Statement of problem: Within the Crooked Creek Corridor there are mountain meadows heavily infested with timothy with little or no residual of native grasses. By the time cattle are let onto those meadows, first of July, the timothy has become tough. Cattle do not graze upon the timothy infested mountain meadows. Therefor those meadows are a resource not utilized.

Many of the Pryor meadows I have been treating for Canada thistle are infested with timothy.

All these meadows are within a grazing allotment. Cattle are not let onto those allotments until the first of July and the pastures are grazed in the customary rotation.

More than likely the Forest Service sowed these meadows with timothy back in the 1950’s as a way to halt and control erosion. Timothy now dominates some of these meadows, possibly to the exclusion of any native grasses. The meadows burnt during the Red Waffle Fire seem to be free of timothy. The large meadow within the saddle at the head of Crooked Creek seems to be free of timothy.

Though I am very familiar with the meadows in the Crooked Creek Corridor I have not set out to survey and list meadows infested by timothy.

Meadows that are unequivocally infested to a 100% are: Tebbs (named for James V. Tebbs – no one named Tibbs). The Brush Pile Site and East Mill Hollow. Cows to Creek is heavily infested but not 100%. Open areas in Cows to Creek were sown with slender wheatgrass in late fall of 2015.

On the Pryor Mountain Road, west of the north-south running fence line on Commissary Ridge the large meadow south of the road; as a shorthand, we can call this meadow WCR, West of Commissary Ridge. There are various estimates of the size of WCR; but 60 acres is a good starting point.

The cattle are not let onto these meadows until the first of July, and because of the grazing rotation some meadows are not grazed until later.

By the first of July the timothy is waist high or higher and in bloom. The stems of the grass have becoming extremely tough. The cattle will not, perhaps can not eat the maturing timothy. The cattle will walk through the infested meadow trampling down the timothy stems. Good, the stems become litter and eventually humus. The cattle get no nourishment. If those meadows were mine and it were my cattle, I would be losing money. In order for me to make money off these weed infested meadows (Yes, timothy is a weed!) I would turn my cattle onto those meadows while the timothy was young and tender.

Why would the Forest Service not allow those meadows to be grazed before the first day of July?

The concern is that the soil in the meadows has not become dry. Yes, there is a high clay content in these soils; and, if wet, the clay would be compacted. We know that 20 ft snow drifts on the Pryor Mountain Road persisted until the 25th of May ten years ago. Those snow drifts had melted away long before the end of May in 2016. Springtime is dryer and warmer. In 2016 there was no water in Tebbs Creek, usually a perineal stream. Now, by early June, the meadows in the Crooked Creek Corridor are dry enough for the cattle to graze.

You might fear harming native grasses by grazing too early in the spring. Timothy is not a native grass; it is a weed. Its shallow fibrous roots form a sod-like structure that other grasses, though doubtful that they are still present, can not penetrate.

This approach to grazing the timothy meadows early in can be started in June 2017. There is enough already known about the infested meadows to begin this program now, prior to doing a formal survey. A survey is needed to serve as a baseline; but, that can be done in May. This would coincide with the time the range management/weed team is treating the cheatgrass on Crooked Creek Road.

It can be done, just do it!

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Smooth brome is another non-native invasive grass that was likely sown along the roadsides in the Pryors. Consideration of this weed has to start with a survey.

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Canada thistle

The emphasis of this change in grazing practices is to be placed upon the timothy. In the Pryors, Canada thistle goes along with the invasive non-native grass.

Back in 2010, Canada thistle infested all these timothy meadows. Then the Canada thistle was growing in dense circles as is often depicted as typical for Canada thistle infestations. While in full fuzz stage, Canada thistle was growing on the edge of the Crooked Creek Road. I have photos from that time showing the Canada thistle at road edge at Tebbs Hollow and the Brush Pile Site.

By 2014, the Canada thistle was no longer restricted to the ever-enlarging circles. It became uniformly spread throughout a meadow, everywhere there was full sunlight. Those circles of Canada thistle are no longer present within the meadows. In the riparian site in Bridge Hollow there are two circles that can still be seen.

WCR (West of Commissary Ridge) is nearly 100% timothy with Canada thistle. By July the Canada thistle becomes hidden by the timothy.

I began treating the Canada thistle in most of the Crooked Creek Road and Pryor Mountain Road in 2013 and in four years have achieved good control. With continued treatment Canada thistle could be eliminated from these sites.

Cattle relish Canada thistle. They will at least top the tender growth. If left on a pasture too long, they eat the Canada thistle to the ground. Of course, two weeks after the cattle are off the pasture, the Canada thistle sprouts are up by four inches. That is the best time to dribble 5 ml of an herbicide solution onto the thistle. I have learned to work with the cattle whenever possible.

My point is that allowing the cattle to graze in early June on selected timothy infested meadows will also help with the control of Canada thistle.

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This seems to be a good reference; although it counters my argument that timothy be treated as a noxious, invasive non-native grass (weed).

<https://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/plants/graminoid/phlpra/all.html>

Submitted on Thursday 05 January 2017 by:

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