



Range Resilience in the West

Human Dimensions Group
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Photo: Mitch McClaran

What does resilience mean?

Capacity of the system to absorb disturbance and retain essentially the same function, structure, identity, and feedbacks (Walker et al. 2004)

- Multiple definitions today in social science literature

What does resilience mean for ranchers?

- What are the identified threats to ranching?
- How are ranchers adapting or not adapting to these threats?

Resilience of what to what?

Resilience for where?

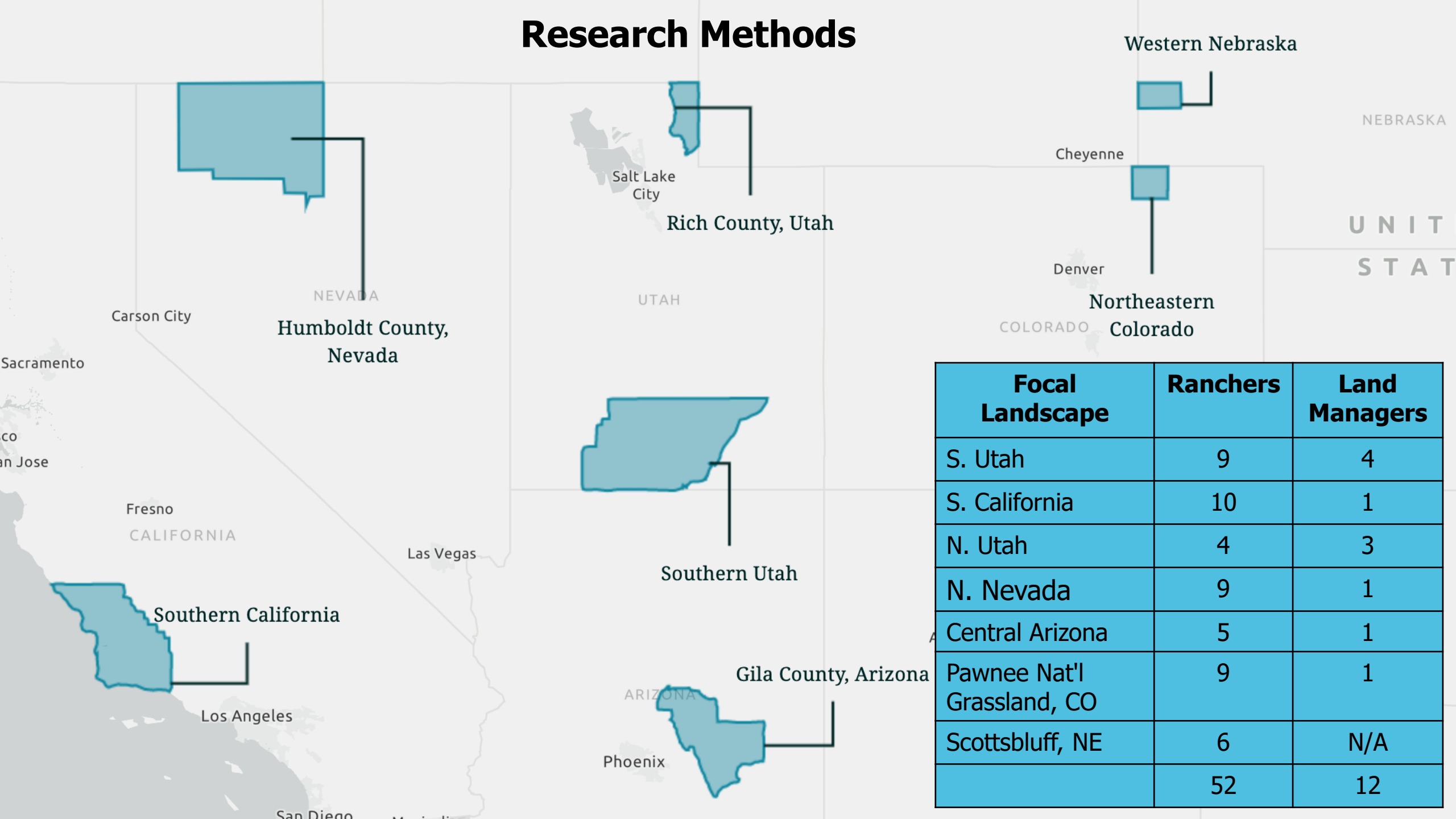
Resilience for whom?

Resilience for when?

Why resilience?

(Meerow, Newell, and Stults 2016)

Research Methods



Focal Landscape	Ranchers	Land Managers
S. Utah	9	4
S. California	10	1
N. Utah	4	3
N. Nevada	9	1
Central Arizona	5	1
Pawnee Nat'l Grassland, CO	9	1
Scottsbluff, NE	6	N/A
	52	12

Resilience Themes

1) Resilience to changing ecological conditions

Resilience to what?

2) Struggle to maintain economic resilience

Resilience to what?

3) Aspirations to keep ranch and communities resilient for the future

Resilience for when?

4) Resilience in face of competing demands on land

Resilience to what and for whom?

Resilience to changing ecological conditions

Ranch manager's ability to respond to changing ecological conditions

Threatened by weather variability, regulations on when and where to graze and drill for water, invasive species (cheatgrass), fire, etc.

Adaptations include understocking, wells and pipelines, grazing management, drought insurance, cattle genetics, buy hay, etc

Private and public land dynamics

Resilience to changing ecological conditions: Water for cattle

Well, we're almost all well water down our allotments. Very few springs and creeks. And the state of Nevada fights with the BLM over water rights and we're in the middle. And it's really hard to drill. It's expensive to drill a well anyway, but the red tape you have to go through to get permission to drill a well from the BLM and then through the state also... It takes a long time.

- Rancher, Nevada

I've got a solar pump. Who would've thought I'd put a solar pump on a windmill, it's been there since late 1800's. But that's pretty cool because when I run out of water, I've got feed and now I've got permanent water. Anyone else been down, I've got more deer, I've got more dove, I've got more pigs, I've got more wildlife than I had before directly a result of somebody willing to help me, help the land.

- Rancher, Central Arizona

Struggle to maintain economic resilience

Struggle to maintain economic viability of ranches and ranching communities in a changing global market

Range of economic pressures at different scales: beef prices, input prices, labor, role of meat packers, international markets

Adaptations: diversification & off-farm income, improve beef quality, specialization, downscale operation

Struggle to maintain economic resilience: Profitability in a changing political economy

In the past ,with the cattle, years ago before the video auction, you pretty well sold all your animals. But because of the video auction with the cattle now we have to sell in semi-load lots. And that becomes a challenge. I played with everything to try to get my cattle to where I think it will work, and it's a challenge to make this. Is the juice worth the squeeze?

Rancher, Northern Utah

A lot of people talk about the market, the cattle market, and how it's shifting - short-term trends and long-term trends and how you plan for that. The more I learn about the cattle market, the more I realize how it's just like Russian roulette in the cattle business.

Rancher, Colorado

Fed Manager 2: *A lot of them have other jobs, they're school teachers, they're whatever else. What would there be in our field office?*

Fed Manager 1: *Two.*

Fed Manager 2 : *Probably two that really do it full-time.*

Interviewer: *Out of how many?*

Fed Manager 1: *125.*

Fed Manager 2: *I don't know where you direct that threat, other than it just comes. Nowadays, on these kinds of allotments, you really can't feed a family.*

Federal Managers, Southern Utah

Aspirations to keep ranch and communities resilient for the future

Aspirations to keep the ranching operation and the ranching community operating for the next generation

Threatened by factors such as ecological variability, ranching economics, and land prices, difficulty to enter ranching without inheriting the business

Adaptations include family transition planning, conservation easements

Aspirations to keep ranch and communities resilient for the future:

Succession

A lot of these big ranches were put together by grandparents and great-grandparents. I see a real problem with keeping these ranches intact generationally. You've got a bunch of kids, you've got all of a sudden a bunch of owners and they're urban people and they see a big investment in that real estate and they don't see much of an investment coming back from the sale of cattle. So they say, "What are you doing dad? You need to sell this place, we can do better with real estate." So I see that as a problem in agriculture as time goes by. How we get away from that? I don't know.

Rancher, Southern California

I've got to be able to make it someplace that my kids want to be, my wife wants to be, and so I can't be working. I mean, I'd love to be working on that ranch 100 percent of the time... I went to work at an insurance agency, not so much as I needed a job, but it's in the works for me to buy the agency... Yeah, it diversifies things, and gives a little bit more stability... I've got two kids. I want them both to have something to stick around for. I think that's one thing we've done a poor job, in rural America, is trying to promote our kids to stay.

Rancher, Nebraska

Resilience in face of competing demands on land

Competing and changing preferences for how rangelands are used

Threatened by urban development, competition over land and water for other agricultural activities (grapes and cannabis in CA), recreation on public land, increasing involvement by environmental groups, declining importance of range within federal agencies, changing cultural norms towards ranching and agriculture

Few adaptations available: educational activities, collaborations

Resilience in face of competing demands on land: Cattle is no longer king

I feel like there's almost a negative view against ranchers, westerns, when you had your old cowboy days and stuff, the west was this romantic place. I think that has shifted a little bit to not be so great. We grew up watching John Wayne movies and stuff like that. They don't do that now. And so the perception of younger people, is looking a different direction. And so that romance of the Western beef is not quite so much. We're just the people who run cows on, and destroy the land.

Rancher, Southern Utah

Even in the last five years, our office has received a lot more just general inquires, even in the form of official inquiries through the FOIA process of how are you grazing, when are you grazing, where are you grazing? What's happening with the birds? Why do we have stock tanks? Why can't we target shoot everywhere? Just an increased interest in how it's used, not necessarily in a negative light, but I think, in the future, moving forward, there's going to be more people that are looking at how ranching is conducted out there and that could change, for better or worse, I think maybe for the better, how ranching is conducted on federal land out there.

Federal Land Manager, Colorado

What does resilience mean for ranchers?

Ranchers are trying to adapt to multiple interconnected social and ecological threats

Private and Public land dynamics

Resilience timelines: threats affect short term & long term – but ultimate goal is ranch operation for next generation

Do ranchers have capacity to adapt to all of these threats?