

SHARING COMMON GROUND: LIVESTOCK AND WILDLIFE

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The theme of my talk today is sharing common ground. I thought I would approach the topic by answering the question whether there is any evidence of a willingness to seek or share a common ground between livestock and wildlife interests. I appreciate the opportunity to again be with you today.

Five years ago at your 1991 convention in Sacramento, California, I spoke to your meetings. Then, I was asked to focus on the economic impacts of wildlife biologists' and other scientists' activities on agricultural enterprises. However, during that speech I also admonished you to avoid adversarial approaches in your activities, and I urged you to educate, communicate, and seek common ground. So, at least 5 years ago I was thinking about the topic upon which I will speak today, and thus some of the earliest evidence supporting my hypothesis was in my own notes from that speech.

During my review of those notes I found an article written in the September 1990 issue of *Outdoor Life* by its editor-at-large, Lonnie Williamson. I'd like to quote at length from that article to give a flavor of what one non-scholarly publication was doing in an attempt to seek common ground.

"Ranchers, therefore, are not interlopers on public land as many people seem to think. They are legal, historic, and welcomed users of multiple use land just like hunters, hikers, anglers and campers ... There's lots [sic] of reasons why sportsmen and conservationists should care [that federal agencies not reduce livestock use to increase wildlife numbers], not the least of which is that forcing ranching off the public land is not right. Ranching is as much a proper use of rangeland as recreation ... For wildlife and recreation ranchers offer millions of acres of private land, generally the best land in the West, which is important winter range. This is land that could be lost to big game if ranching is excised ... but if ranchers are forced to sell out, experience shows that hoards of recreational and retirement land buyers split the property into damnable 'ranchettes' ... And let's not forget water. Ranchers own water rights and construct water developments that wildlife often depend on ... To be succinct, wildlife can win the battle in a big way, but it could lose the war later on as a result ... I believe that livestock permittees and wildlife interests can help each other and public land resources, but they have to shut-up, sit down and be fair with one another ..."

This is a very timely topic. Later this month on February 26-28 there will be a forum in this hotel entitled "Sharing Common Ground Livestock/Big Game Symposium." This symposium has been supported since 1991 by the Nevada and National Cattlemen's Associations and other livestock interest groups. In fact, the former president of the Nevada Cattlemen's Association, Jim Connelley of Mountain City, Nevada, was one of the founding members of the committee which organized the original livestock/big game symposium. The entire first and last days will be devoted to the topic of sharing common ground between the livestock industry and supporters of wildlife interests.

Other evidence can be found in writings and publications of recent vintage. The Nevada Cattlemen's Association's own policy has two examples of many which support the premise that there is evidence of a desire to seek common ground.

"The Nevada Cattlemen's Association is not opposed to big game re-introduction so long as each specific introduction, re-introduction or augmentation follows a scientifically based NEPA analysis and: (1) will not cancel or reduce any grazing permit, (2) includes a cooperative program for monitoring resource impacts and big game populations, (3) includes a viable method and goal for big game population control, (4) includes full compensation for property damage including capital costs of prevention, (5) to include protection of private property and water rights."

Another policy of the Nevada Cattlemen's Association:

"opposes grazing use which results in overall rangeland deterioration due to failure to comply with appropriate planning and applied management. The Nevada Cattlemen's Association supports effective range management which is supported by sound long term trend monitoring directed toward attainment of practical and attainable allotment objectives developed in cooperation with the affected permittee."

The affected interests face new challenges to seek common ground everyday. In a recent issue of *Range Magazine*, Winter 1996, author Dan Daggett wrote an article entitled "Put Up or Shut Up." The article relates the history of the conflict between livestock grazers and

conservationists over the cause of the deterioration of the western ranges. He tells the story of several ranchers who, following the techniques of Allen Savory have achieved great successes in restoring over-grazed or drought stricken ranges to a healthy grassland ecosystem. In the article, S.J. McNaughton of Syracuse University is quoted in 1993 as saying, "Grazing benefits many grasses and other plants and grassland ecosystems ... furthermore moderate grazing promotes the productivity of many grasslands above the level that prevails in the absence of grazing." However, on the other hand, biogeochemist Bill Schlessenger was quoted in the article as saying that these "schemes have never proved to work anywhere in North America" and such successes "would violate any common sense principle of ecology that I know of."

In his article Daggett challenges conservationists and ranchers to establish test plots chosen by conservationists and see just which theories regarding rangeland science are correct. Mr. Daggett's experience is when people get together out on the land and work to grow something and share a concern about it when it doesn't grow, the adversarial posturing of the past and other obstacles fall and people "join hands to create some real rangeland reform to keep the regions' great open spaces from being subdivided, paved, cut up into ranchettes, over-grazed or used as a political football."

Also, in the same issue of *Range Magazine* is an article related to the discovery of the once thought extinct black-footed ferret (*Mustela nigripes*) on a ranch in Wyoming. The owner of the ranch is cooperating with wildlife biologists in helping with the recovery of the ferret by providing access for research, habitat rehabilitation, and money. He talks eloquently about the ability of wildlife and domestic livestock populations being able to coexist together in the same area.

In the Winter issue of the *Nevada Rancher*, which is the official publication of the Nevada Cattlemen's Association, the above 2 articles from the *Range Magazine* issue are discussed.

As other evidence of a spirit of cooperation, I would like to offer 3 examples. In a recent letter dated 16 January 1996, from former president of the Nevada Cattlemen's Association, Benny Romero, to Mike Dombeck, Director of the Bureau of Land Management, Romero stated:

"As past president of the Nevada Cattlemen's Association it has been my privilege to become acquainted and involved with ranchers and BLM managers from every district in the State of Nevada. I feel that recently I am seeing a new tone, possibly a significant change ... The new district managers ... are demonstrating an

attitude that Nevada ranchers are not used to seeing. An attitude not of confrontation or not of communication via certified letter, but rather an attitude in search of common ground and reaching for common goals ... After talking with a group of Nevada cattlemen we plan to take this opportunity to enter into a new era of communications with the Bureau in order to continue making the land better for present and future generations. I thank you for this participation in helping to set the stage for this new reasoning."

Paul J. Butler in the April 1995 issue of *Rangelands* wrote an article entitled "Communications Between Range Managers and Ranchers, a Federal Range Manager's Perspective." Mr. Butler summarized his article by writing, "Communication should be one of our strongest goals in today's rangeland management. We must increase time conferring with the people who graze their livestock." The premise of Mr. Butler's article was that a model for encouraging and enacting communication skills can be developed in dealing with the resource users on the public lands, and without such a model, relationships will deteriorate to the point where managers and resource users can no longer work in common to make the lands better.

Finally, in a letter last year from a BLM District Manager to Benny Romero the striving for better communications was evident.

"I believe we both agree the key ingredient is attitude. So much rides on the positive open attitude required to work together toward a common objective while treating each other with mutual respect ... After some nineteen years in this business, I've learned that every controversy has a middle ground that only needs to be sought in order to be found."

Dan Daggett was also recently quoted in an Elko, Nevada Daily Free Press article dated 24 January 1996, "Cooperation is more powerful than confrontation." In that same article, a reviewer of the recent Daggett book *Beyond Rangeland Conflict The Future of the West* wrote:

"One of the most wasteful tragedies of the west has been the conflict between ranchers and conservationists. This book states the terms of an authentic reconciliation. Renew the sense of community of common good and common ground, work together to define common goals and to achieve them. The ranchers and conservationists who populate these pages have quit

fighting over the contested landscapes and have begun restoring them ...”

I believe all of us are tired of the conflict and only want to restore and improve the range lands rather than fight over them. I also believe livestock and wildlife can share the rangelands in common to the betterment of each interest involved. I pledge to you that the goal of

the Nevada Cattlemen’s Association is to work diligently so we may all share a common ground in the West. I only ask you treat us fairly and pledge the same.

In conclusion, I believe that there is ample evidence to support my premise. We only need to search for it and we will find a desire to share common ground exists between the livestock industry and wildlife interests.