



Sustainable Ranching

Sustainable ranching is a concept that is implicit in National Park Service laws and policies and one we are actively applying to Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site. Sustainable ranching *maintains and improves grassland and riparian health, supports vigorous livestock and wildlife populations that result in economic success, educational opportunity and community benefit beyond a single generation.* As a working cattle ranch, the concept of sustainable ranching is expressed through resource protection, economic efficiency, and community and social connections in the following actions to date.

1) Best Management Practices development – the list of savings and best practices is extensive, helped along by the 2005 Business Plan and Core Operations Evaluation that focused on the ranching process as a business within the park. A final Ranch Management Plan is pending summarizing current management direction and operations. Some examples:

a. Application of behavior principles with livestock - we have developed a herd of livestock that have improved distribution on the rangeland, improved mothering behaviors, are less likely to cluster in sensitive wetlands and are easier to work with, using principles of BEHAVE and appropriate breeds.

b. Cows & Weeds – in 2004, working closely with Utah State University and local land owners, we successfully trained cows to eat 3 noxious weeds—Spotted Knapweed, Canada Thistle, and Leafy Spurge. The results have been successful, 250 acres treated annually, with positive benefits to the project herd, and behaviors passed on to calves and other herd mates. In 2009, we had 1/3 of the herd keeping 600 acres in check adding real value to the park's invasive plants control program.

c. Low-stress livestock handling – park staff are taught low stress handling techniques that translate into a healthier herd that is easier to handle, easier on fences, higher weights at sale and safer for employees and visitors to observe and interact with.

d. Development of a Ranchers Roundtable: From 2004-2009 we invited local ranchers interested in and committed to sustainable ranching practices to share best practices with us. A small group of folks, guided by our staff and Montana State University's Extension Service, met occasionally to discuss current challenges and opportunities for improved resource stewardship. These meetings informed the development of the ranch's pending Ranch Management Plan.

e) The Undaunted Stewardship Program, -hosted by Montana Stockgrowers, is currently waiting for renewed federal funding. When/if it comes through, we are in line to go through their certification program. Certification is completed by MSU leadership with Montana Stockgrowers and emphasizes sustainable practices. Stockgrowers is the premier industry organization and was launched by Conrad Kohrs and friends in 1883, providing a solid link between our histories.



B-8, one of our project cows, enjoys spotted knapweed

2) Community education and land ethic development– Institutional memory is handed down to younger generations and shared within our local and regional community through targeted actions

a. Tehabi Intern Program– hosted with Utah State University, college students enrolled in resource management majors obtain practical on the ground experience in a variety of public land agencies. Tehabi focuses on systems thinking. While working for federal field units, students are exposed to the complexity of resource management and are given tools to help with issue resolution. The ranch has retained from 2-6 students every year for the last 5 years, benefiting from their fresh perspective and provocative analyses of park service resources dilemma.

b. The University of Montana– Western. Grant-Kohrs Ranch and Western are currently exploring opportunities to collaborate with Western’s Sustainable Ranching Program and their Natural Horsemanship degree program.

c. Birding program – successful ranching management can mean improved habitat for many bird species. Our success is shared with grade school students through field trips designed to assist the next generation develop an appreciation for the land and what it can offer through bird watching. We pay particular attention to our on site raptors: eagles and osprey and their success in nesting and fledging and our resident species counted in December during the Audubon sponsored Christmas Bird Count.

d. Science Teachers Workshop – an increased awareness of the value of science and how it applies to land management is supported by our local school district in training teachers to get young folks engaged -and we agree! Each year we host a 3-day teacher’s workshop designed to adapt and develop curricula focusing on water, vegetation, wildlife and habitat and how ranching fits in ecosystem management.

3) Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit – the staff at Grant-Kohrs Ranch are extensively engaged with the Rocky Mountain CESU, Missoula Montana. Through the efforts of both a CESU natural and a cultural research coordinator, the park has had improved research, increased technical assistance, and meaningful educational opportunities.

4) Volunteerism – from 2004-2010 the ranching program has tripled its hours of volunteer service, providing skills towards the accomplishments described above, many in heritage demonstrations such as horse powered haying and teamster skill development.



5) Heritage Demonstrations – the park has increased its demonstrations to assist the public in understanding historical practices using horses and traditional equipment, primarily in haying and field work, which leads to provocative programs on the merits of historic practices.

6) Inventory and monitoring -through the Northern Rockies I & M network, Grant-Kohrs Ranch NHS has worked with staff and scientists to identify biological and ecological ‘vital signs’ necessary to ensure the maintenance of biological integrity, soil/site stability, and hydrologic function, in other words, grassland ecosystem health. The grassland health protocol was developed here and implemented in 2008.