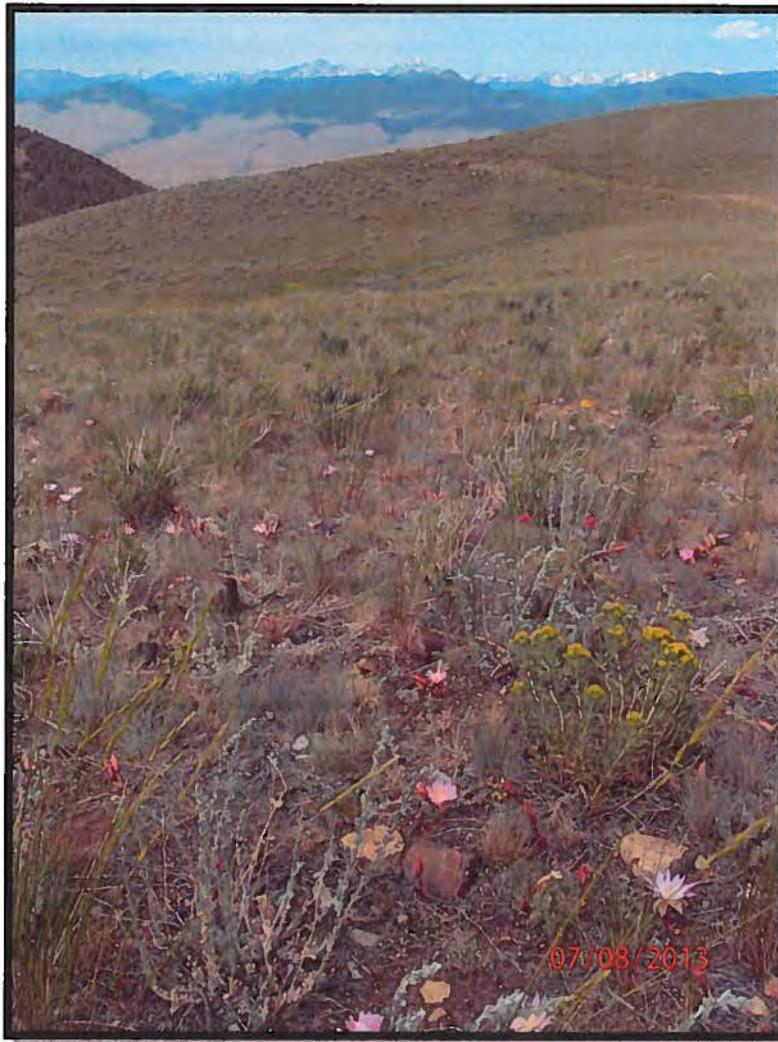


**Southwest Highlands Watershed Assessment
Executive Summary and Authorized Officer's
Determination**



The vegetative community on McCartney Mountain North with the Pioneer Mountains in the distance, July 8, 2013.

**Bureau of Land Management
Dillon Field Office
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This document summarizes the findings of the Southwest Highlands Watershed Assessment (SWHW) conducted during the 2013 field season. The assessment area covers approximately 120,000 total acres of land, of which about 72,000 acres are public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in Madison and Silver Bow Counties, Montana. Of the total BLM-administered lands within the SWHW, 71,870 acres are allotted for livestock grazing and 240 acres are unleased. No acres are categorized as unallotted (unavailable for livestock grazing).

The Southwest Highlands Watershed Assessment Report describes the existing conditions of BLM-administered lands within the watershed. The assessment also presents management and project recommendations for improving resource conditions, where needed. Please refer to the report for a complete discussion of resource conditions, concerns and management opportunities.

During February, 2014, the BLM will begin preparing National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation, which will include all BLM-administered public lands covered in the SWHW. Alternative management strategies will be analyzed wherever it is determined that allotments are not meeting the Standards, allotments are meeting the Standards but have site specific resource concerns, unhealthy forest and/or fuels conditions are outside the natural range of variability, or we have received an application to modify any of the authorized uses.

The issue of scale must be kept in mind in evaluating each standard. It is recognized that isolated sites within an allotment may be functioning-at-risk (FAR) and not meeting the standards; however, considering broader scope and scale, the allotment may be in proper functioning condition (PFC). Alternatively, isolated sites may be PFC, but overall the resource in the allotment is FAR and not meeting the standards. No single indicator provides sufficient information to determine land health. They are used in combination to provide the necessary information to make a land health determination. Alternatively, just because a standard is being met, does not mean that the conditions on the ground represent desired resource conditions or objectives.

In addition, not every riparian reach or acre of upland habitat need to be rated as PFC for the allotment to meet standards. The scope of the resource being assessed and relative importance of riparian/wetland habitat or upland sites within the context of the allotment as a whole is considered when determining if the allotment is meeting standards or not. For example, if an allotment has 15 miles of riparian habitat and 13 miles of habitat is functioning properly while two miles is functioning at risk, the relative importance of the two miles that is functioning at risk is considered in making an overall determination of meeting the riparian health standard or not. If the two miles of functioning-at-risk stream has fisheries habitat or is contributing to water quality impairment, the allotment would not meet the riparian health standard. However, if the two miles of functioning-at-risk stream are low energy, isolated intermittent reaches or spring brooks, not hydrologically connected to larger bodies of water, the allotment as a whole may meet the riparian health standard and these isolated reaches will be addressed as site-specific resource concerns.

Table 1 summarizes the determination of Rangeland Health Standards by allotment. It also briefly describes the primary resource concerns identified by the interdisciplinary team (IDT) and initial recommendations to address those concerns, where deemed necessary.

Table 1. Determination of Rangeland Health Standards, including primary resource concerns and initial IDT recommendations, by allotment.

Allotment Name, Number, Category ¹ , & BLM Acres	Are Land Health Standards Being Met?					Primary Resource Concerns	Interdisciplinary Team Initial Recommendations
	Upland	Riparian Wetland	Water Quality	Air Quality	Bio-diversity		
Buhrer, 30414, (I), Acres: 707	YES	N/A	N/A	YES	YES	1. Historic livestock impacts to upland soils and vegetation.	1. Refine current grazing management to improve upland soils and vegetation.
Camp Creek, 30308, (I), Acres: 29,279	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	1. Livestock impacts to upland soils and vegetation from current management. 2. Livestock impacts to riparian soils and vegetation from current management. 3. Sediment from roads and undersized or damaged culverts. 4. Camp Creek, Rochester Creek, Soap Creek, & Wickiup Creek are on the Montana DEQ 303(d) list of impaired streams. 5. Conifer expansion into sagebrush/ grassland and mahogany stands. 6. Localized noxious weed infestations.	1. Reduce the frequency and/or duration of growing season use and increase periodic rest. 2. Reduce the length of time livestock have access to stream reaches and enlarge livestock exclosures. 3. Improve road maintenance practices and replace culverts. 4. Design and implement BMPs for water quality. 5. Treatment via prescribed fire, mechanical, or other methods, if feasible. 6. Continue treating and coordinating weed treatments with private land owners, counties, and state and federal agencies.
Dancehall Custodial, 30659, (C), Acres: 629	YES	YES	N/A	YES	YES	1. No resource concerns identified from currently authorized uses.	1. Continue current management.

Allotment Name, Number, Category ¹ , & BLM Acres	Are Land Health Standards Being Met?					Primary Resource Concerns	Interdisciplinary Team Initial Recommendations
	Upland	Riparian Wetland	Water Quality	Air Quality	Bio-diversity		
Devil's Dancehall, 20327, (M), Acres: 3,130	YES	NO	*	YES	YES	1. Historic livestock impacts to upland soils and vegetation. 2. Current livestock impacts to riparian soils and vegetation.	1. Refine current grazing management to improve upland soils and vegetation. 2. Reduce or eliminate livestock access to riparian areas.
Garrison, 20314, (I), Acres: 8,052	NO	NO	*	YES	YES	1. Current livestock impacts to upland soils and vegetation. 2. Current livestock impacts to riparian soils and vegetation.	1. Reduce the frequency and/or duration of growing season use, and increase periodic rest. 2. Construct or enlarge livestock exclosures.
Logan Smith, 20345, (I), Acres: 1,821	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	1. No resource concerns identified from currently authorized uses.	1. Continue current management.
McCartney Mountain North, 20357, (M), Acres: 7,913	YES	YES	*	YES	YES	1. No resource concerns identified from currently authorized uses.	1. Continue current management.
McCartney Mountain South, 20366, (I), Acres: 16,225	NO	N/A	N/A	YES	YES	1. Current livestock impacts to upland soils and vegetation. 2. Substantial noxious weed infestations.	1. Reduce the frequency and/or duration of growing season use, and increase periodic rest. 2. Continue treating and coordinating weed treatments with private land owners, counties, and state and federal agencies.
McCullough Individual, 20355, (C), Acres: 436	YES	N/A	N/A	YES	YES	1. No resource concerns identified from currently authorized uses.	1. Continue current management.
Richards, 20315, (I), Acres: 728	YES	N/A	N/A	YES	YES	1. Historic livestock impacts to upland soils and vegetation.	1. Refine current grazing management to benefit upland soils and vegetation.

Allotment Name, Number, Category ¹ , & BLM Acres	Are Land Health Standards Being Met?					Primary Resource Concerns	Interdisciplinary Team Initial Recommendations
	Upland	Riparian Wetland	Water Quality	Air Quality	Bio-diversity		
Seyler Pasture, 20354, (I), Acres: 2,909	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	1. Historic livestock impacts to upland and riparian soils and vegetation. 2. Sediment from roads. 3. Localized noxious weed infestations.	1. Continue current management. 2. Improve road maintenance practices. 3. Continue treating and coordinating weed treatments with private land owners, counties, and state and federal agencies.
Triangle, 30359, (C), Acres: 41	NO	N/A	N/A	YES	NO	1. Current livestock impacts to upland soils and vegetation.	1. Address supplemental feeding and provide rest, or exclude livestock until recovered.
Unleased Parcels, Acres: 240	YES	N/A	N/A	YES	YES	1. No resource concerns identified from currently authorized uses.	1. Continue current management.
¹ Allotment Category: I = improve, M = maintain, C = custodial ² The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has the responsibility for making water quality determinations and has completed its evaluation of 303(d)-listed streams. * Tributary streams in the EGW are not on the 303(d) list, are not priority streams, and are not scheduled to be evaluated by the DEQ.							

Allotment category refers to BLM’s level of management for a given grazing allotment, based on resource values and opportunities for improvement. Allotments in the I-category are managed more intensively and are monitored more frequently. Allotments in the M-category are usually at a desired condition and are managed to maintain or improve that condition. Allotments in the C-category are usually isolated parcels with few resource concerns that are fenced in with larger parcels of deeded land, are managed in conjunction with the permittee/lessee’s normal livestock operation, and are monitored less intensively.

Standard # 1: Upland Health

The Garrison, McCartney Mountain South, and Triangle allotments are **not** meeting this standard.

The Garrison and Ziegler Gulch pastures, of the Garrison allotment, and the Bronx and North Big Schultz pastures, of the McCartney Mountain South, allotment are not meeting this standard

and, because of the broad scope and scale of the identified resource concerns, these allotments, as a whole, are not meeting the standard.

Additionally, the Bunyard and Mine pastures, of the Camp Creek allotment, are not meeting the upland standard. However, because of the relatively limited scope and scale of the identified resource concerns, the Camp Creek allotment is meeting the standard, but management changes will be considered to address site-specific concerns in these pastures.

Current livestock management has been determined to be one of the contributing factors in not meeting the upland standard on the Garrison, McCartney Mountain South, and Triangle allotments, as well as those pastures identified within the Camp Creek allotment.

Standard # 2: Riparian Health

The Camp Creek, Devil's Dancehall, and Garrison allotments are **not** meeting this standard:

The riparian areas that are not meeting the standards were determined to be FAR, with either a static or downward trend. Riparian habitats that are FAR with an upward trend are considered to be meeting the riparian health standard because it is making progress toward achieving PFC.

Current livestock management has been determined to be one of the contributing factors in not meeting the riparian standard on the Camp Creek, Devil's Dancehall, and Garrison allotments.

Standard # 3: Water Quality

The Camp Creek, Logan Smith, and Seyler Pasture allotments are **not** meeting this standard.

The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MTDEQ) has the responsibility for making water quality determinations and has completed its evaluation of 303(d)-listed streams. Camp Creek, Soap Creek, Wickiup Creek, and Rochester Creek are on the MTDEQ 303(d) list of impaired streams. Tributary streams in the SWHW are not on the 303(d) list, are not priority streams, and are not scheduled to be evaluated by the MTDEQ.

The livestock grazing impacts affecting the upland and riparian health standards for the Camp Creek allotment, may also be providing non-point source pollution, and therefore be a contributing factor in not meeting the water quality standard on these allotments. On the Logan Smith and Seyler Pasture allotments, uses currently authorized by the BLM are not contributing to degraded water quality.

Standard # 4: Air Quality

All of the allotments assessed within the watershed are meeting this standard.

Standard # 5: Biodiversity

The Camp Creek and Triangle allotments are **not** meeting this standard.

Biodiversity is closely related to upland and riparian health. The Camp Creek allotment does not meet the biodiversity standard because of the impacts and conditions described under the upland and riparian standards. Additional concerns that are affecting biodiversity include conifer expansion/encroachment into sagebrush/grassland and mountain mahogany stands and impacts to conifer stands resulting from mountain pine beetle, western spruce budworm, and Douglas-fir bark beetle. To a lesser extent, noxious weed infestations are also contributing to not meeting this standard.

The Triangle allotment does not meet the biodiversity standard because of the impacts and conditions described under the upland standard, which do not support diverse plant communities and do not contribute to meeting habitat requirements for wildlife species.

Current livestock management has been determined to be one of the contributing factors in not meeting the biodiversity standard on the Camp Creek and Triangle allotments.

NEPA Documentation

Before any of the above stated recommendations can be implemented, NEPA documentation will be completed to analyze a range of reasonable alternatives to address resource concerns found during the Assessment. The Dillon Field Office will be working on the Southwest Highlands Watershed Environmental Assessment (DOI-BLM-MT-B050-2014-007-EA) during the spring of 2014.

Implementation of new plans will begin upon the Authorized Officer's decision becoming final and may take several years to fully implement.

For more information, please review the Southwest Highlands Watershed Assessment Report or contact the Dillon Field Office at (406) 683-8000.

Authorized Officer's Determination

Based on my review of the Assessment Team's recommendations, and other relevant data and information, I have determined that the following five allotments and the unleased parcel within the Southwest Highlands Watershed **meet** all five of the Standards for Rangeland (Land) Health and Guidelines for Grazing Management for BLM lands in Montana:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Buhrer | 4. McCullough Individual |
| 2. Dancehall Custodial | 5. Richards |
| 3. McCartney Mountain North | 6. Unleased Parcels |

I have determined that the following seven allotments **do not** meet the Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Grazing Management for BLM lands in Montana:

- | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Camp Creek | 5. McCartney Mountain South |
| 2. Devil's Dancehall | 6. Seyler Pasture |
| 3. Garrison | 7. Triangle |
| 4. Logan Smith | |

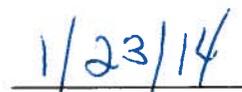
Although the water quality standard is not being met within the Logan Smith and Seyler Pasture allotments, I have determined that activities currently authorized by the BLM are not contributing to impairment. Further, I have determined that current livestock management is a significant factor in **not meeting** land health standards on the Camp Creek, Devil's Dancehall, Garrison, McCartney Mountain South, and Triangle allotments.

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. Appropriate action means implementing actions that will result in significant progress toward fulfillment of the standards. Practices and activities subject to standards and guidelines include the development, modification, or revision of AMPs, establishment of terms and conditions of permits, leases and other grazing authorizations, and range improvement activities such as vegetation manipulation, fence construction and development of water.

BLM Manual Handbook H-4180-1, Rangeland Health Standards Handbook, provides guidance for conducting watershed-based Land Health Assessments. It states "If the Land Health Standards are not being achieved because of a causal factor other than current livestock grazing management, you must consult other program guidance for the appropriate steps to be taken to ensure that progress toward meeting Standards is made."



Dillon Field Manager



Date

