

# impact

of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences



## Greater Harmony Between Agriculture and the Environment Managing Rangelands with AgNIC, A Web Tool

### Issue

In 1995, a collaboration began at the University of Arizona to create one of the first fully operational components of the Agriculture National Information Network (AgNIC), an initiative involving multiple land grant universities and the U.S. National Agricultural Library. It was conceived as a means to distribute basic information to the public, specialized information to land managers, and instruction to students. The Managing Rangelands AgNIC web development project united the University Library with the School of Renewable Natural Resources, the Arid Lands Information Center, and the Networking Group of the Educational Computing and Technology unit in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences with a common goal of providing timely, accurate, trusted information on Western rangelands.

### What has been done?

Over the past six years, the site has been regularly updated and expanded both in content and design to improve its ability to serve rangeland students and land managers. It includes more than 350 unique pages and features. Besides an archive of full-text articles published in the *Journal of Range Management* and other in-depth sections on rangeland management, the web site includes a section on weeds and invasive species, and sections on

marketing and conservation ranching. In cooperation with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), Ecological Site Guides covering all areas of Arizona are also available. These Guides describe soil qualities, vegetation, precipitation, and other factors that affect decision-making in land management.

A major section of the site is focused on policy issues concerning public land management, including such topics as wildlife and endangered species, forests and logging, mining, Indian lands, urbanization, grazing, recreation and wilderness areas. In addition to covering the different sides of such contentious issues, the web site provides extensive background information on legislation impacting rangelands, such as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Clean Water Act. There is also a section "For Kids and Teachers" which provides educational sites that cover a variety of aspects of rangelands, as well as an "Ask a Question" feature allowing users to submit specific questions to University of Arizona experts in the field.

One of the newest sections provides access to geospatial applications for rangeland management which have been developed in cooperation with both agency and private land managers.

### Impact

The Managing Rangelands web site (<http://ag.arizona.edu/agnic/range.html>) is widely accepted as an important source of information on the understanding and management of Western rangelands. On average, the site receives more than 2,600 hits per day, bringing the total during 2001 to approximately 600,000. The average number of visitors per month was nearly 4,500 in 2001 – an increase of more than 2,500 from the previous year.

Informing the Public: Through information obtained from users who send in reference questions via the site, it can be seen that a broad cross-section of the public benefits from the Web site's capabilities. In 2001, questions were sent in by students from middle school through the post doctoral level. In addition, reference questions were received from landowners in Arizona, with others coming from people in Oregon, Texas, New Mexico, and as far away as Iran and Jordan. One staff member from the U.S. Forest Service sent a message that included the following comment: "This is a great site; made me proud to be an alum. Thanks for the obvious effort that went into it. Appreciate the effort at achieving balance in the discussion."

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