



# Rangelands West Partnership

This project improved and expanded the Rangelands West Web portal, providing cutting-edge, science-based information on local, national, and global rangeland ecology and management issues to increase the economic, environmental, and human health benefits of rangeland management.

## Who cares and why?

Rangelands cover 70% of the land area of the 11 western states and provide many ecological services, including forage production, wildlife habitat, watersheds, and recreation. Rangelands managed by federal and state agencies are commonly used by livestock operators as a critical part of ranch systems. Managing and conserving these lands is hindered by the limited ability of state land-grant universities (LGUs) to provide quality information and support through the Internet. This requires collaboration among subject, information, and technology experts. The Rangelands West Partnership has brought together rangeland specialists and agricultural and natural resource librarians from 19 western LGUs to tackle this challenge. By collecting, creating, evaluating, and organizing relevant data, information, and learning materials, the Partnership provides researchers, educators, and public and private land managers with electronic access to the full scope of research and educational information on rangeland ecology, management, and conservation.



Covering 70% of the land area, rangelands are the most extensive class of lands in the western states. Map courtesy of [rangelandswest.org](http://rangelandswest.org).

## What has the project done so far?

For over 12 years, a team at the University of Arizona (UA), made up of rangeland scientists, librarians/information specialists, and IT experts, has been creating a Web portal of rangeland management resources. This led to the formation of the Partnership and the Rangelands West portal (<http://rangelandswest.org>). The current portal contains a searchable database of around 1,500 publications and links to news on hot issues, journal articles from the Society for Range Management (SRM), and



Dr. Mitch McClaran shows WERA-1008 members around a 50,000 acre site where over 100 scientists study southwestern agricultural rangeland sustainability (left). Rangelands provide livestock forage, wildlife habitat, and watersheds that help filter drinking water (right, USDA photo).

the website for each of the 19 Partnership states. In 2005, the Partnership became a Multistate Research Project and established and adopted a governing and operating structure. The Partnership has successfully sought and received funding to support project activities, including stakeholder surveys and training sessions for Web portal users. In addition, the Partnership received a USDA-NIFA International Science and Education grant in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization that has supported a full redesign and expansion of the portal based on the latest technological advances. The Partnership also gained funding from the UA Libraries' Strategic Plan funds to complete a needs assessment and to develop a business plan. To increase awareness of the Web portal, the Partnership has continued to collaborate with the SRM and has held two symposia at their annual meetings. The Partnership continues to identify new partners to keep the portal up-to-date and relevant. Currently, agreements are being negotiated with rangeland societies and universities in Australia, southern Africa, and Mexico.

## Impact Statements

**T**rained more than 40 ranchers and public land managers as part of a USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education professional development grant, better equipping them to utilize online tools for land management decisions.

**S**urveyed agriculture and natural resource advisors on critical sustainable rangeland management issues that contributed to the development of the hot topics section of the Rangelands West portal.

**L**ed the "Sustainable Rangeland Management—On the Cutting Edge" workshop for 32 Agriculture and natural resource advisors, exploring issues across the West, including vegetation monitoring programs and invasive species management.

**M**aintained Rangelands West portal and collected usage statistics on site visitations, which numbered hundreds of thousands per year.

**C**onducted an online survey of 196 participants and focus groups sessions with 24 participants on Rangeland Management Information Needs and Preferences. The findings directed the third phase portal redesign, which included automatic and frequent content updates, more relevant search results, full-text repositories of documents and images, local information resources, and networking tools.

**P**resented the first version of the Global Rangelands/Rangelands West portal at a symposium, gaining valuable feedback on how to simplify the interface.

## What research is needed?

To support efforts to expand the focus of the portal to provide information on rangelands on a global basis, the Partnership is in the process of establishing formal agreements with organizations in Australia, Mexico, and South Africa. In addition, the new Global Rangelands/Rangelands West database repository, which already contains more than 10,000 resources, will be launched in the fall of 2011. Full site usage analytics will be tracked and provided in subsequent WERA-1008 reports.

## Want to know more?

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