

Journal of RANGE MANAGEMENT

EDITORIAL

The Future of the American Society of Range Management¹

Fourteen years from now, I visualize the American Society of Range Management as the leader among scientific conservation organizations in North America. I see ten thousand or more enthusiastic, dedicated, members in every section of the United States, Canada, and Mexico, with three-fourths of these members from the ranks of ranchers and other landowners. I visualize an organization that, over the years, has taken a deep interest in all matters affecting the conservation and use of rangelands, one whose advice and council is sought by public and private interest alike, and one ready to express its views on affairs that affect either of these interests. In short, an organization that has not only continued to proclaim the objectives printed on its masthead, but one that has done everything possible to live up to them.

These objectives have already stood the test of 14 years and I see no reason to change them.

There are, however, many things that we as an organization can do to bring them alive so that they will in fact give direction to our actions.

Let's start with the first purpose for which we were organized—"to foster advancement in the science and art of grazing land management." Perhaps the greatest barrier to progress in any field, whether it is in the biological sciences or human relations, is simple lack of knowledge and understanding. How much does the general public know about rangelands, their importance to the national welfare, or what is being done or should be done to improve them? For that matter, how well informed is the average school teacher on this subject, or State and county officials, legislators, and many others in positions of influence? Here is a vast opportunity for an important service to the public.

Many of the local Sections have recognized this opportunity and have made a good start in helping others learn something about the Nation's rangelands. They have done this through the organization of youth camps, range judging contests, in the preparation of printed materials

for various uses, and in a number of other ways. These activities have usually been carried out in cooperation with other groups and individuals so that many people have learned about them. Much more remains to be done, however, if we are to arouse the interest of all the people whose help we need "to foster advancement in the science and art of grazing land management."

I believe, too, the time has come when the Society should take the leadership in openly discussing some of the controversial issues involved with the conservation and use of rangelands. We have announced to the world that one of our purposes is "to stimulate discussion and understanding of scientific and practical range and pasture problems" but we haven't done very much about this as far as broad public questions are concerned. On the contrary, we have been pretty careful to refrain from public discussion of many important matters on which we know there are differences of opinion.

As an illustration, one issue of this kind was recently brought into sharp focus by the contrasting remarks of two highly-placed officials. After administering the conservation programs of one of the great departments of the Federal government for six years, the Assistant Secretary of that department expressed his philosophy regarding conservation in something like these words: Conservation cannot be bought, it cannot be proclaimed,

¹ Presented at Homecoming Meeting, American Society of Range Management, January 31-February 3, 1961, Newhouse Hotel, Salt Lake City, Utah.

nor can it be achieved by dictum. We will have lasting conservation in this country only when the people who own and operate the land believe in it, understand what needs to be done, and practice it voluntarily.

At almost the same time another official of that department was pleading before a scientific congress for a "wider application of both cash payments for conservation and technical assistance in conservation from public sources."

There are many such questions that involve both rangelands and the public interest. A list would include consideration of whether some rangeland might not be more profitably used for dude-ranching or wildlife production; whether public ownership of rangelands should be increased or reduced; differences in policies affecting the use of public lands administered by different agencies; whether extremely low-producing publicly-owned rangelands should continue to be used for grazing or reserved for watershed protection purposes, and many others.

While I am not suggesting that the American Society of Range Management take an immediate stand on one side or the other of such questions, I might point out that neutral organizations, like neutral Nations, are rarely looked to as leaders. I think you will agree that no other organization understands these problems as well, has more first-hand knowledge about them, or is in a better position to analyze the advantages, disadvantages, and costs of alternative courses of action. Presenting these facts to the public is clearly the obligation of a professional society, one I suggest that we must assume if we are to attain the position of influence in National affairs that I indicated earlier.

Another objective of the Society is "to encourage professional improvement of its members." Clearly, the Society has an ob-

ligation to make sure that young men planning a professional career in range work receive the basic scientific training they need. A start was made on this matter some years ago with the appointment of a committee to draw up a set of recommendations for the kind of comprehensive training needed by range men. That committee did its job and its recommendations were printed in the Society's Journal. The record is not clear, however, whether these proposals represent the position of the Society itself, or are merely the recommendations of a Society committee. In the light of our additional decade of experience, I am sure considerable improvement can be made in these proposals. A good way to start might be to have the Range Education Council re-examine, and if it appeared desirable, revise and upgrade the proposals of our earlier committee. We need to remember, too, that officials of agencies who employ range conservationists have a real concern with this matter and they, as well as the membership generally, should be given the opportunity to review and comment on recommendations of this kind. After such consideration, the final proposals should be formally approved by our Board of Directors and published so that we may all say, "Here is what the American Society of Range Management stands for in the way of minimum scientific training for professional range conservationists."

Another closely allied problem is concerned with the qualification standards used by the Federal government for the employment of range conservationists. Most of you probably know that in 1959 the U. S. Civil Service Commission proposed a set of education requirements so broad that men could have qualified for such positions with no training in range management, soil science, plant taxonomy, plant physiology, or any branch of ani-

mal husbandry. This proposal was officially endorsed by two of the agencies who employ range conservationists, as well as by the Director of Personnel of their Department.

This was an astonishing situation in the light of long-standing recommendations that the Federal government raise, rather than lower, its standards for the employment of scientific personnel.

Fortunately, the decision to adopt such standards was not allowed to stand. I might add that it took strenuous efforts by members of the Range Education Council and others to get it rescinded. This was a victory of sorts but the fact remains that the qualification standards finally issued lower the educational requirements that had been in effect for the preceding ten years. Furthermore, they are considerably short of those recommended to the Civil Service Commission by the American Society of Range Management. In addition, they set up different requirements for agencies whose work and responsibilities, in the opinion of many people, are sufficiently similar to require the same basic educational training.

This situation, plus the recent widespread criticism that some agencies are employing men as range conservationists who are not qualified to perform such duties, suggests that the American Society of Range Management still has an important job to do. While I am sure that the professed interests of the American Society of Range Management and employing agencies are identical in desiring standards that will insure the employment of qualified personnel, it is apparent that we are not yet together on the means by which this may be achieved. It will take leadership on the part of our Directors to bring about a common understanding on the kinds of qualifications required, and persistent action to make

sure that these requirements are made a part of Civil Service procedures.

We also have the avowed purpose of "providing a medium for the exchange of ideas and facts among society members and with allied technologists." Here, I think there are some things that need to be said about the services our members have a right to expect, as well as the kind of people we hope will be members 14 years from now.

When we met in Salt Lake City thirteen years ago, the decision was made that we didn't want "just another technical society," with membership restricted to technicians and college professors. Time has proven the wisdom of that decision. The membership of ranchers and their participation in our meetings, on our programs, and as officers of our organization has given the Society a vitality it would not have had otherwise. Of more importance, this relationship has probably speeded up the practice of conservation on our Nation's rangelands.

This brings us to a consideration of whether or not we are providing the kind of information through our Journal of Range Management that our rancher members need and want. This becomes increasingly important when we remember that, to a large extent, the growth of the Society depends on them. If we are to grow as we must to meet the challenging opportunities of the future, that increased membership must come largely from ranchers, rather than from professional people.

Here I am going to talk straight from the shoulder. We are all proud of the Journal of Range Management and we owe a "well-done" to every man who has served as Editor, or on the Editorial Board. The Journal of Range Management has now reached the point where no technician can afford to be without

it. I am equally certain that only a very small proportion of our rancher-members look upon it in the same fashion.

To make sure this was not merely my opinion, this past fall I sought and obtained the views of a cross-section of nearly 100 rancher-members in 15 States. Their statements were revealing.

The vast majority of them felt that many Journal articles were written in a manner that made them difficult to understand. Some of them reported that they had quit, or almost quit, trying to read the Journal for this reason.

A large number of them objected to what they considered the undue amount of space devoted to research techniques and methodology. They were interested in the studies some of our Journal authors had under way and they were even more interested in the results and possible application of some of these studies to their own operations. They objected, however, having to wade through a description of the detailed procedures by which the results were obtained.

Others pointed out that the stereotyped organization of many articles, while perhaps suitable for formal research reports, made dull reading when constantly repeated in the Journal.

Finally, and this was probably the most important suggestion of all, there was a widespread plea for more articles—as they expressed it—"on how ranchers are doing things", articles on the successful application of conservation measures in practical ranch operations.

I think, too, the membership generally has a right to expect better coverage of important developments affecting rangelands and the people concerned with them. How many of you know, for example, that 39 United States Senators and Congressman recently petitioned the Secretaries of Agriculture and In-

terior to launch a nation-wide study of "America's Grazing Lands" as a basis for a national program to foster range development, or what their response was to this proposal? Some means should be found for keeping the membership informed on developments as important as this; perhaps the restoration of the Editorial page as a regular feature of the Journal would help.

All of this leaves me with a pretty blunt conclusion. This is that unless we find ways to broaden its appeal and increase its usefulness to all of our members, the Journal itself will prove a barrier to any greatly increased growth of the Society.

I pay tribute to the men of vision who founded the American Society of Range Management and to all those who, over the years, have worked so hard in its interests. We have an organization of which we can all be proud. We also have unlimited opportunities. Meeting the challenges of the next 14 years will take positive and aggressive action from all of us.

We will need the help of many thousands of people and to get that help we must have their understanding. We must do more than we have done in the past to let them know about the importance of the Nation's rangelands and what is being done, and should be done, to improve them.

Where there are differences of opinion about what should be done, the Society itself, as the one organization that knows the most about such problems, must meet its responsibilities in helping to guide public opinion. Furthermore, if it is to attain a position of leadership, it must take a positive position on matters involving the public interest.

The Society also has a responsibility to help young men interested in range management acquire the necessary training for such work, and it has equal responsibilities to make sure that

those in public service in this field are properly qualified.

The Journal of Range Management has two primary functions. As the one publication of its kind in the world, we should be able to look to it as the principal source of the technical information we need in our work, with

equal emphasis on the "art" as well as the "science" of range management. As our official publication, it should continually reflect the purposes for which we were organized, express the opinions of our leaders, and publicize our accomplishments to help create the image of the

Society in the public mind that we want to establish.

Clearly, there is work to be done if we are to build on the foundations of the past and meet the challenges of the future.—
F. G. Renner, Head Range Conservationist, Soil Conservation Service, Washington, D. C.