

Ninth in a Series: Insight From SRM's Charter Members

The Society for Range Management (SRM) History Committee has conducted interviews with many of the Society's charter members to capture their perspective of events leading to and subsequent to the formation of the American Society of Range Management in 1947–1948. Interviews from several of these individuals will be shared for today's SRM members to enjoy and learn from.

SRM Charter Member – Wayne W. West

Editor's Note: Wayne West, of Wendell, Idaho, was interviewed on January 9, 2004. The following is transcribed from the taped interview but in a paraphrased format done by Tom Bedell.

Wayne West is a native of Idaho born about 25 miles away from Wendell. He started his career with the U.S. Forest Service doing range surveys using the square-foot density method, continuing with the Service until the war started. He participated in the war and after the war came back to the Forest Service doing range reconnaissance in 1947 and 1948 on the Umatilla National Forest in Oregon.

He worked under range staff officer John Clouston, from whom he heard about the American Society of Range Management in the process of being formed. Wayne was impressed by not only John Clouston but also Ken Parker and Joe Pechanec in the research branch, so he joined the Society. John Clouston was executive secretary from 1956 to 1968. It seemed to Wayne that the Society would be a good organization for range people, as there was no place for them in the Society of American Foresters.

Wayne recalls that there were no sections in the beginning. He was not able to attend the first ASRM meeting in Salt Lake City.

With regard to his expectations, Wayne thought since ASRM was open to all people and especially to range practitioners as well as scientists that more recognition of range

management would come about. He states that this has always been a struggle and still is a struggle, maybe getting worse than it was.

Wayne's career with the Forest Service was as assistant district ranger and then district ranger on the Umatilla Forest. He then went to the regional office in Portland, Oregon, for a few years. Region 8 in Atlanta was looking for a staff person to take charge of getting a handle on wild hogs and sheep in southeastern forests. Wayne took that job for 5 years and felt progress was made under his tenure there. He relates that there was suspicion of anyone driving a government vehicle, as they thought it was the revenue men coming. All government employees were looked on with some suspicion in those days. After the Atlanta stint, Wayne returned to California as branch chief of range management in the California regional office for 9 years. He retired from there at age 55 and moved to Idaho, where he has been living these past 32 years.

Wayne states that the Forest Service was very encouraging of their employees participating in ASRM. He said that at least 4 people from the regional office at San Francisco would go to an annual meeting. This doesn't seem to be so true now. Good support from the range management boss was important. Wayne participated in the old range reseeding/revegetation committee. When in Atlanta, he pushed for more Society membership. While there, he was chairman of the Southern Section and worked on the newsletter after that.

He states that in about 1963 or so, things began to change, with fewer employees authorized to go to meetings and that some deemphasis was made in range management. This was due primarily to budget limitations. It was a matter of priorities. He could see that coming over 30 years ago.

Wayne did not serve as an officer after the Southern Section chairman but was involved with a number of committees over time before he retired.

Wayne's observations and perspectives on the Society and the profession: He is concerned that fewer practitioners seem to be involved in the Society with more emphasis by college professors. He thinks this affects how the operation may be run and perhaps the kinds of advice being given, that is, that maybe it is not as practical as it could be. He reflects back on trends that developed years ago. He suggested that rangeland uses needed to be allocated, a sort of carrying capacity for things like recreation. If not, some uses could get too large and out of control. He feels uses should be balanced but also felt that was hard to get accepted in the early 1960s.

Wayne currently is concerned that resource management decisions seem often to be made by politicians; especially the current administration seems to do this with the result that management agencies are weakened and someone else can do the work, ie, a form of outsourcing.

Advice to young people: Wayne says he can't say what will happen in the future but feels the trend of fewer range jobs in public agencies will make it more difficult for young people to get started. In times past there was a range conservationist on every ranger district, and now there may be only one per forest. This trend started some years ago but hasn't been changed around. He recognizes a great deal of the pressure stems from inadequate funding for range and cites a discussion he had before he retired when the operations officer suggested he get rid of his GS-11 assistant, a professional taxonomist, and hire two GS-3 or 4 people! He stated that kind of thinking really bothered him.

Regarding skills being taught, Wayne reflected that he did not know just what is being taught currently. He did cite the beneficial uses of remote sensing for vegetation as contrasted to the entire on-the-ground survey work he had to do. Ground truthing is still needed, he said, and he is concerned too much emphasis may be given to in-office work only. Fieldwork still is necessary for management.

Last thoughts: Wayne senses that the last several years of drought and the devastating fires have resulted in making the range more at risk. A series of better moisture years would be greatly beneficial. Sometimes we fault the government management agencies when weather conditions are the primary factor. However, he does cite an instance where he was able to spray the right chemicals to stop a spruce budworm outbreak on the Umatilla that helped vegetation stay healthier and be not so fire prone. That can't be done now, so management options are fewer and fire hazards more prevalent.

SRM Charter Member – George Rogler

Editor's Note: George Rogler lived at 1000 West Century Ave, Apt. 233, Bismarck, North Dakota 58503. George was 89 years old at the time. He had the question format and responded directly (ie, he wasn't asked the questions by Jon Hanson or Al Frank). Transcriber Tom Bedell has paraphrased a good deal of the responses. George passed away in 2003.

George feels there may be some things that SRM members would not know generally about the origins of the

Society. He went to a meeting in Woodward, Oklahoma, in 1948 or perhaps 1947 where the discussion was starting of a professional range organization, as there was no such organization at that time. They talked about things that applied to range management and related activities. The next meeting was called by Kling Anderson at Kansas State University, and the first formal meeting was at Salt Lake City in 1948.

George grew up on a cattle ranch in the Kansas Flint Hills, 70 miles south of Manhattan. His father and brother piqued his interest in grasses and range management. George got a B.S. in general agronomy at Kansas State University. He went on to the University of Minnesota and studied genetics. He did not give details on his formal education except to say it was essentially range management or range-related.

Except for 1935 and 1936, when he was at Manhattan with the Bureau of Plant Industry, he has been at the Mandan Field Station, Bismarck, North Dakota, in research. George started working in the grass program at Mandan in 1936. He said he had essentially free rein to study grasses, as very little research was done before then. In 1941, with the advent of the retirement of J. R. Sarvis, George took over the range management project at the station. The experience he gained being raised on the ranch was instrumental in successfully managing that project. The Bureau of Plant Industry was a predecessor of the Agricultural Research Service-USDA. George said that at the time he took over the range work that there were only two people between him and the secretary of agriculture in line authority!

George, as mentioned, stayed at one location his entire career. He explains it this way. While at Manhattan, he found he was going to be transferred to Tucson, but he got a telegram informing him that the position was filled and would he go to Mandan. He didn't know anything about Mandan, but he said yes. So, as he says, he got married, and they packed up and went to Mandan, where he has been ever since. George retired from ARS in June 1973.

He became a member in 1948. He was unable to attend the first meeting at Salt Lake City but did go to the second one at Billings, Montana. Sections came along soon after the initial organization, and he has been a member of the Northern Great Plains Section all his life. He held several offices at one time or another but said the plaques on his wall should be used for reference since he has forgotten. The NGP Section has several chapters because of its large size.

Regarding expectations of range management when he joined in 1948, George believes there hasn't been nearly enough common sense utilized. He says there are some things that people overlook where common sense would have helped them to much better address the problems. In terms of application of practices, George feels that using more common sense and less science is desirable.

George believes that SRM is on the right track. He says he kind of loses track of some things, as he has been retired so long. There are a lot of fine and wise people in the SRM,

and although he doesn't always agree, the differences are probably important. Again, he stresses the importance of experience and common sense when managing rangelands.

Lastly, George says there is much yet to be done, and encourages young people to enter the rangeland management field. He used the example of range production in the northern Plains area being enhanced with the proper use of fertilizers and believes this practice still should be pursued.

Jon and Al led a short discussion on the need for knowledge and experience, fires, and crested wheatgrass. George cited the necessity for knowledge on plant responses and the experience desired to use that knowledge. He cited the example that in 1936 a group from Washington, D.C., came to Mandan with the statement that the country is ruined. Dave Savage was with them and said, "Oh no it's not; these plants will come back." In 1938, George said it was like a garden of Eden. George worked actively for 40 years and remained as a consultant for an additional 19, resulting in 59 years with the USDA.

Using fire to manage vegetation purposely is valuable, especially in the Flint Hills, the Osage Mountains, and maybe even the sandhills under careful control. Forage plants

green up and are available sooner in the spring, stock gain better, and invasion of woody plants is kept under control.

On crested wheatgrass, a subject dear to George's heart, he waxes eloquent. George spent a significant part of his research energy on development and use of crested wheatgrass. He is concerned that some people, in and out of range management, don't have the understanding and appreciation for crested wheatgrass when managed properly. It greens up nearly a month ahead of native plants, is highly nutritious for cattle and other herbivores, makes good hay, and cattle can gain as much as 3 pounds per day. On the other hand, when it gets ahead of one, nutritional value is reduced as well as palatability, and gains may be low. George attempted to develop a hollow-stemmed cultivar but was not too successful. He was able to get some plants through selection but not enough on a practical scale.

Tom Bedell is a member and former chairman of the SRM History Committee and a member of the Pacific Northwest Section living in Philomath, Oregon.