



# THE RURAL LANDSCAPE INSTITUTE

A CATALYST FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL INTEGRITY  
IN THE AMERICAN WEST

## RANCH MANAGER TRAINING PROJECT

### Professional Development Program

*“Successful ranch managers are directed to lifelong learning.”* Dr. Barry H. Dunn, Executive Director, King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management, Texas A&M University in “Key Characteristics of Successful Ranch Managers”, *National Cattlemen*, Fall 2007

*“Successful ranch managers make learning a lifetime pursuit.”* Burke Teichert, Ranch Manager, Deseret Ranch, Utah in “Taking the Reins: What does it take to make a good ranch manager?” in *Working Ranch*, October-November, 2007.

*“Only motivated, life long learners need apply.”* Troy Smith in “Taking the Reins” in *Working Ranch*, October-November, 2007

Essentially any professional in any skill area devotes a significant amount of time and energy each year to professional development. A Certified Ranch Manager is no exception. Due to the multiple set of skills needed to operate in a volatile and fluid political, social and economic environment, ongoing professional development is critical in order to be successful as a ranch manager. There is no question that this takes a great deal of motivation and a perspective that one always is learning new ways of operating and managing a ranch so that it is not only profitable but is kept sustainable as a working landscape. This kind of attitude is essential to stay on the forefront of progressive ranch management practices. It not only takes motivation, but also the discipline to learn on an ongoing basis, both from practice and from experts in the field.

This can be done through a variety of venues, starting with collaborating with colleagues, having the intuition to know when and what skill sets to retain on a consulting basis, experiencing multimedia opportunities (DVDs, the Internet, journals, etc.) and participating in formal learning opportunities. Those who are successful in making the most of professional development opportunities have a team approach mentality to ranch management; in other words, they realize they can't do everything themselves but are open to learning from colleagues, experts and other available resources that are usually readily attainable.

Therefore, once an aspiring ranch manager becomes certified, he or she is buying into a lifelong professional development process. The National Association for Certified Ranch Managers (NACRM) can play a pivotal role in assisting a Certified Ranch Manager attain salient and high quality professional development opportunities. This can be done by requiring a Certified Ranch Manager to partake of and complete an annual professional development program that is a requirement to remain certified.

Such a program can develop in many ways. However, its direction should be developed by an accreditation committee that is an integral part of the NACRM. Such a committee would be comprised of Board members, successful veteran ranch managers and educators in the ranch manager arena. Recommended parameters of the recertification program are as follows.

We are assuming that recertification will occur on a biannual basis. We propose that a Certified Ranch Manager undertake 16 hours of accredited professional development courses a year, or 32 hours (“continuing education credits”) total. Half of these courses will be in areas that the accreditation committee considers mandatory topics. Out of these mandatory topics, it is assumed that at least half of them will be in the general area of natural resource management. The other half of continuing education credits will be elective, but they still have to be in areas and programs approved by the accreditation committee of the National Association.

The mandatory and elective topic areas may well change from year to year. Such changes will be made by the accreditation committee.

It is encouraged that all continuing education credits are done in a live interactive environment; for example, classrooms, organized field trips and seminars. The priority assumed here is that having an interactive environment with fellow colleagues, along with professional educational leaders, will be in the long run a more productive use of the Certified Ranch Manager’s professional development time. However, it is also assumed that there will be online courses approved by the accreditation committee. WIRE (Western Integrated Resource Education), a coalition of several state universities in the Northern Rockies region, was a part of the SARE (Sustainable Agricultural Research and Education) program. While no longer in existence, WIRE is used here as an example of what an accredited online program might look like. It is highly recommended that online courses comprise, at the most, only one half of the continuing education credits necessary for biannual recertification.

Accredited continuing education credits obtained online will most likely be scored, whereas those continuing education credits obtained through a more interactive environment would be judged by pass/fair criteria.

All syllabi and those teaching and/or coordinating these continuing education programs will be thoroughly vetted and approved by the accreditation committee of the National Association. What is being suggested is common practice in a wide variety of professions. Real estate, law, accounting, land appraisal and the medical field are all illustrative of professions that have a similar professional development program to that being articulated here.

To be more specific, and assuming such a professional development program is now in place, the following are some examples of what might be viewed as mandatory subject areas:

- The 2008 Farm Bill and how it affects ranch management
- Consumer trends regarding agricultural products
- Energy conservation on the ranch
- Farm and ranch product diversification
- Inventorying of all resources at one’s disposal to further conservation practices, productivity and profitability

Current topics for elective subject areas might include:

- Marketing direct
- Value-added products
- Team building
- Habitat enhancement and management for wildlife

- Annual meetings of professional organizations, such as the Society for Range Management, Montana Stockgrowers Association, the Quivera Coalition, Weed Control Districts, etc.

Continuing education credits also would be given to those certified ranch managers who choose to partake in a variety of organized programs that speak directly to professional development. How many credits, mandatory or elective, will depend upon the program, the Certified Ranch Manager's experience and the criteria used by the accreditation committee of the National Association.

For example:

- For a ranch manager who acts as the employer/supervisor of one or more interns who are part of a ranch manager internship program at a university, continuing education credits should be given. How many credits would depend upon the complexity of the program and the degree of involvement of the ranch manager.
- If a ranch manager is involved in a private ranch management program such as Ranching for Profit and its Executive Link, or Allan Savory's Holistic Range Manager program, continuing education credits should be given towards recertification. This also would hold true if the ranch manager wished to enroll in continuing education programs that have been developed by The Society for Range Management and approved by NACRM. How many credits would be awarded for partaking in one of these programs will depend upon the ranch manager's situation and experience. The ranch manager would apply to the accreditation committee for a certain number of credits, which would then have to be approved.
- Some universities may have advanced ranch manager programs, much like The King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management at Texas A&M University. Certified ranch managers may well want to enroll in such a program. This then would have to be approved by the accreditation committee, along with how many credits that would be given for participating in such a program.

#### NACRM Resources for Professional Development

In addition to the formal professional development program in which ranch managers involve themselves to stay certified, the NACRM can and will provide a variety of resources that regularly assist Certified Ranch Managers in their lifelong pursuit of learning. We propose that the National Association consider the following:

- A monthly newsletter that all Certified Ranch Managers would receive featuring relevant trends and breaking news relevant to the interdisciplinary world of the ranch manager. Specific attention would be focused on what's new in production, marketing, natural resource management and in public policy laws and regulations
- A weekly Internet news service available to NACRM members that provides linkages to agricultural news, articles and papers that are deemed important to the ranch manager. This news service would provide links to relevant topics that NACRM staff feel are important for the ranch manager to know.
- The development and maintenance of a virtual library in relevant topic areas to the ranch manager available through the NACRM website. Such a virtual library has been developed by this project. The library is sorted through topic areas relevant to the formal curriculum that has been proposed in this project. This should be viewed as a beginning virtual library – one that the National

Association keeps current and advises Certified Ranch Managers on a regular basis what's new in the virtual library.

- Also posted on the NACRM website will be relevant programs, conferences, seminars and courses in which NACRM believes the ranch manager should have some familiarization. In most cases, these would be programs that the accreditation committee has vetted so that if one decided to pursue such a program, continuing education credits would be earned.

### Getting Started

The National Association for Certified Ranch Managers is at present an association on paper only. No matter how good the concept is, NACRM will not make a significant difference until it has a minimum membership of at least 200-300 Certified Ranch Managers in the region loosely called the Northern Rockies. That will not happen overnight. And it particularly won't happen for the foreseeable future if the only Certified Ranch Managers are those who go through an undergraduate university program. In the Certification section of this project, we talked about the fact that ranch managers with at least five years experience (but without the educational background) could become a Certified Ranch Manager if they take a certification test. If that is indeed the case, the National Association needs to develop immediately a program that helps experienced ranchers prepare for the certification test. Such a program, while essential at the outset, should always be available as there always will be experienced ranch managers who are beyond a formal education but would like to become certified. Every effort should be made to help such individuals become Certified Ranch Managers while at the same time not compromising on overall ranch manager certification standards.

Another startup task for NACRM is to determine what to do with the ranch manager who is not certified but wants to take advantage of the professional development resources that NACRM makes available for the professional development of Certified Ranch Managers. Will only Certified Ranch Managers have access, through a password, to these resources? Or is it more appropriate to have associate members who are not certified but are paying a membership fee to NACRM so that they can make use of the Association's professional development resources? This may be necessary for the first five years of NACRM's existence, but after that period of time, NACRM's benefits and resources will be made available only to those who are Certified Ranch Manager members.

We don't feel a judgment can be made here on this matter. But it is appropriate to raise the issue as one that needs to be considered in the start up years of the National Association.

Ongoing professional development and having the motivation and discipline to seriously embrace the concept of lifelong learning cannot be overstated when we are looking at training ranch managers for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.