2018 Upstate Institute Summer Field School Fellowship in the Adirondacks

**Title:** Climate- and Wildlife-Friendly Farming in the Adirondacks

**Community Partner:** Wildlife Conservation Society’s Adirondack Program

A survey and mapping project of farms and farm products to assess climate and wildlife friendly farming practices, relevant for a student interested in food systems and sustainable agriculture.

**Project Description:**
Small-scale farms are often major economic contributors in rural communities in New York and play an important role in community revival and providing access to healthy food. Farms in New York state empower people in rural areas to participate in local food production and create employment by expanding opportunities for and encouraging the retention of skilled people, including youth. Additionally, locally produced food helps to minimize food insecurity among vulnerable populations by providing healthy options in rural, often disadvantaged communities, some of which only offer groceries at a mini-mart or force residents to travel long distances to a large grocery store.

WCS’ goal for this project is to improve ecosystem integrity and resilience in northern New York through identifying and implementing climate- and wildlife-friendly farming practices. WCS is currently participating in a network with Essex Farm Institute, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Adirondack Harvest, Wildlands Network, and a number of local farmers in the Adirondacks to assist farms in implementing such practices. In summer 2017, an intern developed and administered a farmer survey in Essex County to (1) document the current extent of best management practices for wildlife on farms in the Champlain Valley; (2) document current participation in USDA programs relevant to wildlife conservation; (3) identify common “nuisance” species and regional management challenges; and (4) identify perceived barriers to adoption of wildlife friendly farming.

A Field School Fellow will help WCS to build a program around climate and wildlife friendly farming in the Adirondacks with the possibility of expanding to other areas of NYS. A student would conduct an inventory of farms and farm products to help understand the geographic context of these farms and their potential value for wildlife. A student would also help to characterize the farms in upstate NY in terms of their value for humans (number, types, products available) and for wildlife (habitat, landscape context, potential threats, best practices). Working in GIS, a student would also describe the potential value of farms for wildlife in the context of connectivity, resilience, ecological integrity, available habitat (for which data exists); visit farms to expand the farmer survey in additional counties in NYS; identify potential interested partners to implement climate and wildlife friendly practices; identify the best mechanisms for communication among partners; and help to plan a workshop to share this information.

The long term goal of this work is to establish a model farm that showcases such replicable approaches and to create an active community of practice in the Adirondack region. They are actively looking for additional opportunities to leverage this work to improve climate resilience, ensure sustainable agricultural production systems, and support wildlife and conservation elsewhere in Upstate New York. The Field School Fellow will help them build and support this project by visiting farms in the Hudson Valley and Central New York to expand the study area.

**About the Community Partner:**
The Wildlife Conservation Society’s saves wildlife and wild places worldwide through science, conservation action, education, and inspiring people to value nature. To achieve this mission, WCS harnesses the collective power of its Global Conservation Program in nearly 60 nations and in all the
world’s oceans and its five wildlife parks in New York City, including the Bronx Zoo. In 1994, WCS began working in the Adirondack Park. Their conservation efforts in the Adirondacks take an interdisciplinary approach, linking wildlife, wilderness, and human wellbeing, through applied science and community-based conservation. Our explicit focus, local approach, and expertise provide a unique position for WCS to lead in efforts to enhance ecological integrity and resilience on Adirondack farms by encouraging practices that directly incorporate the needs of wildlife.

**Required Skills:**
This Fellowship requires GIS and survey skills. The Fellow will need to be comfortable talking to partners and farmers and traveling in remote areas in northern New York. From this experience, the student would have the opportunity to experience a professional workplace in a field office for an international conservation organization. The Fellow will attend and potentially facilitate meetings with partners, conduct and analyze data, apply GIS skills, and learn about and understand implications of climate change on wildlife and agricultural systems. The Fellow will engage in discussions with farmers about farming and wildlife and provide WCS with information to help guide their programmatic efforts. Through this work, the Field School Fellow will have the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to their work and help them build their wildlife-friendly farming program.

**Logistics:**
This is a full-time paid research position to last approximately 10 weeks, conducted under the joint supervision of the Upstate Institute and WCS based out of WCS’ Adirondack Program office in Saranac Lake, NY. The Fellow will be directly supervised by Zoë Smith, Director of the Adirondack Program, and will work closely with Dr. Michale Glennon, WCS Adirondack Program Science Director. The Fellow will also have direct access to Dr. Heidi Kretser, Communities and Conservation Director for WCS’ Americas Program, who is trained in human dimensions of wildlife conservation and would provide input on social science aspects of the project. WCS will provide office space and will ensure the student has direct access to partner networks.

A Fellow will need a U.S. drivers’ license to travel throughout northern New York (Essex, Clinton, Franklin and St Lawrence counties) and possibly the Hudson Valley and Central New York. The cost of transportation will be covered by the Upstate Institute, and housing will also be provided and paid for by the Upstate Institute. Field School Fellows receive a research stipend of $4500 for 10 weeks of research.