Nebraska Cattlemen provided the following information about the grazing of cattle on public lands, due to increased discussion in the political arena on the subject.

How much public land is grazed by cattle?

In Nebraska, less than 1.25 percent of the land is owned by the government. While not all of this land is grazed, some of it is grazed by cattle owned by cattle ranchers.

How many ranchers graze their cattle on public lands?

Nationwide, more than 22,000 ranchers graze their cattle on public lands. While not all ranchers may have access, many do not want to graze on public lands for various reasons such as transportation of their cattle to the public land area or compliance with rigorous guidelines. To say that a small special group of ranchers are the only ones allowed to graze is not a true representation of the demand.

What does a rancher pay to graze his/her cattle on public land?

In 1986, a market based fee formula was created to establish the rate ranchers pay. Dr. Larry Van Tassell, Department Head of the Department of Agricultural Economics at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, reports that the formula has a base that is affected by three primary factors: current private grazing land lease rates, current beef cattle prices and the cost of producing cattle. There is also a minimum fee of $1.35 per animal per month. It is also important to note that many formulas do not allow year round grazing.

Does a rancher pay anything else in addition to the fee?

Yes. Many ranchers pay a grazing permit fee in addition to the per-animal fee. They also pay taxes on the value of their permits. Ranchers are also required to pay for upkeep of infrastructure like fences and watering places, and often own the water rights on the range. Their ability to graze is subject to heavy regulation; for example, they must observe seasonal effects in some areas such as wildlife nesting/birthing or migration.

Is grazing cattle good or bad for the public land?

The Public Lands Council says that cattle grazing can be very beneficial to the land. Not only will the cattle control the over-growth of grass which helps reduce wildfires, but research has shown that land properly grazed versus un-grazed land is more productive by preventing invasion of noxious weeds while encouraging robust forage growth and healthy root systems. Also, cattle in properly grazed systems interact beneficially with most wildlife primarily because the rancher is ensuring that wildlife habitat is maintained.

Do ranchers receive subsidies or any other funds from the government to graze their cattle on public lands?

No. Cattle ranchers must pay for the use of the public lands.

What does public land grazing cost taxpayers?

In 2003, grazed public lands cost the federal government $2 per acre while un-grazed lands cost taxpayers $5 per acre. Because ranchers pay for their cattle grazing, they are actually saving taxpayer money. In other words, if grazing public lands were disallowed, it would cost taxpayers more.

More questions about cattle ranchers grazing public lands can be directed to Nebraska Cattlemen at 402-475-2333.