



# Center for Grassland Studies

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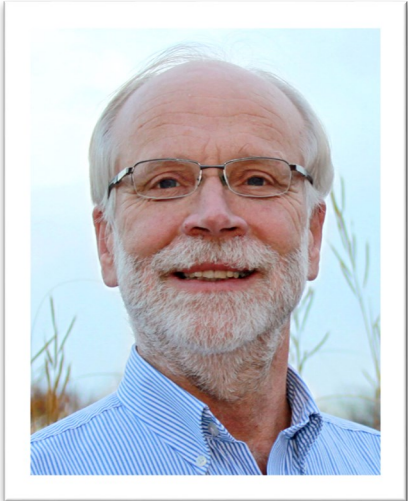
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## Leadership Transition within Center for Grassland Studies

The Center for Grassland Studies celebrated its 25th Anniversary this year. The founding Director of the Center, Dr. Martin Massengale, served in that role for the Center’s first 23 years. Seldom does an organization enjoy the benefits and prosper from such remarkable commitment and passionate leadership represented by over two decades of servant leadership. The stability in leadership and vision coupled with the inherent passion for grasslands and grassland science positioned the Center well for service to the students, faculty stakeholders, state and beyond.

Dr. Steven Waller feels it has been an honor to have followed Dr. Massengale in the role of Interim Director of the Center for Grassland Studies. The opportunities for the Center that have occurred as a result of the foundation that Dr. Massengale and others created have been extremely rewarding, both personally and professionally for Waller. Steve said, “My experience in the Center has only reaffirmed how blessed we are to be grassland stewards in the state of Nebraska. My three years in the Center have felt like a rebirth of my lasting passion for our grasslands which has always been grounded in the people. I will retire at the end of this calendar year having thoroughly enjoyed a return to my range science roots.” Steve continued, “Whether it is the administrative team in the office or the faculty, students, stakeholders, farmers and ranchers; we all become one in service to our grassland heritage. It is the people that make a difference and it is time for a new leader of the Center for Grassland Studies to make their difference, and they will.”

Dr. Walt Schacht has accepted the position of Interim Director beginning January 1, 2020. Dr. Schacht is a Professor in the Department of Agronomy and Horticulture specializing in Grassland Ecology. He is uniquely suited for the position as Interim Director. He has been a servant leader his entire career and his network of friends, colleagues, students, alumni, stakeholders, farmers and ranchers testify to the breadth and diversity of his knowledge in grasslands and the respect that he enjoys from all. Dr. Schacht has always been a difference-maker and now he will make a difference in the Center for Grassland Studies.



**Dr. Walt Schacht**

We wish Dr. Waller and Dr. Schacht well as each embarks on a new life chapter.

## Center for Grassland Studies Policy Advisory Committee

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& Horticulture, UNL

**Tom Bragg**, Department of Biology, UNO

**Craig Derickson**, USDA, Natural Resources  
Conservation Service

**Jim Douglas**, Nebraska Game & Parks  
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**Dayle Williamson**, Formerly with  
Nebraska Department of Natural Resources

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within the University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
Institute of Agriculture and Natural  
Resources. It receives guidance from a Policy  
Advisory Committee and a Citizens Advisory  
Council.

Note: Opinions expressed in this newsletter are  
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## Director's Column by Steven Waller,

Interim Director, Center for Grassland Studies

This has been a momentous year in the Center – the year that: the University celebrated 150th years of ‘Grit and Glory’, the Center for Grassland Studies celebrated its 25th Anniversary, a consulting firm was contracted to develop the first formal management plan for Nine-Mile Prairie and its environs, the Center for Resilience in Agricultural Working Lands was co-located with the Center for Grassland Studies to leverage the synergy of

integrated programming, a successful Nebraska Grazing Conference was held in Kearney despite the challenges of mid-summer flooding that was overcome by the Nebraska spirit and Kearney kindness, a review and revision of the undergraduate curriculum (Grazing Livestock Systems and Grassland Ecology and Management) was initiated, the PGA Golf Management program created a joint domestic tour with the Turfgrass and Landscape Management program within the Department of Agronomy and Horticulture, the Center’s role in facilitating and providing support for the Beef Systems Initiative (BSI) and the developing Nebraska Integrated Beef Systems Initiative (NIBSI) gained momentum, and the Center had its first comprehensive review.

The comprehensive review will serve as a benchmark in the history of the Center. It was a wonderful opportunity to showcase 25 years of accomplishments as the foundation for building a new future. The discussions and recommendations from the Review Team coupled with the guidance and aspirations of the IANR Administration will provide the Center a blueprint for the future. We are extremely grateful to the Review Team chaired by Dr. Chuck West from Texas Tech University [Dr. Randy Jackson (University of Wisconsin), Dr. Larkin Powell (IANR representative), John Craw (Nebraska PGA), Elizabeth Widder (Graduate Student) and Nicole Strand (Undergraduate Student)] and all who participated in the review in person, on call-ins, or by submitting written comments for their time and thoughtful deliberations on behalf of the Center. Their insights helped inform all of us on the opportunities of the next 25 years and beyond. The review reaffirmed that the greatest asset that the Center has is the people who care about it and our grasslands while our greatest liability is underutilizing the vast array of people who care about and care for our grassland resources. We are committed to enhancing the opportunities for all of you to have meaningful contributions in developing Center programming, enhanced venues for participation in Center leadership and a formal mechanism to receive your thoughts and ideas on a 24/7 basis.

For now, don’t hesitate to send your comments on the Center to me at swaller1@unl.edu with the Subject: Center for Grassland Studies Comments and Ideas. Thanks for being part of our greatest asset and our grasslands strongest advocacy!

## Alumni Updates: Keith Harmony, Range Scientist, Kansas State University, State Agricultural Research Center-Hays

Keith Harmony cherished his rural upbringing north of Kearney, NE. The small farm where he grew up consisted mainly of row crops and some alfalfa, but also had some range and pasture land for their small cattle herd. The many hours spent outside working the fields, tending animals, and walking pastures were valuable encounters for his later career path.

His childhood education started in a now-closed country school and was completed in nearby Kearney. From there, he went on to the Ag Honors program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL), where he focused on range, pasture, and animal production classes, much like the current Grazing Livestock Systems major before it was implemented.

Midway through his time at UNL, Keith joined the Range Club and enjoyed the many hours of study that were needed for competing in the Range Plant Identification contest and Undergraduate Range Management Exam (URME) at the international Society for Range Management meetings. In 1994 in Colorado Springs, the Range Club URME team managed a top 5 finish and Keith won the award for the highest individual combined plant ID and URME score. But, his most fond memories were of the time spent in the herbarium with fellow Range Club members and excursions to field sites and the research center at Mead to help graduate students with research projects. He was greatly influenced by putting the topics of range plants and management together in a class that traveled to actual Sandhills ranches and critically evaluated them for production, sustainability, and potential improvements.

Together, all these experiences at UNL allowed him to realize that the study, analysis and critical thinking of research were something that he liked to do, and that he just may be able to do research as a career in a field he especially enjoyed, range and pasture.

After graduating from UNL, he immediately pursued a graduate degree from Iowa State University in which his research projects and coursework incorporated forages with ecology. That topic combination was inspired by his appreciation of the complexity of rangelands gained from his studies at UNL.



Keith Harmony, Range Scientist

Keith is now a Professor of Range Science for Kansas State University (KSU), and has been stationed at the KSU Agricultural Research Center in Hays, KS since 1999. At KSU, he oversees the use of nearly 6,000 acres of western Kansas rangeland at four locations, and, along with the Research Center's beef scientist, manages 325 cow/calf pairs, 100 replacement females, and varying numbers of stocker steers for use in grazing studies. While at KSU, he has conducted trials on different stocking systems for beef cow/calf production or stocker calf production, and how these different stocking systems have affected land productivity and rangeland resources of their research units.

During his career, he's had many research interests, including several grazing studies, complementary forage evaluations, biofuel production, suppression or control of weedy species such as honey locust and old world bluestems, and even the breaking strength of stems of different grass species. The techniques learned in his rangeland analysis class and field lab at UNL nearly 25 years ago have been some of the most used tools and skills still implemented today in his research in Kansas.

Keith is married to Andrea, and they have two children, ages 11 and 14. When not working on research projects, he and his wife are constantly following their kids to church, sports, and school events. Otherwise, he spends as much time as he can at the nearest fishing hole chasing largemouth and smallmouth bass, and still tries to identify any plant he comes across in his daily excursions.

*“Techniques learned in rangeland analysis class and field lab at UNL nearly 25 years ago have been some of the most used tools and skills still implemented today.” — K. Harmony*



## 2019 Nebraska Grazing Conference Highlights by Daren Redfearn, Chair,

Nebraska Grazing Conference Advisory Committee

The original goal for this year's Nebraska Grazing Conference was to build on enhancing traditional grazing lands management practices and provide insight for implementing practices that support the stewardship of grasslands and grazing lands resources throughout Nebraska and the Great Plains. This year's conference was a bit "different" than some of the past conferences due to the flooding that occurred in Kearney during early July. The only thing that remained rather constant was the program.



Participants listening to one of the 18 speaker presentations at the Nebraska Grazing Conference session.

The Nebraska Grazing Conference Advisory Committee did a superb job this year identifying speakers for a comprehensive learning experience. Several topics were on the radar for a couple of years. This year, we assembled a dynamic group of speakers to address themes in *Rangeland Health*, *Grazinglands Management*, *Winter Feeding*, and *Rangeland Resilience*.

Given the circumstances surrounding this year's extreme weather, the conference was greatly successful. The conference site and hotels, as well as catering had to be completely recreated two weeks prior to the conference when the original hotel and conference center notified us that renovations would not be completed before the conference. **Margo McKendree** in the Center for Grassland Studies and **Brent Plugge** with Nebraska Extension in Buffalo County worked to ensure a successful conference.

One conference highlight was the video presentation from **Jim O'Rourke**, who along with **Lora O'Rourke** were the 2018 Leopold Conservation Award winners from the RuJoDen Ranch in Chadron, Nebraska. Jim gave a passionate

presentation on Grazing Lands Conservation and Rangeland Health, which he described as a lifestyle. One attendee summed it best, "his message on conservation is invaluable and his message resonates with everyone who works with rangeland."

**Rex Peterson** of Plum Thicket Farms in Gordon, NE, said of the conference, "I was delighted when the field trip tour at The Nature Conservancy's Derr House was added to this year's agenda. Chris Helzer did a great job finding plants to show us in the restored prairie along the Platte River. The demonstration of diverse wildlife habitat from both their patch burn grazing and their open gate rotation system examples were a fantastic bonus. I found this year's conference thought provoking in that it brought me to question several of the notions held concerning grazing."



Chris Helzer, The Nature Conservancy, leads pre-conference plant identification tour.

We were honored to have Vice Chancellor **Mike Boehm**, the Harlan Vice Chancellor for the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Vice President for Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska, offer comments to the conference attendees. Since he arrived in January 2017, he has been a strong supporter of the Center for Grassland Studies, along with the Nebraska Grazing Conference.

There were 170 attendees at the 2019 Nebraska Grazing Conference, which was a 30% increase over the 2018 conference. Over 60% of conference survey respondents (n=85) indicated attendance at three fewer NGC events with approximately one-half of these attending their first conference. **(Story Continued on Page 5)**

## Conference Highlights (Continued from Page 4)



Stiff sunflower seen on the plant identification tour.

Approximately 84% of all conference survey respondents indicated that they were likely to very likely to make changes from knowledge gained at this conference. Survey respondents specified owning, managing, or influencing 1.4 million grazing lands acres with hay production and cropland grazing representing an additional 27,000 and 45,000 acres, respectively. Survey respondents also owned, managed, or influenced 42,019 beef cows, 1,300 bison, and over 4,000 small ruminants. Estimated knowledge gained from the 2019 Nebraska Grazing Conference would increase profitability \$20.90 per head on an average herd size of 1,050 beef cows. While the total program value for the Nebraska Grazing would likely be greater, program value for 40 conference respondents who owned, managed, or influenced beef cows only was over \$875,000. This speaks to the quality of the program and also to the future of managing the grassland resources in Nebraska and the Great Plains.

Mark Your Calendar...

Nebraska Grazing Conference, August 10-12, 2020  
Younes Conference Center, Kearney, NE

## Nine-Mile Prairie: Now and Forever by Steve Waller, Interim Director, Center for Grassland Studies

The Nine-Mile Prairie Advisory Council has been exploring opportunities to collaborate with the City of Lincoln's Prairie Corridor on Haines Branch project as well as obtaining formal integration of Nine-Mile Prairie into the planning and vision of the Lincoln and Lancaster County 2040 Comprehensive Plan. As part of these discussions, the importance of land use buffers surrounding Nine-Mile Prairie became an immediate priority to preserve for posterity the integrity of the Nine-Mile Prairie. The goal is to encourage and facilitate land management that is compatible with prairie conservation at Nine-Mile Prairie and sustainable grassland management in the surrounding public and privately-owned landscape through an extended management and utilization philosophy that creates a lasting land buffer. The development of a long range management plan for Nine-Mile Prairie and management strategies for its surrounding environs is essential for long-term prairie preservation and will honor Nebraska's prairie legacy while ensuring that all future generations have the opportunity to enjoy and learn from our native grasslands.



Nine-Mile Prairie landscape.  
© Mike Farrell 2017

The Nine-Mile Prairie Advisory Council contracted with The Flatwater Group, an environmental consulting firm with relevant prairie experience, to develop long-range management strategies for the Nine-Mile Prairie and its surrounding areas. This will be the first long-range plan for Nine-Mile Prairie made possible by a donor supported endowment. The recommendations should be available by the end of the calendar year.

## GRLS Internship: Intern and Provider Perspectives



Colten Bergt

The Grazing Livestock Systems (GRLS) degree program provides a unique opportunity for students to obtain hands-on experience and training in areas related to livestock, range, and economics management. Part of the student experience is to complete a required internship between their junior and senior year in school.

**Colten Bergt** is a senior from Amherst, NE pursuing degrees in Grazing Livestock Systems and Animal Science. This summer, Colten interned with **Jim Jenkins** of Callaway, NE and gained experience in how to market cattle, utilize a management-intensive rotational grazing system, and the importance of keeping good livestock records. The Jenkins enterprise consists of JJ & SE Jenkins, LLC, which handles land, equipment, and facilities, and Ten Cattle Company, LLC, focusing on running stockers and finishing between 2,500 and 3,000 cattle.

Colten, who comes from a cow/calf and feedlot operation, obtained a new look at a different stage of raising cattle. "I enjoyed gaining the experience of a different cattle sector such as the stocker business," said Colten. Learning about and discussing how Jim markets cattle was a benefit for Colten. Jim had Colten sitting in on weekly calls to his broker to learn about the market's movement and how and when to maneuver within the market to minimize risk. "It seemed like we talked cattle and corn markets nearly every other day during the internship," commented Colten. Jim echoed this idea noting, "Colten proved himself to be well read and open to discussing different ideas. Because of his maturity and interest, we spent a lot of time discussing trade issues, tax policy, and other societal issues impacting the beef industry."



Jim Jenkins

Jim began working with interns because he believes in making an investment in youth by giving them opportunities to hone their skills in production agriculture. One of his goals for interns is to make sure they understand that a successful business requires good execution across a number of disciplines, such as marketing and risk management, herd health, pasture management, and finance and accounting. "We want interns to understand that a successful cattle operation is about much more than taking care of cattle," said Jenkins. Additionally, Jenkins understands that college students working toward an agricultural degree can bring valuable insights to his operation based on their own experience and education.

A second goal Jenkins has for the interns is for them to recognize the unique opportunities and challenges presented to businesses, which he speaks about often and openly. "The combination of classroom training and frontline experience allows students to gain a more complete understanding of the challenges they will face," according to Jim. Interns get to see the good, the bad, and the ugly of every operation, especially over a three-month internship.

Jenkins tried to make sure Colten experienced all aspects of summer ranch activity. This included rotating cattle through nearly 30 pastures, helping chute side with herd health and monitoring weight gain, checking on salt and minerals, repairing and building fence, and banking tanks and repairing water systems. Learning how to ride and care for horses was also a new experience for Colten, and one he really enjoyed.

When asked what he took away from the internship experience Colten said, "One of the biggest benefits I gained from working with Jim is learning how to be a better grazer." Colten noted the amount of time Jim puts into making grazing decisions; and he could see many of Jim's grazing practices working on his family's operation. He gained insights into how cattle groups can be combined to provide less breeding cost per cow and to achieve a greater harvest efficiency of grass with more even grazing distribution and more recovery time. "I also plan to keep records of each cow's calf crop on our own operation each year," shared Colten. He also saw how using electronic identification to track weight gain and performance will allow him to better manage his herd.



## Clubs Welcome New Members

The Grazing Livestock Systems Club and the Range Management Club are two of over 500 clubs for students to become involved in at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Student clubs provide a range of professional networking and social activities to enrich student life. Both the Grazing Livestock Systems Club and Range Management Club welcome new members and invite them to come to a meeting to learn more and meet current members.

### Grazing Livestock Systems Club



Officers for 2019-2020 include (L-R): **Kate Krebs** (Monticello, WI), secretary; **Sam Steffen** (Beatrice, NE), president; **Miranda Mueller** (Wahoo, NE), vice president; and **Matt Hoffman** (Plainview, NE), treasurer. Not pictured, **Jessi Sayers** (Clarkson, NE), event planning and recruitment.

Follow the Grazing Livestock Systems Club on Twitter, @unlgrazing, or on Facebook, @unlgrazinglivestocksystems.

### Range Management Club



Officers for 2019-2020 include (L-R): **Ryley Johnson** (Hyannis, NE), primary programmer; **Asha Scheideler** (Scotia, NE), president; **Nicole Strand** (Wauneta, NE), recruiter; and **Nick Sanders** (Dwight, NE), vice president/treasurer.

Follow the Range Management Club on Instagram, @unl\_range\_management\_club, or on Facebook, @unlrangemanagementclub.

## PGA Golf Management Students Go Global

**Kyle Murray** (Beatrice, NE), **Jason Palmer** (Elm Creek, NE), and **Spencer Schaulis** (Lincoln, NE) were three of 11 PGA Golf Management University Program students selected by the PGA of America for the 2019 PGA Global Internship Program. Murray and Palmer interned at The Grove Golf Course in the United Kingdom, while Schaulis was at Royal Wellington Golf Club in New Zealand. The PGA Global Internship Program was launched in 2018 and had five students interning abroad. Students are chosen from any of the 18 accredited universities across the nation for placement in leading golf clubs around the world; the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's PGAM Golf Management Program is one of the accredited program institutions.

## Congratulations Graduate!

The Center for Grassland Studies wishes the following August 2019 graduate much success on her future endeavors.

❖ *Grazing Livestock Systems:* **Emily Gill** (Gaithersburg, MD).

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## Windh to Focus on GRLS / GECM Recruitment

The Center for Grassland Studies welcomes **Jessica Windh** as its Grazing Livestock Systems' Graduate Research Assistant. Jessica will work to recruit new undergraduate students to the Grazing Livestock Systems (GRLS) and Grassland Ecology and Management (GECM) degree programs. Jessica said, "I am excited to help increase the visibility of these two degree programs and bring new students to the programs, as well as to work with the current students in both the GRLS Club and the Range Management Club."

Jessica is from Reedley, California, a small farming town in the Central Valley. She studied at the University of Wyoming (UW) earning her B.S. in Rangeland Ecology and Watershed Management and minoring in Ag Economics, and her M.S. in Agricultural and Applied Economics with a focus on rangeland economics. At UW, Jessica was involved as a mentor to undergraduate students in her role as a UW Range Club advisor, coach for the Undergraduate Range Management Exam (URME), and as an ambassador to the UW College of Ag. She was also involved in the student activities committees for both the state and national levels of the Society for Range Management.

Jessica is pursuing her Ph.D. in Agricultural Economics at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to support her research interests in sustainable ranching enterprises, and what makes them successful economically.



**Jessica Windh, Graduate Research Assistant, Grazing Livestock Systems**