

Range Management: Past Accomplishments and Future Challenges

Peter Myers

Thank you for inviting me to speak with you this afternoon. I remember seeing some of you at the National Range Conference in Oklahoma City, and some of you are new faces to me.

On the occasion of the Society's 39th anniversary, I was tempted to give a "Clairol commercial" speech—you're not getting older; you're just getting better. However, because this group is a vigorous 39, I'd like to focus, not on the past, but mostly on the challenges we will face in the future.

I'm glad to see a Society for Range Management meeting being held in the East. We often stereotype range management as a western concern, but land managers, perched in four-wheel drive trucks with a southern pine forest in the background, are an important part of the range management community too, as are research scientists working in laboratories and professors in the classroom. I'm a hog farmer from Missouri, and I can testify that livestock grazing and management of rangelands is also of personal interest to some of my neighbors in the "show me" state. Really, the topic of range management is important to all Americans.

The Lord has blessed this nation with a large and productive land base, and we must be good stewards of the natural resources. Despite the generous size of our national boundaries, we have no more frontiers. As the demands on our resource base increase, our ability to manage the resources must also increase. In the biblical accounting of the genesis of the universe, God directs Adam to "replenish the earth."

That mandate has been passed on to us. The land is for the wise use and care of our own and future generations. Since rangelands comprise approximately 54 percent of our nation's land surface, you, the professional range managers, have a major responsibility for the environmental and economic health of our nation's future.

In the past, that responsibility was redeemed in many ways. Range managers can take pride in knowing that they were among the first to understand multi-purpose resource management. They were among the first resource managers to understand the need for balanced use, to understand that the grasses, the trees, the water—all parts of the resource base—must be managed holistically. Of course, stressing the need for integrated management today would generate no real argument, because that concept is now held by most natural resource managers, but range professionals were among the pioneers in developing the concept.

Range professionals can also take pride in their leadership role in natural resource research. Back in 1912, the Manti National Forest was home to the Utah Experiment Station,

the first research station devoted mainly to range research. Research continues today at the Intermountain Forest and Range Experiment Station, headquartered in Ogden. A recently released report, summarizing the range research that has been done, has been a very popular publication, indicating that people are actively looking for ways to improve their land management.

The Agricultural Research Service, which was formed in 1953, has also pioneered important range research, and the Soil Conservation Service, through its plant materials centers, has done important work to transfer new technology.

There are several recent examples where those three agencies—the Forest Service, the Agricultural Research Service, and the Soil Conservation Service—have worked with state agencies to develop better grasses and other plants and have made them available to private landowners:

- * The Forest Service and the Soil Conservation Service worked with the State Agricultural Stations in Utah, Arizona, and Idaho to develop and make available the Ephraim Crested Wheat Grass.

- * The Agricultural Research Service and the Soil Conservation Service worked with the North Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station to make Rodan Western Wheat Grass available.

- * As a final example of how several agencies can work together, the Forest Service and the Soil Conservation Service, along with the Agricultural Experiment Stations in California, Idaho, Oregon, and Nevada, the Departments of Forestry in California and Nevada, and the California Department of Fish and Game, are introducing Lassen Bitterbrush to improve range vegetation.

It's encouraging to get that many government agencies to work together with such positive results, and that's exactly the kind of cooperation we need more of.

So, your early recognition that resource management must deal with the entire ecosystem and your research and application of research results place you in a leadership position in land management. You can take pride in past accomplishments, but that won't help you face the challenges of tomorrow.

We cannot rest on past accomplishments. The management and use of the range resource has weathered periods of turbulence in the past, and ominous clouds of challenge can be seen on the horizon.

I said earlier that more than half of this nation's land base is classified as rangelands. Much of that land is managed by the federal government—primarily BLM and the Forest Service—and grazing is an important part of the range program. In 1985, grazing fees generated approximately \$24 million, with the Forest Service collecting more than \$9 mil-

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lion of that. That's a lot of money, but, in the case of the Forest Service, that return recoups only about one-third of the dollars spent to administer the program.

These figures are not news to most of you, but I think it's important to focus on them for a moment nonetheless. While the figures on expenditures and returns of the federal grazing programs do not provide a total, nor accurate, picture of the economics of the grazing program, they do provide fodder for attacks on grazing on federal land.

There is a tremendous amount of governmental and public interest in reducing the federal deficit. Some of those who criticize grazing on public lands are primarily concerned with the economics of government programs. Others, however, have totally different agendas and lock-on to dollar figures to bolster their particular argument.

For example, there are groups who oppose grazing on public lands because of concern for its ecological impacts. These groups may use economic data to persuade those individuals who are more inclined to get upset by matters of the wallet than by matters of the land to adopt their cause.

Range managers are not strangers to opposition. The current assault on public grazing programs is the latest in a long history of attacks, but it would be a mistake to adopt the attitude that current attacks are like all the others before. The social and political environments around land managers have changed, and success in the past does not necessarily assure success in the future. Because the tenor of the time has made arguments of economics and environmental values effective, we must all be concerned with finding ways to improve range management programs, to make them more economically and environmentally positive.

Speaking of improving range management programs, we have been hard at work overcoming problems in some of our areas, and some writers have noticed. As I was reviewing some recent news clippings, I noticed a number of positive comments about our efforts.

Lonnie Williamson, in an article for *Outdoor Life* magazine titled "A Range Is A Terrible Thing to Waste," visited the Tonto National Forest to review a four-pasture rest-rotation grazing program. He took note of the efforts to improve our rangelands and said the results of the management program are gratifying.

An last July 5, Ken Brown, writing in the Twin Falls, Idaho newspaper, the *Times News*, reviewed the range management program on the Oakley Valley allotment of the Sawtooth National Forest. In that program, the ranchers voluntarily reduced grazing in 1966 by 38 percent. By 1970, the range had improved to the point that they could return to the original grazing use level, and by 1981, grazing use was increased by ten percent. So, we do get coverage of the positive news in range management when we can show we earned it.

I always enjoy coming across positive statements such as the two I've just mentioned. It reinforces one of my basic beliefs that most writers are willing to present both sides of a controversy. We just need to give them a little help sometime. We do have some positive stories, and it's counterproductive to "hide our talents under a bushel." At the same time, we do face serious and legitimate challenges to some of our current practices. These challenges, too, find their way into print, so

we must continue working.

There are two other issues in USDA these days that are receiving considerable attention: the conservation section of the 1985 Farm Bill, and the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Act for deficit reduction.

Without going into great detail in either area let me say that both are significant in the areas they deal with: conservation of our nation's natural resources as well as management of our nation's financial resources.

As you know, Gramm-Rudman legislates a plan to bring the federal deficit to zero by the end of 1991. While the law may have some flawed areas of exemption, it is basically a very needed tool to force our federal legislators to face the seriousness of our growing federal deficit and all the problems it causes. In my opinion, farmers and ranchers would be among the prime beneficiaries of lower real interest rates and a weakened U.S. dollar, both of which should occur when we begin to *reduce* the federal deficit.

On the conservation side of the ledger, conservation reserve, sodbuster, swampbuster, and conservation easements are all historical additions to the 1985 Agricultural Adjustment Act. Whether you approve of these measures or not, it is clearly evident to me that our country is saying, in these sections of legislation, that the federal government is through financing abuse of our nation's soil and water.

We hope that conservation reserve in the Western and Plains States will encourage land owners and operators to put back into range some fragile acres that should never have been converted to row crops.

Sodbuster, conservation compliance, and swampbuster may seem to some to be land use management by the federal government, but, in reality, it is just denying federal subsidies to people who abuse their land.

I'd like to conclude my comments with a prescription for our future. Today, while I've acknowledge this profession's illustrious past, I've focused most of my attention on the challenges we must deal with presently. If we are going to have successful range management programs in the future, we must carry forth the notions first espoused by range conservationists and focus on rangelands as ecosystems. We need to encourage appreciation of rangelands as places that are vital for grazing, watershed protection, recreation use, and wildlife habitat.

Jack Benny, the great comedian who passed away a few years ago, had a running gag in which he became fixated on his 39th birthday. His efforts to remain at the same age were humorous as he failed to mature and acknowledge the changes in his life. This year, the Society for Range Management is 39 years old, but it's not funny to be caught in the past in real life. I trust all of you, unlike Jack Benny, will look forward to the coming years as a time of growth and change.