

Grasslands, Forests and Tame Pasture Range Management in Alberta

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Key Points

- Alberta's rangelands are a rich source of natural capital and livelihood.
- They produce a wide range of benefits, and ecological goods and services such as water, forage, fish and wildlife, fibre, recreation, and aesthetics.
- Our present and future generations rely on the sustainable use of rangelands in the Grasslands, Parklands, Montane, Foothills, and Boreal forests.
- A key factor to achieve sustainable land use is rangelands are managed for ecological health and function.
- In 2006, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development¹ and Canada Greencover partnered to develop a range management course that assists livestock producers and resource managers better understand and apply 'state of the art' range management ecology and tools.
- When rangelands are grazed 'ecologically' and their key ecological functions are maintained, sustainable livestock grazing can be achieved.

Body

Ecological health and function means land managers carry out stewardship practices that maintain the ecological integrity, biodiversity, site stability, nutrient and hydrological cycles of the rangeland. In addition, invasive species are controlled like noxious weeds. This ecological range management approach can provide a balanced socio-economic and environmental framework that is beneficial to the many values and uses of rangelands.

For livestock grazing, healthy and functional rangelands can produce: optimum plant community forage production; support biodiversity, reduced erosion activity and bare soil within natural limits, maintain inherent soil fertility, and enhance watersheds to store, retain and slowly release beneficial quality and quantity water. What can this mean to the livestock producer and resource managers? It can mean, optimum stocking rates and carrying capacity, reduced costs and risk, improved management flexibility, and the ability to better survive through drought. Healthy rangelands provide increased

¹ Range Resource Management Program and the Hinton Training School

cooperation, increased total benefits to society with fewer conflicts to resolve, less regulation and enforcement. In short, this rangeland state can lower costs.

For the past 15 years, range management scientists, practitioners and livestock producers have been developing new knowledge and tools about Alberta's rangelands: their ecologically sustainable stocking rates, and how to manage and assess rangelands for ecological health and function. In 2006, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and Greencover partnered to begin the development of a current range management course called, "Grasslands, Forests and Tame Pasture Range Management in Alberta." This course, to be released in 2008, will house and provide access to a suite of new and updated ecological range management knowledge and tools. The course is geared to an intermediate level of range management understanding and application.

Provincial in scope, this range management course will apply to native grasslands and forests, and complementary tame pastures. The course can be used to educate and train livestock producers, government staff, and non-government organizations who use and work in rangelands. The course has been developed for specific application to Crown grazing lands in Alberta such as grazing leases and licences and permits. However, much of the material can equally apply and benefit privately operated rangelands.

Divided into six learning modules, the course introduces key Alberta legislation and policy, and provides a basic understanding of range ecology such as plants, soils, processes, and classification. The course continues to increase in scope to deal with more advanced range ecology information and tools such as range health and monitoring. A separate module deals with aspects of grazing management in native rangeland settings such as forest, parkland, or grasslands. And the final module deals with range resource management integration and discusses subject matters such as wildlife, timber, recreation, reclamation, riparian areas, and biodiversity.

Each module contains learning objectives, lesson plans and practicum that can assist the user to better understand and apply the information and tools. This course can be taken in whole or in parts, such as learning from a specific module. "Grasslands, Forests and Tame Pasture Range Management in Alberta" is not a stand alone course. Teachers and students are encouraged to search for companion information and tools found in other programs, books, journals, contacts, and websites. The course has been developed so information should be taught and applied in the classroom and field. Non-government conservation based organizations that work in landscapes and watersheds where grazing occurs can also benefit taking this course, and learn about an ecological approach to grazing management on rangelands.

The course will be made available in 2008 on Alberta Sustainable Resource Development's external website. The course will be taught by range management specialists at various stockmen and women's courses held throughout the province.

Conclusion

Completing this course will provide the user with an improved understanding and opportunity to apply an ecological approach to range management on native rangelands. The user will have access to important guidelines and tools that can be used for ecological range planning, management, and monitoring. For those users who apply

this knowledge to problematic rangelands, you will be able to see improvements that benefit your grazing operation and society.

Together with the many other range learning institutions and conservation based programs², the authors hope this course will help foster an increase in environmentally friendly thinking and practices on rangelands so that we and our children will live long and prosper.

References

Proposed Citation for this Range Management Course:

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² Canada Alberta Environmental Farm Plan, Alberta Environmentally Sustainable Agriculture, Canada Greencover, Alberta Stewardship Network, Cows and Fish, Prairie Conservation Forum, Classroom Agriculture Participation, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Watershed groups, and MULTISAR Habitat Conservation Strategy