



**Conservation Alliance  
of the Great Plains**

P.O. Box 22809  
Lincoln, NE 68442-2809  
www.conservationalliance.org

*Inside this issue:*

Reversing Grassland Wildlife Decline	1
It's Time to Get Going	3
Prairie Dogs	4
Protection of Temperate Grasslands	8
News Notes	10
State of the Planet	14
The Grass Has Won	13



**How can you help?**

The Conservation Alliance of the Great Plains is a Lincoln, Nebraska-based not-for-profit 501 (c) (3) organization dedicated to preserving and restoring grassland ecosystems through research, education, and advocacy. We invite you to join us in creating a sustainable future.

To make a tax-deductible contribution to the Conservation Alliance, please fill out this form and return it along with your contribution to the address below.

The Conservation Alliance of the Great Plains  
P.O. Box 22809  
Lincoln, NE 68542-2809

Thank you for your support!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Street: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Contribution Amount:

\$25.00 \_\_\_\_\_ \$50.00 \_\_\_\_\_

\$100.00 \_\_\_\_\_ \$250.00 \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*The Conservation Alliance  
of the Great Plains*

Winter 2005

Issue 6

# Green Fire Journal

*Grassland Conservation News and Commentary*

## Reversing Grassland Wildlife Decline

*By Tyler Sutton*



Photo courtesy: Michael Fritschy/www.michaelsfritschy.com

A few months ago, Nebraska Gov. Mike Johanns submitted a proposal to the federal government to pay western Nebraska farmers \$150 million to temporarily stop irrigating 100,000 acres of cropland and instead plant wildlife habitat. The proposal seeks to improve stream flows and increase water levels in reservoirs and to create more grassland habitat for declining wildlife species.

While these are worthwhile goals, the proposal unfortunately will not do much for grassland wildlife populations.

More than half of western Nebraska's prairie grassland has been converted to cropland. What remains is mostly in poor shape. The loss and degradation of this habitat is the main

*Continued on page 6*



## Opening Statement

By Tyler Sutton

In this issue our lead article is *Reversing Grassland Wildlife Decline*. As farm commodity subsidies dry up in coming years when U. S. agriculture is brought under the WTO framework, there will be a tremendous opportunity in rural Nebraska to increase grassland conservation spending for the benefit of communities and wildlife. Our lead article urges policy makers and community leaders to begin thinking creatively about how land use and ownership change may help diversify the rural plains economy.

*Protection of Temperate Grasslands - A Global Perspective* describes a recent study by William Henwood, Grasslands Protected Areas Chair for the IUNC World Commission on Protected Areas. This study identifies grasslands as the least protected and most in need of protection of the world's biomes. Henwood concludes the Northern Great Plains should be one of the top four global grassland conservation priorities.

But Scottsbluff banker Hod Kosman did not need a global study to conclude the grasslands of western Nebraska are worth protecting. Through the Platte River Basin Environments land trust, which Kosman helped create, he is protecting some very special places in the Panhandle, according to intern Sarah Lierman in *It's Time to Get Going*.

But regrettably Nebraska Game and Parks is still refusing to address a conservation plan for the prairie dog. According to Nebraska Prairie Dog Survey, the latest estimate of prairie dog numbers show more critters than previously thought, so the Commission continues to leave on the shelf any conservation plans for the species.

The CA recently submitted written comments to the Nebraska Legacy Project, the Game and Parks Commission's effort to develop a state biodiversity plan. We urged the Commission to prioritize private land conservation, but we also suggested a number of initiatives that would help create more grassland protected areas, which we believe are essential to the long-term survival of prairie species.

Finally, Joel Sartore, in his *State of the Planet* column makes another pitch for the important role Morrill Hall plays in the natural history education of Nebraska residents.

Please read on to learn more about these and other topics and do not hesitate to contact me about matters raised in this issue or about other topics we should cover in the future. [tyler@conservationalliance.org](mailto:tyler@conservationalliance.org)

### Green Fire Journal

Issue 6 Winter 2005

#### Inside this issue:

Reversing Grassland Wildlife Decline	1
It's Time to Get Going	3
Prairie Dogs	4
Protection of Temperate Grasslands	8
News Notes	10
State of the Planet	14
The Grass Has Won	13

The *Green Fire Journal* is published biannually by the Conservation Alliance of the Great Plains.

Our mission is to assist in the creation of protected grassland natural areas and advance sustainable communities in the Northern Great Plains. We were formed in 1999.

#### Board of Directors

David Hecker  
John LaVelle  
Chip Lienemann  
Joel Sartore  
Russ Semm  
Anna Shavers  
Tyler Sutton

**Executive Director** Tyler Sutton  
**Editor** Sarah Lierman  
**Illustrations** Paul Johnsgard

#### Conservation Alliance of the Great Plains

P.O. Box 22809  
Lincoln, NE 68542-2809  
Phone: 402-477-2044  
Email: [info@conservationalliance.org](mailto:info@conservationalliance.org)  
[www.conservationalliance.org](http://www.conservationalliance.org)

allow them to be there. Human overpopulation is rampant, and getting worse each year. As we expand our range, the amount of wilderness shrinks. It's as simple as that, really. Many species are now at a tipping point and extinction rates are accelerating.

*In every case,  
my camera serves as  
a witness to both the  
good and the bad.  
Wherever I go, the  
situations are  
different but the story  
is pretty much the  
same. The hand of  
man now reaches out  
to every corner of the  
globe.*

It is certainly possible that humans can throttle back and allow for intact habitats to survive. But will we? I know we have it within us each time I'm heartened by the caring questions I get from school children. Never before have so many known and cared for the environment.

But while small battles are being won daily, we are losing the war. Until and unless the general public begins to truly

care about saving the Earth, until it is more than just a feel-good notion in the back of our minds, not much will change. We'll continue to see a business as usual approach to the world's resources until they're all gone.

*Fragile Nature* touches on all of this, as well as what you can do to help. But through it all, this is a show that celebrates life in all its forms, from the California gray whale to the Wyoming toad.

In the end it's up to all of us to learn, to care and then to act. Acting just one at a time, it's all any of us can do. But in the end it may be enough.

## "Fragile Nature: A Personal View" by Joel Sartore

Sartore will take you on a personal journey to understand and witness up close and personal the loss of wildlife, from the grizzly bear to the Salt Creek tiger beetle.

The show will run until July 5, 2005 in the Morrill Hall Cooper Gallery.

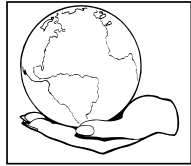
Contact Deb Meier, Public Programs Coordinator at Morrill Hall for more details, (402) 472-8970.

**Morrill Hall, Nebraska's Natural History Museum,** is open to the public.

*Monday - Saturday,  
9:30 am to 4:30 pm.  
Sundays, 1:30 pm to 4:30 pm.*

**Admission:**  
*Adults (19 and over) \$4.00  
Children (5-18 yrs) \$2.00  
Children (4 and under) FREE  
Families \$8.00*

For more information see <http://www-museum.unl.edu/> or call 402-472-2642.



## State of the Planet - Sartore Style

### Fragile Nature at Morrill Hall

By Joel Sartore

On the University of Nebraska campus, within the shadow of Memorial Stadium, stands Morrill Hall, Nebraska's state museum. Each home game Saturday, literally thousands of people stream by. Dressed in red and in a hurry, they don't pay much attention to the old building just down the street. But if they stopped to look inside, what they'd find is a real treasure.

Up the front steps and past the oversized columns is the history of life on Earth.

One of the world's richest collections of prehistoric mammals resides within. And there's a planetarium. Biodiversity exhibits abound. Walk-in dioramas lead visitors through the sites and sounds of present-day Great Plains wildlife.

Despite public misperceptions that they're closed, this is a museum that's still strong and gaining momentum. In fact, they recently sponsored a show of endangered species work from my past 15 years with National Geographic Magazine. It's titled 'Fragile Nature'.

The show is a look at both the ups and the downs of wildlife conservation. Standard wildlife portraits in beautiful scenes are balanced with images showing why habitats and species fail and what we can do about it.

In many ways, the show mirrors what's been happening to Morrill Hall.

We live in a hurry up world these days, where money made and spent right now is what counts the most. There's very little thought given to the next generation. Our entertainment must be action-packed. We've got things to do and there aren't enough hours in the day as it is. Things such as museums, the arts and the environment, while nice, must take a back seat. There are just too many other things of importance ahead in the line. Our time and dollars seem better spent somewhere else.

I say just the opposite is true. We must have healthy, vibrant ecosystems to keep our air and water clean. Our very survival depends on it. And one way to ensure this happens is by

understanding and appreciating the natural world. Morrill Hall does this elegantly, effectively and daily.

Fragile Nature was originally designed not only to draw more people in to the state museum, but also to give them a sense of what's happening 'out there.' National Geographic has sent me all around this hemisphere to document environmental issues as varied as grizzlies in the Arctic to the jaguars in the Bolivian Amazon.

In every case, my camera serves as a witness to both the good and the bad. Wherever I go, the situations are different but the story is pretty much the same. The hand of man now reaches out to every corner of the globe. Where wildlife and habitats still exist is only because we



"Fragile Nature" exhibit at Morrill Hall

## It's Time to Get Going

By Sarah Lierman

According to Scottsbluff banker Hod Kosman, the clock is ticking on opportunities to protect special places on the Great Plains. But Kosman and the conservation group he helped found are helping to stop the ticking clock by creating protected areas in the western part of Nebraska.

President of Platte River Basin Environments, Kosman said that the state's population centers have naturally encroached on our wild places and we need to be out in front of this encroachment in Nebraska because we still can. "In many places in this country, that time has passed," Kosman said.

Groups like Platte River Basin Environments (PRBE) inspire those of us who realize how important it is to conserve the North American grassland biome. Kosman and PRBE are inspiring not only because they are protecting areas on the Great Plains, but also because of the innovative approach they've taken, which benefits the public.

"What we are providing with our approach is the ability to provide public access to a variety of land parcels," Kosman said. "The degree of that public access will be in concert with what our biologists and other scientists say makes sense - both for the use of the land and the species." There are no other groups that Kosman knows of that are doing it this way. CA President Tyler Sutton, agrees. "Kosman's group is doing some of the most innovative work on the Northern Great Plains, no doubt about it."

Depending on the circumstances, land acquired by PRBE may be restored and transferred to the State of Nebraska or restored and held privately with public access. PRBE owns the property in most cases and entities such as Game & Parks will manage and provide the rules for access.

Whether mountain biking, hiking, hunting or bird watching, the communities are able to enjoy the land that has been purchased by PRBE. "We are on the migration route for millions of birds. There are so many wonderful opportunities here and we can make a difference," Kosman said. "It's much more cost effective now and we

shouldn't wait until development is on our doorstep."

PRBE was formed in 1991 to carry out the wishes of former Clive Ostenberg, who set up a bequest to stimulate habitat development and preservation in the western Nebraska area. Although the original plan focused on acquiring tracts of wildlife habitat along the North Platte River for public use, the non-profit's purchases have expanded to wetland marshes and the Wildcat Hills, an area south of Scottsbluff.

Putting in hundreds and hundreds of volunteer hours and forming partnerships, PRBE has certainly made an impact on the plains. Through the assistance of a Kiewit Foundation grant, the group recently purchased 12,000 acres in the Wildcat Hills. They are in a joint planning process to create an overall usage model.

"This is a gorgeous area with lots of opportunity for education and access," he said.

Being a member of the Kansas City Federal Reserve Bank has created a sense of urgency in Kosman. While we see certain trends that are negative and pockets of populations that are continuing to grow and encroach on our wild resources "it just makes sense for us to get out ahead of those population centers."

The group focuses on landowners and farmers, who are willing to sell off parts of their property that aren't very productive. "These lands tend to be exactly what we want. And we're convincing landowners that there is real economic value to farm acres with low productivity."

According to Kosman, people are seeking out PRBE to purchase their land. "People choose to come to us and know that we have an adaptable approach. We can adapt our approach to the needs and wishes the landowners have."

Being a member of the Federal Reserve Bank has also given Kosman a great sense of the potential for bringing eco-tourism dollars to the state. "We see the desires of people wanting to recharge their batteries and they can do so right in our backyard. We need to conserve the



## Prairie Dogs

By Krishna Mastel

Those of us in love with the prairie are losing the battle over the black-tailed prairie dog. States, private landowners, and legislators are shaping the future of the prairie dog without regard to the vital role they play in the shortgrass prairie ecosystem.

Recall, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was petitioned in 1998 to list as threatened the black-tailed prairie dog. In response, the agency found the petition warranted and placed the species on the candidate list. Before actually listing the species, the agency wanted further information. Consequently, a multi-state conservation effort was begun to assess the distribution and status of the black-tailed prairie dog. State wildlife management agencies within the species' range began surveying and monitoring efforts and in nearly every state but Nebraska, states developed conservation plans.



Photo courtesy Michael Krasberg / www.michaelkrasberg.com

Nebraska Game and Parks, as part of the multi-state conservation effort, conducted an aerial survey of occupied acres of prairie dogs in 2003. The survey estimated that approximately 137,000 acres of active prairie dog colonies currently exist within Nebraska. A multi-state prairie dog conservation group in charge of developing a prairie dog conservation plan estimated 135,000 acres to be the approximate number of acres of habitat necessary to conserve prairie dogs within Nebraska. The number is based upon the historic habitat of prairie dogs in Nebraska.

Mike Fritz of Nebraska Game and Parks (NGP) says that although the number of estimated acres is within the range the multi-state conservation group established, that does not necessarily mean the size, location, and configuration are ideal for conserving the species.

Jonathan Proctor of Predator Conservation Alliance says the Alliance feels the multi-state conservation plan was not adequate to sustain the vital role prairie dogs play within the shortgrass prairie ecosystem. Although the number may be within the multi-state estimate, many conservationists feel the number of acres is too low, and the configuration of prairie dog colonies is not sufficient to maintain the shortgrass prairie ecosystem.

Moreover, the results of the 2003 survey varied considerably from a survey conducted in 2001/2002 by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The 2001/2002 survey estimated a range of 17,704 acres to 43,748 acres of active prairie dog colonies within Nebraska. The 2003 survey reported that the disparity in estimates is likely the result of different survey techniques and sample

size. The University survey had to rely on 1993 aerial photos of prairie dog colonies. In the years between 1993 and 2001/2002 prairie dog colonies could have developed or expanded, and the changes may have been difficult to verify on the ground due to limited access to private land.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Nebraska Game and Parks decided not to aim any conservation measures directly at black-tailed prairie dogs. According to Fritz, the decision was not based upon the results of the 2003 aerial survey; instead, the decision was based upon what the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission feels should be done regarding black-tailed prairie dog conservation-which basically is nothing.

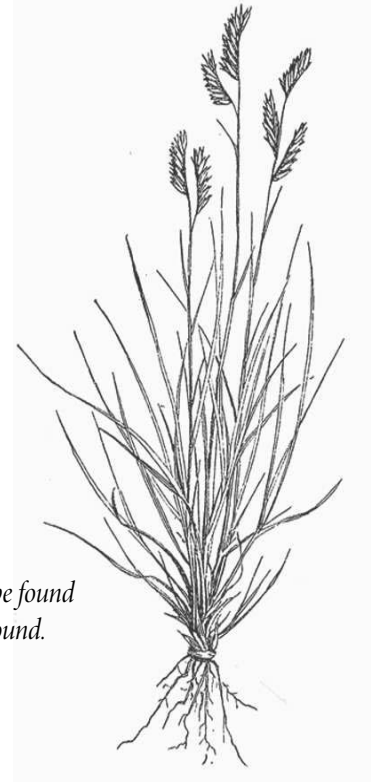
## The Grass Has Won

*The homestead's gone, crushed by time  
As wind and rain will do.  
And perhaps a careless hammer in hand,  
Helped hasten its adieu.  
How sad, the grass has won.*

*I turned to where the barn should be,  
There's a chunk of concrete and a doubletree,  
And the animals housed there long before,  
Have left fertile soil for the floor.  
How sad, the grass has won.*

*I looked to find where Papa lay,  
His resting place now a field of hay,  
And if the grave was unknown, it would not be found  
Where family and friends laid Papa in the ground.  
How sad, the grass has won.*

*Then it came, permanence is not our lot,  
What we are or what we've got.  
God heals his earth's majestic skin,  
Like the Red Sea, the waves of grass close in,  
It's His will, His plan - His grass will always win.*



- Frank J Barrett



## Comments Submitted to Legacy Project

By Tyler Sutton

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission must complete a state habitat conservation plan by October, 2005, to remain eligible for certain types of federal wildlife conservation funds. This planning effort, known as the Nebraska Natural Legacy Project, recently sought public input. The CA serves on the project's partnership advisory committee and submitted written comments. A summary of some of the points we made follows.

Given nearly all Nebraska land is owned privately, the CA urged the plan to prioritize private land conservation. We suggested the plan adopt payment incentives for private landowners to manage their land for biodiversity. But we also proposed the plan address innovative private land conservation strategies like grass banking, conservation concessions, and private cooperative management agreements among landowners.

Nevertheless, while private land conservation should be the short-term priority, our comments pointed out there are unavoidable management conflicts between biodiversity and agricultural uses of land that require the state to consider increasing the amount of land in public and quasi-public ownership dedicated to biodiversity management, not to mention increasing the amount of land managed for biodiversity already owned by the state. Regrettably, almost none of the land owned by the state is managed for biodiversity presently.

We suggested this situation could be improved by creating a state natural areas program that would buy and manage ecologically significant lands. Such a program would complement private efforts by national organizations like The Nature Conservancy. We believe the protection of ecologically significant areas in the state is a public benefit for which public funds should be used, just as public funds are now used to build roads, hospitals, schools and other infrastructure necessary to sustain our economic future and our Nebraska quality of life.

*A grassland preserve of one million acres in western Nebraska would be globally significant, not only for the conservation of the short/mixedgrass prairie ecosystem, the least protected biome on the planet, but also for creating a world class, nature-based tourism opportunity.*

One place to look for ecologically significant land is the nearly 1.5 million acres of school land still owned by the state. These lands should be surveyed for conservation opportunities, and then win-win solutions found to protect some of those lands that are ecologically significant.

We also suggested the Commission explore innovative arrangements between public land and surrounding private land. One example is a "cooperative ecosystem management plan" involving public and private land. This might be achieved by creating "wildlife conservation districts" whereby cooperating landowners in the district receive property tax rebates, funded by a broadly based revenue stream from the state. We further suggested the state look into a bond pool to fund purchases of ecologically significant land, again funded through a broadly based revenue stream.

We encouraged the Commission to explore research partnerships with the UNL Institute of Natural Resources

that will help encourage landscape-scale conservation arrangements in the state.

Finally, we proposed the planning team consider what role one or more large grassland preserves might play in the biodiversity conservation strategy. Conservation biology teaches that generally large contiguous or mostly contiguous areas of land are necessary to provide for the long-term survival of many species. A grassland preserve of one million acres in western Nebraska would be globally significant, not only for the conservation of the short/mixedgrass prairie ecosystem, the least protected biome on the planet, but also for creating a world class, nature-based tourism opportunity.

We will be interested in how the planning team reacts to our suggestions.

However, Fritz says the survey results will help establish a baseline number for current black-tailed prairie dogs within the Nebraska shortgrass prairie. In the future, the baseline may aid NGP in utilizing the ecosystem management approach to the shortgrass prairie ecosystem. An ecosystem management approach would be a welcome change. The approach would help accord greater respect to the vital role prairie dogs play within the shortgrass prairie ecosystem.

Prairie dog proponents should keep an eye on Nebraska's neighbor to the north. South Dakota planned to allow poisoning and shooting of prairie dogs on almost 8,000 acres in Buffalo Gap National Grasslands. The plan also called for a mile-long buffer zone of poisoning and shooting on federal lands adjoining private lands. The Predator Conservation Alliance, along with several other conservation groups brought suit in federal court alleging that the action was illegal. In an out of court settlement the number of acres to be effected was reduced to 5,000, the buffer zone reduced to a half-mile, and only the current round of poisonings and shootings may occur until the government agency overseeing poisoning creates a full Environment Impact Statement.

The Buffalo Gap National Grasslands includes the Conata Basin, which is home to the world's only successful black-footed ferret recovery site. Black-footed ferrets are one of America's most endangered animals and rely on prairie dogs for ninety-percent of their diet.

So the prairie dog controversy rages on. Meaningful dialogue needs to occur between proponents and opponents of prairie dogs conservation in order for a balanced long-term solution to be achieved. However, one thing is clear. The role of black-tailed prairie dogs within the prairie ecosystem must be accorded greater respect if the shortgrass prairie mosaic and prairie dogs are both to endure.

*Krishna Mastel is a second-year law student at the University of Iowa. She was a 2004 summer intern for the Conservation Alliance. Krishna is originally from South Dakota and received a master's degree in biology from the University of South Dakota. She especially misses canoeing on the Missouri River near Vermillion, SD.*



Photo courtesy Michael Fitzsimon / www.michaelfitzsimon.com

## *New Prairie Dog Book by Dr. Paul Johnsgard*

No animal species on the plains stirs up as much emotion as the prairie dog. To the prairie enthusiast, the prairie dog is essential to a healthy ecosystem, but to the rancher, the prairie dog is a weed to be exterminated like a dandelion in a neatly manicured blue grass yard. *Prairie Dog Empire-A Saga of the Shortgrass Prairie* is yet another insightful but accessible book by Paul Johnsgard on the natural history of the Great Plains. Johnsgard is Foundation Professor Emeritus of Biological Sciences at University of Nebraska, author of nearly 50 books, and winner of numerous awards for his works. *Prairie Dog Empire* is a disturbing look at how the shortgrass prairie has been profoundly altered and the impact it had on the black-tailed prairie dog, one of its most important keystone species. The book contains maps, drawings, and listings of more than 200 grassland nature preserves where many native plants and animals may still be seen. Published by the University of Nebraska Press, at \$29.95 this is a must read for anyone who cares about prairie wildlife and the fate of the shortgrass prairie. Johnsgard shows once again why he is the dean of prairie conservation writers. For more information go to: <http://unp.unl.edu/bookinfo/4732.html>



Continued from page 1

reason grassland wildlife is declining. Because of the sheer magnitude of the problem, this proposal will not make much difference. It regrettably is a Band-Aid for a gunshot wound.

What would make a real difference is a significant increase in federal spending for prairie grassland conservation. Most federal conservation spending now supports soil and water conservation programs for cropland and temporary cropland retirement programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program. The project Johanns now proposes essentially is a modification of the latter program. While these programs do help wildlife, much more needs to be done for prairie grassland if the decline in grassland species is to be reversed.

Additional spending for prairie grassland conservation should be directed both at private grazing land and at expanding protected areas, such as parks, wildlife refuges and natural areas.

Our first priority should be to stop the conversion of prairie grassland to cropland and to assist private

landowners in better managing of prairie grazing land for plant and wildlife diversity. The conservation of private land for wildlife is a public benefit for which ranchers should be paid.



Swift Fox kits.

We also need to expand the amount of grassland in protected areas. In Nebraska and most Northern Great Plains states, only 1 percent to 2 percent of remaining grassland is in some form of protected status, and not all of that is managed primarily for wildlife. Protected areas conservation is a necessary complement to private land conservation because there are unavoidable management conflicts on private land between wildlife and livestock. We need areas on the plains where the primary management objective is wildlife.

Moreover, protected areas are necessary to create the natural infrastructure for nature-based activities that can help diversify the livestock-based rural economy. Protected areas are a sustainable use of the grassland resource that will continue to provide economic benefits to surrounding rural communities even during times of drought.

In other grassland areas of the world, where drought

### *Richard Reading to Speak in Lincoln*

Richard Reading, Ph.D., Director of Conservation Biology for the Denver Zoological Foundation, will speak in Lincoln on the "**Human and Ecological Dimensions of Prairie Dog Conservation.**"

Dr. Reading received a Ph.D. in wildlife ecology from Yale University in 1993, after completing a dissertation on recovery of the endangered black-footed ferret. He is an Associate Research Professor in the Biology Department at Denver University and an Affiliate Faculty Member at Colorado State University and the University of Montana. Dr. Reading focuses on interdisciplinary approaches to grasslands conservation and has worked on grassland conservation on four continents. He is the author of over 125 technical and non-technical papers and books on wildlife conservation and is an EarthWatch project leader in Mongolia, doing research on argali sheep, wild Bactrian camels, cinereous vultures, and small carnivores. Dr. Reading's lecture is co-sponsored by the Center for Great Plains Studies and the Conservation Alliance of the Great Plains.

*When: Thursday, January 27, 2005, 3:30 p.m.*

*Where: Great Plains Art Museum, Hewitt Place, 1155 Q Street*

A reception will be held at 3:00 pm prior to the lecture. The event is free and open to the public. For more information call 472-3082 or go to <http://www.unl.edu/plains/>



Photo courtesy Michael Forberg / www.michaelforberg.com



## NEWS NOTES

### *Natural Areas Conference*

The Center for Great Plains Studies and the Natural Areas Association will co-host the symposium

**"Changing Natural Areas: Ecological and Human Dimensions"** in Lincoln at the Cornhusker Hotel on September 21-24, 2005.

The call for papers will be available in January 2005. The symposium will cover a broad spectrum of natural area creation, management and support issues, but will be of particular interest to those interested in prairie grassland preservation and restoration.

More information on the symposium may be found at <http://www.unl.edu/plains/events/2005/overview.htm>

### *Grants.*

The CA is pleased to report in the second half of 2004 we received general support grants from the Lincoln-based Cooper Foundation and the New Mexico-based Messenger of the Healing Winds Foundation. The grants were \$12,500 and \$10,000 respectively. We appreciate the leadership of our Board Chair, Russ Semm and Chair Elect, David Hecker, in securing this funding. We also received \$5,000 from the Lincoln-based Lienemann Foundation to begin a study on the economic and other benefits to rural communities for creating protected grassland natural areas in Nebraska.

### *Election.*

The Conservation Alliance's President and Executive Director, Tyler Sutton, was elected to the Board of Directors of the Predator Conservation Alliance (PCA), a Bozeman-based conservation group with both mountain and grasslands programs. "I look forward not only to help strengthen the capacity of PCA to conserve the grassland ecosystem for the black-footed ferret and other prairie species, but also to become more involved in the conservation of predators like the grey wolf and grizzly. Globally predators are under tremendous pressure because of human intolerance and loss of habitat," Sutton said. He was elected to a three-year term.

### *A New Name.*

We will change our name on February 1, 2005 to *The Grassland Foundation*. Why, you may wonder? Very simply, we were formed in 1999 to speak out about the senseless destruction of species and their habitats. Over the years, however, we've narrowed our focus to issues relating to the preservation and restoration of the grassland ecosystem that is our own backyard. Today, temperate grasslands are the least protected biome--and the most in need of protection--on the planet. The same is true of North American grasslands. In Nebraska, nearly 97 percent of all the land in the state is used for agriculture. Not even the little amount of land owned by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is managed expressly for biodiversity conservation.

In short, there is a desperate need for an organization to focus attention on the conservation needs of grasslands. We hope our name change contributes to that mission and that through our research, education, and advocacy work we can contribute to increasing the amount of land in protected grassland natural areas. In fact, by 2025 we hope 10-15 percent of our remaining grasslands on the Northern Great Plains are in some form of protected status, where the management objective is biodiversity.

is also a fact of life, nature-based tourism and related activities are booming in areas where rural communities have set aside a significant amount of grassland in protected areas. The same will happen in Nebraska if we create more and larger protected areas.

Combining private and protected grassland conservation objectives has the potential to unite the ranching constituency and those groups interested in wildlife conservation and nature-based activities such as hunting, wildlife viewing, horseback riding, camping and related activities around a common agenda. Uniting these groups won't be easy, but given grassland conservation has been a low priority for federal spending in the past, building a broader constituency that includes both private land and protected areas is essential to getting more support for it. Bold leadership for Nebraska politicians and education and community leaders, but most importantly from the ranching community, will be necessary to make this happen.

Even with united front, making prairie grassland conservation spending a federal conservation priority will not happen overnight. Nebraska leaders could, however, jump-start the effort by building support for grassland conservation in Nebraska and by becoming a strong voice nationally for federal grassland conservation programs.

For discussion purposes, the following suggestions may be worth considering as part of a state grassland initiative. First, increase the amount of Nebraska land in park, wildlife refuges and natural areas to 10 percent to 15 percent by the year 2025.

Second, establish a state protected areas programs within the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission to set state priorities for creating grassland protected areas. Third, create a large Prairie Grassland Park Preserve in western Nebraska as a centerpiece of the state protected areas program. Fourth, establish a program within the UNL Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources to do research and outreach on creating and managing grassland protected areas. The Center for Grassland Studies would be an appropriate place to house it.

The globalization of agriculture demands new approaches to the economic and conservation challenges Nebraska faces. With bold leadership, we can make grassland conservation the

national priority it deserves to be sooner than one might expect. Only then will we be able to reverse the decline of prairie wildlife and truly make progress on creating a sustainable future for people in western Nebraska.

*This article appeared in the Lincoln Journal Star, September 14, 2004.*

*Our first priority should be to stop the conversion of prairie grassland to cropland and to assist private landowners in better managing of prairie grazing land for plant and wildlife diversity.*



## Protection of Temperate Grasslands - A Global Perspective

By Tyler Sutton

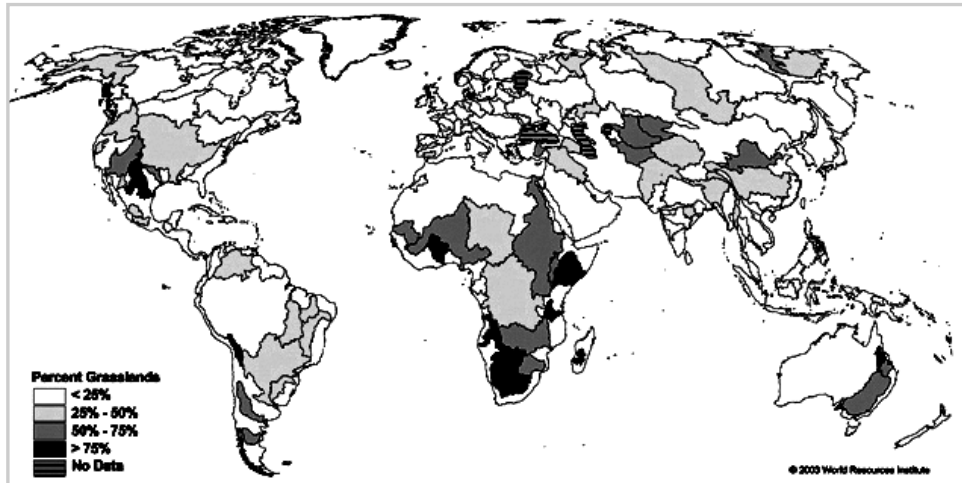
William Henwood, Grasslands Protected Areas Task Force Chair for the IUNC World Commission on Protected Areas delivered a paper in Calgary, Alberta last February on the conservation status and prospects for the world's temperate grasslands.

Temperate grasslands are found on every continent except Antarctica. But regrettably they are now the most endangered ecosystem on most of them. According to Henwood's presentation, the four most endangered are the prairies of North America, the pampas of South America, the lowland grasslands of southeast Australia and the steppes of Eastern Europe.

The IUNC is the largest conservation organization in the world, being composed of nation states, NGOs, corporations, and individuals and has observer status at the United Nations. Henwood, when not working on IUCN grassland conservation issues, is a senior planner for Parks Canada, and now works on establishing marine parks on the west coast of Canada.

The following are some of the more significant points he made in the presentation:

1. Temperate grasslands used to be home to some of the greatest assemblages of wildlife the earth has ever known. In most cases, these populations exist today as only shadows of their former selves.
2. Globally, about 41% of temperate grasslands have been converted to intensive agriculture, another 6% to urbanization and 7.5% to other disturbances.
3. Today, only 4.59% of the world's temperate grasslands are currently protected within the global system of protected areas. Historically, the opportunity to protect significant representative and ecological viable examples of this biome has been overlooked, and in many areas irretrievably lost.
4. The goal of the Grasslands Protected Areas Task Force is to promote and facilitate the protection of 10% of the biome globally by 2013.
5. Temperate grasslands are the least protected terrestrial biome on the planet. To reach the 10% goal, the level of protection will have to increase 120%.
6. The original grasslands of central North America



were the second largest next to the steppes of Eurasia. These grasslands are shared among the United States (80%), Canada (16%), and Mexico (4%).

7. Perhaps as much as 99% of the North American tallgrass prairie has been lost, and while up to 40% of the shortgrass prairie remains uncultivated, overgrazing and introduction of exotic species have significantly impacted it.

8. Less than 6% of the North American prairies are in protected areas. (Other researchers have calculated the amount protected on the Northern Great Plains at less than 2%.)

9. Today only 1-3% of the Pampas in Argentina remains in native vegetation.

10. Nearly all of Europe's grasslands are under some form of intensive management.

11. From a global perspective, the grasslands of Inner Asia are of special significance because, while they comprise only 6% of the world's grasslands, they constitute the largest and least disturbed area of temperate grasslands in the world.

12. Though the grasslands of Inner Asia are under threat, the potential for them to make a major contribution to the protection of the temperate grassland ecosystem, at a scale available nowhere else in the world, cannot be underestimated.

13. The lowland grasslands of southeast Australia are the most threatened ecosystem in that country. But in New Zealand, approximately 27% of their grasslands are protected in national parks or conservation reserves, with an additional 45% still in public ownership in pastoral leases. New Zealand is reviewing its rangeland tenure arrangements with an eye toward creating additional grassland protected areas.

14. South Africa's temperate grasslands, known as the veld, occupy about 10% of the country. Presently, less than 2% of this biome is in some form of protected status and despite its reputation as a wildlife safari destination, less than 6% of the country is in protected areas, and 86% is used for crop production and livestock grazing. The country has, however, set

a goal of increasing the total amount of land in protected areas to 8% of the country, which may significantly increase the amount of the grassland biome in protected areas.

15. On a global basis, the Task Force concluded that the places with the most potential to achieve an ultimate protection level greater than 10% include the Eastern Steppes of Mongolia, portions of Kazakh steppe, Patagonian steppe, and the short and mixed grass prairie of North America.

16. At the World Parks Conference in Durban, South Africa in September 2003, the global conservation community recognized that a new focus must be brought to bear on threatened or under-represented ecosystems.

According to Henwood, the temperate grasslands biome clearly qualifies as both threatened and under-represented, and a new strategic approach to achieving a 120% increase in protection in 10 years is necessary.

Given North America's grasslands constitute about 17% of the global

biome it can play a significant role in achieving the goal of representative protection. In fact, it is only one of three regional grasslands in the world where conservation and restoration is still possible on the landscape scale.

*Today, only 4.59% of the world's temperate grasslands are currently protected within the global system of protected areas.*

*Historically, the opportunity to protect significant representative and ecological viable examples of this biome has been overlooked, and in many areas irretrievably lost.*