

Livestock Effects and Grazing Permit Revision Status Item 30

OBJECTIVE: To report on allotment monitoring and progress of allotment management plan (AMP) revisions.

DATA SOURCE: Technical review of condition and trends, forage production, transitory range, and other parameters as needed.

FREQUENCY: Ten percent of allotments annually.

REPORTING PERIOD: 2014-2015

VARIABILITY: +/- ten percent change in the carrying capacity

EVALUATION:

Although transitory range increases temporarily with fires, these are not calculated in any allotment's permanent carrying capacity. Therefore this does not affect the Forest Plan variability thresholds noted above. The quantity of monitoring during the 2014-2015 monitoring period met minimum Forest Plan annual requirements.

MONITORING RESULTS:

There was little change in the carrying capacity. However grazing permittees are reducing their use of the grazing allotments by personal choice which is showing improved effects on riparian and watershed and reducing erosion.

Actual Use

Sixteen of the 20 grazing allotments hold active permits. In 2014, eight permittees grazed 1,634 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) on eight allotments. In 2015, six permittees grazed 892 AUMs on six allotments.

Land Area Grazed

Cattle grazing is authorized on approximately 11 percent of the land area of the Bitterroot NF.

Transitory Forage Status from Large Fires

The loss of tree canopy in the moderate and high severity burned areas from large fires in recent years combined with harvest of burned timber from salvage sale units did not lead to an increase in permitted grazing animals. The Forest no longer includes transitory forage in the calculation of the carrying capacity of an allotment. The transitory forage produced by the opened canopy of a burned timber habitat type is classified as secondary or supplemental rather than part of the primary permanent forage base. The amount of transitory forage does not change the allowable stocking rate of an allotment (the number of animals and the duration of grazing) in most cases. Natural plant succession eventually returns these areas to a forested cover type and phases out any flush of palatable forage plant growth.

New transitory feeding areas may change established livestock foraging patterns. The amount of grazing that occurs in these areas is dependent on the forage production and palatability, distance to water, natural barriers, elevation, steepness of slope, noxious weed invasion, and availability of other forage. Many of the sites that experienced fire and are accessible by permitted livestock are not producing palatable herbaceous forage species. For example, pinegrass (*Calamagrostis rubescens*), an unpalatable grass that livestock generally avoid, dominates many acres of Douglas-fir habitat types. As tree roots and boles weaken from fire effects, the resulting downfall increasingly prevents livestock movement through burned areas.

Allotment Compliance Results Summary

Forest rangeland specialists inspected actively grazed allotments during the 2014-15 grazing seasons. The Forest uses these inspections to determine range readiness, permit compliance, and utilization levels, as well as to collect data for the AMP revision process. In addition, range specialists inspect allotments to determine if they are in compliance with Forest Plan standards. These standards vary by management area, but generally require

that forage use by livestock not exceed 50% on elk summer range or 35% on elk winter range. Rangeland monitoring work continues to focus strongly on grazing impacts to riparian condition. Specialists also employ supplemental stream bank alteration standards prescribed for some drainages to address fisheries and water quality concerns.

Table 1 – Status of Allotments, 2014-2015

Allotment	2014	2015
Ambrose Creek	Rested	Rested
Andrews-Waugh	Rested	Rested
Warm Springs	Rested	Rested
Bass Creek	Grazed to standards	Grazed to standards
Bertie Lord *	Inactive	Inactive
Bunch Gulch	Rested	Rested
Shirley Mountain	Rested	Rested
Camp Reimel	Rested	Rested
Coal Creek	Rested	Rested
Gold Creek	Inactive	Inactive
Harlan Gulch	Grazed to standards	Grazed to standards
Little Sleeping Child*	Inactive	Inactive
Meadow Creek	Rested	Rested
Medicine Tree	Grazed to standards	Grazed to standards
North Sleeping Child	Grazed to standards	Grazed to standards
Piquett Creek *	Inactive	Inactive
Skalkaho	Grazed to standards	Coffee & Brennan grazed to standards Uplands slightly above standards
Sula Peak	Grazed to standards	Rested
/East Fork	Rested	Rested
Sweathouse/Gash	Grazed to standards	Grazed to standards
Trapper Peak	Grazed to standards	Rested

*Reserve allotment in inactive status to be used when another allotment needs rest

Allotment Management NEPA and Plan Revision Status

Analysis on the North Sleeping Child Grazing Allotment Environmental Assessment began in 2012 with completion expected in 2018.

