



NEWSLETTER

Spring Valley Ranch 2022 Leopold Conservation Award Winner



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.

Whether it's land or livestock, Lance Gartner believes it's best to look at nature and emulate it. As owner of Spring Valley Cattle, near Glen Ullin, ND, he extends his calving season late into May and grazes most of the winter. That's working with nature, rather than against it.

Gartner has created a low-input ranch that is economically and environmentally resilient with a diverse, no-till cropping system and reduced labor, fuel and other input costs required to raise beef cattle.

Innovative grazing and cropping strategies have allowed Spring Valley Cattle to nearly double production from its 5,000 acres, reducing the need for more land and the costs associated with it.

Gartner's grazing strategies typically allow him to leave taller grass on the land, which makes the landscape more drought tolerant. Better managed grasslands are more ecologically productive. Cross fencing has been used to increase the number of grazing cells on the ranch from 14 to 88 since 2005. This was made possible by the installation of solar water developments across the ranch to provide reliable access to drinking water for livestock and wildlife.

Spring Valley Cattle has partnered with local, state and federal agencies and programs to install conservation practices such as reseeding more than 410 acres of crop fields with native grasses.

Spring Valley Cattle's herd is grazed as long as winter weather cooperates, with hay typically fed for just five weeks when the snow is deepest. Gartner distributes hay bales to parts of the ranch that will benefit most from the nutrients in cattle manure. The herd has adapted to these unique winter grazing techniques, and Gartner reports better herd health, a healthier range and a reduction in the concentration of manure on the landscape.

On his 400 acres of alfalfa, rye and oats, Gartner uses no-till cropping methods and

a diverse rotation of cover crops to promote water infiltration, reduce erosion and control weed species. Cover crops such as sorghum and sudan grass are grazed, which helps break up soil compaction and increase water and mineral cycling.

For more than a decade, Spring Valley Cattle has not used synthetic fertilizers on crops. Instead, rye and oat crops are paired with a companion legume such as peas or hairy vetch. The legumes naturally supply the rye and oats with the nitrogen they need to grow, which keeps input costs low. These are the types of innovative approaches Gartner shares with others as a member of the Grazing Lands Coalition Mentor Network.

In its nomination of Spring Valley Cattle, the Morton County Soil Conservation District wrote that whether during a ranch tour, as a guest speaker or a one-on-one monitoring session, Gartner's message is "honest, raw and full of things that worked well and those that didn't."

Spring Valley Cattle provides a blueprint for how a family run ranch can embrace a more sustainable model of land improvement. It shows that farms and ranches can retain their size, yet produce more to meet the needs of feeding a growing population.

Chairman's Message

Jerry Doan, NDGLC Chairman

Wow, how time flies by! Here we are in October and on our place, like most of you, it seems like a thousand things are left to be done as we prepare for winter. Regenerative practices and holistic management do make life and running an operation simpler, but we also know Mother Nature can bring big surprises as we move into later fall!

We are again facing a lack of rainfall in most of North Dakota, and it is even worse in much of the western U.S. Thank the Lord for the early season rainfall, as we had one of the best grass and forage years in a very long time! But now the pastures are very dry and the grass quality is definitely less than we would like to see. Our cover crops, which we use to winter graze our livestock, are not as good as I had hoped for. They are spotty with some fairly good and others not. Kochia had a banner year and seemed to choke out many different species of cover crops. Mother Nature always mixes it up and keeps us learning as we go.

Last year, we were able to only graze into mid-February on the cover crops because of drought. I am hoping we can get further through winter than that this year, but we will need milder temperatures. The more days we get grazing is money in your pocket. Profitability comes when cows work for us! Remember, when utilizing cover crops to extend your grazing system and increase your profitability, you must have a back-up plan. This year, we were able to replenish hay supplies, so the back-up plan is in place. We always take supplement feed to the cows and leave them on the cover crop fields. This way we are building soil health through the manure and urine and saving costs of not hauling manure. One of the big benefits is when we keep the livestock out of a watershed drainage area, which is where most of our headquarters are built, we improve water quality for us and people downstream. This will become a bigger problem as we move forward, and we must do our part to protect water quality. When we do, tell the story so the consuming public hears that we care and work to regenerate our natural resources! We must spread the positive image of agriculture as the media portrays a completely different image.

Thanks to everyone that participated and worked on the Grazing the Grasslands tour, social and meal at our ranch. This was part of the National Duck Stamp event that was held here in North Dakota. It was a very interesting event and there were many folks here that have limited knowledge of the grasslands or a ranching operation. They had many questions and, hopefully, they left with a better understanding of the importance of

grasslands. Audubon and the North Dakota Game and Fish were a very big help in making this happen!

A very big congratulations to Spring Valley Cattle and the Gartner family on being chosen the 2022 Leopold Award winner! Lance and his family have been a very big part of moving the needle forward on regenerative practices and how to use livestock in the system.

I can't write a newsletter without a few words on the loss to conversion of our grasslands. I was down the road a couple of days ago and saw a big chunk of grassland being torn up for cropland! I don't blame the producer, as the economics are definitely in the favor of crop production. At the NDGLC, we are looking to help lead, along with other concerned groups, discussion on how can we address this very serious issue. We must get the public on our side to insure we move this issue to the forefront. Even programs we have to help keep grassland intact, like the grassland CRP, have some glitches that need to be fixed. With massive federal dollars coming from legislation, conservation will get a big chunk. We must work together to insure these dollars are used to help keep our grasslands for the benefit of the future generations! I would hate to see someone ask down the road, "Do you remember when we used to have beautiful grasslands filled with livestock and wildlife?" We must all work to make sure that doesn't happen!

Please check this newsletter and social media for upcoming events and opportunities to learn and network on regenerative practices. If you have any questions or ideas, please reach out to me, Trish Feiring or any of our mentors listed on our web site.

Please be safe as we round-up livestock and finish field work. Slow down and appreciate the beauty of our landscape!

Field Update

Trish Feiring, NDGLC Field Representative

What a difference a year makes! As I've reflected on last year and the struggles that many faced with the drought, I am reminded at how forgiving Mother Nature is when you allow her to be on your side. On our operation, we went from a year of downsizing our herd several times to a year of watching warm season grasses, such as big bluestem, sideoats grama and prairie sandreed, explode up the hillsides.

I kept trying to tell myself that hopefully we would be able to look back on last year like it was the best thing that ever happened to us. I'm not sure I'm 100% there yet, but there were so many positive things that I witnessed happening on the rangeland this summer.

- Spiders building webbed tents to trap their next meal, the grasshopper.
- Big bluestem growing up sidehills in places that I'd never seen it before.
- Dragonflies in populations so dense it felt like I was being swarmed by bees.
- Crickets by the hundreds feeding on grasshopper eggs.
- Frogs and toads in places you would never expect them. In most cases on top of the rolling hills with no dam, dugout, creek, or stream in site.
- Native forbs, like Echinacea (Black Sampson), in clusters of thousands.

Next summer will be the true test. Do we continue to see these positive things happening on the land? Let's hope so.

Now, as fall is upon us, it is a great time to reflect on the grazing season and any adjustments or changes that we need to make for next year.

- Did we leave too much or not enough cover in each cell?
- Did we graze a pasture too long?
- Did we give each pasture enough time to rest and recover?
- Do we need additional fencing to improve my system?
- Do we need additional water developments to improve my system?
- What body condition are the cows in and are we satisfied with their condition?

As you're thinking about the things that went right and maybe even the things that didn't, be sure to write them down. Take good notes so that when the winter months roll around, you have all the information you need to sit down and plan for the next grazing season.

Please be sure to reach out if you have questions about your grazing system, if you'd like assistance with finding cost share or if you'd like another set of eyes on a plan or project. You can reach me at my home office at 701-872-5888.



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.

Event Wrap Up



Summer Tour

The NDGLC summer tour was held near Denbigh, ND at the Arrow Down Six Ranch owned by Rob Kramer. More than 90 people attended the event to listen to speakers like Gene Goven, Kevin Sedivec, Robert Gordon, and host, Rob Kramer.

Participants remarked, "I liked the opportunity to network with others" and "I liked that it was informal and felt like a judgement free zone for any questions."

Leopold Conservation Award Tour

The Leopold Conservation Award Tour featured the 2021 award-winning Sand Ranch, near Ellendale, ND, owned by Brad Sand. Featured speakers Greg Judy and Dr. David Hopkins shared their insights regarding pasture management and soil health with more than 120 attendees. Host Brad Sand shared the knowledge he has gained from his successes and failures in implementing regenerative management practices.

One person stated, "I thoroughly enjoyed networking and educating myself on the different ways to nourish the soil and what the science aspects are behind the conservation efforts." Another said, "I liked that people felt comfortable enough to ask or make comments, even if they disagreed with the speaker. It makes a for a much better discussion."



Partner News

Ducks Unlimited

Ducks Unlimited's (DU) team of conservation program biologists and agronomists work with farmers and ranchers across North Dakota to help them reach their operational goals through various conservation programs. Its team can help landowners evaluate conservation programs that amplify productive uses for marginal cropland, improve the health and vigor of perennial grasslands, or improve soil health on croplands. DU biologists can also assist landowners with any of the conservation program applications that will suit their needs.

Recently, with support from important conservation partners like the North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition, North Dakota Natural Resources Trust, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, North Dakota Game and Fish Department (NDGF), North Dakota Department of Trust Lands, Millborn Seeds Inc., Pulse USA, and more than 16 local soil conservation districts, the North Dakota Outdoor Heritage Fund awarded DU more than \$1.9M to help ag producers with the third phase of the Cover Crop and Livestock Integration Project (CCLIP3) and the second phase of Grassland Enhancement Project (GEPP2).

CCLIP3

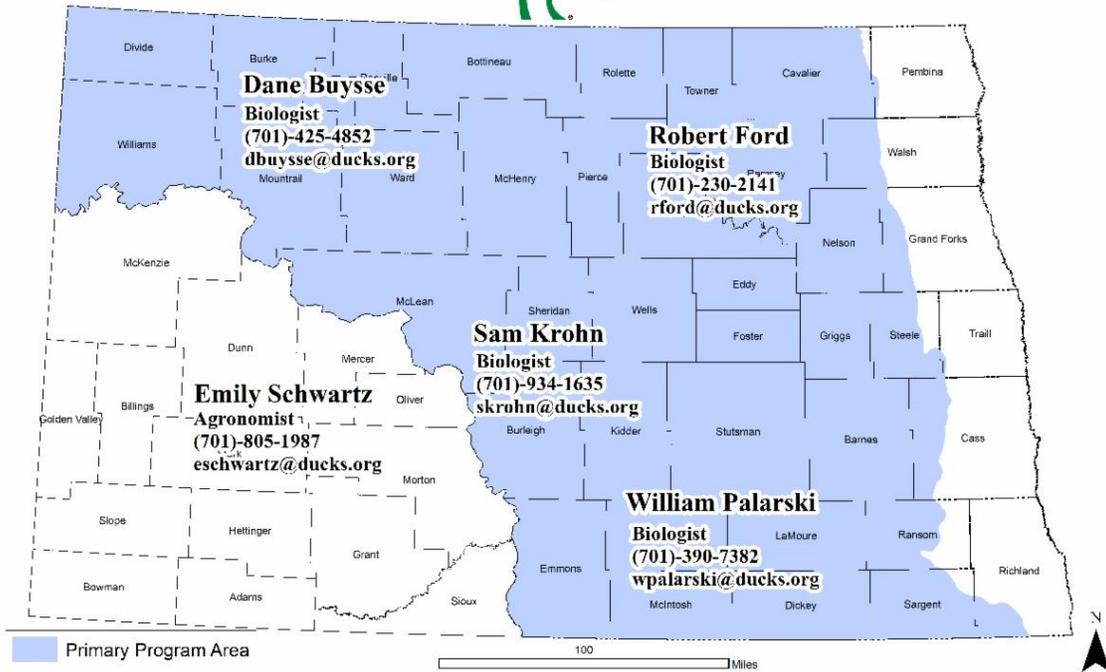
Cover crops and livestock improve soil health and functionality by restoring organic matter, increasing aggregate development and stability, reducing soil compaction and increasing water infiltration. Through CCLIP3, DU can provide cost-share assistance to cooperating producers through this unique North Dakota Outdoor Heritage Fund-sponsored program. CCLIP3 offers producers 60% cost-share on permanent grazing infrastructure, cover crop seed and portable grazing infrastructure.

GEPP2

This project provides grazing incentives for lessees of state school trust land, other public land, and landowners enrolled in NDGF's Private Lands Open to Sportsman (PLOTS) program. Funding is available at a 60% cost-share rate for grazing infrastructure and vegetation establishment. This includes the installation of water wells, pipelines, water tanks, solar pump systems, rural water supplies and native grass plantings. The objectives of this program are to improve soil health on pastures, provide reliable water resources on leased land, increase plant diversity, and improve pasture drought tolerance with planned rest and recovery periods.

There are no batching periods for CCLIP3 and GEPP2, so please contact a Ducks Unlimited team member today.

Ducks Unlimited Programs Biologists & Agronomists



Audubon Dakota

Need Forage? Apply Today!

The North Dakota Conservation Forage Program (CFP) works with producers to establish grasslands on marginal cropland to improve forage availability and quality while nurturing soil health and wildlife habitat. Generous financial and technical support is available. Integration of grazing and haying is encouraged!

FORAGE FUNDS

- 3-year establishment payments*
- 60% forage seed mix cost-share**
- \$20/acre for seeding labor
- 50% grazing infrastructure cost share

* Establishment payments are based of ND Department of Trust Lands cropland rental rates.

** Cost share reimbursements are based off of and cannot exceed 2020 NRCS Field Office Technical Guide rates

PRAIRIE MANAGEMENT TOOLBOX

The Prairie Management Toolbox provides financial and technical support for grazing infrastructure for private landowners. Funding for the program was provided by the North Dakota Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF), which has allowed Audubon Dakota to enhance more than 15,000 acres of rangeland.

Contact A Range Ecologist To Learn More

North Dakota Central Coteau and Stutsman County Toolbox Projects
Charli Kohler | Range Ecologist charlene.kohler@audubon.org

Grand Forks Area Toolbox Projects and Conservation Forage Program
Juli Bosmoe | Range Ecologist julianna.bosmoe@audubon.org



North Dakota Game and Fish Department

Meadowlark Initiative ... Cattle-centric Grassland Conservation

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department and a coalition of committed conservation, agriculture, industry, and science partners recognize integrating livestock and applying regenerative grazing are vital components needed to stem prairie loss and move the needle on overall native grasslands conservation in North Dakota. Hence, the reason it has combined forces and pooled resources to assist private ranchers and producers through a cooperative effort called the Meadowlark Initiative.

The vision of the Meadowlark Initiative, named after North Dakota's cherished, yet declining state bird, is *"to promote and create healthy, thriving grasslands that provide biodiversity and prosperity for wildlife, pollinators, ranching operations and communities."*

The Game and Fish Department, charged with the responsibility of keeping the state's rare and declining wildlife species out of the emergency room, recognized it was going to take "all hands on deck" and "every tool in the toolshed" to enlist, support and assist cooperating private landowners in the monumental task of enhancing, restoring and retaining what's left of North Dakota's native grasslands.

"This diverse partnership, including the North Dakota Grazing Land Coalition, brings a wealth and wide array of financial, technical and mentoring support to help cooperating

private producers stay resilient and prosperous,” said Meadowlark Initiative Coordinator Heather Husband, . “The Initiative’s diverse menu and partner support includes grazing system infrastructure cost-share, grazing management treatments, native grass reconstruction, wetland enhancements/restorations, grazing mentoring, and science-based response monitoring. My role, and goal, is to help interested producers find the appropriate programs and assistance to fit their operational needs.”

To learn more about the Meadowlark Initiative, visit the Department’s website at <https://gf.nd.gov/meadowlark-initiative> or contact Husband at Heather@naturalresourcestrust.com or 701/223-8501.

Coalition Receives Grants

The NDGLC submitted successful applications for two funding sources:

TC Energy - Build Strong Grant

- Grant funds will be used to support the mentor training event and grazing exchange website.

USDA - Agricultural Research Service Grant

- Grant funds will be used to deliver the Grazers Road Show and grazing exchange website.



The North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition (NDGLC) is a member-supported nonprofit that relies on your generous donations and memberships to provide peer-to-peer mentoring, conferences and outreach to North Dakota landowners. If you are not yet a member, [consider joining](#). As a NDGLC member, you will receive reduced registration rates for the conference, events and field trips throughout the year. The coalition also produces quarterly newsletters to provide members with ideas, practices and information within the industry.

Join Today!

Upcoming Events

- **NDGLC Winter Conference:** January 18-19, 2023, Ramada, Bismarck.
- **Grazers Road Show:** February - March

Get Involved

Are you looking for ways to get more involved with NDGLC? Here are a few simple ways to

help us out:

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 in your network to our events

- NDGLC hosts many [events](#) open to the public. Bring a friend the next time you come.



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