

Species at risk habitat opportunities
ON LIVESTOCK FARMS



Best Management Practices that

PROTECT

**PROTECTING EXISTING HABITAT IS THE EASIEST AND MOST COST-EFFECTIVE WAY TO HELP SPECIES AT RISK (SAR).
REDUCING THREATS TO HABITAT CAN RESULT IN SIGNIFICANT BENEFITS TO THE ENVIRONMENT.**

LIVESTOCK WATERING SYSTEMS

Livestock watering systems that remove the need for direct access to surface water are essential to preserving the environment and habitat on farms. By installing an alternate water source for livestock, herds can be fenced out of sensitive aquatic habitats, like streams and ponds. Dedicated watering systems provide high quality drinking water for livestock and improve herd health.

EROSION CONTROL AND IMPROVED STREAM CROSSINGS

Erosion control structures help to keep nutrients and soil on fields and out of waterways. Dedicated stream crossings also help to preserve the sensitive aquatic habitat that many species at risk rely on, while maintaining a safe and effective crossing for moving livestock.

EXCLUSION FENCING

Keeping cattle and other grazing animals from sensitive environmental areas on your farm has many benefits. Not only are woodland areas and aquatic habitat especially sensitive to disturbance, but livestock are at a greater risk of injury. By fencing livestock out of streams and ponds specifically, you can reduce the many risks associated with manure entering waterways.

INVASIVE SPECIES

Control of invasive plant species can be critical to maintaining healthy natural features and habitats on farm. Invasive species out-compete native species, and have an adverse affect on natural environments. Left uncontrolled, dog-strangling vine (an invasive plant in Ontario) can grow rampant in fencerows, short-circuiting electric fences, and may be toxic to some livestock.



Best Management Practices that
ENHANCE

ENHANCING EXISTING HABITAT IS A SIMPLE WAY TO SUPPORT AND STRENGTHEN SPECIES AT RISK POPULATIONS. HABITAT ENHANCEMENTS CAN PROVIDE IMPORTANT BREEDING AND NESTING AREAS AND CAN CONNECT SMALLER HABITAT PATCHES.

NATIVE PLANTING

Planting native grass, shrub, and tree species as buffer strips and windbreaks provides valuable habitat and corridors for many wildlife and species at risk. Not only can these farm features provide much needed habitat and travel cover, they can also provide a host of benefits to the farmer, as well. These types of plantings help to shade livestock and reduce weather stress from wind. They also help to increase soil health and provide valuable erosion control, while improving the biodiversity of plants and pollinators on-farm.

HABITAT STRUCTURES

Livestock farmers are skilled at making their farm comfortable for their herd. They can also have an important role in creating a hospitable environment for species at risk. While there are many activities that can increase the abundance of natural habitat on a farm, habitat structures built to support specific species have proven effective. Barn swallow structures and bat boxes are just two of the structures many farmers are building to help support species at risk.

ROTATIONAL GRAZING

Rotational grazing provides many on-farm benefits. Implementing a rotational grazing system gives your pastures time to regenerate, while also giving grassland birds and other species at risk, the opportunity to nest in these areas. Rotational grazing can also improve forage quality by preventing overgrazing, and reduces the costly need to reseed to rejuvenate pastures as often. An abundance of healthier forage helps to better satisfy the needs of your livestock as well as the needs of many species at risk.

Best Management Practices that

CREATE

CREATING HABITAT CAN BENEFIT SPECIES AT RISK THAT HAVE SPECIALIZED HABITAT NEEDS, ESPECIALLY WHEN THEIR NEEDED HABITAT IS IN SHORT SUPPLY. CREATING HABITAT IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT IN AREAS OF THE PROVINCE WHERE HABITAT HAS BEEN LOST DUE TO SETTLEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT.

NATIVE GRASSLAND PLANTING

Native grasslands are designed to thrive! Planting native grass and wildflower species increases species diversity, which can make your grasslands more resilient to pests, drought, and other stressors. Through the establishment of native grasslands, your farm can provide healthier habitats for species at risk. As an added bonus, native grassland species are prolific in their production of seed and able to thrive on their own once established.

With an abundance of native species, grasslands on your farm can become biodiversity havens, attracting native pollinators and other species that can benefit your farm through valuable pollinator or pest control services. The diversity of flowering plants present in grasslands provides varying blooming periods, which is essential to providing food sources for native pollinators throughout the growing season.

WETLAND RESTORATION

Wetlands on farm can provide valuable services to farmers and to the health of the broader environment. Wetlands have an incredible water holding capacity that collects surface water and filters excess nutrients from runoff water before it enters streams and other water bodies. Wetlands are exceptionally valuable to both plant and animal species at risk, and should be considered a significant ecological asset on the farm landscape. With so little wetland acreage available, it is important to properly maintain or restore wetlands, where possible.

Wetlands provide a habitat haven for many species at risk. With an abundance of food and plant cover, many animal species at risk rely heavily on healthy wetlands to thrive, while some plant species at risk require the specific growing conditions that wetlands offer.

Ryan and Jayne Green started their farm with only ten cattle. At that time, Ryan says that he didn't even know what stewardship was. "I was just doing what I thought was right."

Learning as he went, Ryan developed a deep and personal understanding of stewardship and what it meant on their farm. Through completing several projects with the financial support of the Species at Risk Farm Incentive Program, the knowledge he gained by designing projects is as valuable as the cost-share funding he received to implement them.

"I know things now that I wasn't aware of before, or that I wasn't paying attention to before. I know now about the importance of grasslands for birds and for our farm," admits Ryan. He always had a strong sense of how his farm would be most productive, but hadn't fully appreciated that productivity didn't have to be a trade-off for the natural environment and the species that rely on it.

Through fencing his cattle out of the sensitive features on his farm and implementing a rotational grazing system and alternate watering system for his herd, Ryan is pleased to report that they've seen more birds and wildlife than ever before.

"It feels good that we can work in harmony with nature, and help vulnerable species, like Bobolink, thrive," says Ryan. He recommends implementing Best Management Practices like these on your farm; "take the leap! You get long-term benefits for the cattle, the environment, the landscape, and for your family's health, too".

Photos: Jen Hoesen and Christine Schmalz



The views expressed herein are those of the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Ontario.