

Wildlife, Swaths & Soils

What's the Connection?

“ I feel the 3D fence will be the best answer and I am aiming to fence the wildlife completely off my property.”
Bill Wilson

Wildlife Mitigation Forage Fact Series

This is the beginning of a series of fact sheets highlighting the interesting information we are learning from producer interviews.

Possible Future Forage Fact Sheets :

- Individual strategies
- Compilation of fencing strategies
- Economics of mitigation strategies.

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Producer Situation?

Bill Wilson custom grazes, feeds and calves approximately 300 head of cattle for five to seven producers a year.

Wildlife Pressures?

The wildlife present in and around his operation are elk, moose, white-tail deer and mule deer. On average, there are about 75 to 100 elk, about 25 deer and 3 to 4 moose. Most of the wildlife damage on his property affects feed and fences. The majority of the damage occurs in the winter but persists on a small scale throughout the rest of the year. Predators also pose a small problem where wolves and coyotes will sometimes kill or wound cows and calves.

What Have They Tried?

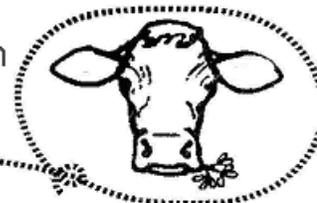
A recent change in ranching location has placed Bill in a dense wildlife area and forced him to change his feeding management, significantly increasing his costs. Elk and deer populations have been too large to try swath grazing for the past few years. Where previously he had been able to swath graze for approximately two thirds of the winter, Bill is now forced to feed bales all winter. This has lead to him changing the management of his operation, overall increasing the costs of production.

Mitigation Strategies for Ungulates and Success Rating

Strategy	Success Rating*	Reasons/Details
Stackyard fence	1	Not fenced with a wildlife fence
3-Dimensional fence	3	Potential to be successful with more experience
Changing feeding	3	Feeds every 3-4 days instead of placing all feed out at start of winter
Changing swath grazing to bale feeding	4	Lose large amounts of feed if swath graze
Allowing hunting	1	Only works for short period of time

*1 to 5, 1 = poor, 5 = effective

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Assumptions in:**Time spent swath grazing**

- ◇ Fences were moved every 3 days
- ◇ 1.25 hrs to move cows and return home*

*Time dependent on depth of snow.

Time spent feeding with tractor

- ◇ Bales were fed every 2 days
- ◇ 2.5 hrs every feeding time*

*Time dependent on cattle group size (number of bales to feed) and if there was snow to plough.

Comparison of Feeding Management

Since the change in feeding management is the largest cost Bill has incurred, below is a comparison between his two feeding practices. These are based on feeding 300 head of cattle by swath grazing and bale feeding or just bale feeding.

	Swath Grazing + Bale Feeding	Bale Feeding Only
Days swath grazing	150	0
Time spent moving fences (min/day)	25	0
Days bale feeding	50-75	200-225
Time spent feeding with tractor (min/day)	75	75
Total time cost (hrs)	125 - 156	250 - 281

* Swath grazing is not only more time efficient but cost efficient since there is less use of equipment than with bale feeding.

What's Working

Bill is currently a cooperater in the 3-D fencing project and he believes that this will become the most successful mitigation strategy for his operation. He is currently fencing the entire quarter section so that he can swath graze again. Current results with this project are very promising.

What Didn't Work

The least successful mitigation strategy so far has been allowing hunting on his property. Bill believes hunting only places pressure onto wildlife for a short period of time and forces them to adapt their behavior to avoid people. It can also be difficult to get hunters when they are needed and hunting seasons do not always line up with when damage occurs.



Bill Wilson with swath grazing

More Hidden Costs

"When I began swath grazing just over 10 years ago, I started soil testing both the swath grazed and silaged land. With this data, I adding the required fertilizer to both pieces of land. After six years, I needed noticeably less fertilizer on the land I was swath grazing than the land I was silaging. Changing my feeding management has greatly decreased the spread of nutrients in my fields and amplified my time and equipment costs."

Bill Wilson

Compiled by: Talon Johnson and Bill Wilson in October 2011.

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