

For immediate release, June 18, 2007

For information, contact: Justin "Judge" Jessop, (605) 859-2301

Photo tagline: (Doug Backlund of the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks, leads a group of birding enthusiasts at the Reddick Ranch near St. Onge.)

### **Grassland Coalition shares message during bird watching tour in the Black Hills**

Over fifty people participated in the "Birds. At Home, on the Range" bird watching tour held June 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> in the Black Hills. Hosted by the South Dakota Grassland Coalition, the event took birding enthusiasts through ranches in the Rapid City and St. Onge areas where participants viewed and listened to various bird species and learned how landowners manage their grazing lands.

Wildlife experts from state and federal agencies shared information about characteristics of birds native to the area. Professional photographers were on hand to share bird photos and to give tips on capturing the best pictures.

The purpose of the tour was to view, listen, photograph and learn about native bird species while also learning the connection between land stewardship and habitat preservation.

"In the last 40 years, we've seen a significant decline in grassland birds native to South Dakota," said Steve Fairbairn, Private Lands Biologist with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. "It's important that we work together with producers to improve the management of their grazing lands in order to boost production for their livestock while preserving habitat for bird species."

The South Dakota Grassland Coalition is dedicated to the improvement of the state's grasslands for future generations. The Coalition provides local leadership and guidance and provides information and technical assistance to grassland managers in an effort to meet the organization's goals.

"Collaboration is key to meeting the Coalition's objectives," said Alexander "Sandy" Smart, Range Scientist at South Dakota State University and interim coordinator for the South Dakota Grassland Coalition. "The birding tour opened doors for future partnerships for the Coalition allowing us to work with other agencies to share our vision of promoting sustainable and profitable grazing lands in South Dakota."

For information about becoming a member of the South Dakota Grassland Coalition or learning more about programs and initiatives of the organization, contact Justin "Judge" Jessop, (605) 895-2301 or [jjessop@sdconservation.org](mailto:jjessop@sdconservation.org), or visit the Coalition's web site at [www.sdgrass.org](http://www.sdgrass.org).

###