

RANGE RESOURCE ASSESSMENT

BACKGROUND

The lease area encompasses 23,351 acres. The terms of the lease are for 244 cattle from March 16 to September 15 for a total of 1,476 AUMs. The lessee has taken non-use since 2003. Livestock use since 1991 had been largely restricted to trailing cattle along a road that is 3 to 4 miles above the Merced River. Use that did take place was normally the result of stray cattle drifting through the area. Since 1991, Mr. Meyer had reported 25 cows grazing for 5 months, from mid-April or early May to the end of September, for a total of 125 AUM's. Mr. Meyer mostly used the BLM land to trail cattle to his grazing lease on the Stanislaus National Forest. He recently reported that he "sold" his Forest Service permit. In the past, the public land had been manipulated (brush clearing, burning, and seeding) to produce good range conditions. Pre-fire, the brush had encroached into most of the previous rangeland and it had become unsuitable for grazing.

He only recently (post-fire) indicated an interest in grazing the lease area to capitalize on forage opportunities now that the brush has opened up. Over 50% of the grazing allotment is within the burn perimeter.

ISSUES

- Vegetation in the burned areas needs a period of rest from cattle grazing to allow for natural revegetation of the area.
- The boundary between the private base property and the BLM allotment is unfenced, therefore making it impossible to contain the cattle on the lessee's private lease.
- The lessee has indicated an interest in grazing 100 cow/calf units (AUMs) from April 1 to September 30 for a total of 600 AUMs for the grazing year. He intends to put his cows on his private property on April 1.
- An August 19, 2008, assessment of the burned area adjacent to the lessee's private property indicates some areas of high severity burns that have reduced the forage in the area. Natural revegetation is expected to occur but will take time in this area.
- Livestock forage will actually improve if the range is allowed to rest. It will not produce much forage immediately post-fire.
- The allotment is within a Wilderness Study Area.
- Portions of the Limestone salamander ACEC (400 acres) are within the allotment.
- The eastern half of the allotment is critical winter range for the Yosemite Deer Herd.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Close the area to livestock grazing for at least one year to allow natural revegetation to occur.
- Evaluate the vegetation to determine when it would be prudent to allow grazing to resume on the allotment. Also evaluate terms and conditions of the lease, such as numbers of AUMs and season of use, as well as cattle movement and possible concentration areas.

- Hire a seasonal employee to patrol the area to make sure that cattle are not trespassing on the allotment (April through September). This need can not be met with existing staff. A seasonal will be needed to patrol the areas, not only for trespass cattle, but for prohibited OHV use.
- Evaluate the Burgess Lease which is also in the burn area to determine if it is prudent to allow livestock grazing this year. The allotment is located south of the Merced River. The lessee is making use of only a portion of the allotment, and does not use the area around Sherlock Creek and the Merced River. The lease is for 127 AUMs (21 cows/calf from 3/1 to 8/31).