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A voluntary partnership with private landowners

GLCI News

Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative

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Cover Photo: Mementos of the 2003 National Conference on Grazing Lands are a reminder of the exciting and information-packed event. *Photo by Kindra Gordon.*

Grazing Lands Take Center Stage in Nashville

Over 1,100 ranchers and other conservation leaders from all over the U. S. gathered in Nashville, Tennessee, Dec. 7-10, 2003 to focus on conserving natural resources on the nation's grazing lands at the Second National Conference on Grazing Lands.

From conservation easements and intensive grazing rotations to tracking livestock patterns through the use of GPS, attendees gained knowledge to help them conserve natural resources on grasslands throughout the country – while at the same time keeping those lands productive for cattle, sheep and other grazing livestock.

U.S. Senator Conrad Burns (R-MT), who kicked off the conference, congratulated ranchers for their leadership in conservation, and for their dedication in maintaining and enhancing open spaces and natural resources for all Americans. "Farmers and ranchers are great caretakers of the land," said Senator Burns. "We all need to step up and work together to maintain this national treasure – our nation's private and public grazing lands."

"The fact that well over a thousand people traveled to Nashville for this conference is a clear indication of the increased interest in grazing lands," said Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief Bruce Knight. "Grazing is finally being recognized as an important tool to achieve conservation objectives, rather than something that is bad for the environment."

Look inside for more highlights from the conference!

2NCGL Conference Highlights

In Nashville, grazing conference participants learned practical as well as some of the most innovative grazing management techniques available. Included are highlights from a handful of the presentations.

The trade show area was always buzzing with interested participants; bottom left: Poster papers offered findings of current grazing research and below: several state booths provided updates on active GLCI programs; right: Mike Siler sang pure country during opening night of the conference.

A Bevy of Beetle Benefits

Reduced fly and parasite populations, increased nutrient cycling, and more available surface area for forage growth are all benefits provided by a mighty little force called dung beetles. These beneficial bugs were the topic of discussion during one of the cutting-edge technology sessions at 2NCGL.

"Dung beetles are an important component to a healthy pasture ecosystem," says University of Arkansas graduate student Michelle Thomas. She and Bill Clymer with Fort Dodge Animal Health point out that with good dung beetle populations, manure pats will be broken down and nutrients returned to the soil within a few days. Quick removal of manure pats also helps minimize fly and parasite populations, as well as increase the area for forage production.

"Without dung beetle activity, a manure pat can last a year or longer," Clymer reports.

To enhance dung beetle populations on your operation, Thomas says grazing management plays a key role. That includes leaving enough residual forage to increase soil water retention and organic matter, which is a favorable environment for dung beetles. Rotational grazing can also be beneficial.

Also consider the type of endectocide used for parasite control among your livestock. Most on the market are harmful to dung beetles. However, Mosidectin based products, such as Cydectin for cattle and Quest for horses, have been shown to be less toxic.

What are the Keys To Profitable Forage Production?

Garry Lacefield, University of Kentucky Extension forage specialist, and Don Ball, Extension agronomist at Auburn University, share these tips – regardless of the type of livestock you're grazing:

1. Focus on the forage – this includes diversifying species and varieties and matching feed value to needs of the animal.
2. Conduct soil tests and, if necessary and feasible, apply fertilizer and other nutrients.
3. Use legumes whenever economical.
4. Minimize your stored feed requirements by extending your grazing season with different warm and cool season forages.
5. If available, graze crop residues.
6. Reduce weathering losses to stored hay by placing them on rock pads or wood pallets, placing bales together only on the flat ends and storing in rows rather than stacked.
7. Implement a grazing system to utilize pastures efficiently.

Pete Jackson Memorial Established

In memory of Pete Jackson, a founding member of GLCI, a national summer internship with the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative is being established. An endowment to fund the internship is being set up and was announced at the 2NCGL.

Jackson, a longtime Montana rancher, served on the National GLCI Steering Committee until his death last year. Montana Senator Conrad Burns made the first individual contribution to the effort after his keynote address to conference attendees.

GLCI supporters are encouraged to contribute to the endowment as well. Checks should be made payable to GLCI with a notation that the money is for the "Pete Jackson Internship." For more information contact Monti Golla at 979-268-0980 or grazinglands@cox-internet.com.

Students In Nashville

Seven college students from the Midwest Region were awarded $750 travel stipends to attend the 2NCGL in Nashville. "This is a tremendous opportunity for those students to learn about GLCI, network with possible employers and be advocates for delivering technical grazing assistance," says Midwest regional GLCI coordinator Jim Wallace.

The students include from back left, Joe Koehler, OH; David Trott, IL, Matt Haan, IA; Joe Stadler, WI; Kristin Mack, OH; Leann Meinhardt, MO; and Meagan Wheaton, MI.

The region was also able to underwrite the cost of the 16 Midwest speakers who presented at the 2NCGL Conference. Their travel was supported by each of the eight NRCS state conservationists in the Midwest region.

GPS Offers Grazing Insight

Global Positioning Systems (GPS) are offering helpful insight into the world of livestock grazing. Texas A&M Extension range specialist Robert Lyons is using this technology on three ranches to help determine where animals are and are not grazing.

"Grazing distribution was uneven in all of the ranches studied," he reports. While many would expect this to be so, with the GPS data points of the animals plotted on a map, landowners can see exactly which areas are being used and those being avoided. For instance on the three ranches studied, results indicated that animals often avoided specific areas if they were too far from water, too heavily covered with brush, too steeply sloped, and even too rocky.

Lyons says that is powerful information. "With that knowledge, landowners can eliminate some of these problem areas with management. In some situations they can adapt to the challenge and perhaps save those areas for wildlife or recreation."

Lyons reports that individual GPS collars cost about $4,500, but he says they are worthwhile research tools that will provide valuable grazing management applications in the years to come.

Working With The Media

Taylor Brown, a farm broadcaster with the Northern Ag Network based in Billings, MT, addressed conference attendees during one of the noon luncheons. Brown shared these tips for working with the media:

1) Utilize the media who are friendly to you. "Get to know your local ag editor and farm broadcaster ahead of time, so that when your organization has an issue or event it wants covered, you have a contact person." He says not to try to convert media with an opposing viewpoint. "You're not going to change them."
2) Take the initiative. If you can help the media set up interview sources or places to get video footage, they'll be grateful to you, he says. Watch the national news on your issues, then help your local media find local sources providing your viewpoint, because they are seeking that local angle.
3) Practice being a good spokesperson for your issues and viewpoints.
4) Continually provide the media with information. Your local or state newsletter, press releases, listings of upcoming events, websites, and contact information for leadership in your organization, so again they have sources at their fingertips.

To Order Your Proceedings

If you were unable to attend the Second National Grazing Conference, proceedings will be available from the event highlighting presentations by over 175 speakers on topics including wildlife livestock interactions, grazing and endangered species, organic dairying, over-wintering livestock, grazing management on small acreages and much more.

Individuals interested in receiving a copy of the proceedings, or interested in learning more about GLCI can contact Monti Golla, administrator of the GLCI at 979-268-0980, or by e-mail at grazinglands@cox-internet.com.

THE CHAIR'S CORNER

Bob Drake

As you've seen from the information presented in this newsletter, the 2nd National Grazing Conference was a huge success. I would personally like to thank the National GLCI Steering Committee, National and Regional Coordinators, John Peterson, Monti Golla, Ann Harris and the Society for Range Management staff for their hard work in planning and carrying out this event.

Also, a big thanks to all the NRCS personnel, volunteers, presenters and producers who shared their research and success stories to make this conference the best ever.

Lastly, hats off to our National GLCI Coordinator Rod Baumberger who retired Dec. 31, 2003 after 37 years of service with NRCS. We appreciate all you've done.

Bob Drake, Chairman
National GLCI Steering Committee

Michigan In March

The Michigan Grazing Conference will be held March 8, 2004 at the MSU Pavilion. The event is designed to provide an opportunity for Michigan graziers, new and experienced, to gain knowledge and explore new practices and technologies. For more information contact Kevin Ogles, Michigan State GLCI Coordinator, by phone at 517-324-5265 or kevin.ogles@mi.usda.gov.

GLCINews 609 Deerfield Court Spearfish, S.D. 57783

Contact these affiliated organizations:

American Farm Bureau Federation
Rosemarie Watkins
(202) 484-3608

American Forage and Grassland Council
Dana Tucker
1-800-944-2342

American Sheep Industry
Tom McDonnell
(303) 771-3500

Dairy Industry
Jack Laurie
(517) 323-6575

National Association of Conservation Districts
Robert Toole
(405) 358-9011

National Cattlemen's Beef Association
Myra B. Hyde
(202) 347-0228

National Farmers Union
Chris Schepis
(202) 554-1600

Society for Range Management
Samuel Albrecht
(303) 986-3309

Soil and Water Conservation Society
Craig Cox
(515) 289-2331, ext. 13

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