

LIVESTOCK GRAZING

Land managers can use cattle, sheep and goats to selectively overgraze certain weed species, thereby weakening them. In cases where desirable native species are not attractive to livestock, grazing may favor these species over weeds.



Livestock controls are most useful for ...

- Weeds that are palatable (at least at some point during the year) and non-toxic to livestock. Weeds vary greatly in their palatability to types of livestock. Generally speaking, the preference for grasses declines from horses to cattle to sheep to goats. Furthermore, goats and sheep are more likely than horses or cattle to relish broadleaf weeds (forbs).
- Leafy spurge control. Goats and sheep are very effective control agents for all but the smallest infestations, especially in riparian areas.
- Low-level, widespread weed infestations where other control techniques are not cost-effective.



Livestock have limitations such as...

- Lack of availability of goats and sheep or even cattle when and where you need them.
- Need for water and fencing or herding to control livestock movement.
- The need to manage the intensity and duration of livestock grazing carefully to avoid overgrazing, and allow desirable species to recover from grazing impacts.
- Areas where predators such as coyotes, mountain lions and black bears may kill grazing animals, especially sheep and goats.
- Using the proper kind of animal to manage the weeds on your property.
- Need for someone with knowledge of animal husbandry to manage the animals.
- Palatability of weeds varying widely throughout the growing season. For example, young shoots of Canada thistle are very palatable to cattle, while old, mature stalks are not. However, palatability of many weeds can be greatly increased by spraying them with a dilute solution of molasses.

Pitfalls of livestock include:

- Expecting livestock to control weeds without close management. Simply turning animals into a pasture and expecting weed problems to vanish would likely be counterproductive.
- Failing to manage the intensity and duration of livestock grazing to prevent the animals from depleting the desirable plant species they are grazing, or creating disturbance which favors the establishment of weeds.
- Spreading weed seeds in fur or in manure when animals are moved from one area to another. Grazing should be done before weeds set seed.
- Toxicity of weeds such as poison hemlock, halogeton, St. Johnswort and Russian knapweed to grazing animals; toxicity can vary greatly by type of animal.

Cost of livestock:

- Infrastructure such as fencing and water, including capital and maintenance. Cost of fencing is highly variable depending on soil conditions, access and the type of fencing. Modern electric fencing is available that is much less expensive than barbed-wire fencing. Electric fence can be erected on a temporary basis while the animals are grazing then removed once grazing is finished. There are many sources of electric fence materials.
- The cost of contracting with a person to supply and manage grazing animals. You can expect to pay from \$19 - \$38 per acre to rent goats and sheep for the grazing season.
- Cost of creating a holding area to confine animals (for 10-14 days) which have been grazing weedy areas where weed seeds are present.