



# Woodland Livestock Grazing

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## Why manage for grazing?

Native grasses and other herbaceous plants that grow in Florida's forests provide livestock forage that requires very minimal effort to manage. Woodland grazing provides landowners an opportunity for annual income from the sale of beef and can strengthen your stewardship forest portfolio.

## Considerations for grazing on your stewardship forest

A grazing management plan developed by a range specialist serves as a guide to the land user. The plan will identify the amount and location of forages on the property, as well as physical features such as existing fences, watering sites, working pens, etc. In addition, the plan will determine the maximum number of animals that can optimally graze on the property without damage to natural resources.

Grazing management recommendations take into account the class of grazing animals, seasons of use, and key grazing plant species. Different classes (e.g., bulls, heifers, commercial brood cows) of livestock may require different pastures, supplemental feeding schedules, and require varying amounts of forage each day. The grazing management plan will create a schedule for resting different areas of the property during the year, to allow grasses to recuperate and produce seed. It is important to identify the preferred grazing species of plants so that their use can be monitored closely to prevent overgrazing.

Grazing intensity will be adjusted so that half of the current year's growth on all grazing plants (particularly key species) will be left at the end of each grazing season. This moderate use of forage will provide the grass plants sufficient leaf area to produce the energy and nutrients necessary for maintenance of adequate growth. As forest stands age and canopy cover increases, forage production declines. Therefore, a planned reduction over time

in the number of animals that graze certain portions of the property will reduce the risk of overgrazing those stands. Thinning, harvesting and regeneration will increase sunlight to the forest floor and stimulate the replenishment of forage allowing increased animal stocking levels.

Regeneration sites should be protected from grazing for at least one growing season to allow establishment of newly planted pines and regeneration of the forage base. Pines are most susceptible to grazing damage during the first year following planting. Typically, pines are planted in the winter months; therefore, cattle should be excluded from the site until at least the following winter or possibly longer if the forage base is not yet sufficient. Care must be taken not to overgraze the site at this time to avoid delays in forage and tree growth.

Supplemental feeding troughs/mineral feeders and water developments must be located away from newly regenerated areas. Cattle will naturally be drawn to these areas due to the increased forage supply. Therefore, all items that tend to congregate cattle (supplemental feed sites, water) should be located away from regeneration sites. Site damage can be avoided by keeping supplemental feeding locations away from water sites and new plantations.

Understory shrubs often compete with herbaceous plants for sunlight, water, and nutrients, more so than overstory trees. This may be controlled by mechanical means. Roller chopping and prescribed burning will enhance forage production for cattle. Pine trees will need to be maintained at wider than normal spacings (Figure 13) to accommodate the mechanical equipment and not inflict root damage to the trees. Roller chopping should be performed every 4 to 7 years depending upon density and species composition of shrubs. Care must be taken to leave adequate cover for wildlife species.