



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

Southwestern  
Region

September 2005



# Attitudes, Values, and Beliefs Toward National Forest System Lands: The Black Kettle, Kiowa, and Rita Blanca National Grasslands





**Prepared for:**

**The Cibola National Forest**  
2113 Osuna Road, NE, Suite A  
Albuquerque, NM 87113

and

**USDA Forest Service Region 3**  
**Southwestern Region**  
333 Broadway SE  
Albuquerque, NM 87102

**Submitted by:**

**John C. Russell, Ph.D.**  
**Peggy A. Adams-Russell**

**Adams-Russell Consulting**  
1688 Springvale Road  
Placerville, CA 95667

September 23, 2005



# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>The National Grasslands</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Data Collection: Focus Groups and Participation</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Black Kettle National Grasslands</b> .....	<b>9</b>
Social Environment.....	11
Results: The Black Kettle National Grasslands .....	12
Landscape Character and Instrumental Resource Values .....	12
Social Values .....	14
Ecological Values .....	14
The Value of Wildlife .....	15
Recreation Values .....	15
Economic Values .....	16
Use and Value Conflicts .....	18
Management Priorities and Desired Futures.....	19
<b>Kiowa and Rita Blanca National Grasslands</b> .....	<b>21</b>
Social Environment.....	24
Results: The Kiowa And Rita Blanca National Grasslands .....	25
Landscape Character and Resource Values .....	25
Social Values .....	27
Habitat and Wildlife Values.....	28
Economic Value.....	30
Conservation Values .....	31
Recreation, Aesthetic and Existence Values.....	32
Multiple-use Values and Conflicts.....	33
Special Designation Values .....	34
<b>Management Priorities and Desired Futures: Agency and Public Perspectives</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>Forest-Community Relationships</b> .....	<b>41</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>43</b>
<b>Appendix</b> .....	<b>45</b>
Topic Areas For Discussion .....	45
<b>List of Tables</b>	
Table 1: Region 3: National Grasslands Land Areas.....	3
Table 2: Black Kettle National Grassland .....	10
Table 3: Kiowa National Grassland.....	22
Table 4: Rita Blanca National Grassland.....	23
<b>List of Figures</b>	
Figure 1. Black Kettle National Grassland Counties .....	5
Figure 2. Kiowa National Grassland Counties .....	5
Figure 3. Rita Blanca National Grassland Counties .....	6
Figure 4. McClellan Creek National Grassland Counties.....	6

# Acknowledgements

Planning staff of the Cibola National Forest and the four national grasslands administered by the Cibola National Forest were instrumental in the implementation of this project. Susan Bruin, Chuck Milner, Nancy Walls, and members of their staff assisted in identifying participants and organizing meeting sessions. This was time consuming and often arduous work that was cheerfully accomplished. Reuben Weisz at the Regional Office in Albuquerque was especially helpful in reviewing and commenting upon the document and for his oversight in project implementation. Members of the National Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values Team also made important contributions to the structure and process for data collection. Dan McCollum provided insightful comments and interpretations in discussions about the data and their meanings. Participants in the interviews and discussion sessions who volunteered their time to attend and contribute to these sessions deserve special recognition. Some traveled long distances during late hours to and from these sessions. Their dedication to a volunteer effort to gather public viewpoints concerning management of these national grasslands is an invaluable resource.

# 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
<b>Black Kettle</b>	33,113	31,286	1,827
<b>Kiowa</b>	143,497	136,417	7,080
<b>McClellan Creek</b>	1,449	1,449	0
<b>Rita Blanca</b>	93,229	92,989	240
<b>Total</b>	271,288	262,141	9,147

Source: U. S. Forest Service website [http://www.fs.fed.us/land/staff/lar/LAR04/table3\\_r3.htm](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.

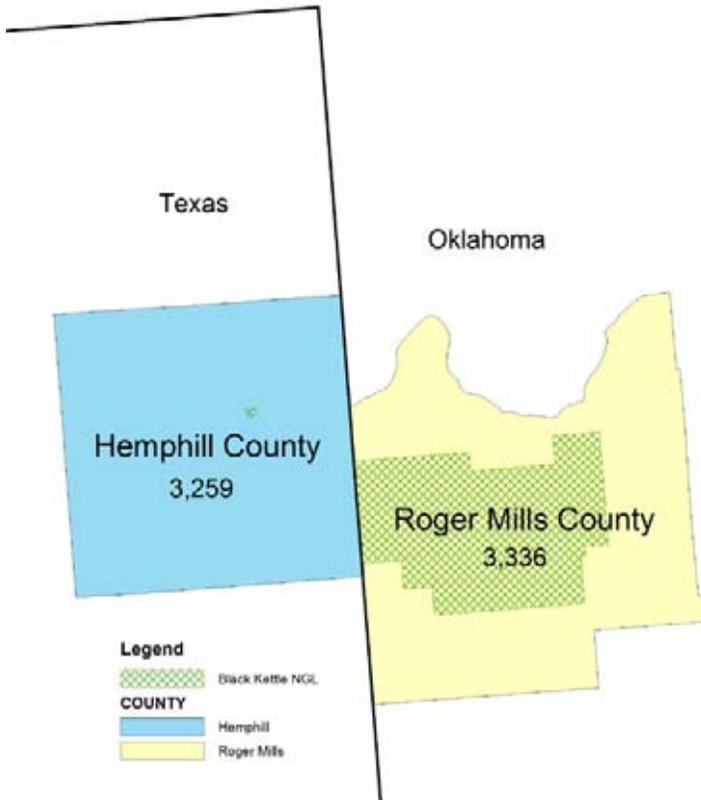


Figure 1. Black Kettle National Grassland Counties

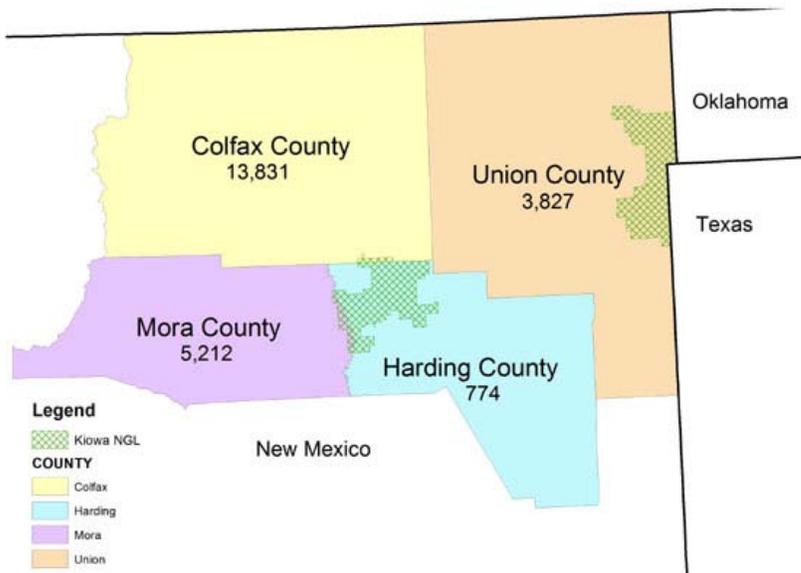


Figure 2. Kiowa National Grassland Counties

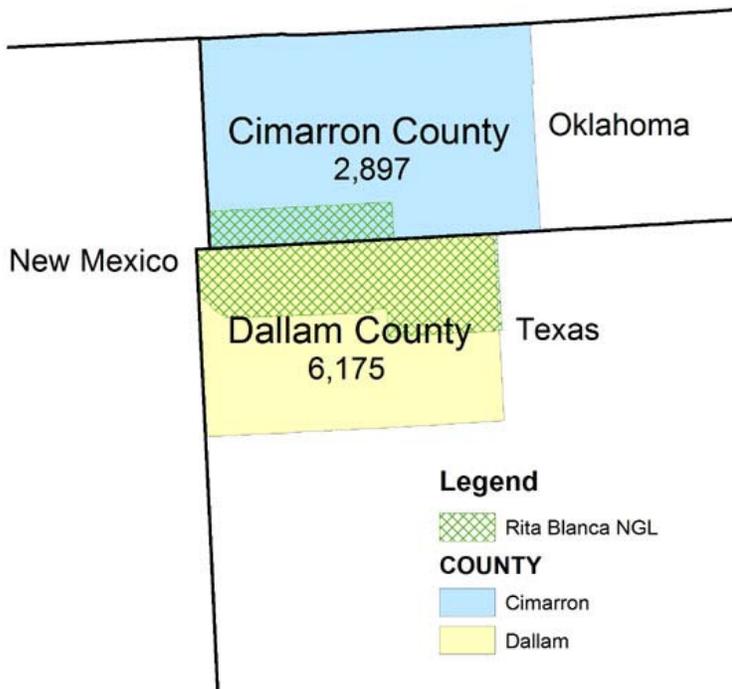


Figure 3. Rita Blanca National Grassland Counties



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.<sup>1</sup> 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 document<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>2</sup> 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
<b>2003 Population Estimate</b>	3,201	3,333	3,511,532	22,118,509
<b>Percent Change 2000 - 2003</b>	-6.8%	-0.5%	1.8%	6.1%
<b>Population, 2000</b>	3,436	3,351	3,450,654	20,851,820
<b>Population, percent change, 1990 to 2000</b>	-17.1%	-9.9%	9.7%	22.8%
<b>Persons under 18 years old, percent, 2000</b>	23.8%	28.0%	25.9%	28.2%
<b>Persons 65 years old and over, percent, 2000</b>	18.7%	14.7%	13.2%	9.9%
<b>White persons, percent, 2000</b>	91.8%	87.6%	76.2%	71.0%
<b>Black or African American persons, percent, 2000</b>	0.3%	1.6%	7.6%	11.5%
<b>American Indian and Alaska Native persons, percent, 2000</b>	5.5%	0.7%	7.9%	0.6%
<b>White persons, not of Hispanic/Latino origin, percent, 2000</b>	90.2%	81.2%	74.1%	52.4%
<b>Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin, percent, 2000</b>	2.6%	15.6%	5.2%	32.0%
<b>Language other than English spoken at home, pct age 5+, 2000</b>	3.1%	13.3%	7.4%	31.2%
<b>Median household income, 1999</b>	\$30,078	\$35,456	\$33,400	\$39,927
<b>Per capita money income, 1999</b>	\$16,821	\$16,929	\$17,646	\$19,617
<b>Persons below poverty, percent, 1999</b>	16.3%	12.6%	14.7%	15.4%
<b>Land area, 2000 (square miles)</b>	1,142	910	68,667	261,797
<b>Persons per square mile, 2000</b>	3	3.7	50.3	79.6
<b>Agriculture</b>				
<b>Number of Farms 1997 to 2002 % Change</b>	-4.0%	-5.5%	-0.9%	0.3%
<b>Acreage in farms 1997 to 2002 % Change</b>	9.9%	-12.5%	-1.2%	-3.0%
<b>Average size of farm 1997 to 2002 % Change</b>	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.<sup>3</sup>*

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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.”<sup>4</sup>*

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*

---

<sup>4</sup> 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.

# Kiowa and Rita Blanca National Grasslands

The Kiowa and the Rita Blanca NGs are located within six counties in three states. The Rita Blanca NGs is located within portions of Cimarron County in Oklahoma and Dallam County in the Texas Panhandle.

The Kiowa NG exist primarily within Harding and Union counties in northeastern New Mexico.

The populations of the counties associated with the Rita Blanca NG vary substantially. Dallam County, Texas has a 2004 estimated population at about 6,175 persons with 4,554 in the community of

Dalhart. Cimarron County in Oklahoma has an estimated 2004 population of about 2,897 persons with about 1,900 persons in the county seat of Boise City.

Similarly, counties associated with the Kiowa NG also have substantial population differences. Union County in far northeastern New Mexico has an estimated 2004 population of about 3,827 persons. Clayton is the largest community in this county with a population of nearly 2,220. Harding County has the smallest population in New Mexico with about 774 persons; and, Mosquero (~100) and Roy (~250) are the population centers.



**Table 3: Kiowa National Grassland**

People QuickFacts	Kiowa NGL				
	Colfax County, NM	Harding County, NM	Mora County, NM	Union County, NM	New Mexico
Population, 2003 estimate	14,051	747	5,216	3,814	1,874,614
Population, percent change, April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2003	-1.0%	-7.8%	0.7%	-8.6%	3.1%
Population, 2000	14,189	810	5,180	4,174	1,819,046
Population, percent change, 1990 to 2000	9.8%	-17.9%	21.5%	1.2%	20.1%
Persons under 18 years old, percent, 2000	25.1%	20.2%	26.7%	27.3%	28.0%
Persons 65 years old and over, percent, 2000	16.9%	28.3%	15.4%	17.8%	11.7%
White persons, percent, 2000	81.5%	84.3%	58.9%	80.4%	66.8%
Black or African American persons, percent, 2000	0.3%	0.4%	0.1%	0.0%	1.9%
American Indian and Alaska Native persons, percent, 2000	1.5%	1.4%	1.1%	1.0%	9.5%
White persons, not of Hispanic/Latino origin, percent, 2000	49.9%	52.8%	16.9%	62.7%	44.7%
Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin, percent, 2000	47.5%	44.9%	81.6%	35.1%	42.1%
Language other than English spoken at home, pct age 5+, 2000	26.6%	40.6%	68.6%	23.0%	36.5%
Median household income, 1999	\$30,744	\$26,111	\$24,518	\$28,080	\$34,133
Per capita money income, 1999	\$16,418	\$16,240	\$12,340	\$14,700	\$17,261
Persons below poverty, percent, 1999	14.8%	16.3%	25.4%	18.1%	18.4%
Land area, 2000 (square miles)	3,757	2,125	1,931	3,830	121,356
Persons per square mile, 2000	3.8	0.4	2.7	1.1	15
<b>Agriculture</b>					
Number Farms 1997 to 2002 % Change	-28.6%	-36.8%	-7.7%	-23.3%	-15.1%
Acreage in farms 1997 to 2002 % Change	-1.2%	-21.4%	-4.1%	-0.2%	-3.0%
Average size of farm 1997 to 2002) % Change	38.5%	24.3%	3.8%	30.1%	14.4%

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

**Table 4: Rita Blanca National Grassland**

People QuickFacts	Rita Blanca NGL			
	Cimarron County, OK	Dallam County, TX	Oklahoma	Texas
Population, 2003 estimate	2,961	6,100	3,511,532	22,118,509
Population, percent change, April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2003	-5.9%	-2.0%	1.8%	6.1%
Population, 2000	3,148	6,222	3,450,654	20,851,820
Population, percent change, 1990 to 2000	-4.6%	13.9%	9.7%	22.8%
Persons under 18 years old, percent, 2000	27.6%	31.8%	25.9%	28.2%
Persons 65 years old and over, percent, 2000	18.6%	10.3%	13.2%	9.9%
White persons, percent, 2000	85.8%	82.6%	76.2%	71.0%
Black or African American persons, percent, 2000	0.6%	1.6%	7.6%	11.5%
American Indian and Alaska Native persons, percent, 2000	1.0%	0.9%	7.9%	0.6%
White persons, not of Hispanic/Latino origin, percent, 2000	81.0%	68.4%	74.1%	52.4%
Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin, percent, 2000	15.4%	28.4%	5.2%	32.0%
Language other than English spoken at home, pct age 5+, 2000	16.0%	19.6%	7.4%	31.2%
Median household income, 1999	\$30,625	\$27,946	\$33,400	\$39,927
Per capita money income, 1999	\$15,744	\$13,653	\$17,646	\$19,617
Persons below poverty, percent, 1999	17.6%	14.1%	14.7%	15.4%
Land area, 2000 (square miles)	1,835	1,505	68,667	261,797
Persons per square mile, 2000	1.7	4.1	50.3	79.6
<b>Agriculture</b>				
Farm 1997 to 2002 % Change	2.8%	-8.6%	-0.9%	0.3%
Land in farms acres 1997 to 2002 % Change	3.4%	-5.8%	-1.2%	-3.0%
Average size of farms 1997 to 2002 % Change	0.5%	3.1%	-0.2%	-3.4%

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

## Social Environment

A noteworthy feature of this social environment is the scale, composition, and population trends. County populations are small as exemplified in Harding County with a total population of less than 800 persons; and, the trend over the past census decade is for population decline or only slight increases. Population density is low with less than four persons per square mile, indicating the large areas of open land and distance between communities and neighbors. Caucasians are the majority in most counties with Hispanics constituting the next largest group. The median age is higher than the state averages and it shows an increasing trend between the 1990 and 2000 census. The demographic character of the region is well expressed in the following statement:

*This is an extremely rural place. My closest neighbor is five miles away. I am twenty miles from town and maybe 400 people live in town, maybe less than that. There are only 800 people in the county. ... People are leaving too. Most of the people left here rely on agriculture to make a living and our schools rely on that. Our population is probably 60% over 60. There is no way to make a living here. Remember that the grasslands came into existence because of the population loss of people moving to California when they couldn't make a living here.*

The lifestyle of these rural counties is based in ranching and farming. The majority of county lands are used for agricultural purposes. The grasslands of the region provide the forage for either “cow-calf” or “stocker” type ranching operations. Cow-calf ranchers have a resident herd that is used to produce calves sold at auction or to cattle buyers. “Stocker” operations buy younger cattle in the late winter and early spring and then graze the animals until early fall. These animals are then sold to feed lots or to other markets. Feed lots are also major employers in this region. There is also some dry land farming for grains and other crops as well as some carbon dioxide gas production in Harding and Union. In Dallam County, Texas there is also oil and gas production. These are alternate sources of income in this agricultural-based economy, but ranching gives local communities their lifestyle and values.

This ranching lifestyle values self-reliance, individual property rights, mutual support for one's neighbors, and hard work. Participants suggest they perceive their culture and way of life as threatened by multiple factors, including:

- Declining economic opportunities resulting in the out-migration of younger persons who cannot find local jobs.
- Declining population resulting in fewer school enrollments and the movement of older persons from the rural areas to towns as the costs of living rises and they require different services.
- Sale and consolidation of ranches. Ranches and agricultural land is often owned by absentee landowners who may not participate in the community. Some suggest associated with these absentee owners is a rise in recreational ranching that is not based in the way of life and values of the local communities, including the land ethics and values of the longer-term residents.
- Recent drought has increased the costs of ranching and farming and threatens operators who have limited financial resources.

The perception of a threatened way of life is a strong theme in the information about the social environment of this region. It influences some of the values and the beliefs residents have about

the grasslands and how they should be managed. Despite this sense of threat, there remains a dedication to this lifestyle:

*I like living here. I came back here after I moved away and went to college because I like this place and the people. It has a place in my heart that drew me back. I like the wide open spaces and quiet times. Ranching can be pretty slow paced, but you work from dawn to dusk. Most ranchers have to have a side-job to make it work or someone in your families has one. You do this because you love it. It is something in your blood.*

The perceptions of threat to a way of life also influence how residents perceive the future and what is defined as an asset to help preserve a way of life. This has direct implications for how residents view the grasslands as part of their community.

Residents of this region use the grasslands primarily for grazing cattle, hunting, and some other recreational pursuits, especially in Mills Canyon. The Canadian River flows through the canyon creating opportunities for fishing, camping, and other recreational activities. Mills Canyon is also a destination for tourists because of the dramatic change in scenery offered by the transition from grasslands to canyon floor. Yet, the majority of the uses of the grasslands appear to be instrumental and related to grazing. Yet, there is some diversity in views about the values and beliefs associated with the grasslands and how they should be managed in the future. These are summarized in the following sections.

## **Results: The Kiowa and Rita Blanca National Grasslands**

*Our land is just so flat that you will never really have much but grass ....*

The participants from counties surrounding the Kiowa and Rita Blanca National Grasslands have some diversity in their attachments to and evaluations of the grasslands. For example, Dallam County, Texas is more farming oriented than Harding and Union counties in New Mexico. Cimarron County in Oklahoma has a limited amount of grasslands, but it is important for some ranching operations. The differences among the counties are socially and culturally important, but there are shared themes about values and beliefs associated with the grasslands that are the focus of this discussion.

### **Landscape Character and Resource Values**

Several assessments of the grassland's character are expressed in the statements of participants in this project. 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. The first perspective is expressed in the following statement:

*The grasslands, well they are our livelihood. Ranching and farming is what we do and that is what the grasslands are for. We use it for grazing our cattle and our neighbors do too. Ranchers are always trying to piece (land parcels) together. That is really what it is good for. I can't think of much else. There is some recreation out there, but when you go out there you don't see much but land for grazing, or that is all I see. What else could you use it for?*

This perspective emphasizes that grazing is central to the history and character of this region. One participant expressed this observation in comments about Environmental Assessments (EAs):

*When they do an EA the “no action” alternative has “no grazing” as the status quo when this land has been grazed for over 400 years. These lands have always been grazed by one type of ungulate or another and it is misleading when the “no action” alternative is listed to be non use or no grazing. No action should mean leave things as is ... It is not just word play because when it gets to the public it is more than that.....*

This is a focused perspective on the instrumental and utilitarian value of these lands. This perspective is based on long-term affiliation with these lands; but, it also entails respect and pride in the ranching way of life. The same participant quoted above described this pride and its relationship to these lands as follows:

*We are ranchers and it is our way of life. I like being a cowboy and being out on the grasslands because it is peaceful work. You work on a piece of land and it creates a lot of pride to see it do well. Places like this get into your heart. We want them to be healthy and do well. It gives me pride when I know we are doing a good job on the land.*



The second assessment of the grasslands is one emphasizing its character and value as wildlife habitat. For example,

*This area is not just cactus and rattlesnakes. That is what a lot of people think it is. But it is short grass prairie, the last remnants of what it used to be in the days of buffalo and before. We need to value it for what it is and not dismiss it as only good for cattle grazing. It is really high priority habitat that is a safe haven for waterfowl and other birds that nest here. The plants are important too, maybe as important as the wildlife. We need to stop treating the grasslands as stepchildren. They (USDA Forest Service) started to change for the better when they hired a biologist here.*

This perspective acknowledges the landscape has value as grazing land “as long as it is not overgrazed.” But, it emphasizes the need to acknowledge the habitat values of vegetation, water, and wildlife as equally important.

The third perspective is less consistent, but the central theme is the transformation of the grasslands from damaged lands of the dust bowl era. Participants describe the grasslands as having a character based in this historical damage:

*The droughts and the dust bowl made the land fragile. The grass is maybe not as strong as it should be because the wind blew away most of the top soil and I am not sure it has recovered to the way it was before.*

And,

*When people came here they planted wheat, corn, and pinto beans. It wasn't the best thing for the land. Then when the dust bowl came and they wanted to move to California, they (the government) gave them a dollar or two per acre. So, there are a lot of smaller pastures spread out. We don't have large areas of federal land, it is smaller pastures, and it is not always the best land because it was damaged back then. ....*

And,

*There was a time when people treated their federal land as more like a stepchild. They treated their federal land less well, but that has turned around. You see good fences, good gates, the windmills are taken care of. There was a time when it was not well taken care of ... but it has changed ....*

A sub-theme is that although these lands were damaged, some units are perceived as having some of the best grazing in the United States because of current management practices. This perspective emphasizes that these healthy units produce high quality grass because both ranchers and the Forest Service are using sound grazing practices.

## **Social Values**

Two types of social values are expressed in statements about the grasslands: (1) the grasslands enable some ranchers to continue their way of life and operations because of access to reasonably priced grazing; and (2) the Santa Fe Trail as well as “historical ranches” associated with the grasslands are valued because of their linkage to the traditions and ways of life of areas residents. The first social value is expressed in the following statement:

*There is a lot of state land, not very many people, and it is getting more problematic as we lose people. As far as the federal land goes, it has let me become a rancher. I couldn't be a rancher if I did not have the federal land. You can't buy a ranch and have it work on its own. If you are a doctor or a lawyer and you have money you could dump in, then you can make it work. And that is maybe even more so today than it was in the past. People who buy grasslands or ranches, they lawyer somewhere and say they have a ranch in Cimarron County. But the people who are trying to make a living out there, they have a harder time .... If you have neighbors that don't have children, then you can slowly gather up enough to make a living. I don't know if I have gathered up enough for my own son. It gets pretty interesting as to what you tell your children if they want to come back....*

The relatively high price of private land combined with increasing operating costs and the unpredictability of cattle markets is perceived as constraining who can and cannot afford to ranch. The perception is that new operations are those funded by “lawyers and doctors” who can afford what the sons and daughters of existing ranchers cannot. However, access to grazing permits on the national grasslands enables assembling enough grazing lands for traditional ranchers to maintain their lifestyle and perhaps involve their children in this way of life. In this sense, the grasslands enable continuing valued traditions:

*There is a value to raising our kids in this kind of environment. We have the freedom to enjoy the county and this agricultural way of life that we show our kids. It is about respect for the land and respect for hard work and we want them to learn that. ... Ranching is about the whole family and these are values we want to pass on to our children.*

A second social value is the presence of historical resources on the grasslands that are associated with the traditions and values of their way of life. These resources include portions of the Santa Fe Trail and other “historic spots” as expressed in the following statement:

*There are historic spots and historic ranches here. People have great misconceptions here about what the land is. One fellow came roaring in and he wanted to see the grasslands. There was this big green spot on the map, like a forest or something. ... It isn't that way. There are sections of it here and there. And some of them are just the way they were when the Santa Fe Trail was being used. And, you can still go out and see that. It is one of the few places you can go to now and see history the way it was. That is important.*

Decisions about grasslands management directly address what is perceived as a valued but threatened way of life. Perhaps the very nature of ranching predisposes those who practice it to evaluate their lifestyles and traditions as always on the edge of solvency. This evaluation results in sensitivity to management issues that individually or in combination with other socioeconomic factors (e.g., absentee landowners) may either support or constrain continuing their way of life.

## **Habitat and Wildlife Values**

Several themes about wildlife and wildlife habitat were identified in the data. The first theme expresses a perception of the value of wildlife and its connections with grazing. This is similar to the theme expressed by participants in the Black Kettle focus group. A second theme concerns the value of enhancing a perceived “monoculture” of the grasslands so that it can support more wildlife. The third theme is similar to the second in its emphasis on valuing the grasslands as habitat for wildlife species, including some that are threatened or endangered. A final theme concerns the management of prairie dogs on the grasslands.

The first theme is illustrated in the following comment by a Harding County rancher in response to questions about the character of the grasslands he knows:

*Other than the canyon and river county, wildlife and grazing is the majority of acreage over there. That is what there is. Antelope, wildlife, birds, long billed curlew. Wildlife here is part of our life. We get golden eagles and bald eagles. When we are out there, them and the cows is all we see. ... It is part of what makes being out there so peaceful for me.*

Wildlife is, as expressed in the statement, a component of the lifestyle that adds enjoyment and satisfaction to the ranching lifestyle. Importantly, creating wildlife habitat and grazing are perceived as complimentary and perhaps as necessary as expressed in the following comments:

*I have been in this grazing business more than 20 years and they (Forest Service) have seen the country improve. There are more varieties of plants, more healthy plants, and so they know the grazing is working. ... And they know it is good working with us ... they partner with us and it is really working.*

And,

*If the grasslands are not utilized, then the plant communities that are there right now would change drastically. The Forest Service had these test plots they fenced off and just did nothing to them and what happened is it just grew weeds ....(It grew weeds) because there was no hoof action to help new plants. If you remove the hoof action, then the strength of the grass goes down*

*... the livestock are good for the land .... Hoof action helps replant new grass and that is good for the quail and wildlife and good for the grazing. It is a necessity that some kind of grazing happen out there. Most folks that have lived a lifetime out there ... they know what makes these systems work, we know about succession, we know about what plants and animals benefit.... We are always trying to learn better management techniques....*

And,

*This country had thousands of buffalo across it. Then there was the homesteading. What is good for wildlife is good for cattle. They feed off of each other. On my units, I pile up some posts to attract quail ... and we usually have a family of ducks at our watering ponds, and we have plover, American Avocets, and larks. They put the Swift Fox on the endangered species list .... They come to us and we told them we seen them ... Now we hear about the endangered prairie dogs ... well it is my experience that the prairie dog does pretty well around here. I don't want them extinct, but there seems to be plenty of prairie dogs around here....*

The second theme perceives a value in creating more diversity in the perceived “monoculture” of certain portions of the grasslands that are primarily prairie grass. From this perspective, the grasslands are under-used as wildlife habitat because of the preference for managing them for grazing. Participants expressing this perspective emphasize the potential for creating habitat for quail and other bird and wildlife species that could enable different types of uses than grazing, especially for recreational hunters and wildlife enthusiasts.

The third theme expresses a value about the grasslands as having value for ground-dwelling birds and other types of wildlife. For example,

*This is some of the most valuable bird habitat in this region. This short-grass prairie is unique. It has value for more than grazing, but they (the Forest Service) are not developing that value as much as they should be. I hear all this talk about stock tanks and the value of that to wildlife. Well, that is all well and good, but there is still some of the original prairie here. There used to be a strong population of prairie chickens here and I would like to see that again. I am not against grazing, but I do want to see some habitat development that is about wildlife and not about grazing. ...*

This perspective incorporates the previously discussed notion of the grasslands as having value as a “safe haven” for wildlife.

The final wildlife theme identified in the data concerns prairie dogs. Some residents perceive a strong need for more aggressive management of prairie dogs because of their assessments of damage to the grasslands as well as to neighboring lands:

*Our area is beginning to recover from a 3 year drought which caused damage to all grassland in the area. Drought was one thing, but uncontrolled animal damage is another. Because of the drought, the prairie dog population has increased and expanded to unprecedented levels. Coming from US Forest Service lands, the dogs have now invaded private pasture and cropland to the point it is nearly unusable.*

A sub-theme expressed by some participants that although the prairie dogs do cause damage, and this damage needs to be addressed, the problem can be self-regulating:

*People come all the way from Louisiana to shoot prairie dogs. Just about the time you think the prairie will go to the prairie dogs, then the plague happens and Mother Nature takes care of it. She has a way of taking care of it. You have to keep an open mind and have flexibility about these things.*

## **Economic Value**

Participants expressed the following themes about the economic value of the grasslands:

- The presence of the local Forest Service offices offering employment opportunity is perceived to provide economic benefits to communities. As one participant noted, *We got a couple of jobs in town because of it.* These benefits are associated primarily with the offices in Clayton, New Mexico. Participants from Harding County expressed a desire to have a local presence to address management issues in Mills Canyon. The effect would be to provide some economic benefit in this small county as well as to increase the presence of the Agency.
- Grazing resources are perceived to directly benefit cattle producers: *The immediate (economic) impact is the benefit to the cattle producers. It helps them and then it helps the community because the money flows about the county.* The interconnections of the cattle industry with many other parts of the local economy results in the perception that benefits to cattle producers help the community economy.
- Cattle producers acknowledge there is direct economic benefit resulting from their access to the grasslands. For some operators this access is the basis for a viable cattle ranch. These ranchers also suggest that although they recognize the financial benefit resulting from the price of grazing fees, they also provide a service in return that benefits the grasslands. For example, one rancher commented: *As a user of the grasslands, we have a great advantage because of the cost of grazing. ... We are taking care of the country too. It used to be that the Forest Service would pay 100 percent if we wanted to put in a fence, but now it is 50 percent and I don't have a problem with that. The more they are not on the land (because of declining Agency resources) and the ranchers are on the land, we can watch out for it .... There is also a common misconception that the Forest Service just gave the ranchers that property and they don't realize that the permit costs, and it can cost as much as the land. You have to buy that permit then you have to pay the rent on it .... So it is not free... There is an obligation for us to take care of it and we do.*
- Communities also receive direct economic benefits in the forms of Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) because of the presence of the grasslands within their counties. For example, one county official noted: *We have 70,000 acres of grasslands in our county and ... we get some economic benefits. We receive PILT and then some benefit off the grazing. .... If we lost the grasslands it would make a difference in our (county budgets). ... We have some tourism and there is wildlife and some fishing and ... the Canyon (Mills Canyon) is a major resource that draws some tourists, but the PILT makes a difference.*
- Participants note there is also some economic opportunity associated with the grasslands that may be under-developed, including mining of slabs of flagstone in certain areas of the grasslands. Some participants note there is a growing market in urban areas for flagstone that could be exploited if residents could mine this resource on the grasslands.

- Grasslands tourism and recreation are also perceived to be under-developed resources. There is existing economic benefit from hunters pursuing antelope, quail, and other wildlife. The development of more wildlife habitat, especially for quail, to increase hunting opportunities is perceived to offer economic benefit to surrounding communities. Similarly, there is also perceived economic benefit from promoting some of the other perceived assets of the areas: historic resources such as the Santa Fe Trail, natural history associated with the many dinosaur tracks in the area, and the clear night sky that is attractive to professional and amateur astronomers. There is also recognition of the potential benefits of promoting wildlife viewing and bird watching given the population of ground-dwelling birds and waterfowl.

## Conservation Values

Participants expressed beliefs and values about the conservation of grasslands resources. The three major themes are expressed in the following bullet points.

- Ranchers and agriculturalists perceive their livelihood is tied to the health of the grasslands. They express a strong conservation ethic about maintaining the health of the land because it has direct implications for continuing their way of life. A common statement by ranchers is, *We are the real conservationists, the real environmentalists because we are in contact with the land everyday and we care for it. If we don't care for it, then we pay for it down the line.* As previously noted, ranchers perceive compatibility if not a necessity in the relationship between conservation values and ranching values. For example: *The grazing improvements are good for wildlife, the Swainsons hawk is here, and we put in culverts for the swift fox ... we are the conservationists here.*
- A contrasting perspective is offered by other participants who suggest there is some past and contemporary “over-grazing” by ranchers who are motivated by profit and not by conservation principles. These participants suggest ranchers are willing to compromise their conservation values when necessary to respond to financial or other demands in their ranching operations. As one participant noted, *It is the fox in the hen house and that is why we need the Forest Service to be vigilant. They (Forest Service) are doing a good job on the grazing keeping the ranchers doing what they are supposed to do.*
- A third theme emphasizes the necessity for all users to maintain a conservation ethic about the use of these public lands. This perspective suggests that ranchers and other users have a responsibility to “put something back” in addition to consuming grassland resources. For example, *My whole thing is that I think if you are taking something out then you should be putting something back ... and we seem to be doing an awful lot of taking and not much putting back.... We need to remember ... you never really own the land. We are just stewards of the land. It is our responsibility to leave it better than we found it ... for ourselves and our kids and their future. We seem to be awfully short-sighted in the here and now and greed is a bad thing.*

These themes express potentially conflicting perspectives about conservation values. Ranchers strongly believe they have a conservation ethic that has contributed to the current health of the grasslands. They also believe they are good stewards of the land who have the traditional knowledge and local expertise to fully understand grassland conditions and processes. Other

conservation interests suggest ranchers have been focused on promoting conservation ethics that meet their needs, but not necessarily the needs of other types of users and interested parties. These interests argue there is a need for a broader conservation ethic that promotes a wider range of conservation values rather than only ones associated with ranching. These interests acknowledge the benefits of ranching, but they suggest wildlife conservation values should receive more attention in the future management of the grasslands.

## Recreation, Aesthetic and Existence Values

Although utilitarian values appear to be the foundation for most participant statements about the grasslands, there are also other values related to the recreational use and aesthetic appreciation of the grasslands. Some of these also have a utilitarian component, especially those with any potential tourist implications. However, the following themes are present in the data about these other value types:

- There is recognition, as expressed by participants in the Black Kettle focus groups, of a perceived need for the aesthetic and existence values associated with the grasslands. These values have local importance, but they also are ones that may attract out-of-area visitors. For example, one participant expressed these values as follows: *I think there is a big demand for people who want to watch the sunset. There are people who come here for that. ... We were out on a hunt and it was sunrise and dead quiet. One of them said, "Can yawl hear that?" And someone said, "What" and he said, "Exactly, it has been so long since I have been anywhere where I could hear dead quiet." I think there is a big yearning among people who live in big cities, well maybe not to come here and be cowboys but to experience it. ... to experience it, to come out and just be here. ... Here we have this grassland, this massive canvass that has the potential for prairie chickens and antelope, and quail....* This statement recognizes some of intrinsic values of "sunsets" and "quiet" and the experience of open space. Other participants noted the dark skies of the region and the aesthetic values of places such as Mills Canyon. These are perceived to enhance the quality of life for local communities as well as to attract out-of-area residents seeking these types of experiences for themselves.
- In general, participants acknowledge more limited use of the grasslands for their own recreational use and emphasize recreational activities by out-of-area users.
  - o Residents note that Mills Canyon is an important local recreational site. Hunting, fishing, camping, and picnicking are cited as common local recreational uses of this canyon. This constitutes a "special place" for local residents because it represents one of the prime local recreational resources with historical associations with local lifestyles. For example, *Mills Canyon ... when I was a kid there was no improved road. Me and my dad, we would walk down there and go fishing there. That was what the canyon was like for years. People who went down there went just to fish and maybe to hunt. .... There were some orchards down there at one time .... In 1904 there was a major flood and between then and the 1950s it was pretty quiet down there.... After that flood the local people would just go walk down there, tourists never really used it. Now, we get lots of tourists, we get four wheelers down there now and in the last five years they tore it up more than livestock ever did. There are roads everywhere, it is a major, major problem as far as I am concerned and it is a major problem for the Forest*

*Service.* Recreational users of Mills Canyon from out of the area are perceived to be increasing and the effects of some activity, especially off-highway vehicle use, is perceived to be deterring local residents from using this resource. Residents have strong attachments to Mills Canyon, but they also wish to see its resources maintained for both local and non-local users: *From an economic development side the Canyon is important to us. On highway 39 there is a turn off to Mills Canyon and the Forest Service did agree to partner with us on the signs. We want that to happen. ... It is a beautiful and awesome asset we have and ... we want people to visit it and not abuse it ....*

- o Other participants suggest more limited use of other areas of the grasslands for local recreation. For example: *There isn't a lot of local recreational use of the grasslands. Mostly it is people who have never seen grasslands that might be interested, but we see it all the time. Most people that live here may do some coyote or prairie dog hunting out there, but it is the out-of-state hunters that come here for antelope and prairie dogs that are the big recreation users.*
- o There is also some recreational gathering of plant material that is apparently used for consumption. For example: *Some of the local folks gather some local plants to eat from the grasslands, some of the ladies pick them and eat them....there is a small amount of use in that manner.* Unfortunately, this work did not determine the specific plants gathered.
- Recreational hunting is an important use of the grasslands. There is some local hunting, but out of area hunters for antelope, turkey, quail, and prairie dogs are acknowledged as among the more common grasslands recreationists. Prairie dog hunters are apparently especially attracted to the opportunities for hunting and their contributions to reduction of prairie dog populations is a side benefit.

## Multiple-Use Values and Conflicts

There are contrasting perspectives about the multiple-use values of these grasslands. One view describes the grasslands as having limited multiple-use values because of its prairie characteristics. A utilitarian world view, not uncommon among ranchers and agriculturalists, informs this perspective. For example, the following statement expresses a utilitarian assessment of the value of the grasslands:

*It is just a lot of grasslands and there isn't much else there. They say a land of many uses, but there are not many uses for most of it. It is just good grasslands. It is very strong grass, but not a land of many uses like other places. It has been a good place to become a rancher.....*

The contrasting perspective recognizes the existing grazing focus of grasslands management, but expresses a desire for more multiple uses in the future. This perspective was expressed by conservation and wildlife enthusiasts who participated in this project. For example, one conservationist perspective commented:

*I have nothing against grazing and as long as they do not over-graze, I don't see a problem. I just don't want to hear one more thing about the wildlife value of stock tanks! It is going to take more than that for them to seriously promote wildlife and the needs of nesting birds. In my lifetime I would like to see a prairie chicken here again. They need to be more serious about getting rid of*

*the salt cedar and getting some water into Mills Canyon and other places so it will benefit wildlife. Another thing I would like to see is for them to set aside some habitat for wildlife where there are no cows. There needs to be some places that cows are not stepping on birds. Now, I know all about hoof action and what they say about that, but we just don't need cows everywhere.*

Other wildlife interests also stress a future that contains more diverse habitat and more opportunities for a variety of uses, including grazing. On the other hand, grazing interests are satisfied with existing conditions and do not necessarily perceive a need for new types of uses. However, during the focus groups there were cordial discussions among ranching and wildlife interests in which both parties agreed that managing for more wildlife habitat in the future is desirable.

Participants noted a limited number of conflicts about existing uses as well as desired futures for the grasslands. The most prominent use conflict noted concerns off-highway vehicle use in Mills Canyon. Participants noted that while they are supporters of the concept of multiple-use, OHV use needs more management:

*In the 50's and 60's they made a road and a picnic area down in the canyon (Mills Canyon). They invited tourists and recreationists down there with that road. Now, we all support multiple-use, but once they get to the campground, they need to walk. The four wheelers and the vehicles, the roads they have developed are a problem.... I think they need to have some personnel there to enforce the rules and regulations. If they had a ranger station or something there it would be a valuable asset to the county ... they need to concentrate some effort and some personnel where there is a problem. ... We are the caretakers, but they are the managers of the grasslands. It is up to the ranchers to take care of this land, they are very good conservationists and economists. They watch the grass and know when to move the cattle, they have an interest in it .... The 740 or so that are left here are the ones that really care for the land here. They want to be there, they care about the way of life, they care about the land and there is a reason they are there.*

Multiple participants describe OHV use as potentially problematic for the grasslands and especially Mills Canyon. Participants suggested this is an area of potential conflict in the future as the recreation pressures in the canyon increases. Other participants also stressed the need for promotion of a conservation ethic that is equal to their own conservation values:

*No one opposes the responsible use of the resource. I support multiple-use, but it has to be responsible use, recreational use, the hunters, everyone .... They need to have the same level of responsibility as the people who live here and take care of the land .... They know that when they wake up in the morning they know they are going to have to pay a price for the decisions they made yesterday ... and we would like the other users to be as responsible....*

Although some hunters leave open gates and others use fence wire and poles for target practice, participants do not describe any perceived significant perceived conflicts among grazing, hunting, and other recreational users.

## **Special Designation Values**

The Canadian River is currently under consideration for designation as a Wild and Scenic River. Organizations such as the Center for Biological Diversity and Amigos Bravos (Friends of Wild Rivers) support this designation. However, participants in this process are at least ambivalent about the need for this designation.

Participant responses to this proposed designation express themes in a more general discussion about special designations and their relationship to these grasslands. In general, participants are skeptical about the need for any additional “special designations.”

- Participants observed that a special designation usually results in constricting other types of uses, especially grazing uses. For example, this extended quotation describes the content of ranching concerns about such designations: *The Canadian River is up for designation as a Wild and Scenic River. I don't know what that means, but if it means a total removal of livestock, then I don't support that. Now, the Forest Service said that the rock formations there are very unique, but I am not sure it is. There are formations in other places nearby that look the same, so I am not sure it is unique. I don't know what the restrictions would be ... but if it restricts livestock use, then I would be against it.* This statement expresses reservation about designations that would restrict other types of existing uses, especially grazing uses. This is one basis for opposition to any special designation for the Canadian River Canyon. This statement also questions the “uniqueness” of the Canyon based on the criteria of distinctive rock formations that are perceived to exist elsewhere. A related perception is that a special designation may also prevent addressing key ecological problems such as the spread of salt cedars, an invasive species, in the Canyon.
- Another response to this proposed designation suggests a gathering of local and other interested parties to address the perceived need to “protect” the Canyon with a special designation. For example, one participant commented: *You can go in there on horseback and that is ok with me, but not the four-wheelers. ... I oppose it (Wild and Scenic status) because of the restrictions ... We should let the canyon rise and fall on its own merits. There should be consultation with locals and interested stakeholders out of the area and then make a decision about what most benefits the wildlife, plant life and the river .... Any special designation, well ... interested parties should be able to work out the problems, locals and others without having to have a special designation.....*
- Participants also suggest that special designations tend to attract more visitors and this may result in the degradation of what is considered to be sensitive and fragile habitat. For example, one participant observed: *Special designations tend to attract people and then what people are coming to see deteriorates. Then more and more come and you see less and less.*

Participants in this process value the special resources such as Mills Canyon and the Canadian River Canyon. However, they also suggest these designations may have unintended consequences that may ultimately harm the resources they value. Also, if a special designation restricts current uses, especially grazing, then it is likely to be opposed by those local residents who support the ranching communities of the region.



# Management Priorities And Desired Futures: Agency And Public Perspectives

The following bullet points describe themes in the focus group discussion data about management priorities and desired futures. In general, participants express a theme consistent with the “status quo is the way to go” perspective of the Black Kettle focus group participants. That is, there is a general satisfaction with grasslands management. As one participant noted: *I would like to see things stay the same. The grasslands went through a terrible time when people were farming it and it is not tillable soil. It is back to the way it was before homesteading and that is the way it ought to stay....* However, participants do have a perspective to “fix” some perceived problems in a system that otherwise appears to be meeting most needs. These issues include:

- Consideration for more diversity in the grasslands ecosystem, especially diversity that supports wildlife and bird habitat. This issue is expressed in such statements as: *I don't think the grasslands have ever been managed for much more than keeping cows and calves going. I would be a firm believer in peaceful coexistence between production agriculture and ecotourism .... We don't have lots of some things here, but we have lots of antelope! We are attempting to do what we can to improve wildlife habitat .... I think there are more things that could be done .... When we want to go in and take out five acres from 640, then I think that has a negligible impact on the amount of grass that the producers have to give up in support of the wildlife....* This sentiment applies to other wildlife and related perspectives that desire a wider mix of habitat and ecological values other than forage for cattle. Again, these perspectives generally support grazing, but the desire is for consideration of other than grazing issues among the priorities for managing grasslands resources.
- Participants note that fire is as much a part of the ecological history of the grasslands as ungulate grazing. Participants generally praise the Forest Service for the use of controlled burns to clear invasive species and for other management purposes. This is expressed in the following comment: *A few years ago juniper had infested the whole area and so we had a controlled burn and it made a big difference. We killed 80 percent of the juniper and now there is grass growing all around. The fire has done a super job at cleaning that up. Fire, grazing, those are both tools that can make a difference ... Fire can be a hazard if the grass grows up and it is not used , but the way it is now it is ok. You have to remember, there are two kinds of fire – hot fires that kill the grass and controlled fires that clean up the ground and return the meadow cycle to the land that is beneficial to the land and start the initial stages of succession. The hot fires are catastrophic .... Other fires hurt the ground, but it does not kill them. ... If the grasslands were not used, then it would be bad for the land ...* This view of fire is strongly utilitarian. It also represents common sentiments about fire in the group discussions and individual data.
- Managing to support local custom and culture. Participants perceive the grasslands as an environment that requires some tending in order for it to flourish. They also perceive their way of life as requiring some appreciation in the management of these grasslands. There is a strong perceived connection between the viability of many ranching operations and access to grazing. Recognition and consideration of these interdependencies in making management decisions is a strong theme in the data about future management priorities. For example: *They (Forest Service) should continue to be cognizant of our custom and culture, and our way of life. They should*

*manage in a way that respects and supports our way of life. People come here as tourists to be apart of the way of life in our community .....I think that shows the value of it. We feel we are the true environmentalists. Why should someone in New York dictate to us our way of life?* These are common sentiments, especially the comments regarding outside (e.g., New York) influences with what is perceived to be limited to no knowledge of local conditions appearing to have more say in management issues than local people who are in touch with the land daily.

- Anticipate future demands from increased population pressures. Participants note that although their communities are not experiencing growth pressures, areas within reach of the grasslands are growing. This external growth will create a need for more “people” management, especially for uses such as off-highway vehicles; and more “intensive” management in sensitive areas such as Mills Canyon. One participant expressed the essence of this concern in the following comment: ... *What I do see because of the increased population is that things will probably become more intensely managed as more people come in and want different things from the land. I totally support multiple-use, but .... you are going to have increased pressure on the grasslands for more types of uses and not just grazing. I foresee that in order to maintain the quality of life we have now, it will take more intense management such as a ranger or some staff person at the Canyon .... It is the outside people pressure, not the local people pressure that will change things.* Other participants share this concern about a growing awareness of the grasslands and the need to anticipate “people management” as essential for avoiding degradation of resources as well as the quality of experiences currently available to area residents. One solution offered is to increase the management presence in sensitive areas, especially at Mills Canyon.
- Effective management of off-road vehicles is a corollary to concerns about “people management.” Participants emphasize they support multiple-use, but perceive OHV usage as requiring more intensive management.
- Invasive species were noted by multiple participants from varying perspectives as an essential issue to be addressed in future plans. Species such as salt cedar (Tamarix), locust trees, mesquite, and scotch thistle (*Onopordum acanthium*) are species specifically cited as requiring attention in future management.
- Prairie dogs were noted as a topic requiring present and future consideration in management decisions. In addition to the destruction of grasslands and the spill-over to lands bordering the grasslands proper, some participants also noted the potential health problems associated with the plagues affecting prairie dog populations in this region.
- Ensuring fair return for grazing is a topic raised by several non-grazing participants in individual interviews and focus groups. These participants suggest the grazing use of public lands appears to be a “bargain” for cattle producers; and, the Forest Service should make an effort to ensure fair market value for grazing permits. When these topics were discussed in groups with diverse participants, ranching interests stressed the value of their management knowledge and the contribution this makes to grasslands health as an important but under-appreciated contribution that accompanies their grazing permit.

These management priorities from a public perspective can be compared to those the key issues for Forest Plan revision identified by forest managers. The grasslands managers identified three priority areas:

- Invasive species, especially eastern red cedar and black locust.
- Potential increased levels of oil/gas development and of impacts.
- Consideration of the interaction of declining ground nesting bird species and management practices such as prescribed fire, grazing management, and invasive species control.

Participants in the grasslands groups expressed the above concerns as well as others. Forest managers share some of the same priorities as expressed by the publics participating in this project. However, public priorities also include consideration of the effects of grasslands management on community ways of life; management of anticipated demands on the grasslands from more diverse uses; and, more effort toward creating more wildlife habitat that will benefit a variety of species. Additionally, there is specific public concern, as expressed by the participants in these groups, about off-highway vehicle use, prairie dog management, and continued use of fire to effectively manage the grasslands.



# Forest-Community Relationships

There are three noteworthy themes in the information about the relationship between grasslands managers and surrounding communities. The first theme emphasizes satisfaction with the working relationship between the Agency and grasslands users. Several factors appear to contribute to this satisfaction:

- Communication between managers and publics about the reasons for management actions.
- A willingness to be “flexible” and not manage “strictly by the book” so that local ecological and social conditions are an element of management decisions.
- Outreach by District Rangers to key local groups and local government.
- Consistency in local management personnel.

The second theme is an overall satisfaction with the grazing programs and “forward looking” grazing management by the Forest Service. For example, this sentiment is typical of many expressed by project participants:

*Their grazing management is forward looking, and they will work with you on problems. We developed a relationship to work with them on land use planning and they are very open to local input as well as other input. .... They will listen to all sides of the issue. They use innovative grazing practices and they have created a larger diversity of plant life which creates diversity of wildlife too.... If you rotate those cattle, when you are only in those pastures 30 days at a time, you rest those pastures and it is good for forage and good for wildlife ... So, those practices they have developed, they have done a good job.*

The third theme concerns some desired changes to increase the quality of communication and relationships with local managers. The desired changes include:

- Increased presence of Agency personnel in the field, especially at Mills Canyon.
- Attention to acquiring Agency expertise that fits the ecological conditions of the grasslands, which will promote confidence in management decisions.
- A greater range of opportunities to provide feedback to the Agency about issues and concerns.
- At a region-wide level, consideration of the use of perceived special interest groups that may not necessarily be objective. One participant specifically suggested: *On a region-wide level, they seem to listen to the National Wildlife Federation. They are a special interest group .... But the Forest Service treats them as an independent body and they are a special interest group with what some people think is a biased point of view .... I would like to see the universities involved.*
- Greater appreciation for local knowledge about the ecological processes and best management practices for this region. Or as one participant observed: *Sometimes there is a problem with them listening to us and what we know about the land. They listen, but I am not so sure they hear us. I think it is a good thing that some of our feedback gets back to the Forest Service....*

Each of these suggested changes were presented as “gentle criticism” in an effort to constructively improve the working relationship between communities and grasslands managers.



# References

- Dey, Ian. 1993. *Qualitative data analysis: a user-friendly guide for social scientists*. London: New York NY : Routledge.
- Steinbeck, John. 1974. *The grapes of wrath*. Viking Press ed. New York: Viking Press.
- Strauss, Anselm L. 1987. *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*. Cambridge Cambridgeshire ; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Strauss, Anselm L., and Juliet M. Corbin. 1998. *Basics of qualitative research: techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Worster, Donald. 2004. *Dust Bowl : the southern plains in the 1930s*. 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.



# Appendix. Topic Areas for Discussion

The following topic areas will guide the discussion about forest and grasslands management.

**Identity.** Each participant will be asked to describe their interest in management of national forests and grasslands and any particular perspective or interest/stakeholder group with which they are affiliated.

**Community Character and Recent Changes** This topic address about the lifestyles and social life in communities adjacent to national forests and grasslands. The purpose of this discussion topic is to understand the connections between communities and these public lands. Example questions are:

How would you describe this place to someone who has never been here, both the place and the way of life?

How has this community changed in the last 10-15 years? What are the important sources of change?

What are your thoughts about the challenges for this community/region?

What communities, occupations, or lifestyles are most and least affected by how national forest and grasslands are managed?

**Uses.** Communities and groups have connections to national forests and grasslands from the types of uses of these lands. This topic develops the range of uses of national forests and Grasslands. Example questions to discuss are:

What are the most and least common uses of these national forest and grasslands?

Are there any types of existing or potential uses that are not compatible with these lands? Do all users get along?

Is there anything the USDA Forest Service should do to change how forests and grasslands are used in the future?

**Resources.** This topic area identifies the types of resources that are contained within national forests and grasslands. This will aid in identifying the connections between communities and resources of the national forests and grasslands. An example issue to develop is:

A place is often thought of as the sum of its parts. Can you describe the parts, the types of resources of this national forest or grassland?

What are the special qualities and characteristics of these grasslands?

**Areas for Special Designations.** Some forests and grasslands have an area or geographic feature that is given a special designation such as Wilderness, Wild and Scenic River, Roadless Area, or Research Natural Area.

For any existing area, how do you describe the qualities and characteristics of this area?  
What does it contribute to communities in this area?

What are the benefits of having this type of area in this national forest or grasslands?  
(local, national, other?)

If areas for special designation do not exist on this National Forest or Grasslands, is there are need to identify a particular place or landscape? If so, where?

Are there other types of “special places” in this national forest or grasslands (locate these on forest/grasslands map), and what are the qualities of these places that make them “special?”

**National Forest and Grasslands Benefits and Values.** “Value” has several definitions such as “attributed worth or merit.” This discussion will develop locally meaningful definitions about values and identify specific values about national forests and grasslands.

Similarly, a “benefit” can refer to the types of effects that result from a resource such as a National Forest or Grassland. Some benefits may be economic and others may be recreational. Some communities, groups, or individuals may receive more benefits than others from having such resources nearby. This topic area will address questions such as:

What is valued about national forests and grasslands?” (e.g., products, services, opportunities, existence)

What are the benefits to nearby communities and groups from national forests and grasslands?”

**Desired Futures.** Many people have an idea of how they would like to see a place such as a national forest be in the future. They have ideas about current conditions and how those should change to improve the landscape and its resources. This topic will develop information about your future vision for national forest and grasslands resources. Example questions this topic will address are:

How would you describe how these lands (national forest/grasslands) were when you first became aware of them? (Historical and present-day conditions)

If you think about how you want these forests/grasslands to be when your children are grown, what is your vision?

What should the USDA Forest Service do to achieve your future vision for these lands?

**Key Management Issues and Priorities for Future Forest Management.** The USDA Forest Service is developing strategic plans to guide future management of national forests and grasslands. An understanding of public assessments of existing plans and future needs can help the agency to identify planning issues. To discuss this topic, we can address questions such as:

What do you think is broken and what needs to be fixed as the USDA Forest Service revises existing plans?

What has the USDA Forest Service done well in its management of lands and resources here? Are any changes needed in the management strategy in those areas?

What are the “bottom line” issues for you in revision of the existing plan? That is, are there management issues that absolutely must be addressed or changed from how they are now?

**Additional Issues.** These topics are guiding the discussion, but there may be others that you feel are important and need to be included. Please identify any additional topics you feel need to be considered by the USDA Forest Service as it tries to understand the connections between communities and national forests and grasslands.