

Meeting Notes

Rangeland Assessment and Monitoring Committee

February 10, 2019

Minneapolis, Minnesota

These notes were compiled by Lamar Smith and Bret Olson and have not been reviewed by the Committee.

Meeting was called to order at 8:00 am in Room M100E, Minneapolis Convention Center.

Jason Karl – Editor of Rangelands

Before starting on agenda items Jason Karl made a short presentation to the group. He commended RAM for their contributions to Rangelands over the past two years and said he thought it would be good for other committees to follow this example. He urged the committee to submit more articles and to consider submitting papers for a special issue, perhaps based on a symposium, or to secure funding for a sponsored issue on some topic.

Introductions and Agenda

Each member introduced themselves. The Chairman (Lamar Smith) explained the membership structure of RAM and determined that there was a quorum (at least 5 appointed members plus either Chair or Vice Chair) present if a vote were needed. He reported that Bret Olson (Vice Chairman) would assume the Chair at the end of this meeting and he would become Vice Chair.

Barry Perryman (Board Representative) encouraged the committee to submit articles for Rangelands, e.g., utilization of annual grasses. We briefly discussed the idea of a sponsored or special edition of articles for Rangelands related to assessment or monitoring.

Nevada Rangeland Monitoring Handbook -3rd Edition

Sherm Swanson reported on the contents of the recently revised Nevada Handbook (2017, 3rd edition). The handbook was originally published in 1984, and was revised in 2006. This publication has been a standard reference used in Nevada and elsewhere by all agencies. Sherm pointed out that the issues have changed since 1984, when overgrazing was assumed to be the principal issue, and this has changed the emphasis of the handbook to emphasize management, including grazing use records and the Grazing Response Index, and interpretation of trends.

LandPKS Phone App

Jeff Herrick described the updated LandPKS app developed by ARS. This app is designed to allow almost anyone to access resource information on soils, ecological sites, and other info. The information is compatible with the AIM data system, but not a substitute for it. It has been tested and used in many locations around the world and is available in English and Spanish versions, with other languages planned.

Proposed Letter from SRM on ESDs, Soil Surveys

Lamar Smith had composed a draft letter on this topic based on his interaction with NRCS personnel and consulting experience. The letter addressed 3 main topics: 1. Need for increased support for continued development of ESDs and completing and/or updating soil surveys, 2. Concern that experienced on-the-ground professionals who are necessary to develop such ESDs are becoming increasingly rare in the agencies, and 3. Need to extend the soil survey information available on data bases (e.g. WSS) to Forest Service land. The letter had been sent out to the committee several weeks prior to the meeting. There was general support for the content of the letter but some felt that it could be re worked to make it more effective before presenting to the appropriate entities. Therefore, a subcommittee was formed to accomplish this task and do so before the SRM BOD makes their annual trek to Washington DC to meet with agency officials. This subcommittee was tasked with developing a plan of action for the BOD to take to take to DC. These tasks would include the quality of data (personnel – numbers and experience), the structure of data (linking plant and soil information accurately), and delivery systems. The subcommittee is composed of Mike Hannemann (USFS), Ken Spaeth (NRCS), Alan Bass (BLM), and Sarah McCord (ARS). Chairman Bret Olson will coordinate this subcommittee.

Revision of Tech Ref 1734-6 – Rangeland Health

RAM was asked to review the draft of Version 5 of this tech ref some time ago. At the 2018 meeting a subcommittee composed of Jim O'Rourke (chairman), Ken Spaeth, Quinton Barr, Amanda Gearhart, Scott Lusk, Bret Olson and Patti Novak was formed to make this review for RAM. Jim O'Rourke summarized some of the comments made by various RAM members and Mike Pellant summarized how those comments were resolved. Of the 250 comments received, 70 were from RAM, and Mike indicated they were very helpful and probably the most difficult to deal with. He had sent out a tabulation of the comments and how they were resolved, but this version did not include all the comments yet. That information will be made available and RAM may get another chance to offer some additional comments before publication. There was good discussion on various issues. As a result of this discussion, a symposium was suggested to present different points of view on proper and improper uses of the tech reference, especially in relation to BLM's standards of rangeland health, which could be the basis for a special or sponsored issue of Rangelands based on them.

Suggested Revision of Terms Relating to Cover and Litter

Smith had sent out a "final" draft of the proposed definitions based on deliberations of the committee which started in about June 2017 in response to issues raised by Gene Fults. The committee basically agreed with the definitions proposed in this draft. Jim Sprinkle made a motion that the document be accepted, and it was seconded by the Chairman. However, there was discussion that there needed to be more explicit language inserted on some definitions, especially litter, bare ground and bare soil, to explain that the definitions as written are general concepts and that they may be modified for specific uses or specific agency requirements so long as those modifications are documented. Suggested explanatory statements will be solicited with the hope that this matter can be resolved soon and a recommendation for amending the SRM Glossary to incorporate them be sent to the BOD.

Revisions of Technical Reference 1734-3 Utilization and Residual Measurements

Proposed revision of this tech ref was instigated by Sherm Karl (BLM) prior to the 2017 meeting. He suggested that RAM take an active role in it. In 2018, Smith contacted George Ruyle (AZ), Sherm Swanson (NV) and Mike Bormann (OR), all university extension specialists and asked them to help develop suggested revisions from extension, which was part of the original interagency group. These initial suggested revisions were circulated to the RAM committee prior to this meeting. Sherm Karl could not be present at this meeting, but he had indicated that he had not had time to make much progress with the project among the agencies. Mike Hannemann (USFS) said he felt the FS would definitely favor a revision, but it would require that someone be relieved of other responsibilities and charged with that task. It is likely the same applies to both NRCS and BLM. Therefore, two lines of action on RAM's part were decided. First, a subcommittee was formed to continue to work on suggested revisions for the reference based on the initial proposals by the extension group. The subcommittee would also develop a letter to the 3 agency chiefs which could be used by the SRM officers to propose that adequate time and support from these agencies (again, via the SRM board/officers trip to DC) be provided to finish the task. The subcommittee members appointed were: Judith Dyess, Amanda Gearhart, Patti Novak, Sherm Karl (or someone he will designate), and Lamar Smith. Bret Olson will coordinate efforts of this subcommittee.

Communicating Range Science

Amanda Gearhart and Sarah Mc Cord raised the issue that range professionals do not do a very good job of getting to the general public with information that can explain the scientific basis of many range management practices, and why they are ecologically sound and needed for sustainable use. Note, this is not just a RAM issue. Much discussion followed. A major point raised was that we (our professional society) are usually reactive rather than proactive. We may use language and/or structure our arguments like scientists but that may not be most effective way to reach the public. For example, some interest groups, via social media, will encourage negative discussion regarding rangeland-related issues, e.g., wild horse and burro, which should be countered with prepared positive, educational SRM spots quickly via web algorithms soon after it goes public. This is an SRM-wide topic. Shortly after our meeting, we contacted the SRM outreach representative and will bring it up at the public policy committee later this week. This will be an ongoing issue for the coming year.

Appointments to Fill Expiring Committee Slots

Smith reported that the 2nd VP was supposed to have appointed 3 new or returning members to fill the positions of the 3 members whose terms expire at the end of this meeting: Judith Dyess, Jim Sprinkle, and Amanda Gearhart. He had recommended that these 3 might be re-appointed if they were interested and also recommended several others who would be good candidates. All of those whose terms are expiring have indicated that they were willing serve another 3-year term. Based on this, Smith re-appointed all 3 to the committee as regular voting members and will notify the 2nd VP of this action.

Smith turned over the Chairmanship to Bret Olson, who made a few remarks and adjourned the meeting at about 12:00 pm.