Research Profile – Benjamin Geaumont

Name: Benjamin Geaumont
Department: Hettinger Research Extension Center (HREC)
REC Location: Hettinger, ND

Brief background about yourself:
Benjamin Geaumont has been a wildlife and range science research assistant professor at the Hettinger Research Extension Center since 2011. Originally from Deering, New Hampshire, he holds a B.S. degree in Biology from Keene State College, Keene, New Hampshire. After graduation, he moved to North Dakota to work a seasonal job at the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center. After spending one summer in North Dakota, he decided he wanted to stay around and hunt; that was 13 years ago and he has not left.

In 2003, while working with the ND Game and Fish Department, he met with Dr. Carolyn Grygiel, previous Director of the NDSU Natural Resource Management Program (NRM), about returning to graduate school. In 2006, he completed an M.S. degree in NRM and was in the process of looking for work when he was offered a PhD assistantship working with Drs. Chris Schauer, Director of the HREC, and Kevin Sedivec, Professor and Range Science Program Lead in the NDSU School of Natural Resources Management. After completing his PhD in 2009, he worked as a post-doc at the HREC until 2011.

In 2011, a multiple land use position was funded by the ND legislature as part of the Soil Health Initiative. He applied and was offered the job which is his current position. While the position is 100% research, he does a fair number of speaking engagements annually. He is responsible for the development of the Multiple Land Use program at the HREC which includes conducting research projects, writing manuscripts, mentoring both undergraduate and graduate students, as well as securing funds for future research projects. He currently lives in Hettinger with his wife and their three children. When not working or raising his children he really enjoys hunting and looks forward to teaching the outdoor heritage to his children just as his parents and grandfather did for him back in New Hampshire.

Tell us about the goals of your research program?
The main goal of the research program is to provide stakeholders with information to help them better manage the land for multiple uses.

More specifically, what is the primary focus of your current research?
While there are numerous ongoing research projects, the primary focus is to provide applicable knowledge that will be useful for the management of natural resources. There is a limited land base with many demands placed upon it. The idea behind the research is to help meet these demands through applied research. One of the more exciting projects recently started involves looking at the interactions among prairie dogs, birds, and cattle. This is a cooperative effort among NDSU, South Dakota State University, Sitting Bull College and the USDA-ARS Northern Great Plains Research Laboratory at Mandan, North Dakota.
**What are your long term objectives?**
The long-term objective or goal of the prairie dog project is to establish a natural beef herd on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation. One of the sub-objectives is to determine how cattle, prairie dogs, and grassland birds can co-exist together. While food production is of utmost importance, developing a better understanding of how prairie dogs and livestock interact or affect each other’s behavior will help land managers better manage their lands. Although prairie dogs are often viewed as pests, their importance to other wildlife species, including numerous bird species, is likely huge.

**How do you feel it will impact the region, nationally, globally?**
An economical and environmentally sustainable beef production enterprise could provide a much needed economic boost to the Native people who live on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation as well as a vital source of protein for the people.

With respect to wildlife, prairie dogs have been reduced substantially from their historic North American range. So much so that in the mid-2000’s they were considered for listing on the endangered species list. While they were deemed not warranted for listing, prairie dogs continue to be a species of interest both from a ranching standpoint and as a Keystone species. Increasing the bank of knowledge concerning the species will help managers make future decisions regarding land use changes and livestock management.

**When finished, what will your work mean to the state of ND?**
Our work could result in a better understanding of both the positive and negative aspects of livestock production on areas occupied by Black-tailed Prairie dogs leading to more efficient management of both. The research also could prove beneficial for the conservation of prairie dogs and the other wildlife species often found in association with prairie dogs.

**What excites you the most about your project?** It is exciting to hear the endless questions that arise from being in the field as well as experience what we have seen and learned so far. Many species of wildlife are attracted to the prairie dog towns being researched, which has led both me and my graduate students to ponder the importance of this small ecosystem engineer to the landscape.

**Could you expand on how graduate/undergraduates have assisted with this project?**
I currently have two master’s-level students. Wyatt Mack is pursuing his master’s degree in the Natural Resource Management program and is working on a project evaluating the interactions occurring among livestock, prairie dogs, and birds. Matt Danzl is also pursuing his master’s degree in the Natural Resource Management program and is working on a project evaluating habitat selection of sharp-tailed grouse at the landscape level.
What is the greatest reward after completion of a project?
I enjoy doing work that impacts the local folks. I like interacting with people about what we have learned and get great satisfaction when I see them incorporate it into their operation.

What is your advice for students who want to go into your field of study?
Be prepared to move around in search of experience. Very seldom does one in the wildlife field find a full time job directly out of college. If it is truly your passion, don’t ever give up.

What are some of your hobbies/activities you like to do when you are not spending time on your research project?
When not working or raising our children I really enjoy hunting.

Contact information:
Ben Geaumont
Wildlife and Range Research Assistant Professor
Hettinger Research Extension Center
PO Box 1377
Hettinger, ND 58639
701-567-4323
benjamin.geaumont@ndsu.edu