



# Grassroots

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## 15 Years of Education

by Dan Rasmussen

I have now been on the South Dakota Grassland Coalition board for 12 of its 15 years of existence. During that time native grasslands in SD have receded at an alarming rate. 15 years ago a few forward thinking individuals were warning us of this decline. Now you can read about it in your local newspaper.

We can blame high commodity prices, roundup type chemicals or speculators buying up grassland and planting it to crops. But in the end I feel the solution lies in private land stewardship and increasing profit per acre on grasslands.

Both of these goals are being addressed by the Coalitions' Education Committee which I am honored to be Chairman.



Dan Rasmussen

The first goal of land stewardship means many things including building soil, litter, plant diversity, retaining rainwater in the sod, grazing grasses and forbs, resting plants, building temporary fences and attending your kids athletic events. The list is endless but more importantly inclusive of all parts of the ranching and farming business. This inclusiveness has been named Holistic Management by leaders of the Ag. Education community.

Addressing the holistic approach to management is a goal of the SDGC. Achieving this goal as a manager does not have to mean more bookwork. But schooling yourself to steer the business with knowledge of how to include all aspects of the family, the land's natural resources, financial health, and farm/ranch production is critical.

The second goal of increasing profit turns out to be tied very closely to good land stewardship. This relationship I believe will be one of the saviors of our remaining privately owned grasslands. The Education Committee sponsors training opportunities for farmers and ranchers. Look for holistic management seminars scattered around SD in the newsletter.

15 Years of Education Continued on Page 2

# 15 Years of Education continued



2013 Grazing School pasture allocation exercise  
(Photo by Dan Rasmussen).

At the top of the list is the annual South Dakota Grazing School. Two and a half days of hands on range management training. Participants learn new ways to increase profit through better land stewardship.

Other events include: pasture walks, a winter workshop series that highlights nationally known range instructors, the Leopold tour, a mentoring program and a bird tour. Wildlife are important to our land and even our bottom line. One of the changes I am seeing from 15 years ago is the focus of the large wildlife protection groups. What used to be an antagonistic relationship is now often complementary to private land stewardship.

They finally get it. Landowners are the ally in saving wildlife, not the enemy. The coalition works with wildlife groups whose intent is to help improve habitat through stewardship on the land.

The annual Leopold Award provides a way of identifying individual ranch/farms that are managing through the holistic process. The tour gives other ranchers a chance to see how and why these exceptional individuals run their businesses.

In the end, 15 years isn't very long from a ranching point of view. Long enough though for the coalition to grow in both budget and knowledge. It is our hope that the ranchers and farmers of South Dakota will be drawn to attend the training opportunities we provide.

## South Dakota Blizzard Oct 4, 2013 by Dan Rasmussen

Its mid morning, 32 degrees, the wind is gusting to 50 mph plus. Alternating snow, rain and sleet. The county road was a combination of mud, slush and snow. Driving a pickup and pulling a horse trailer was closer to skating than driving. I felt sorry for myself almost getting stuck until I saw our cows huddled in an unprotected fence corner and then I felt sorry the cows only. They were soaking wet and exposed to the wind. Three cows lay dead in the mud when Blake and I got there. It was only the beginning. Within an hour more just laid down and died, now the dead included 450 lb calves. We tried moving them west into the wind. There were trees 1 mile away. They died as we moved them. Some were on the fight. Some were too hypothermic to care. We stopped in a small treeless draw hoping the wind would let up soon.

**South Dakota Blizzard Oct 4, 2013 Continued on Page 6**

## Triple Whammy: Perfect Storm Decimates Pheasants by Garnet Perman

In 2008, pheasant numbers were at a record high. This year the pheasant population hit a 35 year low. Travis Runia, SD Game, Fish & Parks upland game bird biologist said, “What happened was a perfect storm of adverse weather and key habitat loss.”

Weather issues started with the winter of 2010-2011. Heavy snow cover in much of the state cut pheasant numbers. In 2012, severe drought impacted cover and available feed. According to SD Game, Fish and Parks surveys, hen survival last fall was half of normal. Pheasants start nesting at the end of April and early in May. A series of snowstorms and below normal temperatures at that time this year made for a very poor hatch. An unseasonably early blizzard and icy drenching rain early in October claimed more birds. Statewide the numbers were estimated to be down 64% compared to last year, 76% compared to a 10 year average. Tim Olson, Senior biologist for SD Game Fish and Parks said, “It’s a common observation that hunting was worse than expected.”

Compounding weather related problems is a steady reduction in nesting habitat and wetlands. In 2007, pheasants had 1.5 million acres of CRP in which to nest and raise their chicks. Over half a million CRP acres have been lost in SD since then. Tens of thousands of acres of non-CRP native grassland have also been lost. Row crops replaced most of that lost habitat. The change in land use brings other stresses in addition to habitat loss. For example, as farming increases, so does the application of chemicals. Insecticides in particular impact newly hatched pheasants as bugs are their main protein source.

What can be done short-term to help pheasants rebound? Winter habitat is the most immediate concern. Runia advised to leave some corn standing and manage grassland so that residual cover remains come next spring. “Most guys do a good job with winter cover and food plots, but they kind of miss the boat on having enough undisturbed nesting habitat,” said Olson.

Use caution in applying pesticides early in the growing season. Predators follow birds into shrunken habitat. “Controlling predators can have a positive impact, but it has to be a continuous process, not just a one year effort,” said Chad Switzer, Wildlife Program Administrator for SD Game Fish and Parks. “You can’t stockpile pheasants. They are a very short-lived bird. Reproduction habitat is critical.”

Plan and plant well-placed food plots next spring. SD Game, Fish and Parks, Pheasants Forever and local sportsmen’s organizations offer help with the cost of planting food plots and placement.

Get involved. The swift decline of a resource so important to the state’s economy prompted Gov. Dugaard to call a Pheasant Habitat Summit to be held in Huron on December 6th. The registration deadline is November 29. The agenda and registration details can be accessed through the SD Game Fish and Parks web site. Chime in on the importance of including conservation measures in the new Farm Bill. Rep. Kristie Noem is on the committee putting it together.

Private landowners are key players in holding and rebuilding bird numbers regardless of weather. “It comes down to providing habitat,” said Runia. “If we can keep well managed grassland on the landscape, the birds will respond.”

*Garnet Perman is a freelance writer and ranches with her husband, Lyle, near Lowry, SD*

## USFWS Proposed Listing of Two Butterfly Species: Lemons or Lemonade!!!

by Jim Faulstich

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is proposing listing two butterfly species under the guidelines of the Endangered Species Act. The Poweshiek Skipperling is proposed to be listed as endangered and the Dakota Skipper is proposed to be listed as threatened. This is probably a good time for a refresher on the difference between endangered and threatened. According to the USFWS fact sheet on the proposed listing, the two terms are defined as such:

*“Endangered - any species that is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range; Threatened - any species that is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range. In simple terms, endangered species are at the brink of extinction now, whereas, threatened species are likely to be at the brink of extinction in the near future.”*

So, ----what is our immediate reaction to a proposal that could change the way grass managers, that are affected, do business? Should we draw a line in the sand and say “we will fight the potential listing”? Should we say “there is nothing we can do” and wait for the news of how this will impact our ability to manage grasslands? Should we say “this only affects the northeast part of the state, so it doesn’t matter to me”? The South Dakota Grassland Coalition thinks the answer to all three of these scenarios is “No”. The potential listing of these two species is only the beginning of a huge list of declining species that may follow as the result of disappearing grasslands in South Dakota.

We as private land owners and managers must be involved in the process, and support the 4(d) Rule that is proposed for normal ranch and land management for the Dakota Skipper. According to a USFWS fact sheet, the 4(d) Rule would allow incidental take of Dakota Skippers for a variety of normal ranching practices. Normal ranching practices are construction and maintenance of fence, livestock facilities, water facilities as well as spot spraying, haying, and grazing. This is a good start, but we also need clarification and assurance on how listing of the Poweshiek Skipperling would relate to ranching and grazing activities. How will this be handled when it appears the Poweshiek Skipperling is not even present in South Dakota at this time?

If we do not get involved in the process, those that oppose normal ranch activities described in the 4(d) Rule for Dakota Skippers will be more vocal and win. Likewise, if we do not get involved, we also run the risk of not confirming similar types of grazing and ranching assurances for Poweshiek Skipperling. This could be devastating to future grass management in South Dakota.

We believe there is potential to put programs to work helping individual grass managers and ranchers that can improve habitat for species of concern, and help producers be more profitable and stay on the land. I refer you to an excellent, well written article by Extension Range Specialist, Pete Bauman, explaining the history and additional information of this potential listing at <http://igrow.org/livestock/beef/cows-butterflies-why-private-grazing-lands-matter-in-a-changing-landscape/> Together let’s chart the future for grass management as it deals with declining species and make “lemons into lemonade”. GET INVOLVED!!!!

**USFWS Proposed listing ... Continued on Page 7**

# Contract Grazing

by Dave Steffen

What a year this has been for South Dakota! From a dry winter and spring, then a very wet summer to an early blast of winter for Western South Dakota. It is hard to believe that Mother Nature could pack so much variability into one short year. The test of strength for those livestock producers impacted is monumental to say the least. A couple of weeks ago, Dan Rasmussen emailed me to ask if I would be willing to write an article for the South Dakota Grassland Coalition's newsletter. The Coalition Board thought there may be an interest in contract grazing this next year where so many cattle were lost in the Atlas blizzard.

Over the past 15 or so years, I have had opportunities to pasture cattle for other cattlemen on my operation, especially those years that appeared to be difficult to profit from owning the cattle. Before moving back to the place where I was born and raised in Gregory County, I had the privilege of working for the NRCS in South Dakota. Those years of federal employment allowed me to learn much through working with producers. Several Conservation District Boards wanted to keep ranchers on the land during the tough times in the 70's, resulting in the start up of the educational Bootstraps program. Bootstraps groups and rancher workshops brought many expert speakers to the area. Gordon Hazard, Dave Pratt, Jim Gerrish, Alan Savory, and Temple Grandin are several professionals that come to mind. Each person provided detailed methods and ideas of how to manage livestock herds for a profitable outcome while caring for healthy grasslands.

The knowledge gained from years of association with livestock producers revealed several things. First and foremost, the majority of livestock producers wanted to profit financially and enjoy the natural resources they had available so they could pass the ranch on to the next generation. Second, book keeping was not the highest priority on their list of things to do. However, they liked to remember the results of the year's work without much book work. Thirdly, no one wanted to make the same mistake twice. Finally, most will admit that all records can't be kept in their heads. I must admit that I share those opinions here on my operation. So when my career shifted to owning and operating the place where I grew up, my first thought was to establish goals and methods of measuring success or failure along the way. A set of documents was put together using past experiences and teachings of the experts who had left a positive imprint on my memory. Each document could only be one page long (well maybe front and back of one page).

"Calculating the Purchase Price of Feeder Cattle" is a one page document created from the form Dr. Gordon Hazard presented to several groups in South Dakota. It is a simple but thorough document cattleman can input his/her projected figures for purchasing yearling feeder cattle. The form is created on a spreadsheet so only the cost of expense items and projected gains and future market prices are entered. The spreadsheet calculates a break-even price/lb and a profit (or loss) figure. This one page document will predict if money can be made by buying the livestock, or if you should consider taking in someone else's. If the results indicate it would be more profitable to contract graze cattle, the next document can be used to address contract grazing.

**Contract Grazing Continued on Page 7**

## South Dakota Blizzard Oct 4, 2013 *continued*

A friend called about noon wondering if the rumors of dead cattle were true. He lives 15 miles away and east of the snow line. His cattle were fine so he headed our way to help. We loaded calves in the horse trailer and put them in a neighbors barn. We loaded more to take home with us that evening. Newly came to see what was going on and offered to bring hay with his tractor. Our tractor was miles away getting the transmission rebuilt. Most of Newly's cattle were east of the snow line so he was free to help us. He brought six cow saving bales just as the wind started letting up at dark. Then 3 more bales at daylight the next morning.

It was noon before I could finally begin to understand we were dealing with a cow killer storm on the 5th of Oct. It didn't make sense. Way too early for a killing blizzard. The rest of the day all we could do was keep the cattle from drifting and watch them die. 28 cows and 28 calves the final tally. The 10 calves we took home, put in the shed and covered with blankets and tarps all died.

All of our other stock had adequate protection to survive. The older cows had badland banks and gullies for windbreaks. A group of 90 yearling steers drifted out of protection into a fence corner and had the good sense to break the gate down and head for wooded draws. All survived. In the end we were fortunate to only loose 56 animals.

Because this storm came so early in the fall, our cows hadn't grown enough winter hair to take this combination of wet, cold and wind. Maybe in a month fewer would have died. The next day the sun came out and the temp hit almost 50 degrees. Just a normal beautiful fall day. Except it wasn't. We were starting to get reports of dead cattle north of us a few miles. Lots of them.



Russell Eagle Bear and friends butchered young cows killed in the Atlas Blizzard to share with Neighbors  
(Photo by Dan Rasmussen)

The next question was what to do with the carcasses. All of our cattle died along the Highway 44 fence and in the ditch. Early Sunday morning my phone started ringing with requests to take animals home to butcher. 24 were loaded onto flatbeds and pickup boxes. 12 went to the Corn Creek and Norris communities and 12 to the White River community.

It was wonderful to see so many carcasses being utilized for food. Something good among all this devastation.

*Dan Rasmussen is vice-chair of the SDGC and ranches west of White River, SD*

## Contract Grazing Continued by Dave Steffen

If you should decide to contract graze someone else's livestock, you may want to consider a "Livestock Grazing Permit". This two page document has four major sections. The first part identifies the names and addresses of the parties involved in the agreement and the description of the land to be grazed. Section 2 lists the general terms of the grazing permit. Time period covered, what happens if the land is transferred during the time of the permit, right of entry, livestock identification (brands), sub-permitting not allowed, lien on grazing fees, stocking rate allowed, price of grazing fees, and the date the permit will terminate are the main items included in this section.

Section 3 covers a general description of grazing management practices that will be followed. Section 4 covers operation and maintenance items such as who maintains fences, water supplies, fencing materials, fly control, liability and death loss insurance. If there is a grazing plan, who moves the cattle, who provides and replenishes the mineral and who will check livestock. This section also covers agreement to any adjustments to the permit during the season if changes are needed. The document should be signed, dated, and witnessed by third party, according to the attorney I had review my original document.

On another note, I do implement a management-intensive grazing system on my operation. This grazing program requires dividing pastures into small pastures or "paddocks". I use electric fence to set up the paddocks and concentrate large numbers of cattle on small areas. Lightning storms are a special concern in this situation. As a result I do carry a special insurance policy on my own livestock that covers losses from lightning. My Farm Bureau insurance agent advised me that coverage is also available for "freezing and smothering". I personally do not purchase the additional coverage because livestock are only on my operation during the summer months.

Samples of both documents are available if anyone is interested. I can be reached at 605-830-9112 or email me at [dsteffen@goldenwest.net](mailto:dsteffen@goldenwest.net) Good luck to you in your future endeavors!

*Dave Steffen is retired NRCS District Conservationist*

## USFWS Proposed listing ... Continued by Jim Faulstich

Comments to the USFWS are due by December 23<sup>rd</sup>. You may submit comments by one of the following methods: (1) In the Keyword box, enter Docket No. FWS-R3-ES-2013-0017 for comments on the proposed critical habitat *or* Docket No. FWS-R3-ES-2013-0043 for comments on the proposed listing, which are the docket numbers for the rulemakings. Then, in the Search panel on the left side of the screen, under the Document Type heading, click on the Proposed Rules link to locate this document. You may submit a comment by clicking on "Send a Comment or Submission." If your comments will fit in the provided comment box, please use this feature of <http://www.regulations.gov>, as it is most compatible with our comment review procedures. If you attach your comments as a separate document, our preferred file format is Microsoft Word. If you attach multiple comments (such as form letters), our preferred format is a spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel; or (2) By hard copy: Submit by U.S. mail or hand-delivery to: Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R3-ES-2013-0017 (for comments on the proposed critical habitat) *or* FWS-R3-ES-2013-0043 (for comments on the proposed listing); Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, MS 2042-PDM; Arlington, VA 22203.

*Jim Faulstich is the Chair of SDGC and ranches near Highmore, SD*



Sandy Smart  
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## Calendar of Events

| Event                          | Date      | Location        | Contact Person  | Phone              |
|--------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Range Beef Cow Symposium       | Dec 3-5   | Rapid City, SD  | Julie Walker    | 605-688-5458       |
| Gov. Pheasant Habitat Summit   | Dec 6     | Huron, SD       | SDGG&P          | 605-773-3387       |
| SD Cattleman's Annual Meeting  | Dec 11-12 | Pierre, SD      | Jodie Hickman   | 605-945-2333       |
| Winter Road Show               | Dec 16-19 | TBA             | Judge Jessop    | 605-280-0127       |
| SDGC Annual Meeting            | Dec 18    | Chamberlain, SD | Judge Jessop    | 605-280-0127       |
| Rancher's Workshop             | Jan 14    | Mission, SD     | Lealand Schoon  | 605-259-3252 ext 3 |
| Beef Days                      | Jan 10    | Buffalo, SD     | Robin Salverson | 605-374-4177       |
| Dave Pratt Ranching for Profit | Jan 15-16 | Rapid City, SD  | Judge Jessop    | 605-280-0127       |
| HRM Workshop                   | Jan 7-9   | Eagle Butte, SD | Ryan Beer       | 605-244-5222 ext 3 |
| HRM Workshop                   | Jan 15-17 | McIntosh, SD    | Ryan Beer       | 605-244-5222 ext 3 |

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