



Stewardship

Stewardship.....defined by Webster as “ 1. the office, duties, and obligations of a steward 2 the conducting, supervising, or managing of something; especially : the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care. We in SRM believe strongly in stewardship. It is right there in our Mission Statement: *Providing leadership for the Stewardship of Rangelands based on sound ecological principles.*

Reverend J. Hugh Magers of Bryan, Texas used to explain the origins of the word “stewardship” to the youth at the Texas Section Youth Range Workshop in a way that captured their attention and was remembered. When he was through, the audience got the message. I guess it comes from his many years in front of a church congregation and his reputation as one of the best fund raisers the Episcopal Church of North America ever had! Where exactly did “stewardship” come from? Why do I have to take of my rangeland? Or my family? Or my bank account?

It started in the somewhere in the 11th-15th centuries.....references are conflicting and my memory just isn't that good anymore. Nonetheless, the story is the same.

Times were simpler then. No Wal-Mart. Not a grocery store of any kind anywhere! Households raised their own food, preserved, etc....planning their food supply into the future. It was common to have a pig, or four, outside in the "sty." The pig's fate was always the same, to be food for the family. The manager of the food chain for that family was responsible for keeping the pigs healthy.....they were fed everything from small grains to scraps from the household. The manager of the food chain for any particular household, be it a one family dwelling or an estate with a large castle, was a very important position. Without his/her careful management, the people would go hungry. The pig needed to be at the right age and weight to slaughter when the current supply of meat ran low. That important household position came to be known as the "sty ward." Sty- ward.....Steward.....the one responsible for care of the animals and the people. And one could suppose the care of the animals depended upon wise use of the land available for those animals to graze or wallow in, whatever the case may be. In time, the rise of Wal-Mart and the availability of food from across the globe at any season has diminished the role of the "Sty Ward" of any household. Or certainly changed it! We do find that even today, good stewards of the groceries are much appreciated!

Today, the term stewardship is applied to a variety of occupations. However, there is no higher calling than to recognize and practice stewardship of our natural resources. Impacts everybody from the folks buying meat at the grocery store to the folks who enjoy bird watching on federal land to everyone who turns on the tap for a drink of water. What we do in Range Science is pretty important stuff!