

Rangelands and Grazing

Rangelands in the Blue Mountains

Rangelands in the Blue Mountains include natural grasslands, shrublands, savannas, alpine tundra, moist semi-deserts, and riparian and wetland plant communities, including marshes and wet meadows. Today, rangelands account for 16 percent of National Forest System lands in the Blue Mountains, about 765,000 acres of 4.9 million total acres. With the addition of grazable forest lands, the total grazing land is approximately 69 percent, or 3.4 million acres, in the Blue Mountains National Forests.

As of 2023, the Blue Mountains National Forests manage 212 active cattle allotments and 11 active sheep allotments, along with 14 vacant cattle allotments and one vacant sheep allotment. The cattle allotments support permitted grazing for 50,557 cow and calf pairs, 214,570 animal unit months, or 163,047 head months. The sheep allotments support permitted grazing for 14,374 ewe and lamb pairs, or 57,858 head months.

One of the tools used to meet natural resource objectives is permitted livestock grazing. Livestock grazing is intensively managed in ESA listed species habitat, and near bighorn sheep, greater sage grouse, and wolf populations in the Blue Mountains. In addition, livestock grazing has been known to reduce ground fuels and grasses that would have normally carried low and mixed severity surface fires.

Looking Forward

Livestock grazing in the Blue Mountains National Forests has been an important part of the local economy and culture for over a century. While grazing practices and rangeland conditions have improved substantially over past decades, the legacy of high historical livestock levels and associated activities still impacts the current ecological integrity of some ecosystems in the Blue Mountains. Long term ecological trend data is needed to assess whether the current utilization standards are adequate to protect and improve ecological integrity and to inform trends and conditions.

