
HOW HISTORICAL AND CURRENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES HAVE AFFECTED MILK RIVER RIPARIAN HABITAT IN NORTHCENTRAL MONTANA

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Riparian and wetland communities support the greatest concentration of plants and animals, yet only constitute 4 percent of Montana's land cover. Because they are more productive than surrounding uplands, they are attractive to livestock and wildlife as they provide important forms of cover and forage. For private and public land managers interested in maintaining long-term integrity and functionality of riparian and wetland communities on their lands, management strategies that accommodate on-site resource needs must be implemented. Determining habitat types and their associated community types on these sites can help identify historical impacts that have affected community type succession, and how current management strategies could be affecting the trend towards one seral stage or another. Both natural and artificial disturbances can affect community type succession, yet succession from one type to another can take several years and even decades. Thus, changes from year to year can be very subtle, and as land managers implement current management practices, they may overlook the visual cues indicating these trends, simply because these processes can be very slow. This presentation summarizes an evaluation of a riparian area located in the Milk River Valley in Northcentral Montana. An illustration of how historical impacts have affected community type succession, and how this site has been affected by a significant change in management practices that occurred over 20 years ago, is provided. Depending on what goals are desired for this site will determine if a change in current management practices is warranted.