



Additional Perspectives on SRM's 1978 Objectives from a 25 Year Vantage Point

By Thomas E. Bedell

These thoughts are meant to complement those of Dan Merkel in an accompanying article. They are in the vein of my own activities and observations over this time period but tempered with somewhat less involvement in recent years. They are offered with the hope that SRM may be able to think and act "outside the box" enough to be modern but retain adequate roots of our origins.

In 1979 I had the honor to be Advisory Council chairman and meet and work with the SRM Board. Dan Merkel was SRM president. Dan allowed me to review his perspectives toward accomplishment of SRM objectives that were developed and adopted at that time and I appreciated that opportunity. I offer some of my own which I hope will bring out more thought on our member's part.

The leadership of SRM spends a great deal of time in planning whether or not we as members realize and appreciate that. Our current planning now incorporates quite a bit of difference in committee structure and procedures for planning. As one example, it has been some time since the Society had a Planning Committee; for better or worse is hard to determine.

1. SRM membership has fallen greatly since 1979. This is tragic. Many have talked about this and much energy given to the problem. Dan made an analysis of membership trends that I shared with the Council of Past Presidents at Guadalajara. Perhaps the 1979 objectives were just to be external but there wasn't one to maintain and improve the membership base. I don't know the reason for this, and it may not have been an oversight, but it has turned out to be critically important.

2. SRM has changed greatly. a) We have many women who bring their unique and different perspectives to the fore. This is a strength and I am glad for it. b) We have considerably fewer agency members, mainline agencies, at least, with the probable exception of NRCS participation. Thus, we

don't have the pipelines into the same power structure at maybe any level because the folks in those slots are not members and don't have the benefit of what SRM does and can do. c) At least some university's range programs seem to have bowed to environmental/conservation biology and administrative pressure, whether intentionally or by attrition. This has drawn away much student talent from SRM. It needs to be utilized in a positive context and probably is more than I am knowledgeable about.

3. The following are things that I think we all recognize. We need to evaluate just how effectively we deal with them .

- a. We must recognize the strong shift away from agriculture and natural resources management in the last 25 years. Fewer people are on the land who are dependent upon the land. Ownerships had to get larger with concomitant concentration of power. This is a two-edged sword in the context of SRM being able to meet or not meet their needs.
- b. Our advising institutions have greatly changed. I am saddened by this. Extension now functions on a considerably reduced and disbursed basis; NRCS primarily does farm program planning and advising. There is a greater role for consultants but all but the large agricultural companies (farms and ranches primarily) either cannot or will not utilize them beneficially. It is true that there is a current Technical Service Provider program but that can only benefit farm program participants.
- c. We have to recognize that environmental organizations have gotten much more assertive, active, confrontational and powerful. Their obstructionism is quite influential. SRM really has no choice at getting some things done if we can't find ways and means of dealing with this.

- d. Conversely, we must recognize the power of partnerships and good working relationships in trying to influence policies. This is a real strength for SRM and fortunately the Society is making strides at that level. Whether or not the same can be said at the Section and local level I think is debatable.
- e. Recognize that conditions on private lands are either better or at least not much worse but that those on public rangelands are probably worse, due to a number of factors that I believe all stem from much less active management on the part of public land management agencies. Factors include certainly fewer people, less well trained people, onerous and overburdened planning procedures which siphons off limited professional energy, injunctions, etc. It all adds up to some real problems in my view and I don't see it getting any better.
- f. Recognize the efforts of the Holistic Management program and that, whether or not SRM likes it, for the most part the program as it applies to rangeland utilizes application of basic principles but in a different manner than the conventional perspective. I am sure that there are some real exceptions but I think it should be beneficial to at least recognize it.
- g. We need to get "real" and recognize the Endangered Species Act effects, resulting litigation, and the "hands off" perspectives toward active management. I know there are some good range examples as there are many fish problems which bear on riparian area management and surely the spotted owl mess that resulted in massive economic upsets here in the NW.

This profession stands virtually alone in championing caring for the land, its ecological and economic values and the people who are so necessary for its management and at the same time dependent upon it for livelihoods and useful products. The Society must continue to make a place for itself or we will have lost our unique value.

Editor's Note: Thomas E. Bedell was a director of SRM in 1982-85 and President of SRM in 1989.

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