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## Our Mission: Introducing the Quivira Coalition

The purpose of the Quivira Coalition is to teach ranchers, environmentalists, public land managers, and other members of the public that ecologically healthy rangeland and economically robust ranches can be compatible. Our mission is to define the core issues of the grazing conflict and to articulate a new position based on common interests and common

sense. We call this new position the New Ranch.

It addresses the ecological and economic needs not only of ranchers and environmentalists, but of the nation as a whole.

In a regular newsletter, in lectures, workshops, site tours, and in research, the Quivira Coalition will facilitate the definition and application of the New Ranch.

## The New Ranch

In an effort to bring sanity to the quarrel between ranchers and environmentalists, the Quivira Coalition has adopted some simple methods used by dispute mediators in labor negotiations.

### *First--What are the Issues?*

The first step is to understand what the real issues are. Environmentalists have good reasons to be concerned with the management of our public lands. The core envi-

ronmental issues involved include grazing fees, loss of biodiversity, or the simplification of the ecosystem especially in riparian habitat, and widespread subsidized killing of predators. Environmentalists would like an equal voice in public lands issues and the admission by managers that not all lands are suitable for grazing. All this might be combined under the concept of elevating con-

*(con't on page 12)*



Photo by Courtney White

## QUIVIRA

“The Spanish associated Quivira with a fabulous realm just beyond the horizon. **At one time the name Quivira referred to all the unknown land in what is now the western United States.** As to the origins of the alluring name, some scholars have attempted to trace it to the French cuivre, “copper,” saying Indians got the term from Jacques Cartier. The name also has been said to be a Spanish corruption of the Wichita tribal name Kirikurus. More likely is an association with the Arabic quivir which appears in such Spanish place names as Guadalquivir. But like the place it names, Quivira remains essentially a mystery.” **Robert Julyan**, *The Place Names of New Mexico* (1995)

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## The Quivira Coalition

535 Cordova Road,  
Suite 423  
Santa Fe, NM 87501  
(505) 466-4935 (fax)

### Founders:

**Jim Winder**

(505) 267-4227

[jrwinder@aol.com](mailto:jrwinder@aol.com)

**Courtney White**

(505) 982-5502

[wldwst@rt66.com](mailto:wldwst@rt66.com)

**Barbara Johnson**

(505) 466-4935

### Editor:

**Barbara Johnson**

(505) 466-4935

The Quivira Coalition Newsletter is published by **The Quivira Coalition** 6 times a year.

The opinions expressed in signed articles are the opinions of the writers and not necessarily those of the Coalition. Articles may be freely reprinted for nonprofit purposes, provided that credit is given to the author and The Quivira Coalition.

**Subscriptions are available for \$15 a year.** Please send a check or money order to The Quivira Coalition, 535 Cordova Road, Suite 423, Santa Fe, NM 87501. Send address changes to the same address. Please allow 4-6 weeks for processing.

**Printed on Recycled  
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The founders, a rancher and two conservationists, have brought this organization to life because we believe we have discovered a reasonable solution to the increasingly angry debate that surrounds grazing in the American West. We enter onto the grazing battlefield not to referee the contest of wills between ranchers and environmentalists, or to mediate a negotiated truce, or even to find "common ground" among combatants. Instead, we propose to lead people to another playing field altogether. We believe that an alternative exists which allows the land to heal, and perhaps thrive, while enabling ranchers to make a living. We call it "The New Ranch."

This new alternative is not a synthesis of two separate worlds; we did not take the "best" of the ranching world and combine it with the "best" of the environmental world, with a sprinkling of agency wisdom on top, to create a synthetic Frankenstein of unwieldy and unpredictable actions. No, we are proposing a whole new model in-and-of itself; a third position, separate and distinct from the two previous models, now locked in mortal combat.

Our model is based on the work of Jim Winder at his Double Lightning Ranch, near Nutt, New Mexico. But there are others, too; a growing number of ranchers around the west have begun to employ sustainable ranching techniques--with positive consequences. They are herding their cows up, constantly moving them, keeping them out of the creeks, dodging the springtime growing season, and giving every acre of land a rest for the vast majority of a year. And they're making a profit, too.

The New Ranch satisfies environmental goals as well. Abundant wildlife, clear streams, hardy riparian zones, and healthy grasses are all direct benefits of this new ranching program. A visit to Macho Creek on Jim's ranch, which was bone dry until he removed cattle

during the growing season, is a perfect illustration. Today it flows year-round with water and is thick with willows, grasses, and wildlife. (See before and after pictures of Macho Creek on page 14.)

It can be done elsewhere. After all, it is what the American people want us to do. The West's ranching heritage is highly valued by the entire nation; at the same time, a clamor is rising for an end to environmental abuse of our public rangelands. The Quivira Coalition, by promoting the New Ranch, encourages ranchers to re-examine the way they do business, to think about land as an ecosystem, and to embrace new ideas about herding, timing, rotation, fencing, protecting streams, and treading more lightly on the land in general. The Coalition encourages environmentalists to consider that poor land management, not the cow itself, is the primary cause of ecological damage on rangeland.

Coalition members believe that ranchers and environmentalists share too much in common to keep fighting: love of land, for example, and a desire to experience solitude and beauty. We believe that open space is vital to the future of this country and its quality of life. Since ranchers play a critical role in the protection of our wide open skies, we should be allies fighting the spread and stink of urban sprawl, which threatens both the health of the ecosystem and the vitality of ranching. The future of the West depends on our ability to shake hands and get to work preserving open space.

Our children are counting on us to succeed.

# A Message From The Founders

Jim Winder  
Courtney White  
Barbara Johnson

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# The Far Horizon

by Courtney White

*"You cannot save the land apart from the people or the people apart from the land. To save either, you must save both." Wendell Berry*

Why the Quivira Coalition? Why try to bring environmentalists and ranchers together in an attempt to resolve our long-running dispute over the role of livestock grazing in the American West? Why not continue the slugfest, especially now that the bout is in the late rounds? Why not keep the punches coming until only one combatant, battered and bloody, remains standing?

**Because it serves no one's long-term interest to continue brawling. And because there is an acceptable alternative--something we are calling the "New Ranch."**

As everyone is well aware, the West has changed dramatically over the past decade. A wave of immigrants from large urban centers has flooded into the West's cities and towns. Wealthy retirees, big city refugees, the technologically liberated self-employed, the quality-of-life starved, and other denizens of the "new" West have also filled up the nooks and crannies in the countryside. The rural West, once the province of cowboys and Indians, now teems with a lively cornucopia of new faces. Some of these newcomers will move on, but many will stay. Either way, they have brought with them new values, new politics, and new hopes for their adopted home. Although most work in the cities, they play in the country and have developed, as a result, a strong sense of ownership over the land, especially federal land. As their numbers have swelled, their influence, as well as their needs, has risen proportionally. They have fundamentally affected the economic and social foundations of the region. The West will never be the same again.

## *The Big Hurt*

Unfortunately, this latest transition from "old" West to "new" (it has happened a number of times before) has been a very rough one. In the beginning, attitudes on the part of the "locals" were stubbornly opposed to change in any form. Occasionally, this stubbornness

erupted into anger and hostility; sometimes it was expressed in the shape of an ambitious, but misguided, legal scheme to assert "local" control over federal land. Always, the feelings of outrage and pain were genuine.

The attitude of environmentalists, many of them newcomers, was no less passionate. A desire to correct both long-standing and more recent mistreatment of the land grew into a bright flame. Putting an end to clearcutting, overgrazing, and bad mines became a cause for many activists, and they advanced this cause no less strenuously than did their antagonists defending their lifestyles. Environmental abuse, however, was plain to see and activists demanded a resolution that favored conservation. Nothing less would do.

## *The Battle*

Thus the battle between environmentalists and ranchers became a conflict of values as intense as the infamous Indian Wars of the late nineteenth-century. Neither side understood the other's viewpoint, nor did many try. Old-time rural residents fought like hellcats to maintain a doomed status quo, while the conservation community would give no quarter to their enemies. Casualties began to mount; a native species went extinct here, a ranch was subdivided there. Like a bad television movie, both sides struggled with each other at the edge of a deep precipice while everyone in the audience held their breath.

To no one's surprise, exhaustion, not extermination, appears to have triumphed. The Wise Use movement, while still ornery and active, has exhausted most of its appeals. Its armageddon-ish, "War-on-the-West," rhetoric failed to move the masses and may have done more damage than good to its interests. After all, 700 million day-visits were made to our National Forests last year; and they weren't made to check on cattle, or chop



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down trees. People love their public land and will no longer tolerate its abuse.

Similarly, the general public has not embraced Chicken Little environmentalists and their "Sky-Is-Falling" predictions. While public support remains strong for clean air, clean water, and healthy land, as evidenced by the resounding populist rejection of recent Congressional attempts to roll back basic environmental laws, it has never accepted the extreme solutions offered by some conservation organizations. And it probably never will, especially if these solutions harm lives and homes. People don't like to see other people hurt. That is a fact of life some environmentalists forget.

### *Why Quivira?*

But why should environmentalists care? Why should they support the efforts of the Quivira Coalition and its promotion of scientifically supported, ecologically sensitive ranching, which we are calling the New Ranch? Why not simply push ranchers off the precipice and be done with it?

Because the New Ranch addresses nearly all of our concerns. On the ecological front, it: 1) abolishes overgrazing; 2) ensures the protection of streamsides and wetlands; 3) allows native grasses to return and flourish; 4) provides the proper habitat for endangered species; 5) maintains "wildlands" corridors for native wildlife; 6) increases biodiversity and biomass on the land; and 7) admits that some lands simply are not suitable for any type of grazing.

The New Ranch also helps us meet concerns on the social front, which include: 1) accommodating recreational use of the land; 2) encouraging the economic diversification of ranches; 3) blocking the spread of subdivisions and sprawl; and 4) ensuring, through use, that public land will remain in public hands.

What the New Ranch does not do is throw cattle off the land--the only acceptable alternative to some environmentalists. To those who believe that ranching has no place on public lands at all, I can only ask: why? What are your objections, really? If they are ecological-- nearly all of those concerns are addressed by the New Ranch. If they are nutritional--well, the New Ranch is not in the morality business. However, if the issue is simply bad blood and a desire to punish ranchers for decades of bad management with extinction (be honest), then the time has come to put hard feelings aside. We should work together toward common interests, not exploit our differences.

Buying grazing allotments (with what money?) and "retiring" the land, as some environmentalists demand, is not only impractical but it may be ecologically suspect as well. Scientific evidence indicates that rangelands need the occasional attentions of hooved creatures to help stir things up. As an experiment, "resting the West" may or may not be a bad idea ecologically; there is little doubt, however, that it is a bad idea culturally.

### *Helping People*

I intentionally chose a quote from author, and farmer, Wendell Berry to start this essay. At the heart of all his work is a central question: how can we respect the land, and all the living creatures on it, without also learning to respect each other? Caring for the land and caring for people arise out of the same impulse. Affection, as he calls it, is a universal emotion. It should be applied equally to all things, organic or not. Its opposite, selfishness, is simply another form of self-destructiveness.

Ranching involves people, people who have deep ties to the land, both historically and emotionally. We should learn to respect those

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## The Far Horizon

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# Why is the New Ranch Important to Ranchers?

by Jim Winder

It is in the best interests of ranchers to join with environmentalists to solve conflicts in ways which enhance both biodiversity and economic stability. These are tough times for ranchers. Although cattle prices are on the mend, the economic fundamentals of ranching are poor. Economists consider the beef industry to be mature, meaning that growth is slow and price competition is extreme. Since economic pressure has put ranchers' backs to the wall, it is no wonder that we fight so hard when confronted by environmentalists and government agencies. Seems to me that we have always been fighting one battle or another, drought, fire, BLM, Forest Service, Sierra Club. In fact, we have become pretty good at fighting, even supporting professional fighters among our ranks.

## *Losing the War*

Although we win most battles, we are losing the war. We are not losing to the environmentalists, we are losing to the economics and demographics. Leadership must come from those of us with cut hands and skinned knuckles who know in our hearts that things must change--that maintaining the status quo means eventual bankruptcy.

What can be done? Well, we can use stumbling blocks for stepping stones. If we embrace change we will find that our enemies can be our friends and the threats will become the very opportunities which will keep the land in the family for another generation.

**Our problems are economic not political.** If the American public ever sweeps us off the land it will be because we are not producing enough value for society, not for some hidden political agenda. The solution is to roll our sleeves up, quit moaning about the environmentalists and get to work. We are not the first industry to face maturity and not all mature industries have to die. If we are smart, we will

study what other industries have done in similar situations and learn a lesson from the survivors on how to innovate and prosper. Each of us should take a long hard look at the facts of the situation, not the rhetoric spewed by opposing camps, and then seek the changes which will ensure not just our survival, but our prosperity.

## *Why Don't the Environmentalists Just Leave Us Alone?*

Perhaps the best starting place is to understand why is it that the environmentalists don't go away and, in fact, seem to be gathering strength. The quick answer is that they are right, at least partly so. The damage the environmentalists bemoan has in fact occurred and continues to occur, though perhaps not to the extent claimed.

In the 1800s, the livestock cultural practices used in New Mexico were based on those from the more temperate Eastern states. We know today that what is good management in high rainfall areas is disastrous to semi-desert rangelands. As early as 1899, Jared Smith discussed a 40% loss of grazing capacity in Southwestern rangelands. In 1908, E.O. Wooton surveyed New Mexico ranchers found that of the 118 stockmen reporting, 102 (86%) believed the carrying capacity of the ranges had diminished. Of these, 69 believed the diminution was due to overstocking and 33 to drought.

Earlier this century, public concern over the loss of productive capacity from rangelands brought about a massive governmental effort to reverse the trend. Millions of dollars have been spent through agencies like the Soil Conservation Service on land restoration treatments such as brush and erosion control. The positive results of this effort have led to claims that rangelands today are in better shape than they have been for a century. The trouble is that these claims are based on yardsticks that value plants for their use to livestock and not

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biodiversity. What the rancher sees as success, the environmentalist sees as failure. Increasingly, the American public requires more of their rangelands than fat cows--these lands need to produce clean water, habitat for wildlife, and natural beauty. When held up against these measurements, we find that rangeland managers are falling short.

### *Riparian Areas*

The most glaring example is the condition of natural communities along streams called riparian areas, which require very different management from the more arid rangelands. Riparian areas are important for their ability to reduce flood impacts and produce clean water, forage and wildlife habitat. One study indicates that 95% of the animal species in New Mexico depend on riparian areas for at least a portion of their life span. The same management which has successfully restored many upland range sites has been ineffective and even damaging to riparian vegetation.

The Environmental Protection Agency has reported: "Rangeland conditions reportedly have significantly improved in many areas since 1980. However, improved upland conditions do not necessarily mean improved riparian conditions. In fact, extensive field observations in the late 1980's suggest riparian areas throughout much of the West were in the worst condition in history."

So what can be done? We first have to admit that there is a problem--then fix it. On my own ranch, I never realized that there was riparian potential because Macho Creek had been a dry arroyo for generations. One small change to my management, elimination of growing season grazing, allowed spontaneous regeneration of cottonwood trees and, with them, running water. (See before and after photos of Macho Creek on page 14.) Most importantly, riparian vegetation, and with it birds, bugs and animals,

continues to recover even though I graze the creek bottom during the dormant season. In fact, I now remove ten times more forage than before--ten times more forage and infinitely more biodiversity. This is an example of the "win-win" solutions that the Quivira Coalition is all about.

### *The Future is Bright For Resource Managers*

Under the current strain, ranchers will either evolve to become fully aware of all aspects of natural resources, or become extinct. Many have already made the change to manage a broader range of resource values than just livestock grazing. Recreation and conservation are emerging as often dominant land uses which can either benefit or kill a ranching operation. Although food and fiber production remain valuable to society, it is things like biological diversity, clean air and water and even endangered species which offer resource managers a future.

Ranching has long been know for an abysmal return on assets, a common economic measure of productivity. **The single best way to increase return on assets is to creatively produce new products from the same asset base.** In this case, things like hunting, tourism, and species conservation produce value from the same lands that continue to produce beef. Herein lies salvation for those open minded enough, or desperate enough, to recognize that commodity beef production is not the only use of American rangelands.

This may sound high minded, but it is being done on ranches around the United States, including my own. What makes the Quivira Coalition different is that it is driven by people who are out on the land making a living--people who have recognized the evolution and made changes that keep their

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## Why is the New Ranch Important to Ranchers?

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# Science and the Grazing Debate

by Kris Havstad

USDA/ARS, Jornada Experimental Range

Dept. 3JER, NMSU, Las Cruces, NM, 88003-0003

email: [khavstad@nmsu.edu](mailto:khavstad@nmsu.edu)

voice: 505-646-4842

fax: 505-646-5889

web site: <http://www.nmsu.edu/~jornada/>

As a scientist I see the Quivira Coalition as a tremendous opportunity to speak factually about livestock grazing in the American West. It is unbelievably frustrating to listen to the twisted arguments from all sides of the grazing debate, and to know that science has been used and misused in these arguments. Admittedly, much of the blame falls on the inability of scientists to synthesize what we know about grazing. But that is in the past. The Quivira Coalition offers the opportunity to address the present in order to preserve the future.

**The truth is that there are environments where grazing is and has been harmful, there is land that is unsuitable for grazing today, and grazing isn't always properly managed.** These situations have caused serious problems to the resources. **However, grazing has been and can continue to be a productive use of much of our Western rangelands.**

Any discussion of livestock grazing in Western North America could involve the synthesis of thousands of research studies and centuries of knowledge based on practical experience. It is a formidable task, compounded by tremendous variations in individual perspectives which skew any synthesis of information.

There are many elements to an understanding of livestock grazing on Western rangelands. I will discuss four: (1) sustainability is a moving target, (2) the historical extent of overgrazing is underappreciated, (3) much of the land that will respond to passive management (including destocking) has responded, and (4) grazing by livestock (as well as other large herbivores) is a small scale process.

## *Sustainability*

Rangeland landscapes are dynamic. Various aspects change constantly. One prominent feature that changes is vegetation composition.

Though perennial species are generally reliable from year to year, even these have finite life spans. Over centuries and millennia, we have documented substantial changes in the composition of Western rangelands. For the Southwest, it is estimated that desert grasslands formed about 5 million years ago with changing climates and the uplifting of mountain ranges that altered regional precipitation patterns. Present vegetation patterns probably only date back about 10-12,000 years. Large herbivore populations have also varied tremendously during the last few million years. Of importance were the mass extinctions of dozens of species, such as the mammoths and ground sloths, that occurred between 8,000 to 15,000 years ago. Grazing by large herbivores has been an intermittent process in the Southwest.

Southern New Mexico can serve as a local example of these dynamics. The Chihuahuan Desert first developed about 9,000 years ago. Within the last 3,000 years, it has been shown that this region has shifted from grasslands to shrub lands and back again at least three times. We have experienced a fourth shift from grassland to shrub land in the past 120 years in much of this region. We have also observed that today's vegetation changes are frequently in new directions rather than a regeneration of prior conditions. There are new elements in the environment that influence vegetation composition. These include the introduction of exotic species of plants and animals, the loss of some native species, altered habitat features due to changes in natural fire occurrence, and increased concentration of some atmospheric gases.

Can we honestly think of any use of these rangelands as being sustainable for more than a few decades given this record of ecological change? It is probably more appropriate to think that our use needs to be geared towards flexibility and the capability to adapt to a changing

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environment than to the concept of sustainability.

### *Historic Overgrazing*

There were 41,000 head of domestic cattle in New Mexico in 1870. In 1884 there were about 1 million. Similar increases in livestock numbers were recorded in other states after the Civil War. By the late 1890s, scientists began to publish reports on the overgrazed conditions of the Southwest and the need for research on techniques for rangeland improvement. In 1908, a report on the poor condition of New Mexico's rangelands concluded that there was a need for government control of grazing to prevent further deterioration. Similar reports were written for other Western states during this period. In only about a 20 year span (1870s to 1890s for Southern New Mexico), we recorded tremendous degradation of our Western rangelands due to overgrazing. The lack of knowledge at that time about the low carrying capacity of these lands was certainly a contributing factor. However, it is most important to recognize that many of the impacts of that overuse are still evident today. Even a century later, the loss of top soil, the reduction in fine fuels, and the elimination of certain native perennial grasses have created either irreparable damage, or set back recovery mechanisms so that it might take many decades for land to recover.

Total animal units (which accounts for cattle, sheep, goats and horses) peaked at about 2.4 million in New Mexico during World War I with the federal government's emphasis on food production during the war. Since that time animal units have generally declined, especially after the drought of the 1930s and the passage of the Taylor Grazing Act in 1934 that resulted in government control of much of the unappropriated public domain in the West. Animal units in New Mexico now fluctuate around 1.5 to 1.6 million, a grazing use roughly spread

out over 70 million acres. This level of grazing use has held relatively steady over the last half of the 20th century.

### *The Status Quo--Passive Management*

Much of range management "technology" (such as grazing systems, brush control practices, reseeding techniques, animal distribution methodologies) was developed during the mid-part of this century and has been implemented now for several decades. From the degraded conditions of the early part of the 1900s, we have recorded an improvement in general conditions of the range. However, that improvement has (1) leveled off during the last two decades, and (2) still includes a very large percentage of land classified in poor condition. Though actual range conditions are debated, and the data on the amount of land in any condition category are suspect, it is apparent that the trend on much of these lower elevation, drier rangelands is now static, at best. Some lands have not responded or improved to any sufficient extent.

In addition, many of these range management "technologies" are now no longer affordable, or no longer appropriate given the multiple use demands placed on many of our rangeland resources. Other than some specific areas where grazing use is still excessive or the resource conflict potential is high, such as in riparian zones, **we should not expect further improvements under present management practices.** We will still experience fluctuations with variations in wet and dry periods that are so characteristic of the climatic patterns of these regions, but these fluctuations will not represent improvement.

### *Grazing is Natural and Small Scale*

Grazing is a natural process. There are many species of vertebrates and invertebrates that

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# Science and the Grazing Debate

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consume vegetation. In studying this as a natural process, we have learned that it is very localized and is a very acute event. In other words, animals, even large herbivores like elk and cattle, have feeding sites that are quite small (a few acres for any grazing period), and native animals usually graze a plant only once during a grazing period. There are exceptions to these observations, but they are reasonable generalities. Natural levels of herbivory are usually low, especially in arid environments. For example, in the Chihuahuan Desert small mammals (the primary native herbivores) consume <15% of any current year's annual growth.

Grazing has a number of direct and indirect effects. These include removal of photosynthetic material, soil trampling, alteration of plant structure, alteration of nutrient transfers between plant and soil, altered plant growth, and modification of microclimates. Depending on the circumstances (such as plant growth characteristics, environmental conditions, degree of grazing pressure), these and related effects can have minimal to serious consequences. There is no specific formula or system for managing grazing in any environment. There are no "real-world" examples of optimization of grazing or overcompensation by plants to grazing. The goal is for the effects of grazing to be negligible, and to allow the full complement of land resources to respond naturally to the main ecological influence, the weather.

Because of the stagnation of many rangelands under current management practices, and the lasting influence of historic degradation, we should not expect resource improvements even with complete removal of livestock. In other words, **walking away from these lands will not result in their restoration.** For example, we have observed in areas in the Chihuahuan Desert where 60 years of nongrazing by domestic livestock has not generated range-

land improvement. For these areas, and they are extensive, where we have crossed thresholds to new vegetative states, we need people living on the land and engaged in agriculture that can and will invest in stewardship.

## *Progressive Stewardship*

Livestock grazing is typically managed as "set stocking." Livestock are placed in a pasture for a specific period of time. If this grazing use is conservative, the use is well distributed within the pasture, and the numbers are reduced for drought periods of low available forage, then this use can be indistinguishable from the natural grazing process. These are very large "ifs," and require skilled management. Key issues include not seasonally regrazing plants (animal have preferences for certain plant species), and not overgrazing drought-stressed plants. If a site meets suitability criteria for grazing, then the important point for managing livestock grazing is to control utilization of the forage resources. Tight spatial and temporal control of grazing will result in maintenance of the soil and vegetation resources, and maintenance of the ability of the land to recover from natural disturbances such as drought.

We know that the combined stresses of continuous grazing (set stocking) of large pastures and drought will result in resource decline. We also know that controlling the timing, intensity and duration of plant defoliation can prevent resource decline. The issue is whether land managers can effectively implement the means to control these three crucial variables of the grazing process. There are examples in the West where ranchers are controlling grazing, and overall resource conditions have improved. These people are practicing a level of stewardship that is benefitting the land, and there are scientific principles that are a basis for that

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One of my early frustrations in this job was the realization that hot rhetoric and political posturing were preventing us from solving some of the most difficult problems facing us as land managers. With a trust estate the size of Rhode Island, Delaware, Connecticut and New Jersey combined, I knew that the success of my administration depended on our ability to bridge the political gaps and bring people together.

Every day, we are confronted by the enormity of this endeavor. But every now and then I see signs that I am not alone. The greatest satisfaction comes in being able to work with people willing to share and work toward that vision.

That's why I'm enthusiastically lending my support to the Quivira Coalition. I commend its founders and the others who are leading this effort.

All across the West and in New Mexico, coalitions are emerging among city-dwellers, environmentalists, the agricultural community and public land managers who

## Science

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stewardship.

have recognized their common interest in light of our fast-growing population.

Urban residents are beginning to appreciate the role agriculture can play in preserving open lands, which city-dwellers need to stay in touch with the natural earth. Farmers and ranchers, facing development pressures, have allies in the city who will help them protect their livelihoods and their communities. We all want to make sure New Mexico grows the right way. We want homes built so that they conserve water, maximize transportation resources, preserve the best of our agricultural land and protect our remaining natural wild areas.

As the elected state land commissioner, I see this evolution as the growth of a powerful political base that could influence the performance of public and private sector land managers, planners and developers.

Land and water are finite, and they are essential resources for life on earth. There may be disagreements about how they will be used, and that will test our ability and resolve to find solutions. We can start by lowering the volume of the rhetoric and refraining from pushing the hot buttons that so easily divide us. When we learn to respect each other and work together, there are no problems we cannot solve.

# Bringing People Together

*by Ray Powell, M.S., D.V.M.  
Commissioner of Public Lands,  
New Mexico State Land Office*

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# The New Ranch

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servation of natural resources to the status of a right, equal to grazing or water rights.

The ranchers in turn offer compelling logic as to why they should remain on the land. When we recognize that many of these ranch families have been on the land for generations, it is easy to understand why they may resent the criticism of newcomers. Ranchers have strong attachments to this family land, no matter how hot and dry. Ranchers speak of nothing less than survival, just a chance to make an honest, independent, and uncomplicated living from the land.

## *Second--Areas of Common Interest*

The second step in the mediation process is to examine the areas of common interest. Most interestingly, **the landscape description which includes biodiversity, healthy riparian areas and active participation by non-ranchers in public lands affairs has proven to be more profitable to ranchers.** One of the principal reasons for increasing biological diversity is that it makes an ecosystem less susceptible to disturbances such as floods, droughts and fire. The capacity of simplified ecosystems to support livestock or wildlife varies widely in response to rainfall. But the carrying capacity of a diverse ecosystem is much more stable and able to ride out the tough times. This stability is important to a rancher because droughts usually require additional feed and the sale of breeding herds, often with disastrous consequences to profitability.

It is hard for anyone to argue with running water in healthy riparian areas, but why would a rancher want increased public participation? Because it solves problems and makes more money by ending expensive conflict and offering opportunities for business expansion.

Just as diversity is important for plants and animals, it is also important in our society as we at-

tempt to solve difficult problems. It is not very productive to hand complete control of a parcel of public land to a single individual, rancher or environmentalist. Ranchers can appreciate the value of ideas coming from people with varying backgrounds and experiences. Environmentalists can appreciate the way a rancher uses the artist's feel to blend the immensely complex interactions between species and their surroundings into real world solutions that bring change to the land.

## *Third--A Neutral Position*

The third step in mediation is to recognize that neither side will give in to the other and that a neutral third position is needed. The third position builds on the common ground between the parties to create new possibilities which capture the needs of both sides but without the conflict of the old entrenched positions. This third position is what we call the New Ranch.

The New Ranch is, in fact, not new. Over the last ten years or so, a number of ranchers, agency folk and environmentalists have become fed up with the impasse and set out to talk things over and find solutions on the ground. Throughout the West, these local solutions and alliances have proven highly effective in restoring critical habitat like riparian areas, protecting endangered species and even getting ranchers out of debt.

Although these examples vary widely in focus and geography, they do share many common elements: healthy, diverse ecosystems and profitable, independent managers. Perhaps the best way to understand these principles is to take a trip out to the New Ranch.

## *Two Percent*

The first question we have once we have entered the New Ranch is "where are all the cows?" Although there are actually more cows on the land than under the old type of contentious stocking, only

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2% of the ranch is being grazed on any one day while 98% of the land is resting. The cows are kept moving in a herd in order to simulate the grazing habits of large herding ungulates like bison and elk. Once we do find the cows, 1000 grazing together high along a hillside, we find something else that surprises us: coyotes, lots of coyotes. Several of the predators can be seen moving in and around the cows, undisturbed even though hundreds of baby calves are with their mothers. Why do the cows appear to ignore a predator capable of killing their offspring? Closer observation shows that the coyotes are cleaning up after the cows and calves by eating placentas and manure. Not very appetizing to a human but caviar to a coyote. The coyotes also know that attacking a calf in the midst of 1000 cows, each weighing over half a ton, is not a good career move.

### *Under 10% Eaten*

While grazing, the cows are always in motion--moving to a plant, taking a bite, and then moving to the next. When the herd has passed, we see that the amount of plant tissue removed is actually quite small compared with what is left standing--in fact under 10% of the forage is eaten. Our goal is to maximize plant production during the growing season, and we know that the more tissue remaining, the faster the recovery.

The soil surface between plants has been cultivated by the cows' hooves, and old grass has been knocked down to cover the ground. The animal impact works the same way as cultivation in the irrigated farmland down along the river, breaking soil crust and allowing water to infiltrate quickly. Grass seeds are planted in little water catchments within each hoof print, giving them a better chance at germination. The old grass lying on the ground will soon be eaten by termites or any number of other denizens of the soil who are the founda-

tion of the entire ecosystem.

### *Cows and Riparian Areas*

It is hot now, and the cows are heading to a creek for a drink. What we find is that they are only allowed to water along a few feet of the stream, while a fence keeps the cows out of the riparian forest which lines the creek for miles. However, cows are not always excluded from the riparian areas. During the winter, they will be allowed to graze the highly nutritious grasses and forbs for a day or two to prevent stagnation and to plant the seeds which are heavy on the stalks. In the spring, when the trees send cotton-coated seeds everywhere, the cows will be herded quickly along the length of the stream. The response of the riparian system to the energy of the cows' hooves is much like the response to flood waters: cottonwood seeds are planted and new sprouts emerge from roots which were abraded.

### *New Ranch Values Biodiversity*

It is clear to see that the New Ranch values diversity in plants and animals, even those species that have no apparent economic value. The manager recognizes that it is the web of interaction between all species that supports this ecosystem and that, once she took a whole ecosystem view of ranching, things started improving. Realizing that it was silly to grow hay all summer and feed it to the cows all winter, she moved the calving dates to coincide with green weeds and grass in the spring, or even summer, eliminating the need for expensive feed. She has studied the life cycle of insect pests like the horn fly and learned that moving cattle to clean pastures regularly controls the fly better than expensive insecticide ear tags. Savings on hay, insecticides, antibiotics, and hormones, coupled with higher conception rates and carry-

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# The New Ranch

*(con't)*

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# The New Ranch

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ing capacity, have brought her solid profits.

## *Most Profitable*

But the most profitable thing she has done is to quit selling her calves as a commodity and started selling directly to customers in the surrounding area. These cus-

manager was when she voluntarily placed a conservation easement on the private lands which will ensure that they will never, ever be developed. In return, she was able to utilize the substantial tax benefits to offset her growing income.

This has been a quick trip to the New Ranch, and we have only scratched the surface. It would take a library to hold all that is known about the economics and ecology of the New Ranch, certainly more than these few paragraphs. Over time and through articles, tours and seminars, the Quivira Coalition will consistently demonstrate the existence and viability of the New Ranch. It is easy to be against something, but very difficult to hold up your work for others to criticize. The founders and members of the Quivira Coalition are willing to take the heat from those who will throw stones because we have seen what the New Ranch can do in diverse locations. It is time to move from being the exception to being the rule.



Photos by Jim Winder

*Riparian improvement under the New Ranch: (above) Macho Creek 1986; (to the right) Macho Creek 1993*



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tomers are willing to pay more for beef that is hormone- and antibiotic-free, but they especially like knowing where their food comes from. This has brought more customer involvement in decisions concerning public land as well as profitable recreational enterprises. Perhaps the greatest reward for our



## The Far Horizon

*(con't from page 5)*

ties and learn to think anthropologically; ranching, after all, is a distinct culture. How can environmentalists fight for the rights of indigenous cultures around the world and then turn a blind eye to rural cultures in our own backyard? Respect has to be applied fairly and evenly.

On the other hand, the "right" of rural people to their culture does not give them free license to abuse the environment. Respect is a two-way street. Ranchers must learn that saving themselves means saving the land, as Berry says. It is time that ranchers become the environmentalists they keep insisting they already are. And it is up to us to help. There simply is no other choice.

At the same time, environmentalists need to put people back into their equations. The movement was founded not on ecological principles but humanistic ones. John Muir exhorted us to go into the mountains to "get their glad tidings," not to chain ourselves to a tree, or chop it down. We need to rediscover our "humanness" and fight for the things that help reestablish our humanity.

A good place to start is with affection. We love the land, but so do ranchers, and for reasons that are more similar to ours than we suppose. Each of us loves the open space, the blue skies, the wild critters that live there, and the feeling of a fresh breeze in our face. Going outside is going home, as Muir said; and it is a home that we all share. It is also a home in increasing peril from the steamroller of the global economy.

The time has come to explore a resolution to this crisis. And that time is now.

families on the land.

Ten years ago I realized that my business was slowly circling the toilet. Those same management techniques which had served my family well for generations were failing me, and the harder I worked, the faster I went broke. Things got to the point where my banker wouldn't even give me a free cap anymore because he said I was a bad advertisement. Slowly, and painfully, I came to grips with the economic reality of our industry and set out to find a solution that might keep the ranch in the family for a few more generations. The solution was to broaden my horizons, to become a resource manager and to make friends out of the same environmentalists my neighbors saw as enemies. I will save the details of my story for a later date, but let me just say that the hardest part is just deciding to change. Once that decision was made, I found support from other ranchers who had turned the corner before me. I gained the clarity needed to grow my business fourfold in ten years and to reach out to the environmental community for consensus, which has given me stability on public lands.

If you are serious about continuing in or even entering into ranching, it is time to chuck the ways of your grandfather and to find new partners in unique places. It is not easy to change, but there is comfort in knowing that you are not the first. Many others have pioneered this trail and are willing to show you the way. Ranchers have everything to gain from the Quivira Coalition and nothing to lose.

## Why is the New Ranch Important to Ranchers?

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# UPCOMING EVENTS

## Tours of Jim Winder's Ranch

Saturday, August 2nd

and

Saturday, September 6th

Come see a New Ranch in operation! Jim will lead a four-hour tour of his property, including an opportunity to see the recently rejuvenated Macho Creek. Learn about cattle rotation, range ecology, biodiversity, economics, and other cool stuff. Enjoy the open space and blue skies of southern New Mexico.

We will assemble at 10 a.m. at Jim's house, located two miles north of Nutt, NM. Take I-25 to Hatch, then drive 19 miles West on Highway 26 to Nutt (or 29 miles East from Deming). Bring a lunch, water, a hat, and plenty of sunscreen.

For more information, call Jim Winder at (505) 267-4227.

## Tour of the USDA's Jornada Experimental Station

Saturday, September 27th

Tour the premier rangeland research station in New Mexico! This large tract of land, located squarely on the historic Jornada del Muerto, was closed to uncontrolled cattle grazing 85 years ago. A long-term research station was then established to provide data on the effects of grazing on arid environments.

Tour this cutting-edge research institution with Kris Havstad, Director and Chief Scientist of the Jornada station.

We will assemble at 10 a.m. at the south boundary of the Jornada property. From I-25, turn East on Highway 70 (just North of Las Cruces) at a Shell Station, drive three miles, then turn north on the Jornada Road (dirt), drive 12 miles to the boundary fence. Bring a lunch, water, and a hat.

## HELP!

Would you like to help the Quivira Coalition? If so, please send your contribution with this form to our Santa Fe address.

Yes! I would like to help the Quivira Coalition in the following amount:

- \$15
- \$30
- \$50
- \$100
- Other

Contributions entitle you to be on our mailing list, to receive the Quivira Coalition newsletter and notices of upcoming events and publications.

Thank You!



The  
Quivira  
Coalition

535 Cordova Road, Suite 423  
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501

