

## RANGE

The purpose of this resource report is to evaluate the impacts of the Little Hogback-Meyers Fire Salvage project on the rangeland resource with respect to livestock grazing within the applicable legal and regulatory framework.

### Regulatory Framework

Where consistent with other multiple-use goals and objectives, there is Congressional intent to allow livestock grazing on suitable lands (Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act of 1960 [74 Stat. 215; 16 U.S.C. 528-531]; Wilderness Act of 1964 [78 Stat. 890; 16 U.S.C. 1131-1136]; Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 [88 Stat. 476 as amended; 17 U.S.C. 1600-1614]; Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 [90 Stat. 2743; 43 U.S.C. 1701 et seq]; National Forest Management Act of 1976 [90 Stat. 2949; 16 U.S.C. 472a, 476, 476 (note), 500, 513-516, 521b, 528 (note), 576b, 594-2 (note), 1600 (note), 1600-1602, 1604, 1606, 1608-1614]). It is Forest Service policy to make forage available to qualified livestock operators from lands suitable for livestock grazing consistent with land management plans (36 Code of Federal Regulations 222.2 (c); Forest Service Manual 2203.1). The 2009 Land and Resource Management Plan for the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forests (Forest Plan) and related Environmental Assessments/Decision Notices provide this aforementioned regulatory framework governing management.

### Affected Environment

As stated in the Forest Plan, sustainable grazing opportunities are provided for domestic livestock from lands suitable for forage production. Use of forage by domestic livestock will maintain or enhance the desired structure and diversity of plant communities on grasslands, shrub lands, and forests. Use will be managed to maintain or restore riparian function as defined in the allotment management plan. A desired condition in the forest plan is to allow people and communities to benefit from programs and infrastructure that support livestock grazing and an array of forest products and services.

The history of grazing use throughout the project area is typical of most grazing areas in southwest Montana. Livestock grazing began in the mid-1800s, prior to the creation of the National Forest Reserves. The Little Hogback-Meyers Fire Salvage project area boundary overlaps portions of three active grazing allotments: Scotchman-Miners, Middle Fork, and Ross Fork. There are harvest units proposed in all three allotments. The following table provides allotment information in relation to the project area and harvest unit areas:

Allotment Name	Allotment Acres	Project Area – Allotment Acres	Harvest Unit – Allotment Acres	Project Area – Suitable Acres for Grazing
Little Hogback Fire				
Scotchman Miners	2,450	2,021	671	38
Meyers Fire				
Middle Fork	52,239	6,051	225	11
Ross Fork	30,830	1,399	96	3

Each of these allotments also has active grazing permits, the following table provides permit information:

Allotment	Permit Type	Number	Kind/Class	Season	% Acres in Project Area
Scotchman-Miners	Term	15	Cow/calf pairs	7/1-10/15	82
	Term Private Land	2	Cow/calf pairs	7/1-10/31	
Middle Fork	Term	21	Cow/calf pairs	6/15-9/15	12
Ross Fork	Term (On/Off)	1 On 5 Off	Horse	7/1-9/30	5
	Term	172	Cow/calf pairs	6/21-9/30	
	Term Private Land	25	Cow/calf pairs	6/21-9/30	

A term private land permit and a term permit with an on/off provision addresses allotments with mixed land ownership of National Forest System lands, private land, state lands, etc. when the permittee owns or controls the non-National Forest System lands. Some of the existing roads in the allotments are used to accomplish maintenance of range structural improvements, but are not specifically identified in the permit. Allotment boundaries and structural improvements within the project area have been digitized or mapped and potential effects within the allotments are based on their association and proximity to treatment units.

### Direct and Indirect Effects

Direct effects to grazing are primarily the potential of proposed activities to damage existing infrastructure within the allotments. Infrastructure includes existing interior and exterior pasture and allotment boundary fences, existing water developments, and the potential to remove natural barriers to livestock movement.

### No action alternative

Livestock grazing management on the active grazing allotments would continue at its current use within the project boundary. However, over time as fire killed trees come down livestock grazing use and management may need to be modified. Falling trees could cause blocking of trails and routes used by livestock to access suitable rangelands within the allotments, as well as potentially causing structural damage to structural improvements. Indirectly, this could disrupt scheduled grazing rotations within an allotment, resulting in areas of overutilization or areas of under utilization

Beneficially, there would be no potential for range structural improvement damage (e.g. fences, water developments, cattleguards) from harvest operations, hauling, road work, or other associated activities.

ment maps displaying existing range improvements, such as fences and water developments, are included in the project record.

## **Proposed alternative**

There would be no increase in livestock numbers or increase in season of use resulting from implementation of the proposed alternative. The salvage logging operations would indirectly increase short term forage production through removal of conifers, and “day-lighting” of forested stands so that sunlight is able to reach the forest floor to stimulate herbaceous plant growth. This short term flush of herbaceous growth will diminish as conifers re-colonize the harvest units.

This alternative has the potential to directly affect existing allotment infrastructure. Infrastructure includes existing interior and exterior pasture and allotment boundary fences, existing water developments. Existing cattleguards, boundary and pasture fences, and water developments would be protected during project implementation. All improvement locations will be delineated on treatment area maps during layout phase to protect them from damage from harvest operations. If any infrastructure is destroyed or damaged, it will be repaired or replaced.

Removing timber during harvest activities along existing natural barriers, which are often used as pasture barriers or barriers between allotments, would open the area for livestock to freely breach the barrier, resulting in unauthorized drift into adjacent pastures or allotments. In the event a natural barrier is removed, the barrier will be replaced with some other barrier to prevent livestock movement.

## **Cumulative effects**

Grazing will continue on all three active grazing allotments into the foreseeable future. Potential cumulative effects on range characteristics and livestock use that may occur include motorized and non-motorized recreation. The continued treatment of noxious weeds will improve range conditions throughout the allotments with continued reduction in infested acres (see Invasive Plants report).

Cumulatively, adverse impacts to range resources in the project area are not expected as a result of the proposed action. Understory vegetation overall is expected to temporarily increase as a result of the fire salvage harvest activities.

## **Compliance**

The Forest Plan provides direction for management of livestock grazing activities. Under either alternative, livestock grazing activities would continue to be managed in compliance with grazing direction identified in the Forest Plan as well as applicable Allotment Management Plans. See Forest Plan consistency table in the project record.

## **References**

USDA Forest Service. 2009. Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, Final Environmental Impact Statement. Corrected. USDA, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest. January, 2009.