

Letter to the Editor

By Fred Marshall

Dear Editor:

The June 2012 issue of *Rangelands* discussing “Education in Rangeland Ecology and Management” was not only timely but also revealing and encouraging. The future status and well-being of our natural resources is, without a doubt, going to be in the hands of today’s youth—especially those dedicating their lives to such endeavor. What those youth learn in their professional quest will largely determine the degree of their success.

While the various articles focused on how to teach, the Special Acknowledgements naming the sponsors of this *Rangelands* issue provided a revealing insight into what is now being taught in the various colleges and universities. For example, virtually all of the listed names of these educational entities indicated the consideration and inclusion of all natural resources across all jurisdictions. The University of Arizona specifically included “international resource issues,” while Oklahoma State’s program description, including a widespread “outreach on fisheries, forestry, rangelands, wildlife, and fire ecology for students, landowner, and land managers and promotes the sustainable and ecological management of natural resources,” epitomized what all the others portrayed.

To be successful, the previous and quite narrowly focused curriculums of “Range” and “Forestry” have had to change, and, fortunately, as depicted above, they have.

Thad Box, via his always insightful commentaries, highlighted the need for an additional “educational” change that

will help ensure success by today’s youth; this is the addition of a fifth year to the Natural Resource curriculums with the incentive of an advanced master’s degree to make it more desirable and palatable to the future resource managers.

There is no way that today’s natural resource students can learn and meaningfully assimilate all the knowledge and skills they need to be successful before they embark on their careers in a four-year program. As Thad noted, “the new land manager must be able to understand where the land fits into the broader community governed by global, social and economic systems.”

To do that successfully, a fifth year is absolutely necessary. As alluded to by Thad, the fifth-year curriculum should include strong components of philosophy, ethics, and the intricacies of resource policy development, disciplines that enable the understanding of how to determine what is right and what is wrong and how everything fits together over the long term—for all of mankind.

The author is an Independent Resource Consultant with a BS in Forestry from the University of Idaho and an MF from Yale University; he and his wife live on and manage a small cattle ranch combined with a Crown Woodlot in southern British Columbia. He worked for both the BLM and the USFS in Idaho and Washington, for the Forest Industry in British Columbia, and taught at technical forestry colleges in British Columbia for 14 years. He continues to teach a variety of courses throughout British Columbia.