

June 2026

RANGE & PASTURE *Journal*

~ Providing Stewardship Strategies For Northern Plains Grasslands ~



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NEBRASKA Grazing Lands Coalition

Registration Open for Grazing Schools in the Sandhills and Panhandle

The Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition (NGLC) will host two 2026 Grazing Schools. The three-day, field-based learning experiences are designed for ranchers who want to sharpen their grazing strategies, strengthen peer networks, and improve the long-term health and profitability of their grazing operations. Registration is now open.

2026 Grazing School dates & locations

Sandhills Grazing School: July 28–30, hosted at the McGinn Ranch near Anselmo, NE

Panhandle Grazing School: August 24–26, hosted at Sprenger Cattle Co., near Sidney, NE

The program blends hands-on learning, real-ranch scenarios, and

producer-led discussion to help participants clearly calculate their forage supply, evaluate flexibility in their livestock demand to deal with drought and other resource concerns, and strategically design the water, fencing, and financial systems that tie it all together. Early registration is \$475 and includes instruction, materials, meals, and access to the new Grazing School Follow-Through program. Registration increases to \$575 on July 10.

A producer-led, field-based experience

The school is designed for ranchers with decision-making responsibility who are ready to achieve their grazing goals. The majority of

the program will be led by seasoned Nebraska ranchers who will share their real-world application of adaptive grazing and business planning. Technical teaching will be provided by range-land professionals. Participants will spend most of their time in observation, small-group problem-solving, and working through real ranch scenarios.

Follow-Through support after the school

Graduates gain free access to the new NGLC Grazing School Follow-Through program, which provides one-on-one, on-ranch support to help achieve their grazing goals. This ongoing connection with instructors and peers is designed to build local networks of like-minded

ranchers who continue to work together long after the school ends.

About the Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition

Dedicated to the enhancement of Nebraska's grasslands, the Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition is comprised of ranchers and private landowners all focused on creating public awareness and improvement of the grazing lands in Nebraska. The organization's top focus is to provide voluntary technical assistance and educational opportunities on grazing land management.

To register for Grazing School or learn more about NGLC visit www.nebraskagrazinglands.org, or call Executive Director Laura Nelson at 308-235-8420.

Free Post-wildfire Stewardship Support for Nebraska Ranchers

Recent wildfires across Nebraska have left many ranchers facing difficult questions about forage recovery, grazing management, infrastructure repairs, and what comes next.

To help navigate those decisions, the Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition (NGLC) is launching a new Post-Wildfire Stewardship Resilience program, offering free, one-on-one consultations to Nebraska ranchers affected by wildfire in 2026.

The program connects ranchers with an experienced range management professional who will visit the operation, walk the pastures, discuss recovery goals and concerns, and help evaluate practical options to move forward.

Support may include conversations around:

- Grazing rest and recovery timing
- Forage availability and stocking decisions
- Infrastructure repair priorities

- Monitoring approaches to track recovery

- Strategies to strengthen long-term ranch resilience

Each participating ranch will receive an on-site consultation, practical recommendations tailored to their operation, and follow-up support as recovery progresses.

The pilot is open to any Nebraska rancher affected by wildfire in 2026. Because this is a pilot program, space is limited.

If demand exceeds availability, preference will be given to young and beginning ranchers. Participation is free of charge.

Ranchers interested in learning more or signing up can visit www.nebraskagrazinglands.org or contact Executive Director Laura Nelson at laura@nebraskagrazinglands.org or (308) 235-8420.

Friends, neighbors, local conservation professionals, and community members are also welcome to nominate ranchers who may benefit from the program.

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Coalition

On the Cover:

Bird Tour participants take in the view and watch for winged creatures while on the Bird Tour held at the Bien Ranch on June 3 in South Dakota.



Save the date for these upcoming NGLC events!

- July 28-30: Sandhills Grazing School - Anselmo, NE
- Aug. 4-5: NE Grassland Alliance Gathering & Nebraska Grazing Conf. - Kearney, NE
- Aug. 4-7: Young Adult Ranching for Profit, Kimball, NE
- Aug 24-26: Panhandle Grazing School - Sidney, NE
- Sep 9: Farm & Ranch Legacy Workshop with Pam Olsen - Broken Bow, NE
- Sep. 23-24: National Grazing Land Coalition Bus Tour - Sioux Falls, SD
- Dec. 8: Farm & Ranch Legacy Workshop with Pam Olsen - Chadron, NE



WWW.NEBRASKAGRAZINGLANDS.ORG

Photo by Angela Redman

The Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition (NGLC) is a part of a national effort to enhance the resource stewardship and success of grazing land-dependent operations. Objectives of the NGLC board, made up of mostly ranchers, are to strengthen partnerships, promote volunteer assistance and participation, and promote education, training, appreciation, advocacy, and public awareness of the 23 million acres of grazing lands in Nebraska.

Specific projects include sponsoring statewide grazing educational opportunities, collaboration with other partners and agencies focused on grazing management, promotion of farm and ranch transition planning and education, and advocacy for the stewardship of Nebraska's grasslands.

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Lots of Summer Prairie Happenings

The South Dakota Grassland Coalition has a variety of events planned for this summer.

Already SD Grasslands has hosted a Pasture Walk at the Butzer Ranch at Norway Center, South Dakota and coming up in July there are two more pasture walks located in the more central portions of the state. On July 10, attend a pasture walk at the Doud Ranch at Midland, South Dakota. The Douds have years of experience working with different partner agencies to improve their operation's water and

fence infrastructure. As this pasture walk you will see firsthand how underperforming hay was transformed into a manage grazing system. The Douds offer practical ideas for improving pasture and soil health.

Then on July 15 the Heinz Farm at Onaka, South Dakota will welcome guests to its operation. While there, the Heinz family will show you how generations of stewardship and adaptive grazing have helped transition them into an organic beef herd.

You will also get to learn more about how to farm and ranch with

multiple generations in the same operation and how to plan for succession.

RSVP is needed if you plan to attend one of the Pasture Tours. RSVP to Jenita at jenita@wild-prairiesolutions.com.

A new event in August is the Prairie Fest to be held at Good Earth State Park on Aug. 22.

The SD Grassland Coalition invites you to an afternoon of music, food, family fun, and prairie discovery. Prairie Fest brings together people of all ages to celebrate one of South Dakota's greatest treasures: our grasslands.

Enjoy live music, delicious food trucks, hands-on activities for kids, and opportunities to explore the plants, wildlife, and landscapes that make the state's prairie unique.

Whether you're a life-long rancher, a nature enthusiast, or simply looking for a fun family outing, Prairie Fest offers something for everyone. Come connect with your community, learn something new, and experience the beauty and importance of Dakota grasslands in a relaxed, festival atmosphere.

"A unified voice for managing South Dakota's grass resource"

The Coalition's goal is to provide local leadership and guidance in a cooperative effort, and provide information and technical assistance to grassland managers.

By focusing the collective power of resource management agencies, producer organizations, educational institutions, professional societies, environmental organizations and private grassland managers, much can be accomplished.

To that end, the Coalition is a major partner in the Grassland Management and Planning Project. For more detailed information on this project, visit sdconservation.org and click on Grassland.

Grazing Workshop and Bird Tour Held

On June 3 the South Dakota Grassland Coalition welcomed guests to the Bien Ranch at Veblen, South Dakota for a grazing workshop and bird tour. The morning offered a time to be out on the land learning about grazing strategies the Bien's have implemented while the afternoon provided time to have discussion and then a bird tour.

SDGC

To become a member, clip and mail the form below with your payment.

SD GRASSLAND COALITION MEMBERSHIP - \$30/yr or \$55/2 yrs.

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

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E-mail Address _____

Return to: Judge Jessop
PO Box 401 • Presho, SD 57568

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"A Unified voice for managing South Dakota's grass resource."

Upcoming Events

- July 10**
Pasture Walk,
Doud Ranch, Midland, SD
- July 15**
Pasture Walk,
Heinz Farm, Onaka, SD
- Aug. 20**
SD Leopold Conservation Award
Tour, Darling Creek Ranch,
Meadow, SD
- Aug 22**
Prairie Fest 2026,
Good Earth State Park, SD

For information contact Judge Jessop • 605-280-0127
judge.jessop@sdconservation.net • www.sdgrass.org

Drought and the “Million Dollar Question”

Kayla Walker
Good Grazing Makes Cent\$

Drought decisions are tough. So many questions arise and almost all of them have been referred to as “the million dollar question” because there is no solid answer to any of them. “When do you know you’re in for real drought?” “What’s the best reaction to drought?” “How long will it persist and does that alter your plans?” These were all addressed during a live, virtual panel organized and hosted by Good Grazing Make Cent\$ on May 27.

How Do You Know You’re In Drought?

The first question is usually ‘when are reactions necessary.’ And while this varies regionally and for each operation, both Derek Scasta, Laramie Research and Extension Center Director and Interim Associate Dean and Director of Extension at University of Wyoming, and Dusty Emond, fifth generation, Malta, Montana rancher, agreed that paying attention to weather patterns as early as mid-winter is necessary.

“We’ve been worried about it all winter and

spring because last summer we just kind of skated by on stock water,” Emond said. “I didn’t fully stock this spring because I knew I was playing on the edge and we’re already liquidating some livestock here to try to make it through because in our country it takes a lot of rain to fill those reservoirs. We can fill them with a little bit of snow, but once that frost goes out of the ground, it takes a lot of rain to run water.”

Scasta said in Southern Wyoming snowpack is a major influencer too, and in the case of the research ranch he manages, not only can it impact stock water and range forage production, but irrigation as well – and their ability to put up hay which they feed through long winters. As for signs that drought is imminent, he not only watches the drought monitor, 30-day forecasts through spring, and long-term weather predictions, but pairs that with what he is experiencing on the range.

“When we turn the corner in February and March, we’re really starting to think about it,” Scasta said. “And I’m always trying to couple on the ground observa-

tions with these predictions and maps and what I’m seeing.”

The market can indicate signs of drought just as clearly as what’s occurring with the weather too, according to ShayLe Stewart, DTN Livestock Market Analyst and Big Country Genetics owner and operator. For example, at Wyoming’s largest livestock market, in Torrington, a special drought sale saw 9,000 head when it typically markets 400-700 a week, according to the *Cowboy State Daily*.

“You don’t need more of an example than just that to get the feel of the market,” Stewart said. “I mean there’s just simply no grass to be had out there. You couple that with other tragedies such as the fires that happened in Nebraska and that just exasperates the issue... The last crop progress report said 75 percent of Nebraska’s pasture and range conditions were either poor or very poor conditions and when you consider that’s the whole state, you don’t need any clarity beyond that – we can definitely see where people sit in regards to their attitudes of the market and drought through those things right there.”

How Do You React?

Determining that conditions merit reaction, the next big question is what works best. As a fifth-generation rancher in Malta, Montana, Emond has experienced many droughts and found diversifying to be a beneficial part of his drought plan. Today, they run cow-calf pairs, yearlings, replacement heifers, sheep, and goats – meaning when dry conditions hit, he has many options to destock and can choose the best one based not only on feed and water availability, but market conditions as well.

“Twenty years ago we were almost straight cow-calf and after one of those droughts and going to Ranching for Profit, we made the decision to get some enterprises that were a little more drought tolerant or expendable,” Emond said. “And the funny thing is, now I’m selling pairs and keeping sheep and replacement heifers, but that’s more due to market influences – so much for my plan to protect the cowherd, it’s the first thing I’m selling right now.”

And while that decision is largely due to the price pairs are bringing today,



SHUTTERSTOCK
Drought conditions are present across much of the Nebraska and South Dakota region.

Emond also said with low stock water supply, and consequently potential water quality issues, yearlings and sheep are more tolerant. He has faced calf health issues on low water years in the past.

“If we end up hauling a bunch of water, you have to haul less gallons to smaller animals, too,” he added.

Reactions to each drought cannot be the same, though. Just as Emond’s diversity helps him make destocking decisions based on the year, Stewart warned that no two droughts are the same.

“The drought plan we needed in 2012 is not the same drought plan we need this year,” she said. “People need to not only look at weather, stocking, pasture, range and forage conditions, but also where is this drought showing up in the cattle market cyclical cycle.”

For example, in 2012 many had to destock but the market’s peak wasn’t coming for another two to three years. Those individuals had fewer calves to sell when the market was reaching its high and they were attempting to restock their herd when the market was at its peak.

“That really stung,” Stewart said. “But if you look at the market from today’s perspective, we’re in a totally different scenario. Here we sit in 2026 with all-time high fat cattle prices, all-time high cull cow prices, and pretty phenomenal feeder cattle prices. We’re assuming we are at the market’s peak right now and in two to three years, it’s likely going to be steady at best, if not softer, so that changes how we need to go about addressing drought.”

Today’s market conditions may make selling decisions a bit easier, but Stewart also warned to consider how those choices may affect future cash flow. She cited a study by Harlan Hughes of North Dakota State University which found “that if you’re in a drought, the financial ramifications, the deterioration in your cash flow, actually isn’t seen until the year after the drought.”

Liquidating different classes of cattle can all offer different opportunities, particularly at this point in the market cycle, but Stewart said these tough decisions can really worry her as the cash flow aspect is “one of the most underdiscussed points about drought.”

“If anything, we’re going into a softer marketplace, it’s not like they’re going to be missing out on the highs of the market, and that’s true,” she said “But at the same time, when we’re going into lower prices, you’ll need bigger volumes to sell to bring in the cash that’s needed to pay the bills,” in future years at lower points in the cycle.

What’s the Best Course of Action?

So then, one of the next big questions arise – do you destock, provide supplemental (or substitute) feed, push the grass resources a bit harder, or haul cattle to feed? Another “million-dollar question” as there isn’t one right answer.

For Emond, who has experienced many droughts on his operation, some supplementation through winter may be in order, but he said he won’t “substitute feed.” He aims to mainly graze year-round, but purchases hay when he does need to feed. This spring his hay supply ran a bit short and he said, “I literally had to beg to find five semi loads of hay around here.”

“I know there’s no carryover out there and now with drought conditions getting worse, hay’s going to be a problem in my part of the world,” Emond said. “We’ll always have some hay on hand, but I’m certainly not going to substitute feed hay. I will destock – whether we sell them or send them to some yards somewhere is yet to be seen but trucking hay to my part of the world is never very profitable in any year.”

Emond has also always prioritized protecting the range condition first and foremost.

“I’m probably going against the grain of most people, but I’m always in the camp of destock early and quick and protect

Continued on page 5



Farming & Ranching is a way of life.
Protect it for the next generation.



Farm & Ranch Legacy Workshops

- Broken Bow, [Custer County 4H Building](#) - September 9
- Chadron, [Platte Valley Bank](#) - December 8
- Free Tax planning webinar - Fall 2026

REGISTER

NEBRASKAGRAZINGLANDS.ORG/EVENTS/EVENT-REGISTRATION

Apply for a scholarship!

The Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition is looking for ways to help farmers and ranchers attend educational events and to help with the financial burden of legacy planning.

DON'T WAIT TAKE THE NEXT STEP!

- Access scholarships for education and professional support
- Connect with a professional
- Gain access to valuable resources
- Learn alongside others
- Turn questions into action

CHECK US OUT!
www.nebraskagrazinglands.org



New Native Plant Field Specialist with SDSU

South Dakota State University Extension is pleased to welcome Allison Dollen as a new Native Plant Field Specialist.

In her role, Dollen will work with producers and the public to extend the Native Plant Initiative and provide education on native plants that thrive

in South Dakota and the benefits they provide. She is based on the SDSU campus in Brookings.

Dollen said she is excited to help South Dakotans reach their native plant and restoration goals, and to work with others who are championing the area.

"I hope to establish myself as a resource on

everything pertaining to native plants for the people of South Dakota," she said. "I want to connect them with the wonderful organizations across the state already working to get more native plants on the landscape."

A native of northeastern Iowa, Dollen grew up on a family farm with

a mind for native plant restoration. She graduated from Iowa State University with a bachelor's in environmental science and a minor in animal ecology, and from SDSU with a master's in biological sciences with a specialization in natural resource management.

"I grew up helping with restoration projects on the farm and am so grateful I get to make a career out of doing the same for other landowners," she said.

Her prior work experiences include the Iowa Learning Farms and Water Rocks! Programs through Iowa State University Extension, the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, a soil and water conservation district for the Natural Resources Conservation Service and at the SDSU Natural Resource Management Department.

Sandy Smart, professor and SDSU Extension Interim Director, said Dollen's range of experi-

ence with native plants from both her personal and professional life make her well-suited to the role.

"Allison is very familiar with growing native plants (grasses and forbs) for habitat and seed production," Smart said. "She will help growers and industry professionals with the goal of increasing the seed supply and demand for native plant uses in South Dakota and the Northern Great Plains region."

— SDSU

Nebraska Grazing Conference set for Aug. 4-5 in Kearney

Ranchers, land managers, educators and students from across Nebraska are invited to attend the 2026 Nebraska Grazing Conference, scheduled for Aug. 4-5 at the Younes Conference Center in Kearney.

The theme of the 2026 conference, "Celebrating Grazing on Nebraska's Grasslands," aligns with the 2026 International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists, recognizing the role of grazing sys-

tems in environmental stewardship, agricultural productivity and rural communities.

The conference will be preceded by a Grassland Alliance meeting from 1 to 3:30 p.m. Aug. 4. Conference programming will begin at 3:30 p.m. with tradeshow and educational sessions focused on grazing management innovations, including virtual fence technology. An evening celebration will follow, recognizing

the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists.

A full day of programming on Aug. 5 will begin at 8:30 a.m. and feature expert speakers covering regenerative grazing management, grazing on cropland, small ruminant systems, grazing practices, stockmanship, carbon market opportunities and producer experiences using virtual fencing.

Keynote speakers include Gail Fuller, who

will present regenerative grazing practices, and Tom Noffsinger, who will discuss the role of stockmanship in effective grazing management.

Student registration fees for high school and university students will be waived for those who register online by July 31. Registration is open at the Nebraska Grazing Conference website (https://go.unl.edu/grazing_conf_2026).

— UNL



MITCHELL STEPHENSON, The Nebraska Grazing Conference is scheduled for Aug. 4-5 at the Younes Conference Center in Kearney.

Ricketts Seeks Virtual Fencing Option to Help Ranchers Rebuild

Nebraska U.S. Sen. Pete Ricketts is promoting new legislation he says would give ranchers another tool to rebuild and manage livestock after wildfires damaged fencing across Nebraska.

Ricketts said the proposal would expand allowable recovery options under a U.S. Department of Agriculture program used after disasters.

"The legislation would allow for virtual fencing as an option for producers under the Emergency Conservation Program. It would also extend beyond livestock operations to areas like the

Valentine National Wildlife Refuge. Past administrations have not freed up this land for grazing. I've worked with the Trump administration to allow grazing on this refuge. There are a variety

of ways that we can help our farmers and ranchers rebuild. The Fence Act would allow for one more option," Ricketts said.

Moving forward, Ricketts says he'll start

building support among colleagues, arguing the proposal is a practical recovery option for producers still rebuilding after wildfire damage.

— KNOP News

Drought

Continued from page 4

your range and then be the first one to buy back in," he said. "That's why we're destocking cows pretty quick right now, we don't have to per se, but if this market would happen to fall 25 percent and I would catch a little rain and have good grass back, I want to be the first to buy back in."

Again, different regions may have different options if there is more rainfall, but in Northern Montana "if you hurt this ground, it takes two or three years to get back to where you were." And that's with ample rest.

"Whether to sell or go somewhere else with them, those are separate decisions, but in my mind you have to get off the grass," Emond said.

Protecting the grass is critical in drought, obviously, but grazing strate-

gy both before and during dry conditions can make a difference. On the University of Wyoming research station Scasta is managing, they have been studying more traditional, time and AUM structured grazing versus more adaptive management.

"We put these cows and calves in much larger groups and we're moving them every week to three weeks. Last year was pretty dry for us and we moved through our pastures a lot quicker," Scasta explained. "Then we changed the order of those pastures every year so each pasture is getting more than a year's rest. And changing that order, I think always just kind of innovating and not getting stuck in, 'well, this is how we all always have done it,' can help mitigate that."

How Do You Maintain a Positive

Attitude?

Between managing the range carefully, playing the market right, and maintaining the cowherd strategically, saying drought decisions are "tough" is an understatement. But ranchers are no strangers to adversity, fortunately.

"I kind of enjoy the challenge, so I guess I don't really look at drought as a morale killer," Emond said. "We're pretty profit oriented so we just do the math and whatever looks to be the best is what we do and carry on and don't look back. We're not always right, but we don't spend a lot of time worrying about it. I look at it as an opportunity to make good decisions."

Like Scasta said "drought is just one of the things that comes with the territory," too.

"Just listen to Dusty talk, he's resilient," Scasta said. "He's ready to go

to work every day and there's going to be challenges. Agricultural folks and range folks tend to be pretty optimistic, even when it's dusty and rough."

That attitude isn't just true of multi-generation ranchers who have seen drought multiple times in their ranching careers, it's the same attitude that keep the young Stewart family going as well.

"I would just encourage everybody to go read Ecclesiastes," Stewart

said. "Work is good for us. Hardship is good for us. And at the end of the day, this isn't our land and it's not our cattle, even. It's just our turn. So, we are called to be good shepherds and to take up our cross and go do the next right thing. And when you when you have that mindset, it puts it into a perspective that gets you out of the hole of here and now. So, I would just encourage you to seek the light and be the light and pick up your cross and run with endurance

because it's good for you. It's not easy, but it's good for you."

Good Grazing Makes Cent\$, a program of the Society for Range Management, aims to provide practical, applicable, and economically feasible range management solutions which can ultimately improve productivity of the land and the bottom dollar of the ranch through conversation and collaboration between range scientists and ranchers. Learn more at goodgrazing.org.

Grazing Guide

A calendar listing of pasture and range events

<p>July 7 Excellence in Range Management Tour of Jeff & Scott Hamilton's, Wessington Springs, SD</p> <p>July 10 Pasture Walk, Doud Ranch, Midland, SD</p> <p>July 15 Pasture Walk, Heinz Farm, Onaka, SD</p> <p>July 28-30 Sandhills Grazing School, Anselmo, NE</p> <p>Aug. 20 South Dakota Leopold Tour, Darling Creek Ranch, Meadow, SD</p> <p>Aug. 4-5 Nebraska Grazing Conference, Kearney, NE</p> <p>Aug. 4-7 Young Adult Ranching for Profit, Kimball, NE</p>	<p>Aug. 22 Prairie Fest 2026: A Family Celebration of Dakota Grasslands, Good Earth State Park, South Dakota</p> <p>Aug. 24-26 Panhandle Grazing School, Sidney, NE</p> <p>Sept. 9-11 Chamberlain Grazing School, Chamberlain/Oacoma</p> <p>Sept. 9 Farm & Ranch Legacy Workshop, Broken Bow, NE</p> <p>Sept. 23-24 NatGLCI Tour, Sioux Falls, SD</p> <p>TBD - Fall Tax Planning Webinar with the NGLC</p> <p>December 3 - 4, South Dakota Grassland Coalition Annual Conference, The Box, Box Elder, SD</p> <p>Dec. 8 Farm & Ranch Legacy Workshop, Chadron, NE</p>
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Have a Range & Pasture Event you would like others to know about?
Send information to cattlenews@gwtc.net.

Visit these organizations online:

Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition
www.nebraskagrazinglands.org

South Dakota Grassland Coalition
www.sdgrass.org

Overgrazing vs. Overstocking: Long-Term Impacts on Pastures and Profitability

Charles Rohla, Ph.D.
Noble Research Institute

Effective pasture management is essential for maintaining a healthy grazing ecosystem and a profitable livestock operation. One of the most persistent and often misunderstood challenges producers face is overgrazing and its impact on both pasture condition and animal performance.

Although frequently confused with overstocking, overgrazing is not simply a matter of running too many animals per acre. Understanding the distinction between these two concepts and their consequences is critical for maintaining pasture health, maximizing forage production, and supporting long-term productivity.

What Is Overgrazing?

Overgrazing occurs when plants are grazed repeatedly without adequate time to recover. This weakens plant vigor, reduces root development, and diminishes ground cover, ultimately degrading the entire pasture ecosystem.

Importantly, overgrazing is less about the number of animals and more about timing, frequency, and duration of grazing. When livestock return to graze plants before they have recovered from a previous grazing event, those plants must rely on stored energy reserves to regrow.

Repeated grazing during this vulnerable stage weakens the plant, reduces productivity, and causes root systems to shrink. Over time, desirable forage species decline and are replaced by less productive or less palatable plants, reducing overall pasture quality and performance.

What Is Overstocking?

Overstocking refers to placing more livestock on a given area than it can sustainably support over time. It is typically expressed as stocking rate, or animals per acre, relative to the pasture's carrying capacity. Carrying capacity is the maximum number of animals the land can support without long-term damage.

While overstocking can contribute to overgrazing, the two are not

the same. Pastures can become overgrazed even at an appropriate stocking rate when recovery periods are too short or grazing pressure is poorly managed.

Likewise, higher stocking densities can be managed successfully when grazing periods are controlled and plants receive adequate recovery time.

How Overgrazing Impacts Pasture Production

Pasture productivity depends on maintaining a balance between grazing pressure and plant recovery. When that balance is disrupted, several negative outcomes can occur.

Reduced Forage Yield

Plants grazed before full recovery must rely on stored root carbohydrates for regrowth. Repeated defoliation prevents plants from fully replenishing energy reserves, leading to reduced forage production, thinning stands, and declining productivity over time.

Loss of Desirable Species

Livestock naturally select the most palatable and nutritious

plants. Without sufficient recovery time, these preferred species are grazed repeatedly and weakened. As their populations decline, less desirable species, including weeds and invasive plants, often fill the void, lowering forage quality and overall production.

Soil Compaction and Erosion

Insufficient plant cover exposes soil to compaction from hoof traffic and increases susceptibility to erosion. Compacted soils limit root growth and reduce water infiltration, slowing plant recovery and increasing vulnerability during dry periods. Soil structure deteriorates as pore space for air, water, and microbial activity decreases.

Reduced Water-Holding Capacity

Declining root systems and reduced ground cover limit the soil's ability to absorb and retain rainfall. Less water is available for plant growth, increasing drought vulnerability and reducing overall pasture resilience.



SHUTTERSTOCK
Overgrazing is less about the number of animals and more about timing, frequency, and duration of grazing.

Weed and Brush Encroachment

Degraded pastures create opportunities for opportunistic species to establish. In many cases, this includes invasive weeds or woody brush, particularly in arid environments. These species further reduce forage availability and carrying capacity.

The Long-Term Impact of Overgrazing

The effects of overgrazing extend far beyond short-term declines in production. Repeated stress on plants reduces both aboveground biomass and root depth, contributing to declines in soil organic matter and microbial activity.

As soil health deteriorates, carrying capacity declines and pastures become increasingly

vulnerable to drought, flooding, and temperature extremes. In severe cases, particularly in arid and semi-arid regions, chronic overgrazing can contribute to desertification.

Overgrazing is not simply a function of animal numbers. It is driven by grazing management, particularly the timing, frequency, and intensity of grazing events. Consistent grazing without adequate recovery reduces root growth, lowers productivity, and compromises pasture resilience.

Understanding plant growth cycles and implementing grazing strategies that prioritize recovery can help producers maintain productive, resilient pastures while supporting long-term profitability and land health.

On the Bookshelf

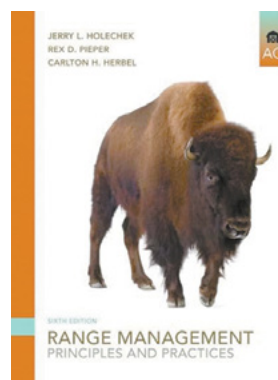
Range Management: Principles and Practices

Now in its 6th edition,

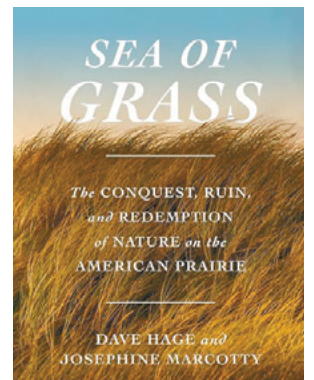
Range Management: Principles and Practices is an easy-to-read text bringing together the key

principles and practices of contemporary range management, presenting them in logical sequence as concisely and efficiently as possible. The authors introduce the

fundamentals of range management using current and relevant scientific studies and practical examples, and illustrating key concepts with pictures, figures, and tables. Grazing management is emphasized, and several other aspects of range management are given comprehensive coverage. In particular, this edition has been updated with comprehensive information on highly relevant



issues such as range animal behavior, economics,



energy, and multiple use environments.



Save the Date





South Dakota Leopold Conservation Award Tour

Darling Creek Ranch
Meadow, South Dakota
Thursday, August 20, 2026



More details will be forthcoming in a formal invite. In the meantime, direct any questions to Alex Erickson.
AErickson@sandcountyfoundation.org | 507.829.3467


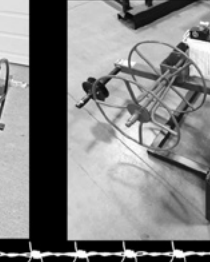
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Sea of Grass: The Conquest, Ruin, and Redemption of Nature on the American Prairie

Sea of Grass is a vivid portrait of the American prairie, which rivals the rainforest in its biological diversity and, with little notice, is disappearing even faster.

Veteran journalists and midwesterners Dave Hage and Josephine Marcotty reveal humanity's relationship with this incredible land, offering a deep, compassionate analysis of the difficult decisions as well as opportunities facing agricultural and Indigenous communities. *Sea of Grass* is a vivid portrait of a miraculous ecosystem that makes clear why the future of this region is of essential concern far beyond the heartland.

Winning in Range

South Dakota teams win at national range, homesite judging contest

Two South Dakota teams won first place in the 4-H Range and Homesite categories at the recent 2026 National Land, Range and Homesite judging contest.

The contest was May 7, 2026, in El Reno, Oklahoma, and is split into two categories: 4-H and FFA. Teams from each state had to win their respective regions to qualify for the national contest.

Corson County 4-H was the first-place team in the 4-H Range judging contest, with team members Darla Barnes, Katelyn Gebhart, Laine Gebhart, Brooks Foss and coach Renae Gebhart. Haakon County 4-H placed third, and Day County 4-H placed fourth.

Four South Dakotans also placed in the top 10 individually: Darla Barnes, of Corson County, won first place, and Katelyn Gebhart, also of Corson County, placed second. Kaydence Eisenbraun, of Haakon County, took fifth place and Bryn Sippel, of Day County took seventh.

For the FFA Range contest, Sturgis FFA placed seventh as a team with members Jackson Cammack, Garrett Rohloff,

Aydan Rhodes, Ellie Storm and instructor Stran Holben.

A total of three states, seven teams and 27 individuals competed in the 4-H division and a total of nine states, 32 teams and 132 individuals competed in the FFA division of the Range contest. Tyler Swan, a soil conservationist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Conservation Service; Sandy Smart, SDSU Extension Agriculture and Natural Resources Senior Program Leader and professor; and Kaylee Wheeler, SDSU Extension Range Field Specialist, assisted the high school agriculture teachers and their students in preparing for the contest.

Students need to be able to identify 130 plants (39 grasses, 19 legumes, 41 forbs and 31 trees/woody plants). They also need to learn/memorize each plant's characteristics (life history, season of growth, origin, desirability for bobwhite quail food, cover and cattle food).

South Dakota was represented by two 4-H and five FFA teams in the National Land and Homesite Judging Contest. In the 4-H Homesite category, Wessington Springs 4-H won first place as a team, and Max Klein, of Wessington Springs, won first place individually. Ella Fagerhaug,

of Wessington Springs, placed seventh individually. Other Wessington Springs 4-H team members were Kohen Mebius, Remie Roduner and coach Brady Duxbury.

McCook County 4-H placed eighth as a team with members Khloie Klinkhammer, Hadley Flogstad, Hailey Heumiller and Caleb Hoffman, and instructor Terry Rieckman.

For the FFA Homesite judging category, Deubrook FFA placed third as a team, with members Georgia Siddens, Carson Engelstad, Maddie Schulte, Raymond Klein, alternate Nick Navratil and instructor Ashley Wiesen. Siddens also placed fourth individually.

McCook Central FFA placed fourth as a team with members Noah Durfee, Parker Randall, Leah Feterl and Connor Heiberger, and instructor Terry Rieckman.

In the Land competition, Tri-Valley 4-H placed fourth as a team with members Macie Jones, Rylin Fods, Ema Dissing, Chase Jones and instructor Tanner Peterson. Jones also placed second individually.

The land contest involves identifying four sites on various soil parameters, including slope, soil texture, soil structure, land capability class and recommended land treatments. Homesite evaluation includes additional concepts like permeability, soil depth,



SDSU

Corson County 4-H Range Judging Team placed first out of seven teams. From left: team members were Darla Barnes, Katelyn Gebhart, Laine Gebhart, Brooks Foss and Renae Gebhart (instructor). Barnes received first place individually and Katelyn Gebhart received second place.



SDSU

Wessington Springs 4-H Homesite Judging Team placed first out of 15 teams. From left: Brady Duxbury (coach) and team members Ella Fagerhaug, Max Klein, Kohen Mebius, Remie Roduner and Lance Howe (volunteer). Klein received first place individually and Fagerhaug received seventh place.

shrink-swell, depth of water table and flooding. Lance Howe, a soil scientist with NRCS, assisted high school agriculture teachers/FFA advisors

and their students practice for the contest.

South Dakota teams typically arrive in El Reno on Saturday and practice Sunday through Wednesday,

with the contest held on Thursday morning. When not studying, the students get to tour area sites, visit museums and enjoy local ice cream.

Take Home Points from BIF

Mark Z. Johnson
OSU Beef Cattle Breeding Specialist

I had the opportunity to attend the Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) meetings in Boise, Idaho. The topics were interesting and timely. With regard to the selection of replacement heifers and rebuilding the nation's cowherd, the key, actionable take home points are as follows:

The best cows fit their production environment. As carcass weights continue to rise, doesn't the cow-calf operator need to modify genetics toward more growth and mature size? No! First, packers are discounting carcasses over 1100 pounds and even more substantially discounting carcasses over 1150. A higher percentage of the weekly beef carcass harvest mix is now subject to these discounts. Second, a new (more accurate)

index of beef carcass red meat yield will replace the existing USDA Yield Grade equation within the next few years. While consumer demand will continue to economically incentivize the production of marbling and quality, a better index of red meat yield will act to de-incentivize feeding cattle longer, to heavier weights and fatter endpoints. Other factors (feed cost, producing the tonnage of beef wanted by consumers relative

to lower cow inventory and fewer cattle on feed) will continue to influence finishing endpoints. The point is, growth and pay weight is a positive incentive at any marketing endpoint of our calf crop but needs to be kept in balance with mature cow size. Accordingly, mature cow size (and milk) level need to be in accordance to production environments which vary dramatically across the U.S. The "best" cows breed early, calve early and wean a calf each year because their nutrition-

requirements can be met by the pastures they graze.

A change in thinking is needed whereby cow-calf producers consider the \$\$/profit produced per acre of pasture as opposed to the \$\$/profit produced per cow. Producers who know their cost of production prioritize maternal performance.

When selecting replacement heifers from your calf crop, it is sage advice to favor the earliest born heifers produced by your oldest cows. Your older cows (6 years +) have

proven their fit to your production environment and their daughters should have more lifetime productivity in your operation.

Lingering drought over much of the nation continues to stifle heifer retention and widespread expansion of the nation's cowherd. That being said, consumer demand for beef remains robust and persistent. This information should inform decisions made regarding the selection of your next generation of beef cows.

Reminder: Young Adult Ranching for Profit School is Aug. 4

If you haven't registered, registration is still open for the Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition's Young Adult Ranching for Profit, taking place August 4-7 in Kimball. This four-day, hands-on seminar gives young producers ages 18-25 practical tools to strengthen ranch profitability, improve grazing decisions, and build confidence in running an operation.

Led by Dallas Mount, CEO of Ranch Management Consultants, the seminar blends class-

room learning, ranch tours, and peer discussion. Participants will work through real ranch scenarios, explore grazing fundamentals, and learn how to interpret financial numbers that drive business decisions.

The program is ideal for young adults entering a family operation, beginning ranchers, students exploring ag careers, or any young producer looking for practical, immediately usable skills.

Cost: \$400 per person, including instruction, materials, and meals.

Details & registration: <https://nebraskagrazinglands.org/Events/young-adult-ranching-for-profit-school>. This course typically sells out, so register soon to reserve your spot. Registration closes Friday, July 24.

NGLC encourages partners, educators, and community members to help share this opportunity and support the next generation of Nebraska's grazing leaders.



Join Us

MEMBERSHIP

The South Dakota Grassland Coalition connects ranchers, landowners, and partners who believe in keeping our prairies productive, profitable, and healthy.

Members gain access to grazing schools, pasture walks, and the annual Grassland Conference — all focused on practical, proven management.

CONTACT INFO

Online

sdgrass.org

Contact

judge.jessop@sdconservation.net

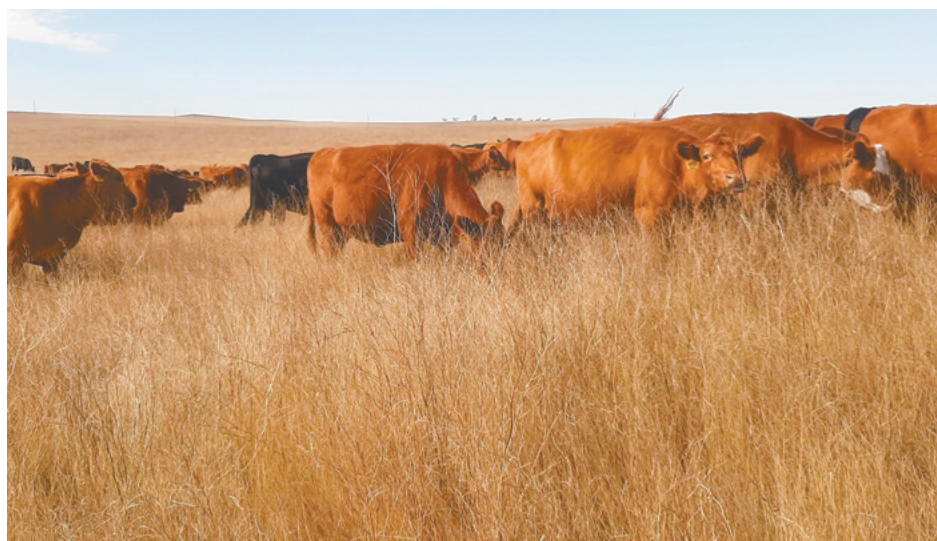
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Darling Creek Ranch to Host S.D. Leopold Tour in August



COURTESY

Dan and Sharon Anderson and family of Meadow, South Dakota will host a ranch tour on Aug. 20 as part of their recently received Leopold Conservation Award. Mark your calendars now!



Farm & Ranch Legacy Workshops Planned for Broken Bow and Chadron

The Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition (NGLC) is inviting farm and ranch families to attend its upcoming Farm & Ranch Legacy Workshops, educational events designed to help producers learn about navigating the transfer of agricultural operations to the next generation.

The workshops will be held on September 9, 2026, in Broken Bow and December 8, 2026, in Chadron. Open to producers at any stage of the planning process, these workshops will provide practical information and tools to help families protect their operations, preserve relationships, and plan for the future.

Participants will hear from an agricultural attorney on key succession planning topics, including inheritance laws, business structures, estate planning considerations, and the equitable

transfer of assets to both on-operation and off-operation heirs. A producer panel will also share firsthand experiences, lessons learned, and strategies that helped—or hindered—their own transition planning efforts.

As Nebraska agriculture faces one of the largest generational transfers of land and assets in history, the importance of succession planning continues to grow. Experts estimate that nearly 70% of U.S. farmland and ranchland will change hands within the next 20 years, making proactive planning essential for the future of family-owned operations.

“The future of Nebraska’s grazing lands depends on the families who care for them,” said Angela Redman, Assistant Director of the Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition. “These workshops provide produc-

ers with the knowledge, resources, and confidence to start important conversations and take meaningful steps toward securing their family’s legacy.”

To help make these educational opportunities accessible, NGLC offers scholarships for producers to attend Farm & Ranch Legacy workshops. Additional scholarships are available to help offset the cost associated with legacy planning.

Through its Farm & Ranch Legacy Program, NGLC is committed to strengthening the future of Nebraska agriculture by helping families preserve their operations, maintain productive grazing lands, and prepare the next generation for success.

For more information about the workshops, scholarship opportunities, or registration, visit www.negrazinglands.org.

Biking the Grassland Triple Crown

The Grassland Triple Crown Bike races are taking place at South Dakota’s three National Grasslands this summer.

The South Dakota Grassland Initiative is helping to ensure there is a presence at the races to engage with the riders and their supporters to learn about the grasslands and the importance of working lands (what’s good for the bird is good for the herd).

Races & Dates

Grassland Gravel- Ft Pierre, July 18th

Thunderhawk Wide Open- Lemmon, Aug 15th

Wheelin to Wall- Wall, Sept 26th.



Get on the Bus!

Explore New Ideas and Build Resilience on the National Grazing Lands Bus Tour

The Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition is excited to promote the upcoming National Grazing Lands Coalition (NatGLC) Bus Tour, an opportunity for producers to learn from innovative ranchers, explore successful graz-

ing operations, and connect with fellow livestock producers from across the country. This year’s tour “Grazing the Heartland” will take place September 23 -24; visiting South Dakota, Minnesota and Nebraska.

Participants will gain valuable insights into grazing management, conservation practices, ranch profitability, and strategies for building resilient operations. The tour offers a unique

chance to see real-world applications of practices that can improve both the land and the bottom line.

To help make this opportunity accessible, producers may be eligible to apply for the Ranchers Resilience Grant, which can provide financial assistance to attend educational events such as the NatGLC Bus Tour. The grant is designed to support producers seeking new knowledge, skills, and resources that strengthen the long-term resilience of their ranching operations.

For more information about the NatGLC Bus Tour and Ranchers Resilience Grant opportunity, visit www.nebraskagrazinglands.org.

Tour Stops

Tour stops will include: South Dakota: Pasque Hill on Beaver Creek

Minnesota: Amo Creamery

Nebraska: Hochstein Ranch & Jessen Ranch

Attendees of the bus tour will have the unique opportunity to experience the benefits and challenges of grazing in the north-



ern Midwest, engage in peer-to-peer learning, and build networks with producers and organizational partners from across the U.S.

To reserve your seat, visit:

[https://natglcevents.zohobackstage.com/GrazingtheHeartland-2026NatGLCBusTour/#/](https://natglcevents.zohobackstage.com/GrazingtheHeartland-2026NatGLCBusTour/)

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