

Landowners want to save ranching in the most threatened ecosystem in the world - grasslands

Landscape fragmentation and development can be combatted with private conservation

SCOTT, KS, UNITED STATES, October 2, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Lesser Prairie-Chicken Landowner Alliance (LPCLA) acknowledged today that America is losing up to two million acres of [prairie grasslands](#) in the American Great Plains every year. The group, supported by the North American Grouse Partnership, includes concerned ranchers in the five southwestern plains states of Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, and Colorado. They are calling for saving American [ranching](#), in part to conserve habitat for grassland-dependent wildlife species that are also declining.

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We want negotiated contracts to produce conservation outcomes, not fixed-price contracts to implement a practice, said LPCLA ranchers of Kansas.

Let's save American Ranching to preserve our species”

Bill Barby

“Grasslands are the most threatened ecosystem on the continent and in the world,” stated Ted Koch, executive director of the NAGP and staff support to the LPCLA. “As we lose grassland acres, we also lose ranching, rural

community stability, water in aquifers, healthy soils, and wildlife populations and beef production. Nowhere are these threats greater than in the southwestern Great Plains region”.

The LPCLA today released a video production by Cornell Lab of Ornithology sharing how this habitat loss is impacting the lesser prairie-chicken, a harbinger of prairie health. The iconic grouse is increasingly threatened throughout its range.

“We, the ranchers of the LPCLA, propose to stop and reverse these trends in grassland losses by establishing ‘ranching strongholds.’ We offer the opportunity for all Americans to invest in a more strategic, focused, and sufficient manner in the wealth of [conservation](#) and community services that our working rangelands provide,” said Stacy Hoeme and Bret Riley, co-leads for the Alliance,

“By conserving these prairie-chickens, I know my ranch will always stay a ranch,” said Hoeme,

whose ranch is located in Gove County, Kansas. He recently secured thousands of acres of permanent easement on his ranch and can now leave the property to his children and their children so they, too, can respect and enjoy the grasslands.

Riley agreed. "A generation ago, you could make a living off 200 head of livestock. Today you need a job in town." Bret runs cattle in Leedey, Oklahoma and Caprock, New Mexico. "Getting paid fair market value for the important conservation services on our lands is essential to stopping and reversing the decline in ranchers and grasslands here."

"The number of U.S. livestock producers is down 40 percent since the 1980s and these ranchers are hoping to maintain a way of life on the American prairie that is consistent with also saving imperiled wildlife," noted Koch. "The U.S. cattle herd count is at its lowest point since 1951."

The LPCLA reported that 41 out of 44 rural counties across the region with the best remaining grassland strongholds have lost human population since 1980.

Mule deer and pronghorn have been declining for decades. And lesser prairie-chickens have been listed under the Endangered Species Act twice in the past ten years, with more grassland species at risk. The video production features the landowner's voices articulating the need for more "conservation ranching" for the benefit of people and wildlife.

Americans spend billions of dollars to conserve grasslands each year; yet grassland losses continue because many government-backed programs are diffuse and insufficient rather than strategic and focused on a conservation goal, like saving the most threatened ecosystem on earth, and ranching along with it, they said.

"We want negotiated contracts to produce conservation outcomes, not fixed-price contracts to implement a practice," said LPCLA rancher Bill Barby of Beaver, Oklahoma. Stopping the loss of ranchers and grasslands will require a deliberate focus, rather than hoping for it as an ancillary outcome from implementing 40-year-old programs that so far have failed to deliver these outcomes.

Alliance member Mark Gardiner, Ashland, Kansas, said using grasslands to feed cattle makes economic sense. "The key is to have a healthy ecosystem and to have that healthy ecosystem it's



The LPC Landowner Alliance met at Gardiner Angus Education Center to launch their conservation program

no different than living in our rural community. Prairie chickens are important, but people are too," Gardiner said.

Mission: About the LPC Landowner Alliance

The Lesser Prairie-Chicken Landowner Alliance's mission is to "Save ranching, rural communities, water and wildlife." They seek to ensure the perpetual success of ranchers throughout the Great Plains and beyond which requires a mindset of recognizing the past while envisioning a future together.

For more information, please see: <https://www.grousepartners.org/lpcla>

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