

Executive Summary

The Black Kettle, Kiowa and Rita Blanca National Grasslands (NGs) comprise about 271,000 acres located in three states and nine counties. The Black Kettle National Grassland (NG) is located in Oklahoma and Texas and totals about 32,000 acres. The Kiowa NG is located in northeastern New Mexico and totals about 143,000 acres. The Rita Blanca NG is located in portions of Texas and Oklahoma and totals about 93,000 acres. The history of the grasslands is rooted in the 1889 land rush in which settlers could homestead 160 acres or quarter sections of “unclaimed lands.” The result was an abundance of 160 acre farms that were planted and plowed, often for wheat and corn, during what was a period of unusually wet weather. Substantial numbers of landowners vacated their parcels when a period of drought created the “dustbowl.” Several legislative mandates including the National Industrial Act of 1933 and the Emergency Relief Appropriations Act of 1935 allowed for the purchase and reclamation of these lands. The grasslands were thus assembled over time as a collection of parcels for reclamation. Some parcels were assembled into contiguous blocks or units, but many were dispersed throughout the counties in which these grasslands exist.

Three focus groups plus additional individual interviews were conducted for the Black Kettle, Kiowa and Rita Blanca NGs. One group was held in Reydon, Oklahoma near Cheyenne for the Black Kettle NG and the other two groups were held in Clayton, New Mexico for the Kiowa and Rita Blanca NGs. A Discussion Guide (included in appendix) was used as the basis for eliciting responses regarding the issues, concerns, values, and beliefs of participants about the grasslands as well as discussant assessments of management concerns. The guide topics were a basis to discuss how participants perceive issues rather than to elicit information in predetermined response categories.

Participants identify the Black Kettle NG as “government land” composed of “units” that are numbered parcels. The location and individual character of these parcels is generally known to local residents. Participants stress a generally utilitarian view of the characteristics of the landscape: it has aesthetic and amenity values, but its practical values are in how it can be used by local residents and visitors. The practical values identified by participants include: the social value of supporting local ranchers who could not continue their operations without grazing permits; ecological and wildlife values, especially in the creation of habitat for game such as turkey, quail, and deer; recreation value for local and non-local hunters; and the economic benefits of oil and gas development. Participants expressed concern about the potential for oil and gas development to infringe on wildlife habitat; and, support for excluding off-highway vehicle activity on the Black Kettle NG. Otherwise, participants suggest their management priorities are to address noxious weeds, acquire full market value for use of Black Kettle NG resources, and continued attention to creating wildlife habitat. Participants also expressed support for existing fire policy and the status quo for grazing levels.

Participants in the Kiowa National NG and Rita Blanca NG groups characterize these lands from one of three perspectives. One view describes the landscape as having the highest value as grazing lands; a second perspective views the grasslands as having value as a “safe haven” and unique habitat for wildlife; and, the third point of view describes the grasslands as “reclaimed” government land. Participants describe these lands as having the following values: social benefits such as providing the opportunity for ranchers to continue a valued lifestyle; habitat and wildlife values; economic benefits associated with grazing and tourism; conservation values that stress the need to keep the grasslands healthy; recreation and aesthetic values that benefit local residents as well as visitors; and multiple use values and beliefs that emphasize developing wildlife habitat as

well as grazing. Participants expressed beliefs that special designations may restrict the range of possible uses; and, concerns that a special designation might attract more visitors and thereby undermine the overall quality of the resource being considered for special designation.

Participants indicate the following management priorities: develop diversity in the grasslands ecosystem to support wildlife and grazing; maintain the use of fire as a management tool; consider support for local custom and culture in management decisions; anticipate the potential effects of increased demand on resources from population growth; manage the potential harmful effects of off-highway vehicle (OHV) use; control prairie dogs; and, continue efforts to address invasive species such as salt cedar.

In general, participants praised local USDA Forest Service staff for the quality of working relationships with a range of community interest groups. There is a desire to see more USDA Forest Service staff in the field and not behind desks; a wider range of opportunities to provide public input; attention to fairness in soliciting expert opinions; and, consideration of local knowledge and expertise in making management decisions.

The National Grasslands

The Cibola National Forest (NF) administers three national grasslands located in northeastern New Mexico, western Oklahoma, and the Texas panhandle. The Kiowa and Rita Blanca National Grasslands (NGs) are administered by a single office in Clayton, New Mexico and the Black Kettle and McClellan Creek NGs are administered by an office in Cheyenne, Oklahoma. The maps on the following pages identify the locations of these grasslands in relationship to the surrounding states and counties.

Table 1: Region 3: National Grasslands Land Areas

National Grassland	Total Acres	USFS Acres	Other Acres
Black Kettle	33,113	31,286	1,827
Kiowa	143,497	136,417	7,080
McClellan Creek	1,449	1,449	0
Rita Blanca	93,229	92,989	240
Total	271,288	262,141	9,147

Source: U. S. Forest Service website http://www.fs.fed.us/land/staff/lar/LAR04/table3_r3.htm

The history of the grasslands is rooted in the 1889 land rush in which settlers could homestead 160 acres or quarter sections of “unclaimed lands.” The result was an abundance of 160 acre farms that were planted and plowed, often for wheat and corn, during what was a period of unusually wet weather. Drought then replaced the wet years. Soil plowed for corn and wheat did not have the holding power they did during the wet years. A prolonged drought accompanied by high winds began to take a toll on grasslands turned to farmlands:

The men in the fields looked up at the clouds and sniffed at them and held wet fingers up to sense the wind. And the horses were nervous while the clouds were up. ... A gentle wind followed the rain clouds ... a wind that softly clashed the drying corn. A day went by and the wind increased, steadily unbroken by gusts. The dust from the roads fluffed up and spread out and fell on the weeds beside the fields, and fell into the fields a little way. Now the wind grew strong and hard and it worked at the rain crust in the corn fields. Little by little the sky was darkened by the mixing dust, and the wind felt over the earth loosened the dust and carried it away (Steinbeck 1974).

Dry winds displaced soils creating the “dust bowls” that turned farms into what seemed like wastelands. Many of the farmers moved west seeking newer opportunities or just fleeing the disaster. Many left their lands behind, never looking back as they fled west.



These grasslands originated from this 1930’s dust-bowl period when winds displaced earth, plants, and people and created what some suggest is one of the worst environmental disasters in American history (Worster 2004). Large unoccupied tracts of land

were left behind, often with significant damage to the soils and grasslands that previously characterized this landscape.

Several legislative mandates including the National Industrial Act of 1933 and the Emergency Relief Appropriations Act of 1935 allowed for the purchase and reclamation of these lands. The grasslands were thus assembled over time as a collection of parcels for reclamation. Some parcels were assembled into contiguous blocks or units, but many were dispersed throughout the counties in which these grasslands exist. The Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act transferred administration of these lands to the Department of Agriculture in 1937. In 1960, 19 national grasslands were created for administration by the USDA Forest Service. The grasslands addressed by this report were among these newly created national grasslands.

The Black Kettle, McClellan Creek, Kiowa, and Rita Blanca NGs are islands of “government land” surrounded by private landowners, although there are some larger tracts of contiguous grasslands. The parcels are numbered, usually according to the date of acquisition. The McClellan Creek and Black Kettle NGs have about 114 different parcels, including the Marvin Lake parcel near Canadian, Texas. The Rita Blanca NGs has about 144 labeled parcels and the Kiowa NG has about 145 identified parcels.

Although the social environment of these three grasslands is similar, there are important and distinct differences that require a separate presentation of the social environment and the values and belief issues associated with each one. Consequently, this document presents findings regarding the Kiowa and Rita Blanca NGs separately from the Black Kettle NG after a brief review of the focus group process.

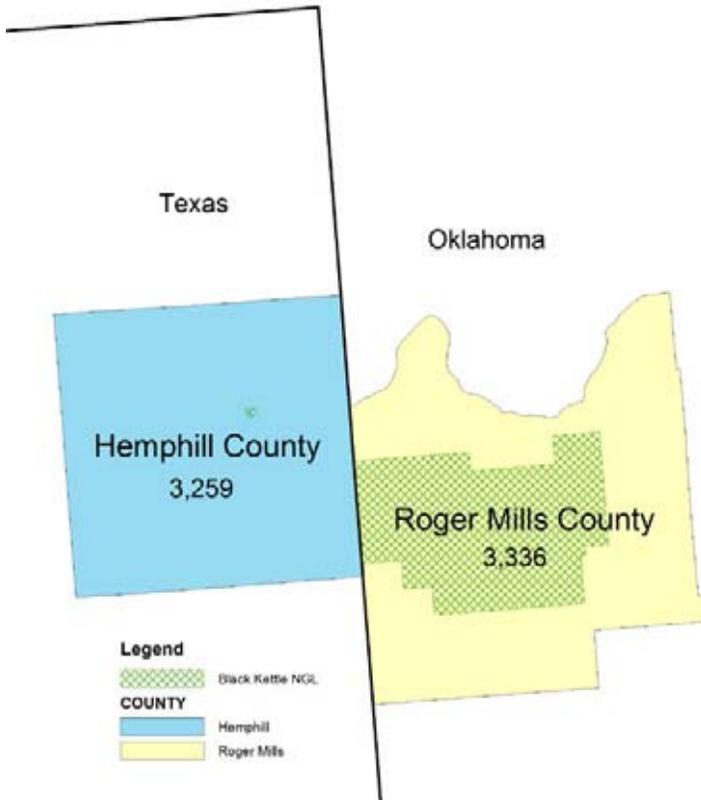


Figure 1. Black Kettle National Grassland Counties

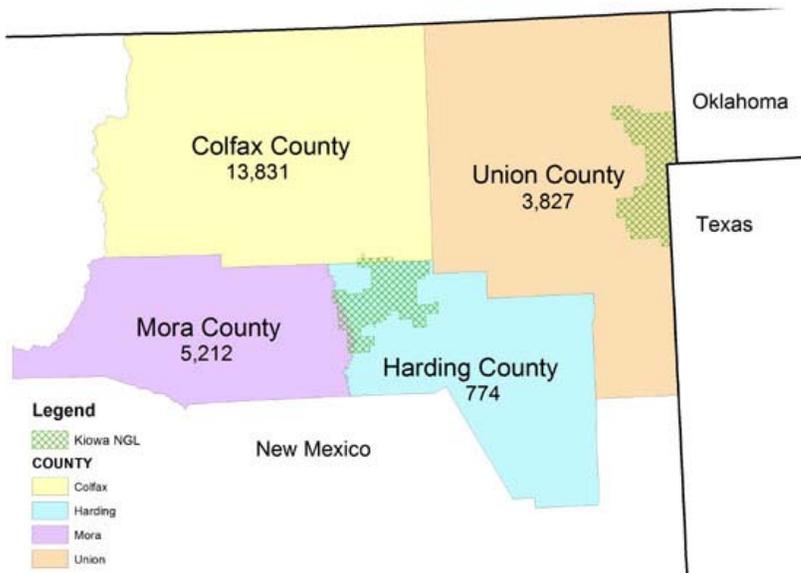


Figure 2. Kiowa National Grassland Counties

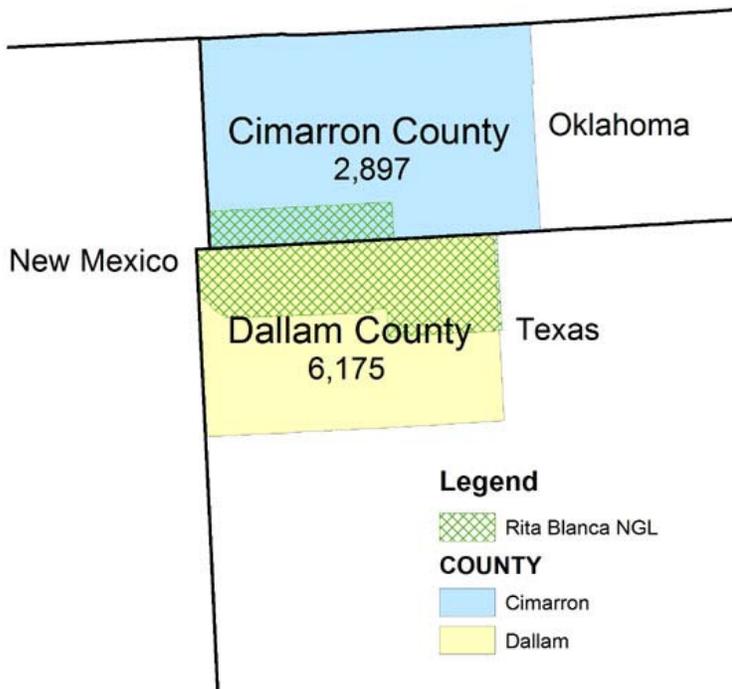


Figure 3. Rita Blanca National Grassland Counties



Figure 4. McClellan Creek National Grassland Counties

Data Collection: Focus Groups and Participation

Three focus groups plus additional individual interviews were conducted for these three grasslands. One group was held in Reydon, Oklahoma near Cheyenne for the Black Kettle NG and the other two groups were held in Clayton, New Mexico. The Reydon group was attended by three persons: a wildlife expert; a hunting guide and long term resident; and a rancher. Additional interviews were conducted with local business persons and ranchers. One of the groups conducted in Clayton was attended by five individuals living near the Kiowa NG and the other group consisted of six persons living near the Rita Blanca NG. Ranching and local community interests as well as those with wildlife concerns composed these groups. Each group meeting had a duration of about 2 hours.

A Discussion Guide (included in appendix) was used as the basis for eliciting responses regarding the issues, concerns, values, and beliefs of participants about the grasslands as well as discussant assessments of management concerns. The guide topics were a basis to discuss how participants perceive issues rather than to elicit information in predetermined response categories. This approach is a discovery process to understand the issues from a local perspective. Consequently, the guide outlined a general area for discussion, but the interests and issues of concern to participants structured the information discussed. The guide was sent to participants before the sessions so participants would be aware of the general areas of interest for the focus groups.

The focus group sessions were recorded to ensure access to the most detailed information for analysis. Notes were also taken during the groups and key areas of interest were briefly identified as well as the time location within the audio recording. This facilitated subsequent access to the information. The recordings were subsequently coded using a combination of pre-defined and emergent codes. The pre-defined codes correspond to the topic areas in the discussion guide. The emergent codes were based on topics volunteered by participants. Themes in the topic and emergent codes were identified and participant statements identified to illustrate particular themes and issues. The results of this approach (Strauss 1987; Strauss and Corbin 1998; Dey 1993) are presented in the following sections.

Black Kettle National Grassland

The majority of the Black Kettle NG are located in Roger Mills County, Oklahoma. The McClellan Creek NG is located in Gray County, Texas. Roger Mills County has an estimated 2004 population of about 3,259 and shows a slight five percent decline from the 2000 Census population of 3,436.¹ The largest community in Roger Mills County is Cheyenne with a population of less than 800 persons. Gray County, Texas has an estimated 2004 population of about 21,409, a decline of about six percent from the 2000 Census population of 22,744. This information is only a brief summary of some relevant demographic data that assists in understanding the context of the values and beliefs topics discussed in this document. The largest community in Gray County, Texas is Pampa with a total Census 2000 population of about 19,000.

The Black Kettle NG as well as the other grasslands addressed in this document is part of a socioeconomic and cultural environment. To assess the connections influencing values, attitudes, and beliefs about the grasslands, it is useful to have an overview of demographic characteristics as presented in the following table. This information is only a brief summary to provide some context for this discussion. Other work is developing a more detailed socioeconomic profile to provide a broader context for the results presented in this document²

¹ Table 1: Annual Estimates of the Population for Counties of Oklahoma: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2004 (CO-EST2004-01-40) Source: Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau. Release Date: April 14, 2005

² The University of New Mexico Bureau of Business and Economic Research is conducting this work.

Table 2: Black Kettle National Grassland

People QuickFacts	Black Kettle NGL			
	Roger Mills County, OK	Hemphill County, TX	Oklahoma	Texas
2003 Population Estimate	3,201	3,333	3,511,532	22,118,509
Percent Change 2000 - 2003	-6.8%	-0.5%	1.8%	6.1%
Population, 2000	3,436	3,351	3,450,654	20,851,820
Population, percent change, 1990 to 2000	-17.1%	-9.9%	9.7%	22.8%
Persons under 18 years old, percent, 2000	23.8%	28.0%	25.9%	28.2%
Persons 65 years old and over, percent, 2000	18.7%	14.7%	13.2%	9.9%
White persons, percent, 2000	91.8%	87.6%	76.2%	71.0%
Black or African American persons, percent, 2000	0.3%	1.6%	7.6%	11.5%
American Indian and Alaska Native persons, percent, 2000	5.5%	0.7%	7.9%	0.6%
White persons, not of Hispanic/Latino origin, percent, 2000	90.2%	81.2%	74.1%	52.4%
Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin, percent, 2000	2.6%	15.6%	5.2%	32.0%
Language other than English spoken at home, pct age 5+, 2000	3.1%	13.3%	7.4%	31.2%
Median household income, 1999	\$30,078	\$35,456	\$33,400	\$39,927
Per capita money income, 1999	\$16,821	\$16,929	\$17,646	\$19,617
Persons below poverty, percent, 1999	16.3%	12.6%	14.7%	15.4%
Land area, 2000 (square miles)	1,142	910	68,667	261,797
Persons per square mile, 2000	3	3.7	50.3	79.6
Agriculture				
Number of Farms 1997 to 2002 % Change	-4.0%	-5.5%	-0.9%	0.3%
Acreage in farms 1997 to 2002 % Change	9.9%	-12.5%	-1.2%	-3.0%
Average size of farm 1997 to 2002 % Change	14.5%	-7.4%	-0.2%	-3.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2002 People Quickfacts and U.S.D.A. 2002 Census of Agriculture

Social Environment

Lifestyles in this region of Oklahoma and Texas are focused around agriculture and especially ranching. Over 90 percent of the approximately 1,142 square miles of the county is in farms and ranches (Census of Agriculture 2002). Ranches and other agricultural operations are also increasing in size showing a trend common in the west for the aggregation of land by local or absentee landowners. For example, in Roger Mills County the total number of farms and ranches decreased about four percent between 1997 and 2002 but the average size of agricultural operations increased about fourteen percent (2002 Census of Agriculture).

Oil and gas production provides an additional source of income for some landowners in both Gray and Roger Mills counties. Roger Mills County sits atop the Anadarko Basin, a rich source of natural gas that boomed during the late 1970's and early 1980s. The landscape in this region is dotted with wells and pipelines indicating the prevalence of oil and gas operations providing landowners with another source of income. One project participant observed,

Without those natural gas revenues, some ranchers here would be less than marginal. They need those revenues to keep their operations going. Other folks here have become very well-off from those revenues. It tends to smooth things out in terms of how people think about living here.³

There are also some wells on the national grasslands that also provide revenues to the federal government. Under provisions of the 1935 Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act, some of these royalty payments are returned to the states and counties.



Hunting is also an important element of local lifestyles and economics. The Rio Grande Turkey, several species of quail, deer, waterfowl, and other game are hunted by local hunters as well as visitors from metropolitan areas such as Oklahoma City and out-of-state. The Rio Grande Turkey is an important attraction for non-local and other out-of-state hunters who specialize in hunting wild turkeys. Local motels, grocery and convenience stores, as well as hunting guides and other businesses benefit from the hunting attractions in the region. Some ranchers and farmers also sell trespass fees or day hunts and some may also lease their lands for hunting. This also provides an additional source of revenue for some agriculturalists in the region.

³ The quoted statements are edited to remove utterances such as “ah” and other items not essential to the meaning of the statement. The identified statements are thus not technically an “exact” quote; but, they indicate the essential meaning expressed by project participants.

The grasslands are a visible part of the landscape as well as the lifestyles and values of residents of this region. The 112 units of the grasslands within Roger Mills County are dispersed throughout the counties resulting in an interface with multiple private landowners as well as some other public landowners. For example, just south and east of Cheyenne are three units which are used by local residents for day walks. The USDA Forest Service also constructed the Cheyenne Nature Walk on one of the units; and, this unit is used by local schools for educational purposes. Four other units (Black Kettle Recreation Area, Spring Creek Lake, Skipout Lake, and Croton Creek Wildlife Viewing Area) contain lakes that are popular fishing, camping, and recreation sites. One resident observed that in the past, these lakes were used for water skiing, which became an important Sunday socializing opportunity for Cheyenne area residents. The grasslands also provide habitat for wildlife, grass for grazing, and access to public lands, which are relatively scarce in this region of Oklahoma.

Results: The Black Kettle National Grasslands

“Anyone can love the mountains, but it takes a soul to love the prairie.”⁴

American culture has produced prodigious literature, art, and poetry about the west and its resources, often emphasizing its mountains and rivers. However, the prairies and grasslands of the west have their own admirers who describe the beauty of long vistas full of big and little blue stem, buffalo grass, and sweetgrass. The grasslands also evoke images of cowboys riding the “high lonesome” to gather and herd cows in the traditions of the American west. These grasslands are a part of these traditions, which influence public assessments of these lands as described in the following summary of themes from the focus group discussions conducted in Reydon.

Landscape Character and Instrumental Resource Values

The Black Kettle NG is generally identified as “government land” or “federal land.” Participants describe this as a landscape that has changed since the turn of the century:

My Granddad came here in 1909. He talked about this place as belly deep in grass. There used to be running water through Sweetwater Draw and there isn't now. There didn't use to be as many trees as there are now too. I think they had more wild fires then than they do now.

The grasslands are also understood as part of the history and development of this region; and, the grasslands are also perceived as integral to the contemporary setting of adjacent communities:

It has been here long enough ... Lots of things are built up around it. Nobody has seen it come in and setup. ... There have been some changes, but it has been slow progress. .. It is just kind of here, it is built in.

A participant described his view about the contemporary grasslands as a landscape different than popular conceptions of a flat prairie:

You read these guide books and they describe the prairie as just flat lands of grass. Maybe it is that way some of the way between here and Amarillo, but it is just not flat ground here. It is

⁴ This saying was offered by a grasslands resident. It is attributed to several mostly unknown persons such as “old Nebraska sod buster saying.”

rolling hills and gullies and river bottoms and not just flat lands. That is part of what makes it interesting to me, the ups and downs of the grasslands.

Rather than “one block of land” that is flat prairie, the grasslands are perceived as diverse “units” that, in total, are a reasonable size. One participant noted the grasslands are “not so big they (the USDA Forest Service) cannot control it.” Even though there are multiple and diverse units, no one block of grasslands is so large that local managers are unaware of how it is being used. Furthermore, the Black Kettle NG has signage identifying the various units: “It is hard to get on it Black Kettle NG and not know it.”

Each “unit” is perceived to have particular characteristics and features. Land forms, water features, vegetation, soil types, and the abundance of wildlife are among the important attributes. Those units that contain water are especially valued because: “This country doesn’t have much water.” Those units with water also attract wildlife:

Those units with water on them, like those by the Washita, the good thing about them is that the game has to come to them. You can just sit there and see it all. ... By having that water source there it tends to be more productive, more gamey. You see those deer leaving the water there ... and it is just satisfying.

However, trees, including “locust” and cedars, are not especially valued since they are assessed as invasive species in this environment. Furthermore, there appears to be a preference for a landscape that is more open and less covered by trees. As one participant noted, “Trees can get to be kind of a problem when they are too thick. ... We like it a bit more open than that.”

Particular units are valued for other reasons. Some are described as “gamey” because they provide a mixture of water, cover, and food sources for birds, deer, and other wildlife. Other units have “good browse” that provides high quality forage for wildlife as well as cattle. The presence of wildlife appears to indicate the health and value of a unit. For example,

You just walk up and down that old river and see all kinds of wildlife. I went down there and just sit down and you see quail running through there and ... all kinds of wildlife. It is all there.

Other units are described as containing a mixture of features that constitute an “interesting” and aesthetically pleasing or “satisfying” landscape. For example, one participant noted the “enjoyment” he received from viewing the changes in land forms and soil types while driving from one unit to another.

Despite any aesthetic or other “interesting” landscape characteristics or features, the dominant perception expressed by project participants is the practical purposes and uses of grasslands resources. Bluestem and other grasses are forage. Water creates habitat for wildlife. Some combinations of landforms and vegetation create a “gamey” unit. Others have value for oil and gas production. These assessments directly express a predominately utilitarian assessment for the use of grassland resources. This is not to suggest there are no aesthetic or existence values associated with the grasslands, but these appear to be subordinate to instrumental assessments of the grasslands and its resource. As one participant suggested,

If you are looking for something else other than hunting, grazing, and recreation on the Black Kettle grasslands, that is it. There is not much else there. If there was something else out there I am sure somebody would have thought of it by now. There is just not that much out there.

Social Values

One noteworthy social value of the Black Kettle National Grasslands is the contribution it makes to sustain the rural lifestyle of community residents, and especially ranchers. The grasslands provide communities in Roger Mills County with open space, recreational opportunities, and there are economic benefits that improve the overall quality of life in the county and also assist a variety of residents to continue living in these communities. The following statement expresses the quality of life residents have and desire in these rural communities:

A lot of people who live here choose to be here because there is not a lot going on People tend to take this county to heart more than what you would in Oklahoma City or even in rural areas in other parts of the state. ... Our backyards are big here as compared to over yonder. ... Out here our backyards stretch a long ways

Participants make a direct connection between the presence of the grasslands and the “big backyards” on their communities.

The other component of the social value of the grasslands specifically concerns the benefit to ranchers who graze on these public lands. Participants acknowledge the limitations of 160 acre parcels to make a living in the cattle business. Some perceive that without access to public lands grazing, smaller family ranching operations will sell out to “corporate” ranchers who may not reside in the community. Participants suggest these “absentee ranchers” may not have the same rural values and sense of land stewardship as local residents. This is evaluated as having adverse benefits for the future of these communities. Consequently, access to affordable grazing is more than an economic benefit: It contributes to maintaining a valued lifestyle that is perceived to benefit a range of community residents.

Ecological Values

The data contain three themes about ecological values associated with the Black Kettle NG. First, the grasslands are perceived as a “natural” habitat that is consistent with the ecological history of this region. This habitat is short and mixed grass prairie that was once forage for buffalo, deer, and other ungulates that inhabited the region’s prairies. The contemporary status of these lands as a “government” grassland is perceived to demonstrate the coexistence of complimentary uses such as cattle grazing, wildlife habitat, as well as oil and gas production. These ecological conditions are assessed as “worth saving.” Participants cited community resistance to attempts to return the Black Kettle NG to private ownership as exemplifying local assessments of these lands as worth preserving. These were not the only reasons cited for opposition to these efforts, but the ecological value of these lands as prairie was noted. The second theme about ecological value concerns the protective value against future ecological disasters such as occurred during the dust bowl years. One participant described this value as follows:

You have to understand the soil conditions around here. It is sandy. It is part of what caused the problems in the dust bowl days when people didn’t understand the land and they didn’t use it the right way. My granddad talked about how there didn’t use to be wildlife life here during those days, and look at it now with all the quail and turkey and other game there. ... I also think we need to keep the grasslands because we need the protection for the future. It is kind of a safety valve against a future dust bowl. This land can be marginal if there is another big drought. ... if the government didn’t have those lands, then we just don’t know what might be done with them.

So, I think it is healthy for the community and healthy for the environment because they (USFS) take pretty good care of it. They don't let it get over grazed. They rotate the cows and don't let things get out of hand.

The history of the dust bowl disaster caused by uses that did not fit the soil and ecological conditions of this region is thus a reminder of the value of having lands in their “natural” condition. However, underlying this perception is that these natural conditions are ones that require active management by the Forest Service in the form of controlled burns and facilitating grazing of the grasslands.

A third theme suggests there is unique habitat created by some prairie grasses and shinnery oak (*Quercus havardii* Rydb.). Some participants, especially those with hunting interests, noted that shinnery oak does not have a wide ecological distribution and its presence in the Black Kettle NG is an asset that supports wildlife production. One participant noted that,

Shinnery oak is one of those plants to just love to hate.

But, there was also recognition that because of its limited distribution it has ecological value.

The Value of Wildlife

Throughout the statements by ranchers, business persons, and other interested parties there is a strong theme of “wildlife” as a valued asset on the Black Kettle National Grasslands. Some of this value is associated with an instrumental orientation to natural resources that identifies wildlife as an asset for hunting or attracting tourists. However, the prevalence of this theme of wildlife in the information provided by participants suggests that the existence of wildlife such as deer, quail, and turkeys also adds to the quality of life in this region. For example, when residents spoke about favorite or special places, wildlife was often noted as a characteristic of those locations. For example, one rancher provided a tour of his 400 acre property and commented,

This is my favorite place on the entire ranch because of the wildlife that is here. I just like to be here and see it.

Similarly, other participants use wildlife as an indicator of the health of the environment, contrasting the contemporary abundance of wildlife with scarcity during the dust bowl times. That is, wildlife appears to be one of the assets of the grasslands that is a fundamental value, although it may have strong instrumental overtones.

Recreation Values

The lakes, hiking trails, grasslands, and open spaces of the Black Kettle NG are perceived as local recreation resources. There is some local hunting for quail, deer, turkey, and other species inhabiting the grasslands. For example,



I lease a piece of land from a fellow for hunting. But, sometimes I like to hunt the government land. There is some real good turkey hunting there and the quail can be thick. It is nice to have another place to go. ... Sometimes I see other people out there, but you can get away from them pretty easy. ... Most people probably hunt on their own land, but if you don't have much then the grasslands are always there.

There is some use for hiking, especially among Cheyenne residents who are nearby to several units south and east of the town. However, a strong theme in the information collected for this project is that out of area users may get the most recreational value from grasslands. For example, residents report that fishermen and boaters from Pampa, Texas (about 90 miles distant) use the lakes and hunters from Oklahoma City and elsewhere are frequent grassland users.

Although there is a strong theme of recreational use by area persons and instrumental uses by local residents, there are indications of some local use for hiking, wildlife viewing, and similar activities. For example, one Cheyenne resident observed:

What's my favorite place here? ... Well, I would have to say there is a spot just out of town, not too far a distance and there is a little rise and you can look off and see a valley and enjoy a view into the distance. I like that. There is some high country to walk in and some canyon bottom too that is fine walking country. But, I guess I like those spots where you get a view, where you can see the sky.

These comments suggest residents value the recreational opportunities of the grasslands, yet the strongest assessment is the use of the grasslands by local persons for more practical purposes:

If you see local people out on the government land they are usually checking their cattle, repairing a fence, or hunting. They aren't hiking. ... There is some local recreational use, but it is primarily the out of area people using it.

Economic Values

The grasslands also provide an economic opportunity for local residents in at least four ways: (1) there are direct benefits to communities from royalty payments from oil and gas development on the grasslands; (2) the grasslands provide forage for ranchers with grazing permits; (3) habitat for game attracts out of area hunters; and (4) the open space may have future potential to attract more tourists. In an economic environment of limited opportunities, the grasslands are thus understood as an important local resource. For example,

You see a little of a resource out here and you better capitalize on it because there is not much out here. And this (the grasslands) is one of the few things we have out here that we can capitalize on because the habitat is here. It is a natural thing ...

Oil and gas development is perceived as having direct local benefits though royalty payments received under provisions of the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act. Participants recognize these funds assist local schools and the maintenance of county roads. Although there is some ambivalence about the total amount of land in oil and gas production, there is overall support for this type of use:

One of the biggest benefits we get from the grasslands is the oil and grass revenues. There is some (benefit) that goes to the ranchers and some from turkey and quail hunting, but the biggest

benefit is oil and gas. Now, there are some who say we are losing grazing and turkey habitat because of it and maybe we should look at that a little more, but it is a help to the county.

There also is an assessment by some participants that “tighter” federal regulations result in fewer problems with oil and gas development on public lands than on private lands. These more stringent regulations are perceived as a buffer than can ensure oil and gas development is not harmful.

Hunting on the grasslands is perceived as an important economic benefit for county residents. Deer, quail, and turkey are among the primary species sought by hunters, but wild turkey and quail are especially important because they attract non-local hunters who spend money in motels, feed stores, convenience stores, and other local businesses. The Rio Grande turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo intermedia*) is a particular attraction for non-resident hunters:

People come here to hunt the Rio Grande Turkey. The hunters come here for the “Grand Slam.” The hunters are going around the country trying to harvest all the sub-species of turkeys... And, we have some of the best Rio Grande hunting in Oklahoma. This is probably as good as it gets and definitely on public land. In other words, this Forest Service just happens to be situated in some pretty prime Rio Grande Turkey habitat. That is why we get people ... coming here from every part of the country.

The Black Kettle NG is also identified as important habitat for quail:

For the most part, the Black Kettle is better for quail than most private lands, unless guys are grooming (their lands) for the birds. The Black Kettle has so much shinnery (shinnery oak) and they burn (it). They take real good care of it. They are doing things pretty well right for the habitat.

There is some overflow of hunters to private lands where some owners offer ‘sell hunts’ to out-of-area hunters. Those who may not be successful on public land hunts may also hire guides or pay trespass fees to hunt on private land for other hunting opportunities. However, the attraction of hunters to the public grasslands is perceived to be among the most important economic benefits to local communities:

When the hunters come in, then the motels get busy, and he buys from the hardware store, and they get busy, and the motels and the feed store also get busy. In hunting season things pick up and you can almost see the dollars circulating ... and, it is mostly from the hunters going to public lands.

The grass lands are also an asset that draws out-of-area residents who also desire the benefits of open space:

People come out here an hunt on this Black Kettle deal to get away from a lot of this city living. They get out here and kind of gain their senses a little bit. We had some guys here from Georgia a while back and they were out looking at the stars and I went and asked them if they had stars in Georgia. ... He was amazed how far you could see. This is a good retreat for them. ... They like to get our here and get away from that rat race stuff. ... We realize how fortunate we are that we don't have all that stuff here.

This comment suggests the grasslands attract those who are seeking a place to “gain their senses” and experience open spaces, clear skies, and the solitude and vistas of these prairie lands. Some participants suggest this type of tourist may be more prevalent in the future, especially if wildlife habitat is maintained that could be a further attraction for non-hunting tourists.

Grazing is also perceived to have a substantial economic benefit that is consistent with other types of uses:

Grazing, as long as it is managed, tends to create habitat. ... You got to have cattle running in there to beat down paths and knock seed off and scatter seed and the hoof action you get to create smaller plants. ... One compliments the other a lot.

Grazing is also perceived to be integral to the ecological integrity of the grasslands environment:

Before there used to be buffalo here and they grazed the land. Then came the settlers and things like the prairie chicken went away along with the grass. Now the land is getting back to how it should be with grazing. You need grazing on those lands to keep them the way they are supposed to be. If you didn't have cows on there, then what would you do? I think the ranchers are getting a good deal, but so is the land getting a good deal from the grazing. It is good for everyone.

Some participants acknowledge that there are smaller operations that can maintain more cattle than their own lands can support because ranchers graze extra cattle on the grasslands. This is perceived to have direct economic benefit to the ranchers as well as surrounding communities.

These smaller ranchers are usually the ones that live here. They aren't the big operations with the people who live out of town. They live here, they spend their money in the stores and they support the schools and the churches. We need to keep those people in business. It helps the community as much as it helps them when they can graze their cows out there.

The economic values and benefits are perceived to be associated with particular segments of the population such as ranchers and those directly or indirectly associated with hunting. And, there are also more general economic benefits that result from oil and gas royalty payments and the circulation of dollars from grazing and a variety of recreational activities.

Use and Value Conflicts

There are some perceived conflicts regarding values and uses of the Black Kettle NG. These conflicts represent a minor theme in the information expressed by participants. Most of the information recorded suggests a strong sense that “things are going well” and there are only a few “minor” issues. For example, ranchers who graze on public land have some criticism of hunters and other recreation users who also use these lands:

Most of the guys that come here are pretty good. They come in and spend their money and help out the mom and pop type operations. Most of them are pretty good guys, easy to get along with, and they aren't bothering nothing. ... I only had trouble one time. The guy would go in there and leave the gate open and the cows would get out. And, there are a few people that leave their trash. ... About 80 percent pick up after themselves, but most of them are pretty good. There's not a lot of trash out there and it is getting better over time.

There is also some expressed concern about the compatibility of oil and gas development and wildlife habitat:

From strictly a wildlife perspective, oil and gas exploration is very plentiful. A few wells don't amount to much but a couple of acres, but when you start talking about fifty or a hundred wells, then you are starting to impact some habitat. ... When it is just a couple of acres it does not seem like much, but when there are quite a few well then it all adds up.

The cumulative effect of oil and gas wells is thus perceived to remove wildlife habitat that is valued by local hunters as well as non-local hunters who contribute to local economies.

Some participants also suggest there is some over-use of hunting on public lands:

I sometimes think the government land gets over-used in terms of hunting. I see big coveys of quail and when the season is over they are coming into the feed grounds and then you might see three birds in there. You see these hunters in there day after day....

There are trails available for off-highway vehicle riding at the McClellan Creek site, but otherwise OHV activity is prohibited on the Black Kettle NG. In the context of discussing the range of potential future uses, participants expressed support for a status quo regarding this policy because: (1) portions of the grasslands have steep gullies and canyons that are believed to be undesirable to most OHV riders; and, (2) some OHV riders are prone to drive off established trails, which is assessed as having a higher potential for damage in the grasslands because of beliefs about the nature of region's soil characteristics. For example:

The OHV guys when they come out there they don't stay on the trail. And then you will have wind erosion and water erosion and it will degrade the habitat. ... This land is not suited for that kind of stuff because it is so sandy.

This statement expresses an assessment of the potential for damage from OHV use in this particular environment. This is consistent with other participant's beliefs that OHV activity conflicts with other users and the potential for environmental damage should be addressed by maintaining existing policies about OHV use in the Black Kettle NG.

Management Priorities and Desired Futures

Participants were asked about management issues requiring attention in existing and future management plans. The dominant sentiment was expressed by one participant who noted, "The status quo is the way to go." Participants expressed general support for the management actions and appreciation of the quality of the relationship of the USDA Forest Service with local communities. Yet, there were several issues noted as "minor" topics or issues for consideration. These topics are as follows:

- Participants expressed the assessment that the USDA Forest Service should ensure a market price is received for the use of Black Kettle NG resources, especially oil and gas. There was also support for receiving a "fair" market price for grazing cattle on public lands.
- Some ranchers expressed concern about attempts to raise the number of allowable AUM (animal unit month) that would benefit larger out-of-area landowners. The

“status quo” in AUM appears to be favored if it is compatible with local ecological conditions.

- Continued use of fire to control vegetation and invasive species, especially cedar, was considered a priority. Participants expressed support for the use of controlled burns and the benefits to the landscape, wildlife, and hunting. Ranching interests did note their desire for the repair of any fences damaged during these controlled burns. There is also a sub-theme of using more grazing rather than controlled burns to control vegetation.
- Participants also expressed a desire for more aggressive control of invasive species, especially along roadways used by hunters, recreational users, and local ranchers. Locust trees were cited as an especially troublesome problem along some roadways and the desire expressed is for cutting the trees back farther than the current practice.
- The maintenance of good wildlife habitat was cited as an important priority. Any actions that would degrade habitat or change the desirability of existing habitat for game species is a special concern.
- Participants also expressed a strong desire for more control over management issues by local Rangers and other personnel who are familiar with the conditions and issues of the grasslands.