

Public Perceptions of Public Lands Grazing: From bad news to not so bad after all

Mark Brunson
Dept. of Environment & Society
Utah State University

6th National Grazing Lands Conference – Grapevine, TX – Dec. 13-16, 2015

Is there such a thing as “the public”?

- Yes, but the “public” opinions that matter most are when specific publics emerge to engage in political action
- This happens when citizens perceive negative consequences of processes/events outside their normal control
- Political action seeks to gain/regain control



Negative consequences? In the context of livestock grazing?





- Environmental degradation has occurred on some lands held in public trust, and sometimes due to grazing
- Specific events have sparked emergence of grazing-focused publics (pro and con)



National survey (Brunson & Steel 1994, 1996)

- Telephone survey of 1,360 adults
- Questions relevant to times
 - Should livestock grazing be banned?
 - Should grazing fees be raised?
 - Should wilderness be grazed?
 - Set aside ESA to protect ranching?

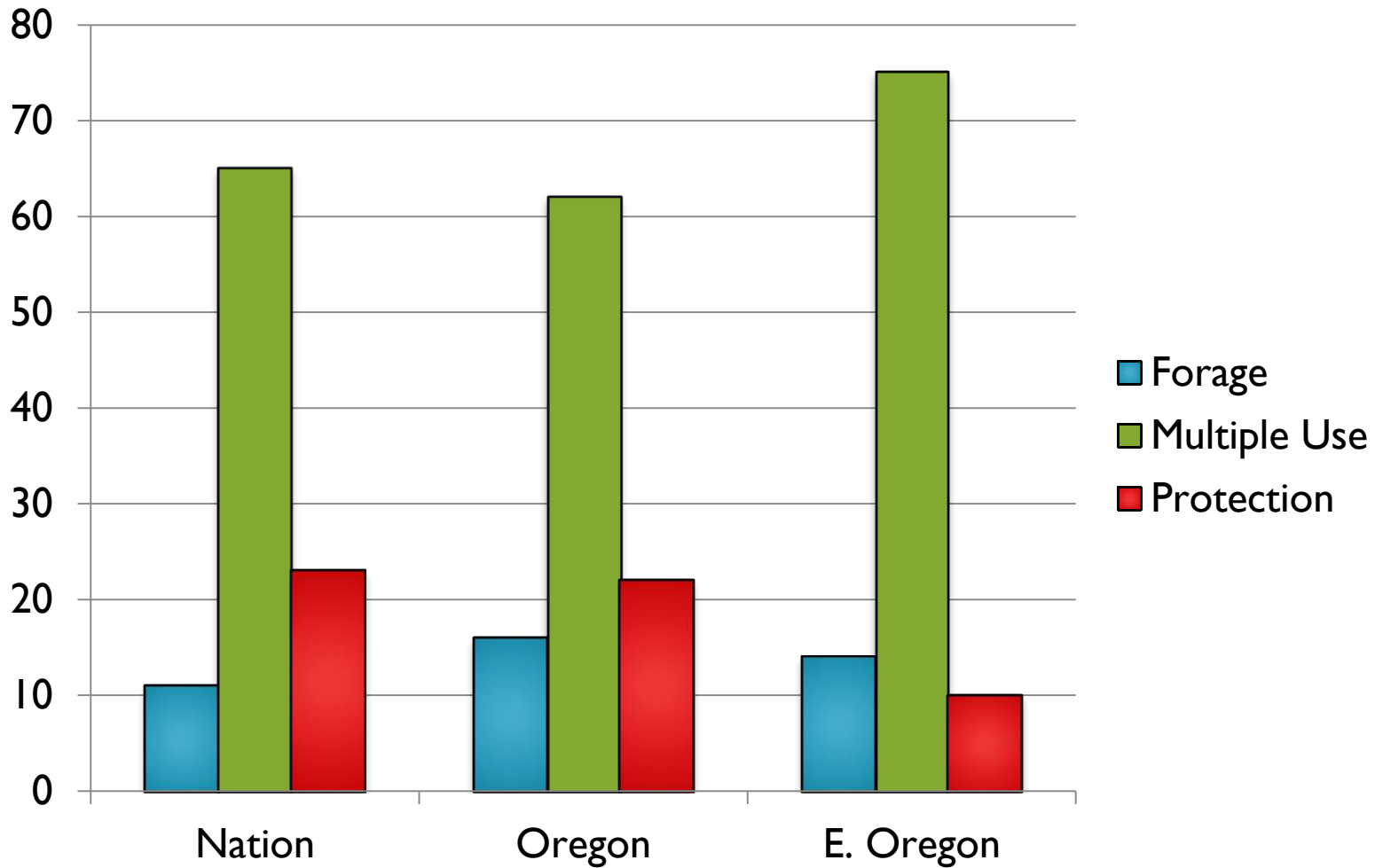
Attitudes toward grazing (1993)

	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Agree</u>
Livestock grazing should be banned on federal lands	21%	45%	34% 
Federal range policy should emphasize grazing	 43%	32%	25%
Ranchers should pay more to graze federal lands	14%	19%	67% 
Set aside endangered species laws to protect ranching	 65%	17%	20%

Beliefs about grazing (1993)

	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Agree</u>
Most federal rangeland is overgrazed by livestock	26%	14%	60%
Extent of overgrazing has decreased in last 50 years	65%	18%	17%
Water quality on federal range has declined in past 50 yrs	7%	7%	86%
Loss of riparian vegetation is a serious range problem	8%	10%	82%

Why the picture's not so bleak: Public lands priorities (1993)

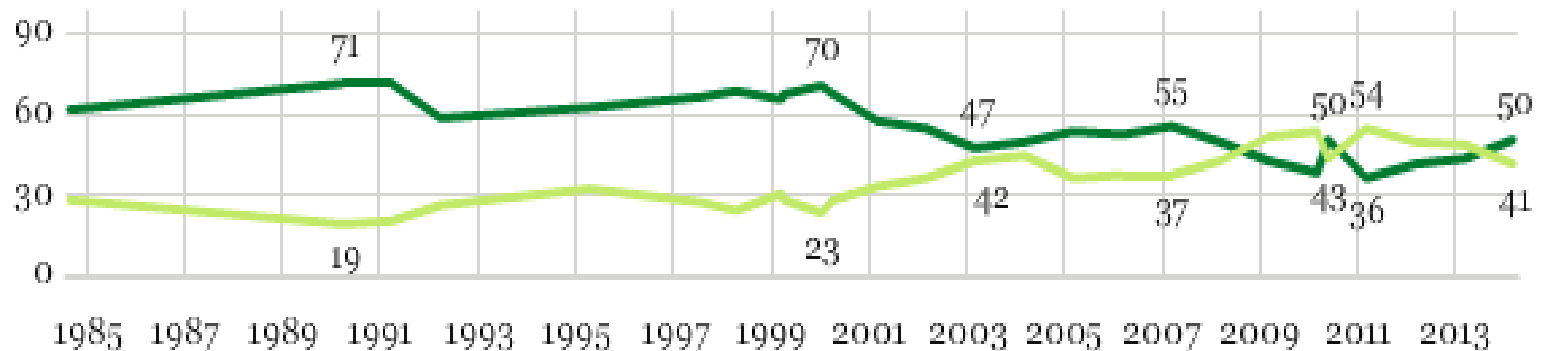


Why the picture's not so bleak: Nationwide environmental trends

With which one of these statements about the environment and the economy do you most agree -- protection of the environment should be given priority, even at the risk of curbing economic growth (or) economic growth should be given priority, even if the environment suffers to some extent?

■ % Protection of the environment should be given priority

■ % Economic growth should be given priority



GALLUP®

Grazing as a management tool: A comparative perspective

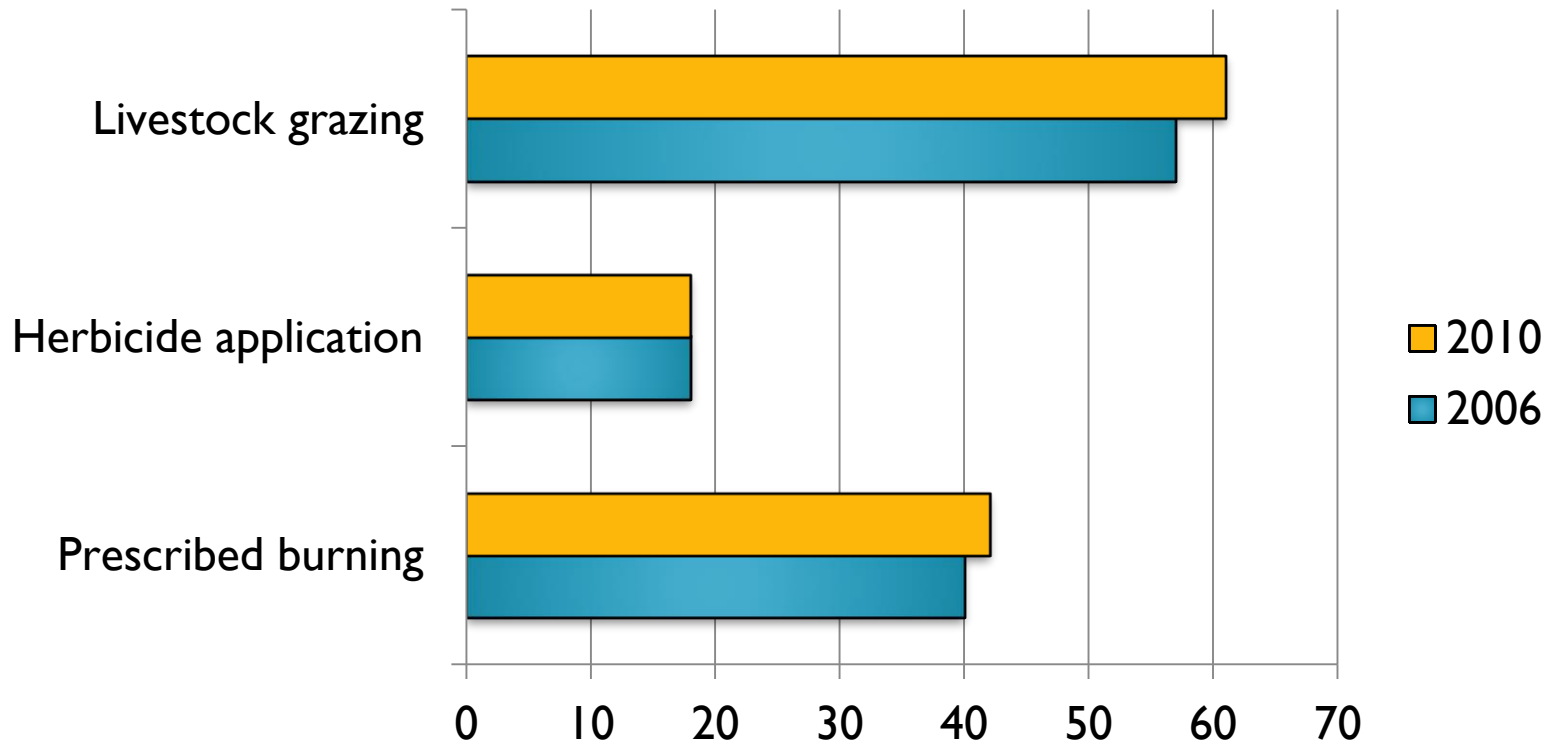
Acceptance of fuels-reduction methods (2000)

Pct. supporting *widespread* use

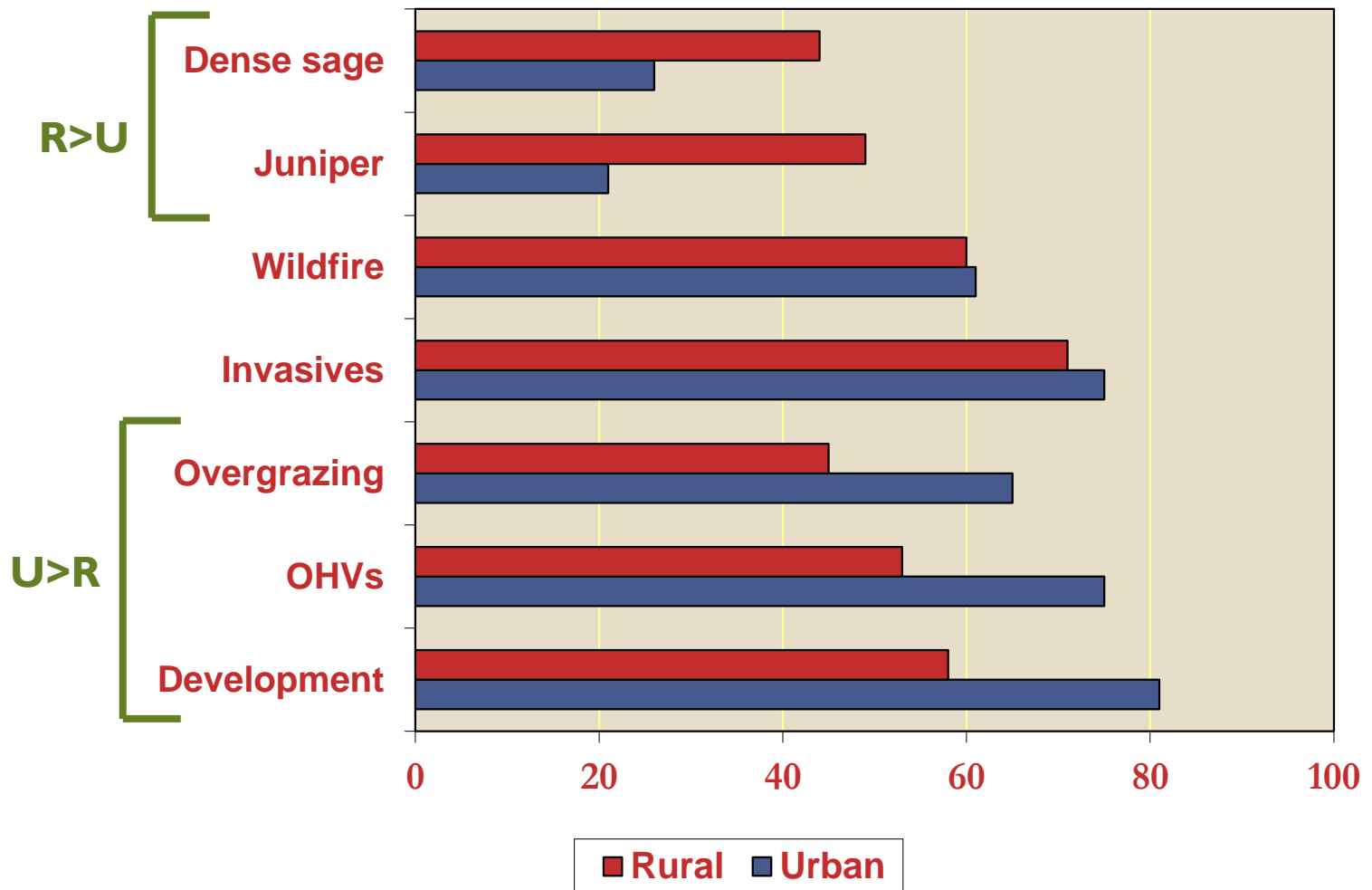
<u>Practice</u>	<u>AZ</u>	<u>OR</u>	<u>UT</u>
Prescribed burning	46%	56%	37%
Mechanical removal	61%	64%	43%
Plant fire-resistant spp.	83%	----	82%
Grazing fine fuels	70%	60%	72%

Grazing as a management tool: Gauging acceptance over time

Surveys of Great Basin residents (2006 & 2010)
Pct. indicating acceptance of practice used widely

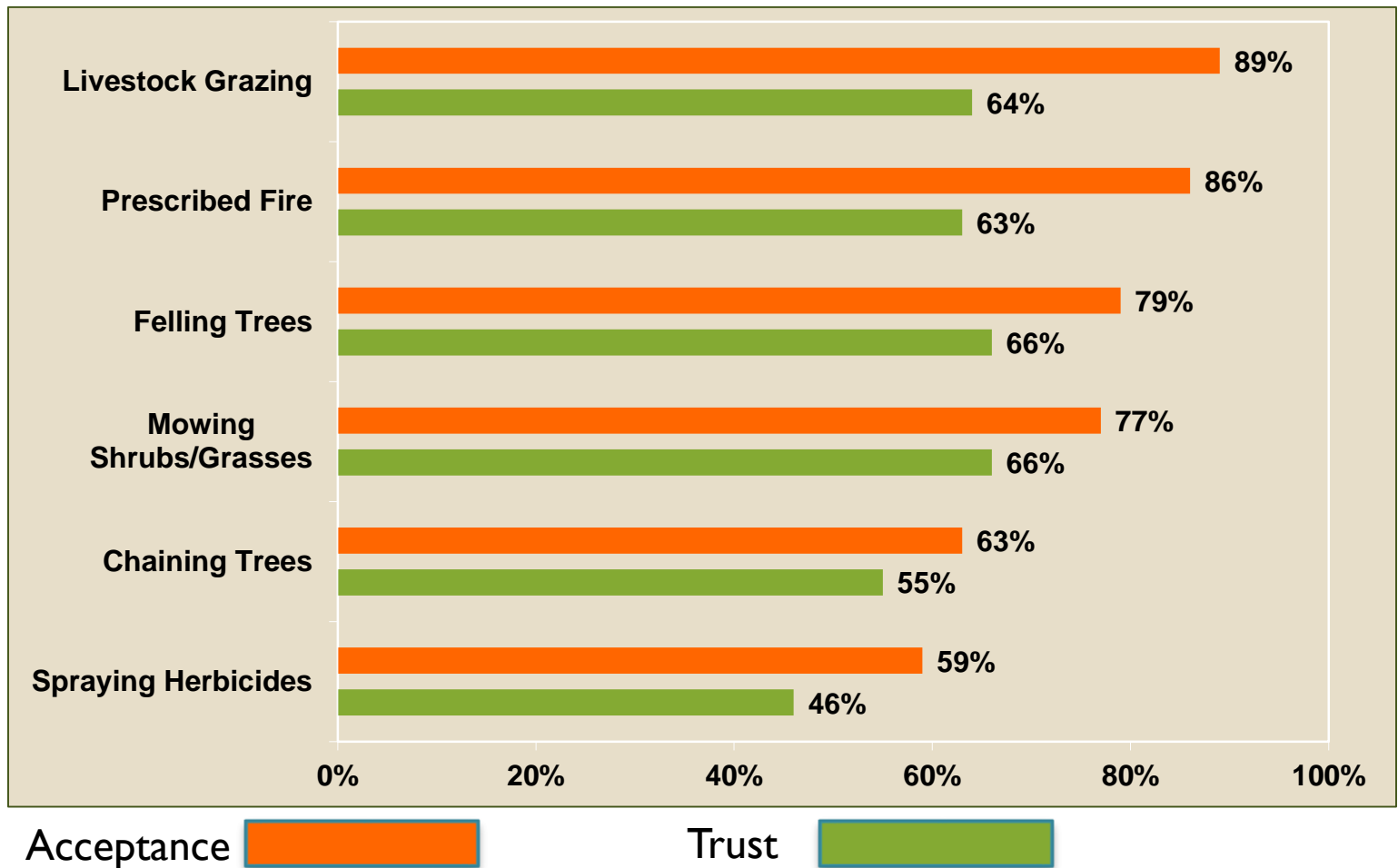


Perceived threats to public rangeland: Great Basin residents (2006)

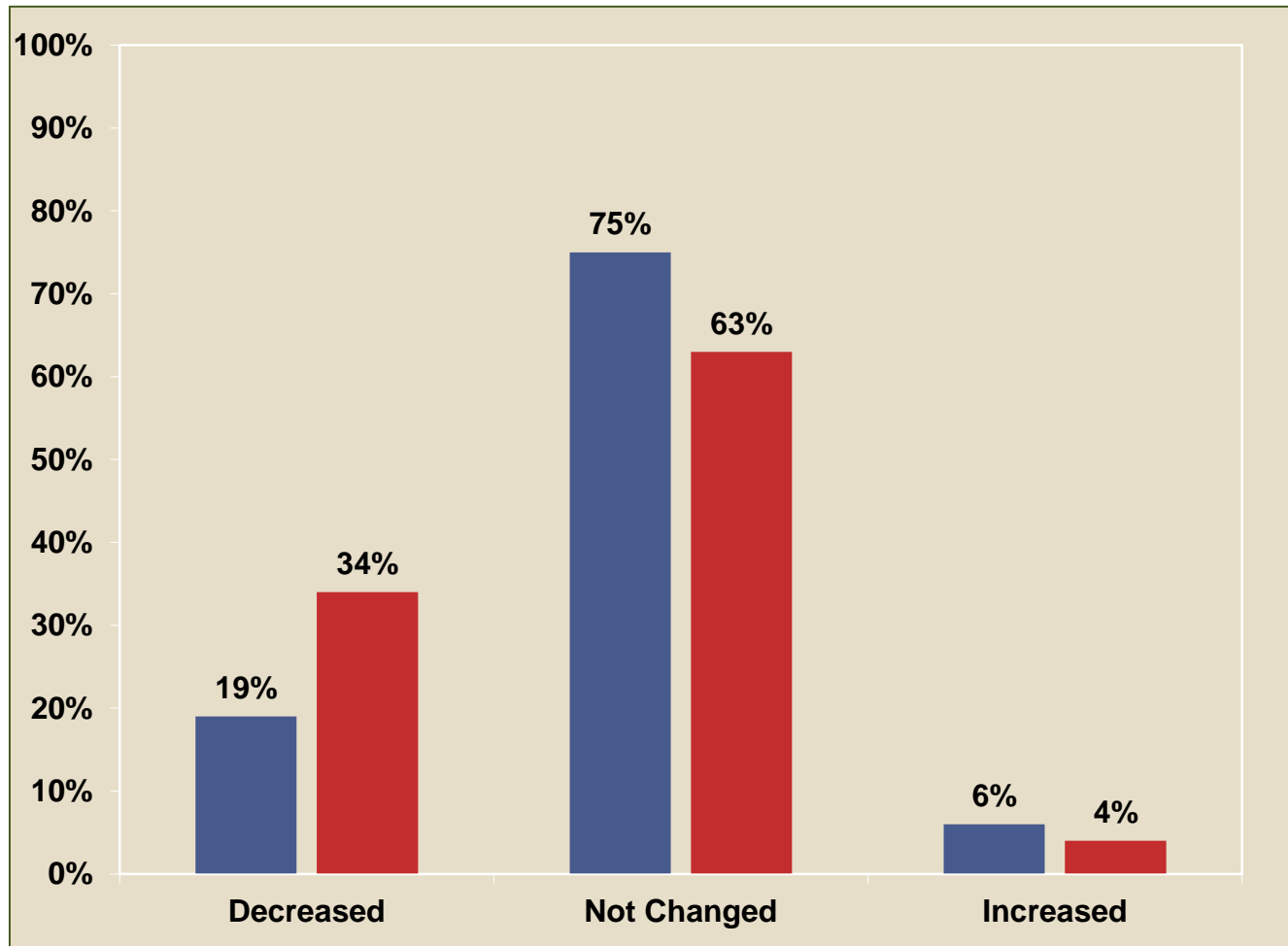


Trust, not knowledge, drives attitudes toward federal range management

2010 re-survey of Great Basin respondents



Changes in overall trust in federal management (2006 to 2010)





Recreation-grazing interactions

- Land managers hear about it when public views livestock grazing negatively
- Negative views of grazing diminish with increasing visits (Sanderson et al. 1986)

Effect of seeing cattle on visitors: Grand Staircase-Escalante Natl. Mon.

- Does seeing cattle detract from experience?

	<u>Detracts</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Enhances</u>
Hunters	39%	36%	25%
Hikers	70%	22%	8%

- How often do you see cattle on your visits?

	<u>Never</u>	<u>Rarely</u>	<u>Occasionally</u>	<u>Frequently</u>
Hunters	1%	7%	28%	64%
Hikers	22%	19%	28%	31%

Social media analysis of perceptions of grazing on park lands (Barry 2013)

- Analyzed 7 yrs of Flickr™ photo-shares from East Bay parks
- 1,087 photos, 733 with comments
- 71% of photos with comments included cattle
- Most cow-related comments were positive
- About 5% indicated fear of cows



Applying the findings

- Continue demonstrating sound stewardship, embracing new science
- Look for ways to promote positive recreation experiences
- General public knowledge remains low – seek opportunities to inform
- Trust is low, but it can be built through listening and collaboration