# Appendix A26
# Thorn Creek Allotment #292

## 1.0 Introduction

Thorn Creek Allotment #292 consists of approximately 120 acres of public lands, 2,080 acres of private land, and 640 acres of IDL, per the RMP. Public land is in one isolated parcel that is completely surrounded by private land with no public access.

Through the Evaluation and Determination, it was determined that:

- Livestock management is in conformance with the Watershed (#1), Native Plant Communities (#4), and Threatened and Endangered Species (#8) standards;
- Compliance with all applicable guidelines for livestock grazing management being achieved.

## 2.0 Description of the Alternatives

## 2.1 Alternative A – No Action /Continue Current Management

Livestock grazing authorization would continue, with the current grazing permit expiring February 28, 2018. Mandatory terms and conditions of the grazing permit are:

| Permittee[1] | Livestock | Season of Use | Percent Public Land | Preference | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Authorized | Suspended | Total |
| Jake Glen Merrill | 200 Cattle | 04/21 to 05/31 | 4% | 11 | 0 | 24 |
| | 200 Cattle | 10/16 to 11/15 | 4% | 8 | | |

Following are allotment specific terms and conditions attached to the grazing permit:

1. Changes to the scheduled use require prior approval, on an annual basis.
2. The annual Actual Use Report is due within 15 days of completing your authorized annual grazing use.
3. Turn-out is subject to range readiness. Range readiness occurs once physiological requirements of the plants have been met.
4. Annual maintenance of range improvements will be completed prior to livestock entry of the allotment.
5. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(b), the permittee must notify the BLM Field Manager, by telephone or with written confirmation, immediately upon the discovery of human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony on Federal Land. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(c), the permittee must immediately stop any ongoing activities connected with the discovery and make a reasonable effort to protect the discovered remain or object.
6. Salt and/or supplement shall not be placed within one-quarter (¼) mile of springs, streams, meadows, riparian habitats or aspen stands.

## 2.2 Alternative B – Proposed Action

Based on field mapping of existing fencelines and information provided by the permittee, the acreage for Thorn Creek Allotment has been recalculated. There is now one acre more of public land, no state land, and 1,006 fewer acres of private land within the allotment boundary than are shown in the RMP. The allotment now contains approximately 1,195 acres, including 121 acres

of public land (10 percent) and 1,074 acres of private land (90 percent). These revised acres reflect the most accurate and up-to-date information, and would be used for the new term permit.

To incorporate updated allotment information and current grazing management guidance, it is proposed to:

1. Modify the allotment boundary to correspond to existing fencelines.
    a. The pasture with public land in Section 28, T15N, R1E, would become the allotment, along with the isolated parcels of public land located in North Fork Allotment #293.
    b. Public land in North Fork Allotment #293, located in Sections 20, 29, 30, T15N, R1E, is fenced away from adjoining private land. By consolidating these two allotments, three pastures would be created that would be managed in a rotational grazing system, in conjunction with private pastures outside the allotment boundary.
    c. Rotational grazing would be conducted in such a manner that periodic rest or deferment during the critical growth stages would be provided (Guideline #4). To provide rest or deferment, public lands would not be grazed during the critical growth period, of May 01 through June 30, in consecutive years.
2. Modify the percent public land term of the grazing permit to 45 percent (public land: 121 acres from Thorn Creek, plus 444 acres from North Fork; private land: 700 acres). If the permittee chooses, he may remove the fence along the west boundary of South Thorn Creek Pasture to create a larger grazing area. If this opportunity is exercised, then approximately 800 acres of private land would become a part of the allotment. If this occurs, allotment acres and boundaries would be adjusted to 565 acres public land and 1,500 acres private land. The grazing permit would be adjusted from 45 percent public land to 27 percent;
3. Renew the grazing permit showing maximum authorizations for livestock numbers, season-of-use, and AUMs (each of these columns would be stand-alone sections of the permit therefore standard method for calculating AUMs would not apply). Annual flexibility of livestock numbers and/or season-of-use would be allowed based on seasonal circumstances (example - range readiness; variations in permittee's management; but not limited to these situations). Management flexibility would be allowed provided livestock use remains within the sideboards of maximum livestock numbers and season-of-use, and without exceeding authorized AUMs.
4. Use Annual Indicators to insure continued conformance with Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management.

Based on the proposed action, livestock grazing would be authorized for a maximum of 85 AUMs (this does not constitute a grazing preference increase, but reflects the preference from both allotments) from mid-April to the end of July. Cattle would be rotated between the public land pastures and private pastures. Terms and conditions necessary to regulate grazing activities on public land would be added to the grazing permit. Annual Indicators would be used to describe utilization criteria. Term of the renewed grazing permit would be for ten years, from March 01, 2009 to February 28, 2019 as follows:

| Allotment | Livestock (maximum) | Season of Use (maximum) | Percent Public Land | Preference | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Authorized | Suspended | Total |
| Thorn Creek | 100 Cattle | 04/15 to 07/31 | 45% | 85 | 29 | 114 |

If South Thorn Creek Pasture is combined with the private land to the west to make one large pasture, the permit would be changed to:

| Allotment | Livestock (maximum) | Season of Use (maximum) | Percent Public Land | Preference | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Authorized | Suspended | Total |
| Thorn Creek | 100 Cattle | 04/15 to 07/31 | 27% | 85 | 29 | 114 |

Following are allotment specific Terms and Conditions to be attached to the grazing permit for Thorn Creek Allotment:

1. Livestock grazing for Thorn Creek Allotment will comply with Field Manager's Decision that became final on (intentionally left blank at this time, date to be inserted when the decision becomes final).
2. Authorized AUMs would not be exceeded on public lands. Livestock numbers and season of use, as shown above, indicate maximums that would be allowed under this permit. Permittee has discretion to manage within these numbers, provided overuse does not occur on public land.
3. Changes to the scheduled use require prior approval, on an annual basis.
4. The Annual Grazing Use Report (BLM Form 4130-5) must be properly completed, signed, dated and submitted within 15 days of completing your authorized annual grazing use.
5. Annual maintenance of range improvements would be completed prior to livestock entry of the allotment.
6. Livestock turn-out is subject to Boise District range readiness criteria.
7. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(b), permittee must notify the BLM Field Manager, by telephone followed with written confirmation, immediately upon discovery of human remains, funerary objects, scared objects, or objects of cultural patrimony on federal land. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(c), permittee must immediately stop any ongoing activities connected with the discovery and make a reasonable effort to protect discovered remains or object.
8. Salt and/or mineral blocks shall not be placed on public lands within one quarter (¼) mile of springs, streams, meadows, riparian habitats or aspen stands.

**Flexibility**

Scheduled turn out dates by pasture may be adjusted based on Range Readiness and Annual Indicators. Grazing schedule adjustments require prior approval from the Authorized Officer.

Based on the results of monitoring associated with Annual Grazing Use Indicators, periodic modifications to authorized grazing management may be imposed. Monitoring data collected would be used to ensure adherence with Annual Indicators, listed below. Modifications may include, but are not limited to: duration of grazing use by pasture, and/or reducing livestock numbers by pasture. These modifications would be coordinated annually with the permittee and incorporated into the annual authorization.

**Annual Indicators**
Adherence to the annual indicators listed below, and the prescribed grazing management program are expected to make progress towards meeting, and maintaining achievement of the Standards for Rangeland Health and land use plan objectives. Periodic collection, evaluation, and interpretation of monitoring data would provide an indication of the potential success of the grazing management prescription.

1. Average utilization by livestock on key bunchgrass species would not exceed 40 percent during the period of critical growth (May 1 through June 30), and 50 percent outside the critical growth period.
2. Utilization on shrubs would not exceed 30 percent of current year's production as determined by Browse Removal Method, or other approved methods.

## 3.0 Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences

Affected environment is discussed in the main body of this EA, with additional information provided below.

## 3.1 Vegetation

### 3.1.1 Affected Environment – Vegetation

Over public lands within the allotment boundary, rush skeletonweed comprises approximately six percent of the plant community. Even though invasive plants or noxious weeds are intermingled throughout the plant community, this allotment is meeting the native plant community health standard.

### 3.1.2 Environmental Consequences – Vegetation

#### 3.1.2.1 Alternative A

The Idaho rangeland health standard for native plant communities is being met on this allotment. Livestock grazing management under this alternative is expected to continue to meet the standard by maintaining or promoting healthy productive and diverse native animal habitat and populations of native plants appropriate to soil type, vegetation, climate and landform to provide proper nutrient cycling, hydrologic cycling and energy flow.

#### 3.1.2.2 Alternative B

The Idaho rangeland health standard for native plant communities is being met on this allotment. Livestock grazing management changes proposed under this alternative are expected to continue to meet the standard by maintaining or promoting healthy productive and diverse native animal habitat and populations of native plants appropriate to soil type, vegetation, climate and landform to provide proper nutrient cycling, hydrologic cycling and energy flow.

## 3.2 Soils

### 3.2.1 Affected Environment – Soils

Evidence of erosion was observed, in the form of pedestalled plants and bare ground, however these problems are isolated and do not occur throughout the allotment. Conversely, noxious weeds were observed throughout the allotment; however they are not causing the watershed standard to not be achieved.

### 3.2.2 Environmental Consequences – Soils

#### 3.2.2.1 Alternative A

The Idaho rangeland health standard for watersheds, based on soil site stability and hydrologic function, is being met on this allotment. Livestock grazing management under this alternative is expected to continue to meet the standard by promoting proper infiltration, retention, and release of water appropriate to soil type, vegetation, climate and landform to provide proper nutrient cycling, hydrologic cycling and energy flow.

#### 3.2.2.2 Alternative B

The Idaho rangeland health standard for watersheds, based on soil site stability and hydrologic function, is being met on this allotment. Livestock grazing management changes proposed under this alternative are expected to continue to meet the standard by promoting proper infiltration, retention, and release of water appropriate to soil type, vegetation, climate and landform to provide proper nutrient cycling, hydrologic cycling and energy flow.

## 3.3 Wildlife – Including Special Status Animal Species

### 3.3.1 Affected Environment – Wildlife – Including Special Status Animal Species

There are no populations of threatened, endangered, or sensitive animal species, known to occur on Thorn Creek Allotment. Southern Idaho ground squirrels do occur in similar habitat eight miles west of the allotment and Columbian sharp-tail grouse persist in Indian Valley four miles to the south. Potential habitat for both species exists in Thorn Creek Allotment.

### 3.3.2 Environmental Consequences – Wildlife – Including Special Status Animal Species

#### 3.3.2.1 Alternative A

The Idaho rangeland health standard for special status animal species is being met on Hornet Creek Allotment. Livestock grazing management under this alternative is expected to continue to meet the standard by maintaining or promoting healthy productive and diverse native animal habitat and populations of native plants appropriate to soil type, vegetation, climate and landform.

#### 3.3.2.2 Alternative B

The Idaho rangeland health standard for special status animal species is being met on Hornet Creek Allotment. Livestock grazing management under this alternative is expected to continue

to meet the standard by maintaining or promoting healthy productive and diverse native animal habitat and populations of native plants appropriate to soil type, vegetation, climate and landform. The addition of a rotation grazing system with additional acreage added would benefit wildlife and potential special status animal species habitat.

## 3.4 Riparian Areas, Water Quality, and Fisheries

### 3.4.1 Affected Environment – Riparian Areas, Water Quality, and Fisheries

A 0.3-mile long segment of North Grays Creek occurs in North Fork Allotment and was in proper functioning condition before a range fire in September 2007 burned most of this segment. As a result, the stream is now in functioning-at -risk with upward trend condition.

Many cottonwood, redosier dogwood, willows, and forbs are regenerating from rootstocks. The stream may be in proper functioning condition within five years. This segment receives no grazing as the banks are steep and rocky, and most of this stream segment is located within a livestock exclosure.

Water quality standards for cold water biota and salmonid spawning were met. The stream supports a healthy and viable population of redband trout, a BLM sensitive species.

### 3.4.2 Environmental Consequences – Riparian Areas, Water Quality, and Fisheries

#### 3.4.2.1 Alternative A

North Gray's Creek is located in North Fork Allotment #293, therefore would not be impacted by the no action alternative.

#### 3.4.2.2 Alternative B

With the proposal to consolidate public lands from North Fork Allotment #293 into Thorn Creek Allotment, North Gray's Creek would become a part of Thorn Creek Allotment. The 0.3-mile segment of the stream crossing public land would continue in an upward trend for Standard 2 (riparian vegetation) and Standard 3 (stream channel and floodplain) over the long and short terms. Water quality standards for cold water biota and salmonid spawning would continue to be met over the short and long terms. The fishery would continue to support viable populations of redband trout.

# Thorn Creek Allotment #292