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Grazing and Grassland Conservation

Managing grasslands for clean water, habitat and carbon sequestration

The Nature Conservancy works to conserve grasslands and promote science-based practices that support healthy lands capable of producing food and sustaining ranching communities. Grasslands are an extremely threatened habitat. One-third of Minnesota's land cover was once prairie, but less than two percent remains, posing a threat to wildlife and the species that call grasslands home.

This loss of grasslands also means that ranchers have less land on which to raise livestock. Grassland ecosystems evolved alongside large grazing animals like bison, but with the lack of these large grazing animals on the landscape today, cattle ranchers can mimic this effect with regenerative grazing. Some of the grassland preserves owned and managed by conservation organizations like TNC are suitable for partnering with local ranchers to improve management of important conservation landscapes through time-constrained, ecologically driven grazing.

Grazing management like this is responsive to the needs of the landscape, often lasting only a few weeks. But to access these acres for conservation grazing, the rancher would incur the annual property tax associated with the entirety of the parcel—despite grazing only a portion of the land for a limited time. These partnerships are often not suitable for rental fees due to the brief, targeted nature of the project. Under the current situation, it is not financially viable for the rancher nor the nonprofit conservation organization to pursue mutually beneficial grazing opportunities.

Ranchers cannot stay in business without access to grazing land, and the ensuing loss of livestock producers means the grasslands that were managed with grazing are more likely to be converted. Ensuring that healthy grasslands can be used for sustainable grazing helps ranches stay in operation, which in turn maintains critical habitat for birds, native grasses and forbs, pollinators and wildlife.

Property Tax Reform for Conservation Grazing SF 49 (Weber)

A modification to property tax statute to enable conservation grazing activities on nonprofit-owned lands to support adequate conservation practices on grasslands. This bill is a win-win opportunity to support Minnesota ranchers and advance conservation practices that benefit nature, climate and local communities without changing property tax revenues.



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