

Land Health Evaluation Report
Moose Creek Non-AMP Allotment
Bureau of Land Management
Butte Field Office

Introduction and Assessment Process

This report documents whether land health standards were achieved for the Moose Creek Non-AMP Grazing Allotment administered by the Bureau of Land Management's Butte Field Office. Standards for Rangeland Health were evaluated utilizing an interdisciplinary team (ID team) of resource specialists.

Rangeland Health Standards for Western Montana are described in detail in the Record of Decision (ROD) issued for Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management for Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota (August 1997). The preamble of the Western Montana Standards states: "The purpose of the S&Gs (Standards and Guidelines) are to facilitate the achievement and maintenance of healthy, properly functioning ecosystems within the historic and natural range of variability for long-term sustainable use." Standards are statements of physical and biological condition or degree of function required for healthy sustainable lands. Achieving or making significant progress towards these functions and conditions is required of all uses of public land as stated in 43 CFR 4180.1.

This report contains an evaluation of each of the five standards:

- Standard #1 Upland Health
- Standard #2 Riparian/Wetland Health
- Standard #3 Water Quality
- Standard #4 Air Quality
- Standard #5 Biodiversity

Available monitoring data from both upland and riparian sites, existing inventories, historical photographs and standardized methodology are used by an ID team to assess condition and function. Condition/function declarations regarding are expressed as:

- Proper Functioning Condition (PFC)
- Functioning at Risk (FAR), which is assigned a trend of up, down, static or not apparent
- Nonfunctioning (NF)

Standards are met when conditions are at PFC or FAR with an upward trend. This is dependent on scope and scale. The BLM will consider the information contained in this report, along with public scoping and other sources of information, to make a determination regarding causal factors and courses of action to be analyzed in a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document.

General Allotment Summary

Allotment Name/Number: Moose Creek Non-AMP, 20309
Current Management Category: C (Custodial)
Location: T. 1 S., R. 9 W., Sec 34 (See attached Map)
Public Acres: 170 acres
Season of Use: Year around
Public Animal Unit Months: 40 AUMs
Assessment Date/Period: 7/29/2010

Allotment Overview

The Moose Creek Non-AMP grazing allotment is a small custodial allotment grazed in conjunction with adjacent private land on the Moose Creek Ranch. Historically the allotment was utilized heavily during the growing season, which led to some degradation of rangeland resources. The allotment is located adjacent to a frontage road and Interstate-15, approximately 3 miles north of Melrose, MT, and 25 miles south of Butte, MT. The allotment consists of upland grasses and forbs including blue grama, bluebunch wheatgrass, prairie junegrass, Hood’s phlox, and rubber rabbitbrush. Clubmoss is also present in the understory. Topography is gently rolling with slopes of less than 10%. No springs or streams are located on the allotment.

Summary of Standards Achieved						
--Yes, No, N/A (Not Applicable)--						
Allotment Name	Allot #	1. Upland	2. Riparian	3. Water Quality	4. Air Quality	5. Biodiversity
Moose Creek Non-AMP	20309	NO	N/A	N/A	YES	NO

Rangeland Health Standards Evaluation and Rationale

The issue of scope and scale must be kept in mind when evaluating each standard. It is recognized that isolated sites within a landscape may be Functioning at Risk (FAR) and not meeting the standards; however, considering broader scope and scale, the area may be deemed in Proper Functioning Condition (PFC). Likewise, isolated sites may be in PFC, but, overall, the resource within the allotment or area could be FAR and not meeting standards. Therefore, no single indicator provides sufficient information to determine rangeland health. Indicators are used in combination to provide information necessary to make rangeland health determinations.

Western Montana Standard #1
“Uplands are in Proper Functioning Condition”

Finding Standard is not met.

Rationale

One range evaluation was completed on a droughty, steep ecological site representative of the soils, topography, and vegetation on the allotment. The soil surface texture was gravelly-loam as verified by a soil pit dug at the evaluation site. All soil and site stability indicators were as expected. Hydrologic function was as expected overall, however two indicators were slightly to moderately departed from the expected including the amount of litter which was less than expected and the plant community composition and distribution relative to infiltration due to clubmoss which reduces infiltration and fewer bluebunch wheatgrass plants than expected. The overall biotic integrity rating was slightly to moderately departed from the expected overall due to three key indicators that were not as expected for the site. Annual production, functional structural groups and litter amount were not as expected due to the limited amount of bluebunch present on the site. Bluebunch wheatgrass should have been a dominant perennial grass which contributes a large portion of the annual production within the ecological site. No trend monitoring sites have been established on the allotment.

Western Montana Standard #2
“Riparian and Wetland Areas are in Proper Functioning Condition”

Finding Not Applicable

Rationale

There are not springs or streams on the allotment.

Western Montana Standard #3:
“Water Quality Meets State Standards.”

Finding Not applicable

Rationale

Surface water is not present on BLM land within the allotment.

Western Montana Standard #4
“Air Quality Meets State Air Quality Standards.”

Finding Standard is met.

Rationale

Although the actual air quality in the allotment is unknown, there is no evidence to suggest that the current allotment conditions would be contributing to any air quality problems in terms of a source of smoke or dust particulates. No visual impairment was

observed.

Western Montana Standard #5
“Provide habitat as necessary, to maintain a viable and diverse population of native plant and animal species, including special status species.”

Finding Standard is not met.

Rationale

The following indicators were used to assess whether existing habitat conditions are at a condition to support viable and diverse populations of native plant and animal species, including special status species.

- Plants and animals are diverse, vigorous, and reproducing satisfactorily
- Noxious weeds are absent or insignificant in the overall plant community.
- Spatial distribution of species is suitable to ensure reproductive capability and recovery.
- A variety of age classes is present.
- Connectivity of habitat or presence of corridors prevents habitat fragmentation.
- Diversity of species (including plants, animals, insects, and microbes) are represented.
- Plant communities in a variety of successional stages are represented across the landscape.

This small allotment is located adjacent to developed private land and Interstate 15 and was heavily grazed in the past resulting in a reduction of desirable plant species and lower vigor of existing forage species. Due to its location and lack of suitable habitat, the allotment provides very limited habitat for wildlife. The allotment may be used by mule deer, pronghorn antelope, elk and bighorn sheep moving through the area but most likely does not provide habitat for resident individuals.

Bird use of the allotment is also suspected to be limited to those species that prefer grassland/shrubland habitat such as western meadow lark, horned lark, and savannah sparrows.

Habitat for one BLM sensitive species, long-billed curlew, may exist in the allotment but no curlews have been documented using the area.

No federally listed species are expected to occur in the allotment. No sensitive plant species are expected to occur in the allotment or have been documented on any of the allotment visits.

Due to the location of this allotment (next to private lands and Interstate 15) and the lack

of quality habitat, this allotment is not providing habitat necessary to maintain a viable and diverse population of native wildlife species, including special status species.

Preliminary Identification of Causal Factors and Recommendations

Based on the field review and observations, it appears the following factors may be contributing to land health standards not being achieved:

- Historic livestock grazing.
- Location adjacent to high vehicle traffic corridor

Final determinations will be made upon assessment of further information. It should be noted that if changing a current management or use will not result in progress toward meeting the standards, then the current management or use should not be considered a significant causal factor.

The following actions may be necessary in order to make significant progress in achieving the Western Montana Standards for Rangeland Health:

- Continue to closely monitor grazing use, and set up permanent trend monitoring in order to determine whether perennial vegetation is improving, remaining static, or declining.
- Other than improving vegetation resources, nothing can be done to change the location of the allotment with respect to wildlife.

How This Information Will Be Used

If the information in this Evaluation Report indicates that the allotment meets the Western Montana Standards for Rangeland Health, BLM will issue grazing decision(s) (subject to protest and appeal) to renew or issue associated grazing authorizations as necessary, with the appropriate level of NEPA documentation and public involvement in accordance with CEQ guidance and BLM direction. No additional final determinations are necessary.

For allotments not meeting the Western Montana Standards for Rangeland Health, BLM will use the information in this Evaluation Report along with any other relevant data or information, including input from interested parties, to make a final determination whether or not current grazing management or levels of use are a significant causal factor in not meeting rangeland health standards on the allotment. If current grazing management and/or levels of use appear to be a significant causal factor, BLM will use the NEPA process to document the affected environment and develop alternatives to propose changes to grazing management to facilitate achieving rangeland health standards. These changes or actions will be addressed with an appropriate level of NEPA documentation and public involvement in accordance with CEQ guidance and BLM

direction. A Final Determination Document will be prepared in concert with the NEPA analysis and associated decision(s). Pursuant to 43 CFR 4180.2(c), the Authorized Officer shall take appropriate action as soon as practicable, but not later than the start of the next grazing year upon determining that existing grazing management practices or levels of grazing use on public lands are significant factors in failing to achieve the standards. Any grazing decisions, however, are subject to protest and appeal.

If current grazing management or levels of use do not appear to be a significant causal factor, changes or activities in other program areas or activities that appear to be significant causal factors may or may not be undertaken through a NEPA process, dependent on program and office priorities. However, a Final Determination Document will be prepared to document and outline the significant causal factors.

Involvement of Permittees, State Agencies and Interested Publics

The following groups/individuals were notified of the Sugarloaf Allotment Assessment:

Permittee authorized to graze on the allotment

Western Watersheds Project

Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest
Wise River Ranger District

Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks
Butte Resource Area

BLM Staff Participants

The following BLM staff participated in the preparation of this report:

Assessment Team Member	Title	Signature	Date
Roger Olsen	Rangeland Management Specialist		
Sarah LaMarr	Wildlife Biologist		
Tanya Thrift	Rangeland Management Specialist, Riparian Coordinator, Sensitive Plants		
Corey Meier	Soil, Water, Air Lead (Soils Scientist)		

Review	Title	Signature	Date
---------------	--------------	------------------	-------------

Tanya Thrift	Assistant Field Manager, Renewable Resources		
Sherri Lionberger	Butte Field Manager		