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.

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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-

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iting membership to those who could meet their relatively high requirements. It is not surprising then that a forestry curricula accreditation program was established by SAF in 1934 and has continued since then as an important factor in maintaining professional forestry standards. The Council of Forestry School Executives has been instrumental also in the initiation and maintenance of this program. The SAF Council maintains subcommittees on educational policies as well as on accreditation, and the Executive Secretary’s office has a full-time Director of Professional Programs to service the 44 accredited and seven candidate schools. The SAF program is affiliated with the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation and recognized nationally as the only accrediting body for forestry.

Currently, among natural resource professional societies—wildlife, recreation, fisheries, wood science, and range—there is an increasing interest in accreditation.

**SRM Involvement**

Accreditation has been a subject of discussion in the Society for Range Management as well as in the Range Science Education Council (RSEC) since the mid-1960's. However, it has been difficult to overcome the anti-elitism sentiment among range managers that was generated by early efforts to become associated with the Society of American Foresters. Range managers, even those with extended experience in national forest administration, were not accepted for full membership status. Consequently, when the “founding fathers” wrote the constitution for the SRM (ASRM then), they accepted as full member everyone who had the inclination and dues. To the professionals who remembered, as well as the nonprofessional members who didn’t, any moves toward mandated professionalism were suspect and so were discouraged.

A different, but equally effective, blocking situation existed in the Range Science Education Council. Voting membership on the council, by constitutional definition, always has been open to delegates from all interested institutions without reference to the quality of their programs. Although the Council was a natural point of origin for an accreditation effort, over the years all of the several proposals hatched there were effectively killed by negative votes. Perhaps it was too much to expect support where a majority of the members feared that their programs might be excluded.

The identity crisis that developed for SRM in the 1970's forced a reevaluation of the then prevalent open-minded attitude toward professionalism. The up-grading effort was triggered by a growing realization among land management agency administrators that too many “pseudo-professionals” from related fields, unable to perform as range managers should, were filling professional positions. As a result, land administrators were concluding that range management could not solve their grazing problems. In all fairness it must be noted that the fault was not entirely that of the so-called “range conservationists.” They had been educated in marginal programs and recruited under inadequate standards. Nevertheless, their inadequate performance reflected upon the range profession and seriously threatened to destroy it in the long run.

SRM Board meeting discussions were filled with foreboding about the future of the profession. Several members of the Board were educators or sympathetic to the adopting of educational objectives during this period.

Because I recognized this as an opportune time to renew efforts to get SRM support for an accreditation program, in the fall of 1976 I contacted Dr. C. Wayne Cook (Colorado State University) and Dr. Donald D. Dwyer (Utah State). We decided to proceed as a self-commissioned committee of three to develop an approach to the SRM Board. Accordingly, in January, 1977, a letter was sent from this 3-man committee to most colleges and universities that had range management programs. The schools were invited to send delegates to participate in a meeting to formulate the proposal. The meeting was held February 14, 1977, in connection with the Portland, Oregon, annual meeting of SRM. Not all universities were represented and several delegates declined to sign the memorial. However, delegates from 15 universities did sign, and thus requested that the Board take action to establish accreditation procedures for all range management programs.

At the Board meeting on February 15, the memorial was enthusiastically received, and President Robert Williamson appointed an ad hoc committee to prepare material for further consideration as an SRM sponsored program. Members of the committee were Harris, as chairman, along with Cook and Dwyer. Dr. Jeff Powell of Oklahoma State University was added to represent the Board.

A first draft of the instruments, including separate documents describing standards, procedures, and instructions for preparing the self-evaluation report, was prepared by the chairman and circulated to the other members of the committee during the spring of 1977. A second draft, incorporating committee comments, was presented to the Board at the July, 1977, summer meeting at Elko, Nevada, where again it was accepted, tentatively.

A third draft, incorporating suggestions from Board members, was prepared and distributed in September to schools—in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico—known to have undergraduate instruction in range management. Mixed responses ranged from enthusiastic encouragement to enthusiastic discouragement. About one-third made no response. Many suggestions for revision were received, the most frequent being related to reductions in the minimum number of faculty members required for accreditation. These responses led to a fourth draft, circulated to the committee in November, and a fifth draft submitted in December to President Thadis Box for consideration in the January, 1978, Board meeting.

The committee suggested three alternative actions: (1) adoption of the full program based on draft number 5, (2) a trial period during which schools that so requested could be examined, and (3) dropping the proposal. The Board tentatively approved an accreditation program at this meeting but agreed to take final action at the annual meeting.

Range education program accreditation was accepted on a trial basis by action of the Board at the San Antonio, Texas, annual meeting, February 6, 1978. An Accreditation Committee consisting of Dr. Jim Bob Grumbles (Dow Chemical, Dallas, Texas), Dr. Philip L. Sims (USDA Southern Plains Range Research Station, Woodward, Oklahoma) with Dr. 1

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1The RSEC is an autonomous group composed of representatives from universities offering courses in range management. Its objectives are to promote high standards in the teaching of range management, to advance the professional ability 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. The group meets each year in connection with the annual SRM meeting wherever it is held.
Floyd Kinsinger (Bureau of Land Management, Denver, Colorado) as chairman was appointed to initiate the Society's activities in this area. Almost before activities began, Dr. Kinsinger became Executive Secretary to SRM. He was replaced as chairman by Dr. Sims and replaced on the committee by Dr. Charles Poulton, formerly of Oregon State University.

President Box notified appropriate universities of the trial accreditation program and several took steps to apply. Colorado State University has the honor of being the first (completed in January, 1980) and Utah State the second accredited university. The University of Arizona, Texas Technological University, and Washington State University are at present in the process of accreditation and more than five others are in various stages of application.

The Future

With the spread of interest in natural resources education accreditation, what will be the reaction of university administrators to having several professional societies coming on campus for that purpose? Accreditation visits are expensive both in faculty time and operations funds. Generally, natural resources programs are administered in one unit, often including forestry, range, wildlife, watershed, and recreation. The reasonable approach would be for one team to examine and evaluate all available programs in a single visit.

In October, 1979, while attending the SAF annual meeting at Boston, I contacted Ronald Christensen (newly appointed Director of SAF professional programs) and Robert Day, also on the staff of the national office, to explore the possibility of a cooperative accreditation program. SRM President Dan Merkel joined the discussion and encouraged further exploration of the idea.

The SAF hosted a meeting at its headquarters in Washington, D.C., on August 20, 1980, to discuss the prospects of cooperative accreditation efforts. Professional societies attending included the Council of Forestry School Executives, SAF, SRM, American Fisheries Society, National Recreation and Park Association, Society of Wood Science and Technology, and the Wildlife Society.

Representatives of the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation were there and encouraged a cooperative approach. (This is the organization that recognizes accrediting bodies in the United States.) A representative from the Accrediting Board for Engineering and Technology was there to provide advice from their experiences in cooperative accreditation in the engineering sciences. The Renewable Natural Resources Foundation, which now provides coordination in other phases of natural resources policy, was proposed as the coordinating agency for natural resources accreditation. SRM is an active member of the foundation, as are the other natural resource societies mentioned as having attended the meeting.

Participants at the meeting concluded that "a joint approach to renewable resources accreditation is desirable" and that another meeting should be held soon to continue planning cooperative efforts. It was suggested that an institution should be sought where a pilot coordinated visit could be made to test the proposal. Suggestions have been made that SRM host the next meeting.

It seems assured at the present time that the SRM accreditation program will be successful. With regard to its trial nature, as initiated by the Board, Dr. Sims has said that the presidents of universities where visits have been made are not thinking of the program as being on a trial basis. The Board has encouraged the universities to invest considerable resources from their side, and they now expect the Board to carry through on a permanent basis is part of the bargain.

Range accreditation has become a significant factor in the reestablishment of Range Management as a profession, and should receive the full support of SRM membership from this time forward.

Editor's Note: Besides establishing accreditation SRM has taken other actions in the recent past to improve the professional image of its members. In 1978 a roster of Certified Range Consultants was established to provide prospective employers a source of highly professional individuals who have met established criteria of education, experience, and performance. (Presently, 22 are certified.) In 1980 the U.S. Civil Service standards for federal employment in the range conservationist series were increased by approximately 50%.

Think Calgary for February 1982