

Saskatchewan Stock Growers Foundation Annual Report

Annual General Meeting – June 9, 2026

Current SSGF Board of Directors

Kelcy Elford – President
Miles McNeil – Vice President
Ray McDougald – Past President
Dena Weiss – Treasurer
Chad MacPherson – ex-officio
Ray Glasrud
Clair Fitzpatrick
Cameron Carlyle
Jeremy Pittman
Calvin Knoss
Joe Gilchrist
Taneile Hammond

Current SSGF Staff Members

Brant Kirychuk- General Manager
Tom Harrison- Program Manager
Marika Sherman- Asst. Program Manager
Maggy Cooper- Asst. Program Manager
Tess Ryder- Asst. Program Manger
Mindy Hockley-Anderson- Communications Specialist

The Saskatchewan Stock Growers Foundation (SSGF) is a federally registered non-profit charity dedicated to fostering stewardship by supporting producer-led conservation efforts and increasing public understanding of grassland ecosystems. To advance this mission, SSGF offers a range of programs and conservation tools that promote sustainable land management and the long-term health of Saskatchewan's native grasslands.

Conservation Easements:

A conservation easement is a voluntary, legally binding agreement that protects and conserves ecologically significant land while remaining in private ownership. The easement restricts any destructive activities such as cultivation, subdivision, or development that could degrade grassland ecosystems, while still allowing compatible land uses, including grazing and ranching. Conservation easements are registered on the land title and remain in effect when ownership changes, ensuring the land continues to be managed in accordance with the easement's conservation goals. Ensuring long-term protection of native grasslands, safeguarding habitat for species at risk, maintaining essential ecosystem functions, and supporting the sustainability of working landscapes for current and future generations. The SSGF offers two different easement programs, Term and Perpetual Conservation Easements.

Term Conservation Easements

The SSGF is proud to be the first organization in not only Saskatchewan but possibly Canada, to offer Term Conservation Easements. These easements are unique because they are only tied to the land title for a set term length and not indefinitely, creating a previously unavailable option to landowners, where they have the opportunity to work with and develop a relationship with a land trust and retain the ability to still make future land use decisions. Our Term CE's have flexible term lengths with a minimum of 25 years but will extend up to 30, 35, 40 and 45 years, if the landowner is interested. Financial compensation is based on fair market value but is influenced by the length of the easement. The longer the term length, the more financial compensation is offered. We have seen incredible demand for the program that has made it is apparent that this program will fill an ever-growing need to conserve grasslands and protect them from conversion but with added flexibility that is needed in the ranching industry to keep them on the landscape for years to come.

Perpetual Conservation Easements

Perpetual Conservation Easements work to protect the land from cultivation, drainage and development for perpetuity. This means that regardless of time passed or changes to land ownership, the land cannot be modified and must remain ecologically intact. These are registered on the land title forever and not just for a set term length. This can be useful for landowners looking to conserve their grasslands no matter who owns that land at any point and have concerns of the next generation wanting to make changes in land use.

Habitat Management Agreements:

Habitat Management Agreements offer support for landowners to take on projects that work on improving and maintaining the health of their native grasslands. These projects that are eligible for funding include livestock water development, cross fencing, invasive weed management, wildlife friendly fencing and grazing management plans. All habitat management agreements are multi-species focused and will hold significant ecological value for the grasslands. They can be tailored to each rancher's operation based on a ranch evaluation and planning exercises, producer objectives and resources, habitat objectives and circumstances that are present.

Habitat Restoration Agreements:

These are 30 year agreements to convert cultivated lands to perennial cover using native plant species. Financial compensation based on $/acre with consideration given to change in land use, land preparation, weed control, seeding and seed costs. Native seed is provided to the agreement holder.

Grass Bank/Results Based Conservation Agreements:

SSGF has been involved in several Grass Bank Projects in partnership with Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association (SSGA), South of the Divide Conservation Action Program (SODCAP) and Grasslands National Park (GNP) which see producers accessing GNP lands at a reduced rental rate in exchange for achieving habitat outcomes or implementing conservation measures on their own lands.

SSGF has partnered with Birds Canada to deliver the **Birds Friendliness Index Project**, rewarding landowners for reaching biodiversity targets on their rangelands with the ability to receive additional annual payments from Birds Canada based on a $/acre figure if biodiversity targets are met. The goal is to reward biodiverse farms and ranchers that support grassland bird populations and avoid conversion through financial incentives. To learn more about the Birds Friendliness Index visit:

Interested in SSGF Programming?

1. Contact an SSGF staff member to discuss the program(s) you are interested in and determine potential opportunities for your operation.
2. Provide the corresponding legal land locations for the proposed project area(s).
3. SSGF staff will complete preliminary mapping and project review prior to the site assessment.
4. During the field season (May–August), SSGF field staff will conduct a range health assessment and site evaluation.
5. Following the assessment, SSGF will provide a detailed report outlining field findings and possible recommendations.
6. SSGF staff and the landowner will then discuss practical and applicable program options and develop a plan tailored to the operation.
7. The proposed project plan is presented anonymously to the Producer Advisory Committee and Board of Directors for review. Projects may be: approved for funding, declined, or returned for revisions or adjustments before proceeding

Total Agreements Summary 2000-2025

Conservation Strategy	Goal	Cumulative (acres)	# of Cooperating Producers
Conservation Easements	4000	7,343	6
Habitat Management Agreements	220,000	245,205	27
Habitat Restoration Agreements	2847	1,767	15
Result-based Conservation Agreements/Grassbank	125,000	154,580	9

Program Highlights

SSGF has fully executed six conservation easements on 7,343 acres of native grasslands in southwestern Saskatchewan. Two easements are in perpetuity, three easements are for 25 years and one is for 45 years.

Our partnership with Birds Canada for the Birds Friendliness Index brought forward a results based approach to grassland conservation and has seen significant uptake.

SSGF and partners have fully executed Habitat Restoration Agreements with 15 cooperating producers. 12 of the agreements on 1300 acres were achieved through the Reverse Auction for Grassland Restoration.

Field Season 2025

Field Assessments and extension took priority over the summer of 2025. SSGF hired three summer students to assist with this initiative. SSGF performed range health and habitat assessments on 20 properties including both private ranches and community pastures across southern Saskatchewan covering over 160,000 acres. Discussions were held with the ranch managers about current management, challenges, and future goals for their ranch. In total, 499 individual range health assessments were performed on rancher's properties. GIS data continued to be analyzed on farms and ranches assessed and surveyed.




Sprague's Pipit

In 2025, Birds Canada conducted surveys at 941 avian monitoring stations across 12 ranches. Audio Recording Units (ARUs) were reintroduced into the survey program in 2025 and used to sample 84 stations, while the remaining 857 stations were completed through in-person point counts. The most frequently detected species were Horned Lark (1,263 detections), Chestnut-collared Longspur (1,025), and Vesper Sparrow (787).

Data collected through ARUs also contributes to the Birds Friendliness Index Program and supporting ongoing monitoring of grassland bird populations and the identification of long-term trends.

Education, Training and Engagement

The Foundation offers training support for SSGF agreement holders. Agreement holders can receive up to $2500 in support for training/education that would support rangeland management, conservation, and/or ranching business management tailored to their individual needs.

Workshops/Events

In both 2025 and the beginning of 2026, the SSGF has continued to be active in events all over Saskatchewan and even into the United States. These events serve as a tool to continue to spread awareness for our programs as well as being able to present some of the work and projects that we are doing with landowners on the ground. Program interest continues to grow from the participation and hosting of in-person events.


Range Health Field Day

In August 2025 we hosted our annual Range Health field day outside of Maple Creek, SK at the McDougald Ranch. We had a fantastic turnout with over 60 attendees and are planning to host another this summer. Watch for details to come!

In June 2025, SSGF attended and presented at the America's Grassland Conference in Kearney, Nebraska. Presentations highlighted both the Reverse Auction for Grassland Restoration and the Term Conservation Easement Program. The sessions generated strong engagement, with valuable feedback and discussion from participants. The conference also provided an important opportunity to learn from other grassland initiatives and explore programs and approaches being implemented in other jurisdictions that may be adapted to support grassland conservation efforts in Saskatchewan.

TESA 2025

SSGF proudly presented The Environmental Stewardship Award to Mark & Karin Elford from Killdeer, SK for their ongoing dedication and commitment to grassland conservation and stewardship. Congratulations to Mark, Karin and family!



SSGF Secures $6.5 Million Commitment from Weston Family Foundation to Advance Grassland Conservation Programming

The Saskatchewan Stock Growers Foundation (SSGF) is pleased to continue its partnership with the Weston Family Foundation through a $6.5 million, five-year commitment supporting programs that protect native grasslands, encourage sustainable stewardship, and strengthen the long-term resilience of Saskatchewan's prairie landscapes.

Through the Weston Family Foundation's Prairie Grasslands Initiative, this investment will allow SSGF to expand producer-led conservation efforts by working collaboratively with ranchers, Indigenous communities, and conservation-minded land stewards to protect and restore ecologically significant grasslands across Saskatchewan.

This continued partnership supports several SSGF programs, including the Term Conservation Easement Program, which offers voluntary, flexible conservation options that keep native grasslands intact while supporting sustainable, working ranch operations. These agreements conserve ecologically significant grasslands for a defined period while maintaining grazing, wildlife habitat, and landscape connectivity, and allowing flexibility for future land use decisions.

Additional funding will expand the Bird-friendliness Index (BFI) incentive program in partnership with Birds Canada, supporting biodiversity monitoring and stewardship initiatives that benefit declining grassland bird species while recognizing producers for maintaining healthy native grasslands.

Support will also continue for Habitat Management Agreements, which assist landowners in implementing stewardship practices such as sustainable grazing, cross-fencing, wildlife-friendly fencing, and invasive species control to enhance habitat quality and strengthen grassland resilience.

We gratefully acknowledge the Weston Family Foundation for its continued support and commitment to empowering landowners who are making a meaningful, on-the-ground impact every day through conservation and stewardship of Saskatchewan's grasslands. Stay tuned for the full press release.

Weston Family Foundation

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Other Events Attended

- Birds Canada Grassland Tour for Donors and Board-June 5, 2025 Val Marie, Saskatchewan
- America's Grassland Conference- June 24-26, 2025 in Kearney, NE, USA
- Saskatchewan Aboriginal Lands Technicians Pasture Management Workshop- July 10 & 11, 2025 Regina and Regina Beach, Saskatchewan
- Arena Pasture Tour- July 15, 2025 by Eastend, SK
- SSGF Range Health and Field Day- August 7, 2025 in Maple Creek, SK
- Pine Ranch Pasture Tour- August 14, 2025 by Morse, SK
- Saskatchewan Aboriginal Lands Technicians Pasture Management Workshop- Sept 17 & 18, 2025 Spiritwood, Saskatchewan
- SODCAP Annual General Meeting- September 22, 2025 in Frontier, SK
- Farm and Food Festival- September 23-25, 2025 Batoche, SK
- Saskatchewan Association of Watersheds Conference- October 22nd & 23rd in Regina, SK
- Saskatchewan Cattle Association District Meetings October 2025 Various Locations
- U of Alberta Presentation to 3rd and 4th year students- Nov 20, 2025 Virtual
- Transboundary Grassland Partnership Workshop- November 5 & 6, 2025 in Milk River, AB
- SK PCAP Prairie Speaker Series Prescribed Fire with Renny Grilz- November 20, 2025 in Eastend, SK
- Indigenous Agriculture Summit-November 27 & 28, 2025 Regina, SK
- Living Labs- Central Prairies Co-Development Meeting- December 15 & 16, 2026 in Moose Jaw, SK
- Habitat Management Workshop- February 5th in Claydon, SK
- Celebrating Rural Ranching Women- February 5th & 6th in Maple Creek, SK
- School Presentation for Grade 7 children- February 26th in Maple Creek, SK
- Northern Sagebrush Steppe Virtual Landowner Workshop- March 3rd Virtual
- Habitat Management Workshop- March 11th in Mankota, SK
- Canadian Wildlife Federation Working Landscapes Webinar- April 15th Virtual
- Prairie Conservation & Endangered Species Conference- May 5th to 7th in Saskatoon, SK

Increased investment in communication activities continues to result in many inquiries into SSGF programming. Landowner engagement through extension events, social and conventional media and advertising resulted in contact with approximately 1000 agricultural producers.



SSGF Website Blogs

We continue to publish blog posts on our website that highlight everything native grasslands, including wildlife that rely on them, the types of vegetation and stories highlighting the beauty of them. Check out our website for the full archive but below is a list of all of our blog posts in the last year.

- Northern Sagebrush Steppe Workshop Connects Ranchers Across Borders
- Riparian Areas: The key to water, wildlife and grazing
- Get to Know Your Grasslands: Cacti
- Native vs Tame: A Rancher's Guide to Forage Quality & Resilience
- Fall Forage Heroes
- Where the Grass Still Grows: Ranchers Keeping the Prairies Alive
- Get to Know Your Grasslands: Downy Paintbrush
- Understanding Grasslands: The Role of Increasers, Decreasers, and Rangeland Health

SCAN THE QR CODE TO READ OUR BLOGS!

SSGF Articles

All of our articles are posted on our website then promoted via social media as well as published in the Beef Business Magazine. Below is a list of articles from this past year.

- 5 Years Strong: Highlights from the SSGF 5th Annual General Meeting
- Rest Right, Recover Strong: Avoiding Setbacks in Grassland Management
- The Dollars and Sense of SSGF Term Conservation Easements
- Native Grasslands for Winter Grazing: Maximizing Forage, Wildlife Habitat, and Cost Efficiency
- Conservation Through Collaboration: Advancing Grassland Resilience in the Cypress Hills
- Reading the Range: What Your Pastures Are Telling You This Spring

SCAN THE QR CODE TO READ OUR ARTICLES!

Social Media Posts

We actively post on Facebook, Instagram, Youtube and X (formerly Twitter) to ensure we reach a wide range of landowners in Saskatchewan to promote not just our programs but the stories and successes of the ranchers that we partner with. Social media accounts are also where we share any new blog posts, articles or events/workshops we are planning or attending.

Facebook: We have 423 page followers and have reached over 17,000 accounts, resulting in 2,632 interactions on our content. From links provided in our posts there has been over 300 clicks to the corresponding content.
Instagram: We have 542 followers and have reached over 740 accounts.
X: We currently have 202 followers.
YouTube: We have just recently started our YouTube Channel and are working on uploading videos about our projects, landowner's stories and the overall importance of grassland conservation work.

SCAN THE QR CODE TO SUBSCRIBE TO OUR MONTHLY E-BLAST

Monthly E-Blast

We continue to send out monthly e-blasts to landowners and interested parties that we have come into communication with or have expressed interest in our programs. Currently, we have 230 subscribers with an 67% open rate as of May 5, 2026. We featured any current programming updates, advertise new programs, upcoming events, share links to blog posts and news articles and summer student job postings.

SSGF Project Spotlights

Preserving the Prairies: Signing of First Term Conservation Easement to Protect Native Grasslands

The signing of SSGF's first Term Conservation Easement marked a major milestone in grassland conservation not only in Saskatchewan but Canada. The 25-year easement protects 640 acres of intact native grassland south of Fir Mountain, SK. This historic Term Conservation Easement wouldn't be possible without the commitment of the landowners, Lloyd and Nyla Anderson, who operate a generational ranch in the area. Driven by their dedication to protecting native grasslands, they established a partnership with the SSGF to ensure the protection of this native grassland, while also underscoring the importance of flexible programming to accommodate the needs of future generations.

LEARN MORE

Conservation Through Collaboration: Advancing Grassland Resilience in the Cypress Hills

The Cypress Hills Water Pipeline Project demonstrates how Habitat Management Agreements can help bring impactful projects to life through additional funding and strong partnerships. The project involved constructing a water pipeline to move water from Battle Creek onto the benchlands where some of the richest vegetation occurs. This infrastructure will support improved grazing distribution, enhance range and riparian health in the West Block, and help sustain the production of high-quality beef while supporting long-term grassland stewardship.

LEARN MORE

We would like to sincerely thank our program partners, participants, and landowners for their continued support and collaboration. We look forward to continuing to grow and strengthen our programs in 2026 and beyond.

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