



## *Greater Harmony Between Agriculture and the Environment*

# A Western Regional Land-Grant Web Initiative for Rangeland Management

### **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. 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. Initially, the effort focused on Arizona, but following a regional workshop held at the UA in 2002, a new "Rangelands of the Western U.S." web resource has been developed as part of a multi-state collaborative effort.

### **What has been done?**

Recognizing that Western rangelands and environmental issues do not stop at political boundaries, the March 2002 workshop explored the possibility of forming a Western regional rangelands alliance to develop a comprehensive Web-based resource on current issues and knowledge related to U.S. Western rangelands. This resource would build on the UA's six-year effort in creating the Managing Rangelands web site which is part of the Agriculture Network Information Center (AgNIC) national initiative. The workshop's 22 participants included representatives from 12 Western land-grant institutions, the Policy Analysis Center for Western Public Lands, the Society for Range Management, and the AgNIC

Coordinator from the National Agricultural Library. It was unanimously decided to pursue a common agenda including the development of a regional web site and closely-linked state sites, with the UA taking the lead on initial development activities for the first year. This resulted in a redesign of the existing Managing Rangelands site into a regional home page [<http://rangelandswest.org/>] and a series of state-specific linked sites [see Arizona Rangelands at: <http://rangelandswest.org/az/index.html>]

Over the past seven years, the Arizona 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.

One of the initial motives for selecting rangelands as the University of Arizona's contribution to AgNIC was the controversial nature of the issues surrounding the topic. The goal was to develop a major section whose purpose was to defuse those issues and provide access to balanced and trusted information. To that end, a major section 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. These sections are now being expanded through the new regional partnership and are available from the regional home page.

### **Impact**

The Rangelands of the Western U.S. web site is widely accepted as an important source of information on the understanding and management of Western rangelands. On average, the site receives more than 2,200 hits per day, bringing the total during 2002 to approximately 760,000. In addition, the newly established Western partnership is an accepted model for collaboration within the national AgNIC effort.

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. Throughout the past 7 years, questions have been sent in by students from middle school through the post doctoral level. In addition, reference questions have been 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 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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**Contact**

George Ruyle, extension specialist, rangelands  
Rangeland and Forest Resources Program  
School of Renewable Natural Resources  
Biosciences East 301, Tucson, AZ 85721  
Tel: 520-621-1384; FAX: 520-621-8801  
Email: [gruyle@ag.arizona.edu](mailto:gruyle@ag.arizona.edu)