

Ninth In A Series

The Future Role of Range Management Professionals: A Canadian Perspective

Tomorrow's range management professionals will be faced with increasing public participation and scrutiny of rangeland uses. How should they adapt?

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Predicting the future is both challenging and risky. Our approach is to first review some of the past and the present in order to interpret likely trends for the Canadian range management profession.

Aboriginal peoples were Canada's first range managers. They existed for centuries on the Canadian plains and intermountain West utilizing the natural plant and animal food resources for their purposes. Undoubtedly, both fire and grazing comprised primary tools in their management of rangelands. Recent anthropological works reveal a level of sophistication that has been acknowledged only rarely. These first Canadian range managers learned how to manage the natural resources surrounding them, and they passed this knowledge along through the generations.

The next wave of immigrants to North America were Europeans who brought new plants, new livestock, and new resource management systems. Community leaders and settlers assumed their European ways were appropriate for the new lands. What emerged was an era of exploitation and mismanagement precipitating extreme overgrazing on some rangelands and dust bowls in others.

During the early 20th century, range management emerged as a profession primarily in response to overgrazing in the western United States. The discipline's pioneering approach to wise stewardship—based on the grazing ani-

mal as the primary tool of conservation—led to improved environmental and range conditions, particularly after the 1930s. Our status in Canada as a scientific discipline grew quickly following the formation of the Society For Range Management in 1948.

The beginnings of range management in Canada developed for similar reasons on the central plains and intermountain regions. Since there is more forest than natural grassland in western Canada, there has been a considerable emphasis

within the discipline on understanding the management of grazing by wildlife and livestock on forested rangelands. Most of these forest ranges are on crown (public) land managed under provincial, multiple use policies that recognize the needs of many resource users on a common land base. Canadian range management unfolded more slowly than in the United States, but enjoyed continued success from the 1950s through the 1980s, and in many cases also through the 1990s.



Cultural and Economic Change and the Environmental Movement

The second half of the 20th century was a period of rapid technological and sociological change. New industries and new wealth developed in the cities rather than in rural areas. Economic opportunities and people moved away from agriculture to light industry and service sectors in urban centers. Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* alarmed urban activists regarding the effects of a technological society on the environment. As these social changes occurred, the balance of economic and political power also shifted from its agrarian base in rural areas towards urban-based industries and voters. In a few decades the rural-dominated political power structures have been largely replaced. Beneficiaries of these social changes include the various urban-based environmental lobby groups.

Increasing urbanization distanced and virtually eliminated the public's personal familiarity with natural resource management. During this time, the range profession found itself placed on the other side of the fence in terms of its perceived relevance to conservation and stewardship issues by these new and vocal public lobby groups. Many range managers, because of their association with livestock grazing, began to be perceived as part of the problem rather than part of the solution. Our profession's initial, and in some areas, continuing, defensive reaction to these social changes brought further alienation between range management professionals and the multi-publics that we serve.

Since control of Canada's natural resource policies lies primarily with each province rather than with a distant federal government, policies affecting rangelands are changing rapidly to reflect the concerns of urban dwellers. For example, in British Columbia, most of the population now resides in urban areas and Canada's most influential environmental groups are also headquartered in this western-most province.

In northern regions, and other areas far from the large cities, change in land use and range policy has not been as widespread. Rangeland management policy of the Prairie Provinces generally

remains under stronger agrarian influence. Rural ranching remains a viable industry, particularly where rangelands are well managed. More changes will eventually affect these areas, however in response to urban concerns.

For example one study in the USA revealed that California ranchers believe that society is becoming hostile to ranching (Liffmann et al. 2000). Most ranchers identified the following issues as serious or extreme threats to ranching: wilderness designations, regional planning, endangered species legislation, animal rights, closure of open range, environmentalism, water quality standards, and urbanization. In western Canada these pressures vary greatly and are most pronounced in southern British Columbia closer to the influence of large urban centers, and Rocky Mountain foothill rangelands near Calgary. Such changes in the way that society views resources and their uses will continually force Canadian range managers to rethink the growing demands on resources and rangelands.

Another example of shifts in societal views can be observed from how the foot-and-mouth epidemic was handled in rural Britain. To stop the spread of this disease, tourist access to the countryside was substantially restricted, causing extensive financial loss to the rural tourism industry; however, resistance within the non-agrarian rural interests to these closures has gradually risen, and some commentators speculate that this likely represents the last time agriculture successfully lobbies the government to shut down the countryside. During the next crisis, tourism and recreation may be too valuable and too powerful to allow such a closure.

Preparing For The Future

How long will it take before the urban public holds a similar perspective towards use of rangelands in western Canada? To prepare for these changing social views, range managers must examine the following questions:

1) Who do we serve?

As range management professionals, we must remember we serve first the rangeland resource. Secondly we serve the publics that rely upon our expertise.

Lastly, we serve our personal interests. These truisms have always been, and will always remain so.

The key emphasis is upon the resource rather than upon any one user of the resource. As our profession matures, there will be a greater diversity of users of rangelands and all users will periodically need the expertise of range management professionals.

The diversity that is Canada will continue to increase. To adapt to that diversity, change in range education will be inevitable. The ecology-based discipline of range management fits more closely to the umbrella of natural resource disciplines than to the biotechnology-and genetics-laden intensive agriculture of the future. We expect a greater diversity of rangeland users in the future and thus we also expect a greater diversity of students.

In the future, more urban-born students will enroll in range management classes without having seen a range or a ranch. Nonetheless, the range management students of the future will share a great deal with their colleagues of 20, or even 50 years ago. They will be genuinely interested in conservation and wise stewardship and will also respect the entrepreneurial skills and unique perspectives of the ranching community. Because of their background, many of these students will be better prepared than their predecessors to deal with the challenges of an urban society that has the political clout to revise resource management policies.

Tomorrow's student will bring a cosmopolitan sophistication that recognizes sustainable range management needs much more than knowledge of rest-rotation grazing or the ecological role of rangeland fires. This young person will generally accept that tomorrow's solutions require broadly-educated, rangeland professionals with communication skills, objectivity, ecological knowledge, empathy for rural and urban priorities, an ability to facilitate and profit from conflict, and a passion for achieving solutions to complex problems.

2) What do we want to be?

The Society for Range Management should continue its primary role as an organization of resource expertise. As much as possible, SRM, and future

range management professionals, should ensure that its "cult of values" continues to expand to include a broad spectrum of values.

Range professionals must accept that the interests and needs of our society continue to change whereas certain tenets never change. Wise stewardship of rangeland resources is a permanent tenant for all range management professionals, now and in the future. Nevertheless, the users of rangelands will vary among regions, ecosystems, generations, and cultures. Each generation of range professionals must adapt to, and communicate with, the multifaceted society of their day.

Future range professionals will require the technical knowledge of the day, but must also be skilled socially and politically. Above all, rangeland professionals must be sincerely and openly receptive to differing points of view, and to differing values.

A few range management professionals will be regarded with sufficient esteem by all parties that they will be sought out to play a mediatory role between opposing resource interest groups. These few range management leaders will be knowledgeable regarding rangeland resources. They will also be skilled communicators able to mitigate among widely divergent points of view and values to such a degree as to reconcile differences between parties without compromising the basic tenets of sustainable rangeland management.

The modern range management professional must deal with ever increasing complexities due to global pressures, environmental issues, special interest groups, explosion of information and technology, and public awareness. Although technical skills will always be essential for range management professionals, an ability to think critically and to synthesize information are far more

important than the mere acquisition of information that doubles every few years, and often becomes quickly outdated.

The urban public will continue to scrutinize range management professionals intensely. More than ever before, range professionals will be required to defend their decisions, and to communicate their decisions clearly to a wide variety of publics who have a genuine, legitimate interest in public resources.

Conservation of rangeland resources constitutes a primary goal of the Canadian range management professional at the beginning of the 21st century. The greatest difference with the last century will be the amount of public participation and scrutiny.

References

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