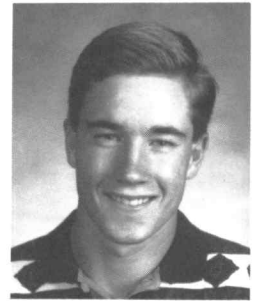


# The Truth About Rangelands—A Seed that Must be Planted

**Dustin Dean  
Jacksboro, Texas**



Dustin Dean

What do people today really know about rangelands? Does the public still think that range is just a wide open space where seldom is heard a discouraging word and the skies are not cloudy all day? It's a sad truth, but that just about says it for most people.

I read an article in the December, 1992, issue of the *Trail Boss* which stated that the importance of rangelands to people and to the environment is beyond calculation and that ecologically, rangelands are just as important as rain forests. This is the truth about rangelands which people must come to understand.

**These facts place some awesome** responsibilities on the shoulders of the Society for Range Management. SRM must remain on the cutting edge of technology in range management and ecology. Equally as important, SRM must remain the voice of truth to educate all people about the importance of rangeland resources. It is the critical job of creating a range awareness that I want to address.

From my viewpoint as a student, let me suggest some successful ways that the true story about rangelands can be told, especially to the open minds of young people.

The conservation district in Jack County offers a really fun activity for kids. The Sixth Grade Roundup is a 1-day outing at a local ranch where youth are exposed to many aspects of natural resource management.

**After being divided into small groups**, the students hear presentations on soils, plant identification, range practices, wildlife, livestock health, and even a little on ranch economics. After a lot of hands—on fun, the kids eat hot dogs then go back to school.

Now this may seem like just another field day for a bunch of kids. But, let me tell you why it's actually a great opportunity.

Only 2% of the U.S. population lives on farms or ranches. Most of my friends will never have anything to do with agriculture, except that they all like to eat. A day like this Sixth Grade Roundup may be the only chance they get to learn some facts about rangelands and ranch management.

I conducted a survey of sophomore and junior students in my high school who attended the Roundup as sixth graders. I purposely interviewed students who I know had no interest in agriculture. I asked them one simple question: Do you remember any of the information you

learned about rangelands at the Sixth Grade Roundup? The answer was a resounding "yes!" Even after a time lapse of four or five years, 95% of the students told me of things they could still recall, like the state grass being sideoats grama, why we sometimes need brush control, and how to age a deer by his teeth.

This tells me the day was successful. Mission accomplished!

Here is the challenge: If there is not a field day for grade school kids where you live, start one. And, if there is one, offer to help in any way you can.

In Texas schools, most high school students have the option to become involved in Agricultural Sciences and Technology and also in the FFA organization. Ag. Science is an upbeat program, offering 23 courses covering many subjects such as the one I'm taking new called Plant and Soil Science. Also offered is a course called Range Management, which has 26 lesson plans covering 26 topics related to range.

Texas FFA and 4-H members can be nominated to attend the Youth Range Workshop. I was fortunate to be one of the 36 high school students selected in 1992. Range Camp, as we call it, is sponsored by the Texas SRM Section with a whole lot of help from other resources.

The week at Range Camp was one of the busiest and most fun times in my life. We worked from 6:30 a.m. to after 11:00 p.m. every day.

We received mounds of technical information about everything from plant ID to grazing systems. We did radio programs, had daily stewardship devotionals, and even had a little recreation time. I made friends there that I will have the rest of my life. And, through the camp, I was selected to come to Albuquerque, New Mexico, for the annual SRM meeting.

Here is the challenge: If your section does not sponsor a Youth Range Workshop, you must start one. Believe me, the benefits will be well worth the time, expense and effort.

Finally, let me tell you of a golden opportunity that I believe is almost untapped by SRM.

I've been active in the Boy Scout program for several years. It's a great program and has meant a lot to me.

One of the basic things that a scout does is earn merit badges on various subjects as he advances through the different scout ranks. There are 121 merit badges available.

But, I noticed a missing link in the merit badge chain. Although some of the badges deal with conservation sub-

Dustin Dean is a junior at Jacksboro High School in Jacksboro, Texas. Dustin is very active in FFA and is FFA District President. He is also active in Boy Scouts and is a candidate for Eagle rank.

*Editor's Note:* This paper was the 3rd place winner in the High School Youth Forum at the Winter Annual Society for Range Management Meeting, Albuquerque, New Mexico.



*Dustin Dean displays one of the wood duck nesting boxes he constructed as part of his Eagle Scout service project. Dean said that other scouts should be encouraged to carry out range or wildlife service projects.*

jects, there is no range management merit badge.

According to the National Boy Scout Headquarters, there were 934,537 scouts in the national program as of November, 1992. I can tell you from experience that the majority of scouts who advance through the scout ranks will earn at least some conservation merit badges. If a range management merit badge could be put in place, there would be a potential to reach thousands of young men with the truth about rangelands.

**However, there are some roadblocks** to developing a range management merit badge. The National Boy Scout headquarters estimates that it costs up to \$600,000 to completely adopt a new merit badge. And then, there is the question of who writes all of the technical information for the new merit badge book.

SRM member Dr. Karl Wood, with New Mexico State University, has contacted the scout organization and suggested this merit badge idea. So far, the scouting program has not been convinced. But, Dr. Wood says it's still a project that should be pursued.

Along with a possible range management merit badge, there are other opportunities for scouts to gain an awareness of rangelands. The William T. Hornaday Award For Distinguished Service to Natural Resource Conservation requires scouts to carry out numerous conservation projects. Also, scouts pursuing the high rank of Eagle are required to do a public service project as part of the Eagle



*SRM members W.B. Owen of Jacksboro, Texas, teaches range plant identification at the annual Sixth Grade Roundup. The author points out that this field day may be the only exposure most area students get to the proper use of range and wildlife resources.*

badge. The Eagle project I am currently working on is to establish wood duck nesting boxes in an effort to increase the wood duck population in my county. Many scouts never consider that they could carry out range or wildlife service projects.

Here we have an ambitious challenge for SRM: Expand the partnership with the Boy Scouts of America. Convince them to develop a range management merit badge. A real key to success could be for SRM to offer to write the merit badge book. Could SRM afford to offset some of the expense? The fruits of this effort could be fantastic.

There are many challenges that face SRM today. I believe we have touched on one of the most critical, that of stimulating the minds of young adults. The seeds of range awareness must be planted in young minds. SRM has many opportunities to do this. Work through grade school field days, support the Ag. Science program, serve as a volunteer 4-H leader, establish a Youth Range Workshop in your section, and cultivate the partnership with Boy Scouts. Seeds planted today will provide an abundant harvest as we step into the next century.

### Bibliography

#### Interviews

- Burkett, Joe Ray.** 1993. Personal communication. Ag. Science Teacher, Jacksboro, ISD.  
**Rector, Dr. Barron S.** 1993. Personal communication. Extension Range Specialist, Texas A&M University.  
**Rumage, Ed.** 1993. Personal communication. Chairman, Jack Soil and Water Conservation District.  
**Traweek, Andy.** 1993. Personal communication. Paraprofessional, Boy Scouts of America, Longhorn Council.  
**Wood, Dr. Karl.** 1993. Personal communication. Dept. of Animal and Range Science, New Mexico State University.

#### Articles

- The Kiplinger Agriculture Letter* 1990. Page 2.  
*Trail Boss News* December 1992. Page 3.