Grazing Pod Assessment – West L Pod – June and August, Complete

June Map

Overview: June

- 17 sheep (including ewes, rams and lambs) and five alpacas
- Session Timing – June 10: 4:15–6:00 p.m. (1.75 hrs); June 11: 7:30–8:50 a.m. (1 hr 20 min).
- Weather – June 10: 16°C, partly cloudy, light wind; ground dry to slightly damp in shaded zones. June 11: 15°C, overcast with light breeze; ground firm with good footing.

Stand Health Overview June

- Overall condition – moderately healthy with significant variability across the pod.
    - Lush zones (esp former bale grazing sites) are thriving, with dense cool-season tame grasses (ie timothy, brome, bluegrass) approaching or exceeding 20” and forming heading tillers
    - Sparse zones under conifer canopy show signs of:
        - Shade suppression
        - Low litter breakdown
        - Reduced ground cover with open soil
        - Compacted areas or drier microclimates (possibly due to needle drop acidity or moisture competition)
    - Forage stages: many grasses are in the boot to heading stage, which represents:
        - Peak or slightly post-peak nutritional quality for lactation/growth
        - Strong seedbank regeneration potential if deferred
    - Species mix noted:
        - Tame cool-season grasses dominate (orchard grass, timothy, brome, bluegrass)
        - Native component ~ 20 per cent with visible Northern Wheatgrass
        - Good legume presence (white clover, low profile)

        - Dandelion, fireweed and willow/aspen providing diversity and succession signals
        - Some few unpalatable/low-value forbs but not dominant
    - Estimated total grazeable coverage across pod – 60-65 per cent effective forage availability

Additional Notes: June

- Ant hills: numerous and active
- Dung presence - moderate to heavy, likely from past loafing patterns – useful for nutrient recycling but may suppress regrowth if not well dispersed

Animal Impact

- Canopy impact – in shaded areas (esp. spruce/conifer), regrowth is limited; likely best left for passive rest rather than graze hard.
- Tree-litter zones – spruce needles in particular can supress clover and grass emergence. Worth considering for exclusion or passive regeneration with fungal inoculants or light forking

During Graze Behaviour – June

- Alpacas browsed woody species (willow, aspen shoots) and targeted high-protein, tannin-rich browse.
- Sheep scattered and lightly sampling, rapid movement, high novelty/selectivity.
- Patchy forage structure; sheep grazing “cream” off the top, classic first-pass behaviour in a mixed-quality paddock.

Post-Graze Analysis – June

- Animal behaviour – resting post-graze (sheep lying, alpacas kushing).
- Forage utilization – 40–50%, light to moderate impact.
- Species targeted – cool-season grasses, young dandelion; clover mostly untouched; willow lightly browsed.
- Trampling – light; thatched bale areas compressed but not broken through.
- Soil & litter – litter layer intact; no bare ground; hoof impact minimal.

Future considerations – allow 45–60 days recovery minimum; monitor regrowth and insect activity within 7–10 days; consider targeted grazing in lushest 2/3rds in future passes.

Recommendations

- Ideal timing before full seedhead maturity to maintain quality and promote regrowth in tame grasses
- Max four hours with 17 sheep and five alpacas if using full pod
- Consider split pod approach if using only the most productive 60-70 per cent of the space
- rotate quickly through subzones

- target lushest 2/3rds, skip or lightly impact conifer-dominated areas
- trample in thick thatch zones (especially where dry hay/straw remains from bale grazing)
- light tread in willow zones to encourage natural pruning without suppressing regen
- mineral and water access – if using strategic salt/mineral placement, use lush mid-zones to attract grazing away from loafing zones or conifer shade
- allow 45-60 days recovery minimum, longer for shaded/stressed zones
- if dry weather persists, consider rotation deferent for areas with thin cover.

During Graze, behaviours noted –

- alpacas are behaving as expected – they naturally browse woody species and are targeting protein-rich, tannin-containing browse
    - this can help with parasite suppression and minor brush control, especially in regenerating willow stands
    - may see little grass impact from alpacas
- Sheep scattered and lightly sampling
    - Rapid movement and scattered behaviour suggests high novelty or selectivity – they're exploring the full buffet
    - Patchy forage structure – they're having to search for the best bites
    - Mouthfuls here and there = grazing "cream" off the top, classic first-pass pattern in a mixed-quality paddock

This is ideal for AMP – it means:

- The flerd is stimulating a wide range of plants without camping out too early
- Setting up for potential second pass to catch lower growth or less-palatable plants after initial selection.

Graze total duration – 1.75hrs

Post-Graze Analysis

Animal Behaviour

- Sheep lying down, alpacas kushing – classic satiety/rest behaviour
- Strong signal: optimal bite density achieved, and interest in remaining forage dropped
- Removal helps prevent:
    - Overgrazing of regrowth
    - Lazy standing-around/trampling
    - Disruption of soil-dwelling insect communities (ant hills, beetles)

Forage Utilization

- Residual height – excellent residuals for recovery
- Utilization – 40 – 50 per cent grazed, light to moderate impact: first graze pass
- Species targeted – cool season grasses, young dandelion, clover mostly untouched, willow lightly browsed
- Grazing pattern – patchy with high-pressure zones – sheep avoided ant hills and shade-dense zones
- Trampling – light, thatched bale areas compressed but not punched through

Graze Efficiency Summary

- Uniformity – moderate, good for diverse regrowth
- Animal behaviour – positive, active grazing, natural satiety signs
- Forage conditions – vigorous and recoverable
- Ground cover maintenance – excellent, no significant soi exposure

Suggested Next Steps

- Monitor regrowth – check for tillering in grazed zones in 7-10 days
- Dung beetle or ant activity – 3 – 5 days post graze
- Move sheep to east end of this pod to make use of underutilized zone in cooler morning temps

Other Notes

- On day two, (1hr, 20 min) sheep seemed to enjoy other forage including spruce tips and forbs. Began leaving on their own
- Light to moderate grazing on day 2
- Sheep were “moving and chewsing” edible plants very selectively
- Aim for 45-60 day recovery cycle

West L Pod Post-Graze August Assessment

Please note, a new “Centre” L Pod had been carved into the L pasture to make allowance for richer forage due to high July rainfall. Please see photo for exact locations.

August Map

August 4 (4-6pm) and 5 (7:30 – 11am), 2025
Animals – 15 sheep (minus three rams) and 5 alpacas

Grazing impact: August

- Utilization – light to moderate across most of the pod
    - Heavier impact along sunny slope edges and corridors
    - Undergrowth in shaded aspen/spruce areas remains largely intact
- Selective grazing: sheep again targeted shorter swards and previously lightly grazed patches
- Trampling: noticeable but not excessive in moist zones – soil structure intact
- Standing residue: plenty of cover remains, especially in more vertical grasses and interior shaded areas
- Mushroom zone: still present and undisturbed, animals showed no interest

Vegetation Persistence – June to August

- Clover remained largely untouched, similar to June.
- Woody browse (willow/aspen) light in both grazes.
- No major changes in forb composition; fireweed, dandelion, and low-profile clover persisted.

Vegetation Recovery Outlook: August

- Ground cover remains high
- Soil moisture favourable for regrowth
- No bare patches or compacted zones observed

Future Considerations – August

- Rest for 4–5 weeks before potential revisit (depending on rainfall/temps).
- Consider split-pod approach in fall to target underutilized interior and shaded zones.
- Maintain mushroom zone as undisturbed microhabitat.
- Continue to avoid heavy pressure in conifer-dominated areas to encourage passive recovery.