

Agricultural Service Board Bulletin



GRAZING LIVESTOCK IN RIPARIAN AREAS

'Riparian areas' are the transitional zones between water bodies and upland areas. Fully functional, healthy riparian areas provide valuable services that include filtering and trapping runoff, recharging groundwater, slowing soil erosion along banks and gullies, supporting biodiversity, and producing abundant forage for livestock throughout the growing season. Riparian areas can be damaged when livestock are allowed access to graze and/or drink from the adjacent water body. However, with careful management that accounts for the unique characteristics of riparian areas, riparian grazing can be done without long-term degradation.

Riparian Grazing Considerations:

- **Stocking rates.** By estimating the forage yield of the riparian area, you can determine an appropriate stocking rate over a given time period that does not lead to overgrazing. Ongoing monitoring is essential to adjust plans to reflect current growing conditions.
- **Access to water.** Cattle drinking directly from the stream or wetland can destabilize the bank, muddy the water, and contribute to nitrification of the water supply. Off-stream or off-site watering areas prevent degradation of stream banks and improve water quality
- **Rest periods.** Letting riparian areas rest during the growing season enables plants to re-grow leaves and root mass post-grazing. Keep in mind that overgrazing is a function of time, and can result from staying in a riparian area for too long or returning to a grazed riparian area before plants have fully recovered. Monitor for regrowth, bare ground, and changes in species composition to determine whether a riparian area needs more rest.
- **Moisture conditions.** Wet soils are vulnerable to pugging and compaction, especially in the spring. Graze in low moisture conditions to avoid damaging sensitive streambanks.
- **Grazing management.** Cattle may linger around riparian areas on summer days due to the availability of water and shade. Thus, allowing cattle to simultaneously access riparian areas and upland areas can lead to overutilization of the former and underutilization of the latter. Fencing your riparian area as a separate pasture makes it possible to better manage the grazing process and to exclude livestock from particularly sensitive areas
- **Livestock preference.** It is important to be aware of the palatability of different riparian species to livestock. Trees and shrubs tend to be browsed more intensively in late summer and fall, when grasses have cured and good forage is lacking.

The above article was adapted from the Agroforestry & Woodlot Extension Society's April 30, 2018 factsheet of the same title. To view the full factsheet and more from AWES, visit <https://tinyurl.com/hesbk5ry>.



AWES
Agroforestry & Woodlot
Extension Society

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DID YOU KNOW?

- Only 3% of the Earth's surface can be used to grow food.
- Horses and other equines are the leading farm type in the Yukon and Northwest Territories.
- Manitoba has the largest number of young farmers in Canada (under 35 years old).
- Over 100 varieties of potato are grown in P.E.I.
- In Nunavut, the cost of groceries can be 3-10 times more than the Canadian average.
- About 2% of Canada's farmland is in certified organic production.
- It can take 100-500 years to build just 2cm of topsoil.
- Beef steers only consume about 38 litres/day, whereas the average Canadian uses 223 litres/day.
- Over 50% of lentils traded in the world come from Saskatchewan fields.
- It takes almost 40L of raw maple sap to make 1L of maple syrup.
- The average dairy cow produces almost 11,000L of milk every year.
- 97% of Canadian farms are still family owned and operated.



AB OPEN FARM DAYS HOST REGISTRATION NOW OPEN!

Registration is now open for farms and ranches to be part of the 13th annual Open Farm Days on August 16 & 17.

Alberta Open Farm Days is an annual 2-day summer event that presents Albertans with an opportunity to experience the farm firsthand from farmers and ranchers. The program started in 2013 and has encouraged Albertans to engage with their local communities and experience agri-tourism.

In 2024, over 150 farms participated in Alberta Open Farm Day, welcoming over 52,000 Albertans to their farms and ranches. Host farms have included traditional farms, livestock farms and ranches, organic operations, corn mazes,

wineries, craft distilleries, meaderies, craft breweries, stables, petting zoos, along with honey, fruit, vegetable, grain and u-pick farms.

Since 2013, Open Farm Days has seen over 235,000 people visit over 1,200 farms and ranches, injecting over \$1.7 million into the rural economy through on-farm sales. In 2024, reported on-farm sales surpassed \$300,000 for the first time.

To register as a host farm, visit <https://tinyurl.com/d5ubk57d>. **Registration is open until April 30**, so don't wait! To learn more about Alberta Open Farm Days, visit albertaopenfarmdays.ca.

AB Open Farm Days host farm registration ends April 30! Open Farm Days are August 16 & 17.

2025 BLUE BOOK AVAILABLE

The 2025 Blue Book (Alberta's Crop Protection Guide) is available for order or digital download!

The Blue Book is a longstanding and trusted resource for Alberta farmers and agronomists, providing current pesticide application information. With over 700 pages of valuable crop protection information, spraying guidelines and farm safety, The Blue Book is an essential tool for any farming operation. The Blue Book publication is collaboratively produced by three of Alberta's crop commissions – Alberta Canola, Alberta Grains and Alberta Pulse Growers.

Visit <https://www.albertabluebook.com/> to download or order your copy.



TIPS TO MANAGE SPRING PASTURES

The following is adapted from the Beef Cattle Research Council's Feb. 28, 2024 article titled "When Do I Turn Out My Cows? Managing Spring Pastures During and After Drought". To view the full article, visit <https://www.beefresearch.ca/blog/managing-pastures-during-and-after-drought/>.

The question of 'when can I turn my cows out?' is an important one, especially for those with dwindling hays stacks or for producers purchasing feed.

When do I turn my cows out in the spring?

- Know your carrying capacity: Be realistic with the amount of forage you have and develop your grazing plan accordingly.
- Wait until the three-leaf stage: Using plant height is not a good way to determine readiness to graze as plants can vary greatly by height, especially in the early stages. Instead wait until plants have three leaves to start grazing. This gives the plant time to build the reserves it needs for long-term survival.
- Match your grazing plan to your pasture type: If possible, graze tame pastures prior to native pastures. Tame pastures are generally more grazing tolerant, and may be quicker to green up in spring, providing valuable early grazing.
- Pay attention to litter: Litter is the standing or fallen dead plant residue left remaining in a pasture. Pastures with abundant litter will require less recovery and can be accessed earlier in the season than those where there is little or no litter remaining.
- Look backward: how was your forage managed in the previous year? If certain pastures were left in poor condition last fall, plan to use those in the following grazing season to allow ample time for rest and recovery.
- Use rainfall rather than snow as your indicator of moisture recharge: Although looking at the plants and pastures should be your first indicator for forage growth potential, many beef producers may look to soil moisture levels to help determine pasture turnout.
- Be ready to adapt: Recognize that grazing plans made in early spring are a moving target and will need to be adjusted based on rainfall, heat, and other environmental factors. Monitor pastures throughout the grazing season and consider what potential back-up plans might need to be implemented to ensure pastures are managed for drought resilience.

Continue reading more in the full article linked above!



Installing artificial nest poles can encourage predatory bird species to nest in fields with minimal tree stands. To find construction designs, visit <https://tinyurl.com/2p4m5vzf>. Photo courtesy Government of Alberta Species at Risk Report No. 140 (March 2011).

MANAGING GOPHERS—EARLY CONTROL IS KEY

The following is adapted from Agri-News' Mar. 24, 2025 article titled "Early intervention crucial in managing Richardson's ground squirrels". To view the full article, visit <https://tinyurl.com/3vct3szn>.

A springtime window of opportunity

Richardson's ground squirrels typically emerge from hibernation in early spring, with their first appearances occurring in late February, depending on the local climate. Males are the first to surface, with females emerging about 2 weeks later. During this period, they are often sluggish, taking time to feed and regain strength after months of dormancy. It also marks the beginning of their mating season, making this time crucial for controlling their population.

Effective control methods

Several methods of control, in combination, can help landowners reduce the impact of Richardson's ground squirrels, including trapping, shooting, encouraging natural predators and use of rodenticides.

Trapping: Traps should be placed near burrow entrances, where they are most active. This method requires consistent monitoring to ensure captured Richardson's ground squirrels are dealt with promptly and humanely. While time-consuming, trapping is a direct way to reduce squirrel numbers and can be effective for smaller areas.

Shooting: In areas where it is legal and safe, shooting can be a highly effective way to reduce the population of Richardson's ground squirrels. This method is particularly useful in larger rural properties. It is crucial to follow local regulations and ensure safety when using firearms for this purpose.

Encouraging natural predators: Richardson's ground squirrels have natural predators, such as hawks and owls, that can help keep the population in check. By creating environments that attract these predators, landowners can foster a more balanced ecosystem.

Rodenticides: Several rodenticides are available for controlling Richardson's ground squirrels, but proper application is crucial to prevent poisoning of non-target species. The most effective time to apply these rodenticides is just before the first green blade of grass appears, as this is when they become more attracted to new vegetation. Careful use of rodenticides including following the label directions helps ensure that the Richardson's ground squirrels are targeted effectively, while minimizing the risk to other wildlife in the area.

REDUCE WILDFIRE RISK AROUND YOUR FARM

FireSmart is a program that gives you information and recommendations on how to reduce the risk of a wildfire damaging your home or other buildings. The FireSmart program is supported by many community fire departments as an education and prevention tool for fire prevention/damage reduction.

Vulcan County's Protective Services department has summarized some key aspects of wildfire risk reduction into the following checklist. To minimize the risk to your home and property, follow these best practices:

- Keep your lawn mowed as short as possible at least 5 ft (1.5 m) from your home and around all other buildings.
- Reduce the amount of brush and trees close to your home, choose wildfire-resistant plants whenever possible, and space them out.
- Clear all combustible material, including wood piles, away from your home. Keep these materials no closer than 30 ft (10 m) from your home and other buildings.
- Clear and maintain your eaves-trough and roof regularly. Remove debris like dry leaves and twigs to prevent sparks from catching.
- Trim the low branches of trees to a height of 6 ft (2 m) from the ground to help reduce the risk of your trees igniting.
- Apply the same standards of maintenance to all buildings on your property as you do your home.
- Plan and practice your home escape plan and include a plan for wildfire evacuations.

For more information on FireSmart and how it can help protect your home and property, go to <https://firesmartalberta.ca/>.

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Test Your Knowledge

1. Trees tend to be browsed by cattle more intensively in the ____.
2. What days are AB Open Farm Days?
3. How many pages is the 2025 Blue Book?
4. Female gophers emerge about ____ later than males in spring.
5. Wood piles should be no closer to buildings than ____.
6. Rough cleaning should remove about ____ of the soil from the unit.
7. When is the BRRG's Dugout Optimization webinar?

1. Late summer and fall.
2. August 16 & 17, 2025
3. Over 700!
4. 2 weeks
5. 30 feet (10 metres)
6. 90%
7. May 6, 2025.

Answers

County of Paintearth No. 18
Box 509
Castor, AB T0C 0X0
Phone: (403)882-3211
www.countypaintearth.ca

Have an event or article suggestion for the next ASB Bulletin? Email tkerr@countypaintearth.ca to have it included in the next issue!

County of Paintearth
No. 18

EQUIPMENT SANITATION: WHY AND HOW

The following is adapted from the Canola Council of Canada's page of the same name. To view the full page and additional information, visit <https://tinyurl.com/5n7745zj>.

Moving soil means moving pests. The list includes Plasmodiophora brassicae (canola pathogen causing clubroot), Verticillium longisporum (canola pathogen causing verticillium stripe, Aphanomyces euteiches (pea and lentil pathogen causing aphanomyces root rot), weed seeds, nematodes, and possibly insect pupae.

Anything that moves soil can move these pests across a farm and from farm to farm. Anything that keeps soil in place – like equipment sanitation and reduced tillage – will reduce the spread of these pests.

Farm machinery can be a highly efficient way to spread hundreds of pounds of infested soil a long distance and very quickly. And yet it can take only a few grams of soil to introduce a problem pest.

How to clean

To clean equipment before leaving a field, choose an appropriate worksite where soil can be removed and then not picked up again when exiting the field. A low-traffic grassed area near the field exit is an ideal place to sanitize equipment.

Step 1: Rough cleaning. A long-handled tool, such as a shovel, hoe or ice scraper, will easily remove large soil clumps from openers and frames. A hand scraper, wire brush and/or compressed air will remove smaller debris. This combination could take an hour or more for an average sized seeding tool, and should remove at least 90% of the soil from the unit.

Step 2: Fine cleaning. Use a pressure washer at 2,000–3,000 psi on all areas where soil can accumulate. Turbo nozzles are generally more effective at removing soil than regular nozzles. Addition of an industrial detergent may enhance the degree of soil removal. Steps 1 and 2 in combination should remove 99% of soil from the unit.

Step 3: Disinfection. This will achieve near complete removal of the clubroot pathogen. We don't know if this is effective or necessary for the other pests. A 3-gallon backpack herbicide sprayer will work to apply disinfectant on all surfaces. For clubroot, bleach is the best performer, but bleach has its disadvantages. All areas should remain wet with the solution for 15–20 minutes. Disinfecting in the early morning or in the evening slows evaporation so a second or third application may not be necessary to keep the area wet for the required time. Step 3 alone is not effective. The first two steps are required if you plan to include the disinfection step.

It may not be practical to follow all steps every time machinery leaves a field. The more soil removed in step one, the fewer pathogen spores, weed seeds and nematodes that are spread.

DUGOUT OPTIMIZATION WEBINAR

Join Battle River Research Group on May 6 at 2 PM for a Zoom webinar on Dugouts for Agriculture & Rural Uses! Learn how to optimize your water supply for farming and beyond.

Date: May 6, 2025


Time: 2:00 p.m.

Where: Online Webinar

Register by calling the Battle River Research Group at (780)582-7308 or visit <https://conta.cc/4iQaHkV>.



Battle River Research Group
www.battleriverresearch.com



Zoom Webinar
Dugouts for Agriculture and other Rural Uses

Shawn Elgert is an Agricultural Water Engineer from the Farm Water Supply Section with Agriculture and Irrigation. He provides technical consultation to rural agricultural operations and other rural land owners giving them advice on design and construction of their water sources and information on the suitability of their water as well as treatment.

Agenda items are:

- Planning considerations
- Dugout design
- Construction
- Dugout operation and protection
- Maintenance
- Water quality issues and treatment solutions
- Dugouts for stocking fish

Shawn Elgert

MAY 6 2 PM

REGISTER ONLINE AT [www.battleriverresearch.com](https://conta.cc/4iQaHkV)

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