

President's Address: Rangelands

John Buckhouse

Those improbable landscapes which make up about 50% of the earth's land surface. Lands which provide wildlife habitat, native and non-native plant communities, watershed values, herbivory, wildlife interactions, a lifestyle for independent and rugged individuals of all stripes, recreation opportunities from solitude to rock climbing to bird watching to hunting to rock hounding to nature study.

Fifty-one years ago a group of visionaries recognized the value of these wonderful and varied landscapes. Landscapes which ranged from prairies to deserts, from Arctic tundra to tropical savanna, from woodlands to shrublands, from verdant to beige, from dry to swampy. The visionaries established the American Society of Range Management which has evolved into the internationally flavored Society for Range Management. These early pioneers for sustainable conservation of rangelands faced a daunting challenge. These men and women who established the Society for Range Management faced land threatening ravages of severe drought, decades of overgrazing, and expatriation of numerous wild species. They did something about it! They created a Society where scientific principles and sustainable management were honored and valued. They established goals which were appropriate, high minded, and timeless. These goals, to work for the enhancement of the land resource and to work for the professional growth of its members are beautiful. They are enduring. They are appropriate. They are as right today as they were in 1947!

Yet something distressing seems to be happening. Somehow the pragmatic, logical and valuable concepts of the SRM seem to be under attack by the very people whom one would guess would be the first to embrace us and the ideals for which we stand. In this climate, I find that it is easy to slip into a defensive posture, speaking a litany of all the things we are not: "we are not for only single use", "we are not simply, "we are not apologists for anyone", "we are not only interested in economics", "we are not managing in such a way that wild creatures are at risk", etc., etc.

Well, I for one am tired of a reactive posture. I don't want to tell the world what we are not, but rather what we are!

We are wonderful plant ecologists. We are practical botanists. We understand plant physiology, soil and water relationships, and the role of herbivory—be it from any of dozens of sources. We are terrific landscape-level ecologists. We are biologists of a practiced nature. We understand the role of climate. We recognize and manage natural cycles in plants and animals, in prey and predator. We understand the roles economics play in making any institution or organization functional. We are rural sociologists who recognize the role of Human Beings in any ecosystem one could name. We are watershed scientists and managers. We know about the role of precipitation, infiltration, vegetation, erosion and erosion control. We understand how to rehabilitate a mine spoil or repatriate a lost plant or

animal species. We are able to control the squander of soil resources and can provide for functional riparian systems.

Individuals in consulting firms or land management agencies who have been around long enough to recognize the value of holistic thinking have long known and understood that rangeland trained people are practical ecologists, practical economists, and practical sociologists. We are "big picture" trained people who are realistic about problems . . . and are trained to get beyond the hand wringing toward practical solutions.

If you read my report, "On the Cusp of a New Millennium: The Society for Range Management", in the January 1998 issue of the *Trail Boss News* you saw a sampling of the items and issues that the Society for Range Management dealt with this past year. Yes, it has been a busy and a productive year!

There is some especially good news on the horizon as well! In January, the several Presidents-Elect, the Executive Vice President and I met for a planning session. We agreed with the full support of the BOD, that in addition to the myriad daily and topical issues with which each of these individuals must contend, we would promote a several years long theme which deals with education standards for people doing rangeland jobs within the agencies, with image, with status, with professionalism, and with membership issues. In short, we are embarking on a quest to let people know what valuable resources rangeland and rangeland managers are! We are anxious to promote rangeland trained individuals for rangeland jobs! We believe that rangeland managers are the best trained individuals available for rangeland ecosystem management! We are anxious to insure that the world recognizes how valuable this land resource is—and equally how valuable rangeland trained women and men are! We want our voices to be heard and our logic judged on its merit!

So in the coming months and years, watch the Society for Range Management develop a positive, proactive approach to natural resources and rangeland issues. It's a big job. One for which the officers, staff, and committees can provide some leadership. But if Rangeland Management is to take its appropriate place of influence, it is a job which will demand they very best from each of us.

My challenge to each of you—to each of us—is to go forth, beginning now, and insure that everyone from school children to policy makers are informed of the tremendous resources which are represented by these lands and by these dedicated individuals.

This address was given by John Buckhouse, 1997 President of the Society for Range Management, on February 9, 1998 at the Society's 51st Annual Meeting which was held in Guadalajara, Mexico. This address was published in the March 1998 issue of the Journal of Range Management