



Foundation Document Overview

Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site

Montana



Contact Information

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Purpose



GRANT-KOHR'S RANCH NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE provides an understanding of the nation's frontier cattle era commemorating cowboys and cattlemen through the preservation, interpretation, and operation of an intact ranch with more than 150 years of unbroken history.



Significance

Significance statements express why Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site is the only unit of the national park system specifically designated to tell the story of the frontier cattle era and its role in shaping the history and character of the United States.
- The unbroken history of ranching, as told through the Grant and Kohrs families and the individuals connected to their ranch, provides an exceptional opportunity to compare and contrast the lives of the diverse peoples, communities, and industries touched by cattle ranching.
- Grant-Kohrs Ranch provides an authentic historic setting to experience the cattle industry as it matured and contributed to Western culture. The Home Ranch's integrity is illustrated by its original structures, family furnishings, personal papers, ranching equipment, and its continued use of land and heritage skills for livestock production.
- Grant-Kohrs Ranch was once the headquarters of a 10-million-acre cattle empire, and remains an important symbol of the American West and its wide open spaces, hard-working cowboys and their horses, and vast herds of cattle.



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Cultural Landscapes.**
- **Historic Structures.**
- **Museum and Archive Collection.**
- **Historic Setting and Ambience.**
- **Opportunity to Understand and Appreciate an Operating Ranch.**
- **Ranching Processes and Heritage Skills.**

Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Nonhistoric Facilities.**
- **Partnerships and the Volunteers-in-Parks Program.**
- **Relationships with Tribes.**

Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- The historical integrity and intactness of Grant-Kohrs Ranch facilitates a deeper understanding of the myths and realities of cattle ranching and the American West.
- The story of Conrad Kohrs' rise from hopeful emigrant to powerful cattle baron exemplifies the pursuit of the American Dream through flexibility, vision, determination, and good fortune.
- The relationship of the cultural and natural landscape at Grant-Kohrs Ranch provokes appreciation for the interconnectedness of all life; the direct human dependence on natural resources for food and other products; and the necessity of wise and sustainable resource stewardship to ensure continued prosperity.
- The history of Grant-Kohrs Ranch offers insights into how an enterprise often attributed to the effort of one person or family is inextricably tied to many people of diverse talents, cultures, and backgrounds working together for individual and mutual advantage.

- The deliberate preservation of Grant-Kohrs Ranch by Conrad and Nell Warren—including original buildings, records, artifacts, and landscapes—represents values of historical awareness and respect, and connects to the larger idea of cultural memory and its preservation.
- The open range cattle era played an integral role in shaping American society.



Description

Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site celebrates the frontier cattle era of American history. The ranch is framed by the snow covered peaks of Deer Lodge Mountain and the Continental Divide, picturesque grasslands, the Clark Fork River, historic buildings and structures, and grazing cattle and horses.

Located in southwestern Montana, adjacent to the town of Deer Lodge, Grant-Kohrs Ranch was designated a national historic landmark in 1960 and a unit of the National Park Service by Congress in 1972 to “provide visitors with an understanding of the frontier cattle era of the Nation’s history, to preserve the Grant-Kohrs Ranch and to interpret the nationally significant values thereof.” The lives of Johnny Grant and Conrad Kohrs represent the challenges, opportunities, and hard work that many cattlemen faced. Their stories help illustrate the classic saga of immigrants pursuing the American dream, one that defines the cattle baron and cowboy heyday of 1865–1890. The people of the open range cattle era shaped our western lands, opened eastern markets, and created a culture whose principles of freedom, integrity, and independence live on.

The current boundaries of the historic site encompass approximately 1,618 acres, a small fraction of what was once a much larger ranch. During the 1890s, the ranch extended over 27,000 acres, with additional feed, water, and grazing rights to more than 10 million acres of public land that spanned Montana and parts of Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, and Canada. In addition, the ranch has 88 historic structures, approximately 35,000 historical artifacts, more than 100 linear feet of archives, 30 miles of fences, 12 miles of historic irrigation ditches, and livestock. The site maintains this cultural landscape through a cattle ranching operation that uses both modern and historic practices. The Clark Fork River and floodplain, historically contaminated by upstream mining and smelting, is slated for remediation through the national Superfund process.

The importance of protecting the historical legacy of the ranch and its resources was recognized by the Kohrs’ grandson, Conrad Warren. He and his wife, Nell, were responsible in large measure for the remarkable preservation of the property entrusted to the National Park Service. The records, artifacts, and structures maintained provide a thorough and accurate picture of ranching operations from the 1860s through the 1960s and can be used to tell the bigger story of the impact the open range cattle era had in shaping the America we know today.

