

Central Coast Rangeland Coalition Monitoring Program - Results of Online Surveys

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BACKGROUND

The Central Coast Rangeland Coalition (CCRC) has been working for 6 years to develop an affordable science-based system to monitor rangeland health. Based on numerous CCRC meetings and review by a panel of scientists, a comprehensive monitoring system has been designed to demonstrate whether a rangeland property is "fundamentally healthy" in its ecological, social, and economic systems. The idea is to help those managing rangelands to evaluate their own practices and goals, as well as to build societal support for rangeland stewards. Between 2007 and 2009, the available funding allowed us to try out some of indicators and present results at CCRC meetings. But we have not been able to test the comprehensive monitoring system, develop tailored "special indicators," or to provide technical assistance. In 2010, we surveyed CCRC members to find out what rangeland issues were most important to them (center graph). We also surveyed participants in the monitoring program about which aspects of the monitoring were of most use to them, and where we should make our next efforts. This poster presents our results.

QUESTION: How could the Monitoring Program be improved to make it a more useful tool in your efforts to promote rangeland health and the economic stability of your operation?

Implementation is Job #1.

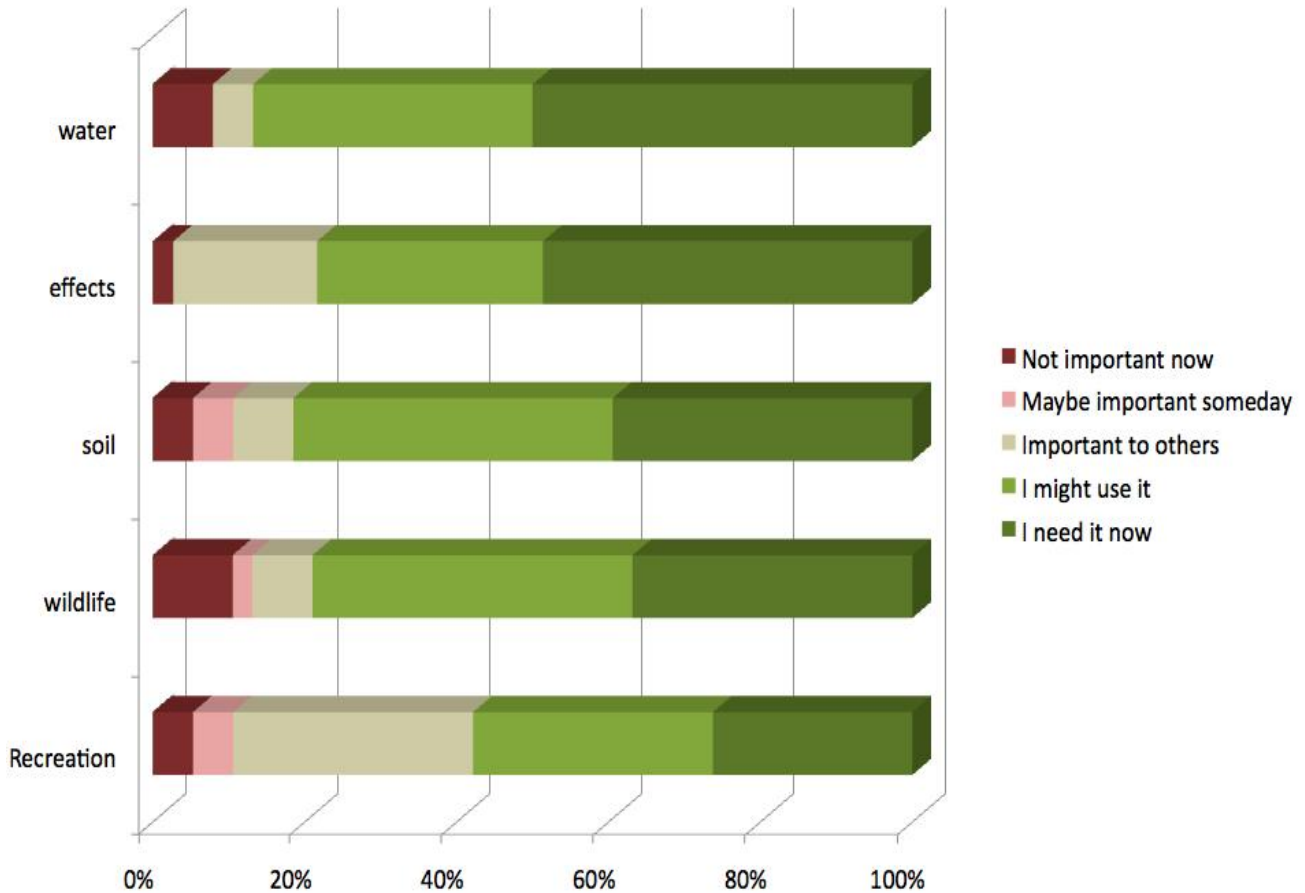
Probably need someone applying the monitoring to host field day. Real disconnect between operators and how to utilize monitoring data.

Indicators seem very specific to the sampling sites rather than the whole grassland ecosystem...whole-site inventories would be helpful too; monitoring that would direct grazing management prescriptions and decisions. Can we rotate cattle differently to better support a healthy grassland system?

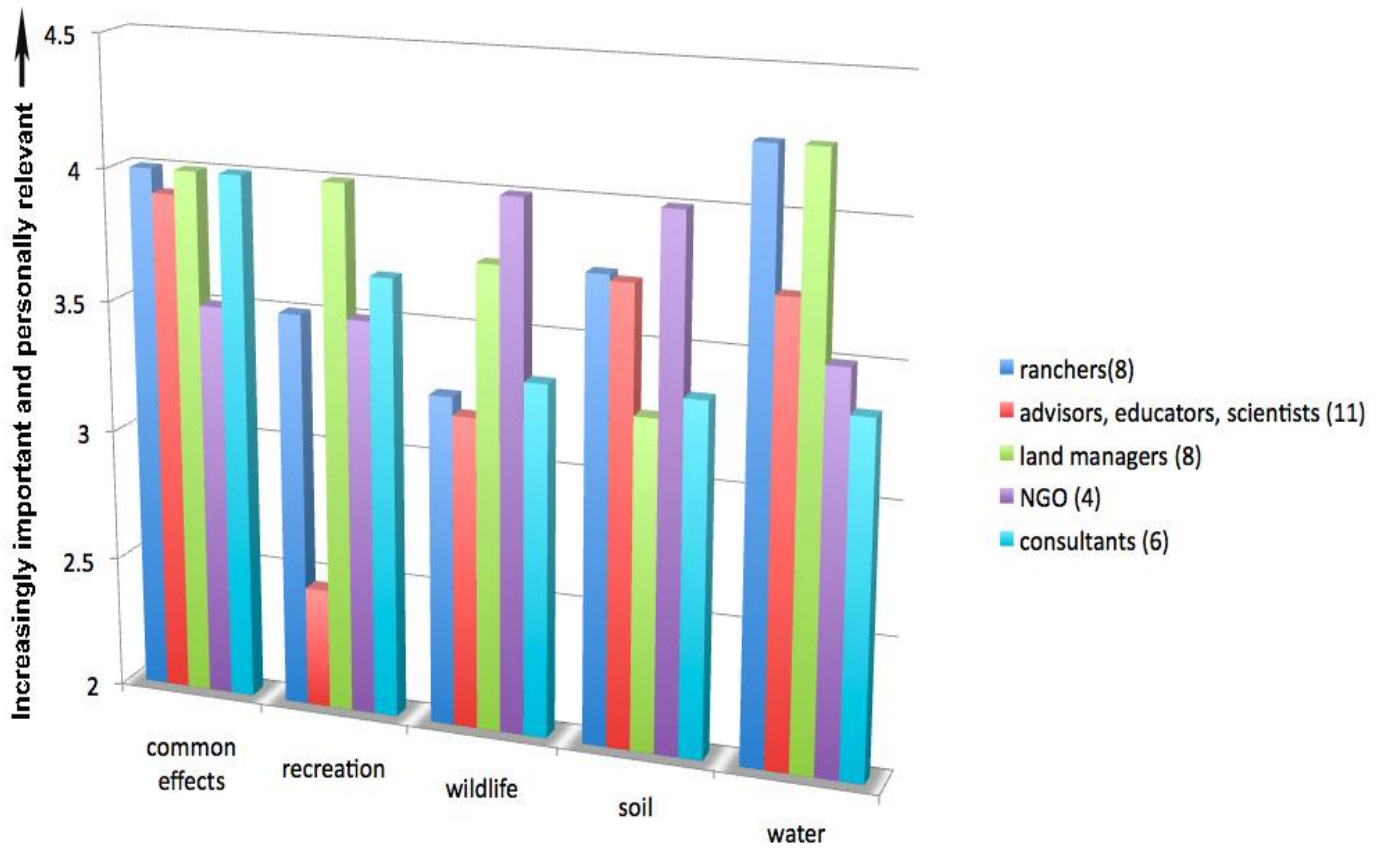
I believe it comes down to time and benefit...I don't have sufficient staff to conduct the monitoring. Secondly...does this truly mean something? CCRC monitoring gives me a broad picture of existing conditions...but does that tell me I'm doing a good job of stocking and moving animals or is it pure coincidence.

To know if the perennial grasses are increasing or not . To know what % organic matter we have and if it's increasing or not. Is our operation moving toward sustainability or not?

QUESTION FOR ALL CCRC MEMBERS: What are the most important issues?



Looking at different groups' responses, we can see a lot of consensus. Almost all topics were given an average score for relevance and urgency that was above 3. Ranchers and land managers felt most strongly about water issues, while other groups considered water issues less urgent. People who identified themselves as representing conservation groups (NGO) were most concerned about wildlife and soil issues. None of these differences were statistically significant, however.



When it comes to recreation there were significant differences – recreation was least relevant to scientists, educators, and agency personnel ($p < .05$). This probably reflects the type of scientists, educators, and agency personnel that are involved in the program, as they are mostly oriented toward natural resources ecology and management.

QUESTION ABOVE: FULL TEXT

WATER QUALITY: Livestock Effects on Water Quality—What are the most significant contributions and pathways of sediment, nitrogen, total organic carbon, pathogens, and other water pollutants related to grazing in Central Coast rangelands; how do riparian vegetation characteristics affect water quality in grazed watersheds; how can grazing be planned and managed to maintain a low level of these pollutants?

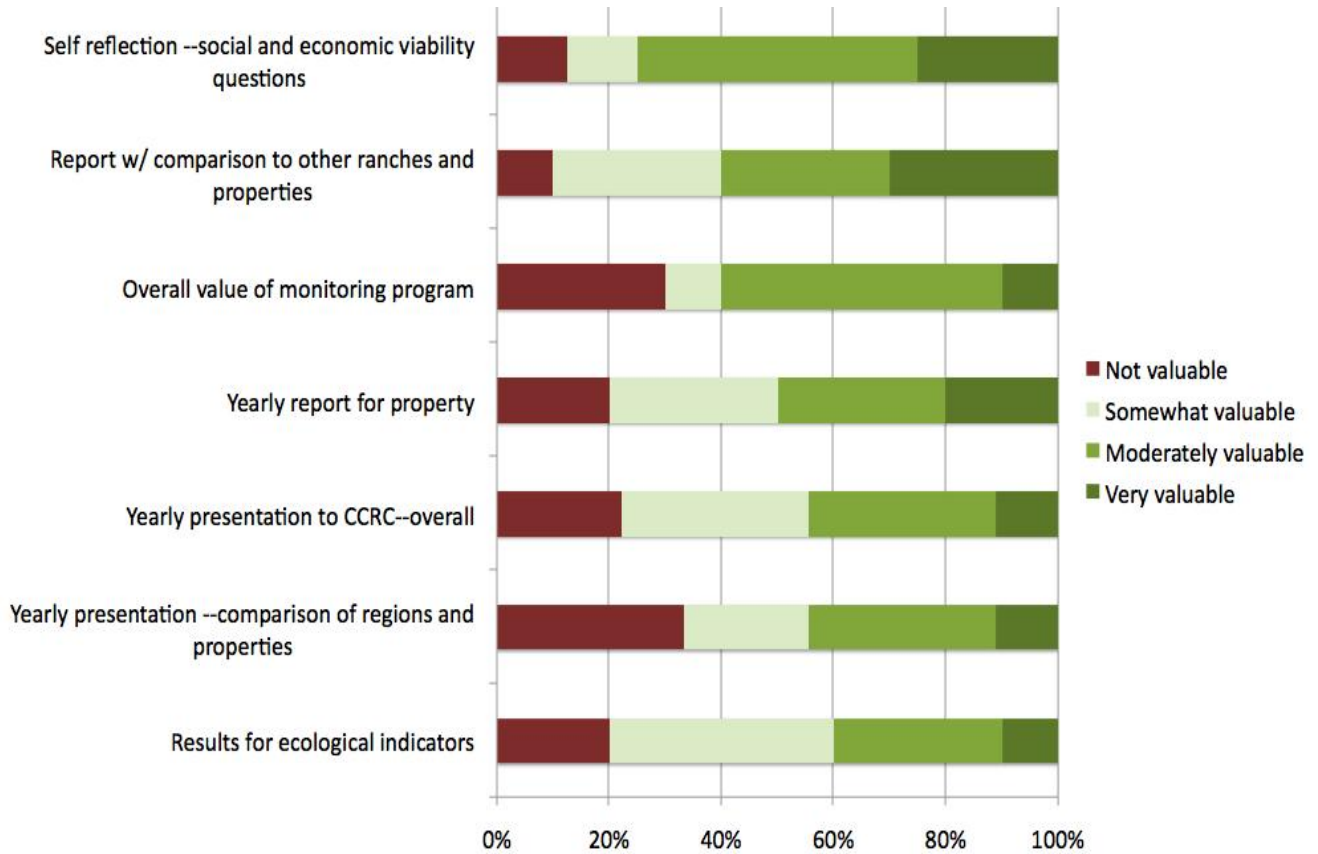
COMMON EFFECTS: Common Conservation Effects--How do Central Coast conservation agency's and grazing lessee's needs and interests intersect in terms of the land management services and livestock grazing effects provided by the lessee; how does economic viability intersect with sustainability for grazing lessees and conservation agencies; what are the values of the management services and effects that are in common; are these values recognized by the agencies?

SOIL HEALTH: Livestock Effects on Soil Health—In what ways does grazing significantly affect productivity, carbon-sequestration, water infiltration, and water retention in Central Coast rangeland soils; how can grazing be managed to improve soil health?

WILDLIFE: Livestock-Wildlife Conflicts--What significant conflicts occur between livestock grazing and wildlife on conservation lands of the Central Coast; which can be mitigated, and which cannot; how have these conflicts been mitigated effectively?

RECREATION: Livestock-Recreation Conflicts--What significant conflicts occur between livestock grazing and recreation on conservation lands of the Central Coast; which can be mitigated, and which cannot; how have these conflicts been mitigated effectively?

QUESTION: “Please let us know how useful the various aspects of the CCRC Monitoring Program are to you”



The most valuable component to most respondents was the self-reflection stimulated by the questionnaire about social and economic viability. The least valued were the results of the ecological indicators. This may reflect frustration with developing ecological measures that can help with daily decision-making. **However, 80% of respondents agreed ecological indicators were somewhat to very valuable.**

COMMENTS:

The lines between what I do on a daily basis, i.e. monitoring that comes from observing the ranch these past 50 years, and what a particular program like the CCRC donates, gets blurred. I have so much information stored in my brain, that is on the to-do list. For me, right now, implementation is Job No. 1.

Haven't been able to use the data in any practical way.

It has helped me understand where I might broaden my current monitoring practices and better evaluate the benefits I might derive from expanded monitoring.

QUESTIONS:

- Has the monitoring information that was provided for your property changed the way you view, plan and/or work with the rangelands you manage?**

- Have you discussed the monitoring program with others not in the CCRC?**

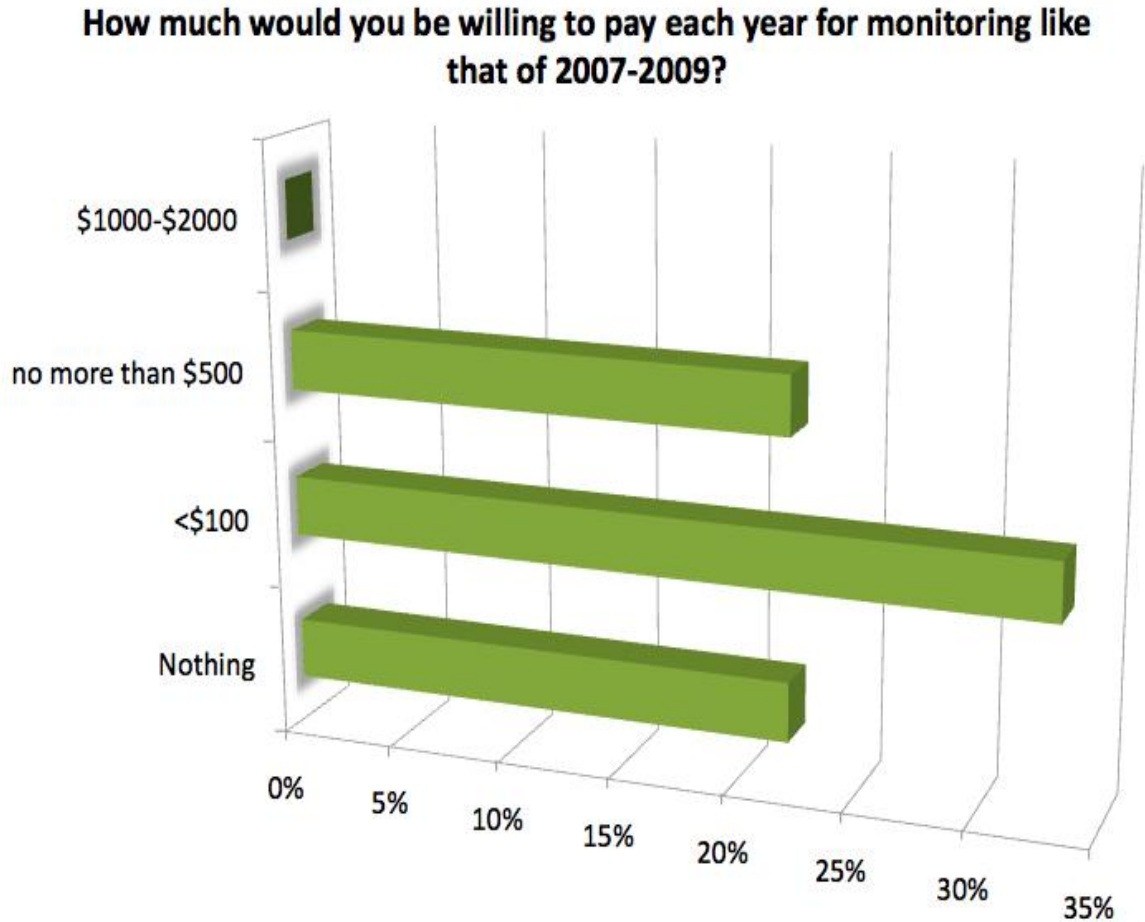
- Do you think that the monitoring program has changed the way people view you or your land management?**

Responses indicated that the monitoring program was widely discussed, with two thirds of respondents reporting that they had discussed the program with those not in the CCRC. More than a fifth of the participants changed their views or management, and a third felt that the program had changed the management of other people.

COMMENT:

I am constantly tweaking, reviewing, changing, assuming I'm wrong, monitoring in my mind, and testing to see if the ranch is better than it once was on a daily basis. Most of my conservation decisions are made by what a specific decision does to the speed of water. If I'm speeding water up, I'm making a bad decision; if I'm slowing it down, I'm on the right track. So much of what I do is subjective, I find it hard to be specific.

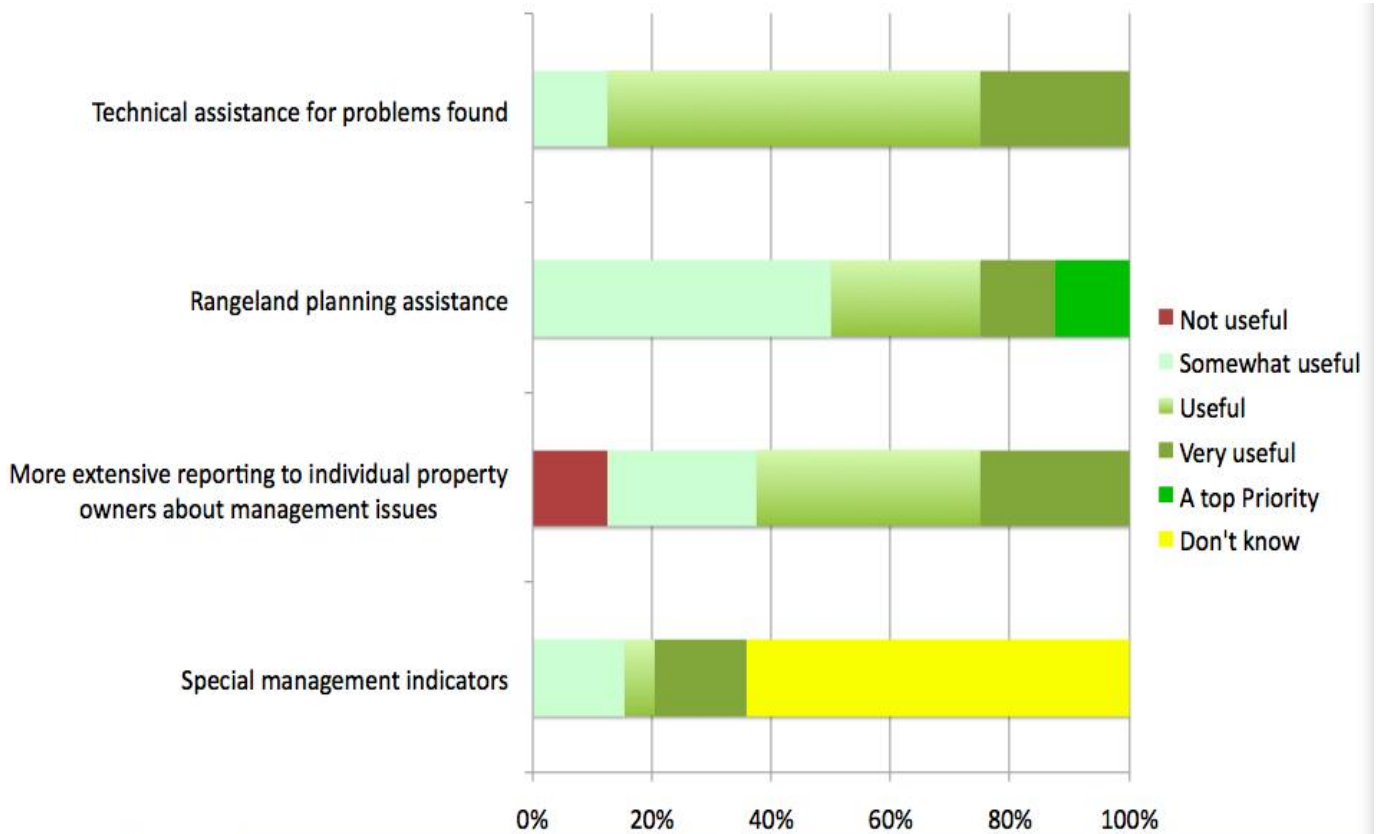
QUESTION: “How much would you be willing to pay each year for monitoring like that of 2007-2009”



COMMENT:

I would like to have a rangeland expert come out once a year and spend the day looking, questioning, and identifying species that are indicators of land health. This is what helps me the most.

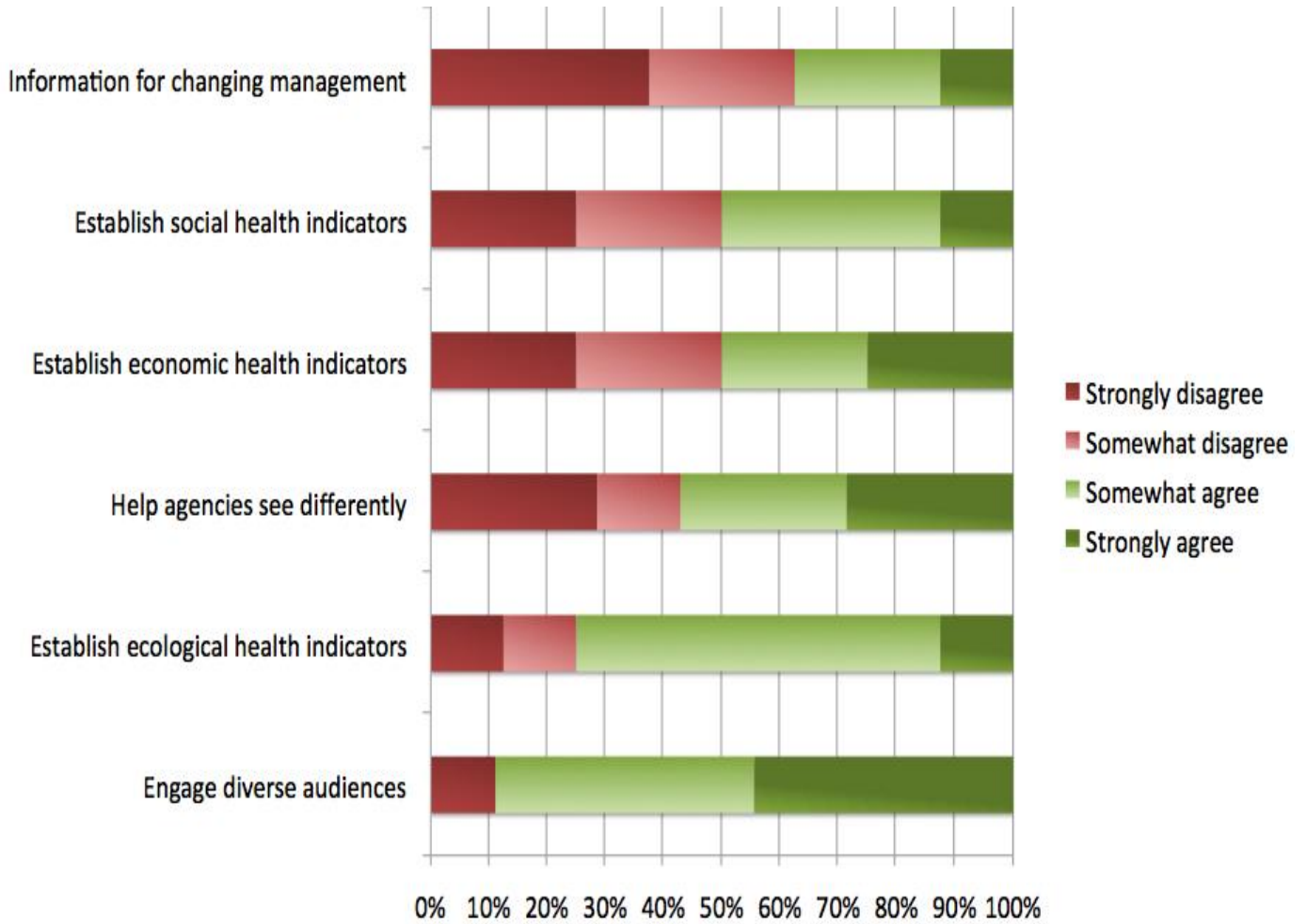
QUESTION: “Please rate the value of the following proposed CCRC Monitoring Program expansions:”



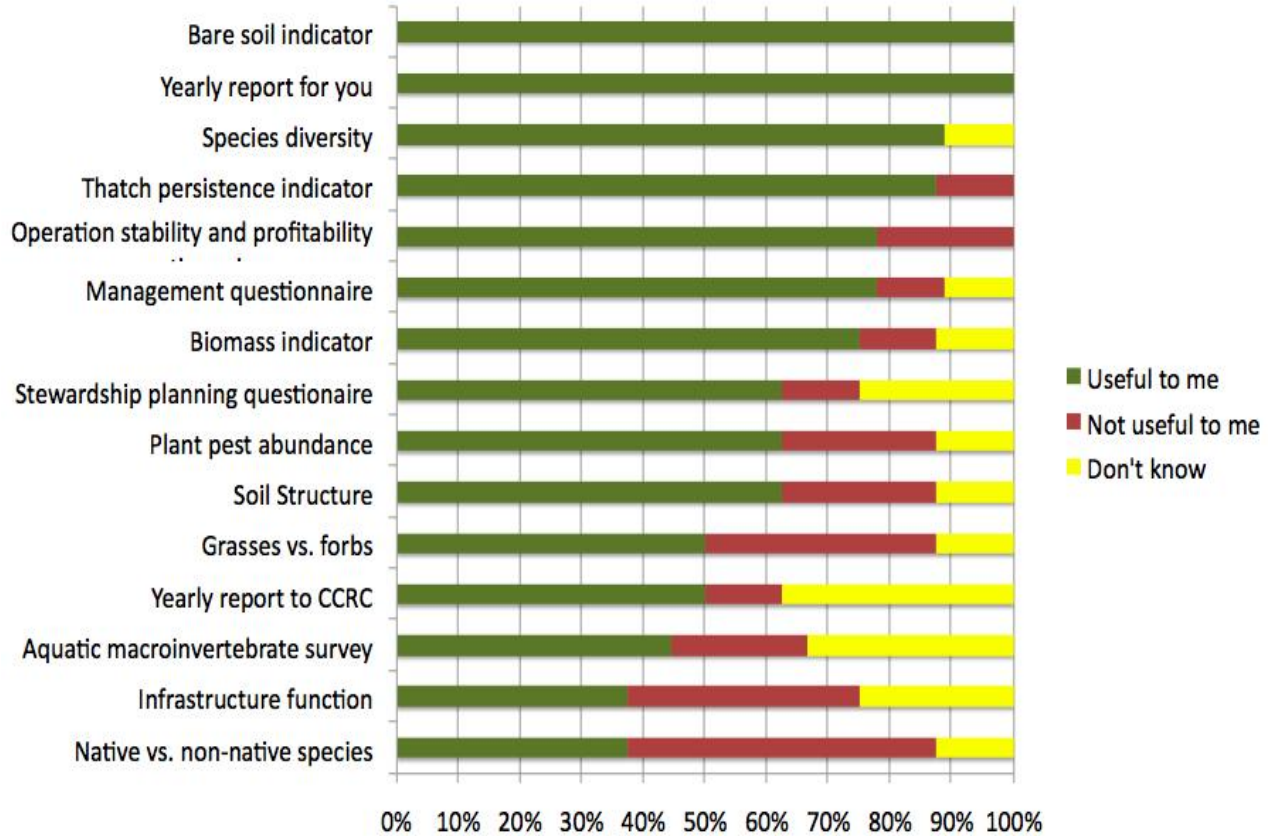
COMMENT:

It would be very helpful to me to have some forum where science-based natural resource management and long-term stewardship grassland topics are discussed openly and creatively...a clearinghouse of information on various topics that may affect the Central Coast such as mima mounds, are there specifics to managing coastal prairie or Danthonia californica habitat vs. CA annual grasslands – and what if they are intermixed? Communication strategies...a short course on common animal husbandry language and the best place to check beef commodity prices or infrastructure cost...the rancher vs. the on-site stewards...what are other land managers doing when it comes to coordinating agencies (Safe Harbor Agreements CTS, CRLF, SBB) and ranchers (economics), neighbors (fuel management, invasives), and property owners and stewards (science-based resource management to promote ecological health and vitality of native species and communities)...

QUESTION: “Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about the usefulness of the CCRC monitoring program for California rangelands: The CCRC monitoring system has been useful in....”



QUESTION: “Please vote on various aspects of the current monitoring program.”



Many people did not know enough about the yearly report to CCRC, or the macro-invertebrate survey, so did not know how to respond.

COMMENT:

Were all the monitoring tasks listed above offered? I reviewed a report and coordinated meeting dates with the CCRC biologist monitoring the site, yet I was not aware of all aspects of project.