

USING PATCH-BURN GRAZING TO MEET CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES IN A WORKING LANDSCAPE.

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Abstract: Patch-Burn Grazing (PBG) is a management technique that mimics the historical interaction between fire and grazing in native grasslands in the Great Plains. It uses the preference by bison and cattle for recently burned areas to dictate where livestock will forage. Within a given pasture, livestock concentrate on the most recently burned patch while vegetation on non-burned patches receives little grazing pressure. By rotating burning over 2–3 years, spatially dynamic grazing pressure creates differences in habitat structure across the entire unit that has been shown by recent research to have positive effects on biological diversity. In 2010, PBG management was initiated on 750 acres at the Anderson County Prairie Preserve in eastern Kansas. The Preserve, owned by The Nature Conservancy and managed by the Kansas Biological Survey, is located in a 125,000-acre working landscape dominated by tallgrass prairie. The PBG unit contains three patches, one of which will be burned in the spring on successive years. Cattle will be stocked from May 1–October 1 at rate of 85% of that recommended in an NRCS Prescribed Grazing Plan. Baseline data on vegetation structure, birds, butterflies, and conservative forb species were collected for two years prior to implementation of PBG. We hope to demonstrate to local ranchers and land managers that PBG is a viable alternative to traditional livestock management practices that can provide greater habitat diversity for wildlife. We invite investigators to visit and to consider using the site in their research programs.