

# Influence of the Animal Rights Movement on Range Management Activities-Productive Directions

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**A democracy allows for freedom of expression** and the opportunity for nonconventional viewpoints. This has certainly encouraged the formation and growth of the animal rights movement. The philosophical strength behind the animal rights paradigm lies in the belief that all animals, human and nonhuman alike, have a moral equality that should defy separation. One leader of the animal rights movement has summed it up as an "equal consideration of interests." Simply stated, the animal rights philosophy dictates that the use of nonhuman animals in biomedical research, food and fiber production, recreational uses such as hunting and trapping, zoological displays, and controlling wildlife damage, among others, is totally inappropriate unless it is ethically and morally proper to subject humans to the same or equivalent treatment.

This philosophy clearly does not sanction a number of activities currently associated with the management of rangelands. These activities include the production of livestock such as cattle, sheep, and goats; invasive research manipulations of range animals; the control of free-roaming horses and burros; rangeland rodent population reduction; most predator management systems; rangeland hunting operations; and the production and harvest of forage materials to maintain the livestock industry.

However, the **animal rights** philosophy is not to be confused with the **animal welfare** philosophy. Proponents of animal welfare do not promote equal rights for non-human and human animals (Schmidt 1991). Rather, adherents to this philosophy desire to reduce pain and suffering in animals. Livestock production, predator management, and other rangeland-related activities are not opposed *per se*; however, the concern here is that these activities are performed and accomplished in a manner that reduces, minimizes, or eliminates animal suffering.

**Because the animal rights movement** is philosophically opposed to many activities currently performed on rangelands, little compromise is anticipated over the next decade and beyond. The relatively small yet vocal minority of "animal rightists" have neither political power nor the heart of the social majority. They do stimulate the public into thinking about the role and use of animals in

our society, however. This heightens the public's sensitivity to animal welfare-related issues.

**Animal welfare concerns** are currently affecting the *status quo* of rangeland management with concerns about native species of wildlife versus domestic livestock; biodiversity and endangered species; predation management systems such as trapping, aerial gunning, and the use of toxicants; and free-roaming horse management being influenced at the political level through legislation, initiatives, and judicial and executive interpretation. Researchers involved with the use of animals already must receive approval from institutional animal use and care committees prior to initiating a project.

It will be realistic and productive to focus animal welfare concerns on rangeland management systems. The range management profession needs to demonstrate that it is a caring, progressive, professional, and socially responsible profession. The Society for Range Management can clarify this role through position statements, activities, and testimony. This clarification must not focus simply on defending current activities. It must, in order to maintain its leadership into the future, focus on upgrading management technologies to make them socially acceptable, progressive, and a role-model for other professional natural resource management organizations and agencies.

**Livestock producers on rangeland** are looking to SRM for leadership in how to address the animal rights issue. Assisting these producers in reducing their fears as to the influence of animal rights believers and focusing their industry in progressively tackling animal welfare considerations should aid in softening future conflicts and giving them positive direction. This effort may involve the development of new techniques, the creation of alternative management paradigms, and a revision of standards of conduct for managers and scientists. The effort must not involve fooling the public with no concern about being caught. The time is past to educate the public. We must allow the public to educate us, the resource management professionals.

## Literature Cited

- Schmidt, R.H. 1991. Why do we debate animal rights? Wildl. Soc. Bull. 18:459-461.