



By Gary Frasier

# Frasier's Philosophy

A wet spring followed by a hot, dry, early summer is a recipe for major fires. As I write this, the Governor of Montana has declared the state a major disaster area with uncontrolled fires of thousands of acres burning in several locations. Other areas of the country are deluged with multiple extended rains in excess of several inches causing major flooding. This is the pattern in much of the West. There is too much water in some areas and too little in others. As much as we would want to we can not change this pattern. We must live with it.

Water seems to be on everyone's mind. Cities in the West are growing and to support this growth they need more water. Where is it coming from? It comes at the expense of the farmers and ranchers who are living on our vast range and farmlands. Water needed to maintain mountain meadow ranches is going downstream to the cities. In much of the West the water in our streams and rivers is allocated based on prior use. The earliest settlers that used the water beneficially first have the earliest right. The cities have bought the prior water rights. The ranchers and farmers are left in the dust. Ranchers are told to do the best they can. Times are changing.

The early settlers of the West came from areas that supported various trees. Much of the areas they came to were primary low vegetation types that had developed under a fire regime. They brought cottonwoods. Ornamental shrubs such as tamarisk were planted as windbreaks and privacy fences. These were nice but they were also water-loving invaders. Today these two plants are using ground water at a rate that is affecting the stream flow in many rivers. Going back to the vegetation conditions along our rivers and streams of several hundred years ago is almost an insurmountable task. We must change.

These problems are not unique to the United States, Canada, and Mexico (primary areas of SRM members). These problems are occurring in many areas of the world. Just talk to range managers who have worked outside of the United States and Canada. They will tell you that change is occurring on all rangelands of the world. We cannot abuse the land as has been done in the past. This is a recognized fact from the simple herder to the governmental land manager. There must be changes in range management or there will not be a rangeland resource for the future. We must move forward.

What does this mean to the range management profession? We have the knowledge to live within these changing conditions and still maintain our country's heritage and natural resources. It takes a unified effort of many scientific disciplines dealing with plant, soil, water, and animal (domestic and wildlife) resources. It takes an understanding of the social philosophy and economic factors of living on a land under conditions that are not always under the person's control. We must adapt.

The trained range manager is a unique person who can integrate all the scientific disciplines that it takes to manage the rangelands. In most parts of the world the number of people

involved in range management is decreasing every year. As the problems grow, we see fewer and fewer people with fewer and fewer resources to cope with the tasks. We cannot let this continue or there will come a time when we no longer have good drinking water for our cities. We will not have our vast wildlife resource for our sportsman. We will not have our open spaces for hiking, camping, silence, and solitude. We need to keep our range managers. This includes the people who make a living from the land, our

ranchers and farmers. We have a generation of people who have never experienced the hardships of making a living from the land, such as a farmer or rancher. They do not understand the long hours of hard work and the small monetary rewards you get from living and working our rangelands. The range management profession would not be here without these people. Let us forget our differences and work toward the common goal of maintaining our rangelands for the future of all. Otherwise all is lost. ♦