

Lowham Ranch potential habitat improvement projects

A. Yellow Creek grazing management enhancements

The most apparent potential project I would suggest is to create separate pastures for the Yellow Creek riparian area. As we discussed, the livestock tendency to congregate in the riparian area poses a major challenge in pastures such as on the Lowham Ranch. Reducing livestock grazing on Yellow Creek should allow willows and other riparian plants to increase, which will benefit a wide variety of wildlife including sage grouse, deer, and fish in the stream.

Cows and calves hanging near the water and green grass on Yellow Creek in Section 8



Yellow Creek in Section 8 near a steep bank limiting cattle access to the site



A highly impacted area of Yellow Creek in Section 8



I believe it would be beneficial to create separate “riparian pastures” in the Section 7 & 8 pasture south of Chalk Ck Road and in the Section 4, 5 & 9 pasture north of Chalk Ck Road (see conceptual map).

Section 7 & 8 pasture

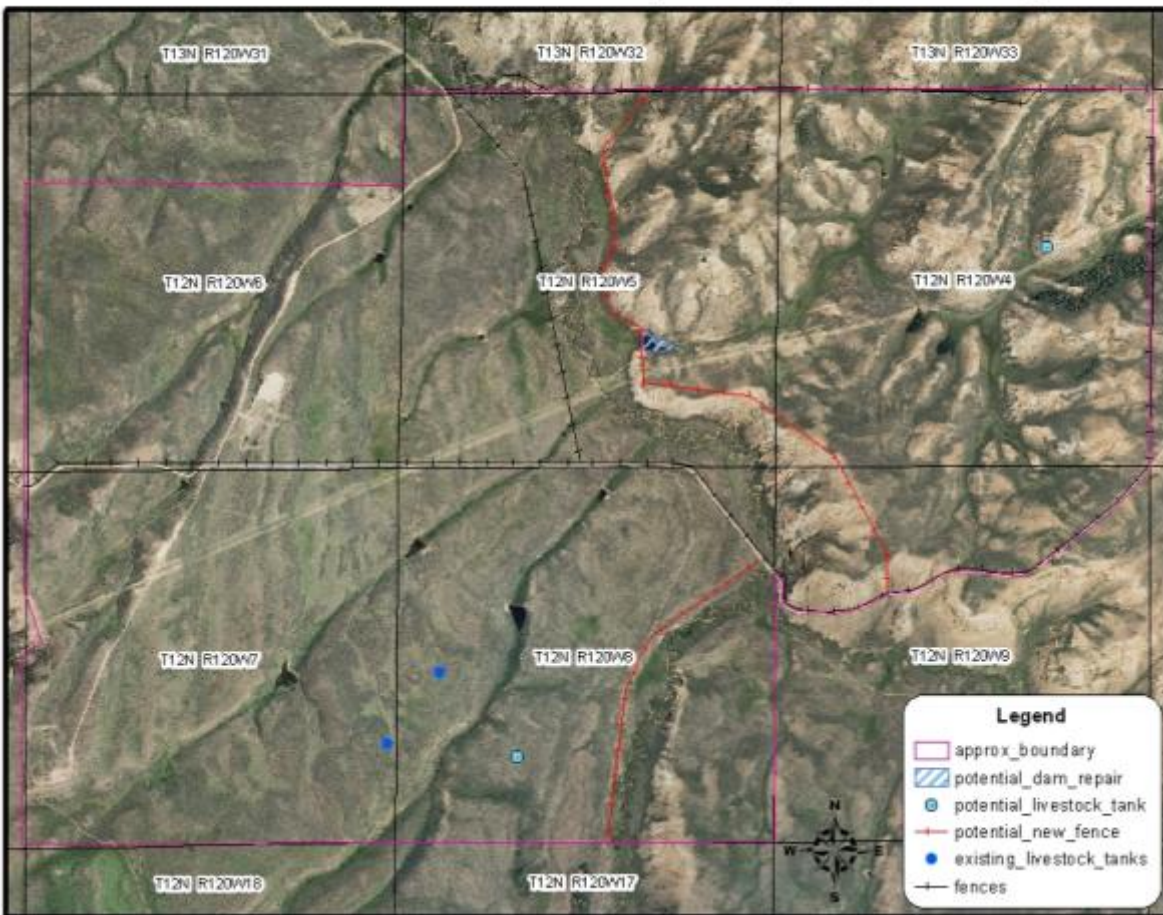
The Section 7 & 8 pasture south of the Road would be the least complex project. This pasture is currently about 1260 acres. The potential project would add about 5000’ of fence and separate the pasture into an approximately 165 acre Yellow Creek riparian pasture and another approximately 1095 acre pasture. The general idea would be to allow the cattle to have access to the riparian pasture for a time, but then close it off when the cattle are in the 1095 acre pasture. For example, if the grazing season is 4 months, the cattle would graze the riparian pasture for a single 3-week period and not return until the next year (just an example—may not be accurate). If access to water would be a problem for the cattle in the non-riparian pasture we could look at options for further water development, although you have the benefit of already having the numerous reservoirs in this pasture. The topographic map showed that there might be a spring that could be developed on the east draw that runs into Randall Draw. I don’t know if this reflects the reality on the ground.

Section 4, 5, & 9 pasture

The proposed project in this pasture would be the same general idea as described above, just duplicated in the pasture north of the Chalk Ck Road. However, it could mean some fencing on the State of WY land, which will complicate matters for funding and permitting the project. (It might be possible to use the steep terrain as a “fence” and avoid fencing on State land, but this option would need to be investigated further.) The project could potentially include about 10,000 feet of new fence, separating the existing 1,250-acre pasture into an approximately 280-acre riparian pasture and a 970-acre upland

pasture. As we discussed, at least 1 spring development in the State's Section 4 and a repair to the large reservoir near the bottom of Bessie's Draw would help ensure a good livestock water source for the cattle when they are locked out of the Yellow Creek pasture.

Lowham Ranch conceptual project map



Additional thoughts on the riparian pastures

Not only will these riparian pastures benefit wildlife habitat, but the increased ability to manage the livestock should ultimately result in improved plant production and better productivity of the land for raising livestock. However, this will involve some increased work for your leasees, in terms of fixing fence and moving livestock. Therefore, it will be desirable to get their buy-in on the projects. If the livestock are not moved between the pastures and the gates left open the pastures will not function as intended.

There are several entities that could potentially share in the cost of this project. These include NRCS, Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust, WY Game & Fish Dept., and the Partners for Fish & Wildlife Program (that I work for). This is the type of project that we could probably implement at a relatively minor cost to you.

B. Sagebrush treatments

This property is likely used by sage grouse as nesting habitat and habitat for raising chicks. There are some parts of the property that could likely benefit from thinning of the sagebrush to attain the desirable mix of sagebrush, grass, and forbs that is most preferred by sage grouse during this important life stage. A sagebrush thinning treatment would also benefit the ranch in terms of livestock productivity. There are several potential funding partners for this type of a project. It would be most important that we try to engage a Wyoming Game & Fish Dept. habitat biologist to at least get their opinion and suggestions since sage grouse is such a hot topic nowadays.

This could be a good project, but does not have the same obvious and far-reaching positive impacts to habitat for a broad range of wildlife as the Yellow Creek riparian pastures. Therefore, I would consider sagebrush treatments as Priority #2.

C. Where do we go from here?

1. I suggest getting a grazing inventory completed for all of your property. As we talked about, it appears to me that the current levels of grazing on the ranch appear fairly well balanced with forage production. (The exception would be the riparian areas where the cattle are attracted like a magnet, but this has already been discussed.) However, a more thorough examination based on some real data would be much better than a casual look. The Uinta County Conservation District has a Range Specialist, Oakley Ingersoll that might be able to assist you with a grazing inventory. This would involve categorizing the different ecological sites in the pastures and measuring the actual vegetative production of the areas to arrive at a recommended livestock stocking rate. I would recommend giving Oakley a call: (307) 747-8225

2. If you are interested in pursuing any of these projects, please let me know.

My follow up action items would then be to:

1. start planning to set some PFW Program money aside and
2. Coordinate with you to bring in some potential partners, especially NRCS and WY Game & Fish. The WY Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust would be a grant application, which I would be willing to write.