



SUSTAINABLE RANCHING INITIATIVE | 2018 IMPACT REPORT



WWF NORTHERN GREAT PLAINS PROGRAM



THE SUSTAINABLE RANCHING INITIATIVE

Since 2011, WWF's **Sustainable Ranching Initiative (SRI)** has identified challenges and opportunities to help build the resilience of ranchers across the **Northern Great Plains**. Each year, WWF evaluates the impact that we are having on communities and biodiversity and identifies new areas where the SRI can have the greatest influence.

Nearly 91 million acres of privately managed and intact grassland remain in the region, providing for species of conservation concern like the greater sage-grouse, Sprague's pipit, and mountain plover. Because >70% of the region's intact grassland is owned and maintained by cattle ranchers, WWF is working to help ranchers sustain their livelihoods and, in turn, conserve the region's grasslands. WWF believes that generating a better working environment for ranching will secure the future of the region and its wildlife.

The SRI team has built relationships with ranchers, as well as industry groups, corporations, agencies, and non-profit groups to help conserve grasslands at a meaningful scale. WWF works to: improve the resilience of ranching communities, develop market forces that reward sustainable beef production, and understand the benefits and impacts of beef production. Despite the increasingly complex environment for ranching and grasslands, the future is hopeful as collaborations between ranchers and conservation groups have grown and demonstrated greater power working together.

THE SRI TEAM



NANCY LABBE

**Manager
Sustainable Ranching Initiative
Northern Great Plains Program**

Nancy leads the SRI, working to maintain grasslands for generations by identifying and accelerating the use of more ecologically and economically sustainable land management practices. She also works to influence national and global market-place efforts on sustainable beef production through the US Roundtable for Sustainable Beef and other national platforms.

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KEVIN ELLISON

**Grassland Ecologist
Northern Great Plains Program**

Working with over 60 ranchers in the region, Kevin uses bird surveys to quantify the benefits of ranching for grassland birds, working from the level of species' populations down to individual ranches.

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CLAIRE HOOD

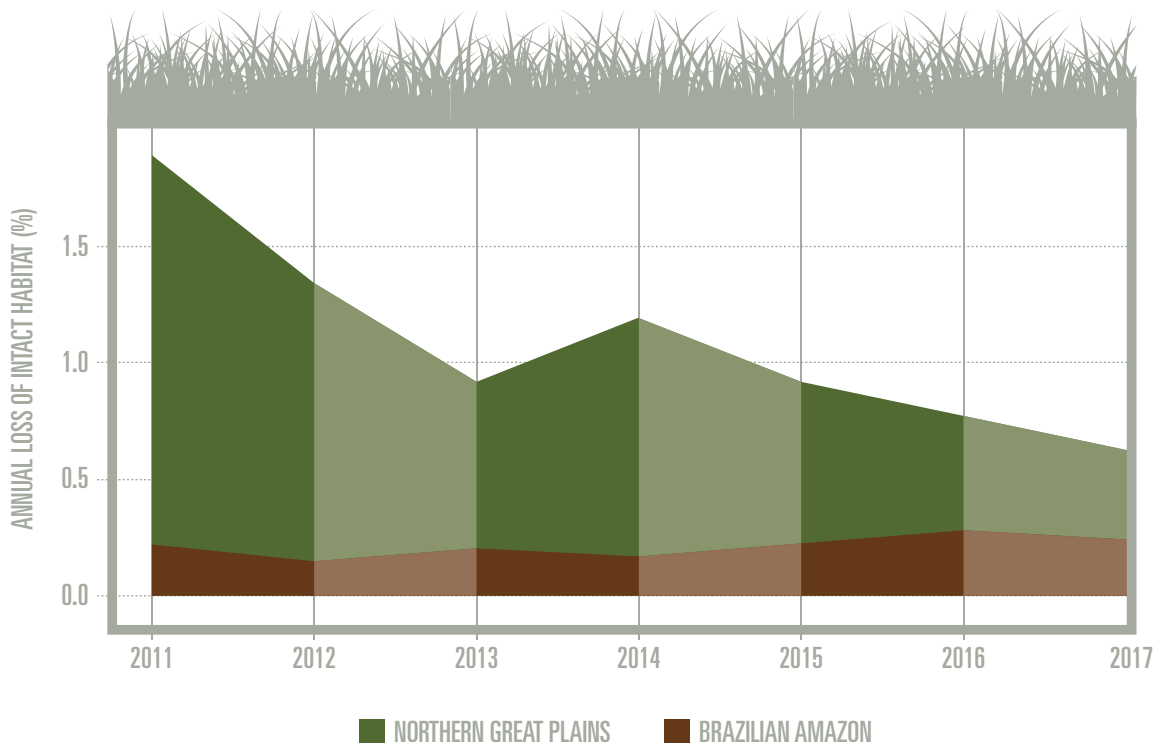
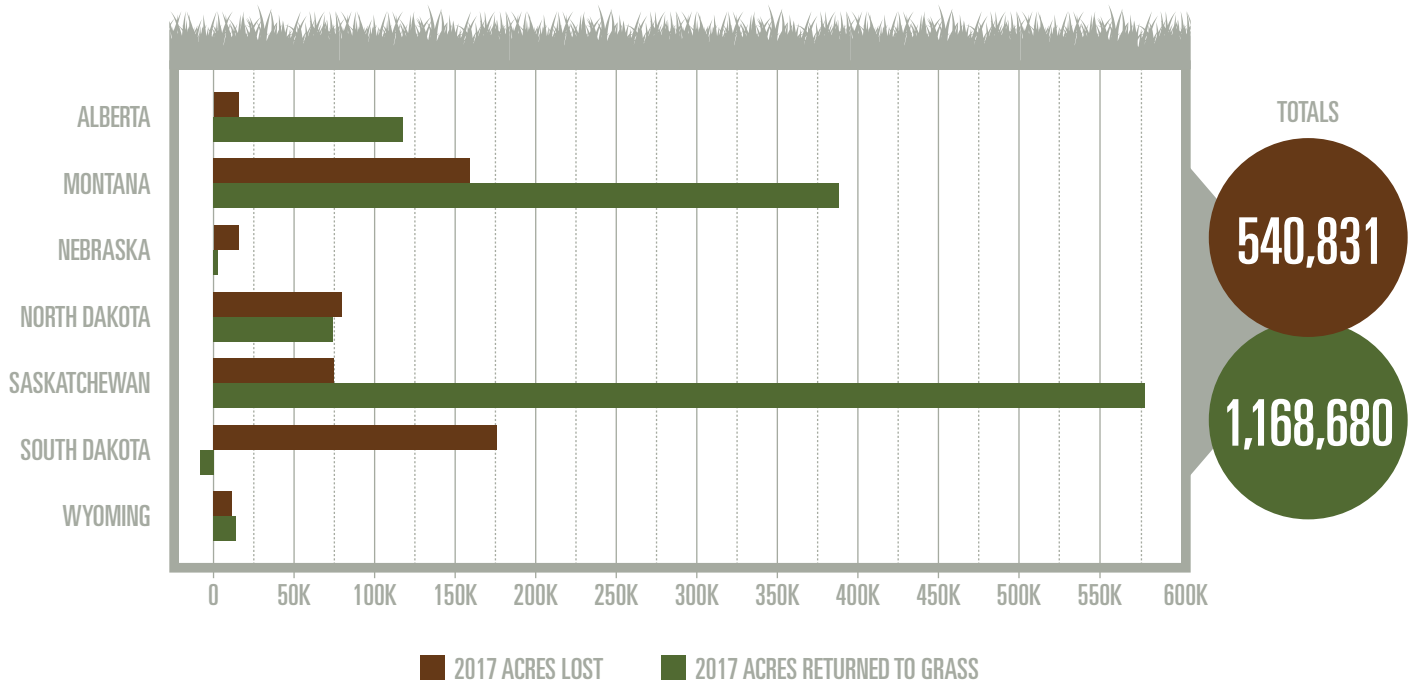
**Program Officer
Northern Great Plains Program**

Claire oversees the SRI capacity building and education programs as well as evolving work around conservation finance and financial tools for ranchers.

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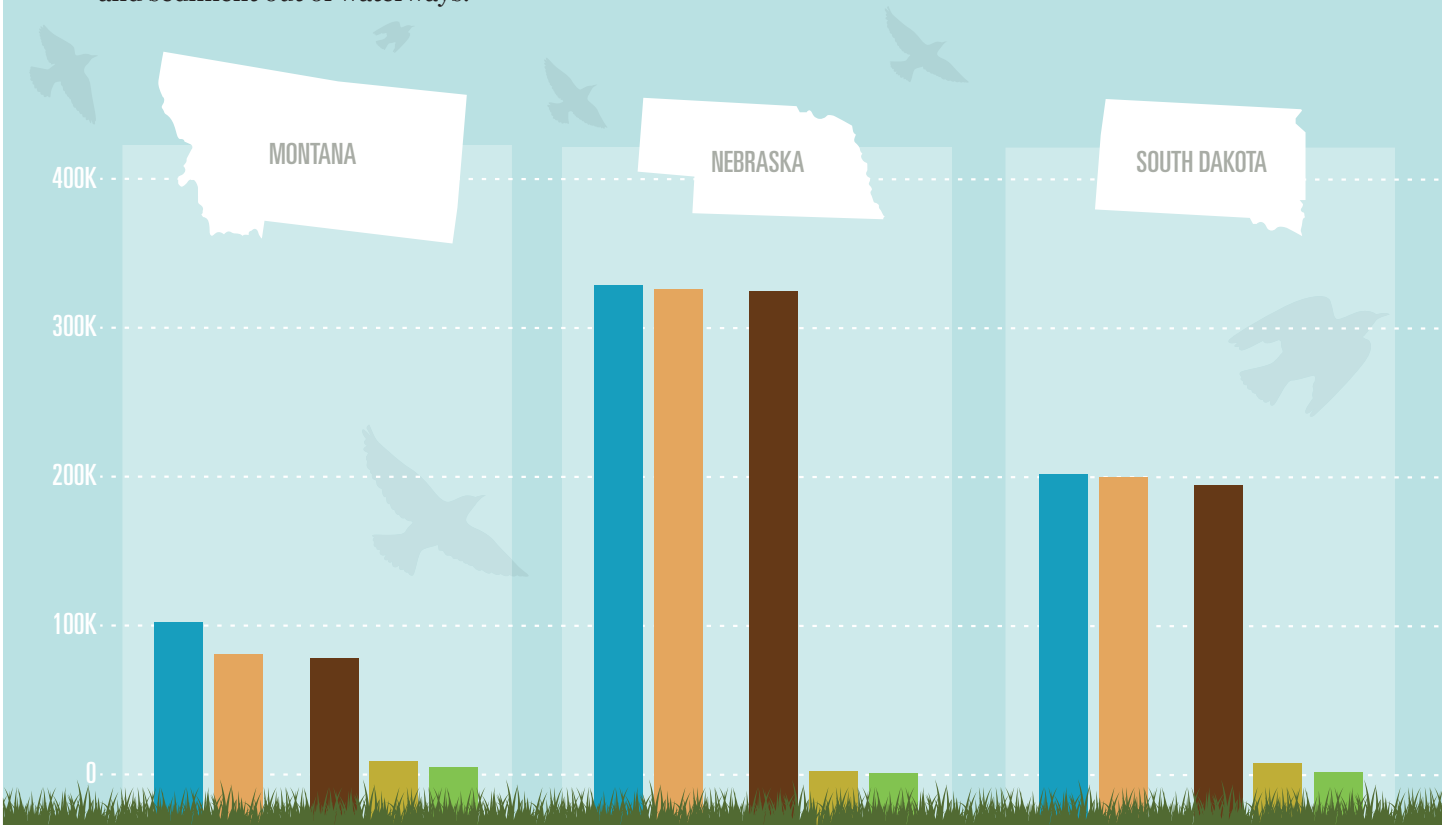
WHERE WWF WORKS AND WHY

The Northern Great Plains span over 180 million acres across five U.S. states and two Canadian provinces. WWF has prioritized this region because of its intact habitats and biodiversity. As with grasslands globally, the region's grasslands are threatened by conversion to annual row crops. The Northern Great Plains are losing more intact habitat each year in relation to its size than the rainforests in the Brazilian Amazon. In 2017 alone, more than a half million acres were converted to cropland.

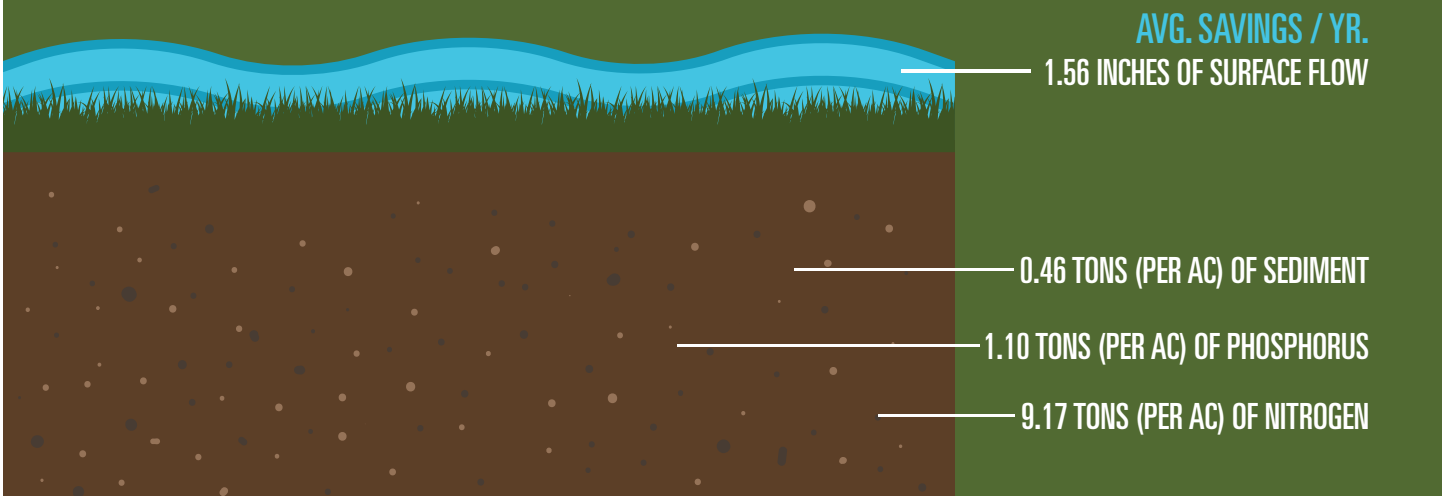


Beef production, when managed appropriately, results in conservation benefits. Grazing maintains the health of grasslands, improves soil quality, and preserves open space and wildlife habitat. Beef production also provides social benefits, sustaining livelihoods and community vibrancy in rural areas. WWF has surveyed birds on over 60 ranches since 2015. These participating ranchers maintain **>600,000 acres of grassland** that provide for grassland birds as well as keep tons of phosphorous, nitrogen, and sediment out of waterways.

- TOTAL ACRES IN BIRD SURVEY RANCHES
- ACRES OF SUFFICIENT CONNECTEDNESS TO SUPPORT BIRD SPECIES OF CONCERN
- ACRES ON LOW QUALITY SOILS
- ACRES ON MODERATE QUALITY SOILS
- ACRES ON HIGH QUALITY SOILS

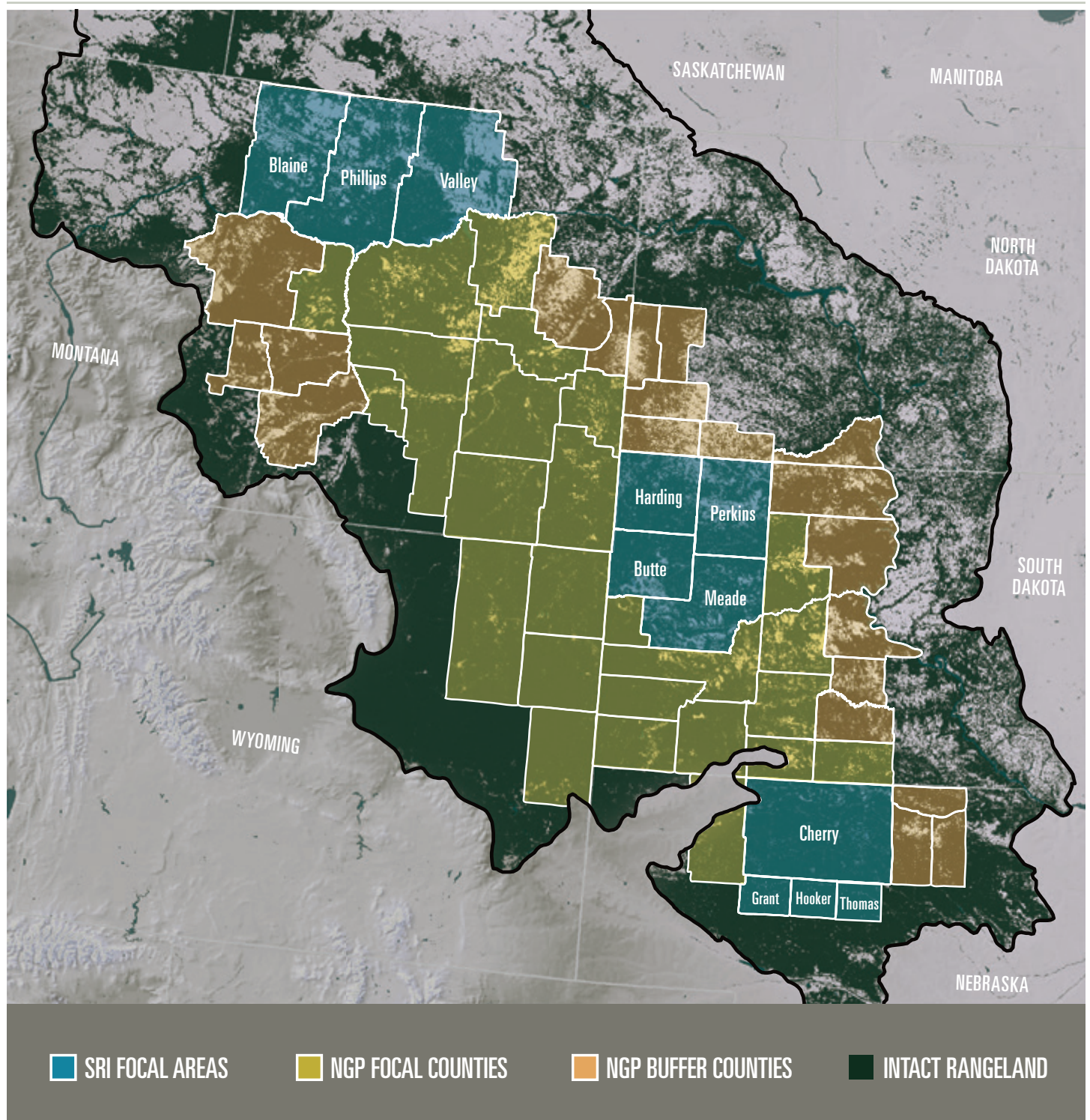


THESE >600,000 ACRES OF RANCH LANDS PROTECT WATER QUALITY AND LIMIT FLOODING FOR DOWNSTREAM COMMUNITIES



NORTHERN GREAT PLAINS SUSTAINABLE RANCHING INITIATIVE

WWF’s US geographic focus is on 35 priority counties (an area covering almost 61 million acres), comprising the areas of highest species diversity and the most intact grasslands. Our initial engagement with ranchers has centered on 11 counties (over 19 million acres) in three focal areas: north-central Montana, northwestern South Dakota and the Nebraska Sandhills.

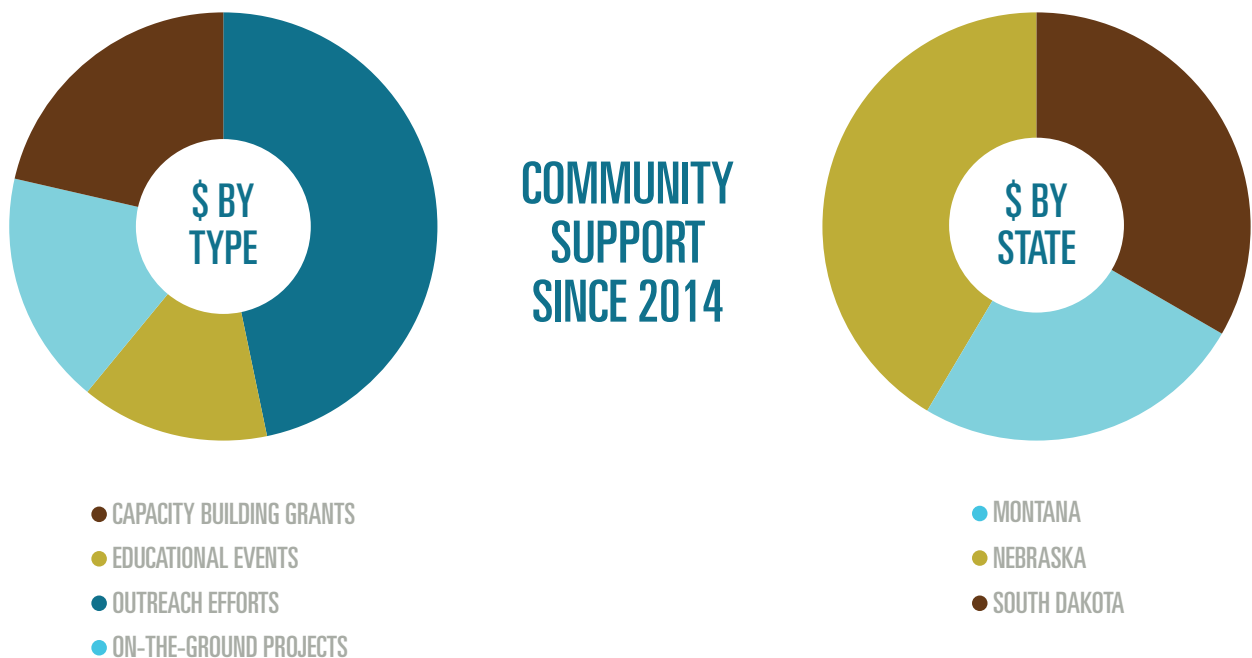


SRI IMPACT

The SRI has helped to build community resilience and develop markets for sustainably produced beef.

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

WWF invests in ranchers and rancher-led groups to build local capacity and community resilience, thereby enabling communities to develop local solutions to issues. Since 2014, WWF has been providing support to ranchers across the region through capacity-building grants, sponsorships for educational events, and support for on-the-ground projects that maintain grasslands. WWF sponsorship of rancher educational events **has reached over 1,200 participants since 2014**. Collectively, WWF's community resilience efforts **have provided over \$180,000 in targeted support to ranching communities and impacted over one million acres**.



ONE PRODUCER'S STORY ON THE IMPACT OF OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

Change takes time, and this story began long before WWF showed up, but it is a clear example of why WWF is investing in groups like the South Dakota Grasslands Coalition to scale up their impact.

A decade ago, Brett Nix and his father ran a mixed farming and ranching operation in Jones County, in west-central South Dakota. They had adopted no-till agriculture on their cropland, but conventional wisdom of the day said no-till required more chemical inputs. Over time, Brett began to wonder what impacts pesticides might be having on his soil. Additionally, at that time, making ends meet meant the Nix family worked six to seven days a week, sunup to sundown, and even hired up to four additional employees in the summer. This was unsustainable, and something had to change.

In 2010, Brett joined the SDGC and heard Jim Garrish speak about holistic land management. This prompted Brett to learn as much as he could on holistic land management. Brett and his family sat down and defined their goals for their land – to have more time for family, friends, and their community; to continually improve the ecological health of their land; and to improve their financial situation. Today, the Nix ranch is 100% grazing land, and he feeds hay for three months instead of seven. He has adopted a more ecologically sound approach to land management. Moreover, as his soil and grassland health have improved, annual wildlife populations seem to fluctuate less than elsewhere.

DEVELOPING MARKET FORCES

WWF is a founding member of the US Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (USRSB). Together with NGOs, industry stakeholders, scientists, and others, WWF is developing programs to measurably and transparently improve beef's environmental, social, and economic sustainability. Over one-fifth (21.8%) of all US beef cows come from the five-state region where WWF works. WWF partners with the world's largest food companies because they have the power to drive more sustainable production of meat and feed at a scale that is meaningful for grassland conservation.

WWF works within the beef industry to help:

- › identify and prioritize risks;
- › create more transparent supply chains and traceable products;
- › engage suppliers and buyers to drive sector-wide progress; and
- › monitor efforts to improve production and sourcing.

USRSB MEMBERS REPRESENT:

80%
OF BEEF PROCESSED



30%
OF THE CATTLE HERD



28%
OF U.S. CONSUMERS



USRSB FOUNDED



USRSB MEMBERS DEVELOP SUSTAINABILITY METRICS



WWF BEGINS PILOT PROJECT IN MONTANA, TESTING USRSB METRICS AND SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT GUIDES WITH COSTCO, JBS USA, AND HY-PLAINS FEEDYARD

2015

2016

2017

2018

2019



USRSB MEMBERS DEVELOP HIGH PRIORITY INDICATORS



USRSB MEMBERS DEVELOP SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT GUIDES



LOOKING FORWARD

While much progress has been made, there is more to do.

The SRI team will strive to better:

Support ranching as a resilient livelihood in the Northern Great Plains

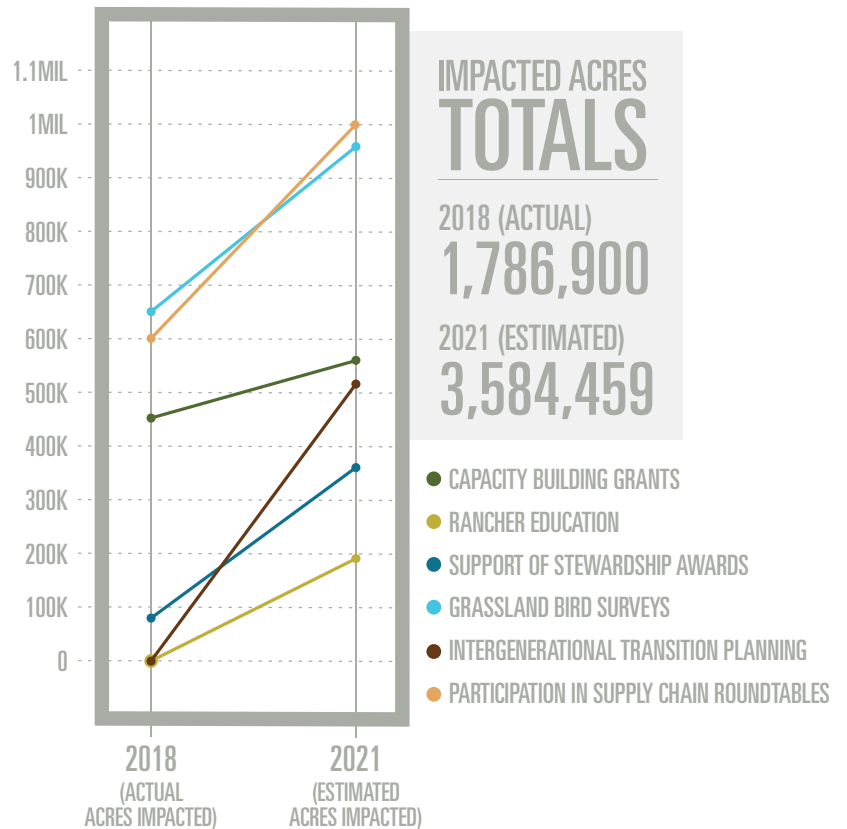
- › Build the capacity of rancher-led groups, supporting rancher education, and recognizing exemplary land stewardship.
- › Empower ranchers with data about bird species on their lands and the connections between their grazing management and grassland condition.
- › Initiate a pilot project that places a “transition facilitator” with ranch families in Nebraska.
- › Develop an initiative for financial support to beginning ranchers.

Ensure market stakeholders value intact grasslands and demand sustainable beef

- › Improve market sustainability by working with the beef industry through the US Roundtable for Sustainable Beef and develop criteria for sustainable beef practices.
- › Begin a pilot project in Montana that tests the work of the US Roundtable for Sustainable Beef and demonstrates its usefulness to producers and industry.

Communicate the importance of intact grasslands to consumers, conservation groups, industry, and policymakers

- › Measure carbon trade-offs of keeping grazed grasslands intact versus the carbon released when grasslands are converted to crops.
- › Highlight the biodiversity that thrives in working landscapes.
- › Promote policy that will strengthen the resilience of ranching communities and grasslands.



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