

Partnership Efforts in the Sustainable Rangelands Roundtable

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Abstract

Various stakeholders derive values (economic, ecological, and social/cultural) from rangelands. To develop criteria and indicators for sustainable rangelands that will be acceptable to a range of stakeholders, the SRR was established as a partnership of scientists, ecologists, economists, sociologists, policy and legal experts, environmental advocates, and public and private rangeland managers. To increase awareness of and participation in the SRR and its activities, the SRR is distributing news items, maintaining a website, coordinating with other sustainable resource roundtables, conducting symposia and workshops, and providing the opportunity for local participants to sit in on SRR meetings in various locations around the country.

Introduction

Rangelands affect the quality of life of every person in the United States. Rangeland ecosystems account for approximately 40 percent of the lands in the United States, including Great Plains grasslands, savannas in Texas and Florida, shrublands in the Great Basin, Alaska tundra, alpine meadows, Southwestern deserts, and wetlands across the country. This diverse and dynamic natural resource provides numerous goods and services, such as:

- wildlife habitat;
- high quality water, clean air, and open spaces;
- natural carbon sequestration systems;
- habitat for threatened and endangered species;
- recreation;
- food and fiber production, including livestock grazing; and
- a setting for social and cultural activities.

These goods and services provide values (economic, ecological, and social/cultural) to a suite of stakeholders from those who live on and derive their livelihoods from rangelands to those who derive joy from the knowledge that these ecosystems continue to exist and flourish. Many of these stakeholders are very passionate in their perspectives on the values rangelands should provide and to whom. These passions have often advanced different values and goals, resulting in conflicts over rangeland use.

The Partnership Approach

The significance and diversity of the goods and services provided by rangeland ecosystems underscore the importance of ensuring that rangelands are sustained for current and future generations. Advancing the sustainability of rangelands uses and values necessitates the ability to measure economic, ecological, and social/cultural conditions of U.S. rangelands using criteria and indicators (C&I).

To develop C&I for sustainable rangelands that will be acceptable to the suite of stakeholders that derive values from rangelands, the Sustainable Rangelands Roundtable (SRR) must consider various perspectives. The SRR seeks to promote understanding and support for the C&I under discussion among diverse interest groups including private and public organizations and agencies involved in the use and conservation of U.S. rangeland ecosystems. Towards this end, the SRR was established as a partnership of rangeland scientists, ecologists, economists, sociologists, policy and legal experts, environmental advocates, industry representatives, and public and private land managers (Table 1). SRR participants have made a commitment to collaborate on the goal of identifying indicators of sustainability, based upon social, economic, and ecological factors, to provide a framework for national assessments of rangelands and rangeland use.

Participants contribute to the development of C&I through working meetings, through e-mail discussions, and through the Delphi Process. In

Table 1: Organizations Involved in the Sustainable Rangelands Roundtable

Government Agencies	Universities	Non-Governmental Organizations
USDI Bureau of Indian Affairs	Arizona State University	American Farm Bureau
USDI Bureau of Land Management	Bradley University	Ecological Society of America
Chippewa Cree Tribe	Colorado State University	Gray Ranch and Malpai Borderlands Group
Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs	Montana State University	The H. John Heinz Center for Science, Economics, and the Environment
USDI National Park Service	New Mexico State University	Idaho Conservation League
Oak Ridge National Laboratory	Oklahoma State University	Lady Bird Johnson Wildlife Center
Pacific Northwest National Laboratory	Oregon State University	National Association of Counties
San Antonio Water System	South Dakota State University	National Association of State Foresters
USDA Agricultural Research Service	Texas A&M University	National Audubon Society
USDA Economic Research Service	University of Arizona	National Cattlemen's Beef Association
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service	University of California, Berkeley	National Public Lands Council
U.S. Department of Interior	University of Colorado	National Wildlife Federation
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	University of Idaho	Quivera Coalition
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	University of Nevada	Society for Range Management
USDA Forest Service	Utah State University	The Nature Conservancy
U.S. Geological Survey	Washington State University	Welder Wildlife Foundation
Wyoming State Grazing Board		Western States Land Commissioners
		World Wildlife Fund

addition to providing their personal and professional expertise, SRR participants also act as liaisons between the SRR and the organizations they represent. Other interested parties receive meeting notes and updates on SRR activities.

SRR Outreach Activities

The SRR Outreach Working Group was formed to:

- advise the SRR Steering Committee on ways to recruit and communicate with non-participating organizations;
- direct/develop outreach materials for the SRR;
- coordinate with outreach groups in the Roundtable on Sustainable Forests, the Sustainable Minerals Roundtable, and the new Sustainable Water Roundtable;
- review outreach efforts for the SRR Steering Committee; and
- maintain the momentum of the SRR.

The SRR Outreach Working Group includes representatives from Federal agencies, academia, non-governmental organizations, and industry.

To increase knowledge and understanding about the SRR and its activities, the Outreach Working Group helped develop a news item that announced the formation of the SRR and described its goals. This news item was sent to a number of relevant scientific societies, environmental

organizations, and industry groups. Articles appeared in newsletters of the Society for Range Management, the Ecological Society of America, the Society for Conservation Biology, and others. In addition the story was posted to several listserves to increase its distribution. The news item was the first in a series that will hopefully provide updates on future SRR activities.

The SRR maintains a website (<http://www.cnr.colostate.edu/RES/srr>) which provides an introduction to the SRR, its mission and vision. The website is regularly updated with meeting notes and notices of upcoming meetings. It also has a place for stakeholders to contribute their ideas and comments. The initial question asked in the "Your Input" section was, "What is your one greatest concern about the state of U.S. rangelands?" Respondents have offered ideas regarding water quality and the complexity of rangeland ecosystems. The current question addresses the challenge of developing meaningful indicators on a national scale by asking for examples of relevant indicators used successfully on rangelands, shrublands, or grasslands.

Another way of increasing the understanding of and input to the SRR is through symposia, workshops, discussions, and presentations. For the Society of Range Management 2002 Annual Meeting, the SRR organized a symposium on "Sustainable Rangeland Management: Status of a Roundtable to Determine Criteria and Indicators."

The objective of this symposium is to inform SRM members and the rangeland science and management community of the SRR, its vision, mission, process, progress, and plans. To elicit input from symposium participants, a response questionnaire was developed and distributed at the symposium. Proceedings from the symposium will also be made available electronically to reach a larger audience. The SRR has submitted a proposal to hold a workshop in conjunction with the 2002 joint meeting of the Ecological Society of America and the Society for Ecological Restoration. This workshop will provide participants with a chance to become acquainted with the SRR, its vision, mission, process, progress, and plans, as well as allowing them to participate in small group work on developing C&I.

The SRR also participates in the Sustainable Natural Resources Roundtable Coordination Network (SNRRCN), a loosely-knit organization to provide coordination among the various natural resource sustainability roundtables. Through SNRRCN, the SRR hopes to be able to effectively coordinate and communicate with the other sustainable resource roundtables—the Sustainable Minerals and Energy Roundtable

(<http://www.mackay.unr.edu/smr/>), the Roundtable on Sustainable Forests (<http://www.sustainableforests.net/>) and the newly-formed Sustainable Water Resources Roundtable.

The SRR provides the opportunity for local participants to participate in SRR meetings at various locations around the United States. Meetings have been held in Denver, Salt Lake City, Reno, San Antonio, and Tucson. At each meeting, 8 to 15 new participants have joined in SRR discussions, some only for that meeting. Others have continued their involvement through the listserves, Delphi Process, and other meetings. Future meetings will be held in Denver (March 2002), Washington, DC (May 2002), Billings (July 2002), and San Diego (November 2002).

Through these outreach efforts and the communication links that the SRR participants provide to their organizations, the SRR hopes to fully inform and encourage input from stakeholders. In this way, we can develop a partnership of individuals and organizations that consider U.S. rangelands valuable.