

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 sustainable 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, 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
Kris Havstad, *Supervisory Scientist at the USDA ARS/Jornada Experimental Range*
Paul Johnson, *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 of the *Center for Sustainable Environments, Northern Arizona University*
Duke Phillips, rancher,
Nathan Sayre, anthropologist
Paul Starrs, *professor of geography, University of Nevada-Reno*
Bill Weeks, *The Nature Conservancy*
Courtney White, *The Quivira Coalition*