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Ranching

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teen thousand by 1906, integrated into local market economies by performing seasonal agricultural labor, working on ranches, and participating in traditional hunting and harvesting activities. But they still maintained familial and cultural ties to home communities.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, humanitarians like Paiute writer Sarah Winnemucca and noted muckraking author Helen Hunt Jackson conducted speaking tours that revealed the poverty and tragic history of California's indigenous population. The Indian Rights Association took on the cause of California Indians and advocated assimilation and improved health services. Though the Indian Rights Association's campaign was paternalistic, and dismissive of Native cultural practices, it still raised awareness of desperate conditions across Indian Country, including California.

Following a 1906 report detailing the conditions endured by "homeless" Indians in California, the federal government authorized money to purchase land for them. The federal government created fifty-four rancherias in the state between 1906 and 1934 and five since that time. In some instances, the rancherias placed the lands that Indians had previously purchased for themselves under federal trust protection.

Although the rancheria system stabilized Native land holding in California, significant problems remained. In a 1917 ruling stemming from questions about Indian eligibility for the military draft, the California Supreme Court, in *Anderson v. Matheus*, ruled that rancheria Indians were "born citizens of the United States." This created a legal distinction between rancheria Indians and most Natives living on reservations elsewhere in the United States. Moreover, because rancherias were residential areas, most covering between five and one hundred acres, they lacked the land base and resources necessary for economic development programs.

Although several rancherias created their own constitutions and corporate charters under the Indian Reorganization Act (1934), they were vulnerable during the era of termination. Beginning in the early 1950s, the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs transferred health care and law enforcement for rancherias to the state of California. In 1958 the California Rancheria Termination Act led to the dissolution of 40 rancherias by privatizing lands and withdrawing federal programs. As a result of termination, California Indian rancherias lost 5,000 acres of land.

Since the 1970s, rancherias have taken advantage of the era of self-determination. In 1979 Tillie Hardwick, a mem-

ber of the terminated Pinoleville Rancheria, sued the United States over termination. The U.S. federal courts ruled in Hardwick's favor and the federal government restored the rancheria's status. This suit eventually led to successful recognition petitions from seventeen terminated rancherias. Moreover, several rancherias took advantage of Indian gaming to create entirely new economic enterprises. Gaming profits allowed rancherias to build housing for rancheria members and fund health care facilities and schools. Many rancheria governments also use gaming money to launch other economic endeavors. The Rumsey Band of Wintun Indians, for example, purchased non-gaming businesses and land in Sacramento, California, and Springfield, Illinois. While they began as an effort to provide land for "homeless Indians," rancherias have weathered the shifts of federal Indian policy in the late twentieth century. Rancherias and their members fought termination and have been active participants in the emergence of self-determination and Indian gaming. Today, they exist as some of the wealthiest Indian communities.

See also *California Indians; Gaming; Indian Reorganization Act (1934); Jackson, Helen Hunt; Mission Indians; Termination and Restoration; Winnemucca, Sarah.*

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Ranching

Ranching is one of the main economic activities on many Indian reservations today. While especially true for the arid regions west of the Missouri River, many Indian tribes—from the Seminoles in Florida to tribes in California—also have substantial cattle ranching economies. Tribes have developed buffalo ranching operations as well. In the Southwest, sheep ranching has been part of Native cultures for hundreds of years.

According to the 2002 U.S. Census of Agriculture, 42,304 Native American farm operators are managing 29,189 farms, of which 13,289 raise beef cows and 1,381 raise sheep; 11,122 Native American farms are devoted to raising

hay and other forage. Of the 56.8 million acres of land operated by American Indians, only 4.1 million acres are designated as cropland. Although the census reports only the number of Native American farm operators and not those who work on farms and ranches, these numbers demonstrate the importance of ranching in Indian Country.

Ranching as an economic activity depends on domesticated, or at least feral, animals. Native American societies such as the Navajos developed their ranching economies without direct Euro-American interference. The Plains tribes, for example, developed horse herds containing tens of thousands of animals. Although these horses were not primarily kept for meat, they are evidence that some principles of pastoralism were developed by Native peoples before the arrival of Europeans.

By the mid-nineteenth century, most Native American tribes had become familiar with ranching. If they did not participate in the ranching economy by owning ranches themselves or by working for non-Native ranchers, they at least participated by occasionally raiding ranches, picking up stragglers from cattle drives, and taking cattle from the open range. On the unfenced plains, cattle not only transmitted diseases to native animals, but competed for grass with buffalo and horses. The growing cattle industry in the West thus encroached on the lands of the American Indian nations.

While Indian reservations were being established on the plains, the ranching industry was losing access to open range and losing lands to farming interests. The Homestead Act of 1862, which was geared to agriculture, not ranching, offered Americans the opportunity to graze cattle on reservation lands. The General Allotment Act of 1887 (Dawes Act), however, opened new doors for American ranchers as surplus lands on reservations became available. Meanwhile, the small private parcels allotted to American Indians were not sufficient for tribal members to build ranching enterprises. On many reservations, allotment resulted in the failure of promising tribal ranching operations.

On those reservations that escaped allotment altogether or were allotted in the twentieth century, reservation land was leased to outside ranching corporations. On some reservations, the Office of Indian Affairs (OIA, later Bureau of Indian Affairs, BIA) leased hundreds of thousands of acres to these industrial ranching businesses, most often for minimal grazing fees. As a result, instead of being able to build their own ranching enterprises, tribes had to watch the "outside cattle" grazing their reservations. Many reservations experienced further losses of ranch lands during World War I, when

agricultural improvement plans that emphasized industrial farming enjoyed higher wheat prices.

Ecological and Cultural Impacts of Ranching

The ecological effects of ranching have largely stemmed from overstocking and overgrazing. Because of the growing competition and the less land available for ranching, many ranching operations overstocked their grazing lands, especially the leased public and reservation lands. Combined with the severe droughts and other factors, the overstocking of lands contributed to the Dust Bowl years of the early 1930s. The Office of Indian Affairs, with its new commissioner, John Collier, addressed the issue in two ways. In 1934 Collier's allies in Congress passed the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), which ended the government's efforts to allot Indian land and, in Section 6, introduced the concept of sustained yield management. The IRA gave the secretary of the interior the power to regulate grazing on reservations, to prevent range deterioration and erosion, and "to assure full utilization of the range." Those same principles, which were repeated in the American Indian Agricultural Resource Management Act of 1993 (AIARMA), were introduced nationally in the Taylor Grazing Act, which affected those American Indians who owned and managed rangelands outside reservation boundaries.

The IRA also gave the Department of the Interior the power "to restrict the number of livestock grazed on Indian range units to the estimated carrying capacity of such ranges." Collier thus installed livestock reduction programs on many reservations. In the most infamous of these programs, tens of thousands of sheep were killed on the Navajo reservation to deal with the problems of overgrazing and soil erosion. Navajo anger about the stock reduction program and the destruction of their economy led them to reject the OIA's efforts to persuade them to adopt an IRA tribal constitution. Thus although these programs reduced grazing pressures, they also alienated tribal ranchers because the programs were often carried out forcefully and with no prior consultation with the tribe.

In the wake of the Dust Bowl, many outside cattle interests gave up their leases, thereby improving opportunities for tribal ranchers. With the end of allotment and the return of surplus lands to reservation governments, tribes now owned a sometimes substantial land base that they could offer for lease to Native ranchers. Under the New Deal policies of the 1930s, the Indian Civilian Conservation Corps also began to improve the ranching infrastructure, building roads, struc-

tures, and dams for irrigation. Some of these new dams displaced other tribes that relied on rivers and fishing for their subsistence. After World War II, tribal ranching operations appeared to be recovering and expanding. In the 1950s and 1960s on the northern plains, tribal ranching operations and tribal societies dependent on them suffered when the Pick-Sloan Plan for the control of the Missouri watershed was implemented. In order to control water flow in the Missouri River, the government built several large dams. The dams created huge lakes that flooded the most valuable lands of several reservations. Despite restoration programs, the loss of shelter in wooded areas, as well as the expense of relocating ranches and towns, could not be remedied.

The years between the establishment of reservations in the mid-nineteenth century and the 1940s saw the ranching culture become entrenched in many reservations, at times replacing the traditional cultures. Many Indians in the West, as Peter Iverson pointed out in his 1994 study, had long ago become cowboys. Because the government encouraged Indians to farm rather than to ranch, ranching became a form of resistance, of remaining true to the land and the culture. Ranching also brought another activity to reservations, one in which many Native Americans excelled: the rodeo. Rodeo riding was a way to continue the traditional competitive quest for status, while successful ranchers could enhance their status by giving away their cattle and caring for the people.

Within the cattle culture, Indians' traditional ecological knowledge of the range was often replaced by scientific ranch management methods. Today, many Indian ranchers approach the land and their animals the same way that non-Indian ranchers approach their business operations. For example, they feed animals corn before slaughter, try to eliminate prairie dogs, and dehorn their animals.

Contemporary Issues

Today, many tribes and tribal members run exceptionally well-managed cattle ranching operations. The success of these enterprises is often directly attributable to tribal sovereignty over tribe-owned lands. When tribes can set their own goals in accordance with local environments and cultural expectations on economic success and management style, more often than not they are successful.

Overgrazing remains an important issue on reservations, especially during droughts. On reservations whose economies heavily depend on ranching, especially where much of the land is trust land managed by the BIA, success-

ful ranchers are often able to exert political pressure on tribal governments and BIA officials to refrain from lowering the grazing limits. During drought years, overgrazing leads to processes of desertification that in the long term are extremely harmful to these economies.

Water rights have also become an increasingly important issue, especially in the arid West and Southwest. Ranching is possible only with adequate water supplies, and because more water is being diverted to the growing cities in these regions, water rights have become one of the most important issues for tribes.

Although allotment ended in 1934, the consequences of allotment policies continue to affect Native American tribes. Over the generations, many of the land parcels have been so severely subdivided through inheritance (often referred to as fractionation) that tribal governments have to lease the land and divide the lease money among the heirs in order to make any economic use of it. Through the American Indian Agricultural Resource Management Act of 1993, the American Indian Probate Reform Act of 2004, and the Indian Land Consolidation Act of 1983 (amended in 2000), Congress has attempted to ease the problem of fractionation. Innovative tribal initiatives have emerged as well. These initiatives, however, will require funding and time to become truly effective.

With the division of ranges among a multitude of owners, jurisdictional checkerboarding of reservation lands, and the federal oversight of many of these ranges under the trust system, another issue that plays back into overgrazing is stewardship. Because of the confusing bureaucratic hierarchy that precedes decisions about these lands, it is hard for individuals to take responsibility for the range. Separate units of rangeland may fall under different rules and laws, making good environmental management more difficult. Often, the BIA simply takes too long to respond to local or regional issues that need immediate attention. For example, BIA checks often arrive months after the rancher had to spend the money, and decision-making processes frequently take too long for business deals to succeed. Moreover, ranches on trust lands are hard-pressed to obtain lines of credit. Trust lands also fall under a variety of federal acts, which potentially involve several federal agencies in decisions on land use, sales, and leases.

Native American ranching, like non-Indian ranching, is also integrated into global processes and thus influenced by the global market economy. Ranching on Indian reservations has, however, withstood some of these pressures better.

For example, there is a trend toward smaller ranches on reservations, while off-reservation ranches are often more industrialized. A possible explanation is that many Native American ranchers do not primarily ranch for economic profits; rather, they ranch to have contact with the environment and maintain the ranching lifestyle for cultural reasons.

See also *Buffalo*; *Bureau of Indian Affairs*; *Collier, John*; *Indian Reorganization Act (1934)*; *Rancherías*; *Ranch Management*; *Reservations*.

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Ranch Management

Among many Indian people, the care of livestock has been an integral part of both their economy and their culture. Stock in the form of horses, cattle, sheep, and pigs came to America with the first European settlers, but the herding and raising of animals predated their arrival. When Europeans arrived with their animals, they had many problems keeping them penned. The vastness of the American landscape presented European herders with the prospect of recovering escaped animals. By "discovering" escaped animals and launching raids against European settlements, Indians acquired livestock. Additionally, on rare occasions, Europeans

gave Indians stock as part of their negotiations or in an effort to win support from one Indian group over another. Missionaries in the American Southwest encouraged their Indian converts to keep cattle and sheep as part of a program designed to bring Indians into the Spanish cultural milieu.

Although many Indian people believed that land could not be owned, such was not the case for other possessions, such as livestock. Indians took great care to exercise control over their livestock; nothing was guarded more closely than Indian herds. Ownership may not have rested with a single individual but rather with the tribe or a specific clan, but it was ownership nonetheless. Once Indians were forcibly removed to reservations, livestock offered a quick way for people to develop new identities or to maintain older, traditional forms of cultural identity. In some cases, such as with the Navajos, stock-raising was not new to reservation inhabitants. In others, herding and ranching was an entirely new experience for the Indians brought to reservations by federal mandate.

Many federal policy makers argued that encouraging ranching among the Indians was the answer to protecting tribal sovereignty, keeping whites out of Indian lands, and providing a transition from nomadic hunting to agricultural production. Among the five major southeastern tribes in the Indian Territory—the Cherokees, the Chickasaws, the Choctaws, the Creeks, and the Seminoles—successful ranching was expected to lead to the development of Indian-owned railroads and supply enough income to allow the various tribes to be self-sufficient. Such ambitious results never materialized. Cattle ranching among the Seminoles of Oklahoma, however, was so successful that one person commonly ran twenty thousand head of cattle. Among the Cherokees there was hope that the vast Cherokee Outlet (the Oklahoma panhandle) would produce a Native-owned and -operated cattle industry.

Raising Livestock

The Navajos may perhaps serve as the best example of the importance of ranching to Indian people. After being pushed to their reservation in 1868, the Navajos took steps to increase their land holdings and their flocks of sheep. The Navajos had raised sheep since their first contacts with the Spanish, and they now saw the herds as a way to maintain their cultural identity. The thriving Navajo herds were hailed by the federal government as a sign of progress and an indication that the Navajos would soon join the American economic system. Problems of overgrazing, however, led to mas-