



Grassroots

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New Board Member Spotlight by Sandy Smart

The South Dakota Grassland Coalition welcomes three new board members: Drew Anderson, Wacey Kirkpatrick, and AJ Munger.



Drew Anderson grew up on a small grain operation in western, North Dakota. Drew is married to Kayla and has three daughters: Sadie, Emmie, and Henley. Drew and his family own and operate a ranch near Lemmon, SD. They run cows, yearlings, custom grazed yearlings, and bison.

Drew graduated from Dickinson State University with a degree in Natural Resources and Range Management. This gave him a firm foundation for managing his grass. He has attended numerous schools and workshops that have helped guide his management philosophy. Some of these are Ranching for Profit, Burleigh County Conservation District Workshop, BeefSD, SD Grassland Coalition events, and ND Grazing Land Coalition events. “My goal is to never stop learning,” Drew said.

Drew believes that he and his family are called to be stewards of the land and the livestock that have been entrusted to them. He strives to graze as much of the year as possible and has a cow herd that will thrive on the resources that the ranch provides. He currently practices adaptive rotational grazing, where he utilizes temporary and permanent electric fencing to create pastures that will facilitate long recovery periods for grazed grass. He rotates cattle anywhere from daily to every 30 days. The ranch is set up with many water sources so he has the ability to create an almost endless number of pastures for rotation. Their grazing plan is very adaptive and we are constantly making assessments about grass and livestock conditions to modify our plans.

Drew has a passion for South Dakota grasslands. “Grasslands are a vital part of our world. When stewarded properly, they are very resilient. Most ag systems try to mimic the processes that take place naturally in grasslands. There is so much more to learn about grasslands,” he said. Why did you become a board member? “Our operation has benefited tremendously from the Coalition and I wanted to be able to help continue the mission and vision of the organization,” Drew said. Why is it important to be a Coalition member? “There is a lot of value being a part of a group with like minded people. There is a wealth of ideas shared because people are eager to teach as well as learn.” said Drew.

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New Board Members Continued by Sandy Smart



Wacey Kirkpatrick was raised on his family's ranch just southwest of Hayes, SD. Wacey is married to his wife Jamie and they have two children: Roadie and Reata. They own and operate a ranch in northeastern Haakon County along the Cheyenne River. They graze yearlings on this ranch along with another leased property in Stanley County. They also lease another property south of Chamberlain along the Missouri River where the Kirkpatrick's cowherd resides year round, grazing in the river breaks during the spring, summer and fall, then graze crop residue in the winter.

Wacey learned his guiding principles for ranch management from many sources. He graduated from SDSU with a degree in Range Science and then attended Ranching For Profit, SD Grazing School, Understanding Ag Soil Health Academy, and several other classes. Wacey has had many mentors and many 'learning lessons' that have helped him become a better manager. Wacey has always had a passion for grasslands from a very young age. "Early on in my life I realized through the drought period from 2002-2006 that in order for us to survive as ranchers in South Dakota we needed to revamp and overhaul our grazing management of our grasslands", he said. Why did you want to become a board member? "I wanted to become more involved and learn more from the people involved in this great organization", Wacey said. Why is it important to become a member of the Grassland Coalition? "It is important to be involved with preserving and enhancing our grasslands not only in South Dakota but across the globe. If we lose them, we are losing a vital part of our ecosystems that we rely heavily on", said Wacey.



AJ Munger grew up on his family's homestead southwest of Warner, SD. AJ is married to his wife Emily going on 15 years. They have two children: Briggs and Blaire. The family along with his parents Steve and Debi and brother Nate and his family live on their ranch (Eagle Pass) east of Highmore, SD. "We operate a diversified cattle and farming operation. We've been in the seedstock business for over 30 years and hold an annual bull sale in February at the ranch.", said AJ. "In 2020, we started making the shift to later calving, and in 2024 we calved the whole cowherd on grass starting the first week of May.", AJ said.

"I think one of the biggest challenges in ranching is striving for profitability without negatively impacting our resource base. When I read Allan Nation's "Knowledge Rich Ranching" I had an "aha" moment, which led to my growing interest in grazing and ranch management. I've appreciated several other books on the topic and have attended a few courses put on by the SD Grassland Coalition. I'm inspired by the wealth of knowledge from people who have first-hand experience discovering effective management methods.", said AJ. "I believe native grasslands are the most important ecosystem in the world, and my family and I directly depend on its health for our wellbeing. I find the diversity and interconnected ecosystem fascinating-- the various species of grasses and forbs, insects and birds, bacteria and fungi, ruminants, and (most recently) humans working together is truly a beautiful thing.", AJ said.

Why did you become and SDGC board member? "It was at a SDGC event that I was first exposed to the idea of rotational grazing and the principles of soil health. That started a paradigm shift in

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New Board Members Continued by Sandy Smart

my thinking about how I manage the resources entrusted to us as landowners. I've seen the benefits firsthand in our own operation and want to help provide those same opportunities to others.”, AJ said.

Why should you become a SDGC member? “I used to take native grasslands for granted. Through my involvement with the SDGC, I've learned how "at-risk" South Dakota grasslands really are. It takes a collaborative effort by all grassland stakeholders to provide education and to be an advocate for grasslands in order to prevent the continued loss of one of our greatest resources. It was why the SDGC was started and continues to be its mission today.”, said AJ.

The Green Side Up by Pete Bauman

When planning grassland restoration or native rangeland renovations, keep a few things in mind

Many are expecting changes federal policy related to our land and natural resources after the recent election, but exactly what might change is anyone's guess. It is probably safe to assume that grasslands and grassland-related programs through federal and state efforts will continue to offer opportunities and, as always, we will have to advocate for programs ensure the future of grasslands.

I am not very optimistic regarding the future of our native grasslands as it seems the big wheel keeps 'chipping away' at the land. It seems that high cattle prices and low commodity prices cannot be relied upon to 'save' our grasslands as many once hoped. The bottom line is that cropping continues to expand west and north in our state with improved technology. It is critical that we retain our remaining native grasslands. That said, the rest of this article will focus on opportunities for grassland establishment, restoration, and enhancement.



Photo courtesy of NRCS flickr page.

The time to start planning is now, and there are always several 'programs' one can take advantage of. Traditional or enhanced USDA programs like CRP or CREP (in certain areas) offer soil erosion control coupled with wildlife habitat, and some include options for livestock (grassland CRP). State programs through SD GFP or those run through the Second Century Initiative target wildlife habitat but also are flexible as working lands programs, as are those offered by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and various non-government organizations such as Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, Audubon, World Wildlife Fund, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, National Wild Turkey Federation, etc. Also emerging on the scene are newer for-profit and non-profit groups targeting climate and carbon. Within some of these programs are options to cost-share new seedings and future management of new grasslands and/or 'enhancement' of native rangelands, and some might include forage, cover crops, infrastructure, and other livestock support options. Finally, several organizations offer the opportunity for term or perpetual protection of resources through various easement options.

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The Green Side Up Continued by Pete Bauman

Groups like NRCS, the SD Agricultural Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and others have various programs for landowners related to easements.

I appreciate programs that do not sit on shelves, and I appreciate staffers who are willing to get out and knock on doors to ensure landowners are aware of opportunities. However, it is imperative that landowners take the initiative, ask questions, and seek advice from experienced people. Programs often have limited funds or time, and getting landowners on board quickly can be a primary goal. This reality poses some challenges, and landowners may not take enough time to critically evaluate their short or long-term goals. For instance, cost share on diverse seed mixes is fantastic, but those seed mixes must reflect what is best for the land and the objectives of both the producer and the agency. Working through this process can take time, and I always recommend bringing in a neutral third party for an unbiased second opinion if questions arise, especially when planning to establish grasslands in previous cropland. Proper lead time can ensure the correct pre-cropping strategy that considers the previous crop, chemical history, payment and reimbursement schedules and benchmarks, future management needs, and eventually future integration of the field(s) into a working farm or ranch or habitat plan.

Taking the time to seek out experience grassland advisors can help avoid potential long-term mistakes, like planting certain species into native rangelands that may not perform well or that may result in negative impacts over time. There is no substitute for research and self-education in this area.

No two projects are the same. The land, the objectives, the goals of the sponsor organization, the goals of the landowner, the knowledge and experience of both, and the program parameters all drive decisions – good or bad. Here in South Dakota, we are blessed with federal, state, non-government, and local organizations that work closely together to ensure landowners are afforded the best collective advice. I work across the Great Plains, and nobody can boast the same level of cooperation as we can here in South Dakota!

So, plan early, seek advice, don't chase the money, don't sign until you're comfortable, and commit yourself to learning all you can about your land, your soils, and your opportunities.

Look for the Coalition and partners to offer Grassland Management class Feb 11-12, 2025 and again during the mid-summer growing season. We will be posting more information over the next weeks and months. These classes are complimentary to our Grazing Schools and Fire Schools, so consider those as well as you plan your next year of management. So long 2024, hello 2025!

South Dakota's Grassland Listerv: Email me at peter.bauman@sdstate.edu if you want to be put on the email list for all upcoming grassland related events and opportunities. Happy 2025!

The Great Land Swap Part III: Making a Path to Ranching by Garnet Perman

While many of the Coalition readership is looking at handing down the ranch to the next generation, there are young people that want to enter production agriculture but have no land in the family to proceed with the process.

Abigail Neill, who was born and spent her early childhood near New Orleans, is one of a growing number of young people who are very interested in production agriculture but are making their own way instead of following in a relative's foot steps.

Abigail's family moved from New Orleans to the small town of Princeton, MO (population 1,100) where her dad took a position as a pastor. Up until that point she had thought that a career in health care was something she might be interested in. Then she started working as a nanny for Nathan Rogers of Rogers Cattle Company & Lile Farms Red Angus. Going out to the farm was her first exposure to farm life. As fate would have it, one day Rogers needed someone to pinch hit recording numbers and asked Abigail to help. She immediately fell in love with the cows and the work and decided at that point that's what she wanted to do with her life. "I went from kid nanny to cow nanny!" she laughed. That was in 2018 and she hasn't looked back. She still doesn't know exactly how to build her own operation, but the why is indisputable.

She earned an associate degree from a community college in 2022 with a degree in agriculture and natural resource management with an emphasis on livestock management. While in school, Abigail became active in the Missouri chapter of the Professional Agricultural Student Organization and served as state president. She knew that she needed hands on experience if her dream of managing her own herd was to materialize, so she looked for as many opportunities as possible. She did an internship on the ranch in northern California that did direct marketing. She spent some more time at the Rogers operation but knew she needed to branch out. She applied for a ranch hand position at Eagle Pass Ranch near Highmore 2.5 years ago. She's soaking in as much as she can, taking advantage of her employer's encouragement to attend the East River grazing school and is currently enrolled in the Beef SD class through SDSU.

Asked how being a newbie and female in the business has impacted her experience, she replied that because she isn't influenced by previous experience, she doesn't have preconceived ideas about how or why various tasks or management decisions should be done. Her questions often challenged her teachers, employers and fellow workers to re-evaluate how or why they made certain decisions. She also learned that classroom scenarios don't necessarily work well in real life.

"There are certainly challenges, doubts and obstacles that I've had to overcome but hard work, integrity and dedication have always been a part of who I am so I'm not afraid to prove myself when necessary. The blessing of having an encouraging team of leaders, mentors and family behind me both during my collegiate and now professional career has been exceedingly helpful as I navigate this industry as both a female and the first generation in production agriculture," she said. Her original mentor, Nathan Rogers, continues to be an important influence.

As the current farm and ranch managers continue to age out of production, giving someone new to production agriculture a chance may be an answer to the Great Land Swap for someone who doesn't have children able to or interested in continuing the family business.

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

Perman Family Recognized at Soil Health Coalition Conference

by Sandy Smart



Perman family: Lyle, Garnet, Luke, and Naomi with two sets of twins Isaac and Ella, Micah and Noah.

Rock Hills Ranch founded by Lyle and Garnet Perman were honored with the Legacy Award at the SD Soil Health Coalition annual conference held in Watertown, Jan 15-16. The Perman's are transitioning the ranch to their son, Luke and his wife Naomi, who have a regenerative mindset like their dad.

Lyle and Garnet have been long-standing advocates for conservation and soil health. Lyle served and chaired the board of directors of the SD Grassland Coalition for a number of years. They received the Leopold Conservation Award in 2014 and the National Environmental Stewardship Award from the National Cattlemen's Beef Association in 2014.

Lyle and Garnet have hosted many tours and have provided internships for aspiring young professionals in livestock production as well as a place for people to learn about agriculture through agritourism events. Please congratulate the Perman family the next time you see them.

Strengthening Connections and Stewardship at the Grassland Coalition's Annual Conference

by Bri Rupp

This year's South Dakota Grassland Coalition Annual Conference was a resounding success, with nearly 150 attendees—our highest turnout in several years. Ranchers, conservationists, and grassland supporters came together to share knowledge, exchange ideas, and build connections, reinforcing the strength of our community.

We are especially grateful to our members for their enthusiastic participation, which makes events like this possible. Their dedication to advancing grassland stewardship inspires everything we do. A heartfelt thank you also goes to our sponsors, whose generous support ensured the conference's success. The event featured engaging presentations on topics like leadership, resilience in agriculture, and low-stress livestock handling. Attendees left with new tools and perspectives to apply in their own operations.

One special feature of this year's conference was the America's Grasslands Exhibit. This display celebrates the beauty and importance of grasslands through a modular 8 x 50' mural, which can be divided into smaller panels. It provided a striking visual representation of why our work matters. For those interested, the exhibit is available for use at other events. You can learn more and submit a request at <https://www.wlfw.org/americas-grasslands-exhibit-request/>.

We're deeply thankful for everyone who attended, contributed, and supported this year's conference. Together, we're making meaningful progress in preserving South Dakota's grasslands for future generations.



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- *News from the SD Section of the Society for Range Management*
2025 SRM Annual Meeting, Spokane, WA Feb 9-13 by Sandy Smart

The 2025 Annual Meeting entitled “Healthy Rangelands—Sustainable World” of the Society for Range Management will be held in Spokane, Washington, Feb 9-13. The planning committee has done an excellent job in putting this meeting together with engaging plenary talks, rancher forums, technical workshops, research and management symposia, and scientific talks and posters. Undergraduate students will participate in the Undergraduate Range Management Exam (URME), Plant ID contest, Rangeland Cup poster competition, extemporaneous speaking contest, and present undergraduate research talks and posters. Graduate students will give oral and poster presentations and compete for best poster or oral presentation at the MS and PhD levels.

Plenary speakers include rangeland managers and experts talking on local collaboration and traditional knowledge, regional initiatives to promote healthy rangelands, and global rangeland ecosystems and sustainability. A ranchers forum will focus on advancing regenerative practices through Holistic Management and agroecology. Feature presenters are Allan Savory, Alejandro Carrillo, and Jonathan Lundgren.

Workshops include:

- International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists—2026 Stakeholder Action-Planning for North America.
- Healthy Lands and Healthy Horses—Extension and BLM professionals.
- Information sharing on effectiveness of BMPs for controlling exotic annual grasses.
- Career Leadership Workshops.
- Evidence-Based Pedagogical Approaches for Rangeland Education.
- Survey 123 for Range Implementation monitoring and Range Structural Improvement surveys.
- Co-Laboring Block One: Workshop-Principles and Processes: From Collaborative to CoLaborative.
- Co-Laboring Block Two: Symposium-Risk, Bias, and Accountability in Stewarding Western Rangelands.
- Testing the Boundaries: Virtual Fencing Insights.
- National Animal Nutrition Program-Rangeland Symposia: Mathematical Grazing Livestock Nutrition Models for Enhancing Sustainable Livestock Production.
- From Data to Action: Synthesizing, Visualizing, and Interpreting Monitoring Data for Evaluating Treatment Outcomes.
- Grazing Associations: Institutions for increasing the adaptive capacity of federal lands grazing?
- Soils 101: Practical Information on Soil Form, Function, and Carbon for Grazing Management.
- Threat-Based Strategic Conservation to inform post-fire planning on large landscapes.
- Unlocking Rangeland Analysis Platform (RAP) Data: Five ways to access and explore data.

Symposia

- Challenges and Opportunities Surrounding Pinyon-Juniper Woodland Management for Improved Rangeland Health and Ecological Resilience.
- USDA-ARS Poisonous Plant Research Lab Presents Poisonous Plants in the Pacific Northwest.
- The science and practice of native seed selection for restoration: Where are we, and what is needed?
- Process-based management the Science and Application.
- RTEC: From beginning to end; the equipment, methods and processes of seed based restoration.
- Data systems Integration: Incorporating multiple data streams to better study grazing behavior on rangelands.
- Leveraging geospatial technology for rangeland monitoring.
- Riparian Restoration of Functions and Values - Linking LTPBR, PFC, Adaptive Grazing Management, and Beaver.
- SageSTEP: Vegetation treatments for sustainable rangelands, fire risk reduction and ecosystem resilience.
- Understanding the role of grazing management on soil carbon outcomes across diverse grazing landscapes.
- Innovative Approaches to Sustainability in Ranching and Rangeland Management – The Culmination of a Five-Year Coordinated Agriculture Project.
- Managing what we measure: the state of the art in soil carbon quantification on rangelands.
- Measuring Rangeland Restoration Effectiveness for Wildlife.
- Rangeland restoration amidst short-term variability and long-term change.
- Aiming for the STARS: Advancing Healthy Rangelands by Supporting Rancher Decision-Making.



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Calendar of Events

Event	Date	Location	Contact Person	Phone/email/website
2025 SRM Annual Meeting	Feb 9-13	Spokane, WA		https://rangelands.org/annual-meeting-2025/
Grassland Management School	Feb 11-12	Oacoma	Pete Bauman	605-882-5140
Winter Workshop & Awards Luncheon with Jay Fuhrer	Feb 19	Bison	Judge Jessop	605-280-0127

Please remit any comments, suggestions, or topics deemed necessary for further review to: Sandy Smart, SDSU Box 2207D, 114 Berg Hall, Brookings, SD 57007, alexander.smart@sdstate.edu, (605) 688-4940

