

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES BULLETIN

Fencing to Contain Horses on Yukon Government Grazing Agreements

The purpose of this bulletin is to provide fencing construction guidelines and specifications that will contain horses on Yukon Government grazing agreements and help keep wildlife safe. Horses are the most common livestock found on YG grazing agreements. Mixing of horses and wildlife has low potential for disease transmission therefore horse containment fencing should allow easy and safe passage for wildlife. Although the purpose of this Best Management Practice is to recommend fencing on grazing agreements, YG endorses these recommendations for any situation where horses need to be contained.



Grazing Policy and YESAB Review

- YG grazing agreements grant the exclusive right to graze livestock within a specified area.
- Containment of livestock on YG grazing agreement areas is required because livestock at large can be hazardous to traffic and a nuisance.
- Grazing agreements require fencing to be in place unless natural terrain (e.g. steep slopes and waterbodies) provides containment or there are no roads or other land users nearby.
- Under the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act (YESAA), fence construction triggers an environmental and socioeconomic assessment that can determine fencing specifications for new grazing agreement applications. Fencing specifications from YESAB reviews may become part of the grazing agreement document.

Wildlife and fences

Fences can block wildlife access to good habitat, such as wetlands, or block game trails. Wildlife (animals and birds) can be injured or killed when they collide with fences or become tangled in wire. Animal damage to fences can be expensive to repair and result in livestock at large. Livestock and wildlife benefit from good fence design.

Deer, elk and moose are capable of jumping fences. Deer and elk jump with their hind legs forward; if the top strands are too high, too loose or too close together the animal can get hung up. Deer often prefer to pass under a fence. There is a higher probability of wildlife being injured while crossing barbed wire compared to crossing smooth wire. Problems arise with fences that allow females to jump over but not their young. Caribou do not jump fences but can still be injured or killed if they collide with them.

Fences will cause problems for wildlife if they are:

- **Too high to jump,**
- **Too low to crawl under,**
- **Difficult to see,**
- **Create a complete barrier, or**
- **Are poorly constructed or maintained with loose wires.**



Fence types recommended for horse containment on grazing agreements

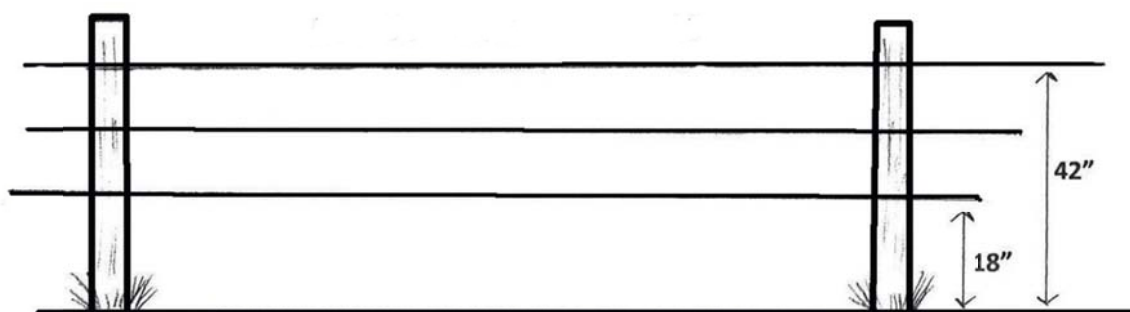
- Post and wire strand,
- Post and rail,
- Russell, and
- Electric.

Specifications for recommended fence types:

Post and wire strand fences

Three strands will contain horses successfully; two strands might not. If the top strand is no higher than 42" and the lowest wire at least 18" from the ground, wildlife will be able to go over or under the fence. Smooth wire is more expensive than barbed wire, but is less likely to injure horses or entangle wildlife. At least the top and bottom strands should be smooth wire. This can be high tensile smooth wire or twisted barbless wire. Wildlife will see the fence more easily if visibility tape or markers are applied to the top wire.

Treated wooden posts will last longer than natural posts. Metal posts are also durable and easy to install. Posts should be close enough to each other to maintain tension; taut wire is much safer than loose strands. Do not staple wire to trees. The irregular alignment of wire attached to trees is difficult to see for humans and wildlife. The *BC Agriculture Fencing Handbook* provides detailed specifications for wire strand fencing.



3-Strand Wire Fence



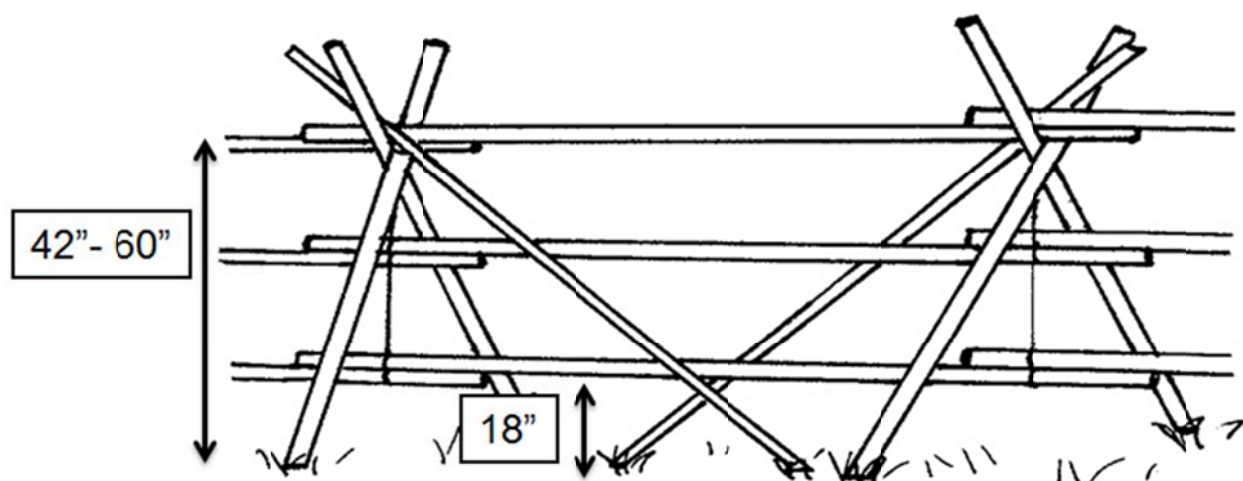
Post and rail fences

This design has wood rails instead of wire between the posts. Three rails or less are recommended, with two-rail fencing preferred. If the top rail is no higher than 42" and the lowest rail/wire at least 18" from the ground, wildlife will be able to go over or under the fence. Post and rail fences can be an inexpensive option if wood rails are available locally.

Rail fences can also have a top rail with wires below. A strand of electric wire on the top rail will discourage horses from pushing and chewing on the wood.

Russell fences

This type of fence is constructed by suspending rails between crossed log supports. Wire is used to tie the supports together and to hang the rails. The top rail should be 42"- 60" high and the bottom rail at least 18" from the ground. Russell fences are solid and highly visible.



Russell fence



Fence types not recommended for horse containment on grazing agreements

Barbed wire fences

Although barbed wire fences are inexpensive and effective at containment, they are dangerous for livestock and wildlife. Consider upgrading to smooth wire from barbed wire when replacement time rolls around.

Page wire / chain link fences

These types of fencing, which create a total barrier for wildlife, will only be approved for grazing agreements in exceptional circumstances. This type of fencing is expensive and should only be used to a maximum height of 42 inches.

Special use fences

Electric fences

Because this type of fencing typically excludes or deters wildlife, it is not recommended for perimeter fencing. It could be used as temporary fencing to restrict livestock from environmentally sensitive areas or to manage rotational grazing to improve pasture management.

The top wire should be no higher than 42” with the bottom at least 10” from the ground. Use visibility tape or markers since electric fence wire is lightweight and difficult to see. While electric fencing is relatively inexpensive and is effective for horse containment, you need to inspect it frequently to ensure it is working.

Natural tree (or ‘drift’) fencing

This type of containment is not permitted for perimeter fencing on grazing agreements because it does not provide reliable, long-term containment of horses. However there are some situations and locations on grazing agreements where piled trees provide suitable livestock containment, while allowing wildlife passage. These management conditions would be included in the grazing agreement document.



Gates and crossings

Gates must be constructed in grazing agreement fencing wherever fencing crosses a road or trail. Gates must be easy to open and left unlocked. Openings in fencing that allow people to pass through or over a fence while restricting livestock can be considered where fencing crosses trails. Whenever horses are absent from a grazing agreement, gates should be left open to allow wildlife passage. Also, top fence rails can be dropped every few hundred feet on unused grazing areas.

Visibility and fence maintenance corridors

Highly visible fences create fewer problems for livestock and wildlife than less visible fences. Fence visibility can be increased by using a top rail, high-visibility wire, flagging or other visual markers. When constructing fencing through forest, enough trees and brush should be cleared to allow passage of a vehicle or ATV for fence maintenance and to ensure that livestock and wildlife can see the fence. Fence corridors should not exceed the width necessary for fence maintenance.

For more information about fencing on grazing agreements, contact the Yukon government's Grazing Management Coordinator at 667-3698 (Whitehorse) or 1-800-661-0408 X3698.

Reference materials

BC Agriculture Fencing Handbook: www.agf.gov.bc.ca/resmgmt/publist/300Series/307000-1.pdf

