North Side Pod 3 Grazing Assessment August 10 complete

*This pod grazing session came after the June grazing session where all the north-side pods were combined. This is the first time this pod was grazed on its own.

**It was my intention to take the tail-end of this pod in the extreme west end and open it up in the afternoon for our short evening graze. Unfortunately, mosquito/black fly pressure was too high and I was unable to set up fencing.

Northside Pod 3 Pre-Graze Assessment

August 10, 2025, planned for 8 a.m. to noon
Pod size: .4 acres (smaller than many of the other pods)
Adjacent feature: wetland area to the NW (indicated by blue X)

Weather & Ground Conditions:

- Morning session: ~15°C, light overcast, humidity ~60%, light breeze from NW; ground firm with slight surface moisture in shaded areas. Afternoon session: ~18°C, mostly sunny, humidity ~55%, ground drying in open areas but retaining moisture under canopy.

Forage Composition and Condition

- Dominant Forbs/Legumes:
    - High density clover (both white and pink), evenly distributed in open and semi-shaded areas.
    - Vetch present in notable quantities, particularly along edges and near shrub zones

    - Mix of other broadleaf forbs – possibly some medic and trefoil-type species – interspersed with grasses
- Grasses:
    - Medium-height mixed grasses, some still vegetative, others setting seed
    - Under conifers and aspens, grass is thinner but still green and palatable
- Woody/Shrub elements:
    - Scattered aspen saplings and patches of willow near wetter zones
    - Moderate shrub density along edges, providing browse options but not dominating space.

Nutritional Potential

- High nutrition forage available, especially from clover and vetch – protein and mineral rich
- Risk of bloat if left too long without sufficient grass mixing, particularly given smaller pod size

Grazing Strategy Notes

- Initial plan: morning graze from 8 a.m. until noon to allow animals to target high-value forage without excessive legume intake
- Monitoring focus:
    - Legume consumption rate – especially by sheep vs. alpacas, as sheep may over-concentrate on clover
    - Forage height and availability at midday to decide if second graze session is viable.
    - Soil moisture near the wetland boundary – avoid pugging in softer spots.

Overall Condition:

Pod is in excellent pre-graze condition with diverse species mix, good standing biomass, and no visible overgrazing from prior use. Smaller size and high-quality forage will require tighter management to avoid overconsumption of legumes (bloat).

First 20 minutes Grazing Observations:

- Animals dispersed fairly evenly across pod, using both open grassy area and shrub/shelter zones
- Sheep showing mixed foraging: some concentrated on clover-rich patches in the open, others targeted grass in transitional zones.
- Alpacas engaging with woody browse – particularly willow and shrub stems/ leaves with occasional grass foraging
- No signs of bunching or stress; movement is steady, with most heads down grazing or browsing.

Forage Targeting (Observed Preferences)

1. Clover and forbs: Sheep heavily focused on the dense clover stands, especially in partial shade and open sun
2. Shrub browse: alpacas prioritizing willow/small shrub leaf and stem material
3. Grasses: sheep engaging with medium-height grasses in areas where clover is less dense though it's not as preferred as the legumes

Key Management Considerations

- Legume intake monitoring: given pod size and clover/vetch density, bloat risk management remains important. Early movement patterns suggest high initial legume intake – ensure baking soda is available in the sheds at the end of graze.
- Alpacas are providing complementary control on woody plants without over-stripping
- Graze Duration: based on early selectivity, target impact may come well before the four-hour window.

Plant	Status	Forage Value	Control/Mgmt. Note
Creamy Peavine	Native	High Protein; palatable spring-mid summer, good for biodiversity	Encourage via rest-rotation; avoid overgrazing in early growth stage
White Clover	Non-native	Excellent forage spring/fall; high bloat risk when lush	Manage grazing time to prevent overconsumption; maintain grass mix
Alsike Clover	Non-native	High forage value spring/fall; bloat risk and potential photosensitization in horse	Mixed swards best; limit exposure for sensitive species
Harebell	Native	Low-direct forage value, occasionally browsed, more important for pollinators	No control needed – good pollinator plant
Smooth Brome	Non-native	High value early spring; declines after heading, coarse later.	Graze early/often to keep vegetative; prevent seed set to limit spread
Kentucky Bluegrass	Non-native	Good palatability in Spring/early Summer; maintains grazing value later though lower protein	Can dominate under heavy grazing; mix with natives via rest and overseeding
Common Yarrow	Native	Minor forage; aromatic; lightly grazed	No control needed; supports insect biodiversity
Wild Rose	Native	Light browse by sheep; good winter forage for wildlife	Leave for habitat value; manage spread mechanically if it encroaches beyond what's acceptable.

Potentilla spp. *(P. gracilis or P. anserina)*	Native	Palatable early; becomes fibrous later	No control needed; withstands grazing pressure well.
Showy Aster	Native	Low direct forage importance; good late-season pollinator	No control needed
Alfalfa	Non-native	High protein and energy; excellent hay and pasture forage; high bloat risk when lush	Mixed plantings are best; graze before bloom for quality, after bloom safer for bloat risk

NOTE: Yellow Hawkweed found in this pod – designated a noxious weed in Alberta
Yellow Hawkweed thrives in open, disturbed or overgrazed ground where sunlight can reach its basal rosette. It's a strong competitor once established because:

- Spread is by both seed and creeping above-ground runners
- Forms dense mats that choke out other plants
- Minimal forage value

Control options

- Mechanical – hand pull (ensure entire root system is removed) before seed set; mowing can help reduce seed spread but won't kill established plants
- Chemical; selective broadleaf herbicides can be effective when applied at rosette stage (not an option here)
- Cultural; maintain a dense, competitive pasture cover to limit spread; overseed with competitive grasses – in healthy, dense pastures or meadows where the soil is well-covered, light penetration to the soil surface is minimal and grazing pressure is well-distributed, it struggles to colonize and spread.

Utilization Estimates:

- Clover ~40% leaf removal in targeted patches;
- grasses ~20–25% height removal in open zones;
- woody browse (aspen/willow) ~25–30% tip removal; trampling light and localized to travel routes.

Vegetation Persistence Compared to June:

- Clover dominance remains strong and evenly distributed;
- woody regrowth browsed at similar intensity;
- grass height slightly reduced in open areas but structure and seed heads largely intact.

Other notes:

Sheep brought themselves in at 11 a.m. indicating that perhaps the forage they prefer is either consumed or it's nap o'clock.

Post-Graze Assessment:
** Grazing session was not continued due to intense and unrelenting mosquito/black fly pressure.

- Preferred forage hit first – clover flowers and leaves are visibly reduced, especially in sunnier spots
- Aspen saplings – multiple stems show signs of browsing but are not stripped out – light to moderate pressure
- Shady areas – under-tree zones have more residual grass, likely due to lower palatability or bug pressure pushing animals out earlier
- Wetland edge – forage there still has good height and density – minimal pressure, possibly due to insect pressure or the animals preferring more open ground.
- Light-to-moderate graze impact:
    - Clover and high-preference forbs: noticeable flower and leaf removal but not fully cleaned out – plants still have plenty of leafy area to photosynthesize
    - Aspen saplings and willow – stems nipped here and there, not heavily stripped
    - Grasses – minimal reduction in height except in a few select patches; most grass cover remains standing and green
- Trampling impact
    - Some trampling visible in travel lanes and shaded loafing spots but no large flattened swaths (as in Backside pod)
    - Ground cover remains intact with no bare soil exposed

Soil & Litter Observations:

- Litter cover ~95%; no bare ground patches;
- hoof impact light and beneficial for seed/soil contact;
- no erosion observed.

The pod retains a high percentage of standing forage and live leaf material. Trampling has been limited enough that regrowth will be fast, especially with current soil moisture. From an AMP perspective, this was more of a first-pass, selective graze rather than a utilization-focused graze.

Potential Return Date (Prioritizing native self-seeding and broader uptake by the flerd) – project 40-45 days rest for a return mid-to-late September.

Guide for Residual Forage –

Tailored for confirmed species mix in Northside Pod 3. Heights are in inches to ensure plant health over winter and strong spring regrowth.

Species	Status	Safe Residual Height (inches)	Why It Matters
Smooth Brome (Bromus inermis)	Non-native	3.5–4	Stores winter carbohydrates in crowns/rhizomes; needs residual leaf to insulate crown and protect buds.

Kentucky Bluegrass (Poa pratensis)	Non-native	2.5–3	Sod-forming; tolerates closer graze but benefits from some stubble for insulation and early spring growth.
White Clover (Trifolium repens)	Non-native	1.5–2	Tolerates low graze but repeated hard fall grazing can weaken stands; leave a small canopy for crown protection.
Alsike Clover (Trifolium hybridum)	Non-native	2	More upright than white clover; needs some stubble to protect crown over winter.
Creamy Peavine (Lathyrus ochroleucus)	Native	2–3	Low, trailing stems; overgrazing can damage root reserves and reduce patch density.
Alfalfa (Medicago sativa) – volunteer	Non-native	3–4	Needs crown protection; hard fall graze weakens winter survival, especially in exposed pods.
Potentilla spp.	Native	1.5–2	Hardy; close graze tolerated but leave minimal leaf cover to prevent soil exposure.
Common Yarrow (Achillea millefolium)	Native	1.5–2	Hardy; tolerates close graze. Residual mainly for ground cover.
Wild Rose (Rosa acicularis)	Native	N/A – browse height	Late browsing won't harm root reserves; fall pruning by animals can slow spread.
Hawkweed (Hieracium caespitosum)	Non-native / Noxious	Close graze if possible	Removing flower stalks and reducing leaf area helps suppression; residual height not critical.
Harebell (Campanula rotundifolia)	Native	1.5–2	Hardy perennial; tolerates light grazing.
Showy Aster (Eurybia conspicua)	Native	2–3	Leave some stem/leaves to protect overwintering buds.

Note: Aim for light-to-moderate grazing before winter – remove ~40–50% of height, leave enough green cover for insulation. Rotate late-fall grazing between pods to maintain stand vigor