



# NEWSLETTER

Winter 2022

## NDGLC Update from the Chairman

*Jerry Doan, Chairman NDGLC*

As I write for this newsletter, we have received over a foot of snow and Old Man Winter is definitely making an appearance! The good news is let's hope this is a sign of breaking the record drought we have been under here in North Dakota and much of the Western U.S.

This year has been a challenge and most of us have struggled to put feed together either to winter graze or to supplement feed. Here on our place, we are grazing our cover crops with bison and cattle. However, because of the drought and the very low production, we won't be able to graze very long. Like most of you, we scrambled to put up whatever low-quality forage we could find and also for the first time in several decades, we chopped drought-stressed silage without corn. This will certainly help us get through the winter. In times like this, holistic management and regenerative agriculture teach us to be resourceful, weigh our options and act. Sometimes the acting part is very hard but making non-traditional decisions allows you to weather these times.

I just returned from the National Grazing Lands Coalition Conference in Myrtle Beach S.C. It was a great event with a very good turnout and lots of discussions. There was a lot of talk surrounding the renewed conversion of grasslands to cropland. It seems with crop price increases and active investor interest in cropland, grasslands are being converted at a fast pace again. I know around our place there are several big parcels of native prairie broken up for cropland. It would seem that with all the work conservation and wildlife groups are doing to protect our native rangelands, we wouldn't continue to see the conversion to cropland. But the extreme high rental rates for investors and crop insurance for producers is allowing both an opportunity.

It seems we at the NDGLC and our partners and producers need to have an honest discussion about how to fix this. We have lost 75% of our native rangeland in 200 years. That means only 25% left. The other day, I heard a statistic that we have even less left. That is very alarming if we want the benefits of diverse grasslands in our ecosystem!

Congratulations to Brad Sand for winning the North Dakota Leopold Award! Brad has done an outstanding job of moving the needle on his ranch with regenerative practices.

Thank all of you for attending both the Mentor Guided Workshop and the Profitable Pasture School. I hope you found them beneficial. If there are ideas for other educational events you would like to see, please let us know.

Our Winter Workshop and Annual Meeting is Jan. 11-12 in Medora. We have several excellent speakers lined up and it should be a great event to network with other producers about regenerative practices. The annual meeting is your time as members to have input into the direction and activities of the NDGLC. Please plan to attend and let us know your thoughts.

On March 3-4, NDGLC and Starion Bank are bringing you a Succession Workshop, which looks at business structure, family dynamics, estate planning and how to keep the operation in the family for generations. We are working hard to bring a great educational event on this much-needed topic to our producers and Starion customers. We are in the planning of this ag event so please keep posted.

As we look to the new year, I want to wish you a very happy and prosperous new year! I hope we get plentiful moisture and we can move the needle of regenerative agriculture forward!

---

## Field Update

*Trish Feiring, NDGLC Field Representative*

Happy New Year! I hope this newsletter finds you all happy and healthy. I'd like to share some information about some of our upcoming events.

First of all, we would love for you to join us at the Annual Meeting and Winter Workshop in Medora. The annual meeting is Tuesday, Jan. 11 with the [winter conference](#) to follow on Jan. 12.

We had such a good response to the “Munch on This” virtual series last winter that we’ve decided to do it again this winter. We are in the process of deciding on topics, so if you have a topic that you’d like to see us discuss, please be sure to call or email me with your thoughts and ideas. We are hoping to get started with them in mid-February. More information to come.

As you know, holistic management focuses on the three-legged stool – the land, the livestock and the people. NDGLC generally focuses our efforts on the land and the livestock, but for this upcoming event, we are going to focus on the people. Succession of farms and ranches is getting to be more and more important all the time. Without the people, the land and the livestock can’t exist. The North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition will co-host a succession planning ag event on March 3-4. More details to come.

It’s once again time to be working on your grazing system planning for the upcoming summer. If you have projects that you are considering (fencing, water developments, cover crops, etc.), please contact me and I’ll help you find the right conservation program for you.

---

## Of Beef and Birds

*By Taylor Linder, University of North Dakota*

The University of North Dakota (UND), The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and Ducks Unlimited (DU) are teaming up to study the impacts of high-intensity short-duration grazing on the grassland nesting bird community in North Dakota. This study, which underwent a pilot season this past summer, is funded by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department and led by Taylor Linder, a PhD student at UND. *(At right, 2020 field crew Jera Wilke and Taylor Linder).*



Many studies have looked at the effects of continuous, rotational and patch burn grazing on grassland birds, and as you can imagine, the results are as nuanced as the grazing systems they evaluated. Generally, the impact of cattle grazing on grassland birds is related more to grazing intensity than to specific grazing practice, and the impacts to grassland nesting birds can be highly species specific. As a community, grassland birds have adapted to the different habitat types created by the patchy grazing of large herbivores like cattle. For example, chestnut-collared longspurs and marbled godwits nest in relatively short vegetation while bobolinks and clay-colored sparrows nest in taller vegetation.

The structural changes to the vegetation with high intensity short duration grazing are quite different from other practices. When the goal is for cattle to consume or trample all the vegetation within a grazed area, the impacts to ground nesting birds might be different. However, the smaller area impacted by cattle at any one time and the long rest period between grazing events may compensate for loss of nests within the grazed areas. The reality is we don’t know. Our goal is to fill this knowledge gap by comparing nest success, abundance, and structural vegetation changes between high intensity short duration grazing practices (e.g., cattle moved 1-7 days) and longer rotational grazing practices (e.g., cattle moved 3-5 weeks).

The summer of 2020 posed many challenges for getting the pilot season up and running, but the crew did manage to test field methods on two ranches – one high intensity short duration and one longer rotation. When nest searching includes songbirds, dragging ropes through the grassland to flush birds off their nests is the preferred method to locate and monitor nests. The crew located 90 nests between the two ranches. These nests represented 17 different species, 6 waterfowl and 11 songbirds. The number of nests was relatively even between the ranches, and raw percentage of nest success was right at 50% for all 90 nests. Trampling of nests was low at 2% and only occurred on the long rotation ranch.

This summer allowed Taylor to work out the kinks in protocols and refine research questions, and the project will move forward full steam for the next three summers. To keep travel costs reasonable, we are focusing our efforts on the central part of the Missouri Coteau. Within this region, we will be identifying a few more ranchers willing to allow us to count birds, nest search, and measure vegetation on their property over the next three years. We are looking for ranches using either high intensity short duration grazing or longer rotational grazing. If you are interested in learning more, or would like to see if your ranch would be a good fit, please reach out to Taylor Linder ([taylor.linder@und.edu](mailto:taylor.linder@und.edu)).

We look forward to sharing updates as the project progresses, and we welcome thoughts and feedback along the way!



## Sand Ranch Selected for N.D. Leopold Award

### About Sand Ranch ...

Brad Sand planted 12 rows of trees, each more than a mile long, with help from a local conservation group when he began cattle ranching in 1974. "I did it for the wildlife, the soil, and for my cattle," he said. The same can be said of his implementation of conservation practices at Sand Ranch ever since.

"When you take an active role in making the land better, it'll take care of you and the people who eat your food," Brad said.

By using what he learned in classes and on ranch tours, Brad reduced his risk from volatile markets and extreme weather events. Sand Ranch has become an example of how conservation can be environmentally and economically beneficial. Sand Ranch's 700 acres are located in the Drift Prairie physiographic region: home to some of North America's best grasslands and depressional prairie pothole wetlands.

"I enjoy using cattle to manage the resource," he said. Brad's rotational grazing strategy mimics how bison once roamed the prairie: Short, intense bursts of grazing followed by a long recovery time for the grass. Grazing stimulates plant root growth, enhances nutrient cycling in the soil, and produces diversified grassland species.

A grazing partnership he helped establish with the North Dakota

The Sand Ranch of Ellendale is the recipient of the 2021 North Dakota Leopold Conservation Award<sup>®</sup>.

Given in honor of renowned conservationist Aldo Leopold, the prestigious award recognizes private landowners who inspire others with their dedication to land, water and wildlife resources in their care.

In [North Dakota](#), [Sand County Foundation](#) presents the award with national sponsor [American Farmland Trust](#), and state partners: [North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition](#), [North Dakota Association of Soil Conservation Districts](#) and the [North Dakota Stockmen's Association](#).

Brad Sand, a rancher from Ellendale in Dickey County, will be presented with \$10,000 and a crystal award during the NDGLC Winter Conference on Wednesday, Jan. 12.

"The North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition is honored to present this prestigious award to the Sand Ranch," said Jerry Doan, NDGLC President. "The way that Brad Sand manages his operation is an outstanding model in the implementation of voluntary conservation and outreach on the role private landowners play in conservation. He is a true inspiration for other landowners."

"The North Dakota Association of Soil Conservation Districts is proud to be part of the prestigious Leopold Conservation Award in North Dakota," said Brian Johnston, NDASCD CEO. "We are proud to honor the Sand Ranch as 2021 recipient of the Leopold Conservation Award. NDASCD congratulates Brad Sand, recognizing his commitment to incorporating sound conservation practices to ensure the land will be productive for many generations to come."

"The North Dakota Stockmen's Association offers its congratulations to this year's Leopold Conservation Award winner," said Jeff Schafer, NDSA President. "Ranchers and farmers take their jobs as stewards of the land and the livestock seriously. To us, it is not only how we make our living, but how we can ensure a legacy for future generations."

"Recipients of this award are real life examples of conservation-minded agriculture," said Kevin McAleese, Sand County Foundation President and Chief Executive Officer. "These hard-working families are essential to our environment, food system and rural economy."

"As the national sponsor for Sand County Foundation's Leopold Conservation Award, American Farmland Trust celebrates the hard work and dedication of the North Dakota recipient," said

Game and Fish Department on public Wildlife Management Areas increases his feed production, while enhancing wildlife habitat and recreational experiences for the general public. In the early 2000s he partnered with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to build wildlife-friendly cross fencing.

Brad also works with Ducks Unlimited to improve his grazing system and restore native grasses on marginally productive soils. He regularly hosts tours to facilitate cooperation between agriculture and environmental organizations to advance the cause of private lands conservation. He also fields calls and emails from farmers, ranchers and conservation biologists as part of the North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition's mentorship network.

The restorative powers of grazing were evident when he turned 80 acres of hay into a pasture. Years of haying had exported carbon, resulting in degraded soil health and less diversity and density of grasses. All of that reversed by returning cattle to the land. "Grazing cattle on this hayland has improved forage production," he said. "Instead of constantly removing carbon, now I'm putting something back."

Brad has always grazed cattle on recently harvested crop fields to reduce winter feed costs and grow less hay. He began planting cover crops in 2010 to provide even more feed, attract beneficial insect pollinators, and improve the soil's biology.

Healthy soils tend to have increased water infiltration rates and can hold more residual moisture, which is important during dry years. The mix of cool and warm season grasses and forbs in his pastures are also how he manages for drought.

The fall of 2020 was especially dry, but Sand Ranch didn't run out of grass. In fact, some deer hunters asked Brad why he didn't graze his pastures, when he had. The healthy soil had held enough moisture to keep growing grass amid a drought.

John Piotti, AFT President and CEO. "At AFT we believe that conservation in agriculture requires a focus on the land, the practices and the people and this award recognizes the integral role of all three."

Earlier this year, North Dakota landowners were encouraged to apply (or be nominated) for the award. Applications were reviewed by an independent panel of agricultural and conservation leaders. Among the many outstanding North Dakota landowners nominated for the award was finalist: Spring Valley Cattle of Glen Ullin in Morton County.

The first North Dakota Leopold Conservation Award was presented to Black Leg Ranch from McKenzie in 2016. Last year's recipient was Dockter-Jensen Ranch from Denhoff.

The Leopold Conservation Award Program in North Dakota is made possible thanks to the generous support of the American Farmland Trust, North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition, North Dakota Association of Soil Conservation Districts, North Dakota Stockmen's Association, Sand County Foundation, Starion Bank, North Dakota Game & Fish Department, APEX Clean Energy, Audubon Dakota, Basin Electric Power Cooperative, Burleigh County Soil Conservation District, ConocoPhillips, Cow Chip Ranch, Delta Waterfowl, Ducks Unlimited, Emmons County Soil Conservation District, KEM Electric Cooperative, McDonald's, Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative, North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality, North Dakota Natural Resources Trust, Pheasants Forever, Roughrider Electric Cooperative, Slope Electric Cooperative, The Nature Conservancy, The Wildlife Society, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service - Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.

In his influential 1949 book, "[A Sand County Almanac](#)," Leopold called for an ethical relationship between people and the land they own and manage, which he called "an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity."

[Sand County Foundation](#) presents the Leopold Conservation Award to private landowners in 23 states for extraordinary achievement in voluntary conservation. For more information on the award, visit [www.leopoldconservationaward.org](http://www.leopoldconservationaward.org).

#### **LEOPOLD CONSERVATION AWARD PROGRAM**

The Leopold Conservation Award is a competitive award that recognizes landowner achievement in voluntary conservation. Sand County Foundation presents the award in California, Colorado, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Wisconsin, and in New England (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont). [www.leopoldconservationaward.org](http://www.leopoldconservationaward.org)

#### **SAND COUNTY FOUNDATION**

Sand County Foundation inspires and empowers a growing number of private landowners to ethically manage natural resources in their care, so future generations have clean and abundant water, healthy soil to support agriculture and forestry, plentiful habitat for wildlife and opportunities for outdoor recreation. [www.sandcountyfoundation.org](http://www.sandcountyfoundation.org)

#### **AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST**

American Farmland Trust is the only national organization that takes a holistic approach to agriculture, focusing on the land itself, the agricultural practices used on that land, and the farmers and ranchers who do the work. AFT launched the conservation agriculture movement and continues to raise public awareness through its No Farms, No Food message. Since its founding in 1980, AFT has helped permanently protect over 6.5 million acres of agricultural lands, advanced environmentally sound farming practices on millions of additional acres, and supported thousands of farm families. [www.farmland.org](http://www.farmland.org)

It was visible proof of how embracing conservation has improved soil, water, wildlife and livestock, just like the 12 rows of trees from decades ago.

#### **NORTH DAKOTA GRAZING LANDS COALITION**

The NDGLC is a non-profit organization that believes through voluntary actions, respect for private property rights, and providing education on the values and multiple benefits of well managed grazing resources, the goals of promoting the health and sustainability of North Dakota's grazing lands are achievable. [www.ndglc.com](http://www.ndglc.com)

#### **NORTH DAKOTA STOCKMEN'S ASSOCIATION**

The North Dakota Stockmen's Association is a 90-year-old non-profit trade organization that works to unite, protect, promote, educate and serve the beef industry of North Dakota. [www.ndstockmen.org](http://www.ndstockmen.org)

#### **N.D. ASSOCIATION OF SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS**

The purpose of the North Dakota Association of Soil Conservation Districts is to further the widespread application of sound and practical soil and water conservation practices in North Dakota. Our goal is to provide quality membership services and nursery products to carry out the soil conservation program of the soil conservation districts of North Dakota. [www.ndascd.org](http://www.ndascd.org)



## **Grazing for Good: Conservation Forage Program**

*By Amanda Booher, Audubon Dakota*

Interested in promoting the health and regeneration of North Dakota grasslands? North Dakota has 13.5 million acres of grazing lands, most of which are privately owned. Planting native grasses and forbs can offer a beauty that is unique to our state while offering a new use for land that is difficult to manage.

Today, less than 1% of tallgrass native prairie remains in North Dakota, it's easy to think grasslands are dull and destitute, but they serve many necessary purposes for soil health, water filtration, and habitat for the many birds, mammals, and insects that depend on them for survival. As a NDGLC member interested in management of soil health and biodiversity as a key to sustainable farming and ranching, you can support conservation efforts while improving grazing management and the health of your land by restoring cropland to grassland.

An exciting new opportunity for landowners has emerged in North Dakota, the Conservation Forage Program (CFP) with Audubon Dakota and partners across the state. The Conservation Forage Program provides financial and technical assistance to plant perennial grasses and forbs to increase forage availability for livestock producers and address natural resource concerns. Doing so will create profitable grazing land or hayland on marginal acres, thus adding value to their land. This project is made possible by the North Dakota Industrial Commission Outdoor Heritage Fund, which awarded a \$6.9 million grant, the largest awarded by the Commission, aimed at grassland expansion.

Audubon Dakota advocates for conservation efforts with the greatest benefit for bird conservation. CFP is designed for North Dakota's producers to plant marginal crop lands back to grasslands to improve forage availability and quality for grassland birds while increasing their habitat across the state.

“CFP is an excellent example of how conservation, agriculture and producer partners can indeed come together for a common goal, in this case to improve forage availability and quality across the state. We are so fortunate to have the Outdoor Heritage Fund’s and partner support to make this innovative concept a reality”, said Sarah Hewitt, Conservation Programs Manager for Audubon Dakota.

The Conservation Forage Program will lead the restoration of grassland habitat across North Dakota, not only for grassland bird species, but also for native pollinators, like monarch butterflies. Developing land management techniques across private lands over a 10-year project period, landowners enrolled will improve forage availability and quality, wildlife habitat, and soil health. By planting perennial cover, producers improve soil health which can provide better water filtration, microbial diversity, soil carbon storage, and increase the supply of nutrients to plants. Perennial cover also provides habitat for wildlife including grouse, pheasants, and songbirds. This helps conservation efforts by improving habitat and forage quality for native wildlife and species to survive. Integrating grazing practices will further increase the landowner’s earning potential on the restored land through the value of the grazed forage. This provides an opportunity to increase land value especially for cropland that is environmentally sensitive and could be better utilized.

“The biggest benefit of CFP, when compared to similar programs, is that the CFP offers increased management flexibility beyond year three for producers to graze, hay, and overall manage their land,” said Josh Lefers, Working Lands Program Manager for Audubon Dakota.

Once seen as non-essential objective for many, conservation practices are now viewed as beneficial opportunity. While various programs exist to motivate landowners to adopt conservation practices, it can be expensive and time-consuming, and some programs are too competitive or have strict guidelines and restrictions prohibiting some from participating.

CFP is a pilot program that provides the opportunity for interested landowners to convert cropland into perennial forage. Unlike similar programs, CFP encourages application from historically underserved farmers and ranchers in connection to the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 Farm Bill). Additionally, CFP has no minimum land requirement of land ownership, making this program a unique opportunity for new landowners often overlooked.

CFP provides financial assistance to growers to offset deferred income and assist with seed costs and other aspects of restoration management, including fencing and water infrastructure. Audubon Dakota and partners provide a technical assistance partner and one-on-one planning to ensure success. Producers enrolled will work with a program partner to develop a restoration management plan that will cover site preparation, seed composition, seeding rate, timing, and post-planting management. After implementation, participants will actively manage their land including weed control, haying, resting, and grazing. Developed and backed by Audubon Dakota, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Delta Waterfowl, North Dakota Game and Fish, North Dakota Wildlife Federation, Ducks Unlimited, Natural Resources Conservation Service, the North Dakota Natural Resources Trust, and the North Dakota Association of Soil Conservation Districts. Conservation is a team effort, and the expertise from each organization allows for project selection and assistance at a broader reach.

North America's grasslands are among the most imperiled ecosystems in the world. In North Dakota, restoring land back to native prairie not only contributes to conservation by creating natural habitats for native animals, birds, and insects, it reduces erosion and runoff, improving water filtration. Grassland bird species that rely on this habitat are among the most endangered group of birds in the United States. Since 1966, populations have declined more than 40 percent and for some species up to 80%. The majority of grasslands in North Dakota are on private lands, making private landowners major stewards of North American grasslands that play a key part in conservation collaboration to restore habitats for native bird species. Enrollment for the North Dakota Conservation Forage Program opened November 15 with the goal of enrolling 18,000 acres.

---

## Njos Family Endowment

In 2021, Edwina Njos donated \$25,000 to NDGLC in honor of her late parents, Edwin and Betty Loken, for their pioneering spirit, faith and love of the land. NDGLC established the Njos Family Endowment within the North Dakota Community Foundation and the income from the endowment will support NDGLC’s mission and will be used to support NDGLC priority needs including operating expenses and educational events and opportunities. Contributions to the Njos Family Endowment may be made through the North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition. [Click here to learn more.](#)

“The gift from the Njos family is greatly appreciated. Their generosity will help NDGLC promote the health and sustainability of North Dakota’s grazing lands.” - NDGLC Chairman Jerry Doan.



Edwina Njos presents a check for \$25,000 to North Dakota Grazing Lands Executive Director Dan Bohn, establishing the Njos Family Endowment.

## Events

**Jan. 11-12: Annual Meeting and Winter Workshop, Medora**

**March 3-4: Succession Ag Event, Bismarck**

**SAVE THE DATE**

**North Dakota Grazing Lands  
Coalition Succession Ag Event**

**Thursday, March 3 – Friday, March 4**

BSC NECE, Bavendick Stateroom #415

\$50 per person/\$100 per family or operation

Please register at [www.ndglc.com](http://www.ndglc.com)



**SPONSORED BY**



PURCHASE AN

# NDGLC CAP

\$30 PER CAP  
PLUS SHIPPING

PURCHASE NOW!



## Mentor Network

NDGLC has established a grassroots-based network of North Dakota grazing land managers who have agreed to provide guidance and counsel to interested ranchers and agency personnel on grassland management.

[Learn more](#) about NDGLC mentors.

## EASY WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

*Are you a member looking for a way to get involved with NDGLC?*



**Like us on Facebook.** Liking us on Facebook and engaging with our posts helps us share our message with a new audience.



**Share your stories with us.** We want to hear from you. Please share your stories with us. Your experience is a great resource.



**Invite people to our events.** NDGLC hosts many events open to the public. Bring a friend the next time you come.

---

## Become a Member Today!

The mission of NDGLC is to promote the health and regeneration of N.D.'s grasslands. Farmers and ranchers can become members of NDGLC for annual dues of \$30. Members will receive newsletters plus email notifications of pertinent events, legislation and other opportunities on a regular basis. Members may also attend field days and other workshops at a discounted rate.

Join Now

---

## Let NDGLC Share Your News!

[Contact the NDGLC office](#) for questions or information to be included in the next newsletter.

---





*NDGLC newsletters are sponsored by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. All programs and services of NDGLC are offered on a nondiscriminatory basis, without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, marital status or handicap.*