

2025 Annual Operating Instructions
Smith Mountain, Boulder Creek, Price Valley, and Curren Hill Sheep Allotments
Council and New Meadows Ranger District, Payette National Forest

These annual operating instructions are for implementing grazing management activities on the Smith Mountain and Price Valley allotments for the 2025 grazing season. This plan was developed with the participation of the livestock permittee on May 14, 2025. The interdisciplinary resource personnel and livestock permittee who participated in development of this plan are:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Title</u>
1. Frank Shirts	Permittee
2. Dana Harris	New Meadows District Ranger
3. Brian McMorris	Range Specialist
4. Ryan Waite	Idaho Department of Lands

FRANK SHIRTS JR. Permitted Use:

<u>Allotment</u>	<u>NUMBER & CLASS</u>	<u>SEASON</u>
Price Valley S&G	925-Sheep ewe/lamb or mature- Variable Numbers, 14-Horse- Variable Numbers	06/16 to 8/31 Variable Season
Smith Mountain S&G	1800-Sheep ewe/lamb or mature-Variable Numbers, 14-Horse-Variable Numbers	06/01 to 10/10 Variable Season

FRANK SHIRTS JR. 2025 AUTHORIZED USE:

<u>Allotment</u>	<u>NUMBER & CLASS</u>	<u>SEASON</u>
**Smith Mountain S&G & *Price Valley S&G	Band 1 - 1900 - dries	6/1 to 10/10
**Smith Mountain S&G & *Price Valley S&G	14-Horses/Mules	6/1 to 10/10

The Boulder Creek S&G and Curren Hill S&G Allotments are not authorized for domestic sheep grazing because they are designated unsuited for domestic sheep grazing by the July 2010 Record of Decision for the: Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and Forest Plan Amendment Identifying Suitable Rangeland for Domestic Sheep and Goat Grazing to Maintain Habitat for Viable Bighorn Sheep Populations (FSEIS ROD).

*The Head of Boulder area is unsuited for domestic sheep.

** Sheep Creek and part of the Lost Creek Units are the only areas of the Smith Mountain allotment suited to domestic sheep grazing.

The permittee will do on/off counts for all bands authorized onto the Payette NF. The Forest Service is planning to be present when the sheep are trucked onto and off Forest Service-administered lands. Permittee will notify Forest Service personnel so arrangements can be made to meet with the permittee for the on/off count.

The AOI is viewed by the Forest Service as instructions issued for implementing the term grazing permit and as such is part of the permit. This AOI is made part of the term grazing permit consistent with Part 1, item 3 and Part 2, Item 8(a). Situations may develop during the grazing season which requires changes to these instructions. If changes become necessary, or if the permittee cannot comply with some part of these instructions, please contact the appropriate District Ranger and obtain approval before initiating changes or deviating from these instructions. Refer to Part 2 of the term grazing permit for general terms and conditions that apply to these operating instructions. Failure to comply with the AOI direction is a violation of the grazing permit and will be resolved following agency procedures established in regulation, manuals and handbooks.

The grazing fee of \$0.27/HM must be paid prior to livestock entering Forest Service-administered lands. This bill is due five (5) days prior to the earliest turnout date. The New Meadows Office must receive confirmation from Lockbox that payment has been made prior to livestock entering Forest Service-administered lands. **Based on current events please do not wait to pay your bill as it may take additional time for checks to clear. We recommend paying online. The web address for payment of the grazing bill on-line is located in the upper right-hand corner of your bill.**

TERMS AND CONDITIONS PERTAINING TO SEASON OF USE AND LIVESTOCK NUMBERS

The grazing prescriptions are designed to meet the resource needs of the soils and vegetation. Consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service has been completed on the allotments with listed species. Mitigation measures have been designed to reduce adverse effects and have been incorporated into this AOI.

The District Ranger may modify the season of use and livestock numbers permitted on any given year. The season of use is dependent upon weather conditions (annual precipitation and temperature) which influences annual forage production and range readiness. The District Ranger's authority to modify permitted grazing use is further described in Part 2, Section 8 (c) of the term grazing permit.

Turnout will not occur prior to range readiness. Range readiness is measured by soil moisture and plant growth. Soils may be damp, but not saturated, and should be firm to avoid excessive compaction due to livestock. Grass species other than bulbous bluegrass and cheatgrass must be a minimum of 6 inches in height and out of the boot stage. Arrowleaf balsamroot should be in bloom or past bloom.

Livestock Rotations

The rotation schedule below is a general outline of grazing for the 2025 grazing season.

Band #1 (Smith Mountain Band)

This band will unload in the southern end of the Smith Mountain Allotment. They will graze in this general area, and then move northerly towards Railroad Saddle. They may cross over onto the Prive Valley Allotment during this time. While grazing the Smith Mountain and Price Valley

allotments together they will graze the areas where water dries up first and then move to areas with more perennial water sources. Grazing will continue until October 10 or standards are met whichever comes first.

The permittee will make sure the band does not cross over into the unsuited area. The unsuited area for domestic sheep needs to be avoided. They will also need to make sure they don't graze areas previously grazed.

The northern Idaho ground squirrel sites in Butter Gulch, behind Price Valley Guard Station, and Mud Creek need to be avoided.

Livestock Trucking Instructions/Livestock Shipping Instructions

Livestock will be trucked onto the allotments following range readiness, confirmation of payment, and the authorized-on date. Livestock will then be trucked off the allotment after allowable use is met or by the authorized off date whichever comes first. The permittee will need to call before turnout or trucking off.

Sheep are **NOT** allowed to trail through the unsuited area and are **NOT** allowed to use Forest Road 128. If water is needed the permittee and Forest Service personnel will work together on a plan to get water to the sheep.

Allowable Use/Mitigation Measures

The following allowable use criteria and mitigation measures are to be followed for all grazing activities. There will be Forest Service personal monitoring these standards throughout the grazing season along with any long-term vegetation monitoring that may be collected this grazing season.

1. Sheep will be allowed annual once over grazing except for designated sheep driveways, travel routes, or where specifically authorized. Sheep are to move to the next unit or leave the allotment after 40% use in riparian areas and uplands. When the permittee observes proper use standards being reached, the livestock will be moved to the next area or off Forest Service administered lands. The permittee will notify the Forest Service when this happens.
2. Avoid concentrated use on NIDGS sites, sheep herders will be advised of the location of NIDGS sites and will be instructed to not bed sheep on those sites. A new site was found in Grouse Creek.
3. Sheep watering is limited to one time per location.
4. One night per bed site.
5. Bedding of sheep in plantations will be prohibited until plantation trees have grown to a size that reduces their susceptibility to damage from livestock. There are currently no plantations in these allotments that need to be avoided when bedding.

Salting Requirements

Salting is restricted to the following:

1. No less than 0.25 mile from water, and not to be placed in meadow bottoms.
2. Only at bed grounds.

3. Contained and not placed directly on the ground.
4. Unconsumed salt will be removed from the site.
5. Salting of sheep in plantations will be prohibited until plantation trees have grown to a size that reduces their susceptibility to damage from livestock.
6. Placement of salt must be a minimum of ¼ mile from NIDGS sites.

Other Management Requirements

Implement the Emergency Response Plan (ERP) (Updated May 13, 2025). Actions taken are to ensure separation between bighorn sheep and domestic sheep.

Domestic sheep or goat grazing may only be permitted where separation from bighorn sheep can be maintained. If separation cannot be maintained, permitted domestic sheep and goat grazing shall be prohibited (RAST11).

The Payette National Forest will notify permittees immediately of any known stray or domestic sheep according to the ERP (Updated May 13, 2025).

The permittees herders will be required to document at least once a day the location of the domestic sheep with a SPOT device. When the herder uses the SPOT device to mark the daily location they must be standing with the sheep. This location will be recorded by the Forest Service (see SPOT Operating Plan for more details). The Forest Service will provide one SPOT device with batteries per band. The permittee and herders will be trained in the use of the SPOT device at turnout. If the SPOT device provided to the permittee is broken or lost because of negligence, the permittee will be responsible for replacing it. In addition to the SPOT device there will be one logbook per band. The permittee will be responsible for turning in a logbook form to the New Meadows or McCall Ranger Districts throughout the summer at least every seven (7) to fourteen (14) days. The logbook form will document any total counts, marker counts, losses, additions, scattering events, or big horn sheep observed. The Forest Service will go over the information being collected in the logbook at turnout. If the permittee would like to meet before turnout to go over the SPOT device or logbook, they can contact the Forest Service.

Herders will count marker sheep (black, horned, belled, other distinguishing feature, etc.) daily to assure that no small groups of sheep have separated from the main band. Counting will be noted in the logbook.

If dipping of sheep becomes necessary, the permittee will contact the District Range personnel to determine an appropriate site. The permittee will implement a closed system and haul all effluent off Forest Service-administered lands.

Livestock are not authorized to bed or salt on Forest System trails.

The permittee is responsible for ensuring there is no trash left behind when moving sheep camps.

MAINTENANCE OF RANGE IMPROVEMENTS

The permittee is required to provide the materials and labor during routine maintenance. If an existing range improvement has been properly maintained but requires reconstruction, a cooperative effort can be made between the Forest Service and permittee to reconstruct the development, depending on material availability. Please notify Forest Service staff if you have any improvements that are in a condition in which they may require reconstruction within the next several years so the improvement can be reevaluated. Shipping corrals are maintained just prior to shipping dates. Portions of the corrals are temporary and are not maintained at an earlier date to avoid vandalism.

The Railroad Saddle shipping corral is the only improvement the permittee is responsible for on the New Meadows District.

MONITORING OF THE ANNUAL LIVESTOCK GRAZING ACTIVITY

The herder folder currently provides actual use information for each unit grazed.

MULTIPLE USE COORDINATION

Potential logging and thinning from Butter Gulch to Railroad Saddle and over to the East Branch. This is in Lost Butter Stewardship, Lost Timber Stewardship, and Restoration Stewardship.

Possible logging and road work in Grouse Creek Stewardship.

There may be chipping and hauling, and road work within the Rough Finn Stewardship Project. This is up West Fork Weiser Road (east side) from the Forest boundary all the way up to Sheep Creek Road.

Brush Mountain Ecosystem Maintenance Burn and Thinning - wildlife habitat improvement project around Brush Mountain area (Mud Creek north past Round Valley). Project would use prescribed burning (broadcast & piles) spring/fall and non-commercial thinning to meet desired conditions.

The Payette National Forest Coalition project #4 called Huckleberry is to the east of the allotment. Implementation (burning, road work, thinning, logging) of this project may be taking place, but will not be on your allotment.

If there is damage to Forest System trails by the permittee's livestock the permittee will need to repair it or pay for it to be repaired.

SPECIAL MANAGEMENT

The northern Idaho ground squirrel (NIDGS) was listed in April 2000 as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. There are known colonies of NIDGS located on the Price Valley and Smith Mountain Allotments (along the East and West Branch Weiser River, Mud

Creek, Butter Gulch, Lost Creek, and Grouse Creek). To mitigate effects of livestock grazing in the NIDGS sites, the sheep will be required to avoid these sites. Avoidance includes livestock management activities such as trailing, bedding, and grazing within the colony sites. Contact the Forest Service and arrangements can be made to show the permittee the sites in order to prevent any accidental use of the areas. There were no new sites found on the Price Valley or Smith Mountain allotments last year.

In the event a designated mitigation measure fails to protect a species listed under the Endangered Species Act (Chinook salmon, steelhead, and bull trout), a change in authorized grazing activity will occur. The change could be as simple as moving the sheep out of the area to a requirement for the sheep to be moved off the allotment. If this situation arises, the Forest Service will be contacting you to discuss the situation.

Other Species listed are Whitebark Pine was listed as threatened December of 2022 and Wolverine was listed threatened January 2024. If you stay within allowable use standards in these areas currently no further mitigation is needed.

If proper use grazing levels are reached, then livestock are to be moved to the next grazing area or off of the allotment. If livestock grazing does not comply with the terms and conditions of these Annual Operating Instructions, then Forest Service policy and procedures regarding administrative permit actions will be followed.

Invasive weeds are becoming a serious threat to the welfare of rangelands. The Forest Service asks the permittee to provide assistance in identifying new weed infestations and to help prevent the establishment of weeds on the forest. Please pay particular attention to areas where stock is concentrated such as loading/unloading areas, water developments, and salting areas. The Payette National Forest has a requirement that any hay (non-pelletized), straw or mulch that is brought onto the National Forest be certified weed free. All livestock entering the National Forest are recommended to be fed Certified Weed Free Forage for at least 2 days prior to entering the Forest.

If there is a wildfire on your allotment, we will work with you and try to provide as many updates as possible. Please work with your local district office who will be working closely with any fire teams. Make sure you have a plan if a wildfire happens on or near your allotment.

The Forest Service will work with you within our rules and regulations during exceptionally dry years. Allowable-use levels will continue to be used to trigger livestock movements or removal. Contingency plans need to be made for your livestock, should utilization levels require removal of livestock prior to the end of your permitted grazing season. Please work closely with your assigned rangeland management specialist as you make decisions for your operation.

VOLUNTARY

In addition to these instructions, the permittee has identified other management actions that will be voluntarily implemented this year.

1. Remove sick or physically disabled domestic sheep from the band. If a sheep is no longer able to keep up with the band it will be killed or removed from the allotment.
2. Use a minimum of 2 guard dogs per band.
3. Bands will be fully counted in locations where counting can be accomplished and when bands change major geographic locations (i.e. moving from one major drainage to another). Due to changing conditions such as precipitation, thunderstorms, water availability, wildfires, predation events, forage availability, etc., areas in which full counts are conducted will be adjusted as the grazing season proceeds. Dates in which counts are completed will be documented on the logbooks.
4. Each pack string will carry binoculars to improve their ability to spot bighorn sheep.

REQUIRED

The following are management actions that the permittee discussed in detail with District Rangers and Rangeland Management Specialists at the AOI meeting. These actions require implementation during the 2025 grazing season for one or both of the following reasons: 1) to meet the intent of the Emergency Response Plan and 2) to reduce the likelihood of stray domestic sheep and goats.

1. Each band will have either a satellite phone, cell phone, radio, or other similar and effective communication device (Send or Spot) that is in functioning order. Functioning order is defined as operable and not “dead” or having battery life adequate to make contact (per Emergency Response Plan, Updated May 13, 2025). Any of the required communication equipment may be used to notify the permittee that the emergency response plan is being activated.
2. If the herders or pack strings spot any bighorn sheep while grazing on the Forest, they will adjust their grazing path according to the Emergency Response Plan (Updated May 13, 2025) and haze the bighorns out of the area to minimize the possibility of direct contact.
3. The permittee will immediately report any bighorn sheep sightings according to the Emergency Response Plan (Updated May 13, 2025).
4. Predator attacks, primarily wolf attacks, may create a risk for a straying event. If a predator attack results in stray domestic sheep, the permittee will immediately implement the Emergency Response Plan (Updated May 13, 2025).

The permittee is responsible for ensuring herders are informed and understand the standards, guidelines, and other management direction in this plan.

Please review the AOI for consistency with our discussion at the annual meeting, and sign and return it to the New Meadows Ranger District. If a signed copy is not received within two weeks, this AOI will serve as the final copy approved by the District Rangers.

/s/ Dana Harris
Approved by
Dana Harris
New Meadows District Ranger

5/28/2025
Date

Frank Shirts Jr.
Permittee

Date