

ranch's future direction, yet for now the Angus' and Tip-tons are concerned with keeping their cattle ranch a viable operation to support family members currently there, and for future generations to operate and enjoy.

Other ranches, especially those which are family-owned, need to be aware of beneficial changes to alter their operations. It has been those ranches choosing to

make sensible, efficient management changes which have succeeded. With future turns and twists placed upon the ranching industry, there are no clear-cut defined paths, but the characteristics of successful ranchers today are the qualities necessary for ranching in the future.

## Solving Environmentalist/Range User Conflicts

Heather Smith Thomas

"Cattle Free by '93". "Showdown in the West". "The New Range Wars". Similar headlines and slogans bombard us today. The battle lines seem rigidly drawn between the so called "environmental" interests and the ranchers who use public land for grazing. Quite a few shots have already been fired. The war is on. Yet no matter who "wins" this war, the land will suffer.

It is a foolish fight, a political power struggle. The ideals and goals of those who truly care about the land and its future are not dissimilar, be they environmentalist or rancher. There should be no fight at all among people who have a true concern. The war is mainly in the minds of those who want control of the land, power over people or public opinion, a cause (and hence more donations and membership) for their organizations, those who refuse to look at compromise in any form—and the news media who keep things stirred up, since controversy makes good copy.

Controversy is perhaps the greatest enemy of proper land management, since it makes for choosing sides or catering to the loudest voices. Controversy makes it hard for us to see a broad picture; it narrows our focus.

There is probably no such thing as total objectivity. We all see and interpret "truth" from our own point of view, from where we stand. This changes our perspective. The person standing on a plain has a different view of the horizon than someone partway up the mountain. Your view is shaped by where you are. The rancher raising cattle in the West has a different view of the land than the Eastern city dweller who thinks of the West as a romantic place straight out of the movies or a Louis L'Amour novel, and a different view than the conservationist or preservationist who thinks of mountains and rangeland as something to be "saved" for future generations.

The rancher who lives on the land, works on the land, invests it with his sweat and tears, aspirations and fears, the energies of his youth and the conditioned endurance of his maturity and old age, has a different view from that of most other people and some strong feelings about his

views. He knows the land, loves it and respects it, knowing what it can do for him and to him. He works with Nature and against her, bound by her seasons and dependent on them for his survival and continuity, yet ever struggling to perfect his own meager devices to defeat her worst

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whims. He creates irrigation systems to bring water to his fields even in drought, tilling his marginal fields and making ditches to try to prevent devastating erosion when Nature's excesses turn the desert into flood. He works to make shelters for his newborn lambs or calves against the killing late spring blizzards or cold spells. He puts in water developments so his stock can utilize certain areas of range even in drought or dry seasons, and manages his grass so there will always be feed for his animals.

The rancher wrests a living from land that no one else would use. He took up lands too marginal for crop farming, and raises his stock on native pasture—on land too steep, too dry, too high for ordinary agriculture. Through all the homesteading and pioneering era, which encompassed more than 300 years on this continent, agricultural use of the land was considered the highest use to which land could be put. The rancher is part of that agriculture, raising food this country. Because he does it in a somewhat unconventional way (on lands that for many years were considered worthless for anything but grazing), he was often overlooked and never understood. The homesteaders coveted his lands in the days of the open

range and most of the grasslands were eventually broken up into farms. The stock rancher, with his grazing herds that needed more than 160 acres, retreated to the "undesirable" lands that were "good for nothing" but grass—the mountains and deserts, the arid lands where there wasn't enough water for crops. Here he tried to hang onto his grazing lands so he could raise enough cattle or sheep to make a living.

These rangelands, on which ranchers have made a living now for several generations, have been good to the stockman. He has learned to make peace with Nature and to endure her worst moments. He learned how to use the arid pastures and mountain ranges with livestock, and how to keep the land healthy and producing a good crop of grass. He has come to love the rugged precariousness of his existence in the palm of Nature's hand, and he feels

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he has earned the right to stay, producing food for the nation and making a living for his family, holding onto a way of life he would like to pass on to the next generation. He has survived because of his own abilities and tenacity.

But now he is threatened by more dangerous forces than blizzards or drought. His use of the range is questioned and threatened by interest groups and the "environmental movement" that has become popular in our society, by people who look upon these lands with a view that would reduce or exclude livestock use. Some areas are coveted for wilderness (which shows how well the stockman has cared for them, that they could be classified as natural and "pristine" after being grazed by domestic livestock for more than a century), or recreation areas, or wildlife habitat. The rancher, who has used these lands and loves them for their beauty and wildlife resources, argues that these purposes are not incompatible with livestock grazing, but his voice is often drowned out or sneered at. He is still the man of the Western myth—the cattle baron, the exploiter. His livestock shouldn't be on public land; his time is past.

This angers and frustrates the rancher. He feels he has as much right to use this land as anyone. He has invested his entire lifework and his soul in these lands, and he will stay and fight. He is not just defending a "cause"; he is defending his home and his birthright, his reason for being. He won't be easily run off, and he won't roll over and give up. He not only believes in his right to exist on the range, his right to his part and his role in western agricul-

ture, but he is also defending his very existence. The strength of that resistance should never be underestimated. The defender, on his home turf, has the advantage of greater determination—perhaps laced with the courage of desperation—even if he is outnumbered and outgunned by his attackers.

The rancher is not just trying to justify his range use solely upon the basis of the meat and animal products he produces, or upon his rights and priority of use, or moral principle, or the personal hardship and economic disaster which would result from reduction or elimination of his permit or from higher grazing fees—even though all these factors are a part of his standing firm in defending himself. He also strongly feels that his range use is justified because of logic, common sense, as a part of multiple use. There is no sensible reason to eliminate his use because it can continue without detriment to other legitimate uses. Since his use benefits society as a whole, he feels he is an important and responsible caretaker of these lands.

Sometimes it seems that the majority of the environmentalists are only interested in making social changes regarding who gets what from our country's resources. But there are a significant number of sincere, honest people within their ranks who are truly concerned about the long-term health of the land, and these true environmentalists recognize the effort and contribution that ranchers make to the range. The environmentalists who are honest about their concern are quite willing to look at anything that will cause ecological improvement.

For example, after a range and ranch tour in central Oregon a few years ago by three members of the Izaak Walton League (a national conservation group with a strong interest in grazing issues, a group dedicated to improving ranges by reducing livestock and eliminating permit tenure), one of the League members wrote (in an article in their *Oregon Ike* newsletter) that the ranchers "received us with greatest courtesy and consideration despite some active differences of opinion and concept. We were able to see how these three ranchers are using livestock in a beneficial manner to enhance their own lands as well as those under the jurisdiction of the BLM...these three ranchers are progressive operators who cooperate with federal land management agencies. They are improving ground cover and raising ground-water levels that will improve both the livestock carrying capacity and stream flows."

That was a strong statement. Traditionally the Izaak Walton League has had little good to say about ranchers or government agencies involved with livestock grazing. This man's written acknowledgement of an improving environmental situation as a result of managed livestock use was a major step forward. And since he was a respected wildlife biologist with nearly 40 years' experience, the ranchers took his comments as a compliment.

His statement that ranchers "are using livestock in a beneficial manner to enhance their lands" says it all. According to Doc and Connie Hatfield, who own one of the ranches visited on that tour, "in that statement lies the

solution to many environmentalist/rancher problems. Using livestock as a positive tool to reach goals for the common good is a much different approach than the idea of allocating so much grass to wildlife and so much to watershed. The whole government agency concept of forage allocation is a political solution and has almost no bearing on the land's ecological improvement."

Doc Hatfield also said that the point environmentalists need to consider is the reaction of those three ranchers to the Izaak Walton League biologist's crusade to put pressure on agencies and ranchers to stop range deterioration. The ranchers did not totally agree with his views, but respected his position. According to Hatfield, "ranchers in general have great respect for anyone who honestly and sincerely states a position on an issue and stands firm regardless of his audience. Whether the rancher agrees with the position has little to do with the respect he has for the individual...The general lack of respect accorded environmentalists by ranchers comes not from what the environmental community is saying, but *why* they are saying it. All too many environmental activists are here to make social changes geared toward redistributing our declining natural resource base. That they have little real concern or understanding for the resource itself is all too obvious." We have the tools to solve our environmental problems. Reducing livestock grazing is not one of them.

The rancher does not respect the pseudo-environmentalist because the latter has no sincere concern for the environment and no desire to even listen to any other perspective than his own. Ranchers have the moral responsibility to become aware of the concerns of the legitimate environmentalists, and environmental interests in turn have a moral responsibility to become aware of the concerns of ranchers. When this happens, we'll see some positive progress on the range.

Those who would hurry the livestock man off the range by raising grazing fees, cutting permits, using legislation or other means to make it no longer feasible for the rancher to make a living on these lands, need to take another look. The people who want to eliminate livestock in order to conserve the land for wildlife or wilderness (an unrealistic argument, since these values can exist alongside the present range livestock industry) are not being honest.

Those who still believe in the myth of the cattle baron and the spoiler need to hike a little farther up the mountain and get closer to the rancher's own ridge—and look across at the horizon from where the rancher himself is seeing it. The old saying that you can't really judge a man until you've walked a mile in his moccasins, is true. When you get close enough to him to see the world as he sees it, you find that your strongest desires and highest goals aren't that much different from his; you've just been expressing them differently and there's been a lack of communication. You begin to understand him, his hopes and dreams and motivations. The environmentalist or rancher who takes the time to really try to understand the other will find that the "adversary" is not the ogre he

pictured, not an adversary at all.

Much has been written from the point of view of the conservationist. But the greatest conservationist of them all—the person who actually has to work with the land and Nature in order to exist—has often been ignored, maligned or misunderstood. It's time to look at the issues from a broader view, and that may mean, for many people, trying to step for a while into the scuffed boots of the person who actually knows the range like the back of his own weathered hand.

Cecil Garland, a long-time environmentalist (active in the movement to establish the Bob Marshall and Scapegoat Wilderness Areas in Montana) and later a rancher in Utah, wrote an article "In Defense of Running Cows on the Public's Land" (*High Country News*, March 3, 1986), in which he said: "Stockmen love the West for its vastness and its seeming emptiness. I've come to know and love a good healthy range, and look for it everywhere I go. I know that if the range is in good shape, then everything that lives there will be in good shape: the cows, the wildlife, the plants and the people who live near it. Poor range is a prelude to misery, poverty and squalor, and eventually to the loss of wildlife which we must have for survival and sanity. And there is more to it for me than that. I also care for my cows. Yes, I've been kicked, butted, charged, stomped, and rendered green by excretion. There have been times on a cold, stormy night, lying face down in the straw and manure with my arm all the way in a first-calf heifer's reproductive organs—trying desperately to turn around a calf who was determined to come into the world the wrong way, and with all the push his mother could give him opposing me—when I wondered why I had not stayed in Las Vegas as a crap dealer, as I used to be years ago. But when the calf was born... I forgot all about the bright lights, because I love my life here with my cows. I like the cows because they stand and fight for their territory and their calves, and they will babysit one another's calves while the other goes to water, and fight for her calf, too.

"Like them old cows, I'll fight for my young'uns and my territory. I know that some of my environmental friends view me first as a rancher and second as an environmentalist. And some of my rancher neighbors view me as an environmentalist first and a rancher second. While not disregarding both of them, I have personal aspirations of being an Environmentalist Rancher, and of living in a world where the two will not be viewed by either side as being mutually exclusive."

My sentiments, exactly. The solution to problems and disputes over range management problems and conflicts over the use of these lands is to try to forget our differences and concentrate on the goals and ideals we have in common, and "get on with it". A lot more can be accomplished with constructive cooperation than by divisiveness. We all stand to gain a great deal if we can work together, and we all stand to lose a lot if we don't.