

Grassland Gazette

WWW.MULTISAR.CA

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Cowgirls only!

Southern Alberta Grazing School for Women coming to Milo in July

Women have always played an active role on farms and ranches in Alberta. Their interest in continuing to learn new techniques and tricks has led to the creation of many women-only educational events like the Southern Alberta Grazing School for Women.

The 1st Southern Alberta Grazing School for Women was held in 2004 near Pincher Creek, Alberta. Overwhelming positive feedback led to it becoming an annual event rotated throughout southern Alberta. It has been held in Cypress Hills, Rowley, New Dayton and will be held in Milo, in the County of Vulcan, in 2010.

The school is two full days with an evening to socialize and connect with other ranching women. The school consists of both indoor seminars and outdoor hands-on learning. Common elements of the school include sessions about grazing management, range and riparian health, plant identification and special topics pertinent to the area. This year's special topics will include Livestock Handling and Landowner Rights during Energy Development. The format of this year's school is new - an entire afternoon will be devoted to a stock dog demonstration and electric fencing demonstration at a nearby ranch.

One of the favourite sessions has been the personal stories of Alberta ranch families. Each year two local ranching women are asked to share their stories from their own operation and family experiences. Each story is unique and motivating. Another favourite is the smores and stories shared around a campfire in the evening.

The 7th Annual Southern Alberta Grazing School for Women will be held at the Milo Community Hall, July 22 and 23, 2010. There is camping available in Milo and hotels in Vulcan, about 35 minutes away.

Watch cowsandfish.org for more information coming soon!



Identifying plants in Rowley in 2008.



2009 school in New Dayton.

In Brief

Weed Watch: Controlling invaders on the range

MULTISAR is offering personalized Species at Risk Conservation Plans for your property! Species at Risk Conservation Plans are a rapid assessment of the wildlife habitats on your property, a quick interview to understand your objectives and some tips on how to improve your habitat in a manner compatible with your operation. Sign up now - see multisar.ca for more details or call Darryl at 403-388-3146.

The 4th annual Oldman Watershed Council's Holding the Reins landowners summit was very successful once again with 80 attendees. Topics included bio-engineering in Alberta, weeds across borders and the activities of the Alberta Water Research Institute. Landowner groups shared their ongoing projects and digital stories were also presented by Cows and Fish.

MULTISAR has completed its survey of landowners in the Milk River basin and South Saskatchewan River sub basin. The survey included questions about land management practices, habitat and wildlife and conservation groups. We had a great response, thank you to all who participated!

Scentless Chamomile

Grazing: Unpalatable.

Mechanical: Hand pulling small patches is effective. Mowing early in season (before flowering) and each successive mowing should be lower than the previous one.

Chemical: Herbicide application before seeding can be effective. A combination of mowing or hand pulling and herbicide application, before the plant goes to seed, is the best method.

Biological: A seed feeding weevil (*Omphalapion hookeri*) and a gall midge (*Rhopalomyia tripleurospermi*) have been tried at some locations in Alberta.

Areas prone to invasion: Areas of poor growth or overgrazing.

Interesting fact: A single plant can produce as many as a million seeds.

Tall Buttercup

Grazing: Unpalatable and irritable to grazers. Its juices can cause blisters and irritation.

Mechanical: Hand pulling for some infestations and mowing prior to flowering to prevent seed dispersal. Will not persist under cultivation.

Chemical: Many available for both range and crops.

Areas prone to invasion: Wet areas.

Ox-eye Daisy

Grazing: Unpalatable.

Mechanical: Mowing before plants go to seed may be useful, but may encourage re-sprouting. Hand-pulling prior to flowering is effective, but may need to be repeated over a period of years.

Chemical: Apply to actively growing plants until flowering stage. Glyphosate, 2,4-D, dicamba can be used. Picloram on some soil types.

Areas prone to invasion: Soil low in nutrients but tolerates a wide range of conditions.



Photos by Andrew Stiles

Show me the money!

Shining the spotlight on financial incentives for environmental projects on agricultural land.

In the Spotlight: Ducks Unlimited Forage Incentive Program

Summary: Planning to seed forage this spring? Or do you want to restore a piece of marginal land back to a natural grassland? This program offers \$20/acre to seed cultivated lands to forage or \$30/acre if you are willing to also restore any drained wetlands in the area being seeded to forage. To qualify you must use approved Viterro products and wait until the forage is established before payment is issued.

Pro: Get paid to grow forage for your livestock!

Con: To qualify your land must be within Ducks Unlimited's critical program areas and you must sign a 10 year conservation agreement.

For more information call Craig Bishop, Forage Specialist with Ducks Unlimited Canada at 1-866-301-3825 extension 1872 or 403-476-1872 or email yourland@ducks.ca.

Sharing our story: Twin Butte Simmentals Protects their Cottonwood Forest

Producers have been involved in protecting Alberta's headwater streams on the slopes of the eastern Rockies for generations. Many producers have joined watershed stewardship groups like the Drywood-Yarrow Conservation Partnership, to ensure good quality water continues to be the norm and to make improvements to the watershed where needed.

Tony and Lorraine Bruder, operators of Twin Butte Simmentals, are members of the partnership and want to keep cattle out of their riparian area, especially since their wintering pens are along Yarrow Creek. The Bruder's had already fenced most of the creek, limited access in one pasture to a single point along the creek and allowed only their horses in the riparian pasture for short times when they were introduced to MULTISAR through Jeff Porter, Conservation Coordinator for the Southwest Alberta Conservation Partnership.

MULTISAR and a grant from the Greencover Canada Program were able to assist the Bruder's in finishing their fence along Yarrow Creek and setting up off-stream watering sites in their wintering pens. A wide buffer zone along the creek was fenced to allow young cottonwoods to establish and provide replacements for when the older ones fall. As the only forest type on the prairie, cottonwood forests are essential habitat for species at risk and other wildlife including deer, songbirds, grouse, bats and waterfowl. These riparian forests support up to 7 times more birds than the surrounding uplands and 80% of birds on the grasslands use them for part of their life cycle. They also provide shade and shelter for cattle and provide high quality forage but they have to be managed very carefully to stay healthy. It often takes 2 years of complete rest for new cottonwood seedlings to establish and become hardy enough to withstand grazing.

The Bruders and MULTISAR are excited to watch more cottonwoods establish and will be monitoring their growth. This stewardship project is being used for demonstration purposes and has also been featured in the Alberta Conservation Association magazine *Conservation* as another example of the proactive stewardship of producers of southwestern Alberta.



Conditions allow cottonwoods to reproduce through seeds every 7-10 years. Seedlings need 2 years of growth to be strong enough to withstand grazing.

Cottonwood Reproduction

There are 3 species of poplars found in Alberta's cottonwood forests: balsam poplar, plains cottonwood and narrowleaf cottonwood. All 3 hybridize to produce a variety of leaf shapes. Narrowleaf cottonwoods are found only in the very southwest of Alberta. Cottonwoods need very specific conditions in order to reproduce through seed dispersal and these conditions are usually only met every 7-10 years. They can also reproduce without seeds through sprouting.



Caring for your cottonwoods

- Allow as much rest as possible during the growing season and in fall when riparian vegetation is more palatable than upland vegetation and tends to be overgrazed, setting back the woody vegetation the following spring.
- Once seedlings have established, 2 years of rest is needed to allow them to grow strong enough to withstand grazing.
- Provide an access point with a hard surface. Fencing off everything but the access point will protect riparian health and restrict weeds and erosion to a small area.
- Distribute salt, off-stream water and feed away from streams and forests to attract cattle elsewhere.
- Graze with a low stocking rate and allow rest after for recovery. Overgrazed riparian areas will lose their deep rooted plants leading to wider stream channels and shallower, warmer water. Shallow or tap rooted plants do not maintain bank stability.

For more information see www.multisar.ca/bmp and click on the cottonwood forest link.

SPECIES PROFILE:

Burrowing Owl

At risk - Endangered



Description: Small owls with white and brown barring. Darker coloured back and wings. About 20cm long with long legs. Active during day and night. Forage for insects, mostly grasshoppers, beetles and crickets, and small mammals such as mice and voles. A family of these owls can eat as many as 1500 mice and 10,000 grasshoppers each summer. Often seen on top of their burrow or on a nearby fence post.

Status: Listed as endangered in both Alberta and Canada. Breeding range has been shrinking - these owls are already largely gone from Manitoba and British Columbia and their range in Alberta has shrunk. Surveys show the number of breeding pairs has declined significantly from about 243 pairs in 1991 to 150 pairs in 2004 when the last survey was conducted.

Habitat: Burrowing owls use abandoned ground squirrel or badger holes to nest in when they return to Alberta in April or May. They line their nests with dried cow dung. They prefer shorter vegetation around their nest to allow them to watch for predators but also need taller vegetation and riparian (streamside) areas close by to forage for insects and small mammals. Burrowing owls also use other burrows in addition to their nest. Their wintering habitat is in the southern USA or Mexico where they migrate to in autumn.

Threats: The cumulative impact of habitat loss and alteration, increased development, fragmentation and intensive activity on the grasslands has taken its toll on these owls. Use of pesticides for control of burrowing mammals and insects, increased predation, collisions with vehicles, low reproductive success and disturbance are also contributing factors to their decline.

Beneficial management practices for burrowing owls:

- Preserve natural grasslands. Burrowing owls prefer to nest in natural grasslands over tame pastures but will forage in both.
- Allow regular grazing around burrows. Burrowing owls prefer grass heights below 10cm around their nests to watch for predators.
- Graze pastures with burrowing owl nests in late summer or early spring. Avoid grazing during the breeding and nesting season (May to June).
- If you must spray chemicals to control weeds or use poison to control rodents, leave a 500m buffer zone around burrowing owl nests.
- Avoid creating predator perches. Cross fences create perches for predators of burrowing owls. Consider where owl nests are when placing fences.
- Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Fish and Wildlife Division recommends set back distances of between 50m to 500m for industrial development, depending on the type of activity. A pre-development survey should be conducted to locate burrowing owl nests and plan for set back distances and timing restrictions. See multisar.ca/bmp - click on burrowing animals and/or industrial guidelines for more information.



Is there something you would like us to write about? Do you have any questions?

Please contact:

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