



## NDGLC Update from the Chairman

*Jerry Doan, Chairman NDGLC*

Here we are in the Christmas season and flying towards another new year! This year has certainly been crazy, and I could spend hours giving you my opinion, but I will spare you!

The weather has certainly been on our side for fall grazing. I have noticed producers that don't graze this late still have cattle out on native range or crop fields. It sure helps with feed costs. On our place, we have been grazing native range we saved for this time of year and harvested crop fields. We have not gone into our multi-species cover crops yet with cattle. The cover crops are not as good as normal because of the drought, so staying off them as long as we can, will certainly help. Any time we can work towards the goal of not feeding cows helps us to our goal of profitability. Winter feed costs kill profitability! Our cows are in excellent body condition and the mild weather and good grazing is helping them stay in good condition. Remember, in winter grazing systems, it is important to maintain body condition.

I want to congratulate the Dockter-Jensen ranch of Denhoff, N.D., for being named this year's Leopold Award winner! This is a great family operation, and we are very proud of their conservation accomplishments. There are many other operations deserving of this very prestigious award. Please become involved.

My hats off to Abby Wick and all the folks that helped put on the Dirt Workshop. They ran it virtually, which had its challenges, but it went very well with a lot of participation. I was able to be a part of the program talking about cover crops in a livestock system and winter grazing. It generated many questions and I appreciate Abby, Miranda Meehan, Kevin Sedivec, and others at North Dakota State University (NDSU) and their interest and help in the area of cover crops and winter grazing.

The NDSU folks are involved in a SARE study on cover crops that hopefully will help answer more questions as we move forward. We have a plot in this study, and it has been interesting to graze heifers earlier than we normally do on a multi-species cover crop. It put these heifers in good body condition going into winter. We just got the results back from the Nutritional Balancer Test and it showed these heifers, in early September before they went on the cover crop, were just maintaining or even losing weight on native range. Having that cover crop to boost their nutrition before winter could be a real benefit. Part of the fun of regenerative agriculture is the constant trying and learning that goes on!

Please mark your calendar and join us in Medora on Jan. 12 and 13 for the NDGLC Annual Meeting and Winter Workshop. We hope to have a great program and some great networking. This is a new idea to try it in a new area, so I hope you will support the hard work Trish Feiring and our great staff have done to bring this together!

In closing, I want to remind you that even in very challenging times there are new doors opening up with opportunities. Watch for those and take advantage of them!

I want to wish you a very merry Christmas and a very happy and very blessed New Year!!

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## Dockter-Jensen Ranch Wins 2020 Leopold Award

The [Sand County Foundation](#), along with the North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition, North Dakota Association of Soil Conservation Districts and North Dakota Stockmen's Association, recently announced the Dockter-Jensen Ranch in Denhoff as the recipient of the 2020 North Dakota Leopold Conservation Award.

The Sand County Foundation, the nation's leading voice for conservation of private land, presents the annual Leopold Conservation Award to private landowners in 21 states for extraordinary achievement in voluntary conservation. The award recognizes landowners who inspire others with their dedication to land, water and wildlife habitat management on private, working land.

The Dockter-Jensen Ranch in Denhoff is operated by Kerry and Brenda Dockter and their family. They acquired the land through Theo and Norma Dockter, Kerry's parents, and continue to increase its size and the diversity of their operation. In 2015, Kristi and Kyle Jensen, the Dockter's daughter and son-in-law, moved to the ranch to learn their practices and someday take over the ranching operation.

Both families are life-long learners that use science and experience to guide their decisions. Their holistic practices include rotational grazing systems, alternative water sources for cattle, innovative crop rotations, no-till practices, and cover crops. Using these practices, the ranch has experienced a positive difference in grassland diversity, soil erosion, soil consistency, stocking rates, and forage production for winter feed.

The ultimate goal of the Dockter-Jensen Ranch is to maximize beef production by utilizing the available resources with limited input and costs, while taking advantage of proven management practices that will help to conserve these resources for the next generation.

The Johnson Family Ranch in Wolford and Paul Ranch in southcentral Grant County were also named finalists of the award, given annually in honor of renowned conservationist Aldo Leopold. "It is an honor to present the Dockter-Jensen Ranch with this esteemed award. Each of the award finalist showed outstanding achievement in implementation of voluntary conservation, inspiration of other landowners by example, and outreach on the role private landowners play in conservation," said Jerry Doan, North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition president.

The Sand County Foundation inspires and enables 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. For more information visit, [www.sandcountyfoundation.org](http://www.sandcountyfoundation.org).

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## Field Update

*By Trisha Feiring, NDGLC Field Representative*

What a beautiful winter we have had so far! I hope this newsletter finds you all happy and healthy during the holiday season.

With the Mentor Guided Workshop being postponed until October 2021, we have decided to try something new for the winter. We will be hosting a winter virtual series called "Munch on This." It will feature NDGLC mentors, partners and ag lenders covering topics such as grazing management, balancing work and family, financial management, holistic management, and much more. We want this to be a way to socialize, communicate and discuss the topics that make a difference on your farm or ranch. More information to come.

Spring will be here before we know it. The Winter Workshop and "Munch on This" series will be a great opportunity for you to sit down and start your grazing plan for next summer and think about the projects that you would like to implement. While doing this, please contact me if you are interested in learning more about the conservation programs that are available in your area. I will do my best to help you find the best fit for your operation.

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# Of Beef and Birds

*Marissa Ahlering, The Nature Conservancy*

*Taylor Linder, University of North Dakota*

*Susan Ellis-Felege, University of North Dakota*

*Kaylan, Kemink, Ducks Unlimited*

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.

Many studies have looked at the effects of continuous, rotational and patch burn grazing on grassland birds. 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 on 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 the 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 the raw percentage of nest success was right at 50 percent for all 90 nests. The trampling of nests was low at two percent and only occurred on the long rotation ranch.

This summer allowed Taylor to work out the kinks in protocols and refine research questions. 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 operations 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](#).

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

## NDGLC Winter Conference - Jan. 12-13

The NDGLC Winter Conference and Annual Meeting will be held in Medora on Jan. 12-13. Speakers include Diana Rodgers, RD and co-author of "Sacred Cow," and Gabe Brown, NDGLC mentor. Register online or by calling NDGLC at 701-355-4458. Registration for the Winter Conference includes free registration for the NDGLC Virtual Series "Munch on This", Jan. 26 - Feb. 18. The cost of the winter conference is \$60 for nonmembers and \$35 for members. Please [register](#) for the winter conference by Jan. 5. Registration is limited to 100 in-person participants.

## "Munch on This" Virtual Series - Jan. 26-Feb. 18

The "Munch on This" virtual series will take place Jan. 26 - Feb. 18 at 8 p.m. CT on Tuesdays and Thursdays. It will feature 45-minute presentations from NDGLC mentors and stakeholders on holistic management practices and ways to support these practices followed by a discussion. Each session will be recorded and available to all registrants. The cost of the virtual series is \$60 for nonmembers and \$35 for members. Registration will open soon.



### 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.

## Become a Member Today!

The mission of NDGLC is to promote the health and regeneration of North Dakota's grasslands. Farmers and ranchers can become members of the 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.



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