



Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition Vision for Public Rangelands

Across the seventeen western states ranchers currently operate on over 650 million acres of private and public rangelands and forests. Over 200 million acres of this is public land managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Forest Service (FS), where ranchers hold permits to graze their livestock on public grazing allotments for some portion of the year. Many ranchers depend on these grazing permits for the sustainable operation of their ranches.

In some areas, public and private rangelands have been adversely impacted by historical grazing practices that preceded contemporary understanding of rangeland science and ecology. And in many parts of the West, conflicts and misunderstandings over public lands grazing and other uses are still commonplace. However, there are growing numbers of exemplary ranchers who are engaged in the successful conservation and stewardship of their private ranches and public grazing allotments. There is also a history, as well as new and growing efforts, to take collaborative approaches to private land conservation, and foster common ground on public rangeland management decisions.

Healthy and resilient public rangelands provide multiple ecological, social and economic values and should be stewarded and maintained as a key anchor for multiple uses. Rangelands are a source of high water quality and quantity, prime fish and wildlife habitat, open space, and public opportunities for recreation and hunting. They provide a diverse array of values; from grass and browse for livestock and for wildlife species, to sequestering carbon from the atmosphere.

To sustain the multiple values that our private and public rangelands provide, we envision a balanced, collaborative, conservation-based approach to rangeland management that: 1) recognizes the value of sustainable grazing

Key Recommendations:

To make the RVCC vision for public rangelands a reality, we provide the following recommendations to Congress, the Administration, and the land management agencies:

1. Support collaborative restoration and management efforts to achieve healthy public rangelands, strong rural economies and harmonious communities.
2. Promote rangeland monitoring for improved management, more informed decisions and increased accountability.
3. Develop and foster a more effective and timely allotment renewal process.
4. Incentivize private and public rangeland conservation and stewardship.

practices that promote rangeland health and productivity; 2) acknowledges the interplay between access to grazing on public lands, the viability of ranching operations, and opportunities for landscape-scale conservation and restoration efforts; and 3) recognizes the contribution that access to grazing on public lands makes to the vitality of rural communities.

Our vision of a balanced, conservation-based approach recognizes the following:

- It is possible to accommodate diverse uses on our public rangelands. The American public relies on the federal government to manage these lands for the benefit of all. Uses and benefits such as forage for livestock and wildlife, recreation, water resources,

Working together to find policy solutions to the ecological and economic challenges of the rural West

RVCC is comprised of rural western, regional, and national organizations that have joined together to promote balanced conservation-based approaches to the ecological and economic problems facing the West. We are committed to finding and promoting solutions through collaborative, place-based work that recognizes the inextricable link between the long-term health of the land and well-being of rural communities. We come from Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon and Washington.





energy production, open space and others can occur and still allow for species recovery and the improvement or maintenance of rangeland health. We recognize that these uses have varied impacts, benefits, consequences and tradeoffs.

- Ranching communities with access to the right tools, resources and incentives can provide a lasting and effective stewardship workforce while retaining and fostering a stable ranching culture and rural way of life. In many places across the West, reduction in access to public lands for grazing can have social, economic and ecological ramifications that may include: loss of jobs in rural communities; impacts to the health of private land, loss of open space to development; fewer regional sources of food and fiber; and finally, the erosion of a stewardship workforce that has intimate knowledge of the land.
- Ranchers' use of public lands comes with a responsibility to institute and maintain sustainable practices and environmental quality. Many ranchers work in partnership with the land management agencies to restore and maintain the rangeland health of their allotments, while also utilizing the range for water and forage for their cattle.
- Public and private land can and must be managed for the good of both. While the size, extent and interspersed nature of public and private lands may vary, both are integral in supporting ranching operations and unique ecosystems; including many types of uplands and riparian areas with an array of species. Although private and public lands are distinct in ownership and purpose, together they form interdependent landscapes and ecosystems that can provide multiple ecological, social, and economic benefits. Success can only be reached with a coordinated, collaborative, "all lands" approach to management and conservation.
- An integrated approach to stewardship and management is also needed to address the thousands of acres of rangelands that include mixed forest and forage landscapes. Too often, these resource assets have been viewed as competing and managed exclusively for the benefit of one or the other rather than optimizing both. In some landscapes, managed, strategic grazing by livestock can be designed and implemented to meet specific vegetation management objectives.

Challenges to the future of ranching and conservation:

The health, productivity and sustainability of our public rangelands is critical for ranching and for conservation, and the following challenges impact both:

- High demand for competing land uses leading to the fragmentation and loss of large landscapes and habitats, sale of water and/or mineral resources, and consolidation and turnover of family ranches.
 - An aging population of ranchers and limited opportunities for intergenerational transfer of land and knowledge.
 - Razor-thin profits and rising costs.
 - The effects of invasive species, drought, and uncharacteristic wildland fire.
 - Ensuring recovery of threatened and endangered species.
 - Management considerations for wild horses and burros.
 - Impacts of historic practices that preceded contemporary understanding of rangeland science and ecology.
 - Negotiating and achieving a balance among diverse values pertaining to the environment while preserving the heritage of livestock production in the western states.
 - Declining federal budgets and continually understaffed land management agencies.
 - A lack of capacity (time, money and collaborative efforts) to resolve ongoing conflicts over rangeland management that can lead to appeals and litigation, further straining the capacity of all stakeholders.
- Coordination and cooperation among and between ranchers, agencies, and other stakeholders is critical to realizing a shared commitment to the long-term ecological health of many western landscapes and for the social and economic well-being of ranching communities that call these landscapes home. For ranchers that share allotments, coordination and cooperation is especially important.

- Communication and education within the ranching community, the environmental community and within the land management agencies is essential to foster understanding and more successful partnerships. Better communication will increase recognition of the ecological, social and economic impacts of rangeland management. It will aid the dissemination of best practices and the development of management actions that support rangeland health; providing strong ecological function and productive grazing lands.
- Outreach and education to the general public about the complexity of management on public rangelands, the multiple uses that rangelands support, and the conservation and stewardship work that is being done by an increasing number of public lands ranchers is necessary to build an awareness of the real commitment that ranchers have to the land, and to help Americans gain a deeper understanding of where their food comes from.

We envision a western landscape where:

- Together, public and private rangelands provide multiple values to society including fish and wildlife habitat, clean and abundant water, open space, and food and fiber. They support meaningful employment in ranching and rangeland stewardship, maintain worthy western cultural traditions, provide opportunities for recreation and hunting as well as other important assets and amenities.
- For the purposes of grazing management, range improvements, and the implementation of conservation programs, there is recognition of the interdependence, continuity and tradeoffs between private ranches and public grazing allotments in terms of the combined ecological, social, and economic benefits of whole landscapes and ecosystems.
- Management of private and public lands is science based and combines the best technical and local knowledge. Traditional and multi-party monitoring and best management practices are utilized in the pursuit of active and adaptive management and the increase of local and scientific knowledge. Monitoring protocols, procedures, and indicators are consistent, yet adaptable to local ecological conditions. The agencies monitor for both ecological and socio-economic outcomes.



- The land management agencies have the appropriate level of trained staff and budgets to fulfill their mission to restore and maintain the health of public rangelands. They are held accountable for achieving their management responsibilities, and also have the flexibility to learn from their efforts and can adapt based on best management practices, new information, and on-the-ground results.
- Ranchers have the tools and assistance to complete conservation projects on both their private lands and allotments. They have access to strategies and incentives to continually improve their practices and sustainably manage and protect the environment, their livestock and livelihoods. Strategies vary in different landscapes and contexts, but can include restoring and protecting streams, wetlands and other important habitat, mitigating and avoiding conflict with wildlife, hazard free fencing, and species friendly infrastructure.
- Agency staff engage in robust partnerships with ranchers, collaborative groups and community-based organizations to develop local solutions that work for communities and the land. These partnerships can help the agencies work more effectively and get more 'boots on the ground' in this time of declining agency budgets and staffing.
- Resolution of tough resource challenges and conflicts around public rangelands is sought out through the involvement and collaboration of diverse stakeholders that together work through the ecological, social and economic ramifications of public lands management decisions.
- New and beginning ranchers consider ranching a viable profession and the heirs of ranchers do not feel compelled to sell the family ranch. Grazing land stewardship, watershed restoration and conservation provide year-round, living-wage jobs in rural communities.
- Ranchers have access to tools and opportunities to help diversify their income streams through the exploration and use of other strategies to increase the bottom line, such as: niche markets for local or regional livestock, certification marketing programs, easements, or payments for ecosystem services.



- Ranchers are providing meat and other livestock products to consumers that are locally and regionally sourced and contribute to both environmental and community values.

Policy Recommendations:

To make the RVCC vision for public rangelands a reality, we provide the following recommendations to Congress, the Administration, and the land management agencies.

1. Support collaborative restoration and management efforts to achieve healthy public rangelands, strong rural economies, and harmonious communities.

Much like our federal forests, the management of public rangelands is vastly different today than it was even 30 years ago. Evolving societal values and needs, and changes in public policy have increased the diversity of stakeholders participating in shaping public land management decisions. For decades resource conflicts have overshadowed federal forest and rangeland management, however, progress is being made. Especially on federal forestlands, diverse stakeholders are coming together to help shape management and develop projects that promote both environmental and economic values. Collaboration is a process with significant upfront investment, but it is increasingly becoming the way to ‘do business’ on federal lands. We see the growing success of collaboration in federal forest management as an opportunity and inspiration for collaboration in public rangelands settings.

To realize this opportunity, we recommend:

A. The BLM, Forest Service, and Congress support and promote existing and new collaborative efforts in public rangeland restoration and management. Agency leadership provide direction to the ground that existing and new collaborative efforts be supported by agency staff. Agency staff utilize a transition process to deal effectively with changes in personnel and ensure commitments to collaborative partners are kept.

B. Agency staff and community partners are encouraged to utilize existing legislation to coordinate forest restoration activities with the restoration of grazing and rangeland resources. There is a growing body of legislation – including the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Act and

stewardship contracting authority - that promotes collaborative planning and restoration. While the stewardship contracting authority is applicable to both forested and range landscapes, it is underutilized in the range setting. The CFLR program is focused on fire-adapted forests, but presents an opportunity and model to foster the collaborative management of our public rangelands.

C. The BLM and Forest Service prioritize the development and use of capacity building programs that support collaboration, foster agreement, and ameliorate conflict. For example, the agencies are encouraged to:

a) Expand the Community Capacity Land Stewardship program to support existing and new rangelands collaborations. CCLS is a pilot program of the Forest Service, NRCS and Rural Development in FS Region 6 that provides support to collaborative groups and community-based and regional organizations to address their capacity building needs that will further on-the-ground watershed restoration goals.

b) Expand the application of the BLM, Forest Service and NRCS interagency National Riparian Service Team/Creeks and Communities partnership effort aimed at advancing cooperative riparian stewardship in the West. The core principles and practices of this effort blend the need to address technical issues within their social context. A stepwise approach supports achievement of sustainable riparian resources as a foundation for resilient ecosystems and communities.

2. Promote rangeland monitoring for improved management, more informed decisions and increased accountability.

Agencies are expected to monitor thousands of acres of public allotments. With smaller staff and shrinking budgets often this monitoring is either done in a cursory manner or not at all. Monitoring is pushed back by what are deemed higher priorities; however, without information about the status and health of rangeland resources, there is no baseline from which to inform and adapt management strategies and/or prioritize conservation efforts. There is no way to show when progress is being made, if restoration efforts are succeeding, or if there are problem areas that still need to be addressed. Monitoring is essential to improve management and ensure the accountability of land management agencies and permittees.

To realize this opportunity, we recommend:

A. The BLM and Forest Service conduct a situation assessment of current monitoring being done on public rangelands to identify and understand the barriers, gaps and inconsistencies in these efforts and develop strategies to address them.

B. The BLM and Forest Service promote interdisciplinary, cooperative monitoring with landowners and community-based organizations or contractors. Continue to track efforts and facilitate increased participation in the 2004 MOU with the Public Lands Council calling for joint monitoring between the BLM, Forest Service and livestock grazing permittees.

C. The BLM, Forest Service and NRCS develop a program to designate a series of cooperative monitoring pilots. Under these pilots, agency staff will work with landowners, community-based organizations and other entities to better utilize existing local infrastructure and build new capacity for monitoring on public and private lands.

D. NRCS review and publicize their monitoring pilots under the Sage Grouse Initiative. The goal of these projects is to provide an approach to monitoring that is based on achieving outcomes across large landscapes and could be a model for other monitoring efforts.

E. The BLM, Forest Service and NRCS expand their use of cooperative agreements for data collection by third party providers.

3. Develop and foster a more effective and timely allotment renewal process

Around the West, grazing permits and allotment management plans continue to come up for renewal. While the BLM and Forest Service are working to develop updated plans and issue new 10-year permits, they have a backlog of expired permits. There are many factors that contribute to this backlog, including: under-staffed agencies; limited resources for needed environmental assessment and monitoring, and increased appeals and litigation. The long-term viability of grazing operations requires increased certainty regarding the allotment renewal process and completion of NEPA in a timely and thorough manner.

To realize this opportunity, we recommend:



A. The BLM and Forest Service give high priority to completion of allotment NEPA through the establishment of specialized teams focused on the development of effective, timely allotment NEPA. This strategy would facilitate an increase in the quality and quantity of NEPA documents produced and foster consistency across agency efforts.

B. Agencies create oversight and accountability mechanisms at all levels such that problems in the allotment NEPA/ permit renewal process can be recognized and addressed in a timely manner.

C. Where applicable, group allotments and/or range improvement projects under one NEPA analysis to help reduce duplicative efforts while effectively addressing cumulative effects. This will increase the efficiency of agency decision-making over time.

D. Public involvement in the NEPA process by permittees and other stakeholders is critical. We recommend early involvement of permittees in the renewal process in order to ensure the best use of local knowledge and permittee feedback in the development of management plans. Agency staff should invite permittees and other stakeholders to work with their interdisciplinary teams and encourage them to participate in the development of alternatives under NEPA.

E. Utilize the agency 'handover' or 'transition' memo to ensure transfer of relationships with permittees and others. Loss of staff working on an allotment renewal can halt or slow down the process.

F. Increase training for agency staff and permittees in the NEPA and ESA consultation processes. It is essential that agency staff are current on any changes to NEPA rules and regulations (developed under case law or by legislation) to ensure the creation of sound NEPA documents. Share examples and strategies, and transfer lessons learned from successful field units to improve quality and quantity of NEPA documents.

G. Explore use of third parties, including landowners, community-based organizations or contractors to undertake data collection and monitoring. Consider partnerships with



local Tribes to survey for cultural resources. The agencies can create jobs in the community and build needed capacity through use of third party contractors to collect data.

H. Expand and fund both traditional and cooperative monitoring to grow the base of information used to inform the development of allotment management plans and environmental and socio-economic analyses under NEPA.

4. Incentivize private and public rangeland conservation and stewardship

Farm Bill conservation programs provide private landowners with support to improve their stewardship and continue to keep their lands working – providing food, fiber, energy and ecosystem values. Farm bill conservation programs protect open space and support functioning ecosystems - including habitat for fish and wildlife. However, they are not just about natural resource stewardship, but also about securing economic viability for the farms, forests and ranches that are so often the backbone of rural economies. The best programs are a ‘win-win’, for example, improving irrigation efficiency and increasing the instream flow of water for fish, or protecting sensitive riparian area habitat by creating a water development to provide a steady off-stream source of water for livestock.

To realize this opportunity, we recommend:

A. Full funding for the conservation title, including adequate funding for technical assistance and “boots on the ground.”

B. Funding and support for technical assistance, including partnership building, landowner outreach and education, conservation planning and direct technical services – and recognizing the role of intermediary organizations in ensuring the effective delivery of Farm Bill programs.

C. Continue and elevate the 2008 Farm Bill authority that allowed for EQIP funding and technical assistance to be utilized for conservation practices on federal grazing lease lands.

D. Reauthorize the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) in the next Farm Bill. This competitive grant program administered by the National

Institute of Food and Agriculture funds education, extension, outreach, and technical assistance initiatives directed at helping beginning farmers and ranchers of all types.

“One cannot be pessimistic about the West. This is the native home of hope. When it fully learns that cooperation, not rugged individualism, is the quality that most characterizes and preserves it, then it will have achieved itself and outlived its origins. Then it has a chance to create a society to match its scenery.” - Wallace Stegner

APPENDIX A – Public policy regulating the grazing of public lands *(listed chronologically)*

Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 (BLM and Forest Service)

- Intended to end unregulated grazing on federal lands, increase range productivity, and reduce soil erosion due to overgrazing
- Established grazing districts around the country
- Allows permits and leases up to 10 years
- Requires ranchers leasing public lands to have a “base property”
- Established grazing fees to cover costs of range improvements and provide revenue to the U.S. Treasury and to states

Multiple Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960 (Forest Service)

- Establishes policy that National Forests are to be “administered for outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, and wildlife and fish purposes”

National Environmental Policy Act of 1969

- Requires agencies to conduct environmental assessments and/or environmental impact statements before authorizing and issuing grazing permits on federal lands

Endangered Species Act of 1973

- Requires the BLM and Forest Service, when issuing permits or leases to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and/or the National Marine Fisheries Service to ensure that grazing will not jeopardize the continued existence of any listed species

Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (BLM)

- Authorized ten year grazing permits and required a two year notice of cancellation
- Directed grazing advisory boards to guide the BLM in developing allotment management plans and allocating range improvement funds

National Forest Management Act of 1976 (Forest Service)

- Allows individual Forests to determine whether grazing is feasible and appropriate through Land and Resource Management Plans

Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 (BLM and Forest Service)



- Established and reaffirmed the national policy and commitment to inventory and identify range-land conditions and trends in order to manage, maintain, and improve the condition of public rangelands
- Established the current grazing fee formula
- Directed the Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture to develop an Experimental Stewardship Program and explore innovative grazing management policies including cooperative range management projects designed to foster a greater degree of cooperation and coordination between agencies and private range users. The legislation also authorizes the agencies to provide incentives for permit and lease holders whose stewardship improves the range conditions of lands of their allotments. These incentives include a grazing fee credit of up to 50 percent in return for labor or equipment that the permit or lease holder provides in accordance with range improvement projects

Rescissions Act of 1995 (Forest Service)

- Requires each National Forest System unit to identify all allotments for which NEPA analysis is needed. These allotments must be included in a schedule that sets a due date for the completion of the requisite NEPA analysis. Requires adherence to these established schedules.
- If a grazing permit expires or is waived and the permit authorizes grazing in one or more listed allotments for which the scheduled NEPA analysis has yet to be completed, the Forest Service must issue a new term grazing permit upon the same terms and conditions, including the length of term, as the one which expired or was waived, unless there are reasons other than the lack of the necessary NEPA analysis which justify not issuing a new permit.
- Does not alter the line officer’s authority to make a decision not to issue a new permit for reasons other than not having completed the analysis required by NEPA and other applicable laws.

Coalition Partners

Arizona

Altar Valley Conservation Alliance
Elkhorn Ranch
Forest Energy Corporation
Scientific Advisory Board, Altar Valley
Conservation Alliance

California

Northwest Forest Worker Center
Watershed Research & Training Center

Colorado

Forest Energy Corporation

Georgia

Gunner Hall

Idaho

Framing Our Community
Lemhi Regional Land Trust
National Association of Forest Service Retirees
The Nature Conservancy, Central Idaho Rangelands Network
Salmon Valley Stewardship

Montana

Big Hole Watershed Committee
Blackfoot Challenge
Criley Consulting
Flathead Economic Policy Center
Madison Valley Ranchland Group
Northwest Connections
Sonoran Institute

Nevada

Boies Ranch, Inc.

New Mexico

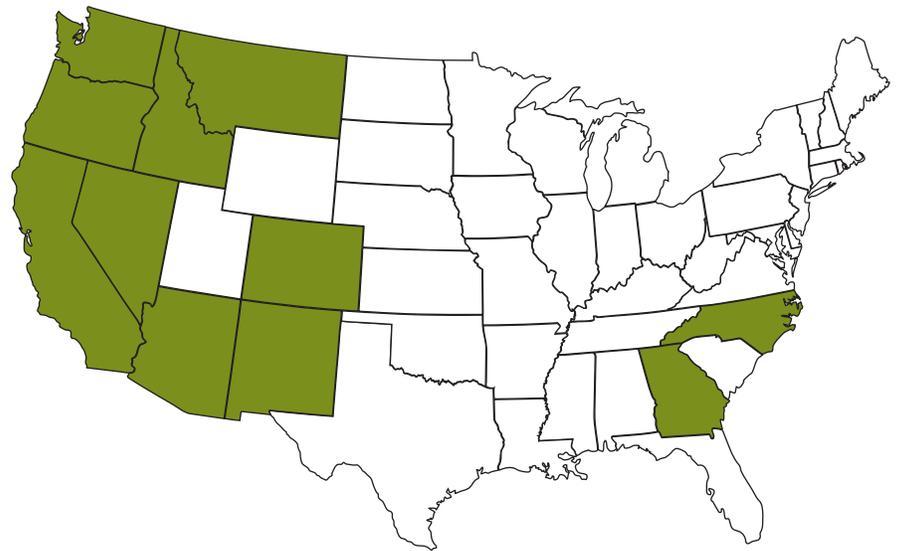
Gila Wood Products
Gila WoodNet
Restoration Technologies

North Carolina

Young Democrats of North Carolina

Oregon

Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council
Ecosystem Workforce Program
Institute for Culture and Ecology



Oregon (continued)

Jebel Ronde Ranch
Lake County Resources Initiative
Looking Glass Ranch
Siuslaw Institute
Southern Oregon Forest Restoration Collaborative
Sustainable Northwest
Western Resources

Washington

Conservation Northwest
Mt. Adams Resource Stewards

For more information contact the RVCC Issue Experts:

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Learn more about RVCC in the Our Programs section of www.SustainableNorthwest.org

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