

# NATIONAL PUBLIC LANDS GRAZING CAMPAIGN

## Publicly Owned Grassbanks: Just Another Bailout

Some public lands ranching interests have proffered an alternative to voluntary grazing permit buyout and permanent allotment retirement.<sup>1</sup> While their proposal supports the federal government paying permittees and lessees to retire their grazing permits, they insist that the associated allotments be retained as community “grassbanks” for use by other ranchers in times of drought, conflicts with endangered species, or to prevent overgrazing of their own allotments. Rather than permanently closing them to grazing use, such grassbanks would simply become public lands grazing commons for other federal permittees/lessees.

***The NPLGC opposes reallocation of vacant allotments as grassbanks or any proposal that would use public funds to buyout federal grazing permits/leases without permanently retiring the associated allotments from grazing.***

### **1. Grassbanks fleece taxpayers.**

It is not in the interest of federal taxpayers to buyout a public lands rancher while leaving their allotment open for use as a grassbank. The same subsidies that supported ranching on that allotment—for water developments, fencing, predator control, planning, resource monitoring—would still be necessary to maintain the allotment as a grassbank for other ranchers. There is no way to justify to taxpayers, federal decisionmakers, government accountants or conservationists that the federal government should pay \$175 per animal unit month (AUM) (or even a much lower market rate) to buyout a permit, only to continue paying for the same subsidies to make the vacant allotment available for grazing by others. Paying generously (\$175/AUM) to buyout grazing permits/leases is fiscally justifiable only if the associated taxpayer costs of the grazing program are eliminated.

### **2. Grassbanks encourage and perpetuate poor grazing practices.**

Public lands ranchers use grassbanks when their own allotments become devoid of forage due to naturally occurring drought and/or overgrazing. Periodic drought is as certain in the arid West as humidity in Florida, hurricanes in the South or tornados in the Midwest. Allotments should be lightly stocked to avoid resource depletion during dry periods. However, where grassbanks exist, ranchers who experience drought or otherwise overgraze their allotments would be able to move their herds to these reserve areas rather than reduce their stocking rates to environmentally sustainable levels. The existence of grassbanks may even encourage ranchers to overstock their allotments because the supplemental forage permits them to be less cautious about natural conditions or their own poor grazing practices.

### **3. Grassbanks do not provide conservation benefits.**

Even after buying out a grazing allotment, taxpayers are denied conservation benefits, including clean water, increased fish and wildlife, and livestock-free recreation, if the area maintained as a grassbank is even periodically grazed by livestock. While providing aesthetic benefits to the public, open space, especially agricultural operations, do not equate to good wildlife habitat.

### **4. Ranchers should buy their *own* grassbanks.**

Rather than having taxpayers buyout grazing allotments for use as grassbanks, privately owned grazing operations, even those using public lands, should purchase *private land* to be grassbanks, engaging the capitalist/market system to meet their business needs like any other business should.

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<sup>1</sup> See T. Moore. 2001. PLC skeptical, but will listen. Capitol Press Agric. Weekly (Nov. 2, 2001): 9.