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## **Federal Government Lowers Cost of Public-Lands Grazing For Livestock Owners: Cost Rises for Taxpayers**

Tucson, *Ariz.* – Once again, the federal government has ensured massive budgetary shortfalls, and thus a whopping bill for taxpayers, by announcing an artificially low fee for grazing allotments—adding to the already huge burden on the public coffers that subsidize livestock operators on public lands. Today the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management announced the new fee of \$1.35 per cow/calf pair, per month, down from \$1.56 last year. The new fee is as low as it can legally be.

“The cost-benefit gap of the federal grazing program just got larger,” said Greta Anderson, Range Restoration Director at the Center for Biological Diversity. “A small number of Western livestock operators, producing less than three percent of the beef we eat, pay less per month to feed their cows than it costs to feed a hamster. Meanwhile those cows are befouling our rivers, accelerating erosion, and driving rare species toward extinction on lands that belong to the American people.”

In 2004, a Government Accountability Office report showed that the federal grazing program operates at a deficit of at least *\$123 million annually*. It estimated that in order to cover costs, the Bureau of Land Management would have to charge \$7.64 per animal-unit-month and the Forest Service would have to charge \$12.26. (<http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/swcbd/programs/grazing/GAO-grazing-report-2005.pdf>) Independent economists have estimated that the costs may be closer to \$500 million annually ([http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/swcbd/Programs/grazing/Assessing\\_the\\_full\\_cost.pdf](http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/swcbd/Programs/grazing/Assessing_the_full_cost.pdf)). In either case, the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service grazing fees have absolutely nothing to do with fair market value. It is far less expensive to “lease” public than private rangeland—or even state-trust lands or federal lands managed by the National Park Service or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The grazing-fee subsidy is a reflection of an outdated and unscientific fee formula. This formula, set by the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978, calculates the fees based on the amount of forage required to sustain one “animal unit” for one month. The formula has long been recognized as flawed, and the Secretaries of the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture’s “Rangeland Reform” project of 1994 proposed altering the formula and setting a new base rate. But Congress declined to accept the changes, and taxpayers have been left to carry the cost of this subsidy for livestock operations ever since.

The Center for Biological Diversity was joined by other conservation groups in submitting an Administrative Procedures Act petition in November 2005 requesting that the fee formula be changed to more closely approximate cost recovery. The petition and more about the fee can be found at <http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/swcbd/programs/grazing/GrazingFeePetition.pdf>.

*The Center for Biological Diversity is a nonprofit conservation organization with over 32,000 members dedicated to the protection of imperiled species and their habitat.*

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