

**Western Rangelands Partnership: Using the Internet for Information Transfer**  
**Society for Range Management Conference Symposium**

February 9, 2009; 1:00 pm – 5:00 pm

Objective: To show how a regional website with individual state websites can be integrated into the delivery of quality information about rangelands.

Summary/Abstract: The Western Rangelands Partnership has developed a regional website (<http://rangelandswest.org>) to provide quality information on all aspects of rangeland ecology and management. The partnership consists of 19 land grant universities, the Agricultural Network Information Center (AgNIC), the Society for Range Management, and USDA-Cooperative States Research, Extension, and Education Service (CSREES). The partnership is also a collaboration between rangeland specialists and librarians at each of the member institutions. The website contains a searchable database of vetted publications and website links, information on hot issues, a repository of journal articles, and links to each of the 19 state rangelands west websites. Information is available by topic, keyword, and geographic location.

Proposed Agenda (topics and speakers)

*Introduction to RangelandsWest.org and the Western Rangelands Partnership:* Carla Casler, University of Arizona, Assistant Director of the Arid Lands Information Center, Western Rangelands Partnership 2008-09 Chair (20 minutes)

*A Collaborative Model for Creating a Web Portal on Rangeland Management:* Barbara Hutchinson, University of Arizona (10 minutes)

*Development of Content Areas and Groups, Versions One through Three – What's working or not:* George Ruyle, University of Arizona (10 minutes)

*Touring Rangelandswest.org: Special Features and Hot Topics:* Julie Conley, Consultant (10 minutes)

*Implementing a Database- and User-Driven Portal: Metadata and Technical Issues, and Results of User Survey:* Jeanne Pfander, University of Arizona (10 minutes)

*Content Development Process for RangelandsWest.org:* Mark Thorne, University of Hawaii (10 minutes)

*Connecting to State Rangelands Websites:* Norm Harris, University of Alaska – Fairbanks, Western Rangelands 2008-09 Vice Chair (20 minutes)

*Break* (20 minutes)

*Tools for the Future:* Barron Orr and Carla Casler, University of Arizona, and John Tanaka, Oregon State University (60 minutes)

*Feedback and Discussion Session (40 minutes)*

*Conclusions and Where To In the Future* – Karen Launchbaugh, University of Idaho, Western Rangelands Partnership Past Chair, and Merrita Fraker-Marble, Montana State University, SRM I&E Committee Chair (20 minutes)

#### ABSTRACTS:

1) *Introduction to RangelandsWest.org and the Western Rangelands Partnership* – Carla Casler, The University of Arizona

From the beginning of the effort that developed RangelandsWest.org, rangeland specialists and librarians learned to communicate and collaborate, sharing different skills and knowledge to organize and display important information about rangelands. The Arizona collaboration has expanded to 19 states in the Western Rangelands Partnership. This collaboration has increased understanding, knowledge, and appreciation of the diverse talents and expertise among members of the Partnership. Discovering ways to build on current and past efforts and to meet challenges also strengthen the Partnership.

2) *A Collaborative Model for Creating a Web Portal on Rangeland Management* - Barbara Hutchinson, The University of Arizona

The Rangelandswest.org website grew out of early efforts to build the Agriculture Network Information Center (AgNIC), a national initiative to bring quality agriculture-related information and resources to the public through the World Wide Web. The AgNIC model is to offer reference or “Ask an Expert” services; quick access to quality, evaluated electronic resources; and to follow common metadata standards to facilitate a “one-stop-shopping” interface. First known as “Managing Rangelands” and developed by a collaboration of rangeland specialists and librarians at the University of Arizona, the Rangelandswest.org site greatly expanded in 2001 with the initiation of the Western Rangelands Partnership. This presentation will provide the historical context for how the Rangelands West Web site was developed collaboratively with both internal and external partners, including SRM (Journals), NRCS (Site Guides), USFS (Walker Basin), Udall Center (Toolkit), and now including plans for going global in cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

3) *Development of Content Areas and Groups, Versions One through Three – What’s working or not* - George Ruyle, The University of Arizona

This presentation will describe the development of the Rangelands West home site, versions 1 through 3. Initially in version 1, the idea was to follow a textbook format with original content identified or created by the University of Arizona team. However, as the dynamic nature of the Web became more understood and relevant content grew on other sites, the inclusion of hypertext links and externally-produced content was expanded. Following the evolution of Web technologies, the Rangelands West portal was again reconfigured as a database-driven system, called version 2, based on a new categorical

structure developed by Western Rangelands Partnership member. The issues encountered with populating these categories in part related to metadata creation and difficulties in maintaining an easy to use technical architecture. As a result, recent efforts have been focused on creating educational modules and scope notes for the categories. The presentation will also set the stage for plans to create a version 3 that will involve users more directly in the development of the site.

4) *Touring Rangelandswest.org – Special Features and Hot Topics* - Julie Conley, The Nature Conservancy, Washington

Special features available through Rangelands West include a “contact us” service that allows users to submit questions and receive answers from experts in the field. In addition, the Rangelands West portal provides access to a full-text repository of journal articles from the back issues of the Society of Rangeland Management’s *Journal of Rangeland Management* and *Rangelands* periodicals. Also, through the National Learning Center for Private Forest and Range Landowners ( <http://forestandrangeland.org> ), a number of learning modules have been developed relevant to rangeland management including: Rangeland Monitoring in Western Uplands, Riparian Area and Grazing Management, Livestock and Wildlife Interactions, and recently Western Rangeland Weeds. One of the more widely used resources is the “hot topics” section that includes extensive overview materials on the NEPA process, rangeland policy issues, and other issues in the news such as fire, recreation, and wildlife.

5) *Implementing a Database- and User-Driven Portal: Metadata and Technical Issues, and Results of User Survey* - Jeanne Pfander, University of Arizona

This presentation describes the development of the Rangelands West technical architecture and specifically the metadata database. Issues encountered in fully realizing the potential of a database-driven information system and in financially maintaining such a system led to implementing a needs assessment study conducted in summer and fall 2008 by the Western Rangelands Partnership (WRP). The purpose of the research was to gather responses from a wide range of private and public land managers, extension personnel, and research scientists involved with rangelands, regarding their information needs related to rangeland issues. Our methods for obtaining this data included an anonymous voluntary online survey distributed to key stakeholders identified by WRP representatives from a number of different states as well as follow-up interviews and focus groups. The needs assessment data is being used to define user requirements to further develop and enhance the Rangelands West web portal and affiliated websites. The ultimate outcomes will be improved online resources and services that will facilitate better land management and decision-making for rangelands.

6) *Content Development Process for RangelandsWest.org* - Mark S. Thorne, University of Hawaii at Manoa

Content accessed on the RangelandsWest.org website can come from many different sources. It is highly desirable that this content be accurate, reliable, credible, and relevant

for the RangelandsWest.org audience. Thus, all content accessed through the RangelandsWest.org website should be reviewed to assure that the content meets the above criteria. Input will be sought for the content review model that best meets the needs of RangelandsWest.org and its audience. Through its annual meetings, the Western Rangelands Partnership has identified a number of critical topic areas for the RangelandsWest.org website. Content development for the website will be prioritized to first populate the critical topic areas with accurate, reliable, and relevant information. Secondly, content will be developed for emergent issues within the field of rangeland ecology and management as the need arises. There are basically three sources of potential content for the website: 1) material that already exists in some other media form (journal publications, extension articles, etc) that can be linked to the RangelandsWest.org website pending author/owner permission (if applicable) and/or conversion to a web supported format; 2) material solicited from experts with in a topic or sub-topic area by the Western Rangelands Partnership; and 3) unsolicited material from prospective authors who have a desire to contribute to the development of the website. It is expected that a recent MOU between the Partnership and the SRM will be highly beneficial in the development of credible and relevant content for the RangelandsWest.org website.

7) *Connecting to State Rangelands Websites*: Norm Harris, University of Alaska – Fairbanks

8) *Tools for the Future*: Barron Orr and Carla Casler, University of Arizona, and John Tanaka, Oregon State University

(Free Tools - Google Groups, Picasa, Google Earth, RSS feeds, Blogs; Rangeland Tools – Rangeview, Watershed visualization tool, Climate forecasting tools; Paid Tools - Web conferencing tools)

9) *Conclusions and Where To In the Future* – Karen Launchbaugh, University of Idaho