

Fourth in a Series: Insight From SRM's Charter Members

The SRM History Committee has conducted interviews with many of the Society's charter members to capture their perspective of events leading to and subsequent to the formation of the American Society of Range Management in 1947–1948. Interviews from several of these individuals will be shared for today's SRM members to enjoy and learn from.

SRM Charter Member— Robert W. Harris

Editor's Note: Robert W. (Bob) Harris was unable to develop answers to the questions submitted, as he has Alzheimer's disease and is confined to a nursing home. His daughter, Margie Fitzpatrick, and his longtime colleague Jon Skovlin responded to the questions in Bob's stead. SRM thanks them for their fine efforts.

Robert W. (Bob) Harris, has lived in Wilsonville, Oregon, for the past 25 years. His career with the US Forest Service (USFS) spanned over a period of 38 years, starting as a seasonal employee in 1939 and 1940. He retired from the Forest Service in 1978 as associate deputy chief for research in Washington, DC. Following retirement, Bob and his wife, Joan, moved to Oregon, where he continued to remain active in areas related to environmental issues and concerns. He has served on the Oregon State Board of Forestry and was a director of the American Forestry Association for 2 terms, retiring in 1989.

Bob was born in Minnesota but moved to South Dakota when he was 5 years old. Growing up during the Depression and dust bowl years provided firsthand experience of the effects that drought had on the farmers. The environmental and economic conditions during the early years in South Dakota influenced Bob's interest in the area of range management. As the drought intensified, food was short for livestock. A federal agriculture program in the new Roosevelt administration bought cattle, pigs, and sheep for slaughter. He can remember hearing those starving animals in the stockyards all night long as they awaited railroad cars to take them to the slaughterhouses.

Bob received a BS degree in forestry in 1941 from

the University of Idaho. One of his professors, Dr Vernon Young, professor of range management, was instrumental in encouraging Bob to pursue a career in range management. Dr Young recommended Bob for a teaching fellowship and graduate studies in forestry. Following these suggestions, Bob became a postgraduate student at the New York State College of Forestry at Syracuse University in Syracuse, New York, in 1941–1942, pursuing a master's degree in forest ecology. During the summers, he worked as an agricultural aid on the central plains at the Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station at Ft. Collins, Colorado. Realizing that it would be impossible for him to complete his final year of graduate school before being drafted, he enlisted in the US Marine Corps, serving 4 years, including active duty during World War II. The completed portion of his master's thesis was stored at the Central Great Plains Field Center, and, unfortunately, it was destroyed in a fire at this facility. Although he did not complete his master's degree, it did not prevent him from achieving his goal of eventually becoming a research scientist and administrator in the area of range management. In 1946, he started his professional career with the USFS as a range researcher and forest ecologist at the Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station in Colorado.

At the time of the American Society of Range Management (ASRM) formation in 1947–1948, Bob was living in La Grande, Oregon, and working at the Blue Mountain Research Center, Pacific Northwest Forest and Range Experiment Station, developing grazing management research programs on the Starkey Experimental Forest and Range in northeastern Oregon. Bob learned of the ASRM primarily through colleagues in forest service research. He be-

came an ASRM charter member. As a new member, his expectations were very high. As a young professional forester, he needed a peer network, contacts with users, and an outlet for research results. The Society for Range Management (SRM) provided all of these. Bob has noted that the addition of *Rangelands* in the past 25 years was a great boost for disseminating new knowledge. (*Editor's Note: It is unknown if Bob attended the first meeting of the ASRM in Salt Lake City.*)

Bob has stated that "ASRM/SRM involvement was definitely encouraged by my supervisors and the USFS in general. It provided employees a network of information on range research as well as an opportunity to share and exchange range research data and results with constituents. It also encouraged communication and brainstorming of ideas among those employees involved in range management research."

Bob was a member of the Pacific Northwest Section, National Capitol Section, Intermountain Section, and California Section. He has been president of the Pacific Northwest Section and vice president of the National Capitol Section. He has served on various committees at both the section and the national level—most notably the Awards, Membership, and Nominating Committees—and the Editorial Board. He noted, "It has been my observation that our society of late could provide a more unifying or leading role in some of the more fragmented aspects of range management. For example, how can we position ourselves to better serve managers on methods and interpretations of "range trend" or succession? Also, what has happened to the goals of the old 'Task Force on Unity in Concept and Terminology?' There are several other such areas of basic concern. We should play a more aggressive leadership role in direction, problem solving, and unification of methodology."

Bob also suggested that the profession could have become more cognizant of livestock grazing effects on the other related resources earlier. Though research information was available, we appeared to hold closely to information and cling to a management philosophy aimed at industry production themes for too long.

One of his observations has been that SRM provides a great forum for expressing various outlooks

on politicized issues. Resolutions from our society are a great way to influence policy and subsequent management at many levels. SRM should continue its positive efforts to solicit members from user groups. Regarding professionalism, SRM has served range professionals well, but, in terms of serving the broad array of user groups and making the general public aware of needs and opportunities in rangeland management, there is still room for improvement. Although there are many opportunities for young people to make a contribution to the rangeland resource, he believes there is still a need for expanding employment possibilities and providing greater accessibility to those wishing to pursue a career in rangeland management. He would encourage interested young people to seek out individuals involved in the area of range management as well as organizations such as SRM. He would also encourage the professionals to take on mentor roles, encouraging, inspiring, teaching, and sharing their own passion for rangeland management to young people wishing to make a contribution to this field.

SRM Charter Member— Gerald W. Thomas

Editor's Note: Gerald Thomas recorded these comments on September 30, 2003, in Las Cruces, New Mexico.

I am presently retired and now am President Emeritus of New Mexico State University. My association with the Society for Range Management goes back to the time it was started. At the time the Society was formed I was working for the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) in St. Anthony, Idaho. I was contacted by Dr Vernon A. Young, who at that time was head of the Department of Range Management at the University of Idaho, right after the early discussions about the Society. I had graduated from the University of Idaho in February 1941, worked for the Forest Service during summers and until World War II broke out. I had some continuing contacts with Dr Young and continued my interest. Of course, after the war, I went to work for the Soil Conservation Service and was interested in this new society and the profession of range management.

Even though I am a charter member of the Society, I was unable to attend the first meeting in

Salt Lake City. In 1950 I took educational leave from SCS to do graduate work at Texas A&M. Again, Dr Young is the one who talked me into going on to do graduate work. He was now at Texas A&M and had started the first PhD program in range management. He insisted that I be a part of that program. So, my wife and I with our 2 children moved to Texas A&M to graduate school. I completed my MS in 1951 and a PhD in 1954. I worked for Texas A&M until 1958 when I moved to the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station as research coordinator for west Texas. We moved our home to Lubbock. Then, in 1960, I was offered and accepted the position of dean of agriculture at Texas Tech.

During this period I had maintained contact with the Society. I was general chairman of the 15th annual meeting that was held in Corpus Christi in January 1962. I have served as president of the Texas Section and served on the Society Board of Directors while I was dean of agriculture at Texas Tech. After I moved into the presidency of New Mexico State University, I was approached several times by the SRM Nominating Committee to consider being a candidate for the presidency. I declined due to my heavy workload at the university. However, in 1982, I decided to allow my name to be placed on the ballot, and in spite of other well-qualified candidates, I was elected.

I enjoyed my term as president of the Society, and as I turned over the presidency to Dr Joe Schuster, one of my former students, on February 15, 1984, I made the following observations: First, officers change, Board members change, but the Society's purposes, because of the continuity and dedication of the staff and because of our worthy goals, will continue. The Society must become more involved in political issues. We can win 100 battles on the technical front and lose the war in Washington or the state capitals. The strength of the Society rests with the sections, and that is where it all happens out on the land. And our Society is unique in that we are kind of a hybrid society between animal science, agronomy, and soil science and so on. And, it is that hybrid vigor and the fact that we look at the total spectrum from a management standpoint that is important.

Our emphasis should continue to be on management, on research looking at alternatives in management rather than protection per se. I think that is

one of our real strengths. We also are fortunate to have both scientists and technical assistance personnel and landowners and ranchers as members of the Society. That keeps us focused on the issue of sustainable approaches to range resource management.

When the Society first started we did not have sections. But, as the Society grew, the concept of sections added strength and a local viewpoint to the Society. That was a really good thing. In my experience, working first with the Forest Service, then with the Soil Conservation Service and later with universities, Texas A&M, Texas Tech, and New Mexico State University, I was encouraged to keep contact with the professional society. So, I would say that the employers were supportive of my involvement with the Society. I gained much from the interaction with fellow scientists and with the ranch and farming sector of our Society.

I was very pleased when SRM went international, and I was also pleased when one of my former students, Dr Martin Gonzalez from Mexico, became the first president of the Society from a country other than the United States. I have had the opportunity to travel and work on 35 different foreign assignments and have observed range conditions in Africa, Asia, Egypt, and other parts of the world. I am convinced that there is a continuing need for individuals trained in range science and management, which really is applied ecology.

There is much debate at the present time about the future of the Society. I read these editorials and commentaries with much interest. I see a need for change. I see heavier involvement of the basic sciences. However, I see a lot of general observations and conclusions made off the cuff without the supporting research and analysis. And, I still believe that the members of the Society for Range Management have more on-the-ground experience and more accurate information based on research on what is happening out there on the land and the interaction between the vegetation resource, the soil resource, and animal and livestock populations.

I also see the need for more cooperation between user groups and the scientists and for more interaction among the various scientific disciplines. But there is need for these general-purpose hybrid-type scientists that can look at soils, vegetation, and biological populations. That need will continue into the

indefinite future. It has been my privilege to be associated with the Society. I have gained much from this association, and I hope the Society will continue to be viable.

SRM Charter Member— Grant A. Harris

Editor's Note: Grant Harris provided the following written information in response to the questions. He can be reached at 1615 NE Upper Drive, Pullman, Washington 99163.

Dr Grant A. Harris, a Professor Emeritus at Washington State University, Pullman, Washington, was born in Logan, Utah. He and his wife, Jennabee, have 4 children.

He tells of working as a research range conservationist with the Northern Rocky Mountain Station, US Forest Service, as superintendent of the Vigilante Range Experiment Station near Alder, Montana under the supervision of Leon C. Hurr from September 1941 to September 1948 excluding service in the US Navy from 1944 to 1946. As superintendent he was in direct charge of the research program, including fieldwork, personnel, and station management. Studies included measuring phenological development of key forage species, ecological changes resulting from different management practices, and success or failure of seeded grass and forb species. Some 210 head of experimental cattle were involved.

He remembers that early in 1948 a group of people who were working in range management met in Moscow, Idaho, and they sent out a notice to all workers in range that there would be a meeting in Salt Lake City and invited all to come. Harris says, "I received this announcement but was unable to attend. However, I received a copy of the proceedings and was impressed with the actions taken and lent my support and became a charter member. There were no sections to begin with; they came later. I was a member of the Pacific Northwest Section and also the Utah Section."

In 1933 he started attending Utah State University. During the summer after his sophomore year, he worked at the Desert Range Experiment Station in southern Utah. Dr Wesley Keller, a scientist in ge-

netics at Utah State and Harris's former scoutmaster, came to review the work. Harris remembers, "He knew of my interest in animals from working on my father's dairy farm and suggested that I change my major from forestry to range management. This sparked my interest, and in the fall of 1934 when I registered for school, I was assigned to Dr Larry Stoddart, a new professor of range management, as my adviser. From then on my focus was in range management, and when I got my BS degree it was forestry with specialization in range management." In 1941 he received an MS in range management from the University of Idaho and a PhD in range ecology in 1965 from Utah State University.

When asked about the expectations of the American Society of Range Management (ASRM), Harris said, "My expectations for ASRM were that people who were actively engaged in range management work would meet together and, using their experiences both good and bad, would organize a group who could make range management a profession of which to be proud and to strengthen research and develop some regulations to further their position. Those expectations have exceeded my anticipation since SRM [Society for Range Management] has been instrumental in having range management recognized as a science and have improved conditions on the range through research and cooperation."

Commenting on his work experience and SRM, Harris noted, "I served on the Department of Range Management and Forestry faculty at Washington State University from 1956 until retirement in 1980. I was chairman from 1967 to 1980. Prior to 1956 and after my tenure with the US Forest Service until 1951, I was on the range and forestry faculty at Utah State University doing teaching, research, and extension. Professional involvement in SRM was encouraged at the universities. Since 1980, I have remained active as an Emeritus Professor, done considerable professional consulting in Washington and chairman of the board of Decagon Devices, Inc., a family business producing ecophysiological instruments, now employing over 30 people."

Harris stated, "I have been active on the SRM Range Science Education Council since its inception. I received the SRM Fellow Award in 1987, was cochairman of the 1992 Spokane SRM annual

meeting, and received the Exemplary Service Award in 1992, the Stewardship Award in 1989 (the first one), and the Trail Boss Award in 1967 (the first one) from the Pacific Northwest Section."

When asked about any lasting impressions, Harris commented, "I was pleased when ASRM became SRM to include worldwide range management participation. From time to time federal agencies who usually would hire professional range managers were hiring people from other disciplines not trained in range management. It was necessary for SRM to meet with these spe-

cialists to emphasize the need for properly prepared land management people who were trained in range management and could help to regulate legislation and other forms of restrictions or practices on rangelands. With the inroads made by environmentalists and other disrupters of rangeland use in our country, properly trained people can be invaluable in furthering wise use of our precious natural resources. For this reason I could recommend range management as a profession for any young person wishing to make a contribution to proper land use."

Ecological Science for a Crowded Planet

Ecologists must take their science in bold new directions if humans and the natural systems on which they depend are to coexist in the future. So states the Ecological Society of America's (ESA's) newly released action plan, "Ecological Science and Sustainability for a Crowded Planet." Prepared by a 20-member ESA committee at the request of the Society's Governing Board, the report calls for greater use of ecological science in decision making, research targeted at sustainability of a human-dominated Earth, and cultural changes within ecology. The authors urge ecologists to forge greater international linkages and to help foster an ecologically knowledgeable public.

Gaining greater understanding of how ecosystems function is a key theme of the document. The group identified water resources and challenges associated with urbanized areas as particularly critical and urged increased collaboration among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers.

Over 10 years ago, the Society unveiled "The Sustainable Biosphere Initiative: An Ecological Research Agenda." That document, which has influenced and informed much of the Society's efforts since 1991, identified and prioritized critical research questions. In contrast, this latest ESA report will serve to crystallize the Society's activities in research, education, and policy, according to President Jerry Melillo.

The action plan suggests specific steps the Society can undertake to work toward achieving the previously stated goals. Now it is up to ESA's Governing Board to determine which actions to begin to implement. Melillo says he is excited that these activities will begin taking place under his watch. According to Melillo, one particularly appealing idea is to form rapid response teams that can spring into action to respond to relevant policy issues.

To download a copy of the report, visit <http://esa.org/ecovisions/ppfiles/EcologicalVisionsReport.pdf>.