

Kiosk Text

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This arts-based exhibit is part of the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists with the Global Alliance for Rangelands & Pastoralists. The partnership is dedicated to raising global awareness of the vital role that rangelands and pastoralists play in conserving and enhancing bio-cultural diversity, addressing land degradation, fostering sustainable food systems, advancing climate action, contributing to economies, and supporting the socio-ecological resilience of millions of people.

In this image, many types of rangelands are brought together into a single composite. These places are ecologically, economically, culturally, and socially vital, yet they are increasingly under threat.

Why Are Global Rangelands Threatened?

Rangelands and grasslands today are under growing pressure from many directions. Pastoralists, such as herders, shepherds, and ranchers, are finding it harder to sustain their livelihoods, and in many places rural communities are being reshaped by urban migration. Biodiversity is declining, with grassland bird populations rapidly decreasing. Climate change, including prolonged drought, is accelerating large-scale impacts across these landscapes. Invasive and encroaching species are displacing native plants and wildlife. At the same time, perennial grazing lands are being converted to annual row-crop agriculture or fragmented by energy and mining development.

These lands, and the people, livestock, wildlife, and cultures that depend on them, are at a critical moment. But this is not a story of loss alone. It is also a call to care, learn, and act.

How We Make a Difference

As part of the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists, this exhibit contributes to a global effort to build understanding, visibility, and care for rangelands and pastoral communities.

We invite you to experience these landscapes through their sights, sounds, textures, and stories. Use the QR codes to learn more about the people and places represented here. Your reflections help extend this work and reach others.

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FLIP PANEL TEXT

Burrowing Owls (*Athene cunicularia*)

Unlike most owls, burrowing owls nest underground, making their homes in open, grazed grasslands. They rely on tunnels created by prairie dogs and other burrowing animals. A primary threat to their survival is the ongoing conversion of grasslands to cropland, urban development, and mining.

Grazing by cattle, bison, sheep, and other wildlife helps create the low, open habitat they need. Burrowing owls even place dung near nest entrances to attract insects such as beetles. Protecting prairie dog towns is essential, because their tunnels provide the nesting sites these owls depend on.

Blue Grama Grass (*Bouteloua gracilis*)

Grasses hold the prairies and rangelands of the world together. Blue grama grass is one of the most widespread grasses in North America, ranging from Canada to Mexico and from California to Illinois. It is a keystone species: its deep roots help soil store water and carbon, provide seeds for grassland birds and mammals, and support the larvae of many butterfly species.

As cornerstones of vast rangelands, grasses like blue grama sustain bison, deer, and domestic grazers, anchoring some of the planet's most important ecosystems.

Monarch Butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*)

Monarch butterflies exhibit one of North America's most stunning natural wonders: migrating thousands of miles each year, flying at altitudes of 800 to 1,200 feet, amassing in the millions at breeding grounds, and relying on "super-generations" that more than quadruple their lifespan to complete migration routes. Grasslands and rangelands are essential to monarch survival. Milkweed is the sole food source for caterpillars, while wildflowers provide nectar for adults. Conserving grazed grasslands and rangelands is essential to protecting this iconic species.