

WALDO NORTH UPDATE

The Trench Society is pleased to announce that the Columbia Basin Trust and Beef Cattle Industry Development Fund will contribute a total of \$60,000 to project planning costs.

The grants will fund upfront planning requirements that must be met before a timber harvesting licence can be issued to the Society.

They will also fund a communications program that includes field tours of Waldo North. The tours, to be offered this fall and next spring, will provide the public with an opportunity to learn about grassland/open forest restoration at an actual project site.

A loan from the Rocky Mountain Trench Ecosystem Restoration Steering Committee will provide further financial support during the planning phase.

• SEVEN TIMES MORE RANGE

Agrologist Tim Ross (Ross Range & Reclamation Services) has completed a site conversion plan which calls for 70% of Waldo North to be restored to Open Range (forest cover of 10% or less) and the remaining 30% restored to Open Forest (forest cover of 11-35%) or a mosaic of Open Range and Open Forest.

In its current condition, Waldo North consists of 10% Open Range, 30% Open Forest and 35% Closed Forest. In other words, restoration treatments will increase Open Range by seven-fold.

Forest cover targets are based on Ungulate Winter Range and Kootenay Boundary Land Use Plan guidelines. Restoration prescriptions for Waldo North will aim for the lower end of the targets.

• SCIENTIFIC MONITORING

Tim Ross has also developed a monitoring plan to determine how forage production and bunchgrasses respond to

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The Trench Society's NEWSLETTER

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Restoration News

ROCKY MOUNTAIN TRENCH NATURAL RESOURCES SOCIETY

Waldo North project aims for bigger, better, faster restoration

The Trench Society's restoration pilot project at the north end of the Waldo Range Unit is well underway (see Update at left). Project planning is on schedule and operations are expected to begin in November.

Waldo North is a pilot project. The goal is to develop a project model that will produce more effective rangeland restoration than is now occurring. As a demonstration project, Waldo North is breaking ground on many fronts and will be closely evaluated by the Society and the Rocky Mountain Forest District to determine if it achieves anticipated results.

Here are some of the project's major features:

- At 1880 hectares, it's the biggest restoration project undertaken on Crown land in the Trench. The site on the northeast side of Lake Koocanusa was chosen because it is a classic example of a grassland/open forest ecosystem degraded by forest ingrowth. Waldo North supplies grazing for Bar X Ranch cattle, supports deer and elk populations, and provides habitat for species at risk – but forest ingrowth is severely limiting its natural productivity.

- With the cooperation of Galloway Lumber and the Rocky Mountain Forest District, Waldo North will be the first restoration project to operate with a temporary timber harvesting licence. This is significant because it provides the legal means to achieve Open Range and Open Forest tree densities – the basis for grassland restoration – over the entire operating area of the project. This differs from the existing restoration approach which has typically been restricted to small, unconnected blocks where tree density goals are seldom met, thus limiting the benefits of restoration.

- The project is the first to plan and carry out pre-burn restoration treatments in an uninterrupted sequence, in this case two years. It is the first to use forage production as a measure of success. It is the first to set objectives for soil disturbance and woody debris residue, factors that can limit restoration benefits.

- Finally, the project will be the first to establish a maintenance burning plan particular to a range unit. This long-term maintenance strategy is a goal of the current restoration program, which aims to mimic the region's historic fire regime of frequent, low-intensity surface fires.

Since 2001 the Trench Society has worked with East Kootenay MLA Bill Bennett, the Ministry of Forests and others to find a way to initiate a project that

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UPDATE

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restoration treatments.

Forest canopy cover, plant species cover and frequency, light penetration, forage standing crop and cattle/wildlife use will be measured on a total of 720 sampling plots representing treated and untreated, grazed and ungrazed, Open Range and Open Forest sites.

Monitoring will continue every year for 4 years after logging then every 5-10 years. A monitoring plan that stands up to scientific scrutiny is essential to evaluate the project's success.

- Archaeologist Wayne Choquette has completed an archaeological overview assessment of the project site. Results will be incorporated into the site plan with a view to minimizing operations costs.

Machine-free zones and archaeological impact assessments are potential increased cost factors for the project.

• PUBLIC CONSULTATION

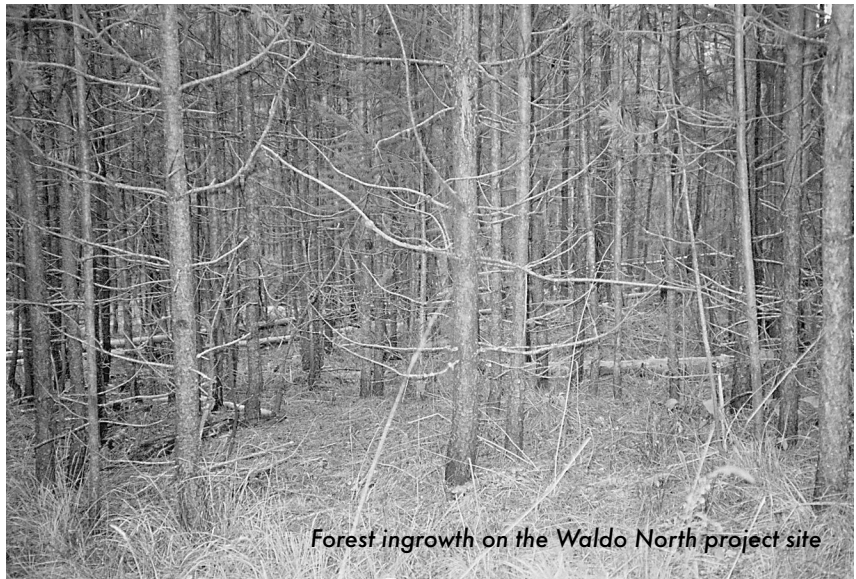
Forester Mark Hall (Majestic Resource Consulting) is preparing the site plan, which will meet Forest and Range Practices Act standards and encompass all planning required to carry out restoration treatments up to the prescribed burning stage.

This includes mapping and layout of operational and exclusion zones, Open Range and Open Forest conversion zones, and a stand management prescription setting out non-logging treatments.

The plan will be advertised and made available for public and stakeholder comment, probably in July.

- Interior Reforestation has been contracted to conduct a timber cruise of the 1400 hectares designated for logging on the project site.

- Over the summer, the Society will solicit marketing proposals from wood buyers and harvesting proposals from logging contractors in preparation for the start of operations in late fall.



Forest ingrowth on the Waldo North project site

Bigger, better faster restoration *continued from front ...*

would determine if ecosystem restoration on a large scale can be both economically feasible and environmentally sound.

As a founding member of the Rocky Mountain Trench Ecosystem Restoration Steering Committee, a multi-sectoral group responsible for the restoration program, the Society supports the goal of restoring grassland/open forest on 135,000 hectares of Crown land over a 30-year period (see pg 4).

But with the forest ingrowth situation in the Trench, compounded by four years of drought, the range resource is struggling to provide a sustainable level of grazing for domestic and wild ungulates. This is evidence that the program, now in its 8th year, isn't producing the desired ecological results. The Trench Society argues that successful rangeland restoration is constrained by a resource management regime that gives priority to commercial timber values. The hope is that a successful Waldo North project will facilitate an accelerated, results-oriented restoration program based on range values.

Forest ingrowth is the end result of suppressing the frequent fire cycles that characterize the grassland/open forest ecosystems in the Trench. Over the past 70 years, the East Kootenay has lost almost 50% of its rangeland to forest ingrowth.

This means more grassland-dependent species at risk, a critical loss of grazing for livestock and wild ungulates, depredation of domestic pastures by deer and elk, economic hardship for the ranching industry, conflict between ranchers and wildlife advocates, forests more susceptible to insects and disease, and huge amounts of fuel to feed potentially catastrophic wildfires.

Restoration News is published by the Rocky Mountain Trench Natural Resources

Society, a partnership of organizations dedicated to restoring the grasslands and open forests of southeastern British Columbia. Society members are:

- Cranbrook Archery Club
- East Kootenay Wildlife Association
- Kootenay Livestock Association
- Rocky Mountain Naturalists
- Southern Guides & Outfitters Association
- The Land Conservancy of BC
- Waldo Stockbreeders Association
- wildsight (formerly EKES)
- Windermere Farmers Institute

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SOCIETY NEWS

New Chair, Vice Chair elected

Directors elected Kathleen Sheppard of Kimberley and Peter Davidson of Cranbrook as Chair and Vice Chair at the Society's annual general meeting in April.

Kathleen replaces past Chair Gordon Edwards of Jaffray, while Peter moves into Kathleen's previous position as Vice Chair. Both positions are for two years.

Kathleen represents The Land Conservancy of BC (TLC) on the Trench Society Board. A BSc graduate in geography and biology, she worked in research, natural and historical interpretation, and wildlife rehabilitation before joining TLC as Kootenay Region Manager in 2001.



Kathleen Sheppard

Peter, representing the Rocky Mountain Naturalists, is a Registered Professional Biologist and Professional Agrologist with a specialty in range. His work with the BC Ministry of Environment included the East Kootenay Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep recovery program in the 1980s. He also helped develop the 1997 Kootenay Boundary Land Use Plan Implementation Strategy which established guidelines for fire-maintained ecosystem restoration and launched the current restoration program in the Trench.

Board of Directors

John Bergenske (wildsight), Marty Cloarec (Cranbrook Archery Club), Bill DuBois (Southern Guides & Outfitters), Gordon Edwards (Waldo Stockbreeders), Don Lancaster (Kootenay Livestock Association), Ivar Larson (East Kootenay Wildlife Association) and Brian McKersie (Windermere District Farmers' Institute).



MEETING WITH MEMBERS. Norman Hendricks, President of the Lake Windermere District Rod & Gun Club, at right, introducing Trench Society Coordinator Maurice Hansen at a club meeting in March. Maurice made seven presentations over the winter and spring to Society members and other groups with an interest in restoration issues.

Welcome Southern Guides & Outfitters!

The Southern Guides & Outfitters Association, representing most of the big game guiding industry in southeastern BC, is the ninth organization to join the Trench Society. Bill DuBois of A Bar Z Outfitters in Windermere, who will represent the Association on the Society's Board, says guides and outfitters are increasingly concerned about loss of wildlife habitat in the Trench and want to participate in efforts to restore it. Elk, mule and white-tailed deer, and bighorn sheep require healthy grasslands and open forests for forage and winter range.

New Chief Forester supports restoration

Directors had a productive get-acquainted session in April with Jim Snetsinger, BC's new Chief Forester, whose responsibilities include Crown rangeland. Snetsinger succeeds Larry Pedersen, who worked with the Society on strategies for expediting the Trench restoration program.

Snetsinger told Directors he is learning that range issues in the Trench are controversial and complex, and that restoration must play a major role in resolving them. He said range issues are getting more attention in Victoria, a fact confirmed in June when Premier Campbell announced that the Ministry of Forests would henceforth be called the Ministry of Forests and Range.

Concerns raised at the meeting included the stumpage rate to be levied on Waldo North timber, which is expected to be high and could be the make or break factor for the project's bottom line, and allocating more of the region's annual cut to timber harvesting on Open Range and Open Forest zones. With the Cranbrook and Invermere timber supply areas under review, the Society has asked that the timber volume for restoration purposes be increased from 3,000 to 20,000 cubic metres per year and made available to restoration project proponents.

2005-09 Elk Plan calls for more and better restoration

The BC Government's latest five-year elk management plan for the East Kootenay says immediate and substantial increases in ecosystem restoration are essential to the region's environment and economy.

"It cannot be overstated that the current deterioration of grassland ecosystems on Crown land is an ecological tragedy," say consulting biologists Dr. Steven Wilson and Rick Morley, who wrote the December 2004 report. "It is not just the economics of the local ranching industry and habitat for elk and deer that are affected ... grasslands are a rare ecosystem in BC and home to over 30 per cent of species considered at risk in the province.

"If current ecosystem restoration efforts are not increased immediately and substantially ... we are likely to see continuing social and economic upheaval, as well as significantly worse ecological conditions for at least the next two to three decades," Wilson and Morley predict.

US program fuels public buildings with wood waste

Public schools, a university campus and a hospital in Montana are offsetting their fuel oil and natural gas heating costs with boilers fired by wood waste. Three of the new biomass boiler systems are operating and six conversion projects are underway or planned.

Fuels for Schools is part of a US Forest Service initiative to reduce hazardous fuels in Montana, Idaho, North Dakota, Utah and Nevada forests. Reducing wildfire risk by removing excess forest fuels produces a lot of unmerchantable wood. Biomass boilers give economic value to this wood and reduce dependency on fossil fuels.

Tembec's co-gen plant at the Skookumchuck pulp mill uses wood waste to generate electricity, but finding additional markets for the small trees and slash taken off during restoration is a continuing challenge for ecosystem restoration here in the Trench.



Lighting up a prescribed burn with a drip torch

Prescribed burns in the works for this fall

More than 1300 hectares of Crown range were burned in April under the Rocky Mountain Trench ecosystem restoration program. Prescribed burns were carried out on pastures in the St. Mary's Prairie, Tata Skookumchuck, Sheep Creek North and Newgate range units.

Additional burns covering 1400 hectares were called off because conditions on site weren't conducive to producing good results.

Prescribed burning follows logging and thinning as the final treatment in the restoration process. Burning halts forest ingrowth by killing off young seedlings and promotes regeneration of the grasses, shrubs and forbs that make up rangeland plant communities.

This year, for the first time, the Ecosystem Restoration Steering Committee plans to test the effectiveness and feasibility of fall restoration burns with one, possibly two, prescribed burns.

The restoration program had a record season in spring 2004 when ideal conditions allowed for 2600 hectares to be burned.

Trench restoration program merits praise

Dr. Richey Harrod, a fire ecologist with the US Forest Service in Washington state, says the East Kootenay's 30-year, 135,000-hectare ecosystem restoration program is one of the few in the world.

"You've done an excellent job of planning restoration on a grand scale," Harrod said. "When you began this program in 1997 it was really on the cutting edge. You should really be proud of what you're doing here. It's something unique."

He said the northwestern states are attempting something similar in their dry forests but have yet to develop a landscape-level plan as has been done here.

"One of the really neat things about your program is the overall coordination and cooperation among the various agencies and interest groups," he commented. "Achieving that level of agreement among diverse groups is not an easy task."

Harrod was one of three presenters at a prescribed burning workshop held at Wasa in early April.