The Range Society is at the Crossroads

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The American Society of Range Management has come far in its first 20 years, as the sole professional organization with conservation of rangelands as its dominant objective. But in the meantime, urbanization and increased leisure for more people have changed our environment. The Range Society should accept broader professional concern for all matters pertaining to range in tomorrow's environment. We need to assemble facts and establish strong policy regarding conservation and use of rangelands. Finally, we need closer ties with user groups and other professional natural resource organizations—to carry out our objectives.

The Range Society's mission in life, if we look at it with vision, is to assure that rangelands serve to the fullest the needs of people. We are the only Society with conservation of rangelands as its dominant objective. Thus, as a professional Society, we are champions of wise use of rangelands.

Today I shall briefly review with you four major questions. First, what foundations have we built since the Society was formally organized 10 years ago last month in Salt Lake City? Second, how has our socioeconomic and political environment changed? Third, how well have we progressed toward our objectives in this changed environment? Fourth, what major challenges does our Society face today?

The Foundations on Which We Built

In the short two decades of the American Society of Range Management's existence we have built well. We can point proudly to many notable accomplishments. Of these I shall mention only a few as illustrations.

Our broad membership base, accepted by the membership within the first year, provides real strength. In deciding to embrace within our membership all men with strong interests in rangelands and their uses, we established an organization dedicated not only to grass, or forage, or livestock, or game, or any other aspect, but to a composite. By creating the opportunity for internal forums representing a variety of interests, backgrounds, and objectives, we avoided a mistake made by some other professional organizations.

At the same time, this broad membership base has created somewhat of an obstacle to recognition of the Society as a professional organization. It also may be partly responsible for concern expressed by the Range Management Education Council in their 1963 Report, as follows: "The most critical problem facing the range management profession today is the lack of recognition of range management as a science and as a profession."

The Society has increased tenfold in membership—from 400 to 4,000—since our first annual meeting. This is good, but not dramatic when we consider the number of range-oriented people who are eligible for membership. Even though it is not as big as we need, it is approaching the number needed to be an effective force for achieving Society objectives and to finance activities that need to be accomplished.

Our Society has a highly respected bimonthly Journal, now in its 20th volume. There is still, and I suspect always will be, criticism among our members about the balance between scientific, how-to-do, and popular types of articles. But you cannot scan through the 20 volumes, as I had occasion to do recently, without being impressed by the tremendous wealth of information and knowledge that this Journal has provided for our membership, and for other readers in North America and abroad.

Our 18 active Sections, three of which we share with our good friends to the north—Canada—and one in Mexico, provide the real strength of the Society. Their meetings and their contacts are closely attuned to exchange of technical information among their members, balanced discussion of conservation issues, and acquainting other groups with the importance of rangelands.

We have liaison with 11 allied scientific organizations, and we have had formal liaison with livestock associations. It is hard for me to appraise how actively, and in what depth, these highly essential relations are being conducted. But a recognition of the need and a mechanism for establishing them has been developed.

We have spread a recognition of the need for range management almost throughout the world, in the majority of coun-
tries where there was absolutely no understanding of the term, what it meant, or the importance of the resources involved. This establishment of widespread international relations has been achieved through hard work of our very vigorous International Relations Committee and our members abroad, through our former Middle East Section, and through widespread circulation of the Journal. Granted, the understanding of range management is extremely thin in many developing countries; but range education and technical assistance are very actively continuing.

We have moved forward aggressively, through the Range Management Education Council, in improving uniformity and professional quality in range management curricula and in establishing higher Civil Service standards for range-trained college graduates.

We have established an orderly basis for the development of effective and vigorous policy by the Society. But, as yet, the Society has not carried out its responsibility to any great extent. To do so in a manner that will engender the needed respect for our position will require a recognition of broad public interest, time, effort, and careful thought.

As you review the accomplishments I have named, it becomes clearly apparent that our Society has internally established good foundations for meeting the objectives as we saw them two decades ago.

**Our Environment Has Changed**

In today’s parlance, our environment is different than it was two decades ago. Since the modest beginnings of this Society, and while we were achieving the accomplishments I just listed, times have changed, and will continue changing with ever-increasing speed. We must examine today’s environment and decide what role we want the Society to play and where it needs to increase effort to achieve a position of prominence in the natural resources field. I will mention only a few of the major changes that have taken and are taking place.

Our rapidly growing population continues to shift from rural to urban residence. Four decades ago about half of our population was rural. Today, an average of less than one out of four persons is from such areas. In the year 2000, according to projections, only one out of ten is likely to be living in a rural area. Thus, any real understanding of land and its management is becoming increasingly a heritage of the minority.

Together with the effects of reapportionment, this population shift means that an increasing proportion of our State legislatures and Members of Congress will be made up of leaders who will have little or no background or understanding of land. These, our elected representatives, are the ones who formulate State and National policy.

At the same time, the American public has intensified its attention to wildlife, outdoor recreation, beauty of the landscape, preservation of endangered species, and to pollution of air, soil, and water. Parallel with this shift has been a decreasing appreciation of land as a source of raw materials and products.

Administration, management, and use of rangeland are becoming infinitely more complex. The public interests just mentioned and such subjects as land law review, weather modification, widespread concern about pestcides, reorganization of natural resource agencies, rural reforms, and river basin commissions, have been or are being reviewed by select committees, conferences, legislative hearings, and similar groups at State and Federal levels. All of these affect our profession and the Society in one way or another.

There is an eruption of special-interest groups—groups of persons with the common objective of defending or promoting their specific interest in some single natural resource or feature of a resource. These groups are frequently made up of dedicated, well educated and highly articulate people whose definition of conservation relates directly—often exclusively—to their own special interest.

All of the above changes in environment and personal interests, plus increasing numbers of people, increasing affluence and leisure time, and mobility of our population, are resulting in increased pressures on the land. To satisfy these increased demands, management direction is shifting quite largely to the simultaneous production of two or more goods and services from the land. Multiple outputs have become a necessity.

At the same time, increasing doubt is being expressed about the importance of livestock grazing on rangeland. There is no question on a State or National basis that dependence of livestock on range for feed and forage, percentagewise, is declining. Even in the State of Utah, it is now estimated that only 40% of the feed and forage used by beef cattle and sheep comes from rangelands.

But the doubt goes further. Some economists have recently shown by traditional methods of economic analysis that ranchers in certain range areas cannot make a profit. You will probably get further insight into this situation during Dr. Upchurch’s paper later in this annual meeting. Those of you who attended the Wichita annual meeting may remember that Director C. Peairs Wilson, in his excellent talk, pointed out that rangeland is in a questionable competitive position with cropland as a basis for meat production.

Some of these doubts have probably given representatives
of special-interest groups and others reason for stating that we don’t need to continue livestock grazing on rangelands—our needs for beef and lamb production in the future will come from intensively managed pastures. A few of our own prominent members have made similar statements in public meetings. These doubts also probably lead to statements by non-rangemen such as that of Dean Stephen H. Spurr of the Graduate School, University of Michigan, in the November 1966 issue of the Journal of Forestry; in writing of America’s natural resources he stated, “Range management has become a field of its own, but, in its turn, is becoming less important as cattle and sheep increasingly are raised intensively and in concentrations.”

These uncertainties, or certainties in the minds of some, in the absence of authoritative data, are leading to serious questioning by high Government officials of the need for expenditures for needed expansions in range research and for management and improvement on public rangelands. They are affecting or doubtless will affect private investment in improvement and management of range. Undoubtedly they will also affect the number and quality of students enrolling for college training in range management.

Moreover, these doubts about the importance of rangelands for livestock forage, coupled with an increased vocal interest in their other uses, values, or attributes, are resulting in allocation of rangelands to uses other than livestock grazing. Decisions on land policy, always of a socioeconomic and political nature, will be increasingly controlled by urban needs and desires.

**How Well Are We Attuned To These Changes?**

We cannot afford to ignore or dismiss lightly these changes and the challenges they present. What do they mean to the Society and to us as members?

Therein can lie a serious threat to one major reason for this Society’s existence. More than two decades ago, when formation of the Society was being considered, the primary force stimulating such a move came from the use of rangelands for livestock grazing. This, as a reason for the Society’s existence, would be seriously undermined if the beliefs of some people regarding continued need and profitability of grazing livestock on rangelands remain unchallenged, and there were extensive, exclusive allocations of rangelands to recreation, production of wildlife, and other uses sought by dominant public interests. Should these changes take place, as predicted by Dean Spurr’s statement, the Range Society under present circumstances is certainly not likely to be an influential voice in management and policy development for natural resources.

I am not convinced that these events will take place. I am sure that many of you aren’t either. But we must critically examine ourselves and the Society in the light of many questions. Among these are:

- **What role do we want this Society to play?** The broad role of professional concern about rangelands and all goods and services they may provide, mentioned in my opening remarks? Or a narrower role dealing primarily with forage production and livestock grazing, with only peripheral concern for other products and values?
- **Has this Society kept abreast of the increasing complexity and breadth of natural resource problems?** Have we members accepted and broadened responsibilities in keeping with the changing times?
- **Has the Society assembled facts that will convey to other professionals and the general public an understanding of the goods and services that rangelands provide, the contributions they make to the economy, and the opportunities for increasing these?**
- **Is the Society recognized as authoritative regarding rangelands and their values and use for livestock production?**
- **Is the Society considered equally authoritative regarding rangelands and their use by wildlife? as watersheds? for outdoor recreation? or for a composite? Or do we just listen politely, hoping these other uses will go away, instead of recognizing them as legitimate, associated, or even competitive and alternative uses?**
- **Does the Society have policy positions related to future uses of rangeland resources? Are we as members willing to devote the time and effort necessary for sound policy formulation and followup action? Or are we willing to let our rightful leadership go by default?**
- **Is the Society known and respected by other natural resource professional groups? Have we worked with them as closely as might be desirable?**
- **Is the Society known and respected by special-interest groups? By urban groups? By legislative policymakers?**
- **Has the Society or its Sections participated effectively at the local, regional, State, or Federal levels in helping to shape natural resource policy?**

All of the activities embodied in the above questions, except for those relating to the role of the Society, were envisioned in the Society’s original objectives, as expressed in the Articles of Incorporation. Even the choice of role may be covered by the breadth of the objectives, and within these we can choose the
size of sphere we represent.

With the other questions, if we examined ourselves objectively, we would find we have made some progress but still are sorely lacking in achievement. This does not mean that Society objectives are inadequate, or that the course we followed up to now was wrong. But it does mean that there needs to be a searching examination of priorities and urgencies in establishing the Society's course for the years immediately ahead.

Some of you doubtless feel this appraisal is too severe. You can point to some excellent, well-balanced, annual meeting programs such as the one for this meeting, to some fruitful relations that have been established with user and other groups, and to some well designed field trips. Even so, I dare say that interest and activity of the preponderance of our 4,000 members are confined to technical aspects of livestock grazing on rangelands.

Challenges For The Future

The Range Society is at the crossroads. This I sincerely believe. Dedicated and imaginative effort on the part of the officers and all members will be required if we fully accept the challenges for the future.

Internally, many things still must be done to strengthen our Society. Among these are enlistment of more members, achieving a wider representation of stockmen and others interested in multiple uses of rangelands, establishing a better financial structure, obtaining a firmer recognition of range management as a science and profession, establishing better standards for range-trained men with inclusion of an understanding of uses and values other than for livestock grazing, and publishing an increasingly useful Journal and other publications.

But the road ahead will need some change, if the American Society of Range Management is to achieve its rightful place among the professional natural resource organizations. The directions I would suggest we pursue are as follows:

1. We need to examine critically the role we want the Society to occupy in tomorrow's environment. I would hope we can accept the broader role of professional concern in all matters relating to the conservation and use of rangelands for all goods and services they may provide for the American people. If we do, we must make it clear by deed as well as word that this isn't just a facade, but a deep conviction to which we are dedicated.

2. We need to assemble facts concerning rangelands, their importance now and in the future for livestock grazing, for wildlife habitat, for outdoor recreation, and for other uses. This should be analyzed carefully, and a comprehensive, authoritative report prepared which could be used for a variety of purposes. It could be that this would substantiate to some extent what some people are saying. Even so, we would have a far better basis for shaping future actions than we now have.

3. We need to establish strong policy, and the first item is a clear statement of what the Society stands for with respect to the conservation and use of rangelands. This is essential for unifying internal purpose, as well as conveying to others an understanding of the Society.

4. We need to seek and establish closer relations with user associations, and urban and special-interest groups.

5. We need to join hands with other professional natural resource organizations. There was strength in setting up a separate organization—but there are also weaknesses faced by ourselves and others. Even with its membership of 16,000, the Society of American Foresters finds itself in a position of weakness. The development of strong, balanced, national policy and pursuit of it will require joint effort by many professional natural resource organizations. Perhaps some type of formal union might ultimately be necessary, but the first step is to seek to develop joint unified action through cooperative effort.

I would further suggest that the road the Society should follow is of such critical importance that at least one full session of an early annual meeting be devoted to exploring various details of it.

A Society that is standing for something concrete, that is effective at the many levels of policymakers, and whose counsel is being sought will, I submit, attract members. Thus, by extending ourselves externally, we may at the same time resolve some of our more perplexing internal dilemmas.

To meet these challenges effectively—if the Society elects to go in this direction—we must keep in mind that we will have to spend the time and devote the effort that are necessary to do a thorough job. Anything less will not strengthen the Society to the extent needed.

If we don't move forcefully in this direction, there are certainly others far less knowledgeable regarding rangelands who will. For choosing this direction the reward is a Range Society—our Range Society—standing as an effective force in the natural resource fields, known for its reliability and professional concern that rangelands serve to the fullest extent the needs of people, now and in the future.