

Rangelands Can Be Forever

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"Rangelands can be forever." This is the title of a pamphlet prepared by the Society for Range Management. It describes the many-faceted values of rangeland and their meaning for all of us. By utilizing the wide variety of skills that are available in the numerous individuals and groups concerned about proper range management, the 47% of the earth's surface which is rangeland contributes immeasurably to meeting the needs of the world's population.

Man has been a herder or shepherd for centuries. Rangelands have been key to man's existence since the days of hunters and wild food gatherers. From this historical background, many branches of agricultural science have evolved such as animal husbandry, plant physiology, agronomy, soil science, wildlife biology, and hydrology. In both the Old and New World, a tremendous body of knowledge has been accumulated to meet the needs of mankind.

Rangelands present a complex of vegetation and climate. Because of their variability, the proper use of rangelands is a combination of both science and art. Range management in the United States evolved following the settlement of our country. In its early phase it was concerned primarily with livestock production with little recognition of other values. As other demands for the land developed, interrelated aspects such as range-soil and range-water relationships emerged. The use and development of the western United States was strongly influenced by the philosophies and experiences of the East. Legislation for homesteads was patterned after more humid areas, fostering poor management and heartbreak for the homesteader. As a result, there were decades of adjustment and learning by bitter experience that management of western rangelands was not the same as taming the prairies of Illinois and Iowa.

Range management, whether on privately or publicly owned ranges, is a constantly evolving science. Rather than promoting a conspiracy to rape the land, the diverse interests—public and private—which are woven into the history of range management have grown more and more aware of the varied needs which are met by our rangelands. The Society for Range Management, an independent professional organization with wide diversity among its members, has compiled and indexed all the information published in its scientific journal for the past 35 years. The authors come from every conceivable background concerned with range management. Their interest in proper range management is their single common denominator. Their collective expertise is nothing less than impressive.

With increasing awareness, there has been burgeoning interests in proper management. Several years ago, Alan Savory, a biologist from Rhodesia, began expounding on a grazing system which espoused intensive grazing utilization. More recently, this has been expanded under the title of Holistic Resource Management. A number of trials of HRM are underway. Concurrently, there is widespread discussion on the many facets of proper management. In a recent panel

discussion in Prescott, Steve Gallizioli, a representative of the Arizona Wildlife Federation and one-time opponent of livestock grazing, enthusiastically endorsed HRM.

Since the turn of the century many people have turned their attention to the proper management of rangelands, both public and private. Watershed values, for example, were analyzed on alpine ranges in Utah decades ago by a pioneer ecologist, Lincoln Ellison. The earliest experimental range in the country, the Santa Rita Experimental Range south of Tucson, was established in 1902 by the Bureau of Plant Industry. Many benchmark principles were defined at Santa Rita, one being the role of fire in maintaining desert grassland free of scrubby plants, especially mesquite. It was at Santa Rita, too, that the degrading effects of long-time protection from grazing were demonstrated. Ungrazed grassy vegetation first increased, then failed under the impact of inevitable drought. Companion areas that were grazed moderately with periods of rest came through droughts without significant damage.

Current research is concerned with the interactions of the many uses of rangeland. Researchers are measuring the water yield, wildlife responses, impacts of recreation use, forage production for livestock and wildlife and vegetation changes as well as livestock response to various combinations of user impacts. Sophisticated mathematical models complement time-consuming field trials to expedite solutions. Many of these studies apply particularly to public lands, as all the uses must be accommodated to some degree. At present, there is also spirited discussion on how to share the cost of managing public lands among the several interests. Historic patterns are being examined to ascertain a more realistic and equitable distribution of costs. Proponents of eliminating livestock grazing (or timber cutting or mining) are faced with the fact that the remaining uses would then have a heavier financial responsibility for land management costs.

As time goes on, the evolution of rangeland management will continue. Populations will continue to increase (with the Southwest a notable example) and the demands on the land will continue to multiply, both in variety and volume. The demands on the manager, whether he or she be in the private or public sector, will continue to intensify. Livestock operators will need to broaden their skills and learn to better cope with other users' needs in order to survive. A rancher member of the Prescott panel discussing the future of ranching on public land stated succinctly that the livestock operators will need to cooperate with and accommodate to the needs, real or perceived, of the public as they claim a proprietary interest in public lands. He is optimistic that this will occur.

Having the knowledge and experience needed to adapt to change, the progressive range livestock operator will continue to operate on public land. Increasing world populations will in the long run require more, rather than less, use of rangeland for the production of food and fiber. As an energy-efficient means of converting native forage into products needed by man, livestock grazing on public land will continue to be a desirable use of these lands at the same time those lands fill ever-expanding needs of our growing population. This is the consensus of many ranchers, ecologists, wildlife biologists, range conservationists, administrators and other concerned interests today.

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