

# Range Revelations

**Three resource managers explore the future of private and public land use.**

**By Kindra Gordon**

**P**olitics, endangered species and range education were on the minds of three range management specialists who sat down together at the annual SRM meeting this past February in Kona, Hawaii. Here's what they had to say on various issues they consider pertinent to the future of private and public lands.

## The Bush Administration

As the new administration settles into its role in Washington, D.C., Arizona rancher and range consultant Lamar Smith seems to speak for much of the agricultural community when he says: "I'm totally relieved."

Smith anticipates a shift toward more voluntary compliance for producers and cooperation from government agencies.

Fellow range scientist Rod Heitschmidt adds, "Philosophies will change. Appointments should be friendlier." He says, "I don't think the new administration will reverse much, but there will be fewer intrusions. They won't repeal the Endangered Species Act or some of the new national monuments, but they may slow it down."

Smith also points out; "It extends over to the courts, too. Federal judges appointed by this administration will also have a more producer-friendly philosophy."

All three of the panelists have hopes that President Bush and his team will keep their promise of reducing big government and returning power to the people.

Heitschmidt says there's an urgent need for the next farm bill to increase funding for more manpower to aid landowners in implementing conservation and grazing practices.

Doing so could help keep landown-

ers out of the courts in the future.

"Litigation is too expensive for most producers, and the courts are a lousy place to resolve conflicts over land management," says Montana Extension range specialist Jeff Mosley. "Providing technical assistance and mediation to producers can help ensure proper land management and minimize conflicts."

## Range Monitoring

Despite a less intrusive administration, environmental pressures from the public will continue. Producers may be pressed to implement range monitoring methods that track range condition and land health, these three say.

"Whether on public or private land, ranchers will need to document that they're doing a good job with water quality, endangered species, whatever," Smith says.

Smith calls it "an accounting system for your ranch," but adds, "I don't

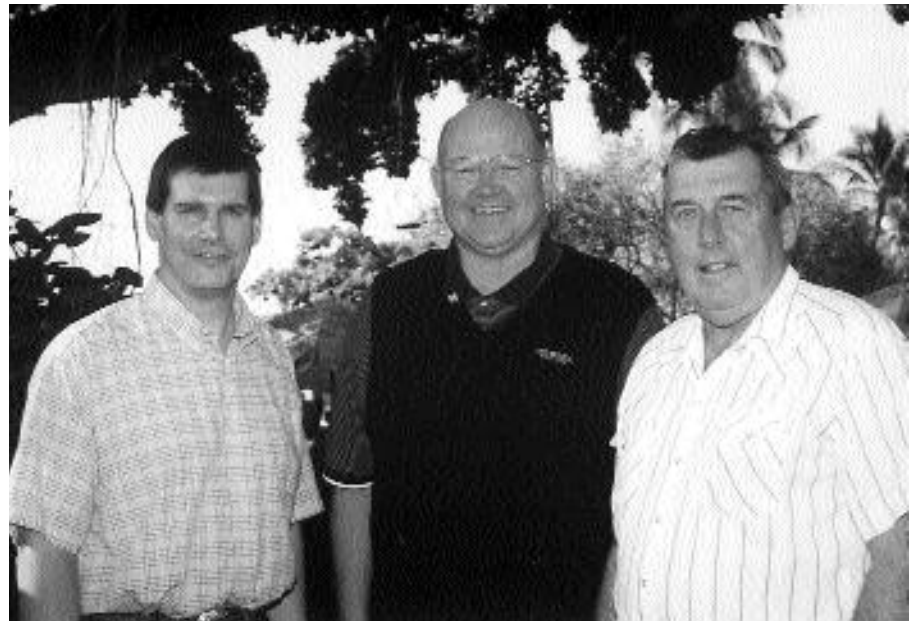
know that we have the way to do that or even an incentive. It becomes an added cost burden and more bookwork."

In Montana, Mosley has taken a step toward preparing producers for this accountability with a statewide monitoring program for private and public lands. "We're teaching producers simple techniques that are easy to do. It's a start."

Heitschmidt says the challenge in range monitoring and assessment is finding a method that is uniform and valid.

"There's a notion that monitoring can be done fast and easy. It may be true, but it can't be done from satellites or airplanes. It takes time, effort and groundwork."

The good news: Mosley believes that in the future producers will be rewarded for their efforts. He anticipates ranchers will increasingly be paid for



*From left to right: Jeff Mosley, Rod Heitschmidt and Lamar Smith*

allowing access to open space, recreation and hunting, and get premiums for beef raised on land with beneficial conservation practices.

### Endangered Species & Water

Mosley indicates an even bolder step toward valuing stewardship may come in the way producers are rewarded for protecting water quality and threatened species.

“The Endangered Species Act and Clean Water Act will be the two things that drive the livestock industry from the environmental side,” he says. “Those producers with endangered species probably have them because they’ve been doing a good job. Right now that’s a negative. We need to change the incentive system to make it a positive,” Mosley adds.

Heitschmidt suggests paying producers to manage the land. “Give the rancher an incentive for having black-footed ferrets.”

“It’s no different than the payments to private landowners for conservation practices,” Smith adds. As an example, he suggests paying producers for clean water coming off the land. “The public’s going to have to pay for endangered species one way or another through incentives or regulation.

“Protection doesn’t mean not doing anything with it. I don’t think the public is anti-logging or anti-grazing. They just want it done in a responsible way. If you have endangered species on your land, you should keep doing what you are doing, because obviously it has survived.”

### Invasive Weeds

One thing these managers would like to see disappear are the noxious weeds that infest nearly 33 million acres of Western rangeland.

“The biggest threat to our rangelands over the next 5–10 years will be invasive weeds,” says Heitschmidt. “We’ll never eliminate them, but how much is acceptable?”

What are the solutions?

Livestock grazing—particularly sheep and goats—can be an economical way to control some weeds,” says Mosley. He adds, “This is also an opportunity for livestock producers to get paid for reducing weeds on public and private lands.”

Heitschmidt adds, “As we get more expertise in molecular genetics, I look for certain animals with diets manipulated to select for invasive species.”

All three point to the need for more technical assistance for landowners—including small ranchettes.

### Public Perception

Land management issues aside, the biggest hurdle ranchers have faced in the past is public perception toward grazing. That’s changing.

“The American public’s appreciation for rangelands has improved dramatically in the last 25 years. That’s a bright spot,” says Heitschmidt.

“The public is saying we like rangeland and want you to

take care of it,” he adds. “As rangeland management specialists, we can be of help to the public. The public can tell us how they want the land to look, and we have the expertise to determine if that’s realistic and how to get there. There’s an opportunity, but we have to be able to sell our profession.”

Still, the trio agrees continued education regarding range resources is needed.

“It is good that people are interested in rangeland,” says Smith. “But, the last election showed there is a division of people who have knowledge for the land versus people in urban centers. That’s disturbing for the future of range policy because one half doesn’t know what the other half does.”

Heitschmidt sees it as an opportunity for communicating with the public and for finding new ways of doing business.

Smith concludes, “The land has to have someone look after it. Ranchers want to do it for very little return. What sweeter deal could you ever have?”

“It’s in our country’s best interest to have farmers. They are a basic strength this country has. The U.S. is one of the most productive food producers in the world. We should appreciate that.”

### Meet The Panel

Jeff Mosley is a professor of range science and the Extension range management specialist for Montana State University at Bozeman. Mosley’s research focuses on foraging behavior and grazing management, emphasizing relationships between livestock and wildlife.

Range scientist Rod Heitschmidt is based at USDA’s Fort Keogh Livestock and Range Research Laboratory in Miles City, Mont. He will serve as president of the Society for Range Management (SRM) in 2002.

Based in Arizona, Lamar Smith operates Banderilla Ranch, a cow/calf operation, and Cascabel Range Consultants with his wife, Deborah. From 1966–98 Smith was involved with teaching, research and Extension with the range program at the University of Arizona. He is also a past president of SRM.

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