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A Brief History of How the Society for Range Management was Founded

Larry D. Howery

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF HOW THE SOCIETY FOR RANGE MANAGEMENT WAS FOUNDED

By Larry D. Howery

The 1930s was a time of tremendous economic and ecologic strife in the United States. John Steinbeck wrote about this tumultuous period in American history in his Pulitzer Prize winning book, *The Grapes of Wrath*, which provided a fictional account of the misery that the 'Joad' family endured during the Great Depression and Dust Bowl Days (Figure 1).

The urgent need for rangeland conservation was no fictional matter, however, as the Taylor Grazing Act was passed in 1934, and several new governmental organizations were created from New Deal legislation in response to the dire problems of the decade. It was also during the 1930's when rangeland professionals initiated discussions about the need for a new scientific professional society that would be devoted to the conservation and management of rangelands.¹ However, these discussions were mostly curtailed when the U.S. became heavily engaged in WWII.

Interagency Range Management Conference

When WWII ended in 1945, discussions of forming a new range society resumed and quickly regained their pre-war momentum. In March of 1946, 66 range professionals representing five colleges and various state and federal agencies met in Moscow, Idaho for what was called the 'Interagency Range Management Conference' (IRMC). A panel discussion was held as part of the IRMC agenda which was titled, 'The Need of a Range Management Organization.' Members of the panel included Charles A. Fite, Gene F. Payne, Joseph F. Pechanec, Vernon A. Young, and Harold F. Heady who was the designated panel leader (Figure 2).

The IRMC, and the panel discussion in particular, were not without controversy. A rather heated debate developed from the floor and it became clear that participants were divided about the direction that should be taken to form a new professional organization dedicated to rangeland science and management. After considerable deliberation no decision was reached but a motion was passed to appoint an Executive Committee (EC) that was charged to further study the issue. The EC was co-chaired by Harold Heady and Joseph Pechanec (Figure 3).

Survey

By August of 1946, the EC had decided that a survey would be the best instrument to further gauge interest in forming a new professional range society. The EC developed and mailed a survey to over 800 individuals who were known to have an interest in rangeland issues. Included with the survey was a mimeographed copy of the nearly verbatim minutes of the IRMC panel discussion that had taken place five months before.

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