

Annual Patch Burn-Grazing Meeting Successful in Bringing Agency Managers and Ranchers Together

The 2013 annual patch burn-grazing meeting was held in Gary, South Dakota at the historic Buffalo Ridge Resort. This year's theme was 'Patch Burn-Grazing in Fragmented Landscapes'. The meeting was coordinated by South Dakota State University Extension, The Nature Conservancy, The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Pheasants Forever, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Additional regional sponsors included the Great Plains Fire Science Exchange, the Tallgrass Prairie/Oak Savanna Fire Science Consortium, and The North American Grouse Partnership. Local sponsors included the South Dakota Grassland Coalition, The MN Prairie Chicken Society, The Coteau Hills Chapter of Pheasants Forever, Millborn Seeds, and Dakota Ridge Pheasants.

As usual, the meeting was held in a location that allowed participants to visit local patch burn-grazing projects while hearing from knowledgeable speakers involved in patch burn grazing from across the country. Over 100 participants from 9 states were in attendance for the two day event. Along with about 20 private producers from SD and MN, the crowd included public land managers, private contractors, biologists, and state and government agency program managers.

Day one began with an introduction to the concepts of traditional patch burn-grazing (PBG) by Ryan Harr, Private Lands Biologist for the Iowa DNR and former Iowa State University Professor. Harr not only gave a brief history of PBG, but also reviewed the contexts in which PBG can be an effective management tool. Harr was careful to point out that a PBG system is not itself a goal, but rather a tool to achieve certain management goals and objectives.

The remainder of the day was dedicated to the Chippewa Prairie complex located near Appleton, MN. Speaker sessions began with presentations from Dave Trauba (MN DNR), Pete Bauman (SDSU Extension), Joe Blastick (TNC) and Fred Harris (MN DNR). These speakers introduced the audience to the history, management goals, infrastructural design, and monitoring projects associated with the nearly 3,000-acre Chippewa Prairie patch burn-grazing project. Chippewa Prairie is a joint project area between the MN DNR and TNC that dates back several decades. Over the last few years, the two organizations have developed one of the largest patch burn-grazing projects in the northern plains, while also pioneering innovative ways to work with private producers.

The afternoon consisted of an on-site field trip to the Chippewa Prairie project area where attendees were able to evaluate the pros and cons of PBG implementation. Participants were treated to presentations and discussion led by managers and MN DNR research staff that focused on PBG impacts to birds, reptiles, amphibians, rare plants, invasive species, and overall prairie/pasture health. In addition, local producer Randy Rolfsmeier shared his views on the project in relation to cattle management and performance. Rolfsmeier has runs his herd of registered Angus cattle on the project area in return for dedicating his home ranch to rest and habitat development through a unique contract relationship known as 'grassbanking'. Under this type of arrangement, a cattle producer agrees not to utilize portions of the home ranch in exchange for access to forage on the project area; ultimately achieving management goals on the PBG project area while incorporating much needed rest and habitat improvement on the home ranch.

Day one closed with a presentation by Bob Hamilton, manager of the Nature Conservancy's 45,000-acre Tallgrass Prairie Preserve. Hamilton discussed the implications of patch burn-grazing on large-scale grassland management and research in the Flint Hills of Oklahoma and Kansas and lessons learned over many years of PBG management with both bison and cattle. An evening social was sponsored by Dakota Ridge Pheasants.

Day two began with a field trip to The Nature Conservancy's 160-acre 7-Mile Fen preserve near Clear Lake, SD where participants were exposed to the pros and cons of utilizing PBG on a small scale. At this site, managers and researchers discussed considerations such as wind, water availability, parasite control, and animal behavior as points of consideration when managing livestock on small-scale patch burn-grazing projects. Attendees were also shown alternative water management systems and a few unique prairie fens.

The 7-Mile Fen property was in poor condition when it was acquired by TNC in the late 1990's. At that time it was under an annual season-long continuous grazing rental agreement with 25 cow-calf pairs on the 115 grazable acres. After several years of rest and recuperation, site managers are able to again graze 25 pairs under the PBG system, but with dramatically different results. The site now offers ample mid and old-growth grass while offering excellent habitat for

species needing short-grass on the burn-graze patch. Local producer and project partner Cliff Millsapps talked about the positive impacts he's seen on his cattle and on the range under the PBG management system.

After reviewing current PBG research with SDSU Range Professor Sandy Smart and watching a display of the Rainfall Simulator provided by NRCS staff, participants took part in a panel discussion with local ranchers who've utilized fire and grazing in their ranch management. Jim, Ryan, and Brodie Dailey discussed how they've incorporated fire into their management of native prairies and custom grazing pastures, highlighting the positive impacts they've seen with fire rotations and good water systems on cattle health. Herb and Bev Hamann discussed their overall ranch operation and how initial apprehension of fire has now turned into a very positive experience. While realizing the benefits of fire, both families cited practical and safe application of fire as a future hindrance for producers in the region.

Presentations on the second day also featured a host of speakers from across the Great Plains. Chris Helzer (TNC Nebraska) discussed utilizing PBG for maintaining grassland restoration and species diversity objectives. Jessica Dowler discussed initial results of PBG on the new 20,000-plus acre Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge near Crookston, MN. Erin Holmes from WI Pheasants Forever introduced the audience to a unique partnership program focused on re-connecting grass and CRP landowners with cattle producers to promote a working grassland landscape model. Missouri Department of Conservation biologist Max Alleger discussed management issues where public attitudes toward grazing can be challenging, offering examples of improved habitat as incentive to continue refining a PBG system. Finally, Britt Smith of Oklahoma State University presented information on his MS work focused on PBG impacts to grassland species.

Overall, the meeting was a great success, with several producers and managers providing positive feedback regarding what they learned, including plans to implement some degree of fire and grazing interaction into their management schemes.



Clear Lake, SD custom grazer and pheasant hunting lodge owner Jim Dailey holds a copper colored 'burnsi' leopard frog caught while touring the Chippewa Prairie Patch Burn-Grazing project area. Reptiles and amphibians appear to be doing well within the project area according to MN DNR scientists monitoring their populations.

to be added to the patch burn-grazing listserv, contact Carol Blocksom blocksom@ksu.edu

2013 Patch Burn-Grazing Meeting 2013 "Patch Burn-Grazing in Fragmented Landscapes"

Evaluation Summary:

On line registrants	72
Mail in registrations	1
1 or 2 day door registrations	10
Landowner guests	9
Students	13

Attendees completing survey: 58 (55%)

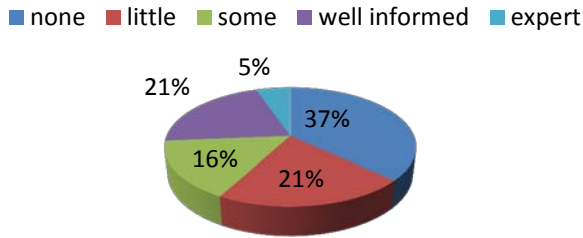
Of attendees completing survey:

Landowners	19 (33%)
Agency Land Managers	25 (43%)
Researchers/Scientist	11 (19%)
Administrator	2 (3%)
Student	1 (2%)

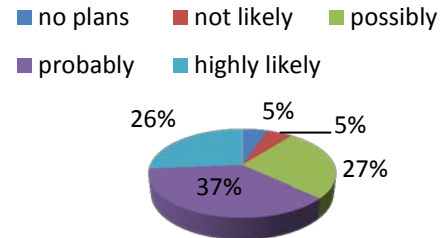
Total Attendees: 105

Males	77 (73%)
Females	28 (27%)

Landowner knowledge prior to meeting (n=19)

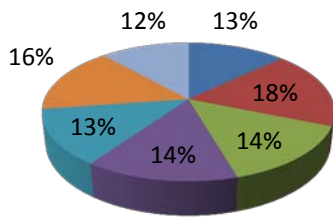


Landowner intent to share knowledge gained within next 12 months (n=19)

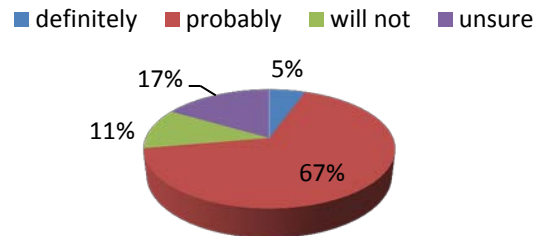


Landowner skills/knowledge gained (n=19)

- role of fire in prairie ecosystems
- How to use fire/grazing for management goals
- when to utilize fire/grazing for management goas
- designing modified PBG at various scales
- balancing fire and grazing for diversity
- improved understanding of grassland threats
- conservation grazing partnerships

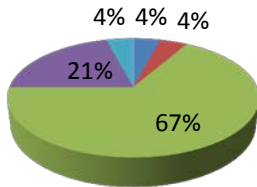


Landowner intent to implement fire and grazing practices learned (n=19)



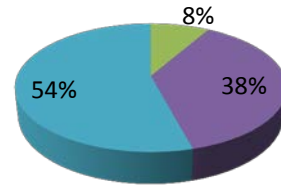
Agency manager knowledge prior to meeting (n=25)

■ none ■ little ■ some ■ well informed ■ expert



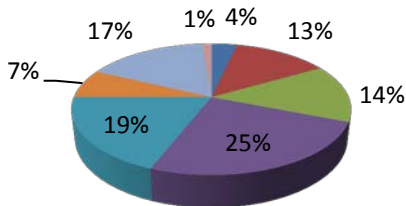
Agency manager intent to share knowledge gained within next 12 months (n=25)

■ no plans ■ not likely ■ possibly
 ■ probably ■ highly likely



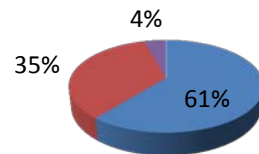
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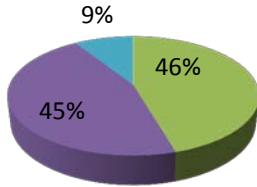
Agency manager intent to implement fire and grazing practices learned (n=25)

■ definitely ■ probably ■ will not ■ unsure



Researcher/scientist knowledge prior to meeting (n=11)

■ none ■ little ■ some ■ well informed ■ expert



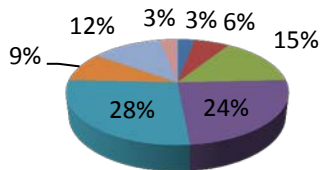
Researcher/scientist intent to share knowledge gained within next 12 months (n=11)

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 ■ probably ■ highly likely



Researcher/scientist skills/knowledge gained (n=11)

■ role of fire in prairie ecosystems
 ■ How to use fire/grazing for management goals
 ■ when to utilize fire/grazing for management goals
 ■ designing modified PBG at various scales
 ■ balancing fire and grazing for diversity
 ■ improved understanding of grassland threats
 ■ conservation grazing partnerships



Researcher/scientist intent to implement fire and grazing practices learned (n=11)

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