposal” in the section to “sale” in reference to the disposition of trust lands in Section 8. This changed the whole meaning of the sentence upon which the Idaho Supreme Court relied in its 1996 decision—the new language would prevent the legislature from stipulating that the school trust land could be leased in such a way so that it could provide a benefit to the schools. Once restricted to sales alone, IWP and other like-minded environmental organizations would no longer be able to apply for and be awarded grazing leases under Section 8 of the state constitution. Idaho voters approved this amendment in the general election of November 3, 1998. However, the court overturned the amendment because of a procedural technicality, and the legislature has not yet acted to readopt it.

207. See Ariz. Cattlemen’s Ass’n, Bidding Wars, supra note 16, at 2.
209. Id. at 370-71.
211. IWP I, supra note 14, at 1209.
212. See generally IWP III, supra note 210.
213. Id. at 360.
214. Idaho Const. art. XX, § 2 (providing that “[i]f two (2) or more amendments are proposed, they shall be submitted in such manner that the electors shall vote for or against each of them separately”).
C. Agency Reaction to BLM Grazing Reform

The inauguration of George W. Bush on January 20, 2001 marked the end of Rangeland Reform ‘94. Even though Public Lands Council v. Babbitt III had been decided only a few months before, President Bush campaigned on a platform “promising to limit the federal government’s intrusion into extraction activities.” On January 30, 2003, BLM Director Kathleen Clarke promised to rewrite the BLM grazing regulations. When the BLM promulgated its final regulations on July 12, 2006, it undid almost all of the reform instituted in 1995. In particular, the BLM modified the FRH guidelines so that they “no longer have any direct effect on the management of BLM rangeland.” In effect, grazing practices and regulations exist as they did prior to Babbitt’s efforts at reform.

VI. PROPOSED SOLUTIONS INVOLVING ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Because grazing lease litigation by environmental organizations has created such negative reactions from landowners, legislatures, and federal agencies, the only effective way to solve the problem is to reduce the amount of litigation. One way to achieve this goal is through Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), whereby “a neutral third party participates to assist in the resolution of issues in controversy, through processes such as early neutral evaluation, mediation, mini-trial, and arbitration.” When used to resolve environmental disputes, however, ADR has also been referred to as Environmental Conflict Resolution, or ECR. Because environmental and ranching organizations have been especially litigious in

217. Id. at 98.
220. Id. at 105.
attempting to resolve grazing lease disputes\textsuperscript{223} and because the litigation itself takes years to reach completion,\textsuperscript{224} ADR is an efficient avenue for conflict resolution.\textsuperscript{225} ADR has worked to resolve major environmental disputes between a wide variety of stakeholders, and it can work with parties regarding grazing lease disputes as well.\textsuperscript{226} Therefore, state legislatures and Congress should enact laws that authorize and encourage grazing lease disputes to be funneled into ADR systems, and the BLM and Forest Service should renew their commitment to negotiated rulemaking so that ADR is again emphasized for agency rulemaking and adjudication.

A. Environmental Disputes Resolved Through ADR

ADR has been used successfully to resolve a number of environmental disputes, and it is often used when resolving land use conflicts.\textsuperscript{227} In these types of conflicts, multiple stakeholders, each with different concerns and objectives, are usually involved. Because of the sheer number of differing objectives among the parties, litigation can be both time-consuming and costly.\textsuperscript{228} However, by using ADR, stakeholders are generally able to reduce both litigation time and legal expense.\textsuperscript{229} For example, in a dispute over a proposed dam on the Snoqualmie River in Washington, “environmental advocates opposed the project because of their concern over the survival of the river’s ecosystem; farmers were concerned about proposed reductions in water for irrigation; and citizens worried about the potential for uncontrolled suburban sprawl.”\textsuperscript{230} Instead of litigation, the

\textsuperscript{223} See Guardians v. Wells, 34 P.3d 364 (Ariz. 2001); see also \textit{IWP I}, supra note 14, at 1206; \textit{see IWP II}, supra note 106, at 367; see also \textit{Public Lands Council III}, supra note 113, at 728.

\textsuperscript{224} See, e.g., \textit{IWP I}, supra note 14, at 1206; \textit{see also IWP II}, supra note 106, at 367.

\textsuperscript{225} See \textit{Siegel}, supra note 222, at 197.


\textsuperscript{227} Id. at 76, 77.

\textsuperscript{228} See \textit{Siegel}, supra note 222, at 197.

\textsuperscript{229} Id.

\textsuperscript{230} See Nolon & Bacher, supra note 226, at 76.
parties agreed to mediation by two facilitators,231 and “the parties implemented many of the land use recommendations that were agreed upon and formed a basin-wide coordinating council that continued operating for ten years.”232 In Southern California, urban sprawl and development threatened to impair or eliminate the last of the “coastal sage scrub habitat, [which was] vital to the survival of a number of species endemic to the area.” Utilizing a voluntary Natural Communities Conservation Planning (NCCP) scheme, developers, landowners, and local officials successfully created a development plan that set aside “large core habitat reserves and wildlife corridors” and set “tough development limits” in buffer areas around protected habitat cores.233 While this land use dispute did not come to litigation, the parties recognized that “legal proceedings would likely be too rigid, time consuming, costly, and inadequate” to resolve the conflict.234 As these examples show, ADR can effectively and efficiently resolve environmental disputes, and, therefore, it should be used to resolve grazing lease disputes as well.

B. State and Federal Statutory Schemes

As explained above, most grazing lease litigation in state courts occurs because of disputes over the school-trust endowment land granted to states when they were admitted into the U.S. Because Congress has no police power, it cannot force the individual states to adopt and enforce statutes that require ADR in all grazing lease litigation.235 However, Congress could encourage states to enact such legislation through its spending power236 and could condition receipt of funds for a national project on such enactment.237 Furthermore, the fundamental

231. Id.
232. Id. at 76-77.
right to justice would be frustrated if states forced parties to grazing lease conflicts into ADR.238

However, a state statutory scheme promoting and encouraging parties to mediate grazing lease conflicts could be established. Under such a scheme, a state legislature would craft a bill authorizing ADR in its courts in a manner similar239 to the authorization in the Alternative Dispute Resolution Act of 1998 (ADR Act).240 The legislature could then draft the statute so that there were positive incentives for parties to utilize ADR processes like mediation, arbitration, and binding arbitration. The incentives could be: drastically reduced court fees and processing time, immediate access to a qualified official mediator or arbiter, or even a stipend, tax write-off, or other financial bonus directed to the parties in exchange for their use of an ADR solution instead of insisting on a trial. The same could be done with negative financial incentives to prevent parties from choosing trial over the ADR system, but these might be more difficult to enact and enforce than positive incentives. While some of these strategies—especially that of the negative financial incentive to participate in ADR—may be difficult to enact, the benefits of a less-cluttered case docket and less hostility between environmental organizations and ranching interests may outweigh any potential legislative difficulties.

A statutory scheme for the federal courts might not be as difficult to establish as it would be in the individual states. Congress already has an ADR Act,241 so ADR has been authorized and encouraged in federal courts.242 It would be a relatively simple matter to amend the ADR Act to include the same positive and negative incentives outlined above to encourage parties to grazing lease litigation to use the ADR system already in place. However, grazing lease litigation is generally only a problem in the western U.S., and Representatives and Senators from the rest of the country might be disinclined to vote for such an amendment. Political ideologies could also come into play just as they did in the legislative defeat

240. Id. §§ 651-58.
241. Id.
242. Id. § 651(a).
of Rangeland Reform ‘94. The best method for passage would involve compromise on both sides of the political spectrum. Proponents of the legislation might need to assure conservative members that it is intended to reduce court costs and clear the court dockets, not to deny ranchers’ rights or abilities to graze on public rangeland, and proponents should also assure liberal members that the legislation would not remove or hamper environmental organizations’ ability to stop ecological damage caused by overgrazing.

C. Renewed Agency Commitment to Negotiated Rulemaking

During the 1980’s, federal agencies like the BLM and Forest Service embraced negotiated rulemaking, which is sometimes called “regulatory negotiation” or “reg-neg,” as an “alternative to traditional procedures for drafting proposed regulations.”243 Under negotiated rulemaking, “the agency, with the assistance of one or more neutral advisers known as ‘convenors,’ assembles a committee of representatives of all affected interests to negotiate a proposed rule . . . to reach consensus on a text that all parties can accept.”244 Therefore, negotiated rulemaking is a method by which agencies can avoid much of the conflict between parties affected by the rule and the subsequent litigation they use to obtain relief.245 Unfortunately, even though negotiated rulemaking is supported and encouraged by the Negotiated Rulemaking Act of 1990,246 federal agencies have used it with much less frequency over the past decade because of declining budgets and agency reorganization during the George W. Bush Administration, among other factors.247 Generally, agencies no longer voluntarily use negotiated rulemaking.248 Because regulations governing grazing on BLM and Forest Service land have proven to be very contentious, reestablishing and increasing

244. Id. at 988.
245. Id. at 991.
247. See Lubbers, supra note 243, at 996-1005.
248. Id. at 1004.
negotiated rulemaking in these agencies could significantly reduce grazing lease litigation by bringing environmental organizations and ranching interests together to draft grazing regulations that protect both rangeland health and the ranching way of life.

VII. CONCLUSION

Grazing lease litigation is a pervasive problem in the western U.S., and environmental organizations have seen great success in wresting grazing leases away from ranchers. However, this has created a public relations nightmare and has provoked strong legislative and regulatory reactions against environmental organizations. Efforts to reform the public grazing system to promote rangeland health have failed, and no viable solution currently exists. Rangeland Reform ’94 was too limited and watered-down to effectuate the change necessary to prevent the grazing lease cases from clogging western court dockets. A Rangeland Reform ’10 legislative package of amendments to the ADR Act to implement the state and federal statutory schemes outlined in this comment combined with a renewed agency commitment to negotiated rulemaking could result in an end to grazing lease litigation, as we have known it.