

The Real Welfare Cheats

Review

E.B. Maple (Peter Werbe)

1992

a review of

Waste of the West: Public Lands Ranching, Lynn Jacobs, 1991, P.O. Box 5784, Tucson, AZ 85703, 8-1/2 x 11, 602 pp, \$28.

It is a cross between mean-spiritedness and stupidity for people to blame those on welfare for the current economic recession (or depression, depending on where you are situated in the pyramid). The real drain on the economy comes from the big money boys looting ever larger sums from the national treasury, through scams like the S&L bailout and from the classes below them. There is a welfare system which should be despised; it is the one which aids the rich.

Even if one excludes the biggest suckhole of all—the war economy, which lines the pockets of corrupt, inefficient munitions makers—there still are untold billions going into the coffers of large corporations in the form of subsidies. These include price supports to cotton and tobacco growers, payments to large agribusinesses for not growing, building roads into wilderness areas to aid the timber industry, animal extermination programs, and, the subject of this book, allowing big ranchers to graze their livestock on public land at below cost fees.

Waste of the West makes a case beyond the economic giveaway which these federal programs provide. Worst of all, livestock production on public land is destroying natural habitat at an alarming rate.

The facts presented by Jacobs, a longtime campaigner against welfare ranching, are truly startling. For example, 41% of the West is utilized for grazing on public lands, which has led to the destruction of more native vegetation and wildlife than any other land use. There has been more soil erosion, riparian damage, water pollution and environmental destruction from public grazing than from any other land use.

All of this devastation produces 3% of U.S. beef while it benefits an even smaller percentage of stockmen. Grazing on public land receives little attention compared with the fight against the destruction of old growth forests in the Northwest, but its results are no less ecologically devastating. The beautiful, ecologically rich and complex prairies of the West are being trampled into mud lots for the enrichment of a few wealthy ranchers.

Lynn Jacobs' book is an important place to start for those interested in opposing this travesty. It is self-published and excellently done with photographs and suggestions for attacking the problem.

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