

# Brown County Success from the Field

## Grazing to Improve Public Land Wildlife Habitat



### Background

It all started on a few acres in Wrightstown, Wisconsin. Carl and Kathy Tennesen bought two beef cows at the request of their young daughter. “She liked cows and we wanted to raise our own food,” Carl recalled. The Tennesens, at the time, were working, raising a family and just had a few acres to play around with. Sure enough the experiment expanded, and along with more cows came hundreds of meat rabbits and chickens. The Tennesens had caught the hobby farm bug.

They put their efforts toward making their hobby a lifestyle. In a challenging landscape pressured with large farms and urban development, the Tennesens managed to purchase 2 parcels of land with acreage enough to expand the beef herd. They wanted to graze, but hadn’t the experience or finances to get it going. They were just about ready to pull the plug when they found out about the local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and started working on a managed grazing plan. Through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, they installed fence and pipeline on their property. What was once unmanageable hours scraping barns and feeding cattle, turned into 15 minutes a day of moving fences. The herd numbers didn’t have to be reduced, but land and hay access were still challenging their beef business dream.

### Program Successes

Meanwhile, in Brown County, Josh Martinez from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR), was looking for a way to maintain the grass cover desired at the Holland Wildlife area. For all the efforts applying prescribed burns, haying and mechanical brush control, undesired shrubs and trees continued to encroach.

The local NRCS Soil Conservationist, Julie Hager, invited Josh out to see Carl’s pastures and grazing management. Josh was satisfied to see that the animals were being moved frequently and were not allowed to overgraze the pastures. Together, Carl, the NRCS and the WDNR came up with a grazing plan to trial cattle at the Holland Wildlife Area to improve the habitat for grassland birds. Fencing and water infrastructure was installed in 2017 and in 2018 grazing began.

The cattle are bringing the desired management to the land in short order. Shrubs are nipped and trampled, and over grown thatch is being broken down through manure and hoof action, allowing a greater diversity of plants to grow and thrive. Julie Hager remarks, “It is a very rewarding project to be a part of because it’s a win, win, win scenario, to the land, animals and to people.”



The before and after affect of cattle is positively dramatic after one day of grazing. Above: Carl moves the cattle out of willow brush which they have stripped off most all leaves, thereby allowing the desired grass cover to come back. Below: A WDNR sign informs Holland Wildlife Area visitors of the active livestock grazing area.



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# Brown County Success from the Field (continued)

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### Future Plans

Carl plans to remove the cattle from the site during the hunting season, and recreational users of the wildlife area can continue to enjoy the site as usual throughout the grazing season.

With a larger land base for their herd, Carl and Kathy can now focus on marketing their grass fed beef and growing their business. The Tennessees finished building their own store by their house and plan to direct sell their meat products.

Carl and Kathy also plan to continue to work closely with the WDNR to manage their grazing in accordance with WDNR objectives. With a fast rate of improved habitat observed at Holland Wildlife Area, expansion of grazing to other portions of the wildlife area are likely to happen in the future.

While fulfilling their dreams, the Tennessees' grazing practices are serving as a wonderful example to other state public land managers and graziers around the state.



Cattle getting ready to move ground at Holland Wildlife Area.



Carl and Kathy Tennessees stand by their new storefront on their farm, where they now sell direct grassfed beef, along with lamb, eggs and other farm raised products.



A young calf hides in the thick native grasses.

