Grazing Assessment Centre L Pod Complete

**this pod was carved out of the East L and West L Pods in August as a result of high levels of rainfall to make better use of available forage by decreasing footprint and maintaining animal impact. Please see photo below for locations.

Centre L Pod – August 3 (4 – 6 pm), 15 sheep, five alpacas
Weather – 18°C, light breeze, partly cloudy, humidity ~60%. Ground firm with dry surface and good footing, shaded zones cooler and slightly moister.

Notes from Pre-graze Photos:

- Conditions look excellent. Diverse plant communities, solid forage volume, and good structural variation
- Clover is prevalent in open areas, mixed forb and shrub presence throughout
- Some heavier shrub regrowth (including wild roses and aspen suckers)

Early Graze Assessment

- Flock distribution – nicely dispersed across the pod, indicating comfort/low stress and even forage interest. No signs of dominance behaviours or excessive bunching
- Forage selection – clover and grasses: being grazed with noticeable enthusiasm – ideal as clover is abundant
    - Aspen sapling leaves – also targeted early which is valuable for wood species suppression and long-term management
- Mixed height structure – still clearly present but sheep starting to make an impact already.

Post Graze Assessment August 3

- Precipitation impact – none noted; footing and leaf structure appear dry and undisturbed

Grazing Impact Summary

1. Forage utilization
    a. Clover – light deflowering and tip grazing throughout; flowers remain visible, indicating only partial uptake
    b. Grasses – light trampling is visible but very little structural removal – most grass blades remain upright or lightly bent
    c. Forbs – minor evidence of bite pressure; some white and yellow composites show minor browsing
    d. Aspen and shrubs – selective browsing on young saplings but bulk of the wood material untouched. Some wild roses appear stripped on the tips.
2. Trampling vs. Grazing
    a. Flattened zones indicate travel lanes or bedding areas more than heavy forage use; not suppressing regrowth.
    b. No matting consistent with overuse. Most trampling is isolated and not suppressing regrowth potential
3. Flerd Behaviour Indicators
    a. Highly mobile and cohesive group, still engaged and grazing evenly right up to departure time
    b. Shade zones were used but not excessively lounged in – no bare patches or dung accumulation.

Management Implications and Recommendations

Successes

- Strongly even distribution – no clumping or overused zones
- Great diversity in diet selection (grasses, clover, aspen, forbs)
- Flock and alpacas worked the pod with minimal stress to the vegetation base

Potential Tweaks

- A second session (shorter, 1-1.5 hrs) could target under-utilized grass-rich pockets, especially around spruce and interior glades
- Alternatively, pod could rest and revisit for light clean-up grazing in 10-14 days depending on regrowth and rainfall

Follow-up

- Worth tracking regrowth speed in this pod – particularly clover rebound and shrub bud response
- Document aspen sapling browse (number and extent) for woody regrowth records

August 4, 2025 – total grazing time 3 hr 22 min (7:30 am – 11 am) for a total time of 5 hrs and 20 minutes on this pod

August 4, 2025 – Second Session
Time – 7:30–11:00 a.m.
Flerd – Same as August 3.
Weather – 17°C, mostly sunny with light cloud cover, humidity ~55%, ground slightly moister in early morning but drying quickly in open zones.

Vegetation and Impact Summary

1. Grasses and Clovers
    a. Moderate utilization overall. The most accessible zones show reduced sward height and some flower removal but most grasses retain structure. This is a classic "take half, leave half" outcome
    b. Clover. Light deflowering and minor leaf removal persists in mid-canopy – still visible and vibrant in most images
    c. Some longer grass clumps remain in shaded edges and near shrub pockets, suggesting slight underuse in microhabitats.
2. Shrub and saplings
    a. Aspen. Browsing is evident but not aggressive. New shoots have been stripped in some areas while others remain untouched – suggests selective pressure rather than overbrowsing
    b. Wild rose and willow. Tips are nipped, particularly in sunny zones
3. Forb layer
    a. Still diverse. Yarrow, composites, vetches and other species remain with minimal pressure
    b. No visible signs of severe pugging, overuse or bedded-down flattening
4. Movement Signs
    a. Trample lanes are visible but not punched out – good flerd flow without loafing.

Vegetation Persistence – Between Sessions

- Clover abundance maintained with only partial deflowering.
- Aspen browse consistent between sessions – light to moderate pressure.
- Forb diversity unchanged; grasses retained structure except in high-use corridors.

Soil and Litter Observations

- Litter layer intact across canopy.
- No bare ground observed.
- Hoof impact light; excellent conditions for recovery.

Management Implications and Recommendations

- Successes – even animal distribution, balanced diet selection (grasses, clover, aspen, forbs), minimal stress to vegetation base.

- Potential tweaks – second short session (1–1.5 hrs) could target underutilized grass-rich pockets, especially around spruce and glades.
- Alternative – allow rest and revisit in 10–14 days depending on regrowth and rainfall.
- Track regrowth speed, particularly clover rebound and shrub bud response.
- Document aspen sapling browse levels for woody regrowth management.
- Consider split-pod strategy in fall if forage remains abundant but unevenly distributed.

Final Recommendations:
This is the end of Centre L Pod grazing. We'll move to West L Pod this evening.

- Excellent species response
- Balanced pressure on grasses and shrubs
- Strong behavioural spread without overuse
- Recovery potential is intact across the canopy.