THE REWILDING RANGELANDS INITIATIVE

Coexistence in Rangelands Ecosystems

Rangelands Working Group,
Global Rewilding Alliance
March 2026

Rewilding
THE GLOBAL ALLIANCE

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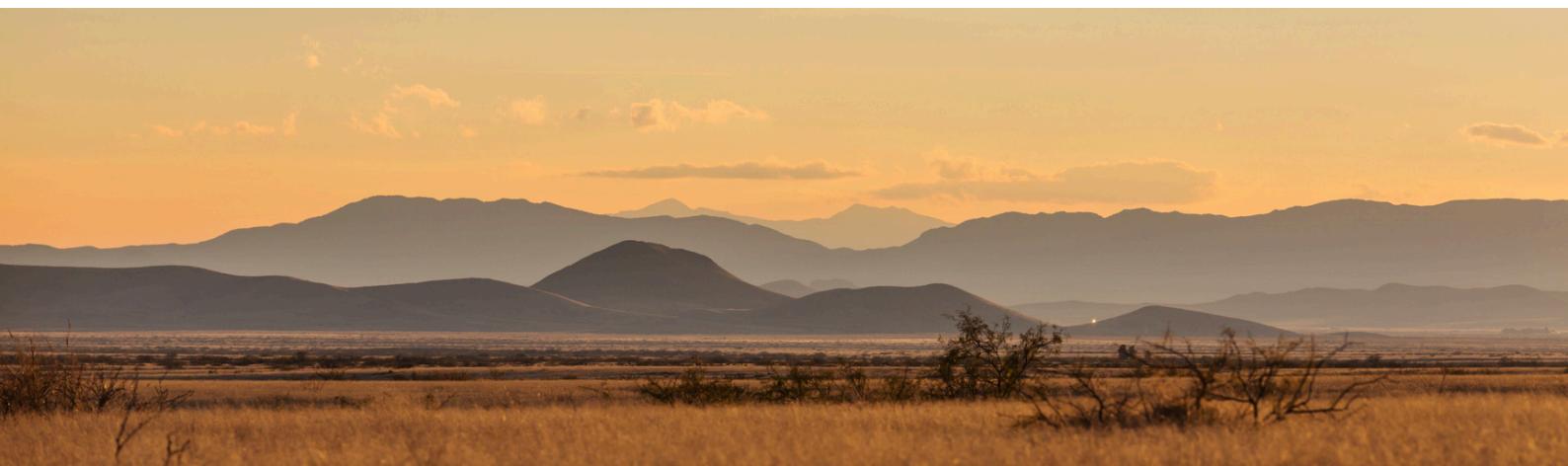
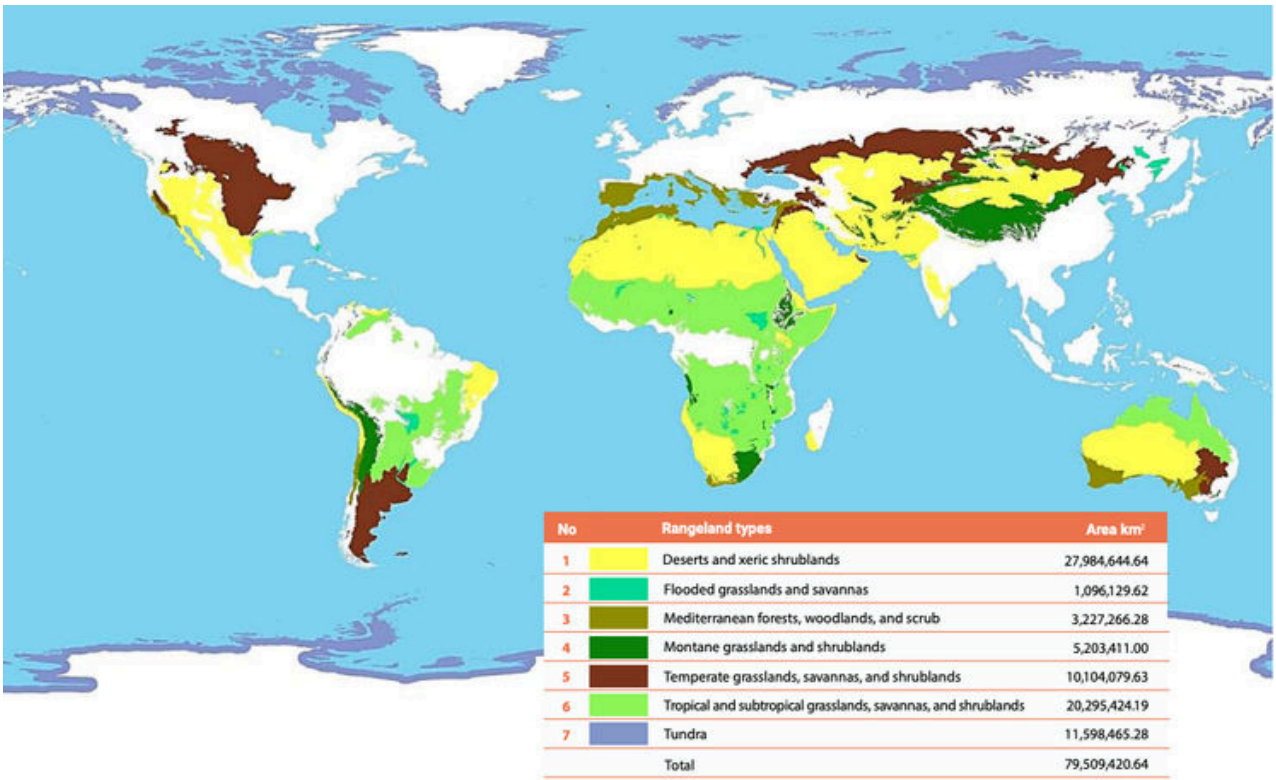


Rangelands

Rangelands cover **more than 50%** of the Earth's terrestrial surface. They sustain food production, store vast amounts of carbon, and support millions of livelihoods. Yet many of these landscapes are in decline. As much as **half of rangelands are degraded**, threatening a sixth of the global food supply and weakening a third of the Earth's carbon sinks. Only a few of the large migratory systems that once shaped these regions remain intact.

When rangelands lose ecological function, both nature and people are affected. Depleted lands yield less food, store less carbon, and filter water less effectively, placing pressure on rural livelihoods and surrounding communities. In addition to land conversion and mismanagement, **a less recognized driver of decline is the loss of wild animal populations below ecologically functional thresholds.**

Large herbivores and predators have shaped these landscapes for millennia. They influence plant communities, nutrient movement, and soil carbon dynamics. Where these species have been reduced or removed, key ecological processes weaken. Rebuilding wildlife populations can help recover ecological function and reinforce carbon storage. Grasslands hold roughly 25 to 34% of global terrestrial carbon, most of it in soils and much of it in natural and lightly grazed systems. Restoring functional food webs strengthens the systems on which both biodiversity and human wellbeing depend.



No	Rangeland types	Area km²
1	Deserts and xeric shrublands	27,984,644.64
2	Flooded grasslands and savannas	1,096,129.62
3	Mediterranean forests, woodlands, and scrub	3,227,266.28
4	Montane grasslands and shrublands	5,203,411.00
5	Temperate grasslands, savannas, and shrublands	10,104,079.63
6	Tropical and subtropical grasslands, savannas, and shrublands	20,295,424.19
7	Tundra	11,598,465.28
	Total	79,509,420.64

Indicative map of global rangelands according to ecoregions - UNCCD

RANGELAND FACTS

Rangelands cover more than **50% of the Earth's terrestrial surface** and provide essential **ecosystem services.**

Grasslands alone store as much as 34% of the global terrestrial carbon, 80-94% of which is in soils, most of it in natural and extensively (i.e., low-density) grazed areas.

Rangelands support a diversity of land users, such as pastoralists, livestock and wildlife farmers, hunter-gathers, tourists, conservationists, and wider society.

Despite their ecological and socioeconomic importance, rangelands are under increasing threat: Up to 50% of rangelands are degraded, threatening a sixth of global food supply and a third of Earth's carbon sinks. In North America, 79% of the prairies have been converted to farmland.

Today only a few of the large migratory systems that once shaped the natural rangelands are still intact.

CARBON SEQUESTRATION POTENTIAL OF LARGE WILD HERBIVORES

Wildebeests in the Serengeti facilitate the annual sequestration of 4.4 million tons of CO_2, which corresponds to 28% of the total fossil fuel emissions by Tanzania in 2021 (13 $MtCO_2/y$). Carbon storage is one important outcome of restored functionality, but it is not the sole objective as maximizing a single ecosystem service without regard to broader ecological processes risks creating new forms of degradation.

Rewilding

Rewilding restores ecosystem functionality for the benefit of people. It enables natural processes and rebuilds food webs so that wild species can perform their ecological roles. Ecosystem functionality in rangelands depends on two interrelated conditions: 1] the intensity and pattern of human use relative to ecological carrying capacity, and 2] the presence of ecologically influential species—particularly large herbivores and carnivores—in densities sufficient to sustain ecological processes. When extraction exceeds ecological limits or wildlife populations fall below functional thresholds, ecological processes weaken and cease to function.

In rangelands, functionality depends on how species interact across the food web and how disturbance shapes the landscape. **Wild animals contribute to ecosystem functionality in distinct and measurable ways:**

- Pollinators sustain plant reproduction and regeneration.
- Certain herbivores act as ecosystem engineers, shaping vegetation mosaics, nutrient cycles, and soil carbon dynamics.
- Apex predators regulate trophic structure and influence grazing behavior.
- Natural disturbances, including fire and grazing dynamics, maintain habitat diversity and renewal.

In addition, some species or assemblages of species function as cultural keystones, shaping human relationships to land and reinforcing stewardship traditions.

The ecological importance of these roles is not always reflected in land management or policy decisions, where wildlife may be treated as secondary to production goals. Yet when animal populations decline or extraction intensifies, nutrient cycling shifts, vegetation patterns change, diversity declines, and soil carbon processes are disrupted. Over time, these changes reduce the resilience of both ecosystems and the communities that depend on them.

Rewilding emphasizes living processes and long-term resilience, stressing the importance of ecological roles being fulfilled and ecological limits respected. It seeks to restore wild species populations to functional levels while reducing pressures that destabilize food webs and maintaining natural disturbance regimes. In doing so, it strengthens carbon storage, supports biodiversity, and reinforces the ecological, economic, and cultural foundations of rural livelihoods.

The Rewilding Rangelands Initiative

Rewilding offers a clear path toward restoring ecological functionality in grassy ecosystems. Translating that path into durable change requires coordinated effort across disciplines, sectors, and geographies. The Rewilding Rangelands Initiative advances that work through two complementary strategies: **strengthening the conditions for change and advancing rewilding in practice**.

A collaboration of Alliance Partners and experts has joined the **Rangelands Working Group**:

AMERICAN PRAIRIE

FUNDACIÓN REWILDING CHILE
El Legado de Tompkins Conservation

FUNDACIÓN REWILDING ARGENTINA

Southern Plains Land Trust
GAINING GROUND FOR PRAIRIE WILDLIFE

The Corbett Foundation

SAHARA CONSERVATION

OLSON BISON
REWILDING THE CANADIAN PRAIRIES

ENONKISHU CONSERVANCY

ALTYN DALA
Conservation Initiative

BIOPHILIA FOUNDATION

JORIS CROMSIGHT

GOAL 1: CREATE THE CONDITIONS FOR CHANGE

Transforming rangelands at a global scale depends on strong foundations. The Rewilding Rangelands Initiative strengthens those foundations by advancing shared vision, credible science, institutional alignment, and a connected global community.

1. **Articulate a shared vision**

The Rewilding Rangelands Initiative advances a clear vision of rangelands as living systems where wildlife, livelihoods, and climate resilience coexist. Many degraded landscapes are assumed to be permanently diminished or destined solely for extraction. The Initiative challenges that assumption by highlighting their beauty, ecological richness, cultural meaning, and capacity for renewal. By making recovery visible and imaginable, it helps shift expectations about what rangelands can become.

2. **Ground the vision in science**

The Global Rewilding Alliance supports and synthesizes research that illustrates how wild animals, trophic interactions, and disturbance regimes contribute to ecosystem functionality. This includes advancing understanding of carbon dynamics, biodiversity recovery, and the relationship between ecological processes and rural economies. By communicating the scientific foundation of rewilding, the Rangelands Initiative ensures that advocacy and policy engagement rest on measurable outcomes rather than aspiration alone.

3. **Align policy and practice**

Lasting progress requires institutional coherence. The Rewilding Rangelands Initiative engages policymakers and practitioners so that rewilding principles inform how rangelands are governed, financed, and managed. By doing so, the Rewilding Rangelands Initiative ensures that policy and practice complement and strengthen each other.

4. **Build a globally active rangelands community**

The Global Rewilding Alliance brings together organizations working in different regions to share experience, refine strategy, and learn from one another. By strengthening connection across contexts and linking local efforts into a global community, the Rewilding Rangelands Initiative helps accelerate progress everywhere.

ALTYN DALA CONSERVATION INITIATIVE
Location: Kazakhstan

The Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative is a long-term multinational partnership dedicated to restoring and protecting the vast grasslands, wetlands, and desert steppes of Kazakhstan, operating over an area of 5 million hectares.

Altyn Dala works through partnerships, with governmental and non-governmental actors, with the aim to revive the “Golden Steppe” (Altyn Dala) by expanding the size of protected areas, engaging local communities and ensuring the recovery of wild animals.

The Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative succeeded in increasing the number of the formerly endangered Saiga Antelope from fewer than 40,000 to over 4 million in less than two decades.

They also support reintroductions of Kulan (Wild Ass) and Przewalski’s Horse and strengthen landscape connectivity to secure key migratory routes and seasonal habitats for wildlife across tens of millions of hectares.

Local communities are central to long-term success. The initiative fosters nature restoration awareness, provides training and employment opportunities.

Learn more about them here.

Credits: Evgeniy Leshenko

Credits: Albert Salemgareyev

Credits: Albert Salemgareyev

WORKING ACROSS TRADITIONS AND SECTORS

Restoring rangeland functionality requires a willingness to question familiar assumptions. Conservation and agriculture communities often approach these landscapes from different starting points. Some see livestock as inherently degrading. Others see wildlife as inherently disruptive. Neither view fully reflects how rangeland ecosystems function.

These landscapes have long been shaped by grazing animals, both wild and domesticated. The question is not whether one replaces the other, but whether ecological roles are active and ecological limits respected. In some contexts, livestock can help maintain function. In others, wildlife recovery is essential to restoring it.

Rewilding works at this intersection. It recognizes that durable conservation depends on viable rural livelihoods, and that long-term livelihoods depend on functional ecosystems. Moving forward requires openness, shared learning, and practical collaboration across sectors.

Credits: Olson Bison Rewilding Project

Credits: Olson Bison Rewilding Project

OLSON BISON REWILDING PROJECT
Location: Canada

The Olson Bison Rewilding Project is one of North America's most significant privately-led rewilding initiatives. For over 30 years, the Olson family has worked to restore degraded prairie ecosystems by reintroducing wild-type Bison as a keystone species. Today, more than 5,000 free-roaming Bison inhabit tens of thousands of acres of restored grassland.

The project uses innovative approaches to fencing allowing natural movement and builds on partnerships with First Nations, recognizing the deep cultural importance of Bison.

This Olson Bison Rewilding Project demonstrates how private land stewardship can restore ecosystems at large scale, support biodiversity, respect cultural histories, and inform global rewilding practice.

PEACE PARKS FOUNDATION (PPF)
Location: Southern Africa

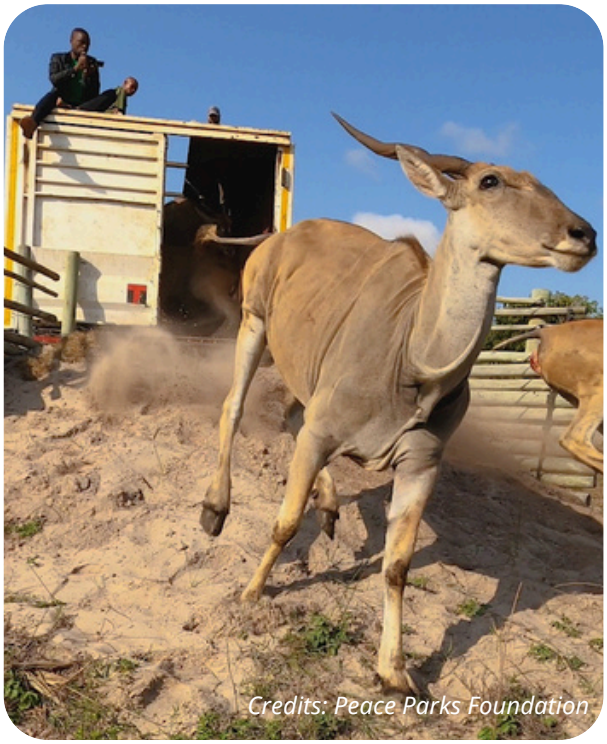
Across southern Africa, rangelands support pastoralist communities, livestock-based economies, and abundant wildlife. Decades of continuous grazing have led to ecosystem degradation and rising conflict between livestock and wildlife. PPF's ambition is to restore 7 million hectares of degraded rangelands by 2030.

The Peace Parks Foundation works closely with communities across multiple landscapes to restore rangeland health at scale while sustaining livelihoods and enabling coexistence with wildlife. In collaboration with Conservation International, the "Herding for Health" Programme is a community-led initiative that helps rural communities near protected areas. It supports livelihoods, restores rangelands, and conserves biodiversity through sustainable herding, capacity building, and collective governance.

Peace Parks Foundation shows that rangelands can recover when ecological processes, livestock management, and community stewardship are aligned. By embedding local communities within a broader landscape approach, this work demonstrates how rangelands can be restored while delivering biodiversity, climate resilience, and social benefits.

Learn more here.

Credits: Peace Parks Foundation



Credits: Peace Parks Foundation

GOAL 2: ACHIEVE TANGIBLE GAINS ON THE GROUND

1. **Demonstrate functional recovery**

In collaboration with the Global Rewilding Alliance partners such as American Prairie, Rewilding Chile and Rewilding Argentina, the Rewilding Rangelands Initiative supports efforts to rebuild ecological roles and reconnect fragmented landscapes. Species reintroductions, habitat restoration, and landscape-scale management interventions provide evidence that restoring food webs and ecological processes can improve resilience and strengthen carbon storage. These examples help move rewilding from concept to practice.

2. **Partner with land users**

Pastoralists, ranchers, and other land managers shape the landscapes in which they work. The Rewilding Rangelands Initiative works alongside those willing to explore how rewilding can complement viable livelihoods and long-term stewardship. Through dialogue with stakeholders and participation in global platforms such as the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP), the Initiative supports approaches that integrate wildlife recovery with working lands.

3. **Expand functional landscapes**

Long-term impact depends on scale. The Initiative supports efforts that extend beyond isolated sites and contribute to broader landscape connectivity. By encouraging replication, linking projects, and sharing lessons across regions, it helps increase the area managed for ecological function and strengthens the conditions under which wildlife and rural economies can coexist.

EXPLAINING PASTORALISM

Pastoralism includes livestock farmers, herders, and ranchers whose livelihoods depend directly on the health and productivity of rangelands. Practiced in more than 100 countries, it supports hundreds of millions of people worldwide. These systems have developed alongside rangeland ecosystems and reflect long experience with climate variability and grazing limits.

Today, many pastoral systems face economic and policy pressures that can push land use beyond ecological capacity. But pastoralism and rewilding share a common foundation: both depend on functional ecosystems. Where ecological roles are active and limits respected, rangelands can sustain wildlife and livelihoods together.

ENONKISHU CONSERVANCY
Location: Kenya

The Enonkishu Conservancy, part of the wildlife conservancy network in Kenya, practices a holistic approach to livestock herding, blending grassland restoration, livestock management, cultural heritage, and economic opportunity.

Grazing is planned adaptively as livestock is moved through different blocks of land to prevent overuse and allow vegetation to recover. Mobile predator-proof bomas (livestock enclosures) are used and moved regularly, mimicking natural herd patterns and enhancing soil fertility, grass regrowth, and biodiversity. These bomas, along with the planned grazing, reduce human-wildlife conflict, benefiting both livestock owners and wild species.

Community engagement is central to the model. Maasai landowners lease their land collectively and participate in governance, creating shared ownership of the conservation vision.

Wildlife Conservancies are a successful approach that aims for co-existence of wild and domesticated animals. As a result these lands have a higher density and diversity of wildlife than Kenya's national parks.

Read more about them here.

Credits: Enonkishu Conservancy

Credits: Enonkishu Conservancy

REWILDING CHILE & TOMPKINS CONSERVATION
Location: Patagonia, Chile

Large grassland areas of southern Chile have been severely degraded through decades of overgrazing by cattle and sheep resulting in soil degradation, loss of native vegetation, habitat fragmentation and declines in wildlife populations.

In the early 1990's, Tompkins Conservation began purchasing land for conservation, and started the process of creating national parks. Today that legacy is continued by their offspring organisation: Rewilding Chile. Together with the Chilean government, which provides additional large tracts of public land, they have founded an impressive chain of national parks that covers an area of 40,000 km², representing nearly a third of all surface of national parks in Chile.

In Patagonia National Park, Tompkins Conservation with the local team from their offspring Rewilding Chile, gradually removed tens of thousands of livestock from former large ranches, dismantled fencing and infrastructure that once fragmented habitats and restricted wildlife movement, and ended extractive land uses, allowing soils and native vegetation to recover naturally.

They have gradually restored the grasslands by reseeding native grasses, such as Coirón, and by strengthening and protecting native herbivores and predators (e.g. Huemul deers, Guanacos, Pumas, Condors and other endangered species).

To secure the long-term protection of landscapes, the mission of Rewilding Chile is to restore large scale ecosystems and create new protected areas. The relationship with the Chilean government, philanthropists, NGOs as well as with local communities is crucial as it ensures that restoration gains are permanent and managed for ecological integrity.

Read more here.


Credits: Marcelo Mascareno


Credits: Linde Waidhofer


Credits: Linde Waidhofer

AMERICAN PRAIRIE
Location: USA

American Prairie focuses on restoring and protecting the Northern Great Plains by reconnecting vast expanses of native grassland and supporting the return of wildlife and natural ecological processes. American Prairie is working to create one of the largest contiguous nature reserves in the United States by restoring native grasslands and reconnecting fragmented habitats, reversing the fragmentation of one of the world's most endangered ecosystems: temperate grasslands.

They do so by acquiring private ranching lands from willing sellers and link them with existing public lands. This landscape-scale approach enables wildlife movement and the recovery of natural ecological processes across millions of hectares, allowing the return of native wildlife including Bison.

American Prairie demonstrates that large-scale grassland restoration combines rewilding, science, and a long-term vision. They offer a powerful model for safeguarding temperate grasslands for future generations.

Learn more about them here.

Looking forward

Rangelands sit at the center of some of the most pressing challenges of our time. Climate instability, biodiversity loss, and the decline of rural communities are converging sharply in these landscapes.

Rewilding offers a science-based framework for responding to these challenges by restoring how rangelands function. This approach is most effective when policymakers, practitioners, and land users share a common understanding of ecosystem function and act on it together.

The Global Rewilding Alliance works to build that shared understanding and to support those translating it into lasting outcomes for people and nature.

Have a look at the rest of the **thematic-focused work**, and if you'd like to get involved, please get in touch by emailing us at **karl@globalrewilding.earth**.

ABOUT THE GLOBAL REWILDING ALLIANCE

The Global Rewilding Alliance is a worldwide organisation catalysing the rewilding movement by bringing together an active network of over 290 partners, working on every continent to help nature heal herself and secure a thriving future for people, nature and planet.

Our mission is to mainstream rewilding in science, policy and practice.

The core support of our Global Rewilding Champions is enabling us to build the hopeful, growing, global rewilding movement.

OUR CHAMPIONS
A GROUP OF REWILDING LEADERS

re:wild

WILD

ifaw

FUNDACIÓN REWILDING CHILE
The Legacy of Tompkins Conservation

Rewilding Europe

BEN GOLDSMITH

BIOPHILIA FOUNDATION

ANDRÉ HOFFMANN

OLSON BISON
Est. 1992
REWILDING THE CANADIAN PRAIRIES

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