

Item #30: Range

Evaluation Objectives: To evaluate if Forest Plan projections for forage use are accurate.

Methods: Amount of permitted and actual use.

Evaluation: The Forest Plan (page II-9) estimated that permitted grazing use during the monitoring period would average 5,900 and 6,200 animal unit months (AUMs). It was also anticipated 350 acres of range improvements and the completion of 5 allotment management plans per year. During the monitoring period, grazing programs were below the Forest Plan estimates due to inactive grazing allotments. For example, a total of 2,328 AUMs were authorized in 2007 (Table 30-1), which is well below Forest Plan projections. On the Swan Ranger District, all allotment management plans are complete. Planning for the Lemonade Springs and Island Meadows Allotments is currently underway. The Swaney Allotment Management Plan will be completed before 2015.

As of 2007, there are 9 active allotments on the Swan Lake and Tally Lake Ranger Districts (Table 30-1). Three allotments became vacant during the Forest Plan monitoring period (Table 30-2). These allotments became vacant because the permits were issued at a time when the majority of the suitable range was transitory range and utilized the forage created by vegetative management, such as thinning, timber harvest, and prescribed fire. Since these allotments have been vacant, transitory range has decreased to a point where they are no longer viable.

Table 30-1. Active Grazing Allotments on the Flathead National Forest.

| Name | District | Acres | Cow/Calf Pairs | 2008 Authorized AUMs |
|----------------------------------|----------|-----------------|----------------|----------------------|
| Lemonade Springs /Island Meadows | Tally | 9,865 10,066 | 140 | 658 |
| Swaney | Tally | 15,322 | 82 | 371 |
| Barber Creek | Swan | 8,217 | 25 | 132 |
| Browns Meadow | Swan | 16,020 | 32 | 169 |
| Holland | Swan | 20,808 | 50 | 265 |
| Kerr Mountain | Swan | 10,902 | 25 | 83 |
| Piper Creek | Swan | 5,619 | 5 | 26 |
| Wild Bill | Swan | 15,950 | 118 | 624 |
| Totals | | 112,769 | 477 | 2,328 |

The vacant allotments in Table 30-2 meet the necessary criteria to be closed through administrative decisions by the Forest Supervisor. Such decisions are excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment.

Table 30-2. Vacant Allotments on the Flathead National Forest.

| Name | District | Vacant Since |
|---------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| Smith Creek | Swan | 1988 |
| Lion Creek | Swan | 1982 |
| Elk Creek | Swan | 1989 |
| Glacier Creek | Swan | 1980 |
| Herrig Creek | Tally | 1996 |

Recommended Action: Continue to monitor permitted and actual range use.