

grasslands of the world

Between the mountains and the seas, there are the grasslands. They are the ecological and cultural heart of five continents. They enrich our world with epic wildlife that inspires us, food and water that nourishes us and time-honored ways of life that define us as people. The many names for grasslands—savanna, prairie, steppe, pampas, llanos, cerrado, veld—reflect their significance around the world. But regardless of what they're called, grasslands—and all that they provide—are quickly disappearing.

Lands of Plenty

The world's grasslands house a huge variety of plants and animals. Africa's savannas support 120 species of mammals, and 40 percent of North America's birds breed in the Great Plains. Australia is home to a grassland so vast and unexplored that 20 percent of its plants have yet to be scientifically described. In Colombia and Venezuela, seasonally flooded grasslands are home to more than 700 species of birds, unusual mammals and the highly endangered Orinoco crocodile.

Healthy grasslands are essential to humanity's food, water and air supply. Corn, wheat, rice, rye, barley and millet, all plants that originated in grasslands, supply most of the world with nearly half the calories of its daily diet. Grasslands are able to purify and store potable water at a scale that cannot be replicated by human engineering, and they sequester carbon dioxide at rates that rival many forests.

Today, more than 800 million people live in the world's grasslands, and most of them have a serious stake in the future of these places. The ranchers

of North America, the gauchos of Argentina and the Masai of Kenya have lived in grasslands for generations. Because their cultures and traditions are inextricably linked to the land and its natural cycles, these people are bound and committed to the health and future of their lands.

With so many lives dependent on healthy, productive grasslands, their protection is integral to maintaining human well-being and biodiversity around the world.

Lands of Loss

Grasslands once covered more than one quarter of Earth's land masses. But today they are among the most threatened habitats on Earth. In fact, one-third of grasslands worldwide have been altered and the remaining landscapes face new and unprecedented threats.

In North America, more than half of the grasslands have been lost to farming and development. Even in remote places like northern Australia, land-conversion and unsustainable grazing and farming imperil one of the world's few remaining wildernesses.



how you can help

The Conservancy's Campaign for a Sustainable Planet is transforming the scale and effectiveness of grassland conservation around the world. But no one organization can do this alone, and we need your help.

The Nature Conservancy is committed to creating a sustainable planet where natural habitats and human communities coexist, a world where the climate is stable and resources such as grasslands, forests, fisheries and energy are renewable, plentiful and secure. Protecting the grasslands of the world, which support so many of the agricultural and ecological services that make human life possible, is one of the keys to achieving this vision. But we must act now or lose even more of these life-sustaining habitats.

Our collaborative approach and scientific expertise are uniquely suited to address the conservation of vast landscapes. By partnering with governments, non-profits and local communities; supporting exchanges of best practices between ranchers and herdsman around the world; and leveraging private support from donors; we are able to achieve immediate, tangible results.

With your support, we can save the world's most important grasslands and all the life they hold, protecting both wildlife and ways of life. Won't you join us?

Image credits: (cover) Eucalypt (gum) trees in Western Australia ©Mark Godfrey/TNC, (back cover) Capybara, birds and wildlife in the Orinoco grasslands of Venezuela ©Mark Godfrey/TNC, (inside, right flap) top: Zebras and wildebeests in Tanzania, Africa ©Emily Whitted, bottom: Nomadic Mongolian herder at Wind Horse Ger Camp near Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia ©Chris Pague/TNC, (inside front cover) Bison at Niobrara Valley Preserve, Nebraska ©Chris Helzer/TNC, (inside right page) top right: Guanacos on San Pedro de Valdes Reserve on the Valdes Peninsula of the Atlantic Coast of Argentina ©Bridget Besaw, middle right: Ranchers herding cattle at Malpai in Arizona ©Will Van Overbeek bottom right: Young woman in east Africa's Rift Valley, ©Sanjayan/TNC



at a glance

The Nature Conservancy is the only organization working to systematically conserve grasslands on a global scale.

Less than 5 percent of the world's grasslands are effectively conserved.

Temperate grasslands are the most converted, least protected terrestrial habitat on Earth, with less than 2 percent effectively conserved.

Mongolian grasslands support 800,000 nomadic herders.

Fire, like rain and sunshine, has played an important role in grassland environments for millions of years. The Conservancy is working with governments, conservation organizations and local communities to restore fire's natural role in maintaining grasslands around the world.

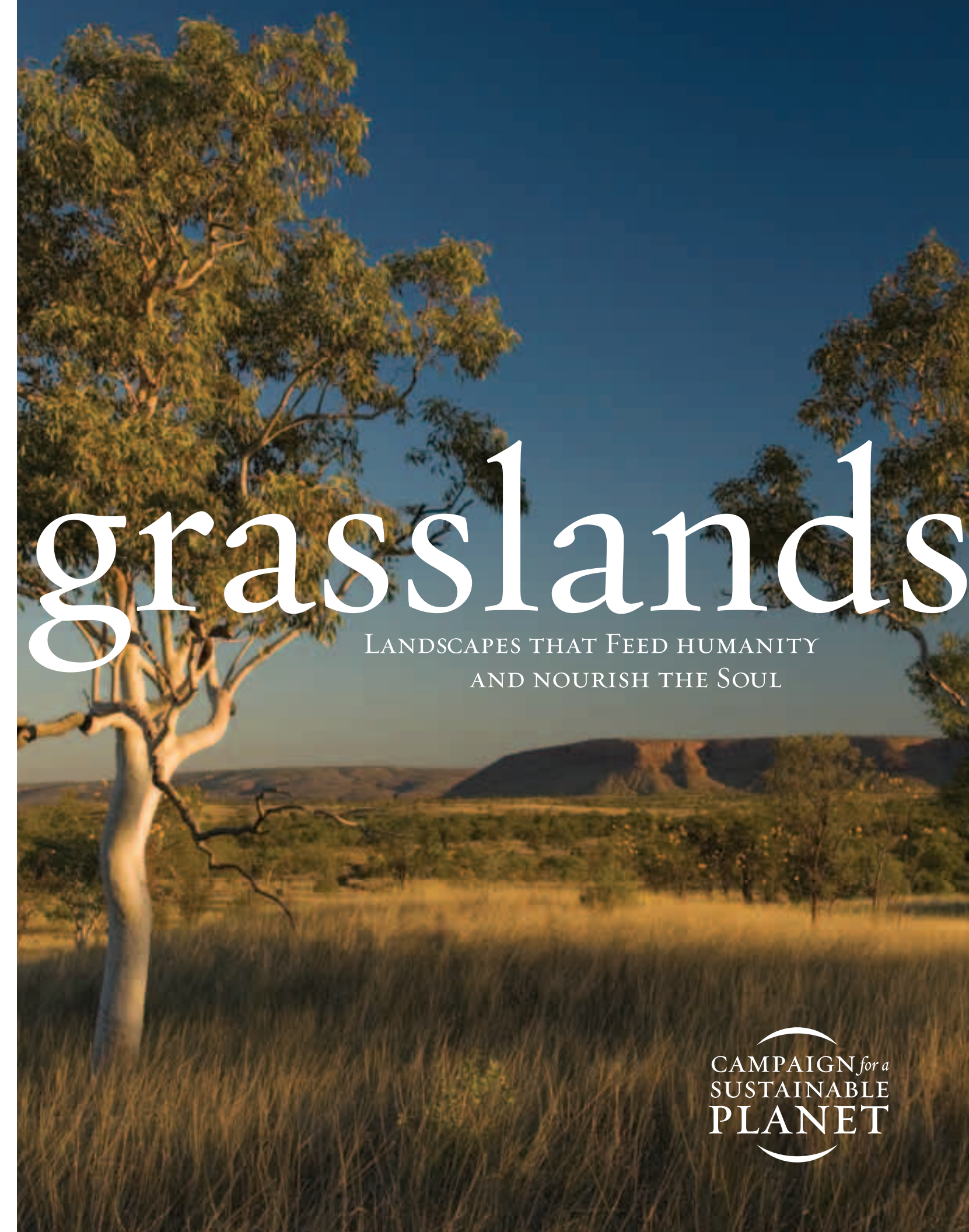
More than 70 percent of the world's tropical savannas are gone and little of what remains is protected. Scientists estimate that these habitats are being lost at twice the rate of rainforests.

All of the major food grains—corn, wheat, oats, rice, rye, millet and barley—originated in grasslands.



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grasslands

LANDSCAPES THAT FEED HUMANITY
AND NOURISH THE SOUL



Since the beginning of humankind, we have taken from grasslands. Our ancestors hunted game on the African savannas, domesticated grassland animals for food, and adapted wild grasses into grains to feed great civilizations.

Grasslands the world over have been plowed under, paved over, and otherwise altered to meet the needs and desires of humanity. They are the most converted habitats on Earth.

The Nature Conservancy's Campaign for a Sustainable Planet is a call to action because now is the time for us to give back to the world's grasslands, to ensure that our most exploited ecosystems can continue to support the plants, animals and people dependent on them for survival.



Taking Global Action

Vast grasslands and savannas still remain in the world, and The Nature Conservancy is working with partners—using both proven and pioneering techniques—to protect them and the traditional ways of life they support. With more than 40 years of experience in the practice of grassland conservation, the Conservancy is singularly positioned to lead a movement that will dramatically shift the scale of grassland conservation worldwide.

Conservation on this scale can only be achieved through the collaborative efforts of many dedicated organizations and individuals. The Conservancy's key partners in grassland conservation include large international conservation organizations, small grassroots groups, private landowners, public officials, indigenous communities, public agencies, scientists and universities.

At the local level, conservation depends on proven land stewardship techniques such as the use of prescribed fire, the control of invasive species, and rotational grazing. At the state and federal government level, the Conservancy is helping to shape and enact policies and legislation that benefit grasslands.

At a still broader level, we are catalyzing more sustainable uses of grasslands by industries like agriculture, mining and energy. We are also mobilizing the large-scale funding necessary to conserve and protect grasslands into the future and helping reintroduce and manage ecologically appropriate fire regimes in grasslands around the world.

Montana Ranchers and Mongolian Nomads: a Common Bond

People who make their living on grasslands are powerful allies in conservation. The Nature Conservancy is strengthening the common goals emerging among these communities, policymakers and other stakeholders in grasslands to protect this vital resource.

Ranchers in the western United States are among those who depend on healthy grasslands for their livelihoods. To help them sustain their way of life, the Conservancy is pioneering new conservation tools like beginning rancher loan programs and 'grassbanks' that provide ranchers a revolving 'bank' of livestock forage when they choose to employ conservation tools on their lands.



Eastern Mongolia's steppe has sustained nomadic herders and their animals for thousands of years. Like the high plains of Montana and its ranching culture, the steppe and its nomadic tradition are in jeopardy. The Conservancy is launching efforts to establish a sustainable management framework with local herder communities and facilitating a national forum to unite business, religious, government and conservation leaders in Mongolia around a common environmental agenda. These projects will support not only the way of life for traditional herders but also cranes, wolves, steppe eagles, huge herds of gazelle and the native wild horses known as takhi.

Whether for ranchers in Montana or nomads in Mongolia, grasslands are a precious source of nourishment for the body and soul, providing food for their herds and rooting them in the traditions of their ancestors. Working with a wide network of partners and allies, we can provide these communities with tools and methods to preserve both wildlife and ways of life.



campaign projects

The Conservancy is transforming the scale and effectiveness of grassland conservation across North America, Africa, South America, Asia and Australia. Our goal is to protect nearly 270 million acres of grasslands and savannas by 2015.

THE GREAT PLAINS OF NORTH AMERICA: In collaboration with landowners, scientists and policymakers, the Conservancy aims to create the world's largest network of protected grasslands. Stretching from Canada to Mexico, each of these 20 landscapes is at least 200,000 acres in size and capable of maintaining ecological processes like fire and animal herd grazing, as well as the traditions of the North American ranching culture.

AFRICAN GRASSLANDS AND SAVANNAS: From Mt. Kilimanjaro to the floodplain of the Zambezi, the grasslands and savannas of Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia support the largest mammal migration on Earth and a rich pastoral tradition. The Conservancy is working closely with partners to protect vital migration paths for wildlife on private and communal lands, as well as helping governments improve management of public protected areas.

PATAGONIAN GRASSLANDS OF ARGENTINA: Southern Argentina is a fabled land with unusual wildlife and a proud ranching tradition. The Conservancy will engage private landowners to develop conservation set-asides, work with academic institutions and sheep ranching associations to expand and improve sustainable ranching programs, and support government agencies in the creation and management of national and provincial parks.

ORINOCO GRASSLANDS OF COLOMBIA AND VENEZUELA: The floodplain of the mighty Orinoco River is one of the world's richest tropical savannas. The Conservancy is working with landowners, ranching associations, policymakers, public park administrators and local partner organizations to create a mosaic landscape of protected areas and working rangelands that will sustain this vibrant natural system.

GRASSLANDS OF THE MONGOLIAN STEPPE AND THE TIBETAN PLATEAU: Eastern Mongolia and the Tibetan plateau are home to two of the largest remaining stretches of grasslands in temperate and mountainous regions on Earth. Working with governments, herder communities and international corporations, we will help ensure that these lands continue to support viable populations of wide-ranging wildlife species and nomadic herders.

NORTHERN AUSTRALIA GRASSLANDS: Northern Australia is home to the world's largest remaining tropical savanna. The Conservancy is helping Australian conservation groups, landowners and indigenous people to apply best practices in conservation, including prescribed fire, invasive species management, sustainable grazing and land acquisition to save this great wilderness.

