

*2020-21 Erica's rotation proposal notes re grazing plan*

Climate change has brought higher temperatures early in the year, and it has given us stalled weather systems with late spring rains - the growing season is prolonged for some of the annual grasses and the invasives like rye, mustard, thistle, hemlock.

Germinating rains are tending to be later, but early warmth establishes some grass growth early. This past year we had even germination & good cover by January – the upper pastures are a week or two ahead of the lower pastures – even though grass height was a little low heading into March.

We can anticipate that 2020-21 will be similar based on NOAA climate projections. (We also need to be prepared for a year in which germination is less even, though not likely this year.)

Our grazing plans have been based on shorter springs than what we're experiencing now. We propose to experiment with ways to deal with the changed conditions, and keep more of our horses effectively grazing throughout the year on our allotment.

Shift in strategy for **Forest Meadow**, to allow more grass growth in Spring before grazing, then mow after grazing to reduce hemlock, mustard and thistle when it's in early bloom. Next winter, try for feeding here in early January to trample emerging mustard and thistle – this may be best timing based on experience in other pastures. High percentage of the grasses here are native perennials, but there remains a zone down the middle where mustard, hemlock & thistle are hard to control.

The **Plateau** plant community has shifted fairly dramatically over the past few years – it's been grazed for the month of January and now has little mustard or thistle. The grasses are still mostly annuals, with some perennials, and there's a lot more clover. It doesn't dry down as early as it used to; it's big enough that it rarely gets fully grazed. A prolonged stay here during the growing season this year should open up the ground for more perennials – like the brome & needlegrass that do well in the Sullivan - and encourage the horses to spread out more fully – like they did during the drought years a few years ago. Then we'd give it a long rest through the balance of the growing season and into September, when we truck feed here for knockdown before the rains.

For both these pastures, a shift in the pattern we've been following should help re-balance.

Continued early spring short grazing pass in Sullivan, Plateau, LSR, Beer Can & Lower to reduce annuals in these pastures – oat grass & rye in particular – and favor perennials.

A strategy of temporary sections and incremental grazing in both **Lower Pear Orchard** & the **Beer Can** for re-habbing horses will do a better job of keeping all our horses on grass and aid in fire control – especially by starting in the Lower Pear Orchard earlier in the season.

*EB 9/2/20*