

Viewpoint: The SRM and the Agency Range Conservationist

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I am an on-the-ground range conservationist in the BLM and have been for over 8 years. I have also been an active member of the SRM for those years. As an area range conservationist, I work directly with the resource and the users resource area range conservationist as opposed to District range specialist or State Office range conservationist, who generally work in advisory roles.

This article addresses the problem of low agency employee membership in the SRM. Frequently, in the office, the question is asked of me, "What do you get out of the SRM?" Or when I am at SRM functions, the question is asked, "Why aren't more BLM people here?"

Some answers to the first question are: "Increased knowledge of range related information";

"An identity with a profession rather than just a job—membership widens my viewpoint";

"It gives me access to people who are studying some of the same resource problems that I have";

"It gives me access to more job opportunities";

"It keeps me up to date in my chosen profession".

Frequent responses to the question, "Why aren't you a member?" are:

"It is expensive."

"I can't understand the journal articles. They aren't applicable to what I'm doing."

"We get no support from management."

"All they do with dues money is buy buildings in Denver."

The above are obviously answers that we have all heard for "Why aren't more agency people in the SRM?" Some answers may also fit as response as to why more producers aren't members.

Maybe in some understanding of the reasons for not being a member, they would say "I can't afford it—everything except my salary is going up—and there isn't any end in sight," or "I know that *Rangelands* was supposed to fill a gap with meaningful or interesting articles, but many of them are still dry and esoteric." The above could be responses to a more prolonged discussion of the membership question.

As with many problems, the difference between a "real" and a "perceived" problem may be minimal, and the net results are the same. The President's Notes discuss stagnant growth in membership. Various governmental committees and environmental groups complain about the lack of professionalism in the agencies. It just appears that there's common ground there, and maybe some grains of truth in the above statements. But are the opposing camps building walls rather than taking them down?

As agency people we do need more consistent and fair support. Some district managers have required their people (SRM members) to take leave to attend professional meet-

ings. Others have allowed attendance (with per diem) only to upper level management within the agency organization. Attendance at meetings shouldn't be a perk automatically bestowed upon a GS-11 and above, nor should one have to take leave either..

The government system (from my viewpoint) seems to have difficulty handling the budgeting and scheduling of meetings that aren't in a GSA, USFS, or BLM catalog. I am certain that there are many papers given at a meeting that would be useful to almost anyone, anywhere in the country. At our Utah section meeting there were some good papers on weeds, tebuthiuron, and the use of cheatgrass for spring forage. Nor does the BLM performance evaluation system seem to have any method of evaluating the need for membership in a professional society or the results of such a membership.

So, what we need is less wall building in the SRM and agencies and more wall tearing down. Would a menu of membership classes help? The Wildlife Society, Audobon Society, and the American Agricultural Economics Association all have membership classes wherein one can be a full member, a regional or state chapter member, and sometimes a parent society member while not receiving any journals. Maybe the SRM could have a type of membership where the member would receive only their state newsletter and *Rangelands*. Who knows, maybe the menu of membership classes would encourage greater membership and participation. Let's not dismiss the idea out of hand. Can the agencies encourage memberships and activity? I don't know what is possible on the federal level, but the Utah State Government, for example, will help pay for membership to one professional society. This is probably out of the question (and maybe should be), but it would seem to be in the agencies' best interest to have professional employees who are active and interested in their professional societies. Some of the answers to the above questions would likely be applicable to the National Cattlemen's Association and the National Woolgrower's Association.

Maybe some of these problems are likely wrestling over a difficult problem with a rancher. If both sides dig in their heels and pull on opposite sites of the rope (problem), nothing gets done and the problem remains the same, or gets worse. However, when both the range conservationist and rancher are willing to give a little, the solution to this problem is a lot closer to being solved.

Hopefully, all concerned in the membership-professionalism question can tear down some walls.

The author is a range conservationist in the Salt Lake District Office, Bureau of Land Management. Thanks is expressed to Phil Urness and Howard Hedricks for their editorial comments.