

Summer 2008

BC Organizations Tour Waldo Restoration Project

The Trench Society's Waldo North grasslands restoration project is attracting province-wide attention.

June, July and August saw representatives from the BC Agriculture Wildlife Advisory Committee, the BC Cattle Industry Development Council, and the Rocky Mountain Forest District touring the project site on the shores of Lake Koochanusa near Jaffray.

The Agriculture Wildlife Committee and Cattle Industry Development Council had a firsthand look at how the Waldo North grasslands restoration project will improve production of native forage for domestic livestock and wild ungulates, and help reduce wildlife grazing on cultivated hayfields.

East Kootenay ranchers have lost millions of dollars' worth of crops to wildlife depredation and have spent millions of dollars to erect wildlife fencing to protect their pastures. A federal-provincial agriculture environment fund assists ranchers with these costs.

The Cattle Industry Development Council helped get the Waldo project underway when it awarded a \$37,000 Beef Cattle Industry Development Fund grant that covered almost half of the project's initial planning costs.

It was the Rocky Mountain Forest District that gave the green light to the project by issuing the Trench Society with a licence to cut timber on the 2,000-hectare Crown land site.

The Trench Society designed the Waldo project to test a more effective grasslands restoration model. It is the biggest single grassland restoration project undertaken in the East Kootenay and is the first time the BC Ministry of Forests and Range has issued a timber licence for a project of this type and on this scale to a non-governmental organization.

To date, the Society has thinned more than 900 hectares of forested land using open range and open forest prescriptions. As well as improving natural forage production, restoration treatments enhance habitat for grassland-dependent species such as American badger, Lewis's woodpecker and long-billed curlew. Trees left after thinning also benefit.

They have better growth potential and are less susceptible to attack by disease and insects.

The Trench Society also planned the project to be self-financing. So far, the Society has sold about 38,000 cubic metres of sawlogs and pulpwood, generating close to \$1.5 million in revenue, and has paid out about \$1.45 million to East Kootenay contractors working on the project and another \$80,000 in stumpage fees to the BC government.

The Waldo project was formally launched in 2005 when the timber licence was granted. Ministry of Forests and Range planning requirements were completed by 2006. Logging began in 2007, continued in 2008, and is expected to wrap up in 2009.



Grassland restoration on the Waldo project site started with logging to open up the forest canopy. An open forest canopy allows sunlight and moisture to reach the ground, conditions which encourage growth of the native bunchgrasses that provide forage for cattle, elk, deer and bighorn sheep. The photo above shows the light forest cover achieved by logging the Waldo site. The end result is in keeping with the historic grassland/open forest landscape of the southern Rocky Mountain Trench. Tree regeneration on the site will be kept in check with periodic prescribed burns which mimic the frequent, low-intensity fires that burned in the Trench before wildfire suppression became the norm.