

Appendix 2

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240
<http://www.blm.gov>

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Instruction Memorandum No. 2003-074
Expires: 09/30/2004

To: All Field Officials

From: Assistant Director, Renewable Resources and Planning

Subject: FY 2003 General Drought Management Direction DD: 02/14/2003

Program Area: Drought Management

Purpose: The purpose of this Instruction Memorandum (IM) is to provide general guidance/direction to the field relating to drought management over the course of the next year. More specific livestock grazing guidance/direction is also provided.

Policy/Action: When dealing with drought conditions and issues, the principle focus of our actions should be to maintain the long-term health and productivity of the Nation's rangelands. Likewise, a conscious awareness needs to be maintained that every action taken may and often does place a hardship on those who use or rely on the public lands for their livelihood. Balancing these two priorities is not an easy task. Although the focus of this guidance is directed toward the biological resource programs (i.e., rangeland management, wildlife, wild horses and burros) that have direct impact on the long-term health of rangelands, much of the guidance is applicable to many of BLM's other resource programs (i.e., recreation, wilderness).

Several years of extended drought in many areas of the West has impacted vegetative vigor and stand composition; created conditions suitable for invasion by exotic plants; reduced both surface and subsurface water quantities and qualities; and created economic hardship for many users of the public land. Projections for the end of the multi-year drought in the near future are not promising. Prolonged drought impacts resource conditions long after rainfall and snowmelt have recharged soil moisture. The following guidance is offered to:

1. Promote a consistent, Bureau-wide approach to managing drought situations.

2. Serve to increase communication internally within BLM as well as with our external partners, stake holders, other users of the public lands, Resource Advisory Councils (RACs), industry and conservation organizations, other Federal agencies and local, Tribal and State governments, including Governors' Drought Task Forces.

3. Assure managers are provided the most current information and data for making timely decisions consistent with the standards for rangeland health.

The following guidelines and recommendations are intended to provide data, flexibility and direction for line management and public land users as they work cooperatively to develop local, regional or national level drought management strategies and make critical decisions during drought conditions. Success of this policy hinges on promoting constant communication, consultation and coordination between Field Offices, State Offices, the Washington Office and the Department as well as with livestock operators, RACs, wild horse and burro constituents, conservation organizations, industry and professional organizations, local, State, and Tribal governments, other Federal agencies, and the public.

Mike Holbert (WO-220) has been designated to serve as the BLM's Drought Coordinator. Each State Office is asked to designate a drought coordinator to serve as the State's liaison with the Washington Office. The States are asked to notify Mike Holbert of the selected State drought coordinator no later than February 14, 2003.

A four-phased approach to detection and management of drought is outlined in this policy. The "early assessment" phase outlines actions and tools recommended four or more months prior to livestock turnout and/or the peak plant growth period to determine the potential for, extent and severity of drought. The "pre-season assessment" phase, which occurs within 3 months of livestock turnout and/or the peak plant growth period, supplements and builds upon the actions taken during the "early assessment" phase. The "continuing assessment" phase outlines actions that are recommended during the grazing season. The "post drought" phase emphasizes the importance of assessing on-the-ground conditions and using an inter-disciplinary approach to establish site-specific criteria required to be present before livestock use is returned to permitted levels.

Early Assessment Phase

The following actions and tools are provided for consideration as early assessments are being made.

1. Standardized indices based on the Standard Precipitation Index, the U. S. Drought Monitor and other data are available from the Predictive Services program at the National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC), and at the local Geographic Coordination Centers for projecting short-term, broad-scale assessment of drought conditions as well as forecasts on continued drought conditions. This information may be useful at the State and National scales. The frequency and need for these

reports will vary by region or state. As appropriate, these reports should be shared with the Field Offices, RACs, other partners, stakeholders, etc.

2. Field Offices are encouraged to utilize an inter-disciplinary approach to (1) identify natural resources of highest vulnerability to being adversely impacted by drought and (2) prioritize emphasis areas¹ to focus monitoring, assessment and allocation of scarce labor and operational resources. It is also recommended that the information and decisions resulting from the inter-disciplinary approach be shared with the State Office drought coordinator to facilitate consistency across the State, working with other State level partners (as referenced in Item 5 below) and coordinating with the Washington Office.

Information and data that could be considered during this process includes the information provided in Item 1 above, data available from partners, stakeholders and others; remote automated weather stations; previous years' monitoring results (plant growth, utilization and/or stubble height, livestock and wild horse actual use, occurrence of insect infestations, use of "rest" pastures, etc.); severity of drought conditions; presence of significant or sensitive resources; priority watershed assessments; allotments that have failed to meet standards for rangeland health; available GIS, remote sensing information and other forms of electronic data and available scientific information. A determination should be made as to the adequacy of existing data to support decisions that will need to be made. Site-specific data is recommended, if available, to support the decisions. If additional data is needed, an assessment of the types of data and the capability to collect such data will need to be made.

In areas of concern due to vegetative conditions, soil moisture may be measured in representative areas using techniques found in agency manuals/handbooks and professional literature. The Crop Moisture Index may also be referenced at http://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/analysis_monitoring/regional_monitoring/cmi.gif.

3. Websites with information pertinent to drought are listed in Attachment 1.
4. The Washington Office will develop a communications plan to address (1) release of drought-related information to national media sources and (2) coordination with national Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), key Congressional contacts, the Department of the Interior and other Federal agencies at the national level. The communication plan will be shared with the State Offices and other National Program offices.
5. Similarly, State and Field Offices are encouraged to develop communication plans addressing release of drought-related information to appropriate media sources and coordination with RACs, County Extension Agents, State/local NGOs, State/local drought task forces, Congressional delegations, local, county, State and Tribal governments, other Federal government agencies², etc. Informal

interaction with as many groups/people as possible to gather their thoughts and ideas is also encouraged. Close coordination between the field offices, the State Offices and the Washington Office is critical to assure a consistent message is provided.

Relating specifically to livestock grazing, as appropriate, livestock permittees/lessees within projected drought areas should, at a minimum, be notified through written correspondence of current and projected conditions, the potential of livestock grazing use being affected during the upcoming grazing season, etc. Permittees/lessees should be encouraged to make needed changes in their grazing operations, which might include adjusting the number of livestock and/or the season-of-use, applying for non-use and to work closely with their Rangeland Management Specialist. Although adjusting both numbers and season-of-use may be used, adjusting the number of animals may provide the most flexibility during the grazing season.

If livestock normally graze public land year-round, follow the guidance identified for the Continuing Assessment Phase.

If on-the-ground conditions at the end of the previous grazing season are known based on monitoring information to warrant changes in livestock grazing use, early consultation and coordination with the affected permittees/lessees and interested publics should be initiated. Whenever feasible, on-the-ground tours to discuss conditions, concerns and possible solutions are recommended. Written agreements are recommended to document agreed upon changes in use. If agreement cannot be reached, the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution techniques is encouraged. As necessary, issuance of a grazing decision(s) in accordance with 43 CFR 4110.3-3 (a) or (b) should be initiated. Issuance of grazing decision(s) should be considered the option of “last resort” only after consultation, coordination and communication has taken place and should not “come as a surprise” to the affected permittee(s)/lessee(s). Whether these changes are implemented with written agreements, or a decision, it should be emphasized that the changes are designed to allow recovery of the long-term rangeland health and may be necessary even if precipitation improves and vegetation production increases during the next growing season.

6. Use of checklists is recommended to ensure all critical resources and issues are addressed when making drought-related decisions. Checklists should be tailored to meet local needs but could include resources such as areas of special concern (i.e., wild horse herd management areas, riparian pastures, critical habitat), special status species, and areas of fragile soils (i.e., Mancos shale). The checklist could be used to document coordination with all parties, interdisciplinary involvement, etc. Several states (Oregon, Arizona and Utah) have already developed checklists to use in drought-related situations.

7. As appropriate, Field offices should assess their current situation against Emergency Gather Criteria released by the National Wild Horse and Burro Program Office. If the assessment determines an emergency gather is appropriate, notification through appropriate management channels should be immediately initiated. It is important that this assessment also be completed during the “pre-season assessment” and “continuing assessment” phases.
8. As appropriate, Field and/or State Offices should initiate early discussions with the State Fish and Wildlife agencies concerning the potential need for wildlife herd reductions, if necessary. Any information available on the drought effects on local wildlife populations should be acquired.
9. Field Offices should complete an assessment of their capability to accomplish projected AWP workload measures in light of the projected drought workloads. As appropriate, notification through appropriate management channels should be initiated. This assessment should also be completed during the “pre-season assessment” and “continuing assessment” phases.

Pre-season Assessment Phase

For reference purposes, the timeframe for the pre-season assessment phase would be within 3 months of livestock turnout and/or the peak plant growth period. The following actions are recommended.

1. Updated information from the Predictive Services program at the National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC) and Geographic Coordination Centers should be obtained. Precipitation, snow pack and soil moisture records for the winter and early spring should be reviewed.
2. On-the-ground conditions (e.g., residual vegetation (height, vigor, amount), snow pack influence on available water, soil moisture) should be assessed to determine the effects and appropriateness of continued grazing use. Recognizing that wildlife, wild horses and burros and aquatic dependent resources will also be stressed by drought, close coordination and consultation between resource program professionals is critical. Working closely with the State Drought Coordinators, the Washington Office will develop a format for summarizing drought-related adjustments.

Soil moisture measurements may need to be continued where problems are apparent or in areas of concern. Measurements in the root zone to determine available water for plants will be especially important during this period. If the capability of the office staff to either collect or interpret information becomes an issue, consider partnering opportunities with other agencies or groups (e.g., NRCS, Conservation Districts, etc.).

3. Review and, if necessary, modify the Communication Plans. Continue implementation of communication plans at all levels. It is important that this review also be completed during the “continuing assessment” phase.
4. Specifically related to livestock grazing, continue to communicate and refine livestock grazing management practices with affected livestock permittees/lessees. Issuance of letters updating drought conditions, identifying areas of particular concern, emphasizing the need to work closely with field office Rangeland Management Specialists, etc., is recommended.

Whenever feasible, one-on-one meetings with livestock permittees/lesses and interested publics (as appropriate) to review and discuss drought information, needed management changes, etc., are encouraged. Written agreements are highly recommended to document agreed upon changes in livestock grazing use. The extent of livestock use adjustments (delayed turnout, reduction in numbers and/or duration, total exclusion, etc.) should be based on assessment of all factors including past grazing use, rangeland health, residual cover, precipitation, soil moisture, long-term weather forecasts, and other resources that may be affected.

Use of a categorical exclusion to authorize placement and use of temporary water troughs for a period not to exceed one month is addressed in 516 Departmental Manual 6, Appendix 5.4(D)(2). Placement and use of temporary water troughs in one location for a period greater than one month should be addressed through the minimum level environmental assessment needed to provide appropriate analysis. If appropriate, troughs may be moved to other locations to facilitate livestock distribution within an allotment.

If voluntary adjustments needed for proper livestock grazing cannot be reached, issuance of grazing decisions in accordance with 43 CFR 4110.3-3(a) or (b) should be initiated, as appropriate. These decisions may be issued as Final Decisions effective upon issuance or on the date specified in the decision if those measures are needed to provide immediate protection of resources. The decision document should specify the on-the-ground conditions that must be present prior to returning livestock use to the range. Modification or cancellation of grazing permits/leases should not be used to make short-term livestock grazing use adjustments.

5. Field offices are encouraged to work closely with the State Fish and Wildlife Agencies to review wildlife data, including population levels, winter mortality, fawning/calving success, etc. As appropriate, discussions with the State Fish and Wildlife agencies concerning the need for wildlife herd reductions should continue, if necessary.

Continuing Assessment Phase

During the grazing season, the following actions are recommended.

1. Monitor on-the-ground conditions including precipitation, utilization by all herbivores of key plant species in key areas, plant growth and production, use supervision of livestock grazing, insect infestations, etc. Grazing utilization should be appropriate to provide sufficient vegetative cover for other resources such as wildlife, fisheries, special status species, and watershed following conclusion of livestock grazing. If field office staff capability is limited, consider exploring partnership opportunities and focusing monitoring to priority watersheds and critical emphasis areas³ such as allotments that have failed to meet rangeland health standards, or areas with reduced vegetation production.

If assessment of monitoring information determines adverse impacts are occurring on the ground resulting from livestock grazing, affected grazing permittees/lessors should be notified immediately to move or remove livestock within a designated period of time. As appropriate, consultation and communication with interested publics should also take place. If livestock normally use public land year-round, identify when the decision to eliminate livestock will be reconsidered (i.e., during or following the normal peak plant growth period). Field offices with year-round grazing should also review the pre-season assessment stage prior to the next peak plant growth period. If the livestock are not moved or removed timely, issuance of a grazing decision based on 43 CFR 4110.3-3(b) should be initiated.

2. Continue coordination efforts with State Fish and Wildlife Agencies concerning wildlife herd reductions where they pose a threat to rangeland health and; therefore, their own long-term habitat requirements.

Post Drought Phase

The importance of achieving or maintaining the health of the rangeland cannot be over emphasized as consideration is given to returning uses to the public lands following the end of drought. When drought conditions ease, an assessment of all on-the-ground conditions (soil, vegetative, water supply, etc.) should be completed prior to the consideration of returning appropriate levels of use including livestock to the range. It is recommended an interdisciplinary team approach be used to establish site-specific criteria required to be present on-the-ground before livestock use would be returned to permitted levels. Involvement of the livestock grazing permittees/lessees and other interested publics in discussions addressing the return of authorized uses to the public land is recommended. Adequate time will need to be allowed for the vegetative resource to restore the vigor of the plant to a level where the plant can sustain grazing use.

Other Considerations

1. The use of salt, minerals, and certain mineral supplements as necessary to overcome natural shortages of minerals in rangeland forage may be authorized to provide for proper range management.
2. Maintenance feeding due to drought is generally prohibited. If an application for maintenance feeding permit is sought because of poor forage conditions

associated with drought, the application should be denied and livestock removed or not allowed. Exceptions for special or emergency situations are allowed. An example of a special exception would be the continuation of a historical practice of overnight maintenance feeding of sheep being trailed over several days.

3. Mid-season grazing applications to modify existing authorizations to request non-use should be processed promptly. Field/District Managers are authorized to waive the application processing service charge and to refund previously paid unused grazing fees.

The Bureau, in cooperation with other partners also affected by drought, will be developing a long-term management strategy to better prepare the Agency to address future droughts. In general terms, the strategy will focus toward effective communication between partners and accurate, timely assessment of drought conditions to trigger effective mitigation and emergency response activities.

Timeframe: This IM is effective upon receipt.

Budget Impacts: Implementation of this IM may affect the ability of field offices in accomplishing targeted AWP workload measures.

Manual/Handbook Sections Affected: None

Coordination: Opportunity to review draft versions of this IM were given to a BLM interdisciplinary Drought Task Force, State 1020 program leaders; WO 170; WO 210; WO 220; WO 230; WO 260; WO 610; Western States Water Council.

Contact: Contact Michael R. Holbert at 202-452-5191 (mike-holbert@blm.gov)

¹Emphasis areas may be defined as grazing allotments, geographic management areas, herd management areas, priority watersheds or any other area that meets the needs of the local field office or state.

²Close coordination with adjacent BLM offices and other federal government agencies (e.g. U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Reclamation, National Park Service) that manage lands adjacent to public lands is important to maintaining consistent approaches.

³Refer to Item 2 in the **Early Assessment Phase**

Signed by:
Edward Shepherd
Acting, Assistant Director
Renewable Resources and Planning

Authenticated by:
Robert M. Williams
Policy and Records Group, WO-560

1 Attachment

[1 –Drought-Related Websites \(1 p\)](#)