William Ridgely Chapline
A Pioneer in Range Research

William Hurst

A 75-YEAR CAREER DEVOTED TO RANGE and forestry research, conservation, and use ended when Mr. W.R. Chapline passed away at his home in Monterey, California, on December 19, 1986. He had moved to Monterey in 1983 from Washington, D.C., where he has resided for 70 years.

Mr. Chapline, or “Chap” as many knew him, was born January 10, 1891, in Lincoln, Nebraska. He graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1913 with majors in forestry, botany, and agronomy and began a long and productive career in rangeland research and range management. During the summer of 1910, 1911, and 1912 he worked for the Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, on range reconnaissance and timber reproduction studies on the Nebraska and Coconino National Forests.

Chapline received his permanent appointment with the Forest Service in 1913. From 1913 until 1920 he worked in the Branch of Grazing as a grazing assistant and grazing examiner, where he was a pioneer in range research. Among other assignments he worked with Dr. Arthur W. Sampson at the Great Basin Experiment Station on the Manti National Forest near Ephraim, Utah. He played an important role in establishing some of the early grazing studies on the Jornada Experimental Range in Southern New Mexico.

From 1920 to 1925 Chapline was Chief of the Office of Grazing Studies in the Branch of Grazing. During this period he worked under such well-known rangemen as Will C. Barnes and James T. Jardine.

In 1926 THE OFFICE OF GRAZING STUDIES was renamed the Division of Range Research and transferred to the Branch of Research in the Forest Service. Chapline was moved to this new research unit, first with the title of Senior Inspector and later as Chief of the Division of Range Research, where he served until his retirement in 1952. He gave excellent national leadership and supervision to the Forest Service range research program during this period.

One of Chapline’s early assignments in the Division of Range Research was to prepare the range research portion of “A National Plan for American Forestry,” an analysis of problems and a plan for organizing and financing research under Regional Forest and Range Experiment Stations. The plan received financial authorization and support under the McSweeney-McNary Forest Research Act. The first substantial financial increases came in 1931. Thus, the transfer of Grazing Studies from Administration to Research gave Chapline the opportunity to work with others in expanding the scope of range research nationwide, to recruit and train qualified personnel and to improve program efficiency.

In 1980 Chapline summarized the history of the first ten years of the Office of Grazing Studies and presented it in a landmark paper at the 1980 Annual Meeting of SRM in San Diego. This was published in the December, 1980, issue of Rangelands.

FOLLOWING HIS RETIREMENT FROM THE FOREST SERVICE, Chapline devoted full time in stimulating and enlightening international programs of range and forestry conservation and use. In 1952 he accepted the position of Chief of the new Forest Conservation Section in the Food and Agriculture Organization of United Nations at Rome, Italy. He served there until 1954. He actively participated in many international conferences and scientific meetings and was Executive Secretary of the Organizing Committee for the Sixth International Grassland Congress at State College, Pennsylvania. He worked with FAO and ICA, served as professor in graduate courses on range and pasture management in Uruguay and Brazil, and served as a range consultant to the governments of several South American and European countries. He continued as consultant on international programs for U.S. and international organizations until 1984. During his career he travelled extensively visiting range and pasture programs in 78 countries. He was highly effective in promoting good resource management in other countries and thereby furthered SRM international objectives.

W.R. Chapline was the author and co-author of numerous publications on range management, range research, and conservation including co-authorship with H.H. Bennett of USDA Circular 33, “Soil Erosion, a National Menace,” which helped focus national attention on soil erosion and led to the establishment of the Soil Conservation Service. It also strengthened forest and range watershed research in the Forest Service. In 1936 he served as one of the authors of “The Western Range,” Senate Document No. 199, 74th Congress, which outlined the major problems on millions of acres of the Public Domain and eventually led to the management of these valuable public lands. In more recent years he authored many articles dealing with the range problems and range management activities in other countries.

CHAPLINE UNSTINTINGLY DEVOTED TIME AND EFFORT to promote formation and development of the Society for Range Management. In the summer of 1946 he enthusiastically endorsed the concept of the new Society. He has continued to serve the organization in many ways. He was a charter and life member. In 1967 in recognition of his
eminent contributions he was presented the Society’s Outstanding Achievement Award. In 1977 he was made Fellow of the Society.

In addition to his affiliation with the Society for Range Management, Chapline was a member of numerous other conservation organizations, as well as the Grange, Sons of the Revolution, Sigma Xi, Alpha Zeta and the Masonic Order. He was an active member of the First Church of Christ, Scientist.

W.R. Chapline’s strong commitment to excellence will be perpetuated in the Society for Range Management by establishment of two endowments. These will provide for annual awards—one, the Chapline Land Stewardship Award, and the other, the Chapline Research Award. Even though Chapline could not be there when these awards were first presented at the 1987 Annual Meeting in Boise, Idaho, he was beautifully represented by his two daughters Barbara Waldner of Downers Grove, Illinois, and Ridgely Peterson of Salmon, Idaho, who were at the banquet.

Many of us remember one of Chap’s favorite words: "indubitably." As a premier rangeman he was indubitably in the top bracket!

Chapline was preceded in death by his wife Eva Behn Chapline in 1965. He is survived by his two daughters; a brother, George F. Chapline, Sr., of La Jolla, California; five grandchildren and one great-grandson.

Current Literature

The section has the objective of alerting SRM members and other readers of Rangelands of the availability of new, useful literature being published on applied range management. Readers are requested to suggest literature items—and preferably also contribute single copies for review—for including in this section in subsequent issues. Personal copies should be requested from the respective publisher or senior author (address shown in parenthesis for each citation).


Effects of Early Weaning on Calf Gain and Cow Performance and Influence of Breed, Age of Dam, and Sex of Calf; by J.A. Basarab, F.S. Novak, and D.B. Karren; 1986; Can. J. Anim. Sci. 66(2):349-360. (Anim. Ind. Div., Alta. Agric., Edmonton, Alta. T6H 5T6) Found that early weaning and one-month preconditioning would require a price advantage of calves so treated, that cow reproductive performance was not affected, but that cow winter maintenance requirements were benefitted.


