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## Public Policy on Private Lands— A View From a Professional Society Standpoint

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In representing an organization with diverse membership and a myriad of viewpoints, it is difficult to discuss policy without generalizing, or even waffling. One is almost tempted to join with the oft-quoted legislator who declared, "Some of my friends are for it, and some of my friends are against it; I want you to know that I stand foursquare with my friends."

Actually, if you look at our Society's policy posture at a basic level, we are advocating about the same things for private and public lands. We have been fairly consistent in working for responsible management of rangeland ecosystems for all their resources, based on sound scientific principles and experience. This posture tacitly recognizes two basic facts of life which do not necessarily conflict, but which may complicate implementation of strategy if you lose sight of them. First: there are public interests which are affected by the decisions and actions of private landowners. Second: there are private prerogatives and rights that go with landownership.

How we go about integrating these simply stated truths is going to dictate the degree of success we can expect in getting our basic agenda for scientific conservation and all its benefits implemented. Tom Cowden, an Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for whom I used to do chores, had a homely expression which sums up the dilemma of those who deal with policy in the making and implementation. He said, "The true test of one's sincerity and commitment lies in whether you are willing to put your money where your mouth is." He added, "And when you are as

big as the Department of Agriculture, you find you have your mouth in a lot of places."

I want to talk a little bit about some of the implementing strategies that SRM has advocated; but first, you should be aware of the areas in which SRM has felt a need to formally express *its* policy as a step toward perhaps influencing others. These include:

- Education—need for professionals with formal scientific training.
- Research—need for publicly and privately supported scientific research to serve diverse objectives.
- Environmental quality—need to maintain and improve basic resource conditions.
- Ecosystem management—sound ecological *and* economic principles as the basis for resource management.
- Multiple use of rangeland resources—encouraged on both public and private rangelands. Separate statements on:
  - Water management
  - Wildlife management (also private land incentives)
  - Aesthetic values
  - Recreation use
  - Livestock grazing
- Rangeland inventories—basic to planning and management.

The Society for Range Management has put its money (or at least its efforts) into several activities in attempting to move some of these policies forward.

**Cooperative Resource Management** has been the subject of grassroots efforts in partnership with NACD and

several federal agencies. The goal is to institutionalize a process in which all interested parties—users and land-owners—participate in formulating and implementing plans for managing the resources of a range allotment or other unit with a win-win outcome.

**Conservation Reserve Program** has been of special concern to SRM with the prospect of hundreds of thousands of acres potentially coming out of the Reserve rather than remaining in grass and other perennial forage cover. In partnership with others, attempts are being made to persuade contract owners of the viability of the permanent cover alternative, and to demonstrate the need for incentives to help hold the gains achieved under CRP. Without a major change in the way federal payments are distributed to producers—inducements from commodity support to conservation—the realists among us don't hold out much hope for major success, but the cause is worthy.

**Unity in Terms and Concepts** is an SRM-led project to develop and reach agreement on a standardized process for measuring and describing the status of rangeland ecosystems to replace the varying measures that have been used by agencies and institutions to report "range condition". This task has been under way for several years, and progress is encouraging. The major players are in substantial agreement and are committed to achievement of an approach that will end the years of quibbling by unknowing critics about acres and adjectives.

**Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative** is aimed at enhancing the application of scientific information and technology in managing privately owned rangelands and

related types of land. SRM, NACD and several industry organizations are in coalition working to bring about more investment to increase the productivity of these lands which comprise nearly half the rural lands in the United States. A priority is restoration of funding diverted in recent years to meet special requirements for enforcement and compliance activities under the last two Farm Bills. The efforts of this coalition may well be successful in direct proportion to the involvement of wildlife and other conservation or environmental organizations who are not now participating.

In closing, I want to share with you the direction in which I see the Society for Range Management heading in advocating public policy for rangelands in the years ahead. These observations stem from watching SRM's leaders begin to work through a new strategic plan for the Society which begins with defining a mission: To ensure sound management of rangeland ecosystems through

- professional leadership
- expanding shared knowledge
- better scientific exchange
- policy analysis and advice
- partnerships
- public outreach
- diverse participation

SRM will focus on the diversity of resources and uses that make up our rangelands, with emphasis on the potential for responsible shared use and the benefits which can accrue to both owners and users. In short, Science, Resources, and People are the key to future policy direction as seen by the Society for Range Management.

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