

**Patch-Burn
Grazing**

January 2021

Patch-Burn Grazing for Cattle Production and Wildlife Habitat

Patch-burn grazing is a planned grazing system that utilizes prescribed fire to help control the distribution of cattle. By changing the location of the burn each year, cattle will focus grazing in different areas and provide different grass quality conditions throughout the pasture.

Following fire, grasses and wildflowers will quickly regrow. This new growth is more palatable and of higher quality than unburned forage. Cattle key in on this high quality vegetation and focus their grazing in that area. When cattle graze down all the forage in the burned patch, they move on to unburned areas to continue to graze. Cattle will continuously move between the burned patch and unburned patches as forage regrows. This “self regulation” is key to the patch-burn grazing system.

Since cattle will utilize different areas of the pasture at different times, cross-fencing is not needed. This saves time and money on

developing and maintaining fences. Using temporary water tanks and shifting mineral and supplement locations can also be used as economical tools to further influence cattle distribution.

Patch burn grazing is often used to enhance habitat for specific wildlife species by creating a mosaic of heavily and lightly grazed and ungrazed areas. Cattle will preferentially graze the most recently burned areas and avoid grazing on the areas not recently burned. Thus, increasing the vegetative structure and diversity.

A patch-burn grazing system enhances habitat for numerous wildlife species including, greater prairie chicken, bobwhite quail, ring-necked pheasants, and other grassland nesting birds by providing critical nesting cover. Pollinator species such as bees and butterflies are also positively affected by patch-burn grazing due to the increase in wildflower diversity.



The patch on the right was burned and the patch on the left was left unburned. Notice the difference in vegetation.



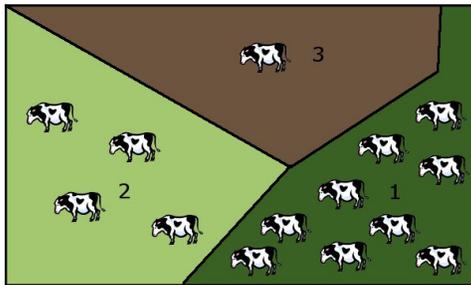
A patch after being burned. Vegetation will begin re-growing within days after the burn.

INTERESTING FACT

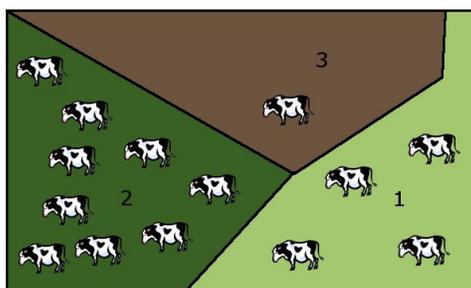
12,000 years *There is evidence that early Native Americans used fire to attract bison as*



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During the first year, patch number 1 is burned and cattle will focus their grazing in that area. If forage becomes limiting, cows are free to graze in other areas of the pasture.



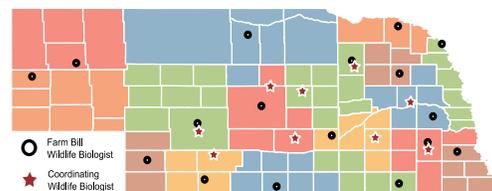
In year two, patch 2 is burned and heavily grazed while cattle roam as available forage decreases. Patch 1 is only lightly grazed, allowing recovery from heavy grazing the previous year.

Specifications for Patch-Burn Grazing

- Burn no more than 30% of the grazing area in any one year. Annual application by burning a different patch each year is acceptable and desirable for many wildlife species including bobwhite quail and ring-necked pheasants.
- A minimum of two burn treatments should be applied during a 3-5-year period.
- Consider burning at various times of the year. Burn from March 1-April 15 to stimulate warm-season grasses and September 1-March 1 for cool-season grasses.
- Do not burn from May 1– July 15 to avoid the nesting season for birds.

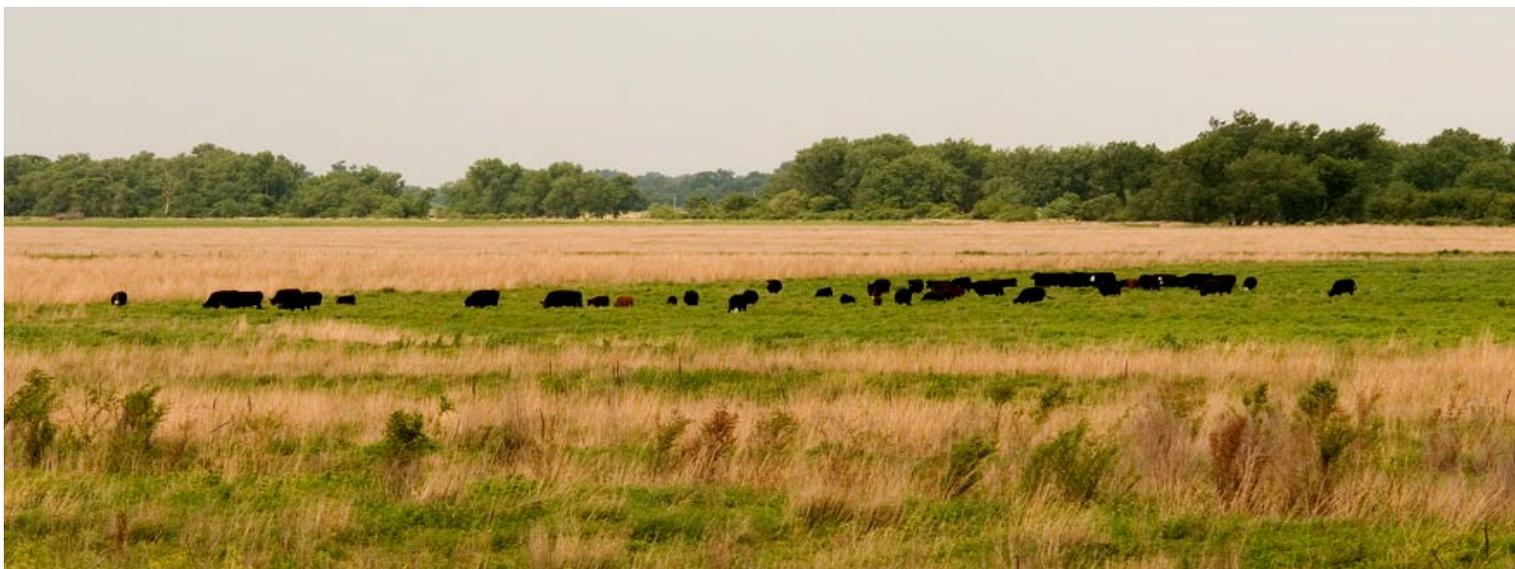
- Employ a moderate stocking rate that will allow for proper forage utilization.
- Ensure three to four inches of plant residue will remain at all times during the grazing season.
- Develop a written prescribed burn plan for each prescribed burn.

FOR MORE INFORMATION



Through a partnership with Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever, Nebraska Game & Parks Commission and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, wildlife biologists are available to help provide wildlife habitat guidance, technical assistance on the available conservation programs and design seeding mixtures.

For further information visit NebraskaPF.com or call 844-733-3669.



Notice the unburned patches and the congregation of cattle on the most recent burned patch. Photo courtesy Michele Fuhrer-Hurt, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.



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