



# GRASSROOTS

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## **Mob Grazing to Control Annual Weeds**

*by: Eric Mousel*

Grass green-up in the spring is one of the most welcomed sights to both a cow and a cowman. Those first spears of green signal the beginning of the end to the cold winter months and the start of a new grazing season. As you look forward to getting cows off of winter feed and onto summer range however, you might notice that a lot of the green you are seeing is weeds in your native range, especially cheatgrass and Japanese brome.

These two species probably cause more irritation to the range man than any other weed species out there. Weeds in general are a bane to a grazing manager as they use up precious moisture that could be used for grass growth later on in the summer and they confiscate priceless nutrients from the soil profile. Many of these weeds, like the aforementioned intruders, can develop so much growth that they restrict the early development or crowd out the desirable grass species. But what makes weed species like cheatgrass and J. brome especially offensive is the fact that they are annuals. They shoot up out of the ground about two weeks before any other plant out there, soak up the lion's share of the moisture and nutrients, set seed and are fully mature within a couple of weeks. Herbicide use is tough to justify on annual weeds as the seed bank already in the soil will marginalize the cost-effectiveness of the treatment. Fortunately, we can use the growth habit of these weed species to our advantage.

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For more information or other events the **SOUTH DAKOTA GRASSLAND COALITION** is involved with, please feel free to contact Kyle Schell or visit the website: <http://www.sdgrass.org>

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Typically, cows don't go out to pasture until the grass reaches at least the third leaf stage of growth. But with cheatgrass and J. brome greening up at least two weeks before our key forage species, why not use grazing to set them back so your key forage species can choke THEM out? Heavy, pre-season grazing is cheap, much cheaper than chemical or even prescribed burning. Furthermore, cheatgrass and J. brome are grasses; and green grass is green grass when fuel and fodder are at all-time highs. So why not let grazing livestock perform your weed control for you?

Pre-season grazing to control annual weeds however, requires much more grazing pressure than your normal summer stocking rate can provide. To accomplish this, try mob grazing, the practice of rotationally grazing with much higher grazing pressure than traditionally stocked rotational systems for much shorter periods of time. It's a very effective strategy to increase grazing pressure to the point where annual weeds are effectively controlled. In a mob grazing system, you will need five to ten times more grazing pressure for this strategy to work.

Successful mob grazers will typically use a portable cross-fence to confine cattle to a smaller area, usually about an eighth of the total pasture to increase grazing pressure. When cattle have consumed all of the cheatgrass and/or J. brome in an area over a day or two, depending on how much

grazing is available, they will move the fence and allow for another day or two of grazing.

Pre-season mob grazing will not hurt your spring or summer grasses so long as heavy grazing ceases before desirable grasses get more than a couple inches tall. Spring-time cool-season grasses generally won't start growing until early- to mid-May so as long as you pull cattle off pasture or at least back the grazing pressure down to summer stocking rate levels by this time no damage will be done.

When using mob grazing however, it is important not to let livestock linger in an area too long. Excessive grazing pressure over too much time can compact soil and damage plant bases. Let the mob clean up the cheatgrass and J. brome in a grazing area and keep them moving to fresh allotments. Livestock probably won't clean up every single undesirable plant, but you can't beat the cost of this weed control treatment.

### **Ellen Reddick**

Ellen Reddick is currently serving as the treasurer for the South Dakota Grassland Coalition. She has a beautiful ranch located in the Northern Black Hills between St. Onge and Spearfish where she raises Hereford cattle.



Feeding a bale at Ellen's Hereford Ranch

The neat thing about the area where Ellen ranches is that it is old country that has been ranched by the same families for years and years. I grew up in that area and know her and many of her neighbors. They are excellent producers with some extraordinary cattle in that area. Ellen is a great range manager as well, having won recognition for Excellence in Range Stewardship. Ellen runs her ranch all by herself as well as being involved in numerous other organizations. She is a very hardworking individual that has been beneficial to the SDGC.

### ***SD Game, Fish & Parks Private Lands Programs – Growing and Evolving Tim Olson, SDGF&P Senior Habitat Biologist***

Kyle pointed out in the last issue of *Grassroots* that the coalition now has over 160 members. We thought it might be a good idea to introduce or reacquaint folks with SDGF&P's Private Lands Habitat Programs. We truly appreciate the opportunity to reach out to landowners across the state that have an interest in working on habitat projects, or on ranch/farm management projects that also benefit wildlife.

With approximately 80% of the state's land base under private ownership, private landowners have and will continue to serve as the stewards with the most influence over wildlife habitat conditions and wildlife populations. SDGF&P recognizes the value of

landowners as essential partners in our goal to implement landscape-scale conservation initiatives. To enhance this partnership, SDGF&P's Private Lands Habitat Program has evolved to address habitat issues and opportunities offered by the federal Farm Bill programs (e.g. CRP) and to meet the needs of private landowners to establish or enhance wildlife habitat or to improve management to benefit an operation and wildlife alike.

While many of you already know about the program and may have worked with us, I'd guess there are many who do not realize we have cost share programs for a variety of habitat establishment and management practices. Over the years, we have quietly spent millions of dollars on private lands habitat projects, but we probably need to do a better job letting more people know what we have to offer and the mutual benefits such projects can provide. We also need to recognize the important role that hunters and anglers play since the primary source of funding for these programs is their license dollars.

For many years, various Wildlife Division staff including biologists, habitat program managers and conservation officers helped deliver our woody/winter cover habitat and food plot programs. In contrast, four biologists deliver the wetland and grassland components of our private lands program across the state (see map and contact information below). For Grassland Coalition members, the Wetland & Grassland Habitat Program is likely to be of most interest.

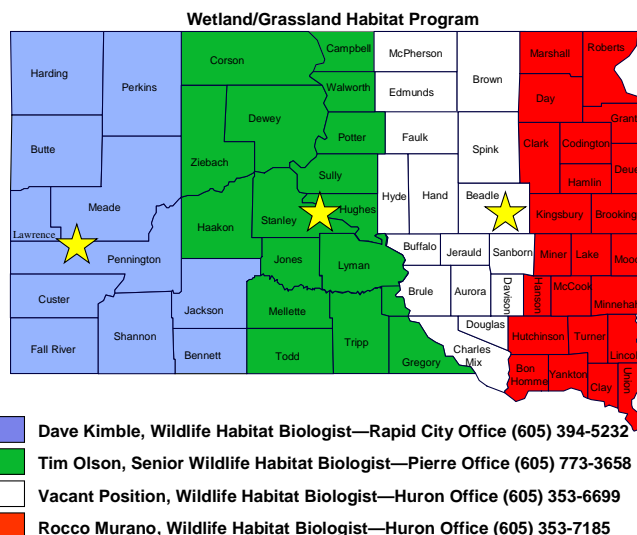
Early on this was primarily a multipurpose pond/wetland development program, but has evolved into a diverse package of grass/grazing management and habitat practices. The primary objective is to partner with landowners to implement practices that benefit breeding waterfowl and other wetland and grassland dependent species, while meeting the needs and management goals of the landowner. Practices eligible for cost-share include **wetland restorations, multi-purpose pond/wetland creations and dam repairs, grass seedings, managed grazing systems, riparian pasture management, and incentives available for certain CRP practices.**

Most habitat projects require a ten-year contract with landowners retaining control of access to their property. Some pond or wetland projects may require federal and/or state permits or water rights to comply with various federal and state laws. Habitat biologists will assist landowners with

these regulatory considerations. SDGF&P biologists will also survey, design, and stake most pond/wetland projects for construction. Dugouts, excavations in natural wetlands, small wildlife watering holes, waterways, and hardened bank stabilization projects are not eligible. Cost share rates vary depending on the practice implemented. More detail regarding this program can be found on our website at: <http://www.sdgfp.info/Wildlife/PrivateLands/WGHP/WetlandGrassland.htm>

In future newsletters we will provide more details about this and other programs that might be of interest to Grassland Coalition members. In the meantime, if you have an interest in learning more don't hesitate to call one of us to visit or to schedule a time when we might come out and look things over on your ranch. There just might be some things we can work on together to help you meet your ranch management goals and make things better for wildlife.

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF GAME, FISH & PARKS





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**Calendar of events:**

<u>Event</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Contact Person</u>	<u>Phone No.</u>
Bird Tour	June 6-7	Bristol	Dave Steffen	605-775-9112
Evening Pasture Walk	June 26	Webster	Darrel DuVall	605-345-4661
Day County Grazing Tour	July 31	Webster	Darrel DuVall	605-345-4661
Bus Tour	Aug.12-13	Bismarck ND	Kyle Schell	605-688-6623
Evening Pasture Walk	Aug. 14	Waubay	Darrel DuVall	605-345-4661
Grazing School	Sep. 8-10	Oacoma SD	Kyle Schell	605-688-6623
SD & NE Joint SRM Meeting	Oct 7-8	Valentine NE	Kyle Schell	605-688-6623

Please remit any comments, suggestions, or topics deemed necessary for further review to: Kyle Schell, SDSU Box 2170, Brookings SD 57007, [kyle.schell@sdstate.edu](mailto:kyle.schell@sdstate.edu), (605) 688-6623