Wildlife and Fences Interpretive Trail

On the prairies, fences are as common as cattle. They serve several important functions:
- define property boundaries
- control domestic livestock
- protect drivers from collisions with animals

On their darker side; they act as barriers, restricting the movement of wildlife.

Fences can trap, injure and even kill birds, reptiles, amphibians, and larger mammals. Animal damage to fences can be costly and frustrating to landowners.

There are wildlife friendly fences available. They are designed to prevent injury and death and allow wildlife to move across the landscape. Many of these enhancements are low cost and, by reducing the need to repair fences damaged by wildlife, they are economical over the long term.

Along this self-guided walk you will see the typical fence construction and some of the alternative fence designs that are more wildlife friendly.

Stop 1: Typical four strand barbed wire fence

Most fences that crisscross the prairies consist of four strands of barbed wire.

Hazards to wildlife:
- The bottom wire 25 to 35 cm from the ground makes it impassible for pronghorn and deer to go under.
- The top wire about 120 cm above the ground is dangerous to animals who can snag, become tangled or pull the wire off when jumping over.

Stop 2: Underpass fence with goat bar

The underpass fence allows easy passage for wildlife, while still controlling cattle and horses.

The advantages to wildlife are:
- The two bottom wires are gathered into a slit in a length of PVC pipe to create a higher opening (40 to 50 cm above the ground), so animals can crawl under.
- The underpass can be permanent or temporary; you can remove the PVC pipe during times when the bottom wire needs to be lower (e.g.: to prevent young calves from escaping).
- You can use underpasses at known crossing points, at corners and intermittently along the fence line.
Stop 3: Smooth wire fence

The ideal wildlife friendly fence is highly visible and allows animals to pass both over and under it with relative ease.

Features of the wildlife friendly fence are:

- Double stranded smooth wire 45 cm above the ground allows easier passage under.
- Smooth top wire at 100 cm above the ground allows easier passage over.
- Increased fence visibility and reduced chances of animals snagging a foot or leg when jumping over.
- Second from the top wire is lowered to reduce chances of animals getting tangled between the top wires.
- Vinyl reflectors placed on the top wire make the fence even more visible, especially to song birds, grouse and waterfowl.

Stop 4: Underpass adjusted fence

An alternative to PVC pipe is to permanently or temporarily staple the bottom wire up to create a bigger gap. This allows ranchers and farmers to:

- Modify their existing fences at known wildlife crossing points.
- Create an adjustable fence section where the wire heights can be adjusted as needed.
- Lower the top wire for elk and deer to jump over and lift the bottom wire so that pronghorn can crawl under with relative ease.
- Save time and money by not having to repair fences broken during animal collisions.

Stop 5: Open gate

One of the easiest ways to allow wildlife passage is to leave gates open when livestock are not present in the pasture. This is especially critical in winter, when snow can build up along fence lines and restrict wildlife movement. Key suggestions for using the open gate method:

- Leave gates open at fence corners, as the existing fences channel wildlife.
- Landowners who are concerned about trespassing can place signs that indicate the gate is open for wildlife passage and information on how to obtain permission for access.

Information

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Alberta Conservation Association
ab-conservation.com
Alberta Fish & Game Association
afga.org
Alberta Parks
albertaparks.ca

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
Additional information about wildlife fencing alternatives is found in the following documents:

Wildlife Friendly Fencing
www.multisar.ca/documents/fencingBMP.pdf


To help the environment, please return this information sheet to the Visitor Centre or place it in the box found at the last fence section—Thank you!