Letter to the Editor

By Roger Blew

Dear Editor:

Range management is usually described as a combination of science and art: the science portion being those concepts provided by biological, physical, and social sciences, the art portion being the ability of the practitioner to successfully extrapolate from those concepts to local conditions.

Much of the scientific basis for range management was derived from ecology. It is our understanding of the dynamics of plant communities and soils that provides the knowledge base that guides range management by recognizing the physical and biological limitations of rangelands. And it is these biological and physical limitations that define the ability of a particular rangeland to provide the products and services to meet societal expectations. As Thad Box recently wrote, "The 'can be' is determined by science ..."

There have been many advances in the science of ecology since providing the initial foundation for range management. Unfortunately, our profession has not always kept up with those changes, and our understanding of the dynamics of ecological systems has not remained in step with that changing science. As a result, our management actions on occasion have not reflected a good understanding of the potential for that disconnect to damage our rangeland resource.

SRM has done much over the past decade to reverse that trend. The changes made to our flagship journal and its rebirth as *Rangeland Ecology & Management* have provided an outlet for high-quality research that will build a new foundation for our profession. However, this is only the first step in reconnecting our management actions with a scientific basis. Ensuring appropriate technology transfer between

our research scientists and our on-the-ground range management practitioners is the key step in linking management action to our scientific knowledge base.

Because *Rangelands* is one of SRM's primary avenues for technology transfer, it is imperative that the articles published there reflect our best understanding of science. The changes seen in *Rangelands* through the philosophy of accepting articles that are "factual, logical, and well-written" have been positive. Recent issues of *Rangelands* contain articles that provide close links between scientific concepts from ecology and other disciplines and management approaches. The recent issue on Ecological Site Descriptions is a great example and provides an excellent introduction to a new approach to evaluating, monitoring, and managing rangelands. However, in that same issue Box warned us that these should not simply be a "re-write of old concepts and science using only the values and beliefs of the previous century" and that "to make sure our tools, such as ecological site descriptions, are most useful, they must be more science and less religion."

I take this opportunity to thank Thad Box for his continual reminders that ours is a science-based profession and that we have an obligation to ensure that our tools remain "more science and less religion." Also, I applaud the leadership of SRM for the changes they brought to our publications. I see these as important steps for making our profession more relevant to natural resource management and in helping society get the greatest good from our rangeland resources.

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