

Save the Great American West

A common sense plan to save our environment and our way of life.

In the early morning hours of July 5, 2018, the Martin fire erupted in Paradise Valley, NV. Over the next several days it consumed hundreds of thousands of acres, killed countless wildlife and destroyed what was prime habitat for the threatened sage grouse. By the end of the first day, we had lost our entire BLM grazing permit and over 6200 acres of our private land.

The Ninety-Six Ranch is Nevada's oldest family operated ranching operation. We started business in the same year that Nevada joined the union, back in 1864. Through 154 years and five generations, our family has thoughtfully and carefully managed the lands entrusted to it.

No matter what the ignition source of the Martin Fire, the truth is that the root cause of the fire and so many others like it, is five plus decades of completely disastrous land management by federal agencies including BLM, USFS and USFWS.

The Ninety-Six Ranch use of its grazing lands predates federal agency management by many decades. Our records indicate that in over 154 years, our lands have never burned like this. This is no accident; it is due to careful and diligent management. Today, we graze at levels less than 30% of historic levels. By the BLM's own admission, fuel levels on our permits were allowed to grow to 200-1000% of normal. We and many other permittees have discussed the fire danger with the agency's personnel for decades, but no changes have been made to our amount of use or seasons of use. Just before leaving our BLM permit in June, our own monitoring indicated that we had used but 18-20% of allowed forage. Even with extreme fuel loads and fire danger, we were not allowed to stay longer because our use dates had past.

Each year, more of the west burns and currently, is burning up at a faster rate than ever before in recorded history. Federal land managers have allowed land management to become political and a bureaucratic nightmare rather than a common sense, science based exercise. Ranchers like our family are the true environmentalists on this land. We have a vested interest in its overall health. The fences, water developments and other range improvements that we build and maintain provide measurable benefits for wildlife, recreation as well as for our livestock. Our cattle move through range and remove dangerous fuels from it. Our use is positive and productive; not negative, as rabid environmental groups like Western Watersheds and even staff at State and Federal agencies might have you believe. In almost any other environment, the holistic grazing of livestock would be a welcome contribution to maintaining overall range health. Only in the US, where environmental activism has taken on an almost religious fervor and all things related to guided human use are dismissed as unnatural and bad; are the real, substantial and measurable benefits of livestock grazing not touted and seen for what they are... necessary, common sense and backed up by sound science.

This fall, the BLM and other federal agencies will seek substantial supplemental funding to restore and rehab the lands burned in the Martin Fire and elsewhere. We strongly urge our congressional delegation and the Trump administration to tie any additional funding to the BLM, USFS and USFWS to enacting the reforms outlined in this proposal for grazing and logging permits nationwide, thus allowing ranchers and foresters to use their herds to reduce dangerous fuel loads on the range and cut fire danger in the West.

For some perspective, from 1864 until the passage of the Taylor Grazing Act in June of 1934, our family ran cattle, sheep and horses out on the same lands we graze today. Our numbers were moderated by the weather, water and available feed. We went out earlier and stayed out longer. In the early days, our range was much more a grassland than a true sagebrush steppe. We built reservoirs and spring developments that are still in use today, but would never, ever be allowed to be constructed today. Following passage of the Taylor Grazing Act, our use and numbers were modified, not by political forces, but by careful study and informed negotiations with the federal agencies in charge of grazing and land management. Our operation settled into Taylor grazing with about 5,000 head of cattle on the permits. By that time we had given up our sheep and major horse operation, but were still allowed over 100 head of ranch horses on the range in addition to our cattle numbers. We went out in late March or early April and came home ahead of the early snows in October. We worked in consultation with range managers from both the BLM and USFS for many decades, and maintained one of the best set of grazing permits in the West. Our permits were the "go to" places to see for foreign groups and range scientists from all over the U.S. Nevada "range camp" was often held at our ranch or on our permits. That all began to change in the 1970's and by the time Bruce Babbitt came into power at the department of Interior, we had little to no say in how the range we depended on would be managed, and we quickly became the enemy, rather than the engaged partner we had always been. Today, the same permits that we have grazed for 154 years, run only about 1,800 head of cattle and 18 horses and we are limited to a strict April to September schedule that requires regular rest for pastures regardless of conditions on the ground.

The Taylor Grazing Act limited use to an effective number of cattle on the range, the cuts that have occurred since that time have largely been driven by politics rather than good science. We are also forced to rest fields after a year of use or when the agencies do minor work in them; when in fact, even brief annual use to reduce fuels makes far more sense from a scientific and practical point of view. The truth is that timing, not the amount of livestock is the key to good range health in our brittle environment, and that targeted livestock grazing in areas with gullies or stream breakdowns is often the best method for restoring stream bank health. Livestock hoof effect, used naturally and effectively for thousands of years the world over, is a practical tool that is ignored and underused by modern land management agencies, especially those managers in the United States, where constant legal challenges from environmental groups to any change or improvement on the range is the status quo.

By the time we are now able to turn out on our BLM in April, cheat grass is up and starting to head out. If we could turn out just as snow is melting off with significantly increased numbers, we could beat the cheat grass back and probably kill it in many places within a few years. The key is to get cows to it before it makes a seed head. This would take a huge change of attitude on the part of the federal agencies. They would need to acknowledge that livestock grazing can and should be a major part of range health and range conservation practices and that use dates should correspond to conditions on the ground, not arbitrary dates set in Washington D.C. by bureaucrats who neither live out-west or actually understand the complexities of resource they manage.

After the Martin Fire, we are left with over a half-million acres of charred black ground, scattered with burned up animals that were not fast enough to escape. A cheat grass monoculture will quickly establish itself on this range as it has following almost every major wildfire in the Great Basin. Our five generations of experience tell us that we could help beat back the cheat grass scourge that is coming by making a large turn out early next spring. Our permit could potentially handle 6,000 head of cattle, all eating young cheat grass shoots while the invasive plant is tender and palatable to the cattle. Nothing else will be above ground growing at that time of year after this fire, just the invasive and very destructive cheat grass plant! If we did that, otherwise displaced cattle and ranching operations could be used to effectively help restore soil and plant health, and we would pay for the opportunity to do so. Then, because effective holistic grazing requires operators to be agile, use good timing and adequate numbers, we would hop back off that ground by about mid-April, in time for remaining or reseeded perennials and native bunch grasses to rebound from the fire. The key to all of this is enough numbers, and the right timing and proper duration. Nobody knows the range like the cattlemen who use it every day. Even the best range manager may only see a specific permit a few times a year. Ranchers see this ground daily. We have a vested interest in doing the right things for the long-term. We are the true environmentalists out on the range.

Before the Martin Fire our BLM and USFS permits were considered prime Sage Grouse habitat, today, there is not a single living sage grouse left on our BLM permit. Yet, some managers looking to utilize federal sage grouse dollars, want to manage exclusively for the bird, rather than for overall range health. This is non-sense and a complete waste of money, period. The birds cannot and will not comeback until a healthy sage brush ecosystem is restored. Even then, grouse are on decline world-wide and have been for over 500 years. The truth is that our sage grouse are an early type of wild chicken. Now ask yourself a simple question, what eats chicken? The answer...EVERYTHING EATS CHICKEN! Over 99% of the species that ever lived on earth are now extinct. As stewards of this grazing resource, I can tell you that we have done everything within our power to maintain and build the healthiest possible habitat for all wildlife, cattle and humans who use this range along with us. We know that our ranching operation and all those affected by the Martin Fire and other disasters like it, can contribute to restoring a healthy plant ecosystem to these lands, and from that starting point, perhaps Sage Grouse and all other species

have a chance to re-establish. We hear different stories, perhaps part of our lands will be reseeded, some may be a part of trial programs aimed at outcome oriented grazing, but one thing is sure, we, the primary users of this land and the primary custodians of this resource have so far been frozen out of any conversations about its future. We've been told that no decisions have been made, but when pressed, local BLM officials acknowledge that a rehabilitation plan was submitted to agency brass in D.C. even before the fire was officially out. When we asked for access to the plan, the answer was NO, because it is not yet a public document. I happened to get a quick glance at a map delivered to Washington as part of their initial rehab plan. It included vast aerial seeding, drill seeding and absolutely no outcome oriented grazing plans. The local BLM office admits to requesting only about \$1,000,000 to replace fencing and range improvements (wells, pumps, windmills, water pipelines and trough systems). Their \$1,000,000 will barely re-fence our allotment, let alone the 8 other Humboldt County operations who lost fence and range improvements, and the losses in Elko County have not even been mentioned. We don't even have a State BLM director to lead the effort. It's been about nine weeks since the fire started. We hear about major University studies at UNR, plans to reseed and keep us off the range for 3-5 years, and even a few thoughts of listening to our suggestions. If we wait and give Cheat grass a chance to take hold, we will be left with a cheat grass monoculture and more devastating wildfires will become the norm on this range instead of a singular disaster. If you have not already read **Holistic Management 3rd Edition, by Allan Savory**, please allow us to give you a copy. It contains all of the science and information necessary to understand range science, the history of livestock grazing and why our reforms make so much sense. It is a quick, interesting, and informative read. Its author employs common sense, sound science, and the only techniques necessary to restore our environment and reduce wildfire danger for the long-term.

The Martin Fire also took over 6,200 acres of private land in the center of what was prime sage grouse habitat. Hardscrabble is at the headwaters of Martin Creek, the creek that runs through the east side of Paradise Valley. That watershed has been wiped out. Our historic 1920 cabin burned, the creek boiled and the fishery lost. Rocks popped and cracked open. Cattle are still making their way there even now looking for water, food and a way home, and so far, we have made 6 drives and brought home over 200 head, only 19 ours, since the fire. Our fences and catch lots were destroyed. The local office of the USDA farm services office tells us that any rebuild before their programs approve us will be denied cost sharing. Last week, we, and 3 other ranches rebuilt the catch lots at Hardscrabble at our own expense. USDA says they cannot promise that we will be reimbursed. We have to control cattle, protect stream banks, and should do some significant earth moving to create levies and shore up the channel at Hardscrabble. But we are constrained by more government bureaucracy, even at the local level.

We have lost animals and more will die as a result of this fire. Smoke inhalation will bring about dust pneumonia as we bring our cattle home this fall. The USDA limits claims to those deaths occurring within 30 days of the fire. That won't be enough for us, so we will suffer without help. Federal agency officials who have never seen a half million acres, let alone worked them day to

day, demand a level of documentation of lost fencing, animals and other structures that our family is not capable of without help. Assistance in documentation was requested and denied by the local office. FEMA recently rejected Nevada's requests for emergency assistance following the Martin and Sugar Loaf complex fires. So while hurricane victims get aid and access to low interest loans, ranchers in Nevada get nothing. I alert you to these issues not to whine, but rather to let you know that we are but one small family operation affected by wildfire this season. 9 more operations in Humboldt County and more in Lander and Elko counties were also hit hard. This nonsense is going to keep happening, and each year we are going to lose valuable businesses that help feed the local economy. Each year, more families and communities all over the west are going to be offered up as sacrificial lambs at the altar of rabid environmental lunacy and politically driven federal bureaucracies unless we act now while we have an administration dedicated to common sense problem solving.

Everyone has heard the saying that doing the same thing again and again and somehow expecting a different result is the very definition of insanity, and that is true. Please join my family, fellow Nevadans, ranchers and foresters to reform our broken system and return health and prosperity to the Great American West.

Save the Great American West

An eight point plan to reduce fire danger, restore our environment and save our way of life.

Did you know that the American West is currently being destroyed by wildfire at a greater rate than ever in recorded history? Rural communities, ranching families, and the Nation's food production are being put at risk because of disastrous decisions by federal land managers.

In response to the Martin fire, which burned over a half million acres across Northern Nevada, and destroyed their entire BLM grazing permit and over 6,200 acres of their private land, the Stewart family of Paradise Valley, NV make the following recommendations regarding grazing and federal land management reforms, so that no other ranching family or community will suffer like they have. Their ranch is Nevada's oldest family run operation, and their 154 year old business and way of life is threatened by the results of the fire; which, regardless of ignition source, was caused by five decades of disastrous federal land management.

1. Immediately restore all suspended AUMs on all grazing permits Nationwide. This includes permanently suspended AUMs. Our estimates are that this action would nearly double the number of animals eligible to graze the range and consume dangerous, excess fuels from the public lands. (Require federal agencies to give specific, proven science based reasons for any AUMs not eligible for this action, and require the agency to prove that their action is in best overall interest of the resource)
2. Allow foresters to log and remove dead and dying trees from our National forests. (Would reduce fire danger and slow the spread of pine beetle infestation)

3. Extend the term of each grazing permit from 10 to 20 years, thus allowing ranchers the surety to finance necessary range improvements such as fencing, water development, and additional livestock over more realistic and sustainable repayment periods.

4. Restructure every grazing permit, so that grazing is allowable 12 months out of each year, giving both ranchers and land managers an effective tool to reduce excess fuel loads in real-time. Make extended season, change of season or amount of use *triggers* mandatory when fuel loads exceed ten percent over normal maximum, or when producer has utilized less than 90% of allowable forage with normally permitted numbers during regular grazing season. Require local land managers to trigger out of season turn-outs whenever conditions pose a threat to overall range health. Give ranchers a local arbitration board made up of agency personnel and local producers to appeal any rejection of proposed out of season turn-outs.

5. Limit or eliminate NEPA reviews in areas where activity such as grazing or logging are already permitted. Categorize dangerous fuel reduction activity and development under emergency and public safety rather than general grazing or logging, thus eliminating most legal challenges to this necessary activity.

6. Level the playing field by amending the EQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE act to either limit its use and funds for already well-funded environmental groups, or allow ranchers, loggers and their respective communities the same access as the Environmental groups have to these funds. The current loop-hole in the law allows groups like the WWF, Sierra Club and Western Watersheds to use tax payer dollars to fund their unrelenting legal assault on the working families of the West through suits against federal land management agencies.

7. Require that every grazing and logging permit issued include a dangerous fuels reduction plan, and insure that every plan has mandatory triggers which federal land managers may not deviate from or contest.

8. Require federal agencies to allow permittees to develop and maintain water resources on permits where the permittee already owns water rights, or where a new development is in the best interests of the overall range and state law allows the development. Further, lift restrictions on use of supplemental minerals and attractants, water hauling and other products or measures which would better disperse livestock grazing and make better overall use of the range resources.

Our goal is proper range management that restores and maintains soil, plant and animal community health, reduces fire danger, and allows the rural west to prosper. As part of our suggested reforms, we acknowledge that most but not all livestock producers/grazers and loggers are quality operators. We accept the need for safeguards, rules, as well as warning systems that give every producer notice of improper action so that the actions may be discontinued or corrected. If these rules are not followed, we accept that these safeguards can and will be used to remove consistently irresponsible operators from the range.

For too long we have listened to the federal agencies tell us that they want to work with us, but the truth is, for many decades, we have been treated like the enemy, rather than an engaged partner. Most local agency personnel have good intentions, good hearts and good ideas, but they don't have the longevity or authority to change the system. Like it or not, the institutional bureaucracy that threatens industries, communities, and small businesses like ours is still very much alive and well at the BLM, USFS and USFWS.

The Washington D.C. swamp still needs to be drained at these agencies and we would like to think that our proposals could be the start of that clean up. We believe that this is an idea and a plan that President Trump can get behind. It is the only practical, environmentally friendly solution when real science and common sense lead the discussion.

A return to holistic grazing at effective levels all over the West will save our environment, grow jobs, benefit communities that rely on ranching and forestry, save precious lands and habitat, and restore sanity to federal land management.

Please, help us with this effort. Reducing wildfire in the West will save lives, habitat, homes and communities.

Our home, which is also Nevada's oldest family ranching operation, has been changed forever by this fire. The lands that we have so loved will never be restored to what they were in our lifetimes or perhaps ever. Even after 154 years in business, no mortgage and money in the bank, we truly do not know how we will operate next year.



This photo shows a dead Ninety-Six Ranch heifer outside of Hardscrabble pasture, July 6, 2018. She along with other livestock and countless wildlife of all



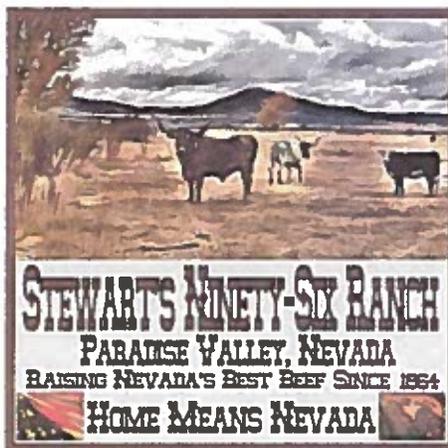
kinds were killed by the Martin fire.

Our campaign is self-funded and truly grass roots. We are moving forward with this effort because in plain terms, we don't want one more ranching family to suffer the way we have.

We want to keep our campaign simple, straightforward and free of political correctness. It's a big, but simple idea...restore sanity to federal land management and start by restoring grazing and forestry rights that have been suspended due to nothing but politics, bad science and bureaucratic bullshit.

Help us Save the Great American West. Log on today and lend your name to our campaign.
www.savethegreatamericanwest.com

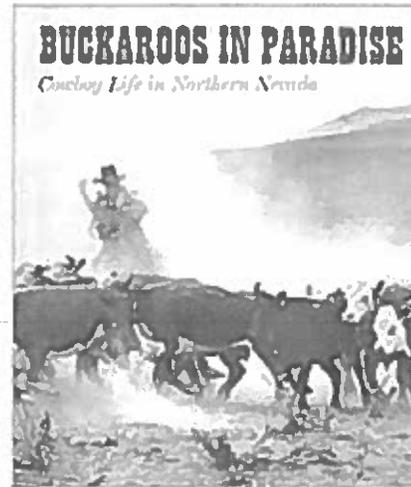
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Some Quick facts about the Ninety-Six Ranch

William Stock Farming Company, now commonly known as the Ninety-Six Ranch was Founded/Homesteaded 1864 by William Stock, a young German immigrant credited with being one of Paradise Valley, Nevada's first permanent settlers in 1863.

The Ninety-Six Ranch is Nevada's oldest family ranching operation and is currently managed by the founder's great-grandson and his family. They operate on more than 17,000 private acres in and around Paradise Valley, NV. Currently owner/operators are Fred W. Stewart, his wife Kris and daughter Patrice Stewart. Fred's mother, Marie also continues to live on the ranch.



United States Library of Congress and Smithsonian completed a program focused on the Ninety-Six Ranch entitled *Buckaroos in Paradise, Cowboy Life in Northern Nevada* between 1978 and 1981. It is widely considered the best documentary coverage of Great Basin ranch life ever compiled. The Stewart family, led by Leslie Stewart, worked directly with LOC and Smithsonian curators, contributed hundreds of rare artifacts as well as thousands of photos and the entire Leslie J Stewart film library to the LOC as a gift to the American people under the creative commons license. Leslie, a lifelong rancher, teacher and son of the Great Basin passed away in 2006. In 2017, LOC staff graciously completed digitizing his classic documentary films of ranch life in Northern Nevada into a high definition format and all are now available free of charge online at LOC. Leslie's granddaughter Patrice Stewart, represents the fifth generation of the family to live on and manage the ranch.



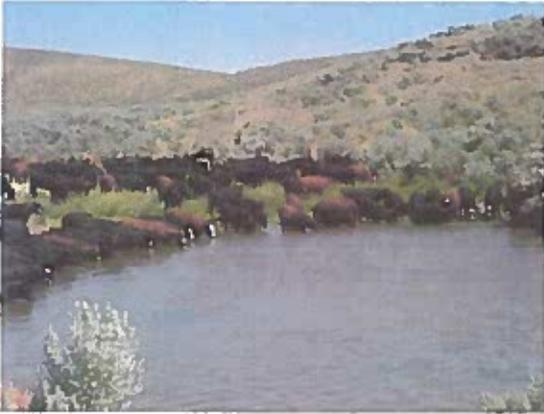
Here, while still a high school student, she discusses conservation before Governor's Sagebrush Ecosystem Forum. Her website and conservation plan can be seen at savethesagegrouse.org



Under the management of Fred and Kris Stewart, the Ninety-Six Ranch has developed and runs a high quality All-English commercial cow-calf herd numbering 750-1200 depending on weather, market and overall conditions. Through experience they have moderated the size of their maternal herd to thrive in the difficult high desert environment of Northern Nevada. The maternal base of their herd is Hereford built out of bulls from the Lilla Bell operation, also of Paradise Valley, Nevada. Bell is noted as being the first woman to graduate in animal science from Cal-Poly SLO, former president of the Polled Hereford Association and has devoted her life to raising Hereford cattle designed to thrive in difficult high desert environments like Northern Nevada. To this impressive base, Stewart's have added Shaw bred Red and Black Angus bulls. Their operation is all-natural, and their moderately sized, high quality calves have qualified for beef shipment to Japan and Korea, and are always included in both Certified Angus and Hereford branded programs.



Their 154 year old operation is celebrated as Nevada's only Sesquicentennial Ranch, and as a treasure within the State and the greater Great Basin region for its history and adherence to buckaroo traditions.



In the summer of 2018, much of the Ninety-Six Ranch range was destroyed in the Martin fire, currently the largest single fire in modern U.S. history. The fire took all of the William Stock BLM allotment as well as grazing lands permitted to 8 other Humboldt County ranching operations. Damage also spread through Lander and Elko Counties. Also destroyed was the Stewart's 6200 acre private range at Hardscrabble, noted as being one of the finest privately managed small German Brown fisheries in the nation and home to a historic 1920 stone cabin which was featured on the back cover of a LOC publication called **Buckaroos in Paradise, Cowboy life in Northern Nevada.**



Very sadly, after such a rich history, the family is unsure how they will operate next year. They plan to encourage Congress and the Trump administration to enact long overdue reforms to range and federal land management aimed at reducing wildfire risk, restoring the range and making sure that other ranching families like them do not suffer in the future.

Ours are the real faces, pictures and stories of wildfire devastation fueled by disastrous federal land management. The Stewart family