

2025 SENATE AGRICULTURE AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

SB 2246

2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Agriculture and Veterans Affairs Committee

Fort Union Room, State Capitol

SB 2246
1/30/2025

A bill for an act to provide an appropriation to the legislative council for the purpose of contracting with a consultant to study the feasibility and desirability of creating a regenerative grazing ranch in the state; and to provide for a legislative management study.

2:53 p.m. Chairman Luick called the meeting to order.

Members present: Chairman Luick, Vice-Chair Myrdal, Senator Marcellais, Senator Weston, Senator Weber, Senator Lemm

Discussion Topics:

- Carbon focused grasslands research center
- Grand Sky and Grand Farm state appropriation and investment
- Grassland importance and carbon capture potential
- Cost of an average study
- Managed grazer impact on carbon and grasslands
- Carbon budget and carbon dioxide fluxes in the ecosystem
- Carbon cycle and impacting variables
- Carbon buying and selling markets
- Soil Conservation District (SCD) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

2:54 p.m. Senator Tim Mathern, District 11, testified in favor and introduced the bill.

3:01 p.m. Dr. Rebecca Philips, carbon cycle scientist and Executive Director of Ecological Insights, testified in favor and submitted testimony #32574.

3:18 p.m. Dr. Shelly J. Lenz, Veterinarian and landowner in Dickinson, ND, testified in favor and submitted testimony #32341.

Additional written testimony:

Daryl Dukart, landowner, submitted testimony #32529 in favor.

Lewis Heaton, owner of Heaton Ranches, submitted testimony #32564 in favor.

Madeline Luke, resident of Valley City, ND, submitted testimony #32826 in favor.

John Bradley, ND Wildlife Federation, submitted testimony #32900 in favor.

James B. Buhr, resident of Valley City, ND, submitted testimony #32933 in favor.

3:22 p.m. Chairman Luick closed the hearing.

Audrey Oswald, Committee Clerk

Testimony by Dr. Shelley Lenz in support of SB2246

Dear Senators;

I am a veterinarian, a business owner, and a landowner in the Dickinson/Killdeer area, focusing on strong rural towns. Food and energy come from our rural spaces, and often, the general public does not fully understand the contribution of our rangelands to our climate, food security, clean water, and competitive energy markets. Likewise, the industrial sector is actively participating in the carbon markets, and speculators in Western North Dakota are beginning to tie up carbon leases around the grasslands. Many ranchers are confused about carbon markets and whether these speculators are legitimate.

SB 2246 is a perfect opportunity to help educate our state lawmakers, fellow North Dakotans, ranchers, landowners, and federal elected officials about our rangeland's ability to contribute to food security, clean water, and a deep carbon sink like the Amazon forest.

In 2023, Senator Cramer sponsored "The Prove It Act" to provide reliable data needed to quantify the climate benefits of American products and Energy. During an in-person meeting with Senator Cramer in 2022, when asked whether the rangelands should be included in those markets, he said he needed data and publications to support the assertion that rangelands can be managed to enhance carbon capture. Luckily, one of our nation's top ecosystem biogeochemists, Dr Rebecca Phillips, worked on that issue in her carbon flux analysis in central North Dakota. Since that meeting, Senator Cramer's staff, the Governor's office, many local conservation groups, and ranchers have been attending and monitoring the Carbon Flux study being performed in Burleigh County with great interest and excitement.

Funding SB2246 will enable more data and excitement about the great resource our Grasslands provide not only for local conservation, great hunting grounds, clean water, and food production but also as an additional potential revenue source for landowners, ranchers, and climate advocacy in our Energy sector.

Respectfully,
Shelley J. Lenz, DVM, Ph.D.
Dickinson, ND

January 29,2025

Written testimony for SB2246

Senate Judiciary Committee Members,

Asking for your support to SB2246 with a do pass.

I have been involved in somewhat of a smaller scale of carbon dioxide fluxes and regenerated grazing practices with the LEAP (Landowner, Energy & Agriculture Partnerships) organizations as one of their Board members. We need to support the growth of this program to help ranch and farm operation understand the values of regenerative grazing practices. Studies and education are very necessary tools to allow landowners to learn what value they are gaining when implementing the use of these practices. Carbon capture and storage happens in many different hard to understand opportunities within the growing grasses and crops we as landowners in North Dakota work with. Some studies are already in progress, and this bill would support the future of Carbon work at the agriculture level to help advance and support the already started research.

Thank you for serving North Dakota,

Daryl Dukart

Retired landowner in Dunn County

701-400-6145

January 29, 2025

RE: SB 2246

Dear Agriculture Committee Members,

I am writing this letter in support of SB2246. I have known for years that I can manage cattle grazing to improve my pastures. Up until now, I had not seen scientific data that could show me exactly how management affects carbon dioxide capture and storage for the entire pasture. This technology, now deployed at my ranch, opens a window into grazing management unlike anything I have seen before. We can now track grazer impacts on production and see how these impacts change over time on a daily basis. The data shows how my grazing system is extending the growing season and improving plant production. The state needs to take a hard look at how this new science and technology can support rangeland value and sustainability and help lead North Dakota ranchers into the future.

Sincerely,

Lewis Heaton,
2024 Aldo Leopold Award Winner
Heaton Ranches
McKenzie North Dakota

SB 2246

Jan 30, 2025, 2:30 pm

Testimony by Dr. Beckie Phillips

I think we can all agree that, regardless of political persuasion, ranching communities and sustaining the rangelands that support them are good for North Dakota. Ranching is more than a business—it is a way of life. I believe ND state legislatures are interested in learning about new directions and new ways they might support our ranchers—now, and into the future.

I am Dr. Beckie Phillips. I have researched ecosystem biogeochemistry for over 25 years, which is the study of how energy and materials cycle through the environment. I specialize in atmospheric exchange of trace gases at ecosystem scales. I have served as faculty at the University of North Dakota, the USDA ARS, a research leader in New Zealand, and am now the Executive Director for a nonprofit in Hazelton, ND that specializes in carbon cycle research and education. I have worked all over the state, from Max to Dickinson, from St. Thomas to Napoleon, and into Lemmon SD.

This bill proposes a scientific assessment of nature-based carbon dioxide capture and the importance of this topic to North Dakota's ranching communities. The report resulting from this research will show current knowledge of carbon dioxide exchange and rangeland carbon budgets as well as potential future directions and how additional research could help sustain the ranching lifestyle we know and love. Rangelands naturally store carbon, but the annual amount of carbon stored or lost depends on grazing management, *ceteris paribus*.

Carbon flux measurements can show us how management alters natural carbon dioxide capture in real time for entire ecosystems. This is distinctive from soil measurements, where cores are taken over several years at points in space. Since grazing management and grazing impacts on vegetation changes year to year, it is difficult to ascribe a particular practice to the annual ecosystem carbon budget without flux measurements, which are collected year-round every ½ hour.

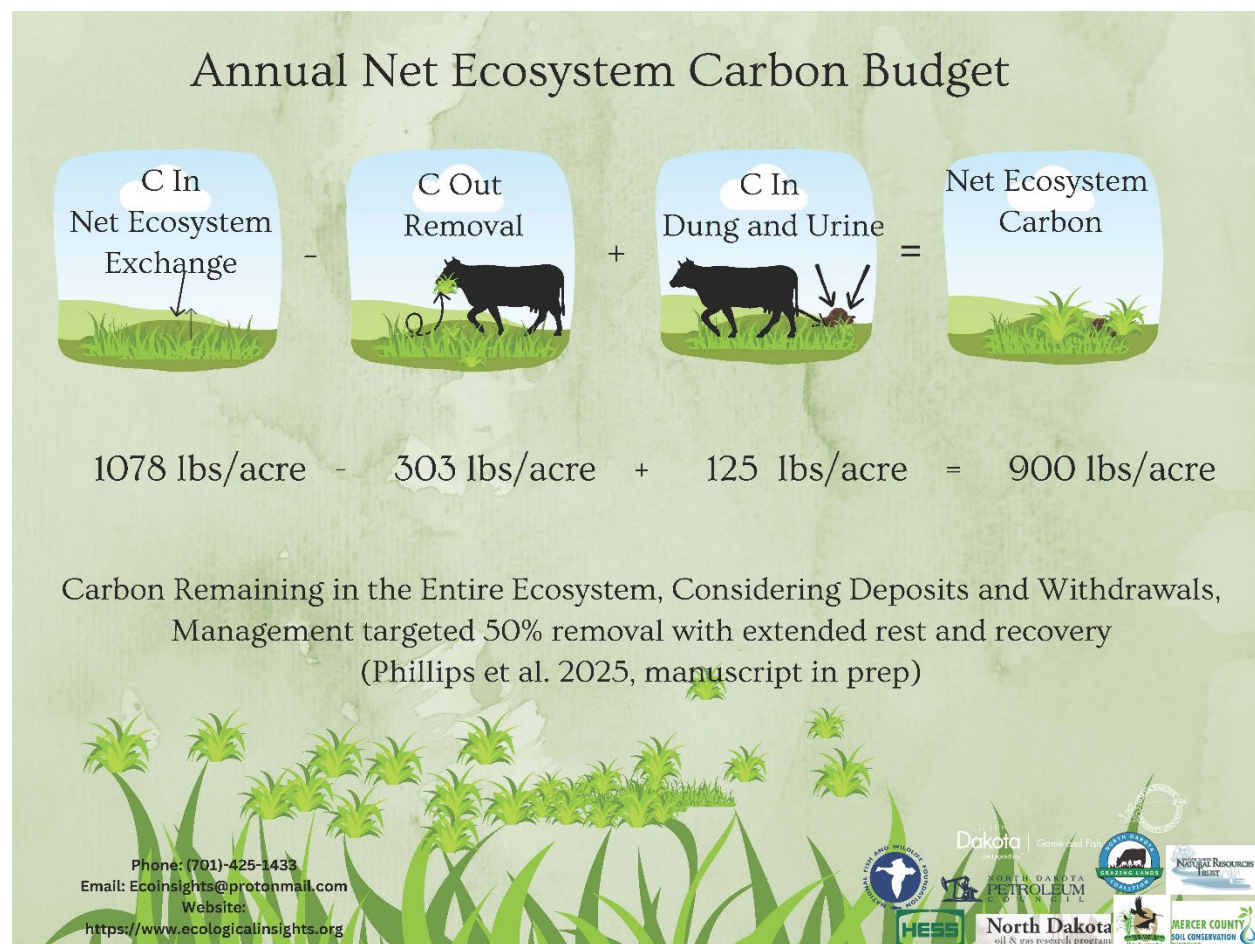
This study would explore funding opportunities for a Grand Ranch, where this research could be showcased to the public and could serve as a platform for collaboration. While carbon dioxide fluxes are central, additional lines of research could emerge, such as managing grazers for plant secondary compounds, carbon-smart beef marketing, and economic analyses. Carbon is the common denominator fueling multiple research pathways.

SB 2246 does not represent carbon buyers or any interest group and is not led by a government agency. SB 2246 would authorize a fact-finding mission focused on what we know and what we do not know about managing rangelands for greater carbon yields—to enhance the amount of carbon remaining in the ecosystem.

The current work in this space has been led by me and my team at the Heaton Ranch in McKenzie, ND. We use a working herd in production to demonstrate carbon dioxide capture under real world conditions. This non-governmental research is not saddled by bureaucracy and overhead and is the first of its kind on a working ranch.

When we started this research, we did not know how managed grazing would impact the annual carbon budget because this type of experiment had not been done before. We found intensive grazing events followed by extended rest and recovery enhanced the annual amount of ecosystem carbon remaining in the first year.

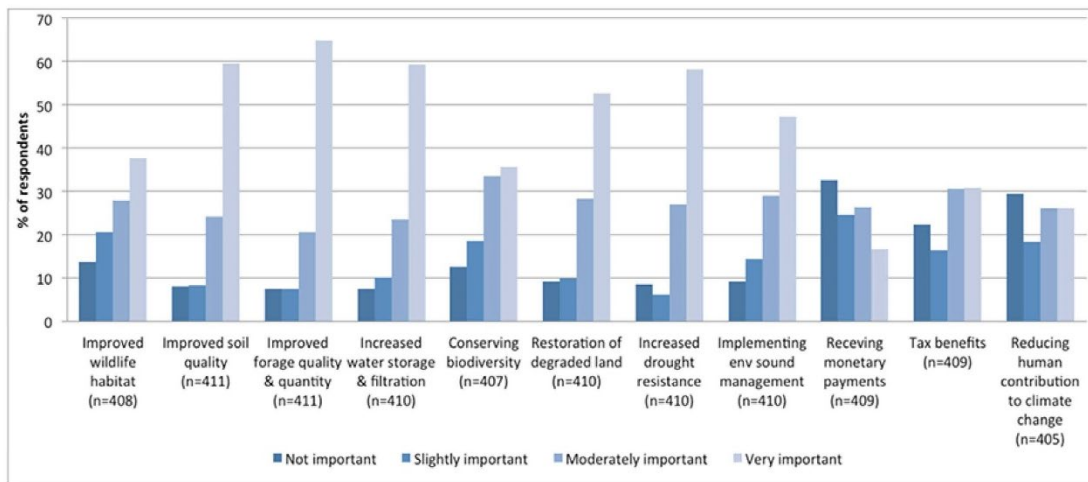
You can see in this graphic what I mean by the annual carbon budget.



Now, we need to extend this research to the grasslands of western ND, but these sites need to be carefully selected. Not all terrains are suitable for carbon dioxide flux research.

I am talking to ranchers near Dunn Center, about setting up similar field experiments on their ranch. A rancher in Alexander is also interested in participating, and the Dickinson State Range Department would like to see their students have a chance to study and apply this new technology under real-world conditions.

There is great interest in how to enhance C in rangelands, and it's not always about carbon credit dollars. Here, a survey of 598 ranchers across 29 counties in Utah show that they place a higher value on carbon for the ecosystem benefits, such as greater plant production and water storage, as more important than carbon credit payments.



I am supporting this bill because I think this approach is good for the state, for ranchers, for rangelands, and for legislators. The essence of this bill is education, which is always a good place to start.

Re SB2246

Dear Agriculture Committee Members:

I support this proposal to fund a feasibility study for a regenerative ranch. The bill asks for \$49,500 as a one-time grant. This seems a modest down payment to explore a different type of agriculture. And as in most things, diversification is a good thing.

The "Grand Ranch" would be a working, research operation where data about the interactions of an active herd with water and carbon would be obtained. This would be used to promote practices that enhance range productivity, improve soils and carbon sequestration.

Possible outcomes?

The world belongs to the next generation, and a "Grand Ranch" would be an exciting and enticing opportunity for young people with fresh perspectives to come to ND.

Products carrying the label "Made in ND on a sustainable ranch" would carry a premium price (as well as taste better)

This is an alternative to CAFO's which may be efficient but offer little resiliency in the food system as we sadly found out during the COVID epidemic.

CAFOs offer large volumes of meat that come with huge water bills and even larger piles of wastes. Regenerative ranching comes with less chemical and water use. Let the consumer decide what to buy and give the producer the option to choose.

Let's give something different a chance, pass this bill.

TESTIMONY OF JOHN BRADLEY
NORTH DAKOTA WILDLIFE FEDERATION
SENATE BILL 2246
SENATE AGRICULTURE AND VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
JANUARY 30, 2025

Chairman Luick and members of the Senate Agriculture and Veteran Affairs Committee:

For the record, I am John Bradley, Executive Director of the North Dakota Wildlife Federation (NDWF). I'm here today representing our 1,500 members in 15 affiliated wildlife and sportsmen's clubs across North Dakota that make up the North Dakota Wildlife Federation. NDWF is in support of SB 2246.

Ranching communities and sustaining the rangelands that support them is good for wildlife and good for North Dakota. NDWF is committed to keeping grass on the landscape. NDWF is interested in working with landowners to create new ways that might support and open new sources of income. The state needs to embrace how this new science and technology can support rangeland value and sustainability. This study could be the first step to ensure that ranching is sustained well into the future. We urge a Do Pass on SB 2246.

To members of the Committee on Agriculture and Veterans Affairs:

I am a bird-watcher and have been watching the birds of eastern ND for 45 years or more, and haven't seen a bobolink or eastern bluebird for quite a while. Bird populations are down. I fully support the effort promoted in SB2246 to study and promote grazing and grasslands. This is vital to bring back bird populations and also promote carbon sequestration. Grasslands are a proven way to do this.

Please Vote YES on SB2246! I

James B. Buhr
613 Chautauqua Blvd
Valley City ND 58072
James.b.buhr.md@gmail.com
(701) 840-1570

2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Agriculture and Veterans Affairs Committee

Fort Union Room, State Capitol

SB 2246

1/31/2025

A bill for an act to provide an appropriation to the legislative council for the purpose of contracting with a consultant to study the feasibility and desirability of creating a regenerative grazing ranch in the state; and to provide for a legislative management study.

9:31 a.m. Chairman Luick opened the hearing.

Members present: Chairman Luick, Vice-Chair Myrdal, Senator Marcellais, Senator Weston, Senator Lemm, Senator Weber

Discussion Topics:

- Overview of the bill and appropriation amount
- State involvement

9:33 a.m. Senator Lemm moved a Do Not Pass.

9:33 a.m. Senator Myrdal seconded the motion.

Senators	Vote
Senator Larry Luick	N
Senator Janne Myrdal	Y
Senator Randy D. Lemm	Y
Senator Richard Marcellais	N
Senator Mark F. Weber	Y
Senator Kent Weston	Y

Motion passed 4-2-0.

Senator Myrdal will carry the bill.

9:37 a.m. Chairman Luick closed the hearing.

Audrey Oswald, Committee Clerk

REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE
SB 2246 ([25.0900.02000](#))

Agriculture and Veterans Affairs Committee (Sen. Luick, Chairman) recommends **DO NOT PASS** (4 YEAS, 2 NAYS, 0 ABSENT OR EXCUSED AND NOT VOTING). SB 2246 was placed on the Eleventh order on the calendar. This bill does not affect workforce development.