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Executive Director's Note

As we move into spring across South Dakota, there's a renewed sense of momentum, not just in our pastures, but in the conversations, partnerships, and people working to support them. The past month has been a powerful reminder that the work of the South Dakota Grassland Coalition reaches far beyond any single event or program; it's part of something much bigger.

In March, we were proud to participate in and support several meaningful efforts that highlight the connection between grasslands, agriculture, and our communities. One of those was the James Beard Foundation event and Invest in Our Land Advocacy Roundtable in Sioux Falls. These conversations brought together chefs, producers, and advocates to discuss how extreme weather and other challenges are impacting our food systems. It was encouraging to see grasslands and the role they play in resilience, soil health, and long-term sustainability recognized as part of the solution. These kinds of partnerships help bridge the gap between producers and consumers, telling a fuller story about where our food comes from and how it's grown.



We also continue to invest in the future of agriculture through our support of the South Dakota FFA Foundation. Their message says it best: this work is a partnership. By supporting programs like the Natural Resources Career Development Events, we are helping equip the next generation with the skills, confidence, and passion needed to lead in agriculture. Hearing directly from students about how FFA is shaping their futures is a powerful reminder of why this work matters. Closer to home, we had the opportunity to connect with families and community members at Ag Day at the Washington Pavilion. Events like this allow us to share the story of

UPCOMING EVENTS

April 21(tentative), Lower Brule
Prescribed Fire Training

June 3-4, Veblen, SD
Annual Bird Tour

June 11, Ree Heights, SD
The Good the Bad and the Ugly Weeds Tour

June 16-18, Wall, SD
Wall Grazing School

Executive Director's Note Continued...

South Dakota's grasslands with a broader audience, many of whom may not have a direct connection to agriculture, but deeply benefit from the clean water, healthy soils, and open spaces that grasslands provide.

Of course, March also included the South Dakota Grasslands Summit, hosted through the South Dakota Grasslands Initiative. The Summit continues to grow as a space for collaboration, education, and forward-thinking discussions around the future of our working lands. It's always inspiring to see producers, partners, and stakeholders come together with a shared goal: strengthening grasslands for generations to come.

As we look ahead, we're excited for what's coming next, from the Bird Watching Tour near Veblen to the first Grazing School of the year in June. These events are more than just dates on a calendar; they're opportunities to learn, connect, and continue building a community centered around stewardship and stewardship-driven profitability.

Thank you for being part of that community. Whether you attend an event, support our efforts, or simply take steps on your own land, you are contributing to something bigger: the long-term health and resilience of South Dakota's grasslands.

The Annual Bird Tour: Experience the Prairie in a Whole New Way

by Briana Rupp

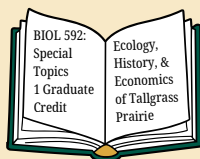
This year's Bird Watching Tour offers more than just a chance to spot wildlife; it's an opportunity to experience the prairie in a whole new way.

Along with guided birding across the beautiful Bien Ranch, we're including an Intro to Prairie Photography session. Whether you're using a smartphone or a camera, you'll pick up simple tips and techniques to better capture the landscapes, wildlife, and moments that make South Dakota's grasslands so special. The photography session is optional and will include both a classroom-style portion and a hands-on portion in the prairie.

From early morning bird activity to wide-open prairie views, this tour is designed for anyone who appreciates nature. No prior birding or photography experience required. Bring your curiosity, your family, or a friend, and enjoy a day that blends learning, exploration, and appreciation for the land we all depend on.

2026 Annual Bird Tour

June 3-4, Veblen, SD



Educators: Earn Graduate Credit at the Bird Tour

Make your Bird Tour experience go even further. K-12 teachers of any subject area have the option to earn 1 graduate credit by attending the bird tour.

- Information and activities for K-12 teachers of any subject Area
- Participants will take part in field activities and get information and access to several classroom activities
- Presentations from natural resource managers, researchers, professors, ranchers, and K-12 teachers



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<https://apply.dsu.edu/register/summer-workshops>

May Calving: Increase your Bottom Line, Less Stress, More Joy

by Emily Rohrer

I started this article thinking about forcing a bunch of facts into a short article (which equaled a snooze-fest). Then I asked AI how to make a light and cheery article on May calving – and, dang, that was a little bit too daisies and happiness. So here we land, somewhere in the middle. Of course, I am glossing over a lot of the complexities of calving date decision-making – but hopefully can give you all some food for thought as you consider how to reduce stress, increase your bottom line, and how to have fun managing grass.

It's pretty difficult to make a case for May Calving when we've had such a mild winter. Blizzards have been replaced with rain, cold has been replaced with mild temperatures. Calving in March has been a breeze for many producers this year. But, we all know that South Dakota weather is quite unpredictable. Our forecasts have included, in some cases, 50 to 60 degree swings in temperature over a few short days. That kind of change can cause stress on livestock. Stressed livestock equates to sickness and disease – which can equal a hit to your pocketbook and bottom line.



This all sounds too good to be true, right? Just move my calving date, and all will be right with the world? Maybe – but always consider your operation's resources when figuring out what calving date works the best for you! Already have that expensive facility setup, you aren't stressed, and neither are your animals – then keep doing what you're doing! But if you have stopped once or twice during calving season thinking, "is this worth it?" Maybe a slight change in dates is worth considering.

"How do I make that change?" you wonder. It might be easy, it might be complicated – depending on how far you read into it. Delaying the turnout of bulls for a cycle to move that calving date, is the simple answer. Maybe move the date over a few years, so it's not as drastic of a change. Find what works for you and your operation. Think about your current calving season. Which calves are the easiest on you and your livestock, is it the beginning, the middle or the end of the season that causes the least stress? Maybe move the bulk of your calving to that specific period to see how it works.

As you consider your calving dates for next year, think about how you can match your forage resources to coincide with your livestock's peak resource need. Take note of when pastures have the best grass, then determine how to best match those resources. Need help figuring it all out? The SD Grassland Coalition Grazing Schools are coming up with one in June in Wall and one in Chamberlain in September. Seasoned ranchers will be available to help guide you through that decision making process. But in the end, it should be your decision – and as long as you and the wife (or hubs), kids, dogs, and livestock are happy – that should make for a happy, healthy, less-stressful calving season for years to come.

For additional resources relating to calving date considerations, visit Growing Resilience SD's website: www.growingresiliencesd.com/calving-on-grass or SD Grassland Coalition's website: www.sdgrass.org/calving-considerations/. The article from SDSU Extension can be found here: https://bit.ly/SDSU_Match.

Get More From Your Land: A One-Day Introduction to Smarter Grazing

by Briana Rupp



If you've ever been curious about what's taught at Grazing School but haven't been able to commit to three full days, this one-day Grazing Workshop is designed for you.

Think of it as a "mini" Grazing School. You'll be introduced to the foundational principles that help land managers get more out of their land. These are the principles that have helped producers increase stocking rates, extend their grazing season, improve plant diversity, and reduce input costs.

You'll dig into the core concepts that drive those results: how grazing timing impacts plant recovery, how to better allocate pastures, and how to make decisions that improve both forage production and long-term soil health. You'll also explore practical topics like fencing and watering systems, planning for forage shortages, and how to adapt your management based on changing conditions.

This workshop is designed to move beyond theory. You'll gain a clearer understanding of how to observe what's happening in your pastures, make more intentional decisions, and begin building a grazing approach that fits your operation. These are the same principles that have helped many producers think differently, leading to more efficient systems, healthier land, and more profitable operations.

Throughout the day, you'll learn from both experienced producers and agency professionals, bringing together real-world experience and technical insight. Just as valuable, you'll have the opportunity to ask questions, share ideas, and connect with others who are exploring similar challenges. For many, the networking and conversations are just as impactful as the content itself.

The workshop will be held at the Bien Ranch, owned by a Leopold Conservation Award-winning family, which offers a unique opportunity to see these principles applied on a successful operation. While the setting is a bonus, the real value is in what you'll learn and how you can apply it.

If you've ever considered attending a Grazing School, this is the perfect place to start. It's practical, approachable, and designed to give you a clear next step forward.

SD Grasslands Initiative Update

By Laura Kahler



Across South Dakota, momentum continues to build around a shared vision: keeping our grasslands healthy, productive, and working for generations to come. The South Dakota Grasslands Initiative (SDGI) exists to bring partners together around that vision, and the initial years of their work has been a powerful example of what collaboration can accomplish.

One of the most exciting highlights has been the continued growth and success of the South Dakota Grasslands Summit. Building on the strong foundation established during the inaugural event in 2024, this year’s Summit once again brought together landowners, producers, conservation professionals, and community leaders from across the state. With a theme centered on “Grasslands: South Dakota’s Most Valuable Resource,” the event emphasized just how deeply grasslands are connected to our economy, natural resources, and way of life.

Over two days, attendees explored the many ways grasslands intersect with livestock production, water quality, wildlife habitat, tourism, and even cultural heritage. From producer panels and restoration conversations to networking opportunities and collaborative discussions, the Summit created space for meaningful dialogue and practical takeaways. Two special sessions that also occurred at the Summit was a Collaboration Exploration session with multiple conservation districts in attendance, and a Heritage Fund Forum that shared how surrounding states have developed outdoor heritage funds. Seeing high interest from participants in both sessions, further exploration is now taking place.



SD Grasslands Initiative Update Continued...

Recordings from the South Dakota Grasslands Summit will be shared on our YouTube channel as they become available (search @SDGrasslandInitiative on YouTube).

The Summit also provided an opportunity for updates from the four SDGI workgroups. The Grasslands Education workgroup has begun developing high school level curriculum focused on prescribed fire as a range management tool, while the workgroup continues to release monthly K–8 lessons aligned with the “Amazing Grassland” topics featured in the Grassland Coalition planner.

At the Summit, the Grasslands Outreach workgroup launched a 30-second video highlighting both the United Nations’ International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) and America’s 250th anniversary. We encourage you to watch and share the video on our YouTube page: youtu.be/mRcQPD_Q2IIsi=ARwkTsXOtYaPug8i.

The next quarterly partner meeting of the South Dakota Grasslands Initiative will be held on May 11 at 1:00 p.m. Central / 12:00 p.m. Mountain. Join via Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81501815211>

NATIVE PLANT OF THE MONTH



COREOPSIS

Photo Credit: Joe Dickie Photography

This annual or sometimes short-lived perennial, taprooted forb usually grows 1 to 2 feet tall with slender, much-branched stems. In June, through September, flower heads appear with 8 bright yellow, irregularly lobed rays, 1/2-inch long, surrounding reddish-brown disk flowers. Leaves are opposite and pinnately divided into narrow linear segments.

Fun Fact: Tops can be harvested and dried to make a tea to improve strength and treat internal pains and bleeding.

Source: *Grassland Plants of South Dakota and the Northern Great Plains*, [SDSU Ext.](#)

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

by Kaylee Wheeler

BROOKINGS, S.D. – Two high school students from South Dakota were selected to be delegates for the High School Youth Forum at the International Society for Range Management meeting.

Karlie Kammerer, of Piedmont, and Katelyn Gebhart, of Meadow, attended this year’s meeting in Monterey, California, on Feb. 7–11, 2026, which had a theme of “Herd ‘Round the World.”

The High School Youth Forum is designed to give students the opportunity to network with rangeland professionals from across the world while introducing them to the mission of Society for Range Management. The South Dakota section of the Society for Range Management funded the trip for Kammerer and Gebhart.

Activities include ecological tours of the local landscape and time spent enhancing leadership and communication skills. The delegates also compete in a presentation competition. High school delegates are chosen by each of the individual sections throughout the U.S., Canada and Mexico. In South Dakota, delegates are chosen from student presentations given during the annual Rangeland and Soil Days event.

Kammerer won first place in the 2025 national contest for her presentation on holistic ranch management in her family operation. For winning first place, Karlie returned to the national meeting in 2026 to help with the forum and gave her presentation to the entire national society membership during general session.

“My favorite thing about the High School Youth Forum was meeting and connecting with rangeland professionals and ranchers across the nation and having the opportunity to network with other kids my age who are just as passionate about plants and soils as I am,” said Kammerer.

Gebhart was the new 2026 delegate; she won first place in the speech competition at the 2025 South Dakota Rangeland and Soil Days youth contest for her presentation on prescribed fire.

In her presentation, Gebhart discussed the ways her family found opportunity after the tragic effects of a prairie wildfire on their ranch. Now her family is supportive of prescribed burns and the benefits it can bring to rejuvenating the health of grassland ecosystems.

“I am really proud of how well Karlie and Katelyn represented South Dakota at the National SRM meeting. I enjoyed practicing their presentations with them and I’m excited that I could help open doors for our youth to these opportunities,” said Kaylee Wheeler, SDSU Extension Range Field Specialist.

The Society for Range Management is an international professional and scientific organization dedicated to the sustainable management and stewardship of rangelands. It brings together scientists, ranchers, land managers, students, educators and policymakers with one shared purpose: to ensure the health and productivity of rangelands worldwide.

Its annual meeting brings together symposia, talks, posters, and workshops that share practical lessons from those that steward rangeland landscapes, including insights that support biodiversity and sustainable land management.



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**A SPECIAL NOTE TO OUR
VALUED MEMBERS**

Your support helps keep this work moving forward. The future of South Dakota's grasslands, ranches, and rural communities depends on continued care, collaboration, and commitment—and we're grateful to have you with us on that journey. We welcome your feedback and invite you to reach out anytime—whether you're looking for more information, want to suggest a topic, or just have ideas to share. And as always, we encourage you to stay involved, spread the word, and help others connect with our work.