

Women in Range

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I am employed as a reclamation specialist with the Colorado Division of Mined Land Reclamation. It is through this position that I became directly involved with rangeland issues. However, my interests and past experiences paved the way for my role as a woman in range.

Having grown up in Denver, Colorado, I took advantage of its close proximity to the mountains. Many summers were spent backpacking and exploring different parts of the State. As a result of my recreational activities, I developed an interest and respect for the out-of-doors.

In high school I took several ecology and environmental conservation classes. These classes stressed the delicate balance within and between natural environmental systems. This was a period in time (the early 1970's) when the ecology and environmental movements were very popular. Given my interest in the out-of-doors it seemed only natural to study ecology in college.

That is what I did. At the University of Colorado in Boulder I enrolled in the environmental biology program with a concentration in plant ecology. Course work included laboratory work and extensive field work.

Before graduation I had the opportunity to work with the Colorado Natural Areas Program and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service conducting an inventory of potentially endangered or threatened plant species in the Piceance Basin in northwestern Colorado. This project was very educational and altered my perspectives on environmental matters. I came to the realization that politics and government play an integral role in the management and preservation of natural resources and ecosystems and that not only is it important to understand the physical aspects of the environment, but the laws that govern those resources as well. This belief was reinforced as I began my job search.

After graduation with a Bachelor's degree in biology (1978), I began working for an environmental consulting firm in Denver as a field technician. The projects I became

involved in were primarily baseline vegetation studies. These studies characterized the existing vegetation communities, and the information was used to develop reclamation plans. The studies were required as a result of recently passed environmental laws. Additionally, I worked on reclamation projects, report writing, and vegetation research plots. The experience gained as a consultant proved valuable in my present job.

As a reclamation specialist with the Colorado Division of Mined Land Reclamation for the past three years, I review coal mine permit applications for compliance with the Colorado Surface Coal Mining Reclamation Act. I also inspect coal mines for compliance with the same law. The job requires a working knowledge of a wide range of disciplines including land use, soils, vegetation, wildlife, hydrology, mine engineering, and reclamation planning. Information on these disciplines is reviewed to insure that the mining and reclamation plans will minimize environmental impacts and produce effective reclamation.

Since my academic training is in plant ecology my specific responsibilities at the Division include reviewing vegetation baseline data, and revegetation plans in the office and assessing the success of revegetation efforts in the field. Additionally, I work closely with geologists, hydrologists, range scientists, and engineers on the Division staff during a permit review. My job requires a great deal of interaction with mine operators, land owners, and other state and federal government agencies. As you can imagine, there are many technical and legal considerations that must be balanced when reviewing reclamation and post-mining land use plans.

With reclamation being a relatively new science there are many ideas on how rangelands should best be reclaimed. Numerous studies have been conducted and the knowledge continues to grow. Reclamation of rangelands in Colorado has been largely successful and will continue to improve as we learn more about reclamation techniques. ●

