Ranchers who manage both for livestock and wildlife can reap significant economic benefits from both, said a ranch-based wildlife manager at a recent grazing conference organized by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

“When we realized there was quite a demand for quality big game hunting . . .we developed a hunting program where there were a lot of mature bucks with nice antlers,” said Rick Danvir, wildlife manager for the Deseret Land and Livestock Ranch near Woodruff, UT.

He said ranch managers resolved early conflicts over land use by allocating costs to both parts of the operation. They determined how many animal unit months each species used, whether it was cattle, sheep, deer or antelope. Then they allocated costs, including fencing, water development and forage costs, to the various animals.

“If wildlife paid 40 percent of the range costs, the cost of producing a pound of beef went way down,” he said.

Deseret management broke the pastures into about 60 units and then moved livestock through those paddocks. Danvir said that the most important thing to do is rest pastures and, in Utah, he believes an adequate rest is at least 12 months. Grazing is timed so that each pasture is grazed at a different time each year.

“What we’ve seen is that, when we take the cattle out of the system, our landscape becomes dominated with long-lived woody plants,” he said. “We don’t get any more grass.”

Danvir says that proper livestock grazing practices provide more digestible protein for wildlife. On the pastures where cattle have grazed, he sees new annual grasses and forbs, as well as new perennial grasses and forbs. The additional herbaceous forage makes “fat cows, sage grouse breeds or baby pronghorns.”

He advised farmers and ranchers to document ways in which they manage for wildlife.

“We wildlife people mean well, we like wildlife,” he said, “but a lot of people have a habit of . . . thinking the ranchers are doing something wrong.”

He believes eventually ranchers will be compensated for management practices that benefit wildlife.

“For most of the Great Plains species of concern, it’s going to be ranchers who bring them back and maintain them,” he said.