

## Taylor Grazing Act and the New Deal

Efforts to control unlimited grazing on private and public lands began in the late 19th century after the cattle boom of the 1880s in the Great Plains and the catastrophic drought, freeze and die-off of 1886-87. In the early 20th century, Progressive Era conservationists, like John Muir, fought to exclude cattle and sheep from national parks and wilderness areas of the national forests. Meanwhile, the first attempts to create a scientific approach to grazing emerged by the 1910s.



*Cowboy and Herd 1902*

The long drought across the western United States from the late 1920s well into the 1930s provoked a new round of debate over land policy and grazing in the west. Yet, as the Dust Bowl worsened in the early 1930s, early legislation failed under President Herbert Hoover. When the New Deal arrived under President Franklin Roosevelt in 1933, efforts to deal with overgrazing, farming marginal lands and restoring the public domain took off.

Grazing legislation was quickly introduced, but took two years to wend its way through Congress. So Roosevelt took executive action to halt unlimited grazing by creating the first federal grazing district by Executive Order in March 1935. FDR was strongly

motivated by a desire to protect endangered wildlife, such as the American bison and Desert Antelope.

The Taylor Grazing Act was signed into law by FDR on June 28, 1935. It ended open grazing on public rangelands and established the Division of Grazing in the Department of Interior to regulate entry and practices on around 80 million acres of previously unreserved federal lands (excluding Alaska). Farrington Carpenter, a rancher, was put in charge of the new service until Secretary Harold Ickes fired him in 1938 and brought in Richard Rutledge of Utah, a stronger advocate for conservation and former Forest Service district ranger.

*Richard Rutledge, 1944*

The Division of Grazing was organized into 59 grazing districts, which soon oversaw around 170 million acres of federal land and 100 million acres of private and state land. A management system was established that included local ranchers in the oversight of every district – much like the price control boards established under the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933, or NRA, a part of FDR's new deal.



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The name of the Division of Grazing was changed to the U.S. Grazing Service in 1939. Later, the Grazing Service was joined with the old General Land Office in 1946 to become the Bureau of Land Management, which continues to oversee around 250 million acres of public and private land in sixteen western states – roughly one-tenth of the nation’s land surface.

Although it does not fall under the Taylor Grazing Act, the Forest Service in the Department of Agriculture regulates grazing within national forests, which include millions of acres of grassland. Its permit and fee system closely parallels that of the Grazing Service. The National Park Service generally excludes grazing from parks and monuments.



While cattlemen have too often grazed land too hard due to economic pressures and bad weather, it is also true that range science has been plagued by errors and has not always been a reliable guide to public policy. The conflict between ranchers and the government continues to flare up around the west, as in the takeover of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge by a group of armed and far-right militants in 2016.