

# Guidelines for Recreational Use of Horses on Crown Range



**Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations**  
*Range Branch*



## Foreword

The rangelands of British Columbia are diverse and extend from the United States boundary right up to the far north of the province. Rangelands include many different ecosystems, including: the low-elevation grasslands, ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir forests of the southern Interior; the lodgepole pine forests of the interior plateau; the mixed boreal and aspen forests of the Peace River region; and the high-elevation subalpine and alpine zones.

Wetland and streamside riparian plant communities that are found in these areas are dominated by grasses, grass-like plants (sedges, rushes, etc.), shrubs and trees. The vistas are spectacular and it is no surprise that many people are attracted to B.C. by the scenery and the opportunity to enjoy outdoor activities.



The Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations administers and manages domestic livestock grazing (for cattle, horses and sheep) and guide-outfitter use of horses on Crown rangelands, through long-term grazing leases, grazing licences and short-term grazing permits.

**Grazing leases** administered under *the Land Act* are most common on lower-elevation grasslands and are often adjacent to deeded land. Some also exist as small parcels in forested ecosystems. Like private landowners, holders of grazing leases have the right to control public access on their leased areas. (An explanation of grazing leases is available online at the link below.<sup>1</sup>)

**Grazing licences** and **grazing permits** are administered under the *Range Act* and often cover very large areas, such as an entire watershed. However, holders of these two types of land tenure do not have the right to control or limit recreational access.

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[https://www.for.gov.bc.ca/hra/publications/legislation\\_policy/GrazingLeases\\_OffroadVehicleRecreation\\_FLNRO\\_Factsheet.pdf](https://www.for.gov.bc.ca/hra/publications/legislation_policy/GrazingLeases_OffroadVehicleRecreation_FLNRO_Factsheet.pdf)

British Columbia's Crown rangelands provide livestock forage and are essential to the sustainability of the livestock industry. Rangelands contribute to B.C.'s biodiversity and provide water and habitat for multiple species (including most of those listed as "at risk" in the province). Aesthetics and carbon sequestration are other important benefits.

Increasing demands to accommodate multiple uses of B.C.'s rangelands (including botanical gathering, fishing, hunting, timber harvesting, wildlife viewing and the recreational use of horses) are increasing pressures on the landbase. Balancing livestock grazing with these other uses requires planning, education and communication.

This document provides guidelines and safety tips for the recreational use of horses on rangeland, to help maintain the health and vigour of these areas, minimize conflicts with other users and reduce impacts related to the recreational use of horses.



**A trail ride on B.C. rangelands**

## **Horses then and now**

*"Wherever man has left his footprint in the long ascent from barbarism to civilization we will find the hoof print of the horse beside it." – John Moore*

The horse has played a principal role in British Columbia's history. Simon Fraser recorded the presence of horses in what would become B.C. on his first exploration of the Fraser River in 1808 and it is thought that aboriginal people may have acquired horses as early as 1740.

In the 19th century, horses were in use (and also living ferally) in nearly all regions of the territory. In the present day, it's easy to forget that horses — through their willingness to do our “heavy lifting” — have shaped both our story and their own.

Although the horse has today, for the most part, outlived its centuries-old working partnership with humans, its value endures. The equine industry is the fourth-largest agricultural commodity in British Columbia, generating over \$740 million in economic activity. Within that industry, there are still many people who feel that the best way to get into the backcountry is on horseback and they actively pursue that activity, recreationally and commercially.

People who use horses to travel through our wild spaces enjoy a unique privilege and also have a responsibility to that land. Most of B.C.'s rangelands evolved over millennia in the absence of large herds of grazing animals and as a result, these rangelands require careful traffic and grazing management. The land, its native plants and the rules that have been put in place to protect them must be respected. All of us must be responsible stewards of our grasslands.

## Planning your trip or event

About 94% of British Columbia consists of provincial Crown land and the public should expect reasonable access to this land for recreational purposes. That being said, much of B.C.'s Crown land is currently under some form of tenure or management agreement (e.g. grazing leases), so recreational users need to know which industrial or commercial activities occur in areas they want to explore.

Signs displaying two-way radio frequencies are usually posted on resource roads and may indicate the presence of industrial vehicle traffic or nearby logging activity. All users of these roads must follow established safety protocols.

Although the recreational use of horses is not prohibited on Crown range, there are important considerations that riders must take into account. For example, it is an offence under *the Forest and Range Practices Act* for anyone to drive (herd) or **graze** livestock on Crown range, **cut** Crown timber or **construct** corrals or new trails. That means that people riding horses for recreational purposes must provide their own horse feed when travelling on Crown range overnight or for extended periods.

This feed must be clean (weed-free) and preferably come from a local source. Dehydrated feed cubes or pellets are preferred. However, hydration is critical when using this type of feed and horses must also be accustomed to eating it.

In some remote areas where recreational use is light and the forage resource has not been tenured to a guide-outfitter or ranching operation, the range program may waive the requirement for recreational riders to pack in feed for their horses. Horses are allowed to graze in these cases, but care must be taken to not overgraze or compact the soils in open meadows. Overuse of these areas may lead to closures or a requirement to pack in feed, so it is in the interest of riders to use these sites lightly.



When planning your trip, you should consult maps to determine the status of the land where you'll be riding and check whether you need permission to travel through or camp in a specific area.<sup>2</sup> FrontCounter BC<sup>3</sup> should be your first point of contact, since staff can provide basic information or direct you to an appropriate range officer or recreation officer who can provide more detailed information.

Holders of grazing leases have the right to quiet enjoyment of their leased land and they typically will want to know who is passing through their tenure. You may come across signs that indicate the land's status, any current closures or other rules concerning access. These regulations help clarify legal liability and also assist the ministry with enforcement if any rules are violated.

If you're contemplating a larger horse gathering or event on Crown land, you can help prevent potential issues and make your event a success by first contacting your local Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations office to discuss your plans. (For example, you may be required to obtain permits for the event.)

If ministry staff are advised of your intentions, they can tell you about any active timber harvesting in the area. They can also provide the names of range tenure holders that you will be asked to contact regarding your horse gathering, since your event might disrupt cattle movements or conflict with grazing schedules.

If you are travelling to British Columbia from another province or country, there are a few other rules you will need to follow. Do not transport straw or hay across provincial or international boundaries, since this could introduce invasive plant species to B.C.

Begin feeding dehydrated feed cubes or pellets to your horses several days before your trip starts, so that any existing weed seeds in their digestive systems pass through before you cross the border. Also make sure that your vehicles and trailers are free of weeds, mud and seeds. Animals should be groomed and any seeds or burs should be removed and burned prior to loading up your horses and leaving on your trip.

If you're coming to B.C. from the United States, you must provide health certificates for your horses at the border crossing. See the Canada Food Inspection Agency website for details (<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/>) or phone the Canadian border crossing that you will be using well in advance of your trip.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.sitesandtrailsbc.ca/planning-your-trip/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.frontcounterbc.gov.bc.ca/locations/>

## Best Practices

The following are recommended practices when travelling on Crown range.

### 1. Respect other resource users and avoid conflict

Some common-sense rules of the range:

- Leave gates as you found them. If they were closed, close them again after passing through. If they were open, leave them open.
- Do not disturb grazing domestic animals.
- Do not allow your horses to consume forage allocated to wildlife and licensed users.
- Keep any dogs under control (or leave them at home).



**Obey signs. Leave gates as you find them.**



**Give cattle a wide berth.**

## 2. Think about safety

Safety on the range is specifically addressed in another ministry brochure<sup>4</sup>, but every recreational rider needs to be aware of potential hazards on rangelands. They include animals (wildlife, feral horses, bulls, protective mother cows), vehicle traffic, logging activity, fences (conventional barbed-wire and electric), and standing dead trees — to name just a few.



**Feral horse herds are common on Crown range.**

Park your vehicle and horse trailer in a designated parking area. If such an area does not exist, park in a way that you do not obstruct gates or roadways. Remember that large industrial equipment may be driven along roads and trails on Crown land and they need room to manoeuvre.

## 3. Do not disturb wildlife

Wildlife adds greatly to the outdoor experience and B.C. has an abundance and variety of wildlife species. Here are some things to keep in mind as you travel on rangelands:

- View wildlife from a distance. Give animals a wide berth and always allow them an avenue of escape.
- Steer clear of nesting birds. You will normally be OK if you follow existing trails.
- Large carnivores such as bears can be hazardous, particularly if you accidentally come across a food cache or a mother and her offspring. Watch out for evidence of a recent kill, such as odours or scavenging birds such as vultures, ravens and bald eagles.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.for.gov.bc.ca/hra/brochures/SafetyOnTheRange\\_Brochure\\_Web.pdf](https://www.for.gov.bc.ca/hra/brochures/SafetyOnTheRange_Brochure_Web.pdf)

- Wild ungulates (particularly bison, elk and moose) during the breeding season or with their young can be aggressive, so give them a wide berth.
- Keep your horses away from animal dens and burrows.



**The adult birds in this active Osprey nest may be disturbed by people moving nearby.**



**This fawn is hiding in a grassland area, but is not lost or abandoned. Don't approach it.**





**This Sandhill Crane chick was seen in an open meadow surrounded by pine forest.**

#### **4. Respect range developments and research installations**

The fences and water developments that you may come across on provincial Crown rangeland are the property of the Crown and are necessary for livestock management and protection of resource values. Maintenance obligations typically fall on the range tenure holder, so it is important to not damage these structures.

In some cases, debris barriers are used to stop livestock moving into riparian areas and restrict access to sensitive landscape features. They are not made of “abandoned” wood and therefore must not be cut or dismantled. Do not breach or cut fences. Use gates when moving from pasture to pasture and always leave the gates as you found them (open or closed).



**Rail fences and debris barriers are considered to be range developments and should not be touched.**

Range reference areas are fenced to exclude livestock grazing and, in some cases, wild ungulates. They are not corrals. In these areas, horses can interfere with research plots, damage plants, compact soils and introduce invasive plant species.



**These rectangular, fenced areas are not corrals. They are research plots and are marked with identification plates.**

## **5. Prevent the introduction and spread of invasive plant species**

Invasive plant species are a major concern on rangelands. Do your part to prevent their spread.

- Before you leave for your trip, thoroughly clean your vehicle and horse trailer so you don't transfer weeds, seeds or parts of plants to new areas.
- Stay out of weed patches, especially weeds with burs that will adhere to your animals.
- Groom your animals regularly and properly dispose of any seeds or burs by burning them or bagging and landfilling them.
- Stay clear of areas that have been spot-treated with herbicides. These may be marked with signs and/or flagging tape.
- Only use local, clean (weed-free) hay or, preferably, dehydrated cubes or pellets when overnighting or going on longer pack trips.

## **6. Limit your footprint**

Most organized horse recreation groups in British Columbia subscribe to "leave no trace" guidelines, which include the following:

- Don't litter. ("Pack it in, pack it out.")
- Don't cut trees or pound nails or spikes into trees, not even to temporarily hang event signs. Nails left in trees create hazards for forest workers and mill workers, and "spiking" is an offence under *the Forest and Range Practices Act*.
- Use designated fire pits if they're available and limit the size of your campfires. Information about the maximum legal size of campfires and current fire restrictions is available online at [www.bcwildfire.ca](http://www.bcwildfire.ca)

- Stay on established trails where they exist. It is better to have one narrow, defined trail than numerous wide and dispersed trails. Respect areas containing sensitive soils, such as riparian areas, stream crossings, and subalpine and alpine regions.



**Rail fences may be used to block horse and cattle access to riparian areas and wetlands, since soils in these areas can be easily damaged by hoofs.**

## **7. Watering and feeding your horses**

Depending on the temperature and the level of exertion, your horse will need 35 to 45 litres of good-quality water per day. If you're feeding dehydrated cubes or pellets to your horse, its water intake will be higher. On rangelands, water is often provided in metal troughs. Use these facilities where possible.



**This water trough is equipped with a float valve to prevent overflow and an escape ladder for small mammals.**

In most cases, you will be expected to provide your own clean (weed-free) feed for your horse. In some districts, limited horse grazing may be allowed. If this is the case, it is recommended that animals be either hobbled or picketed with a 15-metre tether and remain there for no longer than eight hours at a time.



During the first three to four hours, a horse will graze fairly continuously. It will first select grasses and then switch to forbs (broad-leaved herbaceous plants). Tethered horses tend to not move around much, so soil compaction will not be an issue if the grazing circle is used only once per grazing season and grazing is limited to no more than eight hours at a time. Care must be taken to ensure that tethered horses do not get tangled up and injure themselves.

## 8. Firearms

Recreationists may wish to carry a firearm when they are travelling in the backcountry, especially where bears are present or when they will be camping overnight. Familiarize yourself with and follow federal and provincial regulations concerning the licensing, carrying and safe use of firearms.

Americans are advised that they are not permitted to bring handguns or bear spray into Canada.

## 9. Use of recreation sites

The Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations operates a network of recreation sites in British Columbia. Detailed information is available at <http://www.sitesandtrailsbcc.ca/planning-your-trip/>



**Rules are often posted at recreation sites.**

Recreation sites have common rules that set out fee schedules, occupancy limits, prohibitions against grazing and fire restrictions. It is also unlawful to cut grass for hay, cut trees, drive nails or spikes into trees and construct corrals.



In addition to the above common rules, a ministry Recreation Officer may post specific rules for the use of a particular recreation site or trail, and these rules are backed up by provincial law. They may include:

- restrictions on where horses may be ridden, tethered or picketed
- mandatory use of corrals
- prohibitions on the use of electric fences or highlining
- a requirement for horse owners to provide their own horse feed



**These newly constructed corrals are in use at Lundbom Lake Recreation Site.**

## Afterword

British Columbia has millions of hectares of accessible rangelands for your recreational enjoyment.

These guidelines provide a good overview of how to avoid potential problems and some tips for the safe and enjoyable use of this precious resource.



## Organizations representing horseback riders

Horse Council B.C. <http://www.hcbc.ca>

Back Country Horsemen of B.C. <http://bchorsemen.org>

Leave No Trace Canada <http://www.leavenotrace.ca/home>

Endurance Riders Association of B.C. <http://erabc.com>

EQ Trails Association <http://eqtrail.webs.com>

B.C. Competitive Trail Riders Association <http://www.bcctra.ca>

## Other Resources

Range Branch (Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations):

<https://www.for.gov.bc.ca/hra/>

Leave No Trace (outdoor skills and ethics for backcountry horse use):

<http://www.bchw.org/Int/Intbk.htm>

## Front Counter BC Locations and contact information

<http://www.frontcounterbc.ca/locations/>

Call toll-free: 1 877 855-3222

Email: [FrontCounterBC@gov.bc.ca](mailto:FrontCounterBC@gov.bc.ca)

Location	Telephone Number
100 Mile House *	250 395-7800
Burns Lake *	250 692-2200
Campbell River	250 286-9300
Castlegar	250 365-8600
Chilliwack	250 702-5700
Clearwater	250 587-6700
Cranbrook *	250 426-1766
Dawson Creek *	250 784-1200
Fort Nelson *	250 774-5511
Fort St. James	250 996-5200
Fort St. John	250 787-3415
Haida Gwaii	250 559-6200
Kamloops *	250 828-4131
Mackenzie	250 997-2200
Merritt *	250 378-8400
Nanaimo	250 751-7200
Port Alberni	250 731-3000
Port McNeill	250 956-5000
Powell River	250 485-0700
Prince George *	250 561-3479
Quesnel *	250 992-4400
Revelstoke	250 837-7611
Smithers *	250 847-7356
Squamish	250 898-2100
Surrey	250 586-4434
Terrace	250 638-5100
Vanderhoof *	250 567-6363
Vernon *	250 558-1700
Williams Lake *	250 398-4574

\* A range officer or range agrologist is located in this office.

Sample sign at a Ministry of Forests, lands and Natural Resource Operations recreation site:

# Horse Use In The Lundbom Lake Area

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Horse use in the Lundbom Lake Area is subject to the following standards of conduct:

- Horses are only permitted in the corral area of Lundbom Lake West Recreation Site and are not permitted beyond the main kiosk.
- Horses are not permitted in the boat launch area, on the lake shore, or in the lake.
- The use of horse corrals is mandatory and is on a first come first serve basis.
- The use of electric fences and/or high lining is not permitted.
- Horse users must provide their own feed.
- Grazing is not permitted inside or outside of the developed portion of the Recreation Site.
- Horses are not permitted in Lundbom Lake East or Marquart Lake Recreation Sites.

Forest and Range Practices Act  
Forest Recreation Regulations  
Section 20(3)



Recreation Sites  
and Trails BC