

Appendix F. Social Impact Assessment Methods

As part of the Social Impact Assessment concerning proposed amendments to BLM grazing regulations, focus groups were conducted with selected constituents in the West. The purpose of the focus groups was to

- Review the proposed changes to grazing regulations;
- Assess whether the proposed changes could create potential positive or negative social effects on the respondents, their communities, and people who utilize BLM lands in similar ways;
- Identify the distribution of any positive or negative social effects from the proposed changes.

To capture potential regional differences in effects, three sets of focus groups were conducted. One set each occurred in Salmon, Idaho; Ontario, Oregon; and Albuquerque, New Mexico. These regions were chosen because they presented three differing types of ranching and levels of dependence on BLM grazing allotments. Salmon is characterized by high-mountain grazing with reliance on both BLM and Forest Service allotments during spring and summer grazing. Ontario captured a mix of desert and mountain allotments with varying degrees of dependence on BLM allotments of differing durations and seasons. Finally, Albuquerque provided access to a mix of desert types experiencing multiple years of severe drought and with some year-long grazing permits on BLM land.

Each set of focus groups included one group each of grazing permittees, recreational user groups, and environmental

and conservation groups. Participants were recruited on the basis of their involvement with BLM grazing decisions in the past or positions they hold in groups that were involved. This produced a mix of permittees with various-sized operations; recreationists with a wide variety of interests including hiking, off-highway vehicle use, and equestrian events; and conservation and environmental groups ranging from Trout Unlimited to active pressure groups such as the Western Watersheds Project.

Social effects were assessed according to standard categories of impact variables consisting of population changes, community and institutional structures, political and social resources, individual and family changes, and community resources (Interorganizational Committee 1994). After the focus groups were finished, effects of any size or nature fell into the following categories:

- Community and Institutional Structures—changes to group and individual relations with the BLM, changes to basis for community economic and social stability;
- Individual and Family Changes—changes in attitudes toward and perceptions of the policies, perceived changes to family economic situations, changes to local social networks, changes in how groups frame their relation to the resource;
- Community Resources—perceived risk to and changes in participants' environment.

Some of these effects were larger than others. Other effects fell completely on one of the three groups. Many of these effects are

what Vanclay (2003) categorizes as changes to “fears and aspirations” of themselves and the groups they represent. The effects were then evaluated as direct effects if they were related directly to the proposed action. Indirect effects occur as a result of the change brought on by the direct effect. Cumulative effects occur over time as changes

accumulate from the proposed action and all other changes. Each effect was then evaluated for regional differences found in the focus groups. Finally, the likelihood that each effect might occur was judged to be good, potential, or unknown. Social effects from the proposed changes to grazing regulation were then incorporated into the effects sections.