



Whitney MacMillan Program in Private Lands Stewardship

Background

Private lands are key to the culture, ecology, and economy of the West. They produce food and fiber, provide wildlife habitat, protect watersheds, connect landscapes, sustain livelihoods, and more. But private working lands, and the resources they protect, face increasing pressure. Population growth, volatile agricultural prices, soaring land prices, and difficulty recruiting younger generations to ranch life, all compel landowners to sell private land for development, putting the resources and values private lands protect at risk. Landowners need tools, information, and resources to help keep agricultural operations viable, prepare for the future, and ensure private working lands remain intact for generations to come.

Motivated by a desire to sustain private working lands and keep agricultural operations viable, Haub School Emeritus Board Member Whitney MacMillan founded the Private Lands Stewardship Program in 2018. As the retired Chairman and CEO of Cargill Inc., and the operator of a cow/calf ranch in Montana, Mr. MacMillan has seen the challenges facing private landowners first-hand. Mr. MacMillan's gift supports a Professor of Practice in Private Lands Stewardship and establishes the new Whitney MacMillan Private Lands Stewardship Program to advance research and outreach that will create new understanding about the drivers of private land changes and emerging tools for sustaining private lands.

Focus

The new Whitney MacMillan Private Lands Stewardship Program in the Ruckelshaus Institute at the University of Wyoming will address the needs of private landowners by drawing on expertise and interdisciplinary collaborations across natural resource management, rangeland ecology, business and finance, law, decision-making, collaborative processes, and other fields. The program will focus on a range of pressing issues affecting private landowners, including intergenerational transfer of land; options for participation in emerging markets such as conservation banks; science-based range management and grazing practices; and effective collaboration with federal, state, and private land managers on issues ranging from grazing leases to carnivores. Specifically, program staff will:

- Create and synthesize new knowledge about tools for sustaining private working lands;
- Communicate new and existing information relevant to private lands;
- Provide workshops and trainings for landowners, land managers, and other stakeholders;
- Educate the next generation of natural resource professionals to understand the critical role that private lands play and the challenges they face.

Stakeholder Input

The Private Lands Stewardship program officially launched in February 2018. Over the coming months, program staff will be travelling the state to meet with landowners, land managers, federal and state agency personnel, and other stakeholders, to identify emerging issues and prioritize efforts. If you would like to participate in the scoping process and/or provide input, please contact Dr. Drew Bennett.

About Drew Bennett



Dr. Drew Bennett is the Whitney MacMillan Professor of Practice in the Haub School where he directs the new Private Lands Stewardship Program. Drew's work focuses on strategies to balance agricultural production with the conservation of wildlife and other natural resources on private lands in the American West. Previously, he has worked for The Nature Conservancy on a cattle ranch in eastern Colorado, and for the Mesa Land Trust in Western Colorado where he assisted landowners in exploring conservation opportunities for their land. He holds degrees from the University of Denver, University of Texas at Austin, and Oregon State University.

"Sustaining working farms and ranches is essential to preserving the unique culture and natural heritage of the West. I look forward to working with private landowners, agency personnel, and other land stewards, to ensure private working lands remain economically viable well in to the future."

- Drew Bennett

About the Ruckelshaus Institute

The Ruckelshaus Institute, a division of the Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources at the University of Wyoming, advances the understanding and resolution of complex environment and natural resource challenges by supporting stakeholder-driven solutions, communicating relevant research, and promoting shared solutions.

Contact US

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