

A Viewpoint: Changing Headstyles under Range-Landscapes (or Rethinking Range Management—A Thought Provoking Challenge)

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I recognize that the ensuing mental exercise may not bring perfect peace of mind to every reader. It is not intended to heap guilt or self-condemnation upon any of us in the range profession for our past efforts or accomplishments. Range management is a relatively young profession, although a very old occupation. In the recent past era of range management we did things in good faith, well intentioned, as we were taught, and according to what we thought was the best available technology at the time.

It is now time to evaluate, after 40 years, our net lasting impact on the land, on the economy, and on the mind-set of our practicing professionals. If only this article will cause us to stop and think about what we have been doing in range management and ask ourselves the question "Shall we continue along this collision course with ecological dismemberment, environmental desertification, economic disaster, and educational distraction?" If I hear a resonant "No!" then the door is open to a new era of thought processes, reinterpretation of the range ecosystem, and cause-and-effect reasoning.

During the course of this article I will share with you some of the quotations and experiences which stimulated it and pose some questions which each of us must answer to our own satisfaction as professionals.

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An anonymous past definition of a three-time-loser was "a pregnant prostitute driving an Edsel convertible with a Nixon-Lodge bumper sticker." We cannot help but wonder if the modern day version of this will be "a rancher who applies conventional 'range management' practices which are ecologically, chronologically, and economically unsound." Or, could it be the range 'professional' who extends such practices to the rancher? Or, will it be all of us who depend on the land, plant, and water resources of this finite globe for food, fiber, clothing, and shelter who are the three-time losers?

One of the marks of a true professional is the willingness and ability to recognize past misinterpretation, correct the

falacious thought process, and proceed with the improved thought process. Can we possibly progress if we dogmatically hang on to technology which has repeatedly proven faulty and counter-productive, if not destructive?

I recall, as a beginning range practitioner, wondering why ranchers seemed to always place the salt blocks right next to the water points. Surely these experienced stockmen knew that ruminants licked salt, then grazed, then watered, in that order. So why not put the salt out with the available forage? Did they do it to spite the federal land managers who dictated they salt away from water? I thought to myself, "A lot of this petty bickering between public grazing land administrators and ranchers would be eliminated if they both could recall the words of William Shakespeare who said, "Man, proud man,/ Drest in a little brief authority,/ Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven/ As make the angels weep."

Finally when I could stand the suspense no longer, I was working with a rancher one day as he was replacing his salt blocks. The opportunity presented itself and I posed the question. Without saying a word he led me to the back of his pickup and pointed to a new salt block, still in its wrapper. I read from the label, "Place next to a plentiful supply of clean water." That unforgettable day taught me something. There is a true cause for every phenomenon and we as humans are quite capable of misinterpreting situations and believing popular answers that we can live with without undue criticism, or can find some feeble support for.

Years later I realized that ranchers and government had spent literally millions of dollars, on my advice, on physical, conventional "range improvement" practices but the range hadn't improved appreciably. "We've changed their capital investments and physical assets," I told my boss, "but their management hasn't progressed at a parallel rate." I became convinced that the answer was range rest, partly because that was the only practice which wasn't being applied extensively, so I wrote the following poem and published it in our agency newsletter:

The Alternative

Let us not rush to spray death to all brush
Nor should we push to unearth every bush
But rest pasture one, two, three, four or five
And help nature strive to grow grass that's alive.

(The author is presently serving as area range conservationist with the Albuquerque Area Office, Bureau of Indian Affairs. This article does not represent any official position of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, but is contributed by the author as a Society member of 25 years, and presently a professional affairs committee man in the International organization.)

Buoyed up with the conviction that periodic rest was the cure for range deterioration I sold grazing systems incorporating range rest to ranchers all over New Mexico. I was commended, awarded, and even prided myself in my contribution to range management in New Mexico. "The pathetic part of it is that frequently those who have the least justification for a feeling of achievement bolster up their egos by a show of tumult and conceit which is truly nauseating," said Dale Carnegie, so appropriately of my situation. Today, I wish I could buy all those grazing systems back, if anyone is still following them on their calendar. Oh, they improved the range some, I guess. I haven't had the opportunity to follow up on all of them. I told myself that at least they were better than the year-long continuous grazing which had been going on for so long. But they were not the correct solution—they did not stop the overgrazing! Those I followed up on revealed that the overgrazing and undergrazing were now confined to different areas of the ranch each growing season.

If the range management profession (science and art) is to progress rather than rest on the laurels of a self-satisfied status quo, then we as professionals must act on what we believe to be truth at all cost to our pride, vanity, reputation, or tradition. As new truths are revealed to us and we are appropriately enlightened with belief, then we should immediately begin to actively replace the old misconceptions with the new truth in planning, budgeting, making management decisions, investing, or implementing range management. We might say the medical profession is progressing. As managers of our own physical bodies most of us no longer submit to the knife and have our appendix removed unless we are convinced that this is the organ that is causing our body distress. In leaving it intact, we are believing that a functional appendix serves a purpose in being a part of our body. The same should be true of a tree or bush established on our grazing land.

Different segments of the range management profession serve in different roles in the transition of new truths from theory to application. When a new, different, unconventional or non-traditional concept, method, or theory of range management is espoused by an innovator and either applied or rejected by various practitioners, the range academic community should feel impelled to objectively investigate its merit and expose it for either truth or folly, (even if it did not originate in the academic community.) The economic segment should evaluate its cost effectiveness compared to other strategies of comparable effectiveness. The research segment should define its regime of applicability. If true, the extension segment should expedite its application and the educators should teach it. The literary segment should publish and broadcast it and the critics should either prove all the others daffy or hush up, swallow their pride, and become joiners.

What then is our problem in the Society for Range Management if we are not functioning as described? Because of my past susceptibility to fallacy I don't feel really comfortable with the role of exhorter but I tell you without reservation there are strongholds of pride within our profession and Society which must be cast down before we can progress.

James Harvey Robinson, in his enlightening book, *The Mind in the Making*, described us very well when he wrote:

We sometimes find ourselves changing our minds without any resistance or heavy emotion, but if we are told we are wrong, we resent the imputation and harden our hearts. We are incredibly heedless in the formation of our beliefs, but find ourselves filled with an illicit passion for them when anyone proposes to rob us of their companionship. It is obviously not the ideas themselves that are dear to us, but our self esteem which is threatened . . . the little word 'my' is the most important one in human affairs, and properly to reckon with

it is the beginning of wisdom. It has the same force whether it is 'my' dinner, 'my' dog, and 'my' house, or 'my' father, 'my' country, and 'my' God. We not only resent the imputation that our watch is wrong, or our car shabby, but that our conception of the canals of Mars, of the pronunciation of 'Epictetus,' of the medicinal value of salicin, or the date of Sargon I is subject to revision. We like to continue to believe what we have been accustomed to accept as true, and the resentment aroused when doubt is cast upon any of our assumptions leads us to seek every manner of excuse for clinging to it. The result is that most of our so-called reasoning consists in finding arguments for going on believing as we already do.

I have found this element, pride, to be as much or more prevalent in ranchers and the range profession than in perhaps any other segment of our society. We are so ready to say, "I built this spread with the sweat of my brow and hard working hands," or "I originated the concepts of take half and leave half and conservative year-long stocking," or, "I developed the three-herd, four pasture grazing system." Some of this pride might well be justified. Robert MacNamara indicated he would be proud if they named the conflict in Viet Nam the "MacNamara War." Will only the brevity of human life prevent similarly proud men from one day having to boast, "I destroyed that entire county with my persistent adherence to continual light stocking and the obedience of those who respected me and blindly followed my example?"

As I progressively became aware of "Holistic Resource Management" starting with the "Savory Grazing Method" as espoused by Allan Savory, it literally devastated me. I read in 1967 how backward our range management in the United States was because in Rhodesia they had acceptable grazing periods figured down to the day (not month or season!) and were moving the stock without use of a horse! Mentally I visualised our rough country New Mexico ranchers with large pastures who resisted even moving annually, gathering and moving their stock every few days and I laughed hysterically. I could see myself proposing such a thing to even my most progressive cooperators and shuddered. Why, they would tar and feather me and probably vaccinate me for a case of R.D.A. (Registered Dumb Ass).¹ The first time I heard Mr. Savory speak, in 1976, what I thought I heard assaulted my comfort zone as a sane, accepted range professional. It seemed to contradict my college education and that which my agency believed and extended. Still, his presentation struck me as truth. It seemed logical and persisted in my mind, continuing to disturb my "comfort zone." Why this reaction of mine to a different idea? Dale Carnegie, in his book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, put it so sharply and clearly when he said, "Few people are logical. Most of us are prejudiced and biased. Most of us are blighted with preconceived notions, with jealousy, with suspicion, fear, envy and pride. And most citizens don't want to change their minds about their religion or their haircut or communism or their favorite movie star."

With the seed of a question planted in my mind and my inherent natural curiosity I set out to observe the things on the range which Mr. Savory had talked about. I found them to be as he had described. I began to ask myself, "If we truly believe that a rough, broken soil surface with incorporated litter and mulch is conducive to an improved water cycle, better nutrient and mineral cycling, and consequently advancing succession and better energy capture and flow, why do we deliberately manage to achieve a capped or crusted soil surface on rangeland? If we really believe that large, herding herbivores are equipped with cloven hooves to collectively,

as a herd, chip and break the crusted soil surface which re-crusts after each precipitation event, why do we remove the very animals that can enhance their own habitat from the range during the rainy growing season, at the time when they are most needed? If we truly believe that brush infestations on natural grasslands are a symptom of a sick range caused by a combination of over-resting and over-grazing, why do we spend millions of dollars removing the symptom or destroying the evidence and millions more researching additional ways to treat a symptom of sick range rather than isolate and treat the cause?" Remember in the appendix analogy, the appendix is not the cause of appendicitis but merely the organ in which it is manifested. Appendicitis, or the rupture of the appendix is a symptom of an improper body function, likely improper eating or improper exercise, much like over-grazing and over-resting. If we truly believe that sparsely vegetated range is due to lack of germinating conditions and lack of animal impact rather than lack of seed, why do we spend millions of dollars developing and introducing successional unacceptable seed and do nothing to alter germinating conditions after initial planting? If we really believe that infestations of huge populations of rodents and noxious weeds and insects are characteristics of low successional range, why have we invested millions to remove the evidence and little or nothing to advance the succession? Why has the American ranching and range management profession rapidly become the most easily deceived group of people on the face of this earth? Are these not good questions? Do we truly believe these things? I do, and you are right to ask why.

The second time I went to hear Mr. Savory lecture, I made an honest effort to put aside my prejudices and biases and tried to permit myself to understand what his statements meant to him. That's right—to him, without interference from the barriers to understanding from my past brainwashings and pride, and without the instinctive tendency to throw up objections to things that were contradictory to past beliefs. In his book, *On Becoming a Person*, eminent psychologist Carl R. Rogers writes: "I have found it of enormous value when I can permit myself to understand the other person. The way in which I have worded this statement may seem strange to you. Is it necessary to permit oneself to understand another? I think it is. Our first reaction to most of the statements (which we hear from other people) is an evaluation or judgement, rather than an understanding of it. When someone expresses some feeling, attitude or believe, our tendency is almost immediately to feel 'that's right,' 'that's stupid,' 'that's abnormal,' 'that's unreasonable,' 'that's incorrect,' 'that's not nice!' Very rarely do we permit ourselves to

understand precisely what the meaning of the statement is to the other person."

Do we think we in range management know everything? Are we comfortable and secure in our understanding of the "whole" range ecosystem? I feel very fortunate to have had a similar experience to that of Ben Franklin. One day when he was a blundering youth, an old Quaker friend took him aside and lashed him with a few stinging truths, something like this, "Ben, you are impossible. Your opinions have a slap in them for everyone who differs with you. They have become so offensive that nobody cares for them. Your friends find they enjoy themselves better when you are not around. You know so much that no man can tell you anything. Indeed, no man is going to try, for the effort would lead only to discomfort and hard work. So you are not likely ever to know any more than you do now, which is very little."

Of course, in our zeal that accompanies the discovery of new truths, and in our impatience to share these truths with the rest of our profession, we must all, always be careful not to alienate those we care about the most. Should this article alienate rather than inspire any of its readers I shall be eternally remorseful.

Abraham Lincoln (in effect) said, "If a man's heart is rankling with discord and ill feeling toward you, you can't win him to your way of thinking with all the logic in Christendom. Scolding parents and domineering bosses and husbands and nagging wives ought to realize that people don't want to change their minds. They can't be forced or driven to agree with you or me. But they may possibly be led to, if we are gentle and friendly, ever so gentle and ever so friendly."

If you have read this far you have probably correctly concluded that my message is "Let's get informed and involved with 'Holistic Resource Management', the 'now era' in range management."² Yes, and I am also saying that if a greater breakthrough in understanding of rangelands ecosystems or a more effective management strategy ever evolves, I for one am truly looking forward to it. For now you can see why I feel that the "Headstyles" (some call it "mind set") underlying the range management profession must change before we can realize a lasting change in the "Hairstyle" or surface decoration of our range landscapes.

¹Ass is a dumb animal referred to frequently as such in the Bible.

²Holistic means management for the whole, in this case of resource management it means managing to maintain enduring long-term healthy balance between the *land* (and related dependent life), *economics*, and the *animals* (domestic livestock and wildlife).