

# GRAZING IN COLUMBINE HONDO

Congressional direction on grazing in wilderness areas is very well established. The Wilderness Act permits grazing to continue in wilderness areas, and committee reports have established guidelines for managing grazing in wilderness. Today, most wilderness legislation includes language directing that grazing management should follow the Congressional guidelines.

Section 4(d)(4)(2) of the Wilderness Act states that “the grazing of livestock, where established prior to the effective date of this Act, shall be permitted to continue subject to such reasonable regulations as are deemed necessary by the Secretary of Agriculture.”

In the committee report accompanying 1980 legislation designating wilderness in several western states (PL 96-560), the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee developed comprehensive guidance on grazing in national forest wilderness.<sup>1</sup> Identical guidance for Bureau of Land Management wilderness areas was included in the report accompanying the Arizona Desert Wilderness Act of 1990 (PL 101-628).<sup>2</sup>



In short, this guidance emphasizes that grazing should not be curtailed simply because an area is wilderness; facilities may be maintained (including, if necessary, by using motorized vehicles); new improvements and facilities should be focused on resource protection; and motorized equipment should be used sparingly, and mostly in emergency situations or where permitted prior to designation.

Several proposed wilderness bills include provisions that would allow ranchers to voluntarily relinquish their permits to graze on public lands in exchange for private compensation. This approach would provide a valuable safety net to struggling ranchers who seek alternatives to public lands ranching.

The grazing in the Columbine Hondo Wilderness Study Area that occurs today will continue to occur once the area is designated as Wilderness. Grazing permittees in this area were some of the first individuals the Columbine Hondo Wilderness Coalition consulted with in thinking about advocating for full wilderness designation and they continue to be part of the discussion today.

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<sup>1</sup> H. Rep. 96-617.

<sup>2</sup> H. Rep. 101-405.