What do researchers like to read?

HENRY A. WRIGHT

I like to read papers that answer **why** questions, not the **what happened** questions: science proceeds most rapidly when **explanation** is coupled with **description.** The sooner we know when and why a plant will be susceptible to a chemical, the sooner research on type of chemical and rate of application will be informative. Similarly, resistance or susceptibility to fire of a plant varies with season. Once we know our objective (kill or keep a plant), we can prescribe a burn to achieve our objective. A paper should expand our knowledge base and add to management information. Remember, this is the *Journal of Range Management.*

Moreover, I like to read papers that determine thresholds. When will firebrands give us problems and when will they not? Why? When will logs burn up and when will they not. Why? When are plants susceptible to rootkill and when are they not? Why? When will fires burn safely and when will they not? What are the upper and lower limits of weather conditions for permissible burns?

Papers that resolve field problems through basic and applied research are preferred reading. Laboratory work, special field testing, and, ultimately, application are usually involved. Also, this research might incorporate basic information from other disciplines.

As a scientist, I do not like to get papers rejected for the wrong reasons. Associate editors should set the standard for our journal and should take their job seriously to serve the members of the society. They should have the fortitude to make final decisions on acceptance or rejection of papers. I do not like to hear an editor say, "I rejected your paper because my reviewers rejected it, and I need to honor their judgement. Otherwise, they may not review papers for me in the future."

There are harsh reviewers and there are lax reviewers. I can get negative comments on any paper by sending it to certain people for review. Similarly, I can guarantee acceptance from other reviewers. Thus, the editor needs to be rational and fair, and must exercise good judgment if we are to have a quality journal, regardless of reviewer comments. This is necessary if we want good research papers to continue to come to the *Journal of Range Management.*

I am not impressed with editors who say, "We reject 50% of our manuscripts." That is like telling a class of students that "50% of you will flunk this course, regardless of your level of performance." *Ecology* used to send me papers to review. They prefaced their cover letter by saying that "We reject 50% of all manuscripts." I returned their requests for review and said, "I review papers for content, not to make sure that 50% get rejected." In my judgment, editors should accept papers because there is something good in this paper. It should be a contribution that will enable us to better understand ecosystems or manage our lands.

A paper should be scientifically sound. Some of our editors and reviewers are pseudo-statisticians who often reject papers "because of improper design." I had a paper in which we studied the relationship between forage yield and percent cover of brush on a grazed and ungrazed area. The paper was rejected because of "used pseudo-replications." What is wrong with comparing regression lines between two areas?

Some of our editors have made bad decisions based on poor reviews, and they are accepting straightforward **what** studies in place of good **why** research. This is dangerous and embarrassing to our profession. Editors are encouraging scientists to do nothing. If you do not do anything, you cannot be accused of doing anything wrong.

Statistics should be a tool for researchers to evaluate their research. Randomization and replication should be incorporated in all studies to the greatest degree possible. After researchers have analyzed their data, they should set statistical analyses aside and "tell their story."

When associate editors are chosen, there should be some minimum criteria. They should have a good publication record in several journals. Some people have been scientists for 20 to 30 years and only published 2 or 3 papers. These people do not make good editors because they are too critical of themselves. Nevertheless, they generally are some of our best reviewers if their review comments are handled by a rational editor. Lastly, associate editors should preferably be senior scientists, but not necessarily.

All of us need to remember that our goal is to serve our profession so that ultimately we can do a superior job of managing our natural resources. If we use the **why** approach in our research and get reasonable and fair treatment from associate editors, we will be doing what is best for our profession.

Author is Horn Professor and Chairman, Department of Range and Wildlife Management, Texas Tech University. The paper was presented as part of the "SRM Publications and You" Symposium at the SRM Annual Meeting, Corpus Christi, Texas, February 1988.