

**THE ECOSYSTEM PROTECTION ACT
REVISIONS
HR3701**

The Ecosystem Protection Act, HR 3701, is a revised version of HR 652, The National Forest Ecosystem Protection Act of 2003. A number of changes were made to incorporate comments made by concerned parties during the preceding two years. They include the following.

Language providing for “maximizing recreational opportunities” has been changed to “providing wild land recreational opportunities” to make this act more like the Wilderness Act.

Language providing that the basic purposes of the Primitive Areas is for “primitive recreation and habitat for wildlife” has been changed to “primitive recreation, habitat for endangered and threatened species, reforestation and rewilding.” The inclusion of reforestation and rewilding is important because important portions of the newly acquired areas are likely to have been cut recently.

A new section provides a voluntary grazing buyout provision. It replaces language mandating that grazing be phased out over a period of years. In this year’s bill every permit holding rancher has the option of selling or retaining his grazing permit. The voluntary grazing permit buyout language is based on the language contained in the separate bill so entitled. Compensation is set at \$175 per animal unit month. The option can be exercised at any time in the future. The grazing permit is then cancelled permanently.

The grazing permit buyout provisions still include an early buyout component. It provides that a permittee relinquishing his permit within 0 to six months of the enactment of this bill shall receive \$300 per animal unit month and that a permittee who relinquishes his permit from six months to four years of the date of enactment shall receive \$250 per animal unit month.

The sites for the nine states without a National Forest large enough to qualify for this act have been named in the bill. This eliminates the confusion about the area to be affected by the legislation.

A site in Alaska and a site in South Dakota have been dropped from the bill.

The bill now better represents the goals of wild land environmentalists. It also is more passable because of the shift to voluntary permit purchases for grazing permits.