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**DISCOURSE AND REALITIES AROUND COMMON PROPERTY RESOURCES:
PUTTING THE WISE USE MOVEMENT IN ITS PLACE**

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Scholars in recent years have generally regarded social movements that center around environmental issues as examples of mobilization and awareness within civil society that is at odds with the interests of the state and markets. They have celebrated the flowering of environmental movements in the Third World as political and ecological actions at the grassroots that promise an ecologically sustainable and socially just alternative to the hegemonic ideas of economic development and wealth creation (Escobar 1994; Gadgil and Guha 1993; Shiva 1990; Weber 1988). Yet curiously enough, similar movements emerging from within civil society in the USA seem to be viewed in a less favourable light. During the past decade, the Wise Use movement that emerged in the Pacific Northwest has attempted to mobilize popular resistance against the controls and environmental legislation governing public lands (Callahan 1992). Despite its efforts to draw on popular support from a wide array of local groups, environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club, the Audubon Society, and Earth First! regard the Wise Use movement as anti-environmental and as a front for corporate interests that wish to increase the exploitation of natural resources from public lands (Bari 1994; Lewis 1995; Pell 1995; Ramos 1995). Investigative reports by environmental journalists have attempted to reveal its links to right-wing extremist and militia groups in the country (Dowie 1995; Helvarg 1995). By locating Wise Use within the nexus of business and right-wing interests, national environmental groups have tended to represent the movement as a potential threat to public lands in the US West and to the political stability of the nation (Bari 1994; Helvarg 1995; Lewis 1995; Pell 1995; Ramos 1995).

In this paper we argue that the Wise Use movement must be examined in the context of political and economic changes that have occurred in the rural regions of the Pacific

Northwest. Much of what is currently labelled as the Wise Use agenda is in fact part of a long-standing contestation over what multiple use of public lands means, and whether economic uses should prevail alongside non-economic uses on public lands. Existing accounts of Wise Use tend to collapse a variety of interest groups and issues that have emerged around the use of public lands under the movement's umbrella. In so doing, these accounts have provided the Wise Use movement with a semblance of ideological coherence and political power that is questionable and which remains largely unsubstantiated. Our analysis focuses on the state of Oregon and offers a preliminary sketch and groundwork for a more full-fledged analysis that we hope to pursue in the future in Oregon and other western states.

Economic Transformation In Oregon

Natural resource extraction has always played a dominant role in Oregon's rural economy. Both timber and other resource-based industries such as cattle-ranching and mining are dependent on access to federally-owned and managed lands that comprise 52.4 percent of the total land area of Oregon (Bureau of Census, 1994). Nearly 50 percent of the total federal land area in Oregon falls under the control of the Bureau of Land Management (US Department of Interior 1980), while the US Forest Service retains approximately 40 percent of federal lands under its jurisdiction (USDA Forest Service 1987). Federal lands in western Oregon are dominated by forests, while eastern Oregon contains a mix of forests and rangelands (see map). Part of the federal lands in western Oregon form the "billion-dollar checkerboard" or the O&C lands (the Revested Oregon and California Railroad lands), controlled largely by the BLM and in part by the Forest Service.¹ These lands--along with the revested Coos Bay Wagon Road lands--play a significant role in contributing to the timber-based economies of Oregon's southern and western counties. Thus a broad distinction can be made between the resource-based economies of counties in western and eastern Oregon: the former being dominated by a timber-based economy, and the latter by timber, cattle-ranching, and to a lesser extent, mining activities.

Local governments in Oregon have traditionally derived substantial proportions of their revenues from resource-extraction on public and private lands. National forest revenue-sharing payments are the most important timber-related revenues for county governments

(Hackworth and Greber 1988). Both BLM and the US Forest Service are mandated to contribute a proportion of the revenues to the counties where logging occurs. O&C counties receive 50 percent of total timber revenues from the BLM and USFS,² while other counties receive 25 percent from the Forest Service, and 4 percent from the BLM. For example, during the 'eighties, Grant and Lake counties received nearly 50 percent of their total revenue, Jackson and Douglas received 36 and 30 percent respectively, and Crook, Grant, Harney, Klamath, and Wheeler counties each received at least 25 percent from the revenue-sharing arrangements. The use of timber revenues from federal and state lands by county governments is presented in the graph 1 and table 1.

Oregon's economy has been dominated by the timber and wood products industries. The wood products industry accounted for 38.4 percent of the wage and salaried employment in the state's manufacturing sector (Schallau, Olson and Maki 1988). In 1991, there were 51.2 thousand employees employed in timber-related industries in western Oregon's timber industries. This represents nearly 30 percent of total manufacturing jobs in western Oregon, with the proportion ranging between 50 and 90 percent in the southwestern counties such Coos, Douglas, Curry, Josephine, Jackson, Linn and Lane (Greber 1992).

Between 1950 and 1980, employment in timber-related industries remained high despite periods of boom and bust. The recession in the early 'eighties contributed to a decline in housing construction and resulted in high levels of unemployment in Oregon's timber-related industries. This decline in employment was exacerbated by increased competition in lumber exports from Canada and the southeastern United States. Employment in these industries has risen since 1982, but is still about 20 percent lower than the levels in the late 1970s (Lettman 1988). There are two reasons for the lowered levels of current employment. The first is related to private timber forests and large corporations. About 38 percent of the forest lands managed for commercial extraction of timber are under private ownership. These forests are predominantly managed for softwoods which meet the needs of the paper and pulp industries. Hardwood trees in privately-owned forests that are used in lumber and wood product manufactures have been declining and restocking has been poor (Gedney 1988; Lettman 1988). In addition, large timber corporations such as Georgia-Pacific, Boise, Cascade, and Weyerhaeuser have restructured their production strategies by moving part of their timber operations to the southeastern US (Brown 1995). The second

factor affecting employment is related to timber extraction on public lands. The allowable harvest levels have been declining due to a variety of regulatory measures, that will be discussed later in the paper.

Cattle-ranching is an important part of the rural economy of eastern Oregon. According to the Census of Agriculture which classifies farm operations according to the size of their cattle inventories, farm operations appear to be evenly distributed across inventory classes (Bureau of Census 1992). Most ranching in eastern Oregon depends on access to BLM lands for grazing cattle.³ Between 1986 and 1993, the number of AUMs (animal unit months) used fell by 38 percent each for Lakeview and Burns, and by 17 percent for the Vale grazing districts (BLM 1986, 1993). An examination of the changes in cattle-holdings in farms categorized by inventory size in Baker, Harney, Klamath, Lake and Malheur counties (which encompass the three BLM grazing districts mentioned above) indicates that cattle-holdings in all inventory categories declined substantially between 1982 and 1987 with the negative trend continuing in most counties between 1987 and 1992 (see table). These trends may be attributed partly to the decline in beef prices that may have compelled ranchers to reduce the size of their holdings (see graph), to rainfall variations or other factors that may be linked to changes in regulations that pertain to cattle-grazing on BLM lands.

As we have tried to illustrate in our foregoing analysis, resource extractive activities from federal lands play an extremely important role in Oregon's rural economies. Timber-related activities provide nearly one-fifth of the total employment in the rural counties of western Oregon, and more than half of the value-added manufacturing jobs (Greber 1993). In eastern Oregon cattle-ranching accounts for more than two-thirds of the total value of agricultural production. County governments derive anywhere from 15 to 50 percent of their total revenue from the revenue-sharing arrangements with federal land agencies. Thus access to and use of federal lands is paramount to the functioning of Oregon's rural economy, and various user groups within local communities have consequently attempted to shape access to and use of public lands to meet their needs.

The Arenas of Conflict over Federal Lands

As the history of legislation in the US West shows (Cawley 1993; Hays 1987; Hess 1992), local user groups have tended to regard public lands as a common property resource and

have demanded that their needs be formally recognized as customary property rights (Fortmann 1990). Legislation that attempts to change access to and use of public lands may well be seen by local communities as a violation of their customary rights and can become subjects of intense contestation. The Pacific Northwest serves as a classic case for understanding the ways in which relations between institutions of civil society and the state have shaped legislation governing resource use and management on public lands. The legislative outcomes and resource management decisions largely depend on the political power that particular user groups can wield in local, regional and national policy arenas and during different phases in national politics. Viewing the process of formulation of public lands policies from this perspective allow us to understand how the successive legislation can embody contradictory purposes and become subjects of intense dispute.

One of the longstanding issues of contention has been the *Federal Lands Policy and Management Act* of 1976 (*FLPMA*), commonly referred to as the BLM Organic Act. This Act represented the culmination of efforts by the federal government to mediate between and institutionalize the demands of different user groups of BLM lands (Cawley 1993). The very process of institutional mediation of competing demands gave rise to disagreements over the central concept contained within the Act, that of Multiple-Use. Multiple-use implied equal importance to all kinds of economic and non-economic uses that could possibly occur on public lands. Yet it simultaneously asserted that lands were to be managed for an identifiable primary use and "any secondary uses that are compatible with the primary purpose" (*ibid.* 35-36). These contradictory tendencies which were encapsulated in the Act stipulated that all uses be considered equal until such time as a dominant use became apparent (*ibid.* 36). Thus the *FLPMA* became a legislation that both challenged pre-existing dominant users and created new uncertainties in their economic operations. User groups whose livelihoods depend on access to BLM lands, particularly cattle ranching and mining operations have routinely expressed their opposition to the multiple-use concept contained in the Act (Cawley 1993; Hess 1992).

The principle of Multiple-Use also guided the formulation of the *National Forest Management Act* of 1976 (*NFMA*). The aims of the *NFMA* were similar in intent, in that they were to allow timber exploitation only in national forest areas where "the potential environmental, biological, aesthetic, engineering, and economic impacts...have been

assessed" (Chase 1995: 138). The multiple-use mandate involved an elaborate process of review and assessment of all national forest lands, during which pre-existing uses were either restricted or subject to lengthy procedures for obtaining exemption from the Act. The contradictory mandate within the *NFMA* and the review process required of the Forest Service imposed high costs on the agency and provoked criticism and accusations of bias and inefficiency from different user groups. Groups that held widely differing views on how public lands should be used geared themselves to challenge the interpretation of multiple-use as well as the review process in court.

Another issue of contention centers around the definition of wilderness and the process involved in reviewing and designating wilderness areas. The *Wilderness Act* of 1964 contained distinctly opposing meanings that were bound to invoke emotional confrontations and suspicions. Wilderness areas were to be designated on the one hand as one of several uses on public lands; on the other, wilderness areas were conceived as spaces that could be protected from the predatory processes of economic development and industrial society (Cawley 1993: 43). The process of designating wilderness status to particular areas involved a study process that effectively rendered those areas *de facto* wildernesses and therefore not open to other uses until the review was completed. The rapid expansion of wilderness study areas again provoked considerable rancor and disagreement between user groups of public lands. The *Endangered Species Act* of 1973 can be seen as a consolidation of the non-economic dimension of the Wilderness Act, as well as an extension of the environmental and biological emphasis in public lands policy. The Act mandates that adequate areas be set aside to preserve the habitat of particular animal and plant species that are deemed endangered or facing the threat of extinction (Greber 1992). The process of designating a species as endangered and establishing protection areas involves a review procedure broadly similar to what is required by the Act that we have described above.

This brief summary of key pieces of legislation relating to public lands highlights the extent to which US Forest Service and BLM lands have been terrains of dispute that have intensified over the past two or more decades. It is in this context that the Wise Use movement should be placed.

The Emergence of Wise Use

The formal launching of the movement is said to have occurred in 1988 at a Multiple Use Strategy Conference in Reno, Nevada, where specific issues relating to the impact of environmental legislation on economic uses of public lands were being debated. Even though the sponsors of the conference, Ron Arnold and Alan Gottlieb asserted that Wise Use represented a broader agenda than the concerns of loggers and ranchers, it seems evident that the core issues discussed at the conference by various user groups of public lands (such as the Western Public Land Coalition, the Multiple-Use Land Alliance, Western Cattlemen Association, People for the West! and many others) wrestled with the problems of multiple-use. These problems had surfaced in the 'eighties as part of the Sagebrush rebellion. The Sagebrush rebellion had expressed frustration with the *FLPMA*, and demanded revisions in: 1) the land-use planning process carried out by federal agencies; 2) the methods employed by federal agencies for assessing range capacities, AUM estimates, and allotment of grazing permits; and 3) the definitions of multiple use and sustained yield. In addition, the Sagebrush rebellion argued for the conveyance of federal lands to states and county governments on the grounds that this would lead to better resource management of public lands (Cawley 1993; Maughan and Nilson 1993).

But the Wise Use agenda did go further than the Sagebrush Rebellion in some respects: it not only dealt with how new environmental legislation would affect economic uses of public lands, but also how legislation such as the *Endangered Species Act* and the *Wetlands Preservation Act* would affect private property rights. In so doing, Wise Use leaders placed their agenda within the ideological context of American values that regard private property ownership as sacrosanct so as to gain popular support. They invoke Pinchot's idea of conservation as 'the wise use of resources', and assert that the movement's aims coincide with those articulated in the *National Environmental Policy Act* of 1969, that it is their aim "to create and maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony" (Gottlieb 1989; Wilderness Society 1992). Arnold and Gottlieb characterize Wise Use as neither devoted to single-minded preservation nor single-minded exploitation for industrial development, but rather as representing "a new balance, of a middle way between environmentalism and extreme industrialism" (Gottlieb 1989).

The emergence of the Wise Use movement has been viewed with immense

consternation by national environmental organizations. Some have characterized it as an environmental backlash (Callahan 1992) while others have labelled it as anti-environmental and as a front for large-scale corporations engaged in the resource-extractive sectors (Ramos 1995). Recent accounts attempt to link the Wise Use with right-wing militia groups so as to indicate that the movement's anti-environmental stance fits well with the reactionary politics displayed by the militia groups (Helvarg 1995).

We argue that energy expended by national environmental groups to reveal the nexus between Wise Use, corporate interests, and the right-wing militia has been largely misdirected and misspent for several reasons. First, as we have seen from the analysis of the economic transformations in Oregon's rural economies, concern over the potential effects of environmental legislation on economic use of public lands is widely shared by user groups, workers in the lumber and wood products industries, and by county governments. Thus representing the Wise Use movement as a "question of cultural myth and politics" (Jacobs 1995) ignores the material realities and economic uncertainties faced by working people in the primary and manufacturing sectors.

Second, the attempts of environmental organizations to discredit the Wise Use movement by representing its agenda as pro-industry also ignores, and to a large extent, dismisses those concerns of workers and rural communities that have found a place alongside other issues in the movement's agenda. As Beverly Brown has shown in her rich and detailed interviews with individuals and families in the logging communities of southwestern Oregon, corporate forestry practices are far more unpopular than the industry would have the national public believe (Brown 1995: 248). The Silver Fire Roundup, also known as the Yellow Ribbon Rally was represented by environmentalists as a "timber management-sponsored" campaign (Bari 1994). Yet as Brown's interviews show, the rally was "less a rubber-stamp endorsement of the timber industry than a celebration of solidarity among people who identified themselves with their rural and small-town communities, and with a culture that included timber harvests, but was not solely defined by them" (*op. cit.* 33-34). Workers in western Oregon's timber-related industries have not blindly followed a pro-industry stance, nor are they virulently anti-environment. But they do display resentment towards environmental groups that dismiss their economic concerns or represent them as puppets of the corporate timber industry (Callahan 1992; Foster 1996). It is not surprising

that a number of vehicles in western Oregon are adorned with bumper-stickers that wryly ask, "Are you an environmentalist, or do you work for a living?"

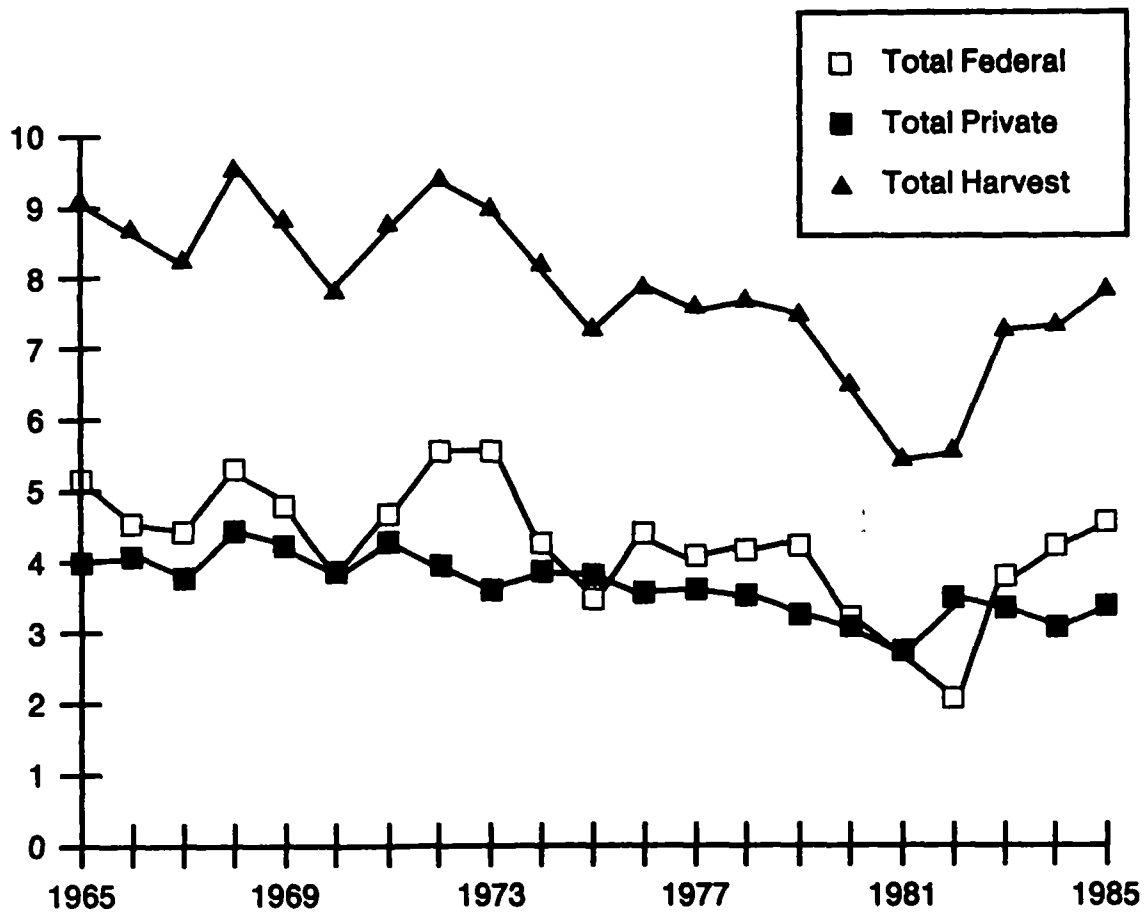
Finally, many national environmental organizations represent Wise Use as a movement that has rapidly gained the support of a variety of interest groups and across the nation through persuasive use of anti-environmental rhetoric and ideological posturing around American values. However, as a report commissioned by the Wilderness Society to review the membership and strength of the Wise Use in all fifty states indicates, many local and regional interest groups currently characterized as part of the movement are unaware of its existence, see as peripheral to their concerns, or openly disassociated themselves from it (Wilderness Society 1993; *cf.* Callahan 1992; Ramos 1995). Thus it may well be that the Wise Use movement is not as powerful as is currently portrayed by environmental organizations.

The point we wish to emphasize is that current representations of Wise Use tend to de-emphasize the livelihood issues facing user groups and local governments, whose concerns are at the very least, articulated in the movement's agenda. The current political climate may well drive workers in timber-related and natural resource-based sectors to seek arenas where they can voice some of their concerns, and in the process attempt to establish some degree of legitimacy for influencing public land policy. If we wish to create political spaces for social movements so that they can participate in policymaking, then we need to employ an analytical approach that examines these movements within the context of the material conditions and social relations from which they emerge. Local conflicts and struggles over the use of public lands in Oregon have emerged from the volatility of resource-extractive sectors and from the contradictions that inevitably arise when changing relationships between state and civil society reshape the meaning of a key resource, namely, public lands.

1. BLM-administered lands in Oregon involve an extensive checkerboard land ownership pattern and include nearly 2.1 million acres. These lands were revested with the federal government when the Oregon and California Railroad Company was discovered in 1869 to have engaged in illegal land dealings and speculations. Forty years later, the Supreme Court ruled that the lands be repurchased by the Department of Interior. Since most of the homestead plots were unsuitable for farming, the Land Office was authorized by Congress to begin logging and contribute a portion of the revenues to the counties. The Coos Bay Wagon Road lands were also vested with the Department of Interior and later brought under the administration of the BLM when it was created in 1946.

2. The 1937 O&C Sustained Yield Act mandated that 75 percent of the revenues were to be given to county governments. In 1952, the law was revised to use 25 percent as a "ploughback fund" to support sustainable forest management that would contribute to the economic stability of localities and industries. The remaining 50 percent continued to flow to county governments (Chase 1994; Hackworth and Greber 1988).

3. Permits defining the number of AUMs (animal unit months) are allotted by the BLM to ranches that show commensurate property holdings for maintaining their cattle during winter months or indication of prior use (Bartolome and Heady 1988).



Total Federal and Private Harvest Levels (1965-1985)
 Source: Oregon Department of Forestry Annual Harvest Report.

AGENCY	REVENUE FORMULA	DISTRIBUTION
USFS	25% of Gross Harvest Receipts to Counties	75% to County Road Fund 25% to County School Fund
O&C	50% of Gross Harvest Receipts to Counties	County General Fund
BLM	Coos Bay Wagon Road Public Dom. Lands	"Would be" Property Tax Value of Land to Counties
	4% of Net Receipts Based on Area of Each County	To Taxing Units Within The County Used for Public Roads and Bridges
Common School Lands	Interest Earnings on Invested Harvest Revenues	Common School Fund
State	Board of Forestry Lands	63.75% of all Harvest Receipts
County	County Forests	All harvest receipts
		10% for County Management 67.5% to County Tax Districts 22.5% Maximum to County School Fund
		County General Fund

Table 1. Timber Revenues From the Public Sector

Employment and County Revenues in Western Oregon

1991 Actuals	Coos County	Douglas	Linn/Lane	Jack/.Joseph.	Others	Total
Total	25,000	32,100	148,030	72,260	821,900	1,099,290
Timber	2,900	7,630	14,380	6,250	20,050	51,210
Other Manufacturing	1,240	1,180	14,710	4,920	111,900	133,950
Timber, % of Total	11.60%	23.77%	9.71%	8.65%	2.44%	4.66%
Timber, % of Manufacturing	70.05%	86.61%	49.43%	55.95%	15.20%	27.66%
Unemployment (#)	3,440	4,500	13,090	8,000	46,590	75,620
Unemployment (%)	9.97%	10.03%	6.85%	7.94%	4.93%	5.65%
1988-89 Budget Total (millions)	27.3	56.7	134.2	57.4	493.5	769.1
BLM receipts (Est.)	7.1	17.1	12.3	18.9	11.9	67.3
BLM % of Total	26.00%	30.20%	9.10%	32.90%	2.40%	8.70%

1. Total represents nonagricultural wage and salary employment.
2. Timber includes logging, sawmilling, plywood, paper, and value-added products.
3. Unemployment based upon all categories of employment.

Source: Greber, 1992.

Percentage of Change in Number of Farms by Cattle Inventory Size

Farms by Cattle Inventory	Baker		Harney		Klamath		Lake		Malheur		Oregon	
	1982-87	1987-92	1982-87	1987-92	1982-87	1987-92	1982-87	1987-92	1982-87	1987-92	1982-87	1987-92
1-9	-31	-5	-46	+13	-13	-35	-36	+103	-29	+2	-25	-7.5
10-19	-38	+27	+14	+0.8	-85	+9	+12	-17	-4	-4	-24	-2
20-49	-10	-17	+27	-10	-5	+18	-9	0	-21	-13	-17	+1
50-99	-16	-6	+16	0	-26	+38	-40	+39	-33	-7	-15	0
100-199	-15	+12	+48	+70	+11	-3	0	+5	-16	-13	-10.5	-3
200-499	-5	+3	+3	+30	+9	0	-43	+54	-14	+8	-6	+7.6
500 or more	0	-17.5	-14	-19	+11	+1	+6	-9	-4	0	-1.2	-4

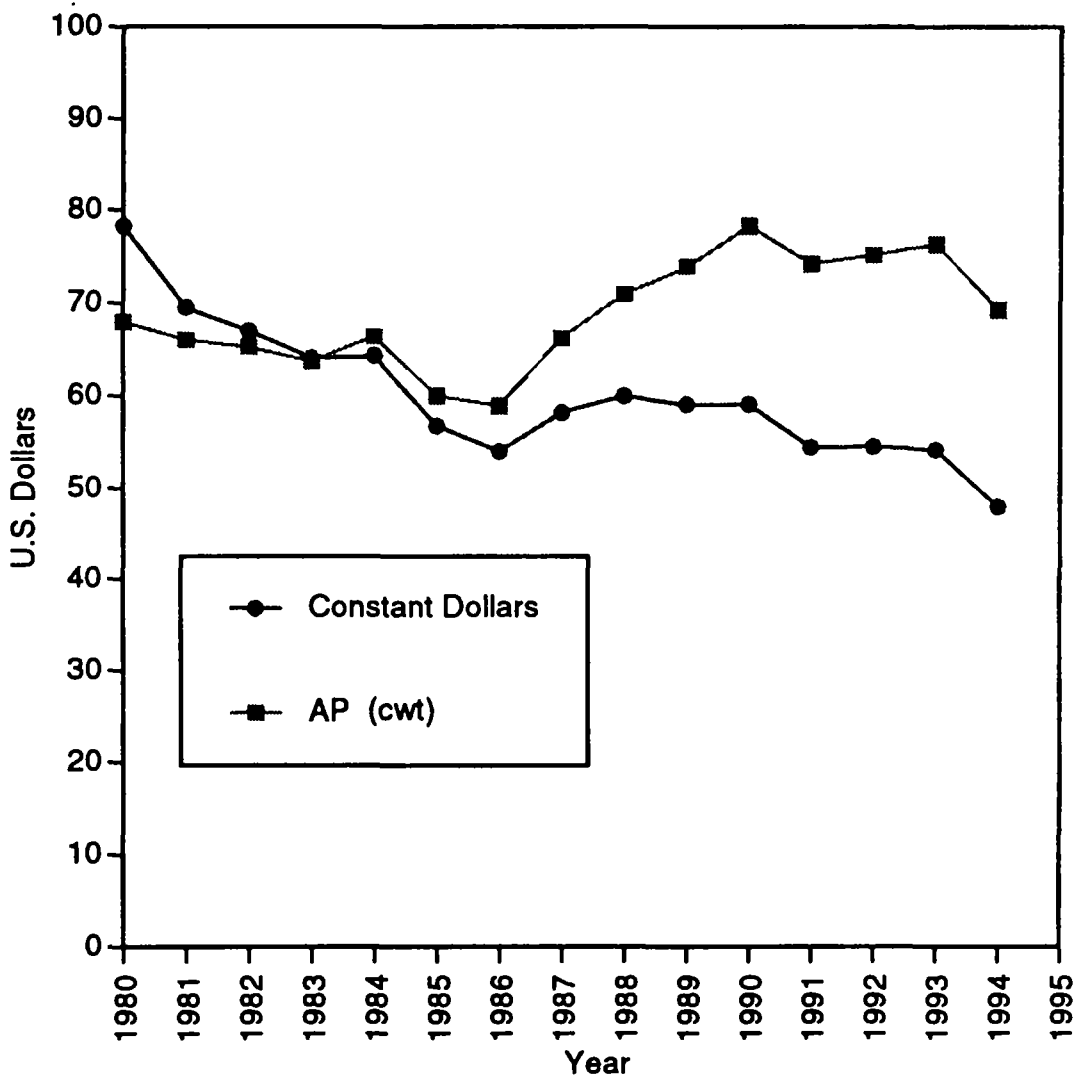
Source: Computations based on the US Bureau of Census, *Oregon Census of Agriculture, 1992*.

**Percentage of Change in Number of Cattle
By Cattle Inventory Size**

Farms by Cattle Inventory	Baker		Harney		Klamath		Lake		Malheur		Oregon	
	1982-87	1987-92	1982-87	1987-92	1982-87	1987-92	1982-87	1987-92	1982-87	1987-92	1982-87	1987-92
1-9	-33.0	+8.9	-145.0	+22.3	-8.0	-59.6	-31.5	-5.6	-32.2	-6.0	-26.5	-7.0
10-19	-40.4	+22.8	-10.3	+17.8	-11.8	+12.7	+25.2	-20.0	-8.7	-1.4	-23.7	-0.8
20-49	-10.2	-14.5	+30.0	-4.7	-1.9	+10.0	-7.7	-8.7	-22.6	-13.3	-15.8	-1.2
50-99	-12.4	-6.9	+10.7	-.8	-26.8	+33.0	-41.1	+39.0	-32.1	-3.7	-14.7	+3.3
100-199	-13.0	+11.6	+100.4	+69.0	+9.7	-3.1	+5.1	-1.9	NA	NA	-9.4	-2.9
200-499	-4.6	+1.8	+2.9	+21.5	-8.6	-7.0	NA	NA	NA	NA	-5.7	+6.2
500 or more	-1.2	+1.8	-6.0	-31.2	-11.4	+7.6	NA	NA	+6.6	+6.2	-1.8	+2.0

Source: Computations based on the US Bureau of Census, *Oregon Census of Agriculture, 1992*.

Trends In US Beef Prices



Sources: <http://www.ncanet.org//beef>

Bureau of Census, *Statistical Abstract of US, 1995* (1982-1984 = 100)

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