Soil and Vegetation Inventory of Near-pristine Sites

MONTANA

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

" Of all the things that live and grow upon this earth, grass is the most important. Should its harvest fail for a single year, famine would depopulate the earth."

For thousands of years nature's grasses have waved in the breeze, bowed their heads to the wind, shook their seeds to the earth, and then died back into the rich brown soil they were helping to build. All the creatures of nature lived on the plants or on each other. When the hungry winds swept over the range, the grass held the line from erosion. When the power-packed rain pellets smashed into it, they exploded harmlessly in the spongy, shock-proof blanket of vegetation and were absorbed by the life-giving soil.

Nature had reached a climax in a marvelous self-perpetuating ecosystem that could have endured indefinitely without change. The grass provided sustenance for the vegetarians, and they for the carnivores and omnivores; and the wastes and residues from all returned to earth to provide sustenance for the grass.

Front Cover Picture - Square Butte, north of Cascade, Montana, is a well-known landmark that Charles M. Russell included in many of his paintings. A portion of the top of the Butte has been protected from livestock grazing to preserve the vegetation as a permanent relict area. The picture "Charles M. Russell and His Friends" was made available through the Montana Historical Society -- MacKay Collection.