

# Forest Plan Revision, Colville & Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forests May 2009

## Briefing: Rangelands and Forest Plan Revision

---

### Managing National Forest Rangelands

The public values rangelands for economic, ecological, and social purposes. The Forest Service administers 96 million acres in rangelands - nearly a quarter of all public and private rangelands in the United States and half of all National Forest System lands. The Forest Service manages rangeland conditions to provide clean water, habitat for a variety of plant and animal species, sustainable grazing and browsing, and recreation opportunities.

Whether it is bird watching, hiking, camping, fishing, hunting, or a Sunday drive, many people look to rangelands as a place for solitude and enjoyment. Federally managed rangelands provide a multitude of recreational opportunities that are generally located at lower elevations and are therefore more accessible than mountain and forest areas.

Rangelands are diverse ecosystems that produce forage for grazing and browsing animals, wildlife habitat, water, minerals, energy, some wood products, and plant and animal genetic biodiversity.

Rangeland conditions are regularly inventoried, classified, and monitored to maintain or improve rangeland health. When rangelands become unhealthy the Forest Service strives to restore their ecosystem functions. Forest Service rangeland management includes a whole host of both public and private partners working together to make sure rangelands remain healthy and functioning properly.

#### Rangeland

Land on which the indigenous vegetation (climax or natural potential) is predominately grasses, grass-like plants, forbs, or shrubs and is managed as a natural ecosystem. If plants are introduced, they are managed similarly. Rangeland includes natural grasslands, savannas, shrub lands, many deserts, tundras, alpine communities, marshes, and meadows.

### The Role of Forest Plans in Managing Rangelands

Forest plans provide strategic guidance in the form of describing desired conditions and guidelines for achieving and maintaining those desired conditions. It is the goal of the Forest Service to conserve the rich resources of rangelands while contributing to communities that greatly depend on these same resources. Forest plan desired conditions and guidelines for rangelands are written to contribute to the long term health and sustainability of these areas to allow for multiple resource benefits that include livestock grazing, recreation and ecosystem diversity. Because Forest plans are strategic in nature they do not provide direction for closing grazing allotments or opening new ones, nor do they establish a specific number of cows, sheep or goats allowed on an allotment. The revised Forest plan will continue to allow grazing on the Colville and Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forests.

### Livestock and Wildlife Grazing and Browsing

Wildlife and permitted livestock are the major rangeland consumers of browse and forage vegetation. Big and small game, and rodents and birds depend on rangeland shrubs and trees for browse and cover. Grazing is the use of rangeland grasses and forbs by wildlife and permitted livestock. A sustainable range management program minimizes impacts of browsing and grazing of wildlife and cattle.

Livestock grazing on National Forest System lands has been relatively stable over the past 30 years (Mitchell 2000). Nationally, the Forest Service administers approximately 6,300 paid permits. The 2007 Grazing Statistical Report shows Region 6 (Oregon and Washington) has about 396 paid permits. About 23% of the grazing permits for cattle, horses and burros, sheep and goats on National Forest System lands in Region 6 are on the Colville, and the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forests.

### **Things to Know**

- Not all of the Okanogan-Wenatchee and Colville National Forests is considered rangeland (see definition in box).
- Not all rangeland is considered suitable for livestock grazing. For instance rock outcrops, very wet or heavily forested areas have limited forage production. Other lands may be too steep, too far from a water source, or they are withdrawn from the land base to serve other resource management needs or requirements. Management areas such as research natural areas, scenic byways, developed recreation areas such as ski areas and campgrounds, heritage sites, administrative sites, mineral production sites, and areas with a high density of noxious weeds or are habitat for threatened, endangered or sensitive plant and animal species may also be withdrawn for the purpose of livestock grazing.
- The Forest Service manages grazing through a system of permits for grazing allotments. Permittees are issued a ten-year renewable permit which stipulates the number of animals that can be grazed, the season of use, and the area to be grazed. Grazing permits are granted on the basis of certain requirements that the permittee must meet. For this use the permittee pays a fee that is determined annually based on fair market value, and those fee receipts are returned to the U.S. Treasury.

-----