



Congress for Wildlife and Livelihoods on Private and Communal Lands: Livestock, Tourism and Spirit

SEPTEMBER 7 - 12, 2014 ★ YMCA OF THE ROCKIES ★ ESTES PARK, COLORADO

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The 8th International Wildlife Ranching Symposium, IWRS, entitled **Congress for Wildlife and Livelihoods on Private and Communal Lands: Livestock, Tourism, and Spirit** was held Sept 7-12, 2014 in Estes Park Colorado and was an intellectual and operational success with a positive “Spirit” being high amongst attendees.

You can follow outcomes and progress from the Congress through the published abstracts, upcoming video outreach from the Internet of all sessions, and new gatherings in 2016 and 2018 through <http://tiny.cc/2014WildlifeCongress> and under the 8th International Congress Category in <http://LandHelp.info>.

Concluding observations from the Congress were positive, yet feelings persist that private landowners and private lands are underrepresented by wildlife and natural resources professionals. The following “Top Ten Review” permeated the gathering:

1. Systems for wildlife management on private lands differ within each country (compare Texas to Colorado) and between countries: extensively managing the wide open spaces of the Americas with free ranging wildlife; more intensive landowner and user-dominated cooperatives in human-populated Europe; inside fences of South Africa encouraging wildlife, tourism and nature conservation while not negatively affecting neighbors with other needs and interests; and unfortunate places with active human livelihoods and minimal wildlife management.
2. Biologists talk about landowners at their meetings and landowners talk about biologists at their meetings: both need to talk more with each other! Applied research that relates to private land needs was suggested as an important basis for interaction.
3. There is a tendency to stay in one’s narrow comfort zones of topic, communications and space thus restricting dialog and learning. The Congress used interactive entertainment, sharing stories with a puppet, videotaping all sessions for future use, and plenary sessions with the entire body to foster interdisciplinary and creative thinking.
4. The most positively talked about keynote address suggested using stories to explain science by adding emotions to information toward peoples’ interests and needs.
5. Including “Spirit” in the Congress title was perhaps the most appropriate word showing that positive spirits make differences and the lack of spirit creates problems.

6. Good deeds should not be punished! Agencies, organizations, and business can help landowners and positive actions should not be hindered.
7. If it pays, it stays; meaning that landowners need value, whether personal, cultural or economic, for wildlife to be encouraged. If there are inordinate costs whether financial or emotional, then wildlife and their habitats suffer on private lands.
8. Public ownership of wildlife, found on privately owned and operated lands, creates mixed signals about authority and responsibility, how to manage benefits and barriers with the resources, and the role of positive incentives for effective conservation outcomes.
9. When wildlife must rely on landscapes that are dominated by private lands (around 60% of Colorado and the US and greater in many places around the world), then landowners become the de facto manager with good or bad outcomes for society and the environment.
10. Landowners care. Landowners need to be functional partners in nature conservation.

Conclusions and outcomes of the Congress include: a private lands edition published by TWS Professional Magazine, abstracts published electronically and housed in LandHelp and CSU Libraries; a complete video production of the Congress plenary and symposia sessions for use with outreach to wider audiences locally and internationally; an invitation for participants to use the updated www.LandHelp.info web site to place conservation links about wildlife, land, and people; an international home for IWRS, plans for two international events, and a new international advisory committee.

The permanent international home for business operations and planning will be in South Africa funded through Wildlife Ranching South Africa. The 9th meeting of IWRS is planned for September 2016 in Southern Africa, likely Victoria Falls Zimbabwe, Windhoek Namibia, or Gaborone Botswana with emphasis on helping communities not now as engaged as South Africa. Initial leadership comes from delegates from South Africa and France involving the South African Development Community in addition to wildlife conservation and tourism communities. The 10th IWRS is proposed for 2018 in conjunction with The Wildlife Society's 6th International Wildlife Management Congress and will likely be held in South America.

Over 100 speakers at the 8th Congress addressed the following symposia themes. Most were recruited specifically by the organizers because of their valuable work and the strength of their messages:

- Working with landowners to provide biodiversity and to protect imperiled species such as rare plants in Colorado, Panthers in Florida, Tigers in Asia, and ranch wildlife on the Chile-Argentina border or Flint Hills of Kansas facilitated through the Colorado Natural Heritage Program, Nature Conservancy, and NatureServe.
- Philosophies, practices and outcomes toward a sound business of conservation were facilitated through actions of private landowners, agencies and NGOs from western US to Africa, featuring professionals and practitioners with Texas Wildlife Association, Western Landowners Alliance, Wildlife Ranching South Africa, The Nature Conservancy and the North American Grouse Partnership.

- State private land management programs and cooperative work of private land biologists sponsored by Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) featured persons with interrelated ties to Natural Resources Conservation Service, Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, Pheasants Forever, US Fish and Wildlife Service, CPW, and local landowners, boards, and other cooperating agencies and organizations that make action happen.
- Human and Wildlife Conflict issues and programs were reviewed sponsored by the National Wildlife Research Center with a special day-long session about managing feral pigs organized by Texas A&M University Extension.
- Climate issues facing the environment, tribal and private landowners were addressed by various US Climate Science Center professionals including from CSU, CU and US Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service.
- Energy developments have potentials to change livelihoods, landscapes, wildlife, and conservation; High Lonesome Ranch in Colorado and others provided examples of research and practices that show how energy, wildlife, and landowners can live more compatibly.
- Wild meats can benefit society and livelihoods, and raising elk, deer and bison in captive settings was discussed from US to Africa with help from North American Elk Breeders Association and North American Deer Farmer's Association.
- Benefits, barriers, and examples around the world were reviewed in the Community Conservation Symposium.
- Poaching and conservation of elephants and rhino was discussed with help from Wildlife Protection Solutions, the WILD organization, and developers of drone surveillance technologies.
- A highlight plenary talk encouraged use of stories to promote conservation and educators heard concerns that we might not be training students well enough to work on private land issues. We showed how the LandHelp website, and creative ideas--such as puppets—might be used to instill a positive spirit for learning, using information, and taking actions.
- We wish that all could have attended the field trip to Blue Valley Ranch to see extensive management in action on private conservation lands.

The 8th Congress made the most apparent business and administrative-based forward progress in IWRS history that should improve actions internationally: a permanent home and secretariat; two planned international events in the next four years; and establishment of a designated advisory committee. Wildlife on private lands is treated as pests and prizes around the world and they present a multitude of benefits and barriers to landowners, society, the land, and the broader conservation community. Needed are interdisciplinary thoughts and actions representing multiple jurisdictions and approaches, because wildlife and people dominate the planet and are central to decisions and effective outcomes for biodiversity.