

Working Wilderness: The Malpai Borderlands Group and the Future of the Western Range. By Nathan F. Sayre. 2005. Rio Nuevo Publishers, Tucson, Arizona. 178 p. US\$22.95 paper. ISBN 13-978-1-887896-81-8.

As he considered the opportunity to write this book, Dr. Nathan Sayre of the University of California said, “For 5 years I had been studying ranching and environmentalism in the Southwest: the history and ecology, myths and misunderstandings of a long and nasty battle over ‘nature.’” The 10-year history of the Malpai Borderlands Group is chronicled in *Working Wilderness*, beginning with a controversy over agency fire suppression policy that provided the catalyst for a group of ranchers to come together in a collaborative effort with environmentalists and agency managers to manage their lives and livelihoods.

In the preface, Dr. Sayre details a legacy of fire suppression and grazing controversies. As he analyzes the search for common ground among a diverse group of individuals, he says, “The conversion of open lands to suburbs and exurbs has alarmed Westerners of all stripes: urban and rural residents, landowners and environmentalists alike.” From a general agreement on the need for restoration of fire as an ecological process and the threat to the western range from subdivision, these individuals with differing backgrounds and belief systems were able to establish a mutual trust and an ability to work together. Dr. Sayre gives a great deal of credit to a liaison between “well-heeled cowboy poet” Drum Hadley and “ascetic pastoralist-philosopher” Jim Corbett.

A discussion of grazing, fire, and drought in the borderlands indicates that a combination of livestock impacts, fire suppression, and drought resulted in a less-than-satisfactory condition of borderland ranges at the turn of the last century. These issues, which are common to all rangelands in the West, and a century of progress are explained.

Dr. Sayre devotes a chapter to the 321,000-acre Gray Ranch and the decision of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to sell it to a private foundation rather than the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The genuine help and support of TNC for this group of ranchers will be of interest to many readers. Support from the science community is described in some detail in a chapter titled “The Radical Center: Science, Politics, and Partnerships.” It has been the experience of the Malpai ranchers that objective science is no threat to their objectives and that it often proves helpful. The scientific community benefits from access to previously inaccessible private lands and the perspectives of long-term inhabitants of the landscape.

Most readers of *Rangelands* will enjoy this well-written and illustrated book.

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