PROBABLY no figure in America’s history has achieved the romantic stature which the world has accorded the western cowboy. He is the part of our folklore which other peoples have idealized and our world image has been the better for it. Zane Grey, Charlie Russell and Frederick Remington memorialized the cowboy in a manner that rivals what Wagner did for the heroes of Teutonic mythology or Tennyson’s press agency for the knights of chivalry.

Like all romanticized portrayals, however, this one is vaguely divorced from the substance of which life is made. Somehow, in the idyllic view, the chuck-wagon is always present to dispense, unexplainably, the needs of the inner man—even as the cups of the gods are constantly filled from some ethereal source. Shelter is no problem because a warm campfire and a ceiling of stars always suffice. The cowboy is strictly a fair-weather hero. Kinescope showings of “Gunsmoke”, with dubbed-in Italian dialogue, hold the same magic spell over viewers in Rome, Italy, as the original version did in Rome, Georgia or New York or Ohio—even though “Chester’s” bass voice loses something in translation.

Quite apart from its complete divorcement from present reality, this picture of the West and its celluloid or electronic heroes ignores completely the sacrifice and suffering, the adversity and the danger, that went into its making. To some of our forebears in this austere environment, it was clear that God and nature had conspired to crush them and that man himself was bent on aiding in his own destruction.

Drought and blizzard shrivelled and froze in alternating onslaught. Indian and white, railroader and miner, homesteader and cattleman—all joined in the melee for the promise of abundance that seemed so evasive. Ill-advised land disposal policies placed ownership in the hands of remote landlords—alien as well as citizen. The wildness of the West was as much in the nature of man as in his environment. His own institutions and competition put a high price on the customary virtues of civility—respect for property, person and law.
The upper Great Plains never had a chance to sort out and reconcile its strengths and weaknesses for itself. Even as the eyes of the world turned toward this state forty years ago to learn the results of a heavyweight championship bout, the clouds of economic adversity were gathering, about to release the deluge that collapsed institutions even more rigidly built than the tenuous structure that struggled here. When collapse did come, it was total—and it had one significant effect for our discussion here. Land abandonment and tax delinquency added yet another dimension to a confused land ownership and tenure pattern.

It is to Montana's everlasting credit that it took steps of its own to bring some order out of the confusion that faced its grazing industry. It moved out, in fact, before the Federal Government made any move to integrate grazing lands into usable units. First, the Mizpah-Pumpkin Creek experiment in public domain leasing was urged upon and approved by the Congress. That institution has now passed into history, having served its purpose. But it typifies the initiative and determination which the cattlemen of this state put forth to help themselves.

Then came the associations and cooperative state grazing districts for which Montana became justly famous. When President Franklin Roosevelt appointed a special ad hoc committee in 1937 to study the problems of the Great Plains area, its principal recommendation on grazing was that other states should adopt legislation patterned after laws enacted here in 1933 and 1935 creating cooperative associations of grazers with a charter for self-help.

The state became an even more directly involved party in 1939 with the law that created the structure which you are dealing with in this joint conference. It is always pleasant to find a familiar and respected name among the sponsors of landmark legislation at any time. A very young member of your House of Representatives in 1939 played a major role in securing enactment of the basic law establishing state cooperative grazing districts. The Montana Legislature's loss was the U.S. Congress' gain when you sent Lee Metcalf on to Washington. Those of us who must struggle with the complex problems of conservation on a national scale in an exploding society are grateful for the support and understanding we have learned to expect from Senator Metcalf.

Many things have changed since the period about which I have been speaking. The Taylor Grazing Act has brought order to the Federal range. Bankhead-Jones acquisitions have blocked up vast areas that formerly defied
ownership identification. But more than anything else, there is at large in the country a new respect for the land, its soil and its forage cover. We no longer force individuals, groups or localities to fill the vacuum that formerly existed on the public domain through lack of management. After generations of neglect, Uncle Sam is taking his proper place as a good neighbor and responsible partner with those who rely upon the Federal lands for support of their economy.

National existence is becoming, increasingly, a matter of living space; competition for land use is sharpening. As a national policy, our answer to this insofar as the public lands are concerned is multiple use. This means increasingly positive management for lands that, even in our own generation, were substantially ignored. Range lands once considered useful only for grazing--and sometimes not very highly prized for that--must now and increasingly for the future be made to support wildlife, hunting and other forms of outdoor recreation, and as many other activities as can be made compatible with each other. All of this means a greatly increased element of public control over public land resources.

These are changes which are nation-wide in scope--or at least common to that part of the nation where range grazing is a major factor. Here in Montana, other changes have been at work. On top of the consolidations accomplished under Bankhead-Jones, much of the absentee-owned acreage of the 30's and the tax-default holdings of the counties have passed into the hands of resident ranchers--in private ownership. Even on the public lands committed to cooperative district use, the trend has been strong toward individual allotments rather than open range. Time has supplied much of the orderliness that the cooperative districts had to provide in 1939.

This change in attitude and philosophy on the part of the Department and the Congress is, in large part at least, responsive to the fundamental adjustment through which our whole nation is passing to meet the challenge of population expansion. It took just about 140 years of our national history to hit the hundred million mark. The second hundred million level will be reached in less than 50 years (that is, before 1970); and we will be 300 million strong by century's end--less than thirty years after reaching the second bench mark.

With this as a background, let us take a look at the status of our relationship. The Bureau of Land Management is a participant in your
cooperative approach to the extent that it has agreements with 30 of your districts. Over 1.1 million acres of public domain lands and nearly 1.8 million acres of LU lands are committed to grazing in this manner. These 2.9 million Federal acres are managed in conjunction with something less than 600,000 acres about evenly divided between state lands and smaller areas in railroad, county and other private ownership. Statewide, therefore, the Federal areas account for 83 percent of the total acreage involved.

All of you are aware that we now have before us the question of renewal and extension of one of the thirty agreements involved. Quite understandably you are probably watching it as a precedent for what might happen to the rest of the system. If you are active in the Badlands District, your concern will be even more direct and personal.

I can only tell you that no decision has been reached. There are many issues involved--issues of land policy and who controls its use and access, administrative issues of financial accountability, and a host of others. But so far as I am concerned two considerations are paramount and controlling: first, what is best for the land and its development, and second, what happens to the tradition of cooperation that germinated and flourished in the environment you furnished for it.

Within the boundaries of the Badlands District are located more than 707,000 acres of Federal range lands, but only 88,000 of these, the LU lands, are under direct management of the District. The more than 619,000 public domain acres were removed from the scope of the agreement in 1952. The District has requested extension of the agreement for another full period and inclusion of the public domain lands once more.

As an abstract question of efficient management in an area of Federal resource responsibility, the answer to this question would be quite simple. Unlike 1933, the Bureau of Land Management has the capacity and the competence, as well as the legal framework, to administer all of the Federal lands in the area. The paper work problem of dual permits, which nettles bureaucrat and range user alike, would evaporate. Montana lands would receive their fair share of the increased appropriations which are now available for range improvement projects. The Department of the Interior would be accepting the full responsibility placed upon it by the Congress and the public.
Were this all that is involved, I should have approved a recommendation made to me almost a year ago that all Federal lands be withdrawn from Badlands District management. But the discussions held by the Bureau of Land Management and representatives of my office with District officials, State government people and representatives of the Montana congressional delegation confirmed my suspicion that such a unilateral decision would have unfortunate repercussions. Hence, we are still talking—looking for solutions to protect valid local interests while permitting the Department to carry out its responsibilities.

Your state officials, in the able persons of Messrs. Teigen and Rivenes, have expressed concern over the possibility that cancellation of the agreement would leave large amounts of acreage in scattered state sections unmanaged. This, of course, would be a great waste—one that must be avoided.

Of possible greater significance, however, is the fact that the Badlands people feel that they cannot maintain their organization if the Federal lands are withdrawn. This too must be avoided. The work of the Badlands District has been a valued contribution to what we hope will be the watchword of Federal range management—cooperation! After a generation of friction and working at cross purposes, range user and range manager have come to the realization that they must work together in the interest of the land and the stability and fruitfulness of its use. We cannot knowingly endanger one of the more promising evidences of willingness to cooperate.

But we are still faced with some rather stark realities. Soil conditions and a long history of improper range use have necessitated the expenditure of large amounts on the public domain lands since 1952, principally in the Willow Creek area—nearly $800,000, with more required. Management to enhance wildlife and recreation values is essential—part of the area involved is in the Charles M. Russell Game Range. A return of the improved estate to non-Federal control is simply not feasible, and the benefits of Federal management programs should be extended to the LU lands as well.

I have mentioned already the growing demand—in fact, the evident good sense—of multiple use management. This, too, involves substantial new investments for access and facilities. No private, single-use group can afford to undertake this kind of public improvement. It is purely and simply a governmental function—and one that cannot be delayed.
These are the metes and bounds of our dilemma. And let me assure you immediately that this is no bureaucratic grab for power or empire. Ours is a genuine concern over what is best for the land and the millions of Americans who have the right to look to it as their heritage—their cushion against the day when 300 million or more people will rely on an inelastic land base for food, fiber and a chance to see open space and breathe fresh air.

Even though the precedent aspect of a Badlands decision is negligible, I recognize the legitimacy of your general interest. We think that effective solutions to the problems involved are available and can be worked out long before the other agreements start to come up for renewal in 1971.

We will strive for an arrangement which will preserve the identity and vitality of the existing range users organization. Whether as a state district actually administering state, county and private lands or as an association of stockmen contemplated by Section 9 of the Taylor Act, the counsel and cooperative assistance of the industry is earnestly desired and solicited. To promote that end, we would propose to establish a fee schedule for grazing privileges on the Federal lands which would be low enough in comparison with commercial rates to justify the District's collection of a small assessment upon its membership. As to the intermingled state and other lands involved, the Pierce Act provides a mechanism whereby they may be leased by BLM for integrated management. This alternative will be made available to the owners, but without prejudice to full and complete cooperation along other lines should they desire to leave them under control of the District.

This is our thinking on a very delicate subject. I hope you will feel that I have laid the cards on the table—face up—for that was my purpose. The decision has not been made and we are open to further suggestions and discussions in the context of the situation I have outlined.

Let me close with some remarks on what might seem to be quite a different subject—but one which has its roots in the same historical facts that I have outlined previously. As a nation we have mistreated our public lands because they were regarded as having little value. In some of our western states, the cry has been heard that they are, in fact, a hindrance because they produce no wealth and return no taxes to the community. They have constituted an irritant in Federal-State relations—especially in election years when whipping posts are popular.
In the past three years, I have come to have an entirely different appreciation of the contribution these lands have made and continue to make each day to the prosperity of the western community. And this is entirely apart from their great national value as a reservoir of future living space.

Consider these stark facts:

-- Range grazing still produces a huge segment of America's red-meat diet and related products. It is the foundation stone for the economic existence of hundreds of communities and a key regional industry. Over 27,000 leases and permits make the Federal range available for nearly 15 million animal unit months of grazing at very nominal fees.

-- Four-fifths of the nation's merchantable coniferous timber is in the West, three-fifths on public land. The conservation philosophy fathered by Gifford Pinchot assures that this resource, in Federal ownership, is available on a sustained yield basis to support another key industry of the region. Timber and related industries represent five per cent of the national economy and provide 3.3 million jobs in the private sector. Thus, public management of a valuable resource contributes directly to stable private enterprise.

-- Western lands contribute almost every one of our mineral needs--coal, copper, phosphate, oil and gas, uranium and all of our helium. Practically all of them are found on the public lands and, with rare exceptions, are open to private industry for extraction to support the local economy. In the eight mountain states alone, the mineral industry provides a half-billion dollar payroll for 85,000 jobs.

These are but sketchy examples of the fact that the resources of the Federal land estate are substantial. They are not locked up but are managed to support industries which create wealth and provide jobs for the people of the West.

But the value of these lands in Federal ownership can also be demonstrated in even more direct, dollars and cents, terms. Over the whole
history of Federal stewardship, the public lands have produced revenues in excess of $3.1 billion--from rents and royalties, timber sales and the sale of the lands themselves. Nearly two-thirds of this total has been realized in the past fifteen years, so the long-range trend is upward.

Nearly half of all these revenues--about $1.5 billion--has been returned to the public land states. Over $680 million went to the states and counties as direct grants to supplement tax revenues. Almost $300 million went to the Reclamation Fund--and every cent of this is reinvested in the West, on the projects which conserve water and produce power to attract people and industry.

When we talk about the tax status of Federal lands it is easy to gloss over some other facts that ought to be more widely known. Do your county assessors realize, for example, that the privilege of grazing on Federal lands attaches real, market-place value to the base ranch? If they are using market-place value criteria, all of this value accretion is on the tax rolls.

Or take just one of our Federal-State grant-in-aid programs--the most important one of our era in dollar terms. The Federal Aid Highway Act contains a formula under which the Federal Government absorbs a part of the State's obligation in proportion to the area of certain Federal lands in the State. In Fiscal Year 1962, Montana and Iowa let contracts under this program which were just about equal in dollar amount, $58 million, and substantially parallel in other significant respects. Yet the Federal share in Montana was $45.7 million, as compared to Iowa's $39.7 million. For this one program alone and for a single year, therefore, the Federal lands returned a $6 million bonanza. This is nearly 75% for every Federal acre. Could you have taxed it at that rate if Montana had been required to pay its full share of the highway bill?

These are mere indicators of the value of the Federal estate--value to the people and the communities where the Federal domain still exists. An estate of this kind is worthy of the best management we can give it. Our decisions must be reached with that in mind. It is a job big enough for all of us to concentrate on. I look forward to the continuance of relations which will assure your maximum participation in that task.