



## Western Resource Values for a New Administration

### Introduction

The bedrock principle for administration of public lands must be respect for the land, respect for the people.

The West, even in transition as it is today, is shaped by its tradition of freedom and rugged independence. People of the West, in rural and urban areas, respond to this image of themselves. The key challenge for a new administration is to find ways to resonate the image of the West through its resource and other policies, while staying true to party principles.

### So what does this mean?

A new administration should emphasize respect for the culture and history of the West, and respect for the men and women who work the land and played a large role in building the families, communities, and region into what it is today.

Federal lands: Owned by the public, subject to management under federal law. Still, federal decisions affecting management of the lands most directly affect the people who make a living from the land, in some cases for multiple generations. Environmentalists will say decisions need to reflect the broad public interest. Others say decisions need to reflect the broad public interest, but specific account must also be taken of the impact of federal land management decisions on local communities.

Most particularly, management decisions need both to conform to legal requirements and management goals and consciously minimize, to the extent possible, adverse impacts on public land-dependent individuals and communities.

A new administration should support sufficient funding for the land management agencies to carry out the multiple and conflicting responsibilities required by statute and demanded by the public. Under the more likely scenario of insufficient funding, the administration should support reform and streamlining of laws to enable the agencies to focus their efforts on activities that have the greatest impact on resources, and less effort on marginal activities. Laws and implementing regulations that can be streamlined and reformed for the purpose of enhancing conservation include, among others, the National Environmental Policy Act and the Endangered Species Act.



## **Why Should the Public Support this Positive Program?**

First, the voting public in the West will respond positively to a program that recognizes their region's unique history and the contributions the land-based industries have made to this history, and which aims to care for the land and environment.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, support for private land owners in the West is an indispensable requirement for conservation to succeed. Significant acres of land richest with biodiversity in the valleys of the West are owned by ranchers and other private landowners. Professor Richard Knight of Colorado State University estimates that public land ranchers own more than 100 million acres of private land associated with their public land operations.

The single greatest threat to biodiversity is the fragmentation of landscapes. Avoiding fragmentation while maintaining conservation values requires a strong public-private partnership. Unless ways are found to keep the public land operations viable, the trend of increased fragmentation of these private lands will accelerate.

There are innumerable reasons why land gets fragmented in this country. One of the cheapest and most effective ways to keep it intact is to promote federal land policies that avoid unnecessary harm to people and communities dependent on public lands.