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Capturing a Global Perspective with South Dakota's Grasslands

by Pete Bauman

In my last column, I suggested that September should be the unofficial 'Grassland Education Month'. So far, I think we've met the challenge.

Over the last week, I've had the opportunity to participate in several events that have focused on South Dakota's grasslands, soils, and livestock resources.

About a week ago, SDSU Range Professor Roger Gates convened a meeting of faculty and staff to discuss improved integration of livestock into row-crop agriculture. At the center of that conversation was overall soil health and increasing opportunities for livestock producers and grain farmers to work cooperatively in utilization of cover crops and forage crops and how those opportunities can tie to improved range management. It's a very exciting time as advances in integration continue to be explored. Stay tuned.

September 10-11, SDSU and the SD Grassland Coalition hosted Allan Savory for two days of grassland related teaching, discussion, and seminars. Savory is globally recognized as a voice for improving systems health through grassland conservation and biodiversity enhancement using livestock. Savory began his South Dakota stint by visiting several classes on campus and by spending some time discussing global grasslands with SDSU faculty over coffee.

On Wednesday evening at the SDSU Performing Arts Center, Savory was the featured guest on an evening that celebrated South Dakota's grassland heritage with an audience estimated at over 500. The evening began with a brief introduction by Barry Dunn, the Dean of the College of Agriculture and Biological Sciences. Dunn reminisced that he was a student in one of Savory's Holistic Resource Management classes over 25 years ago in Nebraska and he thanked Savory for coming to South Dakota.



Allan Savory and Rick Smith at the field tour on Thursday September 11, 2014. (Photo by S. Smart)

Allan Savory Continued on page 4

Pheasant Summit Recommendations by Pete Bauman

On Wednesday, September 10th the Governor's Pheasant Habitat Work group made public their report to Governor Dugaard containing recommendations for eight conservation measures to be considered for improved pheasant habitat in South Dakota. This work stemmed from the December 2013 Governors Pheasant Habitat Summit which was convened as an opportunity for South Dakotans to provide input and suggestions regarding the steep decline in pheasants and pheasant habitat in recent years. Here are the eight recommendations with my interpretation of the opportunities they provide. For the full report find it on the web at: <http://gfp.sd.gov/pheasantsummit/>

1. Facilitate greater collaboration among conservation partners to better utilize available resources for improving habitat management. If such recommendations are enacted, producers will be able to improve their conservation planning and align themselves to become more eligible for conservation program payments. In addition, having habitat information readily available in a simple-access format could make landowners more efficient through self-planning and reduction of inputs (time, energy) when making conservation plans....especially where stacked enterprises such as livestock production and hunting co-exist.

2. Establish a long-term, dedicated conservation fund and appropriate \$1 million in one-time funds to bolster private fundraising efforts. If implemented, a dedicated fund could provide wide-spread opportunity to develop new or innovative private/public partnerships or projects that benefit wildlife across ownership lines. In addition, the potential for a host of various game and non-game habitat benefits could be realized through enhancement of existing programs if adequate funding were provided.

3. Develop and implement the South Dakota Conservation Certification Program. If implemented, landowners receiving Conservation Certification status might benefit from preferences when applying for various conservation programs.

4. Create a multi-part "Habitat Pays" education and promotion series for inclusion in a variety of existing publications. Education of the masses is challenging. Such a campaign may feature real-life examples as well as provide promotional opportunities for individual businesses. Farms and ranches with pheasant hunting interests would be well positioned to promote their services through this type of recommendation.

5. Revisit the current practices pertaining to mowing public rights-of-way. It is important to recognize that the Work Group is not suggesting radical changes to ditch mowing. Rather, the recommendation suggests subtle changes in mowing timing and intensity could improve nest success while retaining landowner opportunity to harvest road ditches.

6. Petition the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Risk Management Agency (USDA-RMA) to include all South Dakota counties as eligible for crop insurance coverage on winter wheat. If USDA-RMA would back winter wheat insurance in the eastern regions of South Dakota, producers would be afforded the opportunity to expand production of a relatively habitat friendly alternative cash crop with a reasonable insurance safety net.

Pheasant Summit Continued on Page 3

Pheasant Summit continued by Pete Bauman

7. Encourage the South Dakota Office of School and Public Lands to include a land management plan as a condition for securing a lease. If adopted, this recommendation may provide an opportunity for producers to more fairly compete for SPL leases. Producers willing to improve or expand grassland acres and/or restore SPL lands may have additional opportunities under certain circumstances.

8. Support Congressional efforts to raise the federal Duck Stamp from \$15 to \$25. Additional revenue in the federal coffers for duck nesting habitat will improve opportunities for South Dakota's grassland producers in particular. Programs such as rangeland and pasture fence cost share, water development, and grassland/wetland easements are often funded through a combination of duck stamp revenue and other funds. Nearly doubling the duck stamp fee, while likely not deterring duck hunters from participating in the hunting season, will have a dramatic effect on the options landowners will have to partner with the US Fish and Wildlife Service on conservation programs, including planned grazing management.

Pete Bauman is an Extension Range Field Specialist in Watertown, SD.



Pheasants: Good News and Bad News by Garnet Perman

The SD Game Fish & Parks recently released their annual brood survey. The survey is not a population estimate, but rather compares the number of pheasants observed on the routes and establishes trend information. Survey routes are grouped into 13 areas, based on a local city, and the index value of each local city area is then compared to index values of the previous year and the 10-year average. The good news this year is that all 13 areas showed an increase in the number of birds per mile, 2.68 birds per mile compared to 1.52 last year. Hen numbers increased over last year as did brood size. Statewide, the index shows a 76% increase from 2013. Central South Dakota showed the strongest gains, with Pierre and Chamberlain areas up 140% from last year.

The bad news is that this year's count is down 53% from the 10 year average (2005-2014). All areas show significantly lower numbers than the 10 year average except in the Yankton area, which has the lowest 10 year average in the state.

Tom Kirschenmann, SD GF&P Terrestrial Wildlife Chief said, "The last 10 years were extremely good, comparable to the pheasant numbers in the 1940's and 50's. The challenge is to put all the information into perspective." Pheasant numbers in the state were high from 2005-2008. Since then all areas of the state have seen a marked decline with the most dramatic decrease along the I-29 corridor.

According to the survey report by Travis Runia, Senior Upland Game Biologist, weather can have a significant impact on annual changes in pheasant abundance, but habitat quantity and quality ultimately dictates population potential and long term averages. Nesting cover, primarily undisturbed grassland, is considered the most important limiting factor for population potential. More abundant grassland combined with higher winter wheat production is what helps the central part of the state consistently produce the kind of pheasant hunting the state has become famous for.

Pheasants Continued on Page 6

Allan Savory continued by Pete Bauman

South Dakota Grassland Coalition chairman Jim Faulstich recognized the 5th anniversary of the SD Leopold Conservation Award and introduced previous winners. Begun in 2010, the Leopold Conservation Award recognizes outstanding stewardship of South Dakota's land and water resources. Faulstich recognized Rick and Marlis Doud (2010), the Mortenson family (2011), the Kopriva family (2012), the Guptill family (2013), and the Perman family (2014). The audience was treated to a short video highlighting each ranch. (Full length videos of each ranch can be viewed by visiting the 'Awards' tab at sdgrass.org).



Family members of the first five winners of the SD Leopold Conservation Award recognized Wednesday evening at the Savory presentation on the SDSU campus. (Photo S. Smart)



Allan Savory then took center stage. Savory (79) has a lengthy resume and for the last nearly half century has advocated for improving global grasslands through livestock management. While extremely entertaining and thought provoking, Savory's singular message that *only* livestock done his way as a means to saving the worlds grasslands and reverse global social and political issues such as desertification, starvation and urban is not something that all scientists or ecologists agree on.

Savory began his presentation with a simple paper plate containing a product that was easily identifiable to most of the audience...

although when he asked for someone to tell him what it was...most mumbled and stumbled for the 'socially appropriate term'. Here was an international speaker with a plate full of manure, and the audience was courteously cautious about telling him what it was. Audience members uncomfortably offered suggestions such as manure, dung, excrement, droppings, pie, patty, etc. Savory, after straining to hear the half-hearted responses, simply set the tone for the evening by shrugging his shoulders and saying unapologetically into the microphone, "*folks, its simply cow s**t*". Laughter and applause ensued. Savory went on to explain that in his view what that singular plate of manure represented was more important to our future than all of the world's technology. He had our attention.

Through the course of the seminar Savory shared his views on human history and the use of what he deemed three basic historical human tools: technology, fire, and environmental 'rest'; and how each has influenced modern day thinking. He went on to champion the notion that large herds of livestock (herbivores) can reverse the negative impacts from the misguided use of these three basic tools.

Savory Continued on page 5

Savory continued by Pete Bauman

As he did in his popular TED talk (TED.com), Savory showed striking examples of how land can be healed through use of livestock grazing in large herds. This healing is primarily accomplished through an interaction of the plant material with the soil and is contingent upon the animals trampling vegetation and creating soil contact, allowing the vegetation to cover and protect the soil while jump-starting biological breakdown of the plant material to create organic matter...thus building soils. In addition, the grazing animal provides plant consumption and digestion, breaking down the plant matter and returning nutrients to through urine and defecation to further build the soil. The theory is perfectly logical, but how do you turn a desert into grassland?

While drawing from some of the material from the TED talk, Savory did offer more details of *why* this type of systematic thinking can work, helping the audience understand the flow of carbon, nutrients, chemicals, and potential pollutants through the system. What remained lacking at times was the *how*. How do you take a desert and stock it up with cattle when there is nothing to eat? In this regard, Savory still left some folks scratching their heads in wonderment.

As he spoke, Savory highlighted his views on the world's problems stemming from the formation of beliefs.....whether scientific or social.....based on public opinion. He wrapped his lecture around the simple idea that the world's issues are often systemic, offering that most societal collapse originates from civilizations becoming too dependent on technology in their agricultural systems. He went on to criticize institutional organizations, modern science, row-crop agriculture, grain-finished beef, prescribed fire, cattle genetics, breeding and a host of other common agricultural and societal trappings. At one point or another he likely ran afoul of nearly every person in the audience.....exactly his intent. Mission accomplished – read on.

These basic themes carried over to the next day when over 200 individuals met at the Rick and Karen Smith farm near Hayti, SD for a field day. On this blustery SD morning, the audience drank hot coffee under the shelter of a hoop barn while Rick Smith explained the details of his cattle, sheep, horse, and crop farm. Smith incorporates much of Savory's Holistic Management philosophy in his daily operations and has adjusted everything from calving and lambing dates to crop rotations to better 'fit' his family's social, economic, and environmental goals. Less work...more profit...better land health.

Savory then led a lively question and answer session with the group and offered more detail about what planned grazing really means while admitting to the audience that he cannot and will not attempt to give specific advice to any one producer for his or her own operation. What he provides is a decision making process that challenges the manager into thinking critically about goals and objectives and the inputs necessary to balance those goals and objectives against the primary goals of land health, profit, and social well-being.



Rick Smith presenting his livestock operation to over 200 people on a cold morning at the Savory Ranch Tour. (Photo P. Bauman)

Savory Tour continued by Pete Bauman

While in the field, Savory mused on the rationale, or lack thereof, of modern weed management, challenging the audience to think critically about the role of 'native' and 'invasive' species. For those who hold healthy native rangelands in high esteem, listening quietly during this part of the day was obviously difficult. Folks fidgeted, shared raised-eyebrow glances, and kicked at the dirt. Ignore invasive species? Really? Now I knew how the corn guys were feeling the night before.

Even though the statements were very direct and somewhat shocking to some, the real message was not much different than what we'd heard throughout Savory's talks. Evaluate, analyze, plan, make reasonable decisions and have reasonable expectations. Weed eradication through heavy chemical inputs is likely a recipe for failure in the long run. Weed control through integration and use of simple tools, such as well-timed livestock grazing may strike the acceptable balance. Again, the details are left to the individual situation.

In my opinion, what Savory offered is a reminder that we do have the freedom to think freely and critically. We are bombarded with seemingly simple quick fixes to what he has described as complex systems. Simple quick fixes generally do not work. He champions a framework for evaluation and implementation of simple planning steps. He has sharp opinions on the value and integration of certain technology and tools, but those opinions are somewhat balanced by the reality of planning for your own place and situation over time and space, using the tools necessary to achieve the desired goals.



Allan Savory and Rick Smith presenting in the field.
(Photo by P. Bauman)

Pete Bauman is an Extension Range Field Specialist in Watertown, SD.



Pheasants continued by Garnet Perman

In addition to the brood survey, the results from the work group that looked at all the ideas from the Pheasant Habitat Summit last December were released and are on the GF&P website (see article on pages 2-3. Kirschenmann said, "We will need all 8 pieces in place to make an impact." Kirschenmann noted that GF&P will be involved in working with the many partners concerned with pheasants. "It's important to make landowners aware of programs and help them figure out what fits their property and management approach." He recommended Pheasants Forever as a good place to start for a landowner interested in improving pheasant habitat. "They are very knowledgeable about all resources available." Mike Stephenson is South Dakota's Pheasants Forever field representative mstephenson@pheasantsforever.org (605) 651- 2716. Perhaps the best news is that many people care deeply about South Dakota's pheasant hunting tradition and any resources are available to build a sustainable bird population.

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

SDSU Investing in Cow-Calf Teaching and Research by Sandy Smart

Investing in Training Young People

South Dakota State University, with the help of industry partners and producers, is taking a major step forward in the future of animal science education by building a new Cow-Calf Education and Research Facility on the Brookings Campus. This investment will help SDSU become a national leader in beef production education during this critical time, meeting the growing demand of meat protein, in South Dakota, the region, and around the world. This commitment builds on a tradition of hands-on “real world” situations for students to learn applications of beef cattle evaluation, reproduction, nutrition, seedstock merchandizing, and management.

The state-of-the-art cow-calf facility will have offices, a classroom, laboratory space, and working facilities (for cattle handling demonstrations).

The site is only 2 miles from the animal science building. No university in our region have facilities this close to campus and will save time getting students to-and-from classes.



Conceptual drawing of the new Cow-Calf Teaching and Research Facility

Investing in Research Capabilities

The strategic plan of the College of Agriculture and Biological Sciences at SDSU calls for increasing focus on beef cow production in South Dakota. The Department of Animal Science has made new hires (Derek Brake, Elaine Grings, and Reid McDaniel) and a yet to be filled rumen microbiologist to meet these needs. This facility will provide this new group and some of the ‘old timers’ (George Perry, Robbi Pritchard, Julie Walker, and Cody Wright) new resources for a combination of teaching, research and extension. For example, the facility will include a state-of-the-art feeding system that will keep track of individual cow intake. This gives these folks huge efficiencies in resource allocation. The facility calls for a series of new pastures to be seeded down to examine nutrition, feed efficiency, and management. This new pasture resource will be connected to the existing pasture resources to expand research opportunities with grazing systems as well as incorporating the use of livestock grazing on crop residues and cover crops.

Investing in South Dakota Grasslands

SDSU’s commitment to expanding its investment in cow-calf teaching, research, and outreach will help serve the cow-calf industry of our state, which relies heavily on our grassland resource. Helping young people get started in the livestock industry will be a major step in providing the transition of family farms in South Dakota and preserve our existing grassland resource. Research and extension will continue to provide answers to producer’s questions in this ever increasingly competitive environment.

How You Can Help - Send a Cow to College

SDSU Foundation is making it easy for producers to make tax-free donations of cull cows at any sale barn in South Dakota (<http://www.sdsufoundation.org/cow-calf>). If you are interested in making a larger donation contact Mike Barber at 1-888-747-7378 or email Mike.Barber@sdstate.edu.



Sandy Smart
Box 2170, ASC 219, SDSU
Brookings, SD 57007

Calendar of Events

Event	Date	Location	Contact Person	Phone
SD SRM Range Tour	Oct 2	Sturgis	Tate Lantz	605-390-8049
SD SRM Annual Meeting	Oct 8-9	Ft. Pierre	Tate Lantz	605-343-1643 x133
Winter Road Show featuring	Dec 10	Mission	Judge Jessop	605-280-0127
Gabe Brown	Dec 11	Yankton	Judge Jessop	605-280-0127
SDGC Annual Meeting and	Dec 12	Chamberlain	Judge Jessop	605-280-0127
Gabe Brown				

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