



Date: November 27, 2017

Subject: Grazing Permits and Greater Sage-grouse Timeframe Change

To: Interested Parties

Greetings:

As Regional Foresters in the Intermountain, Northern, and Rocky Mountain Regions, we are providing notification that we will be approving an administrative change to a timeframe set out in the Records of Decision (RODs) for the Greater Sage-Grouse land management plan amendments, "Greater Sage-grouse Record of Decision: Idaho and Southwest Montana, Nevada, Utah" (Great Basin ROD) and "Greater Sage-grouse Record of Decision: Northwest Colorado, Wyoming" (Rocky Mountain ROD).

The RODs stated that permits are to be modified according to the amendments' grazing directions by the beginning of the 2018 grazing season, but we have found that we will not be able to modify the permits by that time. We will instead require that such implementation be completed as soon as practicable, as described below.

We will be making this change due to several developments since the RODs were signed in 2015:

- 1) Evaluation of allotments, including riparian/mesic areas, described in the RODs as Phase I, have not yet been completed because the scale of work was more complicated and logistically challenging than initially thought;
- 2) Additional scientific information has produced new observations regarding the precision of grazing guidelines and has complicated the evaluation of vegetation relative to the guidelines; and
- 3) New issues have been identified, and continue to be identified, about the current greater sage-grouse plan amendments. These issues may affect the interpretation and implementation of the amendments and may lead to changes to them. On November 21, 2017, the Forest Service issued a notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement, which initiates a scoping process to solicit public comments on greater sage-grouse land management issues that could warrant land management plan amendments. (82 FR 55346).

Because of the above developments, we will be changing the timeframe for grazing permit modification as follows:

We will remove the RODs' directions added to the land management plans that state, "In the second phase of implementation, term grazing permits of affected allotments will be modified with new grazing guidance by the 2017 grazing season for most units and no later than 2018 grazing season for all units." (Great Basin ROD at pp. 71-72; Rocky Mountain ROD at p. 65).



In its place, for each affected land management plan, we will insert, "In the second phase of implementation, term grazing permits of affected allotments will be modified with new grazing guidance as soon as practicable." That is, we will not be ready to modify grazing permits until we have resolved the issues outlined in 1, 2, and 3 above. Furthermore, we may resolve these issues so that modification of the permits would not be necessary or may be different than the current plan direction (see the November 21, 2017 notice of intent, referred to above).

We will make this change by means of an administrative change to the plans. Under the 2012 Forest Service Land Management Planning Rule, a change to plan content other than to plan components is conducted through the administrative change procedure of 36 CFR 219.13(c). The ROD livestock grazing implementation schedule is such "other content"; specifically, "optional content in the plan." See 36 CFR 219.f(c)(2): "A plan may include additional content, such as potential management approaches or strategies and partnership opportunities or coordination activities."

Accordingly, we may make the administrative change following public notice (36 CFR 219.13(c)(2)). This letter serves as the required public notice.

This administrative change will be made to the land management plans amended by the Great Basin ROD: Ashley, Beaverhead-Deerlodge, Boise, Caribou, Challis, Dixie, Fishlake, Humboldt, Manti-La Sal, Salmon, Sawtooth, Targhee, Toiyabe, Uinta, and the Wasatch-Cache National Forests, and the Curlew National Grassland.

This administrative change will be made to the land management plans amended by the Rocky Mountain ROD: Routt, Bridger-Teton, and Medicine Bow National Forests, and Thunder Basin National Grassland.

For this administrative change, we considered whether the timing of term grazing permit modifications was used in the effects or outcome analysis from the final environmental impact statements (FEISs) that informed the Greater sage-grouse RODs. The FEISs were silent on the timing of term grazing permit modifications.

We will make these administrative changes effective 30 days after the posting date of this notice on the websites for the affected administrative units.

Sincerely,



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