

# Grass Roots

Photo by Jeff Goodwin



**PUBLISHED BY THE TEXAS SECTION SOCIETY FOR RANGE MANAGEMENT**

*Providing Leadership for the Stewardship of Rangelands  
Based on Sound Ecological Principles*



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## President's Notes



**Melony Sikes  
President, TSSRM**

Greetings, Texas Section Members!

I want to encourage you to make a contribution this year. Our organization is fueled by voluntarism and enthusiasm for the range profession. Everyone has a special talent and has the ability to make a contribution. I hope you will dedicate some time to nominate one of your peers for a "Grass Roots" Award, write an article about some aspect of rangeland management, host a range field day or encourage someone to join the Section. Please feel free to speak up and share your positive ideas.

Praise the rangeland stewards who make Texas a better place. Positive reinforcement goes a long way. Encourage all grazing managers to be good stewards of the range resource. Stewardship comes with ownership. It is easy to stand up for the fine people who make their living as rangeland stewards. We have got to keep sharing our message as we have more and more people living in Texas who are not connected with the land and do

not fully understand how they benefit from rangeland stewardship. We have work to do until every rangeland owner can be called a steward.

I feel a sense of responsibility to make a contribution to keep our state and our county strong. There is no way I will ever be able to repay my two Grandfathers who fought in WWII. One came home, and one is buried under French soil. Focusing on rangeland stewardship to ensure protection of private property rights and provide continued strength to our country is the cause I have chosen to champion. I am sure every member has a source of inspiration and motivation.

There is one TSSRM member for every 274,201 acres of grazing land in Texas. Less than 2% of the population make their living in Farming or Ranching. We need to continue to be the positive voice for rangeland stewards. There are not very many of us to speak up for rangelands.

We spent a lot of time and energy last year trying to increase our visibility. We have a new tabletop display that is available for events upon request. Contact our First Vice President, Bill Pinchak, if you would like to reserve the display. The Young Professionals Committee created three informational handouts to complement our display.

We lost two Texas Section Members just before Christmas -- Virgil Polocek and Jim Bob Grumbles. They will be deeply missed, as they were two fine gentlemen who made major contributions to the range profession.

Our annual meeting will be held in Beaumont from October 7-9. Our theme is "Hills to Bays, the Impacts are Clear". We will be focusing on the contributions made by range management to the bays and estuaries. Please

*(continued)*

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## President's Notes *(continued)*

mark the dates on your calendars, and make plans to attend. The efforts of rangeland stewards will be recognized not only for what they do inside their own boundaries, but also for the off-site benefits they provide. I want rangeland stewards to be recognized for the contributions they make to this country.

It will be my pleasure to serve as your President for 2009. Our members have been an inspiration to me over the years. We are so fortunate to have some of the best range stewards in the world, best range scientists, range educators, range conservationists, etc., in our Texas Section. There is a camaraderie that is so comfortable. Let's continue to support one another as we work together. Have a great year!

*Melony Sikes*

## In Memoriam

Services for Dr. Jim Bob Grumbles were held at the Crockett Road Church of Christ, Dan Manuel officiating, followed by a graveside service and burial at the city cemetery in San Saba, Texas. Funeral arrangements were under the direction of Bailey and Foster Funeral Home.

Dr. Grumbles died Saturday, January 31, 2009 in a Tyler hospital. He was born in San Saba on August 26, 1928 to Ruth and Charlie Grumbles. He was a member of the Crockett Road Church of Christ for many years as well as past president of Independent Cattlemen Association and chairman of the board of his local soil and water conservation district.

Dr. Grumbles received his bachelor's degree from Southwest Texas State University and his Master's and Doctorate from Texas A & M University, College Station. He taught in the Range Science Department at Utah State University, Logan, Utah. He was a faculty adviser for the rodeo club and was involved in many of the university organizations. He retired from Dow Chemical Company in 1993 and moved to Anderson County in 1987.

Dr. Grumbles is survived by his loving wife of 56 years, Jane; two sons, Randy Grumbles and wife Charmagne of San Antonio and J.T. Grumbles and wife Robin of Fredericksburg; one daughter, Judy Hall and husband Jim of Denton; one sister, Rebecca Schneider of Austin; seven grandchildren, three great-grandchildren, several nieces and nephews and many friends in and around Anderson County.

Those serving as pallbearers were Bert Ricard, Kenneth Holland, Bob Stech, Jerry Sturgess, Jack Thomason, Johnny Jenkins and Gary Todd.

## Upcoming Events

**2009 TSSRM Meeting**  
Beaumont

**2010 TSSRM Meeting**  
Odessa



*Thanks for a job well done!*

Many thanks to Jan Wiedemann for serving as the TSSRM Archivist since 1988. Thank you for your many years of service, Jan!

The TSSRM is looking for an Archivist.

Description of the office: Yearly files to be delivered to the archivist may include, but are not limited to: meeting minutes, general correspondence, field meetings/tours, financial reports, membership reports, newsletters, newsletter sponsors, award recipients, scholarship recipients, and a list of youth range workshop and High School Youth Forum participants. The Archivist shall deposit TSSRM files in the Southwest Collection of the Library at Texas Tech University every three to five years.

If you are interested in serving in this capacity, please contact Melony Sikes.



## Special Recognition Award Winner

**MARK MITCHELL**





## Committed to Lifelong Learning

### KRIRM Awards First Certificate in Advanced Ranch Management to Clayton Wolter of Sarita Texas

By Rachel Williams, King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management



**Clayton Wolter received the first Texas AgFinance Certificate in Advanced Ranch Management at the 2008 King Ranch Symposium. Texas AgFinance's Jimmy Wright and KRIRM's Dr. Kim McCuistion made the presentation.**

In 2003, Clayton Wolter made the commitment to be a lifelong learner. As a south Texas ranch manager, he wanted to be at the top of his game, and he came to the King Ranch Institute to help him in his quest.

This October, Wolter became the first recipient of the Texas AgFinance Certificate in Advanced Ranch Management. This program is a new initiative at the King Ranch Institute to provide lifelong edu-

educational opportunities for ranch owners and managers and other professionals involved in the ranching industry.

Education has always been important to Clay. He graduated from Texas A&M University in 1997 with a degree in wildlife sciences, and went on to earn a master's in rangeland ecology and management, also from TAMU.

Shortly after finishing his degree, opportunity came knocking, and Clay was offered a position as ranch manager of the Kenedy Memorial Foundation Ranch in Sarita, Texas. This job was a dream come true for Clay, as he was able to work with both cattle and wildlife, while living close to his family near Victoria.

Since the Kenedy Ranch is located within 30 minutes of Kingsville, Clay was able to develop a close relationship with the Institute, attending the first HOLT-CAT® Symposium on Excellence in Ranch Management in 2003, as well as four other lectureships and all five of the KRIRM annual symposiums. Wolter says the workshops he attended have been extremely beneficial to his career as a ranch manager and consultant.

"The John Armstrong Lectureship on Systems Thinking gave me a new perspective on how to approach a problem and arrive at a decision after reviewing the consequences those decisions might create," says Wolter.

Wolter says the KRIRM Lectureship on Managerial Accounting, held each December, helped him fill a void in his accounting knowledge that his degrees in wildlife management and rangeland ecology didn't provide.

"My educational weakness in ranch management was finance and accounting," he says. "The cost accounting lectureship was very beneficial in this regard."

He thinks the Yarborough Lectureship on Oil and Gas, held in mid-March, offers great information for all ranchers.

"Oil and gas are other possible sources of revenue for ranchers, even if you only own the surface rights," says Wolter. "The oil and gas lectureship gave me a deeper understanding and knowledge of the industry, and it equipped me with the information I needed to negotiate better surface damages and restoration activities."

Wolter's favorite lectureship was the Richard Mifflin Kennedy, Jr. Family Lectureship on GIS Technology, held each May.

“The GIS technology lectureship was, by far, the most educational for me, especially now with my current position with Walco Resource Management.”

The information Wolter learned at the GIS lectureship comes in handy on a daily basis for him.

“We utilize this technology everyday in planning management strategies for landowners and to map our herbicide applications for brush and weed control,” he says.

Wolter’s perfect attendance record at all of the KRIRM annual symposiums is something he is happy to brag about.

“All five symposiums were not only educational, but a great place to network with people all over the United States and the world,” he says. “I have met someone new that has had some impact on my career today at every symposium and lectureship that I have attended.”

Wolter is still an active learner with the Institute, even though his career path has changed. After nine years with the Kenedy Memorial Foundation Ranch, Wolter accepted a position with Walco Resource Management in February 2008 as a range management specialist. He also owns Wolter Wildlife Services, a private ranch and wildlife consulting firm.

He plans to continue his educational endeavors with the Institute, because he feels it is crucial to build one’s knowledge.

“I think it is very important for managers to continue learning and growing,” says Wolter.

“Ranch management is not a science... it is an art and a complex system of many parts. Everyday I learn something new, whether it be by attending educational activities or just through my own experiences.”

Wolter adds that managing a ranch, its wildlife, its rangelands, and all the people who utilize it is a huge challenge, and that today’s ranch managers must continue to educate themselves to the evolving environment facing them today.

“Our rural lands and population demographics have changed dramatically over the past century, and that change will be even more dramatic in years to come,” says Wolter.

Wolter credits the King Ranch Institute with helping him be prepared to face these challenges.

He encourages ranchers to make the commitment to lifelong learning by attending KRIRM lectureships and earning their Certificate in Advanced Ranch Management.

“KRIRM helped prepare me to face new challenges and protect, conserve, and ensure our way of life through education about and commitment to the ranching industry.”

## Texas Section SRM Awards

One of the functions of a professional society is to properly recognize members who make significant contributions to the profession. The Awards Committee is now accepting nominations for the following five awards:

- Outstanding Contribution to Rangeland Management
- Fellow Award
- Outstanding Achievement
- Outstanding Young Range Professional
- Special Recognition Awards

Award criteria and nomination format can be found on the website:

<http://www.rangelands.org/texas/awards.htm>

The deadline to have nominations into the Awards Committee is:

June 1 for Fellow and Special Recognition Awards, and August 15 for the others.

But don’t wait until the last minute.

Send completed nominations to Steve Nelle, Chairman at

[nelleangelo@verizon.net](mailto:nelleangelo@verizon.net) or

Steve Nelle

307 Westland

San Angelo, Texas 76901

## Wild On the Prairie: Invertebrates Termites Are Important to Ranchers

*Reprinted by permission from the El Desplado Newsletter*

A rancher from the green country around Maryneal (south of Roscoe, northwest of Winters and southeast of Lenorah) dropped by the Sibley Nature Center to say howdy. I hope everybody has seen the film “Dancer, Texas, population 16”, an independent movie filmed down around Alpine. One scene captures the essence of howdying

I am not going to tell you more, except to tell you that it occurs between two ranchers leaning up against a water tank. The heat of summer creates a soporific, somnolent rhythm to rural life anywhere in the tropical and subtropical regions. Our insanely intense industrial-technical life sneers at the pacing, but the art of conversation takes on a wealth of subtlety when people take time to think of what they are about to say and take time to listen.

Howdying, like knowing what a “draw”, or a “tank”, or a “water gap” is, is an integral part of being a West Texan. Everybody should know the lingua franca and social protocols of their region. It is one of the ways to love our homeland.

I rejoice in participating in the style of “them that’s seen the elephant.” I celebrate the incredible endurance, honesty, and dignity of those who have weathered drought, blizzard, brushfire, screwworm fly doctoring and other adversities. Our modern society is mostly unaffected by such things as drought. Our tribulations are rarely those presented by acts of God and I think we lose a wealth of knowledge when we do not honor those whose lives are still overwhelmingly influenced by acts of nature.

I am prejudiced. Ranchers are my heroes. My granddad was one of the last cattle drovers grazing Texas cattle and fattening them in Indian Territory. Being a steward of livestock entails the blunt acceptance of doing a tough job while finding the intestinal fortitude to step into a situation that could end in death.

John Wayne movies are the only place most urban people even get a hint of the vicissitudes within one’s own character that must be overcome when challenged by what can seem to be unbearable natural conditions. It is 10 below zero and the wind is howling 50 miles an hour? So what? — you got to go out and break ice for the stock. And your truck dies 10 miles from the house and the cell phone does not work because you are down in a valley and out of range of the nearest tower. So what you going to do? What if you are working round-up and have a pile-up and break your leg, and your horse’s leg breaks, too, and the country is too rough for an ORV, and nobody will even start looking for you until sundown, and you are a mile from the nearest jeeptrack? What you going to do?

Other professions are as tough — being an ocean-going fisherman, or a lumberjack, or working on a rig, or mining for precious minerals. None of these hard-working folks are given the honor that is truly due them. I am just a mite radical, I suppose, because I think every teenager needs to spend a good bit of time in the company of folks that take the bit in their teeth and pull their weight without a whimper of complaint.

Maryneal is in the 23 inches of annual rainfall belt. It is only 100 miles east of Midland, but drought conditions there are not near as bad as here. They are wishing for some deep soil moisture, but nigh on to every summer that is the story. But, by golly, they actually have grass growing. Here in Midland County, there is not even a dead blade of grass in most pastures. Me and the ol’ boy that was visiting had gone out to check the haybale house the Junior Master Gardeners group built near the windmill at the Sibley Nature Center. It was a tad toasty being 99 degrees in the shade, so we were hunkered down in the shade of the windmill after inspecting the construction.

”I wonder if the termites will get it.” He pointed at the house with his chin. I shrugged and lifted my palms skyward. A Cactus Wren joined us in the shade and we watched it for a minute or two as it tore apart a big black witch moth. The tiny little mesquite cicadas lost their fear and started singing in the thorny bushes again. A pebble-skinned band-winged grasshopper arched over the fence, its wings crepitating. A Mississippi Kite soared over, somehow finding just enough wind to keep from falling out of the sky. All of this and more we watched, without words.

"I was beginning to wonder if the termites hadn't died. The mud-tube termites that process dead grass-roots need moisture to survive, so how could they?" Grassland termites are a major recycler of nutrients — half of a grass clump's hair roots die annually, and termite droppings provide nutrients for the next year. I poked at an old mesquite stick with the vestiges of a mud-tube still draped over it.

The tube is but one sand grain thick, each grain stuck together with saliva and pushed into place by the insects' heads. Even though termites require oxygen, there is no hole in the mud tube. Termites do not like light, and their soft bodies cannot endure dry air for more than five minutes. The mud shell also provides protection from ants that relish termite tidbits. At night, the tube is breached and termite excrement ejected. I pushed at another tube, and after it fell apart we noticed it was completely empty. The rancher found a round ball of the same construction, and when he tapped it, a partially eaten jackrabbit pellet was revealed.

"I amuse myself turning over cow patties, sometimes. I still can find termites under and in the ones that retain a little bit of moisture, so somehow the termites are able to survive eight years of drought." I sneaked a peak to see if he gave any reaction concerning such suspect behavior.

The rancher scratched his head. "Have you noticed the tiny species of scorpion that lives under the cow-plops?" Well, well, another dung-flipper. I was in good company!

## Texas Prescribed Burning Symposium

TSSRM Members,

The Board has asked me to provide a brief summary of the plans for the Texas Prescribed Burn Symposium to the membership in an effort to keep everyone in the loop on our progress. On January 15, 2009 we held a planning meeting at Buchanan Dam, Texas where 13 different organizations were represented. The diversity of groups represented at this meeting, all with a common goal, was outstanding. Furthermore, based on the planning group's discussions, below are the objectives and focus for the Prescribed Burning Symposium.

### Focus of the Symposium:

- Focus on State and County Prescribed Burning Policy.
- Ensure that County and State Officials have a uniform interpretation of the current regulations regarding the declaration and revoking of county burn bans.

### Target Audience:

- Focus on target audience of County Judges, County Attorneys, County Commissioners, State Legislators, Aides, Fire Departments (Local and Volunteer) and the general public.

We are planning on holding the event at the Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center. This venue will allow easy access to Austin and provide the ability to showcase the results of some of the area's prescribed burns, especially within the urban interface. We are planning a two-day symposium with an indoor session, mixer and evening banquet with keynote speaker, followed by an outdoor/tour session the second day. We are tentatively planning the symposium for the spring of 2010. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact me at [jeff.goodwin@yahoo.com](mailto:jeff.goodwin@yahoo.com). Thanks for your continued support.

*Jeff Goodwin*



## Bluestem for Bobwhites

By Steve Nelle

*Previously printed in  
Texas Wildlife Magazine*



According to the botanical textbooks, there are 17 species of native bluestem grass in Texas. One of them stands out above all others as providing superior nesting cover for bobwhite quail and other grassland birds. Little bluestem can be found across all regions of Texas, but is most commonly seen in central Texas, north Texas and along the Gulf coast.

Early explorers and settlers found vast and rich grasslands and savannas across parts of Texas prior to 1850. Little bluestem is one of the “Big Four” tall grasses that once dominated these prairies and savannas along with big bluestem, indiagrass and switchgrass.

Little bluestem is a warm-season bunchgrass and can be found on a variety of soils from tight clay, to deep sand, to shallow and rocky soil. It begins its annual growth cycle in April as the days start to warm up. By the middle of June, it has normally put on a large new crop of leaves. In the spring, little bluestem provides very fine grazing for cattle. By the summer months, the leaves have become somewhat coarse and grazing value declines. By late summer, little bluestem be-

gins to form flowering stalks, and in the fall, it makes the characteristic bluestem seed-head with light fluffy seed. The seed are dispersed by the wind.

Quail enthusiasts have long noted that pastures rich in little bluestem also tend to be prime nesting habitat for bobwhites. In fact, little bluestem is often cited as an example of the perfect nest site for quail. Picture a clump of grass about the size of a volleyball or basketball, with leaves that hang over and you have a mental image of a good quail nest clump. Good bobwhite nesting habitat will usually have 300 to 500 of these clumps per acre. This equates to an average spacing of 9 to 12 feet apart. A triple clump of three plants forming a close overlapping triangle is possibly the very best situation to conceal a quail nest. Such a large number of potential nest sites are necessary to confound nest predators such as raccoons, skunks, fox, snakes, hogs, and coyotes. If only a few suitable nest clumps exist per acre, these predators can easily locate and destroy the nest full of eggs.

One of the most important keys to providing excellent nest cover is grazing management. Quail normally use the clumps of previous year’s growth as preferred nest sites. This means that bluestem clumps should be only lightly grazed in the spring and summer so that those same clumps will still be big with lots of residual dry leaves the following year.

Much Texas rangeland which once supported diverse and productive grasslands now supports mostly shorter grasses. These pastures normally do not support desirable quail populations any longer due primarily to a lack of suitable nest cover. Range management techniques can be implemented to help restore the mid and tall grasses. This often involves reduced stocking rates and a planned program of rotational pasture rest.

Dr. Fred Guthery, renowned quail authority, summarizes the role of grazing management for quail: “No habitat management tool is more powerful than the cow. Give her a little salt, supplement and water, and she manages millions of acres of bobwhite cover. Like any powerful tool, she can be harmful or helpful, depending on how she’s applied.

