



NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION®

People and Nature: Our Future Is in the Balance

NATIONAL
WILDLIFE
FEDERATION®
www.nwf.org

11100 Wildlife Center Drive
Reston, VA • 20190-5362
703-438-6000

P R E S S R E L E A S E

Immediate Release:

August 1, 2003

Contact:

Hank Fischer, NWF (406) 240-2402; 549-0761
Tom France, NWF (406) 239-0988; 721-6705
Steve Kilpatrick, WG&F (307) 733-2383 ext. 227
Hank Phibbs, Walton Ranch (307) 733-5004

Landmark Agreement Leads to Retirement of Wyoming Livestock Allotment Next to Grand Teton National Park

JACKSON HOLE, WY -- The National Wildlife Federation and a broad coalition of conservation interests today announced an agreement with the Walton Ranch Company that preceded the U.S. Forest Service retirement of 74,200 acres of the 87,500-acre Blackrock/Spread Creek cattle allotment. Abutting Grand Teton National Park 20 miles south of Yellowstone National Park, this allotment has experienced more conflicts between cattle and grizzly bears than any other in the Yellowstone ecosystem.

“This agreement is a triumph of common sense over conflict,” said National Wildlife Federation special projects coordinator Hank Fischer. “It’s a pragmatic solution that honors the needs of wildlife while recognizing the legitimate economic concerns of the livestock producer.”

While conflicts between grizzly bears and livestock provide the sole rationale for the Blackrock/Spread Creek closure, the allotment provides important habitat for elk, moose, and bison. According to Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) Wyoming state field director Blake Henning, “This allotment provides important winter range and calving areas for 800 to 900 elk. It’s also a key migration route for elk in the Teton Wilderness and Yellowstone National Park.” RMEF is a leading partner on the project.

NWF provided Walton Ranch with an incentive payment to retire their grazing privileges. Next, the Walton Ranch waived their grazing permit back to the Forest Service without preference.

Following six years of grizzly bear/livestock conflict, and four years of grazing nonuse, the Walton Ranch Company approached the Forest Service and requested that the allotment be closed to grazing. After evaluation of the direction contained in the Bridger-Teton National Forest plan, the Forest Service closed most of the area to livestock grazing.

According to Wyoming Game and Fish Department habitat biologist Steve Kilpatrick, “The wildlife values for this piece of ground rival any found in the greater Yellowstone, even those within the national parks.”

According to Kilpatrick, grizzly use of the area has increased significantly over the last decade. As many as 25 radio-collared grizzly bears have used the allotment as part of their range in recent years. Wyoming Game and Fish wildlife managers documented 108 cattle/grizzly conflicts on the allotment between 1992 and 1998. Kilpatrick stated that the number of bison in the area has also grown substantially during the last decade, and in fact now exceeds bison objectives for the area. Additionally he says a wolf pack has established a den site immediately adjacent to the allotment. "The level of wildlife activity in this area has made it a serious challenge to raise livestock there," he said.

In accordance with existing forest plan direction, the Forest Service will close 74,200 acres of the 25-mile long and 7-mile wide allotment, including all acreage in Management Situation 1 and 2 grizzly bear habitat. The remaining 13,300 acres will be evaluated for livestock grazing suitability during forest plan revision, which is scheduled to begin in 2005.

"This allotment has been an integral part of the Walton Ranch operation for almost half a century," says Hank Phibbs, attorney for the Walton Ranch. "Problems with grizzly bears have grown progressively worse, and now there are wolves and bison to deal with." Phibbs adds that, "Hank Fischer and the National Wildlife Federation stepped forward and offered to help solve this problem by providing an incentive payment to retire grazing privileges. Steve Kilpatrick on behalf of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department as well as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service provided strong support for the arrangement. Kniffy Hamilton, Nancy Hall and Levi Broyles of the Bridger-Teton National Forest endorsed our voluntary permit retirement and made it possible to complete the arrangement. This agreement will allow the Walton Ranch to lease private replacement forage for a number of years. The Walton family thanks these folks and their organizations for making this solution possible."

Major partners on the project include the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the Heritage Foundation of Wyoming, the Charles Engelhard Foundation, Vital Ground, the Cougar Fund, the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, the Wiancko Family Fund, and the Arthur B. Schultz Foundation. Numerous other individuals, foundations, and conservation organizations made this retirement possible.

Fischer says grazing retirements are an effective and equitable market-based tool for reconfiguring where grazing occurs on public lands. "Our objective is not to eliminate grazing," he said. "It's to make sure grazing occurs in places where it's compatible and sustainable." He points out that the National Wildlife Federation only works with willing sellers and only on allotments with significant conflicts. "We seek situations where the rancher is as motivated to solve a problem as we are."

In April of 2003, the National Wildlife Federation teamed up with livestock producers and the Forest Service to facilitate a solution to the decade-long conflict between bison and cattle on the Horse Butte grazing allotment near West Yellowstone. In that case, the National Wildlife Federation paid for a new public land grazing allotment for the permittee and the Forest Service consequently retired the Horse Butte allotment.

The nation's largest member-supported conservation education and advocacy group, the National Wildlife Federation unites people from all walks of life to protect nature, wildlife, and the world we all share. The National Wildlife Federation has educated and inspired families to uphold America's conservation tradition since 1936. ❖