United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Owyhee Field Office
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Marsing, Idaho 83639

In Reply Refer To: 4110.3 (130) January 26, 2016

Acme Allotment #514
Emergency Wildfire Livestock Grazing Closure Agreement

This agreement, made and entered into on this ____ day of _____, 2016, by and between the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and (the permittee) in the Acme Allotment (#514), will suspend livestock use on a temporary basis to achieve land health objectives subsequent to the 2015 Soda Fire (#J08B). The goal of this agreement is to facilitate vegetation recovery to levels adequate to support and protect upland function and wildlife habitat needs.

BACKGROUND

In August 2015, the Soda Fire burned 6,210 acres of BLM administered lands in the Acme Allotment which was approximately 100% of the allotment (Table 1, Map 1). The current grazing permit for this allotment authorizes XXpermittee to run in common on the Acme allotment. The XXpermittee is permitted 500 AUMs from 4/1 to 5/31.

Table 1. Current permitted AUMs in the XX Allotment affected by the XX Fire.

Allotment Name	Pasture	AUMs	Use Period	BLM Acres in Allotment	BLM Acres Burned in Allotment	% Burned	AUMs affected
Acme	1	469	04/04-05/31	6209	6209	100	500

On October 16, 2015, BLM issued a decision under the authority of 43 CFR §4190 to implement emergency stabilization and rehabilitation projects and land treatments necessary to reduce the immediate risk of erosion or damage due to the Soda Fire. The treatments and projects included repair of existing fences and construction of temporary protective fences (Map 1). It did not include closure of the burned areas to grazing or temporary reduction or suspension of livestock grazing permitted use.

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IT IS HEREBY AGREED:

This grazing closure and resumption agreement is based upon, and consistent with, the Owyhee Resource Management Plan and the Idaho and Southwestern Montana Greater Sage-Grouse Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment (ARMPA), which specify that, following a fire, grazing allotments would be rested from livestock grazing for a minimum of two growing seasons and meeting grazing resumption objectives.

Therefore, it is hereby agreed that the Acme Allotment will be rested on a temporary basis for the timeframes specified below:

Table 1. Grazing closure timeframe by authorization.

Auth No	Allotment Name	Pasture	Year				
			2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
1101422	POINT PROMINENCE	1	Fall drill[1] seeding	Rest	Rest[2]	Resume permitted use	Resume permitted use
1101422	POINT PROMINENCE	2	Fall drill[1] seeding	Rest	Rest[2]	Resume permitted use	Resume permitted use
1101422	HEAVEN'S GATE	3	Aerial grass seeding	Rest	Rest[2]	Resume permitted use	-
1100129	WALLOWA LAKE	1	Aerial Seed	Rest	Rest[2]	Resume permitted use	-
1104109	MULE PEAK	1	Aerial Seed	Rest	Rest[2]	Resume permitted use	-
1100129	EAGLE CAP	1	Aerial Seed	Rest	Rest[2]	Resume permitted use	-
110129	EAGLE CAP	2	Fall herbicide application	Fall drill seeding[1]	Rest	Rest[2]	Resume permitted use
110129	EAGLE CAP	3	Fall herbicide application	Fall drill seeding[1]	Rest	Rest[2]	Resume permitted use
110129	EAGLE CAP	4	Fall herbicide application	Fall drill seeding[1]	Rest	Rest[2]	Resume permitted use

1 Grazing will not be allowed until after 10/15 of the 2nd year of rest, and objectives are met.

2 The BLM will consider whether or not a treatment is unsuccessful and if retreatment is necessary. If the BLM decides to retreat an area, two growing seasons of rest will be required in addition to objectives being met.

1) The permittee and BLM agree that areas of the Acme Allotment, identified above (Table 1), are closed to grazing by livestock until vegetation recovery objectives are met.
2) The BLM will notify the permittee through an official letter signed by the Field Manager once objectives set forth in this agreement have been met and livestock grazing can resume on the Acme Allotment.
3) The permittee is responsible for monitoring fences and rested areas to ensure fences are effective and livestock do not enter burned areas.
4) The BLM will provide replacement fencing materials and will repair fire damaged fence as approved and available through ESR plan funding, and/or as agreed to by Cooperative Agreement (Form 4120-6).

VEGETATION RECOVERY OBJECTIVES AND MONITORING

Objectives for Resumption for Livestock and Wild Horse Grazing

The following objectives will be used to determine when livestock or wild horse grazing can resume. Objectives apply to drill and aerial seeding, and natural recovery with and without herbicide treatment. All treatment-specific objectives must be met before grazing can resume at the end of the growing season. Objectives will be monitored at the pasture-scale. Monitoring for these objectives will begin in year one and continue for the five years of the project. Although monitoring will occur the first year after treatment, the efforts will be observational to provide a baseline of post-fire vegetative condition and/or treatment progress. Non-attainment of the objective by the second growing season post-treatment will likely result in rest the following year with monitoring efforts continuing to determine if objectives will be met.

If grazing resumption objectives are not met it is likely that treatment objectives are not being met. The BLM will determine if follow-up treatments are needed. Objectives for treatment success may be re-evaluated upon re-treatment and additional closure periods will be determined. Subsequent closure periods for these areas will be addressed through a revised closure document.

Drill Seeding

Monitoring would occur in random, representative sites throughout drill seeded areas.

The drill seeded areas would be available for grazing two growing seasons after the seeding and when the following objectives are met:

1. Foliar cover of large statured perennial grasses (excluding Sandberg bluegrass) is an average of greater than or equal to 20%.

2. Density of large stature perennial grasses (excluding Sandberg bluegrass) is an average of greater than or equal to 3 plants per m^2.

3. Basal diameter of large statured **seeded** grasses (bluebunch wheatgrass, Snake River wheatgrass, Siberian wheatgrass, and/or crested wheatgrass) has a median value of greater than or equal to 3 inches, excluding Sherman big bluegrass and thickspike wheatgrass.

4. A qualitative assessment of the fitness and vigor of native and seeded perennial plant species would be evaluated and would include at a minimum the following factors:

    - Seed head and seed production
    - Root mass, and lateral and vertical growth
    - Precipitation during germination and growing season

Natural Recovery

Natural Recovery is defined as an area where no aerial grass or drill seeding is occurring, but herbicide treatment, and/or sagebrush and forb seeding could have occurred.

Natural recovery areas would be available for grazing two growing seasons after the fire and when the following objectives have been met:

1. Foliar cover of large statured perennial grasses (excluding Sandberg bluegrass) is an average of greater than or equal to 20%.

2. Basal diameter of large statured perennial grasses (excluding Sandberg bluegrass) has a median value of greater than or equal to 4 inches.

3. A qualitative assessment of the fitness and vigor of native perennial plant species would be evaluated and would include at a minimum the following factors:

    - Seed head and seed production
    - Root mass, and lateral and vertical growth
    - Precipitation during germination and growing season

The specific key perennial grass species are dependent on ecological site descriptions and site conditions. Typical key species include, but are not limited to, Idaho fescue, needlegrass species, wheatgrass species (native then non-native), squirreltail, and Sandberg bluegrass.

Based on monitoring data collected within the Soda Fire perimeter, pre-burn wildlife habitat consisted of mostly Wyoming sagebrush/bluebunch wheatgrass or low sagebrush/bluebunch wheatgrass ecological sites. Pre-burn herbaceous vegetation was dominated by sagebrush and Sandberg bluegrass, sometimes with bluebunch wheatgrass and/or crested wheatgrass, and various amounts and types of forbs. Cheatgrass, medusahead, and/or other annual invasive

grasses were frequent to abundant throughout the majority of the Soda Fire perimeter. Currently, the majority of previously existing vegetation has been removed by the Soda Fire.

Within the Soda Fire, there is the potential that some treatments may not be successful. In these cases, the BLM may consider re-treatments. If the BLM determines that re-treatment is unlikely to succeed and contribute to a more resistant and resilient vegetative community, the BLM may resume livestock grazing at the permitted level.

RATIONALE

The Soda Fire resulted in a loss of vegetation cover that increases both soil susceptibility to accelerated erosion and the opportunity for invasive and noxious weeds to establish. It burned through valuable wildlife habitat as well as Priority, Important, and General Habitat Management Areas (HMAs) for greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*; hereafter, GRSG) (Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment (ARMPA), 2015). In order to stabilize watersheds, protect important resources, and achieve Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health, it is necessary to establish healthy plant communities within the burned area as rapidly as possible. Prematurely grazing the burned areas would further increase the potential for resource damage and decrease perennial plant recovery (Miller, 2015).

Grazing closure duration is determined by fire severity, pre-fire plant diversity, ecological site description, and post-fire weather (Miller, 2015). Post-fire reseeding of the burned area can also influence the length of a grazing closure period. Fire severity within Soda Fire perimeter was general low to moderate with some small areas of high severity (see attached burn severity map). Above average precipitation was received in the region during the fall of 2015.

CONCLUSION

This agreement, made and entered into the date set forth by and between the BLM and XXpermittee, will guide livestock use on a temporary basis to achieve land health objectives following the 2015 Soda Fire as set forth in this document.

Exceptions or amendments to this Agreement may be jointly agreed to by the signatories on a case-by-case basis, where such changes would better provide for protection and conservation of resources. Such exceptions or amendments shall be agreed to by all signatories and documented in an updated and signed agreement.

PLAN CONFORMANCE

All emergency stabilization and rehabilitation actions identified in this decision are consistent with Owyhee Resource Management Plan (ORMP) and ARMPA goals, objectives, land use allocations, management decisions (MDs), and required design features (RDFs) established for

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protecting and preserving the GRSG and its habitat on public lands managed by BLM in Idaho. These objectives and management decisions, presented by program area below, include:

Fire

- ORMP Objective FIRE 2: Decrease soil erosion and sediment yield, restore forage values, and restore upland and riparian habitat values using fire rehabilitation procedures following a wildfire.
    - Apply rehabilitation seed mixtures to meet watershed, wildlife, and riparian objectives.
    - Rest all rehabilitated areas, with the exception of firelines, from livestock grazing for at least two growing seasons.

- ARMPA MD FIRE 34: Provide adequate rest from livestock grazing to allow natural recovery of existing vegetation and successful establishment of seeded species within burned/ESR areas. **All new seedings of grasses and forbs should not be grazed until at least the end of the second growing season, and longer as needed to allow plants to mature and develop robust root systems, which will stabilize the site, compete effectively against cheatgrass and other invasive annuals, and remain sustainable under long-term grazing management.** Adjust other management activities, as appropriate, to meet ESR objectives.

- ARMPA MD FIRE 36: Following seedling establishment, modify grazing management practices if needed to achieve long-term vegetation and habitat objectives.

Livestock Grazing

- ARMPA MD LG 1: Maintain existing areas designated as available or unavailable for livestock grazing. Existing active AUMs for livestock grazing within the planning area will not be changed at the broad scale, though the number of AUMs available on an allotment may be adjusted based on site-specific conditions to meet management objectives during term permit renewals, AMP development, or other appropriate implementation planning. Additionally, temporary adjustments can be made annually to livestock numbers, the number of AUMs, and season of use in accordance with applicable regulations.

Special Status Species

- ARMPA Goal SSS 1: Maintain and/or increase the abundance, distribution and connectivity of GRSG by conserving, enhancing and restoring GRSG habitat to maintain resilient populations by reducing, eliminating or minimizing threats to GRSG habitats.

- ARMPA Goal SSS 2: Provide for the needs of GRSG and their habitat while also providing for resource uses in accordance with BLM's direction for multiple use and sustained yield as described in FLPMA.

- ARMPA Objective SSS 2: Incorporate GRSG Seasonal Habitat Objectives (Table 2-2), into the design of projects or activities, as appropriate, based on site conditions and ecological potential.

Vegetation

- ORMP Objective VEGE 1: Improve unsatisfactory and maintain satisfactory vegetation health/condition on all areas.
    - Provide a minimum of two growing seasons rest from livestock grazing and other watershed disturbing activities following prescribed or wild fire.

- ARMPA Objective VEG 2: Increase the amount and functionality of seasonal habitats by:
    - a. Increasing or enhancing canopy cover and average patch size of sagebrush.
    - b. Increasing the amount, condition and connectivity of seasonal habitats.
    - c. Protecting or improving GRSG migration/movement corridors.
    - d. Reducing conifer encroachment within GRSG seasonal habitats.
    - e. Improving understory (grass, forb) and/or riparian condition within breeding and late brood-rearing habitats.
    - f. Reducing the extent of annual grasslands within and adjacent to PHMA and IHMA.

- ARMPA MD VEG 1: Implement habitat rehabilitation or restoration projects in areas that have potential to improve GRSG habitat using a full array of treatment activities as appropriate, including chemical, mechanical, and seeding treatments.

- ARMPA MD VEG 4: Implement management changes in restoration and rehabilitation areas, as necessary, to maintain suitable GRSG habitat, improve unsuitable GRSG habitat and to ensure long-term persistence of improved GRSG habitat (Eiswerth and Shonkwiler 2006). Management changes can be considered during livestock grazing permit renewals, travel management planning, and renewal or reauthorization of ROWs.

Wildlife Habitat

- ORMP Objective WDLF 1: Maintain or enhance the condition, abundance, structural stage, and distribution of plant communities and special habitat features required to support a high diversity and desired populations of wildlife.
    - Reseed burns with a variety of shrubs, forbs, and grasses. Rest all burns and seedings from livestock grazing for a minimum of two growing seasons following treatments.

AUTHORITY

This agreement between the aforementioned parties is to close burned areas to livestock grazing and where appropriate, to suspend permitted use in (whole or part) on a temporary basis due to the Soda Fire, under the authority of 43 CFR §§4110.3-2(a) and 4110.3-3.

_____	_____
BLM Authorized Officer / Date	Permittee / Date
Michelle G. Ryerson	Permittee X

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