

Chapter 1

Purpose and Need

PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of this environmental assessment (EA) is to describe and analyze four alternatives for the development of an allotment management plan (AMP) for the Green Mountain Common Allotment (GMCA). An AMP enables the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to properly manage the public land and resources under its jurisdiction; to maintain stability in the livestock industry dependent on public lands; and to provide for the orderly use, improvement, development, and reclamation of public lands, consistent with multiple-use objectives. This responsibility and authority evolves from a series of legal mandates, including the Taylor Grazing Act, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Wild and Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), and the Public Rangelands Improvement Act.

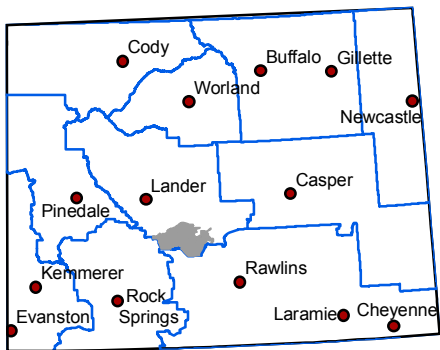
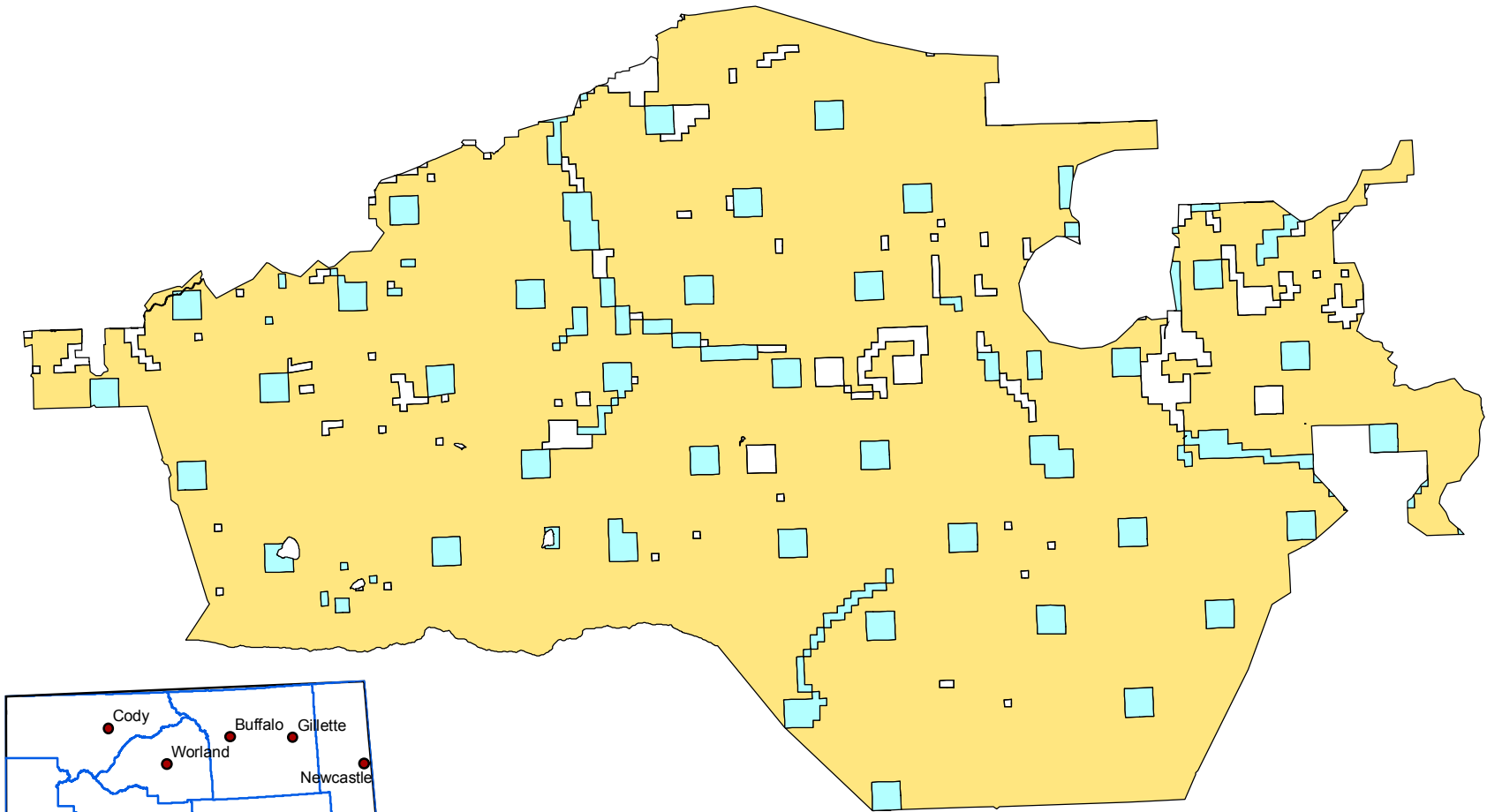
The GMCA is a common use allotment encompassing approximately 522,000 total acres in southern Fremont County and portions of Sweetwater County (see Map 1-1.) Bureau of Land Management-administered public lands in the GMCA are primarily used for livestock grazing, wild horses, wildlife habitat, mineral exploration and production, and recreation. Other uses include rights-of-way for transportation, communication, and utility systems, and timber production on Green Mountain.

Sixteen individuals share livestock grazing use within the allotment on 19 grazing permits. Prior to 1999, no formal livestock management system had been in place throughout the allotment's previous 100 years of use. Internal fencing has been limited to small pastures of mostly private and state land.

In 1996, the BLM initiated a large-scale planning effort involving the general public, local government, special interest groups, and permittees to address the varied and sometimes conflicting uses of the GMCA. This planning effort considered requests to convert the remaining sheep grazing use to cattle grazing and was intended to mitigate the known resource conflicts within the allotment. The planning effort identified a number of management issues and developed a list of goals and objectives to resolve the issues. An analysis documented in an EA (No. WY-050-EA9-039) resulted in the BLM's August 31, 1999 decision for managing livestock grazing on the Green Mountain Common Allotment. The goals and objectives covered in that earlier analysis established that there is a need to:




1. Improve or maintain riparian areas.
2. Maintain wild horses within appropriate management levels.
3. Improve the distribution of water sources.
4. Improve the distribution of grazing animals.
5. Maintain the open spaces and natural character of the allotment and the uses that are dependent on these values.
6. Maintain public access and dispersed recreational opportunities while respecting private property in the allotment.
7. Maintain big game populations near objective levels established by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department.
8. Maintain or improve habitat quality for plant and animal populations and communities.
9. Provide adequate forage and water on a sustained-yield basis to satisfy the present management levels of livestock, wild horses and big game animals.
10. Provide workable solutions that encourage positive economic impacts on the multiple uses.

Map 1-1: Green Mountain Common Allotment Surface Ownership, Lander Field Office



Wyoming BLM Field Offices

Surface Ownership

-  Bureau of Land Management
-  Private
-  State

11. Maintain and improve soil productivity and minimize soil erosion.
12. Improve or maintain upland plant communities so that they are diverse and able to recover from disturbance.
13. Manage the public lands in a manner that will protect and improve the quality of the water resources.
14. Share expenditures on rangeland improvements among all concerned interests wherever possible.
15. Maintain open, honest, and constructive communication among the interested and affected parties including the public. Foster understanding, involvement, and cooperation in resource management.

On July 23, 1999, coincident with the development of BLM's EA, the Lander Field Office made a determination that not all of the Wyoming Standards for Rangeland Health were being met on the GMCA.

"Appropriate actions" were identified pursuant to 43 CFR 4180.2(c) to correct the failure of the allotment to meet all of the Standards. These appropriate actions were included in the BLM's Final Decision of August 31, 1999, EA No. WY-050-EA9-039. The 1999 Decision is the management plan that continues to be in effect today.

The 1999 Decision renewed six GMCA grazing permits for a term of 10 years beginning October 1, 1999 and ending September 30, 2009. The 1999 Decision set initial use levels of 35,910 AUMs for cattle and 11,451 AUMs for sheep. The season of use was changed to yearlong for sheep. Frequent riding and herd movement were to be used in controlling livestock distribution.

The grazing management actions were to be implemented in three phases: initial, interim, and long-term. The initial phase was provided as an intensive effort by the BLM and the permittees to get started on livestock management, herding, and the construction of rangeland improvements necessary to meet the 15 management goals listed above. The interim phase was designed to achieve full implementation and monitoring, and to allow for the adjustments necessary in meeting the goals and objectives. The long-term phase of management was intended for monitoring, adjustments, and implementation.

Full implementation of the 1999 Decision's management actions was to be accomplished over a ten year period with specific actions and rangeland improvements being phased in to provide the best chance of success for the Green Mountain Common Allotment. Some of the first actions included water developments, riparian pastures, and herding to improve distribution throughout the use areas and pastures. A cost summary of the completed rangeland improvements through December 2007 is located in Appendix 1.

An AMP was to be prepared in consultation with the permittees and other interested publics following implementation of the final decision. An AMP contains the necessary guidelines for the management of livestock grazing on public lands to meet resource condition, sustained yield, multiple use, economic, and other objectives (See Appendix 2). However, the AMP was never completed due to grazing management changes implemented by BLM in response to persistent drought conditions which began in October 1999 and has lasted through 2007.

In 2002, a comprehensive rangeland health assessment and evaluation report was completed to determine whether public lands within the Green Mountain Common Allotment were meeting the standards for rangeland health. The evaluation concluded that rangeland health standards were not being met. In particular, riparian health was determined to be the highest priority goal and the biggest rangeland health issue on the allotment.

In 2005, the BLM renewed two GMCA permits under the authority provided under Public Law 108-108 (appropriation rider). Appeals to the Interior Board of Land Appeals were filed protesting the renewal of permits without an environmental assessment (EA). This EA has been prepared as part of a stipulated settlement of those appeals and is designed to identify, develop and describe vital information and data that will be utilized to assist the interdisciplinary team and the decision-maker in making a decision that is "based on understanding of environmental consequences, and take actions that protect, restore and enhance the environment." CEQ 1500.1(c).

This EA is also being prepared to analyze the impacts within the GMCA associated with re-issuing 19 grazing

permits for a new, 10-year period. This analysis will identify the appropriate terms and conditions that should be included in the grazing permits as part of this authorization.

CONFORMANCE WITH THE LAND USE PLAN

The management actions in the alternatives that are analyzed in detail are in conformance with the 1987 Lander Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Record of Decision, with a few exceptions. For instance, the proposed Granite Creek – Rocks Pasture Fence in the Proposed Action would cross the Seminoe Cutoff of the Oregon National Historic Trail in two highly pristine locations. This action would be contrary to decisions made in the Lander RMP (see Appendix 3 for more details). In the event that a non-conforming action is selected for implementation in the decision record, appropriate mitigation measures, such as fence relocation, would be applied. Appropriate mitigation measures to bring actions into conformance with the RMP decisions have been described and analyzed in this EA.

The Lander RMP states, "Management decisions affecting grazing use will be made when monitoring data are sufficient to support those decisions and may include changing livestock numbers, periods of use, or a combination of both." The alternatives being analyzed in detail in this document are in conformance with the Standards for Healthy Rangelands and Guidelines for Grazing Management for Wyoming (1997).

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND CONSULTATION

The BLM decision-making process is conducted in accordance with the requirements of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the United States Department of Interior (USDI) and BLM policies and procedures implementing NEPA. NEPA and the associated regulatory and policy framework require federal agencies to involve the interested public in their decision-making.

This EA has been developed in consultation and coordination with the allotment’s grazing permittees, state and local agency personnel, other affected parties, and interested members of the public-at-large. Table 1-1 below provides a summary of several key meetings regarding public participation and consultation in the development of this EA. A more detailed summary and chronology of public participation and consultation is located in Chapter 5 of this document.

Table 1-1. Public Involvement, Coordination, and Consultation for the GMCA EA

Date	Location	Type of Meeting
December 13, 2007	Lander, Wyoming	Open House/Public Scoping
October 3, 2007	Lander, Wyoming	Scoping Letter to USF&WL
April 18, 2007	Lander, Wyoming	Open House/Public Scoping
November 8, 2006	Lander, Wyoming	Permittee Meeting (Update/Scoping)
November 9, 2006	Jeffrey City, Wyoming	Permittee Meeting (Update/Scoping)
April 13, 2006	Lander, Wyoming	Open House