

Working Wildlands or Fragmenting the West: That is the Question

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The conversion of private ranch lands to exurban development results in an, on average, tenfold increase in fragmentation through perforation (homes) and internal dissection (roads). This resulting fragmentation alters the biotic community leading to landscapes that are dominated by human-adapted species, including plants, birds, and mammals. The fragmentation of these lands also results in deficit spending for county governments and school districts as property taxes from exurban development do not cover costs of county services and schools. Likewise, this land-use conversion results in ecological deficits in that the future values of ecosystem services are eroded and impaired. Because working ranches provide local food, open space, and ecosystem services, measures that ensure their continuity are encouraged.