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## GRAZING

The ecological costs of livestock grazing exceed that of any other western land use. In the arid West, grazing is the most widespread cause of species endangerment, irreparably harming the ecosystems they depend on.

Despite [these costs](#), livestock grazing continues on state and federal lands across the West. It's promoted, protected and subsidized by federal agencies on about 270 million public acres in the 11 western states.

### Protect Public Health From Mink Fur Farming



## ECOLOGICAL COSTS

Cattle destroy native vegetation, damage soils and stream banks, disrupt natural processes, and contaminate waterways with fecal waste. After decades of livestock grazing, once-lush streams and riparian forests have been reduced to flat, dry wastelands; once-rich topsoil has been turned to dust, causing soil erosion, stream sedimentation and wholesale elimination of some aquatic habitats; overgrazing of native fire-carrying grasses has starved some western forests of fire, making them overly dense and prone to unnaturally severe fires.

Keystone predators like the [grizzly bear](#) and [Mexican gray wolf](#) were driven extinct in southwestern ecosystems by “predator control” programs designed to protect the livestock industry. Adding insult to injury — and flying in the face of modern conservation science — the livestock industry remains the leading opponent to otherwise popular efforts to reintroduce species like the Mexican gray wolf in Arizona and New Mexico.

## ECONOMIC COSTS

The federal livestock grazing program is heavily subsidized, getting more than \$100 million annually in direct subsidies — and possibly three times that in indirect subsidies. The western livestock industry would evaporate as suddenly as fur trapping if it had to pay market rates for services it gets from the federal government.

In 2015 the Center commissioned resource economists to study the economic costs of livestock grazing on public lands. We found that the federal lands grazing program generated \$125 million *less* than what the federal government spent on the program in 2014. Further, we found that federal grazing fees are 93 percent less than fees charged for non-irrigated western private grazing land, or just \$1.69 per animal per month for each cow and calf that grazes the public land. (It costs more to feed a house cat.)

Despite the extreme damage done by grazing, western federal rangelands account for less than 3 percent of all forage fed to livestock in the United States. In fact, beef prices wouldn't be affected if all livestock were removed from public lands in the West.

## OUR CAMPAIGN

Since our founding, the Center has led efforts to reform overgrazing on public lands across the West. Our work protecting endangered species has removed damaging livestock from millions of public acres in the Southwest, Pacific Northwest, Mountain West and California.

In the late 1990s, our work persuaded federal agencies to remove cattle along the Gila River to preserve riparian habitat for endangered species like the [Yellow-billed cuckoo](#) and [Mexican garter snake](#). Thanks to Center lawsuits, cows and sheep were removed or restricted on more than 2.5 million acres of habitat for the [desert tortoise](#), [Southwestern willow flycatcher](#) and [least Bell's vireo](#) in the vast California Desert Conservation Area. In 2010 Center work helped stop domestic sheep grazing on 7,500 acres in and around the greater Yellowstone ecosystem to protect [grizzly bears](#), [lynx](#), wolves and bighorn; we also halted grazing on a quarter-million acres of Oregon's Malheur National Forest to protect steelhead trout. In 2011 Center appeals stopped grazing on 33,000 acres of national forest land in Arizona, where we're still working hard to save the endangered [Chiricahua leopard frog](#) from the devastating effects of cattle grazing on its last remaining habitat.

Livestock grazing is also a major threat to greater sage grouse across the Sagebrush Sea. In 2014 and 2015 we worked to rein in livestock grazing to protect sage grouse habitat and the myriad other species that this beautiful ecosystem supports in new land-management plans across about 60 million acres of federal public lands.

We also work to fight destructive livestock grazing on a larger scale, such as by suing the U.S. government to compel it to fix agency budget woes by reforming the grazing program, which loses money just as rapidly and consistently as it destroys habitat. The federal government has repeatedly refused to increase grazing fees to reasonable levels, but we won't give up until these fees reflect livestock grazing's true financial *and* environmental costs.

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