



GRASSLANDS, LLC

Photo by Noah Jackson

Building our Ecosystem

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A man travelling a new land came upon a village and some construction workers. He paused and asked them what they were doing. One peered out from under his grimy hat and stammered, "Layin' bricks."

The construction project spanned the entire hillside. As the man approached the end of the project he saw a fellow whistling and smiling as he laid his bricks. He paused and asked the happy lad what he was doing. He glanced up, sweat glistening off his brow, beaming as he exclaimed, "We're building a cathedral!"

Each of you Grasslanders may, at times, think you are putting up a temporary electric fence, moving cattle, entering numbers in a ledger, filing tax returns or doing a grazing plan, but the reality is that we are building an ecosystem.

Our daily decision-making moves us toward the Future Resource Base (FRB) we must have to realize our desired quality of life. Our hopes, our dreams and all of humanity's potential rests on the ecosystem—the water cycle, the mineral cycle, energy flow and community dynamics. Our futures will reflect the health of the ecosystem under our feet. Is it crumbling and eroding or is it flexing, building and breathing?

Our Holistic Land Plan (HLP) provides the foundational plank in building our ecosystem cathedral. A key component in our approach requires that we leave doors open for unknown potential. We are building the best plan we can imagine, knowing it will not culminate for at least 100 years. Imagine that the ecosystem is pinned down by a huge, frickin', hairy rock, which we must move in order to release life.

This thinking comes from Allan Savory who said we might think of our actions, inaction, or ignorance, as a weight suppressing the ecosystem. He said it is like we have our boot heel crushing the ecosystem's throat, choking her. All we need to do is remove the weight, allowing the ecosystem to flourish. In our example, this huge rock is crushing the ecosystem, which we need to move for the ecosystem to release.

The weight comes in the form of overrested land, with soil capping and little soil organic matter, over grazed plants, with low vigor, over impact of land in the form of cow trails, and other misuse of tools.



This will require a stout lever, with leverage. Massive leverage. To achieve the necessary leverage we need a strong, stable fulcrum. Our HLP centers the base of our fulcrum, the foundational plank. The two sides of our fulcrum rest firmly on the HLP, rising to an apex. One side can be thought of as our capital expense plan (cap ex). The other side is Holistic Planned Grazing (HPG). These two sides rise together, equally and balanced. Think of the height of our fulcrum measured in years so that in year five the base of our fulcrum is 20 times wider than tall.

In these early years, investment in our cap ex and HPG provide a huge Marginal Reaction (MR). As cap ex builds infrastructure enabling more complex and efficient execution for HPG, the MR becomes less. Once the apex has risen 50 to 60 years it becomes difficult to identify projects that will increase our fulcrum's leverage and improve the effectiveness of our tools to gain equal movement of the ecosystem. For example, in the accompanied diagram, Antelope Springs has 31 pastures (grazing areas) and 30 (tanks), with a plan to have 122 grazing areas and 39 tanks in 100 years. Going from 32 grazing areas to 50 grazing areas will provide a big MR, while going from 100 to 122 grazing areas may never be profitable, economically or ecologically.

Remember, our greatest concern is not to achieve a final goal but to allow for unknown potential to express itself. Our HLP needs to avoid creating a pinch point in the ecosystem's expression and development.

Holistic Management's tools— grazing, rest, fire, animal impact, living organisms, technology, labor and money are placed on top of the fulcrum and wedged under the portion of the ecosystem we want to move toward more diversity, complexity and resiliency. Now, we have everything placed, positioned and anchored, ready to employ the most powerful force in the universe— Human Creativity.

Each of us accesses this force from our own unique perspective. Some may refer to the sages of old, others the Holy Spirit, God, soul, Dharma or The Way. But the less restricted and free flowing our access and use of Human Creativity, the greater the force and leverage in moving our ecosystem toward greater resiliency.

A HLP, cap ex, HPG, use of the tools and Human Creativity can only be achieved in the context of each ranch's Whole Under Management, their Future Resource Base and desired Quality of Life, or your Holistic Context. Get in your Holistic Context, develop your Holistic Land Plan, and build a diverse, complex and resilient Ecosystem Cathedral.