

RANGELAND RECOVERY

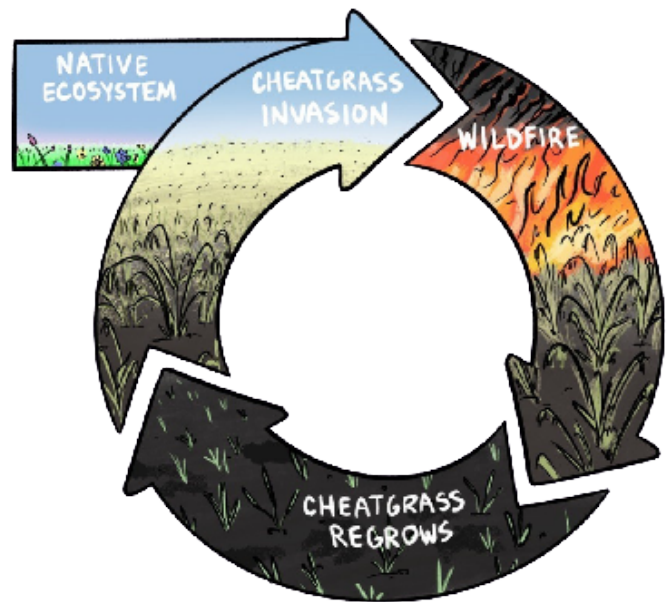
Fire in the Rangeland

When wildfires reach rangelands they can cause significant disturbance and create opportunities for invasives to dominate ecosystems, outcompeting native perennials. Though invasive annual grasses can provide forage for a short period of time, they dry out and become unpalatable quickly, ultimately reducing the availability of late-season forage.

Rangeland wildfire can result in livestock death, reduced forage amounts, and damage to structures (e.g. fences). After the Carlton Complex in 2014, many Okanogan County ranchers were unable to stay in business, critically damaging the county's economy. Luckily, there are interventions to disrupt harmful fire cycles in rangelands and reestablish native perennial grasses to the landscape.

Timing, flexibility, and closely monitored, adaptive management are key to recovery success. Pay attention to how the landscape is recovering, react to what you observe on the land. Active stewardship is essential in this landscape, especially when the goal is to get livestock back on the land and reestablish native grasses.

Fires clear the way for invasive plants, like cheatgrass, to dominate once diverse ecosystems



Graphic: Ben Slyngstad, USGS

Recovery Practices

Seeding

Seeding with native grasses after a fire, when done at the right time and interval, can be an effective way to disrupt cheatgrass/fire cycles, regenerate forage for livestock, and mitigate soil erosion. Seeding is especially recommended in sites where invasive annual grasses were present before the fire. For recommendations on site selection, preparation, and seed species, download WSU Extension's [Seeding After Fire](#) guide.

Closely Managed Grazing

Allowing land to recover after a fire is key for young plants to grow back. Disturbance while the land is recovering can lead to further erosion and damage to the plants and soils. Severely burned grasslands may need to be excluded from grazing when possible to allow grasses to regenerate. In other cases, grazing may be viable but for a shorter period of time or on a smaller pasture. Often, grazing leases will have opportunities to set up deferred grazing, ranchers may also be eligible for federal assistance from the Farm Service Agency. Explore FSA's [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#).

Erosion Control

Erosion and flooding becomes an emergent risk after a wildfire. Implementing flood and erosion control measures can help mitigate against further damage to rangeland. Check out AfterTheFireWA.org's [Erosion Control](#) page for examples of erosion control practices.

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Temporary Feeding

Work with your community and partners to develop a plan to support temporary feeding for impacted livestock owners. See below for information on federal livestock recovery programs.

Fence Replacement

Conservation Districts help landowners, farmers, and ranchers to recover after a fire. In some circumstances, Conservation Districts can help replace fences for landowners in their District areas. Reach out to your local district and ask about cost share options.

Virtual Fencing

Washington has begun piloting virtual fencing projects as an alternative option to rebuilding fence after a fire. **Virtual fencing**, which uses satellite-connected collars, allows ranchers to have more flexibility to exclude burned and other sensitive areas from grazing without replacing expensive fencing.



*Cows wearing virtual fence collars in the Kittitas Valley.
Photo: Allisa Carlson, SCC.*

Get Support

Washington State Conservation Commission Disaster Assistance Program (DAP)

DAP provides short-term disaster recovery financial assistance for farmers and ranchers that sustain physical damage to their land or operation or incur expenses as a result of a natural disaster.

Conservation Districts

Conservation districts work locally in their service areas to provide technical and financial assistance to landowners. When a wildfire damages agricultural land, they often help with fence replacement, erosion control, and reseedling.

Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)

NRCS has several **disaster recovery programs** available to provide financial assistance to eligible farmers, ranchers, and landowners. They are also able to provide technical assistance as needed.

Farm Service Agency (FSA)

FSA **disaster assistance programs** cover a breadth of landowner needs post-fire, including forage and grazing, livestock mortality, financial support, and farmland damage.



*Damage caused by the Whitney Fire in Lincoln County.
Photo: Lincoln Conservation District.*