Golden Memories - Golden Opportunities

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This address was given by John Hunter, 1996 President of the Society for Range Management, on February 17, 1997, at the Society's 50th Annual Meeting in Rapid City, S. D.

It is a pleasure to participate in the Plenary Session of this 50th Anniversary Meeting. When the Program Chairman asked if I would like to talk about the History of SRM, I was delighted to address this topic. Now, I am having misgivings because SRM has such a rich history. What can I include and what must be left out? As I look out at you today, I see the people who made this history; and I, too, am a part of it.

Before I continue, I want to ask all of the Charter and 50 year Members, or their widows, to stand and be recognized. Next I would like for all past Directors to stand and be recognized. To carry this one step further, will all past Committee Chairpersons stand and be recognized. Look around you and you will see the people who are a part of this history.

For the benefit of our younger SRM members, I would like to call the names of all the Charter Members, but time will not permit this; however, the Charter Members are listed in Volume 1, No. 1 of the Journal of Range Management. They are also listed in our SRM History from 1948 to 1985. I encourage all of you to read this history and read the first issue of the Journal of Range Management. Also available at this meeting is the Supplement to the History of Range Management from 1986–1995, plus SRM Past Presidents, Video Interviews, Status and Highlights. If you get as much inspiration from reading this history as I received, I guarantee it will be worth your time. Many of our Charter Members and Past Presidents are deceased. Please join me in a moment of silent prayer to honor their memory.

A large portion of this presentation is taken from "A History of the Society for Range Management 1948–1985" by Clinton Wassert, Elbert Reed, and Arthur Smith, from Joe Pechanec's articles "Our Range Society" found in Volume 1, Number 1, and "The History and Accomplishments of our Range Society" in Volume 10, Number 4, of the Journal of Range Management, from "Milestones in Range Management" by Robert Campbell, and "Past and Present of Range Management" by E.J. Dyksterhuis. When I tried to capture the essence of what they had written, it lost some of its meaning, so in many instances these are direct quotes. If you want "the rest of the story" you will need to read all of the historical information!

The first exploratory range management investigations were made by such men as F.V. Coville, H.L. Bentley, Thomas A. Williams, and Jared G. Smith. Several of these studies were published in 1898 as bulletins of the Division of Agronomy, Botany or Forestry in the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This was exactly 50 years prior to the organization of the American Society of Range Management.

Prior to 1900, there was very little control of grazing on public land. Aggressive administration and management of forest reserves was initiated by the Forest Service in 1905. The objective was sustained productive range on which to build a sound grazing enterprise and to provide economic family units. Indian lands were next, and by 1930 a systematic program of range management was established on nearly 50 million acres. Part of the unreserved public domain was brought under control by the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934, after decades of exploitation. In 1936, the Act was amended to include the entire area. Thus, the Grazing Service was born and started on the road to good management of some 134 million acres.

The concept of a Society for Range Management goes back at least to 1931. Between 1931 and 1946, several different groups of range men seriously considered such an organization. Chiefly because there was a general feeling that numbers of range men were insufficient to support a strong society, none of these earlier considerations bore any tangible move toward formation of a society. The fact that the idea was kept alive, however, was a real accomplishment of the earlier workers.

The first tangible event which subsequently gave birth to the American Society of Range Management took place in Moscow, Idaho, on March 28–30, 1946. Here, at an Interagency Range Management Conference attended by representatives of 5 colleges and several state and federal agencies, one of the panel discussions was entitled "The Need for a Range Management Organization". Members of the panel included Charles A. Fite, Gene Payne, Vernon A. Young, Joe Pechanec, and Harold F. Heady as leader. A spirited and somewhat heated discussion ensued.

At the close of this conference a motion was passed instructing Vernon A. Young, Chairman of the Conference, to appoint a committee to inquire further into interest by range men in a range organization and the type of organization desired. Tom Lomasson, Liter F. Spence, W.T. White, Harold Heady, and Joe Pechanec were appointed to that committee, with the last 2 named as co-chairman.

On August 20, 1946, a survey was mailed to 858 range men. Enclosed was a card to fill out and return, asking whether the men favored an organization of range men, whether this should be a separate organization or a section of an existing society, whether he would become a member in either event, and whether such an organization should publish a journal.

The spirited discussion at Moscow was wan and sickly compared to the pungency of some of the replies. Some wanted to affiliate with the Society of American Foresters, some with the American Society of Agronomy, and some with the American Society of Animal Production. There were 505 replies with 495 favoring a range management organization and 390 favoring publication of a journal. The issue of a separate organization or affiliation with an existing organization was not absolutely clear, but a slight majority favored a separate organization.
A second letter was mailed to about 850 persons in July of 1947 summarizing the results of the survey and requesting payment of $3.00 dues. A meeting was planned during the winter of 1947–48.

This letter also requested a vote on members for a temporary council to assist and help guide the committee until officers could be elected and vote on a name for the Society.

Funds for mailing these letters were contributed by several leading range men in the country and members of the committee contributed as much as $25.00 each. Another important event was official support of the new range organization by W.L. Dutton and W.R. Chapline of the Forest Service and Fred Renner of the Soil Conservation Service. They sent letters to members in their respective agencies strongly urging them to join the new society and give it their support. Later, the Chiefs of both the Soil Conservation Service and the Forest Service sent letters to all of their regions expressing official interest and support. Still later, G.M. Kerr of the Bureau of Land Management sent a similar message to the range men in that agency.

Five committees were formed. They included an organization committee, membership committee, program committee, arrangements committee, and a journal committee.

By the end of 1947 arrangements had been completed for the first annual meeting to be held in Salt Lake City, Utah. A first draft of the constitution had been completed. Membership stood at somewhat more than 400 members and progress was being made toward publishing a journal.

The first meeting was at Salt Lake City January 30–31, 1948. The attendance of 192 members clearly indicated a positive interest in forming a range organization. Up to this point, there was still a question as to whether or not this should be a separate organization. The great majority were in favor of a separate society instead of affiliation with some existing society. The die was cast and a new society was on its way!

The Organization Committee had chosen the name "American Society of Range Management", but an alternate name proposed was the "American Grassland Society". It was decided to submit by mail vote the 2 choices to the full membership for vote, together with a full explanation of the relative merits of each. The "American Society of Range Management" was the preferred choice.

Membership requirements also came up for considerable discussion. There were clearly 2 schools of thought. One group favored requirements broad enough to include anyone sufficiently interested in joining the Society and supporting its objectives. The other thought that such a liberal policy would detract from the professional standing of the society. A proposal was made to the pattern of corporations, and "Councilmen" became "Directors". Since inception, the Board has included 6 elected Directors and the Officers (President and First Vice-President).

In 1950 the Board of Directors asked local sections to send officers/representatives to be non-voting observers at business sessions during annual meetings. At the 1953 Annual Meeting, Officers and Representatives of 16 sections of the Society organized an unofficial "Body of Section Chairmen". In 1962 this became a "Council of Section Officers", and in 1966 this "Council" changed its name to "Advisory Council". However, it was not until 1970, at the Summer Board Meeting, that the Advisory Council was accepted as an official body with its role and status confirmed in the Bylaws revisions of 1974.

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