

**Upper Strawberry Grazing Allotments
Environmental Impact Statement
Scoping Document**

**Heber Ranger District
Uinta National Forest**

Request for Public Input

The Heber Ranger District of the Uinta National Forest proposes to authorize livestock grazing by updating allotment management plans (AMPs) on National Forest System lands on three grazing allotments. Comments are requested on the effects of the proposed action, preliminary resource concerns, and alternatives, and comments must pertain directly to the project area. Issues identified outside of the scope of the proposal will not be addressed. The scoping period is 30 days from publication of the Notice of Intent in the Federal Register.

Please submit your written issues or concerns to the Responsible Official: Julie King, District Ranger, Heber Ranger District, P.O. Box 190, Heber City, Utah 84032. Comments may be faxed to (801) 654-5772 or hand delivered to the Heber Ranger district located at 2460 South Highway 40 during normal business hours from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday. Comments may also be submitted to the following e-mail address: comments-intermtn-uinta-heber@fs.fed.us. If you would like additional information please contact Jim Percy, Heber Ranger District at 435-654-0470.

Location

The Project Area (Twin Peaks Allotment, West Daniels Allotment, and the Strawberry Allotment) is located approximately eight air miles south east of Heber City, Utah. The area includes 25,169 acres of National Forest Lands administered by the Heber Ranger District for the Uinta National Forest. (see attached map)

Background

As part of the 1995 Rescission Act and its implementing regulations (Public Law 104-19 Section 504(a)), Congress directed the Forest Service to issue term grazing permits where existing permits were due for expiration, and to provide management direction for the permits in compliance with NEPA, Forest Plan direction, and other relevant laws and regulations. In accordance with the Rescission Act, the Forest Service prioritized those allotments that needed Allotment Management Plans (AMP).

Purpose and Need

The purpose and need for this project is to analyze issuance of grazing permits and to maintain or improve rangeland conditions affected by domestic grazing. Grazing is a suitable use of Forest Service Lands and is permissible through the Multiple Use Act of 1960, as amended. The Uinta National Forest 2003 Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) identified some of the lands within these allotments as suitable for domestic livestock grazing.

The need of this proposed action is to continue to provide forage for livestock at sustainable levels and meet desired conditions including: improved composition and density of desired plant species within riparian areas; an improved density and composition desired grass and forb species on upland range; improved water quality in affected streams within the project area; and meeting the State of Utah’s Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) standards. Proposed management directions have been designed to comply with and implement relevant direction for grazing management in the Forest Plan and other applicable laws, regulations and policies.

Desired Conditions

Desired Conditions provide management goals and objectives for grazing use. Project monitoring will assess the effectiveness of management toward achieving these desired conditions over time. The following Desired Conditions have been established for this project:

Water Resources

WR1. Stream channels, floodplains, and associated vegetation are functioning properly relative to the landform (gradient, size, shape, roughness, confinement, sinuosity, and climate). Riparian areas filter sediments, protect stream banks, improve water quality, reduce flooding, recharge groundwater and maintain stream flow. These areas are covered by deep-rooted and other desirable, protective vegetation which provides adequate summer and winter thermal regulation. Generally, riparian areas are connected with aquatic and upland components. They provide food, water, cover, nesting areas, and protected pathways for aquatic and wildlife species.

WR2. Water quality in the Strawberry portions of the analysis area meets the requirements of the Strawberry Reservoir TMDL Study (UDEQ-DWQ, January 2005). The TMDL Study gives total phosphorus TMDL load allocations (lbs / year) for the streams within the Strawberry Watershed. The current estimated loads and estimated reductions identified in the Strawberry Watershed TMDL Study directly affects Twin Peaks, West Daniels, and Strawberry Allotments as follows:

Source	Current*	Reduction*	Allocation*
Strawberry River	3,100	310	2,790
Other Stream Inflows	1,700	170	1,530

*Values are presented in pounds of phosphorous/year

The remaining streams within the project area the Provo/Daniels Creek and Hobble Creek and will continue to meet Utah Water Quality Rules.

WR3. Riparian/wetland resources such as springs, seeps, bogs, and wet meadows defined in the 2003 UNF LRMP as Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs), but not inventoried in the Uinta National Forest Geographic Information System (GIS) or USFWS National Wetlands Inventory, will retain sufficient ground cover through the grazing season to minimize erosion and filter runoff.

Geology and Soils

GS1. Soil quality and long-term soil productivity are maintained or restored where adversely impaired, within the Twin Peaks, West Daniels, and Strawberry allotments.

GS2. Upland and hillslope soils have adequate ground cover, soil organic matter (litter), and large woody material to protect against accelerated erosion, thus lowering sediment delivery to riparian areas.

GS3. Soil hydrologic function and productivity in riparian areas is protected, promoting stream bank stability, regulating nutrient cycling, and preserving water quality by capturing and/or filtering overland flow, thus effectively lowering sediment and total phosphorous delivery to the stream.

Fisheries & Aquatic Resources

FA1. Aquatic habitat is sufficient to support all life stages of desirable aquatic and semi-aquatic species at levels appropriate to insure population viability.

Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species

TES1. Livestock management will have no adverse effects on federally listed threatened, endangered, or sensitive plant, fish, or wildlife species.

Vegetation

V1. There is a wide variety of vegetation communities with a full range of seral stages and age classes distributed across the allotments in mosaic patterns. The areas that are in early seral stage are a result of natural or planned events and after the event the trend is toward a mid or late seral stage.

V2. Tall forb vegetative communities are at or trending toward potential natural condition, as indicated by satisfactory soil cover and increases in density and diversity of desirable species.

V3. Sufficient current-year growth of willows to ensure maintenance or growth of existing willow communities, consistent with the wildlife desired condition WL1.

V4. Weed populations are reduced. Livestock management will not contribute to the spread and abundance of invasive species. Desirable vegetation continues to dominate the landscape.

V5. Tarweed dominated sites ecological trend is moving toward a later seral stage and will have an increased ground cover.

Wildlife Habitat

WL1. Sufficient current-year growth of willows to ensure maintenance or growth of existing willow communities. Willow communities provide crucial habitat for beavers (Management Indicator Species), migratory birds, moose, and many other wildlife species.

WL 2. Sufficient cover of residual herbaceous and woody vegetation to provide for the forage, browse, and cover needs of native and desired non-native wildlife species.

WL 3. Sufficient aspen regeneration to ensure maintenance of aspen stands as well as sufficient browse and cover for big game species.

Heritage

H1. Heritage sites are identified, and National Register eligible sites are protected from adverse effects to the features that make them historically important.

H2. Plants and areas associated with traditional uses that are culturally significant to American Indian Tribes are identified and the degree of effect to them by livestock grazing is assessed. They are protected from livestock grazing if this activity is compromising their potential utility to Tribes.

Proposed Action

In order to meet the purpose and need for the project, the Heber Ranger District is proposing to authorize livestock grazing use within the project area under updated management direction to achieve site-specific management objectives and move existing conditions toward desired conditions. Livestock grazing would be managed through adaptive management. Adaptive management allows decisions focused on desired outcomes to be made with the best information available during implementation to achieve desired conditions. Both long-term and annual implementation monitoring and evaluation will be used to assess the effects of those decisions and to identify new information that may become available.

W. Daniels Allotment –

- Convert the southern two units (Jones Hollow and Sugar Springs, collectively referred to as “Mill A unit”) of the Twin Peaks Sheep consisting of 4060 acres to cattle and combined with the West Daniels Cattle Allotment. This will increase the West Daniels Cattle Allotment from approximately 10,524 acres to approximately 14,623 acres.

Twin Peaks Allotment

- The remaining 7,387 acres of the Twin Peaks allotment would continue to be a sheep allotment.

Strawberry Allotment

- Combine the entire allotment with the East Daniels Cattle Allotment.
- The 1,277 acre area along the west side of Strawberry River from Mill B corral to the ridge between Trail Hollow and Bellow’s Hollow would be closed to grazing. Approximately 5 miles of fence would be constructed in conjunction with this activity.
- The upper 852 acres of the upper Strawberry River within the Strawberry Sheep Allotment would be fenced off to create the Trail Hollow Special Management Pasture to better manage livestock grazing and improve soils, vegetation, and

water resources. Approximately 1.5 miles of fence would be constructed to separate the Special Management Pasture from the rest of the allotment.

This livestock grazing will be guided by updated management direction in an Allotment Management Plan to achieve site specific management objectives and move existing resource conditions toward desired conditions.

The Proposed Action would conform with the Forest Plan and specifically with the standards for aquatic and riparian habitat, soil and water resource, wildlife and fish habitat management, noxious weeds, vegetation, grazing recreation, and scenery. The Proposed Action incorporates the standards of the Forest Plan specifically those that related to grazing. Where the Forest Plan standard is being used as the threshold, the specific standard is not repeated in this document. Additional grazing use standards have been developed as part of the proposed action. These standards, in addition to the Forest Plan Standards, would be used as a tool of adaptive management to customize the grazing management system for the Upper Strawberry Allotment

Water Resources

- Livestock grazing impact to stream banks (bank alteration) will be measured at representative stream monitoring reaches to determine when livestock are moved from the unit. Specific standards for bank alteration will be developed for each management area/pasture. In the absence of a management area/pasture specific end of season standard, annual bank alteration is not to exceed 30%. In order to maintain or improve water quality and stream processes, the end of season bank alteration standard for Trail Hollow Special Management Pasture will be 15%.

Streambank stability ratings will be developed for each stream or management area/pasture based on representative stream monitoring reaches. The rating will be used to establish streambank alteration standards, determine streambank alteration standard effectiveness, and monitor long-term streambank stability trends in relation to Desired Conditions. Overall streambank stability will be monitored long-term using appropriate protocol.

- Grazing management within the Strawberry Watershed will be adjusted to achieve reductions of phosphorous recommended in the Strawberry Reservoir TMDL Study. The remaining streams within the project will be managed to meet Utah water quality rules and support their designated beneficial uses. Water quality will continue to be monitored according to the cooperative monitoring program with UDEQ. Annual and long-term monitoring of upland and hillslope ground cover, riparian area ground cover, and streambank stability/alteration will be conducted to determine need for adjustment in grazing management.
- Maintain a minimum ground cover requirement of 80% for 80% of the riparian/wetland resources defined in the 2003 UNF LRMP as Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs), but not inventoried in the Uinta National Forest

Geographic Information System (GIS) or USFWS National Wetlands Inventory. These ground cover requirements are based on S&W-4 Guideline for Class II RHCAs (UNF 2003 LRMP).

Geology and Soils

- **Detrimental Soil Disturbance.** No more than 15 percent of the actively grazed portions of the Twin Peaks, West Daniels, and Strawberry allotments should have detrimentally disturbed soil after the completion of grazing. In other words, at least 85 percent of the Twin Peaks, West Daniels, and Strawberry allotments should be in a non-detrimentally disturbed condition.

- **Detrimental Soil Displacement.** Detrimental soil displacement includes the actively grazed areas of the Twin Peaks, West Daniels, and Strawberry allotments where 1 meter by 1 meter or larger area exhibits detrimentally displaced soil as described below:
 - (a) The loss of either 5 cm or ½ of humus enriched top soil (A horizon), whichever is less, or
 - (b) The exceeding of the soil loss tolerance value for the specific soil type.

- **Effective Ground Cover.** The minimum effective ground cover (70% of potential), following the cessation of grazing disturbance in the actively grazed portions of the Twin Peaks, West Daniels, and Strawberry allotments, should be sufficient to prevent detrimental erosion. Detrimental erosion includes erosion rates that cause long-term productivity losses from the activity area or soil losses that are beyond those acceptable for the activity area. Minimum amounts of ground cover necessary to protect a soil from erosion are a function of soil properties, slope gradient and length, and soil erosivity (precipitation factor).

Fisheries & Aquatic Habitat

- Adherence to water quality and soils indicators for adaptive management to ensure sufficient water quality and habitat conditions to support existing fisheries and maintain or enhance current populations.

Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species

- Adherence to habitat, vegetation, and water quality indicators for adaptive management to meet the desired conditions will prevent management activities from contributing to the listing of additional species nor will these activities negatively impact listed species.

Vegetation

- There are no new noxious weed populations in or very near livestock handling facilities, or areas used by permittee for management of the allotment (camp sites, horse corrals, salt cabins, etc.)
- Utilization on tarweed sites 40% or less.

Wildlife Habitat

- Incidence of use on terminal leaders of aspen less than 5-feet tall will not exceed 30%.

Heritage

- Monitor sites for signs of livestock effects. In particular, monitor the Hogsback Salt Cabin for signs of rubbing or trampling by cattle. Request that permittees monitor their livestock movement near those sites.
- If there are any plant populations which are essential to Northern Ute traditional practices, these populations could be protected through herding, fencing, monitoring of those populations.

Preliminary Alternatives

In addition to the Proposed Action, the following two alternatives have been identified for analysis:

Continuation of Current Management – Continuation of Current management would continue implementation of existing Allotment Management Plans and permits on each of the allotments. Authorized use, in terms of numbers class, season of use, and management would remain the same. Once allowable use is met, regardless of numbers of animals or season of use, livestock are moved from the utilized area or removed from the allotment.

No Grazing – Use of domestic livestock would be phased out. New term grazing permits would not be issued as current permits expire.

Decisions Framework

Based on the environmental analysis in this EIS, the District Ranger will decide whether to authorize livestock grazing on the project area's suitable rangelands under updated management direction, and if so, what changes need to be made to the respective allotment management plans in accordance with Forest Plan and desired conditions.

Julie K. King
District Ranger
Heber Ranger District