

# The Quivira Coalition

Working to Achieve Harmony Between Humans and Nature

## Forging a West that Works: Overview

by Ed Marston, journalist, former Publisher of *High Country News*

Before we enter into a struggle over the future of the West, which means the future of the federal lands in the 11-state region, and the private lands tied to the federal lands through ranching, we must know what we are fighting over, and what we are fighting for. We are fighting over 420,000 square miles of grazed Forest Service and Bureau of Land

Management lands and an estimated 170,000 square miles of associated private grasslands. There are other important grazed lands—the sovereign Indian nations and the state lands, for example—but the Retreat is about the grazed federal lands and their associated private lands.

We are in a struggle because land ownership and land uses exist

within a social, economic, and cultural compact, and the terms of that compact have changed and continue to change. That change has thus far been piecemeal and incremental, taking place across a broad political and geographic landscape, in an uncoordinated and unanalyzed way. We can

*(con't on page 2)*

### Editor's Note

Recently, twenty ranchers, environmentalists, and scientists met at a "Retreat" for 48 hours to figure out a way to take back the American West from the decades of divisiveness and acrimony that now truly jeopardize much of what we all love and value. But they also met to take the West forward, to restore ecological, social and political health to a landscape that deserves it and so desperately needs it.

Using the materials presented here as background, they set out to write a Declaration. But they ended up writing an Invitation. They



wanted to declare an end to the hostilities that have consumed the issue of livestock grazing in the West, hostilities which have failed to protect endangered species and endangered rural communities alike.

But, they came to the conclusion that peace isn't enough. To make progress and move forward, we need to

mobilize what is being called The Radical Center and, by doing so, to give purpose, voice, and energy to an effort that has been growing slowly, by fits and starts, over the last decade or so. Only by working in the Radical Center will we make genuine progress.

In the end these ranchers, environmentalists, and scientists decided to tender an Invitation to Join the Radical Center (p. 34), an invitation that is being widely circulated so that the list of signatories may grow long, varied, and undeniable. Eventually, this invitation will grow into a campaign and, ultimately, a movement.

We hope you will join us, help us, and best of all, spread the news.

# Forging a West that Works: Overview

*(con't from page 1)*

best understand the consequences of the ongoing change by recalling the saying about the loss of a war because of the loss of the nail in the horseshoe of a horse. The Western landscape is littered with the nails of lost horseshoes. We are here in part to better understand what has happened and what is likely to happen, and its consequences.

But this is not an academic conference. We seek understanding to influence the trajectory of the change. We pray that we are early enough in that trajectory that this group can influence it through the pressure we will figure out how to exert. We do not question the legitimacy of this latest chapter in the struggle to define the West. The United States would not be a democracy if it did not question how 85% of the federal lands in the West were being used. The estimated 590,000 square miles of public and private land devoted to livestock is an extraordinary 19% of the continental landmass. It should be a matter of debate and struggle, and we welcome that debate and struggle. We wish to illuminate what is at stake in this struggle, so that

the American people can make the best possible decision.

The result of that decision will determine the evolution of the 11-state West (see map, p. 8), and will have a large impact on the nation as a whole. The question before this Retreat is equal in magnitude to the questions that resulted in the nation's push from 1801 to 1867 to expand to its present boundaries under the slogan "Manifest Destiny." It is equal to the decision to rule off the West into "Big Box" states of 100,000 square miles each. It is equal to the related decisions to steal the land of Native Americans, to settle the West through the railroad and homestead systems, and to subsidize its industrialization through a massive system of dams and reservoirs and nuclear facilities. We are bound by the history of the decisions made before us; but within those limits, we are free to define a different future—a "Next West." It is daunting to consider the magnitude of the coming change. But unless we recognize that immensity, we cannot rise to the level necessary to properly direct the change.

An objective observer might argue that we are not up to this task. For starters, we lack a constitutional scholar, an historian, high elected officials, people of great wealth, people of influence within the business world, or people within the military-industrial complex that runs key facilities within the West. We do not even have a major foundation standing in the wings, checkbook open, to finance whatever we come up with. The observer would be right about our modest qualifications for an imposing task. But the people of wealth and



February 2003

*(con't on page 3)*

## THE QUIVIRA COALITION

1413 Second St., Ste. 1  
Santa Fe, New Mexico  
USA 87505

(505) 820-2544

(505) 955-8922 (fax)

[www.quiviracoalition.org](http://www.quiviracoalition.org)

### Executive Director

**Courtney White**

(505) 820-2544

[executive@quiviracoalition.org](mailto:executive@quiviracoalition.org)

### Communications Director

**Barbara Johnson**

(505) 466-4935

[lunah3@aol.com](mailto:lunah3@aol.com)

### Projects Manager

**Tamara Sherburn**

(505) 867-4685

[projects@quiviracoalition.com](mailto:projects@quiviracoalition.com)

### Founders:

**Jim Winder**

(505) 267-4227

[jrwinder@heritage-ranch.com](mailto:jrwinder@heritage-ranch.com)

**Courtney White**

**Barbara Johnson**

The Quivira Coalition Newsletter is published by **The Quivira Coalition** 4 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, 1413 Second St., Ste. 1, Santa Fe, NM 87505. Send address changes to the same address. Please allow 4-6 weeks for processing.

**Printed on Recycled  
Electrons Worldwide**

influence and power are preoccupied with other matters. By default, they have left it to those of us who are closest to the West, and who care about its land and its future, and have some immediate expertise in the matter, to make time for this Retreat.

It is we who see what is so nearly upon us, and who, following our consciences, have moved into the vacuum. The nature of this deluge is described in the essays that follow. There is an account of how we got to where we are; the ecological and economic challenge presented by the fragmentation of the land; the economics of the industry that now dominates almost 600,000 square miles of federal and private land; and an analysis of the movement that has emerged over the past half century to successfully challenge the dominant paradigm.

The writers of this essay and the following essays are not attempting to tell the Retreatants what to think. We are simply telling you how we see the situation. We hope it provides you with a head start, because you find merit in some of what we have done and because you also see where we have gone wrong.

Speaking of wrong, there is a natural tendency, as we look at what faces the region, to ask others to reform. How easy it would be if the 21,000 public land ranchers were to turn into super-persons, and figure out how to make a living off their federal-private estate while protecting or restoring its ecological health. As a bonus, it would help if they would use their spare time to launch a campaign to tell the American people that the land, despite what they have read in billions of pieces of direct mail, is in good hands.

How helpful if, at the same time, the land grant universities were to read and then adhere to their charters, and, as a result, their disappear-

ing departments of range science were to return to life to help the ranchers return the land to ecological health. It would be even better if the West's sleeping giants—the federal agencies—were to awaken to their responsibilities and become part of a solution. It would also help if the “cattle-free” movement were to accept its role in a collective solution, and desist from its pursuit of a pre-1492 ecological state in the West. Even greater good would result if the beef industry's lions, the four packers, were to lie down with the commodity-producing ranchers, and share the industry's profits equitably.

And, not finally, because the list could go on, but importantly, what if, let's say, 100 million consumers were to feel responsible for the health of the land and of the well being of the ranchers and farmers who produce their food?

Not likely, you say. Well, that may simplify the task of this Retreat. Instead of having to reform the land-grant universities, the big meat packers, the abolitionist wing of environmentalism, the 21,000 public-land ranchers, and the God-Almighty American consumer, we only have to figure out where we want the West to go. Having done that, we will have to then make one big leap of faith. We will have to believe that if we can articulate a desirable direction in our Declaration, and if we can lay out a Plan of Action that would take the West there, and we can get those messages out, then—as Bill McDonald says—the institutions and the individuals who make up the West's institutions will follow. In the end, lacking wealth and muscle, we must place our faith in the fundamental forces that created this nation and the West we love and care about.

## Forging a West that Works

*(con't from page 2)*



February 2003

# HOW WE GOT HERE

by Nathan F. Sayre

The present crisis in ranching has its roots in legal, economic, and ecological events from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The landscape has changed since then, and the institutions and assumptions inherited from the past are poorly suited to cope with today's economy and new public demands

formed the nucleus of homesteaders' efforts. The major exception to this pattern is the "checkerboard" lands, such as railroad grants, where alternate square-mile parcels were privatized outside of the homesteading process.

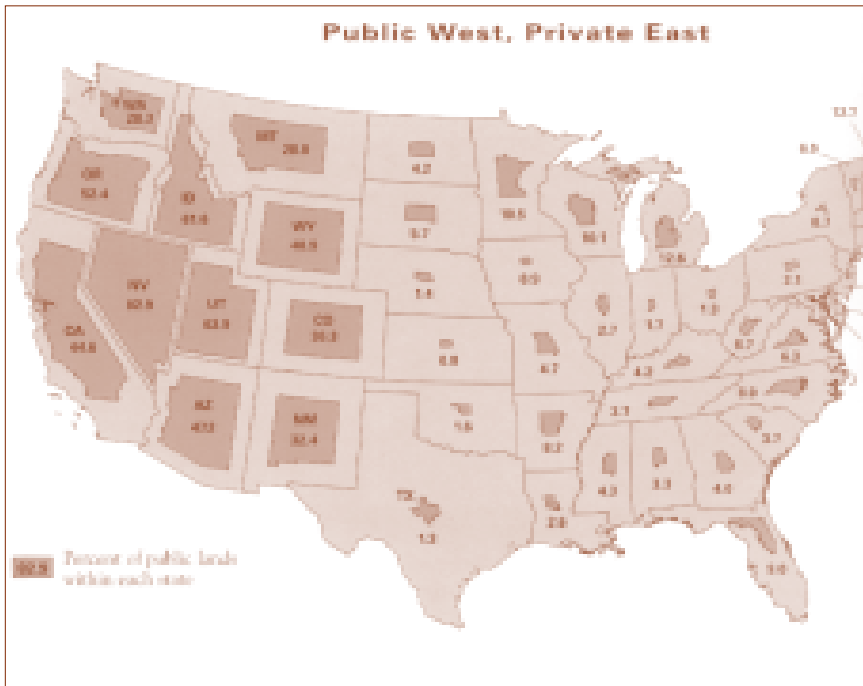
Today's National Forests were withdrawn from settlement beginning in the 1890s, often to protect downstream communities from the effects of indiscriminate tree cutting in Western mountains. Where Forest Reserves preceded statehood, as in Arizona and New Mexico, sections of public domain were selected by state land boards in lieu of those withdrawn by the federal government; often these selections focused on prime grasslands, which were the most valuable areas available. By 1934, when the Taylor Grazing Act ended most homesteading, the public domain consisted of the driest, least productive lands, passed over by homesteaders and state land departments.

With minor exceptions, then, today's landownership patterns were put in place by 1934. In a region of vast landscapes, private land is relatively scarce and dispersed. Lowland and riparian areas are much more likely to be private; mountains are generally federal; the intervening valley lands are often a mosaic of private, state, and federal ownerships. This pattern had unexpected ramifications for range management.

## Grazing, Overgrazing, and Management

The homesteading period left another legacy as well: severe and widespread overgrazing in what has become the archetypal "tragedy

(con't on page 5)



Eighty-eight percent of the nation's public lands (outside Alaska) lie in the 11 Western states. (Map reprinted from *Atlas of the New West*, Center of the American West, University of Colorado, Boulder, 1997.)

on Western lands. Understanding how these institutions and assumptions came to be helps to clarify the challenges we face now.

## Land Ownership

Perhaps the most important institution is property as it has been applied to land. From 1862 to 1934, federal policy emphasized disposal of the public domain to private parties to promote settlement and economic development. Today's patchwork of private, state, and federal land ownership is the legacy of this policy. Private lands tend to be concentrated around water—creeks, rivers, springs, marshes and floodplains—because these lower, more productive areas



of the commons.” Anyone who thinks the Western range looks bad today should examine photographs from a century ago. The quest for a science of range management was a reaction to this crisis. It was a time when ranchers knew little or nothing about the region’s climate and vegetation, and confidence in government science was high. If grazing management could be reduced to scientific laws, then these laws could be applied to ranching—or so it was believed.

By the 1890s, it was obvious to everyone that livestock numbers had to be controlled. Barbed wire fencing offered a means to do this, and in most areas it was the only means seriously considered. This in turn meant that the boundaries of grazing areas would be static. Such areas could be leased to ranchers, providing security of tenure without privatizing the massive public domain. At the time, it was widely stated that the Western range would never find a higher economic use than grazing. From this it followed that secure tenure would give lessees a direct financial incentive to improve range conditions on their allotments, spurring investments in fencing, and so forth.

*Clementsian Theory.* Several of the earliest range scientists had studied with or under Frederic Clements, and they brought Clements’ ecological theory to bear on their task. It fit neatly into the larger political and economic constraints they faced. First, it posited a fixed, “natural” potential for the vegetation of any given area (the “climax”), which implied a fixed carrying capacity for livestock grazing. Thus, fences would delineate not only an area but a certain productive potential, measured in livestock.

This would facilitate administration and, of even greater importance, allow leases to find a market value for exchange and an equity value for lending.

Second, Clements’ theory posited a “natural” tendency of vegetation to return to its climax conditions (“succession”) following a disturbance such as grazing. Early range scientists found a linear, negative relationship between succession and grazing pressure, further reinforcing the emphasis on stocking rates. This model worked fairly well in areas of higher precipitation, such as the National Forests, where much of the research was conducted. It did not work as well in drier areas, as Clements himself appears to have recognized. But it was subsequently applied throughout the West via federal grazing leases and the discipline of range science.

*“Improvement” Techniques.* A mechanistic productivism dominated range science and management for much of the twentieth century, mediated by leases and Clementsian theory. Ranchers and agencies wrangled over stocking rates, while researchers worked to develop economically viable improvement techniques. By allowing livestock to access more forage, for example, artificial water sources served to increase an allotment’s carrying capacity. Competitors for forage—such as prairie dogs, kangaroo rats, jackrabbits and nomadic shepherders—were suppressed or eliminated, as were competitors for livestock themselves (e.g., wolves, bears, lions, rustlers and, at an earlier time, American Indians). Some plants that competed with grasses were subject to control by mechani-

*(con’t on page 6)*

## How We Got Here

*(con’t from page 4)*

### The Quivira Coalition Board of Directors

**Jim Winder, Chair,**  
*Rancher*

**Merle Lefkoff, Vice Chair,**  
*Facilitator, environmentalist*

**Dutch Salmon, Secretary,**  
*Author, environmentalist*

**Bob Jenks, Treasurer,**  
*Deputy Commissioner,*

*New Mexico State Land Office*

**Roger Bowe, Rancher**

**Ernest Atencio, Anthropologist,**  
*author, and environmentalist*

**Sterling Grogan, Biologist,**  
*Middle Rio Grande*

*Conservancy District*

**Dr. Kris Havstad,**

*Supervisory Scientist,*

*Jornada Experimental Range*

**Frank Hayes,**

*U.S. Forest Service District Ranger,*

*Clifton, Arizona*

**Mark McCollum, Rancher**

**Ed Singleton,**

*Albuquerque Field Office Manager,*

*Bureau of Land Management*

**Virgil Trujillo,**

*Manager, Ghost Ranch*

*Affiliations are listed to convey the breadth of experience that these individuals bring to the governance of The Quivira Coalition*



February 2003

## How We Got Here

(con't from page 5)

cal or chemical means, and species from around the world were tested for use in revegetating degraded rangelands. Generally, the larger ecological ramifications of these innovations were neglected, and sev-

restoration.

*Assessing Rangeland.* Assessing the condition of Western rangelands is extraordinarily difficult, both because of natural variability (temporal as well as spatial) and because evolving ecological understanding has redefined the standards of measurement. This is especially true for drier rangelands such as those of the Great Basin and Southwestern deserts. If compared to their pre-settlement conditions (although what these were is often unknown in any detail), today's arid and semi-arid rangelands are much changed in the composition, productivity, density, and/or structure of vegetation. The changes may be due to historic overgrazing, altered fire regimes, drought, inter-decadal climate variations, hydrologi-



Chaining [top] to remove piñon and juniper. (Photo courtesy of Sid Goodloe.) Prairie dog. (Photo courtesy of Charles Curtin.)

eral of them helped create today's restoration challenges. Range science is paying the price for its earlier enthusiasm in a tarnished public image.

*Recent Science.* In recent decades, ecologists studying arid and semiarid rangelands have rejected both parts of the Clementsian model. Forage production varies dramatically over time and space, so no static carrying capacity can be assigned; moreover, the impacts of grazing are not linear—thresholds exist beyond which vegetation may deviate from the presumed successional path, so no fixed climax can be assumed. It is increasingly evident that stocking rate is not the sole important variable for management, that environmental variability must be met through flexibility, not mechanism, and that rest does not always lead to

cal factors such as arroyos, the introduction of exotic species, or any combination of these. On BLM and state lands, stocking in excess of official carrying capacities was common before about 1980. But even authorized stocking levels could have triggered vegetation shifts during severe droughts such as those of the 1890s and 1950s.

Using the old, Clementsian system of range condition classes, many of these rangelands would be judged in poor or fair condition. But if pre-settlement conditions cannot be restored—if the changes are irreversible in important ways—then such judgments are misleading, if not meaningless. New methods of range assessment have been developed, based on ecosystem functions instead of vegetation com-

(con't on page 7)



position. But these have not yet been widely applied. Even when they are, the results will be as apples to oranges when compared to past assessments.

Despite the advances in ecological theory, the Clementsian model remains embedded in many aspects of range policy, administration and management, and, it seems, in the minds of many American citizens. For ranchers, improvements and the official carrying capacity of leases are capitalized assets, exerting a strong inertial effect on management. Much of the range science literature consists in experiments comparing different stocking rates to each other or to no-grazing “controls,” with comparatively little attention to fire, drought, land use history, or other key variables. Public debates, policy reforms, and agency disputes with lessees focus largely on stocking rates; the notion that fewer livestock will equal more restoration, and that no livestock will restore “pristine” conditions, serves as backdrop for these debates.

Meanwhile, two central premises of past reforms have eroded. Ranchers are no longer ignorant of the lands they manage, having had some six generations to learn by experience. And rangelands have found a “higher” economic use than grazing.

### Urbanization

The forces driving urbanization are numerous, and most of them are national or even international in scale. Post-World War II prosperity and generalized access to automobiles made suburbanization the standard form of urban development nationwide from the 1950s to the present. Fed-

eral government spending on defense, highways, and water development has “subsidized” the West relative to the rest of the country throughout the same period. Technological and policy-driven changes in agriculture have steadily diminished the number of jobs in rural areas, both in the U.S. and elsewhere, contributing to demographic movement toward cities. The advent of air conditioning, in homes and later automobiles, helped make the hot Southwest into a desirable destination for newcomers, especially retirees. In recent decades, increasing wealth among richer Americans has led to a proliferation of second- (and third-, and fourth-) homes in scenic or amenity-favored areas throughout the country.

A handful of factors set Western urbanization apart, however. One is the abundant supply of federal lands, whose scenic beauty and open, often free access attract tourists, recreationists and new residents in large numbers. Proximity to these public lands is a major factor in the value and development of private lands throughout the region. Another, related factor is the relatively small proportion of private land, which drastically increases land

*(con't on page 8)*

## How We Got Here

*(con't from page 6)*



Subdivision in Wyoming. (Photo courtesy of Dan Dagget.)



## How We Got Here

*(con't from page 7)*

values by restricting the supply of readily developable property. Finally, the land use that precedes

terms but relatively cheap in dollars-per-acre terms. At least, it was relatively cheap so long as it was appraised according to its agricultural value, which in many areas hasn't been the case for thirty years. Even if returns on cattle were not stagnant, it is unlikely that they could keep up with potential returns to development on urban peripheries or in areas of high scenic value.

Rising property values have put ranchers in a curious position, at once obstacles to and potential beneficiaries of urban growth. They can borrow large sums against their land, but they cannot pay it back with the herd. Non-ranchers have entered the business, drawn by the "lifestyle" and the prospect of a steadily appreciating asset; today, half of all federal permit holders may be classified as "hobbyists," reliant on outside income for their livelihoods. Researchers have found a kind of collective threshold dynamic at play where urbanization and ranching meet. Encroaching urbanization increases ranch operation costs, as problems with fences, gates, trespass-

ers, stray dogs, and car-livestock accidents build. Ranchers remain committed to their livelihoods, but once they come to view development in their area as inevitable, they focus on protecting their property values so they can liquidate and move to another ranch someplace else.

*(con't on page 9)*



The "New West." (Map reprinted from *Atlas of the New West*, Center of the American West, University of Colorado, Boulder, 1997.)

8



February 2003

urbanization in most of the West—range livestock production—presents a different landscape, both ecologically and economically, than is found in more mesic parts of the nation. Being land extensive, ranching generates smaller revenues per acre than other land uses, and it alters the native landscape—plants, animals, soils, etc.—less than other land uses. This means the land is relatively valuable in conservation

This contradictory position may help explain the ranching community's quixotic political relationship to urbanization issues. Even as the economics of beef production squeeze rank and file ranchers harder and harder, those with valuable private land have a kind of golden parachute. Rhetoric about "private property rights" often expresses a determination to protect this parachute above all else. One rancher explained to me a few years ago that he'd borrowed half a million dollars to buy his ranch (which he has since sold), and that his livestock operation had never been able to cover the interest on the note. But his banker wasn't concerned, he said, because the ranch had appreciated by one million dollars in the meantime. This is a rancher who is strongly opposed to sprawl—but what was he to do? Commitment to tradition, culture, family and land may be priceless, but it ultimately must pencil out or succumb. While their sentiments may lean toward conservation and open space, and their work resonates with ancient pastoralism, ranchers' structural economic position is that of developers: they own large pieces of valu-

able real estate, and they inhabit a system in which all assets must realize a competitive return.

### **Conclusion**

A recent study of subdivision in northern Arizona, commissioned by the Arizona Cattle Growers' Association, found that 2.2 million acres of private land have been platted or sold in the area since 1959. Two million developable private acres remain; one can thus foresee the private land entirely subdivided by 2040. The rate may be slower or faster in other parts of the West, but the pattern is the same. It is an economic logic, but it is widely reinforced by political machinations as well: developers donate, and suburbanites vote. After some fifty years of nearly uninterrupted real estate appreciation, it may be impossible to calculate the degree to which the economy of the New West is dependent on—or should we say addicted to—the profits of splitting, selling, building, and reselling residential properties.

What can be done about this? That is the question we face at this retreat.

## **How We Got Here**

*(con't from page 8)*

*"Private lands tend to be concentrated around water—creeks, rivers, springs, marshes and floodplains—because these lower, more productive areas formed the nucleus of homesteaders' efforts."*



# THE CHANGING ECOLOGY OF THE NEW-OLD WEST

by *Richard L. Knight*,  
Professor of Wildlife Biology,  
Colorado State University

*“That which happens to men  
also happens to animals; and one thing  
happens to them both: as one dies so dies  
the other, for they share the same breath;  
and man has no preeminence above an  
animal: for all is vanity.”—*

**Ecclesiastes 3:19**

*“The most tragic conflict in the history of  
conservation is that between conservation-  
ists and the farmers and ranchers. It is  
tragic because it is unnecessary. There is no  
irresolvable conflict here, but the conflict  
that exists can be resolved only on the  
basis of a common understanding of good  
practice. Here again we need to foster and  
study working models: farms and ranches  
that are knowledgeably striving to bring  
economic practice into line with ecological  
reality, and local food economies in which  
consumers conscientiously support the best  
land stewardship.”—*

**Wendell Berry, *The Whole Horse***

The natural heritage of the West is an important economic driver for the region’s economy. If the New West is principally an amenity economy, it is undeniable that wildlife and biodiversity are important components for our region’s inhabitants, for wildlife is an important amenity to New Westerners. Thomas Power has argued that despite incomes that are low compared to the rest of the country, our region is not suffering from general impoverishment precisely because of our rich natural heritage.

Ranch families working viable ranches that sustain biodiversity and contribute to the social fabric and local economies are critical to a West that works. If Power is right and the New West is strictly an amenity economy, our region can only support healthy wild communities if it remains unfragmented. Ranchers, in addition to their other vital services, are a critical component to an intact rather than a subdivided West. Whether the land that is now in ranching remains in ranching or shifts to other uses, we are up against the same need: to keep this land unfragmented. Both ranching and the New West economies of recreation and profligate lifestyles both depend on intact land and healthy wildlife habitat.

A more immediate reason for why we must be concerned about biodiversity in the West is the heavy hand of federal legislation when strictly interpreted by judges over public land-use issues. The implications of federally listed species even affect what can occur on private lands, as evidenced by the sharp increase in Habitat Conservation Plans being developed across our region. If the New West continues to lose its ranching families and

becomes increasingly fragmented, the results will be a further diminished natural heritage. The upshot will be that all of our region’s inhabitants will be the poorer for this impoverishment, whether it be for economic, cultural, or ecological reasons.

## *Four Truths*

To fully understand the ecological implications of the conversion of the Old West to the Next West, one needs to be aware of four undeniable truths. These “truths” speak to the administrative, ecological, economic, and demographic forces that have shaped the West and are the primary drivers that are increasingly buffeting our region and its inhabitants. Importantly, each involves ranching and the grazing of domestic livestock.

*Administration: Half Private, Half Public.* The lands of the West are blended; half public and half private. With diverse federal ownership scattered across the Departments of Interior and Agriculture, with large acreages sequestered in state land offices, parks and recreation and wildlife agencies, the West is unique as a region. No other part of the U.S. has the inherent tensions associated with containing huge tracts of federal lands. As Wallace Stegner wrote, “Take for granted federal assistance, but damn federal control. Your presence as absentee landlord offends us, Uncle. Get out, and give us more money.” Regardless of our personal beliefs, this geographic truth is critical to understanding biodiversity and the West because this division of ownership has created a profound ecological dichotomy.

*(con’t on page 11)*

10



February 2003

*Ecology: Private Lands are the Most Productive.* Although land ownership in the West is blended, the division is not equal. The private lands are the best watered, occur at the lower elevations and contain the richest soils ([Figure 1](#), p. 12). Understanding the history of settlement of the public domain is key to

uses; they have been replaced by ones befitting an amenity economy. Today the highest and best uses of the region's private lands are residential and commercial development, while on public lands outdoor recreation is the chief use. Perhaps not surprisingly, these new uses are now the leading causes for

## The Changing Ecology of the New-Old West

*(con't from page 10)*

Table 1. Numbers of wildlife species at different elevations in the San Juan Mountains and adjacent lowlands, Colorado. Note how the lower elevations (private lands) contain more species (Spencer and Romme 1996).

Feet	4,600-5,899	5,900-7,199	7,200-8,499	8,500-9,799	9,800-11,100
Amphibians	8	7	5	4	2
Reptiles	26	17	6	7	1
Mammals	49	53	42	40	37

appreciating why the federal lands are largely “rock and ice” or “desert and thorn.” The implications to biodiversity of this historical truth are even more important. The private lands are disproportionately important to the maintenance of our region's natural heritage. Although no one has calculated the ratio, private lands, due to their greater productivity, are probably an order of magnitude more important to the maintenance of the region's biodiversity than are the public lands ([Table 1](#)). Truthfully, however, biodiversity could no more survive on just the private lands than it could on just the public lands.

*Economics: The Newest “Highest and Best Uses.”* Historically, the West, blended half in private and half in public lands, was largely devoted to utilitarian uses, such as ranching, hard-rock mining, energy development, water development, and logging. Today, these uses are no longer the “highest and best”

the decline of federally listed species. Importantly, residential development and outdoor recreation will pose ever greater threats to the region's biodiversity since they are increasing, in some cases exponentially, while the traditional uses are in decline.

*Demographics: These Trends Will Continue.* Critical to understanding wildlife and biodiversity in a rapidly changing West is **that these trends will not change.** Indeed, beginning with the first census in 1850, the West as a region has captured a greater share of the country's population, year after year ([Figure 2](#), p. 13). No other region can make that claim. Essential to understanding the implications of this continued population growth on biodiversity, lie two other facts. First, this growth is not just occurring in urban areas. From 1990 to 1998

*“The private lands are disproportionately important to the maintenance of our region's natural heritage. Although no one has calculated the ratio, private lands, due to their greater productivity, are probably an order of magnitude more important to the maintenance of the region's biodiversity than are the public lands. . . .”*

*(con't on page 12)*



# The Changing Ecology of the New-Old West

(con't from page 11)

population in rural areas grew faster than in urban areas in over 60% of the counties in Rocky Mountain states (Figure 3, p. 14). Second, conversion of rural lands in ranches and farms to houses is highly consumptive of land. For example, whereas the annual population growth rate in Colorado has averaged around

environmentalists.

## Biodiversity and the New West

Given these four "truths," administrative, ecological, economic, and demographic, it is relevant to ask how they affect biodiversity and the ecology of the West. The implications are profound

and provide a compelling argument for why ranchlands need to be protected.

Ranchettes, Fragmentation, and the House-Edge Effect. When rural lands, principally in farms and ranches, are subdivided there follows an increase in landscape-level fragmentation. For example, when ranches in Larimer County, Colorado were subdivided, there was an almost ten-fold increase in road densities and fragmentation from houses which perforated the previously intact

rangelands. Critically, there are "house-edge effects" associated with these homes and roads which result in diminished conservation values of these fragmented landscapes. For example, in Pitkin County, Colorado the depth of the edge effect associated with ranchettes extended out into unde-

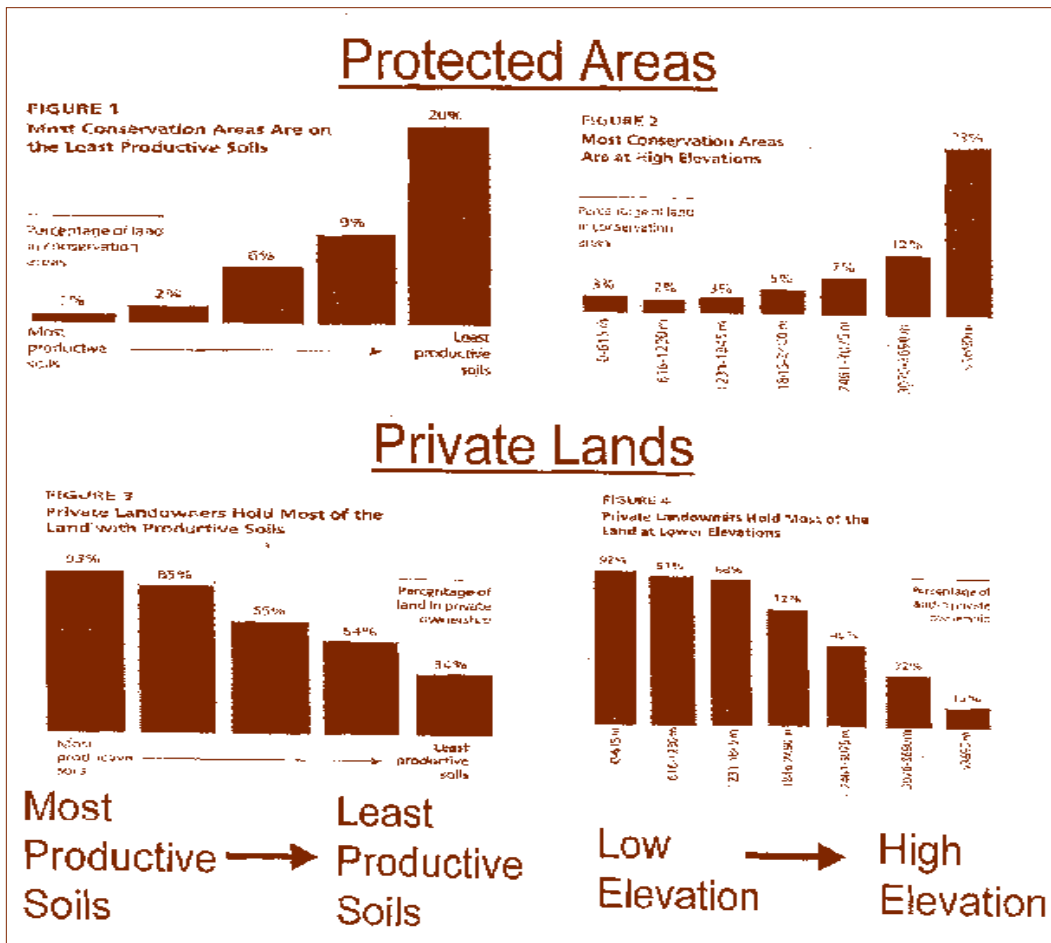


Figure 1. The distribution of public lands and lands in private ownership, by soil and elevation. Note that private lands occur at the lowest elevations and on the most productive soils.

3%, land conversion has averaged around 8% annually. People who buy part of a former ranch don't live on city-sized lots. Because so much wildlife is sensitive to fragmentation of landscapes, these trends suggest that the natural heritage of our region will change considerably from what it had been. The implications of this change do not bode well for any group, most importantly for conservationists and en-



veloped areas as far as 330 meters, although most effects diminished at approximately 100 meters from the homes (Figure 4, p. 14).

Critical to understanding the edge affect associated with fragmentation by ranchettes is the awareness that species composition changes as a result of the homes. Human adapted species, such as brown-headed cowbirds, black-billed magpies, and American robins, all occurred at higher densities near homes and at lower densities away from homes (Figure 5, p. 15). These species can affect the survival and ability to reproduce of species of conservation concern (Figure 4)

through nest parasitism, nest predation, and competition for nesting sites.

This relationship also applied to carnivores. Dogs and house cats were more likely to be detected near homes than away from homes, while coyotes and red foxes showed the reverse pattern (Figure 6, p. 15).

Findings of this sort can help elucidate the true ecological costs associated with ranchette development. Rather than simply acknowledging that ranchette developments fragment the landscape, one can begin to calculate the magnitude of land affected beyond the

building site. Assuming the depth of the house-edge effect is 100 meters, and including a similar depth of road-effect, we find that approximately one-fifth of the land area of a subdivided ranch is affected by

## The Changing Ecology of the New-Old West

(con't from page 12)

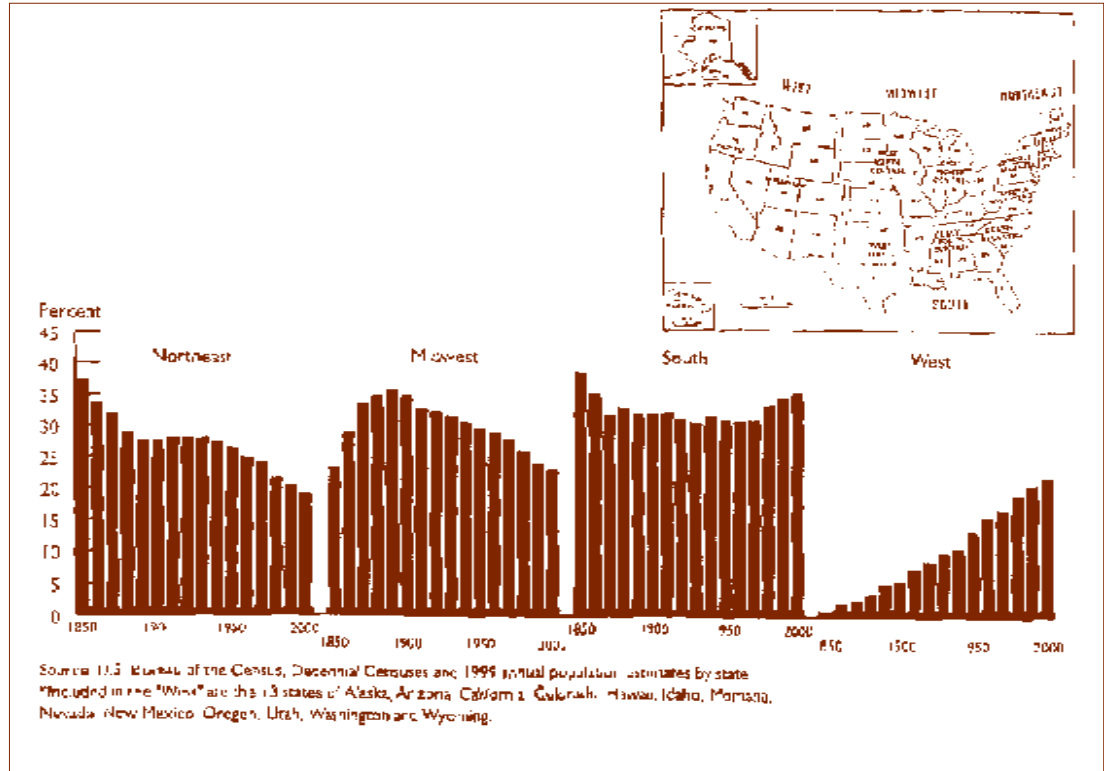


Figure 2. Share of the U.S. population in each region, 1850-1999. Note that the West is the only region that has not shown declines during this 150 year span.

houses and roads. The long-term implications of these findings suggest that more and more species will become listed under the federal Endangered Species Act. This bodes poorly for our region as listed species do not build communities, they fragment them societally, economically, and ecologically.

### Land Use and Biodiversity Beyond the Urban Fringe

In much of the Mountain West, there are three principal land uses beyond city limits: protected areas, ranches, and land in ranchettes. This is relevant since little additional land is being pro-

(con't on page 14)



# The Changing Ecology of the New-Old West

(con't from page 13)

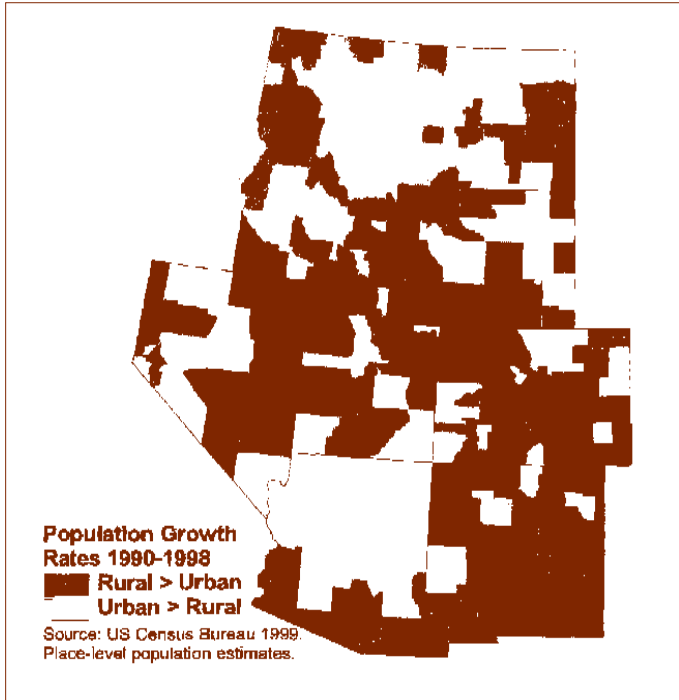


Figure 3 [above]. Shifts in rural and urban population growth in counties of Rocky Mountain states between 1990 and 1998.

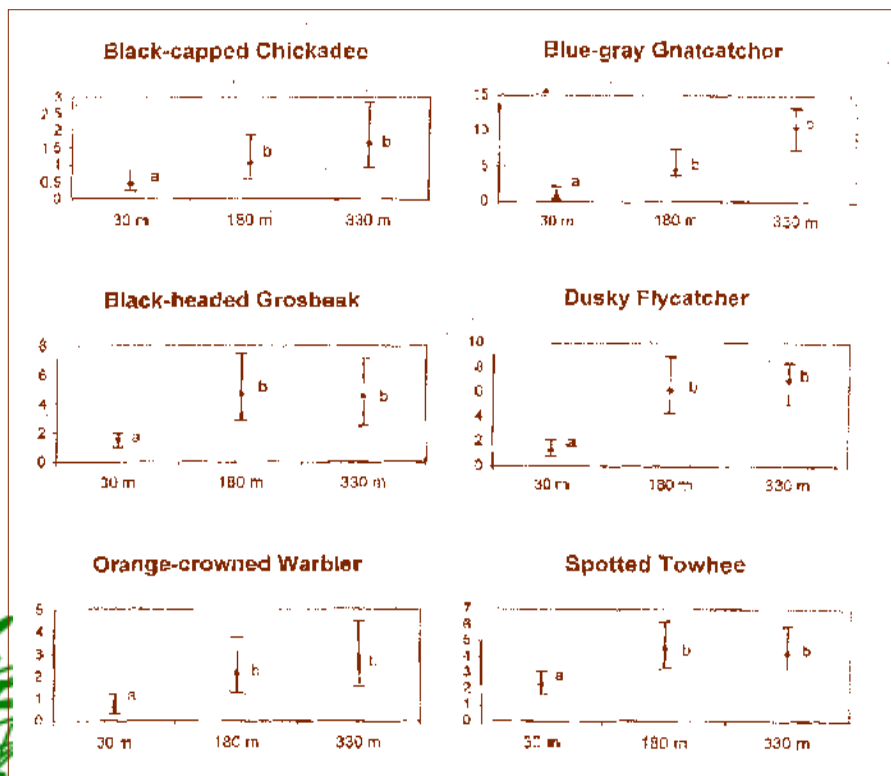
Figure 4 [right]. Density of human-sensitive birds at increasing distances from homes into natural areas. Density estimates with the same letter are not statistically significant. Pitkin County, Colorado.

tected, and an enormous amount of private land in ranching and farming is being converted to residential development. For example, between 1970 and 2000, land in 11 Western states that was in residential and commercial development increased from 20 million to nearly 42 million acres. Most of this newly developed land had previously been in ranch and farm lands.

Although denigrated as an incompatible land use with biodiversity

by extreme environmental groups, conservation organizations are increasingly working with ranchers to ensure that their lands stay in ranching and out of development. This conservation response assumes that ranchlands support biodiversity that is no different from what is found on protected areas and that it is substantially better than what would occur if the ranchlands were subdivided. Researchers examined songbirds, carnivores, and plant communities on these three land uses in Larimer County, CO. Importantly, their data came from sites that occurred at the same elevation, on the same soil types, and in the same plant community.

The occurrence and density of songbirds and carnivores were more similar between ranches and protected areas (without livestock grazing) than on the ranchettes. The songbirds and carnivores that were



most abundant on the ranchettes included dogs, cats, black-billed magpies, European starlings and other human-adapted species (Figures 7 and 8, p. 16). Songbirds and carnivores that occurred on ranches and protected areas were uncommon or did not occur on land in ranchettes (Figure 8, p. 16, and Figure 9, p. 17). Importantly, these songbirds are of conservation concern, whereas the birds that did best on ranchettes are common and increasing across the West.

The plant communities across these three land uses were even more distinct. Native species were more prevalent and non-native species were less prevalent on ranches than on either protected areas or ranchettes. The researchers found the greatest number of non-native species on the ranchettes

change in a rural Colorado county. Until 1960, Pitkin County was sparsely populated with just over 2,300 people and contained about 105,000 acres of agricultural land in private ownership. Over the next two decades (1960-1980), Pitkin County sustained 16% annual population growth and lost more than half of its agricultural land. During the 1990s, population growth slowed to a

## The Changing Ecology of the New-Old West

(con't from page 14)

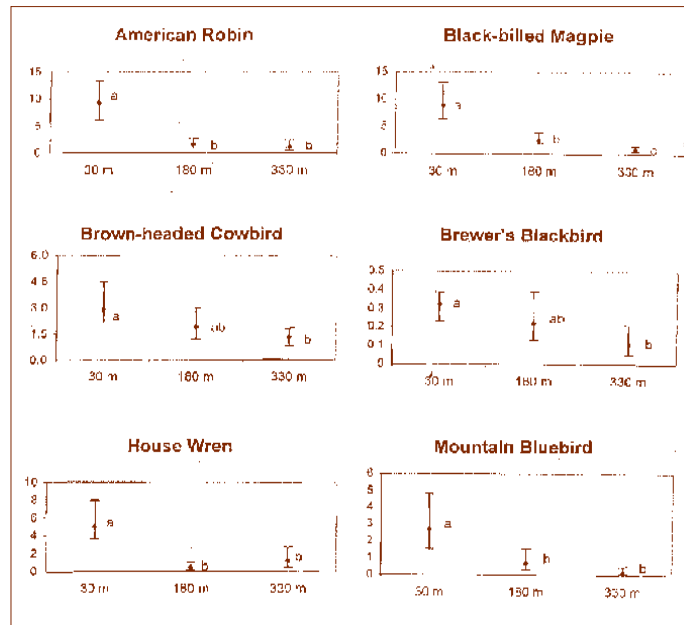
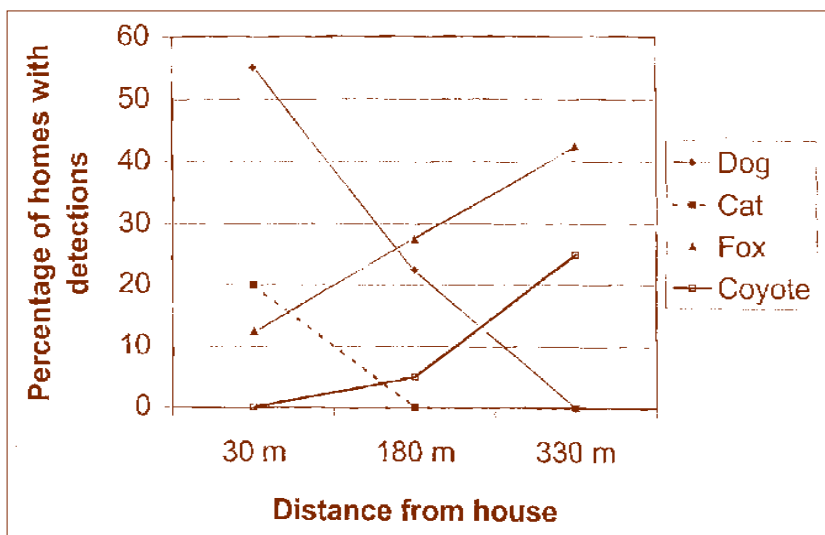


Figure 5 [above]. Density of human adapted birds at increasing distances from homes into natural areas. Density estimates with the same letter are not statistically significant. Pitkin County, Colorado.

Figure 6 [left]. Percentage of homes at which medium-sized carnivores were detected near homes and at increasing distances from homes into natural areas. Pitkin County, Colorado.



with 8 of 23 non-native species being found only on the ranchette developments. In addition, percent cover of non-native plants was highest on the ranchettes and protected areas and was significantly lower on ranches.

Why this matters is evidenced by examining land-use

modest 1% annual rate, but housing units grew at 3%. Only one-quarter of the agricultural land existing in 1964 remained in production in 1997 (Figure 10, p.17). The conversion of these lands from ranching to

(con't on page 16)



# The Changing Ecology of the New-Old West

(con't from page 15)

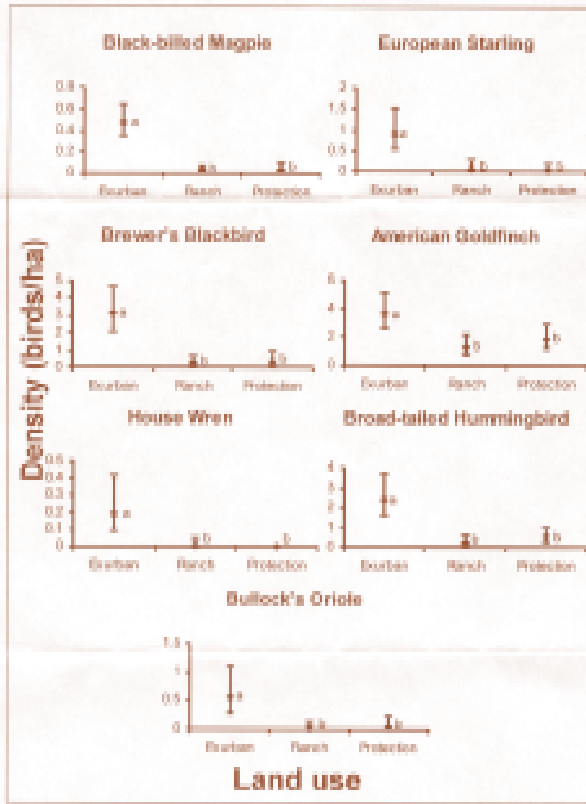
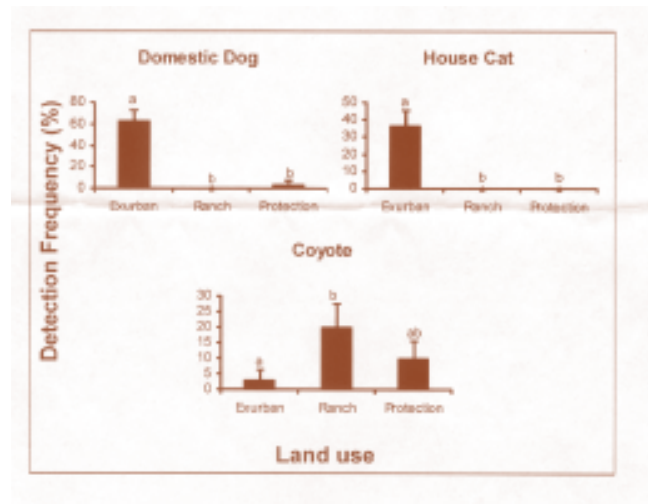


Figure 7 [above]. Birds that reached Figure Density estimates with the same letter are not statistically significant. Larimer County, Colorado. Figure 8 [right]. Frequency of carnivore detections on ranchette developments, ranches, and protected areas without livestock. Different letters indicated a statistical difference. Larimer County, Colorado.



ranchettes is important since these lands have a disproportionate effect on wildlife as they tend to be the well-watered lands in the valley bottoms.

Perhaps this is why so many conservation organizations, from The Nature Conservancy to local land trusts, are working with ranchers to protect their lands from the schemes of developers. Interestingly, it also begs the question of why federal and state land-management agencies, let alone environmental groups, are not working

the right thing when they promote ranching as a compatible land use in the New West. When ranches support viable populations of species sensitive to the harmful effects of sprawl, they act much the same role as protected areas because they serve as “sources” (areas where birth rates of species exceed death rates) of sensitive plant and animal species. If ranchettes serve as “sinks” (places where death rates exceed birth rates) for species of conservation value, populations on these areas are kept afloat by the addition of surplus individuals dispersing from nearby protected areas and ranchlands. The value of ranchlands becomes even more obvious when one compares the productivity of these lands. Public lands, by and large, occur at higher elevations and on the least produc-

more enthusiastically with ranchers to ensure ranching persists as a land use. If ranching protects songbirds and carnivores as well as protected areas without livestock, and is even more compatible with native plant communities, shouldn't we all be working with ranchers?

## Metapopulations and Ranchlands

Apparently The Nature Conservancy and other private conservation organizations are doing

tive soils. Private ranchlands, on the other hand, generally occur at lower elevations and on much more productive soils. This is why conservation groups concerned with the maintenance of native biodiversity see ranches as critical components in their protection strategies.

The upshot of the biologi-

(con't on page 17)



cal changes associated with the conversion of ranchlands to ranchettes will be an altered natural heritage. In the years to come, as the West gradually transforms itself from rural ranches with low human densities to increasingly sprawl-riddled landscapes with more people, more dogs and cats, more cars and fences, more night lights perforating the once-black night sky, the rich natural diversity that once characterized the rural West will be altered forever. We will have more generalist species—species that thrive in association with humans—and fewer specialist species—those whose

evolutionary histories failed to prepare them for elevated human densities and our advanced technology. Rather than lark buntings and bobcats, we will have starlings and striped skunks. Rather than rattlesnakes and warblers, we will have garter snakes and robins. Is that the West we want? It will be the West we get if we do not slow down and get to know the human and natural histories of our region better, and then act to conserve them.

## The Changing Ecology of the New-Old West

(con't from page 16)

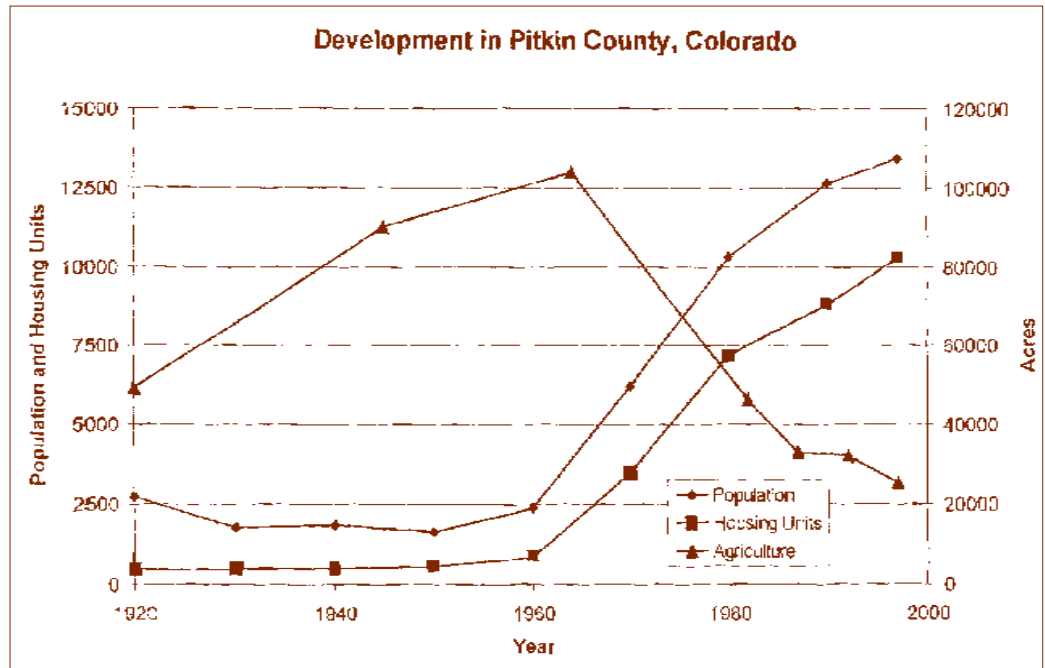
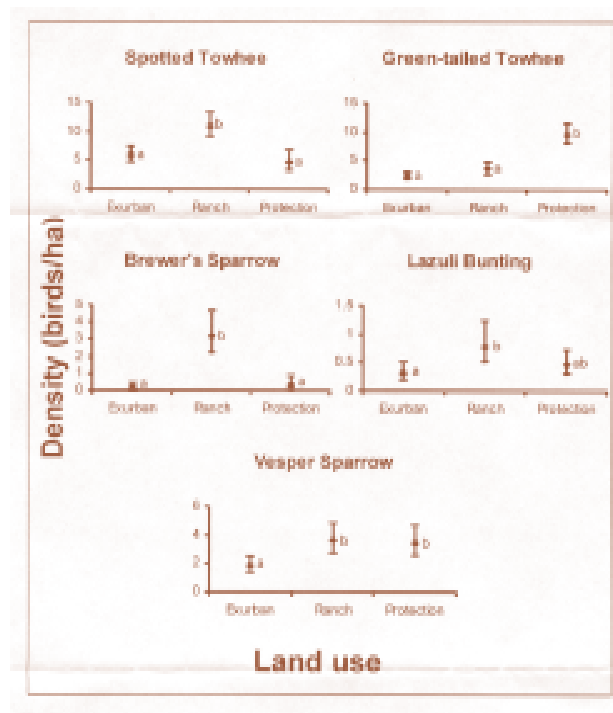


Figure 9 [left]. Birds that reached their greatest densities on ranchlands or protected areas without livestock, or both. Density estimates with the same letter are not statistically significant. Larimer County, Colorado. Figure 10 [above]. Changes in population, housing units, and agricultural land in Pitkin County, Colorado, 1920-1998.



# THE ECONOMICS OF RANCHING IN 2002

*by Bill McDonald,  
Executive Director,  
Malpai Borderlands Group*

Food prices in this country are a bargain. Of the total amount of money spent on goods and services in the United States, only 8.4% is spent on food. That is the lowest percentage ever, and easily the lowest of any country in the world. While food prices in the U.S. have risen over the last 15 years, they have done so at just half the rate of the average American's income. For the producers of America's food, the farmers and ranchers, there is more sobering news. In 1980, the farmer or rancher received 31 cents of every dollar spent for food. In 2002, the figure is 19 cents. Eighty-one percent of the money U.S. consumers pay for food goes to processing, transportation, labor, energy, and wholesale and retail markup.

But don't federal subsidies help make up the gap for producers? While it is true that taxpayers help keep producers on the land and grocery prices low by bankrolling a myriad of agricultural assistance programs, the ability to access those programs varies greatly from commodity to commodity. Subsidies for some commodities can negatively impact the value of others. For instance, subsidies to dairy farmers create incentives to produce an oversupply of milk, the side effect of which is an oversupply of dairy calves that impacts the beef market. Beef producers do not receive commodity subsidies. The majority of dairy calves now go directly to feedlots. In the past these calves did not compete well with crossbred beef calves because dairy calves convert roughage very poorly and have to be fed grain from the time they learn to eat until slaughter. Now, because of the subsidies keeping corn at depression-era prices, dairy calves can be fed economically to reach the same carcass grades as beef cattle that spend most of their life on the range and only a few weeks in the feedlot. So,

while beef producers do have access to some government assistance programs, subsidies are definitely a mixed bag for them compared to producers of some other commodities.

## *The Economic Squeeze*

By any yardstick, the American cattle rancher is getting squeezed economically. In 1981, a 450 lb. steer calf (the primary product of western cow-calf ranches) brought an average price of 71 cents per lb. In 1991 the average price for the same weight steer was \$1.06. But in 2001 the same weight steer brought just \$1.11—a 5 cent increase in ten years. The really bad news is that the years 1991 and 2001 contained the price peaks for the decade. During the intervening years, the price fell as low as 60 cents. This is the famous cattle cycle at work. Historically, the cycle has been based on the fact that when a lot of beef is on the market, prices go down, ranchers subsequently cut back their herd numbers and eventually less beef goes to market and prices go back up—old fashioned supply and demand. In the past, while prices cycled up and down, the overall trend was up. Over the past ten years, however, the trend has been stagnant. The trend of the cost of a rancher's inputs needed to produce a 450 lb. steer calf has not been stagnant. For instance, over the past decade, the price of a new two-ton pickup truck has nearly doubled.

As one can imagine, when an industry has been hit as hard as this one has, the "blame game" and the finger-pointing begin in earnest. The structure of the industry is such that all three of the major segments (rancher, feeder, packer) rarely make money at the same time. Retailers try to keep meat prices relatively stable, so the three segments "trade" profit-

*(con't on page 19)*

18



ability depending on supply. As mentioned, over the past decade ranching has not been profitable. For most of the past decade, feedyards were profitable, but not since 1999. The one segment that has shown a profit throughout that period has been the packers (or meat processors). This industry segment is dominated by four huge conglomerates that process 82% of the nation's beef. By comparison, though there is some consolidation taking place in the feeding sector, it is still relatively fragmented with one half of the feedlots feeding 87% of the cattle. Cow-calf production shows little sign of consolidation. Fifty percent of this country's cattle originate from the herds of producers who own less than 100 cows.

### ***Battle for Control of the Industry***

Symptomatic of the current upheaval within the beef industry is the controversy surrounding the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA). About eight years ago, the National Cattlemen's Association began accepting meat processors as members and added the word "Beef" to the association's name. Coincidentally or not, soon afterward the feeder calf market began its downhill slide.

A rival organization emerged, known by the acronym R-CALF. R-CALF has taken policy positions in direct opposition to some of those championed by NCBA. It is the belief of R-CALF's members that NCBA "sold out" to meat processing interests in order to bring their money into the organization. NCBA's support for free trade, and its lack of support for mandatory country-of-origin labeling on retail meat packages, as well as its lack of opposition to packer ownership of cattle prior to slaughter (all positions some feel are destructive to the interests of cow-calf producers), is sufficient evidence

to NCBA's detractors that the organization is now too heavily influenced by the big meat processors. NCBA's response is that it is an organization with a democratic structure and the majority of its members who attend its meetings have voted to support these positions. The association further points out that the structure of the beef industry is changing to meet consumer demands and that more government regulation of cattle ownership and of trade would be detrimental to the functioning of the industry and ultimately to the rancher.

The Livestock Marketing Association (LMA) is unconvinced. Representing the auction markets (where most of the smaller producers sell their cattle), LMA has sued in federal court to challenge the constitutionality of the "Beef Check-Off," the mandatory \$1 per animal assessment that is paid by the seller every time an animal is sold. The money goes to beef research, public relations and advertising, and to administer the program. NCBA is contracted with USDA to help administer the Check-Off and the compensation it receives for this service is a big revenue source for the organization. NCBA calls the lawsuit "sour grapes" on the part of LMA. Sympathizers of LMA and R-CALF believe it is part of a struggle for control of the future of the industry.

### ***Changes in the Traditional System***

Under pressure from an increasingly consolidated retail sector, packers have begun to demand that

*(con't on page 20)*

## **The Economics of Ranching in 2002**

*(con't from page 18)*



Bull, Buenos Aires Ranch, 1974.  
(Photo courtesy of Wayne Pruett.)



## The Economics of Ranching in 2002

*(con't from page 19)*

fed cattle meet certain targets. Called "selling on the carcass grid" this means that a carcass that scores high, say, on yield grade would receive a premium. However, if it simultaneously scores low in another category, such as rib-eye size or fat thickness, it would be discounted. The final score determines the price. Feeders complain that the system is rigged to produce more discounts than premiums and

sion to pay the producer a bonus if his calves hit enough of the grid targets at processing. The success of an alliance depends on an information flow backward from the processor to the feeder to the producer. This is a new development in an industry where each sector has historically guarded information jealously. A rancher always has the option of owning his cattle all the way to processing, but this increases potential risk (or benefit) and, most importantly, means a delayed "pay day."

Most alliances are centered on meeting specifications for meat products that will carry a brand name. Participation in alliances has grown 20% in the last two years and there is little question that, as brands take up a bigger share of the meat case, the shrinking commodity side of the cattle industry is being affected. Management actions that previously might have been rewarded with a premium at sale, such as vaccinating calves on the ranch against diseases that are associated with transportation and confinement and "backgrounding" (weaning calves and conditioning them to eating from a feedbunk) on the ranch, are now required to avoid selling at a discounted price. Western ranchers, who have to gather cattle over large acreages and who have tried to keep husbandry inputs to a minimum (the drier climate and open space produces a healthier environment than the smaller pastures in the East), are now forced to build more cattle-handling facilities and expend more labor and expense just to obtain essentially the same price that they were getting previously.

Because of the advancements in cattle genetics, nutrition, care, and veterinary practices, today's ranchers produce the same tonnage of beef as



Low-stress livestock (herding) clinic at Ghost Ranch. (Photo courtesy of Courtney White.)

there is some resistance to this method of selling. Packers have ventured into the feeding sector, buying and feeding cattle well before slaughter, and are also utilizing forward contracting (paying in advance to have cattle committed to their facility) in an attempt to keep an even flow of the "right kind" of cattle through their processing plants. There is considerable disagreement within the industry about whether or not this "captive supply" depresses overall market prices.

Cattle feeders, in an attempt to adapt to packer demands, are forming "alliances" with cow-calf producers who can meet the specifications of the alliance. Usually these specs have to do with genetics, weaning weights, and animal husbandry practices. Feeders pay a premium for cattle that meet the specifications of the program. Some alliances also include a provi-

*(con't on page 21)*

20

40 years ago from far fewer animals. Calves arrive at the feedlots younger and at heavier weights than in the past, and convert feed to pounds of beef at a faster rate than ever before. This is a good trend for the rancher in terms of reducing costs (less time maintaining the animals) and it's good for the range (less time the calves are on the range and fewer cows producing the same amount of beef).

There is a downside, however. Americans are conditioned to prefer "marbled" beef. The ability of an animal to marble (put on interior fat) is largely a function of age. All else being even, an older steer will marble better than a younger one. In the Southwest, the calves from domestic ranches compete with imported Mexican steers that are typically older and thinner and, therefore, will: a) make more money for the feeder because they arrive in a lightweight condition with a larger frame and, b) grade higher, because, at processing, the carcass will be better marbled. The ecological cost to the land of keeping that steer an extra year on the ranch in Mexico is evidenced by its condition, but it will be a money maker for whoever buys it.

### **Alternative Marketing**

Reacting to industry trends that threaten to leave them behind, some cattlemen are attempting to market their product in ways other than through the traditional segmented route. Attempts to consolidate, or at least coordinate industry functions from the bottom up, have resulted in some spectacular failures. Future Beef, Inc., launched with much fanfare less than two years ago as a "pasture to plate" alternative to the traditional path, is already in bankruptcy court. But some relatively small, regionalized "niche" marketing efforts aimed at particular consumer preferences (almost exclusively

focused on eating quality and/or health consciousness) have been successful. There is some indication that these ventures will have staying power and that niche marketing is starting to outgrow the "Mom and Pop" phase. Recently, Coleman Beef and B3R, two longtime family-run niche operations, were purchased by Petaluma Holdings, which has the resources for growth that Coleman and B3R lacked. Petaluma will retain the Coleman and Bradley families and their employees to run the business and will continue to use the brand names. This is a likely trend for other small, but successful, efforts that tire of struggling with capitalization problems. Hopefully, the expansion of these efforts will make this option available to more ranchers.

Strangely enough (or maybe not), practically none of these niche ventures have focused their marketing on emphasizing how the animals were raised in terms of impact on the environment.

Although consumers' confidence in beef has rebounded from the "anti-fat" decades of the 80s and 90s, health and safety concerns remain uppermost in people's minds when purchasing food. E. coli, "mad-cow" disease, foot and mouth disease—all these remote threats currently carry more weight with consumers than desertification, soil erosion, or loss of open space; issues which many people don't connect in any way with the food they eat.

### **Grass-Fed Beef**

A relatively tiny percentage of consumers in this country support grass-fed beef producers. While many ranchers would prefer to market beef as grass fed, and while some conservationists, health conscious consumers, and people concerned about ani-

*(con't on page 22)*

## **The Economics of Ranching in 2002**

*(con't from page 20)*

*"...health and safety concerns remain uppermost in people's minds when purchasing food. E. coli, 'mad-cow' disease, foot and mouth disease—all these remote threats currently carry more weight with consumers than desertification, soil erosion, or loss of open space; issues which many people don't connect in any way with the food they eat."*



## The Economics of Ranching in 2002

(con't from page 21)



Father and son at the Valle Grande Grass Bank. (Photo courtesy of Courtney)

mal welfare seek it out, the availability of grass-fed beef in retail outlets (not there) speaks volumes about the overall demand. Grass-fed beef has consistently had problems with year-long supply (it's not easy to find enough green grass for cattle in this country

year round) and the tenderness and flavor of the meat can vary greatly depending on where and when (time of year) the animals were grazing. Perhaps more promising is the organic beef market. Under this program, cattle spend most of their life on grass and then are "finished" on organically grown grain. Now that the government has set certification standards for what is organic, this niche looks to many to have the potential for growth.

The future market for both of these alternatives may have received a significant boost when McDonald's recently announced that it would begin supplementing its domestic beef supply with purchases of imported beef in order to satisfy its customers' demand for lean hamburgers. The U.S. has long conceded the grass fed export market to Australia, but with 63% of the carcass "cutout" now being ground up, that may need another look. The sleeper here is South America. Argentina is already raising the world's finest grass-fed beef, but has been unable to overcome disease problems (especially foot and mouth) so they can export.

A final word about the future: As the standard of living of the world's population rises, the demand for beef rises. The U.S. has forever been the world leader in producing low-cost, high-quality beef. Notwithstanding the potential of South

America and the complexity of trade politics, the long-term demand picture for this country's beef looks pretty good.

### *Ranching as an Investment*

Still, given the overall dismal economics of cattle ranching and the high cost of admission, why do people continue to buy ranches? From a pure economics standpoint, lenders and brokers do not view cattle raising as a business capable of paying off the debt on the ranch, but rather as an activity that has to generate enough money to pay the interest and maintain the investment. Ranches are appreciating investments and, aside from their capacity for agricultural production, the real driver is their potential for development.

Ranches that have a likelihood of being developed carry a higher price tag than those that have less likelihood, and they also appreciate at a higher rate. So, do people who buy ranches, or stay on the ranches they have inherited, do so with the expectation of one day selling to a developer? Some do. Running livestock or engaging in another agricultural practice on a piece of land will keep the property taxes low until the right opportunity to sell comes along.

Many, however, do not. For these people, ranching is a way of life—a tradition and/or an aspiration—an end in itself. For them, selling to a developer equates with failure and they view subdivision of ranches as an abomination.

And then there are those who walk the line in between, selling a ranch in order to "trade up" to a better one, or selling a small piece for development in order to be able to afford to keep ranching on the rest of the place. Regardless of which category they fall under, with property

(con't on page 23)

22



February 2003

usually being their primary asset, all ranchers aggressively oppose any regulatory action that could diminish their right to do as they wish with their property.

### **Conservation Easements**

To try to address this sometimes contradictory situation, the conservation community has dusted off an instrument previously of use to only a relatively few landowners—the conservation easement. Ranchers wishing to protect their ranches from sale to developers by heirs or others (or themselves) can enter into binding agreements with organizations that are legally qualified to hold the development rights. These organizations, especially locally run land trusts, are becoming quite creative at working out ways to compensate ranchers for conveying conservation easements on their land. Current federal law is restrictive—easements must be perpetual in order to qualify for tax benefits that are often of little consequence to the many ranchers who generate little taxable income. The agreements themselves can range from the simple (purchase of development rights) to the complex (term easements, easements with exceptions for clustered development, easements with restrictions on additional kinds of land use, etc.).

The big question about conservation easements is: what will be the long-term effect on the ranch value? There are those who believe that eventually the guaranteed open space will make a ranch more valuable. This idea presupposes that the current trends of suburban sprawl and ex-urban development will continue everywhere except where easements exist. Currently, a conservation easement is treated as a devaluation

of a ranch, and deservedly so.

A completed conservation easement becomes an important component of a rancher's estate plan. Planning for the disposition of an estate when one dies has been particularly important for ranchers be-



## **The Economics of Ranching in 2002**

*(con't from page 22)*

cause of inheritance taxes. Most ranch estates simply don't have the cash assets available for the heirs to pay the taxes and many have been forced to sell the ranch or mortgage it (if that is still an option) in order to pay the taxes as a result of inadequate estate planning. Two years ago, federal tax "reform" legislation put in place incremental increases in the amount of money an estate is allowed to exclude from inheritance taxes (currently \$1 million) with the tax set for elimination in 2010. Unfortunately, because the legislation will sunset that year, "death" taxes will return in 2011 if Congress takes no action in the interim.

Even if inheritance taxes are permanently taken off the table, estate issues remain for many ranch

The Gray Ranch. (Photo courtesy of Courtney White.)

*(con't on page 24)*



## The Economics of Ranching in 2002

*(con't from page 23)*



families. Ranch business roles and financial responsibilities are often entangled in family relationships and poor estate planning sometimes leads to bitter fights among heirs over the future of the ranch, which is usually the decedent's primary asset. In an attempt to be fair to all heirs, it is not uncommon for ranchers to have the ranch split up into smaller (often un-economic) units upon their death, or to devise arrangements that force those heirs who wish to continue ranching to have to "buy out" the interests of those who do not, resulting in their carrying a lifetime debt load. In either case, the infusion of cash as compensation for a conservation easement may allow a family "trapped" in one of the aforementioned scenarios to rebuild the ranch and/or pay off their debts. Conservation easements still have their detractors within the ranching community, but their popularity, along with that of locally based land trusts, is growing.

### *Public Lands Ranching*

As challenging as ranching is for those who own all the land their livestock graze, for the public lands rancher the challenge is even greater. The more than 20,000 ranchers who hold federal grazing permits account for the ownership of one-half of the beef cattle in 11 Western states. The individual significance of each federal permit to each ranch operation varies from ranch to ranch. Some ranches contain base property (the private property on which the original claim to the use of federal land is based), the size of which dwarfs the federal grazing allotment. Others may contain just 40 acres on which the permit is based. The majority are somewhere in between, but most of these ranchers would have difficulty making their operations work without access to the federal land. Many

of the ranches also include leased state land. All such leases and permits run for a finite period (usually ten years) but are eligible for renewal. These grazing permits and leases have become the targets of anti-grazing groups who have detected the vulnerability of the rancher that is inherent in such arrangements.

What would be the fate of a rancher's private land if his ability to graze his livestock on federal land is significantly diminished or eliminated altogether? When federal grazing allotment holders were asked that question, the response most often selected from several choices was that the property, or some of it, would be sold for subdivision. The next most selected responses were to sell the whole ranch (that becomes difficult in many cases without the federal allotment) or to intensify agricultural use of the private land (which is likely to cause degradation). The least selected response category was to diversify. Only a small minority of public lands ranchers are willing to attempt what are usually "people intensive" alternative enterprises on their ranches.

According to the same survey, public lands ranchers rank the profit motive relatively low in comparison with other reasons for engaging in ranching. This response holds true for all categories of federal grazing permittees surveyed, from "hobbyists" to family ranchers highly dependent on the income from cattle raising. Yet using conservation easements to protect the private land of federal grazing permittees is problematic. The private land on public lands ranches, probably more than other ranches, owes much of its real estate value to its development potential. The proximity of the land to

24



public land makes it attractive for home sites in many cases, while the dependence of the livestock operation on access to a public lands allotment currently diminishes its agricultural value.

When a rancher, whose operation relies on his cattle being able to graze on public lands, conveys a conservation easement on his private property, he is giving up his right to benefit from the ranch's primary value and is betting on the future of a means of support predicated on an arrangement that is under attack. At least one land trust has addressed this issue by including a clause in the language of its conservation easements that provides for the revocation of the easement back to the landowner in the event that his means of support is rendered impossible by government actions involving his lease or permit that did not occur as a result of a violation. The inclusion of such a provision makes the easement less than perpetual and ineligible for federal tax benefits.

In addition to the real threat that eventually access to graze public lands may be denied to ranchers, the real costs of grazing on public lands are going up. While the fee itself remains low in comparison with private leases, the costs of increasing interference to grazing operations from other uses of public lands, both recreational and commercial, is rising proportionately with the population increase in the West. On many allotments, there is also increasing interference from illegal uses (alien traffic and drug smuggling, primarily).

Demands on agency personnel's time to answer Freedom of Information Act requests and to respond to court ordered Biological Opinions (all resulting from actions by anti-grazing groups), has meant decreasing the time spent on allotments. Ranchers are being encour-

aged, and may soon be required, to conduct monitoring of their allotments. Many are already monitoring their allotments out of self-defense because the agencies can't get it done. National Environmental Policy Act requirements are not being met by the agencies in a timely manner, putting ranchers' permit renewals at risk. Increasingly, federal grazing permittees



Monitoring. (Photo courtesy of Kris Havstad.)

spend more and more of their time in meetings, their money to support defense against litigation challenging grazing on public lands, and their nights laying awake. The costs involved with maintaining a federal grazing permit are becoming oppressive.

### *Hope for the Future*

There is one ray of hope. In various parts of the West, ranchers, agency personnel, conservationists, and sometimes research scientists are stepping out of their stereotypical roles and forming collaborative groups in attempts to address these issues that none of them can cope with alone and that will likely result in the fragmentation of the landscape if left to the status quo. Does it make sense to make public lands ranching the centerpiece of such efforts? Is there really any choice?

## The Economics of Ranching in 2002

*(con't from page 24)*



# REFLECTIONS ON ENVIRON- MENTALISM AND THE FUTURE OF THE WEST

*by William deBuys,  
Chair, Valles Caldera  
National Preserve,  
Director, Valle Grande  
Grass Bank*

Protecting the lands and waters of the West in the years ahead will require wise and energetic leadership in the public sector and strategically focused activism among NGOs (non-governmental organizations). The environmental movement will neither elect the former nor provide the latter until it revises the largely reactive and backward-looking vision shaping its present rhetoric and behavior. The few forward-thinking politicians I know are eager for new ideas and approaches. Unfortunately, the environmental community habitually devotes the greater part of its energy simply to stopping unwanted projects via litigation and regulatory intervention, modes of behavior that continue to alienate the greater part of the electorate (particularly in rural communities) in the Intermountain West. We win battles but keep losing the war. Our movement needs to become identified with a positive vision and positive accomplishments that will make life better for the people of the region.

This is a tall order, and I do not have the answers. At best I can offer some analysis of relevant questions. A few external conditions particularly bear watching:

—Although we are accustomed to think of the main demographic currents of American history as flowing from east to west, in reality they've been flowing south to north for quite some time. If environmentalists want to win elections in the decades ahead, they need to learn how to win votes outside their traditional white, middle-class constituency. What do we have to say to Chicanos and Latinos? To tribes?

—The vagaries of global energy demand and supply, and the U.S.'s uncurbed appetites, will continue to drive threats to the wildest lands of the West, including Alaska.

—Amenity migration and generalized sprawl will continue to threaten the "middle" lands between the truly urban and what we might loosely call wilderness. I think of these lands as the "wild familiar." They are typically privately held and inhabited; often they are ranch lands. Their continued integrity is vital to the preservation of functional, non-fragmented habitat, as well as to what is left of the aesthetic integrity of many important and storied regions.

—Global forces undermining the viability of traditional, large-market agriculture in the West will speed the erosion (via subdivision and abandonment) of the wild familiar. The possible rise of localized, specialty agriculture offers intriguing, if limited, possibilities for countering this trend.

—There are still important lands to be protected in the West, but the most telling controversies in the years to come will center on the management of lands that are already in some kind of "protected" or public ownership. The outcomes of these debates will strongly influence the appetite of the public for protecting more land, either through acquisition or special designations.

—The end-game of water allocation, region-wide, will continue interminably. The megatrend of shifting water from agricultural to urban/industrial use will offer op-

*(con't on page 27)*

26



February 2003

opportunities for capturing dedications of water for environmental purposes. (I think of this as “tithing the transfers.”) The environmental movement should have a coordinated, West-wide strategy to make the most of this opportunity.

—Finally, drought trumps all. This warrants expanded discussion, below.

### Not If But When

Many economists argue that the whiplash swings of the West’s traditional boom and bust economy are now largely mitigated

by a transition from natural resource extraction to a diversified foundation

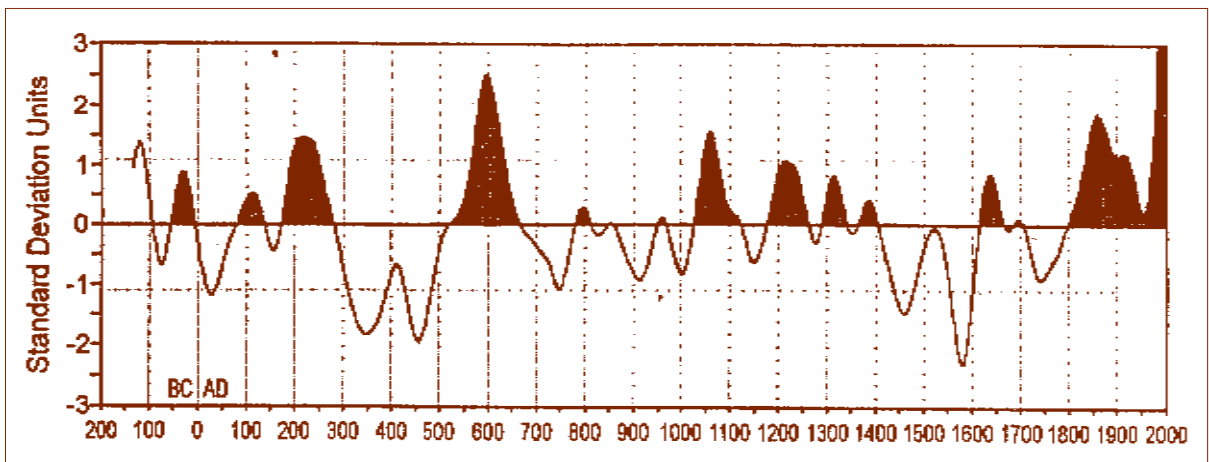
in tourism, finance, other services industries, manufacturing, and so forth. This may be, but drought has the highest hole card.

The great sunbelt boom of the past 30 or so years included the 25-year period from 1970 to 1995, which appears to have been the wettest pluvial period since about 1100, at least in the Southwest. Probably most of the region’s current residents consider the conditions of that patently abnormal period to be “normal.” The period has probably now ended, but the expectations it generated are very much still in force. They interact with a sec-

ond expectation, which was born in wetter regions: the idea that what is normal is or should be consistent. Actually, the most reliable characteristic of precipitation in the Southwest is its variability, and a condition of “drought” is fairly normal.<sup>1</sup> If we in the West were wise, we would strive, as Socrates urged Alcibiades, to “assent to what we know.” We know that harsh, multi-year drought, when it returns, will reshape many features of the region, as it long ago shaped the West’s flora and fauna. We should expect and prepare for the inevitable.

## Reflections on Environmentalism and the Future of the West

(con’t from page 26)



July-July precipitation for the period 136 BC to AD 1992 reconstructed from the MLC, converted to standard deviation units and represented as a 100-year smoothing spline. The 100-year spline emphasizes long-term (100 years) trends in past precipitation.

The inevitable will probably include a regional economic contraction analogous to the rust-belt recession of the 1970s and 80s. It may be West-wide, or concentrated solely in the Southwest or some other sub-region. In any event, the areas that have most expanded past their sustainable base will be vulnerable to the most painful contraction. Certainly such a recession will slow or end the process of amenity in-migration, but given the continued south-to-north movement of

(con’t on page 28)



## Reflections on Environmentalism and the Future of the West

(con't from page 27)

*"This reactive posture, combined with complicity in achieving and maintaining bureaucratic gridlock, is the environmental community's greatest liability in the Intermountain West and contributes mightily to the increasing conservatism of the region's electorate. It is a rearward-looking posture and communicates little in the way of positive vision. If we want to continue to lose ground to the exploiters and utilitarians, we should stay on this course."*

poorer people and the strong possibility that the severest drought conditions may lie south of the international border (which has recently been the case), we may not see a net loss of regional population.

Three conservation-related outcomes of drought come immediately to mind:

- The imperative to maximize water yield, as well as to defend against fire and reduce fuel loads, will drive forestry and the management of upland habitats generally.

- Stresses on riparian and aquatic systems will become overpowering, making the defense of water dedications as urgent as their establishment.

- Periods of significant stress usually result in rapid institutional change. As yet, few environmental groups show much readiness to respond positively to departures from the status quo; besides being blind to opportunity, this posture alienates constituencies we badly need to enlist to our cause (if only we could figure out what our cause is...); more on this below.

### *Institutions for the New West*

Harsh, sustained drought may create opportunities to reexamine multi-state river compacts and the 1944 water treaty with Mexico. The changes that result, if any, may prove to be *de facto* and administrative or (less likely) *de jure* and legislative. The weakest point in the system right now, and the likeliest place for change to manifest, centers on Mexico's inability to fulfill its treaty obligations to provide Rio Conchos water to the lower Rio Grande.

If compacts and the treaty were meaningfully opened for revi-

sion (an enormous if), it would be good to look closely at multi-state or international sharing of responsibilities under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). (E.g.: if Colorado's withdrawals of Rio Grande water contribute to the endangerment of the silvery minnow, should Colorado contribute water to the recovery plan? Similarly, U.S. withdrawals of Colorado water have imperiled species and systems in the Colorado Delta. Prior to the present Bush administration, it seemed likely the means would be found for the U.S. to participate in delta restoration; now prospects are again very dim.)

The most exciting arena for institutional reform, however, involves public land management, especially National Forests and BLM lands. Interest is already great, irrespective of the influence of drought, mainly because of a widespread perception that public land management is not working. Various species of "analysis paralysis" prevent needed programs from moving forward. Unfortunately, the environmental community is fundamentally content with this state of affairs, as its main program consists of preventing implementation of unwanted projects.

This reactive posture, combined with complicity in achieving and maintaining bureaucratic gridlock, is the environmental community's greatest liability in the Intermountain West and contributes mightily to the increasing conservatism of the region's electorate. It is a rearward-looking posture and communicates little in the way of

(con't on page 29)

28



positive vision. If we want to continue to lose ground to the exploiters and utilitarians, we should stay on this course.

Or alternatively, we can acknowledge that:

- The current state of public land management fails to serve adequately either the land or the people who enjoy and depend on it.

- We need to have a plan for improving things. This might mean embarking on a range of experiments in new management models and/or agency reorganizations. In any event, if experiments are going to proceed, we'd better be part of them.

- These experiments should embody values and vision that are ecologically based.

Concurrently, we can acknowledge that key laws (ESA tops the list, and agency NEPA regulations are close behind) might be improved by informed and pragmatic revision. This is important work that the think tanks of the environmental movement should be working on. (Do they exist? Should environmental groups have something closer to R&D divisions?)

Prudent reform, however, must always be based in values and vision, and right now the environmental movement seems confused and unfocused. The story it is trying to communicate has become incoherent, not for want of content, but for an excess of it. What we need are strong, persuasive themes and clearly articulated principles that change the environmental movement's din of objection into a positive message about the future.

## Values and Vision

Once again, I want to emphasize that I am as much at a loss for sweeping answers as anyone. As I try to think about the intellectual and moral progress necessary to develop values and vision for the future, however, I find four ideas particularly helpful. One is broadly conceptual, one is ethical, the third is at heart political, and the fourth is historical.

The conceptual idea has to do with how we view nature. It involves replacing the mechanical view of nature held by previous generations with a more dynamic model of how natural systems work. Here is how I tried to capture this issue a couple of years ago in an essay about the Cerro Grande fire in the mountains above Los Alamos:

“Scientific forestry and the idea of land management developed from a view of the world and of nature that was mechanical. A factory was a big machine. A forest was a bigger one. The same scientific principles that rendered the factory floor more productive would also make the machine of nature more efficient. The first thing to do was to eliminate waste and superfluous movement. Remove unneeded parts. Floods in rivers, freshwater flowing to the sea, bark beetles and budworms, predators, prairie dogs and other varmints, even porcupines. Get rid of them. Get rid of fire especially because it is disorderly and kills trees, which are the output we want. Granted that a lot of other cultural imperatives entwined with the impulse to simplify,

*(con't on page 30)*

## Reflections on Environmentalism and the Future of the West

*(con't from page 28)*

*“Prudent reform, however, must always be based in values and vision, and right now the environmental movement seems confused and unfocused. The story it is trying to communicate has become incoherent, not for want of content, but for an excess of it. What we need are strong, persuasive themes and clearly articulated principles that change the environmental movement's din of objection into a positive message about the future.”*

29



February 2003

## Reflections on Environmentalism and the Future of the West

*(con't from page 29)*



Prescribed fire. (Photo courtesy of Don Usner.)

but the impulse remained the common thread.

“We’ve learned from that experience. We’ve learned that when we try to maximize production of a single variable from a complex system, we destabilize the system. Whether the cherished output is codfish, board feet of timber, or AUMs of grass, the result tends to be that the system crashes. In theory, an obsessive effort to maximize output of an endangered species would be no different.

“In recent decades we traded our mechanical model for a systems view, and glimpsed a partial answer: ignore the individual variables. Ecosystems are too complex for us to attend to all the parts, if we could count them, which we can’t. Focus instead on the key-stone processes that structure the systems, and the variables will take care of themselves. The natural flow regime of a river, including periodic floods, is such a process. Fire pre-eminently is another.”

If you follow this idea where it leads you find yourself arguing strongly for “adaptive management,” notwithstanding that the concept has been more honored in the breach than the observance. Essentially, it calls for close monitoring of natural systems, restraint in placing stresses on the systems, and regular reevaluation and revi-

sion of management behavior in response to monitoring feedback. We are betting heavily on adaptive management at the Valles Caldera National Preserve. Keep an eye on that experiment to see if we can be successful. We feel somewhat alone in our effort, however, and this surprises us. Everybody rightly condemns junk science and science-for-hire, but what is the environmental community doing to advance a culture of place-based science in on-the-ground management? Huge opportunities exist here, but enviros are not much engaged with them.

The second idea, the ethical one, centers on the question of what we owe to each other and to the places that sustain us. I find most members of the environmental community very shy about discussing issues from a moral and ethical perspective, yet in the speeches I give, I find that audiences want to hear plain talk about values. It seems odd to me that my experience and the habits of my “movement” are so different. Many of us talk a great deal about defending the Endangered Species Act, the most powerful of all environmental laws, but we shy from talking about the moral, if not religious expression of belief on which it stands.

Perhaps our colleagues demur from moral discourse for want of knowing how to go about it. The Trust for Public Land, to its credit, is encouraging its people to develop their skills in this area by sponsoring a vigorous internal discussion of conservation values and has pro-

*(con't on page 31)*



duced notable publications that are sourcebooks for this kind of self-education. A few other leaders are also ahead of the pack. Sandra Postel, in her global assessment of water issues, calls explicitly for development of a “water ethic,” and thinkers like Wendell Berry, Scott Russell Saunders, and others are producing a rich literature of environmental ethics. Eventually, one hopes that more of this rubber will meet the road.

I am particularly taken with how Wes Jackson poses the problem of learning to live where we find ourselves. He asks, “how do we become native to this place?”

Jackson’s question leads directly to the third idea, the political one. It involves the same problem to which John Wesley Powell devoted his professional life—the problem of adjusting culture to habitat. How do we adapt the habits and institutions of an eastern, neo-European, humid-land society to the realities of the arid West? Until we have done this, we will not have learned how to live in this place, and few of us will be able to claim that we have become native here.

Powell mainly concerned himself with agricultural adaptation: rejecting dryland farming west of the 100th meridian and taking up irrigation. For years it has been customary in discussions of this sort to point out the inappropriateness of bluegrass lawns in the confines of Phoenix. An easy target, to be sure. As are most golf courses. But how about single family residences tucked away in the flammable wild familiar of ponderosa forests or other fire-structured ecosystems? Such site selection may be fine among moist

hardwoods in the East, but it is non-adaptive behavior where fire demands its due.

Even more fundamentally, some of our ideas about property rights, which evolved in environments where individuals might prosper relatively unfettered, need a fresh look when applied to the oasis civilization of the West. The home-grown institutions of this region—from Indian pueblos, to community land grants under Spain, to more recent grazing associations and irrigation districts—emphasize the protection of communal interests, the holding of rights in trust. It is informative to contrast the individualism of the Anglo doctrines of water rights, for instance, with the communitarian approach of acequias: in Anglo tradition prior appropriation creates winners and losers; but in the Hispanic world, when water is short on an acequia (as on my acequia last year), everyone shares the pain equally. A wiser society than ours would match its veneration of property rights with equal attention to property responsibilities.

When we talk about environmental ethics, we need to keep the conversation broad, as Berry, Saunders, and Jackson do. We need to consider communities of people equally with the community of nature. Every attempt to separate them fails in the end, so let’s not try at the beginning. Let us instead, make room in our worldview for relationships with the land that center on work as well as play, on use as well as reflection and appreciation. When we do this, we will probably teach

*(con’t on page 32)*

## Reflections on Environmentalism and the Future of the West

*(con’t from page 30)*

*“A wiser society than ours would match its veneration of property rights with equal attention to property responsibilities.”*

31



February 2003

## Reflections on Environmentalism and the Future of the West

*(con't from page 31)*



The Valles Caldera National Preserve.  
(Photo courtesy of Courtney White.)

ourselves how important cultural integrity is in making possible the true stewardship of land and water. We will probably want to adopt a term like “cultural potency” to describe the potential for the kind of collective resolve we see in indigenous societies that still possess

democracy, economic and technological *progress* toward.... well, toward the materially rich and profligate way Americans live today.

These narratives, which until recently dominated history textbooks and monographs alike, are giving way to narratives that are more fundamentally about humankind’s ecological prospects for survival and its social prospects for embracing an enduring multi-culturalism. These are the materials from which the new dreams of our civilization will be spun. And many books being written these days give evidence of the new weave, the new pattern.

The most powerful stories in the North American past have concerned the efforts of European Americans to reshape the land to suit their needs and dreams. The spread of neo-European settlement, the subjugation of native people, the develop-

ment of agriculture and industry, the growth of cities, the utilizations of rivers, forests, rangelands and other resources, these things and their kin have shaped the physical expression of history’s passage on the continent. Both literally and figuratively, much of what has happened in this part of the world since 1492 has involved the breaking of new ground. But that story is now largely the story of the past. The story of the future will be more like the story of our damaged rivers and oceans, the fire-prone forests of the Southwestern uplands, and other impaired systems. It will con-

lifeways and territories intact enough to exist in dynamic balance with their environments. We will want to learn from them and not be too prissy about our relationship with the land close by us, or too cavalier about the land on the far side of the global markets in which we trade. One planet, one set of standards, right?

The fourth idea I would suggest is that our sense of history itself is changing and beckons a new appreciation of where we stand in the continuum of time. For the past several centuries the meta-narratives of history (the stories-behind-the-stories of our society’s account of the past) were essentially about progress: religious and philosophical progress toward monotheism, political and social progress toward

*(con't on page 33)*



cern society's efforts to live with and at times ameliorate the consequences of what was broken. The lesson here, it seems to me, is that we have entered an age of obligatory adaptation and repair.

### *Cornucopains vs. Apostles of a Gospel of Limits*

Environmentalism's central message urges restraint and the acceptance of limits. John Wesley Powell was not an environmentalist in a contemporary sense except that he defined the central problem of the West as being the adaptation of society to limits inherent in the land. His adversaries were cornucopians, as ours are today. Nowadays the cornucopian argument relies less on belief in limitless resources and more on faith that technology will provide timely fixes, but the essential argument has not changed: limits can be pushed back; we can have what we want, but worrywarts, like Powell or environmentalists, have to get out of the political way.

Somehow this over-simplified formulation must be defeated if environmentalism is to succeed in the West, or anywhere. The answer may lie in a bioregional ethic: the idea that limits protecting the integrity of place confer positive benefits, but that is a hard sell in a society as rootless as ours where people rarely stay put long enough to "know their place" at a fundamental, geographical level.

Nevertheless, when times grow tough as a result of drought or other demands, people will look hard for answers. We need to be like Vaclav Havel and the nationalist Czechs in the last decade or so of the USSR. They knew the regime

they hated would eventually fall. They trained themselves to be ready to govern. They developed a vision of the government they would develop, and this was based on a vision of the society they wished to create. When their opportunity came, they were ready. Environmentalists are very far from that level of sophistication. We know how to fight better than we know how to take the reins and run things. Fighting requires little vision: you only have to know what you dislike. To govern, we have to know what we want. To know that, we need to become richer in ideas and more willing to experiment. We, as much as anyone, need to take a hard look at our accumulated cultural baggage and be prepared to divest ourselves of what we no longer need. We also need to listen attentively to what our places and local communities can teach us.

<sup>1</sup> Using the Society for Range Management's definition of drought—years when less than 75% of mean annual precipitation falls—the Southwest appears to experience "drought" over 40% of the time. This is far above the frequency in any other region. Although I don't believe anyone has run the numbers over long spans and multiple time periods, I believe this pattern would hold true across most samples and moving averages. The upshot is clear: "drought" is a pretty normal state of affairs in the Southwest, and variability from year to year is the surest thing we can count on.

## Reflections on Environmentalism and the Future of the West

*(con't from page 32)*

33



February 2003

# AN INVITATION TO JOIN THE RADICAL CENTER

For more than thirty years, environmentalists and ranchers have fought over the heart of the American West—the wide open spaces that stretch from our cities to the “purple mountain majesties” we sang of in school.

The combatants have fought long and hard, but as their struggle over the working landscapes of the West pulled in citizens, agency officials, attorneys and judges, one consequence is clear: during the fight, millions of acres of the West’s open spaces and biologically rich lands were broken by development.

There have been other unintended consequences. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management officials who once physically managed our purple mountain majesties now mostly manage mountains of paper. Endangered species hang on by claw or beak despite hundreds of lawsuits. Rural towns simply hang on.

Meanwhile, human communities divide into factions. Most tragically, the stewards of working landscapes are surrendering their lands at unprecedented rates to the pressure which tears the quilt of nature into rags.

Perhaps, the fight had to happen. The West’s grasslands and streams and wildlife were in trouble from a century or more of hard use when this fight was joined. The nation had to debate the use of 420,000 square miles of grazed public land across eleven states.

But the fight has gone on far too long. In recent years, the American West has witnessed tremendous positive changes, including the rise of models of sustain-

able use of public and private lands; the shift of conservation and scientific strategies from ‘protection’ alone to include restoration; and the expanding role of cooperative efforts to move beyond resource conflicts.

As a consequence of these crises and trends we believe it is time to cease hostilities and enter a new era of cooperation.

We believe that how we inhabit and use the West today will determine the West we pass on to our children tomorrow; that preserving the biological diversity of working landscapes requires active stewardship; and that under current conditions the stewards of those lands are compensated for only a fraction of the values their stewardship provides.

We know that poor management has damaged land in the past and in some areas continues to do so, but we also believe appropriate ranching practices can restore land to health. We believe that some lands should not be grazed by livestock; but also that much of the West can be grazed in an ecologically sound manner. We know that management practices have changed in recent years, ecological sciences have generated new and valuable tools for assessing and improving land, and new models of sustainable use of land have proved their worth.

Finally, we believe that the people of the West must halt the further conversion of working landscapes to uses that destroy this wellspring of ecological, aesthetic,

*(con’t on page 35)*

34



and cultural richness which is celebrated around the world.

Time is short. The cost of delay is further irrevocable loss.

We therefore reject the acrimony of past decades that has dominated debate over livestock grazing on public lands, for it has yielded little but hard feelings among people who are united by their common love of land and who should be natural allies.

And we pledge our efforts to form the 'Radical Center' where:

- The ranching community accepts and aspires to a progressively higher standard of environmental performance;

- The environmental community resolves to work constructively with the people who occupy and use the lands it would protect;

- The personnel of federal and state land management agencies focus not on the defense of procedure but on the production of tangible results;

- The research community strives to make their work more relevant to broader constituencies;

- The land grant colleges return to their original charters, conducting and disseminating information in ways that benefit local landscapes and the communities that depend on them;

- The consumer buys food that strengthens the bond between their own health and the health of the land;

- The public recognizes and rewards those who maintain and improve the health of all land;

- And that all participants learn better how to share both authority and responsibility.

As the ranks of the Radical

Center swell with those who are committed to these goals, the promise increases that "America the Beautiful" may become an image of the future as well as of the past and, with the grace of good fortune, the West may finally create what Wallace Stegner called "a society to match its scenery."

In the expectation that we face a better future for the West we hereby sign our names and invite others to add their own:

**Michael Bean**, conservationist, *Environmental Defense*

**Jim Brown**, ecologist, *University of New Mexico*

**Bob Budd**, manager of Red Canyon Ranch for *The Nature Conservancy*

**Bill deBuys**, author, conservationist, *Director of the Valle Grande Grass Bank*

**Kris Havstad**, Supervisory Scientist at the *USDA ARS/Jornada Experimental Range*

**Paul Johnson**, farmer, former chief of the *Natural Resources Conservation Service*

**Teresa Jordan**, author

**Daniel Kemmis**, *Center for the Rocky Mountain West*

**Rick Knight**, professor of wildlife biology, *Colorado State University*

**Heather Knight**, *The Nature Conservancy*

**Merle Lefkoff**, mediator

**Bill McDonald**, rancher and *Executive Director of the Malpai Borderlands Group*

**Guy McPherson**, ecologist, *University of Arizona*

**Ed Marston**, journalist and former publisher of *High Country News*

**Gary Paul Nabhan**, author and Director, *Center for Sustainable Environments, Northern Arizona University*

**Duke Phillips**, rancher, *Chico Basin Ranch*

**Nathan Sayre**, anthropologist

**Paul Starrs**, professor of geography, *University of Nevada-Reno*

**Bill Weeks**, *The Nature Conservancy*

**Courtney White**, *The Quivira Coalition*

## An Invitation to Join the Radical Center

(con't from page 34)

35



February 2003

# Invitation

**Yes, I want to sign the Invitation to Join the Radical Center!**

---

[name]

---

[affiliation, optional]

---

[address]

---

[city, state, zip]

**Just tear off this page or xerox it, sign it, and send it to The Quivira Coalition. Your name will be added to the many others who have signed this Invitation.**

**Or, go to The Quivira Coalition's website ([www.quiviracoalition.org](http://www.quiviracoalition.org)) and sign the Invitation there. It is on the homepage. Just follow the instructions.**



The  
Quivira  
Coalition

1413 Second Street, Ste. 1  
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87505

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Santa Fe, NM  
Permit No. 523