

SRM Section News

Colorado Section Society for Range Management: 2004 Annual Meeting

By Wayne Leininger

The annual meeting of the Colorado Section of the Society for Range Management was held in Longmont, Colorado, on December 1–2, 2004. It was well attended with nearly 100 registering for the meeting. Interestingly, one-third of the registrants were non-SRM members. Their attendance at the meeting is a testimony to the quality of the program and the high interest in rangeland issues.

The theme for the meeting was “The Health of Colorado’s Rangelands.” The meeting started with an overview by Renee Rondeau from the Colorado Natural Heritage Program on Colorado’s grasslands. Ms Rondeau pointed out that prior to settlement, Colorado was 35%–40% grassland. Because of farming and other land use changes, Colorado presently has about 20% grassland.

David Bradford from the US Forest Service highlighted the history of the use and management of Colorado’s rangelands. An interesting statistic that Bradford pointed out was that Native Americans first acquired horses in Colorado in the late 1600s. By the 1800s, Native Americans in Colorado had 6–12 horses for every man, woman, and child. One would have to wonder what their impact on the rangelands was.

After the introductory talks, the program focused on issues involving rangeland health. John Mitchel (US Forest Service) presented an overview of rangeland assessments in the United States. He pointed out that “...the more we know, the harder it is to monitor.” How true that statement is.

Josh Saunders and Ben Berlinger, Range Management Specialists with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, talked about indicators of healthy rangelands. They reviewed the 3 attributes and 17 indicators used to evaluate rangeland health. Berlinger pointed out that there isn’t just one health rating, but evaluations look at 3 separate attributes.

After lunch, Roy Roath, from Colorado State University, led a discussion on monitoring and assessing the health of grassland ecosystems. He stressed that rangeland health can’t be given just one number and that rangeland management specialists need to be detectives. I guess we have a reason to watch CSI Miami (or your favorite version of the show).

Another professor from Colorado State, Bill Lauenroth, gave a presentation on the importance of ecological disturbance on rangelands. He pointed out that every grassland has disturbances, and many of these disturbances kill plants. However, only a few of disturbances, such as grazing and fire, can actually be manipulated. Lauenroth also pointed out that



Photo 1. Colorado Section Awards Committee Cochair Scott Woodall presents the Colorado Section Trail Boss Award to Don Hajar.

on the Northern Great Plains, where grasslands evolved with bison grazing, no grazing is a disturbance, and yet, “no grazing” is the control in many experiments on grazing.

Sharon Collinge, Associate Professor at the University of Colorado, started the second day of the meeting off with a presentation on the biodiversity of Colorado’s grasslands. She pointed out the importance of contiguous areas of grasslands to maintain the biodiversity of small mammals and birds. Collinge also highlighted the problem we’re having on the Front Range of Colorado with the habitat loss and fragmentation due to urban development.

The next speaker at the meeting was Bill Travis, also from the University of Colorado. He addressed the human dimensions of rangeland health. He questioned, as many in the Society have, whether “health” is the right word.

The last talk of the meeting was given by George Beck, Colorado’s Weed Extension Specialist, who spoke on threats to rangeland health from invasive weeds. He pointed out how extremely complex this topic is. For example, some invasive species, like Tamarisk, are excessive consumers of resources (eg, water). In contrast, other species, like sweetclover, enrich the soil with nitrogen. Further, some invasive species help to stabilize soils (eg, smooth brome grass), whereas other species, like spotted knapweed, have been shown to increase sediment production from rangelands.

Two awards were presented at the Section’s banquet on Wednesday evening. The Trail Boss Award, which is pre-



Photo 2. Colorado Section Awards Committee Cochair Tim Steffin presents the Colorado Section Excellence in Rangeland Conservation Award to Don and John Palmer of the Palmer Ranch, Boyero, Colorado.

sented to the individual who has made outstanding accomplishments to the profession of range management and provided outstanding service to SRM, was presented to Don Hajar. In addition to having served on numerous committees

at both the Section and National levels, Hajar has been recognized as a leader in the seed industry where he has promoted the wise use of introduced and native species in the restoration and reclamation of rangelands.

The Excellence in Rangeland Conservation Award was presented to the Palmer Ranch from Boyero, Colorado. This ranch is intensively managed and the improved range condition and livestock distribution on the ranch has resulted in improved forage quality and habitat for wildlife. The ranch has also taken a lead in helping other ranches in the region become more profitable and better stewards of the rangeland resource by participating in field days and extension programs and through numerous personal contacts.

One of the keys to the success of this meeting was the diversity of backgrounds of the speakers. Many of them challenged the traditional views of range management. They stimulated much discussion among those who attended the meeting and pointed out the importance of proper stewardship of rangelands for its various users.

Author is Past President of the Colorado Section of SRM.

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