

**STANDARD AND GUIDELINES ASSESSMENT
LANE PLAN I ALLOTMENT NUMBER 0207**

Standard and Guidelines Assessment Lane Plan I Allotment (0207)

February 99

Standard 1 - Upland Watershed -Upland soils exhibit infiltration and permeability rates, moisture storage, and stability that are appropriate to soil, climate, and landform.

This standard is being met on the allotment. The indicators used to evaluate this standard are Soil Surface Factor (SSF), which documents accelerated erosion; plant community composition, which indicates root occupancy of the soil profile; and trend.

Soil Surface Factor & Erosion

Soil surface factor is a method of recording observations used as an indicator of accelerated erosion. Of the 26,096 acres in Lane I allotment, 4,066 acres (16%) have an SSF rating of stable and 20,150 acres are rated as Slight. The remaining 1,880 acres are unknown.

Trend

Observed Apparent trend from the Ecological Site Inventory (ESI) transects identified; 4,273 acres (16%) as having upward trend, 19,960 acres (76%) as being static, and trend is unknown on 1,880 acres (7%). The unknown acres are the inclusions within a vegetation community that include transition areas and plant communities too small to be mapped separately. Table 1 below summarizes trend in each erosion class for the allotment.

| Erosion Control Class(SSF) | % of Allotment | Acres Twentymile Creek | Acres Deep Creek | Acres Lakes | Acres Internal Big Lake |
|----------------------------|----------------|------------------------|------------------|--------------|-------------------------|
| Stable | 16 | 1,336 | 210 | 0 | 2,520 |
| Slight | 76 | 5,994 | 6,031 | 1,398 | 6,794 |
| Unknown | 7 | 433 | 724 | 181 | 525 |
| Total | 100 | 7,713 | 6,965 | 1,579 | 9,839 |

Plant Community

Another indicator of Upland Watershed Condition is plant composition and community structure. The major vegetation types in this allotment and their approximate percentages in the allotment are shown below.

| | |
|--|-----|
| low sagebrush, with an understory of Sandberg's bluegrass or Idaho fescue | 58% |
| big sagebrush with grass understory | 07% |
| western juniper, with low sagebrush | 15% |
| low sagebrush, with cheatgrass | 05% |
| Lakebed dominated by bullrushes | 08% |
| Drainages dominated by silver sagebrush | 04% |
| Other common plants within the allotment include squirrel tail Thurber's needlegrass, bluebunch wheatgrass with a variety of annual and perennial forbs. | |

Range Condition

Range condition as determined in the 1988 Ecological Site Inventory (ESI) is listed in the following table (Table 2). Using this method, current plant composition is compared to a defined Potential Natural Community(PNC) for the identified soil type and precipitation zone.

Table 2

| Seral Stage | Percent Comparability to PNC | Acres of Allotment in Seral Stage | Percent of Allotment in Seral Stage |
|-------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Early | 0-25% | 302 | 1% |
| Mid | 26-50% | 21,562 | 83% |
| Late | 51-75% | 2352 | 9% |
| Unknown | | 1180 | 7% |

Standard 2 - Riparian/Wetland-Riparian-wetland areas are in properly functioning physical condition appropriate to soil, climate, and landform.

This standard is not being met because two reaches on Twentymile Creek were rated as non-PFC (Proper Functioning Condition). Lotic PFC site inventories were completed in 1996 on Twentymile Creek. The following table summarizes the non-PFC reach locations and their management status.

| STREAM | REACH | PFC RATING | MANAGEMENT |
|------------|------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Twentymile | Lower | FAR* Trend Not Apparent | Rest Rotation |
| Twentymile | Big Valley | FAR* Upward Trend | Exclusion |

*Functional At Risk

The Big Valley reach has been excluded since 1996. The FAR rating was reached based on the erosive banks on this reach. The lower reach was rated FAR because of poor vegetative composition and erosive banks. Both reaches are being managed under consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on effects of grazing on the Threatened Warner sucker. While the existing conditions are largely a result of past grazing practices and natural conditions, current management of livestock is resulting in significant progress towards meeting the standard, and is not a significant factor in not meeting the standard.

Standard 3 -Ecological Processes-Healthy, productive, and diverse plant and animal populations and communities appropriate to soil, climate, and landform are supported by ecological processes of nutrient cycling, energy flow, and hydrologic cycle.

This standard is being met according to the trend, soil stability, plant and animal communities, and the monitoring studies shown in the Lane I Study Files.

Trend

The Observed Apparent Trend as describe in Standard 1 is static or upward on 92% of the allotment and soil erosion class is rated as slight to stable on 93% of the allotment. The remaining 7% of acres are unknown. The deferred rest rotation livestock grazing system, described in the table below, is designed to provide for plant health and to maintain vegetative conditions. The system is effective in maintaining stable upland watershed conditions as well as ecological processes. The Grain Camp and Lower Gibson pastures are used on alternate years in April, use in April is alternated with rest. The other four pastures rotate use periods, with one of the four pastures being rested every year.

Grazing Management

| Pasture | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | |
|---------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|--------------|--|
| Grain Camp | 4/1 - 4/30 | REST | 4/1-4/30 | REST | |
| Lower Gibson | Rest | 4/1 - 4/30 | REST | 4/1 -4/30 | |
| Big Valley | 5/1 - 7/15 | 7/16 - 9/15 | 9/16 - 10//06 | REST | |
| Juniper Lake | 7/16 - 9/15 | 9/16-10/06 | REST | 5/1 - 7/15 | |
| Gibson Canyon | 9/16 - 10/06 | REST | 5/1-7/15 | 7/16 - 9/16 | |
| Big Lake | REST | 5/1-7/15 | 7/16-9/16 | 9/16 - 10/06 | |

Monitoring Studies

Monitoring studies consisting of utilization, actual use, and compliance; show that the level of livestock use and the timing of this grazing use are within limits that maintain plant health and provide for nutrient cycling. Specifically, utilization levels are at or below 45% on grass forage species. The grazing management is designed for plant health which maintains sufficient cover and litter to provide for nutrient cycling.

Wildlife

The Lane Plan I Allotment supports most of the terrestrial animals common to the sagebrush steppe in the Great Basin. The allotment provides habitat for huntable populations of mule deer, pronghorn antelope, and sage grouse. The 200 AUM's allocated to wildlife seem adequate to support the current wildlife populations, however, may need to be adjusted in the upcoming RMP to address the expansion of elk and potential competition with livestock for forage identified in the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW) elk management plan. There is currently no major competition between wildlife and domestic livestock for forage, either early green-up grasses and forbs or winter browse such as antelope bitterbrush and curl-leaf mountain mahogany which are both limited in distribution within the allotment.

The allotment lies within ODFW's Warner Big game Management Unit for deer, pronghorn antelope, and elk. Current populations are slightly below management objectives for mule deer and substantially below that proposed for elk. The allotment contains a small portion of crucial winter range habitat for mule deer. Portions of the allotment are occasionally used by elk and California bighorn sheep from Fish Creek rim throughout the year. The allotment also contains year-round habitat for sage grouse and pronghorn antelope, however, no crucial habitat has been identified.

Standard 4 - Water Quality Standards- Surface water and groundwater quality, influenced by agency actions, complies with State water quality standards.

This standard is not being met. Twentymile Creek from the mouth to the headwaters does not meet state standards for temperature. The reaches of Twentymile Creek in the 0207 allotment are intermittent, generally going dry by the end of June so there is not a measurable temperature and the water in this allotment does not make it by overland flow to the lower thermograph location where the temperature problem was measured. Because of grazing changes to better manage riparian vegetation, it is felt that current management of livestock is resulting in significant progress towards meeting the standard, and is not a significant factor in not meeting the standard.

Standard 5 - Biological Diversity-Habitats support healthy, productive, and diverse populations and communities of native plants and animals (including special status species and species of local importance) appropriate to soil, climate, and landform.

This standard is being met. The diversity of the wildlife and plant species is an indication of health and productivity found in the different habitats within the allotment.

Animal Species

There are only four big game habitat transects set up in the allotment due to the limited distribution of key browse (bitterbrush and mountain mahogany). The decadent or dead bitterbrush plants within the allotment are still providing forage and cover for deer, however,

recruitment of young plants is relatively low. Overall the bitterbrush appears to show some improvement in vigor and stand replacement over the past 10-12 years.

The habitat provided within the allotment is crucial to wintering deer in that it adjoins with winter range on the forest to the west and to BLM - administered winter range to the north and south. It provides habitat connectivity, as well as, a spatial distribution of lower elevation range critical during high snowfall years.

The deer and pronghorn populations are healthy and increasing in number within the allotment - habitat quantity and quality do not appear to be limiting population size or health. Coyote predation is thought to be depressing mule deer recruitment, however, deer and pronghorn populations continue to fluctuate at or slightly below ODFW's Management Objective for the unit. A general hunt season is slowing the population expansion of elk within the unit, however, if ODFW, is unable to limit future expansion to the proposed Management Objective for the area competition with domestic livestock may occur and depredation on private lands may become an issue. Elk expansion will be addressed in the upcoming RMP.

The allotment also provides habitat for numerous small and nongame birds and mammals common to the Great Basin, as well as, sage grouse and marginal California bighorn sheep habitat. There is one known sage grouse lek found within the allotment. Sage grouse populations like the rest of southeastern Oregon are stable to declining. The allotment also provides habitat for raptors and some BLM and state sensitive wildlife species and federally listed species. No critical habitat or limitations have been identified for any of these species which include wintering bald eagles, and possibly pygmy rabbits and various sensitive bat species.

Special status fish species

The Warner sucker is listed as a Threatened Species under the Endangered Species Act. There is no occupied habitat currently being grazed in the allotment. Because Twentymile Creek flows into occupied habitat below the grazed pasture, and it was designated as Ccritical Habitat, it was determined in Section 7 consultation that grazing was having an adverse effect on suckers. This effect has been minimized by restrictions placed on riparian grazing and the Service issued a Biological Opinion to authorize "take" of the species. Warner red-band trout, a Bureau Sensitive Species is found in streams below this allotment in Twentymile Creek. Their populations appear to be strong in this area.

Plant species and special status species

This allotment supports a diverse plant community as shown in Standards 1 and 3. No known special status plants occur in this area.

Noxious weeds are known to occur in the allotment. Weeds are concentrated along roads and the powerline right of way. Of greatest concern is a small population of spiny cocklebur

present in the Juniper Lake pasture. This is being closely monitored and intensively treated annually to prevent spread. It is possible that this weed can be spread by cattle as they are in the pasture during the weeds' active growing season and seed set.

Current Management and Recent Management Changes

The current management is a six pasture rest rotation system and the Allotment Management Plan has been in place since 1969. The Grain Camp and Lower Gibson pastures are used in April, but the use is rotated between the pastures. One year of grazing is followed by a year of rest. The other four pastures are rotated in a deferred/ rest rotation system. The stretch of Twentymile Creek in big Valley pasture has been excluded from grazing. There was a Biological Evaluation completed in 1994 and a biological Opinion issued by the USFWS that current management of the this stream has minimized the effects on the Warner Sucker.

Team Members

Title

| | |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| Theresa Romasko | Range Management Specialist |
| Alan Munhall | Fishery Biologist |
| Vern Stofleth | Wildlife Biologist |
| Lucile Housley | Botanist |
| Walt Devaurs | Wildlife Biologist |
| Bill Cannon | Archaeologist |
| Erin McConnel | Weed Specialist |
| Dick Mayberry | Supervisory NRS |
| Robert Hopper | Supervisory RMS |

Determination

- Existing grazing management practices or levels of grazing use on the Lane II Allotment promote achievement of significant progress towards the Oregon Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health and conform with the Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management.

- Existing grazing management practices or levels of grazing use on the Lane II Allotment will require modification or change prior to the next grazing season to promote achievement of the Oregon Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health and conform with the Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management.

Scott R. Florence
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2/19/99
Date