

APPENDIX I SUGGESTED STOCKING RATES

Monitoring information and suggested stocking rates (AUMs/Acre) are used to help design livestock grazing strategies for meeting plant species composition and vegetation structure objectives presented in Chapter 2. Livestock grazing intensity¹ is a primary factor influencing both plant species composition and vegetation structure on rangelands. For the purposes of this Land and Resource Management Plan, the suggested stocking rates presented below define light, moderate and heavy grazing intensities that, in turn, are expected to help provide the desired mosaic of seral stages and vegetation structure on rangelands. A diverse mosaic of vegetation conditions will help ensure quality habitats for management indicator species and a wide variety of native plant and animal species.

The suggested stocking rates are as follows:

Light Grazing Intensity: A level of herbage utilization that allows palatable plant species (decreasers) preferred by livestock to maximize their herbage producing ability. The dominance of these plant species and the lower forage utilization levels help provide quality habitat for management indicator species (Appendix H) and other plant and animal species that benefit from diverse and high vegetation structure on rangelands. It also helps reduce the impacts of drought on these species. This grazing intensity reduces habitat suitability for wildlife species requiring low structure grasslands. The suggested stocking rate for this grazing intensity is 30 to 40% lighter than the suggested stocking rates used by the Natural Resources Conservation Service in the local area.

Moderate Grazing Intensity: A level of herbage utilization that allows the preferred plant species to maintain themselves but usually does not permit them to improve in herbage producing ability. When growing conditions are normal or better, this grazing intensity typically results in a limited amount of quality habitat, usually restricted to run-in sites and other favorable micro-sites, for the management indicator species and other plant and animal species that benefit from high structure grasslands or sagebrush understories. The suggested stocking rate for this grazing intensity is the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) stocking rate for the local area.

Heavy Grazing Intensity: A level of herbage utilization that does not permit the preferred plant species to maintain themselves. This grazing intensity encourages early successional stages and does not permit movement toward late successional stages. This grazing intensity typically provides no quality habitat for the plant and animal species requiring diverse and high structure rangeland vegetation, but provides quality habitat for those species that use low structure (average visual obstruction readings or stubble heights < 2 inches) grasslands. The suggested stocking rates for this grazing intensity is 10 to 20% heavier than the NRCS stocking rate for the local area.

The suggested stocking rates and local NRCS stocking rates apply only to those portions of a pasture or allotment that are considered suitable for livestock grazing.

¹ Hanson et al. 1970, Hanson et al. 1978, Hart and Ashby 1998, Holechek et al. 1999, Jasmer and Holechek 1984, Lewis et al. 1956, Olson et al. 1985

Monitoring will be conducted to validate that the suggested stocking rates are meeting or making measurable progress in meeting the desired vegetation objectives (Chapter 2) and providing quality habitat for the management indicator species identified for the local area. If they are not, adjustments in the suggested stocking rates will be made. Suggested stocking rates may be also be adjusted for individual allotments or pastures where monitoring information on vegetation and habitat conditions support an adjustment. The monitoring information must have been collected using standard methods of determining composition, structure (height and density), production or utilization. Photographs and videography are also useful in supplementing monitoring information.

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