



# Stewardship

Providing Leadership for the stewardship of rangelands based on sound ecological principles

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(Photo by Jim Thorpe)

## Inside this Issue

- 2 Paying it Forward with Fall Range Work
- 3 Amazing Grass
- 3 Monitor your Pastures Now For Better Grazing Next Year
- 5 Maximizing the Benefits of Being an SRM Member

## The Editor's Corner

Upon reflecting on the years since I first joined the Society for Range Management I find a continuing discussion of how to express the management of the world's natural resources. A part of the problem is that we, as individuals, each have our own ideas as to how to proceed. We do not all think alike (which is good), along with having different objectives of what we want. What makes us unique is that, despite our differences, we can sit down, have a discussion, and come to a consensus of how to proceed to insure that the natural resources will always be here for all to enjoy.

We have been doing this for over 40 years within SRM and I would not expect this approach to change. The Society has always served as a forum for these discussions. It is our strong point. **Stewardship** is a part of this forum where each individual can express his or her views. When you write an article on some aspect of management, then you are extending the ideas. We will never reach the final end.

Send me your story so we can continue to explore.

Thanks to **BEEF** magazine ([www.beefmagazine.com](http://www.beefmagazine.com)) for their contribution to this issue of **Stewardship**

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## Paying it Forward with Fall Range Work

By Jill Burkhardt, SRM Member and International Mountain Section President

What is on your fall To-Do list? Harvest? Second (or third) cut hay? Bringing cattle in from pasture? Preg checking cows? Fall is not when one would normally think about range management; yet, by doing a few simple measures of the rangeland in the fall, you can plan better for the coming spring.



This spring, before the cattle went on pasture, I placed a range cage — an instrument used to restrict access to cattle — in one of my less productive pastures. The cage I used was pyramidal, approximately 40 inches tall by 72 inches wide. The pasture I chose to monitor is particularly hilly with clay pan soils, has a history of heavy gopher population, and in the drought of 2002, was hit pretty hard. For these reasons, I felt this would be the best place to install the cage to see how much potential grass has to grow.

For this particular cage, I plan to keep it in the same location and use it as a monitoring spot. I also intend to clip the forage and rake litter from inside the cage and from a spot outside near the cage. From the clippings, I hope to identify how much the pasture is capable of producing under cattle exclusion conditions (inside the cage) and under grazing pressure; and the litter will give me a measure of what is left-over to provide mulch and bare ground cover.

Monitoring is a very simple task that anyone can do and, with smartphones, it is made even simpler. It involves going out to the same point every year — carefully noted or marked by GPS or flags — and taking a few photos, to immediately print, date and file in a binder with other range notes. On each pasture I take two photos: one directly of the ground and a second one of the general landscape. The spot you chose to monitor in each pasture should

be random, or as close to random as possible. In one of my pastures, my one monitoring spot is the 2nd hill from the internet tower; on another pasture, it's 20 paces south of the 13th post west of the water pen (very random). If you have an area of concern in your pasture, then do a separate monitoring point there as well. I have a few areas of heavy gopher use, and do separate photo monitoring points on those spots. Over time you can see changes in the pasture, both good and bad, that will help you determine your next years' grazing plan.

In the fall after the cattle make their last rotation through a pasture I like to walk through it, observe what I see, and take notes. This fall, I made some observations about the field with the range cage. For example, the south end of the pasture had more use (this is the part of the field closest to the water pen). I noticed the difference of the grass height on the inside of the cage versus the outside. When you place an object in the middle of a pasture the cattle are automatically drawn to it, or so it seems; use around the cage was a bit higher than the rest of the field. Finally, I noticed the north end of the field did not have a lot of use.

While assessing pasture conditions I also note any new weeds that have popped up over the summer. This helps plan for next year's weed control plan (spray, handpull, mow, etc). The notes I take on field use help me to get a mental picture of how the cows grazed the field, and if there is anything I can do next year to either decrease utilization in the heavier used areas, or increase utilization in the lighter used spots. I take into consideration current watering locations - both natural and troughs - to plan for pasture rotations into the coming year.

With everything on your fall "To-Do" list, fall range work may be just another task to some; but taking some time to do simple and quick fall range monitoring can pay off in next year's grazing season.



## Amazing Grass

*By Steve Nelle, SRM Life member, San Angelo, TX*

Amazing grass; how sweet to gaze on grama covered hills.  
Fattens cows and feeds the sheep; fodder rich and green.  
Hides the fawns and nests the fowl; sparrows eat the seed.

Amazing grass; how wonderful, that saves the soil and range.  
Mat of leaf and mesh of root, it covers and protects.  
Rain beats down; wind blows hard; grass holds the ground in place.

Amazing grass; protects the land; protects the waters too.  
Slows the rain; soaks it in, as it passes through the land.  
Springs, seeps, rivers and creeks; grass keeps them all sustained.

Rhizome, tiller, stolon and seed; it spreads; it covers the land.  
Fire wild and drought extreme; these it does endure.  
From soil to grass; and grass to soil; the circuit never ends.

Amazing grass, how marvelous; from sunlight and air to leaf.  
From leaf to rodent to snake to hawk, spinning the web of life.  
Amazing grass; enriches our lives; our souls and spirits too.

Grassmaker above, we give You thanks for the grass that You have made.  
Grant us wisdom, give us grace, to manage and conserve;  
To learn the language of the land; and listen as it speaks.

Hear our prayer, for humility, for skill, for excellence.  
Amazing grass; deserves our best; our finest stewardship.  
Care for it well, tenders of land, the grass is in our hands.

## Monitor Your Pastures Now For Better Grazing Next Year

[Burt Rutherford](#)

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**First frost is a good time to check pasture conditions. The weather is getting cooler. For some, it's getting downright frosty. And cattle are moving from summer pasture to their fall and winter homes. Now is a good time to check pasture condition as you look ahead to next year.**

Now is a good time to take a ride through your pastures as you plan for next spring. That's because first frost is one of the major trigger points in monitoring the condition and health of your pastures, says Tim Steffens, Texas AgriLife Extension Service rangeland specialist in Canyon, TX.

"If I'm not looking at enough for those cows to make it between now and when I expect green-up, it's time to make a decision and not wait until they run out of something to eat," he says.

**But what should you look for and what records should you keep?**

“One is rainfall,” he says, and not just for the benefit of the coffee shop crowd. Keep a running 12- month or growing season tally of how much fell, how hard it fell, and when it fell. That way, you have an idea of its effectiveness. “It’s not just the rainfall, but what’s my grass doing as a result,” he says.

“The other thing we can look at is manure,” he says. “After a while, you can pretty well gauge what the cattle are getting to eat by looking at the manure. If it’s lying flat and has a little divot in the middle, times are pretty fat. If that manure is piling up and has little wrinkles in the side, things aren’t so special right now.”

Then look at cow condition. But just like a line-up of yearling heifers paraded at the state fair, make sure you’re looking at the animal and not the hair. “A lot of people will talk about how grass is getting hard now and cattle are making gains in the fall,” Steffens says. “They’re not making great gains when that grass is starting to go dormant. They’re growing hair. Make sure you keep that in mind as you look at body condition.”

Then look closely at defoliation patterns. “When are they eating, where are they eating, how often are they defoliating it, how intensely are they defoliating it?” If you know that, you know which areas of the pasture are being used heavily and which aren’t being used at all and can adjust your stocking density and rotational grazing periods accordingly, he says.

#### **Related**

[Use the Grazing Response Index To Monitor Pasture Health](#)

[The Color of Grass](#)

There are several ways you can monitor range condition over time beside “cow pie-ology” and body condition scores. Nearly everybody carries a phone, he says. At the same time every year, and at the same place every time, take a picture. Print it, put a date on it and describe where it was. That allows you to look at how conditions are changing over time, he says, and if you need to adjust your management.

Another simple way to monitor grazing usage is an enclosure cages. “What’s inside the cage relative to the use outside the cage?”

With either pictures or enclosure cages, Steffens says you want to collect that data at critical times of the year. “If I’m continuously stocked, I want to do this periodically throughout the season. If I’m moving cattle from pasture to pasture, I want to do it when I leave.” If we don’t keep track of things, we start to think the way things are is the way they’ve always been, he says.

But remember there’s a big difference between data and information. “If you’ve got a bunch of numbers and all they do is sit in a file and you don’t use them to make management decisions, you’re wasting time.”

## MAXIMIZING THE BENEFITS OF BEING AN SRM MEMBER

Gary Frasier, Stewardship Editor

The Society for Range Management was established in 1948 to provide a forum for information exchange on the management of the Nation's rangelands. During the years since its establishment it has met this challenge with outstanding success. It has developed a scientifically sound knowledge base that is recognized around the world. Much of the information is presented in technical articles in its journals, Rangeland Ecology and Management (REM) and Rangelands.

Much of this information comes from the SRM members who are research scientists. Many of these members also present their newest information at the Society's Annual Meeting in the form of presentations at workshops and forums, or in poster sessions.



There is another group of members that have developed a knowledge base as important as the technical researchers. This group is made up of the on-the-ground ranchers and practitioners. To be successful in their operation they have to adapt and apply the technical information. There are many stories of the success of these users of the technical information. Many of these stories will be highlighted as a part of the Rancher's Forums and some poster sessions at the 68th Annual SRM

Meeting, Technical Training and Trade Show. The theme for this year's conference is "Managing Diversity" and it is taking place January 31 through February 6 in Sacramento, CA. Much of this information is only available to meeting attendees.

Attending an Annual Meeting is a means of obtaining the latest knowledge. It is also a place where you can pass on the knowledge you have. You never know, you may meet someone who has the answer to your problem; just as important, you may have an answer to problems others may have.

Becoming an SRM member and attending the SRM Annual Meeting may be the best investment you can make. Click here for information on this year's meeting, <http://www.rangelands.org/sacramento2015/index.html>.

We hope to see you in Sacramento!

