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Holistic Resource Management on the Gilbert Ranch: A Case Study

By Dan Rasmussen

1984 was a tough year to be a rancher in northwest South Dakota. A perfect storm had spread across the Great Plains. A cow killing blizzard, drought, scary low cattle prices and land values so far into the toilet many land mortgages couldn't float. Ray and Linda watched this "storm" eat up their equity and the land. The pastures hadn't looked this bad in their lifetimes. There was too much bare ground and prairie sand reed. "We needed to improve our plant diversity in order to heal our land," Ray observed.

The bank had given Ray and Linda a long rope. However, in 1984 debt to equity disasters were happening in every ranching community. South Dakota was experiencing its share of forced farm sales. The Gilberts knew they needed an "Ah Ha" moment that would literally save the ranch.

The help the Gilberts were looking for came in the form of a book on Holistic Resource Management by Allan Savory. After reading this book and others on HRM, they began fencing. As a result, they were able to rotate their herd through a series of smaller pastures.

Linda refers to Savory's book as "the beginning." The first steps were identifying the ranch resources and systematically building on each one. Examples of these resources are native plant diversity, Ray and Linda's interests and experience, water, and potential fencing options.

Linda explains, "I wish we had gone through HRM schools to learn this stuff back in the 80's. It would have saved much of the trial and error we went through to develop management plans that truly fit our ranch resources."

Fast forward to 2020. The Gilberts have 30 years behind them of HRM management on the ranch.



"I wish we had gone through HRM schools to learn this stuff back in the 80's. It would have saved much of the trial and error we went through to develop management plans that truly fit our ranch resources".

Linda Gilbert

Gilbert Ranch Continued by Dan Rasmussen

Two wagon wheel rotational pastures were set up in 1986. As the Gilberts custom grazed yearlings and ran their own cows through these pasture rotations, the land began to change. The huge prairie sandreed patches began to thin out. Blue gramma was now growing in the middle of the patches along with western wheatgrass and beneficial forbs. The big herds were tromping enough grass into the soil to create a rejuvenation effect, promoting plant diversity the Gilberts had not seen in the past. Today, their stocking rate has increased and the land is healthier. The pastures hold water better so droughts are less severe. When the drought is over, the healthy plants recover much quicker than previous to HRM, contributing to the ranch's increased long term stocking rate.

Linda concludes, "Today we are in a good place on our ranch. HRM has played a huge role in this success."

South Dakota Grassland Coalition to Hold Holistic Resource Management Schools for South Dakota Farm and Ranch Producers

by Kate Rasmussen

The South Dakota Grassland Coalition will kick off 2020 with two Holistic Resource Management schools for local producers. The first school will be held in Mitchell, SD on January 27-30th with another to follow in Wall, SD on February 10-13th. The schools will be organized in partnership with Crossroads Ranch Consulting and will cover topics ranging from financial management to understanding the connection between ecological processes and ranch profitability.



Roland Kroos (Photo courtesy of Crossroads Ranch Consulting, Inc.)

The upcoming schools are designed to help ranchers expand their knowledge base to cultivate resilient businesses and landscapes. The Crossroads Ranch Consulting schools are interactive so attendees will have the opportunity to learn from the experiences of other ranchers as well as share their own experiences. This workshop-style classroom setting creates an engaging learning environment and allows attendees to have input on the topics covered. The speakers, Roland Kroos and Patrick Toomey will cover principles of Holistic Management that help ranchers, improve their businesses from an economic and ecological standpoint.

Roland Kroos trained extensively with Allan Savory, the founder of Holistic Management, beginning in 1985 and started Crossroads Ranch Consulting in 1992. Roland is a certified educator with the Savory Institute and has a degree in Range and Wildlife Management from the University of Nebraska. Roland made sharing the principles of Holistic Resource Management into his life's work after seeing the impact a holistic approach to ranching can have on families and the landscapes they steward.

HRM Ranch Schools Continued by Kate Rasmussen



Patrick Toomey (Photo courtesy of Crossroads Ranch Consulting, Inc.)

Patrick Toomey, a recent addition to Crossroads Ranch Consulting, has a BS in rangeland ecology from the University of Wyoming and has extensive experience as a rangeland manager. After working in the oil and gas industry as a Reclamation Ecologist, Patrick became a range technician for the InterTribal Buffalo Council (ITBC) where he helped manage over 50 buffalo herds across the country. Patrick trained ITBC herd managers in holistic management principles like managing natural resources to prepare for drought and making soil health a part of every decision made on the landscape. "I am excited and appreciative for the opportunity to help ranchers across the Northern Plains and to educate people on another way to do things and provide a different perspective to their operation," Patrick Toomey wrote in his bio on the Crossroads Ranch Consulting website.

These educational events are open for all experience levels and will cover a wide range of ideas. Sign up for one of the two schools to learn more about holistic decision making to improve your business, rangeland, and livestock management. "Holistic Resource Management training is a common-sense approach to managing farm and ranch businesses. HRM is the silver bullet our Ag community is looking for," said Dan Rasmussen, SDGC Education Coordinator, and Range Consultant.

The Mitchell school will be held at Blarney's Sports Bar and Grill. The Wall school will take place in the Wall community center. Visit crossroadsranchconsulting.com for more information on Holistic Resource Management and the work Roland Kroos and Patrick Toomey have done for farm and ranch producers.

Registration is \$200 for members and \$230 for non-members. Registration for non-members includes a year membership with the South Dakota Grassland Coalition. Lunch will be provided each day.

To register for the **January 27th-30th** school in **Mitchell, SD**, contact Judge Jessop at jljessop@kennebectelephone.com

To register for the **February 10th-13th** school in **Wall, SD**, contact Dan Rasmussen at the33ranch@gmail.com.

Nix Takes the Helm of the Coalition Board of Directors by Sandy Smart



Brett Nix was selected by the Board of Directors to Chair the SD Grassland Coalition this year. Jim Faulstich has been serving in this capacity for a number of years and was supportive of Brett taking this next step in leadership. Brett has served on the Board since July 2017 and as vice-chair last year. Brett and his family ranch near Murdo, SD.

Brett held the Grazing School & Grassland Management School Alumni event at his ranch this past summer and was a key advisor to Pete Bauman in the design and execution of SD Grassland Management School. Many of the techniques demonstrated at the Grassland Management School have been put in practice by Brett on his ranch for years. Jim Faulstich commented that "Brett has the right mindset, experience, and passion to lead the Coalition." "He will do a great job of taking the SDGC and grassland conservation to the next level," Jim added.

South Dakota Grassland Coalition Hosts Alternative Calving

Workshops in February by Pete Bauman



Cow and twin calves benefit from later calving at the Pat and Mary Lou Gupstill Ranch near Quinn, SD. (Photo courtesy of Pat Gupstill)

Structuring a calving program that best suites farm and ranch operations can be challenging. Of primary concern are weather, labor, market timing, and animal health considerations; with weather possibly being the most volatile factor, as it often is challenging and occasionally catastrophic. Evaluating alternatives that can improve calving conditions and quality of life while also reducing financial and animal health risks is an important step in assessing a ranch or farm operation. Each agricultural business is unique and thus no one resource can provide all the necessary information.

The Coalition recognizes the challenge that cattle producers have faced in recent years, especially weather related calving difficulties. The Coalition also recognizes that healthy and profitable cattle operations are a major key to ensuring the future of South Dakota's grassland health. Healthy ranches create the foundation for whole-systems health that includes everything from water quality to wildlife habitat to economic vitality. Recognizing this, the South Dakota Grassland Coalition, in partnership with SDSU Extension, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and others, invites the public to a series of three one-day workshops to be held in February that will focus on evaluating calving programs. These workshops will be held:

Tuesday, Feb 18th: Ipswich, 4H Building

Wednesday, Feb 19th: Chamberlain, Americinn

Thursday, Feb 20th: Faith, American Legion

All workshops are from **10 am to 3 pm**, with registration opening at **9 am**. Coffee and lunch will be served. Workshops are free to SD Grassland Coalition members and \$30 for non-members (which includes an annual membership and lunch at the event).

The format for the workshops will be short presentations on key topics by ranchers followed by open discussion and question/answer sessions with the audience. The Coalition encourages spouses, business partners, family members, and lenders to attend these workshops together.

Topics will include:

When and Where to Calve: Weather, ground conditions, nutritional needs.

Managing the Cow: Cow health and nutrition, cow size, safety.

Resource Allocation and Assessment: Matching calving inputs to ranch or farm resources.

Marketing Strategies: Production and marketing if a change to calving dates is made.

Managing People: Considerations for family, employees, health, and time constraints.

RSVPs for these workshops are requested for lunch planning if possible, but not mandatory. The Coalition understands that winter is a difficult time to plan, so walk ins are welcome.

RSVP to Pete Bauman peter.bauman@sdstate.edu 605-882-5140; Jan Rounds

Janice.rounds@sdstate.edu 605-882-5140; or Judge Jessop judge.jessop@sdconservation.net 605-280-0127

Passing It On by Garnet Perman

Dealing with farm/ranch transfer is important, but often difficult to accomplish. The Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition recently hired a ranch transition task manager to work with ranch families in planning for succession and estate planning. Bethany Johnston shared the following advice for getting the process started. First, all the owners need to be unified regarding what they want to see happen in 5 years, 10 years, to estate settlement. Do you want the operation to stay intact? In the family? A well thought out vision statement can guide the process. Then assemble a team that will include a lender, an insurance agent, a lawyer, and an accountant. A financial planner or family counselor may also be good additions to the team.

Talking with family about transition can be hard, but not communicating is a bad option. Johnston observed, “Nothing is more expensive than a lawyer for counseling.” Communication counseling with a trained counselor may be a good initial investment, especially if communication within the family is poor. Nebraska UNL Extension has an excellent downloadable workbook designed to help the younger generation start the conversation with a reluctant older generation: “Workbook for Farm/Ranch Transition When You Aren’t in Control”. The workbook is also on the Nebraska Grazing Lands website along with several good articles. Follow the links under the Program tab.

Second, know your financial situation. What do you own? What are the land descriptions? What is the operation worth? How much do you owe? What would estate taxes be? What would land payments look like if an on farm heir had to buy out off farm heirs? Is cash flow adequate to provide a living and pay off debt, or is an off farm job necessary? How will you fund retirement and/or nursing home costs? If no family member is interested in returning to the operation, consider helping out a young producer. Large operations and absentee landowners may not value the land ethic common to Coalition members. Aiding like-minded young producers can be good stewardship of land resources in addition to helping sustain rural communities. Remember that times have changed. What worked for a previous generation may not be an effective choice today. People live longer. Producers receive a smaller % profit from their goods than 30 years ago. “People change when they see a dollar sign followed by 6 zeros. They either get better or bitter,” Johnston noted.

Third, Johnston recommends hiring an attorney experienced in farm estate planning. “It’s the difference between having a neurosurgeon and a general practitioner doing your brain surgery.” The lawyer you choose should have a list of information they need to help accomplish your goals. Important information includes family demographics, information about applicable life insurance, and key people who could be enlisted to act as fiduciaries (trustee, personal representative, attorney-in-fact, etc.). The legal plan has to fit the family. Planning considerations include how to deal with divorce, death, disability, retirement and nursing home costs in South Dakota as laws vary between states. Be prepared to expose family skeletons, such as addictions or disabilities that can impact the situation.

Planning costs depend on the size and complexity of the operation. Expect to spend \$5000-\$10,000 or more. The more questions answered ahead of time, the fewer lawyer fees. The University of Minnesota website, <https://extension.umn.edu/business/transfer-and-estate-planning> can help with goal setting and pre-lawyer planning. Your insurance agent may also have a good inventory questionnaire. If not, Farm Bureau Financial Services does: <https://www.fbfs.com/learning-center/what-you-need-to-know-about-farm-succession-planning>.

Finding the right resources for your situation may take some effort. The most logical places to start include your current lender, CPA, insurance agent and lawyer. Some South Dakota businesses/ institutions that deal with this issue are Prosperity Wealth Management & Consulting in Aberdeen and Sioux Falls (<https://www.prosperityconsulting.net>) Prairie Family Business Association in Sioux Falls, <https://fambus.org>, and First Dakota National Bank, www.firstdakotaag.com, the SD Center for Farm/Ranch Business Management, Contact: Will Walter, 605-995-7191, will.walter@mitchelltech.edu. SDSU Extension can also point to appropriate resources. Contact Heather Gessner, 605-782-3290, Heather.Gessner@sdstate.edu. County FSA offices offer programs for those enrolled in FSA programs. Johnston said the new farm bill allows Department of Agriculture mediators to help with transition mediation and not just financial issues, but neither the SD Dept. of Agriculture nor SD FSA had any information when contacted.

Don’t wait! In Johnston’s experience, getting started has a snow ball effect, making the rest of the process easier. At the very least start putting things on paper (include dates) and make sure whoever has power of attorney knows where to find it. For those that already have plans, revisit them periodically to make sure they address your current situation.

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

New Board Member Spotlight: Riley Kammerer by Sandy Smart

The South Dakota Grassland Coalition welcomes its newest board member, Riley Kammerer, from Piedmont. Riley is the 6th generation to own and manage their current ranch with his wife Jimmie and daughters Karlie, Katelyn and Kymbal.

Riley recently took over the ranch, located in southwestern Meade County, from his parents Eliot and Cokie Kammerer this past year and is excited about what the future holds for his family. Currently, the ranch is a grass based cow-calf operation. Riley would like to add a yearling enterprise to diversify income streams and add an element of drought protection. Riley said “I feel like I am at a crossroads in a lot of ways, new ownership and new paradigms to consider.”

Riley’s guiding ranching principles started for him when he attended Coalition sponsored workshops and Dave Pratt’s “Ranching for Profit.” Riley said “I believe that healthy grass and soil management is the foundation for a successful ranching business. I fully believe in the Coalition’s Grazing School, Ranching for Profit, and the BeefSD program which can help you change the way you make decisions.”

Riley’s passion for South Dakota’s grasslands is rooted in his belief that “healthy grasslands are the heart and soul of our grazing operation and key to our future success.” When there was a downturn in the cattle market a few years back, Riley worked for a co-op traveling across three states spraying weeds, adding fertilizer, and delivering feed. “I was able to go to places I would not otherwise be and I saw a lot of destructive land management practices that really scared me.” Riley said. “We have a serious issue of land degradation that needs to be addressed through regenerative agricultural practices.” Riley continued.

When asked why he became a board member, Riley responded “I have always enjoyed the education and outreach that the Coalition provided and wanted to be a part of the organization.” “It is important to become a member of the Coalition, get involved, and be a lifelong learner.” he continued.

The Coalition is excited to have Riley Kammerer join the board of directors and looks forward to reaching more people about one of South Dakota’s most precious resources, grasslands.



Riley Kammerer family with daughters Karlie and Katelyn next to Jimmie holding baby Kymbal (Photo courtesy of Riley Kammerer).

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- News from the SD Section of the Society for Range Management

By: Sandy Smart

Why Attend the National SRM Annual Meeting?



Why should you attend a national SRM annual meeting? The SRM leadership team has been doing a bit of soul searching regarding the format of the annual meeting and who have been attending over the years. A survey conducted in 2017 revealed people want a change (for survey results visit <http://www.srm2020.org/about>). People who attend the annual meeting want to network, develop professionally, and present and absorb new research. Does this resonate with you? If you are like me, you become a creature of habit and align with what makes you comfortable. Doing the same thing, year in and year out, is easy and meets certain people's needs but tends to miss opportunities as culture changes. The leadership team realized SRM was missing a huge opportunity to dialogue with each other and include outside viewpoints on important issues facing rangeland management. This year the, 73rd Annual SRM meeting will be held in Denver, February 16-20. The theme for the meeting is "A New Look: Transformation & Translation".

The structure of the meeting will feel strange to folks who have attended meetings for a long time, myself included. The program will focus on transformation, student success, and translation as themes. Attendees will have access to technical information in a variety of formats; daily themed plenary speakers, interactive audience discussions, and e-posters and ignite style talks. The fourth day will include training and professional development, demonstrations, and outreach activities.

Transformation and Translation

If you find the science a bit overwhelming in the way it is presented, you are not alone. We were taught a very rigid, comprehensive way to do science and communicate our experimental findings to each other. This rigid, disciplined method is a good way to learn how to do science, but it is not the best way to communicate its central message. The average meeting attendee is only able to absorb one or two key new insights from hundreds of presentations because the way we structure our conferences. The new format will force presenters to transform how we communicate and translate the complex into simple, understandable bits of information. For a provoking video in scientific communication I encourage you to watch this Youtube video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RwJbhkCA58>. The campfire sessions, e-posters, and ignite style talks give greater opportunity to contribute and have voice than traditional discussions where one or two may dominate the discussion.

Student Success

Students will take center stage on the second day of the conference with the plenary session focused on student career development and afternoon technical sessions highlighting research by undergraduate, graduate students, and the High School Youth Forum. The evening wraps up with Bridging the Gap, a social opportunity to network and ask questions with established range professionals.

Reconnect with old friends and make new ones. Engage in discussing meaningful issues and take away new insights regarding rangeland management. I challenge you to attend this year's meeting if you haven't been to an annual SRM meeting in a while. If you go every year, I hope to see you again soon!



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Calendar of Events

Event	Date	Location	Contact Person	Phone
HRM School	Jan 27-30	Mitchell	Judge Jessop	605-280-0127
HRM School	Feb 10-13	Wall	Judge Jessop	605-280-0127
Calving Workshop	Feb 18	Ipswich	Pete Bauman	605-882-5140
Calving Workshop	Feb 19	Chamberlain	Pete Bauman	605-882-5140
Calving Workshop	Feb 20	Faith	Pete Bauman	605-882-5140

Please remit any comments, suggestions, or topics deemed necessary for further review to: Sandy Smart, SDSU Box 2140B, Brookings, SD 57007, alexander.smart@sdstate.edu, (605) 688-5503