SOUTH DAKOTA GRASSLAND COALITION

GRASSROOTS

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Fifth Annual Coalition Bus Tour

On July 18-19, 2006, the South Dakota Grasslands Coalition will hold its fifth annual two-day bus tour for ranch operators and others concerned with grassland management. This year, the tour will begin at historic Fort Sisseton, near Lake City in the northeastern corner of the state. The tour will include stops at two diverse grassland management operations along with lands owned by The Nature Conservancy.

The tour, which is designed to provide information on grassland management and conservation, will, on the first day, visit the 2,300-acre Neil Bien Ranch, which has incorporated a successful working operation with wildlife and grass management, and wetland restoration. During the evening of the first day, a Rancher's Panel will discuss grazing management issues.

On day two, the tour will proceed to the Tekrony grass-banking project. This developing project is a partnership between The Nature Conservancy and adjacent private landowners that will allow managed grazing on two Conservancy preserves while the landowners rest their land.

Following the visit to the Tekrony grass-banking project, the tour will travel to The Nature Conservancy's 7-Mile Fen, a 230-acre preserve consisting of tallgrass prairie, pothole wetlands, and a fen community.

Later that day, the tour will travel to the Rick Smith Ranch, which is devoted to grass and livestock production. The tour will headquarter out of the Best Western Ramkota Hotel in Watertown, SD. The cost is $50 per person and the registration deadline is July 10. For further information, contact Justin "Judge" Jessop at 605-280-0127.

For more information or other events the SOUTH DAKOTA GRASSLAND COALITION is involved with please feel free to contact Sandy Smart or visit the website: http://sdgrass.org.

Adding Water to Pasture

Rick Smith, Lake Poinsett Watershed Coordinator

Wildlife Compatibility to piped water

Water in a tank is not very appealing to a duck. However, how many ducks do you see raised in a dugout that is not connected to some other wetland with surface water? Open bodies of water are necessary for waterfowl, but what managed grasslands offer are nesting sites. Having a pasture that always maintains a 6 inch residual cover is very appealing to ground nesting birds. Waterfowl nests and livestock are very compatible if pastures are being managed correctly for livestock with healthy grass and residuals. Cattle grazing individually don't bother or disturb a nesting duck, however when livestock congregate around dugouts or dams to loaf most any obstacle in the area will be trampled. Many of the ground nesting song birds have been eliminated from inadequate ground cover in overgrazed pastures. Having a small bird component within the pasturelands will harvest many of the livestock parasites such as flies and worms while in the larvae stage before infecting animals. Predators have a much higher success rate capturing gophers and mice when residual cover is present. Also with nesting sites available in large open areas the predator damaged to nests is significantly reduced vs birds having to nest in narrow fencelines or along a waters edge. If the addition of piped water is used in conjunction with grazing management to promote rotational grazing and residual cover, then it is very compatible to wildlife. If piped water is used just to eat what grass is there shorter and leave less residual, it has no value to wildlife.

Conservation/Watershed Protection

Most of the questions, complaints or misunderstandings surround what is being attempted for conservation or watershed protection, with piped water. So it is best to delineate what can be accomplished, good and bad with piped water. First, by incorporating piped water the limitations of location for water are eliminated. Water does not have to be at the lakeshore, streambank, dugout placed in wetland or dam across some drainage channel. By removing the constraints of water location, management of grasslands focuses on the interaction of the forage and livestock. Grassland management can better react to short duration, high intensity grazing followed by long term recovery and residual cover while improving livestock performance and grass plant health. It sounds like a lot of activity, but that should be the goal of any project-improve all that you can without sacrifice of others. From a downstream water quality evaluation, nothing has more benefit then a deep rooted, residual cover soil protecting healthy grass plant. The healthy grass plant stops runoff and protects the soil from being dislodged as sediment to downstream waters. In turn, optimum livestock production is achieved on grass pastures with healthy plants. Unfortunately, we have very few healthy pastures! In fact without a doubt, the most mismanaged plant to grow in Eastern South Dakota is the grass plant. For most producers that I talk to, it is not purposeful. They simply do not understand what is required for growing healthy grass, and because they don't know any better way, we have the current status in our pastures. Overgrazed pastures will never express their economic potential, offer minimum protection to soil and contribute to excessive runoff with high levels of fecal contamination.

In order for piped water to contribute to conservation it must be accompanied by some form of grazing rotation and grazing management. One pasture with one water source grazed continuously from May til November is not grazing management.

Piped water to one location to replace a dried up dugout, is not grazing management. In fact, if the former water source has dried up and no grazing management is occurring and we supply water to that pasture, we may be harming it more than removing the livestock because of lack of water. This scenario can then be compromised by the threat of plowing under the pasture and use if for field crops, which more than not, will have even a bigger negative effect on water quality.

Hopefully, all those that are involved with conservation will encourage other producers to get the knowledge they need for grazing management by attending grazing workshops or sponsoring some of your own. Workshops and tours have been excellent teaching tools for our watershed to explain and visualize what grazing management can produce. Feedback that we get from evaluations after workshops indicate the great enlightenment attendees get from being exposed to grazing management and being able to discuss their own situations. It is also important to recognize the difference in grazing potential and management in our Coteau Region vs Central or Western South Dakota range conditions. Moisture and species available for our area need to be utilized for optimum production goals.

Rick Smith lives and rotationally grazes cattle in Hamlin County. For additional information he can be reached at the Hamlin County Conservation District. 605-783-3353 Box 165 Hayti, SD 57241

New Cost Share Opportunities from Wildlife Agencies

Kurt Foreman, USFWS, Brookings SD

Healthy grasslands are the common currency of both ranching and wildlife conservation. Grassland managers and wildlife conservation interests have a shared interest in maintaining grasslands and promoting sound rangeland stewardship. According to Kurt Forman, the South Dakota Private Lands Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)---- "Working towards a shared vision of healthy grazing lands helps meet the mutual needs of both the landscape and the landowner." Tim Olson, Senior Wetlands Biologist and head of the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks (SDGFP) private lands program, also notes that--- "The most efficient way to conserve grassland wildlife in South Dakota is to work with ranchers to keep their operations both profitable and sustainable."

Because of this interest in grassland conservation, the SDGFP and the USFWS have developed a wide variety of cost-share opportunities that landowners may find of interest as they develop grassland management plans. For example, both the SDGFP and the USFWS offer potential assistance with the following conservation practices:

*Shallow ponds for livestock watering and wildlife

*Cross fencing and additional stock water for rotational grazing

*Restoring cropland to native grassland for grazing

Over the last decade the SDGFP and the USFWS have partnered with over 4,000 South Dakota landowners to implement a wide variety of voluntary conservation improvements. While each conservation practice has a specific funding cap and eligibility criteria, both wildlife agencies make strong efforts to keep their programs simple, and flexible enough to accommodate the specific conservation needs of a landowner. For more information on these opportunities contact any of the following offices:

-SDGFP Private Lands Program: Pierre. (605-773-3658)
-SDGFP Private Lands Program: Huron. (605-353-6699)
-USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program: Brookings. (605-697-2500)

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Calendar of events:

Event	Date	Location	Contact Person	Phone No.
Coalition Bus Tour	July 18-19	Watertown	Justin "Judge" Jessop	280-0127

Please remit any comments, suggestions, or topics deemed necessary for further review to: Sandy Smart, SDSU Box 2170, Brookings SD 57007, alexander.smart@sdstate.edu, (605) 688-4017