



Aubrey Bettencourt
Chief of USDA NRCS
South Agriculture Building
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

RE: Continued Support of Technical and Financial Assistance for Range Riding Through NRCS Programming

Dear Chief Bettencourt,

We, the undersigned livestock producers and organizations operating on western working lands, are writing to express our interest in West-wide availability of technical and financial assistance for producer-implemented range riding through Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation programs. We collectively recognize the vital role that western working lands play in stewarding critical wildlife habitat and the value range riding provides in supporting the economic viability of agricultural operations affected by predator conflicts.

Range riding reduces costly conflicts between livestock and large carnivores on open rangelands, addressing both direct depredation and indirect production losses caused by carnivores. While cowboys and ranch hands focus on general livestock management—such as herding, feeding, and maintenance—range riders focus on reducing predator conflicts. Riders monitor livestock and predator activity, manage herds to avoid areas of high predator activity, report or address depredation events, and apply deterrents. Implementing range riding requires a substantial investment of time and money from producers or producer groups.

Financial support for range riding has been historically limited. In 2021, a three-year NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant gathered insights into how these tools perform in various landscapes and contexts. This project involved significant contributions from 151 producers across ten western states, reflecting a bottom-up approach rooted in the needs and expertise of landowners. Concluding in 2024, this effort generated valuable conservation planning information for NRCS. It ultimately resulted in the inclusion of range riding as a scenario within Conservation Practice Standard 645: Upland Wildlife Habitat Management in five Western states. Landowner-implemented conflict prevention supported through NRCS conservation programs is an example of locally driven, producer-informed conservation efforts, distinct from more traditional top-down or designation-focused models.

As conflicts between large carnivores and livestock increase in both geographic scope and frequency, the demand for range riding as a proactive tool continues to grow, outpacing the resources available. In total, 175 producers in Montana and Colorado applied for Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) funding for range riding and related practices, submitting over \$28 million in funding requests—far exceeding the \$8.5 million available in the two states. Producers are eager to adopt range riding.

With the historical challenges of making range riding accessible under NRCS programs, we recommend that the range riding scenario within 645: Upland Wildlife Habitat Management be made available for contracting West-wide through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and other NRCS conservation programs as necessary.

Western working lands provide food, fiber, vital habitats for wildlife, and economic viability for rural communities. The health and success of working lands depend on economically viable and socially accepted management approaches. We believe range riding can help enhance wildlife habitat, livestock production, and address range management issues, which affect the economic viability of operations. As landowners, managers, organizations and agencies operating across 14 States, we look forward to working with our local NRCS field offices to continue stewarding land, livestock, and wildlife on the West's working wild landscapes.

Sincerely, the undersigned,

CC:

Colton Buckley, Chief of Staff NRCS
Astor Boozer, Western Regional Conservationist NRCS
Clint Evans, Colorado State Conservationist NRCS
Kyle Tacket, Montana Acting State Resources Conservationist NRCS
Greg Becker, Oregon State Conservationist NRCS
J. Xavier Montoya, New Mexico State Conservationist NRCS
Keisha Tatem, Arizona State Conservationist NRCS
Jackie Byam, Wyoming State Conservationist NRCS
Aime Miller, Idaho Acting State Conservationist NRCS
Roylene Comes At Night, Washington State Conservationist NRCS
Carlos Suarez, California State Conservationist NRCS
Heidi Ramsey, Nevada State Conservationist NRCS
Emily Fife, Utah State Conservationist NRCS

