

Panel Discussion:

Meeting the Challenge of Change in Resource Management

Laren R. Robison

I am happy to participate on this panel. I feel a kinship to the subject matter of the panel, although I feel somewhat displaced because I am an agronomist. I am not totally unacquainted with range science, however, having very nearly completed a graduate degree with George Stewart on a range management problem in Southern Utah and having worked in range survey for the Bureau of Land Management.

The subject the panel was given to discuss encourages a number of thoughts. Change is one of the most constant things we deal with in any phase of life, so the challenge is always there and always will be. What will change, however, is the array of problems with which we are faced. I think the challenges we face today can be placed in several categories, including *image*, *funding*, and *education*. Today in the United States, we live in an urban society. Less than 3% of the population is involved in direct production agriculture. We are faced with agriculture surpluses in spite of the fact that we export about 80% of the world's exportable food, and 2 out of every 5 acres of American farm produce goes into the export market. Only 17% of our take-home pay on the average is spent on food, so in spite of rising food costs, Americans still pay less than anyone else in the world for food.

All of this leads us to some rather apparent observations. Urban America has simply not felt the food shortage, at least not enough that discussions about agriculture or agricultural problems occupy very much, if any, time around the dinner table. There is the assumed certainty that food, unlike fuel, will always be available. Thus, the agricultural industry, so far as public interest is concerned, is seen more as the anti-coyote, and more recently, the anti-rabbit segment of our society.

I suppose what I am saying is that agriculture in general in this country has an image problem. As a matter of fact, foreign governments seem to be far more interested in our agriculture than we seem to be. The problem is not only with urban vs. rural population disparity, but food processing and manufacturing has changed the product from the farm into forms totally different and unrecognized as even farm produced. Having said that much, I think one more point needs to be made. The most visible fraction of agriculture in this country is the cultivated farm. The land, the buildings, and the beautiful crop rows all paint a deceptive picture of tranquility and well-being. If this part of agriculture, then, has

image problems why would range land problems concern urban America? The romance associated with range is far better known than the truth. I have concerns that range land is regarded as waste land, at least as nonproductive land, by voters and those elected to represent us at various levels of government. Also, there seems to be a consensus developing that range land is the exclusive domain of wildlife or wilderness, that it is *not* a part of the agricultural endowment of this country.

I am frankly concerned that our agricultural population itself is relatively uninformed and uninterested about range resources and range needs, much more so than we ought to be. I do not see now, nor do I expect to see in the future, unless by divine intervention, a single unifying force to bring the various facets of agriculture together. We have commodity groups, farm organizations, societies of various sorts, and animal associations, all speaking for agriculture; that is, as they see agriculture. It becomes an extremely difficult task for a legislator at the state or national level to actually know what he should represent. We like to blame those we elect for the problems which we face; but the fact is we haven't given the legislators a clear signal, nor have we given the signal as loud or as articulately as special interest or environmental groups. The only theme that is singular and agreed upon by all is that we've got a problem. When you consider the fact that in the year 1980 in America the return on equity in agriculture was only 1.9% compared to 21% for oil, 13.9% for manufacturing, and 8.9% for textiles, agriculture really does have a problem and one that needs resolution immediately. So if we are talking about the challenge of resource management, number 1 in importance, in my opinion, is to find a way to let legislators and the people of America know that in fact range land is important and perhaps critical to our national health. It is perhaps the most misunderstood resource we have in the country. It does need managing, and it does require money, to manage. It is first and foremost a part of our total agriculture endowment in this country. A return of 1.9% is not going to control erosion, build fences, or reseed and manage very much rangeland. People need to know that the quality of life we enjoy in America is not there because of the age which we live. It's there because of the land—land that provides feed for cattle and sheep and land that grows crops.

I have a couple of other brief points I would like to make relative to the challenge of resource management (and image). We live at a time when wealth, lobby and special interest, and environmental groups seem to be the prime

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determiners of what is good for the country, and this is even more apparent and critical in the case of what is good for our range lands. I suppose that it is not so new nor unexpected; but I get a little tired of the constant rhetoric about how this or that management practice is going to affect wildlife. We've even gone so far as to establish and begin to teach the philosophy of animal rights along with civil rights and human rights. Please don't misunderstand me; wildlife has a purpose in our biological system. It also has a place, and its place will sometimes have to be determined by its relative contribution to human welfare. At times it will need protection; at times it will need control. There is, however, what appears to me to be among citizenry, a misunderstanding of the term wildlife and a tendency to make the term sound as though it were a single species of animal. Wildlife includes hundreds of species from snails to moose, with a host of different characteristics. Changes that improve the environment for some species diminish it for others. There is no such thing as a perfect practice. A decision of nonuse for range or forest land constitutes a practice and, in fact, may be more harmful to the "wildlife" in an area than multiple use. We must become better educated about the interactions of specific animals on specific plants in a specific environment. We need to know the appropriate mix and number of species of animals, wild and domestic, for a specific range site. Appropriate use will improve range land. The challenge of range resource management is to learn how to manage the range resource properly for both domestic animals and wildlife.

A related point, from a purely educational standpoint, needs to be considered. A range management specialist (I prefer to use the term range manager rather than range conservationist for personal reasons) must have extremely broad training in the sciences and, in addition, must have a sense of what I will call the art of range management. I do not believe that everyone now employed or all of those who will become employed in range management, even though they complete a course of study for range management, perhaps with all A's, will be genuine range managers. There are a lot of people working on range problems; but I do not believe there are a lot of range managers. Range land management, in my opinion, is one of the most professionally demanding jobs in all of agriculture, simply because of the multiple biological interactions and the fragile environment in which they occur. To complete a course of study is essential, but it should be coupled with a one- or two-year internship, cooperative education, or work experience with a well-qualified senior range manager whose job it is to train new people. I see little reason for instance, why some retired, superb range managers could not be used for this training mission. It would give them something to do and provide the immediate wisdom and experience of years to those being trained. In other words, to meet the challenge of range resource management, we must first meet the challenge of educating and training range resource managers. Universities have a critical role in teaching and training. Students with an urban background, who take wildlife management as a biology specialty and are then employed as range managers, is like expecting a veterinarian to perform brain surgery on people.

The last challenge I will mention, although not the last one I would like to talk about, is that of the resource itself—that is, the range lands. Range lands in the broadest sense, and including forest lands, in the United States would be in excess of one billion acres in the 48 conterminous states, with some 620 plus million acres in the western United

States. I mention this only to indicate that we are not dealing with a second class resource. Every state has a significant amount of forest/range land; and in 35 of the states, more than one-half of the land is forest/range. This is a first-class, genuine national resource and deserves first-class attention. In the western states, while it may come as a surprise to some people, range land is just as important as a source of food for livestock as it is for food for wildlife or for energy. The three need not be in conflict. As energy in the form of coal and oil is taken from the land, we must not lose its productive capacity for livestock. The cattle and sheep on our range represent the greatest and cheapest food security backup system of any nation in the world, but we have got to keep it alive. We must dedicate funds from federal and state sources for range research. I doubt seriously if all of the money that has been put into range research since the beginning of our nation would even come close to equaling the research money that has been dedicated to a single cultivated crop in the United States. I am concerned that the majority of funds for "range research" are being used to do research on disturbed sites. I don't argue that value or necessity of disturbed site revegetation and research on how to get it done; but the fact is, disturbed site acreage would not equal one-tenth of 1% of the total range land and even if revegetated, would make little contribution to production.

We have an enormous resource that is critical to our national welfare and has an impact on our citizens' pocket-book that needs research funds but is hardpressed to get them. By the year 2000, which is only 19 years away, we will need approximately 74% more carcass beef and 9% more lamb to meet the demands for protein in the world. Most of that lamb and beef is going to come from range lands that are well managed.

So to meet the challenge of change in resource management, then, will require recognition of several things:

1. A need for a turnabout in ranch income or there won't be any ranchers. There will have to be a change in programs which will permit ranchers to make a living. We cannot continue to subsidize foreign agriculture while our ranchers and farmers go broke.

2. A need for national awareness that rangeland produces food; that its principal use is for human welfare; that not all species of wildlife will or should be expected to live eternally under any change in management system; that changes are necessary and that a \$300,000,000 loss to ranchers and farmers from predators is not acceptable and is not in the best interest of humanity.

3. That research funds from federal and state sources should be allocated for range management research and implementation, and that the current disproportion of allocation to disturbed sites be reviewed in terms of real value.

4. That cooperative research be encouraged across institutional lines. The problems we face are public issues. Funds, however, are given to institutions by specific project. Perhaps funds ought to be allocated according to a predetermined priority to organized research task forces which are multi-institutional. I realize this is expecting too much. At the same time, I believe we have reached the point where public problems are more important than institutionalism. We need to determine, cooperatively by institutions, states, and by regions, a priority list of range research programs and unite to create research task forces and assignments to get things done.

5. We need to be determined that students intending to become range managers have to be professionally the best there is and set educational goals which achieve that. Students graduating from various institutions need to be educationally equivalent and be able to have credit at one university accepted at another. Work study programs need to be developed, but with a purpose to train in the field, perhaps using retired, superb professional range managers in the specific training role. Students intending to become range managers (conservationists) should be trained to become just that.

6. Public information needs to be generated. We need to talk to each other, as we are doing today, so we can work together; but we need to talk to the public so they can be educated. I would suggest that industries, commodity groups, and farm organizations finally cooperate in an information campaign on television and in printed documents, perhaps using the Council for Agricultural Science and

Technology as the coordinating group to produce public information. Agriculture simply must be heard.

7. We need to find a means of getting agricultural biology accepted as a legitimate competitor to zoology in the curriculum of high schools, and perhaps even get information packages into elementary and junior high schools. The majority of students today from elementary school through college have absolutely no exposure to agriculture beyond the food they eat. It isn't any wonder that we have an information gap.

8. We need to be certain ourselves that we are informed on the issues and committed to the importance of our professions. ●

Editor's Note: After considerable review we, at Rangelands, decided to reproduce Robison's talk as he presented it. Redone as an article, using third person, it would lose its impact. The message is clear and needs to be said as a personal message.

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