

# Grazing the Hill

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## Grasslands at the National Zoo

So here are the questions. How would you describe grasslands? And, where are they located in the United States? In a survey conducted at the National Zoological Park in Washington, D.C. to determine the extent of visitor knowledge of grasslands, 33% of visitors said that they would use the words "tall grass" or "wild grass" to describe a grassland to someone who had never seen one. Of those surveyed, 45% described grasslands as "wide open spaces" and used the word "prairie", "savanna" and "plains" to complete their descriptions.

In general, according to Kathy Lehnhardt, Zoo audience evaluator, visitors are aware of the North American prairie and the Great Plains environment. However, a large majority of children between the ages of six and fifteen have difficulty locating the region on a map of the United States. Only 28% could correctly point out the Great Plains.

The top response to the word "prairie" was "prairie dogs". The Zoo has long known that prairie dogs are popular with visitors.

The above survey is being used in the design of the first phase of the Zoo's Grassland exhibit, according to Melissa Gaulding with the National Zoo's Department of Exhibit Interpretation. Gaulding points out that the first phase of the Zoo's Grasslands exhibit is currently under construction, and will open to the general public in the late summer of 1998. The exhibit will feature prairie dogs in a 100 foot enclosure in front of a bison paddock. Gaulding points out that an important task of Zoo exhibit developers is to help young people understand where the Great Plains are located and the ecology of the region.

This exhibit will be another reason to visit the National Zoo when you visit Washington, D.C. after the Grasslands exhibit is completed.

## Fee Busby Moves to Washington

Fee Busby has been appointed on an interagency personnel agreement from Winrock International as Deputy Chief for Science and Technology for the Natural Resources Conservation Service in the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In this job, he will be responsible for conservation technology development and dissemination for programs in ecological sciences, resource economics and social sciences, and conservation engineering. He is also responsible for NRCS technical institutes and centers including the Grazing Land Technology Institute.

Fee says that the job presents some interesting challenges and opportunities in all of the disciplines in the science and technology area, including several in the grazing lands program. He indicates that several of the USDA's and

NRC's priorities are directed toward enhancing the knowledge base about and improving the management of the nation's grazing lands. Among these are developing inventory strategies to assess the health of the nation's rangelands, control the spread of and treat existing infestations of noxious weeds, implementation efforts to improve the condition of riparian ecosystems. These are joint efforts of NRCS, Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and several other agencies and organizations, including the Society for Range Management.

Another high priority of NRCS, according to Busby, is locally led planning. This is an effort to get local people to focus on resource problems and opportunities they consider to be important. He considers this to be another phrase to describe coordinated resource management, a concept that SRM has promoted for several years. Busby hopes SRM members will get involved in locally led planning throughout the country. Busby says that the agency will also emphasize farm and ranch conservation planning and technical assistance. This is the work that is often required to accomplish the objectives established by local planning groups. He points out that this is the kind of assistance that the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative has asked the agency to provide the owners and managers of private grazing lands. SRM is an active participant in the Initiative.

Fee's address is USDA/NRCS; South Ag Building, Room 5004, 12th and Independence, Washington, DC 20250. His phone number is 202-720-4630. The fax is 202-720-7710. His e-mail is busby@nrcs.usda.gov.

## SRM in Washington

SRM President John Buckhouse established contacts and discussed key issues with national leaders and officials while visiting Washington, DC in late March. While in the Nation's capital, President Buckhouse met with officials and agency heads in USDA and USDI. Buckhouse emphasized SRM's desire to collaborate with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Forest Service (FS) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) on the March 14 memorandum of understanding between the agencies addressing rangeland health. He also met with Bob Robinson, Administrator for the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) and later with A.J. Dye with CSREES. Later, President Buckhouse met with Fee Busby in his new role with NRCS and then with Paul Johnson, Chief, NRCS, and Dennis Thompson, Rangeland Specialist with NRCS. Johnson unveiled a new document, "*Geography of Hope*" that he will use to cast a new vision for NRCS. In the evening, President Buckhouse attended a Public Lands Council Congressional Reception held in the Capitol for Western Congressmen.

## **Pulling Together - A National Strategy for Invasive Plant Management**

The National Pulling Together Initiative is now underway. On April 15, the concept was introduced at a Congressional Sportsman Caucus breakfast sponsored by the Invasive Weed Awareness Coalition (IWAC) and attended by 60 people interested in the Initiative. Those attending were told that; "Invasive plants and wildlife don't mix".

On April 29, IWAC again sponsored a breakfast for members of Congress and staffers to initiate an action plan for the National Strategy and announce grant proposal winners. There were 75 in attendance. Attendees were informed that on rangelands and wildlands, invasive plants crowd out more desirable and nutritious forage plants, cause erosion problems and may poison some wildlife and livestock species. A new document, "*Pulling Together: National Strategy for Invasive Plant Management*" was introduced to members of Congress and staffers, presenting a nationwide strategy of prevention, control and restoration. Attendees were informed that the National Strategy will focus on identifying potentially invasive plant problems and will outline measures to control or eradicate those pests that are already a problem. Currently 110 organizations and agencies endorse the strategy. Participants were told that Federal, state and local agencies and affiliated organizations have an intense interest in supporting a nationwide Strategy. SRM was one of the first groups to recognize the importance of a national plan by endorsing the Strategy.

In conjunction with the National Strategy, a fifteen member panel representing coalition partners, ranked 101 proposals and came to consensus on funding 24 of them. Results were announced April 29 in conjunction with a Congressional Breakfast in the Rayburn House Office Building attended by members of Congress and staffers. About \$482,700 was matched with \$773,614 of challenge funds to fund the winning proposals. There were several excellent proposals not funded due to lack of funds. The 24 funded projects will be located in California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Massachusetts, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming.

A 15 member Pulling Together Steering Committee has been formed to provide guidance to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) in its role of coordinating the 24 projects and providing guidance for next years' granting process.

IWAC is a group of public and private sector interests working together to initiate activities that focuses on informing others of significant issues associated with the National Strategy. On June 6, IWAC will again sponsor a Congressional tour to inform those attending of the need for the Pulling Together Initiative.

### **Graduate Student Paper Contest Winners!**

Following are the winners of the Graduate Student Paper Contest at the 1997 Annual Meeting in Rapid City, South Dakota which was held in February.

#### **Ph.D.**

1st Place: **Carolyn K. Yoder**, University of Nevada-Reno

2nd Place: **Fernando Rivas-Pantoja**, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

#### **M.S.**

1st Place: **Lance Vermeire**, Oklahoma State University

2nd Place: **J. Scott Crockett**, Oklahoma State University

Congratulations to all of our winners.