

# Water Review

*A Perspective on Western Water Issues Prepared by the Family Farm Alliance and Its Members*

## THE WEST

### Using the Internet to Raise Public Awareness of Ranch Conservation Success Stories

A former executive director of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) is now leading an organization intended to develop private sector solutions for conservation. Resources First Foundation (RFF) seeks to take the message of successful rancher stewardship to the multi-media marketplace as a winning formula. Amos Eno, President and Executive Director of RFF is developing an on-line resource called Ranchbook to raise awareness of grazing land issues and conservation success stories, and to garner broad support for ranchland conservation.

Amos Eno has nearly 40 years experience in conservation and rangeland policy matters, at the Department of the Interior, with NFWF, and in the private sector. In that time, he has witnessed Western ranchers systematically subjected to criticism by mainstream media and environmental press, characterized as oppressors of the western landscape.



“Starting in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s, I witnessed certain environmental groups engage in a persistent legal campaign, suing ranchers over grazing fees and other purported land use abuses,” he says. “And in every telling, I kept thinking of all the Colorado and Wyoming valleys, which were beginning to become studded with ski resorts and condos and second houses, as ranchers were driven from their businesses. And I thought, what is harder on the landscape? A few over-grazed meadows, or habitat fragmentation from multi-faceted pressures of development? This was not rocket science, even to an easterner!”

Eno – who now resides in Maine – recognizes that today, many ranchers are in the forefront of conservation stewardship activities, enrolling conservation easements, improving habitat for threatened and endangered species, restoring riparian areas, improving water quality and quantity. However, he fears that a negative public image - coupled with growing pressures of land use changes - threaten grazing lands’ sustainability, and thus, that of the critical habitats they support.

RFF is working to address this issue through a public relations strategy incorporating technology and the internet to raise awareness of grazing land issues and conservation success stories, and garner broad support for ranchland conservation.

“I was drawn to the internet by my determination to find a delivery service for landowners across the country that cuts out all the bureaucracies and middlemen and empowers individuals with intelligent information,” says Eno. He points to some “hard numbers” people are reporting on the use of the internet everyday:

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**Figure 1: 71% of the continental U.S. is in private ownership, yet according “the overwhelming majority of our public and philanthropic financial resources are focused in public land conservation, ignoring the largest segment of the market needing conservation assistance, tutelage and freedom to innovate.” Source: Resources First Foundation**

## P.R. Strategy Incorporates Technology & the Internet

### (Continued from Page 1)

- The total global internet audience surpassed 1 billion visitors in the last year;
- Almost 73% of the U.S. population - 220 million Americans - use the internet;
- An estimated 9.5 billion searches were conducted in January 2009 alone, a 27% increase over the previous January.

“This brings us to the opportunity of developing an effective strategy of how to create a persuasive presence in public relations,” said Eno. “This enables ranchers to penetrate not only the Western media, but nation-wide metropolitan media markets, the conservation market, the state-federal market, and provide a platform to scale the true-life stories of highly individualistic ranchers as prototypal pioneers in conservation.”

Eno believes that ranching needs an unaffiliated, public relations platform to tout the ecological, biological and conservation benefits of working ranches as stewards of the Western landscape. Towards that end, RFF intends to build, host and annually expand an online resource, entitled Ranchbook, featuring:

- A compilation of rancher conservation success stories submitted by a coalition of partner organizations throughout the west;
- A bulletin board for ranchers, and the general public, to connect and discuss ranchland conservation topics;
- Weekly blogs by two prominent authors (including

Sharon O’Toole, wife of Family Farm Alliance President Patrick O’Toole) using the success stories as grist; and

- Links to RFF’s suite of online directories of conservation resources.

The goal of the project is to provide an innovative approach to promote grazing land sustainability and a reduction in ranchland fragmentation through the development of a rancher- to- rancher network for sharing best management practices and conservation strategies.

“This will ultimately help to keep land in private ownership, with a dual emphasis of increasing public support of ranchland conservation efforts,” Eno predicts. “Ranchbook will be consistent with, and the embodiment of, the visions and business execution of the great internet company success stories, as well as our own experience building our product line of conservation-minded internet resources.”

Now all that he needs is money. Despite receiving support from state conservationists from all the Western states, the Natural Resources Conservation Service recently turned down the RFF proposal. Eno continues to work other federal agencies and private sources to secure funding for his proposal.

“Once we are funded and our product is on-line,” he predicts, “I am confident that the resulting public relations benefits will promote and restore ranchers to their rightful position in frontier western iconography as our premier rural stewards of the American West.”

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