



## Enviro Coalition Buys Out Large Grazing Lease in Wyoming

August 1, 2003

**Coalition 'retires' grazing area in Wyoming.  
Environmentalists buy rancher's lease**

**By Tom Kenworthy  
USA TODAY**

DENVER -- Using a tactic increasingly favored by environmental groups, a coalition of wildlife conservation organizations has paid \$250,000 to a rancher to buy out her federal cattle-grazing permit in Wyoming.

The deal, to be announced today, will end livestock grazing on a 137-square-mile swath of the Bridger-Teton National Forest just outside Grand Teton National Park. The area contains some of the most important bear habitat in the region, a resident wolf pack and many other species, including threatened lynx and bald eagles.

At least 25 grizzly bears frequently prey on cattle there. Wildlife officers have had to relocate troublesome bears in the past, and at least one repeat offender had to be killed.

By paying ranchers to renounce their often long-held land leases, environmental groups remove the greatest obstacle to "retiring" the areas. Often, the groups work in tandem with government wildlife agencies. Together, they help persuade federal officials to stop leasing the land after the buyout.

"Groups are turning to this as a tool," said Tom France, northern Rockies representative for the National Wildlife Federation, one of the groups that helped fund the Wyoming buyout. "It's certainly not our goal in this to suggest that grazing is not appropriate, but it is our position that in some key spots conflicts are best resolved with (lease) retirements."

The buyout represents another victory for environmental groups that would rather pay off willing ranchers than fight federal agencies in court to halt grazing. Within the past two years:

\* The Grand Canyon Trust bought out a 256,000-acre lease in the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in southern Utah to protect sensitive stream-side areas from damage by cattle.

\* Defenders of Wildlife and the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep bought out a 20,000-acre domestic sheep grazing lease for land that contain prime grizzly bear habitat on the Caribou-Targhee National Forest just outside Yellowstone National Park.

\* The National Wildlife Federation retired a 2,400-acre lease on the Gallatin National Forest, also near Yellowstone.

Livestock grazing on federal lands in the West has been a contentious issue for years. Opponents say cattle cause erosion, damage streams and harm endangered species. They frequently go to court to force government agencies to end or scale back grazing in environmentally sensitive areas.

The U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lease about 250 million acres for grazing at rates that fall far short of covering the program's costs.

Some environmental groups who oppose all grazing on public lands want Congress to buy out leases throughout the West. At least in the short run, that is unlikely.

Other environmental groups favor using the marketplace instead of the courthouse in cases in which ranchers are willing to be bought out. That way, no one is forced off the land.

The livestock industry does not oppose such buyouts but is concerned about government agencies "facilitating these deals," said Jeff Eisenberg, federal lands director for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association.

Betty Walton, whose family has held the cattle-grazing lease in Wyoming for nearly 50 years and has run 800 cattle on the allotment, would not comment on the sale, her attorney said.