

**William McDonald Keynote Address
National Cowboy Poetry Gathering 1999**

Transcription

Transcribed by Ross Fuqua, April 11-12, 2006.

Edited by Ross Fuqua, April 13, 2006.

Charlie Seemann: We've always felt that the Cowboy Poetry Gathering should be more than just poetry, music and crafts. When we all come together like this, it's a great opportunity to provide the ranching community with access to knowledge and information that substantively useful in everyday ranching life, like the ranch estate planning workshop that we offer this year, or Allan Savory's presentations on holistic range management of several years ago.

This year we are very fortunate and privileged to have as our keynote speaker a man whose work is on the cutting edge of the sustainable ranching movement. Bill McDonald is the fifth generation of his family to live on his family's Sycamore Ranch in southeastern Arizona. He's a past president of the Cochise and Graham Counties' Cattle Growers Association and supervisor of the Whitewater Draw Natural Resource Conservation District. He's a cofounder and past president and co-executive director of the Malpai Borderlands Group, which is a grassroots organization attempting a whole ecosystem approach to the management of over a million acres of land under multiple ownerships, on the Mexican border in Arizona and New Mexico.

In 1998, Bill received a McArthur Fellowship, which the press likes to refer to as "Genius Grants," for his outstanding work in conservation. So would make welcome please, Mister Bill McDonald.

[audience applauds]

William McDonald: Thank you very much. Good morning. It's, it's a pleasure and privilege and an opportunity to have – an honor, I should say – to have this opportunity to speak to the fifteenth annual Cowboy Poetry Gathering here in Elko. I appreciate the kind introduction, but I suspicion a little bit that they just wanted somebody, given this, the theme of this year's Gathering, they just wanted somebody that, with a *Mac* or a *Mc* in their last name to give their keynote address.

[audience laughs]

I certainly, I do qualify. I've got Scottish heritage on both sides of my family. As a matter of fact, my mother's maternal grandfather, his name was Alexander Bruce Grant, was born in Banff, Scotland, in 1852. He was orphaned at thirteen and, and went to sea, and at sixteen he was on a ship where the crew was so mean to him that, that he jumped

ship in New Zealand. On the return voyage to Scotland, that ship went down and all hands were lost, but he was still in New Zealand. When he got back to Scotland a year later, he ran into some relatives that still had black armbands on in his memory. I guess they took their, they took their mourning rather seriously in those days.

[audience laughs]

Needless to say, they thought they'd seen a ghost when they saw him, but he ended up an American, became a hog farmer in Iowa of all things.

The, my dad's side of the family, the McDonalds were already in America, they came over in the eighteenth century from the Highlands after the defeat of Bonny Prince Charlie. I, we assume that it was time to get out of town, and they were, they were, clung to the clannish ways of the old country. They landed in North Carolina and kind of moved in a big group of relations from Tennessee to Illinois, winding up, most of them in the Hill Country of Texas, around Fredericksburg.

But in 1892, Lewis Martin McDonald left with his children and set out for the New Mexico territory, winding up in what's now southeast Arizona and southwest New Mexico, right on the Mexican border. Now this is an area where Geronimo had surrendered some six years earlier. It was still a pretty wild place to live. Smuggling was a priority – a primary activity then. Of course, it still is.

[audience laughs]

The contraband is a little different than it was then, but outlaws on both sides of the border preyed upon the smugglers. Rustling, Curly Bill Brocius and the Clantons were headquartered in that area and rustling was still commonplace when my ancestors got there. Even John Slaughter, who I guess Disney had an old series on him called *Texas John Slaughter*, he was a real person and he was the owner – or the *patron*, as we call them – of the San Bernardino Ranch, and the Marshall of Cochise County, and the man credited with cleaning up Tombstone. He himself was a formidable obstacle to would-be homesteaders, because he kind of liked to use the range that was outside of the legal boundaries of his ranch. But in 1907, the McDonalds made their stand, homesteading in Guadalupe, Cottonwood, and Sycamore Canyons along the New Mexico-Arizona line, and eventually as more homesteaders moved in, Slaughter gave up the fight and tended to his own ranch and made peace with his neighbors.

Over the next twenty years yet, a scene that was repeated in much of the West, most of it earlier than this, in that more and more people and their livestock moved into what was one of the last good places available. The hundred and sixty acre homestead act didn't cover grazing very well, even when they raised the acreages to six-forty, it just doesn't take care of grazing in the West. It was inadequate, and as a result, you had a lot of, of overuse of the land and the caring capacity was quickly established. Harsh economic and ecological realities whittled the numbers, both of people and cattle, but not without leaving some scars. The McDonalds were fortunate, they were among the survivors. Lewis Martin McDonald, who was my great-great-grandfather, spent his final years at the same headquarters in Sycamore Ranch where I live with my wife and daughter today.

Now, one hundred years after my ancestor came to the area, my neighbors, some of my ranching neighbors and I met at the home of an area pioneer family, another pioneer family, the Glens. We met with a group of folks from the environmental community to see if we could find common ground amid the turmoil caused by the changes that were sweeping through the remote regions of the West and still are. Living as we do on our isolated ranches, we felt ill-equipped to cope with the regulation, the litigation, and the looming development which threatened our livelihoods and the landscape where we live.

Now the landscape down there that we're talking about consists of two, basically two mountain ranges, the Peloncillos and the Animas; a couple of big valleys called the Animas Valley and the San Bernardino. It's an area about eight hundred thousand acres in all, which is approximately about half the size of Rhode Island, I guess. It's where the Sonoran the Chihuahuan Deserts meet, the northern tip of an area the scientists call the Magellan Archipelago – a contiguous series of mountain ranges running deep into Mexico that make up the Sierra Madres.

Now the borderlands themselves are home to a rich variety of species more than exist in many states. But it's cattle ranching country, too, and ranching depends upon and maintains the open space character of that landscape. Less than a hundred people live within the boundaries of the borderlands, the eight hundred thousand acres that I, I described. And the ownership of that land was about fifty-fifty, private and government, and here lies the rub. As many of you are aware, some folks are questioning whether cattle should be run on public lands, and some are calling for their outright removal. What they don't realize is that the future integrity of the public lands is tied to what happens to the intermingled and to the adjacent private ranchland. If ranchers need public land, as I do and many do in order to make economic units out of their ranch, then removing the livestock from the public land means that the rancher must then try to salvage the best that they can from the remaining private land and that almost inevitably leads to development at some point. And that leads to urban type impacts on the public land. And I really don't see a winner here, either from an environment or a ranching standpoint.

It was against this backdrop that our small group of ranchers and environmentalists met in 1992. And I hesitate to call them environmentalists, because after getting to know them, sometimes that word has negative connotations to some people, so we, we divide them between environmentalists, and then there's the *environists*. And I've read this somewhere, so I don't take credit for it, but that's an environmentalist with the mental part taken out of it.

[audience laughs and applauds]

After many meetings at, at different ranch houses over two years, we did find some common ground. We agreed that ultimately, develop, development was the biggest threat to the things that we held dear. And we also felt that in our country at least, we were losing grass to the encroachment of woody brush species. And we felt that fire suppression that had been practiced and enforced by the agencies and basically supported by the public over the past century, was a big reason why this was occurring.

We weren't sure what the next step we wanted to take would be, but we felt that whatever we did should be driven by the best science, it should have a strong conservation ethic, it should be economically feasible – which would be a novel idea for cowboys and ranchers – and it should be initiated and led by the private section – us, with the agencies invited to come in as partners rather than with us as their clients. Well, the event that really pushed this forward and it was a minor event, but it was kind of the straw that I guess you'd say broke the camel's back, was a small brush fire that occurred along the only dirt road that runs through that area, all the way through that area. It's called *Geronimo Trail*. And that fire was destined to burn out in some creosote bush and do a little good, but it was vigorously suppressed at taxpayer expense, over the objection of the ranch, of the manager of the ranch.

At response to this, we had a meeting at the, at the Glenns' Ranch, which is also called the Malpai Ranch from where the name of the group originated, and some thirty ranchers were represented. We agreed to ask the agencies at this meeting to work with us on a fire plan for the entire area. And we even may a big map up with, made up of each of our home ranch maps designated how each rancher would want a fire responded to on a natural, in a case of a natural ignition occurring on their ranch. And that map by the way is now updated on a GIS system yearly and distributed to the variously agencies and rural fire departments and they darn sure pay attention to it.

But at that time, this simple request led to a meeting with the agencies themselves, and over two nights – well, actually one night and two days – we came to agreement on an ecosystem approach to land management in general that was to be led by the private land owners. Now, I, I flinch a little when I say ecosystem management, because I know that carries negative connotations for some people and it's been a buzz word used by the agencies which is why it carries negative connotations. But we, we mean it in a very sincere manner, and we believe that what we're doing is not generally what is, what they're talking about when they talk about ecosystem management, which is really not doing anything.

At the same time these meetings were going on, the Gray Ranch, which was by far the largest ranch in the area, some five hundred sections, was changing hands. It was owned by the Nature Conservancy who'd bought it from a Mexican national of all things who had ownership of it and intentions to develop part of it. And the Gray bought it with quite some fanfare, or rather the Nature Conservancy bought the Gray with quite some fanfare, calling it one of the last great places, and it is a great place. But it was not their intention to hold on to it. They intended to turn some of it over to the Fish and Wildlife Service, or some government agency, and they were unable to do so. So it became quite a financial burden for them and they were looking to, to try to make a deal, but they had to make a deal with the right kind of individual or whoever was going to take it off their hands.

They found a buyer, incredibly, in one of our neighbors. The Hadleys had owned the Guadalupe Ranch for some twenty years at some point, and they have resources beyond that ranch and were able to put together a private foundation called the Animas Foundation, which, with which they could purchase and manage the Gray Ranch, and that deal was made. The Animas Foundation paid substantially less for the ranch than the Nature Conservancy had, and the difference was that the Nature Conservancy retained a conservation easement on the ranch, which simply means that the ranch would never be

developed or subdivided. Well, this was fine with the Animas Foundation, because it's in, it's part of their mission to try to keep that land an open and productive space. They have no intention of ever wanting to develop that country. And it's great for the rest of us ranchers, because we know that there's that big block of acreage out there that won't be developed.

The primary negotiator for the Nature Conservancy was a fellow named John Cook who was a senior vice president, and Drummond Hadley, who many of you may know or know of and is here today and going to be reading some poetry later on, he, he introduced John Cook to myself and some of the other neighbors and Drum, you know, had a lot to do with getting this whole business started and deserves a lot of the credit, and he certainly deserves credit for getting John Cook involved – or blamed, depending on how this turns out.

[audience laughs]

But John Cook was intrigued by our fledgling effort to work with the agencies and with the environmental community, and he wondered if, if the Nature Conservancy could be involved in a constructive way. Now, they had a lot of things to offer. They had good, good contacts with and relations with the agencies, they had access to very good science, good organizational skills, good access to the foundation world of grants and even legal advice. But I had my doubts about it. On the minus side, I, I didn't think they had any, any experience. As it turned out, they didn't in actually trying to work in concert with people on land that they didn't own, and I also didn't trust them. I mean, this was the outfit that takes private land and turns it over to the government. And I wasn't alone. But I had to admit that in the case of the Gray Ranch, even though they were forced, they'd done something, they'd done something quite different, and I think it had had quite an effect on them. And I also, well, we also felt that since they owned no land now in the area, heck, if it didn't work out it wasn't going to be that hard to get rid of them. So we decided to give it a try. Even so, some of the ranchers felt very strongly that we should have anything to do with them at all, and they thought they were going to take over the group. In hindsight, I think that we proved our decision was the right one, it made us stronger, and I think that the doubters underestimated us.

In 1994, this coalition became official as a nonprofit organization, the Malpai Borderlands Group. Our cooperators, as we call our participants, include area ranchers who wish to work with us on both sides, by the way of the international border; the Nature Conservancy, the Animas Foundation, all the land and wildlife agencies that work in the area, scientists from various universities and other institutions, and local conservation districts, both in New Mexico and Arizona, because we have land, ranches on both sides involved. Also, stakeholders – just anyone who's interested in our vision of the future of the land and who is willing to work hard with us to make it happen. The Natural Resources Conservation Service actually committed a fulltime range conservationist just to our project. The Forest Service committed somebody half time.

As you might imagine, all things didn't happen overnight. In addition to all the various means of correspondence and, that we're capable of nowadays, we had numerous visits to Tucson and Phoenix and Albuquerque and back to Washington, DC, and just an endless parade of government officials out to our, our Borderlands area. But I was

frankly surprised at the interest the agencies had and the excitement some of their people had in our approach.

We launched efforts on several fronts. One of them was in the area of science which we felt was really crucial to our getting credibility. We got a major, help to secure a major grant for the research arm of the Forest Service to work in our area. We also had contacts from people like Raymond Turner who was a research ecologist who sits on our board and was with us from the very beginning, and the many scientists that he knows. We have a science advisory committee with, it's a working committee with folks like Jim Brown who was just the past president of the Ecological Society of America, and has a twenty year study plot, actually working with us on a very regular basis. Two weeks ago, we hosted a conference, a three-day conference just on the research and monitoring that's going on in our area since we formed our group, and there were over thirty presentations from researchers in everything from geomorphology to herbitology to archeology to ranch vegetation monitoring. We've conducted and are conducting numerous experiments involving land owners and researchers and we had monitoring plots running into the hundreds.

The scientists tell me that we're doing it cheaper than anybody else is doing anything similar, and more effectively than any place that they know of, because we have the buy in from the land owners and we're all directed at a goal of a continued, healthy, productive landscape for all the values that are important to us. We're as prepared as you can be, and it's hard for endangered species issues, because we have better science than the agencies can bring to the table. It's our goal to be informed as we possibly can be, and as the limits of science allow about our land. The land that supports our ranches – why should anybody else know more about it?

Through the efforts of one ranching family, we've even become involved in trying to recover a threatened species of amphibian. This project started when the Magoffins began hauling water to a stock pond which contained threatened Chiricahuan leopard frogs during a severe drought. That's right – they were hauling water to a damn frog.

[audience laughs]

Working with herbitologists from the University of Arizona, they learned that dirt stock ponds were probably the last refuge for these frogs, because all the aquifers were overrun with bull frogs and other exotic species that were decimating the native amphibians.

The Malpai Borderlands Group got involved in it when we joined with the Arizona Game and Fish Department and drilled – well, we wanted to drill one well. We drilled a, two holes. We drilled one long, dry hole, and one well, which happens out there a lot.

[audience laughs]

The second well got us permanent water for the frogs and crucial water for Magoffins' cattle operation, so it was a true win for both sides, something you don't hear about much in the endangered species area.

Another issue involving endangered species arose when a neighbor of mine who's a rancher and also a hunting guide happened to encounter a jaguar and it was on part of my ranch on the forest allotment. He was guiding a hunt at the time and he was alone when he came upon the jaguar and his dogs, or his hound dogs were in some jeopardy. But instead of shooting the cat or somehow running it over and saying nothing, he took some beautiful photographs which maybe some of you have seen in a book called *Eyes of Fire*.

He made that decision to go public because he had faith in our group making things right – making sure that nothing bad would come of it. And it's kind of what we call the Malpai way. We don't intend to allow well-intentioned laws that are often not used for well-intentioned purposes to turn us into people who have to sneak around and hide about what happens out in the country. We're proud of what we do. We don't want to have to act like a bunch of criminals. And we believe our unique coalition – which hopefully won't forever be unique – our coalition of ranchers, scientists, and folks from the environmental community, have the clout to pull off what ought to be happening anyway. But it's not easy. In this particular case, we went out and got the best big cat expert that we could hear of. His name was Alan Rabinowitz. He's been all over the world and done much research on big cats. He came down and studied the area and his estimation was not jaguar habitat. It was, as we all knew, a place that jaguars sometimes show up out of the Sierra Madres on rare occasions, and probably have as far as we know for centuries.

We did get involved in a recovery plan because it's mandated by the Endangered Species Act and this would have taken place whether he'd seen the jaguar or not, because there have been other sightings. But there's been no critical habitat designation, there's been no sanctions against grazing or hunting or the other things we need to do in order to carry out our livelihoods and we have, as a group, established a fund which will reimburse anyone in our region who loses livestock to a jaguar kill. We have not had any occasion to use it as yet, but it, it's there and we're serious about it.

I want to talk about fire a little bit because it was one of the things that brought us together. It's turned out to be perhaps our most successful program in some ways and our most frustrating in others. Over the last five years, over a hundred and fifty thousand acres has burned out of the eight hundred thousand due to simply our better relations and the work that we've done with the agencies and the rural fire departments and the ranchers – because all of these fires have taken place on ranches where, with the ranchers' encouragement. And they were all natural ignitions and we're getting that we've hoped for from the fire, although the, it's still coming in because the results of a big fire tend to accumulate. You don't know what you've got until several years later. We've got the grass rejuvenation coming and we're slowing the woody species encroachment.

We've managed to, to pull off a couple of fairly large prescribed burns, but these have been somewhat frustrating. The first one was, actually, we thought we'd pick the toughest place we could pick. We had a planning effort that involved two states, four different ranches, Mexico, six agencies in two states, a wilderness study area – it had everything except endangered species. We got the planning done in eight months and it was a very successful burn. The second burn had almost none of the complexities of the first burn, but it had habitat for two endangered species and the planning took three years.

And it required the head of the, national head of the Fish and Wildlife Service to come down to finally get the thing off the ground.

We simply can't afford that. We can not afford to do small burns on three year planning schedules, and trying to have ranchers hold out some of their cattle for a while to build up the fields, it just doesn't, it doesn't work. We were able to get that one off, but we're trying a different approach, a programmatic approach which means it's an area-wide plan, and we're still running into the same problem. We're bogging down on endangered species issues.

With the science and political clout that we can bring to bear, we're determined to prove that either an ecosystem approach to land management – and I'm talking about the real thing – either it can work in the presence of a law which mandates single species management, or it absolutely can not work. We're going to, we're going to prove it one way or the other.

If I can shift gears, I want to talk about grass banks a little bit. The grass bank is a brain child of Drummond Hadley, it's an idea that he had and it remained so for some years until we had an opportunity to try to put it to use. This is my definition of a grass bank – it's a grass which is made available to a rancher's livestock in exchange for a conservation action of value, equal to the value of the grass.

In 1994, we had a severe drought in our area, and I think it even touched up here, it was throughout the Southwest – I know Texas had a big drought. And there were four ranches next to the Gray that were especially hard hit, and their cattle herds were in tough shape. They couldn't get practically anything for them and it looked like they were going to have to sell them. In one case, it looked like the ranch would be lost.

The Gray Ranch had not been stocked very heavily for several years. When they, the Animas Foundation acquired it, some of the Gray hadn't been grazed at all, so there was excess grass there. What finally came down after a series of, of trying to figure things out was that they, the four ranchers moved their herds, entire herds, onto the Gray Ranch. And they moved them on for a period between three and five years. And the way we came to that figure was that they offered development rights in the form of conservation easement to the Malpai Borderlands Group, which is a qualified holder of, of conservation easements. So we had appraisals done of the current development value of those ranches and it's probably nothing like some of the development values that you're aware of that's not, you know, development is not real big in that area, but we have some going on, and some of it was going on near these ranches.

And we took that figure – and these folks had no intention of trying to develop their ranches or anything like that – so we took that figure, that dollar figure and we transferred it over into what the going cost of grass was on the Gray Ranch, because the Nature Conservancy had been leasing it to grazing, so that figure was pretty well established.

So anyway, we, they moved their cattle on for a period of three to five years, and at the end of that time what we had was four cow herds that were saved, we had at least one ranch that was saved, we had four ranches that were rested from grazing for three to five years, and three years in the optimum according to most range scientists for that type of desert grasses, and we had eighty thousand acres that was protected from impacts of future development.

[digital corruption in file]

Now grass bank is a flexible concept and it's being used a little differently in northern New Mexico where they took this idea that we'd started and an outfit called the Conservation Fund has purchased a ranch up there that is almost entire of forest allotment. And it's being used by other permittees to come on to that allotment while they rest their own and do required conservation work on their allotments in return for getting to use the grass on the grass banks. So there's different ways to do this thing.

In our case, as the grass bankers come off, we've been cost-sharing with them on various projects on their ranches to make them more, less vulnerable to drought in the future. Besides the – and some of you may know all about conservation easements, and I'm absolutely no expert, so I, hopefully some that know more will catch me if I make a misstatement – but besides holding the four easements without

[digital corruption in file]

ranchers who use the grass bank, we hold two others on other ranches, and we are working as I speak on possibly another one that one of our ranchers is interested in, in getting. So historically, conservation easements have only been attractive to the very wealthy, because that's were, who can take advantage of the tax benefits. And the IRS has certain regulations that easements must meet in order to take advantage of these breaks, but these easements were crafted not to meet them, because they weren't an issue for these particular ranchers. They're like me – they have all their money tied up in the land, they haven't really have any.

So our easements contained a couple of things that were different. One of them it was that if the state and the federal land that is tied to the ranch for grazing, for lease – you know, that they can lease for grazing – if that changes so that that grazing is no longer available to them, or that, that that land itself becomes open for development, then the easement revokes back. We don't want somebody sitting out there with a white elephant.

[digital corruption in file]

...also puts a little pressure on the public lands, on their side of it. What is their future vision for that land? And then if, the other thing is that if that Malpai Borderlands Group ceases to exist, the landowner can get the easement back or he can transfer it back to another entity if he wishes to do so, but we don't want to be a front for somebody else. When, when we take an easement from one of our ranchers, they're dealing with their neighbors. They're dealing with a board that's made up of their neighbors, and they're not, it's not some outfit that's headquartered somewhere else. Now of course, if a rancher has an opportunity in the future to take advantage of some of these tax breaks, then the easement can be amended in that direction quite easily.

I think easements are useful primarily as tools in areas where you have some growth going on, and you want to carve out some open space. It's more difficult I think to use them to try to keep eight hundred thousand contiguous acres open. And one of the things that it's going to take to do that is going to be some economic stability for the, the

ranching, the ranchers themselves, for the livelihoods themselves. That's a challenge that is a daunting one. I mean, it's something that we're working on. The commodity markets of course are naturally cyclical, and they are somewhat unpredictable. Sometimes they're damned unpredictable. Niche marketing is all the rage now, but you can't find many people who have done it very successfully with beef. Our effort, because of the other things we're doing, is attracting some of the best thinkers and most progressive innovators of this area, and we're laying the foundation, we believe, for a program that could be very successful, but we haven't sold an ounce of beef yet. We're not ready to any differently than we have in the past, and I'm certainly not going to stand up here and brag about anything we've done in that area. But stay tuned, because it is, I believe, crucial to the whole thing that we're trying to put together.

Our biggest challenge of all is just the everyday effort of keeping focused and moving ahead for what we're trying to do. For all the publicity that we're received, the awards and the recognition, those of us involved in it still consider this whole thing an experiment. We have a small base of people to work with basically, that are the worker bees and we are already have a lot to do with our own, you know, everything we can do with our own ranches, and the non-ranchers all have other jobs, too.

[digital corruption in file]

So we sometimes feel overwhelmed by all that we've taken on. But we're inspired by the support that we've received from all over the country and even from outside the country – it's way exceeded our expectations. In a confrontational climate where traditionally the positions on land use issues are taken at one extreme or the other, our radical center approach, as we call it, has touched a chord with a lot of folks. I'm not one who thinks there's a damn thing romantic about being one of the last of a dying breed, but the notion that ranching in the West could disappear has I think finally at, at long last got the attention of some people who are starting to consider what that will really mean, and what will be lost. Now there's a host of talented folks here who can put that into words much more eloquently than anything I can say, but I do know that in most people's minds what will be lost has a lot more to do with – has to do with a lot more than a few pounds of beef.

There are some who disagree. I had an interesting discussion with a man from Tucson, as a matter of fact, although we were in Austin, Texas, at the time. He was one of these *environists*. He made a statement, that if it comes down to it – which it usually always does – condos are preferable to cows on the land, and he assured me that the public agreed with him.

[audience laughs]

Well, do they really? I mean, you read, you know, you read things like that. The Nature Conservancy actually commissioned a poll, it was taken a couple of months ago and it was taken in a very urban state. Eighty percent of this, of the people in this state live in metro areas. Only one percent of the population in that state – probably less than that, farms or ranches – and my own unscientific poll tells me that about half of them showed up yesterday. This is my home state of Arizona. Eighty percent of the

responders to that poll, which was taken, again, with people that mainly live in the city, eighty percent felt that ranching was an important way of life and more should be done to ensure that ranchers stay in business. Seventy-nine percent felt ranches are good for the environment. Seventy-one percent felt ranches, selling for development, is a serious problem. Eighty-six percent disagreed with my friend from Tucson and felt that having cattle on the land is better than having condos. This was gratifying to me, because I didn't know what to expect when they took that poll.

The Malpai Group has been called the model. I don't think we're a model. I do not believe that this is boiler plate stuff that we're doing. Hopefully, we're an example that such a coalition is both possible and desirable, maybe even necessary. Economics of ranching have always been tough, and I don't mean to, to down play that in any way. It's paramount. But ranchers today are being told they're being responsible for much more than raising animals for red meat. How we ranchers respond to that challenge will also determine our fate, both collectively and individually.

I'd like to close by just reading our goal statement and making a couple of quick comments. Our goal is to restore – this is the goal of the Malpai Borderlands Group – is to restore and maintain the natural processes that create and protect a healthy, unfragmented landscape; to protect a diverse, flourishing community of human, plant, and animal life in our borderlands region. Together we'll accomplish this by working to encourage profitable ranching and other traditional livelihoods, which will sustain the open space nature of our land for generations to come.

That's right. It's our belief that a cowboy on the land who needs that land to be open in order for his livelihood to continue is that best chance for the land to remain just that way. Cowboy poetry celebrates a way of life that is real, not a myth. That way of life supports and is dependent upon the large open spaces that are the West. Let's work together and keep it real. Thank you very much.

[audience applauds]