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## Review of *Grazing on Public Lands*

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**Grazing on Public Lands.** Task Force Report No. 129. Ames, IA: Council for Agricultural Science and Technology, 12/1996. iii+70pp. Figures, tables, references, index. \$20.00 paper (ISBN 1-887383-09-3).

The CAST (Council on Agricultural Science and Technology) report "Grazing on Public Lands" is a pamphlet. The mission statement inside the front cover leads one to expect an objective look at the impact of grazing on public lands. The topic may be so controversial that an objective look is impossible, and this idea is certainly supported by the Task Force Report. This report argues that the current management of grazing on public lands is sustainable, promotes biodiversity and that any change (such as increases in federal grazing fees) will adversely affect western communities.

For a short report, this one is highly repetitive, containing an Interpretive Summary and an Executive Summary, in addition to the Conclusion. The presentation is also uneven: sections vary from rich to very poor in citations, from even-handed to strong partisanship. The main body of the booklet surveys western rangelands, lists types of "users" and reviews current and historical range management. The authors also discuss sustainability and compatibility of grazing with game and nongame wildlife.

As presented here, the issue of grazing on public lands seems so one-sided (grazing is good) that it is hard to understand why the authors seem so threatened or why the government invested so much money in the report. In

addition, most sections assume that grazing and sustaining grazing is the goal of federal lands. Some opponents would surely remove cows even if it was shown that grazing was sustainable and increased biodiversity. Or they might argue that biodiversity is not the important metric, because not all organisms are equally desirable. The report makes some excellent points in favor of grazing, but the one-sidedness and poor presentation of the alternative arguments detracts from its credibility.

The report often treats all the grazed grasslands in the West together, but the resilience to grazing and amount of available land varies tremendously in a region running from California to Iowa. Despite its initial recognition of diversity, the report jumps between observations of quite different regions to support its arguments, creating a rather misleading whole. Including tallgrass prairie data, for example, is illogical: 90% of tallgrass prairie has been plowed.

The task force authors' lack of comfort with environmental issues is dramatically illustrated by the picture of the "blowout penstemon," Nebraska's only endemic species. The wrong plant is pictured, and the text implies that good range practice is supporting this rare species, when in fact its abundance is reduced by improved range quality because it competes poorly with grasses useful to ranchers. Furthermore, in the economic analysis of federal grazing fees, which is intended to show that grazing on federal lands imposes costs on the ranchers that do not exist on private lands, the actual size of the fees is never mentioned, making it impossible for the reader to evaluate an otherwise convincing argument.

This is not an objective report: it is a series of range management experts defending their field. The information is both slightly redundant and poorly documented, preventing the interested reader from being able to find the field studies underlying the opinions. On the other hand, it certainly provides a strong summary of the arguments favoring continuing the existing system. **Kathleen H. Keeler**, *School of Biological Sciences, University of Nebraska-Lincoln*.