

RANGELAND HEALTH STANDARDS - ASSESSMENT - BLUE CREEK ALLOTMENT #0200

Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management (BLM, 1997)

Introduction

The Range Reform '94 Record of Decision (BLM, 1995a) recently amended current grazing administration and management practices. The ROD required that region-specific standards and guidelines be developed and approved by the Secretary of the Interior. In the State of Oregon, several Resource Advisory Councils (RACs) were established to develop these regional standards and guidelines. The RAC established for the part of the state covering the Blue Creek allotment is the Southeastern Oregon RAC. These standards and guidelines for Oregon and Washington were finalized on August 12, 1997 and include:

Standard 1 - Upland Watershed Function

Upland soils exhibit infiltration and permeability rates, moisture storage, and stability that are appropriate to soil, climate, and landform.

Standard 2 - Riparian/Wetland Watershed Function

Riparian-wetland areas are in properly functioning physical condition appropriate to soil, climate, and landform.

Standard 3 - Ecological Processes

Healthy, productive, and diverse plant and animal populations and communities appropriate to soil, climate, and landform are supported by ecological processes of nutrient cycling, energy flow, and the hydrologic cycle.

Standard 4 - Water Quality

Surface water and groundwater quality, influenced by agency actions, complies with State water quality standards.

Standard 5 - Native, T&E, and Locally Important Species

Habitats support healthy, productive, and diverse populations and communities of native plants and animals (including special status species and species of local importance) appropriate to soil, climate, and landform.

Standard 1 - Upland Watershed

This standard is being met on the allotment. The indicators used to evaluate this standard are Soil Surface Factor (SSF), which documents accelerated erosion; and plant community composition, which indicates root occupancy of the soil profile.

Soil Surface Factor (SSF) is an indicator of accelerated erosion and is a method of documenting observations regarding erosion. About 10% of the acres in the Blue Creek allotment are on public land (600 acres) and it appears by extrapolating from transects on the private land that about 50% have an SSF rating of stable and 50% are rated as Slight. All the transects on the private land have an SSF rating of either stable or slight which are the lowest levels of erosion in this methodology. A copy of the form used to document SSF is attached (Appendix A, "Determination of Erosion Condition Class").

Another indicator of Upland Watershed condition is plant composition and community structure. Current plant composition is compared to a defined Potential Natural Plant Community for the identified soil type

and precipitation zone. Using the 1988 Ecological Site Inventory, the percent of public land in the allotment in each seral stage is summarized in the table below. All of the known public acres in the allotment are in the Mid seral (40%) and Late seral (13%) stages. A tour of the allotment with an interdisciplinary team from the Lakeview Resource area on May 23, 2002 confirmed that the public land in the allotment appeared to be in mid or late seral stage.

The current use for 2 weeks in the spring and 2 weeks in the fall result in utilization on the crested wheatgrass while allowing the native vegetation to increase in both ground cover and production.

ACRES PNC	ACRES LATE SERAL	ACRES MID SERAL	ACRES EARLY SERAL	Rockland	Unknown*
0	77	240	0	0	283

* The unknown acres on this allotment are the result of the allotment being along the edge of the resource area and the vegetation types were mostly on private and National Forest and therefore no transect was sampled on these types.

Standard 2 - Riparian/Wetland

This standard is being met. The status of the lotic riparian resource in the allotment is not known as no PFC assessments have been completed. Peddler Creek, an intermittent stream, flows in the pasture for a half-mile on BLM. Compared to conditions in 1995, Peddler's Creek has stabilized and is in an improving trend. The nine acres of lentic palustrine riparian resources in the allotment are in Proper Functioning Condition.

Standard 3 Ecological Processes

This standard is being met. The interdisciplinary team on May 23, 2002 found utilization rates to be less than 20% and the plant community was diverse with both grass and forbs growing vigorously. Using the 1988 Ecological Site Inventory, the Observed Apparent Trend (OAT) for the vegetation communities on public land (600 acres) was determined to be upward on 53% of the acres and unknown on 47%. The form for determining the OAT is Appendix B. These unknown acres are on lands not mapped by the BLM because they are in relatively small areas surrounded by private or National Forest lands.

The 0200 allotment supports most of the terrestrial animals common to the sagebrush steppe in the Great Basin. The allotment provides habitat for huntable populations of mule deer, pronghorn antelope, and sage grouse. The 50 AUM's allocated to wildlife seem adequate to support the current wildlife populations, and was adjusted in the proposed RMP from 45 to 50 to address the expansion of elk and potential competition with livestock for forage identified in the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW) elk management plan. There is currently no major competition between wildlife and domestic livestock for forage, either early green-up grasses and forbs or winter browse such as antelope bitterbrush and curl-leaf mountain mahogany which are both limited in distribution within the allotment.

The allotment lies within ODFW's Warner Big Game Management Unit for deer, pronghorn antelope, and elk. Current populations are slightly below management objectives for mule deer and substantially below that proposed for elk. The allotment contains crucial winter range habitat for mule deer. The allotment also contains year-round habitat for sage grouse and pronghorn antelope, however, no crucial habitat has been identified.

Standard 4 - Water Quality Standards

There are no Oregon listed water quality limited streams in this pasture.

Standard 5 Native, T&E, and Locally Important Species

This standard is being met. The deer and pronghorn populations are healthy and increasing in number within the allotment. Habitat quantity and quality do not appear to be limiting population size or health. Coyote predation is thought to be depressing mule deer recruitment, however, deer and pronghorn populations continue to fluctuate at or slightly below ODFW's Management Objective for the unit. A general hunt season is slowing the population expansion of elk within the unit, however, if ODFW is unable to limit future expansion to the proposed Management Objective for the area, competition with domestic livestock may occur and depredation on private lands may become an issue. Elk expansion will be addressed in the upcoming RMP.

The habitat provided within the allotment is crucial to wintering deer in that it adjoins with winter range on the forest to the west and to BLM - administered winter range to the north and south. It provides habitat connectivity, as well as a spatial distribution of lower elevation range critical during high snowfall years.

The allotment also provides habitat for numerous small and nongame birds and mammals common to the Great Basin, as well as, sage grouse and marginal California highhorn sheep habitat. There is one known sage grouse lek found within the allotment. Sage grouse populations like the rest of southeastern Oregon are stable. The allotment also provides habitat for raptors and some BLM and state sensitive wildlife species and federally listed species. No critical habitat or limitations have been identified for any of these species which include wintering bald eagles, and possibly pygmy rabbits and various sensitive bat species.

Current Management and Recent Management Changes

The current management is to graze the allotment in the spring for two weeks and for two weeks in the fall. This allows for use on the crested wheatgrass when it is green and reduces the grazing pressure on the native vegetation.

Team Members

Title

Les Boothe	Range Management Specialist
Alan Munhall	Fishery Biologist
Vern Stoffeth	Wildlife Biologist
Lucile Housley	Botanist
Bill Cannon	Archaeologist
Ken Kestner	Supervisory NRS
Robert Hopper	Supervisory RMS
Erin McConnell	Weed Management Specialist

Determination

- Existing grazing management practices or levels of grazing use on the Blue Creek Allotment promote achievement of significant progress towards the Oregon Standards for Rangeland Health and conform with the Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management.
- Existing grazing management practices or levels of grazing use on the Blue Creek Allotment will require modification or change prior to the next grazing season to promote achievement of the Oregon Standards for Rangeland Health and conform with the Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management.


Anna Manager, Lakeview Resource Area

8/4/03
Date

Blue Creek Allotment 200

- Private Land
- Public Land
- State Land

