

Grazing on Natural Areas

- Conservation grazing is the use of domestic livestock or native grazers to recreate natural ecological processes, and is one of the tools that Natural Areas & Trails uses to manage the health of Greeley's natural areas.
- Grazing helps keep noxious weeds in check and allows native grasses to re-populate the landscape. Short-duration, intensive grazing is particularly effective at noxious weed control.
- Grazing also increases the overall biodiversity of a natural area, improves soil health and provides more habitat for wildlife.
- Hoof action by livestock breaks down dead grass material (known as thatch) that sits on top of the soil and aerates the soil underneath, improving soil quality.
- Fences (often movable electric fences) need to be maintained to keep livestock contained in the correct area, especially if livestock are being rotated between plots to provide intensive grazing in a small area. You may see people maintaining the fences that contain livestock on Greeley natural areas.
- Grazing is one of a handful of management tools land managers use such as spraying herbicide, prescribed burning or mowing. Conservation grazing can be less impactful on the natural environment than spraying herbicides to control noxious weeds. Grazing can be done in areas or at times when burning isn't feasible, such as near residential areas or when air quality regulations do not allow prescribed burning. Finally, grazing is less costly than mowing and provides an added benefit to the livestock managers in the form of affordable rangelands.
- Conservation grazing on Greeley's natural areas is a win-win situation for the land managers as well as the livestock owners.



Resources on Conservation Grazing

To learn more about the benefits of conservation grazing, check out the resources on the following page.

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Resources on Conservation Grazing

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service: https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/energy/conservation/?cid=nrcs143_023633

East Bay Regional Park District: <https://www.ebparks.org/about/stewardship/grazing/benefits.htm>

Western Confluence: <http://westernconfluence.org/conservation-grazing-ranchers-lead-the-way/>

Derner, J. D., Lauenroth, W. K., Stapp, P., Augustine, D. J. (2009). Livestock as ecosystem engineers for grassland bird habitat in the western great plains of North America. *Rangeland and Ecology Management*. 62 (2). P. 111-118

Briske, D. D., Sayre, N. F., Huntsinger, L., Fernandez-Gimenez, M., Budd B., et al. (2011). Origin, persistence, and resolution of the rotational grazing debate: Integrating human dimensions into rangeland research. *Rangeland Ecology and Management*. 64(4). P. 325-334

Penn State Extension: <https://extension.psu.edu/managing-thatch-in-lawns>



Before and After photos of grazing in an area infested with Canada thistle.