

Grazing for Wildfire Prevention

BCCA receives \$500,000 grant for interface grazing project

How is it going to work? The intensity of wildfires which have ravaged our province the last two years have been devastating to British Columbia. With all of the loss, cost, and hardship that have resulted from the fires there have also been some valuable lessons realized. One of these lessons is the value that agricultural practices had in helping slow, turn, or stop fires from moving across the landscape. One of these recognized practices is grazing.

Is this different from range utilization? Rangeland grazing and fine fuel management have very different objectives. Range use allows less than 50% of the forage and grasses to be harvested by cattle in order to leave remaining biomass for wildlife, nutrient cycling, etc. Fine fuel management is designed to reduce plants and woody fuel sources by over 70% to help prevent fires from igniting and removing ladder fuels (i.e. shrubs).

Who funds it? A \$500,000 wildfire management grant from the Province was given to BCCA to develop projects that will reduce fine fuels through intensive grazing in high risk areas. The program will see BCCA work with the ministries of Agriculture, Forest, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development, Wildfire Branch, local governments, First Nations, ranchers and other stakeholders to identify critical areas.

Who benefits? Simply put, everyone benefits from reduced fire risk – society, ranchers, fire crews. Reducing the destructiveness of wildfires benefits society. Grazing benefits the ranching community through access to extra feed but more importantly by building public trust with urban residents who are curious about where food comes from. Reducing the intensity of the fire will assist fire crews in mounting attack and controlling the spread.

What will the plan include? We are in the early stages and the details are still being worked out. There are five key factors to making this a successful project: timing, intensity, infrastructure, public interaction and, of course, cattle.

Will grazing be the only prevention measure? Critical high risk areas will also be managed for timber density, will utilize existing corridors like power lines or pipelines, and utilize natural fire barriers. A combination of these practical, common sense practices are intended to first reduce the opportunity for a fire to start while creating zones that firefighters can use to mount a defense.

What's the biggest myth about the project? That ranchers will be paid for grazing and that range fees will be paid out of this funding. Sorry to disappoint anyone that wanted to retire on their saved grazing fees this year but the project will focus money on ensuring the five key factors mentioned above are in place.

“This is an excellent opportunity to show society the value of cattle and the very positive affect that they have on our environment, making that beautiful landscape what it is because of our management practices, not in spite of them,” Kevin Boon, General Manager.

Stay tuned for more details and updates on the project going forward.

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