Letter from the President:

As 2017 comes to a close, I look back over the year with a deep sense of awe, not only for the many accomplishments of the year, but also for the dedication and hard work of the RSA board of directors and staff. I am so grateful to be working with a group that is so deeply committed to this mission: Ranching, Conservation, Communities – A winning team!

Now, more than ever, I am convinced that this model of cooperative, community based conservation is the way forward. The collaborative partnership of dedicated private land stewards, like-minded public land managers, and creative organizational specialists in natural resources is essential. These partnerships will ensure that the Northern Great Plains remain healthy and intact as both prime wildlife habitat and productive agricultural land far into the future.

It is with renewed excitement for the future of RSA, that I announce Perri Jacobs will be taking over as President of the Board of Directors. Perri brings with her a strong agricultural background and a desire to spread the word about the positive impact of traditional cattle ranching. She also holds a Bachelor’s degree in Animal Science and Agriculture Education, as well as a Masters of Public Administration. Perri brings a diverse and valuable skillset to RSA, and I’m certain she will prove invaluable as the organization moves onto future partnerships and grant opportunities.

This annual report reflects all the great accomplishments of the year, and I am confident that 2018 will prove to be even better.

Sincerely,

Leo Barthelmess,
RSA President 2013–2017
Education remains an important tool for RSA to strengthen our ranching communities. Ranchers can best support their business and local communities through an enhanced knowledge base of business and how to best harvest the diverse native vegetation upon which they rely. During 2017 RSA sponsored several educational workshops, including:

- A ranch grazing tour was held in June, the focus on this tour was to highlight the importance of grazing management and cooperative conservation. The first stop was a presentation on using controlled burning to enhance wildlife and improve grass populations. Next on the tour was a stop at an historical homesteading site. This stop was important to help participants visualize what the tragic ending of that era was. It has taken 80 years of cooperative grazing management to restore this landscape to some of the best wildlife habitat and functioning grasslands in North America. The last portion of this tour consisted of a discussion presented by Bob Sanders, of Ducks Unlimited, on the compatibility of livestock grazing and healthy wetlands. Everyone agreed that cooperative projects that enhanced wildlife habitat and livestock grazing were beneficial for rural communities.

- A profitable ranching workshop with Jim Gerrish from the American Grazing Lands Services was held in September. This workshop examined the variables of profitability, such as: operating cost, feed cost, weaning weight, and more, and how these variables affect a rancher’s profitability. The second part of the workshop consisted of a ranch tour on The Nature Conservancy’s Matador Ranch. The group explored the environmental factors that must be considered by land and natural resource managers. The workshop was a great opportunity to inspire new thinking for people who care for, maintain, and nourish the land.

- A workshop on the importance of rangeland monitoring was held during February. This workshop also highlighted the importance of tracking grass growth in response to grazing changes, and the use of grazing systems to improve grass populations. The workshop was well attended and was led by Rick Caquelin, NRCS Area Range Management Specialist, and Emily Standley, Montana Rangelands Partnership Range Technician.

RSA partnered with the Missoula Food and Agriculture Coalition FarmLink program to develop a specific GrassLink program to assist beginning producers in finding grass land for grazing. The FarmLink website was setup to connect people in the agriculture community with the resources they need. The GrassLink program specifically allows landowners and land seekers looking for grazing in Phillip, Valley, and Blaine counties to find each other. RSA especially hopes to use this program to encourage landowners with expiring CRP to find a lessee to graze it, rather than converting it to cropland and losing additional grassland habitat. More information can be found at farmlinkmontana.org
The importance of community has always been a pillar on which Ranchers Stewardship Alliance has based its work. Ranching families belong to a community that surpass the boundaries of towns, counties, and states. We belong to the community of people that work hard to feed the world. We love the land and wildlife habitat that has been entrusted into our hands, and work tirelessly to steward it to the best of our abilities. That’s why Ranchers Stewardship Alliance works hard to give back, not only to the ranching community as a whole, but also to our local community in Phillips County, Montana.

RSA was busy around the community in 2017. An event that is important to us in our community outreach efforts is the Phillips County Proud celebration. We held the 2nd annual PC Proud event in the fall. This event, that we plan to hold annually, featured artwork from our local youth and honored our community members celebrating a century in the Phillips county area. Among those featured were: The Breipohl Family, the Christofferseon Family, the French Family, the Hall-Henerson-Jacobs Families, the Kienenberger Family of the Rocky Ridge Ranch, the Orahood Family, the Barnard Family, the Phillips County Fair, and Equity Co-op. These families, businesses, and organizations are committed to their community and to family ranching, and it’s the retention of this generational knowledge that makes them so important to our future success. It is for those reasons, and many more that we honor them.

Following a devastating fire season, RSA was pleased to donate the proceeds from this event in the amount of $400 to our rural fire department.
We recognize that the folks in our community are as civic minded as we are. Giving back is a way of life here. Board service is one way that many people in Phillips county strive to serve their communities. In an effort to help our community members be more effective with their board service, RSA partnered with the Malta Chamber of Commerce and Phillips County Economic Development to offer education and training. The first function was a meeting for all non-profit organizations within Phillips County to work on identifying needs, increasing communications between organizations, and avoiding duplicative efforts. In addition we also held a board training, where attendance exceeded our expectations. Due to the popularity and need in the community, we plan to make this an annual event.

RSA continued this effort with our own board of directors and completed a two day leadership retreat conducted by a facilitator. During this retreat, which was thanks in part to a capacity building grant from the World Wildlife Fund, the board developed an organizational strategic plan, and gathered tools to effectively move forward towards goals.

The importance of partnerships is a strong belief with RSA. We take great pride in our ability to partner with diverse groups and organizations to further our goals, strengthen our community, and help create a brighter future for ranching families and land stewards. In 2017 we partnered with many local, state, and national organizations to do just that.

One project that was near to our hearts this year was a partnership with the Phillips County Cattlewomen, Phillips County Farm Bureau, and the Phillips County Livestock Association. Through this partnership we hosted 30 Great Falls High School students on a county wide farm and ranch tour. Many of these students had no experience with agriculture, and some had never been outside of the city of Great Falls before they embarked on this trip. Throughout the course of this tour they were able to learn about agriculture, the ranching heritage, range management, soil management, grass production, and the importance of sustainable food sources. The tour was fun, informative, and of course the favorite activity for the kids was milking a cow and making homemade butter and ice cream!
conservation

This thriving landscape, that we now enjoy, has abundant wildlife and healthy vegetation. It is through the efforts of family owned and operated ranches that is has been tirelessly and lovingly restored from the disaster of the dust bowl era. Conservation of natural resources and wildlife habitat is a tenet of life that we learned from our parents and their parents before them. There is no way to separate ranching and conservation. Without careful stewardship of the ecosystem, natural resources such as grass and water cannot continue to be a sustainable part of a ranching operation. Without land management from ranchers, and grazing systems to manage forage, wildlife that rely on grazers will not thrive.

RSA received a grant in the amount of $300,000 from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). This grant provides funding for projects that would benefit local ranching operations and enhance or restore wildlife habitat in Phillips, Valley, and Blaine County. Specifically, projects allow for grassland restoration, developing grazing systems on expiring conservation reserve program (CRP) acres, and restoration of crested wheatgrass pastures. Additional funding of $110,000 from the Montana Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and $10,000 from World Wildlife Fund was received to enhance these grant activities. Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks is also collaborating with the group to provide project funding. In the first year of the grant, 84% of the funds have been allocated to five different projects in the Phillips and Valley Counties. When these projects are finished in 2018 we will have surpassed our acreage goals for grassland seedings, and crested wheatgrass restoration, and be on track to meet our expired CRP grazing system goals. Because of the success of this first round of funding and continued interest in it, RSA has submitted an application for a second round of funding from NFWF.

RSA is dedicated to communicating the message to the world that ranching and conservation are complimentary practices. To that end, president Leo Barthelmess presented RSA’s story to several conservation students and professionals over the course of the year.

- Leo was asked to give a ranch tour to a class of wildlife students from the University of Montana in September. This diverse group of students were emphasizing scientific disciplines specifically surrounding natural resources. Leo presented on the historical ranching perspective and the transition over the years to a holistic landscape view, and the land ethic that drives ranching communities.

- In June, a group of students visited from Clemson University and toured several RSA member ranches. Members told the history of ranching in the area as well as the landscape history prior to Western settlement. An emphasis was put on the fact that ranches are multiple use locations. Used, not only for livestock production, but also provides diverse wildlife habitat for many grassland birds, and other wildlife species. The students were overwhelmed by the amount of knowledge and expertise needed to manage a ranch at a landscape scale.

- In November, Leo traveled to Fort Worth, Texas to the America’s Grasslands Conference. The conference gathered a diverse group of organizational and agency leaders in grasslands management. Leo presented on RSA’s community based conservation approach. This was an exciting conference that emphasized cattle ranching to be at the forefront of grasslands conservation.
The generosity of our supporters and partners over the last year is deeply appreciated. We offer our sincere thanks for each and every gift, both large and small. Your support this year has allowed Ranchers Stewardship Alliance to offer support to our ranching community members at unprecedented levels. We have big plans for projects in the future to ensure that ranchers continue to have access to the tools, knowledge, and support to continue to produce food and provide wildlife habitat far into the future.

RSA accomplished a lot of big things in 2017. We were able to push our community outreach farther than ever before, while also conserving 5790 acres for agriculture and wildlife use. While there are many of expenses that are a part of doing business, we are proud to say that 85% of every dollar given to RSA was used to further our mission of: Ranching, Conservation, Communities—A Winning Team!

We had lots of great events this year as you’ve seen in this Annual Report. We also introduced a new fundraiser this year that we plan to hold annually. RSA sold a limited amount of tickets for a grand prize trip to Las Vegas. The trip included 4 nights at the Golden Nugget Hotel and Casino, and 2 tickets to the last 3 performances of the National Rodeo Finals. $1000 cash was also included for travel expenses. This was a very popular and successful fundraiser for RSA! The winner was Jason Olson from Lolo, MT.

| Acres reseeded for Ranching Use | 3000 |
| Grazing Systems Established on Expired CRP | 1600 |
| Fencing Installed for Rotational Grazing | 1190 |
| Total Acres | 5790 |

| Net Assets on 1/1/17 | $32,439 |
| Income | $177,127.20 |
| Expenses | $105,139 |
| Net Income | $71,988.20 |
| Liabilities | $0 |
| Net Assets | $104,427.20 |
I would like to contribute to the continuing efforts of the Ranchers Stewardship Alliance, Inc.:

Name________________________________________________
Organization__________________________________________
Phone:_______________________________________________
Email:________________________________________________
Address:______________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
Amount: (Please Circle)
$20          $50          $100          $150          $200          $500          $1,000
_____________________________________________________________________
Other:_________

Please make check payable to: Ranchers Stewardship Alliance

I would like to volunteer my time for:

Volunteer

At RSA Events

_____________________________________________________________________
Amount (Please Circle)
$20          $50          $100          $150          $200          $500          $1,000
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Other:_________

At RSA Events

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