



TERMS OF REFERENCE

Global Rangelands Standard (GRS)

June 6, 2024

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Introduction to the Rangeland Stewardship Council (RSC)

The Rangeland Stewardship Council (RSC) is dedicated to advancing the sustainable management of global rangelands, recognising their pivotal role in supporting human livelihoods, ensuring food security, and preserving biodiversity. As a non-profit organisation, the RSC strives to promote responsible stewardship practices that harmonise the production of essential resources—such as meat, milk, leather, fibre and grains—with the conservation of wildlife habitats and the mitigation of climate change. The pastoral communities that have helped create the rangelands of today will find representation and support in the RSC’s work.

Mission and Vision

Central to the RSC’s mission is the commitment to establish a global benchmark for responsible rangeland management through the creation of a unified standard—the Global Rangelands Standard (GRS). This comprehensive standard aims to promote best practices worldwide, focusing on herder representation, traceability, carbon sequestration, culturally attentive practices, human health and wellbeing, animal welfare, gender equality, and effective land management. The vision is to create a sustainable framework that recognises responsible land stewardship and brings together environmental, social, and economic considerations.

This initiative is supported by the Global Environment Facility-funded STELARR (Sustainable Investments for Large-Scale Rangeland Restoration) Project, which is implemented by IUCN and executed by ILRI and partners

About the GRS Terms of Reference

The GRS Terms of Reference document provides an overview of the framework aimed at promoting sustainable management and conservation of global rangelands. Key specifics include the following points:

- **Background** – importance of rangelands and the need for a unified standard
- **Objectives** – environmental, economic and social objectives
- **Approach** – collaborative, regionally specific, One Health, grassroots, transparent
- **Proposed Structure** – 5 key principles of the GRS
- **Stakeholder Participation** – key stakeholders
- **Governance and Decision-Making** – governing bodies responsible for developing and overseeing the continuous improvement and implementation of the standard
- **Process** – timeline of activities leading to launch of the GRS
- **Partnerships and Support** – collaboration with international organisations and funding bodies

Background

Rangelands cover over half of the Earth's land surface, supporting millions of livelihoods and providing crucial services such as carbon sequestration and water regulation. However, these ecosystems are under threat from habitat destruction due to land conversion and overexploitation. Sustainable management practices are vital to maintaining their ecological balance and supporting local communities.

What are rangelands?

There are many different and valid definitions of rangelands, but for the purpose of this document the RSC defines rangelands **as natural or semi-natural ecosystems grazed by livestock** and/or wild animals. Rangelands are considered **complex social-ecological systems** whereby their natural resources provide a broad range of goods, services, and values.¹

While some commodities like animal fibres from rangelands can already be certified, it is increasingly evident that relying solely on these sectors isn't enough to safeguard the health of rangelands. These areas are also used by numerous uncertified actors. Therefore, adopting landscape approaches to conservation is essential for ensuring the sustained effectiveness of conservation efforts and for attracting investments that support rangeland ecosystems.

The GRS will address this need, taking a landscape approach to calibrate and coordinate management standards across various species and the diverse range of products sourced from rangelands. This global initiative will take a One Health approach, promoting regenerative farming, enhancing biodiversity, and protecting local cultural heritage and diversity. The standard will incentivise and recognise best practices in rangeland management, aiming to create nature-positive outcomes while ensuring the livelihoods of rangeland communities.

By fostering collaboration among stakeholders, the GRS will enable the certification of the entire lifecycle of domestic rangeland animals including the production of livestock feed, not just the phases related to specific commodity production. It will complement and align with existing standard systems. Entities already certified against recognised animal welfare or commodity standards acknowledged by the GRS can transition smoothly to RSC certification.

¹ UNCCD. 2024. Global Land Outlook Thematic Report on Rangelands and Pastoralism. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, Bonn.

Objectives

The aim of the GRS is to establish a fundamental set of principles and indicators to achieve the following environmental, economic and social objectives:

1. Minimise the environmental impact of rangeland production and enhance biodiversity conservation with rangeland stewardship standards. This involves developing and implementing effective global solutions that are adaptable to local contexts.
2. Enhance livelihoods, economic growth, and income diversity among herders by fostering innovations in the value chain that support their livelihoods.
3. Increase global awareness of sustainable production and consumption of rangeland products and promote greater commitment to and integration of sustainable rangeland products across supply chains.

The GRS includes requirements aimed at safeguarding rangeland health through collaborative efforts with other stakeholders. This collaborative approach is evident in the extensive consultations held prior to the standard's publication and its structured compatibility with existing standards. Importantly, the GRS does not replace current commodity standards but serves as a framework for enhancing collaboration among them, thereby achieving more significant collective impact.

For entities seeking certification involving vertebrate animals and/or commodity production (e.g., animal fibres), compliance with animal welfare and socio-economic criteria from relevant third-party standards is required under the Standard. The minimum requirements and assurance systems necessary for recognition under any third-party standard will be established by the RSC Livestock Welfare Standard, ensuring adherence to both animal welfare and human welfare standards, respectively.

Approach

The GRS takes a considered approach, emphasising collaboration, region-specific standards, One Health principles, a bottom-up perspective, and transparency for accountability.

Collaborative

The GRS embraces a collaborative approach by actively engaging with existing programs and groups in both the private and public sectors. This collaborative effort extends to incorporating herder representation to ensure diverse perspectives and expertise contribute to the development of a unified standard for rangelands.

Regionally Specific Standard

Recognising the diverse nature of rangelands, the GRS aims to provide guidance for regionally specific standards. By coordinating with policies at local, national, and international levels, it ensures that its standards are adaptable to the unique characteristics of different regions while maintaining a global vision for best practices in rangeland management.

One Health

In line with the World Health Organisation's 'One Health' approach, the Standard will take a holistic perspective, considering the interconnectedness of human health, animal health and the environment. The GRS emphasises a need for a balanced and optimised health framework for people, animals, and ecosystems within rangelands.

Grassroots

The GRS uses a grassroots strategy to connect communities involved in raw material production with brand customers. It encourages collaboration between organisations using rangeland products and the communities that produce these materials, thereby promoting environmental conservation and sustainability from the grassroots level.

Transparent for Accountability

Transparency is fundamental to the GRS to ensure accountability for all stakeholders, whether public or private. The GRS' development and implementation adhere to the ISEAL Codes of Good Practice, focusing on principles like engagement, impartiality, and transparency. By establishing landscape-level monitoring and reporting systems, the Standard tracks the progress of sustainability efforts, ensuring stakeholders uphold their commitments.

Proposed Structure

Principle 1: Compliance with Laws

This principle ensures adherence to all applicable laws at supra-national, national, state and local levels.

Principle 2: Establish Indigenous People and Local Communities Framework

The framework seeks to promote resilience and sustainable coexistence between local and indigenous communities and the agriculture sector.

Principle 3: Effective Management

Indicators within this principle serve to monitor and assess progress against production criteria, ensuring accurate maintenance and systematic reporting of field-level data.

Principle 4: Decent Work Standard

The primary objective of this principle is to ensure that hiring practices are conducted to uphold the principles of non-discrimination, fairness, and respect for workers' rights.

Principle 5: Adoption of Rangeland Stewardship

The principle seeks to implement sustainable practices to ensure that land users understand the importance of natural resources, how to safeguard them, and how to manage grazing to preserve soil health, prevent pasture degradation, and minimise conflicts with wildlife.

Stakeholder Participation

The consultations for the GRS play a crucial role in developing credible and internationally recognised guidelines, supported by robust assurance and monitoring systems. Stakeholder feedback is essential in adapting the core principles of the GRS to diverse legal, social, and geographical landscapes worldwide.

These consultations aim to assess the relevance and value of the GRS principles, gather suggestions for improvement, and ensure alignment with objectives in rangeland management. Given the global scope of the GRS, it is vital for these principles to comprehensively address pertinent issues while accommodating diverse stakeholder needs.

The consultation process will adhere to the ISEAL Standard Setting Code, which mandates at least two rounds of public consultation and meaningful engagement with stakeholders, with a particular focus on those who are usually underrepresented. This inclusive approach aims to achieve balanced and effective stakeholder participation.

Key stakeholders include:

- Producers
- Brokers
- Primary and Secondary Processing
- Manufacturers
- Wholesalers
- Retailers
- NGOs
- Civil Societies
- Governments and Policy Makers
- Academics and Researchers
- Certifying Bodies
- Non-profit Organisations
- Consultants

Activities and Timeline

The table below outlines proposed activities and timeline² to support the development of the Global Rangeland Standard.

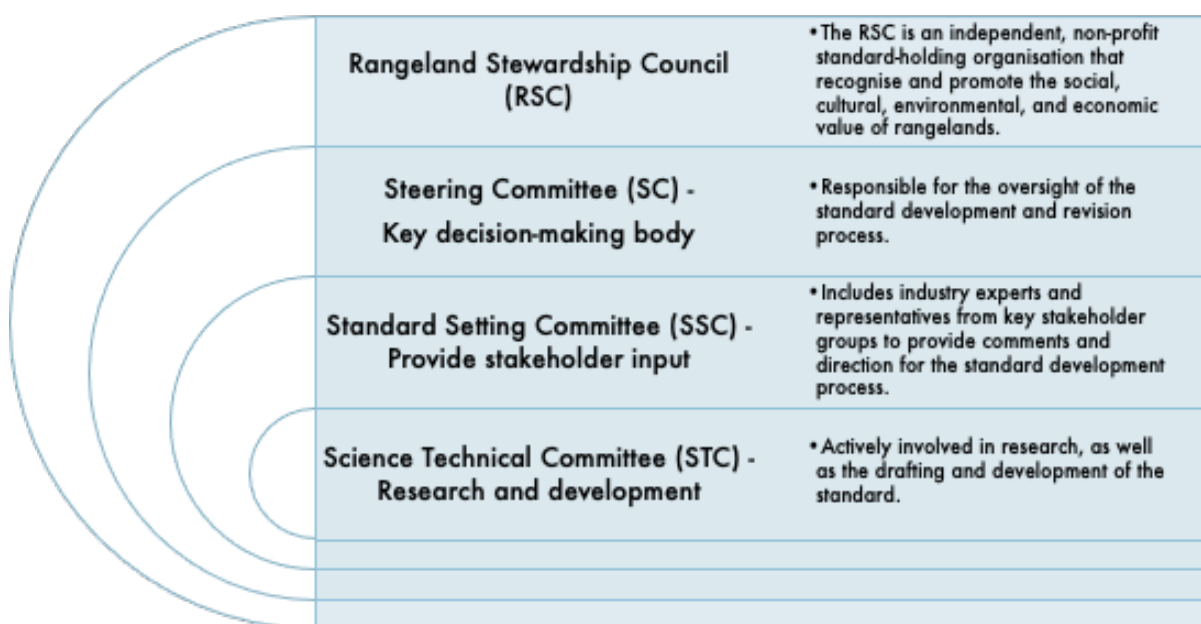
ACTIVITY	PLANNED DATES
Review of Draft 0 of GRS	April - May 2024
International Rangeland Experts and Stakeholders Consultation, online	June - July 2024
Herder Engagement Consultation Various Locations	July - December 2024
MEL Framework Consultation and Development	July - December 2024
Development of the Stakeholder Mapping and Engagement Plan	July - September 2024
Industry Consultation Natural Fibre Connect Conference, Italy	September 2024
Development of the Rangeland Ecosystem Services Procedure Document	September - October 2024
Gender and Decent Work Consultation	September - November 2024
Regional Consultation International Symposium on Pastoralism, Senegal	November 2024
Science Technical Committee (STC) revision of GRS draft	November - December 2024
Presentation of the GRS and Consultation COP 16 Event, Saudi Arabia	December 2024
Private Sector Investment Roundtable	2024 – 2025, Details TBC with STELARR partners ³
Public Consultation	January - April 2025
Regional Consultation Sustainable Natural Fibre Conference, China	April 2025
Regional Consultation International Rangeland Congress, Australia	June 2025
Publicise stakeholder comments	August 2025
STC revision of GRS draft	September - November 2025
Review of updated GRS draft with members of the Steering Committee (SC) and Standard Setting Committee (SSC)	December 2025
Public Consultation	January - April 2026
Publicise stakeholder comments	May 2026
STC revision of GRS draft	June - August 2026
Review of updated GRS draft with members of the SC and SSC	September 2026
Edit and format final draft of GRS	October - November 2026
Publication of GRS	December 2026

² The information provided aims for accuracy but may be subject to change due to varying circumstances.

³ The development of the GRS is supported by the Global Environment Facility-funded STELARR Project, which is implemented by IUCN and executed by ILRI and partners.

Governance and Decision-Making

The Rangeland Stewardship Council (RSC) governance structure is designed to ensure inclusive and balanced decision-making regarding the development, implementation, monitoring and continuous improvement of the GRS. Within the RSC, there are three key committees: the Steering Committee, the Standards Setting Committee, and the Science Technical Committee.



Rangeland Stewardship Council (RSC)

The RSC will establish a governance body responsible for making decisions on the content of the GRS. This body will be open to all stakeholders and will be constituted as a balanced and diverse group, with full consideration given to gender diversity. Stakeholders include those directly affected by the implementation of the GRS or by the broader rangelands sector it aims to impact. The RSC retains ownership of standards developed and reviewed through these procedures, maintaining the authority to establish and modify any requirements of these standards.

Steering Committee (SC)

The SC exercises oversight over the GRS development and revision process, including making recommendations, reviewing and approving drafts, and ensuring the quality of the development process. Time commitments are on a quarterly basis. The committee comprises representatives from standards systems or individuals with technical expertise in sustainability standards, standard setting, monitoring and evaluation, or assurance systems. The SC has the authority to veto decisions concerning the development and revision of the GRS and associated normative documents.

Standards Setting Committee (SSC)

The SSC includes industry experts and representatives from key stakeholder groups to offer feedback and guidance on specific elements of the GRS development and review process. Time commitments are based on requirements. Working Groups are specialised sub-groups within the SSC, each composed of individuals with expert knowledge in specific areas. While all members are encouraged to offer advice on any topic, only those within each Working Group are tasked with providing guidance relevant to their respective disciplines.

Science Technical Committee (STC)

The STC plays an active role in researching and drafting the GRS. Composed of 5-6 members appointed by the RSC secretariat, each member possesses a comprehensive understanding of sustainability principles and contributes specialised knowledge to ensure that the GRS is robust, relevant, and aligned with global best practices in sustainability. The committee dedicates significant time to bi-weekly consultations throughout the Standard's review process, ensuring thorough consideration and expertise in the development and refinement of the GRS.

Partnership and Support

Collaboration with international organisations and funding bodies enhances the scope and impact of the Global Rangelands Standard by providing essential resources, expertise, and global reach.

The GRS is being developed by the Rangeland Stewardship Council in partnership with the UNCCD, the SFA, and with the support of rangeland stakeholders.

This initiative is supported by the Global Environment Facility-funded STELARR (Sustainable Investments for Large-Scale Rangeland Restoration) Project, which is implemented by IUCN and executed by ILRI and partners. Additional funding is provided by the European Commission.



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