

BLM and Agriculture

It's Fair Week! No doubt many of you are participating in or enjoying the endless hours of rodeo, entertainment, exhibits, horse races, and youth 4-H, FFA, and open livestock shows – it's time to recognize and celebrate agriculture in Harney County! Wait, what does the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) have to do with agriculture? Let's find out!

In August 2016, the National Agriculture Statistics Service released facts and figures for agriculture production in 2015 across the United States. Did you know cattle and calves are Oregon's top commodity, with a value of over \$900 million statewide? In Harney County, there are over 300 farms and ranches that contribute to that statistic. Here's where the BLM comes in – many of those local farms and ranches utilize public land grazing to support their cow/calf operations.

Private livestock grazing on public land is managed through a permit and leasing system, under the legal authority of the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934. Aided by our multiple use and sustained yield mandate, permits and leases grant the *privilege* to use publicly owned forage, not the *right*. This clear distinction was intended by Congress in the Taylor Grazing Act, articulated in agency regulations, restated in federal grazing policies, confirmed by scholars, and upheld by the Supreme Court repeatedly over the last 70 years.

Grazing, which was one of the earliest uses of public lands when the West was settled, continues to be an important use of those same lands today. In managing livestock grazing on public rangelands, the BLM's overall objective is to ensure the long-term health and productivity of these lands and to create multiple environmental benefits that result from healthy watersheds. On rangeland, our work includes conservation measures that reduce the threat of rangeland fire and invasive plants, minimize new surface disturbance, and improve habitat for hundreds of species. Together, public lands and adjacent private properties maintain open spaces in the fast-growing West, provide habitat for wildlife, offer a myriad of recreational opportunities for public land users, and help preserve the character of the rural West.

The Burns District of the BLM administers 164 grazing permits and 9 grazing leases throughout Harney County. We continue to value our positive working relationships and the cooperative nature by which the agency supports local agriculture and the ranching industry.

The BLM will have a booth at the Harney County Fair, September 8 through 11. Do you have questions about public land grazing privileges? Other questions or concerns about public land management, access, recreation opportunities, or other topics? Stop by and see us. There will be staff available to talk and information and maps for viewing and purchase. We look forward to talking with you!

