

## Working With America

# RACs on the Range

Colorado is the first state to adopt consensus standards for public land health and guidelines for livestock grazing that were developed with Resource Advisory Councils. The agreement, jointly announced by **Colorado Governor Roy Romer** and **Secretary Babbitt**, represents the first time local government, environmental and ranching groups in the state have agreed on a common approach to managing public land.

"It's a new way of doing business," said Romer at a February 3 news conference in Washington. "I think you all know we have polarized pretty hard out there in the West on this. We got the environmentalists, the grazing interests, and the community interests in a room and we worked out this process."

"Today, we move forward with a strong commitment reached by consensus for taking better care of the public lands," Babbitt said. "After years of arguing, we are now moving to implement needed changes that have been agreed to by people from every part of the policy spectrum. These changes were adopted by the Bureau of Land Management after intensive consultation with ranchers and environmentalists, academics and industry. It's quite an accomplishment, and I want to thank all the members of the Resource Advisory Councils and other members of the public who worked to bring this to fruition."



Governor Roy Romer

The three Colorado Resource Advisory Councils are composed of 45 members from a variety of interests, including mineral management, ranching, environmental conservation, recreation, and academia. Each council has at least one member who is an elected official.

**Reeves Brown**, executive vice-president of the Colorado Cattlemen's Association, said he supported the new regulations, and that they can "hopefully provide a realistic measuring stick" of land degradation that ranchers can live with. He said ranchers were concerned about the degree of public participation in the RAC process because range management is a complicated science with many variables that are out of anyone's control, such as droughts, grasshoppers, and migratory elk and deer herds.

"We do not see today's signing as the conclusion to our work," said **Bob Abbey**, the acting BLM state director. "Rather, it is just the beginning of our efforts to work together with all stakeholders to improve the health of the nation's public lands." The document establishes standards that will apply to all users and resource programs on 8.5 million acres of bureau-managed public land in Colorado.

The standards, which went into effect February 12, are aimed at promoting environmentally sound public land use. They include: 1) ensuring healthy upland soils; protecting and/or improving riparian (stream-side) systems; 2) maintaining healthy, productive plant and animal communities; 3) maintaining or enhancing the habitat of threatened or endangered species; 4) ensuring water quality meets minimum

Colorado standards.

Livestock grazing guidelines that were adopted identified the actions that could be used to meet the standards. They include promoting plant health; maintaining sufficient vegetation to protect soil from erosion; ensuring that range improvement projects are consistent with sustaining ecological functions; and taking steps to avoid the spread of noxious weeds. For example, guidelines like reseed and periodic "time-out from grazing" intervals could be used to allow land to regenerate.

The Colorado document amends ten Resource Management Plans for each of the ten Colorado Resource Area Offices. In most cases, the standards

habitat improvement projects that go beyond standard operating procedures.

Some oil and gas industry analysts predict that southwest Wyoming could become the major natural gas producing region in the United States by the year 2015 with up to 10,000 new gas wells drilled in the region's 15.6 million acres within the next 20 years. Departmental solicitors who initially evaluated the proposal asked why the eco-royalty relief is necessary to promote natural gas development in the region?

The recommendation is proposed as a pilot project for a limited geographic area in Wyoming and Colorado for a five-year period. It would then be evaluated to see if it should be continued. The advisory committee report also includes recommendations based on consensus about road standards, streamlining the environmental impact study process, transportation planning, environmental mitigation and monitoring, and opportunities for partnership.



and guidelines add to the existing plan decisions; in a few situations, plan decisions were modified or replaced.

BLM began operating under new administration-sponsored grazing regulations in August, 1995. The regulations charged the agency to develop standards for public land health and guidelines for livestock grazing through local participation and decision-making. The Resource Advisory Councils were created to advise how best to adapt the new regulations to local conditions and circumstances. Each of the 11 Western states is required to use RACs to accomplish this. Colorado was the first to complete the process. Nevada and Utah, among others, are drafting similar guidelines.

## Million Dollar Partnership

Canon U.S.A., National Park Foundation, and NPS

Marking the third year in their partnership, the **National Park Service, the National Park Foundation, and Canon U.S.A.** recently announced that Canon has donated \$1 million to support inventorying, monitoring, and conservation projects in 12 national parks through the "Expedition into the Parks" program. The project brings NPS staff, researchers, and volunteers together to collect critical data, through activities such as wildlife monitoring, habitat mapping, flora and fauna sampling, and photographic surveys, and to perform hands-on conservation and restoration work to protect park natural resources. A panel of senior Park Service resource managers from across the country reviewed 55 proposals and selected 12 projects on the basis of technical merit, scientific validity, potential to achieve real results, and strength of volunteer involvement.

The following NPS projects were selected for inclusion in the program: Acadia National Park, Maine; Big Bend National Park, Texas; Canyonlands National Park and Arches National Park, Utah; Capitol Reef National Park, Utah; Death Valley National Park, California; Dinosaur National Monument, Colorado; Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, Alaska; Hagerman Fossil Beds National Monument, Idaho; Mount Rainier National Park, Washington; Oregon Caves National Monument, Oregon; Padre Island National Seashore, Texas; and Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, California.

The program represents the first and largest of its kind to help conserve and protect natural resources in the National Parks. Funded by Canon U.S.A. through the National Park Foundation, Canon's \$1 million annual grant supports high priority conservation programs throughout the National Park System.

## Investigation Contradicts News Accounts of Abuses in Wild Horse Adoption Program

Fewer than 350 horses sent to meat-packing plants over a recent two-year period were ever wild, federally protected, or managed by the Bureau of Land Management. Those findings—from an investigation by BLM law enforcement officers—contradicts allegations by the Associated Press that wild horses are routinely channeled through the agency's wild horse adoption program and sent to the slaughterhouses by the thousands.

"While any wild horse being sent to slaughter is regrettable, it is obvious that this is occurring to a far, far lesser degree than was alleged," said Interior Department Assistant Secretary **Bob Armstrong**, who ordered the investigation. "In spite of that, I have asked the BLM to continue their top-to-bottom review of the program to ensure that opportunities for abuse are eliminated."

In the course of the investigation, the BLM sent teams of law enforcement agents and wild horse experts to eight horse slaughterhouses in the U.S. and one in Canada. With the cooperation and assistance of meat processing plant owners and managers, these teams reviewed data from the last two years.

They found that about 266,000 horses were slaughtered during 1995 and 1996 and that less than one quarter of one percent, about 350 per year, were at any time wild. In contrast, the wild horse adoption program, which is conducted by the BLM, adopts out about 8,000 horses each year to qualified adopters.

Associated Press reports also alleged that BLM employees were "...among those profiting from the slaughter." Slaughterhouse records reviewed by BLM investigators also contradict this allegation. They revealed that only one BLM employee in the last two years has sold a horse that ultimately went to slaughter. In that particular case, there was no evidence of profiteering or illegal or unethical behavior on the part of the employee. The horse in question had been titled, became private property, and was sold to a second owner.

"The reports of employees profiting from sending wild horses to slaughter were particularly distressing," BLM Interim Director **Sylvia Baca** said. "We owe it to taxpayers and to our employees to look at those claims seriously. Our employees who adopt wild horses and burros do so because they love the animals, and I can say with confidence that they represent some of our very best adopters."

The adoption process requires a careful pre-screening of applicants, a mandatory briefing prior to adoption on care requirements of horses, and the signing of a care agreement by the prospective adopter. Baca pointed out. Further, applicants are cautioned that the horse remains federal property until one year of proper care has been provided and BLM has transferred title to the adopter.

During that time, unannounced spot checks of the horses may be made by federal officials. In 1996, BLM conducted almost 3,000 such spot checks and responded to more than 200 horse neglect complaints which led to the repossession of 51 horses and the reassignment of 317 horses to other adopters.

As part of its continuing efforts to improve the horse adoption program, the BLM recently announced that it will begin offering some adoptable horses on a competitive bidding basis.

This action is expected to result in higher adoption fees for some animals, which will help defray expenses for the program. Higher adopter investment costs should also further diminish what minimal profiteering incentives may exist for adopting horses and sending them to slaughter after titling.

"The taxpayer public is getting a lot for its money on this program," Baca said. "The annual \$16 million we spend each year has resulted in tens of thousands of horses living better lives with good, caring families. Further, by removing excess horses and burros, we have been able to improve the health of



western rangelands on which ranching families and wildlife depend. This helps provide better habitat for a variety of wildlife such as deer, elk and antelope." Baca said.

As part of the continuing efforts to improve the program, a review team will provide recommendations on a variety of other wild horse and burro program issues, including employee adoptions, the spot check or compliance process, the horse and burro data base, and the horse and burro titling process. A report from that team is expected in March. "I am committed to looking into every specific complaint or allegation of wrong doing," Baca said. "If there are problems in this program, we want to find them and fix them."

The Wild, Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971 charged the BLM with managing wild horse herds in ten western states. To ensure the long-term survivability of the herds, which have few natural predators and reproduce at a rate as high as 20 percent per year, the BLM gathers what are considered to be excess animals and makes them available for adoption at a fee of \$125. Currently there are 42,000 wild horses and burros on the public rangelands.



From left to right: Patrick R. Ralston, director, Indiana Department of Natural Resources; Governor Evan Bayh of Indiana; Army Secretary Togo D. West, Jr.; Tom Ross, chief, Trails and Greenways Office, National Park Service; and Michael W. Wells, chairman, Indiana Recreation Development Commission.

## Lands to Parks Program Helps Indiana

Indiana Governor **Evan Bayh** called it "the most significant addition to the Indiana park system in sixty years." Secretary of the Army **Togo D. West, Jr.** lauded it as a prime example of federal-state cooperation. And **Tom Ross**, chief of the National Park Service's Trails and Greenways Office, said it "illustrates the success of National Park Service partnership programs."

They were praising Fort Harrison State Park at an opening ceremony hosted by the National Park Service for the former military base converted to a natural wonderland in suburban Indianapolis. The Park occupies land acquired by Indiana through the federal Lands to Parks Program. This partnership helps state and local governments acquire surplus federal land for park and recreational use at no cost. In return, the recipient must develop and maintain the property as a public park for all time. When Congress decided to close Fort Harrison in 1991, Indiana requested 1,700 acres of the former Army base to create a new state park.

The Park offers a natural retreat in an area that is only ten miles from downtown Indianapolis. Indiana will restore and preserve the park's natural resources while providing recreational opportunities and environmental education programs to park visitors. The park will have hiking trails, bike paths, horseback riding facilities, picnic areas, a golf course, and environmental education center. The state will also set aside park land to protect the largest heron rookery and forest in central Indiana.

**John T. Kelly** is the program manager for the Federal Lands to Parks Program, New England System Support Office, National Park Service in Boston, Massachusetts.

## No Increase in Grazing Fee

The grazing fee for Western public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service will be \$1.35 per animal unit month (AUM) in 1997—the same amount charged in 1996. The annually adjusted fee, effective March 1, uses a 1966 base value of \$1.23 per AUM. The figure is then adjusted according to current private grazing land lease rates, beef cattle prices, and the cost of livestock production. The 1997 fee is at 1996's level because of continued low beef cattle prices and high production costs.

## The Little Red Book

It's a book of short, common sense, workable rules developed by federal workers over the past four years. And its author would like other federal employees to use it when they have a question about improving customer service, working through community partnerships, or streamlining the federal bureaucracy—much as they would turn to Strunk and White's Elements of Style for creative guidance on grammar and syntax.

"The Blair House Papers is a federal employees guide to making government succeed," says its author, **Vice President Al Gore**. "Public confidence in government has rebounded—up nearly nine percent since 1993, according to a recent Roper poll," Gore said. "It's time for faster, bolder action to expand our islands of excellence and reinvent entire agencies."

The Vice-President's goal is have the 43-page booklet, which he dubbed "Elements of Reinventing Government," in the hands of every federal worker this year. The manual is on National Performance Review's Web Site (<http://www.npr.gov>). Click on latest additions. The GPO also has it, at \$3 a copy, with discounts for orders of 100 or more. The stock number is 040-000-00684-2.

