

Colorado Section SRM News

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FFA Rangeland Judges Compete in Akron

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 the Washington County fairgrounds in Akron on October 10th. 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 to the north and Hoehne 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 several of the **Conservation Districts** across eastern Colorado and the **Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI)** sponsored the team plaques and provide lunch for the participants. Colorado Section members who facilitated the contest this year were Ben Berlinger, Tom Nadgwick, Julie Elliott, Dan Nosal and Josh Saunders.

The Colorado Section individual awards were presented to **Mathew Crane of Pritchett** for the high score on the combined site judging & plant identification (83% score); and to **Kayleigh Santala of Flagler** for second place honors with her combined score of 66% correct. **Todd Arnhold of Hoehne** was recognized as the top individual for the plant identification part of the contest. Todd scored an 89% correct in this exercise requiring the identification of 50 rangeland plants and their characteristics. Matthew 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: **Pritchett FFA Chapter, 1st Place Gold Team; Flagler FFA Chapter, 2nd Place Gold Team; Hoehne FFA Chapter, 3rd Place Silver Team; Kim FFA Chapter, 4th Place Silver Team; Merino FFA Chapter, 5th Place Bronze Team; Wray 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 SRM congratulates 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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