

# Environmentalists rip Babbitt grazing plan

## They say regional concept is unworkable

By Keith Bagwell  
The Arizona Daily Star

PHOENIX – Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, hoping to appease ranchers angry about his promise of higher grazing fees, ran afoul of environmentalists yesterday.

Environmental group spokesmen said Babbitt's plan to let regional councils of environmentalists, ranchers and other interests set local grazing standards by unanimous agreement is unworkable.

"If government waited for consensus in the 1860s, we might still have slavery," said Jeff Burgess of the Arizona Sierra Club. "Government should listen to all sides, then make a decision."

Babbitt was in town in the latest of a series of Western meetings to determine policy on federal land management.

Although Arizona ranchers continued to oppose Babbitt's proposed boost in grazing fees at the meeting with him yesterday, they supported his suggestion for local control of livestock grazing.

"You can't write rules in Washington – they have to be set at lower levels," said Wally Armour, president of the Arizona Cattlemen's Association. "In the 11 Western ranching states, conditions vary widely."

Armour asked Babbitt to support a lower grazing fee pending in Congress.

But Babbitt said that proposal "is arbitrarily discounted. . . . We will go forward with our figure and be prepared to justify it."

He said the fees would go to at least \$3.45 per animal unit per month, and possibly as high as \$4.28. The current fee is \$1.92. An "animal unit" is defined as a cow and a calf or five sheep or one horse.

Babbitt proposed a grazing reform package that included the \$4.28 fee level, but it ran into strong opposition in Congress. He proposes instead an administrative reform without congressional approval.

He met weekly for eight weeks with ranchers and environmentalists in Colorado to devise the compromise plan debated yesterday.

The plan calls for replacing the 1934-vintage, all-rancher grazing advisory boards with district advisory councils in each Bureau of Land Management district, he said.

One-third of the membership on each council would represent environmental and wildlife groups and one-third would be public officials, recreational

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interests and Indians, Babbitt said.

The remaining one-third would represent "commodity interests," such as ranchers, lumber companies and mining industries, he said.

Babbitt's Interior Department would set broad national guidelines for grazing practices not under other laws, and the councils would set local standards after reaching a consensus on them, he said.

Rob Smith, the national Sierra Club's Southwest representative, said Babbitt's plan "just looks at how to manage cows on public lands."

He said it should focus on "ecosystem management, instead of ranching management. A lot of

the public wants to see wildflowers, varied greenery and cow pie-free areas."

Joe Feller, an Arizona State University law professor and public lands specialist, said Babbitt's plan does not address the key grazing issue.

"One major issue that seems to be omitted from the program is to determine which lands are suitable for grazing and which are not," he said.

"Grazing should be authorized only where it's in the public interest," he said. "There are areas in Southern Arizona where grazing is a crazy idea."

Babbitt, a former Arizona governor, said: "These reforms do not address outcomes, but processes."

He said his plan "is about how to make the best decisions - it doesn't address the issue of taking lands out of grazing."

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