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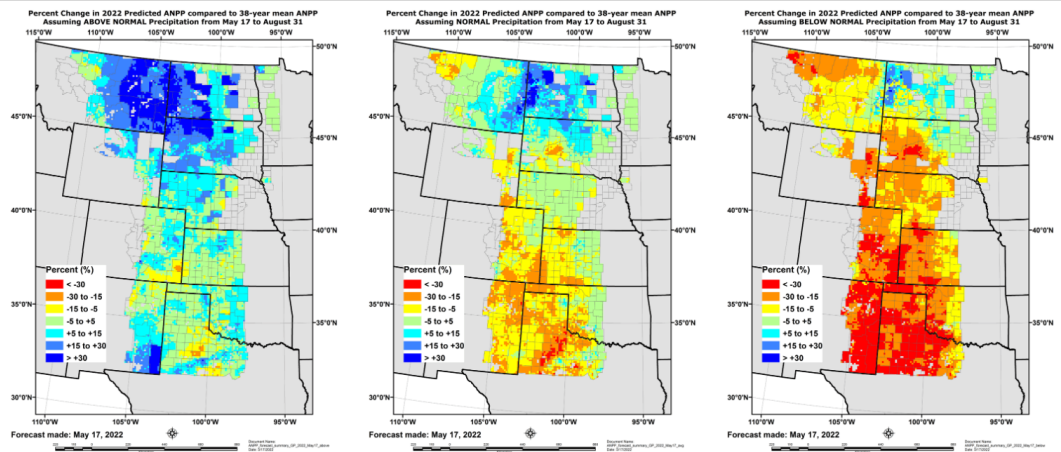
# Grassroots

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## Grass-Cast By Sandy Smart

Wouldn't it be great if there was a tool that could forecast forage production? Fortunately there is such a tool called "Grass-Cast". Grass-Cast was developed by a team of rangeland and climate scientists from the USDA, National Drought Mitigation Center, Colorado State University, and the University of Arizona. Grass-Cast uses a spatial database containing 38-years (1981-2018) of forage production and climate data for specific counties in the Great Plains. It then produces a model, starting May 1, to make estimates of forage production deviations from the long-term average based on current and predicted seasonal outlooks. Grass-Cast produces three scenarios based on a seasonal outlook of above normal, normal, and below normal precipitation for May-August. The forage production forecast maps are updated every two weeks during the growing season, and thus predictions become more accurate as the season progresses. Below is an example forecast I pulled off their website (<https://grasscast.unl.edu/Outlook.aspx>) on May 23rd.



According to the current seasonal outlook (visit Climate Prediction Center at <https://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/>) we are still expecting above normal temperature and below normal precipitation for our region during June-August. It is probably a safe bet to use the map on the right (below normal seasonal forecast). In addition, much of South Dakota has already experienced below normal precipitation in 2020 and 2021. Thus, I would expect forage production to be reduced this year even if we get normal precipitation because rangeland plants often experience a lag effect in forage production because drought interferes with bud formation. Most grasses develop buds for next year's shoots in the summer and fall. Dry conditions can reduce the number of buds formed, which will overwinter, and then produce a shoot in the following spring; hence the lag effect of previous year's drought. Even though Grass-Cast is forecasting 15 to >30% reduction in forage production in much of western South Dakota, I would expect forage production to be even lower because of previous year's drought.

## The Green Side Up by Pete Bauman



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE  
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**

### The Battle for Grass Continues

After cancelling in 2020 and 2021, The Grassfed Exchange held its annual conference in Ft. Worth, Texas last week. It was an interesting event given the volatile spring we've had. Just prior to the conference, I spent some time driving around northeast South Dakota. I then loaded up our gear and headed to Texas with my youngest son to attend the conference. A 17-hour drive gives a person a lot of time to reflect.

Our crazy spring weather has added to the overall volatility in the agricultural world. Here in the northeast part of the state optimism around high commodity crop prices has been tempered by over-abundant moisture. The bottom line is we are blessed and wet compared to other parts of the state and the region.

My observations of our grassland conditions in the area are complex. What I've observed are a mix of pasture conditions. Those that place high value on their pastures as an asset did pretty well to protect those resources during last year's early summer drought. Those that did not went into winter with little to no vegetation. Spring turnout on pasture is generally delayed, but our cold wet spring has also delayed regrowth. It's a difficult choice, either turn livestock out in pastures that aren't yet ready or keep them home and fight mud and high feed costs. Outside of this region, even the best grazing managers are challenged with planning for another dry year. Along with that reality is the continued 'optimism' of some producers. High land prices and high input costs seem like they would temper the desire to convert grassland. But high crop prices create optimism. I've seen a few 'new' breakings of native sod in the area and a lot more drain tile going in, and it's hard to figure the economics of it all over time and space.

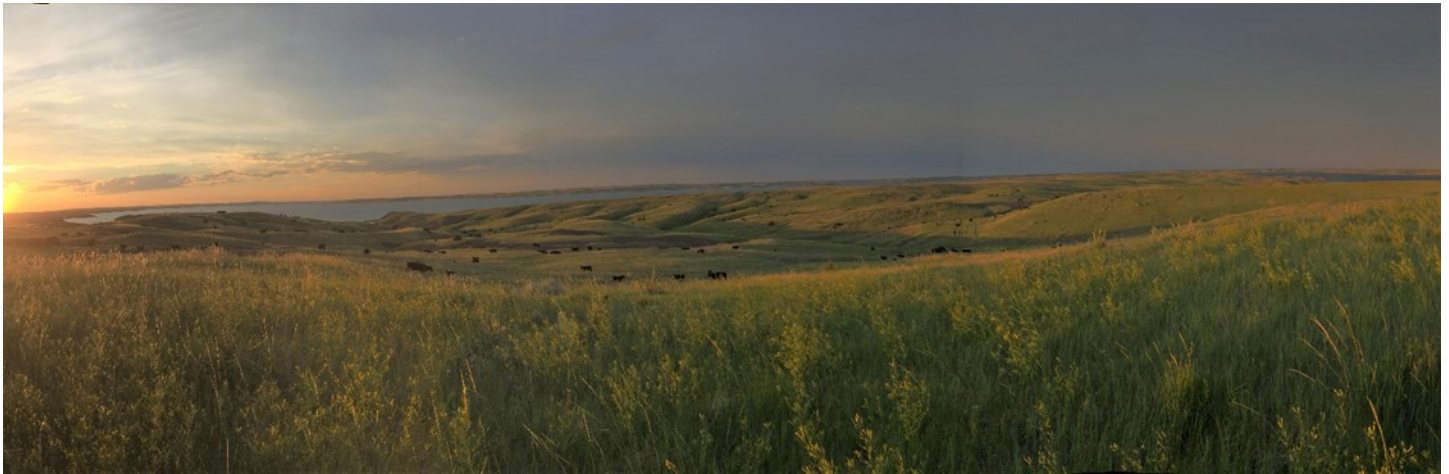
Driving to Texas was a mix of drought, wet areas, abundant grass, and finally record heat. All these issues came together at The Grassfed Exchange meeting, which is much more than just a conference on grass fed or finished livestock, but rather a focus on keeping land healthy and profitable by working with nature, not against it. While some were increasing their herds for the summer, others were on the verge of completely de-stocking. A great slate of speakers and producer panel discussions always centered on a core topic of seeking and utilizing wisdom in all choices. Central to the conference was the message of gaining knowledge through mentorship, classes, or events. Education opportunities offered by the SD Grassland Coalition are well recognized across the country, and we are viewed as being an organization that has something to offer others as a model. In that we are very blessed here in SD.

Collectively, we've invested a great deal of talent, time, and treasure in keeping the greenside up in South Dakota, and we are doing better than most. But, we cannot assume that market forces won't continue to pressure grassland conversion. If nothing else, the Texas trip solidified my belief that we need to be ever vigilant. We need to champion our grasslands while identifying real opportunities for the next generation to understand the value of grasslands both ecologically and economically. It starts with remaining bold about who we are and what we do as grass-based agriculturalists. We are one of the last great strongholds of grasslands in the Great Plains. Let's do all we can to keep it that way. Let's start by encouraging others to attend at least one of the Coalition's education events this summer.

*Pete Bauman is an SDSU Extension Natural Resources & Wildlife & Range Field Specialist located in Watertown, SD*

**GRASSROOTS**

## SDGC and Partners for Fish and Wildlife Team Up to Accelerate Grassland Conservation throughout South Dakota by Jesse Lisburg



Partners for Fish and Wildlife grazing management systems in South Dakota are supported by a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant. (Photo by Mike McQuiston, cooperation landowner).

The South Dakota Grassland Coalition (SDGC) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service South Dakota Partners for Fish and Wildlife program (SDPFW) in collaboration with several other key partners including the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Pheasants Forever, and South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks worked together to implement three separate funding initiatives totaling \$1.2M from 2015-2022. The partnership involved funding from two National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) grants and a multi-year cooperative agreement. Funding assistance was used to provide approximately 50% of the costs of installing conservation practices (mainly fencing and water supplies).

Working with private landowners on mutually beneficial grassland conservation activities has proven to be an effective delivery strategy. To date, 65 projects have been implemented involving 61,692 acres of grazing management on private land. Project delivery focused on voluntary, landowner led implementation of a variety of grazing management practices with the primary goals of continued livestock production, maintaining and enhancing intact grasslands, and providing benefits to a variety of grassland birds. Many of the projects have been implemented with multi-generational ranching operations that place a central emphasis on holistic management and passing a conservation legacy onto future generations. In addition to funding conservation practices, participating landowners were also provided a variety of technical assistance and educational resources. All 65 landowner participants received a complete outreach mailing as an introduction to SDGC education events and the annual SDGC grazing school. Thanks to the ongoing support of private landowners and SDGC, we look forward to more of these partnerships.

*Jesse Lisburg is one of seven Wildlife Biologists serving with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in South Dakota working with landowners to deliver conservation practices through the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program to conserve and improve wildlife habitat on private working lands. To find your regional contact in South Dakota go to: [https://habitat.sd.gov/contact/docs/SDPFW\\_2021.pdf](https://habitat.sd.gov/contact/docs/SDPFW_2021.pdf)*



## Fencing Dilemmas by Garnet Perman

It's no secret that ag inputs can be hard to find and expensive. Fencing supplies are a good example. I visited with Reed Cammack at Cammack Supply at Union Center and Glen Rausch of Onaka who operates a custom fencing business in addition to raising cattle. Rausch has 30+ years of experience in custom fencing.

Cammack and Rausch both say "Plan far ahead!" Fencing supplies are available but don't plan on going to town expecting to pick up what you need that day. It could take several weeks to several months to get what you want depending on the product and you might have to call around or drive farther to find a supplier. High demand items like Red Brand low tensile wire might take a while. Cammack's waited a year to get in a load of that particular wire. Expect to pay 25-30% more than last year. Rausch estimates that materials for a mile of 4 barb wire fence now costs around \$8000.

Some items like railroad ties may be permanently difficult to find. According to Cammack the railroads have switched to composite and concrete ties so the US supply is dwindling. They are still available from Canada, but shipping from there has been difficult. A shortage of truckers and high fuel prices compound the problem. Treated posts are available but need to be ordered far in advance. The supply of lodge pole pine has been affected by recent wild fires. According to Rausch, the quality of fencing isn't what it used to be. "We used to get 50 years out of a barb wire fence, but now they might last 25 years. The price of steel posts has risen sharply but they are available. Part of the issue is that wire is a low profit product so companies that struggle with their own supply issues and labor shortages are not focused on making wire. Prices are up \$25 a roll from a year ago.

Because barbed and low tensile wire prices have jumped, high tensile wire is a cheaper option. Rausch is a fan of high tensile wire. It is easier to string and holds up better in rugged terrain and bad weather. High tensile costs about half of an equal amount of barbed wire and its ability to hold cattle is superior. Be sure to purchase 12.5 gauge high tensile wire. "It's stiffer and harder to work with but much stronger. Fourteen gauge farm supply store wire will be a disappointment", he said. Deer can easily tear 14 gauge and snow will break it easier too. Demand for fencing is up. Many old West River fences have reached the end of their life span and need replacing. More livestock producers have adopted rotational grazing so Cammack's have seen an uptick in demand for electric fence and solar chargers. Solar wells are also gaining more widespread use. Pre grounded fiberglass drill stem posts are seeing more use.

Rausch recommends using two wires, one hot and one ground for dividing pastures. Perimeter fences should be three wires alternating between hot and ground. Energizers and solar panels are better and more reliable in terms of performance than they used to be. Supplies are available but slow as much electric fence equipment such as Gallagher is produced in New Zealand. Rausch advocates electric systems instead of barbed wire due to improved performance, reliability and lesser cost. Most animals excluding young calves learn to respect electric fence. "In this day and age producers have to consider it," he said.

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



## Rotational Grazing and Drought Planning by Dan Rasmussen

Rotational grazing creates soil health which promotes plant growth. Increased soil health leads to greater drought tolerance. If you have historically season long grazed, the pastures will respond positively, over time, to rotational grazing. Plant populations and plant vigor will increase due to healthier soil. Water will infiltrate better during a rain event.

Rotational grazing and Nature. Nature wants grass plants to be grazed then allowed to rest and re-grow. This promotes root health and soil health. Where we start working against this process is when cattle are left in the pasture long enough to bite the regrowth again and again. This is over-grazing which changes a healthy pasture into an overgrazed, low diversity, poor soil health pasture, that will respond poorly to drought and heavy rain events.

Well managed rotational grazing will allow you to eventually produce more forage during a drought when destocking is typically done. As the drought ends plants will respond to rain quicker under rotational grazing than season long grazing.

The time between implementing rotational grazing and being more drought resilient will vary from ranch to ranch. To start observing improvement it may take two years on one ranch and 4 the next. As time goes on, the soil will improve and become more drought resilient.

Here are a few basic steps to help prepare for dry conditions:

- Ask the question often, “**what does nature want?**” and observe what is going on in the pasture.
- Group herds** to allow plants adequate rest for root and forage development.
- By **subdividing pastures**, you are allowing plants to have longer rest periods.
- Avoid “re-biting”** plants after they have begun to regrow.
- Upgrade water piping and storage** to accommodate “grouped herds”.
- Create a **grazing plan** to match forage inventory to stock numbers

Attending a grazing school this summer is a good way to learn how to change management from season long grazing to rotational grazing and make your pastures more drought resistant. The Grassland Coalition Grazing Schools are also very helpful for people who are already rotating pastures and want to become more management intensive.

Following is the schedule for Coalition Grazing Schools this summer:

Wall	June 21-23
Watertown	July 26-28
Chamberlain	September 13-15



Chamberlain Grazing School, 2018 Charlie Totton Ranch.

More info on registering for schools and pasture walks at: [www.sdgrass.org](http://www.sdgrass.org)

*Dan is a third-generation cattle rancher living in south central South Dakota. Dan served on the board of the Grassland Coalition for 18 years and is currently the education coordinator and manages the Grazing School Follow-Up Consulting for the Coalition.*

## SDGC Receives Donation from Bass Pro Shops/Cabela's Outdoor Fund

by Judge Jessop

The South Dakota Grassland Coalition was recently awarded a \$20,000 donation from Bass Pro Shops/Cabela's through their Outdoor Fund. With this money, the South Dakota Grassland Coalition will be able to expand its efforts to promote the conservation of important grassland habitats throughout the state. Educating producers and landowners on the importance of grasslands, and the proper strategies to manage grasslands, are the best strategies to maintain this important resource.



Picture left to right: Becky Noble, CLUB Membership Manager at Cabela's; Brett Nix, SD Grassland Coalition Chairman; Riley Kammerer, SD Grassland Coalition Board Member; Eric Grewing, Cabela's General Manager Rapid City Store; Judge Jessop, Executive Officer, SD Grassland Coalition; and Tiffany Edwards, Cabela's. (Photo: Eric Grewing)

“Our customers continue to carry out the proud tradition of sportsmen and women giving back. Every time you shop, you can “round up” your purchase and contribute to our Outdoor Fund, a 501(c)(3) non-for-profit charity, supporting thousands of local projects and conservation partners across North America” - Bass Pro Shops/Cabela's

*Judge Jessop serves as the Executive Officer of the South Dakota Grassland Coalition*

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*- News from the SD Section of the Society for Range Management*  
**National Land, Homesite, and Range Judging Contest** by Dave Ollila

After 2 years of cancellations, a record attendance of more than 1000 FFA and 4-H members competed in the National Land, Homesite, and Range Judging contest according to the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, the contest's principal sponsor. The Cheyenne-Arapaho Agency north of El Reno, OK hosted the Range and Land judging event on May 5th.

The FFA and 4-H participating teams qualified for the national event by placing among the top five teams at contests held in their home states. The first two days of the three day event offered contestants opportunities to visit nearby practice sites to get acquainted with Oklahoma soils and plants with information available from range and soil experts. The actual contest site remains a secret until contest day, so no one has an unfair advantage. Contestants and coaches gather on contest morning to find out the official contest location.

The event ended Thursday night with an awards banquet in the Great Hall of the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. National championship trophies were awarded to team and individual winners in each category of the competition including land judging, range judging, and homesite evaluation. Each category included FFA and 4-H divisions.

In the Range Judging 4-H Competition, the Butte-Lawrence-Jackson 4-H Range team brought home the National Championship! Individually, 8 points separated the top 3 scores, Farynn Knutson – Kadoka was recognized as the National Champion individual followed by Morgan Mackaben – Belle Fourche placing 2nd, Tate Ollila – Newell 3rd, and Bennett Gordon – St. Onge -8th. The team is coached by Brandy Knutson and Dave Ollila.

Reserve Champions turned out to be another South Dakota team - Wessington Springs 4-H Range Team was comprised of Kristie Munsen- 5th, Quinten Christensen-11th, Kaden Wolter-12th and Austin Schimke-14th, The Wessington Springs 4-H Range Team is coached by Mr. Craig Shryock.

The Kadoka FFA Range Judging Team placed 8th in the FFA Range division, team members included Tyler Ring, Emily Zickrick, Maxwell Zickrick and Madison Brown. The team was coached by FFA Advisor, Mr. Brandy Knutson. Other South Dakota teams participating included Hitchcock-Tulare FFA and Webster FFA

The McCook County 4-H Homesite Judging team captured a national championship as well. Team members included Ella Stiefvater- 2nd, Grace Diogiovanni- 5th, Jonathon Schock- 17th and Mason Pulse- 19th. The McCook County team was coached by Mr. Terry Rieckman. Wessington Springs 4-H Homesite Team received 4th place honors. Team members included Cheyenne Burg- 8th, Braydin Labore- 16th, Blake Larson- 18th, Carter Gaikowski- 27th and coached by Mr. Lance Howe and Mr. Craig Shryock.

The Willow Lake FFA Land team placed a very admirable 8th out of 100 teams in the National Land Judging Contest. Team members included Jack Bratand, Maddie Urke, Emma Peterson and Wyatt Anderson. The Willow Lake FFA Land Team is coached by Mr. Dan Tonak. Other SD Land judging teams included Hitchcock-Tulare FFA, West Central FFA, Philip FFA and Tripp County 4-H.

Also attending to provide technical assistance included: Dr. Sandy Smart, SDSU Extension Ag and Natural Resource Program Leader, Mr. Tyler Swan – USDA-NRCS Soil Conservationist, and Mr. Lance Howe – USDA-NRCS Regional Soil Scientist. The Land, Range and Homesite evaluation opportunities offered in South Dakota are coordinated by members of the South Dakota Section of the Society for Range Management (SRM). The state sponsored events are supported with technical assistance from personnel within the USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Service, USDA Forest Service, USDI-Bureau of Land Management, US Fish & Wildlife, SD Game, Fish and Parks, SDSU Extension, area ranchers and other range and soil professionals. Financial sponsors for this unique national educational opportunity include: South Dakota Section of the Society for Range Management, South Dakota Soil Health Coalition, South Dakota Grassland Coalition, South Dakota Stockgrowers Association and the South Dakota FFA Foundation.





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## Calendar of Events

Event	Date	Location	Contact Person	Phone/email
Landowner Fire Workshop	June 2-3	Astoria, SD	Pete Bauman	Peter.bauman@sdstate.edu
Bird Tour	June 3-4	Highmore, SD	Judge Jessop	605-280-0127
Rangeland and Soil Days	June 14-15	Murdo, SD	Valerie Feddersen	605-530-2020
West River Grazing School	June 21-23	Wall, SD	Dan Rasmussen	the33ranch@gmail.com
Pasture Walk	June 23	Montrose, SD	Casey Wenzlaff	casey.wenzlaff@usda.gov
Young Producers Ranching for Profit School	July 12-15	Huron, SD	Dan Rasmussen	the33ranch@gmail.com
East River Grazing School	July 26-28	Marvin, SD	Pete Bauman	Peter.bauman@sdstate.edu

Please remit any comments, suggestions, or topics deemed necessary for further review to: Sandy Smart, SDSU Box 2207D, Brookings, SD 57007, alexander.smart@sdstate.edu, (605) 688-4940



