



## Sustainable Ranching

**Sustainable ranching** is a concept that is implicit in National Park Service laws and policies and one we are 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) 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 will be out Winter 2007, 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, less likely to cluster in sensitive wetlands and are easier to work with.

b. Cows & Weeds – 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, showing positive benefits to the project herd, treating 250 acres and behaviors passed onto calves and other herd mates.

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: Over the last three years we have worked to identify local ranchers interested in and committed to sustainable ranching practices. A small group of folks, guided by our staff and Montana State University's Extension Service, are meeting to discuss current challenges and opportunities for improved resource stewardship.

e) Working with Montana Stockgrowers we will enlist in their Undaunted Stewardship Program: a year long process that certifies 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.

**2) Community education and land ethic development**– Institutional memory is handed down to our younger generations, and shared within our local and regional community through two college education on-site programs.



Spaz, one of our project cows, enjoys spotted knapweed

a. Tehabi – 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 University of Montana– Western. Grant-Kohrs Ranch and Western are currently exploring opportunities to collaborate with Western’s Sustainable Ranching Program.

c. Birding program – successful ranching management means improved habitat for many bird species. Through the National Audubon Society we are a certified census site. We share with grade school students through field trips, bird-banding programs with the public and with community volunteers in our annual Winter (Christmas) Count, the joys of bird watching and what they tell us about the health of our ecosystem. We pay particular attention to our resident raptors: eagles and osprey and their success in nesting and fledging.

d. Science Teachers Workshop –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. This, in turn, is used in Montana classrooms via our downloadable website products.

**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, technical assistance, and educational opportunities over the last three years.

**4) Volunteerism** – Form 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.



**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. In 2007, we released a first, documentary video.

**6) Inventory and monitoring** -through the NPS’s 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.

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