

Colorado Section SRM Newsletter
CSSRM Website: For Immediate Release:
November 6, 2014

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FFA Rangeland Judges Compete in La Junta
By Ben Berlinger, Society for Range Management, Youth Activities Chair

Future Farmers of America (FFA) students and their advisors from high schools across eastern Colorado arrived at Otero Junior College in La Junta October 8th. The purpose was to compete in a rangeland plant identification exercise and participate in judging the soundness of the rangeland. This **state-level competition** attracted 98 students representing 13 FFA Chapters from as far away as Merino & Peetz to the north and Hoehne & Branson to the south.

Team awards and top scoring individuals were recognized at the awards ceremony which was held at the conclusion of the competition. The **Colorado Section of the Society for Range Management (SRM)** sponsored the individual honors while **nineteen of the Conservation Districts** across eastern Colorado and some local business sponsored the team plaques and provided a breakfast snack and a cafeteria lunch for the participants at the college. **The Olney-Boone, East Otero and West Otero/Timpas Conservation Districts provided the local coordination for the activity. Nancy Aschermann, District Manager in Rocky Ford, handled the local arrangements for the three Conservation Districts in Otero County.** Colorado Conservation Districts have always united to provide support for natural resources education for our youth in Colorado.

The Colorado Section individual awards were presented to **Kolton Aubuchon of Hoehne** for the high score on the combined site judging & plant identification (87% score); and to **Anastasia Torres of Hoehne** for second place honors with her combined score of 82% correct. **Kolton & Mikaela Cushing of Hoehne** were recognized as the top individuals for the plant identification part of the contest. They both scored 91% correct in this exercise requiring the identification of 50 rangeland plants and their characteristics. Kolton was presented with a \$200 check from the Colorado Section SRM along with his plaque.

The winning high schools recognized at this year's state competition included: **Hoehne FFA Chapter, 1st Place Gold Team; Kim FFA Chapter, 2nd Place Gold Team; Fowler FFA Chapter, 3rd Place Silver Team; Prichett FFA Chapter, 4th Place Silver Team; Lone Star FFA Chapter, 5th Place Bronze Team; Rocky Ford FFA Chapter, 6th Place Bronze Team.**

The FFA rangeland judging contest is divided into two parts. The native plant identification involves the naming of rangeland plants common to eastern Colorado together with rating important plant characteristics such as life span, grazing response, and palatability for cattle. The second part of the contest takes place in the field and requires the students to judge the condition of two different rangeland sites. Here the students must determine the plant composition of each site, the range condition compared to the reference plant community, the suggested stocking rate, and range trend. Finally, based on their evaluation of the existing plant community, each student must select the appropriate management practice (or suite of practices)

that would be recommended to the land owner for improvement of the rangeland resource and livestock performance.

The CO Section SRM & Colorado's Conservation Districts congratulate all of the Colorado high school youth who participated in this year's rangeland judging exercise and wish them continued success with their accomplishments to learn more about the conservation of our natural resources.

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Eastern Colorado State FFA Rangeland Judging career Development Exercise (CDE) held in SE CO at OJC. There were 98 FFA students participating in this year's contest representing 13 schools from all over eastern Colorado. This pic shows one group of students judging an Alkaline Plains site, one of two ecological sites located south of La Junta. The participating teams were Hoehne, Kim, Fowler, Prichett, Lone Star, Rocky Ford, Burlington, Arickaree, Stratton, Merino, Idalia, Peetz, and Branson. The order of schools listed above is the placement of the team based on the three highest scoring team members.