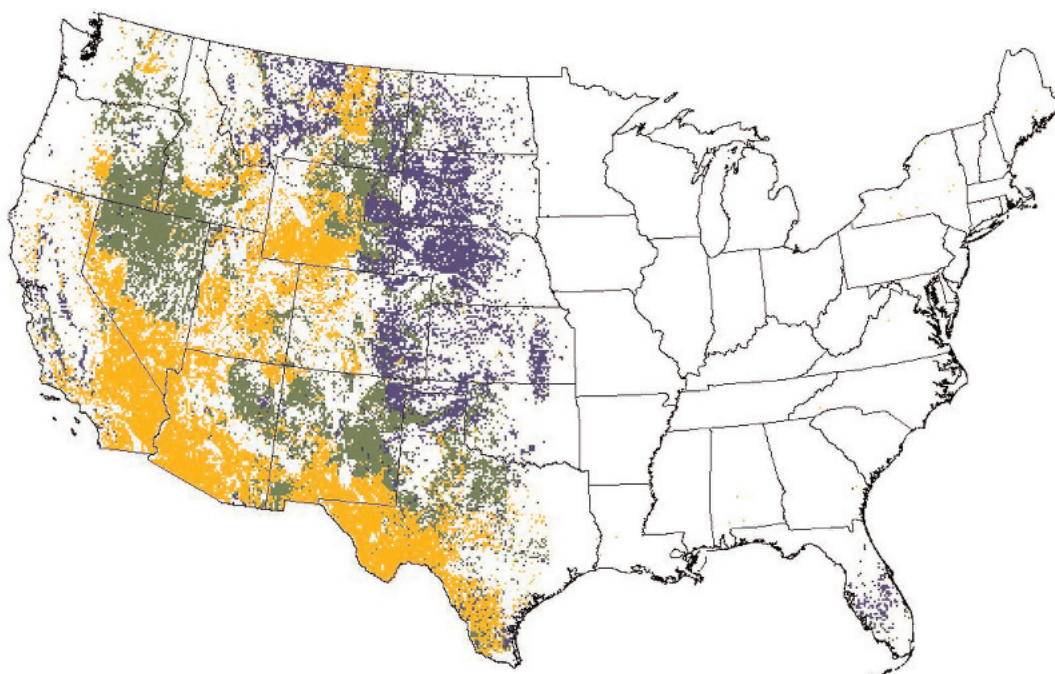


Putting the Pieces Together: Assessing Social, Ecological, and Economic Rangeland Sustainability

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Why Consider Rangeland Sustainability?

United States rangelands currently cover approximately 770 million acres and provide important commodity, amenity, and spiritual values. The country has lost more than 10 million acres of rangelands since 1982, primarily to development and cropland (16). Projections suggest that land available for livestock forage production will decrease over the next 50 years, with the actual rate depending upon environmental issues, government policies, and competing uses. Conversely, grazing land use for wildlife habitat, as well as wildlife-related human activities such as hunting, is predicted to increase during the same period (17).



Rangeland ecosystems account for approximately one-third of the lands in the United States, including Great Plains grasslands, savannas in Texas and Florida, sagebrush steppe and shrublands in the Great Basin, Alaskan tundra, alpine meadows, wetlands, and Southwestern deserts. Map courtesy of USDA Forest Service showing grasslands (purple), shrublands (orange), and mixed shrub-steppe vegetation (green).

As competing demands contend for increasingly limited rangeland resources, consistent, comparable economic, social, and ecological data is necessary for informed decision-making regarding tradeoffs