Role of Animals in Resource Management—A Unique Contribution of the Range Scientist?

It's an understatement to say that our Society is currently struggling with problems of professional development! However, we have been more successful in strengthening our academic requirements than in identifying the uniqueness of a range scientist. When forced to pinpoint what a range man docs that is different from anyone else, we inevitably stumble and mumble around over physiology, ecology, etc. until we finally settle on management. Why we are so bashful to admit that management is important, I wouldn't know unless it connotes more art and less science. For purpose of the present discussion, our objective is to answer an important and timely question—what is unique about a range scientist?

Management of the forage crop on rangelands has been traditionally the domain of range people. However, in recent years many of our productive natural resource scientists have received advanced training in a specialized field such as botany, animal nutrition, and economics. These workers have contributed understanding important in managing the range forage crop and it is not surprising that we have come to regard forage management, per se, as less important. Paradoxically, we have stressed basic understanding and unconsciously given ground in a field where our expertise is the strongest. The question is "how

can we regain and maintain a stronger hand in the management area?" Perhaps by stressing the ability of range people, based on their broad background in training and multiple-use philosophy, to use animals as a tool in resource management we can become more effective land managers. My espousing of this point of view for nearly a year now has generally met with favorable response except for one authority in the field who regards this as the province of wildlife management. If wildlife managers were all knowledgeable re the basic resource (soils) and the raw materials (plants) and were effective in controlling numbers, I would agree. On the contrary, they are more commonly wildlife biologists. Range managers (despite the fact that some Federal agencies masquerade range as wildlife habitat as though it were something different when used by a wild animal) generally are more capable in the use of animals as a tool in land management and have at their disposal animals that can in fact be managed.

Perhaps at this point your question is—"what advantage have we gained in becoming identified with the ability of using animals as a tool in modifying natural environments?" The strongest asset of this identity is to be able to pinpoint something different in the capability of a range scientist that cannot, as a rule, be obtained from other professional land managers. In no sense are we detracting from the value of physiology, ecology, nutrition, economics, etc. in getting the job done. We're merely hanging our hat on a peg with a minimum of overlap and confusion with other scientists with whom we work: agronomists, animal scientists, foresters, wildlife biologists, and watershed managers to name a few. Yet we can and do manage animals in ways that are helpful to the objectives of all these allied professionals.

Range scientists viewed in this light have an increasingly important role to play in the intensive management of our natural resources. Animals using this range forage crop will continue to be one of our most effective tools in resource management. If we realize this fact, we will discover that range people have puttered around in the dark ages long enough and can make a long awaited and needed transition into the space age by asserting their capability of managing animals as a tool in the achievement of multiple-use goals.—*D. W. Hedrick*, Professor of Range Management, Oregon State University, Corvallis.