Brief History of Civil Service Standards in Range Management

Lee Sharp

Gifford Pinchot, first Chief of the U.S. Forest Service, spent most of July and August of 1899 in the West and observed the general incompetence of the people assigned by the Department of Interior, under a political patronage system, to manage the forest reserves (Pinchot 1947). Pinchot’s dismay was passed on to President Theodore Roosevelt and the Forest Reserve Service was put under Civil Service by a presidential order of December 17, 1904. Pinchot set out in 1905, after transfer of the reserves (National Forests) to the Department of Agriculture, to weed out the incompetents and actively seek “men of better training and wider experience to be appointed and promoted on merit alone.” The head of the Civil Service Commission was a friend of Pinchot’s and allowed the Forest Service to develop its own examination procedures. The men being sought had to be residents of the state or territory in which the national forest was situated and with experience and training in rough outdoor work (Pinchot 1907). Lumbermen, stockmen, cowboys, miners, and the like were acceptable.

Early Examinations

The early examinations included a written and a practical demonstration of required knowledge and skills. The written part of the examination was designed to ascertain if a man could write an intelligent report and make simple maps. The practical portion tested skills and knowledge in shooting a gun, riding and packing a horse, using a compass for surveying, using an ax, and cruising a block of timber. Elers Koch (1944) writing about his early experiences in the Forest Service mentioned that the practical examination in 1905 took two days to complete.

Only minor changes were made in the examination until 1925. Arthur J. Wagstaff, presently living in Salt Lake City, Utah, related to me that he had taken the old Forest Ranger's exam in 1925 at Utah State College before going to work for the Forest Service in Idaho. He remembers taking the practical part of the exam and a written part that included questions on forage value of various plants, poisonous plants and other topics requiring specific training in range management. A college or university degree was not required. It is because of this conversation that I have set 1925 as the time that the Junior Forester (JF) and Junior Range Examiner (JRE) examinations became the basis for selecting federal employees in resource management.

Requirements for entrance into the federal service in the natural resource management field generally consisted of passing the written JF and/or JRE examinations until after World War II. The last technical examination was given in 1946 (Silcock 1981). Beginning in 1947, intelligence examinations along with a listing of educational background and experience were the criteria used. Degrees in range management were not required but certain course requirements had to be fulfilled. Graduates or students in agriculture or botany could and often did qualify for federal service.

Examinations Dropped

In the early to mid-1950's, written examinations were dropped as requirement. Education and experience, designated on a federal employment form, became the only criteria used in selecting federal employees for natural resource management. Assignment of ratings or scores for applicants submitting education and experience credentials was done by personnel assigned to this task by the various federal agencies hiring resource people. A modicum of professional and technical standards was maintained with this process even though no technical knowledge or skills had to be demonstrated by written examinations.

The Civil Service Commission assumed the responsibility for grading educational or experience credentials in the late 1960's or early 1970's (Cox 1981). The consequence was a change in the standards previously followed. Civil Service requirements for rating Range Conservationists specified a given number of credits in range management but the Commission was allowing courses in basic taxonomy, soils, animal science, basic ecology, and other areas to satisfy the credit requirement. A great deal of dissatisfaction was expressed and directed to the Civil Service Commission on the lowering of already low standards. As a result, the Soil Conservation Service assumed the duties of grading applicants for the Range Conservation Series in 1977.

SRM's Initial Role

The Society for Range Management was formed, in part, to provide recognition of range management and its application as a profession (Pechanec 1948). Since its formation in 1948, continual efforts have been made for professional improvement of the membership. One of the strategies followed was that of taking a direct interest in the education of professional range men (Pechanec 1949). Minimum requirements were to be suggested and advisory assistance provided in setting up curricula. To accomplish this objective a curriculum committee of the Society was established by President Fred Renner to study college and university
courses offered to train professionals in the field of range management. (Renner 1949).

The report of the Civil Service Eligibility-Curricula Committee, 1951, proposed basic and technical courses that should be included in the education of professional range managers (Stoddart 1952). The proposed courses included essentially the same areas as required in the present Civil Service standards. Weakening the position of the Society in establishing professional standards was the opening statement of the 1952 report in which the committee said, "The American Society of Range Management should not attempt to accredit or 'approve' colleges for range management instruction."

Apparently the advice of the Civil Service Eligibility-Curricula Committee was not followed. A new Civil Service Committee was established in 1953 and charged with the specific objective of getting the Civil Service Commission to give an assembled technical range examiner or range conservation examination (Society for Range Management 1953).

Minimum requirements for professional training in range management were agreed upon and published in 1962 (Society for Range Management 1962). These suggested requirements had been made by the newly organized Range Management Education Council (RMEC). They consisted of 16 semester hours in range management with a specified number of courses in botany, zoology, chemistry, mathematics, soils, and animal husbandry. Supporting courses in physics, statistics, geology, watershed, wildlife, forestry, surveying, and forage crops were listed as desirable. It is interesting to note that the RMEC had passed a motion at their 1961 meeting that stipulated 18 semester hours in range management as a minimum credit requirement.

Range Management Education Council

The history of the Range Management Education Council (became the Range Science Education Council in 1970) is one of efforts to improve professional standards in range management. This council was formed in 1960 when a group of professors and educators from western universities offering degrees in range management got together to discuss curricular and civil service requirements at the Portland meeting of the Society for Range Management. The listed objectives of the Council were: "To promote high standards in the teaching of range management, to advance the professional abilities of range managers, to provide a medium for the exchange of ideas and facts among range management schools, to provide liaison between teaching departments and organizations and agencies in affairs relating to range education and employment standards, and in other ways to foster wider understanding of the problems of range education." It is not an agency nor committee of the Society for Range Management but has maintained close liaison with the Society through the Professional Standards Committee of that body.

The original voting membership consisted of representatives from 14 western universities offering degrees in range management. Voting privileges were restricted to representatives of institutions meeting certain curricular requirements in range management education. A fifteenth voting member was added in 1961 and two more in 1963. In 1976, after some relaxing of requirements for membership, there were 40 member institutions.

In the late 1950's Civil Service eligibility requirements (with some agency variation) consisted of a degree in range management or any one of seven related fields, a course in taxonomy, a course in soils or an equivalent subject, a course in ecology, and only 6 credits in range management, the major subject field. It was estimated that one-third of the applicants taking Civil Service Examinations in range management were graduates of schools which did not offer bona fide range management degrees (Stoddart 1965).

Through efforts of the Council and its members, and in particular the activities of the SRM Civil Service Committee, the 6-credit requirement in range management to qualify as a Range Conservationist was changed in 1967. The new 12-credit requirement was a compromise by the RMEC with the federal agencies and the Civil Service Commission on the 16-credit minimum credit requirement designated by the RMEC. Specific requirements in supporting areas, however, were loosened. In addition, the definition of range management was corrupted to the extent that a variety of courses in agriculture, biological sciences, and other fields could qualify an individual.

Contributing to the degradation of standards was the General Biological Series Examination for the hiring of people of higher than entrance level positions. This was probably developed because of the expressed need of the Department of Interior for "generalists" who they thought would be educated to see the broad aspects of diversified multiple-use management rather than a specialized segment. This action renewed the efforts of the Range Science Education Council and the Professional Standards Committee of the Society for Range Management to improve Civil Service qualifications requirements of range managers hired by federal agencies.

Enthusiasm was high and success seemed imminent at the 1977 meeting of the Society for Range Management when the Professional Standards Committee reported on a new set of proposed Civil Service standards for the classification of a Range Scientist. Support had been indicated by most of the federal agencies, the livestock industry, and the National Association of Conservation Districts. Snags developed quickly when the Civil Service Commission saw no need to change the standards until a review of the Range Conservation Series had been made. This review was not to be scheduled for two or three years.

Letters from members of the Society, the RSEC, and supporting organizations flowed to the Civil Service Commission. Congressional support was solicited through letters to western Congressmen from various groups. The pressure was maintained and a degree of success was obtained when the Office of Personnel Management published minimum education requirements for the Range Conservation Series GS-454. These requirements became effective almost immediately (June 1980) and consist of a minimum of 18 semester hours of course work in range management and a combination of 42 semester hours in the plant, animal and soil sciences.

The long tiring work of the Society, the Range Science

From the Author: The recent Civil Service standards for the Range Conservation Series of the United States published by the Office of Personnel Management in the June 10, 1980, Federal Register mark a degree of success for the long, tiring efforts of many people and organizations. It is the purpose of this article to outline some of the activities related to improving the professional standards of those managing and directing use of the rangeland resources. It is hoped that any omissions, incorrect information or misinterpretations that are made will be addressed by letters to or will be corrected in future articles in Rangelands.
Education Council, and many individuals who have strived for improved professional standards should be recognized. Much has been accomplished but there is more to be done in maintaining and improving professionalism in range management and range sciences.

**Literature Cited**

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### Range Curriculum Accreditation

**Grant A. Harris**

Accreditation is the “quality control” process of education. More than 4,000 United States universities now willingly participate in this evaluation process at their own expense. In most countries of the world, accreditation is a government activity, with all the bureaucracy-generated problems inherent in this approach. However, in the United States it has developed as a more-or-less self-regulation program. The good reasons for keeping it that way are obvious.

Accrediting associations are organized on regional, national, and professional bases. The regional associations generally evaluate whole university programs for quality of basic sciences and arts, but excluding professional areas otherwise examined. All major postsecondary schools belong to these associations and maintain them with annual membership fees. On the other hand, quality control of professional programs in these schools has historically been assumed by the major old-line professional organizations. More recently, a single national organization, the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation, has evolved to recognize and coordinate the accreditation activities of the various accrediting associations and professional organizations.

Many segments of our public depend on accreditation to maintain superior state-of-the-art performance by professionals throughout our society—doctors, dentists, engineers, and others—and many important value judgments must be made every day requiring sound information on the quality of education. Government scholarship commissions, civil service, foundations, university administrations, employers, counselors, students, parents, courts, and many others benefit from the accreditation process.

The need for accreditation developed late in the nineteenth century. Prior to that time only the elite could expect to attend college. However, with the establishment of the Land Grant College system the common people became aware of the opportunities afforded by specialized education. The demand resulted in a doubling of the number of colleges available in the United States in a 40-year period, 1870-1910. Universities and colleges of all types and with all degrees of excellence—or lack of it—appeared. Even the schools that were legitimate in their objectives lacked standards for quality control. Many “colleges” were actually secondary schools and many, by today’s standards, were even less than that.

Faced with the problem of having to depend on the diploma-carrying graduates of these schools for professional services, the public began to demand to know what it meant to be a doctor, lawyer, engineer, or architect. Administrators in the better universities recognized the need to identify their graduates as having superior qualifications and so eventually developed the present system of accreditation. Most schools that did not meet the new standards either upgraded or disappeared.

Professional societies became involved in the process early in this century. Medicine, law, architecture, and engineering programs were among the very first to come under accreditation.

The Society of American Foresters (SAF) has held rigid standards of professionalism since its founding in 1900, lim-