Rest-Rotation Grazing and Streambank Restoration after Two Growing Seasons of Rest

Jarrett Payne, Habitat Bureau, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Dillon

*Indicates Presenter

**Indicates Student Presentation

In the fall of 2020, the French Creek Streambank Restoration Project was completed on the Mount Haggin Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The purpose of this project was to enhance aquatic and wildlife habitat through soft bank restoration techniques and reactivating floodplain connection. The project restored 2,350' of streambank with excessive lateral streambank erosion and poor riparian vegetation establishment. Baseline vegetation conditions were measured in early summer of 2020 to track vegetation response across all streambanks post restoration. Following two growing seasons of complete rest, grazing occurred in the project area during the early summer (light stocking rate; 0.09AUM/hectare). Vegetation conditions along streambanks remained in excellent stable condition following the summer grazing (stability index = 9.1/10). The three-year post-monitoring highlights successful native, riparian vegetation establishment for willows and herbaceous understory following this grazing event. In addition, introduced graminoid establishment along the streambanks remains at significantly lower densities in 2023 than pre-restoration conditions. Continued monitoring will track the effectiveness of softbank restoration techniques developed for the French Creek streambank project to increase riparian vegetation expansion and connectivity over the next two years in tandem with a rest-rotation grazing system. Overall, rest-rotation grazing appears suitable following a minimum of two growing seasons for this riparian setting.