Ph.D. positions: landownership change and conservation

Natural Resources Social Science and Policy

Opportunities for two Ph.D. students, UW Madison

Position Description:
Dr. Rissman is hiring two graduate students to begin in Fall 2019. Rissman’s PIE lab examines the intersection of People, Institutions, and Ecosystems. Her research group examines natural resource policy design, implementation, and evaluation; ecological outcomes of resource policy and conservation strategies; and social and legal adaptation to environmental change. They utilize quantitative and qualitative research methods including spatial analysis, surveys, and interviews.

The two Ph.D. students will work collaboratively on a USDA funded project, Conservation and succession success for farm and woodland owners.

U.S. farms and woodlands are undergoing significant ownership change caused by demographic and market shifts. Nearly 100 million acres of farmland and over 50 million acres of family-owned forest land are estimated to change hands between 2015 and 2020. This widespread and continuing turnover presents a need for decision-support for a large cohort of new landowners as well as the peers and professionals assisting them. At the same time, these transfers to successor landowners present an immediate opportunity to improve the health and viability of working lands by increasing the breadth and depth of landowner engagement. Land ownership transitions are important moments that shape farm and woodland economic viability, environmental sustainability, rural communities, and equitable resource distribution.

We will focus on new owners of small and medium-sized mixed farm and woodland properties, including women and successor landowners with conservation easements, to meet these objectives: 1) understand spatial and temporal trends in rural land transfers, 2) identify types and timing of decision support needs and socialization of new owners, and 3) develop and test welcoming outreach for new owners without prior management experience that integrates forestry and agricultural conservation. The focus on properties with mixed farm and woodland will continue efforts to bridge agricultural and forestry sectors to simplify processes for
landowners who might not self-identify simply as farmers or woodland owners. Outreach efforts will be focused in Wisconsin.

New landowners also need support for working within conservation programs established by prior owners. This is particularly important for perpetual conservation easements that run with the land. Perpetual easements are voluntary agreements in which a landowner agrees to sell or donate a conservation easement (a partial interest in property) to a government agency, nonprofit land trust or tribe, which is responsible for stewarding and enforcing the conservation easement in perpetuity. Conservation easements are designed to prevent conversion of farmland, forests, and other lands to development and to provide for the sustainable management of those lands.

Because landowner succession is a particular challenge for perpetual conservation easements, we will: 4) understand landowner perspectives on easements and organizations’ current and best practices for onboarding new landowners across the United States and 5) develop and test outreach materials for new landowners on conservation easement properties. This integrated proposal harnesses geospatial property and land use information, along with quantitative and qualitative social science, to provide timely and well-tailored outreach to new landowners to ensure the future of sustainable agriculture and forestry.

The two Ph.D. students on the project will have separate roles but will work together closely.

The New Landowners + Outreach Ph.D. student will focus on new landowner research. This person will also assist Extension staff with extension to new landowners, which will include agroforestry and outreach to women landowners.

The Conservation Easements + Outreach Ph.D. student will spearhead the research on conservation easements, and will assist Extension staff with outreach.

One or both students will lead quantitative spatial analysis of property transaction records.

Please indicate which of these positions and analyses interest you, and if you have a preference.
University, Department, Lab:
The University of Wisconsin –Madison is one of the major research universities in the United States (www.wisc.edu). It ranks 2nd in research expenditures among all U.S. universities and first among public universities. Total student enrollment is 41,500, out of which 8,800 are graduate students. Employees include 2,000 faculty. UW-Madison has a long history of excellence in ecology, conservation biology, and remote sensing science. This project will be housed with the Rissman group (http://labs.russell.wisc.edu/rissman/) in the Department of Forest & Wildlife Ecology (http://www.fwe.wisc.edu). Students would also have the option to engage with the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies.

Town:
Madison, Wisconsin consistently ranks as one of the best places in the United States to live, work, and study. It is Wisconsin's capital city, with a friendly, vibrant population of approximately 200,000 who enjoy Madison’s lakes, bike paths, music, art, and food. For more information on campus and town see http://www.wisc.edu/about/facts/

Qualifications:
A BS degree in environmental studies, science studies, geography, planning, political science, sociology, public policy and administration, natural resources, forestry, wildlife ecology, or other related discipline is required. Experience with social science research and/or policy is required. Work experience in conservation agencies or nonprofit organizations also desired. Good English writing and verbal communication skills, as well as the ability to work in a team, are essential.

Application Process:
Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis starting January 7, 2019 and review will continue until candidates are chosen. The University of Wisconsin-Madison is an equal opportunity/ affirmative action employer. We promote excellence through diversity and encourage all qualified individuals to apply. The position to open to both US citizen and international candidates. If you have questions before applying, please email Adena Rissman (adena.rissman@wisc.edu).

Interested applicants are asked to e-mail the documents listed below to Adena Rissman (adena.rissman@wisc.edu) (in ONE PDF file please).
- Our departmental graduate application cover sheet (http://labs.russell.wisc.edu/rissman/prospective-students/)
- Letter outlining research interests, academic and professional backgrounds
- Resume or CV
- Copies of transcripts (unofficial copies acceptable at this point)
- GRE scores if available
- A writing sample (copy of a prior publication, thesis, other)
- Names and contact addresses of three references

Dr. Adena Rissman

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