

2018 Recap of Fieldtrip/Grazing Info

Although the day started off pretty iffy with cold and rain, we did learn a great deal about the vegetation mix on our mountain. If you were present for the field trip, you undoubtedly came away with an improved and better informed knowledge of our habitat.

Roy Roath walked about 20 landowners through the mountain's landscape on Saturday. He identified dozens of different plants, from flowers to grasses to sedges and bushes to trees. Roy took the time to explain to our group important facts about each of them and how they fit into the mountain's habitat. He identified which plants are native to the area and those that are not. Those that are beneficial to our mountain's environment and those that are not.

Some of the plants we observed have taken root on our mountain because of unmanaged grazing over the years. Others have taken advantage of other types of habitat/soil disturbance that have taken place. One of the plants taking advantage of soil disruption is the Canadian Thistle. We learned that this thistle has roots that radiate out to the sides and have small nodes on them about every $\frac{1}{4}$ inch or so. When the thistle is cut off new plants will emerge from these nodes, spreading thistle through the area. With properly managed grazing the balance of plant life will improve and be beneficial to our mountain in several ways; including, fire mitigation and improved game habitat.

To help us all understand the varieties of plant life and how they fit into our mountain's habitat, Roy is going to put together some information that we will share with the landowners.

Roy shared with us the importance of having and maintaining a well managed grazing program and the benefits to our mountain. As we have all seen this year, fire is a major concern and managed grazing is an important fire mitigation tool. With proper grazing the fuels will be greatly reduced. As it stands the county has already expressed concern with the lack of fire mitigation on the peak and is questioning how we will manage this problem.

Another major benefit of well managed grazing on Baker's Peak is increased/improved habitat for game. In the past, unmanaged grazing has been detrimental to our mountain, resulting in limited quality and adequate food for wildlife. Likewise, continued lack of well managed grazing on our mountain will also result in poorer game habitat. The vast majority of our landowners look forward to good hunting and don't want to see the habitat deteriorate any farther.

There was discussion of returning cattle to our mountain. Roy indicated that for cattle to be successfully managed on Baker's Peak, the mountain would need to be

divided into three sections, erecting laydown fences, to rotate the cattle. Proper water would need to be available around the mountain as well, with a number of designated watering areas. It was noted that preparing Baker's Peak for proper cattle grazing would be quite expensive. However, volunteers can lessen some of the cost.

Additionally, grazing sheep was discussed. Sheep will need to be rotated around our mountain similarly to the cattle. The sheep will have the same water requirements as cattle but will not need to have Baker's Peak divided into thirds by the laydown fences. The initial cost will be far less and once again those costs can be reduced with volunteer help.

Grazing sheep, as opposed to cattle, will help to control more of the unwanted vegetation found on our mountain, as they have a more diverse diet. Sheep will forage deeper into the underbrush helping to improve fire mitigation and improving game habitat. The sheep are accompanied by herders and they are able to control where and how much grazing is done in any one area. Sheep can be moved around the peak easily, ensuring a well managed grazing program. Ideally, sheep would be on our mountain grazing from the middle of May to around June 20. By grazing earlier in the season the vegetation will be eaten down and will have time to grow back by the end of the summer season, providing a better habitat for game and improved hunting.

With Roy's vast experience in range management he was able to answer many questions and address the concerns landowners had.