

tion at Burns, Oregon. We spoke to area chamber of commerce groups and found them eager to help because the economy was clearly on their minds.

While we were trying to protect ourselves a new controversy was brewing and picking up momentum fast. This time it was a western phenomenon with bipartisan support and called in the media, "The Sagebrush Rebellion." Nevada is 87 percent Federally owned and the Government would not part with land for expansion of its cities, most notable being Las Vegas. This put tremendous pressure on private land, if available, causing a false real estate market. The Nevada Legislature passed a Sagebrush Rebellion bill asking that the Federal land be turned over to the State. They asked that the Constitution of the United States be upheld and exclude lands needed by the Government for vital services.

Their argument was:

Why can the Eastern States hold most of their land in private ownership and the West not when it was the intent of the founding fathers that all new states coming into the Union after the original 13 be admitted on equal footing?

The Constitution provides that unappropriated land (land not yet passed into private ownership at the time of statehood) be held by the Federal Government in trust until it was disposed of. Nevada reasoned that the time had arrived to close out the trust and other Western States agreed.

Secretary of Interior Andrus and Idaho Senator Frank Church joined with other opponents of the Sagebrush Rebellion. Clearly alarmed, they began an often heated campaign against it. They argued that the Organic Act of 1976 overrode the intent of the Constitution by stating the land would remain in Federal ownership. Our opponents, who had long harassed us, found themselves answering questions for a change and we used the Sagebrush Rebellion to turn the process around with factual information.

On 31 July 1980, a tour was conducted of the controversial wilderness study areas proposed on Juniper Mountain. It was explained that dense stands of brush and juniper created the present wilderness qualities. The brush and trees constituted a biological desert but without them there would be no wilderness qualities. . . especially solitude. It was pointed out that if the brush and trees were allowed to encroach wildfire would sweep the area and possibly harm the soil. The Wilderness Representative was asked how he felt about using mechanical means to control brush. It was agreed that something had to be done and that the land needed management before it could be classified. The result of the tour was that the Owyhee Cattlemen and the Wilderness Society wrote a joint letter to the BLM requesting management of the lands as a priority and emphasized using mechanical equipment, which was against wilderness doctrine. A major breakthrough and a start. ●

The Future of Ranching and Range Management in Alberta, Canada

Stan Wilson

Note: The author is a rancher from Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada. This paper was presented at the International Mountain Section, Society for Range Management, winter meeting in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada on 1 November 1985.

This paper is not only applicable to Canadians but to anyone interested in the use and management of rangeland. Rancher problems and suggested solutions discussed by Mr. Wilson should be of interest to all segments of SRM membership.

Range management could be described as balancing nature's budget. If we extract more nutrients from land than are being replaced, that land will become incapable of producing the type of forage and plants that are desirable for livestock production. There is a natural law that prohibits continual deficit budgeting of grassland, with the penalty for ignoring that law being bankruptcy in productivity. The Minister of Finance should be a member of the Society for Range Management, because that law applies to the total wealth of the country, which is based on our natural resources.

For the most part, the proper management of grassland on commercial livestock operations has been understood, but

there are a number of factors beyond the control of grass users that have interfered with the application of that knowledge. Rapidly increasing costs, combined with static or lower prices for cattle, have compelled ranchers to maximize production in order to meet short-term obligations, at the expense of long-term conservation of the basic resource. This problem is merely a reflection of the economic problems of the country, as well as most of the world. It has been compounded by several years of drought, programs to encourage retention of breeding stock, as well as the lack of permanent policies dealing with weather related emergencies. The result has been severely damaged grassland on the southern prairies. The prescription for treatment of the problem is the same as for the common cold—plenty of liquids and rest.

Mother Nature can provide the liquids, but policies and legislation that is unrelated to range management discourage cattlemen from reducing their herds so that the land can recover. The major disincentive is the refusal of the federal government to recognize the hardships created by taxing forced sale of livestock. The certainty of a high percentage of

the income derived from the reduction of a herd being paid to the Department of Revenue in the year of the sale has compelled cattlemen to retain cattle when there is no economic logic in doing so. In spite of various methods of recovering those tax dollars in the future, the fact is that the capital, and the interest it would earn, would not be available for restocking a ranch when conditions improve.

In my opinion, the proceeds from forced sales of breeding stock in a designated area affected by severe weather conditions should not be taxed until conditions allow the reinvestment of that capital. Deferral of tax in those circumstances would not only allow a rancher to become reestablished more quickly, thereby generating to government, but the management decisions and care of his land would not be influenced by government tax policy. The numbers of animals retained would be based on the condition of his range, the availability of feed and water, and the economics involved.

The Environment Council of Alberta recommended that maintenance of the agricultural land base in the Province could be accomplished by improving Crown land in the settled areas rather than expanding into unsettled areas of marginal quality.

While many ranchers have been making improvements on their deeded land as a means of increasing productivity, they have been reluctant to make similar investments on grazing leases. Restrictions on the methods and amount of improvements allowed, plus the perception of insecure tenure have been the main factors in causing that hesitation. The change in policy that will allow parts of a grazing lease to be transferred into a farm development lease with an option to purchase is being viewed as a positive step to encourage the removal of scrub brush and undesirable plants. Without security of tenure which would guarantee enough time to recoup the investment required, it is understandable that people are reluctant to take that gamble. Their concerns are fueled by demands from politically active groups who claim to represent recreational interests, and are constantly lobbying for greater access to public land including that under grazing lease disposition. While most ranchers subscribe to the concept of multiple use of grazing leases, it follows that grazing, or agricultural use, should be the priority use on land designated for that purpose, with other uses permitted only when they do not seriously detract from the principal purpose.

The increase in demand for access to land for recreational purposes has been a predictable result of increased population, more leisure time, and the development of off-highway vehicles. As we know, people and cows do not co-exist very well in range conditions, because of the interference with proper management of the range. Control over access by the public is therefore of prime importance to a rancher, in order to keep stock distributed, and in some cases, in order to keep them at home.

Policies and legislation dealing with access and trespass on both deeded and leased land have created confusion and controversy between land holders and the public. Common law clearly grants the right of peaceable possession of property to an owner or lessee, which includes the right to control or refuse access to that property. However, the Petty Trespass Act of Alberta excludes grazing leases from protection

under that law, while the Wildlife Act has two sets of rules applying to occupied or unoccupied land. This confusion is compounded by expropriation laws, right of entry orders, and various interpretations of where private ownership ceases on the perimeter of lakes and rivers. In order to resolve the confusion, it would seem that a review of all legislation should be made, and amendments to all legislation dealing with access to land be based on the intent of common law governing property.

Game management policies, wildlife populations and hunting seasons have a direct bearing on domestic livestock production. While reasonable numbers of game are accepted by land owners and leasees, current game policies are allowing rapid increases to occur, creating competition for existing forage and winter feed. Wildlife and recreation are being promoted as of more economic importance than other resources along the eastern slopes. While the analysis is questionable, in my opinion, the expansion of game and predatory populations will inevitably occur, because of restricted hunting access to large areas of public land such as parks, wilderness areas, environmental reserves and special use areas. It is also inevitable that the animals will spend a good portion of their time on leased or deeded land which is intended for domestic stock. This is particularly true during the non-growing season at higher elevations.

The accepted method of controlling game populations has been to issue permits to hunters according to the numbers of animals that the wildlife authorities consider to be in excess of the desired population. It is becoming obvious that the system is not achieving that objective, and that land owners and leasees are not going to continue to freely provide game habitat and feed for an ever-increasing competitor for scarce supplies. A new policy affecting wildlife must recognize the land holder in the decision-making process that applies to game populations, and that reasonable compensation for the costs of providing the wildlife resource should be available to the person providing it. The present liability of game animals and recreational hunting could be turned into an asset for ranchers, if the principle of compensation for costs was recognized in new wildlife policy.

The majority of policy issues important to agriculture are the responsibility of the federal government. Many factors that affect us are outside of the agricultural sector such as general economic conditions nationally and internationally. However, the basic ingredient of most food production is land, which is almost entirely the responsibility of the Provincial Government. Livestock producers are extensive users of land in Alberta, for the most part land which is unsuitable for other types of food production. The development of policies affecting the use of land for forage and feed must be based on long-term, stable principles, which allow individuals to have security to tenure and an opportunity for profitable production. The process for establishing rules for land use should include informed and responsible people who are actively using the land, and have demonstrated their intent to conserve it for future use. In other words, land use policy should begin at the grass roots, because the seed head is generally blowing in the winds of politics, which frequently change direction. ●