

Managing Pastureland for Biodiversity

(Reprinted from the Saskatchewan Forage Council's *Saskatchewan Hay and Pasture Report* – July 16, 2009 issue)

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Good management is good management. Generally speaking if you have pasture and range in healthy condition you will have good biodiversity there. In most cases, the good management practices that normally support the long term productivity of pasture and range land is what's needed to protect the habitat of mammals, birds, fish, amphibians and plants that depend on native prairie grasslands and riparian areas along creeks and rivers.

Maintaining proper habitat for a wide variety of species simply means applying good range management practices, say both agrologists and biologists. Develop a grazing management strategy that supports the long term productivity and sustainability of the native grass prairie and you have a strategy that benefits most species.



Key elements of grazing management strategies will include:

- Manage rangelands for a high standard of rangeland health.
- Stocking rates which achieve light to moderate grazing intensity to maintain plant vigor, productivity and abundant organic residue in the form of litter.
- Range health parameters can be used to evaluate grazing intensity.
- A flexible approach to grazing management balancing ranch needs with habitat considerations.
- Grazing systems viewed as adaptive strategies that evolve over time to address specific management issues that may have negative impacts on habitat values.
- Fostering patch diversity in the vegetation canopy by managing time of grazing, using light to moderate stocking rates and careful use of livestock distribution tools.
- Desirable livestock distribution would include predominantly health prairie vegetation cover interspersed with patches of moderate to heavily grazed range.
- Deferral of spring grazing will improve plant vigor and productivity of grassland plant communities thereby improving plant cover.
- Deferred rotation grazing may be considered to improve plant vigor and rangeland health of pastures with low range health scores.
- Rest-rotation grazing may be considered to restore degraded pastures where the plant community and litter reserves have been seriously reduced.

Similarly in riparian areas, found along rivers and creeks, many of the same management principles apply as used on native prairie grassland. It is important to balance demand with available forage supply, distribute livestock evenly, avoid grazing during vulnerable periods, and provide ample rest for the forage after grazing. Off-stream watering sources, even without exclusion fencing is a management option that allows use of the riparian area for grazing while still maintaining its environmental functionality.

Based on CCA. Species at Risk – Information for Producers www.cattle.ca.

If you are interested in developing a range plan you may want to contact one of the following agencies in Saskatchewan:

Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture
Agriculture Knowledge Centre
1-866-457-2377

Saskatchewan Watershed Authority
Head Office (306) 694-3900

Ducks Unlimited Canada
Regina 1-866-252-3825
Saskatoon 1-866-254-3825

