The continued prosperity of the range livestock industry depends upon improving and maintaining the range resource. This industry, with ranches and livestock worth nearly two billion dollars, makes use of 867 million acres of range lands or nearly one-third of the total land area of the United States. Nearly 70% of the feed for all the livestock in the 11 far western states is obtained from grazing the native forage on timber and other range land.

The productivity of national forest ranges has increased about 25% in the last 15 to 20 years through regulation and the application of improved principles developed by research. On the other hand, most other range areas have continued to decline until, on the average, they are at least 50% below their producing possibilities. The most serious situation is on the 200,000,000 acres or so of unappropriated public domain with its intermingled state and private lands which cannot now be legally controlled, and where under present overgrazing there is little chance for sustained profitable production of livestock. Furthermore, it is these lands which should be furnishing abundant feed for the critical spring, fall, and winter periods.

The western range problem is one of building a profitable industry on ranges where essential parts have been depleted, where excessive non-producing investments have been established through range depletion, and where credit has been badly crippled. Timber production must be maintained, eroded water sheds restored, other uses of the land protected, and a close coordination made between farm land and ranges. There is a wide diversity of conditions. For example, the alpine meadows and grasslands above timber line have a short growing season, yet provide excellent feed for summer use. The mountain grazing lands of the Pacific Coast have a long, dry summer season, the very period when they must grow their feed and yet be grazed. The semi-desert ranges of the Southwest, with their sparse vegetation grazed yearlong, must depend upon production of their feed during a short summer period furnishing but a scant supply of rain.

The range research of the Forest Service is largely concentrated at three stations, viz., the Great Basin in central Utah, the Santa Rita Range Reserve in southern Arizona, and the Jornada Range Reserve in southern New Mexico. Work on special problems is also under way in other parts of the West.