



for the greatest good



**BLUE MOUNTAINS**  
**FOREST PLAN REVISION - 2015**  
Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman  
National Forests

# Meeting Notes

## **Public Meeting on Livestock Grazing and the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision**

Hosted by the Umatilla National Forest  
Heppner, Oregon | Nov. 4, 2015

*These notes reflect the best efforts of the notetaker to capture the discussion of meeting participants, but in no way are these notes a word-for-word transcript as the notetaker may have unintentionally missed some statements or dialogue. Also, the notes do not attempt to correct or clarify any statements made by participants.*

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**Participants** (as they appear on the sign-in sheet): John Edmundson, Mark Rietmann, Glen Wand, Bill Van Schoiack, W. Ashbeck, Butch Knowles, Frank Mason, Lee Homer, Matt Clark, Dan S., Terri Denten, Shirley Rugg, Leann Rea, Steve Cherry, Jeff Blackwood (facilitator)

**U.S. Forest Service (USFS) participants:** Ann Niesen, Tim Collins, David Hatfield, Joani Bosworth, Maura Laverty, Beth Parker, Peter Fargo (notetaker)

**Organizations represented:** Heppner Chamber, Triangle Ranches, Van Schoiack Ranch, Ashbeck Ranch, Healy Ranch, Horseshoe Hereford, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Morrow County, USFS

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### **Welcome from the facilitator, Jeff Blackwood**

Thank you all for being here. Tonight we are discussing the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision and range management. We'll focus on everyone having an opportunity to share ideas, ask questions, and offer recommendations to enhance the Forest Plan.

### **Introductions: Who are you, where are you from, and what is your relationship to the National Forest (NF)?**

- From La Grande, recently moved back here from California; see a lot of change; more people
- Retired educator; worked over 5 years for Heppner Ranger District; user of the forest for hiking and cross-country skiing; member of the Chamber of Commerce; the Heppner Ranger District is important to the community; here to listen to the discussion
- Here to keep up and see how things are going
- Morrow County Commissioner; want to know about anything that impacts our residents
- Run cattle on two allotments up on National Forest; avid outdoorsman; interested in everything that happens on the NF.

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- Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW); here to learn more about the Forest Plan
- Retired wildlife biologist; vice president of a company
- District Ranger; here to listen to what you have to say about range and Forest Plan Revision
- Hoping to correct problems with the Plan if there's anything we can do to help
- Public Affairs for Umatilla; here to listen and hear what folks have to say about range
- From Fossil, Oregon; I am a Permittee and graze on the NF
- Permittee
- Permittee
- Here to listen and see where this thing goes
- Range Program Manager and member of the Forest Plan Revision team; here to answer your questions and serve as a resource to you and your local FS staff
- Permittee on the Whitney allotment

### Opening Remarks

*David Hatfield, Natural Resources Staff Officer, Umatilla National Forest*

- Thank you all for taking the time to be here today, for attending previous meetings, and also thanks to those who submitted formal comments last year. We heard you, and this meeting is a result of folks telling us we could do better.
- A word about the new Forest Supervisor, Genevieve Masters; she is a wildlife biologist by training; comes to us from the Humboldt-Toiyabe NF in Nevada.
- A Forest Plan is a broad, overarching document; it is like a county or city plan in that it's broken up into zones; it is more than range; it also covers timber, access, minerals, and many other topics.
- Keep in mind that a Forest Plan doesn't authorize a grazing permit; the details of number or season of use are determined at the District Ranger levels, and you'll continue to work with your range manager, Tim.
- We are not going to make any specific decisions about your allotment in this Plan. However, the Plan does set side rails; some could constrain our range program in general.

*Maura Laverty, Range Program Manager, Forest Plan Revision Range Specialist*

(Please see the attached fact sheet for more details.)

- I volunteered to be on the Forest Plan Revision team, because it will affect me and my programs.
- I want to make sure we get it right, and it doesn't box us in unnecessarily.

*Facilitator*

- We all have a stake in these forests, and we want to make sure everyone has an opportunity to speak as we go around the room.
- We are here to listen and learn, and also if you have questions to clarify the issues, please ask. Whenever there is change, we naturally ask, "What's it going to do to me?"
- Let's do this with respect, and please take the time to share what's on your mind.

### Comments and questions around the circle

- Don't know enough right now before hearing more and asking questions; have been involved with our ranch for four years; our main goal is to put pounds on cattle; that bottom line comes back to us. If you do

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it wrong—whether in the National Forest or on your own land—it comes back to hurt you. We need ample water. A lot of people think we just don't care, but we are some of the biggest conservationists, because our livelihood comes from this; it is a major economic force in this community; we are more on the conservation side, because that's how we make our living.

- Our department, ODFW, wants to understand how grazing impacts wildlife. How does it tie into the species that we're concerned about? The grazing management I see on this National Forest (Umatilla) looks good and is generally consistent with our objectives.
- I'm curious about the status of timber-thinning projects. [USFS: We're continuing to do treatment, and it will be wrapped up into the Blue Mountains Restoration Project, which is developing a landscape-scale strategy. We're looking for ways to get the Forests back to a resilient state using a variety of methods -- thinning, prescribed fire, etc.]
- We need to make sure we keep our ponds in shape and cleaned up, so we don't impact the riparian areas. I think you've done a better job in the past 4-5 years with fire. More prescribed fire in the fall and clean-up helps a lot. At home, we try to burn about 500 acres a year. Everything can live on something you've burnt – elk, deer, cattle, etc. Any time you have bug problems and you do a burn, the bugs go away; the little pine trees go away too.
- I don't think we're moving enough cattle up there. Elk are moving down onto private ground and eating us out. When we come home, our winter feed is gone.
- Are the elk coming out of the forest because of people, or because the forest is too thick?
- It's mainly people. Put 200 people out there to hunt each fall, and the elk and deer will come down.
- Once they come down to the open country, they never leave. Unless we commit to chasing them out, but there will always be absentee owners and those who want to profit off of the private hunters on their land.
- Changes in the monitoring in the Forest Plan rubbed me the wrong way. Monitoring could lead to a big cut in the season of use. The changes were a big scare to us with how they would be implemented and whether people in the USFS office would interpret our meeting the Standards differently than we do.
  - USFS, Maura Laverty: That is a good concern and spot on; reduced allowable forage utilization in anadromous fish protection areas; those numbers are still in there. We said the Umatilla will not have reduced Animal Unit Months (AUMs), but with reduced utilization, it is possible to have reduced AUMs. Our response has been that this can be resolved with distribution, but that may not always be the case.
  - You have been through consultation on the Umatilla, and you have established allowable uses; the Forest Plan will not override that.
  - Specific allotments go through NEPA, and the Forest Plan has Guidelines, not Standards, for grazing. To clarify, the utilization rates are Guidelines, not Standards.
- We leave our allotments early enough that we have grass growing back again. The fire does good. Clearcuts from 30-40 years ago are getting so thick that something needs to be done. Water is good in all but one pasture, and this was a squeaky year for water and we made it. If you could get a road grader up there and fix some roads, that would be great. I have to go visit a local welder, because of damage to my stock trailer.
- I agree that fuel reductions are helpful; you cut trees the first year then burned the piles a year later; now things are growing back nice; things are opening up, and we're going to gain a lot of grass.

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- Are the cows into the springs? The rock pits have the best water (but people like to camp by the rock ponds). It's best to create a pond and/or runoff; if you have too little water in the box spring, the cattle may damage the equipment or not get enough water.
- Biggest influence is from people, who are not ranchers, seeing the cattle. In some places it looks like our cattle are eating too much grass in one spot. If we could get more water in the uplands, we could spread the impact and stay away from the riparian zones.
- Elk are coming out of the forest and damaging our equipment.
- Any management plan needs to be rational and needs to work; it should support the success of the industry. The Forest Plan is important and gives guidance to the Ranger Districts.
- There are benefits to fire; in the old days we used to burn every fall, and grass would come back nice in the spring.
- I recommend allowing guys like Tim Collins (USFS Umatilla Range Specialist) to have the flexibility to work with Permittees and find solutions based on changing conditions.
- Elk like the short green grass. A lot of the forest has older/longer grass, but the short green stuff is on the private land.
- The previous Forest Plan was completed in 1990. There have been many changes in the topography, management, infrastructure, and animal behavior. You can't compare what was in 1990 to now; take into account the good things we have brought to the Forest.
- When you run sheep and cattle together, you run the cattle for the tall grass and then sheep for what's left. Same thing with the game: elk first, then deer.
- Facilitator: Maura Lavery (USFS Range Program Manager / Forest Plan Team) is here to clarify what may change with the revision and address your questions.
- Maura: The current Forest Plans are from 1990 and are no longer current; they were amended in 1995 with PACFISH and INFISH regulations; we are developing the Plan now starting with today's baseline. The Plan is just guidance and the site-specific Standards will still be set with allotment-level NEPA. What has changed? We have new listed species, Big Horn Sheep, etc.
- USFS Umatilla Range Specialist, Tim Collins:
  - It's a complicated plan; the Standards are kind of subjective. When you read the definition of a Guideline in this new Forest Plan, remember that it's basically a Standard; we would not be differing much from the Guidelines, because we need to get the same results. I don't see it getting easier; I see it getting more complicated for us and challenging with short staff.
  - The streambank-alteration Guidelines may be challenging. In the Forest Plan, only 20% alteration is allowed, but a small stream could see 60% alteration pretty quickly. That could be the case across the board in many of our riparian areas. For example, the streambank alteration may be measured as greater than 20% annually, yet the long-term condition and trend is positive.
- Permittee: That could cut your season in half right there.
- Maura (USFS Range Program Manager / Forest Plan Team): The 20% stream bank alteration Guideline is a carry-over from PACFISH / INFISH in the last plan. Bank alteration is an annual measurement. We developed this through consultation with the fish and wildlife agencies. Success requires long-term monitoring. We have nine allotments needing NEPA on this Forest and need to show that we are trending toward meeting the new Forest Plan.
- Can we use a different measure and have a healthy ecosystem?
- On the 20% stream bank alteration, is that just cattle or also wildlife? [USFS, Maura: It is both.]
- What is the new timeline?

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- USFS: We are continuing these conversations through December, which are helping us determine if there are significant changes needed to current alternatives, more analysis, or if we need a new alternative to evaluate. Looking at a final decision in 2017 if all goes well. We have an objection process that will take some time. We will publish the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and, within it, our response to public comments. There are several Alternatives to consider in the EIS, and the Forest Plan will be the Selected Alternative.
- Are there plans to manage the timber and fuels, and cut more? [USFS: Yes, there are alternatives that will address those issues; it is not only economic timber sale but also restoration/resilience for ecological reasons.]
- Are the Malheur and Wallowa-Whitman on a similar path with their Forest Plans? [USFS: Yes, we decided to work together, since we all signed/started in 1990. Similar Standards/Guidelines would facilitate consistent administration across the Blue Mountains, but where it doesn't make sense, we want to reflect that in the final Plans. There are ecological, social, and economic differences. About 80% similar and the rest will be different.]
- There is a belief that the permitted livestock numbers or season could change due to monitoring of more restrictive utilization levels
- Fuels reduction helps in livestock distribution and movement (thinning & burning)

### Summary of what was heard

*Maura Laverty, Range Program Manager, Forest Plan Revision Team Range Specialist*

- The focus in this meeting seemed to be more on fuels reduction.
- We discussed Standards and Guidelines; the difference between them and perceptions of no difference
- The Umatilla 20% bank alteration could be a challenge; people think we need to look at other measurements.

*Ann Niesen, Heppner District Ranger, Umatilla National Forest*

- Things look good here in Heppner. I think we are doing the right thing and trending in the right direction, but restrictive measurements could make it more difficult than necessary; thank you for bringing that feedback back to the Forest Plan team.
- The Heppner District will continue to work on vegetation treatments across the landscape.
- The elk on private land is a complex issue and a social issue. If there are things we can do to help, I am willing to entertain it.
- Thank you again for being here. We will continue to work on what's important to Permittees; allotment- and site-specific NEPA are important as are water issues.

*David Hatfield, Natural Resources Staff Officer, Umatilla National Forest*

- The integration of topics in this meeting is interesting; we came here to talk about range management, but also discussed fuels and access.
- You spend a lot of time on the ground, and you see how things are working, or not. It sounds like things are working well, altogether.
- We talked about the mechanics of Forest Planning more than at other meetings, and that is a good thing.

**How did you feel about this meeting? Did you get what you were looking for?**

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- I'm proud of our community and our collaborative relationships. We are getting a lot done by working together instead of being at odds.
- How much of an impact do our opinions have in the final analysis? You gotta be careful not to paint us into a box that we can't escape. [USFS, Maura: I want to make sure we can all live with the final Forest Plan, and I will be an assertive voice.]
- ODFW: It's been interesting to listen to the Permittees. We always hear about elk, and that is good too.
- What is the difference between fuel reduction and selective cut? [USFS, Ann Niesen, District Ranger: Fuel reduction includes all kinds of tools, such as timber sale, mastication, stewardship, thinning, prescribed fire. Selective cut is not a technical term but sounds like a timber sale.]
  - What I have seen on the route to Ukiah, I have seen a lot of damage to the forest floor. In the 60s, we would have been in big trouble had we handled the cut that way.
  - That is phase one, and the second phase will be burning the piles. That is why it looks the way it does.
- Planning is a necessary evil; there are good plans and bad plans.
- Having these conversations energizes me, and I look forward to making a difference on the ground.
- Very positive meeting
- The pressure is on you guys now; I hope it works well for the grazers.
- Did people at other meetings have concerns that we didn't raise here? [USFS, Maura: Mainly the same issues -- AUMs, riparian area allowable utilization levels, and stream bank alteration.]
- USFS: Thank you all for coming. It's a gift to be able to manage the National Forests on behalf of all the American people. We don't always agree, but we will find a way forward, and we will make sure our kids and grandkids can use and enjoy the forests too.

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### Livestock Grazing & Grazing Vegetation: Frequently Asked Questions

#### How many acres will be available for grazing?

Appendix G has the acreages broken down by Allotment name and Alternative. Appendix G starts on page 427 in Volume 3 of the DEIS. The total acres suitable for livestock grazing on the Malheur National Forest are 1,197,000 for cattle and 101,000 for sheep. The total acres suitable for livestock grazing on the Umatilla National Forest are 284,000 for cattle and 42,000 for sheep. The total acres suitable for livestock grazing on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest are 408,000 for cattle and 25,000 for sheep.

#### How are Sage grouse addressed with regard to grazing management in the Proposed Revised Forest Plan?

There is a relatively small amount of sage-grouse habitat on the Blue Mountains Forests. Sagebrush steppe habitat was estimated to occur on approximately six percent of the landscape within the Malheur National Forest; however, not all of this is considered sage-grouse habitat. Habitat mapping completed by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) indicates that only 41,600 acres is considered greater sage-grouse habitat, and of this, 30,000 has been mapped as core habitat, and the remainder as low density habitat. Sagebrush steppe habitat was estimated to occur on less than one percent of the landscape for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, but according to ODFW a little more than 3,000 acres within the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest would be considered sage-grouse habitat, most of which is mapped as core habitat. The greater sage-grouse is not expected to occur within the Umatilla National Forest.

The Preferred Alternative retains the Alternative B (Proposed Action) modified management direction with the following addition: In greater sage-grouse habitat, fence construction within one mile of known leks (protected activity centers) and seasonal high use areas should not be authorized or allowed. Fence construction on the crest of low hills should not be authorized or allowed unless the fence is marked with anti-strike markers.

Grazing utilization within occupied greater sage-grouse habitats should not exceed 40 percent at any time during the grazing season and will be determined specifically for each greater sage-grouse habitat, i.e., grazing utilization measured as an average of the entire pasture or grazing unit will not be used to determine compliance with this guideline.

During greater sage-grouse breeding season, livestock turnout and trailing should avoid high concentrations on known greater sage-grouse leks (protected activity centers).

#### Where did the riparian utilization standards come from?

The new Utilizations Guidelines were proposed in response to the need for accelerated restoration for aquatic habitat and species. The Guidelines are meant to balance the Preferred Alternative with aquatic and riparian resource concerns.

#### Why does the Proposed Revised Forest Plan reduce the riparian allowable forage utilization for livestock within riparian management areas? What will happen if my allotment has a higher utilization level authorized in riparian management areas than the Revised Forest Plan does?

Alternative E, the preferred alternative, proposes to increase the pace and scale of restoration. Decreasing the amount of utilization in riparian management areas would help to move them toward the desired condition. Once the Revised Forest Plan is in place, the term grazing permits for each allotment will be modified to replace the 1990 Forest Plan language with the Revised Forest Plan language. However, site-specific environmental analysis and consultation for threatened and endangered species will need to be completed on all of the allotments as each allotment management plan is revised, which will determine the appropriate level of utilization for your specific allotment.

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### What is a *Silene spaldingii*? There is a standard in the Proposed Revised Forest Plan that livestock grazing isn't allowed where that plant exists. Why is grazing a hazard for it?

*Silene spaldingii* is a listed threatened plant species under the Endangered Species Act. Spalding's Catchfly is the common name. The reason for the standard is that trampling from livestock grazing affects its growth and ability to reproduce. It is listed because there are very few plants. With that standard, we want to manage the timing of grazing; it's not a desirable plant for cow forage. We work with local Permittees to help them identify the plant and they have been able to work around it.

### Why wasn't a range of alternatives analyzed for grazing (no grazing alternative and an unlimited grazing alternative)?

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires the agency to analyze a reasonable range of alternatives. The EIS for the Blue Mountains Forest Plans analyzed an alternative with significantly reduced grazing (Alternative C), and an alternative with grazing above current levels (Alternative D). Furthermore, Alternatives G and J (Minimum Management Alternative and No Grazing Alternative respectively) which would have eliminated grazing, were considered but eliminated from detailed study.

In addition, Forest Service Managers are responsible for ensuring compliance with the following laws, regulations, and policies which require multiple use management:

**Organic Administration Act of 1897:** Gives regulatory authority to the President to establish National Forests. Authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to promulgate rules and regulations for the use and occupancy of National Forests.

**Taylor Grazing Act of 1934:** Intended to "stop injury to the public grazing lands [excluding Alaska] by preventing overgrazing and soil deterioration; to provide for their orderly use, improvement, and development; [and] to stabilize the livestock industry dependent upon the public range".

**Granger-Thye Act of 1950:** Provides for the issuance of term grazing permits for up to 10 years. It also provides for the use of grazing receipts for range improvement work.

**Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960:** Provides that national forests are established and administered for several purposes, including livestock grazing. This act also authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to develop the surface renewable resources of national forests for multiple uses and sustained yield of the services and products to be obtained from these lands, without impairment of the productivity of the land.

**Wilderness Act of 1964:** Provides that livestock grazing, and the activities and facilities needed to support it, are allowed to continue in wilderness areas when such grazing was established before designation.

**Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resource Planning Act of 1974:** Directs the Secretary of Agriculture to develop a process for the revision of national forest land and resource management plans, including the identification of the suitability of lands for resource management.

**Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976:** States that public lands will be managed in a manner that will provide food and habitat for fish, wildlife, and domestic animals.

**National Forest Management Act of 1976:** Reorganized, expanded and otherwise amended the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, which called for the management of renewable resources on National Forest Lands. The NFMA requires the Secretary of Agriculture to assess forest lands, develop a management plan for each unit of the National Forest System. It is the primary statute governing the administration of National Forests.

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**Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978:** Establishes and reaffirms the national policy and commitment to inventory and identify current public rangeland conditions and trends; manage, maintain and improve the condition of public rangelands so that they become as productive as feasible for all rangeland values in accordance with management objectives and the land use planning process; charge a fee for public grazing use which is equitable; continue the policy of protecting wild free-roaming horses and burros from capture, branding, harassment, or death, while at the same time facilitating the removal and disposal of excess wild free-roaming horses and burros which pose a threat to themselves and their habitat and to other rangeland values.

**Rescission Act of 1995:** Directs the Forest Service to complete site-specific NEPA analyses and decisions on allotments on a scheduled basis.  
36 CFR 222

**Forest Service Manual 2200:** This manual summarized laws and regulations governing rangeland management and forest planning.

**Forest Service Handbook 2209.13:** Grazing Permit Administration Handbook

**Allotment Management Plans:** Developed through site-specific environmental analysis, an allotment management plan uses Forest Plan direction and current issues to determine desired conditions, areas suitable for grazing, and a broad strategy on how to meet desired conditions. They describe site-specific grazing strategies, stocking, structural and nonstructural range improvement needs, and coordination with other resources. The output, or animal unit months (AUMs), is a result of the allotment management plan requirements, range improvements, and the ability of the permit holder to manage forage and livestock.

**Non-Use for Resource Protection Agreements:** These agreements may be entered into to provide long term non-use needed to address recovery of rangeland resource conditions, provide forage on a temporary basis to allow resource recovery on other area grazing units, provide temporary resolution of conflicts created by bighorn sheep or wolf predation on livestock, or provide supplemental forage in times of drought to assist area livestock operators and lessen the resource impacts of grazing.

### Where can I find information on Livestock Grazing and Grazing Vegetation in the EIS?

#### Standards & Guidelines

Plant Species (Federally listed & species at risk) (Appendix A pg 120)

Species Diversity Riparian Habitat (Appendix A pg 119)

Range Management & Domestic Livestock Grazing (Appendix A pg 125) includes:

- Grazing After Wildland Fire (Appendix A pg 125)
- Grazing Near BHS (Appendix A pg 126-127)
- Grazing within Occupied Sage Grouse Habitat (Appendix A pg 125 & 126)
- Upland Forage Utilization (Appendix A pg 125)
- Upland Shrub Utilization (Appendix A pg 126)

**MA 4B (Riparian Management Areas)** - Appendix A pages 91 & 140-141

**Livestock Grazing and Grazing Land Vegetation** – Volume 1, Chapter 3, pages 126-159

### How are bighorn sheep addressed in the plan with regard to grazing?

There are several Standards and Guidelines outlined in the Plan that are intended to prohibit disease transmission between domestic animals and bighorn sheep. They are:

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RNG-9 **Standard** S-2 Domestic sheep or goat grazing shall not be authorized or allowed on lands where effective separation from bighorn sheep cannot be reasonably maintained.

RNG-10 **Standard** S-3 The use of domestic goats or sheep for manipulation of vegetation (i.e., noxious weed control, fuels reduction) shall not be authorized or allowed within or adjacent to source habitat for bighorn sheep.

RNG-11 **Standard** S-4 The use of recreational pack goats shall not be authorized or allowed within or adjacent to source habitat for bighorn sheep.

RNG-12 **Standard** An effective monitoring program shall be in place to detect presence of bighorn sheep in identified high-risk areas when authorized domestic sheep or goats are present on adjacent or nearby allotments.

RNG-13 **Guideline** Trailing of domestic sheep or goats should not be authorized or allowed within 7 miles of bighorn sheep home ranges.

RNG-14 **Standard** When effective monitoring has not been conducted for bighorn sheep presence, domestic sheep or goat grazing shall not be authorized.

RNG-15 **Standard** Permitted domestic sheep and goats shall be counted onto and off of the allotment by the Permittee. A reasonable effort to account for the disposition of any missing sheep must be made by the Permittee.

RNG-16 **Standard** When permitted sheep are found to be missing, the Forest Service shall be notified within 24 hours.

RNG-17 **Standard** Authorized domestic sheep or goats shall be individually marked in a manner that allows immediate identification of ownership at a distance during the grazing season at all times while on NFS lands.

RNG-18 **Standard** Implement emergency actions when bighorn sheep presence is detected within 7 miles of active domestic sheep or goat grazing or trailing. Actions to be taken shall ensure separation between bighorn sheep and domestic sheep or goats.

RNG-19 **Guideline** To maintain separation, when bighorn sheep are found within 7 miles of an active domestic sheep and goat allotment, implementation of emergency actions for domestic sheep and goat grazing could include: Reroute (move) domestic sheep or goats to a new routing path that will take them away from the likely bighorn movement; this may involve rerouting within the permitted allotment, movement to a different allotment, or, if the situation cannot otherwise be resolved, moving the permitted sheep off of the national forest until the situation can be resolved. Inform the appropriate state agency of the bighorn sheep location.

### Contact Information:

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