

THE
FUTURE
OF
AMERICA'S
NATIONAL
PARKS

First Annual
Centennial Strategy for

Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site

August 2007

CENTENNIAL INITIATIVE



Site: GRKO

Year: 2007

Vision Statement

Grant-Kohrs Ranch NHS celebrates American ranching heritage, a story that encompasses the nation, the world, the cowboy, the cow, and the cattle baron. As the 'nation's ranch' the site is the center for displaying the historic fabric and cultural landscape of the open range era, including a cattle herd, and champions traditions and skills associated with that era, including those used to manage a contemporary ranch operation.

All of the 93 historic structures are improved and in use. Both ranch complexes are fully stabilized and exhibits restored with a wayside tour established. The sights, sounds and smells of a working ranch surround the visitor at every turn. Wagon tours and horse rides take visitors into the grasslands where cattle and the elements are appreciated first hand. The park provides weekend and weeklong participative programs. With partners like the National Cowgirl Hall of Fame, Elderhostel, neighbor Rock Creek Cattle Inc., the Montana Academy of Living History, the park serves as a training ground, providing classes in basic cowboying skills; like roping, riding, moving cattle, haying with horses, etc. This develops skills to manage the ranch appropriately, acquaints newcomers to the authentic rigors of the range, and builds stewardship ethics through appropriate recreational experience. Students work a mixed Longhorn, Hereford, Shorthorn herd, working in the saddle on original ranch lands. Visitors take the wagon to outlying cowboy camps to join them for evening dinners and campfire programs.

The western arts deliver quality products about the ranch landscape and its beauty, teaching visitors about the site's history and significance. The best of many cultures: Metis, Shoshone-Bannock, Salish-Kootenai, Blackfoot, European German, Chinese and all the people who built the ranch, find voice in art exhibits, interpretive programs, new partnerships and park staffing.

The natural resources are scientifically exemplary, a sustainable ranch with a healthy, weed free, diverse grassland improved to the visual limits of the site and a river corridor restored and vibrant with wildlife. The park's cattle are 'educated' animals, those trained to eat noxious weeds, and managed to stop invasive plant growth. Neighboring cattle in the viewshed easement are historically accurate. As far as the visitor can see, the graceful arc of the smooth, American native cow dots the landscape, as it would have when Grant and Kohrs made their fortunes here.

Park/ Superintendent/ Program Manager

Laura Rotegard

Site: GRKO

STEWARDSHIP

Provide inspiring, safe, and accessible places for people to enjoy - the standard to which all other park systems aspire.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Establishing a national Ranching Heritage Visitor Center, gives the country a place to start, in meeting this park. As the recent Business Plan explains: "the Warren Barn Visitor Center is the flagship effort of Grant-Kohrs Ranch to provide a comprehensive interpretive offering and safety introduction to its visitors" With the recent protection of the 3600 acres to the west, the park's visual setting has been secured and the park's image has been elevated. Further investment in the primary need of the park, a workable orientation, indoor classroom & exhibit space with room for performances, partner sales, administrative offices and exhibits, will complete a 30 year endeavor to provide the park with a visitor center worthy of its national significance and quality.

Hosting classes in cowboying skills through a number of established organizations (Elderhostel, Cowboy U, Cowgirl Hall of Fame, Montana Academy of Living History) would give students the opportunity to experience the open range as it was historically, with the grassland as classroom. Students would assist in ranch chores while perfecting roping and riding skills and learning about the real bonanza of the west, grass.

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STEWARDSHIP

Improve the condition of park resources and assets.

Rehabilitate high-priority historic buildings to good condition, and help communities to preserve their history through programs like Preserve America.

Restoring the major visual icon of the ranch, the large red Warren Barn would complete the stabilization of all the historic ranch structures and contribute to the national historic district developed around the downtown core of Deer Lodge. The barn would serve as the orientation and welcoming location for the ranch and provide support space for community gatherings and art performances. As the park's primary contact center, it is graciously ample to include indoor classroom space that 4000 students/year can begin their visits with, and exhibit space to display more sensitive items in the park's collection. As a focal national and regional heritage center, the barn becomes the calling card for the ranch and a symbol of environmental excellence in recycled building use and ranching operations.

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Restore native habitats by controlling invasive species and reintroducing key plant and animal species.

Expansion of the Cows & Weeds program at Grant-Kohrs Ranch and at 100+ NPS sites that manage cattle grazing, creates an effective tool to improve grassland health, nationwide. The program employs livestock behavioral scientists, college interns, consults with county extension agents and ranchers using park lands, training select heifers on site prior to the major grazing season. As the heifers mature, calve and teach the behaviors to their young, successive generations of replacement animals will dominate herds that reduce weed cover. Grant-Kohrs Ranch has 16 initial heifers, now cows, trained in this program and producing calves that are also eating weeds, adding first generation replacement heifers at a rate of 6/year from this herd. Eighteen cow/calf pair grazed 300 acres in 2005 nullifying Spotted Knapweed and Canada Thistle, on this acreage. The ranch's goal is that all 110 pair (ideal capacity) will be descended from this program and keeping 1400 acres free of new weed growth.

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STEWARDSHIP

Assure that no compelling chapter in the American heritage experience remains untold and that strategically important landscapes are acquired, as authorized by Congress.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

20th Century Ranching Theme Study-Developing a research effort on the history of ranching in the 20th century assures that the 100+ parks with remnant ranch features and this park, with a whole ranch complex, understand the significance of this transition era from open range to science based, mechanized agriculture. Outcomes include connecting park sites and partner sites in public management to each other through shared history, stories, commerce and practices.

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STEWARDSHIP

Serve as the Preeminent resource laboratory by applying excellence in science and scholarship to understand and respond to environmental changes.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

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ENVIRONMENT

Engage partners, communities, and visitors in shared environmental stewardship.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Expand Tehabi college internship program for resources, education/interpretation majors. Tehabi, organized through Utah State University, places 20-30 students annually in national park, and other DOI sites for summer internships. The program operates successfully on a 50/50 cost split with CESU's and was commissioned under the Challenge Cost Share program in 1999. Students orient at one site (it has been Grant-Kohrs Ranch for the last 6 years) and return to a close out session after 10 week field seasons. Expansion includes basing coordination centers at major CESU's (CSU next likely) and developing one host park for each center. The program develops an enthusiasm for public service with the potential to pair with the STEP and SCEP programs for career conversion. Eighty percent of graduates have succeeded in entering public service.

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EDUCATION

Cooperate with educators to provide curriculum materials, high-quality programs, and park-based and online learning.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Creating a Western Skills Learning Center program where children and visitors become students of historic practices and basic cowboying skills allows the park to engage the public in a meaningful way and build capacity. Many national parks look for riding skills, so those developed here, would be compatible with the horse program at Yosemite. Riding horses is well known as a transformative experience, one that opens a person's senses to the world of a large herbivore, a perfect entrée into grassland ecology. While supporting ranch work and becoming physically engaged with a magnificent animal, the landscape of the open range becomes a text book. Curriculum would be developed to understand herbivory, range management, historirc impacts and contemporary uses through the park's sustainable ranch operation. Working with school groups, Elderhostel, Montana Academy of Living History, Cowgirl Hall of Fame, the park can tap into a existing programs that bring the infrastructure and do what we do best, become a host site.

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