

Producer Stories

From Alberta Farms and Ranches

Tongue Creek Ranch - Hartell, Alberta

Tongue Creek Ranch covers 4000 acres in the Municipal District of Foothills along Tongue Creek, and has a long history in the area. Merv Page came to the ranch as manager in 1970, and continues to manage it today with his policy of conservation of native pastures, streambanks and riparian areas. Merv uses cattle to manage the grass enough to reduce the build up of litter and promote new growth. He believes that stocking rates and pasture condition go hand in hand, so he tries to balance the number of animals he grazes with the size and condition of his pastures.

*Merv's
recommendation
is very simple --
"Don't overgraze."*

*Healthy
floodplains,
which are well
vegetated, slow
the flow of water
and allow it to
soak in.*

In the riparian pasture, 100 cow/calf pairs are turned out at the beginning of June to graze the old grass for a three-week period under a time-controlled grazing management strategy. The cattle are then moved off the riparian pasture, which is left to rest until September. At that time, 60 heifers are put back into the riparian pasture until the beginning of February.

With the drought conditions in the late 1990's, Merv has reduced cattle numbers to cope with dry conditions and lack of water. His management policy is to allow the native pasture to remain in good condition, and adjusts his herd size accordingly.



Stockman Tom Fenwick (l) and Tongue Creek Ranch Manager Merv Page (r)

Management Highlights

- * management is based on a policy of conservation of streambanks and riparian areas
- * focus on time-controlled grazing management and off-site watering to maintain pasture condition and improve riparian areas
- * maintaining native pasture condition is the priority
- * cattle numbers and stocking rates are adjusted to conditions



Successful Riparian Management

Riparian Pastures + Time-Controlled Grazing

The foundation of the riparian management success on the Tongue Creek Ranch is the creation of 'riparian pastures'. Riparian pastures are defined by dividing the landscape into pasture units based on similar plant communities and topography; the bottomlands are fenced separately from the uplands. Riparian pastures include a landbase wider than a narrow corridor just along the streambanks.

"I manage my bottomlands different than my uplands."

Merv's decision to use this landscape approach, combined with off-site watering and salt placement away from the riparian areas, makes controlling distribution of livestock easier in both the upland and riparian pastures. This results in more efficient use of forages, and excellent upland and riparian health.

Light intensity, time-controlled grazing on riparian pastures is key to keeping the riparian plant communities in a healthy state. By limiting grazing to a few weeks in early summer with a light stocking density and resting the riparian pasture for the remainder of the growing season, Merv is allowing woody plants and grasses to continue to grow. Therefore, they can withstand a light graze in the fall/winter and be productive in subsequent years.

Time-controlled grazing systems minimize regrowth of the regrowth that plants require for rebuilding roots and energy supplies.

All age classes of willows are present in the riparian areas on Tongue Creek Ranch. The streambanks are well protected by an established root mass of riparian vegetation.



Future Plans

The goal of Tongue Creek Ranch is to keep the ranch in as much of a natural state as possible. Through light intensity grazing and carefully controlled stocking rates, Merv plans to continue a management strategy that ensures a policy of conservation of streambanks, riparian areas, and native grasses.

Merv has a very keen interest in managing the ranch and the riparian areas, and is working with the owner to ensure this management strategy continues past his retirement as manager. The Tongue Creek Ranch continues to work with the Cows and Fish program to assess and monitor riparian health.

Photo Credits: Michael Uchikura
Tongue Creek Ranch



Working with producers and communities on riparian awareness

Program Manager: Lethbridge 403-381-5538

Riparian Specialists:

Barrhead 780-674-8262

Camrose 780-679-1289 Lethbridge 403-381-5377

Fax 403-381-5723 E-mail riparian@telusplanet.net

www.cowsandfish.org



Printed in Canada 04/03

Cows and Fish Partners

Producers & Community Groups, Alberta Beef Producers, Trout Unlimited Canada, Canadian Cattlemen's Association, Alberta Agriculture, Food & Rural Development, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Alberta Environment, Department of Fisheries & Oceans, Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration, Alberta Conservation Association

Funding Associates include 
AESA, CARDF, CABIDF, Habitat Stewardship Program