



KEEPING UP WITH CONSERVATION

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Conservation of resources is the ethical use and protection of valuable resources, such as trees, minerals, wildlife, water and others. It focuses on maintaining the natural world in order to protect the sources of resources. Conservation is the practice of using only as much as you really need of something and replacing or renewing the resource whenever possible. The earliest publications on conservation appear in the 1600's in books on forestry. In the 18th century the conservation practices further developed to protect depleting teak trees used by the royal navy and to reduce the risk of wildfire, a concern that is still the forefront on my area of the Great basin. Most consider Gifford Pinchot the "Father of Conservation" at least in our modern times. He was the chief of the USDA Forest Service under Theodore Roosevelt. So who are modern day conservationist? Most people probably think of the Nature Conservancy or the World Wildlife Fund when they think of conservation. While these are noble groups that have long protected the natural world, I propose another group that should be honored for their conservation efforts.

In my little town of Elko, Nevada there is the National Cowboy Poetry Gathering. People come from all over the world to learn about the buckaroo culture. When I was little this was my favorite time of the year. I would get to dress up in my buckaroo outfit and feel like I was on top of the world. This was my time to shine and teach my class what it was like to be a cowboy. My dad would also come into my classroom with bridles, ropes, saddles, wild rags, and if it was okay with the teachers he would bring a couple horses, cows, dogs, and/or sheep. The cool thing about my dad was that he involved everyone. Students would get a chance to rope, brush the horse, or sit on the saddle. This left a lasting impression on the young students many of whom had never even been close to a horse. As a young child I didn't understand at the time, but through my own understanding of conservation I now see that Buckaroos are actually conservationists.

Over the summer my dad and I had to rebuild fence to a pasture that we leased nearly every day because it hadn't been fixed in so long. We have a rotational grazing system. This means that we push cows into different allotments throughout the year to prevent over use of the pastures and to make sure that there will be forage for next year's grazing period. We put out salt blocks and protein tubs as far away from the water sources in various spots to improve utilization throughout the entire pasture and to improve the health of the cattle. Chores that have

to been done around the ranch may not immediately be seen as conservation activities, but really they are. With better conservation education people can understand how buckaroos are also conservationists.

One of the greatest issues with conservation today is understanding all aspects of its complexity. The confusion of knowing the difference between conservation, preservation, and all variations of environmentalism; can be difficult. These are different philosophies often on the same topics or natural systems and or animals. A common misconception about conservation is that its purpose is to protect from any human influence. Or that focusing solely on a single part of an ecosystem such as an endangered species is the best conservation practice. Working towards all organisms maintaining a healthy and sustainable ecosystem to ensure sustainable natural resources is what I believe conservation means. No one knows this more than the buckaroos who live on the land and rely on every part of the land for their livelihood. When the land is not properly managed cows come in skinny and that is not good for reproduction or taking the cows to the sale where they are sold by market price per pound. Ranchers always want a fat calf to take to the sale because that means that they might make a profit that year. When there is a low population of rabbits, mice, voles, and other types of prey buckaroos often see predators come in closer to the livestock especially in the winter time. Last year I saw three coyotes harassing a new born calf with a less than happy mama trying to keep them all away from her baby. Cattlemen are always trying to keep a healthy ecosystem because it really is for their benefit to do so. They know that when the environment is affected negatively they will be affected as well.

As the human population continues to grow, people are constantly using more and more of the limited resources that the world provides for us. When people do not conserve the resources that are provided to them we all suffer not just the wild organisms at risk of endangerment or extinction. I believe no one knows this better than the people who work and live with these resources every day, the buckaroos.

Every organism is a key player in the ecosystem and habitat that they live in. One that is very important in my community is the sage grouse. This bird does not exactly have meaning to people all over the world but it causes some land use/management difficulties for the buckaroos.

It is an organism that may represent the health of the sagebrush ecosystem (USDA, 2010). It is also a species that is a focal point for environmental groups, land managers, and land users.

The greater sage grouse territory ranges all over the western United States and the western part of southern Canada. It is the largest of all the grouse species in North America. Prime habitat for the greater sage grouse is found in the Great Basin where I live according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The breeding season for the sage grouse is March through May. Cowboys gathering, pushing, or checking cows regularly see sage grouse out on the landscape.

The water developments that buckaroos work so hard to maintain for livestock are often used by large groups of sage grouse; also efforts on private land that remove juniper or pinyon trees reduce predator risk for the sage grouse. The control of sagebrush by buckaroos can create open lecking areas. That point gets confusing because how could controlling sagebrush for a sagebrush obligate bird help it? Using controlled burns to create a diversity of young and mature sagebrush plants helps the sage grouse with forage and cover.

Another hard to understand conservation practice for sage grouse is that it is a hunted species, a prey species for humans as well as many other predators in this ecosystem. It is often a confusing topic, conservation and hunting. The buckaroos who rely on an annual understanding of carrying capacity and stocking rates understand very clearly the consequences of overabundance and the need to adjust animal numbers.

Another example of using hunting for conservation is in areas where there are dense elk populations resources can become depleted which is not healthy for other wildlife and livestock. A balance of population numbers of both wildlife and livestock maintains the conservation of both these resources. This is done through legal hunting. In Nevada the process for getting a hunting tag is by a draw. The draw is just like pulling random names out of a hat. Hunters are some of the biggest contributors to conservation. Not only are they contributing to maintaining healthy population numbers, but they also contribute \$2.9 billion towards conservation efforts and projects. The Nevada Wildlife Action Plan, Nevada Predator Management, and Mule Deer Management are just a few of the projects and plans that the money is being put towards. The Nevada Wildlife Action plan focuses on the species and habitats that have the greatest need of conservation in Nevada. The Nevada Predator Management project focuses on coyotes,

mountain lions and ravens that are common predators in Nevada. Buckaroos are often avid hunters and also follow the best practices to deter predators and will control predator numbers on their private land. This can be a controversial topic sometimes.

There are in fact many areas of conservation that are controversial. These debates and different opinions have existed for a long time. In the early 1900's, one of the first disputes was between Gifford Pinchot and John Muir. Pinchot thought that public lands should be considered for all public use including recreation, mining, logging, etc. in respect to conservation. Muir believed that conservation's purpose was to preserve the land owned by the government. We continue to have such debates and often the conservationist buckaroo can be left feeling very frustrated.

An example of this that I see quite frequently in Nevada is the debate over the feral horses in the American west. I am a large supporter of horses as I have grown up around them and love being around them. Coincidentally, I am also a large supporter of healthy and sustainable ecosystems. In Nevada there is an estimate of 34,531 horses and burros as of March 1st, 2016 on the range lands (Gorey, Tom, and Lutterman, Jason "Wild Horse and Burro Quick Facts."), this puts a tremendous resource use on the land. This is far above the recognized management goal and limitations for the ecosystem. They can deplete forage, decreasing the habitat for the wildlife and livestock, and economically and physically impact ranching, mining, and recreation. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is tasked with managing this sensitive topic and one way they accomplish this is with the input of the BLM Advisory Board. The BLM Advisory Board is made up of various interests groups such as wild horse and burro advocacy groups, wild horse and burro research institutions, veterinarians, natural resource organizations, humane advocacy groups, wildlife associations, and livestock organization. Difficult discussions often need to be made to euthanize between 44,000 and 45,000 horses held in short and long-term holding facilities (Williams, Dale "BLM to Kill 44,000 Wild Horses and Burros."). These can lead to public objection and lawsuits. The wild horse activists believe that there should not be population control on the horses and have been successful at stopping conservation efforts like spaying of mares. I feel these decisions do not consider the entire ecosystem and focus only on one part that may be detrimental to the rest. That is not conservation. There is a lack of understanding similar to a lack of understanding how many of the buckaroo activities are in conservation's best interest.

My family ranch was greatly affected by unmanaged feral horses. The land did not have the carrying capacity for the livestock, horses, and wildlife. There was little to no desirable plant forage for wildlife and livestock. As a result, we had to sell a large portion of our cattle because we no longer had any winter ground for them. In order to successfully conserve natural resources we need to consider all aspects of the resource and its value to us, there has to be balance.

What one person considers a beautiful plant may be considered a weed by others that is detrimental to the vital natural resources that animals and industries depend on. There is no one perfect way to conserve nature, but if we all care about the natural world, and we listen and learn from each other than we can all be conservationists. My dad taught me these important lessons of sharing knowledge, involving others, and caring. He made lasting impressions not on just me, but on others as well just by coming into my class for a couple hours and teaching about the buckaroo ways I am so proud of. We all have a responsibility to share what we know with those who are far removed from the land. Being involved is what it truly means to be a conservationist.

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60:100

Land Carrying Capacity

30:100

Biggest problems with conservation

-Emotion

-Not enough of an active role

-More People Involvement

-Appreciate wildlife

Properly Manage

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