

Land Health Evaluation Report
Boulder Guard Station
Bureau of Land Management
Butte Field Office

Introduction and Assessment Process

This report documents whether land health standards were achieved for the Boulder Guard Station currently being withdrawn by the United States Forest Service, back to the Bureau of Land Management's Butte Field Office.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: Not currently allotted, therefore no number
Current Management Category: Not categorized
Location: T. 6 N., R. 4 W. Sec. 29 NW 1/4
Public Acres: 270 Acres
Season of Use: N/A
Public Animal Unit Months: N/A
Assessment Date/Period: July 21, 2011

Public lands within this allotment are currently held under a Notice of Intent to Relinquish. These lands were withdrawn by Public Land Orders (PLO) 736 and 1110 dated July 27, 1951 and March 31, 1955 respectively to the Forest Service within the Deer Lodge National Forest. The Forest Service issued a Special Use Permit to graze horses on 18 acres from June 15 to April 15, not to exceed 5 head months of total use. The Forest Service no longer wishes to maintain ownership of this parcel, therefore the lands would be relinquished back to the BLM.

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
Boulder Guard Station	N/A	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

Two upland assessments were completed on the Boulder Guard Station allotment. The ID team completed the first assessment in the soil map unit Farnuf-Placerton sandy clay

loams, 2 to 8 percent slopes (1602C). A verification pit was dug on the footslope of an alluvial fan. The verification soil did not match any of the soil map unit's major components. The ecological site was therefore determined using the Rangeland Ecological Site Key, version 11.1 (National Range and Pasture Handbook, 2011). The verification pit was keyed out to Shallow Droughty 15-19".

Several pedestals were observed in the assessment area bunchgrasses were elevated as a result of soil loss around plant bases. Since no water flow patterns (active or dormant) were observed, the pedestals were likely generated by wind erosion or by non-erosional processes such as frost heaving. The amount of bare soil surfaces was of slight concern. Moss and bunch grass cover the ground surface in many small unconnected patches. Exposed soils occurring in the un-vegetated patches are susceptible to particle dislodgement and movement. However, due to the near zero slope and the sandy (non-silty) surface texture, dislodged particles are unlikely to move down slope or be blown away by wind gusts. Soil and site stability is not ideal, yet conditions are not deteriorating.

The second assessment was performed in the soil map unit Placerton-Connieo-Jeffcity complex, 4 to 15 percent slopes (1272D). The verification pit was dug east of the first assessment, on a footslope of the same alluvial fan. The verification soil matched the major map component Cannieo and similar soils. These soils form in loamy residuum weathered from granite. They occur on hillsides and ridges. Depth to bedrock is 18 inches. They are not hydric and experience no periods of saturation. The corresponding ecological site is Very Shallow (VSw) 15-19". The only soil related concern was a gully adjacent to an old mining and dump area.

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

Finding Not Applicable.

Rationale No surface riparian or wetland areas are present on the allotment.

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

Finding Not Applicable.

Rationale No surface water is present on 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.

This allotment is too small to sustain healthy and diverse wildlife species on its’ own, and I-15 and the city of Boulder inhibit connectivity to the south. However the allotment is connected to large areas of habitat to the east, west, and north. Several passerine species were seen during the evaluation, and signs of wildlife typical of the area were noted. The allotment provides winter elk habitat. Some noxious weeds are present but comprise a very small portion of vegetation.

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

Press release was issued, in addition to a letter mailed to interest groups, to notify the public that the Butte Field Office would be conducting land health assessments during summer of 2011. Those interested in participating were directed to contact the Butte Field Office.

Western Watersheds Project

Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest
Butte and Whitehall Ranger Districts

Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks

BLM Staff Participants

The following groups/individuals were notified of the Boulder Guard Station Assessment:

The following BLM staff participated in the preparation of this report

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

Review	Title	Signature	Date
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Scott Haight	Butte Field Manager		