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The Quivira Coalition

Sharing Common-Sense Solutions to the Rangeland Conflict

An Environmental Paradox

The Southwestern Willow Flycatcher and Me

by David Ogilvie, Rancher

U Bar Ranch is a commercial ranching and farming operation in southwestern New Mexico along the Gila River. The ranch can be considered an environmental paradox because the largest known and most successful population of Southwestern Willow Flycatchers is found on the private land that we graze and farm.

Seldom a day goes by that one does not read in some publication or hear over some broadcast media of the endangerment of this species. Most environmental groups, with few exceptions, are calling for the removal of all livestock along riparian or riverine systems as the solution. The accusation is that livestock grazing (cattle in particular) have led the Flycatcher to the brink of extinction.

Federal Register Targets Livestock

One would only have to go to the listing of the Proposed Rules in the Federal Register of July 23, 1993 to find extensive references to the so-called negative influence caused by agriculture or livestock grazing. The many factors listed by the publication include destruction and overuse by livestock, cowbird parasitism, modification to the habitat resulting in invastions of exotic tamarisk or other non-native species, water diversion and impoundment, channelization of rivers and so on. In reading the listing, one finds that agriculture (specifically, cattle grazing) is identified as the cause of the demise of this song bird. If one was to believe all the information regarding this species' endangered status, you would immediately assume that the factors cited in the Register would have been scientifically studied, based, and supported. But, are they?

U Bar Ranch's involvement with the Flycatcher began with the Federal Register's listing because it referenced the Gila River. A total of 643 miles of stream and river were proposed as habitat, including the entire Gila River system.

Population Survey

U Bar Ranch's concern was that we knew very little about the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher and wanted information regarding its status on the private land we lease. In response to our concerns, a population survey of the birds inhabiting the U Bar was undertaken in May 1994 by qualified biologists using an established U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service protocol. The population survey continued through June and ended in July 1994, showing a high population of 64 pairs. It should be noted that, in

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From the Founders

Jim Winder
Courtney White
Barbara Johnson

"Courtney, the Berlin Wall fell down up here."

These are the words Forest Service District Ranger Crockett Dumas used to describe the results of a workshop co-hosted by the Quivira Coalition in Peñasco, New Mexico, last June. He was referring to the wall between ranchers and environmentalists in the region.

What did we do to bring down this "Berlin Wall?" Nothing more than invite reasonable people to a meeting, encourage them to listen to some new ideas about ranching and ecology, and give them a chance to respond. We also took a walk through the woods, literally, to see what the land looks like in real life.

During the workshop, Dr. Craig Allen, an ecologist, told the audience what the ranchers already knew, that 50% of forest grasslands have disappeared over the last 50 years in northern New Mexico, mostly due to the proliferation of piñon pines and junipers. Fire, he said, was the key to restoring grass. His research detailed how low-intensity fires burned the forest every 7-15 years historically. The future of ranching, he concluded, is tied to returning forests to ecological health.

Conservationist Bill deBuys told the audience that he was ready to lend a hand. His organization had purchased a grazing allotment on Rowe Mesa and was offering it as a grass bank for local ranchers. Cattle would be moved up on the Mesa for three years while home allotments underwent prescribed burning to knock back the invading piñon-juniper forest. The ranchers, in other words, will stay in business while the environment is being restored.

A week later the ranchers of the Santa Barbara allotment agreed to try the grass bank.

Knocking down the Berlin Wall, however, is only the first step. We must now construct something useful in its place.

We will begin this fall when the Forest Service lights a prescribed burn in the Santa Barbara allotment. This will follow a forest thinning project that will benefit local communities economically.

Next year, the ranchers will

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move their cattle onto the grass bank while grass begins to grow back home, restoring land, and relationships, simultaneously.

This "Peñasco Project," as we are calling it, will be a cooperative endeavor involving the U.S. Forest Service, the state Environment Department, the ranchers of the Santa Barbara allotment, the Rowe Mesa Grass Bank, the Rio Embudo/Rio Pueblo Watershed Coalition, and local communities.

The Quivira Coalition will conduct independent, long-term scientific monitoring of the results of the burn.

Our role is important for two reasons: first, the Forest Service does not have the money or personnel to do long-term monitoring; and second, solid data on forest conditions is desperately needed. Too many decisions are being made without reliable information, both on the ground and in our courtrooms.

The Quivira Coalition is attempting to change this situation. Along the banks of Macho Creek, in the woods surrounding Peñasco, and in yet-to-be-named places in the state, we will provide scientific assessments of land. Knowledge is the key to proper decisionmaking.

Knowledge is also the key to building strong relationships.

From the Founders

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A walk in the woods near Peñasco.
(Photo by Courtney White)

Quivira Wins Piñon Award

In August, the Quivira Coalition was awarded the 12th annual John J. Kenney Award for Outstanding Service to the Environment from the Santa Fe Community Foundation.

It is one of five Piñon Awards offered each year to nonprofit organizations in the state. Over 150 nominations were received by the Santa Fe Community Foundation this year.

The Award carries a cash grant and entitles us to join the festivities at an Awards Dinner. A short video on the Quivira Coalition will also be produced.

Many thanks to our nominators and to the Santa Fe Community Foundation.

Let's keep up the good work!

Handling Endangered Species—Species by Species or at Landscape Levels?

by Rex D. Pieper
Professor Emeritus, New Mexico State University

Dr. Pieper is a rangeland ecologist who taught at New Mexico State University for over 30 years before his retirement in 1998. Rex is internationally recognized as an expert in range science. His research helped define a number of principles of range management based upon a thorough understanding of rangeland ecology in the Southwest.

While few of us would admit to wanting any other species to become extinct, often our human activities impinge on other species. Sometimes this occurs through ignorance and lack of knowledge; sometimes we make the decision that our human activity (an anthropocentric view) was more "valuable" than the other species involved.

For some time, scientists and the public as a whole have understood the need for maintaining large gene pools or large numbers of individual species, commonly called "biodiversity."

From a biocentric standpoint (putting all life first instead of human values), each species has an innate value and deserves to be protected. However, because humans are the only species able to practice this concept, it is reasonable to assume that we have an obligation to attempt to "protect" other species. It is also reasonable to assume that human impacts have been and continue to be so substantial that we must be engaged in conservation management rather than benign neglect.

The Act

In light of these assumptions, the U.S. Congress passed the Endangered Species Act of 1973 to set out a specific set of procedures, regulations, and responsibilities to limit the detrimental influence of human activity on individual species. The Act has been the subject of many passionate debates centered on two levels: within local communities and the public at large and within the scientific community as it explores ways species can be protected and gene pools maintained.

Examples of debates at local and national levels are well-known on western rangelands. For example, the Spotted Owl controversy originally involved mostly logging activities in the Northwest but it has become closely related to other issues such as livestock grazing. Concerns for other species such as the Desert Tortoise and the Willow Flycatcher are directly impacting livestock grazing practices in the Southwest.

Species Level

So far the Act has been applied mainly at the species level. Some scientists and interested people believe that the species is the proper level of concern. After all, the species is the basic biological entity and can be recognized and generally understood by scientist and lay person alike. Czech and Krausman, writing in the Spring 1998 issue of Renewable Resources Journal supported focus on the species level. Proponents of the Act point to successes such as the Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, and Gray Whales that have increased population numbers since the Act was passed.

Other scientists have contended that the species is an inappropriate basis for action. Jordan, writing in his book Conservation stated, "Many scientists believe that the species-by-species approach is inadequate. The goal of preserving biological diversity will never be achieved if efforts continue to focus primarily on species. The simple fact is that there are too many species to handle on a species by species approach. The procedures of the Endangered Species Act will quickly exhaust the time available, financial resources, societal patience, and scientific knowledge."

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Handling Endangered Species (con't)

In addition, efforts to protect one species may inadvertently create conditions adverse to another species not so well know. The species by species approach is fraught with many social, economic, and political problems as illustrated by the Spotted Owl controversy.

Species "Ranking"

Both the scientific community and the general public recognized the second problem with the species approach: the need for species to be ranked in relative importance. Again the biocentric stance contends that all species are equally valuable and worthy of protection. However, from a practical standpoint, it may not be possible to save all species. Extinction is a natural process in response to natural events, and has occurred in an uneven pattern over time. For example, scientists are still puzzled by the massive extinctions across North America of large numbers of mammalian species 10,000 to 15,000 years ago.

In a recent article published in Renewable Resources Journal, two University of Arizona Scientists (Czech and Krausman) liken the situation to fires in a library. If it is not possible to save all books, which ones should be saved first? The largest and the ones checked out the most often might be first choices. What criteria should we use for species preservation?

Criteria

One criterion would be to concentrate on those species containing the most genetic information. But this criterion is difficult to determine and apply in a policy or management framework. Trying to "protect" large-bodied animal species has been suggested as one approach for maximizing genetic diversity. Other emphases have been on conspicuous or "warm and fuzzy" species such as Grizzly Bears, Wolves, Bald Eagles and Black-Footed Ferrets.

Another approach is to place higher priority on those species isolated genetically. The idea is that if their gene pool is lost, then it is not likely to be replaced and their niche filled by closely related species.

Maintain Habitats

There is, though, another more effective and long-term solution. Many scientists have advocated placing primary emphases on maintaining and restoring habitats and not on individual species. Species cannot exist without habitats. Indeed the Endangered Species Act also calls for maintaining habitats as part of maintaining species diversity.

How much habitat maintenance and remediation could have been accomplished with funds devoted to preservation of the California Condor? What criteria should be used to determine what habitats are critical and what modifications are needed? Conservation biologist have determined optimum habitats and minimal area needed for species diversity in many ecosystems.

One example can be found in the Pacific Northwest. Forest Service researchers have developed some unique approaches for maintaining species diversity in the coniferous forests. Here the main concern is the ratio between forest and openings and the size and arrangement of openings and forest. These researchers are attempting to determine the size and shape of open-

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The Case of the Rancher and the Black-Footed Ferret: a True Story

by Dan Dagget

This article was excerpted (and modified slightly) from Dan Dagget's book Beyond the Rangeland Conflict: Toward a West That Works. This book is now in its 2nd edition. It is available through the Quivira Coalition. Copies cost $20.00, plus $3 for postage. Mail requests to: the Quivira Coalition, 551 Cordova Rd. Suite 423, Santa Fe, NM 87501.

In 1981, one of the most endangered animals on earth, a black-footed ferret, turned up dead in Jack Turnell's neighbor's yard near Meeteetse, Wyoming. When that animal was traced to Turnell's Pitchfork Ranch, it changed his life forever.

For years, a search had been underway throughout the West to see if any of these reclusive, nocturnal marauders of prairie-dog towns still existed. The longer the search lasted, the more it was feared they had slipped quietly into the abyss of extinction.

The Wyoming Game & Fish Department traced the ferret to the prairie-dog colonies on the 120,000-acre Pitchfork Ranch, where the Greybull River wanders out of Yellowstone's spectacular Absaroka Mountains. As Jack tells it, the next thing he knew, the world was camped on his doorstep.

Turnell remembers, "Media came from everywhere: San Francisco, Britain, Germany, Japan, ABC, PBS. People in droves wanted to come and look for 'em."

The former high school agriculture teacher was thus torn from a life of literally watching the grass grow to being forced to navigate the stormy seas of high-stress, crisis-oriented environmental politics.

"Some people wanted us to kill all the bobcats and coyotes and raptors to protect the ferret," Turnell recalls. "Some said the cattle should be removed and tried to force me to admit I was doing something wrong. Obviously, whatever we'd done in the past, we'd done right, because we were the only ones with ferrets, so we decided early on that we'd just keep doing what we'd been doing."

To keep the orgy of attention from turning the ranch into a zoo and his family's life into a nightmare, Turnell closed the Pitchfork to everyone who wasn't directly involved in the recovery effort and joined with Wyoming Game & Fish and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to create an orderly process for satisfying requests for access, studies, photographs, and press releases.

Turnell handled what some would have considered a reason for total panic in what has become typical fashion for him. After helping calm things down a bit, he started learning all he could about Black-Footed Ferrets, even helping produce a movie, The Mysterious Black-footed Ferret, which was sponsored by the Audubon Society and aired by Ted Turner on his network.

After the ferret population reached a high of 120 animals a couple of years after their discovery, the colony was suddenly infected with plague and canine distemper. Numbers plunged to a dangerous low of 18 in the fall of 1985.

With everyone holding their collective breath, a decision was made by the advisory team, which included Turnell, to capture the remaining animals before they completely died out. Hopes were that they could be treated and bred in captivity and that their numbers would increase to the point where some could be re-released.

The program was a success. Vaccination bolstered the captive animals' immunity, and the population grew to 500 ferrets. Releases back into the wild are underway, at locations away from the Pitchfork, where the prairie dogs are still infected.

Jack Turnell's date with environmental destiny changed his life

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in a way that he had never dreamed of, and if he had dreamed it, he probably would have blamed it on food poisoning or some other delirium-producing substance. Overnight, he had been transformed from a small-town rancher into an international environmental figure.

In addition to making him something of a celebrity, this abrupt change had a deeper effect on Turnell; it changed his outlook on the things that mattered most to him (after his family): life, people, and range management.

"The ferret forced me to cooperate with people I'd traditionally been an adversary of," he says simply. Turnell was referring to environmentalists, government agents, the urban press, all of whom most rural westerners look upon with suspicion, if not with contempt. "I realized then I could work with them and not feel threatened."

Jack didn't have to wait long to test this new-found confidence. While he was working with the ferret recovery team, he learned the next big environmental issue he would have to face was riparian zone restoration.

Riparian or streamside zones are vital to wildlife in the arid West for a variety of reasons: living space, breeding areas, food, moisture, cover for hiding, shade in summer, and insulation in winter. They're also the areas most heavily used by livestock for many of the same reasons. Cattle tend to park in riparian zones, eating, defecating, trampling, unless someone moves them out. Ranchers and their livestock have been blamed for obliterating a significant amount of the West's riparian zones.

"I could see that train coming down the track," Jack remarks. "I didn't want to get run over by it."

Under the direction of a range expert, Turnell began herding his animals out of the streambeds and adopted a rotation pattern for his pastures that rested each one every third or fourth year. Under this management, the wide gravelly bottoms of the Pitchfork's streams began to fill in with vegetation, the cutbanks began to round off and revegetate, and the stream channels began to narrow and deepen.

Turnell also stopped the traditional practice of trapping beaver out of the streams and dynamiting their dams. "Everybody used to say you had to keep the channels open, so as not to restrict the flow of water to irrigation," Turnell explains. "Now we realize that if we slow the water down, the land holds more and the streams run longer. The Greybull River used to be dry part of the year past the ranch, now it flows year round."

There were blessings for the environment too: greener, more lush, more prolific riparian habitats, more vital rangelands, less erosion, scenery that is more natural.

Turnell realized that the basic reason for these successes was not new breeds of cattle or rest/rotation systems. It was collaboration.

Turnell realized that taking these issues out of either/or terms, and posing them in terms of shared goals, had turned what everyone thought was going to be a long fight leading to a shaky compromise into an opportunity for all sides to achieve what they shared.

As a result, the streambeds, wildlife, and rangelands on both sides of the fence, public and private, became healthier, and the ranch was more prosperous for it.

Black-Footed Ferret

(con't)

Epilogue:

The Black-Footed Ferret recovery program continues to expand. Wild populations have been successfully re-established in Montana, Wyoming, and South Dakota. Sites for new colonies were being identified in Utah and Colorado as this newsletter went to press. While still endangered, the prospects for the Black-Footed Ferret now appear to be bright.

And it all began on the Pitchfork Ranch.

Example of Good Stewardship:

Phil Knight and the Date Creek Ranch

by Courtney White

Phil's tale is rich in irony.

Phil is considered by many ranchers, conservationists, land managers, and others to be one of the best stewards of riparian habitat in the state of Arizona. He has won numerous awards and garnered high praise for his management of Date Creek, a major stream west of Wickenburg.

So why has the Forest Service prohibited him from grazing cattle in the riparian area of his new ranch?

Phil's story begins in 1966, when he grew tired of looking for work as a geologist and decided to give ranching a try. He purchased the Date Creek Ranch, planted an orchard, and began to rehabilitate the creek's riparian area which, according to Phil, was "as bad as it could get."

What trees he could find along the water's edge were all old and dying. There was no riparian vegetation along the sandy banks and no sign of grass. Phil could guess the reason: too many cows lingering too long in the cool creek bottom. "Cows are like people," says Phil, "they don't want to work any harder than they have to."

Phil's solution was to follow his own instincts. He switched to dormant season (winter) grazing in the riparian zone and kept his cows on the move. It didn't take long for Phil to see a difference. Trees grew, birds appeared, and plant diversity exploded. "Plants appeared that I had no idea were here," he says with a grin.

Eventually the Arizona Department of Game & Fish discovered the Date Creek Ranch. Biologists came looking for cougar, and emerged from the lush vegetation singing Phil's praises (he won the Department's Environmentalist of the Year Award in 1993). Recently the Department placed beaver on Phil's place, where they flourished.

The ultimate test of Phil's stewardship occurred last September when the remnants of a hurricane caused a 500-year flood on Date Creek. Huge waves ripped at the heart of the riparian area. When it was over, most of the vegetation was gone.

But the integrity of the riparian zone survived. Many trees still stand, and tons of young cottonwoods and willows are growing along the banks. Zone-Tail Hawks and Vermillion Flycatchers zoom back and forth across the water. Date Creek is repairing itself with amazing speed. It can thank Phil Knight for his help.

This is where the irony comes in.

Fifteen months ago, the Forest Service talked Phil into taking over the Buck Springs Ranch, located among the pine forests of the Mogollon Rim, in central Arizona. Phil accepted partly because he was flattered, and partly because he was tired of "spending his summers in the damn desert." At 7,000 feet, Buck Springs promised relief from the heat.

Officials at the Coconino National Forest told Phil that he was "the ideal person for that ranch." Buck Springs was full of riparian areas, including a long stretch of East Clear Creek, an important stream in the Rim coun-

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Phil Knight and the Date Creek Ranch
(con't)

try. If anyone could handle the challenge, they said, Phil could.

However, shortly after Phil moved his cows up, the Southwest Center for Biological Diversity sued the Forest Service over an endangered minnow in East Clear Creek. In fact, the Buck Springs Ranch was the only allotment on the Coconino to be targeted.

After consulting with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the Forest Service decided they wouldn't let cattle graze in the riparian areas, despite Phil's numerous awards and his undeniable success with riparian restoration. "We proved on Date Creek you don't have to move cows out," Phil said with some exasperation. "It's absolutely crazy!"

The Forest Service told Phil that they didn't want his cows stepping on the fish, even though they weren't going to stop the numerous elk in the area from doing exactly the same thing. That didn't make any sense to Phil. "There's no environmental rationale," Phil said with exasperation, "that's what is so frustrating."

Nobody was really talking about the land. The environmentalists who filed the lawsuit would not accept Phil's offer to look at his land and the results of his management. Orders from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service came from Albuquerque, far from East Clear Creek and the endangered minnow the Service is charged to protect. Forest Service personnel on the Rim were sympathetic to Phil's plight, but felt that their hands were tied.

They quickly tied Phil's hands too. His stocking numbers were cut from 1350 cows last year to 215 this year, a level that is economically unsustainable. Phil knows he can graze East Clear Creek in a manner that ensures the survival of the minnow AND himself. But he is not allowed to graze the riparian areas in his ecologically sensitive manner.

Phil Knight
(Photo by Courtney White)

Phil says ranchers used to treasure seeing endangered species on their land. The sight of a bald eagle or a rare fish was a thrill and a point of pride. Now, however, many endangered species sightings could go unreported or, worse, individual animals or plants could be harmed—and how does any of that help save endangered species?

Phil thought he could go north into the forest to escape the heat—that's an irony he doesn't particularly relish.

An Outdoor Classroom on Rangeland Health—and Hope

On August 29-30, the Quivira Coalition inaugurated its Outdoor Classroom series.

Participants included eight ranchers, ten environmentalists, two public land managers, and two UNM professors. We were assisted by rancher Sid Goodloe, Dick Edwards of the USFS, and Clarke Taylor, Rand French, and Dan Baggio of the BLM.

Our instructor was Kirk Gadzia. We spent two days looking at land and talking about range health. But what we were really doing was building bridges.

When one looks at land one quickly learns that everyone pretty much shares the same goals. Everyone wants abundant and diverse flora and fauna. Everyone wants clear streams, healthy riparian vegetation, good ground cover, and open space.

Also, everyone wants to shake everyone else's hand. We did a lot of that over the course of the weekend. We talked about wildlife while standing in grasslands; we talked about cattle while walking along a river; we talked about our lives over a campfire; we talked about how healthy economies flow from

[Top left] The group gathers at Sid's Ranch for a beginning session. [Top right] Instructor Kirk Gadzia (left) and David McCray, a rancher from Roswell, during one of the on-the-ground sessions. [Right] The participants take a "pop quiz" after lunch. (Photos by Courtney White)

Outdoor Classroom

(con't)

[Top left] The group under a New Mexico sky. [Left] Exposing densely packed juniper roots in unstable soil. [Top right] Sid Goodloe. (Photos by Courtney White)

healthy land.

We talked about our answers to a pop quiz, which included questions such as: "What is New Mexico's most valuable resource?" and "How would you improve livestock carrying capacity and wildlife habitat in this ecosystem?"

We got along fabulously. Some of the credit goes to Kirk and the other instructors, but most of the credit goes to the participants themselves. They learned that reasonable answers exist, if we take the time to look and learn.

During the feedback session the verdict was unanimous: everyone wanted more—more education, more land to look at, more time to talk.

The Quivira Coalition will do its best to help. Our next Outdoor Classroom is scheduled for October at the Gray Ranch. In the meantime we will be assembling new Classrooms, including topics on Resource Management, Monitoring, Riparian Health, Fire, and Forests.

I hope you can join us.

—Courtney White

The Far Horizon

by Courtney White

"The central thesis of game management is this: game can be restored by the creative use of the same tools that have heretofore destroyed it—axe, plow, cow, fire, and gun. Management is their purposeful and continuing alignment."
—Aldo Leopold

Ignorance is killing us. It is killing the environment too, and all the wild creatures that depend on it. Just look around you. Decisions are being made in courtrooms and meeting rooms without an adequate foundation of facts; and the consequences of these decisions are ruining us.

Ignorance rules because no one looks at land anymore. Land managers can't because they are chained to their computers responding to lawsuits; environmental activists can't because they're buried too deeply inside concrete jungles (or too busy rushing in and out of courthouses); ranchers can't because they're too focused on their animals (and on survival).

This is a crime because the answers to our questions can be found on the land—how it looks, how it is eroding, how it is healing. We must understand how an ecosystem properly functions before we can do anything else. We must understand how water cycles, how energy flows, how minerals work their way up to the surface of the ground. We must comprehend how a plant functions before we can preserve it—or eat it.

It is time to get out of our chairs, off of our political agendas, and away from our know-it-all confrontational posturings. It is time to go outside and LOOK at the real world.

We might be surprised at what we discover.

Endangered Species

Nowhere is the need for looking and learning from land more critical than with the issue of threatened and endangered species. The bad blood between environmentalists and ranchers, which has come to the boiling point in recent months over the protection and management of these rare creatures, has completely obscured any messages land might be sending us. Even land management agencies have lost track of the facts.

It has become painfully clear to me that this fight is hurting the chances for some species to recover. When a rancher in the boot heel of New Mexico recently decided to shoot a rare jaguar with his camera instead of a rifle, he was rewarded for this brave act of stewardship with a lawsuit from an environmental organization. Now the rancher is angry that he tried to help.

A handful of environmentalists is pursuing a political agenda in court that has very little to do with real world biology, and they should admit it. Conversely, some ranchers are using endangered animals as a club to fight to maintain political control over public land, and they should admit that, too.

Meanwhile, the imperiled creatures continue to suffer. This isn't right. All creatures, big and small, should have an inalienable right to life and liberty. No species should be allowed to go extinct, unless we can prove unequivocally that it did so as a result of a "natural" process (if such a thing even exists anymore in our increasingly "unnatural "world).

We should stop threatening species and start saving them—REALLY saving them. This won't happen with lawsuits or regula-

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tions. At best they are stopgap measures whose benefits are often neutralized by the hard feelings they engender. Long-term environmental health will not arrive until we get out onto the land and learn, as Aldo Leopold urged us to do so many years ago.

We should go directly to the homes of the Mexican Wolf, the Spikedace Minnow, the Spotted Owl, and the Willow Flycatcher and ask them what they need, rather than revel in our destructive ignorance from afar.

Rest

One of the first things you learn when you actually get out on the land is how limited "rest" can be for restoring ecological health. This is big news because retiring land from livestock grazing, or "unranching" as some call it, is the mantra most often chanted by environmental activists, especially in regard to endangered species protection. Kick the cows off, they say, and Eden will be restored.

The truth is somewhat different. It is true that short-term rest can have a tremendous beneficial impact on an ecosystem, especially if the land has been overgrazed. Like a coiled spring, hammered land will often rebound energetically when released from year-round grazing. The results are often as dramatic as they are substantial.

But long-term rest often has deleterious consequences for land. Ecosystems require disturbance to "stir" things up periodically, either through fire, or animal impact, or hydrologic event. Nature was never "preserved" in its original state. It was constantly subjected to the forces of change, including the grazing of bison, elk, and deer. Human beings have been impacting "wilderness" for nearly 30,000 years in North America.

To tell the public, as so many activists do, that "Resting the West" will automatically restore endangered species is misleading at best. Instead, the public must learn that "rest" is only one tool in the tool chest; others include fire, technology, money, people, and, yes, grazing. Each piece of land will require different combinations of different tools.

In dry environments, such as the Southwest, "rest" often results in ecological stagnation. The absence of water will cause plants to wither and turn gray without decaying significantly. As a result, nutrients and minerals will remain trapped in each plant until a disturbance of some sort occurs, such as a wildfire.

When the "tool" of grazing can be carefully controlled and selectively applied, it can be very beneficial to the proper functioning of an ecosystem. Grazing animals help recycle plant material both by defecating and by pressing seeds into disturbed soil with their hooves.

Besides, who said "rest" was "natural" anyway? Certainly not an ungulate.

The consequences of "rest," both positive and negative, are readily apparent to anyone who has walked across grazed land with their eyes open. "Rest" has its benefits, but so does progressive graz-

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Changes

Things have changed a bit at the Quivira Coalition. Just to keep you up-to-date:

Courtney White has become our **Executive Director**. **Dutch Salmon**, author and conservationist, has taken his place on the **Board of Directors.**

Our **address** has changed to 551 Cordova Road, Suite 423, Santa Fe, NM 87501 and we have a new **telephone number**: (505) 820-2544.

We want to welcome Dutch, and we want congratulate Courtney (we think) on his move up to even more work!

The Far Horizon

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ing management. The results don't lie.

Status Quo?

It is critically important for ranchers to look beyond the avalanche of lawsuits. They need to look beyond beef production as well. They need to look long and hard at what is coming next.

Jim Winder likes to tell people that any rancher who thinks he's going to be only in the beef production business in the 21st century will be out of business very soon. Ranchers need to look at their whole ranch, including potential conservation, recreation, and other economic values. They need to become "resource managers," in Jim's terms, not just livestock operators. (One term I have heard is "Multiple Objective Ranching," or MOR.)

A good place for ranchers to start is by restoring ecological health to their land. This will not only help with the lawsuits (the appearance of an endangered species on a ranch should be a GOOD thing), it will help with the bottom line as well. More grass means more forage; more plant diversity means more wildlife; more wildlife means more hunting and more bird-watching (you would be surprised what people will pay for recreation). More environmental health means more economic health.

The trick is to turn problems into opportunities, as Dan Dagget says. Don't treat an endangered species as an obstacle, for example; tackle it instead as an opportunity, as Jack Turnell did on the Pitchfork Ranch. Make allies with friendly environmentalists (there are lots of us out there!). Get them to help you build a fence, or pay you to scout for birds. Turn the tables. Marginalize the extremists by shaking hands with the friendlies. Look for opportunities and test new ideas.

New thinking, however, requires new looking. This is why the Quivira Coalition has begun a series of Outdoor Classrooms, starting with two on recognizing Rangeland Health. Do environmentalists know what health really is? (Hint: it has nothing to do with a judge's ruling or grazing fees.) Do ranchers? (Hint: it has nothing to do with ear tags or AUMs.) Could they recognize rangeland health if they saw it? Could you?

Eventually, we will expand our offering of Outdoor Classrooms to include sessions on riparian function, ranch/resource management, monitoring, and the effects of fire. We might even have one on the needs of endangered species. We will continue to include ranchers, environmentalists, public land managers, academics, and others in our Classrooms so that everyone has the same opportunity to look and learn.

We will learn, as Aldo Leopold instructed us 55 years ago, that we already have the tools we need to solve our problems. They are the same tools that created them, of course. We just need to use them differently. It starts with looking, listening, and asking questions. I invite everyone to join us.

Learning from the land is our only hope for the future.

Production of this newsletter is made possible by a grant from a private New Mexico foundation.

ings and different successional stages of forest development to meet habitat needs for all major animal species present. These plans need to be made on higher landscape scales, perhaps across several ranger districts of Forest Service land.

In the Southwest at lower elevations, the same kind of information is needed. What is the ratio between shrubland and herbland and the arrangement of these major habitat types for maintaining biodiversity? Early studies in the Jornada Basin of southern New Mexico showed that rodent species diversity is low in grasslands compared to that in shrublands. Bird density and numbers are also low in grasslands, possibly because of lack of perching sites and other habitat requirements. However Bannertailed Kangaroo Rats, Pronghorn Antelope and cattle prefer open grasslands to shrublands. Recent studies by Dr. Jerry Holechek and his graduate students have shown that several wildlife species have the highest numbers on vegetation with mixtures of shrubs, grasses and forbs.

Each situation in the field is favorable for some species. Over 330 separate species of insects have been found in association with perennial Broom Snakeweed plants. Many invertebrate species are also associated with Mesquite. Changes in the number of these shrubs also changes the numbers of species associated with them.

Landscape Level

At the landscape level, one would have to decide what proportion of the landscape should be in grassland, mixed grass-shrub and shrubland. Considerations for endangered species (both plants and animals) could be made at this stage in planning, but habitat criteria would take precedence. Such an approach would need to include a time dimension since wildlands are constantly changing. Perhaps some fire regime would need to be introduced to create conditions favorable to some plant and animal species. Changing fire regimes (generally a reduction in intensity and frequency of wild fires) is regarded as one of the main factors determining current status of coniferous forest and piñon-juniper woodlands in the Southwest. The plan would need to include provisions for vegetational changes following the fire.

Researchers in the Pacific Northwest are currently involved in a major study on the Interior Columbia Basin Project. This study includes not only ecological aspects on broad scales, but also social and economic components. Perhaps this approach is the forerunner of how research and planning can be done at larger scales. Here the emphasis is not on individual species as such, but on biological and physical processes and whether these processes are viable ecologically.

Undoubtedly, the debate over endangered species, biodiversity, sustainability, ecological integrity, and other wildland issues will continue for some time. Perhaps we now have some approaches that can meet the goals and desires of those with different backgrounds and perspectives. Can we appease those with biocentric views and those whose livelihood depends on renewable natural resources at the same time? The key is to manage habitats, and species biodiversity will follow.

Handling Endangered Species

(con't from page 5)

". . .the emphasis is not on individual species as such, but on biological and physical processes and whether these processes are viable ecologically."

The Wildlands Project and Cattle Grazing

by Rod Mondt,
Sky Island Alliance

Cattle have been here several hundred years and maybe they'll stay on a while longer. I can't rightly say. But I don't believe traditional ranching methods will continue to guide the way ranching operations are run.

I often wonder how many people remember the old Earth First! chant "Cattle Free in 93?" My guess is it's a fairly small group. In fact, the actual hard-core proponents of "Cattle Free" never amounted to much more than a handful. It was never the policy of the large environmental organizations. It was, and still is, the work of a very vocal band of dedicated environmental activists.

But as small as these groups are, they have made a huge difference in the way our public lands, and in some cases private lands, are now managed. Today, the cattle country landscape is a different place than it was a mere 20 years ago.

Today our public lands are managed for more than forage and minerals. There is increasing demand for recreation and for the protection of Nature. My job, and the job of other conservationists, is to try to figure out how best to protect our wildlife heritage in a world of changing demands. Our bottom line is protecting native flora and fauna and, in that regard, cattle pose one big problem; they are not native to North America. From my perspective, they do not belong in riparian areas, or in wilderness areas. They cause excessive damage to the land, they eat native flora that would otherwise be eaten by native fauna, and they can be kind of smelly. However, I also realize that, at least for some folks, the above description could just as well fit a fair number of the anti-cattle advocates.

There is another problem for many conservationists. If we're gonna have cattle (which I figure we are), then where are we gonna have cattle?

This is where The Wildlands Project (TWP) and the Sky Island Alliance (SIA) come into play. TWP is an international conservation organization that works to design reserves and protect native biodiversity throughout North America. TWP works with local organizations and is presently working in the Southwest with the Sky Island Alliance to design a type of land use plan for the Sky Island region of Southeastern Arizona, Southwestern New Mexico and the northern portion of the Mexican states of Sonora and Chihuahua.

A Vision

This "plan" is more a vision than an on-the-ground dictate. In fact, it is not a dictate at all. Rather, it is a kind of picture not unlike the picture on the box of a jigsaw puzzle. It draws an image of what we think caring people might like to see on the land, and then asks the different interest groups to help place the pieces of the puzzle to make it reflect the whole picture. It is a plan based on the idea that humans can change the way we do business, protect our wildlife heritage, and continue to live on and from the land. It is based on the idea that we have the generosity of spirit to share the land with the native critters, and that there is still some hope.

But change is inherent in this plan. The backpackers will need to realize that, in some places, the health of the land will take precedence. Camp areas may be closed

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and access limited. Cattlemen will need to realize that not all areas can be grazed, and that some areas now grazed will need to be taken out of "production." It won't be easy, it won't happen tomorrow, and it won't happen unless we can see the land for what it could be. We must sit down and honestly discuss the future.

The Wildlands Project works on the premise that we can all learn, we can define the needs of wildlife, and we can design our lives around those needs. We can create a human community that will enhance and protect the wildlife community.

The model for this reserve design is really quite simple. It is derived from the work of conservation biologists and is an extension of work that the Ecological Society of America started in the 1930s.

Core Reserves

The focal point of the model is the core reserve. These core areas are analogous to wilderness areas, national parks and monuments, and our current system of wildlife refuges. In most instances, the core areas include already designated protected areas. They are not "off limits" to humans. They are open to recreation, hunting, fishing, scientific research, and similar activities.

Linking these core areas to one another is a series of connecting corridors that allow for wildlife movement between the core population areas. Then the whole of the Core and Corridor complex is buffered by zones of compatible use. It is in these buffer zones, and in the developed matrix outside the reserve, that cattle grazing might serve as a compatible land use.

Cattle operations that maintain open space and are compatible with the needs of the wildlife located in the inner core areas could be a viable and, in some cases, preferred land use.

All in all, much of this reserve design work is new. Although no one has, as yet, effectively defined what kinds of land use might be compatible with protecting core habitat, everyone realizes that land uses that maintain open space and can be managed to support the wildlife are preferable to heavily managed and manipulated landscapes that curtail wildlife movement.

This is where organizations like the Quivira Coalition come in to play.

SIA has been working on, and continues to work on, the biological component of this grand vision. The group is only now starting to discuss the ways in which this vision might become a reality. In my view, this provides an open invitation to help define compatible grazing regimes, describe land use in buffer areas, and to sit down and honestly and openly discuss the options that this changing world is offering both the conservationist and the rancher.

How can we judge good from bad and better from worse if we don't have the best information available to us, and if we are not willing to listen to honest discussion about grazing, urbanization, lifestyle, and our vision for the future?

This open process, this reserve design, this invitation, does not imply consensus, nor does it imply promise. What it implies is willingness; a willingness to listen, learn and change.

The Wildlands Project

(con't)

JOIN US!

Would you like to join the Quivira Coalition? While we have finally received our non-profit status from the IRS and are beginning to receive grant money, we still rely on donations. If you would like to help us continue our educational mission, please send your contribution with this form to our Santa Fe address.

Yes! I would like to join the Quivira Coalition. I can contribute:

___$15

___$30

___$50

___$100

___Other

Contributions entitle you to receive this newsletter and notices of upcoming events and publications.

Thank You!

Willow Flycatcher and Me

(con't from page 1)

"Although the habitat found on U Bar Ranch is not typically touted as Southwestern Willow Flycatcher habitat, it appears to optimal for the species. Nesting success is higher than in any other known population with the lowest parasitism by cowbirds found anywhere."

1997, the second largest population known was located on the Kern River in California, with 38 pairs. U Bar Ranch's population in 1994 was almost twice that.

Another interesting observation during the initial 1994 survey year was that the nesting habitats of preference on U Bar were not young dense stands of Willow and Cottonwood as identified, but flood plain forest patches comprised mostly of Box Elder, older mature Cottonwood and Willow, and introduced Russian Olive trees. These trees are more commonly found protected from the river in secondary stringers located along old earthen irrigation ditches. Even more interesting was that cowbird parasitism was not commonly observed.

Population surveys have been conducted every year since 1994. The 1995 survey ended with 107 pairs, the 1996 survey with 138 pairs, the 1997 survey with 174 pairs, and the current 1998 survey with 186 pairs. Keep in mind that the next highest population is 38 pairs where there is no livestock. Coincidentally, with the increase of Flycatchers came a corresponding increase in farm ground U Bar Ranch put under irrigation. In 1995, U Bar Ranch returned approximately 300 acres of fallow farm ground to irrigation production, with an additional 280 acres being returned to production in 1996.

Research Expanded

With these interesting departures from the best available scientific information, it was felt that there was a need to expand the scope of the research. In April 1997, the Rocky Mountain Research Station of the U.S. Forest Service, headed by Dr. Scott Stoleson, was asked to be involved along with Dr. Dale Zimmerman, Professor Emeritus, Western New Mexico University, a respected ornithologist, and Dr. Roland Shook, also of Western New Mexico University. Credibility of the research was of prime consideration, and the issue of credibility could be addressed with the cooperation of these other parties.

Specific objectives in the expanded research included evaluating the population densities of all breeding bird species in habitat patches occupied by Willow Flycatchers, evaluating reproductive success of Willow Flycatchers, quantifying nest site characteristics of Willow Flycatchers, and quantifying the floristic and landscape-level characteristics of occupied habitat.

With this expansion of the research, many interesting and significant observations have been made. Although the habitat found on U Bar Ranch is not typically touted as Southwestern Willow Flycatcher habitat, it appears to optimal for the species. Nesting success is higher than in any other known population with the lowest parasitism by cowbirds found anywhere. The nest placement with regard to nest height and vegetation of preference are significantly different from what the established science has been suggesting. Some nests heights exceed 70 feet above ground. All of these situations have occurred with high densities of livestock. It is important to note that, while the regulating agencies are steadfast in adhering to regulations that call for the removal of all livestock from riparian areas, the science that supports those claims is not being substantiated.

No Flycatchers Without Livestock

The only long-term scientific study of Southwestern Willow Flycatchers in conjunction with livestock has been on the U Bar Ranch. The identification of entire river systems in the Southwest as potential

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habitat (643 miles), including the Gila River system, was probably unwarranted. Extensive survey work has been done on the Gila River in the Gila National Forest and no Flycatchers have been found to exist in the narrow canyon bottoms in the absence of livestock, even with excellent vegetative characteristics. Present areas with wide flood plains and older more diverse stands of flood plain forests seem to be preferred. These situations are most commonly found on private land (not public lands) used for farming or ranching.

Livestock management in riparian areas warrants special considerations. The study on U Bar Ranch demonstrates that livestock grazing can be compatible and even complimentary to sustaining some habitats. One reason that the older more diverse flood plain forest patches exist in the Gila/Cliff Valley is due in part to grazing. Historically, grazing has reduced fire fuels and has provided protection from fire. Earthen farming ditches have promoted the establishment of a variety of tree species and are critical to sustaining the Flycatcher habitat. Earthen levees have allowed the flood plain forest patches to attain maturity.

Flexible Management

U Bar Ranch's livestock management, in association with the occupied habitat, has always been flexible, with some of the pastures being grazed strictly in the dormant season, while others are used in a rest/rotation system in direct association with nesting bird activity. Most farming activities in close proximity to nesting bird habitats are minimized during the active nesting season. On U Bar Ranch, the Flycatcher population is stable and increasing even with this variety of management.

Of great concern to U Bar Ranch is the flooding activity that has occurred along the Gila River. The flooding damage is endangering occupied Flycatcher habitat. We are interested in participating in projects that protect older known habitats and encourage new habitat growth. An example of this involves a completed restoration project on the Gila National Forest with which U Bar Ranch is involved as a permittee. The techniques used to restore a flood damaged section of the river were not commonly accepted. They involved redirecting the river away from exposed vertical soil banks with gravel berms and exposing the water table below the berms to enable planting of native riparian vegetation in backwater marshes to create a vegetative barrier. The berms protected and allowed the vegetative plantings time to establish. After two or three growing seasons, they have been very successful in stabilizing the river banks. Cattle are also managed to foster the recovery of the vegetative plantings.

This project was started in June 1995, with additional work in 1996. Population survey work was completed in 1998 in the Gila Bird Area (the location of the project) and 8 pairs of Willow Flycatchers were found nesting where none had ever been recorded. This same area had also been extensively surveyed in previous years, starting in the 1950s, with no recorded Flycatcher sightings.

We are discouraged about the lack of support from the agencies in charge of adminstering such restoration activities. There are other sites in need of restoration in the Cliff/Gila Valley, but it has been very difficult to obtain cooperation and approval from the agencies. It is hard to understand why such agencies ignore their mandate to protect and foster populations of an endangered species with proven practices, while forcing the elimination of a valid compatible use, livestock grazing.

Willow Flycatcher and Me

(con't)

"The study on U Bar Ranch demonstrates that livestock grazing can be compatible and even complimentary to sustaining some habitats."

UPCOMING EVENTS

Tour of Ghost Ranch with Virgil Trujillo
Saturday, September 26, 1998, 10am-2pm

Virgil Trujillo is the ranch manager of Ghost Ranch, located west of Abiquiu, New Mexico. Come learn about cattle rotation, range ecology, biodiversity, electric fencing, history, and culture in one of the most beautiful settings in the state. Meet at the ranch headquarters, located 60 miles northwest of Santa Fe. Take US 84 past Abiquiu and head toward Chama. The ranch entrance will be on your right, a few miles past the Abiquiu dam. Bring water, food, a hat, and sunscreen. For more information, call Virgil at (505) 685-4333.

Quivira Potluck and Slide Show
Saturday evenings, 6pm, October 17, and December 7, 1998, at Courtney's house in Santa Fe

Gather at the home of the Executive Director of the Quivira Coalition for an informal discussion among friends. Courtney will present a slide show on past and present Quivira activities. We will talk about future plans. Bring some food and help share ideas! For directions, call Courtney at (505) 982-5502.

Outdoor Classroom on Rangeland Health
at the Gray Ranch, located in the bootheel of New Mexico, Sat-Sun, October 24-25, 1998

Under the overall instruction of Kirk Gadzia, educator, author, and range expert, we will spend two days studying the details of range health in a grazing context. Topics covered will include water and mineral cycling, energy flow, erosion, the impact of cattle on the land, fire, riparian health, botany, and monitoring. We will looks at lots of land. Assistance will be provided by the staff of the Animas Foundation, and the Malpais Borderlands Group.

Cost is $35 per person. Class size will be limited to 25. Preference will be given to members of the Quivira Coalition. Call Courtney at (505) 982-5502 to make reservations.

Outdoor Classroom on Resource Management
at the Double Lightning Ranch, near Nutt, NM, Saturday, November 7, 1998

Jim Winder will conduct a one-day school on applied ecology and resource management at his ranch. This course is designed to give participants a working knowledge of ecological principles as they apply to grazing, environmentalism, and public lands agencies. Both ranchers and non-ranchers should gain a perspective on the past, present, and future of resource management and develop a foundation for proactive solutions to resource conflict.

Cost is $35 per person. Class size will be limited to 25. Preference will be given to members of the Quivira Coalition. Call Courtney at (505) 982-5502 to make reservations.

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