



Restoring Rangelands, Restoring Trust: Factors Influencing Citizen Acceptance of Managed Change

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Many current scientific and management initiatives have a goal of restoring degraded rangelands. Restoration activities necessarily must have an intended outcome, with plans designed to achieve a change in environmental condition that meets desired objectives. It is not clear how much thought goes into the setting of those objectives: Must they always re-establish ecological properties believed to have occurred prior to alterations initiated by non-indigenous humans, or should they also account for other socially desirable outcomes? As an example of the latter, many fuels management projects are billed as restoration although the primary desired outcome is a landscape that poses reduced wildfire risk even if that condition conditions never actually existed in the past. Rangeland restoration is a form of managed change, different in spirit from other changes such as those intended to enhance economic gain, but not so different from the perspective of the society that supposedly benefits. Accordingly this paper will present results of research on citizen perceptions of managed change that can be characterized as rangeland restoration. The studies suggest that public acceptance of an altered condition depends on a variety of contextual factors including the practices used to achieve change; the purposes for which change is induced; the target species to be restored and removed; regional factors such as past histories of disturbance and culturally important landscapes; the ways in which objectives are communicated to citizens; and perhaps most importantly the degree to which citizens trust the entity that will be implementing the change.

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