

# CEC Grassland Outreach and Pilot Manger Project

## *Saskatchewan project*

### Final Report

June 2015

#### **Background**

##### ***Selection of Pilot Project:***

The Saskatchewan Forage Council (SFC) was selected by the Canadian Forage and Grassland Association (CFGAs), as one of the provincial partners on the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) Grasslands Beneficial Management Practices (BMP) pilot project. By working with our provincial partners and contacts the SFC successfully identified Coy Schellenberg – Perrin Ranching, Beechy, SK to work with on this project. Selection criteria was developed as follows: the SFC wanted to work with producer(s) who have a genuine interest in conserving native rangeland by using environmentally sound management practices as well as economically sound principles. The BMP of cross fencing was selected as the SFC was aware of producers who were considering dividing pastures to improve animal distribution, better control grazing periods and increase the length of rest periods to improve the overall health and productivity of their rangeland.

##### ***Description of Operation:***

Perrin Ranching 1990 Ltd. is a 4th generation ranch located in south western Saskatchewan near Beechy. Reg and Shannon Schellenberg, along with their son Coy and his wife Laura-Lie, run this commercial cow-calf operation. The ranch consists of nearly 12,500 acres (5058 hectares), with 90% being native rangeland. The Schellenberg Family has always taken pride in their native landscape and, like the generations before them, manages grazing so as to preserve this resource by maintaining biodiversity and a healthy ecosystem. Healthy productive grass and riparian areas, clean water, and abundant wildlife are signs of this careful stewardship.

The ranch currently supports a 450 cowherd, using a Black Angus genetics base and some Simmental cross breeding for hybrid vigour. They also background nearly 100 replacement heifers each winter, some of which are sold in the spring or fall and the rest kept as replacements and integrated into the cowherd.

The Perrin Ranch at Beechy has a history of working with conservation groups such as Ducks Unlimited Canada to forge agreements where deferred grazing periods on some pastures help conserve nesting habitat for waterfowl. The ranch has also implemented many of their own best management practices (BMP's), including water development and cross-fencing, to provide better grazing management for their pastures. Particular attention is paid to their grazing plan where season of use is alternated for each pasture so that pastures are not grazed at the same time each year. During the grazing season, pastures are monitored very closely to determine when it is time to move the herd. Salt and mineral is another method they use to attract the cattle to uplands and under-utilized areas of pastures.

The Schellenberg Family recognizes that the practices used by the generations before them, and the practices they use today, are setting the stage for the generations to come. They are focused on ensuring that the land and water remains healthy and productive well into the future. The ranch has been economically viable over the years and this was especially proven through the economically challenging years after Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) which put many Canadian operations out of business.

## **Methodology and Results**

### ***Description of Project:***

This project consisted of cross-fencing one of the ranch's largest native pastures. The pasture was five sections (3200 acres – 1295 hectares), and a plan to cross-fence it has been long in the works to allow for improved control of grazing frequency, intensity, and duration. The approximately 2-mile cross-fence split this pasture in half with resulting North and South sides (see attached aerial photos - Appendix A) with the north half now 1,760 acres and south half now 1,440 acres. There are at least three very large dugouts/lakes/springs on each side which ensures water availability in both North and South sides.

Perrin Ranching is located in the Brown and Light Brown soil zones of Saskatchewan. Their winter range is located in the RM of Victory #226 and is situated in the South SK River valley and along the uplands. The soil here is fertile and production along the uplands and more fragile and sensitive in the river valley. As such, the ranch is especially careful with how the river hills are grazed and when. Their summer range is located in the RM of Lacadena #228 and is situated along the North boundary of the Matador. The soil here is fertile and productive as well in most pastures. Some pastures do have more sandy soils here and are quite sensitive so grazing plans take this into account.

A range health assessment was conducted in September of 2014 (two areas on the North side and two on the South side) with the assistance of local range professionals. The south end of the pasture is typically over-utilized and the north side is typically under-utilized by grazing animals. Assessments revealed that pasture condition is healthy with problems on the south side and healthy on the north side. The healthy status was largely due to a healthy vegetation status; very extensive and diverse plant communities inhabiting several vegetative layers, the abundance of litter, and minimal invasive weeds. It is also due to healthy hydrologic function and soil protection; minimal to zero soil erosion and bare soil, and healthy riparian areas. The health status of these pastures is a result of good grazing practices, including suitable stocking rates. While the Schellenbergs realize that the acres available could potentially support more cattle, their previous grazing plans included aggressive drought proofing measures aimed at ensuring adequate carryover in the event of drought.

Water resources are well scattered and readily available for the livestock. The ranch has continued to develop dugouts and springs over the years, along with installation of remote watering systems to protect these water resources and provide cleaner water to the cattle. The lay of the land in many of the pastures is well suited to holding run-off and excess water in many sloughs and lakes, which increases water availability and helps take the pressure off the native when the slough grass comes.

Biodiversity is supported in many ways on this ranch. The plant biodiversity is not the only community that is extremely diverse. There is also several species of wildlife that call this place home, including elk, mule deer, white tailed deer, antelope, moose, coyotes, badgers, beavers, and many other species of animals and birds. The vast presence of so many species indicates that the ranch has created excellent wildlife habitat.

### ***Post - Project Results:***

This project was completed during early spring of 2015. Results will be monitored by conducting range health assessments over the next number of years to ensure that range health is being maintained or improved.

In the 2015 grazing season, the Schellenbergs plan for grazing to commence on the North pasture on approximately June 7, 2015 with 350 cow/calf pairs. This area of the pasture was typically under-utilized

by grazing animals. It is anticipated that cattle will remain on the North side until mid or end of July. Grazing is always monitored closely, and cattle will be moved earlier or later if needed. Once grazing of the North side is complete, the 350 pairs will be moved to other pastures on the ranch and return to graze the South end in September of 2015 for a short time (2-4 weeks). In the past, the South end was grazed more heavily and by delaying grazing into September of 2015, plants in this pasture will have almost an entire growing season of rest, with a short grazing period in the fall. Looking into 2016, the Schellenbergs indicate that they plan to assess pasture conditions in the fall (2015) and base decisions for the 2016 grazing season on that fall assessment.

The Schellenberg family will determine whether further cross-fencing projects will be undertaken based on the results of this project. If both grazing management and range health improve, they will consider further cross fencing projects. However, they are cautious due to the significant cost of fencing in this rugged terrain. They also indicate that paddock size must be adequate for the large herd and that they look at managing their native pastures differently than tame pastures which are more suited to intensive rotational practices.

### **Extension Activities**

The Saskatchewan Forage Council works with a wide variety of partners on events and workshops throughout the year to promote forage projects and provide producers with important information. As such, we were able to work with partners on existing events to share information on the CEC's Rangeland BMP's initiative.

Foraging into the Future was held in Swift Current, SK on December 3, 4, 2014. This workshop focused on forage and rangeland topics. Leanne Thompson from the Saskatchewan Forage Council provided an overview presentation of the CEC, and their Grasslands BMP's initiative.

Secondly, Saskatchewan Prairie Conservation Action Plan (SK PCAP) hosts a Native Prairie Speaker Series each winter. March 5, 2015 the SFC arranged to have Perrin Ranching (Coy Schellenberg) as the speaker series presenter which was held in conjunction with the South Saskatchewan River Watershed Stewards Annual Open House at Beechy, SK. Coy's presentation shared information on their pilot project demonstrating why they were interested in implementing the cross-fence BMP and what they hope to see as a result. Information on the CEC and their interest in rangeland BMP's was included in his presentation.

This project can be found on the Saskatchewan Forage Council's website at [www.saskforage.ca](http://www.saskforage.ca). For more information on the Commission for Environmental Cooperation and the Grassland BMP project visit: <http://www.cec.org/tools-and-resources/grasslands-tool/grasslands-beneficial-management-practices-tool>

## **Partner and Funding Acknowledgement**

**This project was administered by the Canadian Forage and Grassland Association and was funded by the Commission for Environmental Cooperation.**



In this pilot project twenty-one ranchers across North America implemented beneficial management practices with support from the Commission for Environmental Cooperation. Projects can be viewed at: <http://www.nagrasslands.org/category/cec-supported-pilots/>

CEC's report for Perrin Ranching BMP ecosystem management can be viewed at: <http://www.nagrasslands.org/perrin-ranching/>

**Appendix A (Project photos and site map)**

**Perrin Ranching – aerial photo of Section 14-22-14W3M**



**Perrin Ranching – aerial photo of Section 27-22-14W3M**





**Finished fence on Perrin Ranch**





**Native grasses in project pasture at Perrin Ranching March, 2015**



**Schellenberg Family**