Concept Note

***North American Rangelands Feature-Length Documentary***

in honor of the

***International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) 2026***

May 2022

**BACKGROUND**: The road towards the declaration of an **International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (**IYRP) by the United Nations was a long one. The idea was first discussed at the International Rangeland (IRC) and Grassland (IGC) Congress held in Hohhot, China in 2008. Facilitated by the Rangelands Partnership and the Society for Range Management, the creation of an International Support Group (ISG) in 2015 helped to provide a stronger global focus as well as the integration of social and cultural dimensions. This led to a growing partnership of national, regional, and international organizations. Numerous events were conducted at international meetings between 2015 and 2021 to solicit support for an IYRP. In 2018, UN Environment Program published a Gap Analysis of knowledge about rangelands and pastoralism that helped to further highlight the significant neglect of these issues in both academic and development circles. Under the leadership of the Government of Mongolia, the proposal for a designation of an IYRP was officially presented to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in 2019. Following key approvals by FAO, the proposal was forwarded to the U.N. General Assembly where it was approved on 15 March 2022 with the co-sponsorship of 102 countries. In addition, more than 300 organizations from around the world have also given concrete support for the effort.

**WHY AN IYRP?** Rangelands occupy 54% of all land on Earth and are home to more than 200 million people. Yet, as the global human population becomes more modernized, people in urban centers are often disconnected from rangelands and their importance to food security, climate variability, conservation efforts, ecosystem services, and economic well-being. IYRP’s mission is to promote an understanding and appreciation of rangelands around the world, the people who use them, and the contributions they make to the health of all communities. Specifically, an International Year provides new opportunities to:

* increase awareness of the importance of rangelands and pastoralists as solutions to the consequences of climate change at local, national, regional, and global levels
* mobilize people worldwide to address today’s most difficult challenges with new understandings regarding such issues as drought/water availability, renewable energy, fire control, wildlife conservation, and invasive species
* boost efforts for creating new knowledge and sharing experiences and practices
* inform decision-making at all levels for enlightened, science-based policies that dispel misconceptions and that will benefit current and future generations

**HOW IS AN IYRP SPECIFICALLY RELEVANT TO THE WEST IN NORTH AMERICA? WHY SHOULD STATE LEADERS CARE? (Expected Outcomes) -** Rangelands in North America are important for Livestock production, wildlife habitat, and recreational activities. They are valuable sources of clean water, fresh air, open space, and renewable and extractive energy resources. As such they support local, rural communities with economic opportunities through livestock ranching, energy production, clean water, and recreational opportunities. Because rangelands comprise a significant amount of the landscape the importance of the ecosystem services they provide throughout the North American continent should not be underestimated. While they are generally experienced more at the local and regional scales, they have impact on every American, Mexican, and Canadian citizen.

As important as Rangelands are, they are increasingly being impacted by issues of land succession and cultural change that are dividing up these grand landscapes into less functional ecosystems and impacting their value for livestock production, wildlife habitat, and sources of clean water and recreational opportunities. Furthermore, drought, wildfire, invasive species, and disagreement on management objectives between agencies, organizations and individuals are creating untenable conditions that are resulting in the decline of rangeland condition and their ability to support the multiple uses we expect from them (livestock production, wildlife habitat, energy, etc.).

The IYRP presents an opportunity to highlight the incredible value of Rangelands to the people and communities that rely on them wherever they may be, while at the same time help focus attention on the challenges and potential consequences to the loss of these vital ecosystems and pastoralist communities. The effort will bring much needed focus on conserving rangeland ecosystems across North America and globally, protecting pastoralist communities and culture, and increasing investment for research, community outreach, and agency collaboration and training.

**THE PROPOSAL:**  If these ends are to be achieved, the public and the policy makers who represent them will need to be reached out to in new ways that go well beyond traditional academic publications and speak to people’s most profound feelings. Current preferred modes of learning tell compelling stories using multi-media formats. The medium of film can reach millions of people quickly and effectively and can be shown at theaters across the country and on television (potentially through PBS or even Netflix). At the same time, documentaries can be used as teaching resources from grade school to higher education. For instance, the following award-winning films were combined with educational materials to support greater learning opportunities: *The West is Burning*: [https://www.westisburning.org/](https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.westisburning.org%2F&data=04%7C01%7Cwpayne%40unr.edu%7C23ebbe3f453746860a1008da0c4e6604%7C523b4bfc0ebd4c03b2b96f6a17fd31d8%7C1%7C0%7C637835828121093169%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=0JIyyxRbmBDmINTVGJmz1%2BeOZH2DOHt%2FXdda%2BtzniUE%3D&reserved=0); *Beyond the Mirage*: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdROtlIdEhA](https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DqdROtlIdEhA&data=04%7C01%7Cwpayne%40unr.edu%7C23ebbe3f453746860a1008da0c4e6604%7C523b4bfc0ebd4c03b2b96f6a17fd31d8%7C1%7C0%7C637835828121093169%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=N4gRKpJOvY8%2FNjG5IJ5DOLvEL%2BrcYWq4f8qYzUTFqlI%3D&reserved=0) (Emmy award winning documentary, also on Amazon Prime, about the future of water in the west). Other documentaries create strong stories told by a sympathetic character such as *The Octopus Teacher* (from South Africa)that won an Academy Award in 2021 (available on Netflix). The North American IYRP Communications Team and Support Group as well as members of the Rangelands Partnership propose to spearhead an effort to create an informative and compelling story for a documentary film (or film series) about our North American rangelands - their significance, complexity, and opportunity to be a solution to many of today’s most pressing issues.

**TARGET AUDIENCE:** General public, agency personnel, and policy makers including a focus on high school and college students and teachers and other influencers.

**FUNDING REQUIREMENTS:** The filming process has four major steps:

(1) pre-production - the director(s) and writer(s) explore the topic and create a compelling narrative that takes on big issues through a story that connects with individuals; gain input from an Advisory Group; determine best approach for gaining the broadest exposure (i.e. PBS, Netflix, other); conduct early shooting and prepare materials/trailer that can be used to raise additional funds for the film. This phase is largely conducted by the director(s) and writer(s). Estimated funding needed - $50k.

(2) production - the director(s), and sound recordist, and other team members rent equipment, spend time in the field, and capture everything needed for the film - this step can be $200 - 800k depending on the length of time, travel, team size, and other variables. At the end, the director(s) will work with an editor and writer(s) to create a rough cut together.

(3) post-production - industry investment may be available for this phase with costs running approximately $250-300k.  The director(s) and editor take the cut through several more passes until it is at “picture lock”. Companies are then hired for sound design and mixing, musical score, computer graphics, color/conforming and delivery of the final files.

(4) A fourth step for an “impact campaign” will include a budget for a launch event, publicist, bookkeeping, curriculum materials, and a post-production supervisor; approximately $100,000.

**FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN AND GOAL:** An optimal level of funding for a feature-length documentary is between $500,000 and $1,000,000. If all 19 Western and Great Plains land-grant universities contributed $20,000, this would be more than enough to begin the project that would result in at least a short video trailer that could be used for further fund-raising, as well as a final script and considerable footage toward the complete film. At the same time, funding from private sources including societies, organizations, companies, and individuals will be pursued, particularly reaching out to those that already expressed support for the IYRP in formal letters of support. All contributors will be listed in the film credits, potentially at the following levels:

* Diamond - $50,000 and above
* Platinum - $25,000 to $49,999
* Gold - $10,000 to $24,999
* Silver - $5,000 to $9,999
* Bronze - $500 to $4,999

While in production, the North America IYRP Support Group, North America IYRP Communications Team, Society for Range Management, and the Rangelands Partnership (with membership from the 19 land-grant universities) will plan and implement a marketing campaign to ensure the film has broad exposure. Members of these organizations will also collaborate to prepare educational and extension materials that will be made available freely through the IYRP website (<https://iyrp.info/> ).

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