Positive Youth Development through Range Management Education

Jennifer Davis
Hyrum, Utah 84319

There is a strong emphasis on ecological issues and conserving our natural resources. All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) use, influences of fire, proper grazing and allowances for wildlife are problems that continually need to be addressed. However, there is another resource we need to take a look at... youth.

"Over 500,000 babies are born to teenage girls each year..." "Juveniles arrested for serious offenses has increased nearly 50 percent since 1985." "The teen violent death rate has risen 13 percent in the past 10 years."

These and other problems continue to pollute the lives of America's youth who fall into them, often because they feel the need to belong. By involving youth in programs that give them a sense of purpose and a feeling of accomplishment, we can tap into this resource and benefit the young people involved as well as help solve some ecological problems.

There are many opportunities for youth to be involved in programs sponsored by the Society for Range Management. In the 1993 Society for Range Management Annual Report, many states commented on the success of their individual programs. For example, in Kansas, 41 campers participated in the 1993 Annual Range Youth Camp. After three days of learning, studying and having fun, a contest was held to challenge the campers to use their new skills.

Since it's beginning in 1955, 1,230 4-H and FFA youth have participated in the annual Texas Section Youth Range Workshop. The workshops goals are to provide basic training in ecology and the art and science of range management and to develop individual leadership skills in the participants. In 1993 the workshop include sessions dealing with conflict resolution and basic problem solving in response to evolving public policy issues in natural resources management.

Nebraska and Oklahoma also reported successful Youth Range Summer Camps.

Range management is a wonderful tool for youth development because it can reach older teens but also younger youth who are very excited about these types of activities.

There is an added advantage to working with younger kids. By participating in a guided range program at a young age they receive training and direction that will develop attitudes and assist in the prevention of future problems.

It is a well known fact that it takes more time and money to try and fix a problem than to prevent one. So it is with youth. It costs an average of $64 per day for one person to be in a correctional care facility while it costs a mere 21c for a youth to be involved in a program such as the range program offered by our local 4-H organization.

Existing youth organizations such as 4-H, FFA, Girl Scouts, and Boy Scouts are a wonderful way through which the SRM could reach youth and help get the message about proper range management. I would love to see the SRM strengthen their partnerships with these types of organizations. Instead of focusing our efforts into starting new programs, I feel this effort should be channeled into enhancing the existing ones and then recruiting youth and leaders to help out. These groups already have established organizations with leadership in place that can be used to a great advantage. We can only benefit each other.

Who do you contact to start? Youth organizations often have groups of teens who help the program in their state or area. For example, in the 4-H program most states have a teen ambassador group or action team who would love to have new ideas for their programs. By working together we can reach more youth as well as get the message on effective range management out to a wider audience.

Range education is a subject taught not only in summer camps but also in some schools. When I was in the 5th grade at Millville Elementary in Millville, Utah, our school class of 29 students and a few parent chaperones went to Yellowstone National Park for 5 days. We studied plants, measured streams and explored the unique characteristics of Yellowstone. Now the fifth graders at Millville take a trip each year to the Teton Science School in the Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming. These kids study ecosystems, conservation range principles, receive occasional visits from the wildlife and find plenty of time for fun. In the process they develop new attitudes and ideas about their role in resource conservation. Unfortunately many schools do not have this kind of hands-on opportunities. This is why we need more of these experiences available for younger kids. Studies have shown that through hands-on experi-

Editor's Note: This is the 2nd Place Winning paper from the 1995 High School Youth Forum at the SRM Annual Meeting in Phoenix, Arizona.

1Alma Hobbs Cooperative Extension Service Reporter on Children, Youth and Families at Risk.
ences, 85% of people involved are able to recall the information at a later date as opposed to only 10% when lecture alone is used.

We need more interesting hands-on experiences for young kids like the Camp of Discovery put on in Logan, Utah by a very ambitious fifth grade teacher at Edith Bowen Elementary. (This also happened to be the same teacher who took my class to Yellowstone and later initiated the Teton trips.)

I served as a counselor at this camp held for 10 and 11 year olds at the U.S.U. Forestry Camp. We took daily hikes to collect flowers, animal droppings, fur, feathers and other samples which were used to teach the kids about plant identification, animals, and taking care of nature. There were also thinking situations along the way where the kids were asked to identify what type of situation may have happened by looking at a place where the grass was crushed, a tree was knocked over, or there were specific animal signs. On the last day they gave presentations for their parents on what they had learned at the 4 day camp. Not only did these youngsters learn and have fun but so did the teens who served as the camp counselors. By using older youth as teen leaders at these types of camps, they develop leadership skills which they will carry with them for the rest of their lives. It was exciting to see these kids get involved in activities that are fun and that develop such positive attitudes about resource conservation.

By learning hands-on about range related principles youth also gain skills that will help them throughout their lives whether they continue into a range related career or not.

By understanding fire and it's effects on the land, youth learn about problem solving. By learning how to identify plants and animals, youth learn to process and use information in a sequential manner. By giving reports and presentations on what they have learned, youth practice their communication skills and are more comfortable in front of people. Range opportunities develop youth to become SMART leaders.

*SPECIFIC-Youth learn to be specific in their goals. To aim high and work to reach that goal.
*MEASURABLE-Youth learn to be measurable. To delegate assignments so others will be involved. To set limits and provide incentives for others to be successful.
*AGREED UPON-Youth learn to compromise, to agree and disagree. That these differences are what make us human and we should build on this diversity.
*REALISTIC-Youth learn to be realistic. Miracles don't happen overnight and most things take time and effort to be accomplished.
*TIME FRAME-Youth learn to work with a time frame. Stress is when too many things are finished at the last minute.

Some of these SMART leaders will be the ones who will go to Washington with a clear knowledge of their purpose, that they may be better qualified to make the right decisions concerning the lands because they've been there and learned first hand what it's like.

Even if youth do not select a range related career they have these skills which they can use in any field. Not only do they have these universal skills but also a knowledge of the environment they can use to be more competent, caring citizens and users of rangelands.

There is the desire for these types of youth programs. Through summer camps, youth organizations and in school education we can help youth be the best they can be. At the same time the SRM will be meeting its objectives. To properly care for the basic rangeland resources. To develop an understanding of range ecosystems and apply that knowledge. To foster public appreciation of the economic, social and environmental benefits obtained from the range environment and to promote the professional development of its members and future range managers.

We just need to make sure the opportunities are there and available to everyone. Not just those involved in 4-H or FFA.

In conclusion I would like to share with you an old Chinese Proverb.

If you are thinking a year ahead, sow seed.
If you are thinking ten years ahead, plant a tree.
I you are thinking one hundred years ahead, educate the people.

By sowing seed once, you will harvest once.
By planting a tree, you will harvest tenfold.
By educating the people, you will harvest one hundredfold.

Anonymous Chinese Poet
500 BC

Through range education for youth we can help make the future brighter one step at a time, for the land, the kids and the world. I strongly believe that if you're not supporting youth, you're throwing that future away.