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It's MARCH MADNESS across the country as I write the column but we're ready for AI season at the 4E. Have you ever considered what it would be like if folks got as wildly enthusiastic about managing our rangelands and other natural resources as they do about the Sweet Sixteen, the Elite Eight, and the Final Four? The task of getting people interested and actively involved would be much easier. However, finding solutions to complex issues would remain as challenging as winning the Big Dance.

Given that rangelands remain a "silent" resource, taken for granted by most, our mission as a Section is to spread the range stewardship message throughout the state and create a little "passion for the prairie". It's time for AI--Active Involvement. An excellent opportunity comes on May 12 with our spring meeting. This is a great opportunity to bring a neighbor, a co-worker, or both, and exchange ideas with others involved in range management.

Information on the 1999 Kansas Range Youth Camp has been distributed to all counties. Now is the time to promote our organization to the next generation of range stewards. I am still surprised by the number in our ranching community who have never heard of RYC, even though several dozen youth from Greenwood County have participated over the years. Each of us can do more to recruit campers and support from local organizations like conservation districts and county livestock associations.

Kansas rangelands have made the major news in the last couple of years, especially on two fronts. First is the development of the management plan for the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve (Z-Bar Ranch) in Chase County. The draft management alternative now proposed by the National Park Service places major emphasis on stewardship of the native grasslands based on practices developed by area ranchers and range professionals over several decades. Active Involvement of these individuals, including several Kansas Section members, in the planning process has been essential in moving the focus of the Z-Bar to ranching history and range stewardship. Sericea lespedeza has also put Kansas rangelands into the headlines. While the noxious weed problem is not good, the press coverage has brought attention to management of our native grasslands. The other positives here are that some grant monies are being directed to sericea control and there appears to be some possibility of using late, late burning, some "bugs", and other management in addition to herbicides to suppress this invader.

Time to nominate ranchers for the Excellence in Grazing Management Awards will soon be upon us. I encourage each of you to think of one or two deserving stewards that should be recognized at the fall meeting. It is not too soon to start taking a few pictures for the occasion. March Madness will be long gone by the time you read this but Active Involvement runs throughout the year. The challenge is there for each of us. See you and your friends on May 12.