

HEAVY USE AREAS FOR LIVESTOCK



SKAGIT
CONSERVATION DISTRICT
SOIL • WATER • WOODLAND

Muddy conditions can make chores more difficult and expose livestock to health risks. Mud harbors bacteria, fungal organisms and other pathogens that cause livestock diseases such as abscesses, scratches, rain scald or thrush. Mud is also damaging to the environment by causing runoff of sediment which is detrimental to aquatic life.



Here are some steps to decide what is best for your property:

Choose the Right Location

1. **Location:** Higher ground and away from wetlands or any surface water flows, convenient to your barn, manure storage and feeding area for chore efficiency.
2. **Surroundings:** Vegetation barrier in these buffer areas will act as a natural filtration system to reduce sediment and contaminants washed from the sacrifice area.
3. **Size:** of a sacrifice area can vary from that of a generous box stall, such as 20' x 20', to that of a long, narrow enclosure where animals can move about to get some exercise. The size and shape of the sacrifice area will depend on the types of animals needing to be confined and their temperament.

The amount of land you have available and your soil type may have a bearing on the size of your sacrifice area.



Create A Confinement/Sacrifice Area

A **confinement area** is a gravel, concrete, or hog fuel area that is used to contain animals and keep them off pasture from late fall through early spring (October through March).

A **sacrifice area** is a small enclosure, such as a corral, run or pen, which is meant to be your animal's outdoor living quarters. You are giving up the use of this small portion of land (previously a grazing area) for the benefit of the rest of your pastures. Animals should be confined to the sacrifice area during the rainy season and when your pastures become overgrazed. It is also useful for separating or confining animals to control the amount of grass consumed on a daily basis.

Keeping animals off saturated and rain soaked pastures is critical during winter months in the Pacific Northwest, as pastures cannot survive continuous grazing and compaction. Horses can be particularly hard on pastures because the pounding of their hooves compacts the soil and suffocates plant roots. In addition, their hooves act like plungers by loosening fine particles of topsoil which are then washed away by the rain. Even cattle, sheep and goats can compact the soil. Pigs can do significant damage to grass and other plants and trees just by the nature of the way they forage.

Fencing

Choose the **safest fencing** for your sacrifice area, no protruding objects (like bolt ends, nails, boards, or the tops of metal t-posts), which could hurt animals. *Also watch out for the corners of roofs and the bottom edges of metal buildings. There should be no wires or hanging cords and absolutely no junk, garbage or machinery in the sacrifice area.*

Reinforce it with some type of hot wire if needed

Gates on fences should be adequately sized for the types of equipment



Add Footing Materials

Hogfuel or wood chips can provide an excellent surface and are good environmental controls. Through the composting process, this footing can contribute to the breakdown of the nitrogen in urine and manure.

NOTE: Needs replacement every 2-3 years.

Gravel or sand work well in some situations. It's recommended to avoid feeding animals on these surfaces as ingesting sand or mud with hay may cause digestive problems, resulting in expensive vet bills.



Try a combination!

Gravel in high traffic areas and hog fuel in the rest.

Keep It Clean

1. Clean manure every 1 to 3 days is one of the simplest and most important things you can do to prevent mud.
2. Manure can then be composted and applied to your pastures in the dry months.
3. Composting of manure is recommended to prevent parasite reinfestation.

Reap the Rewards

Once your sacrifice area is ready, the way to integrate it into your pasture management program is to take your animals off the pasture when the majority of the grass is grazed down to about 3" or when pastures are saturated and rain soaked. Healthier pastures mean more productivity, which means less money spent on supplement feed. This has an added benefit of making your animals and your neighbors happier.