2013 Oral Component Scenario

Your team is a group of NRCS grazing specialists and planners that assist landowners with grazing and conservation plan development. Your team has been asked for assistance by the Smith family (the judges) who currently run a conventional beef operation and want to transition to a rotational grazing system. The Smiths are a multi-generational farm family that has always had an interest in outdoor activities such as hunting, fishing, and bird watching. Younger members of the family have developed an interest in sustainable farming practices and want to market their products as being environmentally friendly. The current herd includes 50 beef cows, and the family has been considering adding 10 sheep in order to enhance their overall farm management. The farm currently produces conventional, grain-fed beef, but they want to change their products to grass-fed beef and include artisan wool and cheeses.

Farm Description

The farm currently has 80 acres of cropland, 4 acres of existing pasture, and 25 acres of woodlands. The existing pasture was established 20 years ago, and parts of it have become an animal concentration area (ACA) because of the current management. The pasture has 40% coverage of tall fescue and 10% white clover. The dominant weed species are plantain and knapweed. Plant coverage in the pasture is patchy and uneven due to animal traffic and lack of proper management.

The crop fields are currently producing corn and soybeans to barn-feed the cattle. The corn/soybean rotation is tilled each year before planting, and erosion issues are present. The existing woodlot hasn’t been timbered in over 75 years.

Troutfull Creek runs through the center of the farming operation. Upstream of the farm, the stream has a forested buffer. The animals currently have full access to the stream, and bank erosion issues are present. The local Trout Unlimited chapter has documented a native brook trout population upstream of the farm but not downstream.

The farmers want to maintain the current herd size of 50 beef cows and add 10 sheep because the existing barn can house that number of animals. The farm is a finishing operation for grass-fed beef, and the beef cows are kept at the farm until a weight of 1000 pounds. The average weight of the sheep is 110 pounds each. The farmers wish to extend the grazing season as long as possible in order to avoid the higher costs of barn-feeding.

Your Task

Develop a 10 minute presentation that includes the following aspects:

- Provide recommendations for a rotational grazing plan. Be sure to also consider multi-species grazing and the types of forage that would best suit the operation.
- Identify and address current environmental concerns.
- Analyze the benefits of the grazing system compared to the conventional operation.
- Summarize how your strategies will impact the aquatic, forest, soil, and wildlife resources on the farm.