



News From Representative Raúl M. Grijalva 7th Congressional District of Arizona

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Contact: Natalie Luna (520) 622-6788

(520) 904-0375 cell

GAO Report Details \$123 Million Shortfall in Federal Livestock Grazing Programs

Washington, D.C. - A report released by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) today estimates budgetary shortfalls in public lands grazing programs exceed \$123 million annually.

The report concluded that federal agencies spent at least \$144 million in fiscal year 2004 to support private livestock grazing activities on publicly owned land but collected only \$21 million in grazing fees, amounting to a cost to taxpayers of an estimated \$1.23 billion every decade. The GAO report acknowledges that this conservative figure does not account for all direct costs and it notes that some agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency, do not specifically track grazing expenditures.

Combined, the BLM and the Forest Service, who manage the majority of grazing on public lands, lost at least \$115 million in 2004.

"In these difficult budgetary times, this report details the annual shortfall from grazing on public lands, but even these figures underestimate the true cost of public lands livestock grazing," said Rep. Grijalva. "The report does not address many of the environmental costs of livestock on public lands. Livestock displace native species, pollute watersheds and damage soil. In order to adequately protect our public lands, the federal government must recover more of the actual costs by collecting reasonable fees."

A small number of the nation's ranchers (representing about 2% of cattle production) have permits and leases to graze their livestock on 235 million acres of federal public lands. Grazed lands include Bureau of Land Management land, National Forests, wilderness areas, national parks, national monuments, national wildlife refuges, national conservation areas and military installations.

Most public lands ranchers pay a nominal fee of \$1.79 per month for each cow-calf pair on federal lands, while ranchers who graze privately owned land in the West pay an average of \$13.30. The report describes the low fee, which is less than one sixth of what is necessary to

recover costs. The fee formula is based on 40-year-old data and has not been updated in almost 30 years.

At a time of fluctuating markets and drought, public lands grazing has also become a stranded investment for many ranchers. Recognizing the hardships faced by many public lands ranchers and the changing priorities for public lands toward resource protection, Rep. Grijalva sponsored the Multiple-Use Conflict Resolution Act (H.R. 3166).

Rep. Grijalva stated, "This legislation will go a long way toward resolving the ongoing and contentious debate on public lands grazing in the West by giving much needed relief to ranching families suffering the results of drought and other economic factors. At the same time, the bill will allow for the restoration of public lands that are no longer suitable for grazing and will reduce the burden on the American taxpayer whose tax dollars subsidize this practice. It is a win-win-win solution to what for many years was viewed as an unsolvable conflict."

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