

## Portable Electric Fences Let Ranchers Customize Their Grazing Systems

Norm Ward wants to control time. To do so, he had to get creative with fences.

For many years, Ward owned a cow/calf and steer operation on 8,000 acres in the Porcupine Hills of southwestern Alberta—a rugged region blanketed in native fescue grasslands and dotted with aspen parklands, where Douglas fir, lodgepole, and limber pine crown the hill tops. Ward's goals were to increase the productivity of his operation while also increasing the health of his grass, all in tune with the wildlife and ecosystems of the landscape. It came down to controlling the time livestock had to graze, and the time grass had to recover.

Through years of experience, Ward has become a proponent of regenerative agriculture to restore grassland ecosystems by boosting the diversity of species both above ground and in the soil. Regenerative methods mimic the patterns and pressure of bison herds that once traveled North American prairies, which translates to grazing cattle in high densities for short (sometimes very short) periods and allowing grass long recovery intervals. It also means keeping an eye on the seasons of fast and slow grass growth and the stubble length (the leafy “solar panels” Ward calls them) left behind for grass recovery.

Ward had 40 paddocks fenced with high-tensile electric fence, which worked well for both cattle and wildlife. But he wanted to

increase to 75 paddocks, increase his stock density, and have more flexibility where he laid out fence. “I was fencing ecosystems not just paddocks, following the edges of slopes and habitats, and needed the flexibility to move fence and cattle as needed,” Ward says.

To do so, he used single-wire temporary electric fence so he could move his animals every day to two days and lay out fence in accord with the ranch ecosystems. He also increased his stock density more than fivefold, from 15,000 pounds of animal/acre/day up to 80,000 to 100,000 pounds. The results were evident in the health of the grass, productivity of his cattle, and increase in wildlife of all kinds on the ranch.

To quickly deploy, roll up, and move his temporary fences, Ward built a trailer system that he called the Power Grazer. After many iterations, Ward's current model includes a solar panel for remote use, a deep cycle battery, a reel with a mile of braided turbo rope, and 100 pigtail posts. With an extra reel and posts, the Power Grazer can carry and power two miles of fence. The trailer can be easily towed with a pickup or quad, allowing quick deployment. “It takes one person an hour to put up or take down a mile of fence,” says Ward.

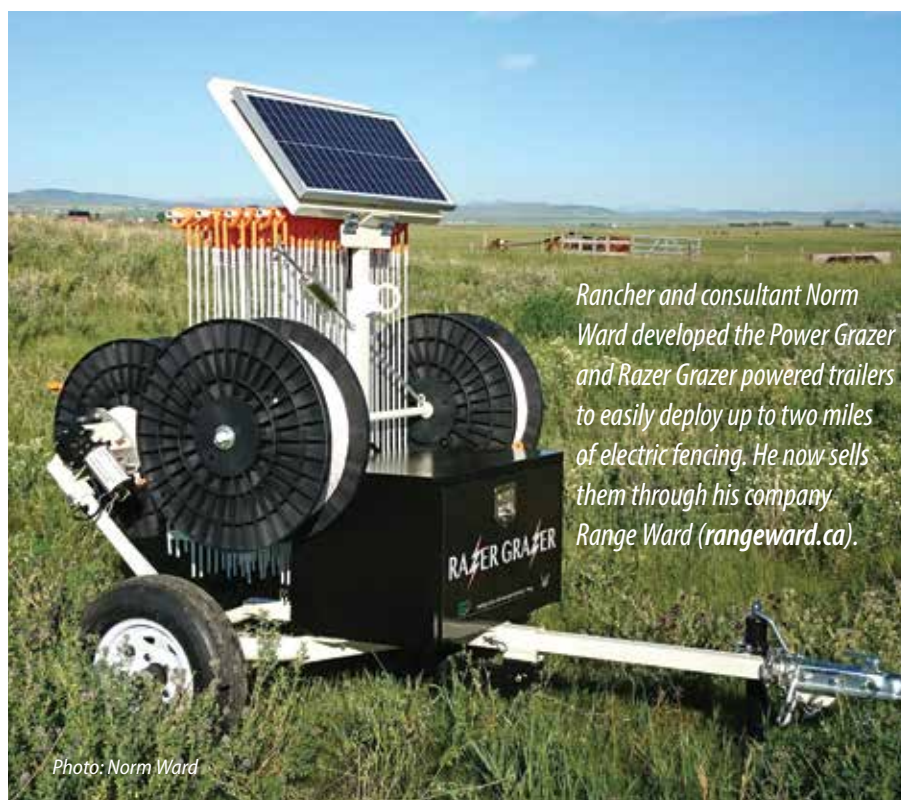
The 1/4” rope is reflective and has two copper wires braided in for conductivity. It is easily seen by wildlife and will withstand 1,300 pounds of force before breaking. Deer, elk and other ungulates can easily pass over or under, and raptors can't perch on the rope or pigtail posts.

The ease of use and success of his trailer system lead Ward to create a new business, Range Ward ([rangeward.ca](http://rangeward.ca)), to market the Power Grazer and Razer Grazer, a smaller trailer that carries 1/2 mile of fence.

The Power Grazer and Razer Grazer are particularly useful in large landscapes, remote areas, and rugged terrain. The trailers allow flexibility in deploying fence for a wide range of uses, from managing cattle grazing time and grass rest periods, to fencing out animals from sensitive habitats or reclamation sites. Ward found he could replace permanent fence with temporary electric fence to better adjust how he managed the landscape with an eye to restoring its abundance and diversity.

Agriculturalists across Alberta, the prairie provinces, and in the States have adopted the Power Grazer and Razer Grazer to manage their cattle and grass. Many find that changing their fence, and controlling time, can transform their production and stewardship of the land.

See the Range Ward website, [rangeward.ca](http://rangeward.ca), for product information on the Power Grazer and Razer Grazer.



*Rancher and consultant Norm Ward developed the Power Grazer and Razer Grazer powered trailers to easily deploy up to two miles of electric fencing. He now sells them through his company Range Ward ([rangeward.ca](http://rangeward.ca)).*

Photo: Norm Ward