

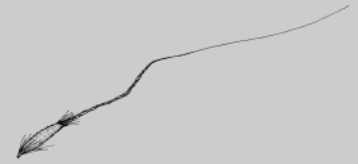


# Needlegrass Notes

Volume 57:1

Spring 2011

Society for Range Management  
California-Pacific Section



Susan Edinger Marshall

## President's Message



Greetings from Humboldt State University. I'm Susan Edinger Marshall, your Cal-Pac President for 2010-2011. I'm in a figurative dust devil up here. (Too rainy for the real thing, but I actually miss dust devils in the Mojave Desert.) My personal whirlwind may be like yours; family, work, and professional responsibilities competing for my attention at a dizzying pace. This article will attempt to stop the whirlwind for a moment to list some of the positive and challenging issues and events facing our Cal-Pac Section of the Society for Range Management.

**First**, I hope you'll join us at the Cal-Pac Spring Meeting and Tour at Fort Tejon, April 18-19, 2011. We doff our hats to Jim Sullins and others for developing a very interesting program about conservation partnerships. **Secondly**, SRM has approved and is gearing up for the 2015 SRM annual meetings to be hosted by Cal-Pac in Sacramento. **Thirdly**, I will work with Larry Forero (incoming Cal-Pac President) to draft proposed updates and changes to our Cal-Pac Strategic plan, devised under Dan Macon's leadership in 2004 (accessible on p. 44 Appendix B of our handbook at: [http://casrm.rangelands.org/Assets/CalPac\\_Handbook.pdf](http://casrm.rangelands.org/Assets/CalPac_Handbook.pdf)). We invite interested members to help us critique and inventory this important document. What have we accomplished in terms of goals and actions? What do we want to keep and what do we want to keep working on? The **fourth** topic we need to address this year dovetails with Goal 4 "Improve public policy decisions by educating policy makers and addressing issues critical to accomplishing the vision of Cal-Pac SRM." Rangeland professionals and especially Certified Rangeland Managers (CRMs) need to review key environmental documents for rangelands, especially when inadequate expertise was involved in the writing of these documents. We need to continuously point out that rangeland managers have unique skills sets for evaluating and solving problems on rangelands compared to other professions. (Thanks to Sheila Barry for this topic.)

**Fifth**, my own whirlwind demands support and growth in range management education. In the Fall of 2010, seven member universities of the Range Science Education Council received nearly \$500,000 from a USDA Higher Education Challenge grant titled "Repositioning Rangeland Education for a Changing World." We have already finished a survey of undergraduate range and natural resources students to inform future student recruitment efforts. Mel George is deeply involved in creating Virtual Ecosystem Exploration units this summer for undergraduate range education. **Sixth**, if you know any former Humboldt State students who are not active SRM members yet, warn them that they will be personally invited to join this year. I may even attach a \$5 to my 'engraved invitation' to get them involved. What will you do to bolster membership?

**Seventh**, we all need to track what is happening with potential statewide Grazing/Water Quality regulations in California. Thanks to Marc Horney for sending out excellent Range Management Advisory Committee meeting notes to the Cal-Pac SRM listserve from the March 17th meeting. Finally, we need to continue to treasure and digitally archive our section's historical documents. Thanks to John Stechman for his long years of service as Historian and to Jim Clawson for reminding me about this at the Lava Beds meeting. We have lots to look forward to this year. I have a great job at HSU that allows me summers to work on my own projects, so watch for more activity on the 8 items I have outlined above. Please write to me at [sem11@humboldt.edu](mailto:sem11@humboldt.edu) if I have omitted something important for our Cal-Pac section to address or if you want to contribute to any of the above items. The wind just picked up again, so I better get back to my whirlwind of making dinner, grading papers, writing reports, etc.

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## **Ecology and Management of Grazing: An Online Course**

The California Rangeland Research and Information Center at UC Davis ([http://californiarangeland.ucdavis.edu/index\\_new.htm](http://californiarangeland.ucdavis.edu/index_new.htm)) is now offering all four modules of its online science-based course entitled the "Ecology and Management of Grazing." This online course is organized in four modules that can be taken separately or in sequential order. The modules are:

1. Introduction to Ecology and Grazing
2. Foraging Behavior and Livestock Distribution
3. Forage Quality and Grazing Animal Nutrition
4. Ranching and Grazing Systems

Each module is introduced by a documentary quality high definition video followed by a series of narrated PowerPoint presentations. There are reading assignments and practical exercises. Each module is self-paced and will take 10 to 20 hours to complete. Outlines for each module can be accessed via the online course registration page: [http://californiarangeland.ucdavis.edu/Grazing%20Management/online\\_course.htm](http://californiarangeland.ucdavis.edu/Grazing%20Management/online_course.htm).

Course registration fees are \$200 per module or \$600 for all four modules. Registration fees can be reduced for groups of more than 10 people. Contact Mel George ([mrgeorge@ucdavis.edu](mailto:mrgeorge@ucdavis.edu), phone 530-752-1720) for group discounts. Each module is approved by the Society for Range Management for 16 CEUs.

## **Oak Woodland & Annual Grassland Ecological Site Descriptions On-Line**

Ecological site descriptions (ESD) replace the traditional range site descriptions that focused primarily on forage production. ESDs include vegetation dynamics and broader resource uses and values as well as forage production. Soils with like properties that produce and support a characteristic plant community and respond similarly to management are grouped into the same ecological site. Ecological sites are differentiated one from another based on 1) significant differences in species or species groups, 2) significant differences in species composition, and 3) differences in productivity, and 4) soil factors that influence species composition or productivity.

You can learn more about, view and download ESDs for California oak woodlands and annual grasslands from the California Rangelands Research and Information Center at <http://ucanr.org/oakwdlnd&anngrasslndesds> or the USDA-NRCS website <http://esis.sc.egov.usda.gov/>.

## California-Pacific Board Member Shares Knowledge On Payment for Ecosystem Services In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

By Susan Forbes, US Forest Service

In October 2010, I had the opportunity, along with two other USFS employees, to partner with the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC) to provide technical support in the design of a Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) scheme. We met with natural resource managers from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to share resource issues, in watershed management, fire, roads and noxious weeds. The objective: to identify the feasibility of payment for ecosystem services (PES) schemes, that could provide a way to harness market forces to improve management of natural resources. We traveled to Almaty, Kazakhstan to take part in a USFS-CAREC organized workshop on watershed management and to use PES to improve management of watershed and pasture lands in the face of increasing pressure from grazing livestock climate change and land degradation. The workshop participants included government officials, governmental organizations and local citizens from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The meeting provided an opportunity for these stakeholders to share their views, hear about U.S. experiences, and discuss important natural resource management issues. More importantly it was a tremendous opportunity to travel around the world to meet and exchange ideas and culture and to meet amazing people and to witness a beautiful country immersing into the 21st Century with energy, hospitality and cooperation.



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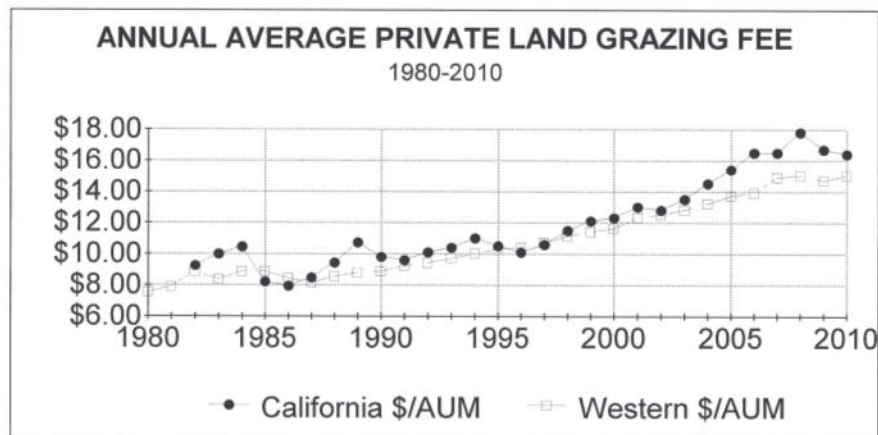
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## Recent History of California Private Land Grazing Lease Fee Price and Assessment

By John Stechman, Section Historian

Fees or rental paid by livestock owners (lessees, permittees) to land owners (lessors) for the right to graze their animals are customarily made each year as a price in dollars (\$) lump sum for a parcel, \$ per acre, \$ per head-month (or head-day), \$ per animal unit month\*, or some portion (%) of gain (weight) made by an animal while on the leased parcel. Leases of private land are commonly made by private treaty. Some government agencies (e.g. F&WS, DOD) and municipal utility districts lease grazing and set fees based upon \$/AUM since this best reflects the actual use and fair market value of forage as a commodity. Some adjust fees periodically based upon average annual livestock prices. Others periodically subject leases to open bidding by qualified, bonafide ranchers.

Trend of rangeland rental rates, or grazing fees, are influenced in the intermediate and long term by the relative profitability of the livestock industry, i.e. primarily by livestock prices and production costs. This is also true year-to-year, a principle recognized decades ago by economists who established the means of setting fees on Federal USFS and BLM lands. These relatively low and recently disputed fees are set by a formula which is driven by a base rate fee (\$1.23/AUM, 1966), annual indexes from surveys of private land fees, beef cattle prices and prices paid for selected production items. USFS and BLM public land grazing fees, first established between 1906 and 1936, amounted to about \$0.05-\$0.20/AUM, increased to about \$2.50+/- \$0.25 in 1980, and thereafter diminished; the 2011 fee is \$1.35/AUM. The trend for private land grazing fees (\$/AUM) is depicted in the graphic shown herein giving annual average price paid for California and for the 11 Western States since 1980. Not surprisingly, fees have steadily increased.



The data behind this graphic was obtained on the internet based upon data collected by the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) and State affiliates (e.g. for California, CASS) which annually survey and report private land grazing fees on \$/AUM nationwide. Results of the preceding year and decadal years are dated each late January at: [www.nass.usda.gov/](http://www.nass.usda.gov/). Click on "Find publication by Date", "January", then late in this calendar month, the day featuring "Agricultural Prices", wait, then go to "Archived Documents", select

a decade and year and January pdf, wait for Report, and search in Contents ("Prices Paid Index") for "Grazing Fee Rates". This NASS data is archived at the Cornell University Library.

Rangeland rental rates are influenced not only by the relative profitability of the livestock industry, but also the sup-

(Continued on page 5)

\*An AUM is a standard unit derived as 1,000 lb (animal unit, AU) of livestock grazing for 30 days (one month) regardless of location and can be compared if forages are in comparable stages of growth; an AUM is worth less when forage is dry or mature (lower quality) and when productivity of land is lower (more acres required per AUM, thus higher expenditure of energy by cattle and cost of maintenance by lessee); an AUM is generally accepted as equivalent to 750 pounds of forage, air dry weight basis.

(Continued from page 4)

ply and costs of alternative sources of feed, the feed-producing capacity of the parcel in question, the demand for forage, and provisions of the lease agreement. There is general agreement among fee appraisers that the most appropriate and valid measure of the rental value of private (and public land) grazing is the average price paid for negotiated leases, that is the value determined in the competitive market, referred to as the economic rent or "fair market value" (FMV). Although competitive bidding is the effective system for measuring FMV, if it is for long lease periods (e.g. 10 years) at a constant rate, it represents FMV in the initial year and the bidder's perception of FMV in future years. Only by intermittent bidding can this process continue to assure FMV in the following years. However, frequent bidding on a lease has extreme negative effects on stability of the lessee's enterprise, discourages proprietary investment in range improvement, and encourages heavy grazing (unless stocking rate is regulated by the lease document). It appears a reasonable compromise to adjust equitably established base grazing fee rates on an intermediate (3 to 5 year) term to the current appraised FMV of comparable private lands.

Market value which is considered "fair", however, must be mutually agreeable to all parties concerned, and disagreements as to the comparability of fee values of different grazing lands immediately surface as a primary issue. And since all lands are different from one another in ecological attributes, and since conditions surrounding their management and factors determining current market value are nearly always imprecisely known, comparability of parcels and pertinent lease arrangements are subject to dispute. Comparability is defined as those products and privileges having similar quality and quantity, accessibility, demand, attractiveness to the purchaser, and supply or availability. The degree to which different lease parcels of a regional and local area are similar is subject to interpretation, and criteria must include considerations of relative vegetative cover, physical land and facility features, climate, location with respect to economic or agricultural market boundaries, and lease or permit stipulations.

Basic to the process of competitive bidding or negotiating through private treaty for grazing rights are the assumptions that a number of different land parcels are considered, and that lessors and prospective lessees are aware of the influences on rental rates and their comparability. The extent to which these assumptions are true and discrimination practiced is not known. A large proportion of private land grazing leases are made by private treaty, i.e. negotiations between two parties familiar with one another. Lease value by this means is usually lower than if the same land was open to competitive bidding. The degrees of variability in the conditions under which grazing leases are contracted and how recently fees were last negotiated may be greater influences on existing fees than the degree of comparability among the various parcels involved. Comparability is further confounded by different bases on which grazing rights are leased. Most private rangeland is priced on dollars per acre (per year), but comparisons with other parcels rated on dollars per animal unit month are frequently necessitated. The conversion to mutual equity is made difficult since stocking rates (animal units grazed, acres per AU and grazing period), crucial to meaningful relationship of value, are often not accurately recorded, and are usually misunderstood by lessors and lessees. However, conversion to AUM basis, and pricing grazing leases on \$/AUM is most equitable to both parties as it assigns an economic value only on the product purchased (forage consumed), not the land (and other use rights) as is the case when payment is based on a \$/acre. There exists an established USDA NASS market prices paid history for \$/AUM of grazing, but not for prices paid on the basis of \$/acre (which is irrational geographically).

Compensation for differences in grazing parcels and lease conditions, i.e. placing a monetary value on them, leads to arbitrary decision-making since few studies have been made of this important facet, cost factors constantly change, and dollar values are often unaccounted for or are unavailable. Setting FMV of any grazing land based upon prices of comparable leases assumes that the latter are truly representative of the current market. This may not be so and is, therefore, problematic and somewhat negotiable. Nevertheless, to enable assessment of FMV and an equitable adjustment in fee values for a property, it is incumbent upon and the prerogative of the appraiser, after a survey to sufficiently sample and evaluate the grazing lease market is made, to determine to his or her satisfaction that the product or privilege priced is comparable to that offered in the region (state) and local (agricultural, ecological) area.

## 2010 Section Awards

By Theresa Becchetti

### Excellence in Range Management

Robert Fink-

Our 2010 Excellence in Range Management was presented to Robert Fink of Rancho Guejito located in north central San Diego County. Rancho Guejito consist of 24,000 acres and ranges from 750 ft elevation up to 4,600 ft allowing for a natural high elevation summer pasture and low elevation winter pasture grazing system. Of the 24,000 acres, 8783 are considered to be sensitive habitat by the San Diego County Multispecies Conservation Program and important to the overall biodiversity of the County. Even though the Rancho has gone through periods of overutilization, a high percent of quality habitat exists on the Rancho and is a testament to value active natural resource management and the agricultural activities that have been maintained over the past 160 years. Grazing and agriculture play a very important roll in managing for fire control, water quality and maintaining sensitive habitat objectives.

In order to manage for these objectives, Mr. Fink has taken an active roll in the development of an Integrated Grazing Management Plan (GMP) that clearly outlines the goals (reduce fuel loads, maintain and enhance riparian, meadow and marsh habitats which in turn will provide for good water quality) and objectives using grazing as a tool to meet the objectives. Residual Dry Matter (RDM) goals for the Rancho are 500 albs/ac in the flats and 800 lbs/ac on the hills. This also meets the Rancho's fire fuel load management goals. Stocking rates and management practices are flexible enough to graze riparian habitats for the appropriate time and duration while maintaining the ability move enough cattle to higher elevation to remove fuel loads for fire protection and oak woodland maintenance. Water improvements, including stock ponds and spring development have been implemented to ensure even livestock distribution.

Mr. Fink has developed a monitoring plan that includes year round monitoring efforts conducted to assess the success of the GMP. This continuous program improvement or "adaptive management" ensures the continued success of the GMP.

In summary, Mr. Fink has met all the challenges of managing a 24,000 acre cattle ranch in an arid, fire prone environment. He has set the bar high in managing for maximum production while improving wildlife habitat, water quality and the overall aesthetics of the Rancho. His program will just get better with time as monitoring data is evaluated and new and improved management strategies are implemented.

### Range Manager of the Year

Mark Thorne-

Since 1998, Dr. Mark Thorne has contributed tremendously to the knowledge base and practice of rangeland management particularly in tropical ecosystems. His tireless work over the last 7 years as State Range Extension Specialist for the University of Hawaii Cooperative Extension Service has benefited livestock producers and other land managers throughout Hawaii and the Pacific Basin. Dr. Thorne has been active in three sections of the Society for Range Management continuously since 1995. Dr. Thorne's applied research and extension efforts have made an immense impact on the economic, ecological, and social sustainability of forage-based industries in the Pacific islands affecting approximately 85% of the Hawaii's estimated 1 million grazing managed acres alone.

## Certified Rangeland Manager Panel Update

By Larry Ford, CRM Panel Chair

The Certification Panel has remained busy.

**New Applicants**—Alan Bower was approved to take the CRM exam. Another applicant is working with Panel member Marc Horney to develop a plan for supplementary education through CalPoly to be eligible for the CRM.

**CRM Exams**—The Panel has improved its development of CRM exams, which are revised and update periodically as new applicants are ready to take it. The new approach will build a collection of authoritative reference documents that can be tied to exam questions, and identified to prospective examinees for study. The Panel also has a new database of questions and answers from which exams and answer keys can be more easily compiled.

**Bagley-Keene Act Meeting Restrictions**—New state legislation expands on the Brown Act regarding meetings of “state bodies,” which includes the Certification Panel. The Panel is required to distinguish “open” sessions, to which the public is invited, from “closed” sessions, not open to the public, which cover material that is confidential, such as applications, exam details, complaints, legal issues, and other topics not ready for public announcement. The Panel must give the Foresters Licensing Office at least 10 days notice of open session meetings, with meeting details and an agenda, a condensation of which will be post on the office’s website. Members of the public may call his office to be given call-in details for teleconferences, or details to attend in-person meetings, and then participate in the “open” session of the meeting only. The Panel will not use teleconferences when discussing controversial subjects in “open” session.

**Revised CalPac CRM Program Description**—The Panel prepared a draft revised CRM Program Description at the request of the Foresters licensing Office. It mainly updated terms and clarified some statements and procedures, such as inconsistencies in education requirements, the national SRM certifications don’t substitute for the state CRM license, and appeal processes. The CalPac Board of Directors approved the draft on January 18, 2001, pending one clarification about the appeal process, which was subsequently inserted. Then the Foresters Licensing Office made one further clarification, and it was reviewed by the Professional Foresters Examination Committee (PFEC) of the Board of Forestry. The PFEC requested further edits, which are now in process.

**Complaint on Unlicensed Practice**—A formal complaint about unlicensed practice of rangeland management was sent to the Panel Secretary. The Panel determined the complaint merits further investigation, based on the lack of evidence a CRM lead the subject project and evidence the subject property is oak savanna, which qualifies as “forested landscape,” and thus such professional work requires the license. The Panel Secretary sent an inquiry to the alleged offending consulting firm, asking about CRM involvement and referencing the Deputy Attorney General’s analysis defining CRM involvement and Policy 12 defining forested landscape.

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# Society for Range Management

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