

South Saskatchewan Regional Plan

Modifying permitted forestry activities in OH Ranch Heritage Rangeland

Albertans can provide feedback on the proposal to amend the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan in the OH Ranch Heritage Rangeland area to enable small scale timber harvesting to manage forest encroachment.

We are gathering feedback on proposed targeted amendments to the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP) to allow small scale forest harvesting for managing forest encroachment while maintaining the ecological objectives of the heritage rangeland and ongoing range health.

Background

- Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act (WAERNAHR)
 - The OH Ranch was designated a Heritage Rangeland in 2008.
 - Heritage rangelands preserve and protect natural features that are representative of Alberta's prairies using grazing to maintain the grassland ecology.
 - According to WAERNAHR, the Minister can permit a disposition to be issued or permission to enable the maintenance of range or forest health.
 - WAERNAHR requires the Minister to make decisions about dispositions in accordance with any applicable regional plan, including Heritage Rangeland Management Plans.
- South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP) appendix M (pg. 200) and note A (pg. 209)
 - The SSRP sets out permitted activities for existing conservation area in the region (appendix M).
 - Appendix M currently allows forest management only for wildfire, insect and disease control in this area. This may include prescribed fire, single tree removal or other limited treatments as necessary.
 - The SSRP and OH Ranch Heritage Rangelands Management Plan must be consistent with the WAERNAHR.

Note A: Commercial Forestry

Management for wildfire, insect and disease control will be allowed in areas where commercial forestry activities are not permitted. This may include prescribed fire, single tree removal or other limited treatments as necessary.

Small scale forest harvesting for forest encroachment

- OH Ranch Heritage Rangelands Management Plan (pg. 11): Identifies the need to manage the forest and shrub communities to slow and/or prevent tree encroachment while still providing a mosaic of forest, shrub and grasslands in the riparian areas. The plan proposes the expansion of commercial or local timber permits to remove woody vegetation.
- Proposed changes to the SSRP would allow the Minister to issue a disposition or give permission for small scale forest harvesting to slow and/or prevent tree encroachment to enable the maintenance of range or forest health.

Timelines for amending the SSRP

- Feedback on the OH Ranch Heritage Rangelands Management Plan and proposed changes to the SSRP will inform future amendments to the SSRP.
- The Alberta government may approve the OH Ranch Heritage Rangelands Management Plan in advance of approving amendments to the SSRP.
- The OH Ranch Heritage Rangelands Management Plan's directions about forest harvesting for managing encroachment will only be allowed once the amendments to the SSRP come into effect

For more information:

Website: alberta.ca/oh-ranch-heritage-rangeland-management-plan-engagement

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