

Land Health Evaluation Report
Yellowshack Allotment
Bureau of Land Management
Butte Field Office

Introduction and Assessment Process

This report documents whether land health standards were achieved for the Yellowshack 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: Yellowshack Allotment #20221
Current Management Category: M (Maintain)
Location: T. 2 N., R 5 W., Sec. 14 SW ¼
Public Acres: 160
Season of Use: 5/1 to 6/15
Public Animal Unit Months: 16
Assessment Date/Period: 7/26/2010

Yellowshack consists of 160 acres of BLM fenced in with 1,280 acres of private land. Elevation ranges from 4,850 feet to 5,000 feet. The allotment is in the 10 to 14 inch precipitation zone. The permittee on the allotment is also the permittee on the Ringing Rocks allotment and usually uses Yellowshack in conjunction with the Ringing Rocks allotment. The Ringing Rocks allotment has gone through a few changes management in 2003 and 2010. Both sets of changes appear to have aided the Yellowshack allotment as well.

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
Yellowshack	20221	No	N/A	Yes	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 not met.

Rationale

Two of the three attributes were found to have a Slight to Moderate Departure from Expected; Soil & Site Stability and Hydrologic Function. The third attribute, Biotic Integrity, was found to have a None to Slight Departure from Expected. Of the seventeen

indicators, one indicator, Bare Ground, was found to have a Moderate Departure, and four indicators were found to have a Slight to Moderate Departure; Water-Flow Patterns, Pedestals and/or Terracettes, Soil Surface Loss or Degradation, and Plant Community Composition and Distribution Relative to Runoff. The IDT identified that though the proper species were present, those species were not as abundant as expected and the percentage of bare soil was higher than expected.

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

Finding Not Applicable.

Rationale

There are no lentic or lotic riparian areas within the allotment therefore the riparian standard does not apply.

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

Finding Standard is met.

Rationale

No surface water is present on BLM land within the allotment. An ephemeral draw is present and no excessive bank erosion that could adversely affect seasonal water quality was evident.

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.

There were small mammals, birds, insects, spiders, grasses, forbs, shrubs, and trees observed on the Yellowshack allotment. They all appeared healthy. Current and remnant inflorescences/flowers on plants indicated that reproduction was taking place. Noxious weeds were not identified. Despite the unexpected reduction of bluebunch wheatgrass 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.

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:

- Past livestock management
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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:

- Continue current grazing schedule

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 Yellowshack 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:

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

Review	Title	Signature	Date
Tanya Thrift	Assistant Field Manager, Renewable Resources		
Sherri Lionberger	Butte Field Manager		