Communications:
You and the Information and Education Committee

M.J. Samuel

"Remember our goals this year — more members and more publicity." Which of SRM's 36 President said that? It could have been any or all of them, and it may have been, but this particular quote was from Danny Freeman in 1956. This presentation is concerned with the latter, "more publicity."

The Handbook for the Information and Education Committee contains the following statements in the Introduction: "SRM needs to continuously strive to inform its membership and the public..."..." develop and disseminate information. ..." and "... broaden Society exposure and recognition. ..." We’re talking about COMMUNICATIONS, internal and external communications. For INTERNAL communications we have Rangelands. Columns by the Society officers inform you of Society happenings. Your Section lets you know what is happening in your Section newsletter. You, as a SRM member, need to be involved in communications. You are not a part of this communication if you don't read your Society's efforts to communicate with you.

There are things you, the SRM member, can do to improve communications. Submit items to your Section's newsletter. (That applause, cheering, and stomping of feet is the agreement from your newsletter editor.) You say you have nothing for the newsletter! Are you dead? If so, that's news! Everyone is doing something or has seen someone else's work in range management that would interest other members of the Section. Send in notices when members receive SRM or other awards. Submit items on students, new members, range-related events, and obituaries. The calendar of events in newsletters shouldn't be limited to SRM activities.

What would a newsletter editor like to say to you? There are some disadvantages to the job "... causing one to ulcerate at the thought of producing a newsletter." What brought about that discouraging comment? It might be because that editor was always having to "pry information from..." or "...beg for information..."

Bob Gartner had a lot to say upon stepping down after 15 years of editing the South Dakota Section Newsletter (No. 83-4, Fall 1983). He suggested that, in addition to the editor, a Section should have a newsletter committee. One member of the committee should manage the advertising, from soliciting to billing. Other members should be reporters who would periodically, but regularly, supply informative material. These members would be hand picked because of their interest and ability. They should represent the different vocations of the members, such as any and/or all of the various agencies, institutions, and ranching interests.

Tour Organizers and Nominating and Annual Meeting Committee members also should consider themselves as unappointed members of the Newsletter Committee. These committees need to plan their work so that pertinent information will reach the editor before newsletter deadlines. Late information may mean the expense of an additional mailing.

What about YOU? You still need to submit information and help even before you're asked. The editor can't be expected to know everything that is going on. Remember, your editor has other things to do, like a full-time job and a personal life.

Our most important concern should be with EXTERNAL communications. Why and what should we communicate? According to G.W. Belsey, a public relations specialist who originated Woody Owl and who is now with the Public Service Council, we need to "spend our time doing one thing: arriving at a consensus on one or two specific points that are important, interesting, believable, challenging and so easily understood that they have the potential of making your publics change their attitudes and also have the potential of influencing your publics to take actions that will be favorable to your interest." We need to "inform and motivate the public to support the highest feasible level of management on each acre of rangeland regardless of its use or ownership." When we communicate with the general public, we're informing them. We're trying to get them to understand what rangeland is and why rangeland is important to them. We're not trying to make them range managers. We are not educating them. The Information and Education Committee is really a Communications Committee.

How do we communicate? The Information and Education Committee has developed a Guide for Working with the Media. Everyone can benefit from its use. This Guide outlines the steps needed to work with the media, ideas for writing releases for the media, the format which will be acceptable, and other items. We must know what we are doing. Read the guidelines, then actively get involved to help build good media relationships.

This work is not limited to Information and Education Committee members. The Information and Education Committee can't do it all. The committee can only disseminate available information. The officers and all Section members must send correct and accurate information so that news releases, or other appropriate information, can be developed. Everyone needs to know what kinds of information is needed.

What kind of publicity can a Section generate? This is limited only by the imagination and time a person or group of persons is willing to invest. Following are three examples of
ways of communicating.

A Section should routinely send out press releases to announce the winners of SRM awards, election of officers, and scholarship winners within the Section or state. If a person receives an award, it is only going to be interesting to people who know the person. The first two paragraphs of a release must contain the answers to the questions: WHO? WHAT? WHERE? WHEN? and WHY? Start the first sentence of the release with information which will catch the attention of the audience. You must know the audience and the style of a particular outlet. Direct contact with media people is important. If a press release is sent to more than one outlet, it may need to be written differently for each outlet.

Another example is to arrange for the Governor of the state or province to proclaim a "Range Management Month (Week/Day)". This must be a state function. Try to get agencies and other organizations involved. First you will need to develop a proclamation text which is tailored to your state or province. The first part of the proclamation could contain such facts as: the ranking of range-related industries in the state; the percentage of the state which is rangeland; and the importance of such rangeland resources and uses as wildlife habitat, water supply, and recreation.

Pick a month (week/day) when there will be Section or other range management activities that will complement the publicity. If possible, avoid conflicts with other agricultural activities. South Dakota Section found that June was Dairy month and the media were reluctant to publicize another agricultural event. Find a good date and make it an annual event.

Here is how you might arrange for the declaration of a Range Management date. Contact a staff member in the Governor's office who has responsibility for special events or, preferably, someone who has expressed an interest in range management in the past. Follow this first contact with a letter to the Governor and a copy of the wording for the proclamation. If the request is granted, arrange for Section officers to be present when the Governor signs the proclamation. The Governor's office usually selects the date for signing. Select alternate Section members in case of conflicts. Use Section members from different parts of the state, if possible. More hometown newspapers are likely to use the story if it involves a local person. Make sure there will be someone to take photos. In some states the Governor's office will do this. Know ahead of time how many prints you will need and who will distribute them. Write press releases specifically for the different outlets.

Another example could be to publish a state brochure. A brochure has only one real purpose: information. Make your brochure fit that purpose. There is no such thing as an all purpose brochure. Consider that the life-span of this brochure will be only 2 to 3 years when you are writing it. Strive for an 8 to 10th grade reading level to assure clarity and understanding. Consider the time and expense required to produce this brochure. Will the Section be able to distribute the brochure to justify the expense? A brochure may not be for every Section. You need to include the name, address and phone number of a contact person. Do not list officers because the brochure will only be good for their term of office. The Texas Section brochure uses the Denver office as the contact. Denver then forwards inquiries to Texas.

If you're sitting in your chair without any ideas on what you can do to help communicate in SRM, one of us hasn't been communicating! YOU need to help. Only YOU can make sure that "Rangelands can be Forever".

MOVING? Please try to give us four weeks notice. Send your present address label and this form to Society for Range Management.

2760 W. 5th Ave.
Denver, Colo. 80204

Name ........................................
New Address ...............................
City .........................................
State ............................. Zip .........

ATTACH OLD ADDRESS LABEL HERE