

63919-GRA Grazing application for Haast River flats.

Assyst Request R144632

Report for Rebecca Beaumont -Hokitika Office

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Cattle roam the upper Haast River valley. Photo: Supplied

1. PURPOSE

To understand at a high level, the effects of cattle grazing on recreational access values on the Haast River flats, to supplement information from District and to inform decision making process.

2. CONTEXT

The Department is currently processing an application for grazing of 736 hectares of the Haast River Bed by John Cowan. This is a publicly notified application. Grazing has been occurring on site for many years, however this is being reconsidered as a new application.

Submitters on the application have raised concerns regarding the grazing and associated fencing etc inhibiting access to, and recreational use of the land. There is a one-wire fence along the State Highway adjoining the grazing, and access points onto the land. The most highly used access is controlled by a Taranaki Gate.

The District Office have not heard reports of issues with access: Hunters utilise the land for access by foot and 4WD. Concessionaires used the Haast River for jetboating and rafting, although it is understood the take-out points are above and below the license.

There are to be 60 cows and 50 calves at any one time on the license, indicative of a low stocking rate.

3. OUTPUT

High-level advice on the effects that cattle grazing can have on recreational values.

4. LIVESTOCK – RECREATION INTERACTIONS

There is little research undertaken within New Zealand regarding the interactions of livestock and recreationist. However, the presence of livestock on public conservation land is widely viewed as in conflict with the reasons why this land was invested into the conservation estate. More so, this is viewed as detrimental to New Zealand's '100% Pure' image and therefore has the potential to cause negative effect to our tourism industry.

This being said, well-known positive and negative effects of livestock and recreation are worth mentioning.

4.1 Positive effects

- Grazing is known to improve scenery and even recreation in some instances. Invasive plants can make passage through areas difficult and may be painful or dangerous due to sharp stickers and thistles. Exotic plant cover also creates a large volume of decadent plant biomass, resulting in a resistant thatch layer that increases competition for light with relatively small-statured native plants (Menke, 1992)
- Grazing is frequently supported by fire departments and other public organizations to reduce exotic annual grasses that may accumulate and pose a fire hazard, which may impact surrounding structures (Fire and Resource Assessment Program, 2010)
- Rural tourism is taking off as farmers seek ways to combine New Zealand's two big export earners. An ANZ AgriFocus report late last year on agri-tourism said over a quarter of the international tourists visiting New Zealand in 2015 visited a farm or orchard, and one in five visited a vineyard or wine trail (New Zealand Herald, 2017). Chinese visitors in particular enjoyed going to a farm or orchard, with two thirds going to either or both.

4.2 Negative effects

- Recreationists often complain about the need to open and close gates when livestock are grazing on conservation land. These structures are a reminder that others are present, whereas for many the act of going to these places is to 'get away' from it all. On the other side, conflicts may occur when fencing is cut and fences are left or tied open by users who desire unobstructed access through recreational areas. When fences are damaged or gates opened inappropriately, livestock may access environmentally sensitive or dangerous areas.
- While 'potential danger from livestock' is commonly cited to support removal of grazing from public lands, recreationist injuries are not necessarily the biggest point of contention for some grazing opponents. The fact that private graziers benefit from use of public lands is a more common complaint.

- Common complaints about livestock grazing in recreational areas include cow manure, flies, fouling of water holes, and damage to trails in wet areas and seasons (Tempest, 2004).
- Fishers tend to have a lower tolerance of livestock grazing activities than hunters due to the perception that cattle foul streams, rivers, and lakes (Sanderson et al., 1986). Damage to riparian habitats is of particular concern, as cattle may congregate and “camp” in these areas for water, forage, and shade.
- Grazing is widely considered to be a key contributor to poor water quality in New Zealand. The notion that this activity can happen on protected lands is known to lead to a negative experience and complaints by recreators. Furthermore, this activity is largely in conflict with the clean, green image we portray on the international stage. Whilst it is difficult to quantify the actual damage to the recreational experience caused by the presence of livestock, the damage to the 100% Pure brand must be taken into account.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The value of conservation lands to the New Zealand public and New Zealand brand should take precedence over the value of the lands to a commercial entity
2. In the event that grazing is allowed to exist on the Haast River flats it should be supported by open dialogue between land managers and recreationists; to educate each stakeholder on the potential risks and benefits of grazing on public lands. Engagement via Surveys; Social Media, Educational Programs, Factsheet and Signage is recommended to create and facilitate positive livestock-recreation interactions (Appendix 1)

5. REFERENCES

Agri-tourism: Visitors flock to farms and vineyards” New Zealand Herald (2017) 27 March 2017. Accessed off https://www.nzherald.co.nz/the-country/news/article.cfm?c_id=16&objectid=11826435

Menke, Grazing and fire management for native perennial grass restoration in California grasslands Fremontia, 20 (1992), pp. 22-25

Sanderson, Meganck, Gibbs, Range management and scenic beauty as perceived by dispersed recreationists.

Journal of Range Management, 39 (1986), pp. 464-469

Tempest, Hikers in East Bay Parks have a beef with cows

Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles, CA, USA (2004) <http://articles.latimes.com/2004/sep/06/local/me-cows6>

APPENDIX 1 | Example of signage used to inform recreators in a dual use area.



**YOU ARE ENTERING A
CATTLE GRAZING AREA**

Cattle are an important tool to maintain our grasslands

- Protect yourself, your pets and the livestock. Do not let your pets chase or harass livestock.
- If cattle are blocking the trail approach them slowly, speak normally and allow them to move away.
- Don't attempt to touch livestock. Do not get between the mother cow and young calves.
- If you encounter a cow that is acting in a threatening manner or appears to be injured, sick or dead, please note the location, the color of the animal, the ear tag number, and report it to the park staff.

PARK OFFICE _____

For Emergencies call **911**
or Public Safety Dispatch: **(510) 881-1833**

For more information on grazing in the parks,
please visit our website:
www.ebparks.org/about/stewardship/grazing



East Bay
Regional Park District