

Meeting Notes
Rangeland Assessment and Monitoring Committee
SRM 71st Annual Meeting – Sparks, Nevada
January 28, 2018

These notes were compiled by Lamar Smith and have not been reviewed by the committee.

Meeting called to order at 8:00 a.m. by Chairman Lamar Smith.

Introductions, announcements, review of agenda. There were 33 people who signed the roster for this meeting.

Report on Rangelands – Jason Karl, Editor

Jason Karl gave a report on Rangelands and urged RAM or any of its members, to submit articles for publication. Options are individual papers, an issue of individual papers on a specific topic, or an issue devoted to a symposium. He encouraged us to submit the paper on utilization.

Data Quality Issue

Smith reported that the joint meeting of RAM with the CPRM committee last year had resulted in a letter from SRM urging interest groups to support CPRM and also contacts and visits by SRM officers to government agencies and others on this topic. Therefore, it appears that, from the standpoint of qualifications for data collection and interpretation, that may be all that RAM needs to do on this topic at present. Most of the remaining agenda items deal with one aspect or another of data quality, however.

Technical Reference 1734-6 Rangeland Health – Mike Pellant

Mike reported that the revision of this reference will be completed later than anticipated and there is time for RAM input. A working draft will be used during the coming summer for field testing and Mike will make this draft available to RAM for comments. It will also be available online. It was suggested that RAM should consider not only the technical aspects of the reference but the appropriate uses for the process. The following subcommittee was appointed to take the lead on this effort on behalf of RAM: Jim O'Rourke (coordinator), Bret Olson, Scott Lusk, Quinton Barr, Ken Spaeth, Patti Novak, and Amanda Gearhart. Any committee member can submit comments and this subcommittee will attempt to organize and summarize those comments on behalf of RAM.

Revision of Technical Referent 1734-3 – Utilization and Residual Measurements

Sherm Karl (BLM) initiated an effort to revise this publication and asked RAM to assist in the effort at the meeting in St. George. Sherm was unable to attend today's meeting and Alan Bass represented him. Due to press of other commitments not much has been done by BLM so far. However, Smith reported that he had gotten several university extension people to start making suggested changes on the

document and this work is underway. (extension was one of the original cooperators on the reference.) RAM will be kept up to date and may, at a later date, want to review the revision.

RAM Paper on Utilization for Rangelands

A suggestion that RAM write a paper outlining generally accepted guidelines for use and interpretation of utilization and residual measurements in management planning and decision making was suggested during the past year, with favorable response. Smith wrote a rough draft of the paper and distributed it to RAM in December, 2017. At this meeting (2018) the members and participants were asked if they agreed that RAM should write such a paper. Some discussion ensued about the purpose of the paper. The general view was that this paper would basically be an explanation for the SRM's position statement on the subject, and rather than represent any one individual or group, would represent the profession's viewpoint. All present were supportive of the effort. A list of 8 major points made in the draft paper was distributed and each was discussed briefly to see if there was general agreement, or whether some points should be dropped or added. The list is as follows:

1. Use of utilization
 - a. Residual measurements and utilization data can be used: (1) to identify use patterns, (2) to help establish cause-and-effect interpretations of range trend data, and (3) to aid in adjusting stocking rates when combined with other monitoring data" (BLM 1999).
 - b. Should not be used for management objective or standards to be met; as automatic triggers to move or remove livestock; without documenting how, when, where measured.
2. Accuracy and precision is usually low.
3. Different methods give different results – hard to compare.
4. Season of measurement is important to interpretation – must be considered
5. Utilization/stubble height guidelines not meant to be met every year- decisions should be over a period of years and take into account weather, etc.
6. Utilization triggers for moving livestock not consistent with coordinated management.
7. Utilization guidelines based on research that may only have general relevance to specific situations.
8. Interpretation of utilization and residual data must have demonstrated relevance to management decisions.

There was agreement on each of the general statements above. It was suggested that discussion of sample size be included and this will be added into #2 above.

Following this meeting, every RAM member or participant is asked to suggest whatever editorial changes they think appropriate and submit to Smith. He will attempt to incorporate these into a second draft and subsequent drafts if necessary. The goal is to get this done soon.

There was considerable discussion and some differences of opinion on whether a short paper, similar to the draft, contained sufficient discussion of each point. The final consensus was to keep the initial paper fairly short but include some additional explanation. Another idea, which was received favorably, was to consider this the first in a series of papers – the following papers to be examples or case studies illustrating in specific terms the validity of one or more of the main points above. Judith Dyess and Amanda Gearhart volunteered to come up with an outline of possible followup papers. One advantage to this approach would be to keep attention on the topic over a period of time. Need for funding for page charges for these followup papers was mentioned.

Rangeland Health

Amanda Gearhart (BLM) discussed problems she has encountered in rating range health on small springs and seeps, which don't qualify as "riparian" and also do not fit well with upland ecological sites. The issues of water quality standards being lacking or inappropriate in some cases was also raised. There was discussion, but no action recommended.

Ken Spaeth (NRCS) reported on some problems he is encountering in assessing range health as part of NRI. Over 85% of ecological sites in the northern plains are invaded to some degree by Kentucky bluegrass and brome grass, but the biotic integrity rating does not seem to adequately account for this. There was discussion on this topic, including some discussion about the role of range health assessment in the NRI. However, no further action was indicated.

Due to time limitations, some of the additional issues with respect to range health and standards of rangeland health could not be addressed at this meeting.

Litter and Ground Cover Definitions

In about May, 2017, Gene Fults (NRCS) asked RAM to review the definition of litter in the SRM glossary and described concerns he had about the existing definition. This was done (via email) and in the process several other glossary definitions for plant and ground cover attributes were included and some suggested changes made. The intent was to reach consensus on needed changes and submit them to the BOD for inclusion in the glossary when and if a revision were done. There was apparent consensus on all but two terms: litter and ground cover. RAM spent approximately one hour discussing these terms, most of it on litter, and failed to reach a consensus. A straw vote whether to change the SRM definition of litter did not show a clear pro or con. Therefore, no action was taken with respect to recommendations to the BOD and the issue will remain on the agenda during the coming year.

Adjourned at about 1:15