



Winter 1985

## Developing Strategies for Rangeland Management: A Report Prepared by the Committee on Developing Strategies for Rangeland Management, National Research Council

Marion Clawson

### Recommended Citation

Marion Clawson, *Developing Strategies for Rangeland Management: A Report Prepared by the Committee on Developing Strategies for Rangeland Management, National Research Council*, 25 NAT. RES. J. 260 (1985).

Available at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nrj/vol25/iss1/17>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Law Journals at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Natural Resources Journal by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [disc@unm.edu](mailto:disc@unm.edu).

# DEVELOPING STRATEGIES FOR RANGELAND MANAGEMENT: A REPORT PREPARED BY THE COMMITTEE ON DEVELOPING STRATEGIES FOR RANGELAND MANAGEMENT

NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL/  
NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES.

Boulder: Westview Press. 1984. Pp. 2,022. \$55.

In 1980 the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) asked the National Research Council to examine the scientific and methodological issues that arise from the Bureau's role of stewardship of the public rangelands. In accordance with its customary practice, the Council established a special study committee, chaired by B. Delworth Gardner of the University of California at Davis. The Committee consisted of 14 persons, mostly university staff persons, with a few other professionals from other public agencies. No users of any kind of land use were on the committee. The study was funded by BLM; begun during the Carter administration, it was ended in the Reagan administration.

During the period from November 1980 to September 1981 a series of six workshops were held, at which a number of persons presented professional papers. This book is the result. The book is published more than three years after the last workshop and actual release of the book is a year later than the publisher had originally announced. The book is organized into six sections, each reporting on one workshop; each section is summarized by a team varying in number from one to four; each section has from 10 to 17 papers (including discussions); and it is evident from the summaries and some of the papers that additional papers had been presented at some of the workshops but are not included in the book. If 20/20 is perfect vision, then this massive book achieves it, with two pages to spare.

It is impossible in a review to summarize or comment upon each part of this very lengthy book. I take up each of the sections, corresponding to each of the workshops, and briefly describe it, with a very few quotes to give a flavor but by no means to capture the full content of each section. Then I offer a few judgments about the book, to complete this review.

Section 1, "Forage Allocation on Arid and Semiarid Grazing Lands," has 570 pages—the longest section of the book, with 13 papers or prepared discussions. The "allocation" does not deal, as perhaps one would expect, with allocation of range forage among competing ranchers or others. Rather, it is ecological and range management in its orientation, and for the most part is applicable to rangelands of any ownership, not specifically

to the problems of BLM. The papers tend to be detailed, mathematical, and deductive. Some flavor of the section may be captured in this brief quote from page 459: "Presently, several methods are available to estimate the botanical composition of range herbivore diets. All have the disadvantage of being either inaccurate, expensive, time consuming, lacking in precision or any combination of these four factors."

Section 2, "Inventory of Rangeland Resources," has the largest number of papers (17) but is only 306 pages in length. While many of the papers are general in the sense they apply about equally to rangelands of any ownership, some of the papers are quite specific to BLM and the summary is very much so. The summary is rather critical of BLM but I had the feeling it was intended to be friendly to BLM.

Section 3 is "Impacts of Grazing Intensity and Specialized Grazing Systems on the Use and Value of Rangeland." Its subject matter is well described by the title. Much, perhaps all, of it is relevant to BLM but much is equally applicable to other rangelands. Some flavor of the section may be captured by two brief quotes: "The one certainty is that there is no single grazing system that will improve rangeland everywhere" (p. 867); and "Existing studies show no hydrologic advantage to grazing a watershed lightly rather than moderately" (p. 927). Section 4 is "Manipulative Range Improvements," the shortest in the book. Much of this section is equally applicable to all rangelands but some is explicit to BLM. One optimistic note is in a quote of page 1421: "the ranges of North America are in the best condition of this century."

Section 5 is "Applying Socioeconomic Techniques to Range Management Decision Making," and here is where the economists had their field day. This section is more a matter of major paper and prepared discussion of it, in the economics tradition, than are the preceding sections. This section is much more explicitly directed toward BLM than perhaps any of the earlier sections, though much of it is applicable to rangeland in other ownerships. Perhaps because it is written by economists, there is more open disagreement among authors in Section 5 than in any preceding section. Gardner, for instance, discusses at some length the differences between economic efficiency and economic equity; Bromley disagrees almost wholly: "a lot less of the tired distinction between efficiency and equity" (p. 1474). The summary of this section had said (p. 1434): "Multiple use management should be based on solid empirical analyses that attempt to quantify costs and benefits of the products produced on public lands."

Section 6, "Legal and Political Aspects of Range Management," is very much directed to BLM although it does draw to some extent on Forest Service experiences. There is strong emphasis on planning, public involvement, and the courts. There is perhaps more divergence, if not

conflict, among authors in this section than in any other. A few quotes: "The scientific community has not yet reached, and probably will not, a consensus about what constitutes the best or even acceptable data collection and analysis technique" (p. 1708); "MIS cannot 'rationalize' decisionmaking in agencies like BLM because the real problems are not scientific data problems, but choices among competing values" (p. 1785); "To lawyers, it is easy to think of solutions to problems in terms of new laws and judicial decisions" (p. 1988); "We have had multiple use management in name for nearly fifty years; I believe we are on the threshold of achieving multiple use management in fact" (p. 1993); and "But without private ownership, it is unlikely that any revolution in land use will ever be forthcoming" (p. 2018). I should add that I doubt seriously that all the contributors to this section will agree with that last statement.

This book is a treasure house of professional and scientific information. Many of the best people in the field have contributed to it. There are many excellent summaries of literature and many excellent bibliographical accounts. But I am greatly disappointed in it.

Strictly as a publishing venture, it has serious shortcomings: it is far too long for a "book," yet not quite an encyclopedia, though it has some characteristics of one. There are summaries of each section but no overall summary or synthesis of the book. The chairman of the committee says "Unexpected changes in funding caused premature termination of the study, and the committee was unable to complete its planned integration of the numerous issues raised by the workshops." (p. xvi). There is no index—a grievous shortcoming in any book but especially in one as long as this. The paper is thin, making the pages hard to separate and turn, and the type is set very closely. The papers (apparently as typed by authors and then photocopied) have somewhat variable typing and the identification of the authors is variable. There is no consolidated bibliography. There is much repetition—the history of grazing in the West must be recounted more than a dozen times; this is perhaps inevitable in a study organized and published as this one is. There are many divergences, not to say outright conflicts, among the authors, which are partly, but only partly resolved in the section summaries.

As to the content of the book, I have some reactions which may appear as criticisms to some, and as admirable to others. The papers are by professionals from various fields—range management, wildlife management, ecology, hydrology, economics, law, political science, and others. There is, as far as I could discern, but one published paper by anyone from the conservation/preservation community, and none from any commodity user of the public rangelands. There is substantial divergence of belief on purely technical issues and much more divergence on matters

of management and policy. The numerous recommendations may be “good” in some sense of that word but few if any of the authors have participated in actual public land administration and none of them have either the opportunity or the responsibility to put their ideas into practice, and to live with the results.

Marion Clawson  
Senior Fellow Emeritus  
Resources for the Future