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# Grassroots

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## Meet Kris Miner By Garnet Perman

Kris Miner recently took the position of Communications and Outreach Director for the SD Grassland Coalition. Her responsibilities include promoting events, coordinating social media, and advancing the Coalition's mission to promote good stewardship of grasslands through sustainable and profitable management.

Miner grew up on the family ranch south of Gregory owned by her parents, Dennis and Alice Miner. She graduated from Gregory High School and received a Master's degree in Counseling from SDSU in 1994. She worked as a family counselor and in juvenile justice mostly in Minnesota and most recently spent 10 years working for a restorative justice non-profit in Wisconsin.

When her father indicated a desire to move to town with the possibility of selling the ranch, the ranch kid in Kris balked. Support from her parents gave her the confidence to make a major career change and in 2015 she moved back to become the 4<sup>th</sup> generation of her family to ranch in the Gregory area. Realizing she had much to learn, a Google search for ranch management introduced her to the SD Grassland Coalition which she joined in 2016.

She credits Leland Schoon, NRCS range specialist with encouraging her to apply restorative justice principles to grass management. She used systems thinking in her former job to assess how things are, what is working, what is not working, and list changes to build on—very similar to the holistic ideas practiced and encouraged by many Coalition members. Miner took advantage of Pat Guptill's experienced advice through the Coalition mentor network early on. She attended the grazing school in 2017 and participated in a post grazing school project last year. The help and encouragement she received at the grazing school spurred her interest in the Coalition position. "They seemed like good people who want to take care of the land," she said.

In addition to falling in love with the ranch all over again, Miner also got reacquainted with and married a high school friend who sadly passed away last summer. She is combining her counseling and ranch experience by renewing her lapsed SD counseling license and seeking certification in equine facilitated learning.

Miner is happy to get acquainted with the Coalition membership and can be reached at 605-222-4717 or kris.miner@sdconservation.net.



## Mental Health Resources by Kris Miner

Over lunch at the calving workshop in Chamberlain, attendees engaged in a Mental Wellness Resource presentation by Kris Miner. Miner has spent the last year renewing her South Dakota counseling license. Miner is now the Grassland Coalition Communications Director. She has worked closely with survivors of a loved ones' suicide, and survivors of a suicide attempt. She understands the rural perspective as a ranchers' daughter. Her father is also a Vietnam Veteran.

The audience was asked if they had been impacted by someone that has taken their life?" Three-fourths of the people raised their hands. This is reflective of current statistics. The audience was also asked if they knew anyone who almost ended their life, but didn't. Three hands at one table went up. Miner emphasized the role of wellness. Farmers and ranchers have been coping with multiple and competing issues that cause chronic stress. That stress can lead to anxiety, that can lead to depression.

Typical mental health responses to stress, anxiety and depression don't always fit for people working in agriculture. Miner said that "recommending exercise and three meals a day, to a rancher who just got on and off his loader six times to feed cattle, and helped a heifer calve over lunch, doesn't fit". Rural mental wellness includes talking to friends, family and others, and it includes taking actions to mitigate or reduce stress. Sometimes this comes in the form or rethinking your operation, exactly what the workshop was offering ranchers.

Listeners were informed of how discouraging thoughts compound over time into suicidal thinking. The thought of ending your life brings a sense of relief from the stress. That relief moves a hurting person to action. It is important to reach out, so there is time between the thought of ending it and the action to do so. Miner shared "suicide doesn't end the pain; it transfers it to loved ones". She encouraged people to remember that suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem.

Miner emphasized that you don't have to be in a crisis to call a crisis line. You can call if you are worried about someone or you are seeking options for support. Miner shared the following crisis line numbers:

Avera Farm & Rural Stress Hotline 1-800-691-4336

Helpline Center 1-800-273-8255/National Suicide Prevention Hotline

Chat option: [www.imalive.org](http://www.imalive.org)

Imalive 1-800-784-2433 (1-800-SUICIDE)

In addition to crisis line numbers, audience members were encouraged to seek services at the state community mental health centers, or private and non-profit counseling agencies. Finding a therapist that is a good fit and works well for you is important. Overcoming depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts is possible. The presentation closed with a letter from "Joe", a rancher that was close to ending his life. He reached out to the crisis line, and to counseling services and health providers. He is still here today, and glad "he stayed".

## Wind Ranch, Al and Simone Wind by Dan Rasmussen and Al Wind



Al and Simone Wind

When Al and Simone Wind purchased their ranch east of Newell, in April of 2007, the region was entering the 6th year of what would be a 7 year drought. But the lack of rainfall was further exacerbated by 50 to 75 years of bad range management. The only thing their future property had been spared was the plow. Overgrazing had weakened the native grasses and eliminated much of the grass and plant diversity. Al observed, “It had destroyed the mesic and riparian areas along the two creeks and numerous draws that wound through the ranch. A majority of the surface area was bare ground, with no litter and severe capping. This limited the soils ability to absorb and retain moisture during normal times, and increasing the deficit effect during times of drought.”

“The 3400 acre ranch had 5 pastures, but one was 400 acres of year round horse pasture and all of the other pastures were combinations of upland range, mesic and riparian areas all fenced together into large 450-750 acre fields. We knew we couldn’t do too much more damage”, Simone joked. “It was mostly bare ground and cactus and broom snakeweed with the occasional western wheatgrass plant. They weren’t giving it away either, but we hoped if we could get through the first few years, with some intensive management we might be able to make it pay the bills”.

Jumping forward to 2020, the Wind Ranch has a new look. Instead of bare ground, cactus and the occasional western wheat grass plant. Now there is litter covering the ground between the grass plants. There is improved plant diversity and healthier native plants. They separated the range, mesic and riparian areas with permanent electric fence and manage each site differently. Al observed, “We now have cord grass, slough grass, willows, wild rose, sunflower, western snowberry, and cattails on the mesic and riparian sites, along with western wheatgrass. On the upland sites we have broken up the big matts of buffalo grass and blue grama eliminated most of the bare ground and increased western wheatgrass, green needlegrass, and forb production. In addition we have reestablished woodies like nettles salt bush, winter fat, and silver sagebrush that cattle and wildlife need when the native grasses start to dry out in the fall.”

Al clipped 500 lbs. per acre in ’07. Today he is measuring 2500 lbs. per acre on native and twice that on hayland. “We tried three different grazing styles over the years,” said Simone. “Because of a lack of pastures, we started with constant movement which we called ‘Flash Grazing’. In those first years sometimes we would make 3 rotations through the ranch, just trying to create litter and break up the soil crust. Then as we started to expand our water system and divide the big pastures into smaller ones, we slowed down to a twice through. Once we got to over a dozen pastures we started working on a once through with longer rest periods, but now that we have over 30 pastures and will eventually have 50-60 we can concentrate on improving soil organic matter and increasing plant diversity even more. The pastures that we have fenced down to 40-60 acres get a 3-4 day graze and then a 750 day rest. Those are the fields that show the best recovery, the highest yields, the most diversity, the most organic matter. Our goal is to basically graze half our ranch each year while the other half rests. And we’ve been able to do it while INCREASING our stocking rate.”

Al summarized: “This is harsh country and our soil had virtually no organic matter left from decades of overgrazing. Moving our cattle through small paddocks every 3 to 5 days is bringing back the organic matter in the soil, fixing the riparian areas and keeping our rainwater on the ranch where it belongs.”

# NRCS in South Dakota to Rollout New Conservation

## Implementation Strategy

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) in South Dakota is implementing a phased-in approach in how conservation programs are delivered. The new approach, Conservation Implementation Strategy (CIS), will target high priority natural resource concerns in a focused and targeted manner. By planning our approach, we are able to prioritize and focus conservation investments in South Dakota.

NRCS has technical staff in the field and partners that are willing to help coordinate this strategic effort through targeted projects throughout the state. Collectively focusing our expertise and resources on the highest priority resource concerns in the highest priority areas will yield the most impressive returns. Funding and support from other agencies and groups can be leveraged and coordinated to focus on mutual issues of the highest priority.

Starting in 2020, NRCS will make an annual call for project proposals. Project proposals can be submitted by any partner or NRCS staff willing to develop the project proposal. The South Dakota NRCS is requesting project proposals be submitted by April 10, 2020 for funding consideration. Funding selections will be completed on May 12, 2020. Applicants will be notified in May. Funding will not be provided until Fiscal Year 2021 funding cycle for programs.

### Proposals Due by April 10, 2020

All proposals should be submitted to:

Jeffrey Vander Wilt, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, [jeffrey.vanderwilt@usda.gov](mailto:jeffrey.vanderwilt@usda.gov)  
Jennifer Wurtz, EQIP Program Manager, [Jennifer.wurtz@usda.gov](mailto:Jennifer.wurtz@usda.gov)

NRCS is committed to continual improvement of the approach by an ongoing discussion of challenges and successes through a steering committee made up of the Leadership Team, field and state staff.

### The Vision

- The goal of South Dakota (SD) Conservation Implementation Strategy (SD CIS) is to solve high priority natural resource concerns in a focused and targeted manner.
- By planning our approach, we are able to prioritize and focus conservation investments in SD.
- NRCS has technical staff in the field and partners that are willing to help coordinate this strategic effort through targeted projects throughout SD.
- By clearly identifying locally-led goals and priorities, partnerships can be more effectively leveraged, conservation can be strategically delivered and investments for treating resource concerns can be focused.

### NRCS Conservation Implementation Strategy Continued

# NRCS Conservation Implementation Strategy Continued

## The Process:

- Starting in 2020, NRCS will make an annual call for project proposals.
- Project proposals can be submitted by any partner or NRCS staff willing to develop the project proposal.
- Project proposals will be approved prior to any funds being awarded. The purpose is to allow time for outreach and planning prior to any conservation being implemented.
- Starting in 2021, NRCS will put 1/3 of its conservation funding from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Agriculture Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) into CIS proposals. This amount will increase by 1/3 each subsequent year. Depending on final Farm Bill rules, in the 2021 proposal year - 2022 funding year, the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) will be available for CIS strategies.
- The phased in approach is meant to allow time for proposal development prior to submittal. This will allow partners and NRCS to work collaboratively to develop complete and effective project proposals.
- Approved CIS projects will assist NRCS with budgeting as well as the State Resource Assessment development.
- The support and assistance of partners will help SD ensure we have identified resource concerns and developed realistic plans to address these concerns.
- NRCS is committed to continual improvement of the approach by an ongoing discussion of challenges and successes through a steering committee made up of the Leadership Team, field and state staff.

## Benefits of this Approach:

- Collectively focusing our expertise and resources on the highest priority resource concerns in the highest priority areas will yield the most impressive returns.
- Funding and support from other agencies and groups can be leveraged and coordinated to focus on mutual issues of high priority.
- Gives guidance to our employees and partners as to where we are going, what we are working to accomplish, and how we are going to get there.
- Provides clear goals and objectives that can form strategies to monitor and evaluate progress and achievements.
- Clearly identifies the resources necessary to carry out the work and provides a solid basis for requesting funding and assistance from a variety of sources.
- This restructure of efforts should allow the state office staff to be more responsive and provides an opportunity to build and organize an even stronger support infrastructure.
- The strategy will give us the information we need to tell the story of what we have accomplished and how the work we have done together with landowners and our partners is changing our landscape and benefiting communities.

For grant template visit the NRCS website link at: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/sd/programs/farmbill/?cid=nrcseprd1522816>



## New Board Member Spotlight: Dugan Bad Warrior by Sandy Smart

Dugan Bad Warrior was born and raised in Eagle Butte, SD on the Cheyenne River Reservation. He has been married to his wife Margaret for 15 years. They have three daughters who ranch with them, Martha 15, Dayle 13, and Sophia 10. Dugan also has two older children Brad 26 and Breeanne 23, who have given them two grandsons: Brad's son Bentley just turned 7, and Bree just had new baby, Asher.



Pictured are Martha, Dayle, Dugan, Peg, and Sophia (Selfie courtesy of Dayle).

Dugan and his family own and operate Zuya Sica Ranch which is a family-run cow-calf and heifer development operation they started in 2007. Their guiding principles are to create healthy land, healthy animals, and a healthy family. They utilize strong planning, management, financial systems and technological innovations to build a product that their customers will come back for. Their operation is guided by Lakota values; “we give back to our Tribal community both by sharing resources and by being a model for change and excellence”, said Dugan. Their mission is to utilize cows to graze the land as the buffalo did for centuries. By mimicking how the buffalo grazed the prairies and helped promote a healthy eco-system, their ranch will accomplish the same effect using intensive grazing practices. “By moving our cows frequently and allowing the grass to rest and recover for extended periods, we will ensure our native grassland’s health for years to come”, said Dugan. The family runs cattle on 8800 acres in Ziebach County, South Dakota. The land is split into nine large pastures, and is watered by the Moreau River, a pasture tap, and numerous stock dams. The land is extremely productive, and contains river bottoms, creeks, and wooded areas as well as short and medium grass prairie. The range supports a variety of wildlife, and our conservation practices have greatly reduced the areas of hardpan and invasive weeds.

Dugan learned ranching the way most of us do - in the school of experience. “Growing up I worked as a ranch hand for my friends’ dad and learned the ropes. After we started ranching ourselves, in 2013 my wife wanted to go to a Savory Institute conference in Colorado, which exposed me to different ideas about grazing practices. Then in 2017, I attended a Ranching For Profit school that challenged my paradigms - everything I had learned about working cows growing up. That was a real turning point. In 2018 we went to the Grassfed Exchange in Rapid City, and then went to SDGC Grazing School that fall. The school helped me get started on a new management strategy for the ranch, and we used the mentor network to get additional ideas and input when we ran into trouble or had questions,” Dugan said.

I asked Dugan why wanted to become a SDGC board member? “I agree with the vision and education that the SDGC has and SDGC’s mission aligns with my own mission, so I want to contribute any way I can”. Finally, I asked Dugan why is it important to be a SDGC member? “Getting educated on the impacts we ranchers have on the health of our native grasslands is going to be vital to the ranching industry. Getting together on these things will give us all a better future, and let our children carry it on”, said Dugan.



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

By: Sandy Smart

## SDSU URME Team

South Dakota State University participated in the 73rd Annual Society for Range Management Meetings in Denver, CO Feb 16-19. The Range team participated in the Undergraduate Range Management Exam (URME) and placed 16th out of 25 teams. Undergraduate student Alyssa Vachino and graduate students Robby Schaefer and Abby Blanchard gave poster presentations. Dr. Sandy Smart and Dr. Jamie Brennen also gave presentations.

Pictured left to right are Nate DeJong, Blaze Jones, Ann Sells, Jamie Theisen, Alyssa Vachino, Dr. Sandy Smart (Range Club Advisor).



## High School Youth Forum (HSYF)

Matae Gordon, from Sturgis South Dakota, won the High School Youth Forum public speaking contest at the 73rd SRM Meeting. Matae will give her speech to the entire SRM at the awards ceremony next year at the 74th Annual Meeting in Boise, ID.

Pictured Matae Gordon, second from left, with SRM HSYF advisors and President Clayton Marlow, far right). Photo by S. Smart.



## Mitch Faulkner Receives NRCS Award

Mitch Faulkner, range specialist with NRCS, was awarded the 2019 Rangeland Conservationist of the Year Award by the USDA-NRCS at their annual NRCS Family Meeting at SRM. Congratulations on your award, South Dakota is lucky to have you!

Pictured left to right are Emily Helms, Mitch Faulkner, and Tate Lantz.





Sandy Smart  
Box 2140B, 139C McFadden  
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## Calendar of Events

Event	Date	Location	Contact Person	Phone
NRCS State Technical Meeting	May 20	Pierre	Kathy Irving	605-352-1205
Annual Bird Tour	June 5-6	Highmore	Judge Jessop	605-280-0127
Rangeland Days	June 9-10	Murdo	Valerie Feddersen	605-669-2404 Ext 3
SD Natural Resource Professionals Rangeland Workshop	June 30 - July 2	Nemo	Krista Ehlert	605-394-2236

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](mailto:alexander.smart@sdstate.edu), (605) 688-5503