

Interpretation of Browse Utilization – Wildlife Impacts on Habitat Quality at Las Lomas Subdivision

Blake Hendon – TWPD

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The following images provide a few examples of some of the readily discernible impacts of browsing on key indicator plant species at Las Lomas. It is important to note that the full impacts of browsing and grazing across the entirety of the Las Lomas subdivision were not assessed during this brief and limited-scope site visit. The challenge for property owners at Las Lomas will be to determine whether the highlighted impacts are representative of the broader landscape or just limited to areas of high congregation. It is my opinion that the highlighted impacts are an indication of what is going on at the broader landscape level in response to high levels of browsing and grazing. This evaluation was provided at the request of Las Lomas POA representatives.

Suggested references:

A highly recommended field guide for woody plants (browse) of the Hill Country.

“Trees, Shrubs, and Vines of the Texas Hill Country – A Field Guide”, Jan Wrede, Texas A&M University Press.

Comprehensive interpretative guide for understanding browse utilization. Digital copy provided.

“Use and Management of Browse in the Edwards Plateau of Texas”, USDA – NRCS, 11-1994.



Image 1. Example of long-term impacts of browsing on woody plants. A distinct browse line is present on this tree line (indicated by dashed line). Impacted plants in this example include Ashe Juniper and Texas Persimmon. Browse lines develop on taller shrubs and trees subjected to heavy browsing by the removal of branch, twig, and leaf growth within reach of animals. Browse lines are typically interpreted as a sign of over-utilization. Ashe Juniper and Texas Persimmon have low palatability for White-tailed Deer and are typically not consumed unless preferred forage is lacking. Photo taken by B. Hendon, 8-29-2022.



Image 2. Heavy use, including rubbing and browsing, of Texas Red Oak (aka. Spanish Oak / Buckley's Oak). A distinct browse line is present on this tree (center of image) and adjacent Ashe Junipers. Texas Red Oak is recognized as a "preferred" browse species for White-tailed Deer and analogous exotic deer species. High deer densities throughout the Edwards Plateau present a threat to the long-term persistence of many preferred browse species as older trees and shrubs succumb and recruitment of younger plants is reduced due to overuse. Photo taken by B. Hendon, 8-29-2022.



Image 3. Heavy use of Ashe Junipers underneath mature Cedar Elm. Photo taken by B. Hendon, 8-29-2022.



Image 4. Signs of moderate to heavy browsing on Agarita and Texas Persimmon. Both plant species have low palatability for White-tailed Deer and are typically not consumed unless preferred forage is lacking. Photo taken by B. Hendon, 8-29-2022.



Image 5. Heavy use of Live Oak. A distinct browse line is present on this tree (center of image). Live Oak is recognized as a “moderately preferred” browse species for White-tailed Deer and analogous exotic deer species. Agarita and Ashe Junipers underneath the canopy are also showing signs of moderate to heavy utilization. Photo taken by B. Hendon, 8-29-2022.



Image 6. View of relatively open Savanna landscape present at Las Lomas subdivision. The tree canopy consists primarily of Live Oak and Cedar Elm. Post Oak and Blackjack Oak are present in low numbers, depending on the site. The ground level herbaceous layer is dominated by Little Bluestem at this site. The standing stems of Little Bluestem provide for fawning cover for White-tailed Deer and nesting cover for Rio Grande Turkeys. The native grass cover is a positive indicator for habitat quality. Photo taken by B. Hendon, 8-29-2022.