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KRIRM Ranch Management Symposium Discusses Wildlife Management

KINGSVILLE, TEXAS (Nov. 20, 2015)—National wildlife and ranching experts gathered in Kingsville, Texas, Oct. 22-23, 2015, to discuss the often difficult challenge of integrating wildlife management into a ranching enterprise.

The King Ranch® Institute for Ranch Management (KRIRM) at Texas A&M University-Kingsville (TAMUK) hosted these experts, and more than 200 ranchers and landowners and industry stakeholders from 15 states at the 12th Annual Holt Cat® Symposium on Excellence in Ranch Management.

Director and Robert J. Kleberg, Jr. and Helen C. Kleberg Endowed Chair Clay Mathis, Ph.D. explained that managing an additional aspect, such as wildlife, on a ranch that encompasses land, livestock, and people, can be challenging.

“There are a host of issues and opportunities managers and landowners face across the country when it comes to integrating these facets of ranching,” explained Mathis. “That is why we assembled a symposium that provided learning opportunities of equal value to managers from Texas and other private lands states, to those that manage ranches in the western states that are predominantly public lands.”

An Overview of Wildlife Management and Ranching

To begin the program that included discussion on both the challenges and opportunities available when integrating the two enterprises, King Ranch, Inc.’s Vice President and General Manager of Livestock and Ranching Operations Dave DeLaney discussed the approach King Ranch has taken to successfully integrate wildlife into their large scale ranching operation.

Jim Heffelfinger of Arizona Game and Fish Department addressed wildlife regulatory and management approaches from the origins of game management to current state agency policies. Case studies from both public and private lands states were offered, illustrating the differences among state regulations. In conclusion, Heffelfinger explained today’s challenges and tomorrow’s opportunities in the wildlife segment. The urbanization of society and conservation funding will have a profound effect on how wildlife is managed.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Executive Director Carter Smith presented societal benefits of ranching and wildlife enterprises. He noted the positive impacts that private landowners have on wildlife habitat and wildlife populations that benefit society as a whole.

Private and Public Lands States Breakout Sessions

The symposium continued with separate educational tracks for public lands states and private lands states. These breakout sessions were intended to reach a broad audience with interests in both areas. In the public lands states session, some key points discussed involved how ranchers can use the public land in coordination with their own private lands to promote their operation in terms of ecotourism and hunting. An important point was made in one session about the balance of economic and ecologic resources for the overall success of a ranching operation.

The issue of sage grouse recovery was a popular discussion, and speakers explained how private landowners assisted in improving the sage grouse habitat, therefore preventing it from becoming listed as an endangered species. However, it was advised that further management take place or the issue could resurface. It was emphasized that each location requires different management approaches, therefore, local research and management plans need to be formed to have the greatest impact.



The private lands states session included a very educational presentation about how to balance cattle and wildlife while utilizing brush control. The legalities of guided hunting leases were explained, and it was noted that leasing land to hunters involves much less legal and financial risk than offering guided hunting access. Disease transmission, particularly anthrax, between wildlife and livestock was also discussed in this breakout session, as well as a presentation about the pros and cons of improved grasses on wildlife.

An opportunity for further discussion on each of those topics was given at the end of each day with a speaker panel.

Government Programs and Symposium Wrap-Up

The Agricultural Act of 2014 was a main topic of discussion from Jeff Goodwin, state rangeland management specialist for USDA-NRCS. His presentation discussed the various government programs that were reauthorized, repealed, and/or established as a result of the act. The new and reauthorized acts can greatly enhance grazing, wildlife habitat, and ranch land value, Goodwin discussed. The challenges and help available to ranchers and landowners who face ranching with endangered species were also discussed. Goodwin noted that one of the top species of concern is the Lesser Prairie-Chicken, among five other species.

Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute Executive Director Fred Bryant, Ph.D., presented the keynote address that wrapped up symposium. His address discussed the future of wildlife management as impacted by weather patterns, government policy, wildlife populations, wildlife management techniques, and human population. Bryant offered historical data of each area, and continued with future perspectives and areas needing change.

“Dr. Bryant highlighted so many pivotal and unforeseeable factors that have impacted wildlife management and ranching over the last several decades,” said Mathis. “In the future, ranch managers and owners should expect external and unforeseeable shocks to our industry. Successful managers of livestock and wildlife will be prepared to adapt to an unpredictable future.”

About KRIRM

Formed in 2003, KRIRM is a ranch management master’s program at TAMUK created in honor of the 150th Anniversary of the legendary King Ranch. As the only ranch management master’s program in the world, KRIRM teaches graduate students using a multi-disciplinary, systems approach to ranch management, and provides the highest quality lectureships and symposia to stakeholders in the ranching industry. The programs serve the ranching industry by empowering graduate students and outreach attendees with skills that will enable them to strategically manage complex ranching operations and successfully lead our industry. Graduates of KRIRM manage livestock and wildlife on over 4 million acres of rangeland. For more information about KRIRM, and the master’s and certificate programs, visit krirm.tamuk.edu.

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