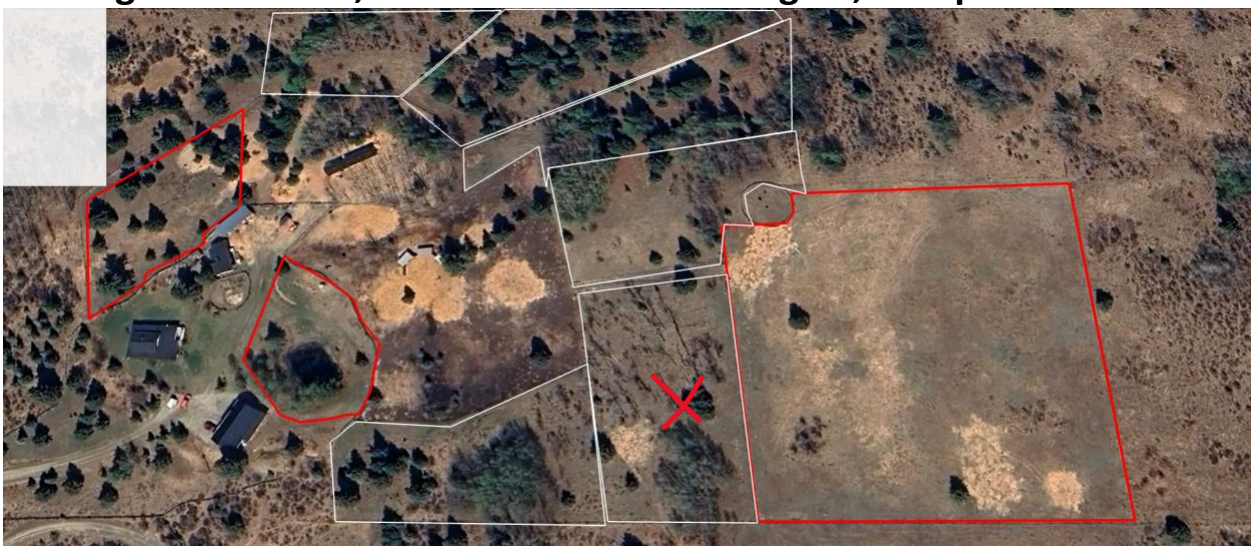
Grazing Assessment, East L Pod June and August, Complete



Overview

- First graze of the season in the East L Pod
- Area features a dying aspen grove with significant deadfall, interspersed with grasses, forbs and shrub regrowth
- Grazing was cut short due to shifting weather patterns

Vegetation and Forage Assessment

Before Grazing (June) –

- High biodiversity – fireweed, arnica, aster, potentilla, cinquefoil, bedstraw, vetch, clover, wild rose, willow, cottonwood, aspen saplings, dandelion, meadow rue
- Vegetation was in mixed stages, from short clover/forbs to 12” + grasses in shaded zones
- Dense litter layer, minimal bare soil

After Grazing –

- Light to moderate utilization (25-40 per cent)
- Clover taken down to the soil – likely by alpacas – when bigger patches found
- Grazing concentrated I open, shorter-vegetation areas
- Taller grasses largely untouched
- No signs of overgrazing, ample residual for regrowth

Animal Behaviour and Movement (June)

- Sheep grazed while walking, with consistent motion and engagement
- Preference for shorter vegetation; avoided areas with 12” grass unless edges were mixed
- Animals clustered in open, breezy zones due to high winds and heavy wildfire smoke
- Lambs showed resistance upon early pull-off, vocalizing frustration
- Alpacas showed strong preference for clover and forbs
- Funnelling observed around dense deadfall
- Rams and lambs more exploratory; ewes and alpacas used established paths

- Light sapling browsing occurred but minimal woody damage

Environmental conditions (June)

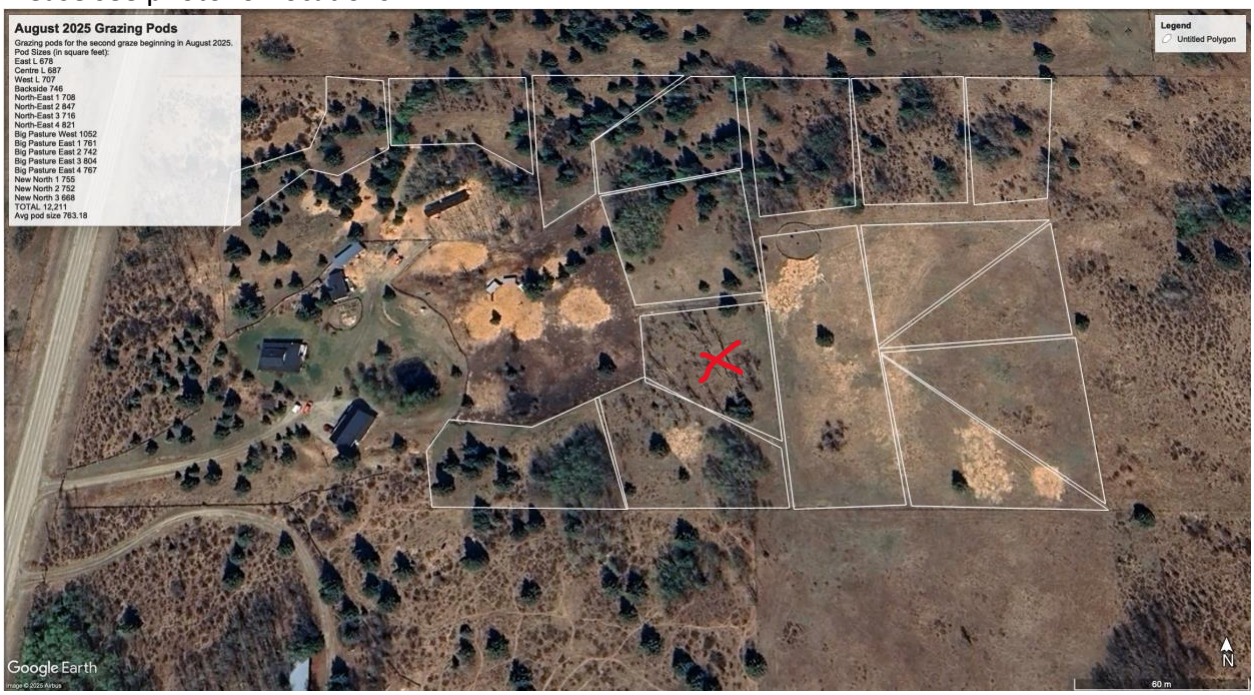
- .25” rainfall overnight prior to grazing
- Daytime high 17C with high humidity and strong winds
- Official wildfire smoke advisory in effect
- Ground conditions: damp but firm, excellent hoof impact without compaction

August Grazing Assessment

Duration – July 31 – August 2, 2025
Total grazing time – 7 hrs over three days
Animals – mixed flerd of sheep and alpacas
Objectives –

- Control invasive tame grasses
- Suppress aspen saplings
- Utilize clover without overgrazing

**Note – a new “Centre L” pod was added prior to grazing any of the L to reduce the pod size. Please see photo for locations.



Vegetation and Grazing Impacts: August

- Tame Grasses: still abundant, lightly grazed in edge zones.
- Clover: light to moderate pressure, mainly in corridors and along fences
- Aspen Saplings: remained unbrowsed and structurally intact
- Native forbs (fireweed, yarrow, bedstraw): present, minimal browse

- Heavy bedstraw patches persisted from June
- Arnica continued to be present tho less dominant than in early summer

Weather Conditions: August

- Morning sessions ranged between 15–18°C with moderate humidity and light winds; ground conditions were damp in shaded zones but drying quickly in open areas. Afternoon sessions were warmer with more fly pressure.

Pod Split Context – Centre L was created to reduce grazing area for better control of invasive tame grasses and improve utilization patterns, especially targeting overgrown zones.

Animal Behaviour: August

- Flerd returned voluntarily on Aug 1 around 11:20 a.m. (15 sheep – including lambs) and five alpacas for all sessions
- Grazing remained steady and calm throughout, though pressure was uneven
- Flerd showed strong preference for specific corridors along fence lines, avoided dense aspen stands entirely and had minimal trampling in tall grass areas. Grazing was more even in shorter mixed zones.

Evaluation of Grazing Goals

Tame grass Control	Partial (edge use only)
Aspen suppression	unmet
Clover use without overgrazing	achieved
Even forage utilization	unmet

Soil recovery and outlook: August

- No bare ground or erosion observed
- Litter layer and ground cover remain strong
- Pod has potential for future light grazing if recovery permits

Future considerations:

- Use targeted strategies (eg. Baiting or fencing) to encourage aspen browsing
- Approach from different direction next graze to shift pressure
- Mid-rest photos will inform whether a third graze is feasible this season

Other Notes –

This was an exceptionally wet July, the third wettest on record. Typical July average precipitation is 65 – 66 mm. By July 28th, we had received 162.5 mm and by the end of the month, 167.5 mm. The City of Calgary reported localized flooding as did the Town of Cochrane. On the homestead, our sheep were largely confined to their home paddock by the end of June as they had moved on to hay and we had decided to defer grazing activity until the beginning of August as we were traveling. The combination of high rainfall and warmer (but not hot) daytime highs meant that the pastures were in excellent condition by the time we began our August graze.