

Fake Green Is Worried (Real Worried)

Enviro flacks attack Allan Savory's "Holistic Management" successes.

Words & photos by Dan Dagget.

Recently, a couple of big-media environmental writers—Christopher Ketcham in *Sierra* (the national magazine of the Sierra Club) and George Monbiot in the United Kingdom's daily, *The Guardian*—wrote articles debunking the work of Allan Savory, whose “Special Report: Cows Can Save The World” appeared in the Summer 2015 issue of *RANGE*.

Savory is the originator of an organization and a practice named “Holistic Management,” which he claims can enable humans to create and sustain healthy, functional ecosystems in much of the planet's arid areas that evolved to be home to grasses and grazing



Regarding Allan Savory's claim that land can be desertified by lack of grazing, Fake Green counters that protected lands that seem to be getting worse rather than better are really “slowly recovering from decades of overgrazing.” The land to the left appears to qualify as desertified. Above, the exact same place a mere five months later shows what happens when you heal with grazing rather than protection. Nothing slow about that!

herds of animals such as bison, wildebeest, aurochs (the ancestors of cows), etc. How? By enabling us to “use livestock, bunched and moving, as a proxy for former herds and predators (including us), that evolved as a functioning element of those ecosystems.”

Ketcham writes, “Allan Savory's Holistic Management Theory Falls Short on Science” because Savory's “cows can save the world” message, “catapulted into the mainstream” via a talk Savory gave on an educational website (TED.com) in 2013 entitled “How To Fight Desertification and Reverse Climate Change.” By the time Ketcham wrote his article, he notes, Savory's talk had garnered 3,746,905 views. That is a cause for significant alarm for the Sierra Club and a number of other protectionist environmental groups because, as

Ketcham puts it, “Savory's apostasy is based on a controversial idea: that we need more cows—not fewer,” a claim that is in direct conflict with the Sierra Club's position that the way to save the environment is to protect it, as much as possible, from humans and all of our impacts, including cows.

George Monbiot, a self-proclaimed “vegan” columnist for *The Guardian*, also takes note of the viewer count of Savory's “more cows, not fewer” TED talk (four million, he says) in his article, “Goodbye—and good riddance—to livestock farming.” In that inflammatory piece, Monbiot describes animal agriculture as “the mass incarceration of animals, to enable us to eat their flesh or eggs or drink their milk.” He claims future generations will look back on these “monstrosities”

as comparable to “slavery, the subjugation of women, judicial torture, the murder of heretics, imperial conquest and genocide, the First World War and the rise of fascism.”

Savory's TED viewership has alarms flashing for the Sierra Club and other environmental groups, including vegan groups like PETA, because those groups have a maximum interest in remaining the only players in the trillion-dollar-not-for-profit, “save the planet” economic bonanza they have created. [For more on this, see Dagget's “Eco-Profits,” Spring 2017 at rangemagazine.com.] These groups have achieved their monopoly by convincing so many of us that the product they market—protection in the form of more government (by them), more regulation, higher taxes, education as a disseminator of their

propaganda, etc.—is the only way we can deal with all environmental problems, real or made-up, including climate change, global warming, endangered species, overgrazing, desertification, etc., all of which, they claim, will eventually lead to the end of all life on Earth!

Why is Savory a threat to this monopoly? For one thing, because he has convinced tens of thousands of ranchers and farmers around the world to apply his “more cows—not fewer” methods on tens of millions of acres of land, and millions of nonranchers have come



The photos above show the first time cattle were lured down the side of the tailings pile with bales of hay along with a more organized application of cattle on tailings.

to support that effort. Maximizing the threat this poses to Big Green, as Ketcham has revealed (perhaps inadvertently), Savory contends his methods achieve the very same goals to which protectionist environmentalism claims to be the only means—to restore the natural function of the environment in which we live—only better!

How did Savory come up with the idea, so compelling to some while so repelling to others, that more cows can make the environment more healthy, diverse, and sustainable? By witnessing nature and native peoples successfully applying that principle on the savannahs and grasslands of central Africa while serving as a “provincial game officer” in the African nation now named Zimbabwe. There he watched grazing animals, wild and domesticated, herded by predators—both four-legged and human—interact in a sustainable synergy that has lasted for millions of years.



The above photo shows a 300-foot-high pile of mine “tailings” consisting of rock crushed to the consistency of talcum powder and washed with chemicals, including cyanide, to remove the copper and other minerals. Terry Wheeler, a local range manager with a degree in range science, noticed that along the edges of this pile the only places where plants were managing to grow in this wasteland were in the tracks of and near the dung left by deer, coyotes, and even an occasional maverick bovine. Based on these observations Wheeler convinced the mining company to allow him to test his (and thereby Savory’s) theories on its tailings pile. BELOW: An “after” photo shows how effectively the method based on the principles of Allan Savory can “accelerate plant succession and green deserts,” to borrow a few words from Mr. Ketcham, the Charter Trials study, and David Briske. Granted, this isn’t Africa, where the Charter Trials were conducted, but this example in the mining waste “deserts” of arid Arizona appears to be “definite evidence” that “regreening from cattle” does happen, and that Savory’s claims that his method can “accelerate plant succession” and “green deserts” are anything but “unfounded.”



The photo to the left shows with dramatic clarity the degree to which the Savory technique “sequesters” carbon in the soil by contrasting the pale, sterile mine tailings with the dark brown of carbon tilled into those tailings by cattle stomping in the mulch of unconsumed hay and manure to be decomposed by microbes added via dung and urine. Imagine this effect spread, to a significant degree, over the hundreds of millions of acres of rangelands of the West. In that light, the statement by Andres Cibils, a professor of range science at New Mexico State University (quoted by Ketcham), that Savory’s claim that “increasing the number of cattle on the land...can boost soil carbon sequestration...founders under close inspection” does some foundering of its own.

In a surprisingly good description of Savory’s Holistic Management, Ketcham says Savory claims that his approach can/will “replicate the beneficial effect on soil of the native herds that once covered the planet’s grasslands.” How? By managing cattle to pulse across the land in the manner of wild grazers being herded by and therefore living in an interactive synergy with predators (us), Savory claims domestic herds will effectively “churn the soil with their hooves, fertilizing it with dung and urine, stomping grass (and grass seeds into the soil), creating mulch,

stimulating plant growth. By so doing,” he continues, “they can regreen arid lands and, at the same time, encourage soil microbes that eat carbon dioxide.”

Encourage soil microbes that eat carbon dioxide? To Big Green advocate Ketcham, and especially to vehement vegan Monbiot, that is going too far! It commits the cardinal sin of presenting Holistic Management as a solution to Big Green’s “end of the world” ace in the hole of climate change/global warming. Monbiot’s response is, “I would like to see the TED team post a warning on Savory’s video,

before even more people are misled.”

While Monbiot’s response to Savory consists of more frothing and villainization, Ketcham makes his case with quotes of scientists who back up his title, “Savory’s Holistic Management Theory Falls Short on Science.” According to Ketcham, when he presented these scientists’ counterclaims, Savory responded with photos of applications of his approach in South Africa, Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe, as well as testimonials from ranchers. Ketcham dismissed all these as “self-



U.S. Forest Service study areas in central Arizona. Photo above, near the site of a ghost town named Drake, was surrounded by a protective fence in 1946 to provide an area to study (and illustrate) how effective protection is in enabling land to recover from damage caused by cattle grazing. Top three photos were taken within the protected area. If these areas have not been desertified from the lack of cattle but are slowly recovering from decades of abusive overgrazing (as Briske claims), their recovery is slow enough—70 years, at this point—to be classified as wishful thinking. BELOW: In contrast, how would the Briske team explain why this grazed land just outside the Drake enclosure fence appears to have recovered.

reported and anecdotal.”

One thing that should be noted is that self-reported, anecdotal evidence is what usually lays “fake” science to rest. Flat Earth theory, for instance, experienced its demise when Columbus and Magellan countered it with self-reported, anecdotal evidence. In the same way, experience has laid to rest scientists’ conclusions that human flying machines, space



travel, electric lights, voice transmission by wires and radio waves, and on and on are impossible.

Among Ketcham’s flat Earth counterclaims to Savory are: A review of a 1969 study called the Charter Trials on 6,200 acres in Zimbabwe, which notes that its authors found “no definite evidence in the African studies that short-duration grazing...will accelerate plant succession” and concluded, “The regreening from cattle didn’t happen.”

A group of rangeland scientists led by David Briske, a professor in the Department of Ecosystem Science and Management at Texas A&M University, who claim that the Savory method: “can not green deserts or reverse climate change”; that Savory’s claims “are not only unsupported by scientific information, but they are often in direct conflict with it”; and “We find all of Mr. Savory’s major claims to be unfounded.”

Considering those “no way, didn’t happen, unsupported by evidence” claims, consider some land as desertified as any on the planet—a pile of mine waste near a copper mine in central Arizona (see photos page 69).

The claim made by Savory and some of



Cattle pulse across Arizona grasslands effectively mimicking the natural synergy between grazers and predators and thus achieving “the mass restoration of nature”—the goal to which Fake Green claims to be the only means.

the people who have applied his methods at which Big Green (and Big Science) takes greatest offense, however, is the claim that the “panacea” that energizes the trillion-dollar contemporary environmental marketplace (protection) actually increases the afflictions to which it is claimed to be the absolute remedy—desertification, endangered species, and global warming. This claim has fueled an uproar among all protection-marketing groups (and all protection-funded scientists) since Savory began making it in the 1970s.

Examples of the uproar quoted by Ketcham: “It’s just wrong,” says Kelsey Brewer, a one-time organic farmer now staff researcher at the University of California, Davis. “A substantial number of studies on desert grassland have found that with rest, grass cover ‘increases dramatically,’ while ‘intensive grazing delays this recovery.’”

Referring to Chaco Canyon, one of Savory’s examples of desertification by protection, the Briske report claims, “Savory misrepresented the photos of landscapes he presents as evidence of the alleged desertifying effect of removing cattle. [T]he land Savory used as an example was not desertified from lack of cattle” but “was slowly recovering from decades of abusive overgrazing.”

Reconsidering the quotes in Ketcham’s article that Savory’s claim that protection causes desertification is “just wrong,” or that “a substantial number of studies on desert grassland have found that with rest, grass cover increases dramatically,” I believe the photos with this article tell us who is really wrong here, and it’s not Savory.

Let’s turn to Monbiot’s claim that removing livestock from the land results in “rewilding” and “reverses the catastrophic decline in habitats and the diversity and abundance of wildlife” caused by livestock. In the comparisons you’ve just seen, it seems clear that the exact opposite of that is true—that removing grazing from the land results in dewilding rather than rewilding. On the contrary, if rewilding and “the mass restoration of nature” is our goal, restoring the natural synergy between grazers and predators by effectively mimicking it with humans and cattle, as elucidated by Allan Savory, seems to be the best way to do it. ■

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