

The South Dakota Section of the Society for Range Management (SD SRM) held their annual meeting September 18 and 19, 2019. The meeting began with an Excellence in Range Management ranch tour at the Dan and Cindi Conner Ranch north of Belle Fourche. About 50 people were in attendance to see the landscape that the Conner's have managed for the past 40 years, using sheep and cattle to maintain productive working lands. The Conner's ranch is located within the sagebrush range of Butte County and is home to active sage grouse leks, pronghorn, and other wildlife. Though the tour participants didn't get a chance to see any sage grouse, they did get a chance to see what kinds of management are favorable to grouse and other wildlife as they traversed through pastures teeming with western wheatgrass, big sagebrush, and other native plants scattered throughout. The last stop on the tour gave a good overview of Antelope Creek, a riparian area that was in great health, showing no active erosion, a wide floodplain, and native vegetation lining the banks. The tour concluded with a plant identification contest, where winners were awarded with plant identification books and other fun prizes.

After the tour, the Section held their annual Social, Crazy Auction, and Banquet at the First Gold Hotel in Deadwood. The crazy auction resulted in over \$1,500 raised for SRM Youth education and outreach programs.

2019 Excellence in Range Management Award winners were recognized during the banquet. These ranch families were nominated for the awards by range professionals from around the state. Award winners for 2019 were Dennis and Jean Fagerland (Langford), Brett and Lori Nix (Murdo), the Grubl Alkali Ranch (Sturgis), the 777 Bison Ranch, (Fairburn), and Slim Buttes Buffalo Ranch (Buffalo). The award winners were recognized with plaques for their efforts and all will host public tours of their operations during the 2020 season to showcase their great resource management (look for tour announcements in upcoming articles). In addition to winning their region, the Slim Buttes Buffalo Ranch poster was also chosen to go on to the International Society for Range Management Meeting in February to compete for top honors and show the great activities happening in SD.

Individuals were also recognized for their service and support for the South Dakota Section. The Top Hand Award for Outstanding Support was awarded to Ag Lenders for their donation of a food trailer to SD SRM for use during rangeland events. Dedicated Service awards were given to Pete Bauman for his time as the SRM President and to Tyler Swan for his time on the Board of Directors. Length of Service awards were given to members for their service and membership in the society: for 55 years of membership: Rod Baumberger, Jim Johnson, and Dave Steffen, for 35 years of membership – Gary Larson, and for 25 years of membership – Jeff VanderWilt and Larry Nelson. The finale of the evening was a gift to Dr. Pat Johnson to commemorate her last meeting as an SDSU employee – as she is retiring from the SDSU Range program in October.

The Thursday morning business meeting opened with a quick Plant ID Contest (winners of that contest were Sandy Smart and Mike Stirling), followed by presentations on innovative technologies by Rebecca Newton and Jenny Walker, both from the Belle Fourche Bureau of Land Management Field Office. Newton presented about the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or drones in natural resources management within the BLM. She explained the challenges and successes of using drones within the agency. Walker discussed the use of various GIS tools for collecting data while on the landscape. She gave live demonstrations of user-friendly apps available for use with GPS and tablets that make collecting data and sharing it between agencies fairly simple.

The annual meeting ended with the Section's business meeting and adjourned around 1:30pm.