

# Western Bracken Fern

*Pteridium aquilinum*

**Common Names:** Brake fern, common fern, eagle fern

**Species Affected:** Cattle, Sheep, Equines

## **Description:**

Bracken fern has broad triangular fronds. It grows from its root stalks in clumps, reaching between 2 and 4 feet tall.

**Toxin:** Thiaminase in equines, glycosides in ruminates, impairs thiamine metabolism in sheep

## **Growing Location and Timing :**

Bracken ferns grow in many places such as, wooded areas, areas previously burned, hillsides, pastures, and rangelands. Growth of a bracken fern is from early spring until frost.

## **Affects on Livestock:**

Bracken ferns affect on sheep and cattle differ from the affects on horses. The disease is more acute in sheep and cattle, and more chronic in horses. Large amounts of bracken must be consumed for 2 to 4 weeks to be affected. The affects on cattle can cause bleeding and damage to the bone marrow. Poisoned livestock seldom have a chance of recovery. Horses are usually exposed through hay contaminated by bracken ferns, hay containing 20% bracken fern must be consumed for about a month to have affects. Horses may begin to struggle standing, death may occur between days to a week.

## **Signs and Symptoms:**

Cattle and sheep may experience high fever, loss of appetite, depression, struggling to breathe, salivation, nasal and rectal bleeding, mucus membrane hemorrhages, aplastic bone marrow. Cattle may also grow tumors in their bladder. Horses can experience weight loss, marked depression, crouching stances or inability to stand, muscle twitching, body weakness, irregular pulse, convulsions or spasms, and hemorrhaging of the heart.

## **Preventative Measures:**

Remove livestock from areas where bracken ferns are present and there is a lack of other foraging material. Supply foraging materials at the end of the grazing season, making sure hay is not contaminated with bracken ferns or other plants that may cause harm to livestock.

