

Celebrating Rangelands in 2026

Carolyn Gaudet, Saskatchewan Prairie Conservation Action Plan

In 2026, rangelands will be in the global spotlight and it is about time. The United Nations General Assembly has declared 2026 the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP). This declaration reflects the importance of rangelands, and promotes an understanding and appreciation of rangelands and the people who use them around the world. Globally, more than 100 countries and 375 organizations support having a year dedicated to rangelands and pastoralists.



What is considered a rangeland?

Rangelands are primarily covered by natural vegetation, predominately grasses or grass-like plants. They also support a high diversity of wildflowers, also known as forbs, and shrubs that may be grazed or provide forage for livestock and wildlife. Rangelands include native grasslands, savannas, shrublands, deserts, steppes, tundra, alpine vegetation, and marshes. In addition to providing forage for grazing animals, rangeland and grassland ecosystems deliver benefits vital to agriculture and the environment, including: habitat for plants, insects, and animals. Range and grasslands have deep root systems that capture and slowly release water as well as providing a rich underground environment for nutrient and energy cycling.

Who are pastoralists?

"Pastoralists" are people whose primary livelihood is raising domesticated or semi-domesticated animals that graze predominantly natural vegetation on rangelands. Pastoralists, who collectively care for an estimated one billion animals

worldwide (from cattle, sheep and goats to camels, yaks and reindeer), should be recognized for their role in stewarding rangelands.

Why an International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists?

Igshaan Samuels is a rangeland ecologist and co-chair of the Global Coordinating Group of IYRP called the IYRP Global Alliance. Samuels explained the initiative's overarching goals: "The IYRP aims to increase global understanding of the importance of rangelands and pastoralism, debunk myths, and promote informed, science-based policies. This is a chance to make rangelands and pastoralists visible to the world."

At the global scale, the IYRP initiative seeks to achieve:

- Greater awareness of rangelands and pastoralists contributions to food security, economy, environment, cultural heritage, and social wellbeing;
- Proclamations and resolutions made by the United Nations and other international entities in support of healthy rangelands, resilient pastoralists, and global rangeland stewardship;
- Policy changes in favour of sustainable management and conservation of rangeland resources by pastoralists and other stakeholders; and



- Increased sustainable and ethical investment in rangeland management and pastoralist livelihoods.

The Global Coordinating Group also developed 12 monthly themes to provide guidance and ideas to celebrate the year. These themes highlight urgent and relevant issues and show how pastoralism and rangelands across the globe share similar issues and concerns.

Saskatchewan IYRP Working Group

In Saskatchewan, less than 20 per cent of our native grasslands remain. Saskatchewan's grassland stewards understand the importance of healthy grasslands. The Saskatchewan IYRP Working Group, which consists of Saskatchewan Prairie Conservation Action Plan and Partners University of Saskatchewan, Nature Saskatchewan, and Society for Range Management—Prairie Parkland Chapter are hoping to bring awareness of rangelands and pastoralists to the general public. We believe there

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is space for everyone to appreciate the value of rangelands and grasslands and celebrate those who take care of them.

The Saskatchewan IYRP Working Group has had a few planning events to bring together Canadian stakeholders to foster provincial collaboration, share resources, and plan the next steps for Canada's participation in IYRP.

Some of the activities we are planning include:

- Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference in Saskatoon in May 2026;
- A quarterly book club;
- Native Prairie Appreciation Week Tour and Photo Contest in June 2026;
- Trello Board to share resources; and
- Working with libraries in the province to focus programming and messaging around IYRP.

To learn more about IYRP and rangelands around the world, visit <https://iyrp.info/>

To access the Canadian Trello Board, visit <https://trello.com/b/EKfGmpt0/2026-international-year-of-rangelands-and-pastoralists-canadian-resources>, which includes resources to share, upcoming events listed, and great ideas to plan your own IYRP events.



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