



PHOTO: RITA BRHEL
This is an example of planned wildlife habitat — leaving cedar cover interspersed with areas without cover — in a cattle pasture.

Coming Attractions

The Benefits Of Attracting Wildlife To The Farm

BY RITA BRHEL
P&D Correspondent

While poultry producers may not want to attract extra wildlife to their farms, many landowners like the idea of adding native fauna — from songbirds to pheasant to deer to ducks — to their property. But there's a little more involved in the process than fencing a woody area out of a livestock pasture or letting a plum thicket spread.

Russell Knight, wildlife biologist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Grand Junction, Colo., assists mostly farmers and ranchers in designing habitat to attract wildlife to their operations. While some are avid hunters, many landowners feel that it's important to include conservation in their farm management plans — perhaps they feel it's their duty in taking care of the land or because they simply enjoy watching wildlife.

On-farm wildlife habitat needs to match the natural resources on each farm, and the natural resources may not match up with the landowner's goals in which wildlife species to attract, so the first step in designing habitat is taking a thorough inventory of site of the future habitat. This includes current conditions, potential conditions based on typical weather patterns, the vegetation currently growing there and what other types of vegetation can be grown there.

"Identifying the soil is the starting place for all else. It determines everything," Knight said, such as whether the habitat a landowner has in mind is realistic for the site. For example, a producer may be set on growing corn to

attract deer but corn won't grow on soils that don't support it.

Next, the landowner needs to decide which wildlife species he wants to attract to the farm, as well as what season of use will the habitat support, what habitat components can be met on-farm versus surrounding property and if there is habitat need not being met elsewhere that the on-farm site has the natural resources to fulfill. For example, ducks prefer wetlands and a natural on-farm marshy area could attract ducks but perhaps not so much if surrounding properties also had significant wetlands. However, depending on duck habitat on the surrounding property, the on-farm site may be able to provide adequate nesting not found elsewhere.

The answers to these foundational questions will help the landowner determine her goals, which should be specific; for example, increase nesting habitat for ground-nesting birds or increase range for big game.

Finally, the landowner is ready to consult with a local NRCS professional in developing the habitat from existing vegetation and additional brush management. But contrary to popular belief, this rarely includes management practices like prescribed burns or clearing a pasture of cedar trees.

"Total removal is generally not what we're looking for," Knight said. "The exception is if you're dealing with a noxious weed that is everywhere, like Russian olive. Beware of noxious weeds. They can cause a lot of problems and really significantly defeat what you're trying to do."

Brush management for wildlife habitat actually means leaving areas of

cover randomly interspersed with open areas.

"Areas of cover should be large enough to provide thermal and security cover and be species-dependent. Obviously there will be larger areas of cover for deer than for birds," Knight said, adding that designed wildlife habitat works best the more natural-growing it appears: "If you think about what you see in nature, you don't see straight lines anywhere. It's more of a wandering mosaic."

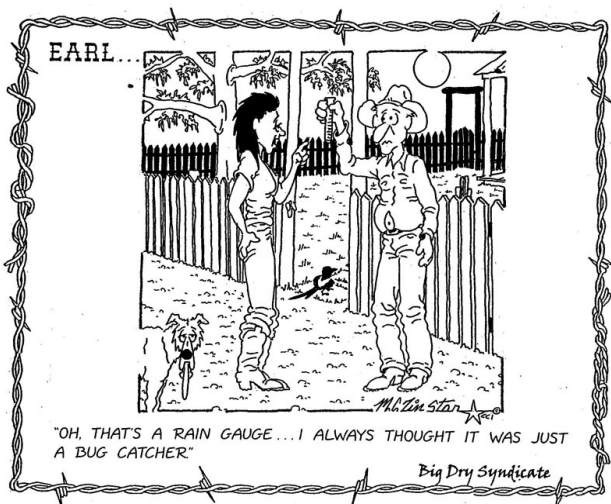
Brush can be removed and controlled with mechanical and chemical treatments, each with their own disadvantages:

- Mechanical — Chainsaw, harrows, Bobcat, roller-choppers, etc.: gets rid of standing dead material, but is labor-intensive and may leave a lot of litter on site;

- Chemical — Aerial or hand-spraying: Easier and faster than mechanical and can be used in rougher terrain, but leaves standing dead brush, although this may be good depending on the desired habitat.

Habitat designs often have limitations for livestock production, such as grazing deferment during seeding, establishment or drought. Problems that can arise include secondary weeds and erosion, especially on slopes. And Knight says not to be surprised if previously removed brush doesn't go away easily.

"Most species of brush will require retreatment at some point, usually every three to five years," he said. "Trees can quickly take over an area again, to look like you never did anything in the first place."



Calf Value Discovery Program Provides Needed Feedback

BROOKINGS — If a cattle producer sells their calves at weaning, most often they lose track of how those calves perform in the feedlot and on the rail. SDSU Extension Calf Value Discovery Program allows commercial cow/calf operators to glean valuable feedback to help them improve their herd's genetics, said Julie Walker, Associate Professor and Beef Specialist.

"One disadvantage of selling calves at weaning is too often there is very little feedback as to the calves' feedlot performance and carcass characteristics," Walker said. "As systems are put into place in the feedlot and packing sectors, it is becoming easier for the next customer in the chain (feedlots) to track and benchmark the prior history of a ranch's calves. In that case the advantage goes to the party with the most information. The question becomes, can a cow/calf producer afford to know less about their calves than a buyer does?"

Walker explained that when cattle producers enroll their calves in the Calf Value Discovery program they are able to gain knowledge about their calf crop.

"Understanding how your cattle perform can provide you with more management options upon weaning with changing conditions," she said.

No matter when you sell your calves, Walker said it's important to understand how they perform post-weaning.

"It affects your bottomline. Cattle buyers bid according to how they believe the cattle will perform. The CVD program allows producers to enroll a minimum of 5 head into the program with an enrollment fee of \$20/head. You will be provided feedlot performance and carcass characteristic at harvest. The 2013 enrollment deadline is Oct. 15, 2013. Details about the program can be found at <http://www.sdstate.edu/ars/species/beef/calf-value/index.cfm>. Calves will be delivered to the feedlot on Nov. 6-7.

RECENT DATA

A realistic scenario, Walker explained that feed costs and weather conditions influence the profitability of calves enrolled in

the Calf Value Discovery program. Table 1 shows the averages for the pen performance (feedlot and carcass) for the last two years. The difference between the most and least profitable animals was \$635.59 and \$774.60 in years 2011/2012 and 2012/2013, respectively. Average daily gains and carcass characteristics were similar between the two years.

"Feed efficiencies and dressing percentages were better in 2011/2012 compared to the year before. That's not surprising considering that weather conditions during the spring of 2013 were much less favorable than the in 2012," Walker said.

MORE INFORMATION

Producers from South Dakota and Minnesota consigned a total of 244 calves in 2011/2012 and 184 calves in 2012/2013. The number of animals consigned by producers ranged from five to 73 head. In-dates were Nov. 8 and 9, 2011 and Oct. 23 and 24, 2012.

Cattle were fed a finishing diet based on high moisture ground ear corn, modified wet distillers grains, and corn silage as a group in a single pen. Cattle were visually evaluated for degree of finish and sold in semi-load lots when deemed to have approximately 0.4 inches of backfat.

Slaughter dates were May 11, June 1 and 15, 2012 (184, 205, and 219 days on feed, respectively) and May 3, June 17 and 29, 2013 (190, 204, and 217 days on feed, respectively). Animals were sold on a quality/yard grid at Tyson Fresh Meats, (Dakota City, Neb.).

To estimate what factors were associated with feeding performance or profit and quality grade for calves that finished the CVD program, calves were divided into thirds based on profit. Profit equals carcass value minus beginning calf value and feedlot costs. Table 2 contains the data from 2011/2012 CVD and Table 3 has 2012/2013 information.

Other than feed efficiency, Walker said the performance of the cattle was similar between the two years.

"What are differences between profit groups? The high profit group had heavier out weights, heavier hot carcass weight, and more choice or higher carcasses. The cattle that made money gained faster and produced heavier carcasses that avoided discounts. You may be asking why the differences between years in profitability. The simple answer is higher feed costs; average total feedlot costs were \$565.31 in 2011/2012 and \$671.11 in 2012/2013," Walker said.

For more information about the program contact either Walker at 605-688-5458 or Warren Rusche, SDSU Extension Cow/Calf Field Specialist at 605-882-5140.

Shutdown Impacts SD Cattle Producers

BROOKINGS — The recent federal shutdown has affected two of South Dakota's largest cattle markets — the calf and feeder markets — explained Matthew Diersen, Professor and SDSU Extension Risk Management Specialist.

"In South Dakota livestock markets are usually well-functioning with good price coverage, however the federal shutdown has affected the calf and feeder-weight cattle segments hampering routine price discovery and the ability to transfer risk," Diersen said. "These markets are the largest livestock sector in terms of economics and the number of producers affected by price changes."

He explained that prices for calves and feeder cattle are normally monitored and reported by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service (USDA AMS). However, with the shutdown, the market reporters were furloughed.

The AMS reports prices for fed cattle, swine, forages and many other crops.

"The prices are compiled into state and national price series and monitored and used by sellers and buyers seeking a fair value," Diersen

said. "A key series affected is the Chicago Mercantile Exchange's (CME) feeder cattle index, which is a weighted average of AMS prices."

Diersen further explained that series is used as the settlement price for feeder cattle futures contracts. He added that the CME Group has issued several statements regarding their contingency plans for the index and settlement of feeder cattle and other livestock contracts.

"So, what are cattle worth this week? That is more difficult to answer," he said. With these trusted sources temporarily shut down, Diersen said one could scour the Internet, call around, and try to watch and read the details of cattle traded at the dozens of auctions in South Dakota.

"Then, you would need a network to do that in the other states with cattle. And you would need to try to exclude from your view any cattle that are too big, too small, too thin, too heavy,

too fancy or with any feature different from the quality grade used in past valuations," Diersen said.

LIVESTOCK RISK PROTECTION PART OF SHUTDOWN

One would also observe this week that feeder cattle are being valued at all-time high levels. Thus, for anyone considering selling cattle in the future, Diersen said those values have risen also.

"That leads to a second problem," he said. "Without knowing with some certainty what ending price would be used to settle a futures or options contract, potential sellers may not be as willing to price or protect cattle."

The other obvious choice for producers with high prices is buying insurance coverage. Diersen explained that typically they would use Livestock Risk Protection or a similar insurance product. However, the staff at USDA's Risk Management Agency responsible for administering those programs has been furloughed.

"Thus, one cannot purchase that coverage," he said. "In addition, those products settle to the CME's feeder cattle index too. Without a reliable index it is not clear what price will be used to settle existing or new contracts."

Diersen said that should an alternative index be needed, potential change in the make-up of the index is a likely scenario, and it may lead to basis risk or less effective management of risk.

For producers, the implication is to make the best of the situation. Those wanting insurance may cover themselves in the short run with put options that could be sold once insurance is again offered. It would also guard against large price moves in the short run. For auctions, they should make as much price information available as is feasible. Quantities traded, weights, and prices are all part of the price discovery that occurs at the auctions that the AMS is unable to provide during a shutdown.



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MORNING COFFEE

WEEKDAYS MONDAY-FRIDAY

Monday, October 7

7:40 am Yankton County Comm (Allen Sinclair)
8:20 am SD Lt. Governor (Matt Michels)

Tuesday, October 8

7:40 am The Center (Christy Hauer)
8:20 am The Tyjuan Benefit (Lynell Kooistra)