

# Intermountain Region Greater Sage-grouse Livestock Grazing Implementation Guide

Version 1.0 (2/8/2017)

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## I. Introduction.

The Greater Sage-grouse (GRSG) [Records of Decision](#) (RODs) amend Forest Plan livestock grazing direction in GRSG habitat (Plan Amendments). This GRSG Livestock Grazing Implementation Guide (Implementation Guide) covers the Plan Amendments pertaining to Idaho and Southwest Montana, Nevada, and Utah (USDA Forest Service - ID, MT, NV, UT, 2015); and the plan amendments pertaining to Northwest Colorado and Wyoming (USDA Forest Service - CO, WY, 2015). This Implementation Guide incorporates guidance to be used to assist with implementing livestock management direction from the Plan Amendments (USDA Forest Service - ID, MT, NV, UT, 2015, p. 31) (USDA Forest Service - CO, WY, 2015, pp. 29-30) in a consistent and efficient manner.

This Implementation Guide does not replace or supersede any direction defined in the Plan Amendments.

### A. Implementation Direction for Livestock Grazing .

The Plan Amendments will be implemented in a phased approach. (USDA Forest Service - ID, MT, NV, UT, 2015, p. 71) (USDA Forest Service - CO, WY, 2015, p. 65) The first phase of implementation of the grazing guidance contained in the LMP amendments will be habitat mapping that identifies GRSG habitat and an evaluation of allotments (i.e. specific pastures and riparian/mesic areas). Field visits with permittees may be conducted to understand the new guidance and expectations, evaluate impacts, and explore collaborative solutions to effectively implement the Plan Amendment guidance. Guidance for mapping seasonal habitats is found in the [Greater Sage-grouse Habitat Implementation Guide](#) (USDA FS, R4, 2016, pp. 14-18) and the [Greater Sage-grouse Vegetation Implementation Guide](#) (USDA FS, R4, 2016, p. 2).

In the second phase, implementation of the grazing guidance into affected permits should begin after January 1, 2017 and be completed no later than the end of the 2018 calendar year<sup>1</sup>. The majority of the 2017 grazing season will be used to collaborate with permittees relative to implementing the plan amendments on affected grazing allotments. After modifying grazing permits, monitoring conducted over the following several years may show need for additional adjustments in grazing practices and potentially, additional future permit modifications. This monitoring may also indicate need for additional allotment level NEPA analyses and new grazing authorization decisions (USDA Forest Service - ID, MT, NV, UT, 2015, p. 72) (USDA Forest Service - CO, WY, 2015, p. 65). Where there is an indication that additional NEPA analysis will be needed, Forests will modify their grazing authorization NEPA analysis schedules, often referred to as the Rescissions Act Schedule. They should include GRSG analysis needs along with other criteria for scheduling these analyses. Where additional or new NEPA analyses and decision processes are needed, the plan-to-project<sup>2</sup> portion of these analyses will include an evaluation

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<sup>1</sup> The Forests in Region 2 intend to use Habitat Suitability Framework (HAF) data, perennial grass height data, sage-grouse occupancy, livestock turn-on dates, capability information and a number of other data to sort affected allotments into five categories. These categories vary by changes that would or would not occur to the grazing permits and/or annual operating instructions associated with each allotment within designated sage-grouse habitat. See Appendix A.

<sup>2</sup> Plan-to-Project Analysis training is available on the R4 O Drive at O:\NFS\R04\Program\2200Range\2200Training\NEPAPlanToProjectDevelop

of GRSG habitat condition (where present) using 4th Order [Habitat Analysis Framework \(HAF\)](#) analysis procedures. The authorization decisions will also prescribe effectiveness monitoring direction for evaluating trend and achievement of GRSG related desired conditions.

Compliance with the Plan Amendments will be demonstrated by:

- Implementation of grazing related standards and guidelines which includes modification of term grazing permits.
- Implementation monitoring to evaluate compliance with permit modifications.
- Effectiveness monitoring evaluating condition and trend of grazing affected desired conditions.
- Inclusion of GRSG direction in allotment level NEPA analyses and grazing authorization decisions.

#### **B. Scope of Implementation.**

The implementation area is defined by the “decision areas” described in the RODs. The decision area is: “. . . NFS lands within GRSG habitat management areas and lek buffers outside habitat management areas”. (USDA Forest Service - ID, MT, NV, UT, 2015, pp. 17-18) (USDA Forest Service - CO, WY, 2015, pp. 17-18).

#### **C. Implementation Process.**

- Determine location of GRSG seasonal habitats (see Section V)
- Determine where grazing guidelines apply (see Section VI)
- Modify term grazing permits (see Section VII)
- Administer grazing permits (see Section VIII)
- Monitor grazing guidelines
- Monitor desired conditions

#### **D. Critical implementation points for line officers.**

1. Firm-up 3<sup>rd</sup> Order HAF designation of GRSG seasonal habitats with partners.
2. Identify condition of seasonal habitats -Phase 3 HAF form F-1.
3. Identify grazing allotments and permits with GRSG seasonal habitats.
4. Coordinate with permittees and others.
5. Modify affected permits with appropriate grazing S&Gs (by 12/31/2018).
6. Process Appeals.
7. Monitor.
8. Manage allotment authorization (Rescissions Act) schedule.

#### **E. Link to GRSG Habitat Implementation Guide for Habitat Mapping and Condition Assessment.**

The [GRSG Habitat Implementation Guide](#) (USDA FS, R4, 2016) provides:

- Information on mapping GRSG habitat for the Plan Amendments.
- Discussion on the monitoring framework and the role of HAF.

- General guidelines for using 3<sup>rd</sup> Order HAF for determining seasonal habitat and habitat suitability.
  - Complete using all available data, such as information from local state fish and wildlife agencies, local working groups, published research, existing data, etc.
  - Complies with Plan Amendment direction for identifying habitat condition at the allotment scale. (USDA Forest Service - ID, MT, NV, UT, 2015, p. 71) (USDA Forest Service - CO, WY, 2015, p. 65)
- Direction to use 4<sup>th</sup> Order HAF for allotment level grazing authorization (NEPA) analyses and habitat restoration projects.

#### F. Link to GRSG Vegetation Implementation Guide Protocols for Monitoring Grazing Guidelines.

The [GRSG Vegetation Implementation Guide](#) (USDA FS, R4, 2016) provides:

- Direction for use of the [The USFS Vegetation Monitoring and Assessment Application](#) for mapping preliminary seasonal habitats and establishing field monitoring and assessment sites. See section titled Habitat Assessment Framework. (Refer to the [Application User Guide](#) for its use.)
- Direction for monitoring grazing guidelines.
  - Protocols for evaluating site capability/ecological potential for meeting perennial grass droop height guidelines in breeding and nesting habitat.
  - Protocols for measuring 7 inch or 4 inch perennial grass droop height in nesting and breeding habitat.
  - Direction for and protocols for measuring 4 inch stubble height (4 in. or 50% use in Kentucky bluegrass) in riparian/mesic meadows in brood rearing and summer habitat.
  - Protocols for measuring grazing guidelines for winter habitat.
  - Plot adjustment and rejection criteria for 4<sup>th</sup> Order HAF assessments and for grazing guideline monitoring.

## II. Goals and Objectives for Grazing Implementation.

### A. Contribute to Sustaining GRSG Populations and Habitat.

- Adjust grazing management to maintain or move toward achieving desired habitat conditions consistent with ecological capability. (USDA Forest Service - CO, WY, 2015, p. 46) (USDA Forest Service - ID, MT, NV, UT, 2015, p. 52)
- Provide consistent grazing management related guidance for Plan Amendment implementation.
  - Provide guidance for GRSG habitat analysis on grazing allotments.
  - Provide guidance for term grazing permit modifications.
  - Provide guidance for implementing Plan Amendment standards and guidelines related to livestock management.
  - Provide guidance for monitoring Plan Amendment grazing standards and guidelines on grazing allotments.
  - Provide guidance for permit administration.
  - Provide guidance for prioritizing project level grazing authorizations in GRSG habitat.

B. Encourage Collaboration and Cooperation.

### III. Grazing Transition Schedule.

#### 2016 – 2017.

- Develop direction and conduct training for implementing the Plan Amendments.
- Forests firm Up 3rd Order HAF Assessment of Seasonal Habitats.
- Work with permittees and other partners to understand what implementation of this direction will entail and how it might affect rangeland uses. Document in 2017 AOI meetings how this will be carried out.
- Begin determination of areas where GRSG habitat is not ecologically capable of meeting the grazing guidelines. This includes identifying other grazing direction that may be needed for these areas to meet GRSG habitat desired conditions.
- Begin implementation of permit modifications to include grazing guidelines. The focus for 2017 will be working with permittees to understand how the new direction will affect their grazing management. Most permits will not be modified until after the 2017 grazing season.
- Process permit modification appeals.
- Implement GRSG grazing guideline monitoring.
- Modify Allotment Authorization NEPA (Rescissions Act) Schedule to include priorities for addressing GRSG issues and needs. Note that this schedule will continue to be updated as we understand how GRSG Plan Amendment implementation will effect grazing authorizations.
- Begin 4<sup>th</sup> Order HAF as needed to support priorities for grazing authorization NEPA reviews.

#### 2018 And Later.

- Complete implementation of permit modifications to include grazing guidelines by end of calendar year 2018.
- Process permit modification appeals.
- Continue monitoring implementation of grazing guidelines,
- Where necessary and based on monitoring results, adjust management consistent with Plan Amendment direction.
- Continue permit modifications as needed to address these adjustments.
- Continue 4th Order HAF as needed to support priorities for grazing authorization NEPA reviews.
- Continue working with permittees and other partners to understand what implementation of this direction will entail and how it might affect rangeland uses.
- Identify and carry out effectiveness monitoring (trend and condition) requirements for GRSG habitat desired conditions along with other needs determined during allotment level NEPA analyses and authorization decisions.

## IV. Incorporation of Inventory and Monitoring Protocols.

### A. Inventory and Monitoring Direction.

Protocols for Inventory and Assessment of GRSG Habitat are described in the Sage-Grouse Habitat Assessment Framework (HAF) (Stiver, et al., 2015) . 3<sup>rd</sup> order HAF will be used to assess habitat condition as required prior to modifying term grazing permits with Plan Amendment Standards and Guidelines (USDA FS, R4, 2016, p. 2). [The USFS Vegetation Monitoring and Assessment Application](#) will be used to map preliminary seasonal habitats and to identify field locations for 4<sup>th</sup> Order HAF condition assessments. 4<sup>th</sup> Order HAF (Stiver, et al., 2015) assessments will be used to assess the condition of GRSG habitat during allotment level grazing authorization NEPA analyses. The FS will use HAF described protocols for Line Point Intercept (p. 91), including recording vegetation height and sagebrush form (p. 94); and Forb Diversity (p. 107). Transect data will be managed using [Vegetation Data System](#) (VGS) software.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Order HAF assessment sites identified using [the USFS Vegetation Monitoring and Assessment Application](#) will also be used for evaluating ecological capability of sagebrush habitats to produce 7 in. and 4 in. perennial grass droop heights in Nesting and Breeding Habitat, and monitoring the 7 in. and 4 in. perennial grass droop height grazing guidelines in Nesting and Breeding Habitat.

Protocols for Monitoring Grazing Guidelines are described in the [GRSG Vegetation Implementation Guide](#).

## V. Determine location of GRSG seasonal habitats.

### A. Phase 3 HAF (Stiver, et al., 2015).

Guidance for mapping seasonal habitats is found in the [Greater Sage-grouse Habitat Implementation Guide](#) (USDA FS, R4, 2016, pp. 14-18) and the [Greater Sage-grouse Vegetation Implementation Guide](#) (USDA FS, R4, 2016, p. 2). This includes use of the [The USFS Vegetation Monitoring and Assessment Application](#) and identification of habitat suitability using 3<sup>rd</sup> Order Habitat Assessment per HAF (Stiver, et al., 2015). Initial mapping of seasonal habitats will be firmed up using available forest data, and available information from BLM, state fish and wildlife agencies, local working groups, research, etc. (USDA FS, R4, 2016, p. 15).

## VI. Determine Where Grazing Standards and Guidelines Apply.

### A. Plan Amendment Standards and Guidelines.

The [Plan Amendments](#) identify grazing standards and guidelines for each State within the decision area. Many of the standards and guidelines are applicable to all states. However, there are some differences. Each Forest needs to review and understand the direction applicable to their specific areas. For example, the Caribou-Targhee NF will need to understand Plan Implementation direction for Idaho, Utah and Wyoming. These guidelines relate in some states to management of existing fences; construction of new fences, water developments and other livestock management facilities; and limitations on forage use, livestock trailing and sheep bedding. Note that some of the standards and guidelines provide management direction

specific to the agency and some are related directly to on-the-ground management. While permittees need to be aware of the full context of the direction, their primary concern will be related to how this direction affects their livestock management activities. This discussion must be supported by seasonal habitat maps for their allotments.

#### B. Identify Potential Grazing Conflicts with Permittees.

Overlay allotment/pasture maps with the location of seasonal habitats developed per section V above. These maps will show where the grazing standards and guidelines from the Plan Amendments should be applied. Using the [The USFS Vegetation Monitoring and Assessment Application](#), identify the location for 4<sup>th</sup> Order HAF transects and grazing guideline monitoring locations. It is important for the permittees to understand where the monitoring will occur and how it will be done. (Monitoring protocols are described in the [Greater Sage-grouse Vegetation Implementation Guide](#).) Work with the permittees to understand how current livestock grazing use is occurring within seasonal habitats and specifically the monitoring sites. Field visits with permittees should be conducted to understand the new guidance and expectations, evaluate impacts, and explore collaborative solutions to effectively implement the Plan Amendment guidance. This information, along with the results of monitoring grazing use at these sites, will help the FS and the permittees determine how to manage livestock to conform to the Plan Amendment direction.

#### C. Modify Unit Level Grazing Authorization (Rescissions Act) NEPA Schedule.

Section 402 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) allows the Forest Service at its discretion, to establish a schedule for NEPA analyses related to authorizing livestock grazing on grazing allotments. Within this context, the Forest Service maintains unit schedules and a national summary of the allotment level NEPA analyses (commonly referred to as the Rescissions Act Schedule). With the Plan Amendments, Forests should add criteria related to GRSG management needs for consideration as they modify this schedule and plan associated workloads. Criteria for schedule adjustments may include GRSG considerations such as:

- The amount of the allotment in seasonal GRSG habitat with emphasis on nesting and breeding habitat.
- Allotments where Rangeland Specialists, Biologists, and line officers feel there are higher levels of concern about grazing and achieving GRSG desired conditions.
- Areas of special concern identified by State Agencies and areas with a high priority for habitat restoration that may require changes to grazing management.
- Obvious need for significant changes in grazing occupancy (particularly season of use).
- Obvious need for changes in, or for construction of additional rangeland improvements.

### VII. Grazing Permit Modifications.

Implementation of the following direction will be done through the modification of existing permits, and not through the issuance of new term permits except for the case where expiration dates or permit waivers coincide with this timing. Annual Operating Instructions (AOI) will not be used to implement the Plan Amendment direction in lieu of permit modifications.

#### A. Implement Permit Modifications.

Term grazing permits associated with allotments which include seasonal GRSG habitat will be modified by the end of the 2018 calendar year to include applicable grazing guidelines from the RODs. Specifically, guideline GRSG-LG-GL-035 in Tables 3 (USDA Forest Service - ID, MT, NV, UT, 2015, pp. 82, 118, 146) or in Wyoming, guideline GRSG-LG-GL-035 in Tables 2 (USDA Forest Service - CO, WY, 2015, pp. 76, 103, 104) will be added as a modification to the term grazing permit. This modification will identify by map the location of the seasonal habitats within each pasture where the associated guidelines will be applied and may display the locations where they will be monitored. Definitions of these seasonal habitats are expected to change over time as new or additional data becomes available or when events such as wildfire change the nature of the habitat. When this happens, the maps of seasonal habitats identified in the term grazing permits will need to be modified as appropriate to stay current and be consistent with this information.

When appropriate, the permit modifications should also include grazing guidelines GRSG-LG-GL-37 and 38 (ID, UT), GRSG-LG-GL-44 and 45 (NV), GRSG-LG-GL-35 and 36 (CO), or GRSG-LG-GL-40 and 41 (WY) with specifics of how they will be applied.

In 2017:

- Give permittees drafts of the permit modifications including seasonal habitat maps and monitoring locations.
- Work with the permittees to monitor and evaluate how these modifications will impact their livestock management and identify potential ways to meet direction.
- Where there is general agreement between the FS and the permittees to the proposed modifications, permits may be modified in 2017.

This provides for additional time to work out the issues and conflicts with the permittees. It may also allow for resolution of current litigation and other issues associated with Plan Amendments. However, it does bunch the workload into the 2018 calendar year. Forests and Ranger Districts will need to plan for adequate resources to meet this requirement.

Use AOI meetings to present the draft modifications and document discussions about the implementation of the GRSG direction from the Forest Plan amendments. This should include:

- Documentation that permits will be modified by the end of the 2018 calendar year.
- Copies of the seasonal habitat maps showing pastures and monitoring locations.
- Copies of the standards and guidelines that will be attached to term permits in 2018.
- Discussion of activities that will take place during the grazing year to help permittees understand how the permit modifications will be applied and how they may effect livestock management.

Current permits will be modified (36 CFR 219.15(a). They will keep their current permit number and expiration date. If the permits are expiring and new permits need to be issued, or are in current waiver actions and new permits need to be issued; the new permits will be issued with the same terms and conditions as the expiring or waived permits. These permits will be modified to include direction from the Forest Plan amendments using the same schedule and process as other existing permits.

The modifications will include:

- The appropriate guidelines from the amendments.
- Maps showing the seasonal habitats where they apply.
- Maps showing where they will be monitored. (Forests have the option of identifying monitoring locations on the maps included with the permit modification or on maps included with AOIs.)

#### **B. Appeals.**

Modifications to the term grazing permits to include the grazing guidelines from the Plan Amendments are appealable under 36 CFR 214. They are not subject to mediation (36 CFR 222.20). District Rangers and Forest Supervisors should plan for significant workloads to handle expected appeals. The 36 CFR 214 appeal process cannot be used to challenge the guidelines or other content of the plan amendments. Opportunity to challenge the guidelines and other content of the forest plan amendments was provided at the time the plans were amended through the BLM appeal process. Should permittee appeals seek to challenge the grazing guidelines or other contents of the plan amendments, the response will be that the guidelines were adopted in the decisions amending the forest plans, and may not be challenged here (36 CFR 214.1, 214.5). Permittees may use the 214 appeal process to challenge the interpretation of forest plan direction as applied to their permits, and where and how the Forest Service apply the guidelines relative to particular allotments/pastures, etc. These appeal issues may require more substantial responses. Forests should plan on providing sufficient time and resources to address appeals when they begin the permit modifications. Note that there may be opportunities to consolidate appeals (36 CFR 214.14(e)).

When plan direction is added to new permits, they will not be appealable (see 36 CFR 214.4). Be sure and discuss this with permittees during the process of preparing new permits.

#### **C. Future Permit Modifications.**

Monitoring of the grazing guidelines and achievement of grazing related desired conditions will be implemented after the grazing guidelines are added to current term grazing permits. Monitoring results over time may identify needs for future grazing management changes that could lead to additional future permit modifications and in some cases additional NEPA analyses.

#### **D. Permit Maintenance.**

Permits will need to be maintained to be consistent with new information about GRSG seasonal habitat. Where new information becomes available, the maps showing where the grazing guidelines apply will need to be updated. New information may include such things as:

- New research.
- Better identification of habitat from collared birds, field analyses, lek surveys, etc.
- Wildfire which removes the sagebrush vegetation component.
- Habitat loss from conversion to annual grasses.

## VIII. Administration of Grazing Permits.

### A. Key Standards and Operating Principles.

The FS has the responsibility and authority for permitting and regulating livestock grazing use on National Forest System lands (36 CFR 222.1(a)). The Forest Service is required to make grazing permits consistent with Plan Amendment direction (36 CFR 219.15(a)) and ensure that grazing management activities are consistent with Plan Amendment components (36 CFR 219.15(d)). To comply with this direction, the FS will modify grazing permits within 36 months of the signing of the GRSG RODs to implement the Plan Amendment grazing guidance (USDA Forest Service - CO, WY, 2015, p. 65) (USDA Forest Service - ID, MT, NV, UT, 2015, p. 71) .

Managing compliance with the Plan Amendments will require a significant Forest workload. Forests should evaluate how they may best use forest resources to accomplish this requirement.

The Forest is required to make a determination that the grazing activity is consistent with Forest Plan direction (36 CFR 219.15(d)). This determination should be made during the project authorization NEPA analysis and associated decision process. However, if the Forest is not currently in a NEPA process, this may be documented in annual monitoring reports, or other documents.

### B. Monitor Grazing Standards and Guidelines (Implementation Monitoring).

After the initial permit modifications are made, The FS will monitor compliance with Plan Implementation direction in allotments/pastures where grazing occurs, specifically to ensure that grazing activities comply with the applicable Plan Amendment Standards and Guidelines. Protocols for monitoring implementation of the livestock grazing guidelines identified in Table 3 (ID, NV & UT) and Table 2 (CO & WY) are described in the [Greater Sage-grouse Vegetation Implementation Guide](#). Monitoring will need to be sufficient to determine that grazing management is in compliance with these grazing guidelines.

Forests should modify their Forest Plan monitoring requirements to meet the Plan Amendment direction. This may include providing direction on monitoring frequency and intensity.

Monitoring results over a period of years (1 – 3+) may indicate a need for additional adjustments in grazing management. In some cases, this may result in future permit modifications. Depending on the nature and degree of these modifications they may be carried out within current authorities or may lead to additional NEPA analysis and decision actions. Monitoring that shows a need for additional rangeland improvements (fences, vegetation treatments, etc.) or significant changes in season of use may require additional NEPA analysis. Grazing authorization NEPA (Rescissions Act) schedules should be modified to support this need.

### C. Timing of Monitoring.

The RODs (Tables 3 for ID, MT, NV & UT; and Table 2 for CO & WY) identify target timing for monitoring grazing guidelines. Our objective is to meet that direction, however; we recognize that this will not be possible in all cases and that FS Units will need to make appropriate adjustments to schedules and resources.

In breeding and nesting sagebrush habitat:

- When grazing occurs during the breeding and nesting season, monitoring 7 in. average perennial grass droop height should occur at (or near) the end of the breeding nesting season within the ROD specified distance from occupied leks.<sup>3</sup>
- When grazing occurs after the breeding and nesting season, monitoring 4 in. average perennial grass droop height should occur at the end of the growing season within the ROD specified distance from occupied leks. This will also need to be coordinated with the timing of the livestock grazing.

In brood rearing and summer habitat, monitoring retention of 4 in. stubble height (4 in. or 50% use in Kentucky bluegrass) should occur at the end of the growing season. This will also need to be coordinated with the timing of the livestock grazing.

In winter habitat, monitoring  $\leq$  35% utilization of sagebrush by livestock should be scheduled relative to the timing of the actual grazing period.

### D. Non-Compliance.

After the initial modification of grazing permits, compliance will be evaluated and managed consistent with current FS procedures. During the first 1-3 years of monitoring the grazing guidelines, Forests will work with permittees cooperatively to achieve compliance with these new guidelines. In general, compliance actions during this period would be informal and would focus on working with permittees to determine management changes needed to achieve Plan Amendment direction. However, non-compliance actions may be warranted relative to specific situations such as permittee refusal to implement the modified permit guidelines. Forests should work with Regional rangeland management specialists when they feel that formal notice of non-compliance actions are warranted.

### E. Monitor Desired Conditions and Trend (Effectiveness Monitoring).

The Plan Amendments describe the need for monitoring the indicators of desired conditions for GRSG seasonal habitat at the site-specific scale (USDA Forest Service - ID, MT, NV, UT, 2015, p. 36) (USDA Forest Service - CO, WY, 2015, p. 34). Plan Implementation direction identifies that livestock grazing should be managed to maintain or move towards achieving desired GRSG habitat condition indicators as described in Tables 1 of the Plan Amendments. Effectiveness monitoring will be conducted to determine the current condition and trend of those GRSG habitat indicators that are affected by grazing activities. Condition information may be needed (along with the results of implementation monitoring) to determine if additional permit modifications are needed to support the achievement of those desired conditions affected by

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<sup>3</sup> Distance from occupied leks: CO, NV, UT – 4 miles; WY - 5.3 miles; ID – 6.2 miles

livestock grazing activities. Evaluation of current GRSG habitat conditions affected by livestock grazing is required during the plan-to-project phase when project level (allotment) NEPA authorization analyses are conducted.

4<sup>th</sup> Order HAF (Stiver, et al., 2015) assessments will be used to evaluate current condition of GRSG habitat on grazing allotments. Protocols for Line Point Intercept (Stiver, et al., p. 91), including recording vegetation height and sagebrush form (Stiver, et al., p. 94); and Forb Diversity (Stiver, et al., p. 107) will be followed as described in the [Greater Sage-grouse Vegetation Implementation Guide](#). These assessments will be carried out at the same sites used for monitoring the grazing guidelines. Selection of these sites is described in the [Greater Sage-grouse Vegetation Implementation Guide](#). Data from other rangeland effectiveness monitoring sites may also be used.

Grazing authorization decisions will include concurrent development of allotment management plans (AMP) containing monitoring direction that describes both short-term (implementation) and long-term (effectiveness) monitoring. If 4<sup>th</sup> Order HAF assessments are used for determining trend, the number of sample points per site may need to be increased or aggregated by pasture to get sufficient samples for statistical accuracy. The needed sample size will depend on the variability of the samples and the desired confidence of the results.

#### F. Cooperative Monitoring.

The FS is responsible for conducting implementation and effectiveness monitoring, however; FS Units may enter into formal agreements for monitoring with permittees or other cooperators. Work with Regional rangeland management specialists when considering the development of these agreements to be consistent with Regional policy and direction.

#### G. Forest Plan Monitoring.

Forests may need to amend Forest Plan monitoring requirements to ensure that the frequency and intensity of this monitoring supports a determination that grazing management is consistent with the Plan Amendments. Allotment level grazing authorizations will need to include a 'finding' that the authorization decision is consistent with Forest Plan direction (including the GRSG amended direction).

#### H. Adaptive Management.

Grazing permits may be modified when there is a need based on resource conditions and other considerations (36 CFR 222.4). Administrative adjustments to grazing permits which are substantiated by sufficient monitoring data and which are within or consistent with applicable NEPA analyses and related decisions may be made without additional NEPA analysis. They will need to be consistent with other regulatory direction such as ESA consultation agreements, etc. Adjustments such as managing the season, duration and number of animals; class of animal; grazing system; need for rest or deferment; range readiness; response to natural events such as fire, drought, or other natural event; etc. may generally be made without additional NEPA analysis. However; these must be reviewed against the current decision and effects analysis for this determination to be accurate.

Determination of sufficiency of monitoring data to support these modifications will vary based on specifics of each situation. Normally several years of data, such as over the period of a grazing rotation sequence, will be required to support these adjustments.

Implementation and monitoring of GRSG Plan Implementation direction will require a learning period to determine when and if additional adjustments (modifications) of grazing permits are required. In general, we do not expect these types of adjustments until 3 or more years of monitoring and management experience implementing the new Plan Amendment direction show they are warranted.

Grazing authorization NEPA analyses and related decisions may prescribe specific adaptive management direction above typical administrative adjustment practices.

## IX. Coordination with Joint BLM/FS Allotments.

Where GRSG habitat is found within grazing allotments that include BLM and FS administered lands, direction from the Plan Amendments will apply only to National Forest System lands. This is independent from, and not determined by, formal agreements for management of the allotments or pastures within these allotments. Where BLM under formal agreement manages NFS lands:

- A FS grazing permit authorizing use of NFS lands is required for grazing to be allowed on these lands (36 CFR 222.3(a)).
- These grazing permits will include direction from the pertinent FS Plan Amendment to be applied to NFS lands.

Where Forests administer BLM lands under formal agreement, the Forest will manage these lands consistent with BLM direction. The Forest will request the BLM to supply them with applicable GRSG grazing management direction. If the BLM, is unwilling or unable to provide this direction to the Forest, the Forest may terminate the agreement and manage only NFS lands following the appropriate GRSG Plan Amendment direction. The FS will not apply FS Plan Amendment direction to non-NFS lands!

## X. Collaborative Management.

### A. Coordination and Cooperation with Permittees and Others.

Firming up of seasonal GRSG habitats using 3<sup>rd</sup> Order HAF should be coordinated with the BLM, local working groups, and with the appropriate state fish and wildlife agencies for consistency in designation of these habitats. Initial seasonal habitats need to be determined prior to implementing grazing permit amendments. This coordination and collaboration effort will continue as current information is analyzed and new information on these habitats within grazing allotments is accumulated.

During the 2017 grazing season, Forest rangeland management personnel and appropriate line officers should work with those permittees whose allotments include seasonal GRSG habitat to demonstrate and explain how the grazing guidelines in the RODs will be applied. It is important that they understand how the determination of the seasonal habitats were made and how the

guidelines will be applied and managed. This will be the beginning of dialogues and working together to determine how the application of the direction will affect grazing practices and how grazing management may be modified or adjusted over the next few years to provide for achievement of the stated Plan Amendment direction. As needed, these same efforts may be made with other cooperators and interested parties. Where appropriate, monitoring agreements may be developed to assist with the GRSG grazing monitoring workload.

After implementation of the grazing guidelines in term grazing permits, Forests should continue working with the permittees during monitoring, evaluation of data, and making livestock management adjustments that may be needed to meet the applicable Plan Amendment direction.

#### B. Internal Coordination.

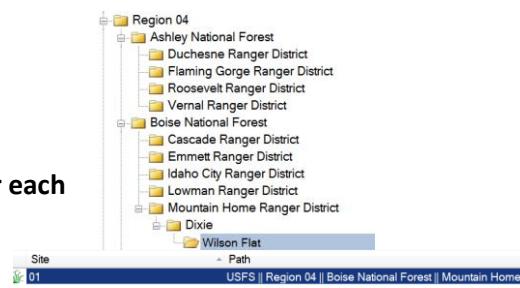
Implementing Plan Amendment direction on grazing allotments requires close coordination with at a minimum rangeland management specialists and wildlife biologists. Much of the grazing direction is dependent on the determination of seasonal GRSG habitats which falls under the primary responsibility of the biologists. In many cases, hydrologists and other specialists may have a role as well. Forests should approach grazing implementation as part of a set of collaborative management actions best addressed by combining available expertise and resources to achieve GRSG habitat assessment, monitoring and management needs. Forest line officers have the responsibility of ensuring that appropriate internal coordination occurs relative to implementing grazing direction from the Forest Plan Amendments.

Forest rangeland management specialists should also be involved during the planning and development of vegetation habitat improvement projects; non-native, invasive plant management; and other vegetation management projects on rangelands within GRSG habitat.

## XI. Data Management, Reporting, and Quality Assessment Reviews.

Note: While this is currently discussed here for direction for implementation of livestock grazing direction, it needs to be applied more broadly to the Plan Amendment process in the form of a data management and reporting implementation guide.

- The University of Arizona developed Vegetation GIS Data System (VGS) will be used for all grazing allotment related GRSG assessments and monitoring using Regionally approved field tablets/workbooks (with few exceptions).
- The Folder File structure for storing data in VGS should be:  
Region→Forest→RD→Allotment→Pasture→Site No.  
Example: Region 4 - Boise NF – Mtn. Home RD – Dixie C&H  
Allotment – Wilson Flat Pasture – Site No. 1)
- **All applicable fields on the General and Description forms for each site should be completed.**
  - User may choose between Land Cover Type or Ecological Site, both need not be entered.
  - UTM coordinates in the locator records must be entered for each Locator Type Record.



- At least one Locator record is required for each site.
- Data collected on the VGS system in the field should be backed up daily on external SD cards or USB drives to prevent accidental data loss.
- Data may frequently be backed up to local Forest electronic storage (C or O drives).
- Data should be moved at least monthly to the VGS Upload Folder on the T drive at:  
<T:\FS\NFS\R04\Collaboration\GreaterSagegrousePlanningStrategy\GIS\Data\VGS>.
- Data backup files will be named using the following convention:  
**VGS\_RegionID-ForestID-DistrictID\_TabletID\_YYYYMMDD.**  
(Example: **VGS\_04-01-03\_A\_20160516.**)
- All data for the current monitoring season should be on the T drive by the end-of-calendar year in which it is collected unless otherwise specified in Regional direction.
- Forests should establish a quality control process for field data collection.
- A Regional Data Steward position may be identified and provide support and management of rangeland GRSG data collection.
  - The Regional Data Steward will work with the University of Arizona per existing contracts to resolve VGS issues or add VGS capabilities.

## XII. References

Stiver, S., Rinkes, E., Naugle, D., Makela, P., Nance, D., & Karl, J. (2015). *Sage-Grouse Habitat Assessment Framework: A Multiscale Assessment Tool. Technical Reference 6710-1*. Denver: Bureau of Land Management and Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

USDA Forest Service - CO, WY. (2015). *Greater Sage-grouse Record of Decision: Northwest Colorado, Wyoming*. Washington DC: USDA Forest Service.

USDA Forest Service - ID, MT, NV, UT. (2015). *Greater Sage-grouse Record of Decision: Idaho and Southwest Montana, Nevada, Utah*. Washington, DC.

USDA FS, R4. (2016). *Greater Sage-grouse Habitat Implementation Guide, Ver. 1.0*. Ogden, UT: USDA, Forest Service, Intermountain Region.

USDA FS, R4. (2016). *Greater Sage-grouse Vegetation Implementation Guide, Ver. 1.0*. Ogden, UT: USDA, Forest Service, Intermountain Region.

## Appendix A – Region 2 Strategy for Modifying Allotment Permits.

The Region 2 strategy complies with the grazing transition direction identified in the Northwest Colorado and Wyoming Greater Sage-grouse Record of Decision.

The Forests in Region 2 are applying an interdisciplinary process (rangeland specialists and wildlife biologists) using Habitat Suitability Framework (HAF) data, perennial grass height data, sage-grouse occupancy, livestock turn-on dates, capability information and a number of other data to sort allotments into five categories. These categories vary by changes that would or would not occur to the grazing permits and/or annual operating instructions associated with each allotment within designated sage-grouse habitat<sup>4</sup>.

Class 1: No modification is required for the grazing permit or annual operating instructions.

Example rationale:

- No sage-grouse habitat
- Livestock turn on dates or use doesn't affect important sage-grouse habitat.
- Less Than 200 acres of contiguous habitat.

Class 2: Add ROD grazing guidelines to the grazing permit, but no changes would occur to the annual operating instructions. Current management is satisfactory and would continue. Example rationale:

- An average of 7" perennial grass heights remains within dripline of sagebrush at end of nesting season (June 30).
- Allotment commonly occupied by sage-grouse
- Livestock use may overlap sage-grouse use, but no suspected issues regarding grazing and nesting (e.g. good results on perennial grass height)
- Good results on HAF data

Class 3: No modification of the grazing permit or annual operating instructions. Additional data must be gathered regarding capability, occupancy, and/or habitat conditions before any changes are made. Example rationale:

- Results of capability to support sage-grouse are unclear.
- Unknown occupancy, suspected unoccupied.
- Habitat conditions are not degraded.
- It is unknown if there are suspected issues with grazing and sage-grouse nesting in the allotment.

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<sup>4</sup> These levels of permit changes do not require any additional NEPA analysis since they were already addressed in the NEPA for the sage-grouse Record of Decision/Forest Plan Amendments (ROD).

Class 4: Add ROD grazing guidelines to the grazing permit, and changes in livestock use or timing may be made in the annual operating instructions. There would be no changes to livestock capacity. Example rationale (meets most of the following criteria)

- Marginal or unsuitable HAF Rating.
- Not meeting 7" perennial grass heights within dripline of sagebrush at end of nesting season (June 30).
- Modified condition thought to persist across allotment or pasture.
- Important sage-grouse habitat.
- Good capability and/or ESD.
- Local knowledge or historic data of continued problems.
- Livestock use overlaps important nesting season and habitat use.

Class 5: At this time, no modifications will be made to the permit or annual operating instructions because habitat is naturally unsuitable, or has been modified so severely by past disturbance that it would not be suitable for sage-grouse for decades to come and current grazing is not negatively affecting this condition from recovering.

Example rationale:

- Severe wildfire has converted the site to grasslands or bare soil.
- Historic uses have converted the site to unsuitable or incapable.
- Existing habitat is Unsuitable and/or incapable.
- When enacted, the "Footnote Errata" would apply such that areas of non-habitat that are located within designated habitat, are not managed for sage-grouse.