# SRM Section News

## Wildlife Habitat Committee

During 2004, did you see the sage grouse synthesis paper in the *Journal of Range Management,* "The Other Grazers" paper in *Rangelands,* or the prairie dog paper in *BioScience*? If so, then you have seen some of the work produced by the Society for Range Management's Wildlife Habitat Committee (WHC).

The Wildlife Habitat Committee has a defined mission and driven members that make it among the most productive groups in SRM. The committee was created in 1991 to address wildlife issues and provide a forum for SRM members interested in the subject. Goals were formalized 10 years later with the mission to make known the ecology and management behind wildlife habitat issues, to foster relationships with wildlife interests, and to provide vision and solutions for wildlife habitat challenges. This mission has been addressed by joint sponsorship of symposia with other professional societies and committees within SRM, publication and development of numerous symposia.

The committee promotes interaction with non-SRM groups to exchange views and to make others aware of SRM at the local and international levels. For example, a joint symposium was held with the American Fisheries Society at their 2001 annual meeting. The Wildlife Habitat Committee has also sponsored events with other SRM committees, such as the Riparian-Watershed Committee, and encourages joint meetings at the chapter and section levels of professional societies.

The majority of the Committee's efforts have been invested in publications and the development of symposia. The largest single publication was the book *Rangeland Wildlife.* The vision of the committee is demonstrated by the publication of the previously mentioned sage grouse synthesis paper when many western states were in the early stages of developing sage grouse management plans to keep the bird from being listed under the Endangered Species Act. No fewer than 6 symposia have been sponsored by the WHC in the past 4 years, and all have been well attended. Six more symposia are being developed for presentation at the next 2 SRM annual meetings.

Committee members maintain contact with a newsletter produced 3 times per year and conference calls as necessary. Membership in the committee is open, requiring only attendance of the meeting at the SRM annual meeting or a written request. The WHC has maintained about 30 members in recent years but welcomes all who are interested and ready to contribute.

Further information on the Committee can be obtained from:

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## Black-Tailed Prairie Dog Listing Unwarranted

The US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) announced August 12 that black-tailed prairie dogs do not warrant further consideration for listing under the Endangered Species Act. State wildlife agencies began planning for prairie dog management soon after the National Wildlife Federation petitioned the FWS to consider listing black-tailed prairie dogs in 1999.

Among the management efforts were intensive surveys of prairie dog colonies. The 2000 estimate of occupied colony area was 676,000 acres. However, improved survey methods now bring the estimate to 1,842,000, nearly tripling the previous estimate. The FWS does not consider the species at risk, given its wide distribution, apparent upward growth trend, and abundance estimated to exceed 18 million.

Prairie dog control was essentially halted on federal lands during the review period. However, with the recent FWS ruling, control efforts are expected to resume to prevent prairie dog encroachment onto adjacent private holdings. The decision is likely to be challenged by proponents of black-tailed prairie dog protection under the Endangered Species Act.

Thriving populations persist throughout the black-tailed range, with the exception of Arizona, where they have been extirpated. South Dakota is believed to have the healthiest prairie dog populations because of the lack of sylvatic plague. Plague is probably the greatest current threat to prairie dog populations.

***Editor's Note:*** *Contribution from Lance Vermeire, Editor of SRM Wildlife Habitat Committee Newsletter, 2nd Issue 2005–2005.*

## Range Management School for Ranchers

The Quivira Coalition and the New Mexico Section, Society for Range Management (NM SRM), is sponsoring the Range Management School for Ranchers, January 13, 2005, at the Albuquerque Hilton Hotel. The meeting is scheduled to follow the NM SRM Winter Meeting, January 10–12, and precede the Quivira Coalition's Annual Meeting, January 14–15. The symposium will be conducted by Dr Robbie LaValley with Colorado State University Extension Services along with experts in the areas of forage and grazing management, animal behavior, riparian management, rangeland monitoring, drought management, and more. This school was taught last year at the SRM Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah, and was well received by attending ranchers.

# Grazing

## Western ranchers consider buyouts.

The landscape is changing for western ranchers, many of whom are now open to federal buyouts of grazing permits, as the federal government considers the affects of grazing on wilderness and species protection.

The federal government is in the process of completing a multi-million-dollar study on ranching and local ecology. "This study has become a big albatross," said Bob Miller, who grazes 150 cattle in Oregon's Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument. "They're going to have to buy us out one way or another. We think they better do it now."

Many ranchers support 2 pending buyout bills, H.R. 3324 and H.R. 3337, that would offer ranchers $175 per animal unit month (AUM). One AUM equals the forage necessary to support 1 cow and her calf for 1 month. Buying out all the grazing permits—about 18 million AUMs—could cost about $3.3 billion, according to the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (Land Letter, September 9).

Ranchers, many of whom have lifetime grazing permits for less than $1.50 per month, have argued that grazing helps manage the environment. "It's a lot better to have somebody take care of the land than to allow it to go decadent," said California rancher Mike Byrne.

"The rancher is an integral part of the system, whether you like it or not," said National Cattlemen's Beef Association vice president for government affairs Chandler Keys.

Environmentalist groups have disagreed. Grazing compacts the soil, increases flooding, encourages invasive species, and threatens endangered species, said Deep Ecology project director George Wuerthner. "Livestock production is the single biggest negative economic impact across the western United States," he said.

Last year the Bureau of Land Management made nearly $12 million on grazing but spent $50 million in administration costs, officials said.

H.R. 3337 is for the establishment of a pilot buyout program in Arizona. A spokesman for House Resources Committee Chairman Richard Pombo (R-Calif.) said the proposal was "dead on arrival" and that it would "end grazing and ranching in the West as we know it." Jim Hughes, BLM deputy director for policy and programs, said the agency also opposed the $100 million plan, saying it is unclear where the funding would come from (Juliet Eilperin, *Washington Post,* September 13)—TE

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### MORE ON CHANGING TIMES

More barbershop conversation on the cost in living expenses in the last few years.

Barber, "I told you about the red minivan that I had that was stolen?"
Customer, "Yeah, did you get it back?"
Barber, "No, I went out and bought one of those new big SUVs."
Customer, "How do you like it?"
Barber, "I am not sure. The day after I bought it was stolen."
Customer, "That's too bad."
Barber, "It is not all bad. The day after it was stolen it was returned with a note saying the thief could not afford to put gas in it."

# Who Will Manage Our Natural Resources?

## First Special Session at Conference will examine personnel crises.

Looming personnel crises in natural resource agencies will be the focus of the first Special Session at the 70th North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference, which will be held March 16–19, 2005, in Arlington, Virginia. Special Session #1—"Retirements and Outsourcing: Who Will Manage Our Natural Resources?"—will feature presentations that address the exodus of baby boomers from public service during the next 5–10 years. Additional presentations will consider the effects of outsourcing on professional management of natural resources, the role of the private sector in wildlife management, and succession planning in the US Fish and Wildlife Service. This Special Session, on Wednesday afternoon, March 16, will wrap up with an audience-participation panel to develop ideas for dealing with the imminent, wholesale changes.

How serious is the personnel crisis? According to a report issued by the Renewable Natural Resources Foundation, more than half of the senior executive service officials in the US Department of the Interior, Forest Service, and the Environmental Protection Agency will retire by 2007. The soon-to-be-released results of a study of state fish and wildlife agencies show that 42% of employees in leadership positions in state agencies will retire by 2010 and 76% percent will retire by 2015.

Although the number of employees leaving natural resource agencies is dramatic, the situation appears even bleaker when the age composition of agency work forces is examined. More than 40% of the federal government workforce is older than 50 and only about 6% are under 30. In state fish and wildlife agencies, nearly 60% of employees are 50 years of age or older and less than 7% are age 30 or younger. Data show that about 24% of the civilian workforce is over 50 and 38% is under age 30.

How will these changes in personnel affect natural resource agencies? "The biggest impact," according to Ryan Colker, director of programs at the Renewable Natural Resources Foundation, "will be on the agencies' ability to maintain their scientific capability, because the people who are leaving are primarily senior scientists, managers and leaders." Colker also suggested that the agencies' ability to address natural resource management problems will be diminished at a time when those problems are becoming increasingly complex and controversial. Agencies will be strained to replace retiring professionals and to perform their missions, says Colker, because "shifting national priorities and budget cuts are diminishing government's historic role in natural resources science and management as federal natural resources agencies must compete with other demands for less and less available discretionary funding."

Natural resource agencies must effectively transfer knowledge from retiring senior employees to junior employees and new hires if they are to maintain their effectiveness in the future. Each of the Special Session speakers will offer strategies for dealing with the personnel crisis, and the audience will have an opportunity to contribute to an action agenda.

For additional information about the Special Session, contact its chair, Steve L. McMullin, smcmulli@vt.edu. For more information about the 70th North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference, go to http://www.wildlifemanagementinstitute.org.

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