The Western Range and the Livestock Industry It Supports

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I. THE RANGE RESOURCE OF THE 17 WESTERN STATES

The United States has a billion-acre resource in its range and pasture lands (11). In the West, more than 728 million acres, or 76% of the land area, can be classified as rangeland with grazing by livestock and wildlife as the most important land-use practice. Even in the Great Plains Region, nearly 200 million acres are still used for range-livestock production (8).

This vast range area for the most part cannot be cultivated due to limitations in moisture, rough topography, soil adversities, or other restricting factors. In spite of these environmental limitations, it is not unrealistic to predict that research could lead to techniques for doubling or even tripling the livestock productivity of western rangelands. If this is to be done, the knowledge of many disciplines must be brought to bear on the problem.

The ownership pattern is a major consideration in the management and use of the western range resource. A very high percentage of the total area of many states is owned or held in trust by the Federal Government. Figure 1 indicates the approximate percentage of each state that is under Federal control. Nevada (88%) and Utah (75%) contain the highest percentage of Federal land with Kansas (0.6%), Nebraska (1.4%), and Texas (1.5%) containing the lowest percentage in the West.

In 1968 the Bureau of Land Management had responsibility for approximately 482 million acres in the U. S.; the Forest Service, 186 million acres; the National Park Service, 28 million acres; and the Fish and Wildlife Service, 27 million acres. In spite of these vast holdings by the Federal Government, private lands in the 17 western states still constitute 63% of the total area. State ownership is now approximately 5% of the total area.

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