Ecological grazing objectives



A healthy native grassland with scattered native tussocks and an open inter-tussock space

The Northern Plains Grasslands (NPG) is one of the most threatened vegetation communities in the state and contains a significant number of threatened flora and fauna, including the critically endangered Plains-wanderer.

All remnants of NPG have experienced some form of agricultural disturbance, most commonly through stock grazing or cultivation.

Though the severity of disturbance varies across the landscape in most instances the disturbance has resulted in increased cover and abundance of weeds.

To maintain the health and function of NPG, Parks Victoria actively manage biomass levels within the reserve with the aim of maintaining an open structure, particularly on red soils.

A healthy grassland consists of native perennial grass tussocks that can provide cover year-round.

An open space between the short compact tussocks is also important as this 'inter-tussock space' is vital for native herbs and wildflowers to be able to re-sprout and germinate.

Many threatened fauna species such as the Plains-wanderer and Hooded scaly-foot also require this open space to forage for food and to navigate through the grasslands.

The timing and intensity of grazing is influenced by what flora and fauna values are present within the grazing area.

Parks Victoria staff will work with contracted graziers to identify the best approach to achieving the desired outcomes.

Parks Victoria has agreements with farmers to graze livestock with the aim of:

Reducing annual grass cover

The proliferation of exotic annual grasses is a major threat to the NPG ecological community.

Annual grasses such a Wild Oats and Rye Grass fill the space between the native perennial tussocks.

The annual grasses also create a layer of ground litter as they die, this ground litter can have a negative impact on many species of flora and fauna.

Maintaining the native tussock structure in an ideal range

Without some form of biomass control, such a grazing, the native tussocks can become too tall and dense *(Figure 1a).*

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An ideal tussock structure can vary depending on the species of native grass, time of year and the habitat requirements of fauna species using that area *(Figure 1b)*.

As a rule, native grass tussocks on red soil should be maintained between 5cm and 20cm in height.

Grazing the native tussocks also helps prevent the tussocks becoming too dense and filling up the inter-tussock space.

Figure 1a – agricultural pasture



Figure 1b – ideal native grassland structure



Images: Schultz N, Keatley M, Antos M, Wong N, Moxham C, Farmilo B, Morgan J (2017). Ecological management and Restoriaion. Vol 18 No 2 March 2017