

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Idaho State Office
1387 South Vinnell Way
Boise, Idaho 83709-1657

In Reply Refer To:
4100/7000/7200 (931) P

March 23, 2004

EMS
Information Bulletin No. ID-2004-079

To: District Managers
From: Deputy State Director for Resource Services
Subject: Drought Conditions

Although snow packs seem to be relatively good with most river basins in Idaho near normal at this time, there are still concerns with the continuing drought. Only the Owyhee Basin has a substantially above-average snow pack. Substantial precipitation deficit over the past three to four years will continue to have effects on ground water. The Drought Monitor for March 9, 2004 indicates that Idaho varies from abnormally dry in the northern part of the state to exceptional drought in the upper Snake River and Bear River basins. Most of southern Idaho is still considered in extreme hydrologic drought.

The 90-day outlook, April through June, indicates that temperatures are likely to be above average with average precipitation. This means that snow packs will melt earlier, and the chances for low ground water flows are still likely.

The drought monitor can be viewed at <http://www.drought.unl.edu/dm/monitor.html> and the long term outlook maps at <http://www.wrcc.dri.edu/longrang/>.

Field office staffs are reminded of Idaho BLM's policy for managing drought conditions in IM No. ID-2003-042. The following are excerpts from the Idaho Drought Policy:

- ∉ Districts and/or FOs evaluate on-the-ground conditions (e.g., residual vegetation, soil moisture, vegetation vigor, available water, and snow pack) to determine the appropriate course of action. Consider factors such as availability of forage, forage utilization or stubble height remaining, soil moisture, years of consecutive drought, grazing use during previous drought years, water source availability, water source supplementation, and distribution. Also consider the needs for wildlife, aquatic resources, recreation, and wild horses when discussing possible changes with permittees and others and making decisions. Areas with winter grazing should assess factors that contribute to appropriate grazing use during the season.

- ∓ Districts and/or FOs contact permittees and interested publics (personal contacts are preferred) to communicate the current conditions and the outlook for adequate water and soil moisture. Possible adjustments to permits will be made on the basis of all appropriate factors including vegetation vigor, residual vegetation, water supplies, and other resource needs.
- ∓ Agreements for adjusting grazing because of drought should be in writing. This protects the parties and reduces the chances for differences in interpretation. When agreements cannot be reached, consider using a third party. If agreements on grazing adjustments are not reached in a timely manner, grazing decisions should be issued in accordance with 43 CFR 4110.3-3(a) or (b). These decisions may be issued as a Final Decision becoming effective the date of issuance or a date specified in the decision. Decisions implementing temporary drought-related adjustments or suspension of grazing will contain an effective date and an ending date. Should it become necessary to extend the decision, a new decision will be issued. If adjustments to permits are requested because of drought-related issues by permittee, the \$10.00 fee for modifying a permit will be waived. The unused grazing fees previously paid will be refunded based on the adjusted permit.
- ∓ Temporary water troughs may be authorized to provide supplemental livestock drinking water. A Categorical Exclusion (CE) (see 516 Departmental Manual 6, Appendix 5.4(D)(2)) is appropriate if: 1) the temporary troughs are not authorized for more than one month; 2) no road construction or other ground-disturbing activities are required; 3) there are no adverse effects on cultural resources, threatened or endangered plants or animals, designated habitat, or special-status species or habitat; and 4) the placement of the troughs will not encourage livestock grazing in areas that the animals have not used in the past. Water placement should be in areas that have previous disturbance, such as roads, near existing water developments, or other locally disturbed areas.
- ∓ New water development (i.e., spring developments, new wells, pipeline extensions, roads for water hauling, and other ground-disturbing activities) must have all necessary clearances and meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Endangered Species Act (ESA), Clean Water Act, and appropriate legal and regulatory requirements.

Although water supplies are improving, drought conditions are expected to persist throughout most, if not all of Idaho. Field Offices are expected to closely monitor resource conditions to help guide any specific actions that may be necessary. Our drought policy provides the necessary guidance to be responsive, to work with public land users, and ultimately, to address any resource concerns.

Please direct any questions to Ervin Cowley at 208-373-3810.

Signed
Susan Giannettino
DSD, Resource Services

Authenticated
Melissa Starr
Staff Assistant (931)