Student Research Position: Assessing the economics of managed grazing as a conservation tool

The Agroecology program seeks a graduate or upper level undergraduate student to analyze the economic aspects of using livestock grazing as a tool for managing grassland habitats. An hourly wage of up to $17.90 is available, as is arranging academic credit. We estimate the time commitment to be 10-20 hours/week for 12 weeks (October through December 2017, with potential for extension into spring.

Background

This effort will be part of an ongoing collaboration between UW-Madison, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR), and private graziers to understand the opportunities and challenges of using managed grazing to maintain grasslands on WDNR Wildlife Areas. In its third year, the goals of this collaborative project include understanding the effects of managed grazing on soils, plants, and wildlife while assessing the social and logistical issues associated with linking private livestock producers and their animals with public agency land management. While there is growing interest to expand the use of managed grazing as a conservation strategy on public lands, questions on the economic viability remain. This work will help inform the economic tradeoffs of grazing as compared to other land management strategies.

There is some project flexibility to align with student interest and capacities, but we envision the economic analysis portion to cover the bulleted items below. The analysis will consider both the private producer and public agency perspectives, with initial priority on the WDNR management side.

- Land manager and producer time (labor), including startup and ongoing work
- Input cost, including initial infrastructure investment and long-term maintenance considerations
- Risks, contracting, and other "transaction costs" such as investments in initial learning and public outreach that may fall outside of direct startup and maintenance
- Comparison of the above aspects with those associated with alternative management strategies such as controlled burning, mowing, and herbicide treatments

This work will be both individual and highly collaborative in nature, necessitating communication with WDNR professionals, UW-Madison researchers, and potentially agricultural producers. Good communication skills, ability to collect and analyze data, and self-motivation are a must.

Applicants should send a short cover letter outlining their interests and skills, along with a resume to Alan Turnquist alturnquist@wisc.edu by September 22nd, 2017.

For more information on the project, please see the website: www. grazingpubliclands.wisc.edu