

Northwest Wisconsin Graziers Network

The mission of the Wisconsin Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) is **“to expand the use of grazing-based livestock production systems that are profitable and foster environmental stewardship.”** To carry out this mission, the Wisconsin GLCI provides grants for technical assistance, education, and research directly related to maintaining, improving and increasing acreage of private grazing lands in the state. Another goal is to increase landowner and public awareness about the importance of grazing lands as agronomic and natural resources. The Northwest Wisconsin Graziers Network received funding from GLCI. A summary of the Network’s activities are listed as follows:

Summary: This project set out to successfully re-establish a Northwest Graziers Network and to increase farmer involvement and leadership roles. During the grant period, a pilot concept of a “Master Grazier” modeled after UWEX Master Gardener program was initiated. By 2004, five area farmers completed this training and have been available as mentors for beginning graziers. While project staff have not found a need to train additional mentors, the willingness of the existing Master Graziers to speak about managed grazing and help coordinate network activities has been an asset. The Northwest Graziers Network holds about one pasture walk per month during the grazing season and has established a regular winter meeting in February.

Description of activities: This area had a grazing network that became inactive. Consequently, the grant was used to connect UW-Extension and county conservationists with graziers and rebuild the network. The coordinators focused on grazing education, including how to effectively apply for and implement EQIP funds and conservation methods. They also worked on improved co-ordination between counties and the development of relationships between graziers. In order to increase farmer-to-farmer learning about practical aspects of grazing, the idea of Master Grazier training was piloted. Several experienced graziers in the area were invited to participate, and they each undertook training which included attending Wisconsin Grazing Conference sessions and becoming familiar with books and references from a portable library of managed grazing resources. These graziers have been available for phone and farm visit consultations with area farmers who have questions about managed grazing, but have not been utilized as much as the project coordinators anticipated. The Northwest Graziers network holds four to five pasture walks each grazing season at a variety of managed grazing operations including, in 2007, dairy cow and dairy sheep farms, an organic grazing farm, a beef operation, and a horse farm. The network is also becoming active in improving marketing opportunities in the region, including seeking a local meat processor and working on getting a goat milk pickup.

Highlights: The network grew to a mailing list of over 670 people in 2007. It is an active, diverse group of farmers in a six-county region of NW Wisconsin. A leadership group of farmers plans network activities, pasture walks, and the annual winter meeting. Recently, this network teamed up with a regional network of direct food marketers to host an event that drew 80-90 people. They were also pleased to host one of the WI Grazing Schools workshops in 2006.

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Primary audience and participants: Farmers using, or wanting to use, managed grazing with any of a variety of livestock, particularly in the northwestern counties of Wisconsin.