



United States Department of Agriculture  
Forest Service

# **Limestone/Silver Vegetation Management Project**

**Newport-Sullivan Lake Ranger Districts**

**Colville National Forest**

## **Range Resource Report**

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### Relevant Laws, Regulations, and Policy

- [The Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960](#) - establishes the policy and purpose of the National Forests to provide for multiple-use and sustained yield of products and services, including range management.
- [Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978](#) - establishes and reaffirms the national policy and commitment to inventory and identify current public rangeland conditions and trends; manage, maintain and improve the condition of public rangelands so that they become as productive as feasible for all rangeland values in accordance with management objectives and the land use planning process;
- [Departmental Regulation, Number 9500-5](#) - dated April 21, 1988; Subject: Policy on Range. It is the policy of the Department of Agriculture to undertake activities and implement programs to “protect, enhance, and wisely use range ecosystems,” as well as “improve the productivity of soil, water, plant, livestock, and wildlife resources on the Nation’s ranges.”
- [Forest Service Manuals \(FSM 2210 - Range Management Planning\)](#)
- [Forest Service Manuals \(FSM 2240 - Range Management Improvements\)](#)

## Regulatory Framework

### Land and Resource Management Plan

The Colville National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (forest plan) provides standards and guidelines for rangelands. Broad scale management direction for Colville National Forest grazing allotments is contained in the current forest plan, which states:

1. Management of grazing by domestic livestock will be guided by project-level allotment plans. The development of these plans will be integrated with the needs associated with use and values present in the area. All associated uses and values will be considered, with special consideration given to: (1) fish and wildlife habitat needs; (2) timber harvest and cultural activities; (3) riparian values; (4) recreation use; and (5) threatened, endangered, and sensitive species. Further considerations are contained as other resource standards and guidelines in this section of the plan (Forest Plan, page 4-44).
2. Coordination requirements...will include: (1) timing of timber harvest and associated activities and grazing schedules; (2) protection of livestock barriers or mitigation of these values where desirable; (3) reducing the spread of noxious weeds where present; (4) seeding of livestock and wildlife forage species, considering desirability of seeding palatable and nonpalatable forage species and species competitive with tree production; and (5) livestock-wildlife conflicts (Forest Plan, page 4-45).

As provided in the forest plan, the allowable use levels in upland areas is 45 percent for forest lands and 55 percent for grasslands in satisfactory condition. Interagency Technical Reference 1734-3, Utilization Studies and Residual Measurements, considers these levels of usage to be “moderate.” The technical

reference mentioned above classifies utilization by grouping a range of potential utilization observations to form categories of use. The use categories are displayed below.

**Table 1. Grazing use categories**

| Category | Percent Utilization |
|----------|---------------------|
| No use   | 0 to 5 percent      |
| Slight   | 6 to 20 percent     |
| Light    | 21 to 40 percent    |
| Moderate | 41 to 60 percent    |
| Heavy    | 61 and above        |

Individual direction regarding the implementation of grazing on the allotments within the project area is found in the allotment management plans.

Annual grazing instructions and direction are provided to permittees annually and specify the pastures to be grazed and the season of use, as well as other items. Documents that provide this annual instruction and direction have had different names through the years that have included annual operating plan and annual operating instruction. Currently, these documents are untitled, but do provide annual direction on when and where livestock use is to occur. The information contained in the annual plans is based on information contained in the most recent allotment management plans, changed physical conditions, any relevant monitoring information, and/or other National Environmental Policy Act decisions that may affect grazing rotation schedules.

### Desired Condition

The desired condition for rangelands within the Limestone/Silver Project area is that:

- Semi-permanent rangelands will be maintained.
- Transitory rangelands from the project will increase forage production on a short-term basis.
- Grazing pressure on semi-permanent rangelands will decrease because of increased forage availability from transitory rangelands.

Long-term direction from the Colville National Forest plan for rangelands included more intensively managed livestock grazing. Livestock use would stay within the established use rates, and permittee control would be at an adequate level. But all allotments would emphasize riparian habitat protection and/or recovery (Forest Plan 1988 page 4-63).

### Federal Law

Where consistent with other multiple use goals and objectives, there is Congressional intent to allow grazing on suitable lands. (*Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960, Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, National Forest Management Act of 1976*)

It is Forest Service policy to continue contributions to the economic and social well-being of people by providing opportunities for economic diversity and by promoting stability for communities that depend on range resources for their livelihood. (Forest Service Manual 2202.1)

## Information Sources

Information used to compile this report consists of professional knowledge, landscape and resource knowledge, documentation on livestock use, and GIS information.

## Existing Condition

The Limestone-Silver Project Area overlaps with the Silver Creek and Z Canyon allotments, which are cattle and horse grazing allotments currently managed by single permittees. Silver Creek is 25,373 acres, and Z Canyon is 8,590 acres, for a total of 33,963 acres. The Silver Creek allotment supports 45 cow/calf pairs with a grazing season from July 1 to Oct. 31; the Z Canyon allotment supports a total of 30 cow/calf pairs with a grazing season from May 15 to Sept. 30. Grazing within these allotments adheres to the allotment management plans, annual operating instructions, and most recent environmental analyses under the National Environmental Policy Act for each allotment. The Silver Creek allotment is managed using a three-pasture, deferred rotation grazing system, while the Z Canyon allotment is managed using a single-pasture, season-long grazing system. According to past and recent monitoring, grazing is occurring at acceptable levels and within specified use levels for both allotments.

These allotments are characterized by having homestead meadows within their boundaries that were created between the 1890s and 1930s. These homestead meadows have been actively managed in the past to maintain them as highly productive rangelands that provide valuable forage to livestock and wildlife. Conifer encroachment and noxious weed invasion is occurring in all homestead meadows within the project area, and as a result, the open foraging areas provided by these meadows are being lost. The reduction of upland foraging sites, such as those found in dry portions of homestead meadows, has the potential to adversely impact streams and riparian areas as livestock might spend more time foraging in riparian areas.

## Range Improvements

Existing range improvements for the Silver Creek allotment consist of six livestock management fences totaling about 1 mile of coverage. There are no existing improvements for the Z Canyon Allotment. The fencing was installed to create allotment and pasture boundaries, as well as reduce cattle drift. Range improvements are maintained at least annually by the permittee.

**Table 2. Silver Creek improvements**

| <b>Improvement Name</b>      | <b>Type of Improvement</b> |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Silver Creek Boundary        | Fence                      |
| Iroquois Drift               | Fence                      |
| North Fork Spring Protection | Fence                      |
| Silver Creek Drift           | Fence                      |

## Existing Condition Summary

The Silver Creek and Z Canyon allotments are cattle and horse grazing allotments that are currently managed by a single permittees and support a total of 75 cow/calf pairs. The Silver Creek allotment uses livestock management fences to control pasture access and manage grazing rotations. These allotments are characterized by having homestead meadows within their boundaries that were created between the 1890s and 1930s. These homestead meadows have been actively managed in the past to maintain them as highly productive rangelands that provide valuable forage to livestock and wildlife. Conifer encroachment and noxious weed invasion is occurring in all homestead meadows within the project area, and as a result, the open foraging areas provided by these meadows are being lost.

## Proposed Action

The Limestone/Silver Vegetation Management Project proposes 2,995 acres of shelterwood and commercial thinning harvest, along with post-harvest fuel treatments, such as jackpot and pile burning, as well as underburning. These activities are not anticipated to have adverse effects on rangeland resources or compromise barriers to livestock drift.

## Project Design Criteria and Mitigation Measures

There are no proposed units adjacent to existing rangeland improvements; therefore, no design criteria or mitigation measures are needed. The treatment areas that would potentially result in transitory range habitat will not likely need fencing because the terrain should be sufficient at preventing livestock drift.

## Required Monitoring

There is no required monitoring from the proposed action for rangeland resources.

## Direct and Indirect Effects

Direct effects from the proposed action should improve rangeland condition by increasing productivity on primary rangelands through fuels treatments, as well as by creating transitory rangelands through vegetative treatments. The transitory rangelands created by vegetative treatments would reduce the amount of grazing pressure on primary rangelands, thereby decreasing impacts to soils and plant communities from the livestock concentrations.

Indirect effects from the proposed action would result in a more open timber stand where there is likely to be a greater amount of herbaceous vegetation in the understory. Converting densely forested areas to more open stands is beneficial to range management and forage production by creating transitory rangelands that provide mid-term grazing land and forage to livestock and wildlife. Forested sites have a high potential for producing forage after logging because moisture availability is relatively high and competition from previously established species is less (Miller and Krueger, 1976). Logged forest communities can produce about twice the herbage as primary rangeland and 10 times more forage than un-logged forests (Miller and Krueger, 1976). Proposed harvest units within the project area would not increase livestock access to riparian areas nor cause livestock to degrade riparian areas from their current state.

## Compliance with LRMP and Other Relevant Laws, Regulations, Policies, and Plans

The proposed action for the Limestone/Silver project complies with the Colville National Forest plan and other laws, regulations, and policies relevant to the management of rangeland resources.

## Finding of No Extraordinary Circumstances (FSH 1909.15, 31.2):

Because proposed harvest units are mostly located in areas inaccessible to cattle and away from allotment and pasture boundaries, the likelihood of livestock management being compromised by the proposed action is minimal. Therefore, no extraordinary circumstances from this project for rangeland resources are anticipated.

## References Cited

Miller, Richard F. and William Krueger. 1976. "Cattle Use on Summer Foothill Rangelands in Northeastern Oregon." *Journal of Range Management*, 29(5): 367-371.

Torrence, James F. 1988. Colville National Forest Land and Resource Management plan, Final Environmental Impact Statement and accompanying Record of Decision, U.S. Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Region, Portland, OR.