

Women in Range Management: Is There a Difference?

Sherri Mauti

I just recently ran across a copy of the article I wrote for the *Western Horseman* magazine in 1979 while working on the Coronado National Forest. While reading through it, the thought came to mind that Danny Freeman had requested an article from me back then.

Since that article, I have worked on the Prescott National Forest and I am now working for the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Keams Canyon, Ariz., at the Hopi Agency. The duties have been varied but the fact that I'm female seems to make a difference each place. After having worked in three different areas and two agencies, I have determined that the basic on-the-ground range management is the same whether you are a male or female, only the initial approach to the individual rancher is different. The fundamentals of livestock movement, watering facilities, fence construction, reseeding, etc., will hold pretty well true across the board for anyone. We all have access to the same knowledge. Individual application varies because of the rancher, livestock type, terrain, and existing facilities. No problem, right? Wrong! On-the-ground acceptance by people can vary from immediate acceptance to absolute refusal to work with a "woman." Heaven forbid!

I was told once by a forest range staff officer that any time spent drinking coffee and visiting with a permittee/rancher was not wasted because you were building a working relationship with them. I still believe that is true.

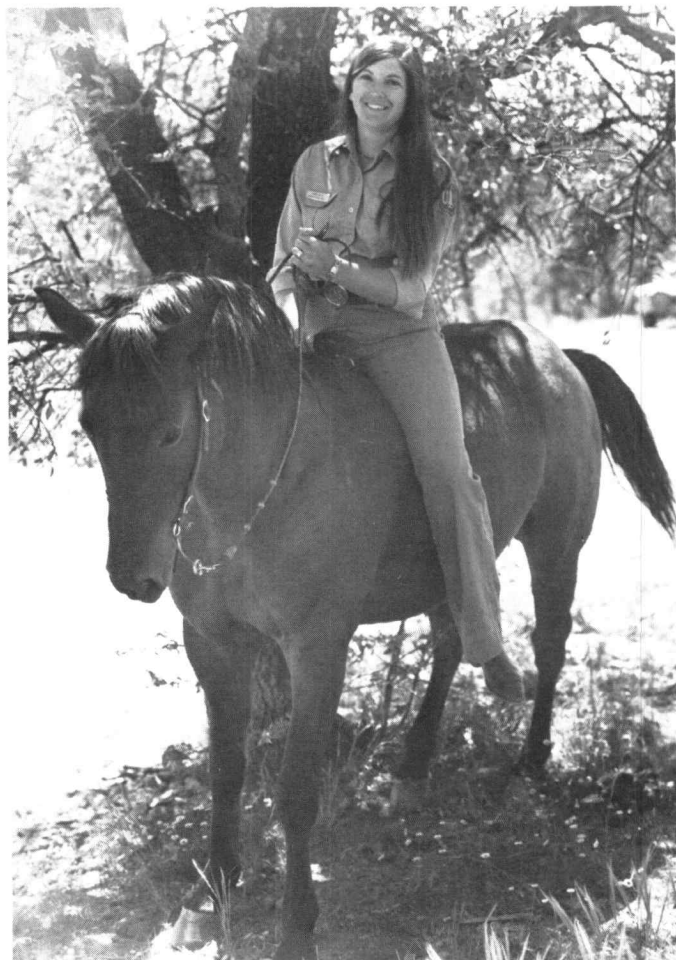
In one case, I was warned in detail about how very hard several ranchers were to get along with. Some, but very little, cooperation had been obtained by previous forest service personnel, usually under a threat of some kind. Acting on the advice I had received earlier, I went to their home to talk management plans, around their kitchen table. When they were on their "home ground" it was easier for them to relax and get down to management. They were not intimidated by an official office and the forbidding "desk." Besides, the office couldn't find me at a ranch. It was only a short time before they came to accept me and respect my judgements and opinions. Management with these people became much easier as time was spent with them on the ground and knowing them as living, breathing people who had separate personalities (no matter how crusty.) These people are rare treasures in my memories. They taught me a lot about people management, as well as land management.

Although during my tour with the Forest Service I had some trouble with acceptance by the ranchers, it was the

wives that were most suspicious of me. The woman calling "her" husband or spending several days on horseback wasn't usual and was not to be trusted. After a few visits to the home they decided I was "harmless."

Shortly after moving into a new area I remember calling a rancher one day and his wife answered the phone. After asking for him and failing to identify myself, there came the very cold question, "Who is this?" After a short time she got to know me and a lot of joking about early suspicions was tossed back and forth.

Nonacceptance of me, as a professional range conservationist is not limited to the ranchers. Many of the professional people I work with have a hard time believing I am "for real"



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About the Author: The author was raised on a ranch near Holbrook, Arizona. She graduated from Brigham Young University in 1974 with majors in botany and range management. Her first professional job as range conservationist was in 1975 on the Coronado National Forest in southern Arizona.

and that I can handle the job. Since the beginning, many have come to accept me, but there are a few who will go to their graves believing I will never be a real range conservationist because I can't grow a beard, won't chew tobacco, or drink Jack Daniels. But these doubters did one very important thing for me, they never allowed me to give up or believe I know everything. I kept going in spite of them and now I am in debt to them for that. I wouldn't have tried nearly as hard if they had been on my side. Thanks fellas, even if I wasn't too appreciative at the time.

As a woman, you will find a few ranchers who just can't stand to see a woman saddle her own horse. I remember one rancher whose headquarters were situated such that we always had lunch at the house. Horses were unsaddled at lunch to grab a bite and roll. It never failed that my horse was saddled for me when we got back to the barn. His reasoning? "My wife doesn't saddle her own horse, neither should you." That was his way of showing his acceptance of me as an equal.

I believe my greatest tribute of acceptance was from a third generation, opinionated rancher. After nearly two and a half years of work with him and countless saddle hours, he saddled my horse after a rest break. I can't remember just what he said when he did it, but again, it was his way of saying I was OK in his book. That day will always stand out in my mind as the actual complete acceptance into a very closed organization of special people.

As any range conservationist can tell you, there are always those ranches at which you can get lunch, and/or even supper if you time it right. I had several firsts at these meals,

including Rocky Mountain Oysters, but I would not trade dinner at the Hyatt Regency for a good ranch-style meal with real, genuine people. My favorite beverage was, and still is, fresh milk and it was usually abundant at the ranches. Since arriving at the Hopi Agency most of my range management experience has been jockeying paper and working on the problem-laden Hopi Partitioned Lands (HPL). This is part of the former Joint-Use Area that was awarded to the Hopi Tribe. The job entails coordinating the livestock use by the Navajos awaiting relocation, with law suits, court decrees, tribal wants, and the Code of Federal Regulations. Not exactly on-the-ground management, but it is still a very important part of any range management program.

I have been promised that field work is to come, (some-day). Maybe I can even do it on horseback if I can figure out some good reasons why I have to use horses. Actually I would use any excuse to indulge in my favorite pastime of horses, on official time.

The new and upcoming device in range/ranch management is the computer. Currently it does some of my paper-work, but it still has me very much intimidated. Maybe some day, I will get the best of it. A good course on "computer management" would be very helpful to anyone in range. One other thing about today's range management. If we could cut the phone cord, we would have more time to do our job.

I have and always will believe that women belong in range management and related fields. The only difference between male and female range conservationists is, and rightly should be, our approach to the subject and to people. ●

