

Editor's Note

By Lori Hidinger

I am very excited to be the new Editor-in-Chief of *Rangelands* and have the opportunity to work with outgoing Editor Ed Fredrickson, the Steering Committee and the Editorial Board, as well as the SRM Board of Directors and members of the Society, to continue to improve the quality and appeal of the journal.

One of the steps taken by the Board of Directors towards improving the quality of *Rangelands* is to have all content peer-reviewed. There seems to be a lot of consternation around the term “peer review” and what it means to *Rangelands*. If you google “peer review,” you get over 18.5 million hits, but one of the cleanest definitions I found was the one used by Office of Research Integrity (ORI) in the Department of Health and Human Services (these are the folks who set the standards for a lot of research done with federal dollars). In the ORI introduction to the responsible conduct of research, peer review is defined as the “evaluation by colleagues with similar knowledge and experience.”¹ Peer review is the system used by journals, funding agencies, personnel committees, and policy decision makers to make decisions about what articles to publish, grants to fund, scholars to hire or promote, and what research or knowledge is reliable when setting policy.

Through the peer review process in publishing, authors are given expert advice, and incentive, to improve the quality of their articles.² During peer review, others who have knowledge in the topic or methods employed ensure that the methods are used and the results interpreted correctly and that the contents of the article are well reasoned and supported by the knowledge base around that topic, or in cases where new knowledge is contradictory to the established knowledge base, that there is strong evidence for this new position. Ideally, this process leads to better outcomes for the reader, the discipline, and the author. For authors, peer review provides respectability, and for busy readers, peer review provides a quality filter.³ In essence, peer review is the gatekeeper against “hooey.”

While peer review is far from perfect—even prestigious journals like *Science* and *Nature* have published outright scientific fraud—it is the system that seems to work the best (for now). A single paper—even one that is peer-reviewed—rarely defines scientific “truth,” something that evolves (and continues to evolve) through an increasing consensus of the knowledge base of a field.⁴ But the peer review process, more often than not, leads to improved quality of articles. In addition to reviewing the scientific and technical content of the articles submitted to *Rangelands*, our review process will focus on the “readability” of articles. Because of the diversity of backgrounds and interests in the Society, we

seek to publish articles that are written in plain English (not filled with scientific or technical jargon) and provide sufficient context for the broad *Rangelands* readership. We will also provide a technical edit to make sure each article reads well and tells a compelling “story.”

To help manage the peer review process for *Rangelands*, we recently instituted an online submission and tracking system, PeerTrack, at <http://www.editorialmanager.com/rangelands/>. Through this system, authors submit their manuscripts to the website, which is accessible to *Rangelands* editors and reviewers wherever they have internet access. The system will allow us to track reviews, revisions, and decisions on acceptance. If you are interested in serving as a peer reviewer, register with PeerTrack and include keywords about your expertise, or send me a note with your contact information and expertise to the email address below. Our hope is that using the system will streamline the review and publication process. But, whatever system we choose to make the process more efficient, be assured that peer review is now an integral part of the operations of *Rangelands*.

Again, I am looking forward to working with the *Rangelands* Steering Committee, Editorial Board, SRM Board of Directors, and most importantly you, the SRM members and readers of *Rangelands*. I welcome your input at lori.hidinger@asu.edu.

References

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Author is the Managing Director of the Consortium for Science, Policy and Outcomes at Arizona State University and is taking up the mantle of Editor-in-Chief of Rangelands with the new year.