

Heritage Rangeland Management Plans

Heritage rangelands

Heritage Rangelands are areas of public land containing grassland landscapes where conservation and working ranches are designed to support each other. Grazing is not treated as separate from conservation; when managed well, it helps maintain the native grassland ecology, protects biodiversity and supports the long-standing ranching stewardship that has shaped these landscapes. The land is protected from uses that would damage native grassland, while grazing continues to maintain the ecosystem and supports responsible stewardship.

“Heritage Rangelands are established for the conservation of representative areas of Alberta’s prairies, using grazing via long-term leases and traditional ranching practices to maintain the native grassland ecology. They are located only within the Grassland and Parkland Natural Regions of Alberta and on significant grasslands within the Montane Sub-region of the Rocky Mountains Natural Region.”

(South Saskatchewan Regional Plan, p. 64)

The key objective of a heritage rangeland is to ensure the preservation and protection of biological diversity and the maintenance of native grassland ecological health using grazing. Heritage rangelands are administered under the *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act* (WAERNAHR) and the *Public Lands Act* (PLA).

Why designated rangelands matter

Native grasslands are among Alberta’s most distinctive and sensitive landscapes. Heritage rangelands help conserve these areas for future generations by protecting native plants, wildlife habitat, soils and natural processes. They also recognize that careful grazing and long-term ranching stewardship can be part of keeping grasslands healthy.

Heritage rangeland plan development

The South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP), approved in 2014, provides direction to create new and expanded conservation areas on provincial Crown

land, including the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland. A management plan guides how each heritage rangeland is protected and used over time, balancing conservation with continued, compatible activities.

Management intent

Heritage rangelands are managed to protect their natural heritage, including soil, plants, wildlife, landscape features and ecological processes, while recognizing the cultural value of ranching and stewardship. The intent is to keep native grasslands healthy in perpetuity so future generations can benefit from the landscape, biodiversity and ecological functions.

Everyone who uses or manages a heritage rangeland has a stewardship role. That means helping maintain ecological diversity and integrity, following access requirements, avoiding disturbance to livestock and wildlife, and respecting private land within and around the designated area.

What a management plan covers

Sustainable activities and approaches are the key elements identified in a heritage rangeland management plan. These include:

- grazing
- invasive plants and weeds management
- fish and wildlife
- access (recreational and commercial)
- educational awareness

Heritage rangeland management

Forestry and Parks, together with Environment and Protected Areas, oversee heritage rangeland management. They work with grazing disposition holders, adjacent landowners and other partners to support stewardship, maintain communication and ensure decisions consider the broader landscape.

Existing dispositions and uses

Grazing dispositions continue to be managed under the PLA. The commitment to grazing is strengthened through the Heritage Rangeland designation, stewardship actions and length of tenure. Grazing leases may extend from 20 to 30 years, if in good standing.

Motorized access for disposition holders, and access to private lands within the boundary, continues to be permitted when working within the terms of the disposition. Other motorized access is not permitted.

Recreational access still requires consent from the grazing disposition holder through the [Recreation Access Regulation](#).

Existing petroleum and natural gas tenure, prior to heritage rangeland designation, is honoured, consistent with existing government policy.

Visiting a heritage rangeland

Visitors should expect a low-impact experience. Heritage rangelands are not managed like developed recreation sites. Access may be limited, prior contact with the grazing leaseholder is required, and activities that disturb native grassland, livestock, wildlife or neighbouring private land are restricted or not permitted.

Permitted and non-permitted activities

To protect Alberta's native fescue grasslands, heritage rangelands allow activities that are compatible with conservation and restrict activities that could damage the land or disrupt grazing operations. Low-impact activities such as hiking and cycling may be allowed with required contact or permission, while motorized recreation is generally not compatible except where needed for authorized management or access.

Rangeland Management and Grazing	
Grazing	Permitted
Cultivation of native grassland	Not permitted
Restoration and/or rejuvenation of tame pasture	Permitted
Control of tree and shrub encroachment	Permitted
Range development project	Permitted
Range maintenance project	Permitted
Weed control	Permitted

Access Management	
Motorized access — disposition holders	Permitted for disposition management use only
Motorized access — private land	Permitted to private lands
Motorized access (highway vehicles, OHVs, snowmobiles, power boats)	Not permitted
New public roads	Not permitted
Foot access	Permitted — prior contact of grazing lessee required
Development of new facilities to support outdoor recreation	Not permitted
Cycling and mountain biking	Permitted — prior contact of grazing lessee required
Backcountry camping	Permitted — prior contact of grazing lessee required
Aircraft take-off or landing	Not permitted

Integrated Land Management	
Commercial tourism and recreational facilities	Not permitted
Outdoor recreation facilities	Not permitted
Surface materials (e.g. sand, gravel, peat, marl)	Not permitted
Maintenance of existing communication towers and transmission corridors	Permitted
New or expanded communication towers and transmission corridors	Not permitted
Commercial windmills or windfarms	Not permitted
Existing oil and gas commitments	Permitted — impacts from development must be minimized
New oil and gas commitments	Not permitted
Minerals — existing commitments	Permitted — surface access honours existing commitments and minimizes disturbance per conditions of approval and IL 2010-02
Minerals — new exploration	Not permitted
Existing pipeline agreements	Permitted
New pipeline agreements	Permitted — only to access existing subsurface commitments
Existing resource roads	Permitted — access controls may apply
New resource roads	Not permitted — access for existing oil and gas commitments must use existing roads where possible

Legend:
Green = permitted, often with conditions such as prior lessee contact, approvals or limits on where and how the activity occurs.
Red = not compatible with heritage rangeland management or not permitted.

