

**Multistate Research Coordinating Committee
Proposal from the “Rangelands West Partnership”
Currently WERA 1008: October 2006 to September 2011**

Proposed Project Title: Rangelands West Partnership

Proposed Project Duration: From October 1, 2011 – September 30, 2014

Statement of Issue and Justification: Rangelands are vast natural landscapes including grasslands, shrublands, woodlands, and deserts that are widespread throughout the U.S., accounting for 36% of the land surface. However, most rangelands occur in the 19 Western States where they account for 53% of the private and public lands (Hart 1994). Rangelands are varied and complex systems that produce a myriad of valuable goods and services, including forage and habitat for livestock and wildlife, places for recreation and scenic beauty, clean water, and energy resources from fossil fuels, solar technologies, and wind (Maczko et al. 2004). Many forces threaten the productivity and ecological integrity of these rangelands and the human communities that rely upon them. Threats include inappropriate grazing practices, damaging wildfires, invasive species, and intensive recreational activities.

Demand for reliable and accessible information about effective management practices has never been greater as ranchers seek to diversify their operations and improve ecological and economic sustainability (Richards and George 1996). Federal and state agency land managers also have a pressing need for information to document potential ecological impacts of their proposed management practices (Vavra and Brown 2006). Against a backdrop of changing values and controversies over land use, greater understanding of innovative, sustainable rangeland stewardship practices is urgently needed. The geographic extent and many important resources of rangelands make their proper use and management vitally important to communities and economies - nationally and internationally. The Western Rangelands Partnership (WRP) is a group of rangeland scientists, subject librarians, and library technologists from 19 land-grant universities who have joined together to create an electronic service that provides accessibility to the world’s rangeland literature and educational resources. The WRP applied for WERA status and was approved as WERA 1008 in 2005. Since that time, the Partnership adopted a governance and operating structure for the purpose of developing a web portal [<http://rangelandswest.org>] to meet the needs of rangeland researchers, extension professionals, private and public land managers, policy makers and teachers and students. In addition, the Partnership applied for and was approved as an eXtension Community of Practice in 2008 [<http://cop.extension.org/wiki/Rangelands> – requires an eXtension ID to access]

During this past year, the Partnership has undergone a complete review, including reassessing its technical architecture, developing a business Plan, and conducting extensive assessments of primary client needs in the U.S. Western region (Pfander 2009). The results of these actions substantiated the need for a complete redesign and expansion of the Rangelands West portal. One of the most requested new features was a comprehensive database offering quick access to the most current, relevant, reliable, and authoritative rangelands literature. Included in such a database would be the complete text (allowable by copyright) of journal articles, reports, guides,

manuals, as well as images, data sets, and learning tools. At the same time, users want simple Google-like search capabilities that rank results in terms of relevancy and importance. As a direct result of this and other input, the Partnership has begun to work with information technology experts on plans for building the technical architecture to provide this new level of functionality.

Objectives:

- 1) To complete a full redesign of the Rangelands-West portal including a new technical architecture to accommodate user-requested functionality and incorporate social media tools to encourage increased user-engagement;
- 2) To continue to build and expand unique state rangelands websites with locally-specific content - with access provided also through the Global Rangelands repository search function and from the home page of Rangelands-West/Global Rangelands.
- 3) To build a global repository of full-text rangeland science and management resources (called “Global Rangelands”) in cooperation with rangeland-related organizations and associations from around the world; and,
- 4) To strengthen connections between Rangelands West/Global Rangelands, eXtension Rangelands, and the Range Science Education Council’s resources and services, and continue their complementary development.

Procedures and Activities:

Based on input gained from previous and ongoing assessments of user needs, the primary procedures and activities will be focused on the development, organization, and maintenance of (1) the state Rangelands West sites; (2) the global repository of rangeland management resources; and (3) social media applications to engage different audiences and user groups. This work will be accomplished through web-conference (Elluminate) meetings (currently the Steering and Information Technology Technical committees) as well as regular communications among Western Rangelands Partnership members through its listserv and/or a proposed online newsletter. While the listserv is primarily used to disseminate general information to all members and to promote and organize the annual membership meeting and related conference sessions, Elluminate meetings serve to facilitate cooperative decision-making and planning. In addition, whenever possible, Western Rangeland Partnership members will participate in scheduled conference calls and meetings of the eXtension Rangelands Community of Practice, AgNIC, and the Range Science Education Council to ensure coordination of efforts.

Expected Outcomes and Impacts:

- Increased quality of rangeland information and resources to meet the needs of a broad range of users and audiences from around the world.
- Improved navigation and accessibility of desired information through the redesigned Rangelands West/Global Rangelands website.
- Creation of user-oriented services based on direct input from diverse audiences through formal needs assessments.

- Strengthened relationships among rangeland professionals, librarians, and information specialists in each Western state through improved communications resulting in greater sharing of information and content development.
- Development of standardized methods for metadata, incorporating input from the Western Rangelands Partners, FAO, and other interested stakeholders. The metadata for significant rangelands resources will then be input into the new portal.
- Identification of Western Rangeland Partnership university institutional repositories with relevant rangeland resources that could also be made available through Global Rangelands for additional access.
- Increased use and exposure of the Rangelands West website, and state rangelands websites to the global community.
- Significant steps taken toward the achievement of the primary vision of Rangelands West/Global Rangelands as the premier website for dissemination of scientifically-based printed information on rangeland ecology and management.

Internal and External Linkages: See Appendix for the NIMSS “Appendix E” list.
http://lgu.umd.edu/lgu_v2/pages/appendixE.cfm?trackID=8556

The Western Rangelands Partnership has extensive linkages. In addition to the internal linkages between the 19 state partners represented by rangelands specialists, librarians and IT experts, there are external linkages with the Society for Range Management, Australia Rangelands, South Africa Rangelands, the Range Science Education Council, AgNIC and FAO. The Western Rangelands Partnership is also involved in the development of the eXtension Rangelands CoP.

Educational Plan: There will be continual development of the Rangeland West portal including learning modules for specific topical areas. We will offer an online tutorial for how to use Global Rangelands/Rangelands West website in both audio and textual formats in order to meet the needs of diverse audiences. We will offer training for new technologies and social media which will provide for alternative communications mechanisms for improved and expanded cooperation and collaboration. In person and virtual special workshops will be available to alert potential users to the resources available.

Governance: Rangelands West governance includes election of officers serving as chair, co-chair, and secretary. At the annual meeting an officer is elected to serve a three year, rotating term. They serve the first year as secretary, year two as co-chair, and year three as chair of the partnership. Officers will include range specialists and librarians. The governing body including the officers, and a revolving number of members make certain decisions on behalf of the membership as needed, and after consulting the membership as a whole. Members in the organization meet in person at least once a year for updates, training, site development and planning.

Authorization:

Administrative Advisor: Dr. Colin Kaltenbach

Dated:

References:

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