

Marketing the Finest Ranch & Recreational Properties

## The Ecology of Ranching

*Doran Creek Ranch  
Jackson County, Colorado*



BY KEN MIRR

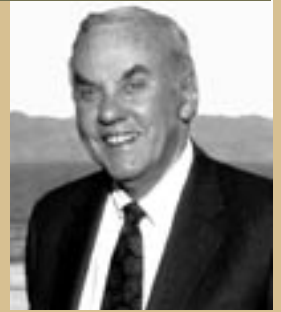
Since the cattle drives of old, ranching has been suspected of destroying delicate ecosystems in the West. For decades, environmentalists have been attacking ranching and trying to limit grazing from public lands. However, recent scientific studies have confirmed what many have known for years: large working ranches actually can preserve habitat for many native species. These studies were presented in respected journals such as *BioScience*, *Environmental Science and Policy*, and *Conservation Biology*. It was also reported in *The New York Times*, *The Denver Post*, and eloquently laid out in the book *Ranching West of the 100<sup>th</sup> Meridian*. To many it is no surprise that ranchers are stewards of the land and care for the West's geography every bit as much, if not more, than those on the sidelines. If done properly, cattle grazing can actually be used as a tool in recovering arid ecosystems and enriching open space and biodiversity. These studies bear testimony that large, intact working cattle ranches are crucial puzzle pieces holding together an increasingly fragmented landscape.

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## Vaya Con Dios H. Bob Fawcett

BY RON MORRIS

In January we lost a good friend, dedicated broker, and a long time mentor of Fuller Western Real Estate, H. Bob Fawcett. Throughout his illustrious real estate



career that spanned over forty years, Bob was the professional in every way. He pioneered ways to market ranch and resort properties and was admired by his competitors for his high standards and his integrity.

A thoughtful person in every way, Bob was very involved in our business, his family, and a significant number of charitable organizations to which he devoted time, energy, and resources. Never shy about any challenge, Bob knew how to get things done. At Bob's funeral, his son John Fawcett gave several instances where his dad generously gave others a leg up or a helping hand. That was the kind of man he was, always there to give you help, advice or a suggestion.

Did you know that this very newsletter was originated by H. Bob Fawcett himself? For those of you who have read his marvelous articles over the years, you might remember Bob for his heart warming stories and quick wit.

Speaking for everyone at Fuller, we will miss a lot more than Bob's writing style. From up in the heavens we know he's watching over us, saying in his raspy voice, "Set your sights high, think positive, and you've still got a ways to go." So until we meet again, go with God H. Bob Fawcett, Vaya Con Dios!

## The Ecology of Ranching

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There is no doubt that the rural landscape in the West is changing and there are many causes for this disjointed countryside. For one, the overall land base for ranching is rapidly shrinking. This declining avail-

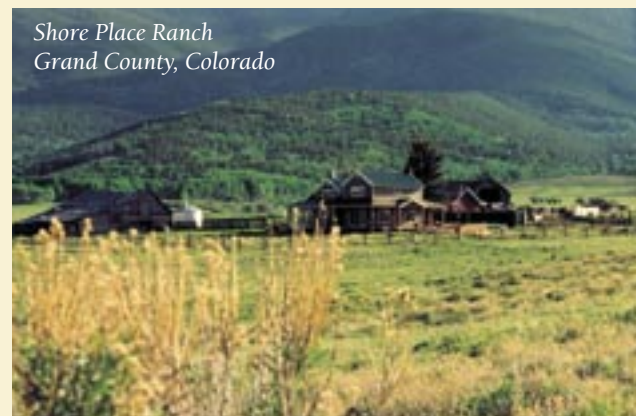
received higher net returns above cash costs per cow than those without permits. In recent years the number of permits have been reduced and a growing number of people with opposing land-use values have tried to limit ranchers' access to public lands or even exclude them entirely. Generally, these exclusionary forces believe that grazing destroys the land and taking cattle off or resting the ground is better for the land. However, it has been shown that the opposite is true. Rest has seldom proved to be the solution and that plant and animal communities need periodic disturbance and not pure rest to function and thrive.

Interestingly, a recent study has found that ranches have at least as many species of birds, carnivores and plants as similar areas that are protected as wildlife refuges. Ranches also had fewer invasive weeds. One important analysis compared 26 long-term grazing enclosures with un-grazed areas in four different states.

ability of land is creating one of the greatest threats facing the future viability of ranching in the West. The loss of agricultural land in the West has been accelerating at an astonishing pace. For instance, Colorado has lost 15 percent of its agricultural land base since 1964. Alarming, 13 of Colorado's counties have lost more than 50% of their agricultural land, and just over half of the counties experienced reductions of 25% in the same time frame. Over the past ten years land used for grazing in the Rocky Mountain West has been declining at the rate of 1.6 million acres per year. From 1982 to 1997, about 45% of the pasture and rangeland taken out of grazing was converted to development.

The Rocky Mountain West is experiencing rapid population growth and this is projected to continue. The region grew three times faster from 1990 to 1999 than the rest of the country. Nine of the ten fastest growing states are in the West and have been for the past decade. Most of this growth is occurring in urban areas, but rural population growth exceeds urban growth in over half of the counties in the Rocky Mountain Region. In this same region, land is being consumed for residential development at a much faster pace than population growth. In the rural areas much of the available land is being converted into ranchettes.

In addition to the displacement of private land holdings, there is also a shrinking amount of public land available to ranchers. From an economic standpoint, grazing on public land is essential to the viability of western ranching. USDA researchers reported that ranchers with federal grazing permits



*Shore Place Ranch  
Grand County, Colorado*

It found no differences between the grazed and un-grazed areas with respect to species diversity, grass, forbs, and shrub cover, soil texture, and percentage of nitrogen in the soil. Over the centuries the West has always been grazed by large populations of herbivores from the early mastodons, to bison, prong-horns, and cattle. Although many of these species are gone, cattle are still here, albeit in lower numbers from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The studies have shown that grazing by livestock, when appropriately done, contributes to the stimulation that rangelands require. Grass and shrubs need the stimulation brought by the chewing, clipping, and the hoof action, which facilitates more efficient nutrient cycling. Today grazing officials believe that rangelands are in the best ecological condition since they began monitoring such conditions.

There has been a rapid conversion of ranch lands

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**“MARKETING  
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**SPLIT ROCK RANCH**  
Muddy Gap, Wyoming

Working ranch offers over 200,000 total acres, approx. 14,000 deeded, 146,000 state and BLM grazing lease, and 40,000 private lease. Twelve miles of Sweetwater River run through the property providing water to a resident elk herd and wild horses. Over 35 miles of underground pipe along with several reservoirs and springs provide stock water. Enjoy diverse terrain from scenic mountains to canyons, valleys and river bottom. Ideal for the recreational buyer or one that wants a lot of country. Seller is offering a fifty percent (50%) interest in the ranch for **\$2,800,000**.



**WYOMING**

**The Ecology of Ranching**

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to rural housing developments in much of the West. Ranchette development is not only a more lucrative use of ranch land, it is also the fastest-growing use. Rural lands in the West have experienced higher land values and have increased the pressure for land conversion to higher and better uses.

Ecologically the effects of ranchettes spell trouble for the future of western diversity. Ranches clearly provide better habitat for wildlife than ranchettes, which have fewer native species and more invasive species than ranches and refuges. When ranches support viable populations of species sensitive to urbanization, they serve much the same role as protected areas because they represent sources of sensitive plant and animal species. Once a subdivision arrives, the size, forage, vistas, and the qualities of the open range are gone. Also gone is the biodiversity of habitat.

Ranching done wrong can hurt the land, but done right has the power to restore ecological integrity to

the western lands. Most of our clients purchase and own ranches for the landscapes, open space, wildlife habitat, lifestyle, and other values offered by large, well managed working ranches. We at Fuller Western pride ourselves in marketing operating ranches to buyers who take the responsibilities of stewardship and preservation seriously. We assist in educating our clients about the available tools offered to preserve the properties and the need to maintain the ecological and operational integrity of the ranch. In doing so, owners not only maintain the integrity of their investment but provide a real and abstract benefit to all of us. There are many challenges facing ranching, and it is important that we recognize the substantial contributions made by ranchers and the need to maintain the ranching way of life.

**References:**

*The New York Times, September 10, 2002.*

*The Denver Post, September 16, 2002.*

*Ranching West of the 100th Meridian, edited by Knight, Gilgert, Marston, Island Press, 2002.*

**SOLD**

**BY FULLER WESTERN REAL ESTATE**

**“MARKETING THE WEST’S FINEST RANCH & RECREATIONAL PROPERTIES”**



**CHADWELL FARMS HUNTING RETREAT, Alamosa, Colorado**  
360 acres | List Price: \$770,000.



**DICK'S CREEK RANCH, Guffey, Colorado**  
284+/- acres with a 40-acre BLM in-holding | List Price: \$399,000.

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