

VERSION II

9/13/88

Changes on 10/13/88; 10/27/88; 12/06/88; 1/05/89; 2/17/89

Important that 2 understand this

THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL, CULTURAL, AND ENVIRONMENT FACTORS  
ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF RANGE MANAGERS\*

Is the profession of range management, a mature or dying profession? Some would say it is dead, others believe it is mature. I believe neither of the above. It is, however, going into a new phase--that of changing to meet today's demands for rangeland resources including professionals adjusting to new technology. Our future is at a critical turning point where destruction is possible if we don't make some changes in a positive way. Yes, I don't feel we can survive without making changes.

Stress on professionals working in the field of range management is at an all time high. Much of this is directly related to changes--good and bad coming at them from political, cultural, economic, and environmental concerns. The overriding influence driving the need to change is political cultural without regard to on-the-ground management needs. Personal ambitions and bias most often drive the political forces rather than the technical needs required to manage the basic resource. These stresses are felt at all levels whether it be the policy or doing levels. They have taken their toll on accomplishing management objectives either directly or by raising perceived barriers.

Change in itself is stressful. To those satisfied with the way daddy and grandpa did it, to those of us steeped in tradition based on our vintage education and early career experiences, change is threatening. However, these changes can be and should be made positive. Our credibility will be lost unless we meet today's challenges and optimistically look to the future.

Let me make it very clear that I am not criticizing what we have been doing. What I am advocating is that we build on our success. The implementation of technology changes, and the increased awareness of cultural, economic, and environmental concerns is causing us to rethink our approach to range management. In the midst of all of this are political and cultural forces influencing the practicing range scientist. These forces are generally driven by the masses. However, political power bases can be built by a few. Both can cause abrupt changes, but political power bases built on small numbers are often short-term with wide fluctuation.

Let us explore some of the reasons causing this stress on the profession of range science.

First, our performance has been measured in terms of livestock production rather than management of range for all of its resources. This was driven by economic demand for red meat and our cultural values to improve the land in the shortest possible time. While this led to improved range conditions, the inability to maintain these developments, due to environmental concerns and increasing costs, has resulted in many of these improvements being short-term.

paper by:  
Bobby Williamson  
Chief of Range Management  
USFS, Wash. DC.

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We are now faced with a declining forage production to sustain current stocking levels. Today's demands go beyond just livestock grazing to the many multiple-uses that are produced from rangelands. An example of this is the growing demand for the increase of elk numbers throughout the West.

We have been unable to keep politics separate from the technical aspects of range management. In fact, the politicians have been telling us the techniques to use. This is done through their reacting to issues, such as grazing fees that have become political. This often results in updated technology that cannot be utilized due to legislative constraints or the lack of dollars to adequately address research needs and properly manage public rangelands. An example of this can be drawn from the recent policies of the Public Lands Council and National Cattlemen's Association to actively reduce monies available to the Federal Land Manager to manage their range program. This has resulted in less dollars for range research. Their implementation of these policies has been very successful. Especially, when compared to the wildlife and recreation interest who have been very successful in building aggressive programs for Federal lands. The livestock industry success has resulted in less monies available for the management of public rangelands and research dollars for range. But, most importantly it has focused attention in a negative fashion on the Federal rangelands in unsatisfactory condition. Increased funding in recreation and wildlife has resulted in diverse opportunities to meet these demands on rangeland, including new opportunities for the private sector. The current administration is more environmental oriented and supportive of programs that respond to the masses. Watch what happens to fisheries initiatives.

Range management and livestock grazing on public lands are considered synonymous by the majority of the public. More important, many politicians feel that all there is to range management, in its entirety, is livestock grazing on public lands. This is frequently narrowed down to the long-standing grazing fee issue, and more recently concern about the condition of riparian areas on public lands. In other words, the conventional wisdom is that range management is nothing more than grazing fees and the negative aspects of livestock grazing riparian areas on public lands. As goes public land grazing, so goes the art and science of range management--politically, unless we as a profession change it.

As always, I am reluctant to discuss grazing fees, but today I feel that I must so that you, as professionals, know what this issue has cost range management. I mentioned earlier that Congress only responds to issues. Grazing fees may be the ultimate example of this. Now, livestock grazing in riparian areas is becoming a companion issue. I look for both of these to continue to dominate the limited energy that Congress has for range management during the next year or so.

In the case of grazing fees, there is no relationship to the amount charged for grazing on public lands and the proper management of rangelands. But, I defy you to sell this to those that oppose livestock grazing or the politician that has a uninformed constituency that has concerns for the environment. The grazing fee issue is a surrogate to ensure that congressional oversight is continued for livestock grazing on public lands.

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Until we can separate grazing fees on public lands from proper livestock management we will not have political support for legislative policy that will serve to assist us in advancing management of the Nation's and world's rangeland resources. There will not be adequate monies for research, education, and technology transfer. At this time Congress sees the only benefits from range as the hard dollars from public land livestock grazing. Above all, there will not be support for an aggressive approach to rangeland management.

I don't feel that SRM should be involved in the fee issue but they can provide information that can be used to put the grazing fee issue in the political arena that it deserves--that is far from the management of range resources.

In the case of the riparian management issue, it will stay around as long as it is useful to those that question the management credibility of the public land permittees and agencies. This can only be corrected by seizing the opportunity to aggressively pursue our goals to improve those ranges in unsatisfactory condition. Our efforts have resulted in much improvement of these areas over the years. But, we need to show people what we have accomplished and strive harder to do more.

A third problem is that those of us practicing the art and science of range management cannot or will not achieve consensus on technical questions. For example we cannot agree on one common definition of "Animal Unit Month." We recently listed at least six different definitions in use for this term. This makes us appear confused and inept. Above all else, it provides an opportunity to those who oppose us to use our apparent conflicts to achieve their goals. They are very good at using our internal disagreements to their advantage.

Part of our cultural is competition. This is what drives the advancement of technology. Competition is not always bad, it can be healthy, but we are not managing it as a profession. We spend much of our energy disagreeing among ourselves, when we should be uniting the rangelands. Remember, competition has two characteristics: (1) Someone loses; or (2) Change occurs. Let us, practicing the art and science of range, be leaders of change rather than becoming a distinct profession.

We are perceived as being negative, never "for" anything, and always against whatever change is being considered. Critics seem to think that our goal is to retain the cultural image associated with the 1880's western range livestock industry, and to conduct our business from that viewpoint. Today more people than ever before are interested in their environment. Without fully understanding just what they are concerned about they are easily influenced. We continually seek, not too effectively, to impose our values and methods on those who oppose us, saying they simply "don't understand." Sometimes, we need to stop and really think what it would require to straighten out those who oppose our way of thinking. Doesn't it occur to you that maybe we need to understand where they are coming from? We do have an obligation to provide the opportunity for those who wish to be informed to do so. We need to stimulate the desire in them to become informed.

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Don't get me wrong. We are the best at what we do. We have the knowledge to do a lot more than we are doing, and when we agree and move forward on a common front, we are one of the most, if not the most, effective professional groups of our size in existence.

For many years, we, working in the art and science of range management, have been extremely proud of our traditional values and the traditional methods of applying those values. To regain our credibility as professionals, we must take a good hard look at our traditional methods. Where needed, changes must occur.

Let's recognize a new reality. The social and political environment within which we operate has changed significantly in only the past 20 years. Not too long ago, the only people who cared enough about rangelands to work either with or against us were the livestock industry. This was a fun era. Now, many other interest groups, individuals and politicians are taking an active interest--and we must deal with them too. This is not entirely new and different, but the magnitude of this thrust is greater and is causing some discomfort as we continue to have conflict with producers, while at the same time environmental interests, concerns, and pressures grow. We as range managers will always be in the middle.

Let me give you a few examples of where I feel change is needed:

One of the bigger changes that I believe must occur is to change our image. More specifically this is, to change the image of rangeland management from one which is perceived only as livestock grazing on public lands, to one of rangeland resource management regardless of land ownership or the dominant use being made of rangeland. To do this we must look beyond just livestock grazing, building from this base to a profession that is perceived by all as managers of the entire rangeland resource. We must also recognize that livestock grazing can and should be used as a tool to manage vegetation. Without this tool, achievement of desired vegetation objectives may not be possible or may be more costly than is justifiable both from an economic and environmental standpoint. However, livestock grazing must be in balance with the available resource and be cost-effective.

We must be bold in recognizing the need to broaden the range resource goals beyond red meat production. This will require a well defined rationale and a carefully articulated public awareness program to ensure its salability. Support for this can be gained but only if these views are directed in concert from a broad leadership base. Land ownership must not be a factor, rather the management of a kind of land and vegetation must be the objective.

We need to listen as well as talk. I have found that many of those who seemed to be opponents were often looking for the same end results as myself. We are just not understanding each other. We cannot convert the whole world to our way of thinking, but we can seek areas in common and move towards the achievement of common goals. As professional range managers, we must be advocates for the management of the range resource.

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How do we improve our "political image?" This may be the toughest problem to solve. This interface between professional and politician is always a tension zone. Each has a legitimate role. My suggestions are: (1) Do the best job that we know how to do on the ground. Get results show these results; (2) As professionals, do not tolerate range in unsatisfactory condition. Take corrective action, even if extreme; (3) Stay politically neutral, supporting only the furtherance of the art and science of range management to achieve overall management objectives; (4) Do a better job by communicating in understandable terms--everyday English; (5) Demonstrate that we know how to properly manage rangelands; and (6) Work overtime to let all know that range management is the art and science of managing the whole complex of rangelands for multiple benefits. It is more than just livestock grazing on public lands!

Can we solve today's range development needs by using the 1936 or even the 1970 social and political approaches? No--today's social and political circumstances require us to approach management needs within today's structure. Another way to say it is, we cannot operate within a small sphere but, we must broaden out and include all those interested in the management of rangeland resources. As discussed earlier, political forces offer the strongest challenge and perhaps the best opportunity. I strongly believe that what happens to the Federal range programs will drive national policy for the management of the Nation's rangelands. This includes the Federal role in range research. There are new interests becoming involved for many and varied reasons. We must recognize that cultural political interests are broader and go beyond traditional boundaries. Cultural and political interests, like everything else, are constantly changing. We must be aware of these and adjust.

I feel that the ultimate vision for rangeland management is to produce quality range vegetation on all rangelands for livestock forage and more. The complete picture of successfully managed rangeland will contain healthy vegetation being grazed by livestock and wildlife, protecting soil and water, providing riparian and upland habitat for fish and wildlife species, generating economic benefits, and meeting public desires for open space values.

The "best way to control the future is to invent it" (Lew Tice). This is exactly the opportunity that we in the range profession have today as we look to the next era "one of change" in the profession of range management.

The traditional values of the range management profession are also my personal values. I am not going to forego my personal values, but I have come to realize that I must change my methods. My goal is to manage rangelands, to protect the soil and water resources, to seek and maintain biological diversity, and to provide forage for grazing animals. My challenge to you and all others interested in natural resources is to do the same. I am striving to do so. I must admit that some days are very long. I find it a big challenge, but a satisfying career.

\*Paper presented during Symposium "Does the Range Management Profession Fulfill Its Claim To Multiple Resource Management" SRM annual meeting in Billings, Montana, February 1989.