

**Land Health Evaluation Report**  
**Willow Spring Road Allotment**  
Bureau of Land Management  
Butte Field Office

## **Introduction and Assessment Process**

This report documents whether land health standards were achieved for the Willow Spring Road Grazing Allotment administered by the Bureau of Land Management's Butte Field Office. Standards for Rangeland Health were evaluated utilizing an interdisciplinary team (ID team) of resource specialists.

Rangeland Health Standards for Western Montana are described in detail in the Record of Decision (ROD) issued for Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management for Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota (August 1997). The preamble of the Western Montana Standards states: "The purpose of the S&Gs (Standards and Guidelines) are to facilitate the achievement and maintenance of healthy, properly functioning ecosystems within the historic and natural range of variability for long-term sustainable use." Standards are statements of physical and biological condition or degree of function required for healthy sustainable lands. Achieving or making significant progress towards these functions and conditions is required of all uses of public land as stated in 43 CFR 4180.1.

This report contains an evaluation of each of the five standards:

- Standard #1 Upland Health
- Standard #2 Riparian/Wetland Health
- Standard #3 Water Quality
- Standard #4 Air Quality
- Standard #5 Biodiversity

Available monitoring data from both upland and riparian sites, existing inventories, historical photographs and standardized methodology are used by an ID team to assess condition and function. Condition/function declarations regarding are expressed as:

- Proper Functioning Condition (PFC)
- Functioning at Risk (FAR), which is assigned a trend of up, down, static or not apparent
- Nonfunctioning (NF)

Standards are met when conditions are at PFC or FAR with an upward trend. This is dependent on scope and scale. The BLM will consider the information contained in this report, along with public scoping and other sources of information, to make a determination regarding causal factors and courses of action to be analyzed in a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document.

## General Allotment Summary

**Allotment Name/Number:** Willow Spring Road Allotment # 20280  
**Current Management Category:** C (Custodial)  
**Location:** T. 4 N., R. 2 W., Sec. 24 NE ¼ of NE ¼, Sec 24 SE ¼ of NE ¼, See attached map.  
**Public Acres:** 40  
**Season of Use:** 6/1 to 11/30  
**Public Animal Unit Months:** 10  
**Assessment Date/Period:** 7/26/2010

The allotment consists of roughly 40 acres of BLM and 1,630 acres of private. The BLM is a wedge shaped portion in the northwest corner of the allotment. Elevations of BLM lands range from 5,040 to 5,120 feet. Willow Spring Road Allotment is grazed in conjunction with the intermingled private lands. Livestock numbers are not regulated providing use is not detrimental to the conditions of the public lands. Past seeding of Russian wildrye (*Psathyrostachys juncea*) has taken place on the private land adjacent to the BLM within the allotment. Cattle use is very minimal in this portion of the allotment since the only water source is in the southeast corner of T. 4 N., R. 1 W. Sec. 19 on private land. Cattle are rarely pushed off these water tanks and usually spend most the grazing season very close to the tanks.

Summary of Standards Achieved						
--Yes, No, N/A (Not Applicable)--						
Allotment Name	Allot #	1. Upland	2. Riparian	3. Water Quality	4. Air Quality	5. Biodiversity
Willow Spring Road	20280	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes

## Rangeland Health Standards Evaluation and Rationale

The issue of scope and scale must be kept in mind when evaluating each standard. It is recognized that isolated sites within a landscape may be Functioning at Risk (FAR) and not meeting the standards; however, considering broader scope and scale, the area may be deemed in Proper Functioning Condition (PFC). Likewise, isolated sites may be in PFC, but, overall, the resource within the allotment or area could be FAR and not meeting standards. Therefore, no single indicator provides sufficient information to determine rangeland health. Indicators are used in combination to provide information necessary to make rangeland health determinations.

**Western Montana Standard #1**  
***“Uplands are in Proper Functioning Condition”***

**Finding** Standard is met.

**Rationale**

All three attributes; Soil & Site Stability, Hydrologic Function, and Biotic Integrity, were found to have a None to Slight Departure from Expected. Of the seventeen indicators only two were found to be slight to moderate; Bare Ground, and Functional/Structural Groups. The bare ground present was enough to rate that indicator as Slight to Moderate departure, although the crusts on the soil surface appeared to be reforming. Yellow sweet clover, (*Melilotus officinalis*) was found to be in over abundance, most likely attributed to the overly wet year, and therefore the departure for Functional/Structural Groups was found to be Slight to Moderate.

**Western Montana Standard #2**  
***“Riparian and Wetland Areas are in Proper Functioning Condition”***

**Finding** Not Applicable

**Rationale**

No riparian areas, springs or wetlands occur within the allotment.

**Western Montana Standard #3:**  
***“Water Quality Meets State Standards.”***

**Finding** Not Applicable

**Rationale**

No surface water is present on BLM land within the allotment.

**Western Montana Standard #4**  
***“Air Quality Meets State Air Quality Standards.”***

**Finding** Standard is met.

**Rationale**

Although the actual air quality in the allotment is unknown, there is no evidence to suggest that the current allotment conditions would be contributing to any air quality problems in terms of a source of smoke or dust particulates. No visual impairment was observed.

**Western Montana Standard #5**

*“Provide habitat as necessary, to maintain a viable and diverse population of native plant and animal species, including special status species.”*

**Finding** Standard is met.

**Rationale**

The following indicators were used to assess whether existing habitat conditions are at a condition to support viable and diverse populations of native plant and animal species, including special status species.

- Plants and animals are diverse, vigorous, and reproducing satisfactorily
- Noxious weeds are absent or insignificant in the overall plant community.
- Spatial distribution of species is suitable to ensure reproductive capability and recovery.
- A variety of age classes is present.
- Connectivity of habitat or presence of corridors prevents habitat fragmentation.
- Diversity of species (including plants, animals, insects, and microbes) are represented.
- Plant communities in a variety of successional stages are represented across the landscape.

Although no mammals or birds were observed on BLM land, there were insects, spiders, grasses, forbs, shrubs, and trees observed on Willow Spring Allotment allotment. They all appeared healthy. Current and remnant inflorescences/flowers on plants indicated that reproduction was taking place. Despite the reduction of bluebunch wheatgrass and increase in bare ground in certain areas, spatial distribution of species appeared acceptable overall. Perennial shrubs and grasses were present in age classes ranging from young to old. There was connectivity of habitat to prevent fragmentation. Multiple plant, animal, and insect species were found in the surrounding areas. No special status plants or BLM sensitive plants have been documented on the allotment.

**Preliminary Identification of Causal Factors and Recommendations**

Based on the field review and observations, it appears the following factors may be contributing to land health standards not being achieved:

- The allotment met all standards, therefore no causal factors or recommendations were made.

Final determinations will be made upon assessment of further information. It should be noted that if changing a current management or use will not result in progress toward meeting the standards, then the current management or use should not be considered a significant causal factor.

The following actions may be necessary in order to make significant progress in achieving the Western Montana Standards for Rangeland Health:

- No actions are necessary as the allotment met all applicable standards.

### **How This Information Will Be Used**

If the information in this Evaluation Report indicates that the allotment meets the Western Montana Standards for Rangeland Health, BLM will issue grazing decision(s) (subject to protest and appeal) to renew or issue associated grazing authorizations as necessary, with the appropriate level of NEPA documentation and public involvement in accordance with CEQ guidance and BLM direction. No additional final determinations are necessary.

For allotments not meeting the Western Montana Standards for Rangeland Health, BLM will use the information in this Evaluation Report along with any other relevant data or information, including input from interested parties, to make a final determination whether or not current grazing management or levels of use are a significant causal factor in not meeting rangeland health standards on the allotment. If current grazing management and/or levels of use appear to be a significant causal factor, BLM will use the NEPA process to document the affected environment and develop alternatives to propose changes to grazing management to facilitate achieving rangeland health standards. These changes or actions will be addressed with an appropriate level of NEPA documentation and public involvement in accordance with CEQ guidance and BLM direction. A Final Determination Document will be prepared in concert with the NEPA analysis and associated decision(s). Pursuant to 43 CFR 4180.2(c), the Authorized Officer shall take appropriate action as soon as practicable, but not later than the start of the next grazing year upon determining that existing grazing management practices or levels of grazing use on public lands are significant factors in failing to achieve the standards. Any grazing decisions, however, are subject to protest and appeal.

If current grazing management or levels of use do not appear to be a significant causal factor, changes or activities in other program areas or activities that appear to be significant causal factors may or may not be undertaken through a NEPA process, dependent on program and office priorities. However, a Final Determination Document will be prepared to document and outline the significant causal factors.

### **Involvement of Permittees, State Agencies and Interested Publics**

The following groups/individuals were notified of the Willow Spring Road Allotment Assessment:

Permittee authorized to graze on the allotment

Western Watersheds Project

Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest  
Butte and Whitehall Ranger Districts

Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks  
**Butte Area Resource Office**

### **BLM Staff Participants**

The following BLM staff participated in the preparation of this report:

<b>Assessment Team Member</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
Roger Olsen	Rangeland Management Specialist		
Scot Franklin	Wildlife Biologist		
Corey Meier	Soil, Water, Air Lead (Soils Scientist)		

<b>Review</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
Tanya Thrift	Assistant Field Manager, Renewable Resources		
Sherri Lionberger	Butte Field Manager		