

is a fine writer and Dusard an accomplished artist; in concert with attractive graphic design, they offer a handsome volume. Upon closer examination, however, the book is wrought with hidden problems. The book's "main objective" is to chronicle success stories of ranchers who have been successful stewards of land. The basic theme goes like this: a few committed people have had the courage to go "beyond the rangeland conflict" between environmentalists and ranchers, to work toward constructive solutions, rather than toward proving oneself right. Key to this constructive approach, we are told, is replacing *issues* with *the land* as a focus to dialogue (why the two are mutually exclusive remains unclear), and letting go of attachment to predispositions and assumptions. When we are courageous enough to transcend political camps and see rangelands in a new light, then we can pave the way (excuse the metaphor) for truly sustainable rural communities in the West.

The format for this lesson is a series of ten short, highly readable chapters, each profiling a different ranch success story, sandwiched between an introductory chapter and an epilogue that provide more theoretical context. (Readers who want the Cliff Notes version would not do badly to read Chapter One and the Epilogue: these two sections address most of the salient points.) The text is lavishly illustrated with high quality photography, making for a pleasant armchair experience.

So—what's wrong with this picture? I find both positive and negative points in the book. Unfortunately (because I would love to believe its upbeat assertions lock, stock, and barrel), the negative significantly outnumber the positive.

Let's start with the strong points. First, Dagget clearly acknowledges at the outset that the status quo of range management has been a failure. For those of us concerned with wildlife, this is an inescapable conclusion, but one not addressed so honestly in many range ecology books. Second—and most importantly—the book offers an instructive perspective on the value of collaboration, of working for instead of against something. The point is well taken that too often range management (or, by extension, any other form of land management) degenerates into partisan mudslinging—good for building egos, but horrible for creating solutions to real problems. The book's case studies provide a rudimentary process road map to a place, as the title suggests, beyond the rangeland conflict. So, given these positive contributions, what are my objections? Essentially, there are three:

(1) *Bias*. Although Dagget poses as an impartial party, his bias toward use or land, and in favor of the workers who use it, is evident on almost every page. While the ostensible message is that both ranchers and environmentalists must dispense with partisanship to meet in compromise, virtually every example of recalcitrance involves environmentalists. Perhaps this can be explained as the fervor of the recently converted—Dagget was a Sierra Club wilderness activist for many years before "the light went on." He insists early on that he portrays neither villains nor heroes—"just people"—then goes on to paint heroic pictures of ranchers for the next ten chapters; the only environmentalists who receive similar treatment are those who agree with his party line.

Beyond the Rangeland Conflict: Toward a West That Works, By Dan Dagget with portraits by Jay Dusard, 1995. Gibbs Smith, Layton, Utah, in cooperation with the Grand Canyon Trust. viii + 104pp. \$19.95 ISBN 0-87905-654-1 (paper).

This volume succeeds admirably as art, but largely fails as science and as a guide to public policy. Dagget

He repeatedly parrots a habitual misstatement by ranchers—that federal land is theirs. (One example: They were concerned about "the movement to declare some of their land wilderness." What ever happened to multiple use?) Dagget's utilitarian bias also seeps through when he says that "getting to know a piece of open country means literally getting a feel for it on horseback, preferably as a matter of work rather than idle observation." What about getting to know land while walking? Thoreau has been replaced by Roy Rogers. And what about natural history study? Sorry, naturalists—that's mere idle observation—not the stuff of which insight is born. Daggett employs a selective use of scientific commentary, using a few quotes, but generally concludes that science cannot provide a path, because both sides of the debate cite "best science." In many cases, it's what's left out that tells a tale of bias. The failure of livestock removal to heal arid lands (often true) is scorned repeatedly. What is never mentioned, though, is that simple removal of livestock usually has rapid, beneficial effects in riparian areas (Fleischner 1994).

(2) *Inaccuracy*. There are numerous instances of scientific, management, and even geographic inaccuracy. Some errors are minor—Crested Butte and Gunnison, Colorado are not on the Colorado Plateau, for example—while others are more revealing. In one case, a photo caption touts a saguaro cactus that is "returning" to a Sonoran Desert ranch because of dramatic improvement in management during the past two decades. If true, this would be the fastest growing saguaro on record. Saguaro growth rates would yield an estimate of the age of the featured cactus at roughly three-quarters of a century. In other words, this cactus didn't return due to wise management; it was simply lucky enough to escape the dozer blade in the first place. Such basic natural history errors undermine the reader's confidence.

Several times in the text, when applauding the desire of progressive ranchers to restore natural fire regimes, Dagget accuses federal wilderness designation of obstructing enlightened fire management. This is blatantly wrong; the basic objective of wilderness fire management is "to restore fire to its natural role in the ecosystem..." (e.g., Hendee et al. 1990). Thus, Dagget's inaccurate information creates a false impression that subverts the work of wilderness fire ecologists seeking to gain support for natural fire.

A favorite theme in the book is that the profiled ranchers are creatively using cattle to mimic the natural role of bison (or even Pleistocene megafauna) in grassland ecosystems. There are several problems with this proposal. First, bison had a much more limited distribution than cattle currently do (Fleischner 1994; true even if one grants that "the process of redrawing the map of bison distribution across the West" he alludes to turns out to be accurate). Second, all the talk of grazer-grassland coevolution is essentially irrelevant on the vast majority of Western grazing lands; most "rangelands" are *not* grasslands, but forests, deserts, chaparral, and a variety of other ecosystem types. Third, even if we disregard the above two items, comparative behavioral studies show huge differences in habitat selection, feeding behavior, and impact between cattle and bison (Van Vuren 1982). Finally, ecological communities do not evolve as discrete

units—natural selection works at the population and individual level.

(3) *Vagueness*. With maddening consistency, Dagget refuses to clearly state what his criteria of successful stewardship are; instead, we keep reading platitudes like "health" and "vitality" of ecosystems—terms that are open to opposite interpretations. Ultimately, this vagueness is the book's greatest undoing. On the very first page he states: "I tell you this not because I've read it in a book or a government report but because I've seen it." But he never does tell us what he has seen, that we might judge for ourselves. Thus, we are left to read between the lines and guess what he thinks makes a healthy ecosystem. Based on frequency of mention, I would guess that he equates "greener and thicker grass" (any grass!) with ecosystem health. If so, this is a remarkably shallow definition, and is certainly one that bears close scrutiny.

Dagget gives brief acknowledgment that "a large proportion of the ranchers included in this hook use Holistic Resource Management (HRM) or some part of it." He accurately states that HRM—the system developed by Allan Savory—is controversial. If he was clearer about what HRM is, and which of the methods he portrays derive from it, the book would more usefully and openly advance the dialogue on this system. As it stands, the book seems to grant a vague endorsement of HRM without coming out and saying so. Important questions that help resolve doubts about HRM are never asked: How is success gauged? Does HRM necessarily succeed for the reasons its practitioners believe, or just because it demands more attentive involvement than traditional approaches? Virtually all experimental tests have refuted various claims of HRM—is this, as Dagget might imply, the fault of the scientific process, or is something awry in the theory of HRM? Dagget's vague homage to HRM furthers these sorts of confusion instead of helping to resolve them.

The book's subtitle is "Toward a West That Works," the implication being that these are models for a new society. But even if we accepted all the book's contentions regarding ecological sustainability, it begs the question of grazing economics, even as it makes a grand conclusion: that the people it profiles teach us that "we can choose to have rural communities in the West with sustainable economies," based at least in part on grazing. But what makes an economy sustainable? Do a handful of ranches, dispersed across thousands of miles, create communities? What do we make of the fact that most of the profiled ranch operations are underwritten by inherited wealth, or external funding? These questions should not deter us, but they should be asked. Dagget remains vague, avoiding these thorny issues.

All these objections might rankle less if this book was an obscure tome, doomed for life on the dusty shelves of library basements. Such is not the case. It was the year's best-seller at my local bookstore (admittedly, on the homeground of both author and photographer), and was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize, and has cast Dagget into national limelight as a range management expert. Despite its bias and vagueness, its appealing message is influencing public policy. The publication of this book has fanned the flames of

fervent belief that Holistic Resource Management (whatever it may be) is the answer to rangeland problems. The Arizona legislature recently attempted to mandate HRM on state lands.

We all would like to see ranching become more ecologically sustainable. The book disappoints and frustrates me because, after all, the sort of collaborative caretaking it profiles is, at the very least, a step in the right direction. The ranchers we encounter are to be commended, and we need more like them. Nevertheless, the author's sweeping generalizations and offhand put-downs of contrary ideas render his assertions suspect. If we are to fashion a new approach to ranching, I hope we may find a foundation that is sturdier and less swaggering than this.

- Fleischner, T. L. 1994. Ecological costs of livestock grazing in western North America. *Conserv. Biol.* 8:629-644
- Hendee, J. C., G. H. Stankey, and R.C. Lucas. 1990. *Wilderness management*, Revised ed. Int. Wilderness Leadership Foundation/Fulerum Publ., Golden, Colo.
- Van Vuren, D. 1982. Comparative ecology of bison and cattle in the Henry Mountains, Utah. Pages 449-457 in L. Nelson, J. M. Peek, and P. D. Dalke, eds. *Proc. Wildlife-livestock relationships symposium*. Univ. Idaho, Moscow.

-Thomas L. Fleischner, Environmental Studies Program, Prescott College. 220 Grove Avenue, Prescott. AZ 86301, USA.