

# Who Knows the SRM in Texas? Who Cares?

Charles R. Hart and Dale Rollins

Back in the early 1960s, a country singer named Henson Cargile sang a thought provoking ballad called "Skip a Rope." The refrain went "listen to the children while they play, now ain't it kind of funny what the children say . . . skip a rope." Sometimes it pays to listen to what the children say, and we use "children" in this article to represent rangeland stakeholders in Texas.

In preparation for the Texas Section's 1998 annual meeting in Midland, our theme was "Who knows the SRM? Who cares?" As program co-chairs, it was our duty to lead off the program with an assessment of how rangelands and the SRM are perceived by stakeholders inside and outside the profession. We chose to accomplish this through survey evaluations in which both members and non-members were asked the same questions. This article summarizes findings from these surveys. Copies of the survey can be obtained by contacting the authors.

## Respondent Demographics

Surveys were mailed to 100 Texas Section SRM members with a 45% return rate. When asked to categorize their agency or organization, 48% responded as conservation oriented, 26% educational, and 17% in the "other" category. The remaining 9% of respondents categorized their affiliation as livestock, resource user, or regulatory. The average years of membership in the Society for Range Management was 16 with a range of 1 to 50 years.

Non-member surveys were conducted as telephone interviews or completed in classroom type settings. Of the 151 non-members surveyed, 14% were from a nature tourism group, 10% County Extension Agents, 9% were absentee landowners, 17% were agricultural producers, 30% were Texas A&M wildlife students, 6% were public schools science teachers, 4% were from the Texas Outdoor Wildlife Association, and 10% were associated with non-governmental conservation organizations. Forty six percent of those surveyed indicated they had never heard of the Society for Range Management and 91% indicated they had never been a member.

## Perceptions of SRM

Respondents were asked to categorize their perception of the mission of SRM as one of the following: livestock production, improving wildlife habitat, conservation of natural resources, controlling brush and weeds, not sure (Figure 1). While Texas Section members were generally of the opinion that conservation of natural resources was our mission (87% of members), the greatest percentage of non-members (45%) were not aware of the mission of SRM. When non-members did indicate a mission, conservation of natural resources received the greatest number of responses (37%).

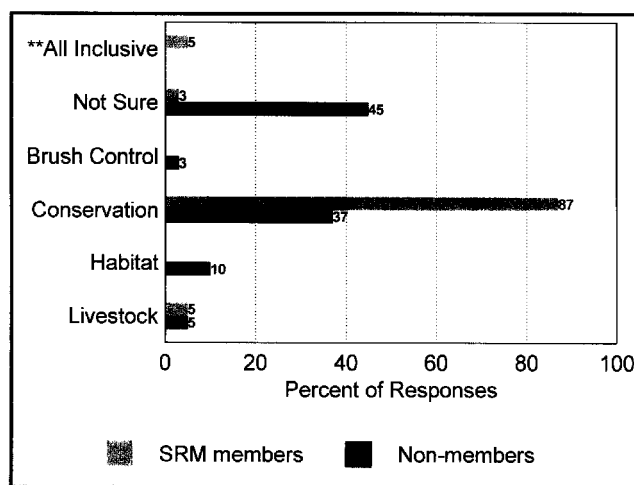


Fig. 1. Which of the following best fits your perception of the "mission" of SRM?

We also asked respondents to categorize what they think the mission of SRM should be within one of the following statements: promote multiple use management, provide leadership for stewardship of rangeland resources, increase livestock carrying capacity on grazing-lands, help preserve landowner rights, or preserve the rangeland environment. While Texas Section members were again generally agreeable (84%) that providing

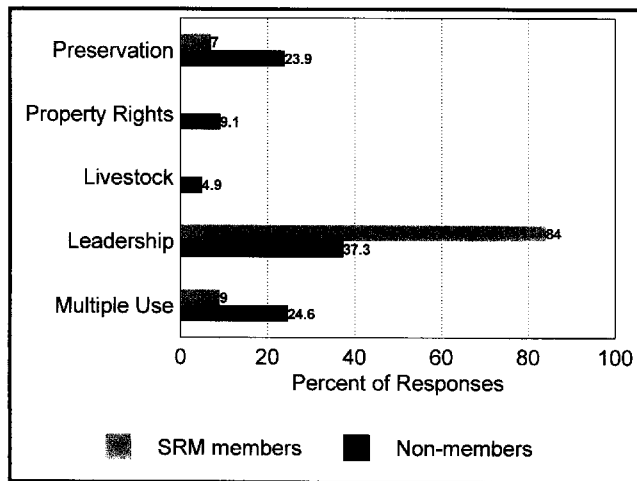


Fig. 2. Which of the following best fits what you think should be the "mission" of SRM?

leadership for stewardship of rangeland resources best fit what they think the mission of SRM should be, non-members showed greater variability in their opinions (Figure 2). Opinions of non-members were generally split between multiple use management (25%), leadership for stewardship of rangeland resources (37%), and preserving the rangeland environment (24%). It is interesting to note that those responding to the latter category of preservation were predominantly wildlife students.

### Perceptions of the Term "Rangelands"

Participants in the survey were asked three questions related to the term "rangelands." The first two questions asked what animal and plant the term rangeland makes them think of first. Surprisingly, both members and non-members alike generally agree that the term rangelands conjures images of cows and grass (Figures 3 and 4). When asked which region in Texas (South, East, Hill

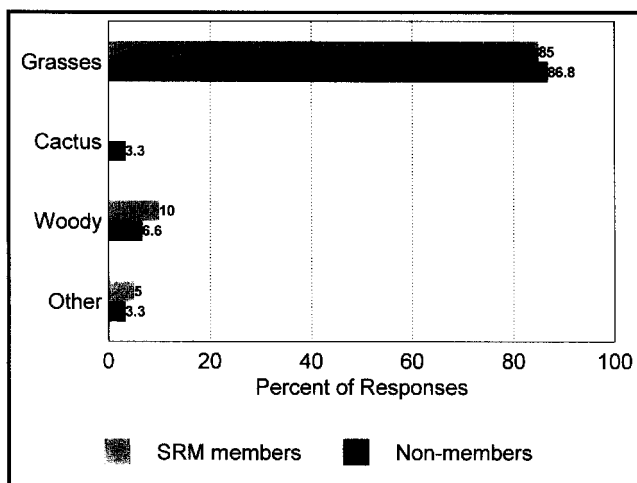


Fig. 4. When I say the term "rangeland", what plant do you think of first?

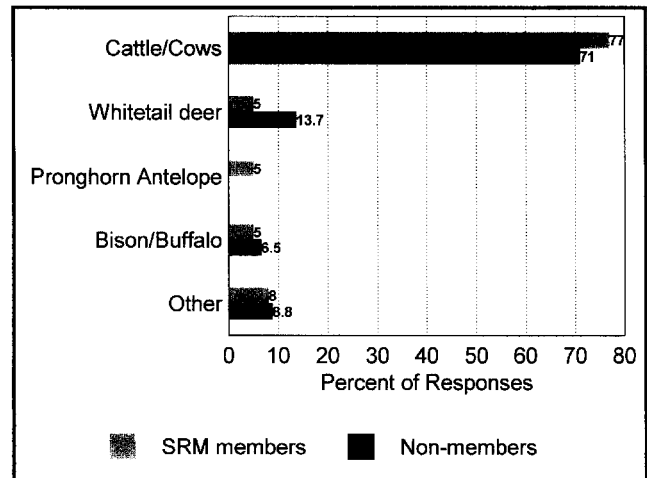


Fig. 3. When I say the term "rangeland", what animal do you think of first?

Country, West, Panhandle, and no particular region) best fits their perception of rangelands, members and non-member responses were fairly uniform (Figure 5). Thirty nine percent of members and 30% of non-members responded that no particular region fit their perception better than another, while 38% of non-members and 33% of members said West Texas best fit their description. It appears that to many of those responding to the survey, the wide-open expanses in West Texas typify rangelands.

### Perceptions of Rangeland Issues

The majority of members surveyed (54%) indicated that of the choices given (recreation, watershed, wildlife habitat, and livestock production), they considered livestock production as the most important use of Texas rangelands (Figure 6). While the majority of non-members agreed (48%), wildlife habitat was nearly as important (31% of respondents). When asked which of the follow-

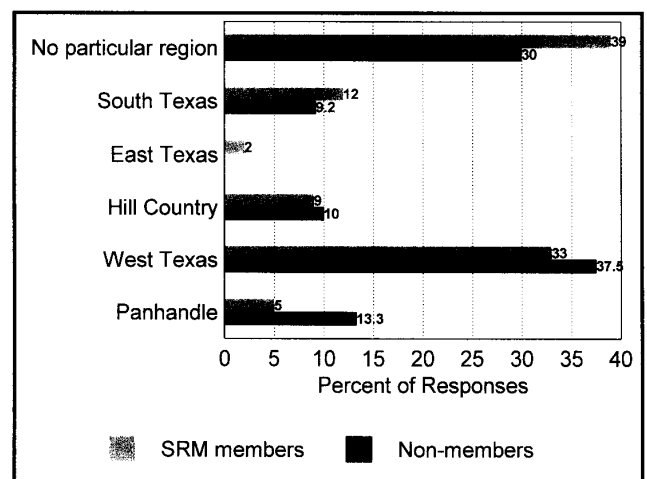


Fig. 5. When I say the term "rangeland", which of the following regions of Texas best fits your description?

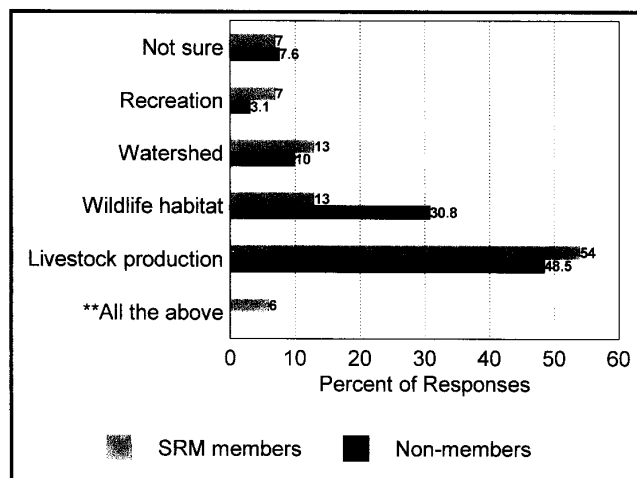


Fig. 6. Which of the following do you consider to be the most important use of Texas rangelands?

ing was the most important issue on Texas rangelands (water, soil erosion, property rights, impacts of livestock grazing, endangered species, brush control), impacts of livestock grazing was the most popular response by both members (32%) and non-members (32%) but responses were much more varied (Figure 7).

Two questions were asked about the health or condition of Texas rangelands. The first asked the respondent to rate the condition of Texas rangelands in 1998 (poor, fair, good, excellent) based on their perception of the term rangeland. The second question asked respondents to compare historic range conditions with conditions today; given the choices of about the same, worse today, and better today. Based on responses, 73% of members surveyed believe rangelands were in "fair" condition in 1998 (Figure 8) and 79% believe that conditions are

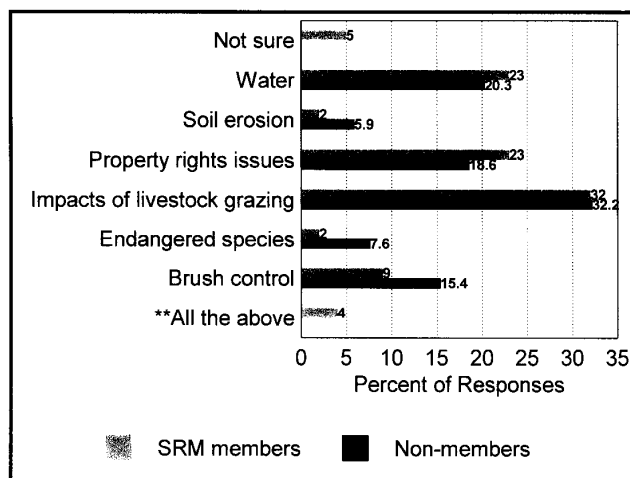


Fig. 7. Which of the following do you consider to be the most important issue on Texas rangelands today?

worse today than historical (e.g. before statehood) (Figure 9). Not surprisingly, non-members agree although the percentages are somewhat different.

## Summary

While about half of the non-members surveyed had heard of the Society for Range Management, the majority were not aware of our mission.

The term "rangeland" conjures images of cows and grass in an overwhelming majority of surveyed members and non-members.

Livestock production received the greatest number of responses as the most important *USE* of Texas rangelands by both members and non-members surveyed.

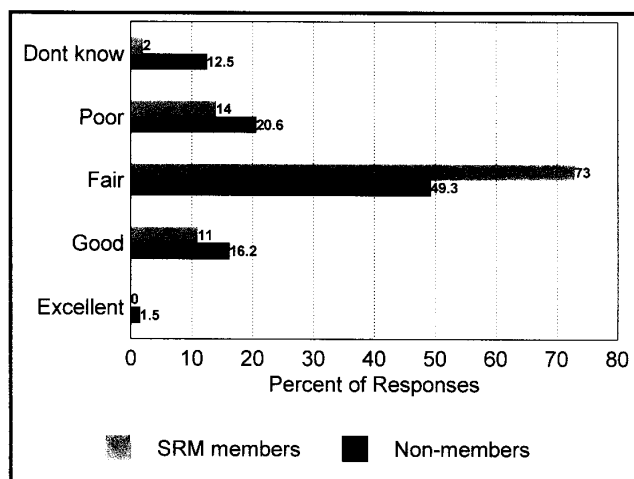


Fig. 8 Based on your own perception of the term "rangeland", how would you rate the "health" or "condition" of Texas rangelands in 1998?

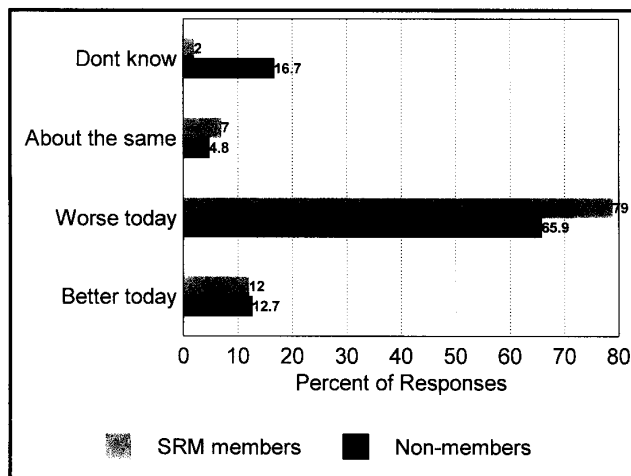


Fig. 9. Based on your perception of "historic" range conditions (e.g. before statehood), how would today's range condition compare?

Impacts of livestock grazing received the greatest number of responses as the most important *ISSUE* on Texas rangelands by both members and non-members surveyed.

The majority of both members and non-members surveyed, rate current condition of Texas rangelands as "Fair" and comparatively worse than historical conditions.

### So What's in a Name?

If your image of the Trail Boss and SRM is one of "cows and grass" then that appears to be consistent with the way that the Texans surveyed perceive rangelands. Yep, listen to the children while they play...now it ain't funny what the children say...skip a rope.

Authors are assistant professor and extension range specialist and professor and extension wildlife specialist, Texas Agriculture Extension Service, the Texas A&M University System.

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- Reclamation  
Grasses



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