

LOST LAKE, GILPIN GRASSLANDS and a RANDOM ACT of PUBLIC GOOD

End of April 2014 a group of public minded citizens replaced a section of fence around Lost Lake to better protect the area from off-road vehicle traffic and range cow damage. The new fence was constructed as fully wildlife friendly fencing.

The original fence: was installed a few years earlier by Range Branch and the Ministry of Forests Lands and Natural Resources (MFLNRO) following public concerns over the actions of off road vehicles, mud bogging in the lake and range cow damage. That installation included a cattle waterer nearby and other waterers and fences were installed at several locations on the Gilpin. These installations on **Public Lands** are at **public expense**.

Many complaints, no changes, new damage:

Complaints were subsequently made by the public as to the inadequacy of the Ministry's work, non wildlife friendly fencing, and poor planning and placement.

MFLNRO made no changes or improvements to these works even after the Forest Practices Board recommended same. In 2013 MFLNRO advised a complainant that "they would look" at the Lost Lake situation in 2014.

In spring 2014 new damage was evident from off-roaders running ATV's and dirt-bikes along the soft edges of Lost Lake which were not adequately protected by the existing fence and new damage could be expected from Range cows which would soon arrive in the area and continue damage evident from the prior years.

Waterer Not Activated: On a visit to Lost Lake on June 19th 2014 we saw that the waterer at Lost Lake had never been activated after the cows arrived. As a result, cows were dependant on pushing at the lake fence to access diminishing water levels. A subsequent call to Range Branch informed us (a) that the waterer had not been activated due to concerns about outflow of the waterer affecting Lost Lake and (b) that cows would have been able to access sufficient water if "somebody" had not put in a new fence.

- (a) complete nonsense as any extra water flowing to Lost Lake would be beneficial in replacing evapotranspiration losses. If the concern was in any way real, any flow from the waterer could be restricted at the inlet or outlet by a variety of cheap devices including a simple valve or tap
- (b) a limited and shrinking access point to the Lake was closed off by the new fence leaving potential access at both ends of the pond and the untouched length of the original southside fence. The new fence prevented new damage along the North length and in no way "created" the damage caused by cows elsewhere around the pond. Without the new fence there would simply have been one more cow damaged area.

On June 20th Range Branch advised that cows were no longer on the Lost Lake pasture area having been moved out a few days ago for the remainder of the year. That information was inaccurate. Groups of cows remained on the pasture and were seen on visits up to October 1st 2014. This extended and presumably unauthorized grazing period resulted in additional cow damage as they pushed on fences as water levels diminished and trampled a muddy corridor down the length of the older South fence, breaking into the fenced off area in several places. The extended grazing season also resulted in cows challenging the new wildlife friendly fence by "reaching" under the wildlife friendly bottom wire to access otherwise protected riparian vegetation. Thanks to the extended grazing period, forage outside the fence was largely depleted.

Ministry Investigating: The writer does not know all of the motivations of the public spirited group that re-fenced part of Lost Lake at their personal expense and time but on the basis of his own experience can surmise that some of the following might be factors:

- A complete lack of confidence that MFNLR and Range Branch are properly representing the public interest on public lands.
- The knowledge that cattle grazing on public lands costs the public much more in administration, ecological damage and infrastructure costs, than pasture rents, and competes significantly with wildlife. A U.S Economic Study estimated public costs of each AUM (animal unit month usually calculated as a cow and its calf on pasture for a month) at \$35.00 while rent paid was less than \$2.00 per AUM. The public cost did not include a calculation of "lost opportunity costs" representing a variety of public benefits that would occur with removal of range cows. No similar study has been done in BC. A study here would likely indicate a much higher public cost as grazing tenures here are smaller, resulting in greater infrastructure costs for fencing, cattle guards and other structures. When that issue was put to the Ministry the response was that they have no duty to do so. So much for public costs.
- Failure of Ministry and Range Branch to use wildlife friendly fencing despite public appeals and input from Ministry of Environment (MOE). A Forest Practices Board Report on the Gilpin from 2012 noted that MOE had provided information and recommendations on wildlife friendly fencing to the Ministry in 2008 and that the MFLNRO approved the 2009 works on the Gilpin to include wildlife friendly fencing as per MOE guidelines. It didn't happen in the Gilpin and other more recent works, e.g. Ingram, fail to use wildlife friendly fencing. The lack of wildlife friendly fencing is worsened by the usual placement of fencing at the edge of slopes and drop-offs into streams and riparian areas. These practices result in a significant barrier and hazard to wildlife as per the illustration below.
- Ministry/Branch contempt for input from other public lands users, stakeholders or knowledgeable critics. Requests from Forest Companies and Wood Lot operators for an opportunity to review and have input into ranchers periodic Range Use Plan renewals have been cavalierly dismissed by District staff even though Forest Companies have provided estimates of the considerable losses they incur as a result of cattle damage.
- The lack of effective oversight of range use activities and the lack of response to recommendations by FREP or FPB for inclusion of "key areas" (those requiring extra protection) in Range Use Plans.

- Ministry/Branch response to the biggest stakeholders of all, the public, which results in denial of or obstruction of access to information that should be readily publicly available either on request or (preferably) on line.
- Effective handover to tenure holders of grazing schedules despite clear evidence from the FPB that ranchers do not have sufficient knowledge or incentive to protect the public interest.
- An attitudinal problem exists in the Ministry/Branch in which they apparently see the rancher as their client, not the public or the public interest. They might as well be seen as being in the employ of the cattle industry.

Could continue this list but recommend the interested reader to our website article "The Problem with Range Cattle" <http://www.boundaryalliance.org/rangecattleproblem.pdf>

Ministry Investigating?

We hear that MFLNRO is now "investigating" the new Lost Lake fence, possibly with the intent of punishing those responsible. We suggest that MFLNRO acknowledge that the new structure has partly fixed a problem of the Ministry's own making and has done so at no taxpayer expense. An example and future model for "wildlife friendly fencing" is now in place that could address the issue that that the Ministry has thus far avoided. While the Ministry might be concerned about acting to prevent any further "**Random Acts of Public Good**" we suggest the Ministry accept the new fence as a lesson and model and publicly congratulate those responsible for the new fence.

The Future of Cattle Grazing on Public Land?

While the foregoing might suggest a call for MFLNRO to do a better job, this writer is of the opinion that cattle grazing on public lands should cease as it is environmentally and economically unjustifiable. Future blog and web articles will address these issues.

SEE PICS BELOW:



**FIGURE 1. NEW FENCE, RIPARIAN VEGETATION BETTER PROTECTED BY
MINIMALSETBACK**



**FIGURE 2. OLD FENCE, CATTLE TRAIL & DAMAGE, END OF
SEPTEMBER 2014**

FENCE PLACEMENT

“A fence of any height is more difficult to cross when placed across a steep slope or next to a deep ditch”

“Fences on steep slopes become nearly impossible for animals to jump over without injury”

Above comments and diagram from Montana State’s excellent article on Wildlife Friendly Fencing which is available: [here](#)

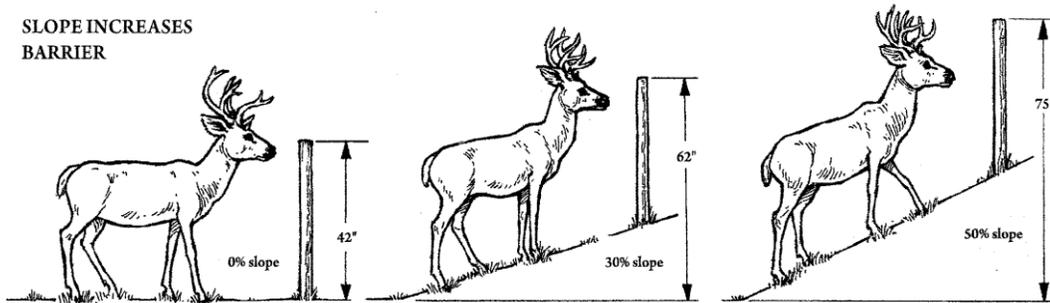


FIGURE 3 ILLUSTRATION OF OBSTACLE

MFLNRO/Range Branch routinely places non wildlife friendly fencing next to drop-offs and stream-banks.

al grant

A short version of this article can be seen on our companion blog:

Dry Rot Journal

[here](#)