

California Certified Rangeland Manager Program

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The intent of California's Certified Rangeland Manager Program is to ensure and provide evidence of professional competency, to protect the public interest, and to promote proper management of the state's rangeland resources as embodied in the Code of Professional Ethics of the Society for Range Management. The need to create this program arose from a series of California state laws and legal interpretations of those laws.

The Professional Foresters Licensing Act became law in 1972. Leaders in the range and wildlife professions declined to participate in development of the law because they felt it had no chance of enactment and would have little impact on non-foresters. They were wrong.

The Professional Foresters Licensing Act requires a license to practice forestry in the State of California. The Board of Forestry is responsible for standards, administration, and enforcement of the activities of registered professional foresters. In 1987, partly due to public pressure for stricter enforcement of forest practice rules, the Board of Forestry appointed a task force to examine the role of the Registered Professional Forester in management of hardwood-dominated rangelands, which includes most of the California hardwood-annual grass type range. Surprisingly, the task force determined that the Professional Foresters Licensing Act required a Registered Professional Forester to supervise all wildland management. The implication was that nearly all range managers would have to either be licensed as foresters or work under the supervision of a Registered Professional Forester. The following year the Board of Forestry appointed an ad hoc Hardwood Range Committee charged with developing and recommending administrative and possible legislative solutions (i.e. changes in regulations and laws) to enable resource professionals other than Registered Professional Foresters to legally supervise work on wildlands. This committee included the California SRM Section President. The ad hoc committee concurred with the earlier task force findings, but also suggested clarification of legal terms and definitions, revisions of regulations, and changes in the Professional Foresters Licensing Act to provide for non-forestry professional practice.

In 1990 the SRM Section's Professional Affairs Committee was alerted by a member that the California Professional Foresters Examining Committee was looking into the issues of non-Registered Professional Foresters practicing wildland management. Around the same time the SRM Section was informed by the Executive Secretary of

the Professional Foresters Licensing Committee that any person other than a Registered Professional Forester making management recommendations on private rangelands would be subject to prosecution. In response, the Board of Directors of the California Section of SRM asked its Professional Affairs Committee to propose certification criteria and procedures, and by 1992 the Section had developed

and approved procedures, created a Panel on Certification, and was ready to certify rangeland managers. Also in 1992, the California Assembly modified the Professional Forestry Licensing Act to authorize individuals to seek Board of Forestry licensing under the auspices of an approved professional society's program. The California Section, SRM Panel on Certification finalized its program for certification, and it was presented to and accepted by the Board of Forestry. The next year

the California Code of Regulations was amended to allow state licensing of Certified Rangeland Managers under the Professional Foresters Licensing Act and another law slightly narrowed the scope of the Professional Foresters Licensing Act as applying to "forested landscapes." Forested landscapes were defined as "tree dominated landscapes and *their associated vegetation types* which are naturally capable of growing a significant amount of native trees." The interpretation of this description has been that a 10 percent native tree cover (or the potential) constitutes a forested landscape. Thus, hardwood rangelands (oak woodland) within the State were clearly included in the scope of the regulations.

The SRM Section began certifying rangeland managers in 1993, and since 1995 Section certified individuals can apply for state licensing. Certification by the Section requires meeting certain educational and experience requirements, providing letters of reference, and passing a written rangeland management examination. Applicants must have completed a course of study leading to a bachelor's or higher degree. If the applicant's degree is not in range management, he or she must have completed course work in rangeland ecology, rangeland plant physiology, rangeland animal management, rangeland policy and planning, range economics, and rangeland measurements. Also required are five years of professional experience directly related to range and/or rangeland management, including demonstration of the application of rangeland management principles. Part of this experience (preferably two years) must be in a range type found in California (not necessarily experience in California). The Certification Panel has the

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discretion to substitute additional experience for partial fulfillment of educational requirements. Individuals not meeting the experience requirement must work under the supervision of a Certified Rangeland Manager or Registered Professional Forester until the experience requirements are met. Applicants must also provide three letters of reference attesting to their ethical and professional qualifications, one of which must be from a Certified Rangeland Manager. The Section's Panel on Certification reviews proof of education and experience. The applicant must meet requirements before being permitted to take the written examination.

The written examination is prepared by the Panel on Certification and administered by the State's Professional Foresters Licensing Committee. The day-long examination consists of short answer and essay questions related to ecology, plant physiology, animal management, policy and planning, economics, and measurements. Questions are targeted toward rangeland management conditions in California. The exam is offered one or more times a year at several locations throughout the state.

Those passing the exam become certified by the California Section SRM. This does not entitle the person to be known as a Certified Rangeland Manager, nor to be legally recognized as such. This requires licensing by the State of California. Fortunately, the State has accepted the Section's process as meeting their licensing requirements, thus, licensing is *only* a formality. The Section-certified individual must apply to the State for a license and pay an annual fee of \$35. That person may then be referred to as a Certified Rangeland Manager. Applicants also pay a one-time fee to the California Section to cover administrative costs. The fee is currently \$50 for Section members and \$100 for non-members.

The certification program includes a process for disciplinary action for violations of professional standards. The procedure allows for censure, suspension, or revocation of certification for cause. Complaints are directed to the State Professional Foresters Licensing Committee, which refers them to the SRM Section's Panel on Certification for recommendations. The legal authority for action lies completely with the State, not with the Section.

A state license is required for range management activities on forested landscapes as described earlier. Forested landscapes include areas such as hardwood rangeland, and mountain meadows (as they are associated with conifer forests), but do not include shrublands incapable of having trees, native or cultivated grasslands, or croplands. The Board of Forestry and the Panel on Certification currently agree on the following interpretations of existing law. Activities covered include making management recommendations, developing conservation plans and management plans, and other rangeland management activities. Professionals working in the private sector, or for universities, state agencies, and federal agencies (when working

on non-federal lands), should be licensed. Licensing is not required for landowners working on their own lands, nor is it necessary for individuals working on federal land. For example, employees of the Natural Resource Conservation Service or the California Department of Fish and Game should be licensed as certified rangeland managers if they are making management recommendations or developing conservation plans on areas such as privately owned hardwood rangelands. But Forest Service employees working on National Forest lands do not need licensing.

What in 1972 was regarded as an unimportant state law applying only to foresters (Professional Foresters Licensing Act), has had significant

beneficial effects on the range profession in California. This came about only through the determined efforts of many dedicated range professionals working closely with legislators and the Board of Forestry. Certification in general provides professional credibility for any profession, but is much stronger when it carries the weight of law. The development of certification standards required close examination of the levels of knowledge needed for professional practice and has provided the impetus for a much stronger continuing education program.

The California SRM Section has now certified approximately 90 persons. To date about 65 have chosen to become state-licensed. The California Section is working closely with the Board of Forestry and its Professional Foresters Examining Committee to continue clarification of laws and regulations and the proper role of Certified Rangeland Managers in resource management. This outcome, building on a solid legal basis, provides an excellent foundation for the future of professional rangeland management.

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