

# Riparian Pastures - A Landscape Approach

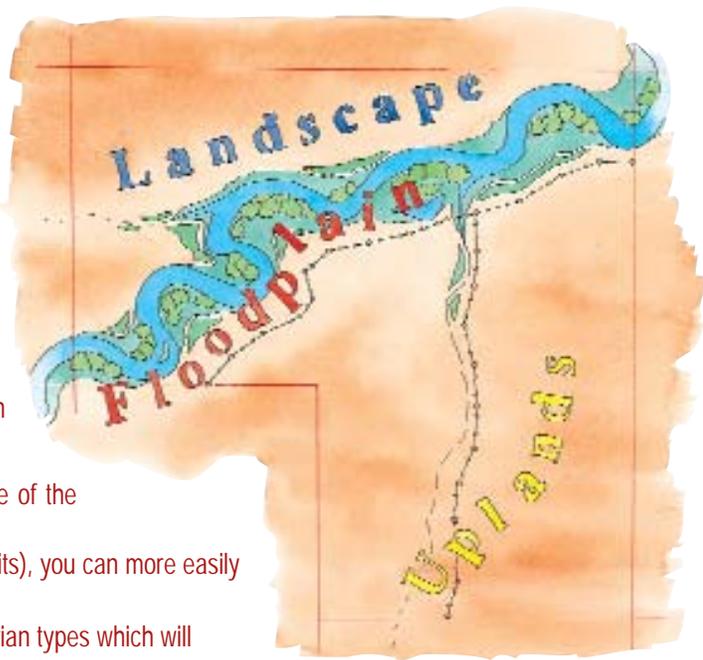
Rotational grazing systems deal with recurring patterns or sequences of grazing and rest. The riparian pasture option takes us the next step to consider how we define and fence pasture units.

Moving to a riparian pasture system means defining fields in a manner that reduces the variation within a given field, such as fencing uplands separately from the floodplain.

Like rotational strategies, riparian pastures also will be grazed in a planned, purposeful sequence. However, the major difference between riparian pastures and other rotational strategies is the separation of range pasture units on a land type or landscape basis.

Often more fencing is required but a riparian pasture is one of the most successful options because:

- ◆ when land is fenced "like-with-like" (in homogeneous units), you can more easily control livestock distribution;
- ◆ animal distribution is improved in both uplands and riparian types which will often allow you to increase your sustainable carrying capacity;
- ◆ providing effective control over livestock grazing during high risk periods allows for the most rapid recovery of riparian area health and productivity; and
- ◆ as a component of your riparian area goal, a riparian pasture will help you restore and maintain woody vegetation.

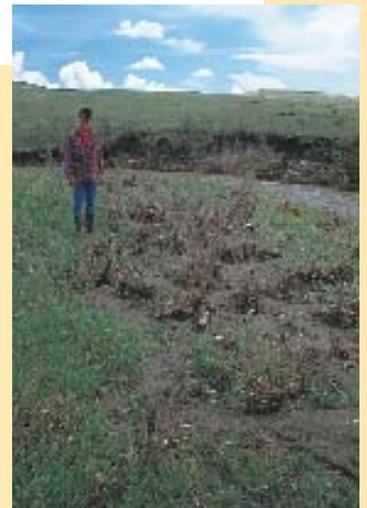


## Vandervalk Ranch Riparian Pasture

Jack and Merry Vandervalk, of VxV Farms, have applied a riparian pasture strategy on their ranch on Lyndon Creek, west of Claresholm. One of their pastures has been fenced as a riparian pasture for 40 years. Grazing use in a typical season would involve 50 heifers for one month during the mid-March to mid-April time frame, followed by 140 yearlings for a week between April 15 and May 5. Yearlings are allowed to return in July to graze a certain amount of forage regrowth. Forage species here are well adapted to growing season use as long as grazing intensity is carefully regulated and an adequate rest period is provided. In this pasture, rest is provided from early-May to July, and then again after the regrazing period.



*This field has been grazed as a riparian pasture for 40 years.*



*Sediment trapped on Vandervalk's riparian pasture after spring floods shows riparian vegetation doing its job - building a productive riparian area.*

Over the years, Jack Vandervalk has learned to take his cues for managing riparian pastures from monitoring livestock use of woody species. He recognized early that prolonged, dormant season grazing will progressively set back the woody species that he needs to stabilize streambanks and provide shelter for his livestock. He has met those needs by shifting livestock use to upland, native pastures to avoid dormant season use in his riparian pasture.