

## OPINION

# Ranchers should follow Koch's model

BY WILLIAM HOWARD

The last frontier in preserving America's natural resources may be in the hands of the ranchers who care for 932 million acres spread across the United States. Fortunately, there's growing evidence that good stewardship of these lands can go hand in hand with profitable operations.

The Wildlife Habitat Council — which for 15 years has been



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seeking to conserve and restore natural ecosystems for the benefit of humanity and the Earth's biological diversity — has focused on helping corporations manage their lands and protect those natural resources that serve as buffers around manufacturing plants, corporate headquarters and other facilities.

The council has identified the first of what we hope will be many more ranches that meet our certification standards. It is Beaverhead Ranch, which comprises more than 250,000 acres about an hour's drive west of Yellowstone National Park and

is owned by Matador Cattle, a subsidiary of Wichita-based Koch Industries.

While now supporting more than 8,000 head of cattle, the ranch provides calving grounds for hundreds of elk and is the seasonal range for 4,000 more. It also is home to whitetail and mule deer, antelope, moose, wolves, fox, black bears, mountain lions, bobcats and dozens of species of birds.

Given the economic realities that the ranching industry has faced over the past several decades, it is obviously not enough just to have abundant wildlife. As conservationists, council officials strongly believe that running an economically profitable ranch is compatible with good stewardship of natural resources, and Beaverhead Ranch proves that point.

Using market-based principles that underlie Koch Industries' management philosophy, Beaverhead Ranch has increased operational efficiency and long-term productivity while restoring and managing the existing natural resources. The ranch has increased its overall carrying capacity by 8 percent since 1991, while at the same time decreasing feed costs by 25 percent and achieving record calf crops.

Its efforts to protect wildlife are equally impressive. Working with federal and state agencies, the Beaverhead Ranch has helped restore the breeding waters of the threatened Westslope cutthroat trout by removing beavers and beaver dams from a portion of Bear Creek. Willows were replanted, and cattle access was limited to allow beaver-ravaged trees a chance to regenerate and stream banks to stabilize. The ranch has developed a grazing program that keeps cattle away from the duck- and goose-breeding grounds during the waterfowl reproductive seasons.

Our hope is that through the council's recognition of Beaverhead Ranch, there will be others who seek and earn certification of the good-stewardship systems they employ. Beaverhead Ranch serves as a model for other working ranches to integrate sound management of their natural resources into their daily operations, so that they also can play a growing role in preserving our wildlife habitat while remaining financially able to make that commitment.

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