



Fire and Strategic Grazing Tools to Restore Rough Fescue Native Range in Alberta

Kevin A. France and Callum Sears; Sustainable Resource Development; Contact Author Email: kevin.france@gov.ab.ca

In May 2008, Alberta's department of Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) undertook a prescribed burn on a large parcel of crown grazing lease land west of Stavely, Alberta. The burn area consisted of large fuel loads of dead plant material and extensive brush, tree and tame grass encroachment upon native rough fescue (*Festuca campestris*) rangelands. The objective of the burn was to determine the success of fire as a range restoration tool by reducing woody and tame grass cover through a combination of prescribed fire and grazing practices. Nine 30-meter line transects were permanently established throughout the burn area. Pre and post fire monitoring was conducted using 15 Daubenmire frames at 2 meter intervals along each transect. Species composition and cover was documented for each plot as well as an estimate of range health, litter production, and stems per hectare for the deciduous plots. Paired cages were located in burned and unburned grasslands to monitor changes in forage production. Intensive grazing management was applied using 350 cow/calf pairs which grazed the prescribed burn area on June 20th for 2 weeks. The burnt area was then rested for the remainder of the growing season. A second graze was implemented in late August for 2 weeks with the same stocking rate in an attempt to control the aspen suckering. While first year data is currently being analyzed, casual observations include predicted increased forb cover and aspen suckering, improved livestock distribution and body condition, and positive rangeland restoration responses.

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