



# Grasslands Conference Highlights Challenges & Solutions

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The Prairie Pothole Region was well represented among the more than 350 land managers, ranchers, academics, agency experts, and prairie enthusiasts gathered in Kearney, Nebraska in June, 2025 for the Seventh Biennial America's Grasslands Conference. The conference served as a forum for networking, partnership-building, presentations and discussions regarding the challenges facing grassland ecosystems, including woody encroachment and conversion to cropland.

Participants had opportunities to see some of the best intact grassland-wetland complexes on the Great Plains. Some participants took a day-long trip into the heart of the Sandhills, visiting the Dailey Angus Ranch, Paxton Ranch, and Santo Land & Cattle, where ranching families discussed managed grazing strategies, the growing use of prescribed fire, and partnerships with the US Forest Service

to conserve and protect the grasslands and fens that make the Sandhills a productive cattle region.

Other participants spent the day in the Loess Canyons in west-central Nebraska, learning how the Loess Canyons Rangeland Alliance organizes landowners around large-scale reintroduction of fire into the landscape to manage eastern red cedar encroachment in the area's steep terrain. Monitoring shows the management changes have increased grassland bird richness.

Some visited the wet meadows, tallgrass, and mixed grass prairie and restored grassland along the Platte River on Crane Trust and Nature Conservancy land.



Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary hosted a dinner for the conference at their 5,000-acre mix of native and restored prairie, riparian wetlands and farmland along five miles of the Platte River.

More than 80 presentations, discussions and workshops covered a variety of topics including planning, management, monitoring, financing, policy, conservation, and generational transition. Many touched on the impacts of woody encroachment and grassland conversion, strategies to address them, and the wildlife impacts of management decisions.

One hot topic discussed was the proposed North American Grasslands Conservation Act, an idea that was hatched and developed at past America's Grasslands conferences. The legislation would help fund and better coordinate grassland conservation efforts. The bill was introduced in the last session of Congress and is due to be reintroduced this year.

The America's Grasslands Conference is organized by the National Wildlife Federation. Last year's conference was co-hosted by the Nebraska Grazing Lands Alliance and the University of Nebraska's Center for Grasslands Studies. Planning is currently underway for the next conference in 2027. Visit the [web site](#) to learn more and to access conference proceedings.

