



Prairie Dog Creek Watershed Annual Newsletter

Prairie Dog Creek
Watershed Steering Committee

Sheridan County
Conservation District

February 2015

(An excerpt from the University of Wyoming publication "Barnyards and Backyards, Summer 2008")

HEALTHY PASTURES mean healthy horses

By Kellie Chichester

DID YOU KNOW

Several factors contribute to bacteria concerns in the Prairie Dog Creek Watershed. Bacteria can enter waterways through direct inputs from animals (including livestock and pets), run-off carrying animal waste, and discharge of human wastes through faulty septic systems.

The health of horses – one of the most celebrated symbols of life in Wyoming and other Western states – is intricately connected to the health of the lands they inhabit. Poor quality pastures can lead to poor health in horses. This arrangement is reciprocal in that grasses and many other Western plants have evolved with grazing so that properly managed grazing can remove older growth, allowing new growth to occur and leading to healthier plant communities. Poor grazing management will lead to poor plant health.

If horses are kept in a confined area and grazing is not managed, they will choose certain plants over and over again. Without giving the grass time to recover, growth can slow, and damage to the root system can occur leading to poor plant health, and, ultimately, the death of the plant.

Horses are heavy, active animals and can exert 23 pounds per square inch per hoof. They like to run and play, and, with their iron-shod hooves, can seriously damage a pasture, especially in wet conditions. Too much of this activity can destroy a pasture over time. **If the ground is bare and has been compacted, rain infiltration will be lessened allowing for more water runoff. Healthy grass causes the soil to capture rainfall better, leading to less erosion, better water quality, and a healthier pasture.**

A number of health issues can arise with horses living on poor quality pastures caused by overgrazing, compaction, and poor manure management practices.

The first issue is nutrition. Proper grazing (not allowing horses to graze all the time, changing the times of year they graze a particular spot, using rotational grazing if possible, feeding them on hay and grain during part of the year, having a sacrifice area, etc.) will allow your pasture to be a quality part of their diet.

The appropriate grazing intensity depends on the growing conditions, intensity of pasture management, and plant species in the pasture. Establish a sacrifice area used to keep horses off pastures for extended periods of time to benefit the rest of the pasture. (continued on page 2)

PRAIRIE DOG CREEK WATERSHED STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING



The annual Prairie Dog Creek Watershed Steering Committee Meeting will be held on **Thursday, February 26th at 6:00 p.m.** at the **Prairie Dog Community Center** (702 US Hwy 14, East of Sheridan). The Prairie Dog Creek Watershed Steering Committee, which is comprised of landowners and interested parties, was formed in 2007 with the main purpose of developing a Prairie Dog Creek Watershed Plan and guiding water quality sampling efforts. It has transformed into a steering committee that provides input and recommendations to the SCCD for implementing resource programs within the Prairie Dog Creek Watershed. The meeting is open to anyone living in or interested in the Prairie Dog Creek Watershed. The meeting will focus on the 2014 interim Prairie Dog Creek Watershed monitoring, as well as public information and education action items. Please come join us on February 26th, your input is always welcome!

SHERIDAN COUNTY



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PRAIRIE DOG CREEK WATERSHED

riparian fencing and stockwater improve water quality along Meade Creek

Landowners throughout Sheridan County benefitted from the Sheridan County Conservation District's (SCCD) riparian management/livestock facilities cost-share program this past year. One of these projects was located along Meade Creek south of Sheridan.



Prior to construction (**top**), Meade Creek was unfenced, which left the riparian area open to livestock. Post construction (**bottom**) Meade Creek is entirely fenced off with gates to allow livestock to pass through.



The project consisted of constructing a riparian fence to keep livestock off of Meade Creek and installing livestock waterers throughout the remaining fenced pastures. Prior to construction, the livestock's only access to water was through Meade Creek.

Since the landowners met the distance requirements to an impaired stream (Meade Creek), they qualified for funding assistance through the District's riparian management/livestock facilities cost-share program. The finished project consisted of approximately 1,200 feet of wildlife friendly fence, and approximately 530 feet of continuous panels in a confinement area near the barn. There were also five automatic waterers included in the project; two within the confinement areas, with the remaining three in the fenced pastures.

Since 2003, the Sheridan County Conservation District has helped improve 26 livestock facilities in Sheridan County. These systems included everything from complete corral relocation, to riparian fencing and/or stockwater. All of these systems were providing bacteria inputs into one of Sheridan County's impaired waterways. The District would like to express a sincere thanks to all landowners who participated in cost-share programs.

The SCCD continues to offer cost-share programs for individuals looking to improve livestock facilities (including corral relocation and grazing management/fencing) that have a significant impact on water quality. There are also funds available for septic system replacements. To qualify for funding, projects must have a significant impact on water quality and be located on or near streams in Sheridan County listed for bacteria impairments. There are additional requirements for septic systems.

(continued from page 1) Generally, horses need supplemental hay in Wyoming as there is not enough grass to meet their needs.

Manure can be a liability or asset depending on how its managed. Improperly managed manure can be a health issue for not only your horse but also for your family and neighbors. **If pastures are grazed too heavily, mud and manure runoff may affect underground or surface water sources. Proper management of animal waste and knowing the soil type and runoff direction can lessen chances of contaminating drinking water.** Mud and manure harbor undesirable bacterial and fungal organisms that can cause health problems. When horses are directly exposed to manure, they are more susceptible to internal parasites. Another potential problem – insects – occurs with a buildup of mud and manure. Flies not only breed in the mud and manure but annoy horses. Insects can also carry diseases and may cause allergic reactions in some horses due to biting. Proper manure management can help control insects. A 1,200-pound horse produces about one cubic foot of fresh manure every day. Manure should be hauled off or put into an area to be composted if the horse is kept in a small corral or pasture. Properly composted manure can then be applied to pastures.

In summary, if you only have a corral or small pasture for your horse, be sure to keep it clean and sanitary, and monitor and recognize when to move horses to the sacrifice area or to another pasture. By doing this, you will better utilize available grass, and keep a horse healthy and happy.

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