



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Region 1

200 East Broadway
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Missoula, MT 59807

File 1570 (215) Date: July 2, 1998
Code:
Route
To:
Subject: West Face AMP, Appeal #98-01-00-0056, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forests
To: Appeal Deciding Officer

This is my recommendation on disposition of the appeal filed by Sara Jane Johnson on behalf of Native Ecosystems Council protesting the West Face Allotment Management Plan Decision Notice signed by the Wisdom River District Ranger (Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forests).

The District Ranger's decision adopts Alternative 6, modified, to implement the allotment management plan.

My review was conducted pursuant to, and in accordance with, 36 CFR 215.19 to ensure the analysis and decision are in compliance with applicable laws, regulations, policy, and orders. The appeal record, including the Appellants' objections and recommended changes, has been thoroughly reviewed.

FINDINGS

My recommendation is based upon the following evaluation:

Clarity of the Decision and Rationale

The document is written at a technical level which is difficult for the lay person to understand. Although references are accurate, clarity and readability could be improved by a brief summary of the referenced points. The rationale for the decision is well-written, detailed and personalized.

Purpose of the Proposal and Comprehension of Benefits

The purpose and need section is not particularly clear. Criteria for the decision would have been clarified if written as "Decision Criteria" instead of "primary factors". The benefits and trade-offs of the selected alternative are easily understood.

Consistency with Policy, Direction, and Supporting Information

This grazing proposal is tied to restoration objectives and is based on ecosystem management principles. The benefits of the modified alternative are clear when compared to the other alternatives. The response to comments should be attached to the decision as an appendix to the EA rather than placed in the project file.

Effectiveness of Public Participation Activities and Use of Comments

The District Ranger made a good effort at involving the public, including effective use of field trips. The DN states how issues raised by the public were considered. The responses to comments vary in professional tone, occasionally becoming somewhat curt.

Appeal Review Findings

Primary objections by the Appellants include violations of the NFMA by failing to ensure viability of wildlife species, failure to adhere to Forest Plan direction, and violation of the NEPA by failing to address public issues and cumulative effects.

The NFMA requires habitat be managed to maintain viable populations of existing native and desired non-native vertebrate species in the planning area (36 CFR 219.19). The Appellants' concerns focus on nongame sagebrush-associated populations. The Forest Plan identifies sage grouse as the management indicator for sagebrush communities. Monitoring for MIS is required at the Forest planning level. The West Face EIS documents (in the Biological Assessment, Appendix B) the project will have no impact on sage grouse. The proposed project is anticipated to improve vegetative conditions in possible sage grouse habitat. In addition, the District completed an analysis of effects on sagebrush habitat and determined the selected alternative will benefit sagebrush dependent species because of the reductions in cattle grazing. The EIS documents adequately the compliance of the proposal with management direction in the Forest Plan.

The Appellants raise the concern their issues raised previously in the NEPA process were not adequately addressed. In review of Native Ecosystem Council's earlier comments and the District response, it is apparent the issues were responded to in accordance with requirements of NEPA.

NEPA requires the analysis of cumulative effects of the proposed action in conjunction with past, present, and foreseeable future actions. The Appellants' concern with regard to cumulative effects analysis relates to elk habitat. The District analyzed cumulative effects within Hunting District 332, an analysis unit established by Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (EIS, up. IV-52). The analysis area included private and state lands adjacent to the project area. The District has adequately documented their analysis of cumulative effects on elk.

RECOMMENDATION

I recommend the District Ranger's decision be affirmed and the Appellants' requested relief be denied. I further recommend that the District be instructed to send all responses to comments to all persons who commented on the EA.

/s/ J. Doug Glevanik

J. DOUG GLEVANIK
Reviewing Officer
Director, Ecosystem Assessment and Planning