

Livestock Heavy Use Areas

Living in the Pacific Northwest we deal with a lot of mud. To eliminate mud, install a heavy use area for your livestock. A heavy use area is used to protect your forage and pasture ground by keeping animals from damaging and compacting the soil in winter or from overgrazing in the summer.

Heavy use areas also:

- Reduce mud and manure build-up. Mud creates unsafe and slick footing and can be harmful to the environment
- Create a healthier environment for you and your livestock and make chores easier.
- Eliminate the mud that creates a breeding ground for insects and harbors bacteria, fungal organisms and other pathogens. These can cause disorders such as abscesses, scratches, rain scald or thrush.
- Reduce sediment runoff which contaminates surface water and is detrimental to fish and aquatic life.
- Increase chore efficiency and feed value.
- Improve animal health and vitality.



Installing a heavy use area

When you are ready to install your heavy use area:

- Pick a dry, well-drained area away from existing streams, ponds, wetlands or other water.
- Locate it for easy access to equipment such as gravel and feed trucks, and near feeding areas and manure storage.
- Size the area large enough for animal movement and comfort but small enough to easily pick manure. A minimum size would be 400 square feet per animal for livestock in general.
- Use footing material suitable for your area and soils, and placed over geotextile fabric.
- Install gutters and downspouts on all buildings and divert water away from heavy use areas. Use swales or subsurface drainage on the outside of the confinement area if surface water threatens to enter.
- Protect downspouts from livestock damage.
- Fence the heavy use area to enclose animals during the wet months or when pasture is grazed down to 3" or less in the summer.
- Provide adequate outdoor lighting.
- Select fencing material with safety in mind. Eliminate protruding nails and bolts. Remove loose and hanging wire.



- Consider covering T-posts with caps and covering in a protective sheath. Electric wire provides the most flexibility in terms of low maintenance and adjusting the size of the area later on. Other fencing materials can be supplemented with electric fencing to protect both the livestock and the fence.
- Size gates to accommodate tractor and truck equipment.
- Select animal-friendly hog fuel, wood chips, 5/8-minus gravel, or sand. These are all good choices for footing.
- Leave a grassed or vegetated buffer on the down slope side of the heavy use area to filter sediments and nutrient runoff leaving the sacrifice area.

Once a heavy use area is installed and in use, be sure to maintain it for optimal use. Pick manure every 1-3 days and dispose of it correctly. If any material is moved, replace it and be sure the fabric stays buried. Your local conservation district can help you pick a site and determine the size you will need.

Questions?

Contact a farm planner at your local conservation district for questions. Snohomish Conservation District farm planners can be reached at 425-335-5634 or farmplanners@snohomishcd.org.