

# Newsletter and Annual Report of the Rangeland Section of the Ecological Society of America

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By

Linda Wallace

Chair, Rangeland Section, Ecological Society of America

## A. Revisit 2004 activities at ESA

The Rangeland Section was active at the 2004 ESA meeting. We sponsored a symposium that was well attended and we had a workshop/discussion following our mixer/business meeting.

**2004 Symposium:** *Ecological Theory and Rangeland Sustainability: Local Strategies, Global Solutions* - Co-organized by Elizabeth King, Jeffrey Herrick and Jacoby Carter.

Rangeland degradation has become an environmental problem of enormous proportions worldwide, and is commonly the result of unsustainable livestock production. Degradation threatens not only the ecological integrity of grasslands, shrublands, and savannas, but also the social and economic viability of pastoralist communities that depend on them. Rangeland ecology can provide much of the information necessary to assess, restore, and manage degraded rangeland, but implementing sustainable land use strategies will ultimately depend on integrating the ecological information with social, economic, and policy considerations. In this well-attended symposium, participants discussed common challenges that arise in developing and implementing plans for sustainable rangeland use and broke these challenges down into categories of ecological, social, economic, and policy issues. They presented some important principles that can help promote the role of ecological information in resolving those issues, including the utility of models for understanding degradation, and the necessity of incorporating land restoration or rehabilitation into sustainable land use strategies. In terms of the social challenges, they focused on the importance of pastoralist education and participation in the ecological aspects of sustainable land management, both because of the importance of self-reliance to the long-term success of a project and also because traditional ecological knowledge may not always be adequate or relevant for lands that are degraded far beyond their historical condition. Economically, they explained how the ecological condition of rangelands can be directly linked to economic benefits for pastoralists, but also how perverse incentives can arise to disrupt that linkage. Finally the role of local, national, and international policy in the promotion of sustainable land use systems was discussed, comparing the effectiveness of grass-roots and top down approaches to rangeland management programs. Importantly, the participants urged greater involvement in policy advocacy by rangeland ecologists.

**2004 Workshop/Discussion.** *Ranches, ranchettes, recreation and conservation: strategies for increasing the contribution of science to land use debates.* The majority of this session was devoted to an informal discussion of the topic. Organized by Jeff Herrick. Wednesday, August 4, 8 PM - 10 PM, OCC, Meeting Room E-147-148. Attendance was good, with about 25 very active participants discussing what interactions scientists and policy makers needed to have to deal with this very critical component of habitat fragmentation. The results of this workshop led very logically to the symposium and workshop that the Section is sponsoring for the 2005 ESA meetings.

**2004 Business meeting/mixer.** The mixer shared with the Soil Ecology Section was a great success. At the business meeting, a committee was established to work on funding for student awards for the best poster and the best oral presentation. The committee consisted of Sam Fuhlendorf, Jack Morgan and Linda Wallace. The committee approached the Turner Foundation for donation, without success. In discussions with Katherine McCarter, we found that most sections ask for donations from their members to establish a fund. If, after three years a sufficiently large fund does not exist, then the section is urged to make a one time award and close the effort.

**Other symposia and organized oral sessions sponsored by Section members at the 2004 meeting.**

- **Symposium:** *Ecohydrology: Towards an Ecologically Meaningful Water Budget*- Co-organized by David Breshears and Osvaldo Sala. Tuesday, August 3, 1:30 PM – 5 PM, OCC, Oregon Ballroom 203
- **Organized Oral Session:** Interannual Climate Variability: How temporal signatures can drive ecosystem processes- Co-organized by Linda Wallace and Jay Arnone. Tuesday, August 3, 1:30 PM – 5 PM , OCC, Meeting Room E-148

**B. Plans for ESA Rangeland Section at 2005 meeting in Montreal**

The Rangeland Section will again be busy at the ESA meeting in Montreal. Activities that are sponsored by the Rangeland Section or organized by members that represent our section are listed below.

- **Special Session**, Wednesday, August 10, 1:30 PM - 5 PM, Meeting Rooms 210a-b-e-f, Level 2, Palais des congrès de Montréal. *Delivering on the promise of ecological science to improve land management: Ecological site descriptions.* **Organizers:** Joel Brown and Jeff Herrick. Jointly sponsored by the Rangeland Ecology Section of ESA and the Society for Range Management. Ecological sites are groupings of soil and landform units that have similar potential to support plant communities and respond similarly to

disturbances. For each site, a unique Ecological Site Description (ESD) is developed that includes: (1) a description of ecological processes affecting critical aspects of soil/vegetation relationships; (2) a synthesis of research results and management knowledge to predict site responses; and (3) a discussion of ecosystem services associated with potential stable states. This special session will bring together academic and agency research scientists and technical leaders from the major federal action agencies charged with the management of private and public lands. The primary objective is to provide ESA members with an opportunity to see how ESDs are currently being used to identify critical research questions and to organize, communicate, and apply research results, including vegetation classification systems. A second objective is to identify challenges in resolving key questions of site-scale behavior and in improving cross-scale linkages to extend information to landscapes and regions.

- **Business meeting/mixer** will be held at 6:30 – 8 p.m. on Wednesday, August 10, Meeting Room 517 A – Level 5 Palais des congrès de Montréal. Finger foods and a cash bar will be available. We will be meeting jointly with the Agroecology, Applied Ecology and Long-term Studies sections, prior to a short business meeting at the end of the mixer.
- **Workshop/discussion** will immediately follow the mixer. The topic will be Delivering on the Promise of Ecological Science to Improve Land Management: Ecological Site Descriptions, An Informal Discussion. This will be led by Linda Wallace and Sam Fuhlendorf, giving participants a chance to have longer interactions with many of the speakers in the special session that took place earlier in the day. The workshop is scheduled to take place on Wednesday, August 10, 8 PM - 10 PM, Meeting Room 517a, Level 5, Palais des congrès de Montréal.
- **Symposium 19: *Spatial nonlinearities and cross scale interactions: Cascading effects in the Earth system*** Thursday, August 11, 1:30 PM - 5 PM, Meeting Room 517a, Level 5, Palais des congrès de Montréal **Organizers:** Debra Peters([debpeter@nmsu.edu](mailto:debpeter@nmsu.edu)), Brandon Bestelmeyer

### C. Ongoing activities

**Website development:** Section website (<http://www.ag.unr.edu/esa/>) Rangeland forum website (informal forum to post, describe and discuss observations, data, and results). Section role: sponsor, Lead contact: Bob Nowak ([nowak@scs.unr.edu](mailto:nowak@scs.unr.edu))

### D. Requests for Evening Session and Symposium Proposals for the 2006 meeting in Memphis, Tennessee.

The Ecological Society of America will be holding its 91st Annual meeting in Memphis, Tennessee from August 6 – August 11, 2006.

The Calls for Symposium Proposals and Organized Oral Session Proposals, as well as information about the meeting, the theme, and the city of Memphis are included on the ESA meeting website,  
<http://www.esa.org/meetings/FutureAnnualMeetings.php>

The deadline for submission of proposals for Symposia and Organized Oral Sessions will be announced shortly. Usually it is September 15. Following submission, all proposals will be peer reviewed and ranked prior to selection by the ESA Program Chair.

The Rangeland Section typically submits a proposal for a symposium, so the membership should be considering potential topics that would fit with the theme at the Memphis Meeting. Multiple topics can be proposed but the section can only sponsor one symposium.