

So, what is Rangeland?

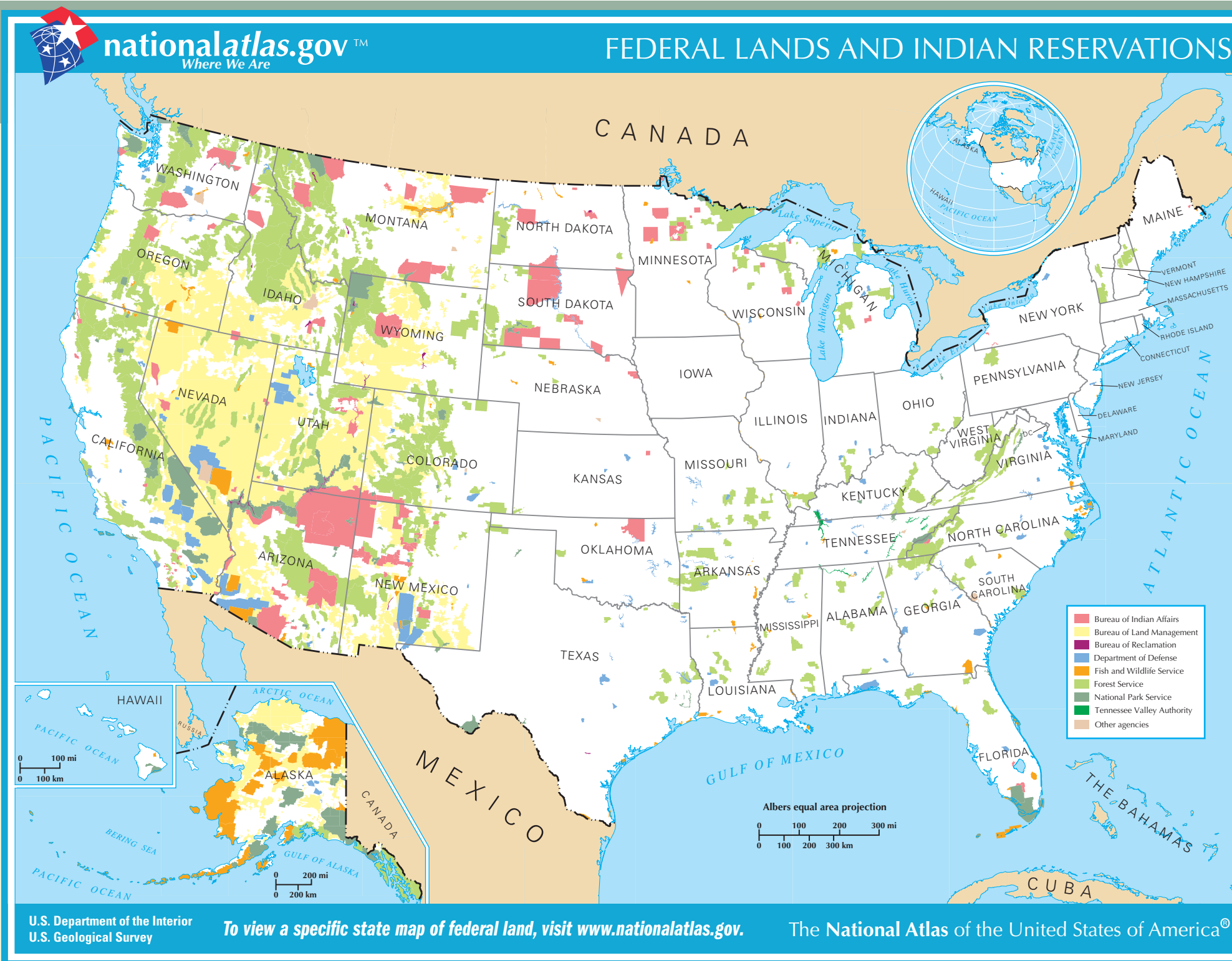
THAT'S ABOUT 60 percent of the United States land mass. There are 1.8 billion acres of land in the United States. The pie chart shows how land in the United States can be grouped. Land often has more than one use. For example, farmlands can also be forested. Likewise, a single forest can have recreational, grazing, timbering and other uses all at the same time (this is called multiple-use land). Urban areas have highways, railroads, and airports; they also include recreational and park areas along with homes and factories. Deserts can have residential and wildlife areas.

When the term "rangeland" first came into use in the 1800s, it was used to describe the extensive, unforested lands dominating the western half of the United States continent. Today, rangeland refers to a large, mostly unimproved section of land that is primarily used for livestock grazing. Rangelands include natural grasslands, savannas, shrublands, many deserts, tundra, alpine communities, coastal marshes and wet meadows. Rangeland is generally unsuitable for farming but suitable for harvest by livestock.

Rangelands cover about 80 percent of Utah's land – from desert canyons to spectacular mountains with numerous lakes and streams. Utah ranks 10th out of 50 states in rangeland area, with about 24 million acres. So how is the land used or owned? Check out the "Land use in Utah" pie chart.

Why are Rangelands important?

People derive multiple goods and services from rangeland ecosystems including wildlife and wildlife habitat; high quality water; clean air and open spaces; carbon sequestration to mitigate global warming; habitat for threatened and endangered species; recreational uses; food and fiber production, including livestock grazing; and a unique setting for social and cultural activities. We depend on these goods and services and expect them to be sustained for the benefit of future generations.

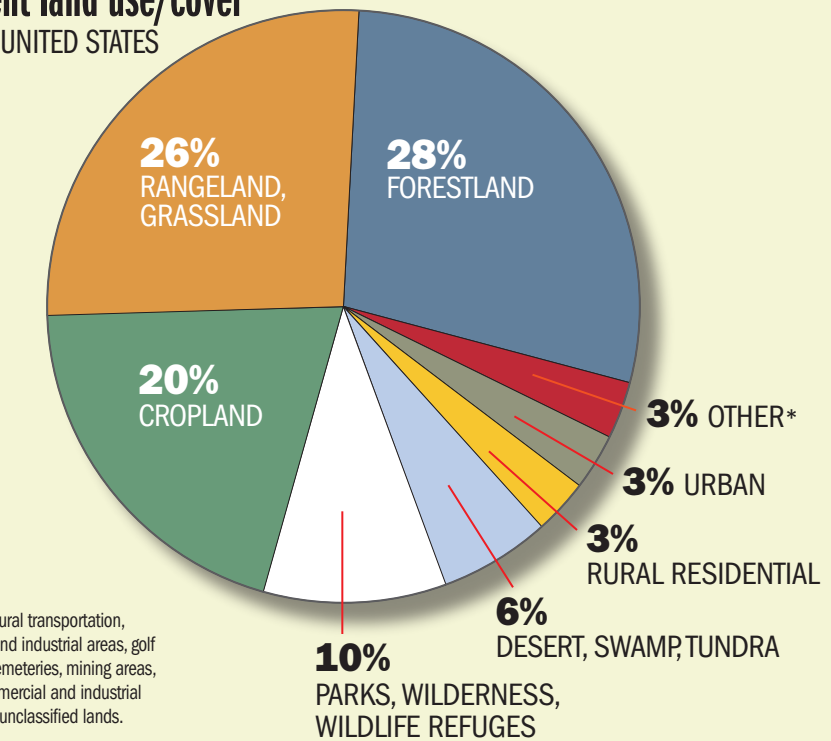


Who owns the land?

Around the time of the Civil War, the U.S. Congress passed the Homestead Act to encourage people to move west in exchange for free land. While homesteading succeeded in the arable lands in the broad Mississippi valley, it failed in the dry high plains and the Rocky Mountains where farming is difficult.

Much of the land that was not homesteaded became today's federal lands. Federal lands, which cover 50 percent of the western United States, include 270 million acres managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS).

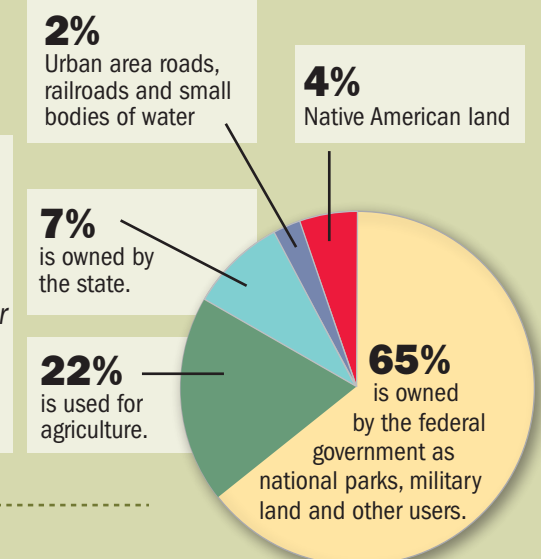
Present land use/cover IN THE UNITED STATES



SOURCE: USDA, Economic Research Service

Land use in Utah

Twenty-two percent of Utah's land is used for agriculture. Only about 2 percent of agricultural land is cropland; the other 20 percent is pasture or private rangeland used for livestock grazing.



On the Trail!

The map above indicates areas that are designated as federal lands and Indian reservations. Note that the white areas are privately owned land. Using your map-reading skills and a Utah road atlas, answer the following questions:

- In what part of the United States are most federal lands located?
- Locate the area of the U.S., called "America's bread basket" (named for the wheat and other crops grown there) which includes Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri and Illinois. On what type of land is most of the wheat grown?
- Which state has the most Indian reservations?
- What agency of the federal government owns most of the land in Utah?
- What biome best describes the Utah lands indicated in yellow?
a. savanna b. desert c. forest d. grassland
- Along what geographical feature is most of Utah's forest land located?
- What two geographical features in Utah are owned by the Bureau of Reclamation?
- Using a Utah road atlas, draw and label the four major interstate highways in Utah.

Ridin' the Range WEB-QUEST Journey



Take an online journey to explore Utah's rangelands. Discover the plants and animals common to these rangelands and how these species get along in their environment. Follow the links on www.agclassroom.org/webquest/ridinrange.htm to answer the provided questions. You can print a worksheet that you can use to record your findings.