

# Will the Real Partners Please Stand—the Rangelands Need Them Now

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ADDRESSING ANY PART OF the complicated tapestry of rangelands could take more than one lifetime. Therefore, my remarks will be restricted to aspects of perspective, principles, priorities, policies, and, most of all, people. My background and natural bias are to private lands, rather than public, but I believe there are valid and valuable principles that apply to both and can be transferred from one to the other.

I am one of four generations of Texas ranchers in my family who have attempted to combine ranching with public service. My father took time from the ranch to help conceive, establish, and conduct the Soil Erosion Service, which became the Soil Conservation Service, and he served as a regional director for the first 20 years of its life and mine. I grew up with some of the people who recognized farm and ranch conservation problems, developed a new technology, and applied it then and now.

The early conception was that the government should do the job, but even with Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) labor and valiant effort mounted with missionary zeal, those in charge soon realized that the task was too enormous for anyone but the individual landowners and operators themselves to accomplish. Those farmers and ranchers had the desire, ability, and economic incentive to do a better job for themselves, their families, and their communities but lacked the technical knowledge to get the job done. Soil Conservation Districts, legal sub-divisions of states, through state enabling acts were created to provide to landowners, at their request, technical assistance from the Soil Conservation Service.

THAT SYSTEM IS BASED on the sound principle espoused by Abraham Lincoln that the government should do for the people only that which needs to be done in the public interest that the people cannot do for themselves. It has served the privately owned lands of the United States well, as operator and technician, each contributing his own expertise, developed coordinated conservation plans which were then applied and paid for by the operator, with additional encouragement in later years by cost sharing through Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service and Great Plains Conservation Programs. Begun in desperation, conservation management has burgeoned in recent years out of economic necessity. Costs and returns have done more for conservation than all the teaching

and preaching ever did. There is no substitute for individual stewardship and economic incentive to stir effective action.

Winston Churchill, among others, said, "Those who fail to study history, are doomed to live it over." In the early 1970's, a new generation in and out of government rediscovered conservation and the environment as a cause and dedicated themselves to the proposition that only massive government intervention could save the country from the impending disaster of environmental degradation. First, second, and third level administrators of departments and agencies were delighted, and still are, to respond to this public outcry for their services and acted vigorously to assist in drafting a proliferation of legislation which hopefully would enlarge their responsibility, funding, and staffing. As a result, and to the dismay of all, there has been too much legislation and responsibility with not enough funding and staffing, to the point that the original mission on the ground has suffered and new programs and procedures are subsiding under their own weight. The original effective policy of a highly qualified field force of working technicians backed by the minimum number of staff and administrators whose primary purpose was to facilitate the field staff has given way to a relatively few overworked field people distracted by more programs, procedures, meetings, studies, and assessments than the alphabet can provide acronyms for, while available funds are diverted to new tiers of administrative personnel.

WHEN DO WE LEARN the hard lesson that only the partnership of operator and technician on the ground they know so well using their pooled knowledge and experience can respond to a dynamic ecosystem and get the continuing conservation job done on both private and public lands with minimum expense? The many land use decisions and adjustments necessary to cope with changing conditions are difficult enough for qualified people to make on-site and impossible to make well at greater distances. The recent federal Acts and directives are investing millions of dollars and thousands of man-hours in inventories not accurate enough to use on the ground, much less for major policy decisions after being blessed with the sacrament of computerization; meanwhile, distraught technicians cannot find enough time to serve the lands and people to whom each agency is basically responsible.

THE CAPABILITY OF TECHNICIANS has suffered. Agency veterans are suffering from lack of time to increase what they know and to apply what they have learned. Frequent moves

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may in some cases be beneficial to the agency or to the technician personally, but lessen productivity if the technician is not in one place long enough to learn the country and the people well enough to interact effectively with both. Knowledge alone is inadequate and ineffective without the desire and ability to educate and motivate. Usually little is accomplished until a personal relationship of mutual understanding and respect is established between technician and operator, and this takes time.

Since, under existing Civil Service employment criteria, preference cannot be given to applicants with farm and ranch backgrounds in addition to educational qualification, many new employees drive up to the ranch house in a government pickup only to be graciously dismissed when the rancher learns the technician lacks the experience to apply what he knows. Thus under the guise of equal opportunity, we place a bright young person in a situation where he cannot be successful, so that his only escape is to hide busily in an office behind a stack of papers to avoid being weighed and found wanting. We should not be prejudiced, but each of us earns his compensation by making discriminating decisions. Surely, with concerted input from all concerned, Civil Service could restore working experience as a valid plus in hiring.

Perhaps worst of all is the number of nonrange-trained personnel who are called upon to make range management decisions and judgments. This frightful situation may occur from top to bottom of the agency and usually is done with confidence born of ignorance. The more you know, the more you know you don't know. The more fruitful kind of confidence is born of competence in what one does know and the integrity to say, "I don't know," when necessary and to defer to someone who does.

You might wonder why I as one who operates on privately owned land would not want grazing stopped on public lands to reduce the supply of red meat and improve my competitive position. The reason is that as a professional rangeman I know that most rangelands can be improved more rapidly with proper grazing use by domestic livestock than without it, and that usually livestock grazing not only is compatible with but complementary to wildlife production. Comparison of livestock exclosures to properly grazed pastures in Texas and New Mexico shows faster improvement outside the exclosures. Proponents of no management should compare productivity and health of timber and wildlife on National Forest lands with National Park lands. The contrast is striking. Often too much emphasis has been placed on numbers of wildlife, which, if excessive, can result in unthrifty animals and routine die-offs, rather than smaller numbers of healthy, robust animals more desirable for aesthetics and hunting and balanced to the habitat available. Contrary to the view of some, most ranchers I know enjoy and appreciate wildlife in a special way from daily contact, are conscious of habitat requirements, and, particularly where an economic incentive exists, will go to great lengths to improve habitats. Income from hunting on Texas ranges has produced annual revenue of one to five or more dollars per acre and is especially welcome in times of

low livestock prices.

From my own experience on private lands on which there is no one to direct stocking rates or management practices, I know that each year varies in production and therefore stocking capacity, so I have to plan herd reductions or additions that will not wreck my breeding program or tax management and vary the rotation grazing systems as required to accommodate changing situations. I sense a reluctance on the part of public lands graziers to reduce numbers in times of lower forage production, perhaps because the government said to, or for fear that numbers will not be increased again when forage increases.

Although I am a strong believer in and user of rotation grazing systems, I share the concern at being forced into one that may not be compatible with the livestock operation or provide flexibility to make needed adjustments. The concept of "Best Management Practices" frightens me. No one expects to wear a suit off the clothes rack and have it fit well without alteration. To an even greater extent, the right combination of range management practices should be custom tailored for each specific locality. These concerns can be overcome by careful planning and full communication between a knowledgeable operator and a knowledgeable technician working together in each management unit.

Further, I see no reason that operators should not be able to pay for all or part of range improvements on public lands with permits granted long enough to amortize and recover the investments. This practice is not uncommon on private and other non-federal lands and contributes to more and faster range improvement.

THERE ARE SOME REALLY GOOD THINGS happening in rangeland management. The Society for Range Management has asserted its rightful leadership role in initiating an interagency committee working to develop common terminology and methodology for rangeland inventory which will facilitate correlation and communication of information and implementation of management plans where more than one agency is involved. Such a system should bring sighs of relief to technicians and operators who must integrate multiple ownerships in one coordinated plan. The Society also provided input and impetus to a proposed Cooperative Rangeland Research Act, which was introduced in the last congress and will be reintroduced in the next with the backing of the National Cattlemen's Association and, hopefully, of other groups as they become aware of the opportunity.

Finally, range livestock operators who have survived recent years of increasing costs have demonstrated competence, soundness, and efficiency-orientation. More and more they will be challenging university and agency personnel with requests for information and technical assistance which will enable them to continue to produce food and fiber for our country and the rest of the world. Can we meet that challenge? We surely can, if we have the right perspective, principles, priorities, policies, and, most of all, people.