

Grazing season begins, grazing management plan still in committee

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TEANAWAY – Cattleman **Sam Kayser** has signed on the dotted line for a Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR) license granting him another season of grazing rights in the

Teanaway Community Forest (Community Forest) – but the agreement this signing represents is in no way an indication that the discussion about how grazing in the forest shall be managed is over and done with – and at this writing Kayser's cattle are, for the 20th year or so, back on the range.

Hurdle: Identify impacts

At this stage of the game nobody really knows where the final management plan will land because the impacts of cattle in the Community Forest are still being studied.

That's because the signing of Kayser's license comes in the early stages of a public process overseen by a subcommittee working under the umbrella of the Community Forest's Citizens Advisory Committee.

At the heart of those discussions is the question of what role cattle actually play in the destruction of critical habitats identified, and what measures must be taken to mitigate the destruction.

With that said, the subcommittee's challenge is to exact a consensus between stakeholders with differing agendas.

As several have mentioned: In a perfect world, or maybe with an adequately funded program, photo reconnaissance of the Community Forest over the last ten years would have provided the kind of smoking gun the subcommittee could have used to make prudent decisions, but that kind of evidence is not available. So what tact is left to take?

Tip Hudson offered his perspectives on the challenge. Hudson is the director of Kittitas County's Washington State University Extension Service headquartered in Ellensburg. He also serves the TCF's grazing subcommittee.

Q&A with Tip Hudson

To get started, what is the subcommittee calling for in the 2016 grazing season? "Fencing at Indian Creek and switching the location where Kayser has traditionally unloaded and loaded his cattle. Jack

Creek already has fencing, but fencing for other critical habitats is still being worked out."

Author's Note: Thursday, June 9, Kayser said the subcommittee also asked that this year he repair a "water delivery system consisting of pipes and a trough" originally built some time ago to carry water away from Indian Creek in hopes of protecting riparian habitat. Kayser said his materials would be paid for with state dollars.

Kayser said that in 2005 you personally established photo points to regularly monitor, over the years, impacts of grazing. Will that evidence help determine which areas to protect? "Not entirely. Last year the subcommittee developed a new list of critical habitats they want to monitor. So my photographs, though helpful, only target four or five key areas. They do show positive natural plant community development in areas grazed by cattle and considered critical."

Everyone seems to want to subscribe to fencing as a solution. Why not

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...spend the money to implement a periodic monitoring program aimed at critical sites before expending dollars on fencing? "It's a mixed bag. All the literature on grazing and riparian zones indicates that summer and early fall grazing over multiple months puts riparian zones at risk.

"I think what's going on here is that there are parts of the floodplain needing new trees and shrubs and it's possible cattle are preventing natural cycles of new growth.

"The goal this summer is to identify where that is occurring in a more deliberate manner than just guessing or assuming in order to channel dollars for fencing.

"We have places where there are down-cut

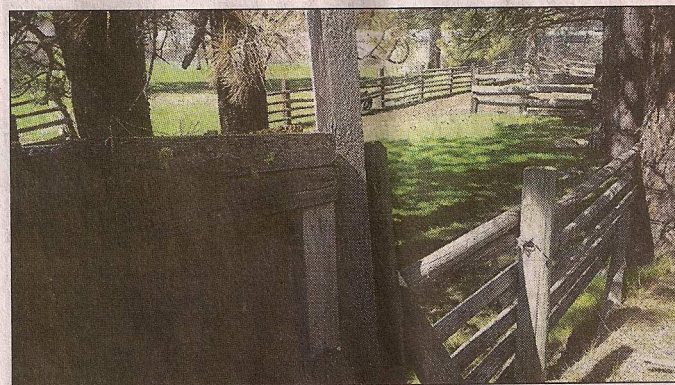
streams, where the water table in the floodplain is far enough away from the soil surface that it can't be accessed by riparian vegetation. Until we get some changes in the stream that raise the elevation of the channel, vegetation expression on the wider floodplain may be limited.

"Fencing might help in those areas where livestock are limiting vegetation development. Shrubs and trees often need a few years completely undisturbed for them to take off and reach a height at which livestock can't slow down their continued growth, though for a fisheries biologist a fence is the safer bet because whatever influences exist inside a fenced area theoretically wouldn't include cattle.

"My sense is that there are probably some areas where cattle and other wildlife are inhibiting the growth of woody vegetation. Those areas would qualify as areas to fence.

"Certainly, this grazing season is the time to identify those areas so we can fence strategically. I think that's where DNR is going to land. I don't think they'll just decide to fence everything. I believe they would consider that practice an improper use of public funding.

"On the other hand DNR is very much interested in the large-scale restoration of the watershed, so they are going to be willing to use some of their money and the Yakama Nation's money - if it's offered - to put fences where fences are needed, but that's still the million dollar question right now: Where do we put



THE SUBCOMMITTEE HAS, for this grazing season, agreed to close the off-loading and loading corral for Sam Kayser's cattle at Teanaway Road's Bussoli Field, the one he has been using for over 20 years. Instead, Kayser will move his operation to a field located further up Teanaway Road. The hope is that Bussoli Field and surrounding riparian habitats will now flourish, though the jury is out on whether the 200 cattle Kayser manages have ever had a lasting impact on the area.

N.K.C. TRIBUNE/Jim Fossett photo



TIP HUDSON is working with the subcommittee charged to develop a long-term grazing plan in the Teanaway Community Forest. His perspective on the issue is one of several that must morph toward a consensus before a plan is inked.

N.K.C. TRIBUNE/Jim Fossett photo

them for the greatest effect.

"For now, we're going to follow our plan to closely watch the range this season. That will help us get a better handle on the issue."

How pervasive is the issue of riparian grazing across the western United States? "It is and for decades has been a pretty big deal and too often in the past it was heavy grazing that did cause problems in riparian zones.

"Literature from the 1950s called riparian zones 'sacrifice areas' that could withstand heavier use in order to get proper utilization of the uplands, but that idea has been gone a long time. Keep in mind that the changes on the landscape in response to better management practices take a while to settle out and look the way we want them to."

Then what lessons



ACTUAL IMPACTS of cattle grazing in the Teanaway Community Forest are the target of a subcommittee chartered to forge – with input from several stakeholders – a long-term grazing plan.

N.K.C. TRIBUNE/Jim Fossett photo - 2016

learned could be of help to grazing managers today?

“After years and years of studies focused on grazing management practices from many different perspectives, there have surfaced, among other things, two universal truths.

“Riparian zones remain healthy if cattle do not graze in the same place all season long and if the livestock manager has riparian improvement goals in mind based on a basic understanding of how livestock influence riparian vegetation and how that affects stream health in line with best practices.

“In this case, Kayser’s seasoned range rider, **Bill Johnson**, is aware of what has to happen inside a riparian zone to keep it healthy. Having him on the range is invaluable, more so than a fence.”

Ultimately will too many regulations make it difficult for DNR to lease the land in the TCF for grazing ... making it totally unattractive to Kayser and other cattlemen? “I think it’s fair to say the more requirements incorporated into the lease the

less attractive it becomes.”

How will subcommittee members decide on the various regulations to be incorporated in the final, long-term grazing management plan? Majority vote? “The subcommittee is aiming to come to a consensus, but sometimes you can’t get a consensus.

“The committee will use a consensus-based decision-making process: That’s called the Coordinated Resource Management (CRM) model.

“In the end it’s my understanding that because this is about a DNR lease ... DNR is the ultimate authority empowered to make the final decision, but I don’t think that will be necessary. I believe the subcommittee will work it out. Besides, this is a great opportunity to show that the CRM model can work – and work well.”

Next meeting

On Thursday, June 23, inside the Kittitas County Fairgrounds’ armory building, the subcommittee meets again to continue work on the long-term grazing management plan.