GRASSLAND FOUNDATION

A GLOBAL OUTLOOK, FOR LOCAL SOLUTIONS

WWF

"I ascended to the top of the cutt bluff this morning, from whence I had a most delightful view of the country, . . . exposing to the first glace of the spectator immence herds of Buffaloe, Elk, deer, and Antelopes feeding in one common and boundless pasture." § *Meriwether Lewis, April 22, 1805*

GRASSLANDS 2010

An action plan for creating grassland reserves and sustaining healthy grasslands and communities in the Northern Great Plains





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Grasslands 2010, a joint project of the Nebraska-based Grassland Foundation and the Northern Great Plains Program of World Wildlife Fund in collaboration with other partners, has the following long-term goals for the Northern Great Plains:

- Increase to 10% from the current 1.5% the amount of land in grassland reserves.
- Conserve native prairie and wildlife by avoiding loss to cultivation and by expanding biodiversity friendly grazing practices.



Northern Great Plains Ecoregion

GRASSLANDS 2010 AIMS TO CREATE A FRAMEWORK FOR ACHIEVING THESE GOALS BY HAVING IN PLACE BY 2010:

- Strong incentives for private land stewardship
- Sound public land management policies and programs
- Supportive federal, state and provincial policies and funding
- Strategic investments by the private sector

A WILD SPECTACLE LOST... BUT IT CAN BE BROUGHT BACK

Few recall that the Northern Great Plains once rivaled Africa's savannahs in terms of wildlife abundance. But both wildlife and the Native American population were quickly displaced by settlers and livestock in the last half of the 1800s, and the region was largely overlooked when the system of parks, refuges and reserves was created in the U.S. and Canada during the 1900s. Consequently, only 1.5% of the Northern Great Plains is now in such conservation areas.

Though the wildlife spectacle that so stirred Lewis & Clark is largely gone, much of the native grassland cover of the Northern Great Plains remains intact, making restoration of the region's rich natural heritage possible and practical. For this to happen on a significant scale, we must turn this natural heritage into a natural amenity for the benefit of local communities.

A REGION IN NEED OF NEW ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVES

The Northern Great Plains has suffered economic and demographic decline. Despite more than $24 billion in federal agricultural subsidies from 1995–2003 for the five states of the Northern Great Plains, agriculture's contribution to the region's gross state product declined from 8% in the early 1980s to just 4% today. Increasingly competitive global markets, taxpayer impatience with subsidies, and predicted climate change scenarios portend a continuation of this trend.

Two-thirds of Northern Great Plains counties lost population during the last decade, the continuation of a long-term trend. Many ranches and farms are for sale as the owners age and young people leave in search of new opportunities. As a consequence, small towns are shrinking, services are being lost, and schools are closing.



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PRIVATE LANDS RANCHING

Grasslands 2010 believes that:

- The profitability of family livestock ranching is essential to the conservation of grasslands. We want to explore innovative ways to link conservation practices on private lands to the profitability of ranching.
- Although some of our objectives may differ from those of the cattle industry, the cattle ranching heritage should be respected.
- Change in land management is most effective when it is linked to local communities and local economic development.

THE BENEFITS OF A WILDLIFE-BASED ECONOMY

A wildlife-based economy taps into the enjoyment and multiple benefits people receive from abundant wildlife, large wildlands, and healthy wetlands and streams. Restoring the native wildlife and ecosystems of the Northern Great Plains can help revitalize local economies in four major ways:

- By attracting visitors such as wildlife watchers, hunters, campers, researchers, and students. People spent $108 billion on wildlife recreation in the United States in 2001.
- By making nearby communities attractive places to live, to raise a family, and to locate a business. Multiple studies have shown that communities located near parks, reserves and similar wildlands in the West have much healthier economies than those that are not.
- Through expenditures by institutions and individuals that manage reserves and wildlife. Reserve and wildlife managers enhance local economies by employing and contracting local people, buying equipment and goods, and paying taxes or the equivalent.
- By helping ensure that agriculture and communities have healthy ecosystems that maintain fertile soils, resist noxious weeds, supply safe water, avoid the accumulation of toxic chemicals, and support other ecosystem services.

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THE GRASSLANDS 2010 STRATEGY

The Grassland Foundation and World Wildlife Fund are reaching out to build a network of individuals and institutions that share the dual goals of restoring abundant wildlife and revitalizing rural communities in the Northern Great Plains. Working with this network of collaborators, we will be carrying out the following activities over the next five years:

- Build an advisory council that will promote and guide Grasslands 2010.
- Prepare and disseminate analyses that address some of the most pressing socio-economic and biodiversity conservation issues of the region.
- Hold meetings of community leaders and experts from various disciplines to mold recommendations for policy reform, private and public land management, private-sector investment, and other mechanisms needed to meet the long-term goals of creating a system of grassland reserves, for sustaining intact and healthy native grasslands, and for integrating these with rural community development.
- Convene a Northern Great Plains conference on conservation and sustainable development in 2007 or 2008 that will bring together experts and leaders from across the region to help finalize recommendations and build broad support for policy reforms, programs and funding in both the private and public sectors that will be needed to meet the long-term goals of Grasslands 2010.
- Use the Northern Great Plains conference as a springboard for having in place by 2010 a significant portion of the reforms and financial support needed to begin implementing, with strong rural community support, large-scale development of grassland reserves and native grassland conservation.