

2024

Rinker Rock Creek Ranch

Annual Report



University of Idaho

Rinker Rock Creek Ranch

Introduction

This report is derived in part from RRCR Working Group bi-annual reports along with information gathered during the calendar year. The 2024 Annual Report generally follows the RRCR Strategic Plan for 2021-2026 and reflects actions and accomplishments for 2024. In September 2024, the Glendale Fire was ignited by lightning and burned approximately 4,653ac (20%) of Rinker Rock Creek Ranch north of the barn to the northern property boundary. The fire was followed by intensive emergency stabilization and restoration on private and BLM ground through November. Our partners were invaluable in assisting with these efforts. Approximately 100 in-stream post-assisted log structures were installed in Long Gulch, East Fork, West Fork, and upper Rock Creek in October and approximately 3,812 acres were re-seeded with grasses and forbs in November. At the time of this report, sagebrush reseeding is scheduled for winter 2024-25.

Review of the Strategic Planning Process

The RRCR overall strategic planning effort is guided by the following principles formulated through discussions with and feedback from UI Deans and RRCR Advisory Board members, along with information garnered from similar research stations and large-scale land management projects nationally:

- Create a nationally renowned, collaborative and interdisciplinary, prestigious platform for research, outreach, and education centered on productive and sustainably-managed, multi-use rangelands
- Create a legacy of accumulated knowledge needed to maintain environmental conditions and ecological processes that support food production, air, water, and soil quality, wildlife habitat, and human health
- Engage a diversity of stakeholders in the planning and implementation of rangeland research, outreach, education, and related management activities

This Strategic Plan was finalized in 2021 and will be revised with additional feedback from Advisory Board members beginning in 2026.

Acknowledgements and Assumptions

We would like to acknowledge our current limitations as they relate to the implementation of the Strategic Plan. Achieving all the outcomes listed within the plan will require participation of the Advisory Board and stakeholders. Funding will be a critical piece in implementing the goals laid out in this plan. This Plan assumes we will have improved access to resources as well as the resolve and commitment of U of I leadership and faculty over time to achieve these objectives. Continued representation and support from the Advisory Board and working groups as active partners will be essential. We have refrained from listing

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specific timelines for deliverables because of the collaborative nature of these outcomes and the need to secure additional funding before committing to a specific timeline for many items. Our intent is that the 5-year Strategic Plan will lay important groundwork from which we will build in the future, therefore many of the efforts described in the plan will be ongoing.

Vision (from 2019 MOU):

The Parties agree to collaborate in good faith at the Rinker Rock Creek Ranch to protect the Conservation Values and establish a program of research, education and outreach focused on sustainable rangeland management in the heart of Idaho where ranching, conservation, and recreation intersect. The facility will host innovative, interdisciplinary and collaborative research and management activities addressing important and pressing challenges impacting ranching and conservation on western rangelands. The Ranch will provide opportunities for public access and recreation and will serve as a podium for education on Idaho rangelands.

List of abbreviations

- CALS College of Agricultural and Life Sciences
- CNR College of Natural Resources
- CWMA Cooperative Weed Management Association
- GRP Grassland Conservation Program
- NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service
- RRCR Rinker Rock Creek Ranch
- TNC The Nature Conservancy
- UI University of Idaho
- WRLT Wood River Land Trust

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Strategic Direction #1

Enhance research capacity

Goals:

- Integrate basic and applied science to enhance understanding of impacts of rangeland practices on dynamics in the sagebrush steppe ecosystem
- Increase use of research results, data, and related tools
- Establish a nationally recognized program of research that facilitates understanding of working landscapes and ecosystem processes
- Monitor populations of known sensitive species

Intended Outcomes:

- Increased number and diversity of research projects
- Make monitoring and research data widely available
- Develop studies that identify starting conditions for process-level research
- Provide long-term context and deep knowledge of sagebrush steppe for researchers working on shorter-term projects

Summary of accomplishments:

- 6 peer-reviewed publications in 2024 (see website for details)
- 8 research proposals and one prospectus submitted
 - USDA AFRI (Murdock et al.; Precision animal management and environmental synergies of beef cattle on Western range)
 - USDA AFRI Rapid Response (Johnson et al.; Refining Post-Wildfire Recovery With New Technologies, Climate Smart Practices, And Targeted Grazing)
 - NRCS (Johnson and Winford; Demonstration of Climate-Smart Agriculture: Linking restoration and grazing management of mesic areas to natural resource conservation)
 - USDA AFRI (Tranmer et al; Partnership: Quantifying Changes In Water Quantity And Quality Through Beaver Dam Analogs Under Different Hydrologic Conditions)
 - USDA AFRI (Johnson and Winford; Building rangeland resilience through grazing management and low-tech, process-based restoration)
 - Idaho DEQ (Ekins; Project WET 2024-2025)

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- Idaho DEQ (Ekins; Source water Assistant Extension Water Educator Funding)
- TNC-Idaho Science Catalyst Fund (T. Ganz) “Evaluating effects of Restoration and Management on Wildfire Risk in the Sagebrush Sea - pending
- TNC/BLM Virtual Fence prospectus
- Graduate students employed (21 to date):
 - Tyler O’Donell (MS)
 - Jaqueline Snow (MS)
 - Walker Field (MS)
 - Kirby Lau (MS)
 - Ellen Incelli (MS)
 - Abhinav Shrestha (MS)
 - Sidney Stratton (MS)
 - Leah Dreesman (PhD)
 - Landon Sullivan (PhD)
 - Aaron Johnston (MS; graduated in 2024)
 - Birochan Acharya (MS; graduated in 2024)
 - Eric Winford (PhD; graduated 2024)
 - Kayla Johnston (PhD; graduated 2024)
 - Heather Neace (MS; graduated 2023)
 - Georgia Harrison (PhD; graduated 2023)
 - Kelton Hunter (MS; graduated 2023)
 - Aaron Wold (MS; graduated 2022)
 - Kenny Randall (MS; graduated 2021)
 - Chas Jones (MS; graduated 2021)
 - Alex Traynor (MS; graduated 2020)
 - Maggie Renolds Bloomsburg (MS; graduated 2018)
- Undergraduate students
 - Annie Vaage (undergraduate researcher)
- Conducted annual monitoring blitz

Goal 1: Integrate basic and applied science to enhance understanding of impacts of rangeland practices on dynamics in the sagebrush steppe ecosystem

Key Actions	Implementation Responsibility	Deliverables
<p>A. Increase distribution of requests for proposals from a diversity of sponsoring agencies</p>	<p>CALS and CNR Associate Dean of Research; U of I Office of Research and Economic Development; The Rangeland Center, RRCR Research Director</p>	<p>Increased number of research proposals submitted to sponsoring agencies that include activities at RRCR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 research proposals submitted: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> USDA AFRI x 4 Idaho DEQ x 2 NRCS x 1 TNC x 1 USDI BLM x 1
<p>B. Enhance support tools for researchers</p>	<p>CALS and CNR Associate Deans of Research; Dir of Idaho Agricultural Experiment Station; RRCR Operations Manager; Advisory Board and partners; Northwest Knowledge Network; CALS/CNR Development Directors; RRCR Research Director</p>	<p>Develop physical infrastructure that facilitates research activity and helps meet long-term data collection goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved corral infrastructure at the barn and lower corrals • Barn remodel began (classroom and office space) • Maintained vehicles • Acquired 1 new UTV for research use • Acquired 1 used truck for research use • Maintained 2 weather stations with continuous data transmission • Acquired and installed satellite internet

Goal 2: Increase use of research results, data, and related tools

Key Actions	Implementation Responsibility	Deliverables
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a widely accessible, centralized database of monitoring and research data 	RRCR Research Director; Northwest Knowledge Network	Database that is updated at least annually and has web-based access <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintenance and development of online database for monitoring data Continued annual monitoring of water temp, water flow, weather, and upland vegetation; fish population surveys with DEQ; trout redd surveys with WRLT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the availability of historical information and records 	RRCR Research Director; CALS/CNR website coordinators	Historical information and records summarized and available on the RRCR website; easily accessible by stakeholders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NA for 2024
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop communication tools highlighting research results and availability of data 	RRCR Research Director; CALS/CNR website coordinators and communication specialists; University Communications and Marketing; The Rangeland Center; UI Faculty; Working Groups	Webpage with bibliography and links to citations of RRCR-related publications, recorded presentations, and outreach materials <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated and maintained bibliography on website Hosted and archived annual webinar on website Increased presence of RRCR-research results, data, and tools on online and social media outlets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated research summaries on website Media coverage of early grazing study and monitoring blitz

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintained social media accounts (Instagram, Facebook) to highlight publications of RRCR research and outreach events
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Goal 3: Establish a nationally recognized program of research that facilitates understanding of working landscapes and ecosystem processes

Key Actions	Implementation Responsibility	Deliverables
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate research projects focused on understanding rangeland ecosystem processes including primary production, trophic structure, organic matter accumulation, inorganic inputs and nutrient cycling, ecological disturbances, and livestock production 	RRCR Research Director; UI Faculty; Faculty at other institutions; Office of Research and Economic Development; The Rangeland Center; researchers at government agencies; Working Groups	Grant proposals that address core research topics submitted to diverse sponsoring agencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 grant proposals and one research prospectus submitted addressing livestock production, primary production (herbicides; beaver dams and sage-grouse), organic matter accumulation and nutrient cycling (soil carbon; hydrology), ecological disturbances (grazing, fire, reseeding, restoration), and trophic structure (herbicides)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Align core research with nationally recognized programs like the LTER, LTAR, and NEON Networks¹ 	RRCR Research Director; UI Faculty; Faculty at other institutions; Office of Research and Economic Development;	Research programs that contribute to development of a coherent proposal to NSF LTER or NEON programs, and/or USDA LTAR program

¹ Long-term Ecological Research (LTER) Network and Long-term Agroecosystem Research (LTAR) Network sites examine and explore long-term and large-scale trends and phenomena, helping to understand an ecosystem, a place, or a practice in great depth. These networks offer an opportunity to contribute to research that advances a greater understanding of ecosystem level processes and/or agricultural production are essential in this landscape. Such programs, in turn, provide access to financial resources that would help establish long-term sustainability of the ranch as a research station. The LTER and LTAR networks are known for their significant contribution to knowledge guiding policy development. National Ecological Observatory Network (NEON) is a continental-scale observation network designed to collect long-term ecological data to better understand how ecosystems are changing.

	The Rangeland Center; researchers at government agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposals – see list of proposals above Publications – 6 articles published in peer-reviewed journals; 2 MS theses and 2 dissertations completed
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Goal 4: Monitor populations of known sensitive species

Key Actions	Implementation Responsibility	Deliverables
A. Conduct greater sage-grouse lek surveys	RRCR Research Director; Idaho Department of Fish and Game; Bureau of Land Management	Location data and status information for grouse leks on and near RRCR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research conducted on sage-grouse brood space-use and survival as a function of beaver dams; confirmed lek status as part of this research
B. Monitor habitat use by sage-grouse	RRCR Research Director; Bureau of Land Management	Movement and habitat use data on and near RRCR property <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research initiated on sage-grouse brood space-use and survival as a function of beaver dams
C. Conduct surveys of other sensitive species as determined by available resources and as occurrences become known	RRCR Research Director; UI Faculty; Idaho Department of Fish and Game; Bureau of Land Management	Occurrence and distribution data <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spotted Frog Surveys planned but precluded by Glendale Fire; spotted frog occurrences confirmed at Hill Pasture spring and Long Gulch DEQ electroshock surveys confirmed Wood River Sculpin Beaver dam and BDA survey of entire ranch conducted as part of MS research project

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Strategic Direction #2

Enhance and support livestock operations and related infrastructure

Goal:

- Use livestock operations to achieve the Vision, consistent with the Strategic Plan and Grassland Reserve Program easements

Intended Outcomes:

- Improved condition of existing livestock-related infrastructure
- New infrastructure to help expand research opportunities
- Improved cattle management techniques utilizing herding and supplements

Summary of accomplishments:

- Maintained fencing to support grazing rotation
- 2024 grazing plan executed; cattle moved every two weeks, research needs integrated
- Forage utilization monitored
- Guy Canyon utilization increased in desired areas due to water development improvement in 2023
- 2+ miles of barbed wire removed in summer 2024
- Continued work on barn corral improvements
- Maintained and improved lower corrals
- Assessed water development in West Fork as part of Water Development Day outreach event
- Used earmark funds for barn renovation, including storage and solar power

Goal 1: Use livestock operations, including infrastructure development and maintenance, to achieve the Vision, consistent with the Strategic Plan and Grassland Reserve Program easements

Key Actions	Implementation Responsibility	Deliverables
A. Plan for and manage cattle activity consistent with research plans and conservation values through annual grazing plan	Cattle Management Lead; Cattle Manager; Operations Manager; RRCR Research Director	Integrated and consistent grazing management, to meet both near- and long-term research and conservation objectives

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2024 grazing plan executed; cattle moved every two weeks • Guy Canyon utilization increased in desired areas due to water development improvement in 2023. • Integrated early grazing research into grazing plan • Accommodated herbicide research sampling schedule • Grazed Hill Pasture late-season for cheatgrass control
<p>B. Maintain and enhance fencing for optimal cattle management</p>	<p>Cattle Manager; Operations Manager</p>	<p>Limit trespass cattle, contain cattle in pastures according to grazing and research plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2+ miles of barbed wire removed in summer 2024 • Hours spent repairing and maintaining fence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Barbed wire: 630 hrs ○ Wildlife-friendly: 35 hrs • Trespass cattle were problematic in Middle Poison Creek and Shirley Spring
<p>C. Identify infrastructure needs including water development</p>	<p>Cattle Management Lead; Cattle Manager; Operations Manager; RRCR Research Director</p>	<p>Prioritized list of infrastructure needs, assessment of locations for water developments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue work on barn corral improvements • Maintained and improved lower corrals • New used truck acquired from Twin Falls Extension • Assessed water development in West Fork as part of Water

		Development Day outreach event
D. Identify near and long-term funding options for infrastructure needs	Operations Manager; Cattle Management Lead; RRRC Research Director; CALS and CNR Development	List of funding options <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used earmark funds for barn renovation, including storage and solar power
E. Improved cattle management	Cattle Manager; Cattle Management Lead; Operations Manager	Reduced reliance on fencing; vegetation utilization at desired levels for research, conservation, and livestock production objectives; reduced impacts on sensitive areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BLM Grazing permit renewal is still in progress, the permit renewal is expected to improve overall flexibility for the private and public grazing land • Cattle rotation on 2-week schedule minimizes potential impacts on sensitive areas • Forage utilization was 8-17.5% at all upland monitored sites (n = 15 sites) except for one site that experienced intended greater use at 33% • To accommodate poor forage conditions in 2024, yearling cattle were removed from ranch after 60 days and pasture rotations were shortened

Strategic Direction #3

Enhance and conserve fish and wildlife habitat

Goals:

- Enhance conservation values of the Ranch to restore water quantity and quality and protect special-status species
- Minimize invasive species and risk of wildfire and employ fire surrogates to maintain conservation values Ensure activities are consistent with GRP easement
- Integrate conservation projects with research objectives

Intended Outcomes:

- Widespread ecological integrity consistent with conservation values and research needs and objectives
- Areas of special ecological or conservation concern or value identified, protected, and monitored as necessary
- Understand how and where to successfully use cattle as a tool to enhance desired upland and riparian conditions

Summary of accomplishments:

- Assessed and managed upper diversion beaver activity
- Weeds treated with herbicide, cheatgrass targeted with grazing
- Conducted fish population surveys, and trout redd surveys
- Completed East Fork head cut restoration work
- Conducted post-fire emergency stabilization re-seeding and installation of in-stream structures

Goal 1: Enhance the conservation values of the Ranch to restore water quantity and quality and protect special-status species

Key Actions	Implementation Responsibility	Deliverables
A. Identify areas of special concern or value	Advisory Board; Fish and Wildlife Habitat Working Group; RRCR Research Director; Operations Manager; Cattle Manager	Prioritized areas for protection or restoration to maintain or enhance ecological and conservation values <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • East Fork head cut restoration • Upland re-seeding and PALS structures installed after Glendale Fire

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-seeded and monitored upper Guy Canyon Pond restoration
B. Plan for necessary improvements for sensitive areas	Advisory Board; Fish and Wildlife Habitat Working Group; RRCR Research Director; Operations Manager; Cattle Manager	<p>Stepwise plan for improving areas of concern including fence removal/replacement for wildlife benefit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Springs in Hill Pasture and Shirley Springs identified as conservation priorities • Approximately 25 miles of fencing lost or damaged in Glendale Fire; planning for replacement via insurance claim or possible virtual fence • Coordinating winter aerial sagebrush seeding in Glendale Fire perimeter • Plan future seeding and herbicide treatments in fire scar
C. Utilize cattle as a conservation tool via prescribed or targeted grazing, including rest or grazing exclusion where appropriate	Cattle Manager, Cattle Management Lead, Operations Manager, Working Groups	<p>Understanding of how and where cattle grazing can be utilized to achieve beneficial ecological outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used cattle to reduce cheatgrass density in Hill Pasture • Monitored forage utilization • Cattle excluded from the developed spring near Cow Camp and Guy Canyon Pond • Minimized use of Shirley Springs via range riders, alternative water, and mineral, and short-duration access in Middle Poison Creek

Goal 2: Minimize invasive species and risk of wildfire and employ fire surrogates to maintain conservation values

Key Actions	Implementation Responsibility	Deliverables
A. Evaluate wildfire risk, plan for post-fire rehabilitation needs	Operations Manager; UI Faculty and graduate students	Wildfire risk and rehabilitation plan that will guide management activities to reduce wildfire risk and prepare for rehabilitation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Glendale Fire (September 2024) post-fire rehabilitation implementation report will guide future rehabilitation plan
B. Treat invasive weeds with herbicides and targeted grazing where feasible	Operations Manager; CWMA; UI Faculty	Fewer noxious weeds <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Ventanata dubia</i> near West Fork treated in Spring for a 2nd year with Plateau Knapweed, scotch thistle, and rush skeleton weed throughout the ranch treated with Milestone. Large patch of scotch thistle south of cow camp treated Milestone Rush skeleton weed in Hill Pasture treated with assistance from Cooperative Weed Management Area using Milestone

Goal 3: Ensure activities are consistent with GRP easement (see also Strategic Direction 5 regarding public access)

Key Actions	Implementation Responsibility	Deliverables
A. Consult GRP easement and NRCS staff when evaluating and approving research project requests and property improvements as necessary	Operations Manager, Director of Research	Approved projects are consistent with the Easement and the ranch Vision. NRCS approvals documented as necessary.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notified NRCS about Glendale Fire and recovery plans, East Fork head cut restoration project, and barn renovation
B. Work with NRCS to maintain a conservation easement plan that is consistent with the GRP easement and the Vision for the Ranch	NRCS staff, Operations Manager, RRCR Research Director; Advisory Board delegates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RRCR is currently in need of an NRCS point of contact to update and revise the easement plan to align with RRCR activities

Goal 4: Integrate conservation projects with research objectives

Key Actions	Implementation Responsibility	Deliverables
A. Identify and integrate feasible and appropriate conservation projects with research objectives	Operations manager; RRCR Research Director; Research and Monitoring Working Group; Fish and Wildlife Habitat Working Group; Advisory Board	<p>Conservation projects supported by science</p> <p>Research projects that address broader impacts for working, multi-use landscapes (see Strategic Direction 1)</p> <p>Conservation and research projects that complement the respective goals of each</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified watershed-level BDA installation as a project proposal and submitted several research proposals for implementation (pending) PIs Prather and Johnson conducted indaziflam research on cheatgrass control and associated sage-grouse habitat use and food web effects PI Picardi evaluated sage-grouse habitat use and brood survival as

		<p>a function of beaver dams and analogs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• PI Winford evaluated early-season grazing in meadows and effects on vegetation and soil carbon• Post-fire rehabilitation in uplands and riparian was incorporated into AFRI Rapid Response research proposal• PIs Karl and Zajchowski evaluated recreation impacts in rangelands
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Strategic Direction #4

Conduct education, extension and outreach programs (EEO)

Goals:

- Use knowledge acquired at the Ranch to inform cattle grazing, conservation, and rangeland policy practices
- Identify infrastructure needs for conducting education, extension, and outreach at RRCR
- Create a legacy of accumulated knowledge accomplished through citizen science efforts
- Provide opportunities for diverse publics to connect with sagebrush steppe landscape and a working ranch

Intended Outcomes

- Science and management conducted at the Ranch is delivered to various stakeholders
- An increased number of stakeholders are engaged in programs and activities at RRCR, including land managers, livestock producers, educators, researchers, policy makers, community leaders, community members and students
- Needs assessment for enhancing education, extension, and outreach at RRCR
- Public establishes a connection to sagebrush ecosystem and familiarity with working ranch

Summary of accomplishments:

- Hosted Annual Research Webinar
- CSI conducted winter/spring field trips
- Instagram and Twitter pages maintained (10+ posts); developed Facebook page
- 2 interns trained (19 to date) – Courtney Beene, Matt Mikelson
- Communicated wildlife-friendly fence lessons learned to broad audience
- Mule Deer Foundation Volunteer Day (fence removal)
- Advisory board field tour
- Hosted Grass Identification Course
- Monitoring blitz included ~35 volunteers
- Hosted U.S. and Idaho Legislative Tour
- Hosted Water Development Day outreach event
- Planned REM 460 field trip and “Science Saturday”; cancelled due to Glendale Fire
- Planned presentation of RRRCR research to ~70 AP Biology students at WRHS; cancelled due to Glendale Fire
- Planned spotted frog surveys with Wood River Valley high school students; cancelled due to Glendale Fire
- Presentation to Wood River Watershed Advisory Group

Goal 1: Use knowledge acquired at the Ranch to inform cattle grazing, conservation, and rangeland policy practices

Key Actions	Implementation Responsibility	Deliverables
A. Generate list of audiences and mechanism for connecting with those audiences	Extension faculty; Education and Outreach Working Group	Audience list <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed targeted audience for Water Development Day with The Nature Conservancy
B. Establish education partnerships with community groups	Extension faculty; Education and Outreach Working Group; Advisory Board; UI Director of Extension	New partnerships with regional and local education groups & livestock industry stakeholders and ranchers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New membership with Idaho Cattle Association • Hosted volunteer day with new Wood River Chapter of Mule Deer Foundation • College of Southern Idaho students Outdoor Club

		volunteered assistance with post-fire rehab
C. Create connections with livestock industry for specific EEO activities	Extension faculty; Education and Outreach Working Group; Advisory Board; UI Director of Extension	New opportunities for EEO in collaboration with agriculture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planned attendance at ICA meeting precluded by RRRCR personnel medical leave Water Development attended by livestock producers
D. Establish K-12 school partnerships	Extension faculty; Education and Outreach Working Group; Advisory Board; UI Director of Extension; UI Director of 4-H and Youth Development	New collaborations with local or regional K-12 schools and 4-H <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planned activities were precluded by Glendale Fire
E. Engage Advisory Board in developing new opportunities for EEO	Extension faculty; Education and Outreach Working Group; Advisory Board	New EEO programs and events <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaged TNC, BLM, ISDA for Water Development Day outreach event

Goal 2: Identify infrastructure needs for conducting education, extension, and outreach at RRRCR

Key Actions	Implementation Responsibility	Deliverables
A. Determine necessary infrastructure	Education and Outreach Working Group; Ops Manager; Dir. of Research	List of needs (software, supplies, buildings, portable shade structures, toilets, etc.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determined need for equipment and supply storage for researchers and identified potential purchase shipping container; sold storage building materials to help fund Evaluated damage to Cow Camp from Glendale Fire and began process of recovery

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Wish list” maintained
B. Identify funding sources	Education and Outreach Working Group; Ops Manager; Dir. of Research; Advisory Board	List of potential funding sources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified NSF planning grant as a starting point for NSF infrastructure grant

Goal 3: Create a legacy of accumulated knowledge accomplished through citizen science efforts

Key Actions	Implementation Responsibility	Deliverables
A. Engage stakeholders through monitoring efforts	Extension faculty; Education and Outreach Working Group; Advisory Board	Increased stakeholder engagement, understanding, and feedback <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yearly monitoring blitz included ~35 volunteers from diverse organizations • Spotted frog surveys were precluded by Glendale Fire • Annual trout redd surveys included WRLT • Utilization monitoring included members of BLM, ISDA, CSI, UI • IDEQ continued water and aquatic habitat monitoring • RRCR continued participation in Camas Prairie Water Study (USGS, IDWR)

Goal 5: Provide opportunities for public to connect with sagebrush steppe landscape and a working ranch

Key Actions	Implementation Responsibility	Deliverables
A. Plan engagement opportunities for public	Education and Outreach Working Group; Extension faculty	Annual event(s) conducted – Sagebrush Saturdays, sage grouse viewing, wildflower walks, dutch oven ranch gathering, etc.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social media: Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook pages maintained (please tag us and/or send photos to share).<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Instagram: #uirockcreekranch○ Twitter: @Ulrockcreek○ 10+ posts• Water Development Day outreach event
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Strategic Direction #5

Manage public access and recreation

Goals:

- Provide a wide range of managed recreational opportunities on the Ranch; ensure these uses are consistent with the GRP Easements and balanced with other Ranch uses
- Utilize recreational opportunities to enhance communication with and education of users

Intended Outcomes:

- Enhance communication with and education of recreational users
- Connect with the broader community through recreation
- Establish infrastructure necessary to manage recreation (parking areas, signs, gates/fences)

Summary of accomplishments:

- Signs and access yes boxes maintained
- Pilot recreation study continued; maintained trail cameras and trail counters
- Maintained security cameras
- Recreation literature review research project initiated (PIs Karl and Zajchowski)
- Installed fence style near lower corrals at Lower Poison Creek access
- Reinstalled “stay on trail” signs installed for winter at 3 locations in conjunction with Sawtooth Snowmobile Club and BLM

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- Managed closures related to Glendale Fire
- Applied for funding from Outdoor Recreation Fund Advisory Council for jack fence and vault toilet
- Communicated with hunters about access yes program

Goal 1: Provide a wide range of managed recreational opportunities on the Ranch; ensure uses are consistent with GRP Easements and balanced with other ranch uses

Key Actions	Implementation Responsibility	Deliverables
A. Communicate appropriate ranch uses	Operations manager; Public Access Working Group; relevant community recreation groups	Designate parking areas and install signage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Installed fence style near lower corrals at Lower Poison Creek access • Reinstalled “stay on trail” signs installed for winter at 3 locations in conjunction with Sawtooth Snowmobile Club and BLM • Installed signs at barn during construction • Numerous trailhead area signs installed/maintained • Vandalized signs replaced/repared • Access yes boxes maintained/monitored
B. Gather baseline data on recreational uses, locations, timing, type of use	Operations manager with public access working group members, in consultation with UI faculty	Data set to help understand and manage recreational uses, feed into future research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued pilot recreation study, data collection ongoing • Recreation literature review and research project ongoing (Jaqueline Snow, MS student) • Access Yes box monitored

C. Monitor recreational uses for GRP easement consistency, including motorized uses	Operations Manager	Adherence to GRP Easement terms, decrease in trespass motorized use <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some motorized trespass use observed during hunting season • Search for funding to help manage motorized recreation continues
D. Confirm all recreation enhancements are consistent with GRP easement before application	Operations Manager, NRCS staff	Approval secured where needed. Documentation of coordination with NRCS if required <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A for 2024
E. Communicate with public and create infrastructure necessary to minimize conflicts with grazing and research	Operations Manager, with Public Access Working Group, Cattle Management Lead, Cattle Manager.	Signs, gates, fences, as necessary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New signs installed for winter – “stay on trail” for snowmobiles • Existing signs maintained; new signs installed • Used website and social media to communicate fire-related closures to public

Goal 2: Utilize recreational opportunities to enhance communication with and education of users

Key Actions	Implementation Responsibility	Deliverables
A. Communicate with public about wildlife habitat needs – utilize public access working group network to communicate when specific areas should be avoided to limit wildlife disturbance and habitat damage	Operations Manager, with Public Access Working Group members and UI Communications	Timely signs, social media posts, website updates, other forms of outreach as necessary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A for 2024
B. Create a list of opportunities to host and educate the recreation community about RRCR	Operations manager with Public Access Working Group and partners, UI Communications & events teams	Identify opportunities for existing recreational or educational events that increase community connection with RRCR

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identified Wood River Trails Coalition as a target for collaboration
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Strategic Direction #6

Increase marketing, communications, and fundraising

Goals:

- Diversify support for the Ranch
- Determine ways to support RRCR operations to ensure long-term relevancy, support, and stability

Intended Outcomes

- Coordinated communication strategy that reaches a broad audience
- Targeted communication and marketing materials
- Understanding of needs and potential sources of support
- Strategies for soliciting diverse sources of support

Summary of accomplishments:

- Hosted annual research webinar
- Conducted two tours for potential donors
- Fee structure implemented
- Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook pages – maintained
- Hosted Grass Identification course (fee)
- Attended annual meeting of the Organization of Biological Field Stations
- Presented at Wood River Watershed Advisory Group
- Hosted U.S. and Idaho State Legislative Tour
- Hosted annual tour for The Nature Conservancy of Idaho Board of Trustees
- Communicated with UI and CNR development personnel about funding needs
- Obtained funding for post-fire soil stabilization from USFWS, BLM, OSC, IDFG, UI CALS, and private donors via WRLT

Goal 1: Diversify support for and enhance relevancy of the Ranch.

Key Actions	Implementation Responsibility	Deliverables
A. Target communications to key elected officials, agency leaders, donors, and stakeholders	Development staff with Operations manager & RRCR Advisory board; Federal Relations program	Current list of relevant parties <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual research webinar • Annual Advisory Board Tour • Hosted legislative tour • Hosted TNC Board of Trustees • Two tours for potential donors
B. Host regular meetings, webinars, or ranch tours to communicate implementation of the Vision	RRCR Research Director, Communications team, Operations Manager	Enhanced communication of ongoing efforts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual research webinar • Annual Advisory Board Tour • Hosted legislative tour • Hosted TNC Board of Trustees
C. Identify funding needs for enhancing ranch management and research	Ops Manager, RRCR Research Director, Cattle Manager	Prioritized list of needs, with timeline <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Wish list” updated and shared with development team • Worked with partners to identify potential solutions to infrastructure needs
D. Identify potential funding sources for non-research projects	RRCR Research Director; Ops Manager; Cattle Manager; Advisory Board; Office of Research and Economic Development	Funding source list with target application dates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSF Research Infrastructure Program • USDA Research Facilities Act Program • Funding for postfire soil stabilization from USFWS, BLM, OSC, IDFG, UI CALS, private donors via WRLT

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attended annual meeting of the Organization for Biological Field Stations
E. Solicit private funds for operational needs	UI Development officers in collaboration with UI Deans or other UI Administration, Operations Manager, RRCR Research Director, Cattle Manager	<p>New relationships with donors; charitable contributions and commitments of charitable gifts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toured ranch with two potential donors • Funding for postfire soil stabilization from USFWS, BLM, OSC, IDFG, UI CALS, private donors via WRLT • Communicated with development team about infrastructure needs

Goal 2: Determine ways to support RRCR operations to ensure long-term relevancy, support, and stability

Key Actions	Implementation Responsibility	Deliverables
A. Develop and implement use fee structure	Operations Manager; RRCR Research Director	<p>Income to support ranch operations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income generated via fee structure and grass ID course offering
B. Explore recovery of UI F&A fees, reduced F&A, or other funding mechanisms	Operations Manager; RRCR Research Director; UI administration	<p>Income to support necessary improvements to benefit research and operations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A for 2024
C. Maintain and manage allocated ranch budget	Operations Manager; RRCR Research Director; Fiscal Staff	<p>Yearly financial overview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fees augmented operating budget by ~20%

Strategic Direction #7

Develop and sustain collaboration with Advisory Board and other stakeholders

Goal:

- Engage collaboratively with the Advisory Board on research, education, outreach, and management activities

Intended Outcomes

- Coordinated communication between Advisory Board and University of Idaho personnel
- Multiple opportunities for input from Advisory Board on Ranch-related projects and activities
- Engagement of Advisory Board in Ranch activities and potential research topics from inception to conclusion, to foster broad, long-term support for RRCR

Summary of accomplishments:

- Attended Idaho Rangeland Conservation Partnership annual meeting
- Held one Advisory Board Tour; Annual Board Meeting moved to Jan 2025 due to Glendale Fire
- Attended Organization for Biological Field Station annual meeting
- Working groups participated in numerous projects on the ground including fencing and restoration work, including board members
- Postfire soil stabilization treatments by USFWS, BLM, OSC, IDFG, UI CALS, WRLT, CSI, TNC
- Hosted a tour for The Nature Conservancy Idaho Board of Trustees
- Opportunity for research summit with stakeholders identified for 2025
- Research proposal and prospectus developed in collaboration TNC

Goal: Engage collaboratively with the Advisory Board on research, education, outreach, and management activities

Key Activities	Implementation Responsibility	Deliverables
A. Annual Advisory Board Meetings	Advisory Board Chair and Vice-Chair, Ops Manager, RRCR Research Director;	Opportunity to assess status of implementing strategic plan. Opportunity for communication to advance strategies for collaborative research and management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Meeting moved to Jan 2025 due to Glendale Fire

<p>B. Annual Research Webinar</p>	<p>RRCR Research Director; UI Faculty; External Faculty; Advisory Board</p>	<p>Presentations to ensure other researchers and stakeholders are aware of research program activities at the ranch, opportunity for communication regarding collaborative research and management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosted Annual Research Webinar
<p>C. Annual Advisory Board Field Tour</p>	<p>Advisory Board Chair and Vice-Chair, Dir. of Research</p>	<p>Opportunity for communication to advance strategies for collaborative research and management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field tour held in June 2024 • Advisory Board members invited to join Science Saturday lectures (event precluded due to Glendale Fire)
<p>D. Working Group activities</p>	<p>Working Groups</p>	<p>Input from diverse working group members. Collaboration on research and management.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working groups participated in numerous projects on the ground including fencing and restoration work, including board members • Postfire soil stabilization treatments by USFWS, BLM, OSC, IDFG, UI CALS, WRLT, CSI, TNC
<p>E. “Rock Creek Sustainability Days” - opportunities for faculty to listen to stakeholder issues in a field setting (at RRCR or other location)</p>	<p>RRCR Research Director; Ops Manager, Advisory Board, UI Faculty</p>	<p>New ideas generated for relevant research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity for research summit with stakeholders identified for 2025

January 2025

References

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