UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

★ news release

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
BUREAU OF SPORT FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

For Release MARCH 31, 1965

INTERIOR AGENCIES REVIEWING WESTERN GAME RANGE POLICIES

Two Interior Department agencies--the Bureau of Land Management and the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife--are taking a fresh look at wildlife lands they jointly administer in the West, to see what changes are needed for improvement.

Five blocks of reserved public lands in Arizona, Nevada and Montana are under study. These lands, covering some $4\frac{1}{2}$ million acres, were set aside during the 1930's primarily for the use and protection of big game herds, then disappearing from the American scene. Called "game ranges," the tracts, situated in remote and mostly arid country, have been devoted to this purpose ever since.

As Federal gamekeeper, BSF&W manages the wildlife and its habitat on these ranges; and as keeper of the public domain, BLM is responsible for all other land uses. Wildlife use is recognized as a dominant use on these withdrawn public lands.

A major question the agencies are seeking to answer is how administration can be better coordinated for more efficient and economical management. Under the 1964 Classification and Multiple Use Act BLM now has authority to manage land for wildlife. The quest for ways to eliminate dual jurisdictions was prompted by President Johnson's call for greater efficiency at less cost.

But the study will also investigate basic land use issues: Are the original purposes of the ranges still valid? Are existing boundaries adequate, or too inclusive? What previously unrecognized wildlife conditions must be considered? Can the lands be shared with other uses without harming wildlife values? Can they be zoned for specific wildlife protection? How can overall land management plans be developed to better realize multiple-use potentials?

In such a study, the agencies say, one question leads to others, and to a broad field of inquiry including delineation of candidate areas under the Wilderness Act of 1964. From reviews of present uses and practices could grow new concepts of integrating the resource techniques of land management agencies--with less emphasis on boundaries that divide public lands. Study teams will report to a coordinating committee.

The five ranges, in the order they will be studied, are Desert Game Range, Nevada; Cabeza Prieta, Arizona; Kofa, Arizona; Sheldon, Nevada; and Charles M. Russell, Montana. The primary species found on these ranges are bighorn sheep, antelope, and mule deer. In addition to these big game species, the game ranges support a wide variety of other wildlife and plants, many of them of unusual ecological interest.

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