



Summary: International Year of Rangelands & Pastoralists (IYRP) at SRM, February 2022

Change the narrative: rangelands are not wastelands

The Society for Range Management (SRM) and its International Affairs Committee sponsored a series of IYRP-related events at the SRM Annual Meeting in February 2022 in Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA. This is a summary of key findings and conclusions of all these events.

IYRP Symposium at SRM 2022

The Symposium was a snapshot of the most pressing and up-to-date research, information and insights about rangelands and pastoralism. The common theme was how to overcome the marginalization of these systems, from local to global spheres.

Bulgamaa¹ summarized the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralism ([IYRP](#)), the Mongolian leadership and the multistakeholder global coalition that has worked towards designating it. Niamir-Fuller² presented the proposed [12 global IYRP themes](#). Already, public debates on these topics are increasing, as is support for the IYRP, said Yilmaz³. The designation of the IYRP will provide the stage to move beyond misunderstanding and marginalization. “It’s time to take a stand for progress”, said the moderator Coppock⁴.

To overcome marginalization, knowledge gaps in areas that are critical for raising awareness need to be filled. Lack of clear definition of how systems and baselines are defined, and biases in data collection are the main reasons why Scoones⁵ and his partners have concluded that the current methods for calculating carbon and other greenhouse gases from rangelands lead to incomplete conclusions. The [PASTRES report](#) shows how this contributes to an inaccurate narrative when comparing industrial, contained livestock with extensive pastoralism.

A coalition of partners including ILRI, IUCN, WWF UNEP, ILC and FAO has initiated a [Global Rangeland Atlas](#). Its preliminary findings are that rangelands currently cover at least 54% of the earth’s landmass, that 84% of these lands support livestock, that 46% of all livestock in the world are raised in rangelands and that 12% are classified as protected areas. Masumbuko⁶ called for more collaboration and fresh collection of field data to regularly update the Atlas, and to support global commitment to rangeland restoration.

From a study covering more than 200 research activities across the globe, Conant⁷ concluded that there are substantial carbon stocks in grasslands, and substantial potential for more sequestration through management options. For example, re-converting lands from cropping back to rangelands has the highest C-sequestration potential of all management options; increasing earthworms in the soil appears to be far better than irrigation; and both are more economical than their alternatives. However, existing studies have limitations and biases, and Conant called for more field data collection and harmonization of methods globally. Several participants provided useful links to methods such as the [Carbon Benefits Tool](#) (Colorado State University/WOCAT) and to the [Podcast Art of the Range](#).

Formalization of pastoral tenure systems is challenging because of their complexities. As a result, tenure insecurity prevails with loss of key linchpin resources and rangeland fragmentation. This complexity is getting ever greater as pastoralists take action to secure access and land in the absence of such formalization. They are purchasing urban land to access a wider pastoral landscape, making alliances with conservation organizations, and “forum shopping” for the system that will most likely protect their rights. To date, formalization schemes have focused on trying to develop an effective tenure system for protecting the whole landscape or rangeland

¹ D. Bulgamaa, Mongolian National Federation of Pasture User Groups

² Maryam Niamir-Fuller, Vice Chair ISG, IYRP

³ Engin Yilmaz, Co-chair of Europe RISG, Director of Yolda Initiative, and Coordinator Alliance for Mediterranean Nature & Culture

⁴ Layne Coppock, Co-chair of North America RISG and Utah State University, USA

⁵ Ian Scoones, Professor, Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Sussex, UK, Co-Director of the Economic & Social Research Council STEPS Centre, and lead for PASTRES (Pastoralism, Uncertainty & Resilience) programme

⁶ Bora Masumbuko, Senior Programme Officer, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

⁷ Rich Conant, Professor and Head, Ecosystems Science and Sustainability, Colorado State University, USA



area. However, Flintan⁸ and co-authors suggest a different approach is needed, focusing on securing the most important pastoral linchpin resources before they disappear. Flintan also highlighted that pastoralist women's rights can be better supported and protected through ensuring greater tenure security as part of the pastoralist group rather than seeking to give them individual tenure.

Lack of tenure security is one reason why some pastoralist communities today are being impacted by large-scale renewable energy schemes attracted by what is seen as “vacant land” with high insolation rates and high wind velocity. Government policies and social-environmental safeguards are needed to ensure no harm is done, grazing resources are protected, and pastoralists benefit from such schemes, said Waters-Bayer⁹. Niamir-Fuller proposed a full review by the IYRP coalition of the social-environmental safeguards of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and other funders of renewable energy, from the perspective of rangelands and pastoralism.

How can financial resources be leveraged for greater support to sustainable rangelands and pastoralism? Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) have been experimented on for decades now to reward good stewardship, but their use in rangelands is still limited, said Klain¹⁰. PES programs can have unintended externalities, especially on “relational values”, because introducing money can destroy intrinsic motivations for stewardship and weaken social cohesion. She concluded that PES programs might help, but not everywhere.

Norton¹¹ provided a summary review of international financial sources such as GEF, Green Climate Fund, World Bank, etc., and domestic USA sources such as USDA (United States Department of Agriculture), [InfoEd SPIN](#), the largest database on grant opportunities for research, and the [Foundation Center](#). Participants offered other sources, such as the [Climate Technology Center and Network](#) (UNEP and UNIDO) and the [Adaptation Fund](#). Vivek¹² proposed that there be a more detailed webinar for IYRP partners on such financing solutions.

How can the IYRP change the “we are marginalized” narrative to a “we are the stewards of the planet” narrative, asked Briske¹³ by way of concluding the Symposium. He traced the current negative narrative to the mid-19th century, when colonial powers saw rangelands as degraded forests. Narratives are difficult to change because evidence alone is not enough to change hearts and minds. The question ‘whether or not pastoralism is sustainable’ is inappropriate. The appropriate question is ‘under what conditions is pastoralism sustainable’? We need simple, timely, positive and piercing messages that can impact today’s communication channels. We should focus on the ecosystem services emanating from rangelands. Manzano¹⁴ offered this message: “We don’t have to swallow the GHGs from meat if we just turn to net-positive meat from pastoral systems”. The IYRP needs to upgrade and harmonize definitions for ‘rangelands’ and ‘pastoralists’ so the entire world can understand them; this will also allow us to finally state with confidence how many pastoralists there are in the world.

SRM Campfire, focus on IYRP

The Campfire was an in-person conversation among rangeland management professionals, educators, researchers, students, ranchers and policymakers about marketing rangelands to the world. Participants agreed that rangelands should be seen as a global land type with an inherent beauty and an ecological and social history, and of critical importance to the earth and humanity that rivals other land types such as forests, deserts and wetlands. “Rangelands are where humanity began”, said one participant, linking back to our hunter-gatherer forebears, to indigenous groups and others who continue to derive a living from rangelands across the globe. The group felt that storytelling – to connect the audience to rangeland professionals through passion and knowledge – would be the most effective. These stories could be told through numerous social media channels (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) and in various formats including newsletters, advertisements, documentaries, short videos and podcasts. Social media influencers could share the “Rangeland Message” through their audiences.

⁸ Fiona Flintan, Senior Scientist, ILRI (International Livestock Research Institute)

⁹ Ann Waters-Bayer, Chair of IYRP Global Communications Team; AGRECOL, Germany, and CELEP

¹⁰ Sarah Klain, Assistant Professor, Utah State University, USA

¹¹ Brien Norton, Utah State University, USA

¹² P. Vivekanandan, Co-chair of the South Asia Regional IYRP Support Group; and SEVA, Tamil Nadu, India

¹³ David Briske, Regents Professor, Ecology & Conservation Biology, Texas A&M University, College Station TX, USA

¹⁴ Pablo Manzano Baena, Co-chair of LatinoAmerica RISG, and researcher at Basque Center for Climate Change



IYRP Workshops at SRM 2022

All three objectives of the two-day [IYRP workshop](#) were achieved: a) preliminary set of priority issues prepared by eight of the Regional IYRP Support Groups (RISGs) in response to the 12 IYRP global themes; b) nine crosscutting issues synthesized from the most common regional priorities; and c) two of these crosscutting issues selected through participatory polls for further exploration. Briske, Fernandez-Gimenez¹⁵ and Norton, who conducted the synthesis, noted that there were many commonalities between the regions even though differences in approach or perspective do occur. It was an important preparatory step towards formal global and regional action

planning for raising awareness and filling knowledge gaps for IYRP 2026.

Rights and land access to enhance pastoral mobility: an issue crosscutting IYRP Themes 2,3 7 and 9 :

Maintaining and enhancing mobility of livestock is a critical factor for protecting the environment and providing sustainable livelihoods. Mobility can be found in different forms, and in areas one might not expect. Turin called for increasing the societal awareness of the value of extensive, collective pastoralism in Latin America, and to continue to advocate for government recognition of these viable systems. Fernandez-Gimenez gave examples of mobility between public and private lands in the USA, and Niamir-Fuller talked about transhumance in the California highlands. Ykhanbai¹⁶ explained how the blocking of transhumance between seasonal pastures in Mongolia and the privatization of rangelands in Kazakhstan led to rangeland degradation. Turin¹⁷ noted the same phenomenon in the Andean region, and Ruijin¹⁸ highlighted it for western China. Vivek described how forestry authorities had blocked grazing in forested areas, often the only grazing resources left for pastoralists outside of Gujarat, India. Abarchi¹⁹ said that another serious threat was the expropriation of rangelands by large multi-national corporations in West and Central Africa.

Recently the Chinese government is encouraging communities to collaborate in managing rangelands and livestock through collectives so as to decrease land degradation, Ruijin noted; the IYRP 2026 can help raise awareness about this. Similarly, Ykhanbai said that the Mongolian government was reinstating the transhumance corridors and seasonal rotation and encouraging “Pastoral User Groups” to manage these lands collectively. He called for exchange of experiences through field visits and other awareness-raising activities for the IYRP.

The South Asia RISG plans to document indigenous knowledge, organize awards and festivals, raise awareness on the value of grazing for reducing risk of forest fire, and advocate for secure grazing rights for mobile pastoralists and veterinary and other pastoral services along mobility routes. Discussion has also started on transboundary transhumance between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Abarchi also focused on [transboundary transhumance laws](#) and regulations put in place by ECOWAS that have helped to better manage mobility in the African Sahel in an equitable fashion. The West & Central Africa RISG plans to continue to advocate for such laws to be implemented in a harmonized way in all countries, and to raise pastoralists’ awareness of these laws. He called for more pastoral services along mobility routes. Hoth²⁰ pointed out that we should not forget the needs of wildlife for mobility, particularly across boundaries.

Value of rangeland biodiversity and ecosystem services sustained through pastoralism: an issue crosscutting IYRP Themes 1, 5, 6 and 9 : Rangelands have intrinsic values for ecosystem health and biodiversity, and pastoralists are their stewards. A common concern among the regions was the loss of such values through conversion of rangelands, whether to crops and settlement, or to forests through well meaning but misplaced afforestation projects.

¹⁵ Maria Fernandez-Gimenez, Senior Research Scholar, Department of Forest & Rangeland Stewardship, Colorado State University, USA

¹⁶ Hijaba Ykhanbai, Chair of Central Asia and Mongolia RISG, and Director of Jasil, Mongolia

¹⁷ Cecilia Turin, member of LatinoAmerica RISG, and Pastoramericas

¹⁸ Ruijin Long, Co-chair of East Asia RISG, and Professor of Pastoralism & Ecology, Lanzhou University, China

¹⁹ Harouna Abarchi, Chair of West & Central Africa RISG, Chief of the Pastoralism Department at AREN (Association pour la Redynamisation de l'Élevage au Niger), and President of the Association Nodde Nooto (A2N)

²⁰ Jürgen Hoth, Co-Chair of North America RISG



In conclusion, Coppock and O'Rourke thanked all participants for a very successful and vibrant meeting, and expressed gratitude to the SRM for making this meeting possible. The RISGs have started a bottom-up process of planning that now needs to be scaled up once the IYRP 2026 is declared. It needs to involve all stakeholders to develop the right narrative, messaging and media to raise awareness at national, regional and global levels, and to continue to fill knowledge gaps in critical areas.



This report was prepared by M. Niamir-Fuller for IYRP ISG March 2022

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