



Grassy ecosystems - management for nature conservation and productivity

Native grassland and grassy woodland remnants require active management with a flexible approach. A healthy remnant can only maintain its high species diversity by being free of weeds and old, rank foliage.

Management practices also need to accommodate the requirements of both flora and fauna. Some plant species need open ground cover with more light and bare ground to survive whilst some animal species require a dense, tall tussock ground cover to hide and to lay their eggs.

Activities should be varied over time, within remnants and between them. This variability will favour a suite of species compared to a more rigid and non-active approach, which will only cater to a few flora and fauna species.

Grassy ecosystem management

General

1. Minimise soil disturbance as much as possible.
2. Avoid 'tidying up' vegetation; understorey vegetation is very important habitat.
3. Avoid planting trees on native grasslands or plant only local tree species if necessary.
4. Revegetate with local native seed.
5. Control feral animals and weeds.
6. Leave any existing patches of native remnant in cultivated areas as wildlife refuges.
7. Retain ground debris such as plant litter, rocks and fallen timber as wildlife habitat.
8. Monitor changes to remnants.
9. Consider protecting native remnants by participating in conservation programs and agreements.
10. Learn to recognise vegetation communities and become familiar with native fauna and flora and rare and threatened species found in your area.
11. Where possible, signpost significant remnant areas and rare plants on public lands.



Above: *Picris evae* growing on roadside grasslands

Grazing

1. Ensure grassy ecosystems, especially of high conservation value on stock routes and private lands, are not allowed to be overgrazed.
2. Graze pastures on a rotational or patch basis with low stock numbers.
3. Spell degraded pastures during summer to allow them to seed before re-introducing stock.
4. Fence off wetlands or creeks to reduce impact in these sensitive areas and maintain water quality.
5. Supply alternate watering points to disperse grazing pressure or encourage grazing away from sensitive areas.



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You could also use high intensity grazing for very short periods as a grassland management tool. Although this must be strictly managed, high intensity grazing in short bursts with a long recovery time maintains diversity by discouraging selective grazing. It can also minimise soil compaction as the impact is evenly dispersed over the paddock allowing the soil time to recover.

Note: Be aware of potential impacts on faunal species and monitor practices carefully

Burning

1. Avoid burning during dry months.
2. Burn approximately every three to five years depending on seasons and grassland condition.
3. Introduce 'cool' burns after good rain, usually in spring.
4. Burn in a mosaic pattern – patch burn, leaving a substantial area unburnt.
5. Control weeds after a burn.
6. Keep records of burns.

Patch burning is beneficial for both plants and animals. The unburnt area acts as a seed source for plant regeneration and a vital food source and refuge for animals both before and after the fire, and from predators. These areas also reduce run-off and erosion by minimising the amount of bare ground present after the burn.

Control of weeds

1. Encourage a dense, native ground cover to minimise weed invasion.
2. Minimise soil disturbance as weed seeds are present in the soil and disturbance creates the right conditions for germination.
3. Control weed infestations by using selective herbicides at appropriate strength.
4. Avoid boom spraying in native grasslands, use selective herbicides.
5. Monitor weed invasion and control.
6. Thoroughly clean all machinery before moving to avoid the spread of weeds.
7. Learn to recognise weeds in your area.
8. Ensure materials are sourced from areas free of declared weeds.



Left: The invasive weed, Lippia, impacts on native grasslands.
Photo: Sheldon Navie