

# Stitching the West Back Together:

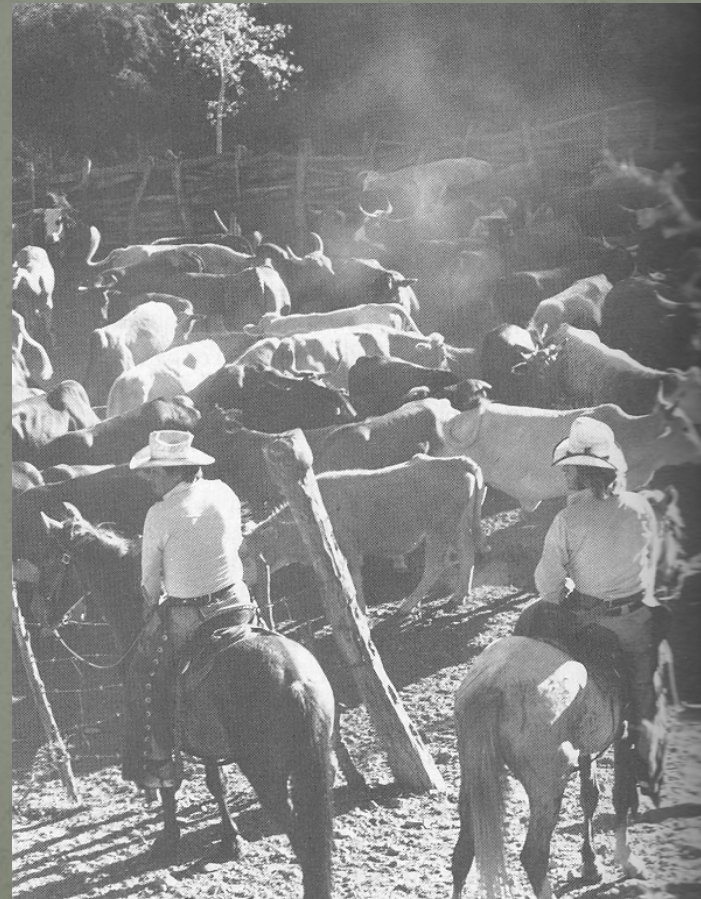
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Ranchers and the Collaborative Conservation Movement  
in the American West

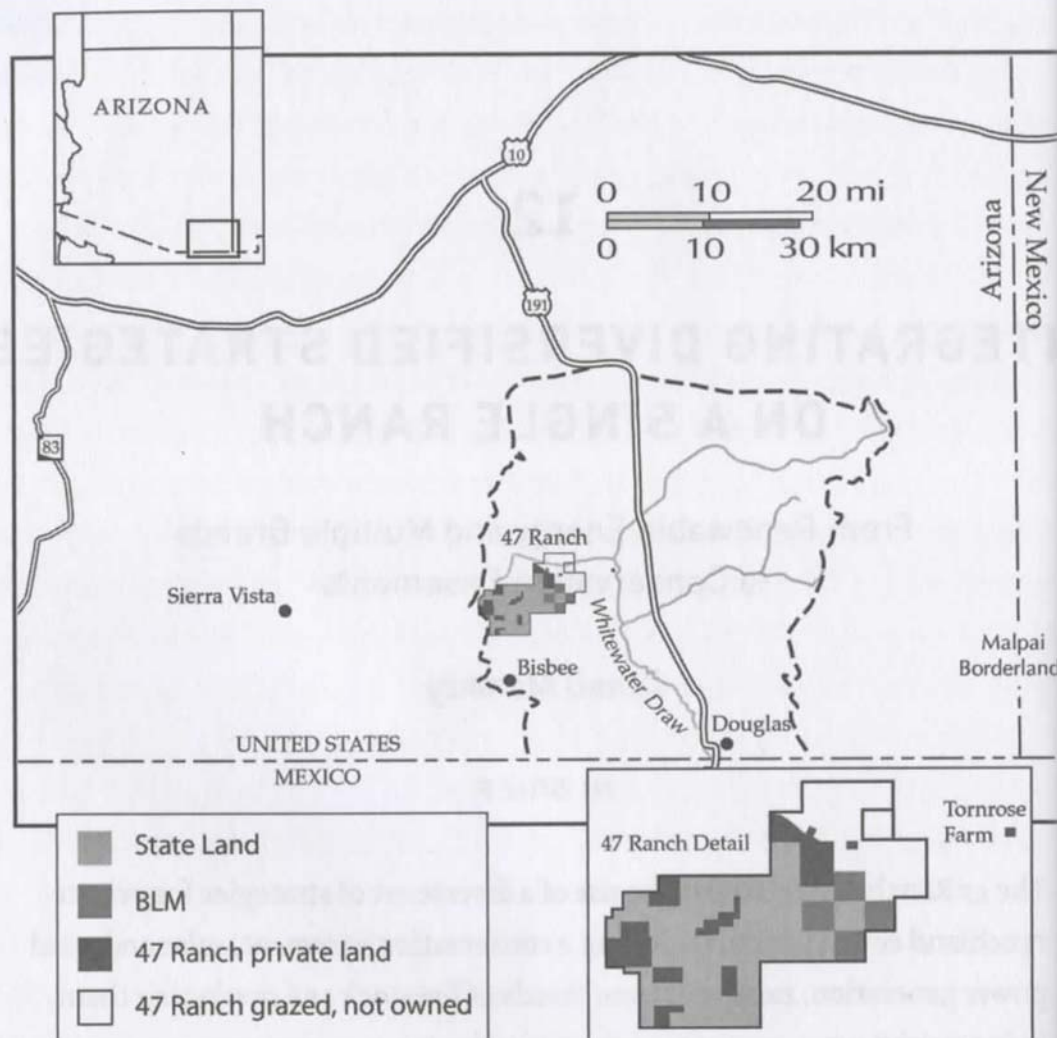
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# The Political Ecology of Ranching

- What resources do ranchers in arid lands need to make a living?
- Answer: Large amounts of land
- In Sonora, *ejidos* and *comunidades* hold rangeland in common
- No tradition of common property in U.S. Very little private land.
- Most ranches in U.S. West mosaics of land tenure: deeded land plus grazing allotments on Forest Service, BLM, State Trust Lands
- Ranch managed, appraised as economic unit, but most ranches depend on public lands



Roundup on the Comunidad de Cucurpe, 1981



**Figure 12.1.** Location of 47 Ranch in southeast Arizona. Map by Darin Jensen and Syd Wayman, 201

## 47 Ranch in Southeastern Arizona

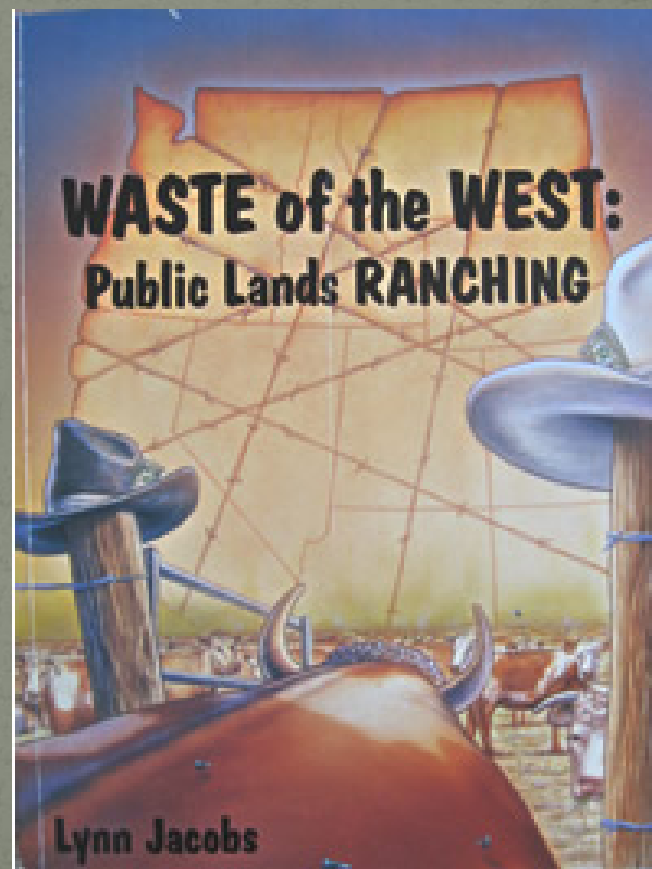
- 30,000 acres: private land, BLM grazing allotments, State Trust Land grazing leases
- Additional 6,500 leased private land and small irrigated farm
- One ranch. Multiple jurisdictions
- “A real-estate mortgage is a tough burden for a bunch of cows to drag around.”
- Paid off mortgage through sale of conservation easement/development rights on 320-acre homestead.

# Ranchers and Public Lands

- Most ranchers depend upon “public” lands: Forest Service, BLM, State Trust Lands because federal land laws not suited to arid/semi-arid West
- State Trust Lands not “public”: managed for beneficiaries, usually public K-12 education
- Rancher may have to deal with several different land management agencies to run his/her ranch
- Ranchers’ access to public lands may be contested by other stakeholders, especially environmentalists

# “Cattle Free in '93”: The Controversy over Grazing on Public Lands

- Bitter polemic in 1990s pitting ranchers against environmentalists like Center for Biological Diversity (CBD)
- Lawsuits over Endangered Species Act (ESA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) filed against federal agencies
- Ranchers not involved in process unless they filed suit themselves
- Rancher Jim Chilton sued CBD for malicious libel: courts awarded Chilton \$100 K in damages, \$500 K in punitive damages
- Drove interest groups to extremes
- Rise of “Radical Center”: grassroots collaborative groups seeking common ground like Malpai Borderlands Group and Altar Valley Conservation Alliance



# The Arizona Common-Ground Roundtable

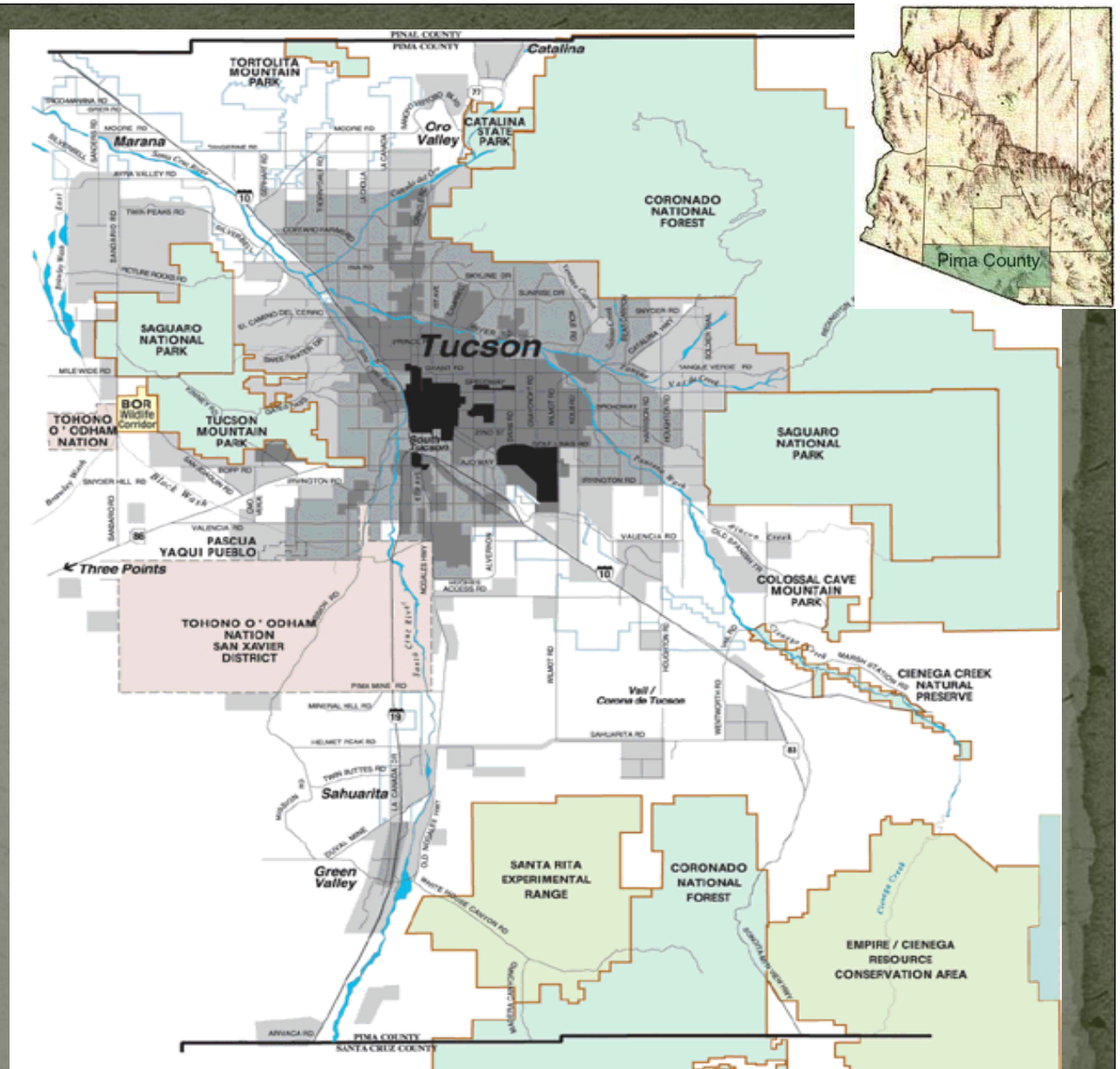
- In 1997, The Nature Conservancy of AZ came to Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy: How can we better relations with AZ ranchers?
- I was Udall Center Fellow working on public lands grazing
- Search for common ground: “It’s land fragmentation, stupid!”
- Developed into statewide forum. Included scientists, hunters as well; I was co-founder, member of Core Working Group



Subdivisions in Prescott Valley, AZ

# Common Ground: Preserve Wide Open Spaces

- Relentless growth of cities and their bedroom communities in West since W.W. II
- As Tucson expanded, urban density declined:  
1953: 5200/sq. mile  
1999: 2400/sq. mile
- Population growth:  
15,000/year
- 5,000 acres of desert bulldozed per year
- “Bulldozer in the Countryside” phenomenon:  
Not In My Backyard  
Pima County Sonoran Desert  
Conservation Plan to preserve biodiversity and open space: Metro Tucson’s boundaries defined by working ranches



**Urban Expansion in the Metropolitan Tucson Area**

1940
  1960
  1985
  1990

# My Involvement in Conservation Policy

- Co-Founder, Arizona Common Ground Roundtable
- Co-Founder, First President of Canoa Heritage Foundation (501-c(3))

## Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan:

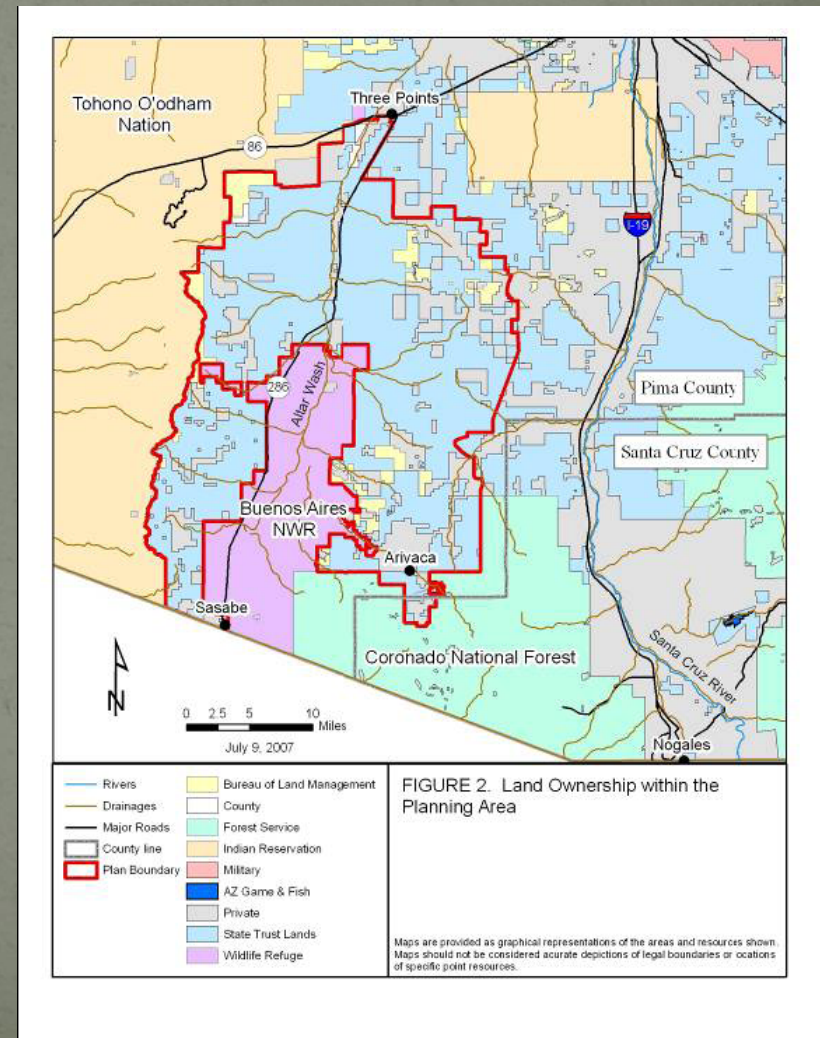
- Member, Pima County Canoa Ranch Advisory Committee (2003-14)
- Chair, Pima County Canoa Ranch Conservation Committee (2014)
- Chair, Pima County Ranch Conservation Technical Advisory Team, Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (1998-present)
- Member, Pima County Conservation Bond Advisory Committee (2003—04)
- Member, Pima County Conservation Acquisition Commission (2004-present)
- Board Member, Altar Valley Conservation Alliance (2006-present)

Ranchers and Collaborative Conservation  
in the Altar Valley, Arizona:  
The Altar Valley Conservation Alliance



# Land Tenure in the Altar Valley

- Private lands 13%
- Federal lands 37%
  - U.S. Fish & Wildlife (19%)
  - Coronado National Forest (14%)
  - Bureau of Land Management (4%)
- State Trust Lands 48%
- Pima County 2%



## Future of Ranching: Altar Valley

- 610,000 acres of high desert grassland
- 9 private ranches: private land, State Trust Land or Forest Service grazing leases
- Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge
- Only one major subdivision
- In 1995, all 9 ranchers formed Altar Valley Conservation Alliance to promote watershed-wide conservation
- 3 ranches, one cotton farm purchased by County with Open Space Bond funds between 2004-09

# Altar Valley Conservation Alliance

Four goals of the AVCA:

“(1) to maintain and enhance open space while respecting private property rights,

(2) to continue economically productive use of public and private valley lands,

(3) to undertake management measures designed to improve resource conditions in the Valley, and

(4) to preserve western cultural values and historic ranching communities.”

I serve as Community  
Representative on AVCA Board



AVCA Annual Meeting, December 10, 2007

# Biodiversity in the Altar Valley

Largest undeveloped watershed in eastern Pima County

Meets major criteria for biodiversity conservation:

- 1) large unfragmented landscape
- 2) open wildlife corridors between major mountain ranges

One of two regions in U.S.: confirmed sightings of jaguars

AVCA supports jaguar conservation



Macho B's first appearance,  
Baboquivari Mountains, August 31,

# AVCA: Thinking Like a Watershed



- How do you accomplish conservation on watershed level after landscape's been fragmented into multiple jurisdictions?
- How do ranchers make their voices heard in the debate about what can and can't be done on public lands?
- How do ranchers, environmentalists, scientists, agency personnel collaborate on watershed-level conservation?
- Attempt to realize J.W. Powell's original vision of a West organized by watersheds, not abstract, square township-and-range grids

# Restoring Grasslands Through Fire

- John King first to reintroduce prescribed burns in Altar Valley, 1985
- Burned 10,500 acres on Anvil Ranch  
Within 5 years:
  - 1) Burroweed: 75% to 5 %
  - 2) Santa Rita threeawn, main native grass: from 5% to 67%
  - 3) Herbaceous production increased twentyfold
- King and Dan Robinett, NRCS range scientist: pastures have to burn every 15-20 years to maintain rangeland health
- AVCA spearheaded Altar Valley Fire Management Plan for entire watershed in collaboration with federal, state agencies



John King, Anvil Ranch

# Arroyo-Cutting



Altar Wash, Pima County, Arizona

# Erosion Control: Restoring Gullies

Goal: Use rock check dams to slow water down in eroded washes during rains to capture sediment and allow runoff to soak into soil

Results: Less runoff, rising water tables, more grass, more wildlife habitat

Low tech  
Low cost  
Low risk



Bill Zeedyk (center) leading workshop in Altar Valley

# Building Roads That Don't Erode



Bill Zeedyk and Steve Carson instructing Pima County road crew, Altar Valley.

# Roads Built Right



A slightly raised and angled roadbed combines with a minor catchment to hold water and reduce road and landscape erosion at once.

# Generations of Ranching Heritage



Pat King and one of her granddaughters  
on the Anvil Ranch

# The Altar Valley as Border War Zone



The Border Patrol Arresting Undocumented Migrants in the Altar Valley