

FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CENTER FOR GRASSLAND STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

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ABSTRACT

The Center for Grassland Studies was formed at the University of Nebraska in 1994 to implement focused interdisciplinary research, educational, and service programs and activities that emphasize the role of grasslands as a natural resource and conservation measure and that enhance the efficiency, profitability, sustainability, and aesthetic value of grasslands, wetlands, and turf. Although the Center is still in a developmental stage, it appears to be accomplishing those objectives.

KEYWORDS

Grasses, Grasslands, Forages, Rangelands, Livestock, Turfgrass, Wetlands, Natural Habitats

INTRODUCTION, DISCUSSION, AND SUMMARY

Formation of the Center for Grassland Studies is the cumulation of many years of thought and discussion on the part of faculty, administrators, and citizen support groups. It is not a building or land area, but it is an organizational structure.

The idea of a Center began with the concept of developing a forage-range-beef cattle area of excellence, but evolved into something much broader in scope. It now includes forage-range-livestock, turf and landscape grasses, and wildlife, wetlands, and natural habitats. Even though the Center is broad in scope, the common denominator throughout all of these areas is grasses.

There is every reason to develop such a Center at the University of Nebraska because of the importance of grass in the state and the University's rich heritage and long history of excellence in grasses and areas relating to grasses dating back to the early 1900s. Grasslands in Nebraska cover more than half of the state's land area and serve as the basis for a strong and large livestock industry, a natural resource for maintaining surface and ground water quality, a means of controlling soil erosion, a vital wildlife habitat, a growing sports and leisure industry, and a positive influence on quality of life.

The Center is guided by a small Policy Advisory Committee of some 14 people comprising different disciplines within the University relating to grasslands and various administrators from state and federal agencies. This committee meets quarterly. There is also a 50-member Citizens Advisory Council with people from across the state of Nebraska representing many different backgrounds and interests. The Council meets two or three times each year. The Center has a small staff consisting of a part-time director, a part-time administrative coordinator, and a secretary-receptionist. Most of the Center's work is accomplished through a group of some 130 professional people called Associates. These are faculty of the University and other educational institutions in the state, professionals in state and federal agencies, and those from non-profit organizations and associations.

The Center publishes a quarterly newsletter, a directory of expertise of the Associates, an annual turfgrass research report and has information on the Internet (<http://ianrwww.unl.edu/ianr/cgs>). The Center assists the Associates in developing interdisciplinary proposals in research, education, and outreach relating to grasslands. It has

held and will continue to hold workshops for the Associates for the purpose of becoming better acquainted with each other's work and finding areas of mutual interest.

The Center has been instrumental in identifying subject matter areas of concern or need for various constituencies and then bringing together expertise from the Associates to form a team to address the major issues. Generally, the teams have been successful, with the Center's support, in finding financial assistance to address the areas of major concern.

