

SRM's Future—Dreams or Opportunities



Daniel L. Merkel

It has truly been an honor and privilege to serve you as president during the past year. I sincerely appreciated this opportunity to work for you and the profession of range management. I hope I have given as much to improving the world's rangelands as I have gained from the experience you provided me.

The president's address has been used by many of your presidents in the past as a State of the Society message. They have informed the membership of the important SRM programs and notable accomplishments of the last year; recognized the dedicated work of members, chapters, sections, committees, advisory council and board; and looked to the future.

These are important and topics that I would like to discuss. You have, however, had the opportunity during the year to become familiar with many of the current and recent range activities. Executive Secretary Floyd Kinsinger has outlined the current administrative situation. And like other presidents, I have been blessed with the services of many active members to whom the accomplishments of the past year belong. Anything I could say here would be inadequate to properly express my appreciation for their assistance.

Therefore, I want to use this opportunity to look to the future—to share my dreams for the Society for Range Management, with you. I want you to put aside those ideas that "it can't be done," "It's been tried," "That's not the real world," and "What's happened to him?" I want you to evaluate the possibilities if we are willing to dedicate ourselves to becoming the best of societies. Then I will let you separate the dreams from the opportunities in SRM's future.

You must first recognize that we are small in number, about 5,700 today, but our mission is to improve the management of the world's rangelands, which influence the lives of millions of individuals and almost every nation. We are young as an organized Society and recognized profession, but we are mature and experienced among the groups concerned with the environment. We are poor financially, but we are rich in knowledge and dedication to our goals. We are inexperienced in the political arena; but we are recognized for our honesty and desire to do the right thing. We have determined that SRM should be the leader in rangeland issues; but we are uncomfortable when called on to act rather than react. We have said that we should exercise self-evaluation and flexibility to change the Society, when necessary, to better serve the members and public, but we resist change or breaking tradition. We provide assistance to many; but we are a pawn to no one.

To look to SRM's future, we must evaluate the past and present. You are aware that for most of civilization, rangelands have been the "forgotten resource," that area that was left over, or, "land unsuitable for cultivation," or as one of our members often says, "The bastard child at the family reunion." It was not until people

became concerned about their supply of high quality low cost food, water, recreation, and energy that they recognized the value of those "wastelands."

Then the instant experts and interested groups sprouted like cheatgrass after a fall rain. They quickly recognized, with our help, that less than desirable conditions existed on much of the world's rangelands. They did not study the early history of range use and the progress that had been made by SRM members and others to improve rangelands that had been damaged throughout history. In place of recognizing the long, silent battle to conserve and improve our range resources, they often searched for the bad guys to wear the "black hat." The livestock industry and range managers won the booby prize. The rancher was given credit for learning and using the three R's—Rape, Ruin, and Run. The range manager was pictured as being on a sagebrush picnic without his marbles.

Fortunately, we have passed the stage of people trying to establish blame, and most are seeking constructive methods to speed up rangeland improvement. This almost universal support for increased authority and resources for range improvement has resulted in unprecedented response by legislative bodies and management, research, and technical assistance agencies. This has resulted in a more involved, better informed public to work with and respond to both through the Society and in our regular employment.

With this background, please let me outline the role I believe the Society must assume if we are to emerge as the international leader in directing this new interest in a productive and constructive manner. We must:

1. *Be the source of and provide technical assistance* on the development of rangeland policy. We should build an identity and reputation that would inspire any person responsible for legislation or policy to seek our advice and assistance. The help should then be provided by any level of the Society to any level of authority.
2. *Do an even better job of improving the public's awareness*, internationally, of the function rangelands perform in the production of food and fiber; in the protection of the environment; and in meeting human needs. Although there is a growing interest in range improvement, those that are supportive and concerned represent a small percentage of the population. Many of those that seek better range conditions are not aware that improvement can result from proper management for production; and, the resource need not be excluded from use. We need to develop more innovative methods of telling people that when rangeland is managed properly, we can have our cake and eat it too.
3. *Further the understanding of and appreciation for* the role range performs in meeting the social, cultural, and political needs of people. More than any other thing, failure to recognize these factors in our work and to identify their importance to others has limited application of available technology. In this area, we have a great deal to learn before we are effective in spreading the message.

4. *Provide the base to increase and improve the professional level* of the individuals and institutions associated with the science and management of rangelands. Although the Society has established a certification program for consultants and an accreditation procedure for educational institutions; provides access to the most recent technology through SRM publications and meetings; and is working to improve U.S. Civil Service employment standards we recognize there are unqualified and substandard individuals and institutions involved in range management.

5. *Through programs, provide the media* for technology transfer for all those interested in the science and applications of range science information. Although this was one of the major objectives of the Society's formation, we must greatly improve the rate of field application of range research results. We must improve the way we package new technology and seek better methods of directing it to the correct audiences.

6. *Develop SRM as a recognized body* serving a lead role in management of the world's rangelands. With the growing interest in and demand on the range resource, the Society must provide the leadership to improve the management of rangelands around the globe or by default allow other groups without needed range knowledge and experience to assume our role. We must explore new, more innovative methods of working on an international level.

7. *Take leadership in providing a forum* for the dissemination and exchange of range science information. The Society's annual meetings have long provided an excellent forum for the exchange of information among members. The Society must extend this role beyond its standard meetings and membership. There is a need for SRM to expand its role of hosting, sponsoring, or co-sponsoring important meetings addressing range topics for more non-members.

8. *Encourage a sound basic and applied research program* aimed at the expansion of rangeland management knowledge. One cannot overstate the progress that has been made by the SRM Research Committee since it was formed at the 1977 summer meeting. There is more support for and interest in range research than has existed in recent history. This

new attention to range research, however, has not resulted in major increases in resources for research. The Society must, therefore, continue to push for quality rangeland research.

Are these eight items dreams or opportunities? Your Board of Directors considered them reasonable and achievable responsibilities of the Society in 1978 when they were identified as the long-range SRM goals. The 1979 and 1980 Society's Programs of work described initial steps to accomplish each of these. I am proud, as you should be, of the progress SRM has made in changing these goals into accomplishments. This progress has been made by dedicated committee members, Board of Directors, executive secretaries and Headquarter's office staff under trying conditions.

In spite of this first step, we have many miles to go before we can honestly say we have assumed a leadership position that will establish SRM as the best of professional societies. This journey will require greater efforts by more of our members, an increased membership; a sound and expanded financial base, increased staff; more visible representation in the centers of government; more professional and higher standards in all range activities; improved communications within and outside the Society; more cooperative efforts with other natural resource, interest and user groups and agencies; and, a greatly expanded international program.

Yes, we must do all this and more if we are going to capitalize and the current interest in and attention to natural resources.

It would be easy to withdraw from our professional responsibilities at this time of major SRM financial crisis. The profession, Society, and world's rangelands cannot afford for us to take the easy way out. We need to continue to move aggressively forward in accomplishing the Society's goals, while solving our current budget problems and building a solid future financial program.

SRM's members are the masters of the Society's future. Dreams may pass, opportunities be missed, goals go unachieved, and future generations suffer if we fail to respond to the range management challenge of the 1980's.

Call for Papers

The XIV International Grassland Congress will be held on the campus of the University of Kentucky, Lexington, June 15-24, 1981. It will include seven pre- or post-Congress tours to leading forage-producing areas of the United States and Canada. The formal program will include ten plenary papers and about 300 volunteer papers. Plenary and volunteer papers will be published. Paper titles and 500-word summary statements must be submitted by **May 1, 1980**, to Congress headquarters in Lexington on a form included in the brochure. Write for your copy of the brochure and send your title and summary to XIV International Grassland Congress, Agricultural Sciences Center, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Ky. 40546.