

## RURAL ISSUES - Grazing for fire safety

controlling fire in timbered areas of Western Australia through what is called their 'mosaic burning' program is a lesson to all managers of native forests in Australia.

Regular high impact grazing for short spells in a controlled fashion in native forests actually simulates the positive benefits of mosaic burning. Controlled grazing in this way in a 'forward defence' role outside the farm fence can reduce not only the intensity of the fire but the degree of ember attack the forest fire can develop. Grazing as a form of fire management in this situation will also help keep the forest fire a low intensity fire. This has multiple benefits for ecology.

**Good grazing, not over grazing:** David McLean states, 'What we are talking about with the use of grazing as a part of fire management is good grazing where the animals are not left in a set-stocking arrangement and allowed to overgraze the paddocks and eat them bare.'

'The key with the use of animals is to have a controlled system of high impact grazing with a high density of animals for a short duration. If you do it this way you will ensure that you are not losing carbon from the soil - as would happen if you ploughed the firebreak - and it means that the root systems and the organic matter is still left in the soil.'



David McLean, of RCS in Yepoon in Qld, says that 'Using grazing animals in this way will help reduce the fuel load in a way that fits in with the farm's commercial plan'.

'Controlled grazing will also mean that the rainfall use in the area of the firebreak will be better once the fire season is over and the plants will recover to full productivity faster,' he says.

The use of animals to eat down the fuel load means that ploughing can be avoided, so the risk of wind

or water erosion in the area is minimised.

**Conclusion:** An appropriate grazing plan can provide an effective tool in fire management on your property. No one should think it is the only tool. It can, and should be, used in conjunction with other ways of controlling fire. ■



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