Section 2.5: Fencing

WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

On an intensively grazed property, livestock movement may be a cause of land degradation and poor pasture productivity.

Good land management should take variations in land capability classes into account. Paddocks should only contain a single land class.

When planning fence lines, construction and maintenance costs should be weighed up against potential productivity gains and livestock management benefits.

Set stocking rates on large areas are less productive than rotational grazing on smaller areas. Livestock will move over the land seeking the better areas for grazing and shelter. This may lead to increased degradation of the agricultural land while less attractive areas are under grazed.

Continual grazing pressure will diminish pasture quality and result in soil compaction. Giving paddocks a break from grazing pressure will allow them to recover.

Restricting livestock to smaller areas for shorter times will utilise the fodder more efficiently, as the livestock have less time to trample the pasture they are grazing. They are also forced to use the less attractive areas.

Stock (particularly heavier animals) can damage creek banks, foul water as well as increasing pathogen loads in our precious water supply. Livestock need a sufficient and reliable supply of unpolluted water from a protected farm dam or other water supply, and this resource can be significantly impacted on after a bushfire.

HOW DOES IT AFFECT YOU AND YOUR CATCHMENT?

There are some simple actions that landholders can do to improve the condition of the watercourse on their properties.

Mapping land classes shows where you can and cannot graze and provides the opportunity to fence to land class which separates an agricultural area from biodiversity areas or of environmental value, such as a watercourse which may be prone to erosion or be an area of revegetation.

Variations in land classes, land use, soil type, property size and alignment with natural geography will affect how a property is fenced. In our Mount Lofty Ranges landscapes only small sections of the main channels of watercourses, like the Torrens and Onkaparinga, are fifth or sixth stream orders. Most watercourses off the main channel are first to fourth order and allocated into smaller landscapes than NSW. Refer to Appendix 1 for Land and Soil Capability Classes. Note: Class VIII "includes beds and banks of streams".

Watercourses should be fenced-off to exclude livestock to minimise over grazing and damage to the banks. Buffering near watercourses is also important to reduce damage of banks from livestock, maintain biodiversity and water quality and minimise the loss of agricultural land from erosion. Having a well grassed or vegetated area creating a buffer zone, ideally 20 metres from the top of the bank of the watercourse and into the paddock area, is best practice.

Maintaining fencing assets to ensure livestock cannot enter biodiversity areas, such as a watercourse, and managing fuel loads near fences to reduce fire risk and damage.

A good fencing design will flexibility benefits for you in the long term and can work in with your rotational grazing strategy also.

Fencing can assist in maintaining good perennial pasture cover in adjacent paddocks to increase

water infiltration and decrease topsoil loss and pathogen loads into adjoining creeks. This will increase the quality of water, which is essential to a healthy environment, which is being utilised on farms for stock water and further down our catchment for our drinking water.

Inappropriate siting of fencing (e.g. different land classes in the one paddock) may result in the degradation of that land and its water.

Building a sediment fence to protect farm water after a bushfire event may be an appropriate action prior to a heavy rainfall to prevent organic matter, manure and sediment entering, while an alignment fence can be built along a watercourse to manage erosion issues. Fencing is a reasonably specific skill set that requires equipment for installing posts, corner assemblies and straining wires. Landholders who are new to fencing should invest in the expertise of a skilled fencing contractor, either to build the fence completely or to help them learn how to build a fence. Local fodder and hardware stores can also be helpful regarding fencing.

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

- Consider the natural in land capability classes over the desire to have larger or rectangular shaped paddocks when fencing your property.
- Fence your property to land class for grazing purposes and to minimise soil damage - fencing to land class.
- Fencing combined with pasture management of adjacent properties will improve watercourse (particularly quality) and catchment health.
- Build a fence that will last and is of appropriate design for its intended purpose.
- Seek professional advice about the most suitable type of fencing for your needs.
- Fencing to keep stock out of waterways protects remnant vegetation and revegetated areas and improves water quality. Special stock exclusion fencing can be used.
- Protect farm dam and water supplies after a fire event by building a sediment fence
- Reduce weed cover and grassy biomass around and near fences to protect this asset and others, against bushfire risk and damage.
- Adhere to appropriate stocking rates.
- Implement rotational grazing to minimise over-grazing.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Landscape SA documents & websites:

Landscape Boards Office
Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges NRM Board
Watercourse Restoration - video
Landscape SA land management document - AMLR-best-practice-land-management-guidelines-small-properties-part1-fact.pdf
Landscape SA Hills & Fleurieu Managing livestock

Other resources:

Agriculture Victoria website - event farm recovery after bushfire (with a link to a video on constructing sediment fences)
Coopers Farm Supplies of Mt Torrens or Mt Pleasant - https://www.coopersfarmsupplies.com.au/
Local fencing contractors and livestock advisors
Local Landcare Groups of SA - https://landcaresa.asn.au/get-involved/join-a-local-landcare-group/
Primary Industries and Resources South Australia
Upper River Torrens Landcare Group (URTLG) - http://www.torrenslandcare.org/
Water Wise Factsheet No. 2. Watercourses and Earthworks, EPA, South Australia

Datasheets provided:

Electrified Floodgates
Electric Fencing
Watercourse Fencing