

The Central Coast Rangeland Coalition

The Central Coast Rangeland Coalition is a community of ranchers, conservationists and government agency staffers committed to the stewardship of our rangeland ecosystems through sustainable management practices. Our coalition consists of more than 50 members – including about 20 ranchers -- representing about 200 thousand acres of private rangeland from San Francisco Bay to Morro Bay.

Our organization is inclusive in principle and collaborative in practice. Because many public and private land holdings conjoin, successful management of their shared ecosystems can only occur through cooperative planning. Private landowners thus play a pivotal role in maintaining healthy rangelands, stable watersheds, open space and healthy wildlife populations. But to fulfill their environmental responsibilities to the commonweal, landowners must be allowed to derive livelihoods from their ranching operations. When large ranches are broken up due to economic exigencies, urban sprawl and ecosystem degradation are the inevitable corollaries. We therefore are dedicated to promoting land management practices that provide for both the enhancement of ecological values and the preservation of Central California's historic ranching traditions.

Our efforts are informed by several broad rangeland health criteria. These include sustainable soil nutrient cycles, well-vegetated watersheds and biodiversity. We believe that healthy rangelands are resilient rangelands – in other words, they recover rapidly from major disturbances such as drought or wildfire.

We also believe the human element must be part of any successful rangeland management equation: An economically sound rural community is implicit in good rangeland management.

Sound rangeland practices will vary depending on site. Nature is dynamic and complex; each watershed presents unique combinations of topography, soil type, microclimate, water availability and species distribution. At the same time, we must factor in economic criteria, such as stocking levels, grazing rotations -- even hunting and other recreational demands.

Finally, we have to consider social issues. Are landscape views and historic landmarks preserved? Is public access possible, and if so, where and to what extent? Successful rangeland management assures that all the essential values – ecological, social and economic – are addressed. But to effectively preserve these values, management methodologies must be flexible, adapting to each watershed as its qualities and characteristics dictate.

Ongoing monitoring is critical to the achievement of our goals for Central Coast rangelands. Monitoring helps us fine tune our management practices. It also constitutes a good faith demonstration to the public that coalition partners are determined to pursue rangeland practices that are rooted in science, not expediency. We are students as well as supporters of this process. As we accumulate data and apply our findings to our rangelands, we will make the information publicly available so other land managers and conservation groups can evaluate and utilize it; we, in turn, will benefit from their analyses and work.

We are seeing the emergence of a new science of sustainable ranching, coupled with an acknowledgment of the rancher's historic role as a steward of the wild landscape. The value of private ranchlands to broad-based conservation initiatives is now generally recognized. Grazing lands contain sensitive ecosystems that must be maintained, and they also serve as critical linkages to existing core reserve lands, providing wildlife with enhanced migration, foraging and reproductive opportunities.

Our coalition is devoted to the continued development of this sustainable rangeland ethic. We welcome any and all partners who share our vision of a rural landscape that provides a living for working families and preserves the functional ecosystems that are among our greatest national assets.