

# **Land Health Evaluation Report**

## **Chuck Reid Allotment**

Bureau of Land Management

Butte Field Office

### **Introduction and Assessment Process**

This report documents whether land health standards were achieved for the Chuck Reid 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 this allotment 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:** Chuck Reid # 05529  
**Current Management Category:** M (Maintain)  
**Location:** T3S, R12E, Section 9; Park County  
**Public Acres:** Approximately 80 acres.  
**Season of Use:** 10/15 to 1/14  
**Public Animal Unit Months:** 5  
**Assessment Date:** May 5, 2009

The allotment is 80 acres in size, and contains about 2400 feet of meandering river frontage along the West Boulder River. The majority of this tract, about 70 acres, is located on the west side of the river. Much of the west side is a steep hill containing sagebrush – grasslands. The most level area of the allotment on the west side of the river is spruce dominated river bottom which contains little livestock forage. Public lands located on west side of the river receive little livestock grazing use. The portion of the allotment located on the east side of the river, about 10 acres, of public lands along the river is grazed annually with adjacent private lands with new born calves and their mothers.

The Big Timber weather station reports 16.29 inches of precipitation on average, and an average daily temperature of 46.8 degrees Fahrenheit. The Livingston Airport weather station reports 15.72 inches of precipitation on average, and an average daily temperature of 45.8 degrees Fahrenheit. The Chuck Reid Allotment lies about 20 miles southeast of Livingston and about 30 miles southwest of Big Timber.

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
Chuck Reid	05529	Yes	Yes	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 met.

**Rationale**

The rangeland health evaluation conducted on this allotment was compared to the Natural Resource Conservation Service’s ecological site guides and the Forest Habitat Types of Montana manual. The sites evaluated on this allotment showed little departure from the soil stability, hydrologic and biotic function indicators.

Much of this allotment is a cliff and too steep for livestock use. The flatter area on top of the cliff sees little if any livestock use as it is a distance from stock water.

Livestock graze allotment lands on the east side of the river in conjunction with farmed fields on adjacent private property. These farmed fields contain primarily introduced herbaceous species. The majority of the livestock grazing use, in this area, occurs on private property on the east side of the river.

There is approximately 10 to 12 acres of public land located in the river bottom on the west side of the river which receives occasional livestock use during the winter season. These lands are timbered, and have little upland vegetation. Livestock do not access this side of the river frequently.

The following sites were selected because they showed evidence of past livestock grazing:

Site 1: a Rangeland Health Evaluation Worksheet was completed at T3S, R12E, Sec. 9: SW1/4NW1/4. The soil type for this site is Beehive, extremely bouldery-Bearmouth, very bouldery complex, 2 to 8 percent slopes, occasionally flooded (1203). This site was determined to be a spruce/sweetscented bedstraw habitat type. The assessment showed 16 of 17 indicators to be none to slight from departure. The reproductive capability of perennial plants rated moderate as there was no new cottonwood reproduction, however there was a good stand of wildlife browse shrubbery species present.

Site 2: a Rangeland Health Evaluation Worksheet was completed at T3S, R12E, Sec. 9: SE1/4NW1/4. This site was near the boundary of public and private property, which showed past livestock grazing use. Public lands west of this site were too wet (somewhat marshy) and did not show evidence of livestock grazing use. The soil type for this site is Beehive, extremely bouldery-Bearmouth, very bouldery complex, 2 to 8 percent slopes, occasionally flooded (1203). This site was determined to be a wet meadow 20”+ precipitation zone ecological site. The assessment showed 17 of 17 indicators rated none to slight from departure.

Overall, the uplands are in Proper Functioning Condition.

**Western Montana Standard #2**

***“Riparian and Wetland Areas are in Proper Functioning Condition”***

**Finding** Standard is met.

**Rationale**

Riparian reach P-7 (West Fork of Boulder River) was previously rated as Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) in the 1990s and was again rated as PFC, in 2009, on the date of this assessment. This reach contains about 2400 feet of stream frontage. The Interdisciplinary Team (ID) gave this reach all positive responses for the hydrological, vegetation and erosion deposition riparian functions. There were no concerns about its function.

**Western Montana Standard #3:**

***“Water Quality Meets State Standards.”***

**Finding** Standard is met.

**Rationale**

The State of Montana, Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has responsibility for implementing the Clean Water Act. This responsibility includes making beneficial use determinations. The State of Montana 303(d) list of impaired water bodies was reviewed for Park County and the West Boulder River is not included on this list. No excess sediment is produced from water running off this 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.

A variety of native wildlife species are distributed across the allotment. White-tailed deer are numerous along the river corridor; small mammal burrows were noted; red-tailed hawks and numerous passerine species were seen during the allotment evaluation; numerous insect and arachnid species were seen; brown trout are the primary fish species in this reach of the river. Wildlife appears to be healthy, diverse, and reproducing satisfactorily. Although the allotment is too small to sustain healthy and diverse wildlife communities on its own, it is connected on all sides to undeveloped private land. There are no significant barriers to wildlife movement in and out of the allotment. Records indicate sightings of golden eagle and peregrine falcon (BLM sensitive species) within two miles of the allotment.

Noxious weeds and invasive plant species are rare. A variety of successional stages and age classes of plant communities are represented across the landscape, other than on the west side of the river where sapling sized trees are limited.

**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.

This Evaluation Report indicates that this allotment meets or is making significant progress toward the functions and conditions of the Western Montana Standards for Rangeland Health. No additional final determination is necessary.

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

The following parties were solicited by mail to see if they had interest in the 2009 Rangeland Health Assessments for the BLM – Butte Field Office: MT Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, Western Watersheds Project, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, Helena National Forest, Gallatin National Forest, MT Department of Natural Resources and Conservation and the allotment grazing lessee.

The grazing lessee's ranch manager accompanied the team on the rangeland health assessment, and discussed the findings with the interdisciplinary team.

The United States Forest Service (USFS) provided some watershed monitoring data for the West Fork of the Boulder River. This is information that was generated following the Jungle Fire (2006), which was located on USFS managed lands upstream from the Chuck Reid Allotment.

## 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>
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Scot Franklin	Wildlife Biologist		
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