



Collaborating in Grassland Education

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South Dakota Grasslands Initiative Laura Kahler, Director

The South Dakota Grasslands Initiative (SDGI) is a communication and collaboration hub launched by the South Dakota Grasslands Coalition and its partners to bring together a diverse audience in support of South Dakota's grasslands. One way this collaboration occurs is through workgroups, consisting of professionals and community members who share a passion for a specific topic, such as grasslands education.

When the South Dakota Grasslands Initiative's Education Workgroup first convened in the summer of 2024, the two dozen members began identifying gaps in existing resources that help the general public better understand South Dakota's grasslands.

One idea that emerged was the development of ready-to-use educational activities that volunteers, with or without prior grasslands

knowledge, could easily use to introduce students to grasslands topics.

Each education tote contains a set of interactive activities, along with accompanying materials and guides. The magic of the development of these kits was bringing together the diverse skills of the workgroup.



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By combining individuals with expertise and passion in biology, pedagogy, graphic design, and building off statewide partnerships, the group developed and raised funds for 10 education totes, which are now available for check-out across the state.

The goal of these education totes is to build awareness of grassland ecology, foster curiosity about native species and ecological relationships, and support SDGI's broader mission of promoting grassland conservation and public understanding of grassland values—both ecological and social. By providing ready-to-use educational resources, SDGI and its partners aim to connect youth with South Dakota's prairie heritage and empower educators with engaging tools to bring this vital ecosystem into learning environments.

With all necessary supplies included, these activities have been checked out by volunteers at community events, scout leaders, after-school program educators, ranchers, and others working with youth. In the first year, over a thousand South Dakotans have been exposed to at least one of the activities in the tote, and the work group speaks to the team's collaborative work to address the need for South Dakotans to have more opportunities to connect with the grassland ecosystem of the state.



1,000+ people
reached in the
first year

Kaylee Wheeler, SDSU Extension Range Field Specialist, using the grassland education tote with 4-H youth in Tripp County, SD to discuss grassland plants and pollinators.

