



South Dakota Ag Land Trust

Newsletter

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OAK HILLS RANCH VIDEO

Where agriculture and conservation will persist in harmony for the benefit of future generations.

The history of SDALT's first conservation easement has been captured on video, available on YouTube. The nine-minute video gives some of the history of the Oak Hills Ranch near Spearfish and tells the story behind Johanna Meier Della Vecchia's decision to donate a conservation easement to SDALT.

"We were very pleased to have come upon this organization," she said. "I especially felt that it was worthwhile because it was a South Dakota organization and would be monitored by the trust. My ties are here and so I was very, very glad to have come upon that."

Della Vecchia added, "It seems to me a little bit difficult when areas around the country are managed by organizations in eastern cities and they don't really know the landscape, they don't know the people, they don't know the climate and the atmosphere. This way I think we have ab-

olutely the best protection that we could have because these are all local people who value what they have here."

SDALT President Lyle Perman explains that ag land trust was founded by four South Dakota organizations: Farm Bureau, Cattlemen's Association, Grassland Coalition, and the Association of Conservation Districts.

"The organization was founded because there was a lot of interest in South Dakota for conservation easements, but no organization was fully controlled by farmers and ranchers," he explains. "Our goal was to form an organization, a non-profit, that would hold conservation easements for the purpose of preserving working lands for the future generations to enjoy."

The video can be found on South Dakota's USDA NRCS channel on YouTube. We appreciate their support in hosting the video.

Our Mission



SDALT is an organization founded by South Dakota farmers and ranchers for South Dakota farmers and ranchers. We work with landowners to conserve South Dakota's agricultural heritage and working landscapes for the benefit of future generations.

Congratulations to SDALT Treasurer Karl Jensen on his recent election to the Executive Board for the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD). Karl also serves as Vice Chair of NACD's Natural Resources committee. NACD represents America's 3,000 conservation districts and the 17,000 individuals who serve on their governing boards. Conservation districts, established by state law, work with millions of cooperating landowners and operators to promote responsible management and conservation of natural resources on all lands through locally-led efforts including grassroots advocacy, education and partnerships.

SDALT Board of Directors

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Thoughts from Tony

By Tony Leif, SDALT Executive Director



Conservation easements are an important tool that benefit both agriculture and conservation, and interest in conservation easements in South Dakota continues to grow – particularly around population centers in western South Dakota where farmers and ranchers are feeling pressure of low-density residential developments springing up next to their agricultural operations. As with most things, identifying and securing funding is the most difficult hurdle in delivering the assistance that these landowners need to help ensure an agricultural future for their property.

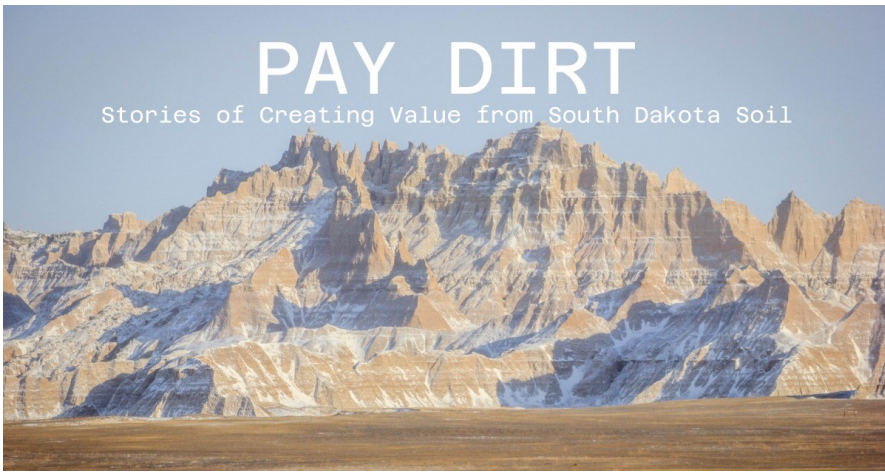
SDALT has secured \$4.25 million in funding from the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) for conservation easements. With this funding, we will be able to protect private rangeland in the heart of the Black Hills and keep that land in private ownership. Anyone who lives in or has visited the Black Hills recently can attest to the accelerated rate of exurban growth that threatens the continuity of forest/grassland ecosystems and the essential foraging areas of mountain meadows. If remained unchecked, this development will severely damage the agronomic and economic vitality of this region and will irreparably damage the ability of this region to support viable fish and wildlife populations. This funding will allow SDALT and cooperating landowners to protect soil, water quality, and wildlife habitat on working lands that will remain under the management of ranchers. Retaining conserved properties in private ownership will sustain the Black Hills regional economic vitality in production agriculture.

The additional good news is that there is more – a lot more – funding coming available from NRCS under the “climate-smart” agriculture provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). At the 2023 annual meeting of the National Association of Conservation Districts, U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said, “the Inflation Reduction Act provided a once-in-a-generation investment in conservation on working lands, and we want to work with agricultural and forest landowners to invest in climate-smart practices that create value and economic opportunity for producers.”

SDALT is well-positioned to be the vehicle to deliver this boost in funding designated for conservation easements under IRA to those landowners who have sought our assistance. This funding will provide practical easement solutions for an improved agricultural future for those South Dakota landowners with property under pressure of conversion to non-agricultural use.



SDALT was well-represented during the annual Ag Fest held during the state legislative session in Pierre. This is an evening for legislators, lobbyists, and others to visit with industry leaders and learn more about South Dakota agriculture. In addition, Lyle Perman and Tony Leif had a chance to testify in the House Agriculture Committee and answer questions about SDALT. From left, Tony Leif, Lyle Perman, and Karl Jensen.



SDALT treasurer Karl Jensen was among the speakers at the “Pay Dirt” storytelling event, held in early June at the Matthews Opera House in Spearfish to highlight SDALT. The evening featured a variety of speakers who gave their perspective on soil, conservation, and community in South Dakota.

Organizers Jake Young and Reid Hensen noted that the event attracted a diverse audience. According to Young, “One of the positive things about the event was to have people of all ages in the same room, all talking about conservation.” Hensen pointed out that land trusts are a relatively new idea to the state, so this served as a good brand-building event to help raise awareness of SDALT, and spark ongoing conversations about ways to keep land in agriculture.



Partnership of Rangeland Trusts

Advocating for conserving working lands and western heritage for the benefit and wellbeing of future generations

SDALT is a member of the Partnership of Rangeland Trusts (PORT), an alliance of ag-focused conservation organizations dedicated to preserving America's working farms and ranches and conserving productive agricultural lands. Differentiating PORT members from other conservation organizations is the close affiliations that PORT members have with their state livestock associations and other agriculture industry groups.

PORT was formed to increase the impact its members could have on national land conservation policy, represent the needs of working lands and ag producers within the broader land trust community, and enhance ways to share information and expertise.

Together, PORT members have conserved more than three million acres of the American west. Nationally, this represents roughly one in every six acres currently conserved through conservation easements held by private, non-profit organizations.

PORT works across five areas to support its mission:

- Increasing the effectiveness of existing and future ag land conservation legislation and programs
- Facilitating the sharing of information and expertise among members
- Expanding funding sources for ag land conservation
- Improving landowner awareness of conservation tools and public understanding of land stewardship
- Promoting the highest business standards for members

You can learn more about PORT and its members by visiting the PORT website at rangelandtrusts.org.



30x30: Land Grab, or Opportunity?

The Yankton County Commission recently became the tenth county in South Dakota to adopt a resolution opposing the “30 by 30” initiative for land conservation. The initiative stems from an Executive Order by President Biden to conserve at least 30 percent of U.S. lands and freshwater and 30 percent of U.S. ocean areas by 2030.

County commissions are being urged to pass the resolution to send a signal to state and federal agencies that they are opposed to any government land grabs – and also to “warn” the public that the program is being initiated with the use of conservation easements.

False claims are being made that conservation easements reduce the

taxable value of the land, causing property taxes to go up for other landowners and revenues to decline in the state and counties. It is important to note that agricultural land valuations are based on the productivity value of the land; a conservation easement does not change that value.

The resolution is also touted as a “warning label to protect unsuspecting landowners who may not be aware of the consequences of their desire to do the right thing for future generations.”

SDALT President Lyle Perman and Executive Director Tony Leif reached out to Yankton County Commissioners to correct some misinformation in the original resolution. A modified resolution was finally adopted.

SDALT views the 30x30 initiative with both trepidation and optimism. We firmly support individual rights when it comes to land ownership, and this sentiment is the foundation of our concern for the 30x30 initiative.

In turn there is cautious optimism that the initiative can be a vehicle to enhance existing opportunities for landowners to voluntarily conserve agricultural landscapes and economically viable farms and ranches.

Allowing private landowners to retain ownership and day-to-day control of the land through voluntary, incentive-based conservation easements is far more cost-effective and favorable than government ownership of land.



Your contribution makes it possible for SDALT to preserve working landscapes, protect water quality, and provide wildlife habitat throughout South Dakota.

ONE TIME DONATION: You can safely use your credit card to make a donation online at sdaglandtrust.org. Or, you can download and complete our contribution form, and mail it to the SDALT office.

SHOP: When you sign up for Amazon Smile and select South Dakota Agricultural Land Trust as your charity of choice, a percentage of your purchases will be donated back to SDALT at no additional cost.

MORE INFORMATION: Contact the SDALT for more ways you can help protect South Dakota’s open spaces for generations to come.

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The South Dakota Agricultural Land Trust is a 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt organization. The IRS considers a contribution to SDALT as a tax-deductible, charitable contribution.

SDALT Guiding Principles:

Heritage – We are dedicated to the agricultural families we were founded to serve and to promoting and preserving the agricultural heritage, private land stewardship, and rural way of life that have always defined South Dakota.

Leadership – We advocate for agriculture and agricultural families to ensure that the primary focus of land conservation in South Dakota is conserving the land and working with the families that produce the food and fiber that feeds the world.

Transparency – We are committed to operational and financial transparency while recognizing the sensitive nature of our work and protecting the privacy of our landowners and donors.

Discipline – We remain steadfast in our commitment to creating and implementing conservation strategies that work for agricultural lands and agricultural producers.

Creativity – We strive to be an innovator in conservation and conservation policy with a focus on the human elements of land conservation.

Result Driven – We base our success on results. Our metrics will be rooted in the working lands that are permanently conserved (i.e. the land that remains available for agricultural production), achieving the goals of the agricultural families with whom we work, and the overall outreach to the general public about the importance of conserving agriculture, productive land, agricultural families, rural communities and our heritage.

Perpetuity – We operate and make decisions based on our perpetual obligations to the conservation easements we steward and the agricultural lands and families we serve.