

## **PRESIDENT'S CORNER**

**Keith Harmony**

**President, Kansas Section, SRM**

It's an election year. We're constantly hearing from both presidential candidates about their views on international affairs and the strategy of the Iraq war, the declining economy and the whole mortgage and finance collapse, the experience (or lack thereof) concerning particular candidates, and of course our dependence on foreign oil and the need to produce our own energy for national security. Of all these topics, the latter undoubtedly has the most plausible link to the management and physical appearance of our Kansas rangelands.

Neither of the presidential candidates seem to have natural resources conservation, or even agriculture, very high on their list of agenda items, and neither topic is very high on their list of expertise either. Obama's natural resource agenda includes energy independence and reducing greenhouse gas emissions as his main focus. That's about all that is found on his campaign energy and environment webpage. Out of 24 main election agenda topics, the word agriculture doesn't even appear. Ag related items are buried under the headline 'Rural'. Coming from one of highest producing agricultural states, this is somewhat surprising. McCain's website has much the same flavor. The environment and energy are basically addressed through the agenda items of energy independence and eliminating green house gas emissions, although the road to get there is somewhat different than Obama's. At least the word 'Agriculture' does appear in McCains's agenda issues webpage. Though, most of the items under 'Agriculture' deal with markets and development of rural communities, not unlike Obama's 'Rural' site. Both candidates devote a whopping couple of sentences to conservation, wildlife, or land

sustainability. It is clear that times have changed since Teddy Roosevelt and the emphasis on our nation's natural resources. Our focus has mostly become consumption rather than conservation, and most thoughts toward rangelands, water, and wildlife have become afterthoughts rather than forethoughts.

When we speak of energy independence, two major forms of energy come to the forefront in Kansas, ethanol and wind. Ethanol production may impact our rangelands in a few different ways. First, grain prices and land values have recently developed an unprecedented direct relationship with the price of oil, and rangeland pasture rental rates in the future are likely to follow this trend. That is the take home summary of some articles I've read this year by ag economists. Increasing the cost of pasture or the value of an AUM will undoubtedly cause some producers to think hard about their current stocking rates and stocking strategies to maintain thin profit margins. Producers tempted to increase stocking rates need to keep in mind that pastures with greater than recommended annual stocking rates have a well documented history of declining desirable plant composition and overall productivity. Secondly, the loss of native rangeland to a plow is probably the most drastic change that we could possibly see from this ethanol era. The demand for grain for ethanol production has resulted in extraordinary commodity prices for grain crops and makes tillage of pastureland more tempting to capitalize on the short term economic boon. This is not a new phenomena, any time grain prices soar the thought of converting rangeland to cropland follows. And finally, the progression toward cellulosic ethanol production may result one day in some producers harvesting rangeland vegetation for feeding a factory rather than a rumen. I'm not sure what the chances are of each of these scenarios taking place and to what extent.

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**KANSAS SECTION  
SOCIETY FOR RANGE MANAGEMENT  
BOX 303 - MANHATTAN, KS 66505**

<http://ks.rangelands.org>

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**EDITOR'S COMMENTS** Subscriptions to the Bluestem Bulletin are available to non-SRM members at \$5 per year. Send remittance payable to the Kansas Section, SRM to Walter Fick, Dept. of Agronomy - TH, Kansas State Univ., Manhattan, KS 66506.

If you would like to receive the Bluestem Bulletin via e-mail please contact me at the above address or at (785) 532-7223 or [whfick@ksu.edu](mailto:whfick@ksu.edu).

Members or other readers are encouraged to submit information to include in the Bluestem Bulletin. Announcements regarding meetings, field days, etc. are welcome. If you would like to write an article related to rangeland management please do so and send it to me.

**Submission deadline for the next issue of the Bluestem Bulletin: January 1, 2009**

## President's Corner cont'd

Another energy resource, the wind, may have less impact on the vegetation of rangelands, but could have a lasting impact on the wildlife that utilizes that vegetation for food and cover. With a push from the private sector and from the stated intent from both presidential candidates to increase our energy independence, more wind farms are likely coming to Kansas. The impact of human encroachment and land fragmentation on some prairie bird species has been a highly researched item and is a main source of debate for proposed wind farms. Even prairie mammals, more specifically bats, may be affected by large wind turbines. This makes site selection of wind farms a rather crucial and important aspect of their development.

To learn more about how energy independence could affect Kansas resources specifically, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kansas Natural Resources Conference is being held in Wichita at the airport Hilton Hotel January 29-30, 2009. The focus of the conference this year is "Renewable Energy – Renewable Resources". We'll hear about ethanol production from grain, grass, and woody fuels, potential impacts of ethanol production on soils and water, and factors considered during site selection for wind farms. Our Kansas Section will also host a business meeting again at this conference.

We may not have much insight from our presidential candidates themselves on natural resource conservation and sustainability, but that is not necessarily a bad thing. No one can take care of the land better than the well educated and experienced people who live off the land. So, plan to attend the conference and get informed.

-Keith Harmony

### Kansas Section, SRM Meeting

The fall meeting will be held at the Golden Corral in Hays, KS on Thursday, November 13. We will have a business meeting at 10:30-noon, eat lunch at the Golden Corral, and then take a tour of the research projects at FHSU and at the KSU Ag Research Center from 1:00 until probably 3:30 so folks can travel home.

## Kansas Section, Society for Range Management Minutes

The annual spring meeting of the Kansas Section, SRM was held February 21, 2008 in conjunction with the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Kansas Natural Resources Conference (KNRC) at the Airport Hilton in Wichita, KS. Section President, Keith Harmony, called the meeting to order at 3 p.m. The minutes of the November 15, 2007 meeting were read and approved. The Treasurer's Report showed a current balance of \$8229.40, after \$41 was paid for postage and \$450 was paid into the KGLC scholarship fund.

**Old Business:** Harmony reported on progress made by the "Excellence in Grazing" sign committee. All those present reviewed and discussed potential sign designs. After reviewing the signs, it was suggested that some of the designs be combined to make a modified sign. A sign design was selected by majority vote. The group then decided to purchase a 20 x 28 inch sign at about \$30/sign. A total of 50 signs will be purchased from Commercial Designs in Hays, KS.

Rebecca Lyons reported for the "Excellence in Grazing" nomination form committee. They suggested making the nomination form more simple to fill out. They also recommended that the Kansas Section needs a nominating committee to select awardees. Keith Harmony also suggested the need for more publicity about the award. David Kraft, Cade Rensink, Rebecca Lyons, and Jim Minnerath (visiting from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) volunteered to serve on the nominating and award review committee. There was discussion regarding the percent of rangeland required to qualify for the award. It was decided to leave that to the discretion of the nominating committee. Rebecca Lyons suggested that County Conservation Districts nominate their Rangeland winners. This could possibly be publicized on the NRCS or the SWCS e-mail list serve. There was a call for more volunteers to serve on the awards committee.

**New Business:** Doug Spencer recommended that we hold a joint meeting with the Oklahoma Section, SRM in 2009. After discussion, a motion was approved to hold a joint meeting. Doug will proceed with contacting the Oklahoma Section to make further arrangements.

The SRM publications committee is seeking input from all sections on ways to effectively cut down the costs for Rangelands. Keith Harmony laid out some options set forth by the publications

committee. Discussion followed and it was decided that the Rangelands publication is worth keeping. Some members were in favor of converting the publication to web based. The overall consensus was to not raise dues in order to fund the added expense of color photographs. The group decided that 6 issues a year are appropriate, with only 4 issues coming through the mail. The remaining 2 issues would be online. There was also discussion on charging the author page charges for submitted articles. This idea was voted down by the group over concerns of inclusiveness. Harmony also discussed an online blog coming soon to the SRM website. Harmony will report the Kansas Section activities to the SRM Advisory Council.

Keith Harmony discussed the need for volunteers for next years KNRC committee. It was decided to have next year's spring Kansas Section, SRM meeting in conjunction with the KNRC. A motion passed to continue our involvement in promoting KNRC.

Paul Ingle, a watershed hydrologist, asked for input from the floor on how to become a Certified Range Professional. He will need to pick up some distance education credits.

Keith Harmony mentioned that he made a poster for the KNRC. Future sites for the annual SRM meeting are Albuquerque, NM in 2009 and Denver, CO in 2010. Sites under consideration for 2011 and beyond include Winnipeg, Canada, Billings, MT, Phoenix, AZ, and Sacramento, CA.

Respectfully submitted,  
Alex Miller

### Kansas Natural Resources Conference

This is the first call for oral and poster presentations for the KNRC to be held January 29-30 in Wichita, KS. This year's theme is Renewable Energy - Renewable Resources, but presentations on any natural resource related topic are encouraged. Direct questions regarding this call for papers to Charles Barden, 2021 Throckmorton Hall - HFRR, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506. Phone: 785-532-1444 or [cbarden@ksu.edu](mailto:cbarden@ksu.edu).

Instructions for submission of abstracts can be found at <http://www.kansasnrc.com/>. Abstracts are due December 1, 2008

**CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

November 13	Kansas Section, SRM Annual Meeting, Hays, KS
November 23-25	Kansas Association of Conservation Districts, Wichita, KS
December 4-5	Kansas Livestock Association Convention and Trade Show, Wichita, KS
December 10-13	North Central Kansas Cow-Calf Symposium, Russell, KS
January 14, 2009	Kansas Hay and Forage Conference, Manhattan, KS
January 17, 2009	Kansas Winter Grazing Conference, Assaria, KS
January 29-30, 2009	Kansas Natural Resources Conference, Wichita, KS
February 8-12, 2009	Society for Range Management Annual Meeting, Albuquerque, NM