



Grassroots

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Remembering Stan Boltz by Sandy Smart



Stan Boltz passed away on Wednesday, September 18, 2024 in Huron, SD. Stan graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 1987 with a degree in Agronomy and a Range and Forage Production option. He worked in Nevada for 10 years and then moved to Rapid City and spent 8 years there. Stan moved up to the state office in Huron and was the State Range Management Specialist for 12 years. Since then Stan has been serving as a Regional Soil Health Specialist covering several states in the Great Plains and Midwest.

He was a great colleague and friend to many of us who worked in conserving grasslands/rangelands and helped producers be good stewards of their resources. I compiled stories and anecdotes from people who worked with Stan over the years. I hope reading these stories honors Stan's life and gives you some comfort as we will miss him dearly. — *Sandy Smart, South Dakota State University Extension*

Stan Boltz was a friend and mentor to many during his career with the USDA-NRCS. Stan worked in a few different locations during his career, he talked much about his time in Nevada, especially when he was able to help with snow surveys. He had fond memories of those excursions, and even had some snowshoes hanging in his office space. Stan started writing ecological site descriptions when he moved to Rapid City to be on an ecological sciences technical team for the Northern Great Plains region. He worked alongside so many folks to develop the initial ecological site descriptions across South Dakota which became the main source of information for writing grazing plans and developing management recommendations.

Stan also worked with a team of folks to develop South Dakota's "Drought Tool" – an Excel-based tool that helps determine the grassland productivity based on precipitation. Stan worked with Mitch Faulkner, Shane Deranleau, and Doug Vik – along with other range experts to develop the tool and test it out. He continually provided support to keep it going throughout his time as the State Rangeland Management Specialist and afterwards during his time as the Regional Soil Health Specialist. His contributions to help provide up-to-date information on the status of grasslands in South Dakota was invaluable.

Stan was the lead for Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) data collection during his time as the State Rangeland Management Specialist – many student employees helped

Remembering Stan Boltz Continued Page 2

Remembering Stan Boltz Continued by Sandy Smart

collect data during his time managing that program. Many of those student employees now work for NRCS in various states throughout the country. He loved NRI, being out on the range collecting data and seeing the trends in the data.

Stan was very wise and always had great advice about so many topics. He knew all things range and soil health, but also so many other things from house maintenance to car maintenance, he was definitely a jack of all trades. He was always able to lend an ear to hear, and give advice when needed.

Stan was a huge supporter of rangeland and soil health outreach events, helping with Grazing School, Soil Health School, and many other events that came up. He always helped with the rangeland judging competitions in the fall, providing outreach to high school students on the importance of grasslands.

Always present with his steel handled shovel, a Stanley coffee mug, cowboy hat, and a smile – Stan was ready to do all things. — *Emily Rohrer, State Rangeland Management Specialist, USDA-NRCS SD*

Stan's leadership in the world of Ecological Site Descriptions and Rangeland Soil Health was truly inspired by his belief in the Lord and Creator of the earth. — *Lealand Schoon, District Conservationist, USDA-NRCS SD*

Coffee, Stan was never without his thermos or 2 of them. — *Judge Jessop, Executive Director SD Grassland Coalition*

Laverne Koch and I drove from Rapid City to Reno, NV with Stan for a NatGLC meeting and since he was from down there he kept telling us about the different mountain ranges. Laverne and I just laughed because to us, everything just looked the same over and over but he was adamant to teach us that every mountain range had a different name! It happened all the way down and all the way back. Hilarious! — *Tate Lantz, Area Resource Conservationist, USDA-NRCS SD*

Stan was the first major influence in my career that led me to choosing rangeland conservation and soil health. Wisdom and kindness, patience and quiet confidence surrounded the man that I would soon consider a friend, already a mentor. When our friend Mitch underwent cancer treatment in Denver, we went to visit him together. I'll never forget the power of the Spirit in that room when we prayed over Mitch. It almost brought tears to my eyes; instead a broad smile graced all three of our faces. Stan lived and loved well - I'm a better Christian, husband, father, employee, and friend because of the example my dear friend Stan was. See you in Heaven partner. — *Tanse Herrmann State Grazinglands Soil Health Specialist, USDA-NRCS SD*

Stan was always known for his uncanny ability to ID native plants. At the Grazing Schools the instructors would always go to Stan requesting he ID the latest native forb the rest of us could not identify. One time near Chamberlain, SD one of us found a 2 ft. tall forb we couldn't find in the book and asked Stan to take a look at it. At first he seemed stumped but as he looked at the forb Stan ran his fingers over the leaves and named the plant. It was a version of "water leaf" with the scientific name Hydro....something. He explained the leaf felt like it was always wet, therefore the reference to water in the name. — *Dan Rasmussen, Education/Consultant Specialist, SD Grassland Coalition*

SDSU New Faculty Spotlight: Dr. Sean Di Stefano by Sandy Smart



South Dakota State University Department of Natural Resource Management has hired a new Rangeland Ecologist, Dr. Sean Di Stefano. Sean grew up in Odessa, TX where she spent a lot of time in the Big Bend region of Texas along the US-Mexico border and up into the panhandle of Texas near Lubbock. It is the heart of the oilfield of the Permian Basin but also has a long history of ranching with cotton and peanuts grown closer to the panhandle. Sean and husband, Ezequiel, have been married 9 years and have two boys, Simon and Miguel. After receiving her PhD, her older son said “I could now call myself a “grass doctor” and I’ve liked that title ever since”.

Sean’s mother was a plant physiologist and she passed on her love of plants and ecology to Sean. “She was very proud on the day I surpassed her in grass identification!”, Sean said. Her grandparents came from homesteading families in western Colorado and Arizona, and she spent a lot of her childhood summers exploring the mountains and deserts of those regions.

Sean earned a bachelor’s and master’s in Range Science from New Mexico State University and a PhD in Natural Resources with a specialization in Rangelands from University of Idaho. She has worked in multiple states and ecosystems across the western US for the past 10 years. During this time, she primarily worked and collaborated with USDA-ARS and USDI-BLM.

Sean’s appointment in the department is 50/50 teaching and research. Classes that she will teach include “Introduction to Range Management” and “Habitat Conservation & Management”.

She is passionate about furthering our understanding of rangeland plant community change over large time and spatial scales in response to land management and climate change. For example, she uses advanced models and remote sensing to dissect and elaborate on the effects of extreme climate variability on grazing management outcomes. Part of this process includes looking at plant species competition, soil C and N cycling, and livestock performance. She is excited to conduct research on topics that is directly relevant to producers and land managers of the northern Great Plains.

Her passion for teaching is rooted in a deep love for rangelands, where she aims to inspire students by merging theoretical knowledge with hands-on experiences. Her goal is to help students build a personal connection with rangelands and nurture a sense of environmental stewardship. For graduate students, she likes to focus on helping them begin to apply, build-on, and synthesize their knowledge to address real-world problems. Additionally, she finds it important to support them in building their professional network and teach them the importance of communicating science to others outside the research world.

One of the best parts of working on rangelands is the people! “Even before I came to South Dakota, I was impressed by the collaborative spirit of researchers and land managers throughout South Dakota”, Sean said. “Being a private land state, South Dakotans have demonstrated to me the importance of working together to solve rangeland issues across disciplines, backgrounds, and boundaries, metaphorical and literal” said Sean. It is one of the main reasons she was attracted to working in the state. Additionally, “I love being back in the open prairie, similar to my youth, where I feel like I can truly breathe and be a part of the landscape. As the American author Willa Cather once said, “anybody can love the mountains, but it takes a soul to love the prairie.””, said Sean.

Updates from the South Dakota Grassland Initiative by Laura Kahler

At the South Dakota Grasslands Summit in March, the five goals of the Initiative were developed through partner input, and since that time partners have been invited to participate in workgroups addressing those goals. Current workgroups include Grassland Conservation Strategy, Connecting Grassland Producers & Programs, and Grassland Outreach, with participants for the Grasslands Education workgroup being recruited now. Each of these workgroups have been developing ideas that relate back to addressing grassland loss, and helping producers who want to keep their land in grass to be successful with that goal.

A few topic areas that have been in discussion in the **Grassland Conservation Strategy** workgroup, and which you may wish to explore further, include recent or potential policy changes. One of these is the SUSTAINS act, which authorizes USDA to accept private funds to increase funds available for USDA's conservation programs. Comments on these programs, including comments submitted by South Dakota Grasslands Initiative, can be viewed at [federalregister.gov](https://www.federalregister.gov). Another recent change was adjustments to USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) which will affect the breaking of native sod in states outside of those with Sodsaver. Comments on this can also be viewed at [federalregister.gov](https://www.federalregister.gov) by searching for Expanding Options for Specialty and Organic Growers. Lastly, a third policy topic that this workgroup has been exploring is how land is taxed in South Dakota. In South Dakota, land is taxed with the highest and best use (HBU) method, which is based off of land capability class rather than actual use. Consequently, across the state it is common for non cropland to be taxed with a HBU of cropland, and vice versa. The SD Grasslands Conservation Strategy workgroup brought this concern to the South Dakota Legislature committee on property tax assessment methodology, and encourages you to learn more at sdlegislature.gov

In the **Connecting Grassland Producers & Programs** workgroup, the team is brainstorming ways to help connect grassland producers and landowners with conservation programs that may help them reach their goals. One way is through supporting the Dakota Conservation Network, conservesd.org. This team is also developing plans to better learn what would help producers connect with available programs.

The third developed workgroup, **Grassland Outreach**, has developed a communications plan to help them focus their efforts. As they move forward into bringing these ideas into reality, look for unique and creative ways they will be helping connect South Dakotans to the grasslands.

To be updated with the activities of the workgroup, or to learn how to be involved, we encourage you to sign up for our email list at www.SDGrassInitiative.org and consider attending our quarterly partner meetings in early October. The South Dakota Grasslands Initiative invites all with an interest in the future of our grasslands to their quarterly partner meetings. These are taking place in three locations around the state to allow the opportunity to network with others in your region. From 1:30-3:30 local time, these meetings will include updates from the SD Grasslands Initiative workgroups, partner updates from all attendees who wish to share, and discussion time focused on connecting producers & conservation programs, as well as identifying barriers. October 1st's meeting in Rapid City's Outdoor Campus will feature Drew Anderson, October 2nd's meeting at the Pierre Chamber of Commerce building will feature Todd Mortenson and October 3rd's meeting at Watertown's Ramkota will feature Rick Smith.

The Big Land Swap: Part I by Garnet Perman

American agriculture is in the beginning of one of the largest transfers of land and wealth in the nation's history. Transition, succession and estate planning are hot topics. Only 30% of family farms/ranches survive to the second generation. Twelve percent make it to the third and only 3% survive to the fourth generation. In keeping with the Grassland Coalition's tradition of peer to peer learning, this is the first in a series of articles about producers and the steps they've taken to bring in the next generation and plan for the future.

Jim and Karen Kopriva, and their son Lee are owners and operators of Kopriva Angus, a registered Angus operation located near Raymond, SD. Their daughter Angela and her family live in Brookings, but she continues to be involved in the operation on a limited basis.

Jim and Karen helped both children start in the cattle business by gifting each of them two heifers about the time they started grade school. Those cows helped pay for their education and helped Lee transition into full time production agriculture when he finished college.

Lee always knew he wanted to raise cattle. He graduated from SDSU in 2009 with a degree in animal science and minors in ag business and range. He spent all his summers and many weekends helping Jim with the farm. When he returned full time, one dilemma he faced was how to add value to the operation. Good long-term relationships with neighbors and friends that had a compatible land ethic were key to him being able to add acres to the operation by renting and eventually purchasing some land. His part of the operation is 20% deeded acres and 80% rented or leased. Lee has been able to negotiate rental and lease contracts for five years. He feels longer leases allow him to be more intentional about caring for the land by putting time into projects like weed control and water development. He makes a point of communicating with his landlords on a regular basis.

Jim described his and Lee's arrangement as "operating separately together". They start most days with a planning session, work together and share equipment, but keep separate books for each person. Their herds are pastured together. They hire some help, especially with haying. Karen maintains the financial records and Lee deals with the registered herd records. Angela still owns a few cows and helps with big projects like the yearly sale and smaller activities some weekends. The principles of soil health inform day to day decisions as well as big picture planning. Practices include native grass seeding, rotational grazing, and the use of cover crops and crop residue stubble to extend the grazing season. Kopriva Angus received the SD Leopold Award for Conservation in 2012.

Prior to farming and ranching full time, Jim worked for the Farm and Home Administration during the 1980's. That experience has been an asset in many ways including understanding the importance of formally planning for the future. He's seen several situations that ended in a family train wreck for lack of planning. About five years ago, he and Karen started their own process for succession and estate planning. They found help through the SD AG Rural Leadership (SDARL) directory. Alan Hojer is an SDARL alumni and works as a legacy consultant for First Dakota National Bank. He met first with Jim and Karen and later with the entire family. He helped them identify goals, examine options and connected them with people that could help put their plan in place. It took about a year to finalize a plan that works for their family. It can be tweaked if necessary.

"If I'm gone tomorrow I know what happens and so does everyone else," Jim said. "Our quality of life is better because of it." For Lee, who is the 5th generation to operate on some of the land, knowing the long-term plan gives him peace of mind and inspires him to put more effort and pride into his daily activities.

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

Grazing Schools and Follow-Up Ranch Consulting Program

by Dan Rasmussen



Grassland Coalition board member, Riley Kammerer (wearing straw hat), helps a group of students “clip and weight” pasture forage to determine the pasture allocation for the next day at the Chamberlain Grazing School in 2023.

The Grazing Schools are designed to help ranchers implement improved grazing planning. Each 3 day school is led by experienced land managers and agency professionals.

After completing the Grazing School, attendees are then eligible to enroll in the Follow-up Range Consulting program. A range consultant will come to your ranch and help implement improved grazing practices taught at the School. The fee for Follow-Up is included in the Grazing School tuition. The Grassland Coalition procures grants that make this low cost investment possible.

This year at the Pat Guptill ranch east of Wall, the attendees were divided into groups of 6 and given the task of laying out a pasture for one day grazing for 10 head of yearlings. After the poly wire fences were built the cattle were turned in and 24 hours later the group evaluated the forage remaining and determined how close they came to achieving their assigned goal. Then they re-plan and set up a fresh pasture for another 24 hour graze.

In the eastern school near Summit, there is one herd of 100 cow/calf pairs which are moved daily. The students are divided into groups to determine the size of each days paddock.

Then they go on to learn plant ID in the pasture. The afternoons and evenings are filled with classroom learning. Including rangeland animal nutrition, soil health, creating a ranch vision statement, experiences from ranchers, and overcoming obstacles with water and fencing.

The instructors at the school stress learning to work with Nature. This is done by observing what is happening in the pasture. Then adapting your management plan to improve pasture health.

Alumni that sign up for the Grazing School Follow-Up Program will have a range consultant come to their ranch and help them apply the things they started learning at the grazing school. The consultant will work on mapping, a resource inventory, and work through challenges with water and fencing. Once these tasks are accomplished, the consultant will assist the school alumnus to create a new grazing plan or update the existing plan.

The location of the Grazing Schools are: Wall in June, Summit in July and Chamberlain in September. For more information on attending a grazing school in South Dakota, go to www.sdgrass.org.

Dan is a third-generation cattle rancher living in south central South Dakota. Dan served as a past board member of the Grassland Coalition and is currently the Grazing School Follow-up Ranch Consulting Coordinator for the Coalition.



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- News from the SD Section of the Society for Range Management
Annual Section Meeting and Pasture Walk by Krista Ehlert



**SD Society for Range Management (SD SRM)
and the SD Grassland Coalition present a
PASTURE WALK
followed by the SD SRM Annual Meeting**



Wednesday October 23 - Faith, SD

- 12:30-3:00 PM, **FREE Pasture walk** at Wedge Tent Ranch w/ the Carmichael Family
- 4:00-5:30 PM, **SD SRM Business Meeting** at Horns Up Sports Bar
- 5:30-6:30 PM, **Supper** (\$28 per person) and **SD Delegate Karlie Kammerer's Winning Presentation**
- 6:30-7:30+ PM, **Crazy Auction and Social**



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Hotel blocks under "SRM" - BOOK NOW:

Country Inn Motel in Bison, 605-244-5234; 8 rooms, book by October 1
Prairie Vista Inn in Faith, 605-967-2343; 20 rooms, book by early September

RSVPs and payment for the supper

https://www.sdrangelands.com/store/p5/Annual_Meeting_Registration_2024.html

Questions?: Krista Ehlert, krista.ehlert@sdstate.edu or

Logan Vandermark, logan.vandermark@sdstate.edu





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Calendar of Events

Event	Date	Location	Contact Person	Phone/email/website
SRM Annual Meeting and Pasture Walk	Oct 23	Faith	Krista Ehlert	Krista.ehlert@sdstate.edu
Regenerate 3-Day School	Nov 19-21	Pierre	SDGC website	www.sdgrass.org
SDGC Annual Meeting	Dec 5	Rapid City	Judge Jessop	605-280-0127
SD Cattlemen's Meeting and Leopold Presentation	Dec 10-11	Pierre	Cattlemen's website	www.sdcattlemen.org

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

