



## **Position Statement**

### **Conservation Grazing**

Conservation grazing is the use of domesticated grazing or browsing livestock for the primary purpose of modifying vegetation structure and composition to meet habitat management objectives. It is often utilized on lands dedicated to conservation of natural resources such as plants, plant communities, fish and wildlife, ecosystems, biodiversity, and landscapes. Examples of these conservation lands include, but are not limited to, state Wildlife Management Areas, State Parks, state Scientific & Natural Areas, federal National Wildlife Refuges, federal Waterfowl Production Areas, and properties owned or managed by non-governmental conservation organizations and land trusts. Conservation grazing is not conducted for the primary purpose of generating income through sale of animal products such as meat, dairy, fiber, or leather. However, income and habitat management objectives can often be met simultaneously.

Properly functioning grassland ecosystems support a wide diversity of native plants and vegetation structure that provides critical habitat for wildlife and contributes to the maintenance of biodiversity. Scientifically sound management plans and practices which mimic the disturbances under which grassland ecosystems evolved and to which their plants and wildlife are adapted, are key to properly managing, protecting, enhancing and restoring grasslands. These disturbances included grazing and browsing by wild animals, along with fire and periods of rest between disturbances. Conservation grazing is an important management tool used to mimic grazing and browsing by wild animals.

The policy of the Minnesota Chapter of The Wildlife Society in regard to conservation grazing is to support:

- 1) The use of properly managed domestic livestock as a habitat management tool on conservation lands to meet clearly defined objectives when science indicates it may be an effective tool in achieving those objectives.
- 2) Its use on conservation lands when potential effects of livestock grazing on resources for which lands are managed have been fully considered, as well as on other natural resources important to society such as biota, soil, and water.
- 3) Its use on conservation lands as a flexible management tool that allows managers to alter stocking rate and timing of grazing to meet specific restoration or management objectives.
- 4) Monitoring to determine its effectiveness in meeting management objectives, including development of criteria to determine what plant communities, landscapes or habitat conditions benefit from grazing based on plants, soils, or water resources at the site.

- 5) Adaptive management driven by results of field-based, experimental design to provide for continual improvement in its application as new knowledge becomes available.
- 6) Identification of lands where grazing could be detrimental to the plant community or local wildlife population or certain species, such as a threatened or endangered species.
- 7) Consideration of its use in the context of other management practices such as burning, mowing, and haying, either alone or in combination, such as with patch burn grazing.
- 8) Effective coordination and cooperation between agencies, organizations and the affected public, such as livestock producers, to encourage information sharing and unity toward a common goal of healthy grassland ecosystems and local economies.
- 9) Its use on conservation lands as a catalyst to encourage its implementation on private lands.
- 10) Training and education of agency and organization staff, the public and landowners on its uses and benefits, as well as practical details such as fencing, watering, and development of site-specific management plans.
- 11) Development of strong professional and public education programs which clearly explain goals and outcomes of its use and encourage development of grazing plans and specific objectives for sites.
- 12) Its use, when appropriate, to demonstrate successful integration of habitat conservation and livestock production objectives that benefit native species, plant communities and ecosystems while also providing economically viable livestock production.
- 13) Efforts by agencies, non-government organizations and landowners to implement this position statement.

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