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Conservation Outcomes and Social Relations: A Comparative Study of Private Ranchland Conservation Easements

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Abstract

Conservation easements have increased dramatically but their social and ecological outcomes are largely unknown. To examine the influence of social relations and institutional structure on easement design and conservation outcomes, we compared two regions where land trusts hold conservation easements protecting large areas of private rangeland: Lassen Foothills, California, and Malpai Borderlands, Arizona and New Mexico. We conducted interviews with landowners, land trust staff, and public agency employees, and analyzed easement documents and monitoring reports. Social relations and organization goals influenced easement terms and their direct effects on land use. Furthermore, easements had important indirect conservation-relevant outcomes resulting from increased land management resources, financial incentives,

and altered relations among landowners, government agencies, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Easements entail a combination of collaborative and regulatory approaches, and their embedded social relations are important for conservation outcome assessment. These findings have significant implications for how conservation programs are designed, monitored, enforced, and evaluated.

Keywords:

- collaboration
- conservation effectiveness
- evaluation
- grazing
- nonprofit organizations
- policy outcomes
- policy outputs
- private land conservation
- property rights
- regulation

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