

Rangeland Health Assessment  
For  
Vinyard Allotment # 0201  
October 17, 2000

# **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 Beaty Butte 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. Of the acres in Vinyard Allotment that are being grazed, (8%) have an SSF rating of stable, (69%) are rated as Slight, and 23% are unknown. These ratings indicate that 77% of the allotment have the two lowest levels of erosion in this methodology. A copy of the form used to document SSF is attached (Appendix B, "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 the allotment in each seral stage is summarized in the table below. As can be seen most of the allotment is in the Mid seral (63%) and Late seral (19%) stages.

ACRES PNC	ACRES LATE SERAL	ACRES MID SERAL	ACRES EARLY SERAL	Rockland
2%	19%	63%	1%	16%

## Standard 2 - Riparian/Wetland

This standard is being met. Lotic PFC site inventories were completed in 1996 on Deep, Camas and Drake Creeks. All areas inventoried were found to be in PFC within the allotment. The ownership of the reach of Deep Creek fenced with Roger's private is in question. Property lines have not been legally surveyed. This reach is in poorer condition, but is currently being developed in cooperation with the NRCS, BLM and Rogers to adjust management and complete structural stabilization projects.

## Standard 3 Ecological Processes

This standard is being met. The utilization rates as illustrated in the Allotment Evaluation (Tables VIII-X) are below the allowed utilization rate for each pasture. The complete rest for the Seeding and Squaw Flat pastures every other year allows for

complete plant recovery with excellent plant vigor and adequate litter cover. The West pasture has growing season rest every year and this also allows the plant to recover from any grazing impact. The trend study plots as described in Table XI of the Allotment Evaluation illustrate static to upward trend in 5 of the 6 plots. The only noticeable change is the increase in juniper across the allotment and this is expected with the lack of fire in the area. The Observed Apparent Trend for the vegetation communities is upward on 17%, and static on 57% of the allotment with 26% unknown.

The Vinyard 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 112 AUM's allocated to wildlife seem adequate to support the current wildlife populations, however, may need to be adjusted in the upcoming RMP 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. Portions of the allotment are occasionally used by elk and California bighorn sheep from Fish Creek Rim throughout the year. 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**

This standard is not being met. Deep, Camas and Drake Creeks from the mouth to the headwaters do not meet state standards for temperature. Grazing is excluded on all of Deep, Camas and Drake Creeks in the allotment that are accessible to stock. Because of grazing changes to better manage riparian vegetation, it is felt that current management of livestock is resulting in significant progress towards meeting the standard or is not a significant reason for not meeting the standard.

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

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.

There are only two big game habitat transects set up in the allotment due to the limited distribution of key browse (bitterbrush and mountain mahogany). The decadent or dead bitterbrush plants within the allotment are still providing forage and cover for deer, however, recruitment of young plants is relatively low. Overall the bitterbrush appears to show some improvement in vigor and stand replacement over the past 10-12 years.

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 bighorn sheep habitat. There is one known sage grouse lek found within the allotment. Sage grouse populations like the rest of southeastern Oregon are stable to declining. 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.

The Warner sucker is listed as a Threatened Species under the Endangered Species Act. The only occupied habitat open to grazing in the allotment is on Deep Creek below the falls. Due to topography, this reach is essentially excluded and the channel type is not sensitive to grazing. Because Gibson Canyon and Sweeney Canyon in the allotment flow into occupied habitat below the grazed pasture, it was determined in Section 7 consultation that grazing was having an adverse effect on suckers. This effect has been minimized by restrictions placed on grazing and the Service issued a Biological Opinion to authorize "take" of the species. Warner red-band trout, a Bureau Sensitive Species is found in all three streams in the allotment. Their populations appear to be strong in all.

Noxious weeds are known to occur in the allotment. Canada thistle, bull thistle, and Mediterranean sage have been present along Deep Creek for a number of years. The populations are widespread and new sites occur each year but the overall level of

infestation has remained constant as previously known sites are controlled. St. John's Wort is working its way down Parsnip Creek and is expected to be present in the Vinyard Allotment in the near future. The current rest rotation system and reduced animal numbers will minimize disturbance and should allow for increased vegetative competition during the growing season.

Special Status Plants: none known to occur in this area

I have surveyed the area (pre-prescription fire, 1997-8) for sensitive plant species and do not believe any special status plants will be found in the allotment. However, the area is rich in cultural plants used by Native Americans, especially yampa (Perideridia species).

Lucile A. Housley, Botanist  
Lakeview Resource Area  
6 December 1999

### **CURRENT MANAGEMENT AND RECENT MANAGEMENT CHANGES**

The current management is a variation of a deferred rest rotation system using 3 pastures (See Map). The Allotment Management Plan has been in place since 1969 and was revised in 1972 with the AUMS being reduced by 50 with decision in 1998. The current grazing system uses the Seeding pasture in the spring and early summer (April-June) one year and the Squaw Flat pasture the next year. Each pasture is rested the entire year every other year. The third pasture, West pasture is grazed every year from July to September 15. The total AUMS for the allotment is 450. The recent changes included not only the reduction of 50 AUMS but the exclusion of deep creek from grazing which lead to the reduction in AUMS

#### **Team Members**

#### **Title**

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

#### **Determination**

- Existing grazing management practices or levels of grazing use on the Vinyard 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 Vinyard 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.

Scott R. Florence

10/17/00

Scott Florence  
Area Manager, Lakeview Resource Area

Date