

Inviting reasonable people to listen to new ideas about ranching and ecology.

By Courtney White, conservationist.

Courtney, the Berlin Wall fell down up here." These are the words Forest Service District Ranger Crockett Dumas used to describe the results of a workshop co-hosted by the Quivira Coalition in Penasco, N.M., last June. He was referring to the wall between ranchers and environmentalists in the region.

What did the Quivira Coalition do to bring down this "Berlin Wall"? Nothing more than invite reasonable people to a meeting, encourage them to listen to some new ideas about ranching and ecology, and give them a chance to respond. We also took a walk through the woods, literally, to see what land looks like in real life.

During the workshop, a scientist told the audience what the ranchers already knew, that

The Quivira Coalition..

50 percent of forest grasslands have disappeared over the last 50 years in northern New Mexico, mostly due to the proliferation of piñon pines and junipers. Fire, he said, was the key to restoring grass. His research detailed how low-intensity fires burned the forest every seven to 15 years historically. The future of ranching, he concluded, is tied to returning forests to ecological health.

A conservationist told the audience that he was ready to lend a hand. His organization had purchased a grazing allotment on Rowe Mesa and was offering it as a grass bank for local ranchers. Cattle would be moved up on the Mesa for three years while home allotments underwent prescribed burning to knock back the invading piñon-juniper forest. The ranchers, in other words, will stay in business while the environment is being restored.

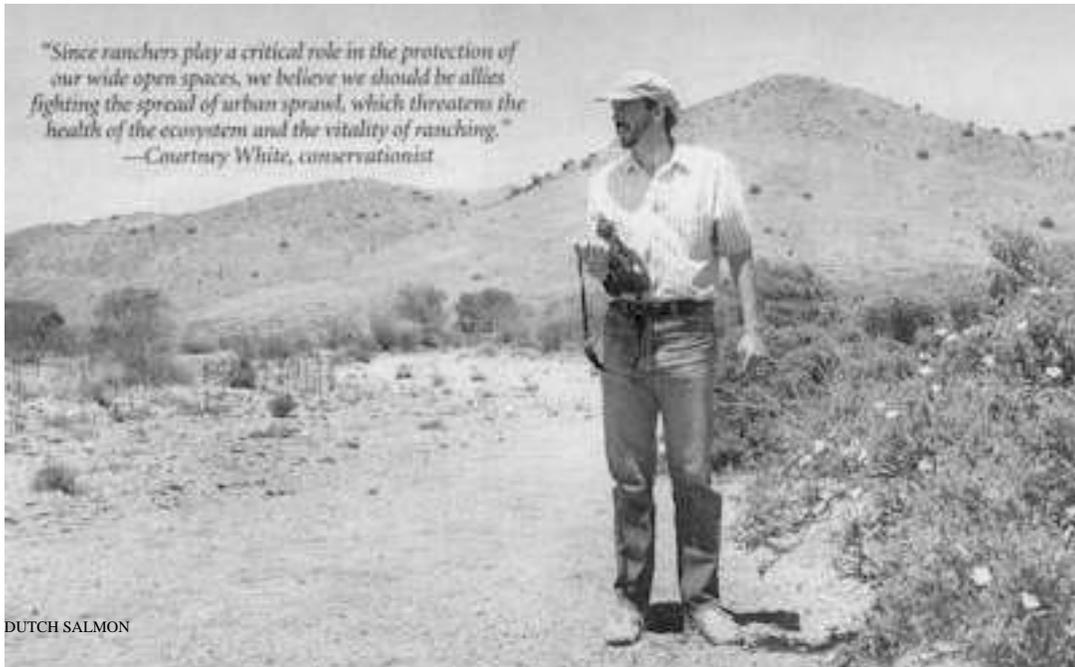
A week later the ranchers of the Santa Barbara allotment agreed to try the grass bank.

What is the Quivira Coalition?

The Quivira Coalition was founded by a rancher and two conservationists on June 11, 1997. It is a nonprofit organization dedicated to bringing ranchers, environmentalists, public land managers and other members of the public together and demonstrating to them that ecologically healthy rangeland and eco-

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DUTCH SALMON



Courtney White, executive director, Quivira Coalition, stands in an improving Macho Creek.

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Macho Creek will challenge many preconceptions, however. To environmentalists who believe that grazing

onomically robust ranches can be compatible.

Our mission is to define the core issues of the grazing conflict and to articulate a new position based on common interests and common sense. We call this position the New Ranch.

Coalition members believe that ranchers and environmentalists share too much in common to keep fighting—love of land, for example, and a desire to experience solitude and beauty. Since ranchers play a critical role in the protection of our wide open spaces, we believe we should be allies fighting the spread of urban sprawl, which threatens the health of the ecosystem and the vitality of ranching.

We believe the future of the West depends on our ability to shake hands and get to work toward our common goals.

The Quivira Coalition is promoting the principles of the New Ranch through newsletters, workshops, outdoor classrooms, management demonstration projects, videos, publications, site tours, community meetings and other educational forums. We are also bringing "third party" independence to the job of collecting scientific data.

Our aim is to build bridges between all reasonable people involved in the grazing debate. Cooperation, collaboration and new ideas hold the key to the future of ranching and rangelands in the Southwest. Ecological and economic health can exist simultaneously—it is not a theory, it already exists. It is simply a matter of spreading the news.

Macho Creek

A good example of the Quivira Coalition's mission can be found on Macho Creek, near Deming, N.M. In cooperation with the State Land Office, the ranching permittee, Quail Unlimited, and the USDA's Jornada Experimental Range, nearly three miles of heavily grazed riparian area along Macho

Creek were isolated by electric fence. The permittee has agreed to switch his management to dormant season use in the creek bottom.

Scientists from the Jornada Experimental Range will closely monitor what happens next. If things go as expected, environmental vitality should blossom along the creek in a short time. This will be good news for wildlife, which depend on riparian areas for life. It will also be good news for the rancher, who will get increased forage for his wintertime grazing.

Everyone wins. The land heals and is restored to ecological health; the rancher benefits economically; the hunters will find more quail; the State Land Office can earn more revenue for New Mexico's schoolchildren; downstream neighbors will enjoy more abundant and higher quality water; and the Quivira Coalition gets to scientifically quantify the results.

And it was all accomplished cooperatively - without a single lawsuit!

cattle is antithetical to rangeland health, our project will be considered heresy. To ranchers who refuse to give up continuous, year-round grazing, our project will be eyed with suspicion. To all the defenders of the status quo, Macho Creek will be considered to be rather radical.

That's all right. We are part of what we call the "Radical Center"—the only place where the answers to the grazing debate will be found.

As author Wendell Berry wrote: "You cannot save the land apart from the people or the people apart from the land. To save either, you must save both." The Quivira Coalition will strive energetically to do exactly that.

For more information contact Courtney White, executive director, at 505-820-2544 or send a letter to the Quivira Coalition, 551 Cordova Rd., Suite #423, Santa Fe, NM 87501. E-mail: <wldwst@rt66.com>. Fax: 505-466-4935.

...and the New Ranch.

Although we win most battles, we are losing the war. We are not losing to the environmentalists, we are losing to the economics and demographics. By Jim Winder, rancher

It is in the best interests of ranchers to join with environmentalists to solve conflicts in ways which enhance both biodiversity and economic stability.

These are tough times for ranchers. The economic fundamentals of ranching are poor. Economists consider the beef industry to be mature, meaning that growth is slow and price competition is extreme. Since economic

pressure has put ranchers' backs to the wall, it is no wonder that we fight so hard when confronted by environmentalists and government agencies.

Seems to me that we have always been fighting one battle or another; drought, fire, Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, Sierra Club. In fact, we have become pretty good at fighting, even

supporting professional fighters among our ranks.

Losing the war

Although we win most battles, we are losing the war. We are not losing to the environmentalists, we are losing to the economics and demographics. Leadership must come from those of us with cut hands and skinned knuckles who know in our hearts that things must change—that maintaining the status quo means eventual bankruptcy.

What can be done? Well, we can use stumbling blocks for stepping stones. If we embrace change we will find that our enemies can be our friends and the threats will become the very opportunities which will keep the land in the family for another generation.

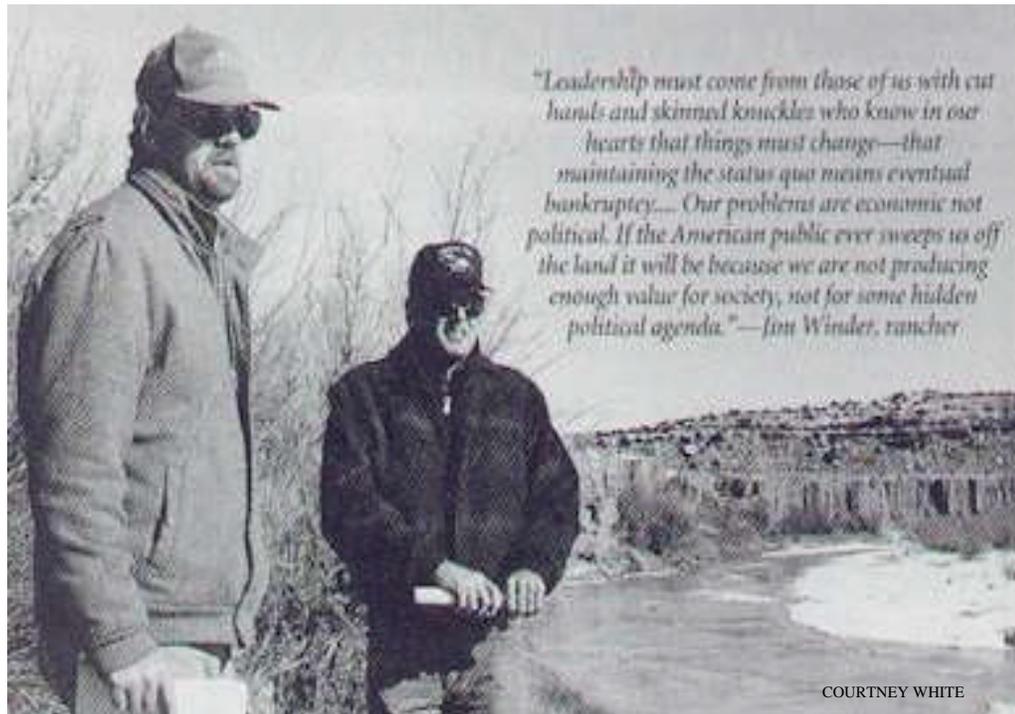
Our problems are economic not political. If the American public ever sweeps us off the land it will be because we are not producing enough value for society, not for some hidden political agenda. The solution is to roll our sleeves up, quit moaning about the environmentalists and get to work.

We are not the first industry to face maturity and not all mature industries have to die. If we are smart, we will study what other industries have done in similar situations and learn a lesson from the survivors on how to innovate and prosper. Each of us should take a long hard look at the facts of the situation, not the rhetoric spewed by opposing camps, and then seek the changes which will ensure not just our survival, but our prosperity.

Why don't environmentalists just leave us alone?

Perhaps the best starting place is to understand why it is that the environmentalists don't go away and, in fact, seem to be gathering strength. The quick answer is that they are right, at least partly so. The damage the environmentalists bemoan has in fact occurred and continues to occur, though perhaps not to the extent claimed.

In the 1800s, the livestock cultural practices used in New Mexico were based on those from the more temperate Eastern states. We know today that what is good management in high rainfall areas is disastrous to semi-desert rangelands. As early as 1899, Jared Smith discussed a 40 percent loss of grazing capacity in Southwestern rangelands. In 1908, E.Q. Wooton surveyed New Mexico ranchers and found that of the 118 stockmen reporting, 102 (86 percent) believed the carrying capacity of the ranges



ABOVE: Kris Havstad, left, and Jim Winder on the Arroyo Chico in New Mexico surveying for a management demonstration project.

had diminished. Of these, 69 believed the diminution was due to overstocking and 33 to drought.

Earlier this century, public concern over the loss of productive capacity from rangelands brought about a massive governmental effort to reverse the trend. Millions of dollars have been spent through agencies like the Soil Conservation Service on land restoration treatments such as brush and erosion control. The positive results of this effort have led to claims that rangelands today are in better shape than they have been for a century.

The trouble is that these claims are based on yardsticks that value plants for their use to livestock and not on biodiversity. What the rancher sees as success, the environmentalist sees as failure. Increasingly, the American public requires more of their rangelands than fat cows—these lands need to produce clean water, habitat for wildlife and natural beauty. When held up against these measurements, we find that rangeland managers are falling short.

The future is bright

Ten years ago I realized that my business was slowly spiraling downward. Those same management techniques which had served my family well for generations were failing me, and the harder I worked, the faster I went broke. Things got to the point

my banker would't even give me a free cap anymore because he said I was a bad advertisement. Slowly, and painfully, I came to grips with the economic reality of our industry and set out to find a solution that might keep the ranch in the family for a few more generations.

The solution was to broaden my horizons, to become a resource manager and to make friends out of the same environmentalists my neighbors saw as enemies. Let me say that the hardest part was just deciding to change. Once that decision was made, I found support from other ranchers who had turned the corner before me. I gained the clarity needed to grow my business four-fold in 10 years and to reach out to the environmental community for consensus, which has given me stability on public lands.

If you are serious about continuing in or even entering into ranching, it is time to chuck the ways of your grandfather and to find new partners in unique places. It is not easy to change, but there is comfort in knowing that you are not the first. Many others have pioneered this trail and are willing to show you the way. Ranchers have everything to gain from the Quivira Coalition and nothing to lose.

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