



United States Department of the Interior  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
Shoshone Field Office  
400 West F Street  
Shoshone, Idaho 83352-5284  
(208) 732-7200



In Reply Refer To:  
4100 (IDT030) P

January 10, 2012

Dear Permittee/Interested Public:

This letter is to notify you that the Shoshone Field Office is asking for your thoughts and comments on the enclosed Scoping/Information Package pertaining to the renewal of livestock grazing permits on Little Beaver, Cherry Creek, and Wolfstone Allotments (Project # DOI-BLM-ID-T030-2011-0027-EA). The Scoping/Information Package for this project proposal can also be found on the internet at: <http://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/info/nepa.html>.

Your comments are specifically requested on the Proposed Action, preliminary issues, and preliminary alternatives to the Proposed Action. Comments are welcome throughout the planning process, however, it is most helpful if your comment is received by February 17, 2012, and is directly relevant to the proposal and project area. The BLM will not reject public feedback outside the established public involvement timeframes; however, these comments may be considered secondary to comments received in a timely manner and may only be assessed to determine if they identify concerns that would substantially alter the assumptions, proposal, or analysis presented in the EA.

You may mail comments to: BLM Shoshone Field Office, 400 West F Street, Shoshone, ID, 83351. Or email your comments to: [cjosaitis@blm.gov](mailto:cjosaitis@blm.gov) with the title of this project "Little Beaver, Cherry Creek, and Wolfstone Allotments" in the subject line. Please identify whether you are submitting comments as an individual or as the designated spokesperson on behalf of an organization.

For additional information call Clare Josaitis, Rangeland Management Specialist at (208) 732-7257.

Sincerely,

/s/ Ruth A. Miller

Ruth A. Miller  
Shoshone Field Manager

cc:

John Anchustegui  
Toone Ranches  
Camas County Commissioners  
Blaine County Commissioners  
Committee for the High Desert  
ICL Public Lands Office  
Idaho Department of Fish and Game  
Idaho State Department of Agriculture  
Idaho Department of Environmental Quality  
Idaho Department of Lands  
Idaho Wildlife Federation  
Shoshone-Bannock Tribes  
The Wilderness Society  
Western Watersheds Project  
David Skinner  
Paul McClain  
Mel Quale  
Dennis Crane  
Chris J. Christiansen

**United States Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management**

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**SCOPING/INFORMATION PACKAGE**  
  
LIVESTOCK GRAZING PERMIT RENEWAL  
for  
LITTLE BEAVER, CHERRY CREEK, & WOLFTONE  
ALLOTMENTS

**January 10, 2012**

Project # DOI- BLM-ID-T030-2011-0027-EA

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U.S. Department of the Interior  
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The information in this package summarizes a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to authorize the renewal of term grazing permits on the Little Beaver, Cherry Creek, and Wolftone Allotments in accordance with the Sun Valley Management Framework Plan (1981) as modified by the Record of Decision for the Sun Valley Grazing Environmental Impact Statement. Little Beaver and Cherry Creek Allotments were originally part of the North Camas Unit as stated in the Sun Valley Management Framework Plan, and Wolftone Allotment was originally part of the Big Wood Unit. Federal actions must be analyzed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations to determine potential environmental consequences.

The purpose of this document is to inform you and other interested and affected parties of this proposal, and to solicit your comments to assist us with the NEPA review of the proposal. The analysis of this proposal is currently ongoing, and will eventually be documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA) with an estimated completion date of winter 2012/2013. Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential environmental issues related to the Proposed Action and to identify alternatives to the Proposed Action that meet the purpose of and need.

### **PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION**

The purpose of and need for the Proposed Action is to: 1) make the authorization consistent with BLM policy and in a manner that maintains or improves resource conditions in the three allotments; 2) and achieve the objectives described in the Sun Valley Management Framework Plan (1981) as modified by the Record of Decision for the Sun Valley Environmental Impact Statement.

### **PROPOSED ACTION**

The BLM is proposing to authorize livestock grazing in the Little Beaver, Cherry Creek, and Wolftone Allotments by renewing two (2) term grazing permits for a 10-year period under the management treatment and period of use described below.

This Proposed Action has been designed to: 1) maximize the recovery of the potential natural plant community in the allotments, 2) encourage recruitment of native vegetation and enhance protection of soils, 3) stabilize streambanks and emphasize improvement of the overall riparian resource, 4) promote the improvement of the elk winter range in the ACEC, and 5) reduce conflicts between sheep and cattle by expanding the availability of areas to livestock and providing flexibility to permittees.

The Proposed Action is to renew the permits under a 3-year early-season-use deferred-rest-rotation system for sheep and a 3-year early-season-use rest-rotation system for cattle. The Little Beaver, Cherry Creek, and Wolftone Allotments would be managed as one allotment, and subsequently, divided into three use areas for sheep and cattle. The three use areas would be: Lower Little Beaver, Upper Little Beaver, and Cherry Creek (refer to map titled *Use Areas*). Upper Little Beaver would include Wolftone Allotment; however, while sheep would be authorized to graze the entirety of Upper Little Beaver, the Wolftone portion of Upper Little Beaver would continue to exclude cattle use. No range improvement projects are proposed under the Proposed Action.

The period of use for sheep and cattle would be restricted to early-season-use from June 1 to July 15. Sheep AUMs would vary from year to year depending upon the use areas assigned (refer to Table 2), however, the maximum sheep AUMs allowed would be 308. The maximum cattle AUMs allowed would be 86. After the third year in the grazing sequence for sheep and cattle, year one would repeat.

Mandatory permit terms and conditions for the Proposed Action are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Mandatory Permit Terms and Conditions for the Proposed Action**

Permittee	Livestock Type	Season of Use	% PL	Active Preference AUMs	Suspended AUMs	Total AUMs
<b>LITTLE BEAVER/CHERRY CREEK/WOLFTONE ALLOTMENTS</b>						
John Anchustegui	Sheep	6/1 to 7/15	100	308	680	308
Toone Ranches	Cattle	6/1 to 7/15	100	86	49	86
Trail Use	Sheep	6/15 to 7/15 (3 day trail limit)	100	0	0	15
<p><b>Mandatory Terms and Conditions for the Term Grazing Permits for the above Allotments:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In Little Beaver, Cherry Creek, and Wolftone Allotments, all livestock grazing will be made in accordance with the grazing management set forth in Field Manager's Final Decision dated MM/DD/YY.</li> </ul>						

Refer to Tables 2 and 3 for the sheep and cattle rotation schedule and use areas.

**Table 2. Sheep Grazing Sequence & Treatment**

Use Area	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Cherry Creek	1 <sup>st</sup> /11days	2 <sup>nd</sup> /11days	<b>Rest</b>
Lower Little Beaver	2 <sup>nd</sup> /21days	<b>Rest</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> /21 days
Upper Little Beaver	<b>Rest</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> /23days	2 <sup>nd</sup> /23days
Total AUMs/Total Days of Sheep Use Allowed per Year	224 aums/32 total days use	238 aums/34 total days use	308 aums/44 total days use

**Table 3. Cattle Grazing Sequence & Treatment**

Use Area	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Cherry Creek	<b>Rest</b>	6/1 – 7/15	<b>Rest</b>
Lower Little Beaver	6/1 – 7/15	<b>Rest</b>	<b>Rest</b>
Upper Little Beaver	<b>Rest</b>	<b>Rest</b>	6/1 – 7/15

## **Stipulations included in the Proposed Action**

The following stipulations would be part of the grazing permit under the Proposed Action:

- ❖ Sheep grazing use would be one-time-over only;
- ❖ Trailing through use areas scheduled for rest would be limited to 2 days and authorized on a case-by-case basis;
- ❖ Separate areas of use would be designated each grazing year for cattle and sheep;
- ❖ Sheep would not water repeatedly at the same water source entry point;
- ❖ Sheep would not bed or noon within 200 yards of creeks, springs, or other water;
- ❖ Salting for sheep would occur away from bed grounds and salt must be placed on a tray or pan;
- ❖ The stay on bed grounds would be limited to no more than three (3) nights;
- ❖ Sheep grazing use within one-quarter of a mile from water would be limited to trailing to and from water;
- ❖ No livestock feeding of salt, grain, or certified weed-free hay within one-quarter mile of water;
- ❖ Utilization levels would be limited to “light use” on key forage species (21 to 40% use on bluebunch wheatgrass and Idaho fescue) and monitoring would be done a minimum of once every three years using accepted methodology as described in BLM Technical Reference 1734-3, *Utilization Studies and Residual Measurements*;
- ❖ Grazing use in riparian areas would leave adequate perennial herbaceous and woody vegetation by the end of the growing season to protect riparian areas from erosion, maintain streambank integrity, provide for sediment catchment, and allow for diversity in vegetation structure and age class; and
- ❖ Riparian monitoring for herbaceous stubble height and woody browse use would be conducted periodically (i.e., at least once in a three to five year period) using accepted methodology described in BLM Technical Reference 1734-3. Adequate perennial herbaceous and woody vegetation includes:
  - A minimum average stubble height of six (6) inches at the bankfull level along riparian areas by the end of the growing season for obligate wetland species such as Nebraska sedge or other sedge species; and
  - Limiting livestock grazing of woody riparian species to 30 percent of the current year’s growth. Woody riparian vegetation includes but is not limited to willow, aspen, cottonwood, alder, and dogwood.

The Proposed Action is intended to move the existing condition of the watershed, soil, native vegetation, and riparian resources on the Little Beaver, Cherry Creek, and Wolftone Allotments toward meeting or making significant progress to meet the Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Management.

The majority of Little Beaver Allotment, all of Cherry Creek Allotment, and a small portion of Wolftone Allotment are located within a designated ACEC; further discussion of this ACEC is located under the “Existing Condition” section of this document.

## **EXISTING CONDITIONS**

### **Location and General Information**

The project area is the Little Beaver, Cherry Creek, and Wolftone Allotments. The Little Beaver and Cherry Creek Allotments are located in Camas County and the Wolftone Allotment is located in Blaine County (refer to the attached map titled *Little Beaver, Cherry Creek, & Wolftone Allotments*). All three allotments are located east of Willow Creek, approximately 11 miles east-northeast of Fairfield, Idaho, and 8 miles north of Highway 20 (Beaver Creek, Idaho U.S. Geological Survey 1:24000 topographical quadrangle).

The approximate public land acreage for the three allotments is as follows: Little Beaver, 5,757 acres; Cherry Creek, 1,052 acres; and Wolfstone, 369 acres.<sup>a</sup>

There are relatively short drift fences between Little Beaver Allotment and the adjacent allotment to the south (Big Beaver Allotment) and there is an allotment boundary fence between Wolfstone and Little Beaver Allotments (refer to the attached map titled *Fences*). There are no allotment division fences between Little Beaver and Cherry Creek Allotments. The allotment boundary between Little Beaver and Cherry Creek Allotments is located along the main Cherry Creek bottom. All three allotments are grazed under separate authorizations and are grazed as single-use allotments, i.e., there are no established pastures in any of the allotments. Cattle use is authorized only in Little Beaver Allotment, while sheep use is authorized in all three allotments.

On September 22, 2009, the Rangeland Health Assessments for the three allotments were mailed to the livestock operators and other interested publics for review and to request any other additional data that the public may have on these particular allotments. No comments were received in regard to the assessments for any of the three allotments.

John Anchustegui holds the term grazing permits for sheep use in Little Beaver, Cherry Creek, and Wolfstone Allotments. Toone Ranches, c/o of Mark Toone, holds the term grazing permit for cattle use in Little Beaver Allotment. The use and preference levels of their existing term grazing permits on the allotments are shown in Table 4 under the “No Action” Alternative.

### **Overview of Cattle Use in Little Beaver Allotment**

In 1989, BLM re-activated the suspended portion of the cattle operator’s AUM preference from 109 to 135 when additional property in the Little Beaver Allotment was acquired through a land exchange. Up until March 1996, the permitted season of use for cattle was season-long, from June 1 to October 12. In March 1996, the season of use for cattle was modified through the Decision Record for the Habitat Management Plan. Cattle use changed from season-long to the current permit of June 1 to July 15, with AUMs remaining at 135.

In general, the cattle operator on Little Beaver Allotment has rotated annual placement of his cattle between three specific areas in the allotment: the west side of the allotment, the east side (in the head of Big Beaver Creek), and Cherry Creek. Management efforts are made each year through conversations between BLM staff and the livestock operators to keep cattle use and sheep use in separate areas of Little Beaver Allotment.

Typically when cattle are placed on the west side of the allotment, cattle eventually drift into Cherry Creek Allotment because there is no allotment boundary fence to deter them. Once this occurs, cattle generally congregate in the North Fork of Cherry Creek and the bottom of Cherry Creek.

### **Overview of Sheep Use in Little Beaver Allotment**

In 1989, BLM re-activated the suspended portion of the sheep operator’s AUM preference from 699 to 814 when additional property in the Little Beaver Allotment was acquired through a land exchange. From 1981 to

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<sup>a</sup> Acreage from Geographic Information Systems database

1989, the sheep permit for Little Beaver Allotment was held by Campbell Land and Livestock. The permit for the Little Beaver Allotment was issued to the current sheep operator in 1990.

In general, the west side of Little Beaver Allotment has been used by sheep on an annual basis, whereas, the east side of the allotment has only been grazed sporadically by sheep. The north slope area of the main Cherry Creek drainage, which is within the Little Beaver Allotment, is typically grazed on a once-over annual basis by the sheep band. The west side of the allotment generally receives repeated sheep grazing use. This is also the case for the east side of the allotment when sheep use it. Between 1990 and 2007, sheep use often occurred outside the permitted season of use, including the months of July, September, and October.

### **Overview of Other Livestock Use in Little Beaver Allotment**

Faulkner Land and Livestock (now known as Goodtime Grazing Association) has been authorized trailing use in the Little Beaver Allotment since 1994. The Goodtime Grazing Association trails their sheep band (approximately 1,200 head) northerly out of Croy Creek Allotment via a ridge between Wolfstone Allotment and Little Beaver Allotment and then trails and beds on the Sawtooth National Forest. From the Sawtooth National Forest, the Goodtime Grazing Association sheep band trails southerly out of the National Forest via a ridge between Little Beaver Allotment and Cherry Creek Allotment to access the Willow Creek Road and subsequently to Goodtime Grazing Association's summer range on the National Forest. This particular trail takes 4 days with 2 days of trail use made in the Little Beaver Allotment. Goodtime Grazing Association's sheep trailing on Little Beaver Allotment usually accounts for 13 to 23 AUMs. Other trailing AUMs in Little Beaver Allotment have been made typically in the fall by the existing sheep permittee.

Other use in Little Beaver Allotment includes unauthorized use made by cattle that have drifted in from adjacent allotments, primarily Camp Creek Allotment, which adjoins Little Beaver and Wolfstone Allotments to the east. When unauthorized cattle use has been observed, the grazing use is usually being made within a riparian area, but considerable forage use by unauthorized cattle has also been observed in the uplands. Unauthorized sheep use has also occurred in Little Beaver Allotment at different times and has either been physically witnessed or evidence of it has been observed.

### **Overview of Sheep Use in Cherry Creek Allotment**

In the 1980's, the sheep permit was held by Josephine Astorquia. The current operator acquired the permit in 1994. From years 1994 to 2006, sheep use occurred outside the permitted season of use, including the months of July through October. Non-use has been made by the permittee from 2007 to 2010. However, trail use was made from 2007 to 2009 but did not exceed 9 AUMs.

Most of the sheep use in Cherry Creek Allotment occurs along the North Fork of Cherry Creek drainage and the lower portion of the main Cherry Creek drainage.

### **Overview of Other Livestock Use in Cherry Creek Allotment**

As mentioned previously, cattle often drift into Cherry Creek Allotment from Little Beaver Allotment or from the Sawtooth National Forest, and once there, they linger in the riparian areas of the allotment until the livestock owner(s) is notified. Unauthorized cattle use has repeatedly occurred from livestock drifting off the adjacent Sawtooth National Forest and into the North Fork of Cherry Creek and into the main Cherry Creek.

Unauthorized use has also occurred by sheep when they were in the allotment outside of the permitted season of use.

### **Overview of Sheep Use in Wolfstone Allotment**

Wolfstone has not been grazed by the sheep operator since acquiring the permit in the early 1990s, however, unauthorized use has occurred at least once when a sheep band was herded from the adjacent Sawtooth National Forest into the allotment.

### **Area of Critical Environmental Concern**

An ACEC is an area of public land where the BLM has determined through the land use planning process that special management attention is required to protect and prevent irreparable damage to important historic, cultural, or scenic values, fish and wildlife resources and other natural systems or processes, or to protect life and safety from natural hazards.

The majority of Little Beaver Allotment, all of Cherry Creek Allotment, and part of Wolfstone Allotment are located within a designated Area of Critical Environmental Concern for crucial elk winter range (ACEC, refer to the attached map titled *Little Beaver/Big Beaver ACEC*). The Little Beaver/Big Beaver Crucial Elk Winter Range ACEC was designated in the Sun Valley Management Framework Plan of 1981.

The ACEC provides winter range that is crucial to the survival of one of the most productive elk herds in the region. According to the 1994 EA for the Little Beaver/Big Beaver ACEC Habitat Management Plan cow-calf ratios of 200:65 have been observed. In regard to the ACEC in these three allotments, emphasis and management direction for the maintenance and improvement of crucial elk winter range and other wildlife habitat was identified in the 1981 Sun Valley Management Framework Plan. A site-specific interdisciplinary Habitat Management Plan and resource management objectives were developed for the ACEC and related grazing allotments on BLM-administered and National Forest lands in a May 1994 Decision Record. The Habitat Management Plan was implemented and included site-specific grazing Allotment Management Plans for the allotments.

The Habitat Management Plan was implemented on-the-ground for a few years on Little Beaver, Cherry Creek, and Big Beaver Allotments; however, most of the plan was discontinued when one of the existing livestock operators lost a Forest Service grazing permit which affected the operation of the Habitat Management Plan.

### **Native Perennial Vegetation, including Invasive Plant Species and Noxious Weeds**

Data collected in the field during the Rangeland Health Assessment showed a departure from the potential natural plant community (PNC) described in the Natural Resources Conservation Services site description for both ecological sites in Little Beaver and Cherry Creek Allotments. Many components of the plant community, such as, perennial native forbs and grasses, were either lacking or absent in some portions of both allotments.

For example, at several transects in the Little Beaver Allotment, many of the major forb components were missing or poorly represented. Many of the minor forbs in the PNC for both ecological sites, were absent at all transects in Little Beaver. Diffuse knapweed, identified by the Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) as a noxious weed, was present in high amounts in at least one transect and was also observed growing in small amounts on the north slope area of the main Cherry Creek. Diffuse knapweed was also present in high amounts

along the lower reaches of Big Beaver Creek; biological control measures were taken in this part of Big Beaver Creek a few years ago to help stem the spread of this noxious weed. Canada thistle, another ISDA identified noxious weed, was common in parts the Big Beaver Creek drainage. Also, tansy mustard, an invasive annual weed, which would not normally be expected at this elevation, was encountered in areas of the Little Beaver Allotment. Flannel mullein, an invasive plant, was found growing in relatively high amounts on the banks of Big Beaver Creek.

In Cherry Creek Allotment, Rangeland Health Assessment data collected showed that cheatgrass was encountered in higher than expected amounts. Perennial native forbs were absent or lacking at both ecological sites and the amount of perennial native grasses was relatively low at one ecological site. Diffuse knapweed was observed growing in Cherry Creek Allotment.

Data gathered in the field during the Rangeland Health Assessment in Wolfstone Allotment showed that the major grass and shrub components were present and most of the major forb components were present.

### **Soils/Watersheds**

Soils in Little Beaver and Cherry Creek Allotments are derived from granitic parent material and therefore tend to be susceptible to erosion. The majority of the soils in Little Beaver Allotment are predisposed to relatively high levels of erosion. The soils ability to resist the forces of erosion that naturally occur in the area is reduced when the native perennial vegetation is lacking or in low abundance relative to site potential. Soils in Cherry Creek Allotment have a tendency to be highly erodible for the same reasons mentioned for Little Beaver Allotment. During the field portion of the Rangeland Health Assessment in Little Beaver Allotment, the amount of bare soil was higher than expected in some areas. The low abundance and weakened vigor of the native plant community that remains has affected site fertility and productivity, making soils more vulnerable to mechanical impacts and grass plants more susceptible to dislodging. This has compromised slope stability.

### **Riparian**

Riparian areas in the three allotments include Little Beaver, Big Beaver, Cherry, and Wolfstone Creeks. At least some segments of all of these streams were rated as functional at-risk based on the assessment protocol, TR 1737-15 *A User Guide to Assessing Proper Functioning Condition and the Supporting Science for Lotic Areas*. Portions of these creeks are influenced by livestock use, recreation use, or roads. The present situation for those segments rated functional at-risk indicated instream sedimentation, high width-to-depth ratios, a lack or absence of obligate wetland or facultative wetland herbaceous plants, bare streambanks, diminished capability of some streambanks to withstand high energy flows, incised channels, lowered water table, and/or a narrowing of the riparian zone.

Monitoring methodology based on *Monitoring Stream Channels and Riparian Vegetation – Multiple Indicators* (Interagency Technical Bulletin version 2.0/July 2006), referred to as MIM, was done on Big Beaver, Little Beaver, and Cherry Creeks. Criteria established for ten recognized components of healthy riparian streams found that the monitored portion of Big Beaver Creek was not meeting the established criteria for streambank alteration, streambank stability, streambank cover, and hydric species. Little Beaver and Cherry Creeks were not meeting the established criteria for streambank stability, streambank cover, and hydric species.

The livestock permittees in the Little Beaver Allotment have voluntarily cooperated with closing the lower portion of Big Beaver Creek to livestock use since 2007; however, some inadvertent livestock use by sheep and

cattle was made in the lower portion of the creek in 2011. Since the voluntary closure, beaver have become active in the closed segment and riparian herbaceous plant species have begun to emerge. Since the voluntary closure, significant progress is being made toward recovery of the riparian resource in lower Big Beaver Creek.

The historic Princess Blue Ribbon Mine is located within the Little Beaver Allotment and is situated in the Big Beaver watershed. In March 1990, the tailings pond dam failed and approximately 100 cubic yards of sediment washed into Big Beaver Creek.

## **Wildlife**

Little Beaver, Cherry Creek, and Wolftone Allotments contain sage-grouse habitat.

The current Idaho Greater Sage-grouse Habitat Map indicates all but 37 acres of public land, or less than one percent, in Little Beaver Allotment is identified as sage-grouse habitat. A total of 3,502 acres, or 61%, of the public land in Little Beaver Allotment is mapped as Key sage-grouse habitat. Key sage-grouse habitat is described as generally intact sagebrush-steppe habitat currently or recently (within the past five years) occupied by sage-grouse. Records at the BLM, Shoshone Field Office show that the area identified as Key sage-grouse habitat in the Little Beaver Allotment has not burned within the last 70 years. The Idaho sage-grouse map reveals that 2,208 acres or slightly less than 39% of the public land in the allotment is currently identified as Sagebrush Limited. The areas identified as Sagebrush Limited have burned in wildfires the majority of which have occurred in 2001.

The sage-grouse habitat map shows that all public land in the Cherry Creek Allotment is currently identified as Key sage-grouse habitat.

The sage-grouse habitat map indicates that 100 acres of public land in Wolftone Allotment is identified as sage-grouse habitat. A little less than one-half of the mapped sage-grouse habitat on public land in the allotment was burned in 2001 resulting in it currently being identified as Sagebrush Limited. The remaining sage-grouse habitat is classified as Key sage-grouse habitat.

All three allotments likely provide suitable habitat conditions for four migratory bird species of conservation concern: red-naped sapsucker, western tanager, mountain bluebird, and lesser goldfinch.

There is mapped bighorn sheep habitat within 30 miles of all three allotments. The allotments are currently under a bighorn sheep and domestic sheep Separation Response Plan which entails the initiation of specific protocol when bighorn sheep are observed on or near (i.e., within one mile) any of the three allotments or when domestic sheep are observed unattended (e.g., strays) on the allotments.

Elk use Little Beaver Allotment in the winter and will graze south-facing slopes because they have less snow and food is easier to access than on north-facing slopes. Late season use on south slopes by sheep has occurred during recent years in Little Beaver Allotment resulting in less forage available to elk during winter months. Game counts by Idaho Department of Fish and Game show that elk make use of Little Beaver and Cherry Creek Allotments in the winter. Also, all three allotments are used by elk for calving and by mule deer for fawning.

## **Fish**

Fish have been observed in Big Beaver Creek; however, the species of fish present have not been confirmed. Due to the limited amount of pool habitats, the fish present are believed to be native fish such as sculpin (*Cottus spp.*), speckled dace and bridgelip sucker. Sculpin were documented in Wolfstone Creek in 2002 and in Willow Creek in 1993. Other species of fish known to be present in Willow Creek include rainbow trout, speckled dace, and bridgelip sucker. Big Beaver Creek and Cherry Creek are tributaries to Willow Creek.

## **PRELIMINARY ISSUES**

Issues are generated through both the internal and the public scoping processes. The BLM has identified the following preliminary issues associated with the proposed project:

- 1) **Little Beaver/Big Beaver Crucial Elk Winter Range ACEC:** Maintenance or increase of the elk population that utilizes the habitat on the three grazing allotments is dependent on the quality and amount of forage, and the condition of the winter range in the ACEC. Late-season livestock use in Little Beaver Allotment reduces the amount of forage available for elk for the winter.
- 2) **Vegetation:** Major shifts from the PNC have occurred in Little Beaver and Cherry Creek Allotments, including high amounts of annual, invasive plants (i.e., cheatgrass) and poor representation of native perennial plant species. Noxious weeds, including diffuse knapweed and Canada thistle, are common along some of the creeks and some springs located in the uplands.
- 3) **Soils and Watersheds:** The soil resource and watershed have been affected by the vigor and recruitment of perennial native herbaceous species, the proliferation of cheatgrass, noxious weeds, and current livestock grazing practices.
- 4) **Riparian:** The functioning condition of several riparian reaches in each of the allotments is at-risk. This means that there are a set of current resource conditions in that segment of stream which make it susceptible to degradation during a relatively high-flow event.
- 5) **Wildlife Habitat:** The current composition and condition of the plant communities on the allotment has altered the suitability and/or condition of the resultant habitat for both the more abundant and the rare wildlife species that include the allotments in their use range.
- 6) **Common Use Conflicts:** There have been times when the sheep band(s) and the cattle have encountered one another within the same use area. When this has happened, it has disturbed the cattle and often leads to an unauthorized grazing situation because cattle end up in adjacent allotments that they are not permitted in.

## **PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED ACTION**

The term grazing permits described in the alternatives below would be issued for a 10-year period. No range improvement projects are proposed for any of the alternatives. Grazing stipulations that are common to Alternatives 2 and 3 are listed after the description of the preliminary alternatives.

Preliminary alternatives to the Proposed Action are:

**Alternative 1** – This is the “No Action” alternative. Renew the permits for all three allotments for the same types of livestock, season of use, and active preference without changes to their current terms, conditions, or on-the-ground management operations.

This alternative includes up to 3 days of sheep trail use through Little Beaver, Cherry Creek, and Wolftone Allotments for a sheep band to get from another nearby BLM allotment to the Sawtooth National Forest.

Mandatory permit terms and conditions for Alternative 1 are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4. Mandatory Permit Terms and Conditions for Alternative 1 – No Action**

Permittee	Livestock Type	Season of Use	% PL	Active Preference AUMs	Suspended AUMs	Total AUMs
<b>LITTLE BEAVER ALLOTMENT</b>						
John Anchustegui	Sheep	5/20 to 6/30 8/1 to 8/31	100	814	0	814
Toone Ranches	Cattle	6/1 to 7/15	100	135	0	135
<b>CHERRY CREEK ALLOTMENT</b>						
John Anchustegui	Sheep	6/5 to 6/15	100	150	10	160
<b>WOLFTONE ALLOTMENT</b>						
John Anchustegui	Sheep	5/15 to 8/31	100	9	5	14
<b>LITTLE BEAVER, CHERRY CREEK, AND WOLFTONE ALLOTMENTS</b>						
Trail Use	Sheep	6/15 to 7/15 (3 day trail limit)	100	0	0	15
<p><b>Mandatory Terms and Conditions for the Term Grazing Permits for the above Allotments:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In Little Beaver, Cherry Creek, and Wolftone Allotments, all livestock grazing will be made in accordance with the grazing management set forth in Field Manager’s Final Decision dated MM/DD/YY.</li> </ul>						

**Alternative 2** – Renew the permits to allow only early-season use for all types of livestock. The use period would be from June 1 to July 15 and would include range-readiness criteria. Grazing would be restricted to one-time use for each permittee for 30 days of grazing during the 45-day use period. From June 1 to July 15 sheep would be limited to 30 days use in Little Beaver, Cherry Creek, and Wolftone Allotments; cattle would be limited to 30 days use in Little Beaver Allotment. The maximum sheep AUMs allowed would be 210 and the maximum cattle AUMs allowed would be 30.

This alternative includes up to 3 days of sheep trail use through Little Beaver, Cherry Creek, and Wolftone Allotments for a sheep band to get from another nearby BLM allotment to the Sawtooth National Forest.

Mandatory permit terms and conditions for Alternative 2 are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5. Mandatory Permit Terms and Conditions for Alternative 2**

Permittee	Livestock Type	Season of Use	% PL	Active Preference AUMs	Suspended AUMs	Total AUMs
<b>LITTLE BEAVER, CHERRY CREEK, and WOLFTONE ALLOTMENTS</b>						
John Anchustegui	Sheep	6/1 to 7/15 (30 day use limit)	100	210	778	210
Trail Use	Sheep	6/15 to 7/15 (3 day trail limit)	100	0	0	15
<b>LITTLE BEAVER ALLOTMENT</b>						
Toone Ranches	Cattle	6/1 to 7/15 (30 day use limit)	100	30	105	30
<b>Mandatory Terms and Conditions for the Term Grazing Permits for the above Allotments:</b>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In Little Beaver, Cherry Creek, and Wolftone Allotments, all livestock grazing will be made in accordance with the grazing management set forth in Field Manager’s Final Decision dated MM/DD/YY.</li> </ul>						

This alternative is designed to: 1) increase the amount forage in the late fall and winter months for elk, 2) enhance riparian health by allowing for regrowth of herbaceous hydric species, 3) allow for upland vegetation regrowth, and 4) allow for recovery of the potential natural plant community.

**Alternative 3** – Renew the permits to allow only fall-season use for all types of livestock. Sheep use would be limited to north slopes only and their use period would be limited to one week within mid-September to mid-October. The use period for cattle would be limited to two weeks within mid-October to mid-November. Therefore, from September 15 to October 15 sheep would be limited to 7 days use in Little Beaver, Cherry Creek, and Wolfstone Allotments and cattle would be limited to 14 days use in Little Beaver Allotment. The maximum sheep AUMs allowed would be 100 and the maximum cattle AUMs allowed would be 58.

No early-season trail use by sheep would be allowed under this alternative through Little Beaver, Cherry Creek, and Wolfstone Allotments from other BLM allotments to the Sawtooth National Forest.

Mandatory permit terms and conditions for Alternative 3 are shown in Table 6.

**Table 6. Mandatory Permit Terms and Conditions for Alternative 3**

Permittee	Livestock Type	Season of Use	% PL	Active Preference AUMs	Suspended AUMs	Total AUMs
<b>LITTLE BEAVER, CHERRY CREEK, and WOLFTONE ALLOTMENTS</b>						
John Anchustegui	Sheep	9/15 to 10/15 (7 day use limit)	100	100	888	100
<b>LITTLE BEAVER ALLOTMENT</b>						
Toone Ranches	Cattle	10/15 to 11/15 (14 day use limit)	100	58	77	58
<b>Mandatory Terms and Conditions for the Term Grazing Permits for the above Allotments:</b>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In Little Beaver, Cherry Creek, and Wolfstone Allotments, all livestock grazing will be made in accordance with the grazing management set forth in Field Manager’s Final Decision dated MM/DD/YY.</li> </ul>						

This alternative is designed to: 1) reduce conflicts between sheep and cattle use by authorizing separate grazing periods, 2) respond to winter elk habitat and forage needs by limiting sheep use to north slopes, and 3) emphasize recovery of the potential natural plant community by authorizing grazing use after the active plant growing period, encourage increased production of viable seeds, and defer/exclude livestock grazing of newly established seedlings during the active growing season.

**Stipulations**

The following stipulations would be common to Alternatives 2 and 3:

- ❖ Sheep grazing use would be one-time-over only;
- ❖ Trailing through use areas scheduled for rest would be limited to 2 days and authorized on a case-by-case basis;
- ❖ Sheep would not water repeatedly at the same water source entry point;
- ❖ Sheep would not bed or noon within 200 yards of creeks, springs, or other water;
- ❖ Salting for sheep would occur away from bed grounds and salt must be placed on a tray or pan;
- ❖ The stay on bed grounds would be limited to no more than three (3) nights;
- ❖ Grazing use within one-quarter of a mile from water would be limited to trailing to and from water;

- ❖ No feeding of salt, grain, or certified weed-free hay within one-quarter mile of water;
- ❖ Utilization levels would be limited to “light use” on key forage species (21 to 40% use on bluebunch wheatgrass and Idaho fescue) and monitoring would be done a minimum of once every three years using accepted methodology as described in BLM Technical Reference 1734-3, *Utilization Studies and Residual Measurements*;
- ❖ Grazing use in riparian areas would leave adequate perennial herbaceous and woody vegetation by the end of the growing season to protect riparian areas from erosion, maintain streambank integrity, provide for sediment catchment, and allow for diversity in vegetation structure and age class; and
- ❖ Riparian monitoring for herbaceous stubble height and woody browse use would be conducted periodically (i.e., at least once in a three to five year period) using accepted methodology described in BLM Technical Reference 1734-3. Adequate perennial herbaceous and woody vegetation includes:
  - A minimum average stubble height of six (6) inches at the bankfull level along riparian areas by the end of the growing season for obligate wetland species such as Nebraska sedge or other sedge species; and
  - Limiting livestock grazing of woody riparian species to 30 percent of the current year’s growth. Woody riparian vegetation includes but is not limited to willow, aspen, cottonwood, alder, and dogwood.

**Alternative 4** – No grazing or trailing of livestock for a 10-year-term period for all three allotments; this is the “No Grazing” alternative. After the 10-year period, the allotments would be assessed and evaluated for whether livestock grazing can resume.

This alternative would provide maximum progress of the existing condition of the watershed, soil, native vegetation, and riparian resources on the allotment toward meeting or making significant progress toward meeting the Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Management and toward meeting the management objectives of the Little Beaver/Big Beaver Crucial Elk Winter Range Area Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). This alternative would: 1) increase the recovery of the potential natural plant community in the allotments, 2) provide improved recruitment of native vegetation and protection of the soil/watershed resource, 3) provide protection of the riparian resource, stabilization of streambanks, and recovery of wetland herbaceous and woody species, and 4) provide improvement of habitat needs for the crucial elk winter range in the ACEC.

**Alternative 5** – Renew the permits for all three allotments for the type of livestock, season of use, and active preference shown in Table 7. This is the permittees’ proposal. This alternative is similar to the “No Action” alternative, except for a modification in the permitted season of use in Cherry Creek Allotment, which has been changed to July 1 to July 31 under this alternative.

This alternative includes up to 3 days of sheep trail use through Little Beaver, Cherry Creek, and Wolftone Allotments for a sheep band to get from another nearby BLM allotment to the Sawtooth National Forest.

**Table 7. Mandatory Permit Terms and Conditions for Alternative 5**

Permittee	Livestock Type	Season of Use	% PL	Active Preference AUMs	Suspended AUMs	Total AUMs
<b>LITTLE BEAVER ALLOTMENT</b>						
John Anchustegui	Sheep	5/20 to 6/30 8/1 to 8/31	100	814	0	814
Toone Ranches	Cattle	6/1 to 7/15	100	135	0	135
<b>CHERRY CREEK ALLOTMENT</b>						
John Anchustegui	Sheep	7/1 to 7/31	100	150	10	160
<b>WOLFTONE ALLOTMENT</b>						
John Anchustegui	Sheep	5/15 to 8/31	100	9	5	14
<b>LITTLE BEAVER, CHERRY CREEK, AND WOLFTONE ALLOTMENTS</b>						
Trail Use	Sheep	6/15 to 7/15 (3 day trail limit)	100	0	0	15
<b>Mandatory Terms and Conditions for the Term Grazing Permits for the above Allotments:</b>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In Little Beaver, Cherry Creek, and Wolftone Allotments, all livestock grazing will be made in accordance with the grazing management set forth in Field Manager’s Final Decision dated MM/DD/YY.</li> </ul>						

**DECISION TO BE MADE**

The Shoshone Field Manager is the official responsible for decisions regarding management of the Little Beaver, Cherry Creek, and Wolftone Allotments. Based on the results of the NEPA analysis, the Field Manager will issue a decision document or documents that include(s) a determination of the significance of the environmental effects and whether an environmental impact statement will be prepared. If the Field Manager determines it is not necessary to prepare an environmental impact statement, the Field Manager will decide which management actions, mitigation measures and monitoring requirements will be prescribed for the allotment(s), including permitted number of animals, season of use, allowable utilization standards, and the term of the permit.

## **PUBLIC INPUT NEEDED**

This scoping document explains what the BLM is currently proposing in regard to managing livestock grazing on the Little Beaver, Cherry Creek, and Wolfstone Allotments. The proposed action and alternatives show what the BLM is considering; they are not firm at this time. Any comments received in response to this solicitation will be taken into consideration and may be used in further formulating and developing the proposed action and alternatives. Your comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, preliminary issues, and preliminary alternatives. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received by **February 17, 2012**, and are directly relevant to the proposal and project area. The BLM will accept public feedback outside of established public involvement timeframes. However, such comments may be considered secondary to comments received in a timely manner and may only be assessed to determine if they identify concerns that would substantially alter the assumptions, proposal, design, or analysis presented in the EA. Comments sent electronically should be sent to [cjosaitis@blm.gov](mailto:cjosaitis@blm.gov) with the title of this project “Little Beaver, Cherry Creek, and Wolfstone Allotments” in the subject line. Please identify whether you are submitting comments as an individual or as the designated spokesperson on behalf of an organization. Issues that are outside the scope of the proposal will not be addressed at this planning level.

The primary contact for questions and comments for this analysis is Clare Josaitis, Rangeland Management Specialist, 400 West F Street, Shoshone, Idaho 83352. Phone number: 208-732-7257.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

*Use Areas Map*

*Little Beaver, Cherry Creek, & Wolfstone Allotments Map*

*Fences Map*

*Little Beaver/Big Beaver ACEC Map*