



Sustainable Ranching

Sustainable ranching is a concept that is implicit in National Park Service laws and policies and is similar to the 'new ranch' concept. The ranch defines Sustainable Ranching as processes and activities that *maintain and improve grassland and riparian health, support vigorous livestock and wildlife populations, that result in economic success, that create 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) Improving Resources through development of best management practices – *the list of savings and best practices is extensive, helped along by the 2005 Business Plan and Core Operations Analysis focus on this primary park function. A Ranch Management Plan is pending, summarizing current management direction and operations. Some examples:*

a. The park has developed a herd of livestock that has improved distribution on the rangeland, improved mothering behaviors, is less likely to cluster in sensitive wetlands and is easier to work with through **implementing BEHAVE techniques** defined by Fred Provenza.

b. **Cows & Weeds Program**– In 2004, working closely with Utah State University and local land owners, the park successfully trained heifers to eat three noxious weeds—spotted knapweed, Canada thistle, and leafy spurge. The results have been encouraging showing positive benefits to the cattle and treating 250 acres/yr. Behaviors passed onto calves and other herd mates expand the initial \$30,000 investment.



B-8, one of the park's project cows, munches spotted knapweed

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

d. Over the last three years the park has worked to identify local ranchers interested in and committed to sustainable ranching practices, creating a **Rancher's Roundtable**. A small group of folks, guided by our staff and Montana State University's County Extension Agent, meet twice a year to discuss current challenges and opportunities for improved resource stewardship.

e) Working with Montana Stockgrowers, the park is on a waiting list to enroll in the **Undaunted Stewardship Program**: a year long **certification process for sustainable practice**. The program was developed by Stockgrowers and MSU range professionals. Stockgrowers is the premier industry organization and was launched by Conrad Kohrs and friends in 1883, providing a solid link between park and industry histories.

f) **Inventory and monitoring** -through the NPS's formal Inventory and Monitoring Program, 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. Procedures are developing to monitor vital signs and commencement began in 2007 for grassland health indicators.

2) Educational opportunity and community benefit– *Institutional memory is handed down to our younger generations, and shared within our local and regional community through two college education on-site programs, employing local rancher’s children and numerous opportunities for community engagement.*

a. **Tehabi intern program** – hosted with Utah State University, this program assists students enrolled in resource management to 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 2-6 students every year for the last 5 years of the program, benefiting from their fresh perspective and provocative analyses of park service resources dilemmas.

b. **The Academy of Living History**- With a coalition of education partners, the park hosts a week of public classes in heritage skills development like teamster(draft horse) training, wagon making, chuckwagon cooking, and sougan quilt-making.

c. **Birding program** – successful ranching management means improved habitat for many bird species. Through the National Audubon Society the park is a certified census site. The park shares with grade school students through field trips, bird-banding programs and with the public and community volunteers in our annual Winter (Christmas) Count, the joys of bird watching and what they tell us about the health of our ecosystem. The park pays particular attention to our resident raptors: eagles and osprey and their success in nesting and fledging. Recent research is documenting heavy metal levels in blood samples to prepare for a Superfund cleanup effort.

d. **Teachers Workshop** –Each year the park hosts a 4-day teacher’s workshop designed to adapt and develop curricula focusing on water, vegetation, wildlife and habitat and how ranching fits in ecosystem management. This in turn, is used in Montana classrooms via our downloadable website products. Our 8th year, 2008 program hosted 23 educators from across the state in credentialed learning.

e. **NPS Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit (CESU)**– 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, technical assistance, and educational opportunities over the last three years.



f. **Volunteerism** – From 2004-2007, the park and the ranching program has tripled its volunteers to provide service towards the accomplishments described above, many in heritage demonstrations such as horse powered haying. In 2007, the park released a first, documentary video of this historic practice, which was aired nationally on cable television, February 29, 2008.