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Better landscape utilisation without more fences – can it be done?

What is Self Herding?

Self Herding is a livestock management approach that uses positive reinforcement to influence grazing behaviour

Our trial aimed to demonstrate that Self Herding techniques can be used to establish grazing circuits within a paddock to create a form of rotational grazing that does not rely on expensive & fixed fencing

What did we do?

➢ Completed a 3-week training period with the cattle to familiarise them with the attractant station, food rewards and cues
➢ Attached GPS tracking collars to 10 of the 70 heifers in the trial
➢ Introduced the cattle to the trial paddock in July 2018
➢ Regularly moved the attractant station to new areas of the paddock and recorded the behaviour of the cattle

What did we find?

In the first weeks the cattle naturally demonstrated a very strong attraction to the historically overgrazed areas of the paddock

The project team "ramped up" the Self Herding techniques to attract the cattle away from the overgrazed areas and into other areas of the landscape that were not being utilised

The GPS data show that the techniques were definitely able to draw cattle to areas they previously had not used

However, the paddock was too small to prevent cattle from returning regularly to the previously overgrazed areas

Summary

At the conclusion of the trial later in 2019, we will be reporting on:

➢ Paddock usage patterns
➢ Pasture utilisation patterns
➢ Observations on cattle behaviour
➢ The Station Manager's experiences using the techniques
➢ Labour, vehicle and feed rewards costs associated with implementing Self Herding techniques in our trial

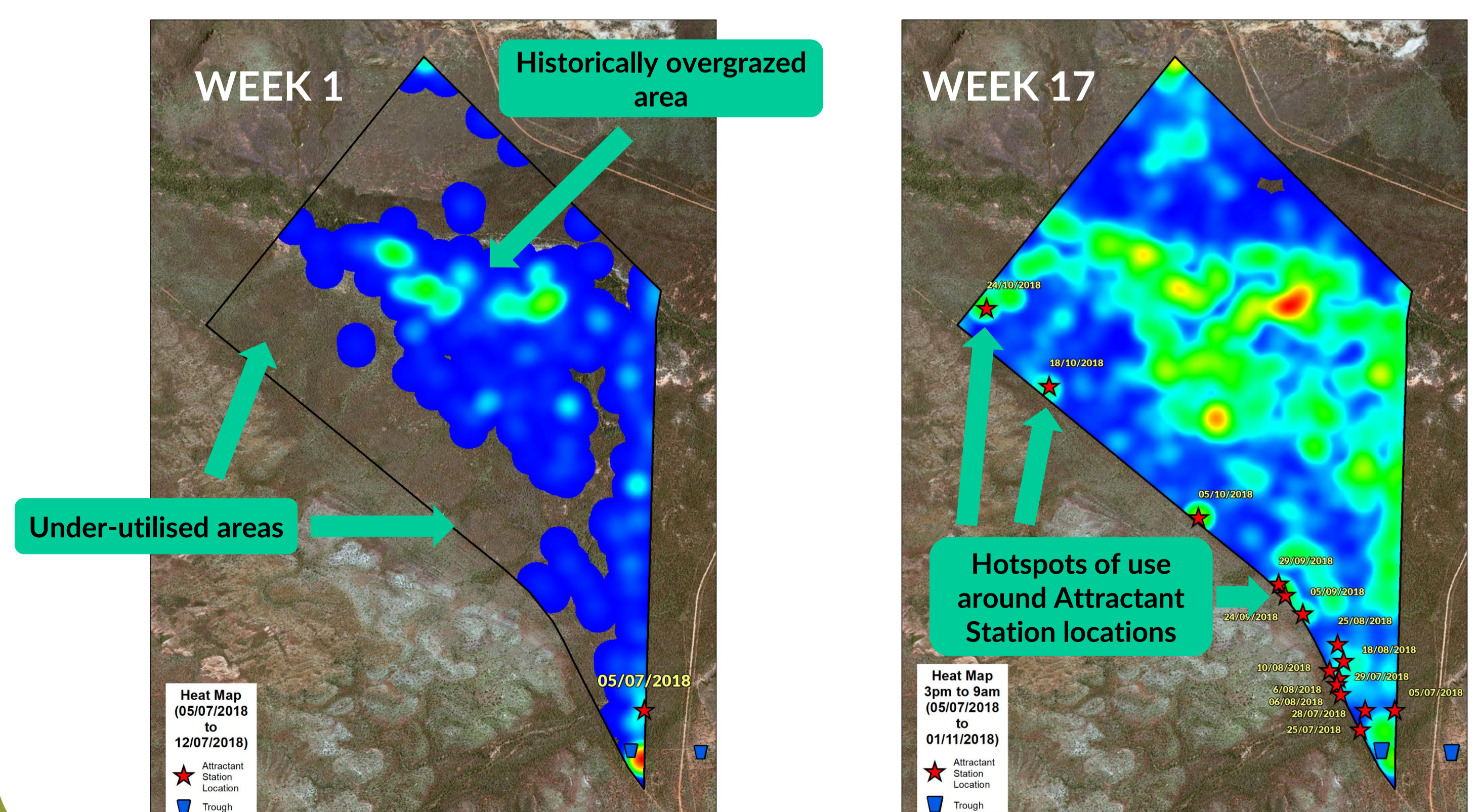We selected a trial paddock with wide contrasts in land condition and grazing utilisation

The aim was to encourage cattle to use areas that had previously been under-utilised whilst reducing the usage of areas that had poor land condition

An "attractant station" comprising four feed tubs was used to provide small food rewards. We used shipper pellets, molasses, salt, grains, "Bruce's Brew" and commercial urea as rewards

Visual cues (witches hats) and audible cues (a whistle & wind chime) were used to help the cattle find the attractant station as it was moved around the paddock

GPS "heat maps" show that Self Herding techniques definitely influenced grazing patterns

WEEK 1 — Historically overgrazed area — Under-utilised areas — Heat Map (05/07/2018 to 12/07/2018) — 05/07/2018

WEEK 17 — Hotspots of use around Attractant Station locations — Heat Map 3pm to 9am (05/07/2018 to 01/11/2018)

Want to know more about our trial?

Scan the QR code to visit our FutureBeef webpage

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