## Parker County



# TEXAS A\&M EXTENSION 

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## NATIVE RANGE

Many of you own or lease native range pastures in the county and use them for livestock production. Did you know that not all pastures are the same? Even within Parker County there are major differences in native pastures.

Soil types and range sites determine how productive a pasture is in producing grasses for grazing. Range sites are made up of similar soils that produce the same kind and amounts of forage. Parker county has 17 recognized range sites. Each range site has an average forage production estimate that would be considered in excellent condition. As expected, the very shallow range site will produce the least amount of forage; estimated to be 800-1500 lbs/acre. The best estimated producing range site is the loamy bottom with up to $7000 \mathrm{lbs} /$ acre.

Identifying the plant species on your property is the first step in understanding range health. Plants are indicators of good or poor grazing management. For instance, if brush and weed species are increasing then you need to adjust something in your management. Also, if undesirable grasses are increasing like three-awns or short grasses like buffalo and curly mesquite then your pastures may be in poor health.

There are a number of resources that will help you get started in determining range health. The first for plant ID is "Range Plants of North Central Texas" by Ricky Linex and available from Parker County Soil and Water Conservation District. The second is to use either the Soil Survey book of Parker County or the web site:
websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/App/WebSoilSurve y.aspx

## Grazing Management

First off ranchers perform a very important service to the world. Livestock is the most efficient and sustainable tool to convert millions of acres of pastureland into a high quality protein food source for people. Sustainable is the part we need to spend some time with and that includes grazing management.

Avoiding overgrazing is the number one way to help make a ranch financially successful. We can do this by implementing a few strategies. The first is knowing the nutrition requirements of the livestock species. Then knowing how much your pastures can produce and then being flexible enough in changing stocking rates and grazing habits.

Cattle consume 2-3\% of their body weight in forage each day. Today's mature cow probably weighs close to 1200 lbs . depending on breed. (Much unlike your grandfather's 800 lb. cow.) If we have a 1200 lb . cow consuming $2.5 \%$ of her body weight each day then the math shows us she needs about 10,950 lbs. of forage per year.

How much forage do you have?
agrilifeextension.tamu.edu/library/ranching/how -much-forage-do-you-have/

This is a great publication that will walk you step by step how to determine amount of forage you produce. There are some terms that you must know in order to be successful. The first is grazable acres, how much of your property is actually grazed. You would need to exclude heavily treed areas, areas fenced off for the house, barn, working pens, ponds and other areas not used for grazing. For some properties this is a lot of area.

The next term is "Take Half / Leave Half". This is where most landowners make the mistake. The old mentality of grazing it down to get the most out of my land is false. The take half, leave half rule applies during normal or average forage production years. The take half is really allocated to grazing animals as well as forage lost to trampling, insects/disease and wildlife usage. In reality only $25 \%$ of the forage is used for your grazing animal.

As an example, take our 1200 lb . dry cow consuming $2.5 \%$ of body weight everyday which comes to 30 lbs of forage daily. 30 lbs per day X 365 days $=10,950 \mathrm{lbs}$ needed a year. If I have 20 acres for this one cow each acre needs to produce 547 lbs per year. But if only $25 \%$ of the total forage in an acre is used by my cow ( $25 \%$ lost to trampling, etc., and $50 \%$ left as residue) then it needs to produce 4 times that amount or 2190 lbs per acre to give $25 \%$ to the cow, $25 \%$ to loss and $50 \%$ to ensure we maintain soil stability and plant vigor. An excellent way to determine how much forage is being grown and grazed is to use an enclosure made of field fence that allows a small area ( $\sim 2$ sq.ft.) being protected by grazing. This gives a good visual to help make grazing decisions by.


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## Things to Help with Grazing Management

There are a few things you can do to help determine if your pastures are moving into that higher risk of overgrazing.

1. The Muzzle Test: When your animal lowers its head to graze can you see its muzzle? If not then you have enough forage to at least protect the soil.

2. Evaluating Cow Pies: Yes, this is a thing and a viable, quick guide to determine your forage quality. We have photo guide you can use to help. Here is a link to this guide:
cdn-ext.agnet.tamu.edu/wp
content/uploads/2018/09/E-541-forage-quality photo-guide.pdf
3. Grazing Behavior: Less time is spent grazing when there is plenty of quality forage. Typically grazing time occurs at sunrise for 3-5 hours, very little if any at noon and then about 3 hours in late afternoon. If your livestock is up grazing around the clock then take note of your available forage.

Livestock also like to graze in groups. Herding animals tend to graze more as a herd when forage is plentiful and more as individuals when forage is scarce.


Figure 14. The relationship between grazing behavior and conditions can indicate forage availability.

This flowchart can help you determine based on current conditions and behavior as to the effect available forage in your pastures.

## Common Brush Solutions

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is an important concept to consider with dealing with pests whether they are weed, brush, insect, or disease. This includes a multifaceted approach that considers mechanical, chemical, biological and cultural controls for a problem. Below are a few common brush pests we see in pastures and some options you have for control.

The cultural control would be proper grazing management. Leaving a good stand of forage helps "choke" out unwanted weed/brush species. There is not a single pasture I have seen that is overgrazed that doesn't have some sort of weed/brush problem.

Mesquite - Mechanical: complete removal of the tree including 18" of roots; Chemical: numerous products, tree size and time of year to consider; please consult our ERM1466 5-20 "Chemical Weed and Brush Control" publication for information. Biological: Leaf eating moth has been released this year in S. Africa, stay tuned.

Prickly Pear - Mechanical: complete removal of the plant including most of the root; key to this is to not let any pad stay on the ground as it may resprout a new prickly pear. We suggest stacking and burning on a brush pile. A hot enough prescribed fire can control pear as well. Chemical: timing of late summer to early fall is best, make sure good coverage is obtained; several products available all rated as Very High in control. Picloram or Aminopyralid:Picloram:Fluroxypyr or Picloram:Fluroxypyr or Triclopyr:Fluroxypyr or Fluroxypyr or Picloram:2,4-D. Biological: There seems to be a fungus that can attach pear but nothing has been researched as a viable option.

Greenbriar - Mechanical: not an effective means since it has a root system much like Bermuda grass. Frequent mowing can suppress the plant. Chemical: Triclopyr:Diesel mix, best results in wintertime as a basal stem treatment. Biological: Sheep/Goat grazing young plants.

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[^0]:    Texas A\&M AgriLife Extension Service)

