



Iowa recreational property ownership: Identification, contact and social dynamics of multiple-use perennial landcover

Abstract: This research explored the opportunities for expanding the productive use of perennial landscapes in Iowa through expanded beef and dairy grazing on non-resident owned recreational lands.

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\$19,068 for year one

Q Were existing grassland acres owned by non-residents being used for grazing to their fullest extent--did underutilized grassland acres exist that might be available for potential grazing expansion?

A The majority of project participants, particularly those with CRP contracts, were interested in considering and learning more about some form of grazing or grassland management on their property.



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Background

Expansion of productive use of Iowa's perennial landscapes faces two major challenges. First, agencies and non-profit organizations in Iowa lack a standardized inventory and analysis method for obtaining contact information for non-resident recreational landowners. Second, there is little understanding of the willingness of non-resident landowners to integrate contract grazing into their vision of how their land is used.

The research project had these objectives:

- Identify of non-resident ownership patterns using a GIS-based inventory and analysis method based on parcel data and land cover attributes.
- Conduct social assessment of non-resident property owners to determine five characteristics:
 1. Ownership information, parcel size, reason for ownership
 2. Landscape characteristics, land cover
 3. Current land use and plans for future change
 4. Land management practices
 5. Level of understanding and experience with grazing systems and grass-fed livestock production, interest in receiving educational materials on perennial land cover use, and preferred methods of contact
- Analyze findings and prepare two templates relating to participants' interests in future contact methods.

Approach and methods

The investigators estimated the size and type of land cover found in agricultural parcels owned by nonresident landowners in this study. Nonresidents were defined as those with permanent mailing addresses more than one county beyond the county where they own land. The three Iowa counties included in the study—Clarke and Appanoose in the south and Fayette in the northeast—were from regions of the state with grazing pressure as determined by project advisors. Land ownership was determined using 2007 county tax assessment records. Land cover types (cropland,

forest, grassland, etc.) were determined by 2007 manual updates to 2002 statewide land cover data obtained from Iowa Department of Natural Resources. These two data types were integrated and analyzed using geographic information system (GIS) software. A subset of nonresident landowners was selected for telephone interviews based on the amount of grassland owned.

Results and discussion

A range of 12-24 percent of each of the three county land parcels was identified as non-resident-owned for a total of 167,919 acres of land. Investigators identified a total of 43,656 acres of nonresident-owned grassland in the three study counties. Nonresidents owned nearly as many grassland acres as cropland acres in the southern Iowa study counties, while in the northeast study county, the owners held considerably fewer grassland acres than cropland acres. A total of 201 non-resident landowners in all three counties owned grassland parcels of at least 60 acres. Twenty-eight landowners were interviewed.

Differing from the hypotheses, nearly all grassland owned by our interview participants was either actively used for agricultural purposes or enrolled in a conservation program; only 318 acres (5 percent) were available for possible rental as pasture. Nonresident landowners also were involved in management to a greater extent than expected, owning the cattle on more than half of all grazed grassland acres. Participants reported stable operations into the future in terms of land use and management structure. Excluding future housing development, the only changes mentioned included pasture improvement.

Conclusions

Study results concerning non-resident agricultural landownership differed from other studies and from the initial hypothesis of the project. Out-of-state ownership rates in the study counties were considerably lower than the 2007 regional results reported in an ISU Extension study.

Non-resident landowners selected for interviews represented those with the largest grassland holdings in each county. While one participant described non-residents owning agricultural land primarily for recreational purposes, the study sample did not uncover a strong representation of this ownership type. Nearly all grassland owned by those interviewed was reported as currently being maximally used. Income from agricultural use was relatively important to the study participants and despite their status as non-residents, participants were directly involved in grazing operations on a majority of grazed grassland in southern counties.

Impact of results

Enrollment in CRP, rather than recreational ownership, provided the most significant obstacle to the adoption of contract grazing by participants. The majority of participants, particularly those with CRP contracts, were interested in considering and learning more about some form of grazing or grassland management on their property.

Several concerns about introducing grazing on their land were mentioned based on previous observations of overgrazed land.

This research included instructions for a standardized inventory process to identify nonresident landowners using conventional digital ownership data. While the process of identifying nonresident-owned agricultural parcels was found to be well within research limits, there were identified institutional challenges to assessing ownership on a larger scale or for non-academic research.

Education and outreach

Two templates were developed for newsletters to communicate with non-resident landowners regarding conservation education. The formats used reflected the preferences expressed in interviews for more information.

Leveraged funds

No additional funds were leveraged by this project.

***For more information,
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