



FACT SHEET 5.6

CONTROLLING ANIMAL ACCESS TO WATERWAYS: FENCING

Many hobby farms rely on nearby waterways to provide animals with freshwater access. Although convenient, direct animal access to nearby streams and ponds can be detrimental to water quality and may eventually render that water source unusable in the future due to pollution.

When farm animals are allowed to congregate near surface waters such as lakes, streams, ponds, rivers, and coastal areas significant environmental damage can occur resulting from hoof traffic, grazing and manure including loss of vegetation and protective buffers, soil compaction, bank erosion, sediment and nutrient deposition and accumulation of harmful pathogens.

ANIMALS SHOULD NOT HAVE DIRECT ACCESS TO WATERWAYS AND BE PROVIDED ALTERNATE WATER SOURCES FOR THEIR DAILY, FRESHWATER NEEDS.

EFFECTS ON WATERWAYS

Waterways have historically been economically important to farmers with animals, as forage quantity and quality at times tend to be greater, not to mention the ease of access to a reliable water source on demand. However, allowing livestock unrestricted access can promote overgrazing along the shore of a waterbody, while grasses in undergrazed areas become unpalatable to the animals. As grasses preferred by horses and livestock continue to produce new growth, the animals will stay in the area longer, which prevents recovery of the area and reduces the ability for vegetation to treat runoff from adjacent grazing areas.

Negative impacts of farm animals on waterbodies and surrounding areas can be prevented or minimized by eliminating access. There are many opportunities for hobby farmers to improve farming practices while protecting the functionality of waterways and adjacent buffers through proper land and grazing management practices.

Hobby farms that raise animals need to consider options to protect waterways through the use of fencing, properly constructed stream crossings and alternative water sources that promote good grazing management.



REGULATORY CHECK

Massachusetts drinking water regulations (310 CMR 22.00) prohibit the stabling, hitching, standing, feeding or grazing of livestock or other domestic animals within 100 feet of the bank of a surface water source or tributary and prohibit people from allowing or causing any animal to go into, or upon, any surface water source or tributary thereto.



PLAN AHEAD

Hobby farmers need to be aware of any local regulations or bylaws that pertain to fencing requirements and also know the exact location of property boundaries when installing fence near neighboring properties.



FENCING

Fencing is a common practice used to prevent access of animals to waterways. Fencing farm animals out has many benefits, including preventing destabilization of streambanks, preventing erosion and improving runoff filtration and nutrient uptake, while allowing control of productive rotational grazing systems.

There are many types of fencing. The best fencing option will depend on the purpose, topography, size of the area, soil type, flood risk, animal type, material availability and cost. Before purchasing fence materials, consider all options to decide which is best for your hobby farm.

Common Types of Fencing

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| WOOD | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditional material commonly used and easily found May require upkeep every few years, including painting or staining Expect that pressure-treated lumber will last for about seven years without painting or staining, but has a higher initial cost than untreated lumber Pressure-treated wood is used for posts with any fencing system for its rot resistant properties |
| WOVEN WIRE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often made with galvanized wire and is often used for sheep, goats, and poultry Horse owners also use woven wire fencing because of its rigid property and keeps predators out of corral areas Woven wire fence can last for 20 years with moderate maintenance |
| HIGH TENSILE WIRE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stronger alternative to galvanized woven wire Requires specialized equipment to install Wire is heavy duty grade which has a higher initial cost Requires little maintenance and has a 50-year life expectancy |
| BARBED WIRE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed for use in areas where wood was scarce and large areas of land were needed to raise livestock Difficult to work with due to the barbs Requires special equipment to install Can cause serious injuries to horses, livestock and wildlife animals if tangled in barbs Local regulations may prohibit the use of barbed wire fencing |
| ELECTRIC FENCES | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easy to install in any configuration that is needed Flexible wire is an inexpensive option for fencing horses and larger livestock Woven wire version is available for use with smaller livestock Has fairly low maintenance requirements |

Unfortunately, fences can also pose a risk to wildlife if they cannot cross over or under the fence. Consideration should be made to maintain free travel for wildlife and reduce adverse impacts when choosing a safe barrier method for your farm animals.



REGULATORY CHECK

Since most hobby farms are not exempt from the MA Wetlands Protection Act (WPA 310 CMR 10.00), most fencing within 100 feet (in some cases 200 feet) of a wetland or waterway will likely require approval. See your local Conservation Commission for assistance in complying with the WPA and for information on other approvals that may be required.