

Viewpoint

Should SRM Make Major Changes?

By Mort Kothmann

The purpose of this and subsequent Viewpoints is to expand on the ideas that led me to write the Viewpoint in the December issue of *Rangelands*. I do not want these expressions of opinion to be viewed as “lecturing” or “preaching” at the membership. I want to enter into dialogue with you on what we want SRM to become during the 21st Century. Change will only occur if there is a broad consensus of our members who agree on both the need and the direction of change that is needed, not just because Mort Kothmann may think change is needed.

I hope that you have read the series of short articles that Dr. Thad Box has written for *Rangelands* over the past year. Thad has called for us to examine our “roots” as range management professionals and to consider where we are going. A study of history leads to the conclusion that change is constant and inevitable. During the recent meeting in KC, Dennis Phillippi reminded me of a quote from Will Rogers, “You can be on the right track, but if you stay in the same place too long, you can still get run over”.

Professional societies are a business in that they have products to market; i.e., memberships, meetings, publications, policy/position statements, etc. For a society to be successful, it must have good products, good management, and good marketing. If any of these components is weak, the society is weak. For the first 25 years, SRM was a “growth” society; however, membership of SRM has been in a steady decline for the past 20 years. This should be a cause of great concern for every committed member of SRM. I think that we need to objectively examine all aspects of SRM: products, management, and marketing, to determine how we can change from a declining society to once again become a growth society.

Much good work has already been done and more is in progress. We have good programs and activities and a sound organization, so please do not interpret these viewpoints as a criticism of any current or past leadership of SRM; that is not my intent! I support the actions and policies of the officers and board. SRM is not alone; many professional societies are experiencing declining membership, but that does not mean that we must accept decline as inevitable and simply strive to slow the rate of decline. My concern is that simply doing what we have been doing, even doing it better, will not solve our membership problem.

Joseph F. Pechanec (*JRM*, October 1948) listed four reasons for the formation of a new professional society, the American Society of Range Management. Basically, it was formed to give professional stature to range workers. He defined the role of range workers as achieving “...the greatest productivity and fullest utilization of the forage resource consistent with maintenance of soil and forage.” The society was to provide “...a common meeting ground for the highly varied group in the field.” Liberal membership requirements were designed to permit professional workers with highly varied basic training to become full members with an equal voice in society affairs. I think the majority of SRM members would agree with the mission statement Pechanec described 55 years ago. The questions we need to answer are; “Why are we not successful in recruiting more new members?” and “Why are retention rates of new members so low?”

I plan to address these two questions in several more of these short viewpoints for *Rangelands* on issues such as; **1.** Will the term range be appropriate to define our professional society in the 21st century? **2.** What is the history of professional societies and why are many professional societies related to production agriculture declining? **3.** What are the changes that are occurring in societal values and land ethics, and who will be the ministers to the land in the 21st Century? I will be expressing my viewpoints and ask you to discuss these issues with your fellow members and with me. Our banquet speaker at the KC meeting, speaking on change, made the case that the rate of change in technology and societal values is increasing exponentially with no decrease in sight. Let's study history and try to predict the direction and nature of change over the next decade or two and then make the necessary changes in SRM to make it a growing, vital professional society during the 21st Century.

Note: Viewpoints expressed are those of the individual author and not the entire SRM membership.