

Fish and Wildlife Development Fund (FWDF) Grazing Program Operational Guidelines

Objectives

The primary objective of the FWDF grazing program is to maintain or improve habitat quality through the use of a managed grazing regime. The program is further intended to reduce potential issues with invasive plant species and risks from wildfires, to generate additional revenue for the Fund and to increase support for retention of wildlife lands in rural communities.

FWDF lands that meet the requirements identified in these guidelines will be considered for inclusion in the grazing program. Local conservation interest groups will be consulted prior to lands being included. The lands will be evaluated at or near inception of grazing and at regular intervals over the longer term to ensure standards are met and the range remains healthy for wildlife. Future annual permit requirements will be adjusted as needed to ensure proper range health that maximizes the benefit for wildlife going forward.

Selection Criteria

Grazing applications on individual land parcels will be reviewed as they are received. The decision to include land in the grazing program will be based on the following criteria:

- Current Range Health – is the parcel in condition to be grazed or has it become decadent where grazing could return the parcel to a healthy state.
- Available Forage - quarter sections which are comprised of 70% or greater forest and/or wetlands will be excluded; there must be a minimum sustainable carrying capacity of 40 Animal Unit Months (AUM)*/quarter.
- Available Water - is there a permanent source of fresh water that will not be compromised by introducing livestock; is there potential to develop a water source for wildlife and livestock.
- Fencing Requirements – how much fencing will be required considering the possibility of fencing to exclude portions of the land from grazing; what is the potential for damage to existing habitat from boundary fencing
- Vehicle Access – is there a history of habitat damage from ATV and snowmobile use on the land and could this be reduced by fencing.
- Cost Recovery – can the costs for fencing the land be recovered in a period of 10 years or less.
- Invasive Species - is there an existing invasive plant problem and would there be an advantage to introducing grazing as a control method.
- Sensitive Species and Spaces – are there documented rare species present that could be impacted by grazing; has there been previous habitat alteration such as regeneration after fire or forest harvesting where habitat recovery might be inhibited by grazing; are there unique research sites (eg Forest Monitoring Program sites) present; are there sensitive ecological sites such as springs or fens that could be adversely effected.

- Uniqueness – isolated quarter sections that represent the majority of good wildlife habitat in an area will generally not be considered unless there are clear goals that can be achieved through a targeted grazing effort.
- Local Conservation Stakeholder Concerns – are there local concerns that have good rationale and cannot be addressed through modification of a grazing management design

Operational Guidelines and Standards

The following operational guidelines and standards will be applied for all grazing programs on FWDF lands. Approved grazing applications will be allotted by annual permit with the option to commit to renewals for up to a five-year period with a further commitment possible subject to range health objectives and permit conditions being met. Failure to comply with the guidelines and standards listed here may result in a requirement for corrective action, an immediate loss of grazing permit or in legal charges being laid.

Fence Construction and Maintenance:

- A temporary or permanent fence will be constructed on or within the property boundaries. Property boundaries will be determined using existing fence lines, satellite images, GPS, drones or a combination. Only in exceptional circumstances will legal surveys be considered.
- Subject to the terms of the grazing agreement, the agreement holder will be reimbursed for the costs of building the fence and the fence will remain the property of the FWDF
- On common boundaries the old fence, if present, must be removed and the new fence built on, or within, the boundary line.
- Damage to any vegetation on the property during fence construction will be minimized by utilizing natural clearings and using a mechanical mulcher clearing only to a maximum 15-foot width. To minimize surface damage fence construction will not take place under wet or soft conditions
- The fence shall be sufficient to contain the livestock on the property at all times and will be wildlife friendly with a smooth barbless top wire, top two wires 12 inches or more apart and smooth barbless bottom wire 18 inches from the ground.
- Fence maintenance during the term of the grazing agreement will be the responsibility of the agreement holder.
- Gate access to the property will be located in a practical location(s) that allows for hunters to retrieve game by reasonable means.

Livestock Management:

- Typically, only cattle will be permitted including cows, bulls and yearlings. Exceptions to this would be limited to achieving unique management objectives such as grazing of sheep or goats to manage invasive/noxious species.
- The grazing period will begin no earlier than June 15th with cattle to be removed by September 1st. An extension of not more than 5 days may be granted upon request prior to September 1st where reasonable grounds exist.

- A maximum stocking rate will be determined based on Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency (SAMA) ratings; an initial range evaluation will be completed with reassessments if significant concerns are identified at a minimum of every 5 years to ensure the range remains healthy. The stocking rate may be adjusted, going forward, based on subsequent range assessments.
- If livestock salt is used it shall be placed in a container that will prevent leeching into the surrounding soil; any remaining salt and containers shall be removed from the land within two weeks of the end of the grazing season.
- Livestock oilers must be placed in locations where trampling damage can be minimized and must be removed at the end of each grazing season.

Administration:

- The permittee must provide a grazing report by September 30 of each year. The report will include the number of animals grazed, herd structure (cows, calves, bulls, yearlings) and average weight (AUM's will be converted to Animal Unit Equivalents (AUE's) based on animal weight). The report will include the date animals were taken in and the date when brought out to allow calculation of total grazing-days.
- Grazing fees will be determined based on current livestock values following the fee structure regulated by *The Provincial Lands Act* and are based on the value of livestock from October 1st to November 30th of the preceding year.
- A portion of municipal land taxes will also be applied along with the grazing fee.
- A special permit is required to use a vehicle on wildlife lands for agricultural purposes. Permits will be issued by the Ministry of Environment prior to the grazing season and failure to comply with vehicle permit conditions may result in the grazing permit being revoked.

Public Access:

- There is no hunting allowed while cattle are on the land. However, all grazing lands will remain open to on-foot public access for other recreational purposes regardless of whether livestock are present. Signs will be erected advising the public that a summer grazing initiative is in place on the property and to please respect livestock and gates.

*AUM – Animal Unit Month (one 1,000 lb cow/spring calf pair = 1 AUM), (1 bull = 1.5 AUMs), (1 yearling = 0.7 AUM) or calculated based on actual weights of yearlings and bulls grazed.