

HEALTHY LAND, HEALTHY HORSES



Healthy
Land & Water

Five quick ways to check
if your horse property
and horses are on track

Caring for your horse property is equally as important as caring for your horses.

A well-managed horse property can result in:

- Lower incidence of weeds.
- Habitat for native birds, animals and fish.
- Healthier soils and reduced erosion: Ground cover protects the soil from sun, wind and rain. Healthy soil grows healthy grass, and more of it.
- Healthier horses since horse health complications such as colic, greasy heel, parasites and poisoning from weeds are often associated with degraded pastures.
- A source of nutritious, relatively cheap feed that can save you money.

This booklet helps you identify five areas where you can improve the health of your horses, property and catchment.



PLANNING FOR HEALTHY HORSES AND LAND

This booklet is a self-assessment tool for horse keepers. It is designed to help you assess your current horse management activities and to explore what actions you can take to promote the health of your horses and your land.

How to use this booklet:

We identified five key areas listed in the table below. We encourage you to work through each section and select the statement that best reflects how you manage each aspect of your horse keeping property.

Five key areas to manage:	For each topic, select the statement that best reflects how you manage each aspect of your horse property:
Soils and pastures	<input type="checkbox"/> Ideal: I've already taken action to manage for healthy horses and land.
Weeds	<input type="checkbox"/> Nearly there: I've got a plan and mostly my property is well managed.
Waterways	<input type="checkbox"/> Just beginning: I've thought about it and started taking action, but I can see room for improvement.
Manure	<input type="checkbox"/> I haven't thought about it yet.
Intensive horse keeping areas	<input type="checkbox"/> I haven't thought about it yet.

We have also provided some notes on ways you might work towards 'ideal' property management. By following these steps, we hope you can adapt your own property management systems that are easy and inexpensive to run and protect the health of your horses and your local landscape.



HEALTHY PASTURES

Goal No. 1:

All grazing areas have at least 90% groundcover* and pasture is dominated by desirable, perennial pastures suitable for horses.

- Ideal:** Congratulations! You have reached the goal.
- Nearly there:** Grazing areas have 90% groundcover for most of the year and are dominated by desirable pasture species for horses.
- Just beginning:** Grazing areas have less than 90% groundcover in most paddocks throughout the year. Pasture may be in poor condition and lacking vigour. There are visible signs of erosion.
- I haven't thought about it yet:** I don't monitor groundcover but I suspect it's less than 90%. There are large bare areas and compaction and erosion are obvious.

All grass is not equal. Knowing what grass species you have and managing grazing to promote healthy, productive pastures not only protects the health of your horse, it also improves the condition of your land.

Ideas for improvement:

- Start monitoring! Know how much groundcover you have and what pasture species are present in different paddocks at different times of the year. Ask Healthy Land & Water how.
- Steps to improve groundcover: Try keeping horses in yards for more time, renovating compacted areas, resting paddocks during the growing season (October to March) through rotational grazing or off-property agistment. A list of helpful resources is available at the back of this booklet.
- Learn: Healthy Land & Water provides regular workshops on this topic. Contact us to find out more.

**The term 'groundcover' is used to describe living or dead organic material (grass, leaves, sticks, manure) protecting the soil from being damaged by wind, rain and sunlight.*



CONTROLLING WEEDS

Goal No. 2:

The property is regularly monitored to detect weed species and action is taken to manage detected weeds. A weed hygiene program is in place.

- Ideal:** Congratulations! You have reached the goal.
- Nearly there:** A pasture weed control program exists, but needs to be reviewed.
- Just beginning:** Some weed control is undertaken, but no formal program has been developed.
- I haven't thought about it yet:** I don't have a pasture weed control program and I don't know where to start.

Weeds can be toxic to horses. They also compete with pasture for water and nutrients, decreasing the amount of feed available in your paddocks.

Prevention is better than cure. Weeds thrive in areas where pastures are degraded. Vigorous, healthy pasture carpets the ground and can out compete weed growth.

Ideas for improvement:

- Identify the weeds on your property and find out how to best manage them. Contact your local council, Landcare group or Healthy Land & Water to help you. Check out the Weeds of Southern Queensland booklet (available from Healthy Land & Water) or buy the app by searching online.
- Change your grazing management to improve groundcover (see prev. page).
- Introduce a weed hygiene program which includes inspection of new hay, encouraging cars to be parked in a controlled area on the property, and quarantining of new horses for 10 days in a yard to allow weed seeds to pass through their system.

PROTECTING WATERWAYS

Goal No. 3:

Watercourses and wetlands are fenced to control access to this sensitive area and there are water troughs in place for your horses to drink from.

- Ideal:** Congratulations! You have reached the goal.
- Nearly there:** Most watercourses have been fenced to restrict access. Water troughs are available to horses.
- Just beginning:** Horses have free access to both watercourses and water troughs.
- I haven't thought about it yet:** Horses have free access to watercourses. This is their only water supply.

Water is our most important resource. Managing your property to protect water courses will help secure good quality water for your horses and will provide space for nature and wildlife in your backyard.

Allowing your horses access into dams and creeks often leads to erosion, increasing the amount of soil entering the water. Horse behavior and grazing can also damage native plants living in and close by the waterway.

Soil running into dams and creeks delivers excess nutrients, bacteria, viruses and parasites into waterways. This can result in very poor drinking water quality for your horses, and is bad news for fish and other natives living in the water.

Ideas for improvement:

- Set up water troughs and tanks so your horses don't have to drink from the waterways.
- Fence off sensitive damp areas and creek lines and restrict horse access.
- If need your horses to cross waterways, plan and harden crossing or access points.



MANURE MANAGEMENT

Goal No. 4:

A manure management plan is in place and action is taken to minimise pollution and prevent manure build up in paddocks.

- Ideal:** Congratulations! You have reached the goal.
- Nearly there:** I'm doing some activities to prevent manure build up in my paddocks.
- Just beginning:** I am investigating how to prevent manure build up in my paddocks.
- I haven't thought about it yet:** I don't have a plan to manage horse manure, and I don't know where to start.

If you are selling horse manure at the front gate, you may be missing a great opportunity. Manure is a valuable resource that can be used to fertilise your soils and pastures.

However, careful management is needed. Manure build up can pollute waterways and introduce weeds to your paddocks.

Ideas for improvement:

- Identify how to best manage manure on different parts of your property. This may include a combination of complete removal, rotational grazing, pasture spelling or;
- Harrowing your paddocks (breaking up manure and spreading it out) when the pasture is resting. This kills some parasites and delivers fertiliser back to your soil.
- Making a compost heap. Composting manure from your yards and stables can kill weed seeds and make it into a valuable fertiliser and soil conditioner.
- Investigating how to make your property attractive to dung beetles. These help to break down manure and recycle nutrients. Check out www.dungbeetle.com.au.



INTENSIVE HORSE KEEPING

Goal No. 5:

Intensive horse keeping areas are managed to prevent dust, mud and manure from building up.

- Ideal:** Congratulations! You have reached the goal.
- Nearly there:** Some dust, mud and manure has built up, but the areas are being upgraded.
- Just beginning:** Some dust, mud and manure has built up, but I'm investigating what I can do to minimise it.
- I haven't thought about it yet:** Intensive areas create dust, mud and manure build up and I don't have a plan to manage this problem.

Yards, riding arenas, stables, gateways and roadways are high traffic areas on a horse property and require careful management.

A build up of mud and dust in these intensively used areas can lead to horse skin infections, respiratory problems and eye infections.

Manure build up increases the risk of reinfection by worms following treatment.

Ideas for improvement:

- Harden high traffic areas with material like cement, gravel or rubber matting.
- Consider adding some drainage lines which stop muddy areas from forming while minimising erosion risk.
- Regularly collect manure, consider storage and regular disposal or spreading across paddocks.

WHAT IS A CATCHMENT?

Water is the link throughout our catchments.

We all live in a catchment. A catchment is an area of land where water collects when it rains, often bounded by hills. As the water flows over the landscape it finds its way into streams and down into the soil, eventually feeding the river. Some of this water stays underground and continues to slowly feed the river in times of low rainfall.



The way you manage activities on your horse property not only impacts the health of the land on your property, but also impacts the surrounding environment and the quality of the water that runs off your land into the waterways.

You can manage your horse property in a way that enhances the health of the catchment you live in.

Healthy Land, healthy horses



Want to know more?

Healthy Land & Water's workshop program and resources provide horse keepers with information on horse health, pasture and weed identification and grazing management, soil health, waterway management, and much more. Check our website to see what's available in your area.

www.hlw.org.au

Developing a Property Management Plan is an important process to help you understand what assets your land holds and the best way to manage them. Healthy Land & Water provides regular planning workshops, as well other training opportunities to support you to care for your land and your horses. Check the website or send us an email for more information.

info@hlw.org.au

Resources:

'Pasture management in SEQ' is a useful booklet available to freely download from Healthy Land & Water's website here:

www.hlw.org.au/

Other useful websites:

Horse SA | www.horsesa.asn.au

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