

# **Executive Summary and Authorized Officer's Determination of Land Health Standards on BLM Lands Within the Upper Big Hole River Watershed**

**Bureau of Land Management  
Dillon Field Office  
Dillon, Montana**

This document summarizes the findings of the Upper Big Hole River Watershed (UBHW) Assessment conducted during the 2009 field season. Twelve BLM allotments and five unallotted tracts within the watershed were assessed and evaluated for conformance with rangeland health standards in the *Upper Big Hole River Watershed Assessment Report*. These lands encompass just over 6300 acres of public land which represents less than 1% of the total land base within the UBHW.

The issue of scale must be kept in mind in evaluating each standard. It is recognized that isolated sites within a landscape may not be meeting the standards; however, considering broader scope and scale, the area may be in proper functioning condition. No single indicator provides sufficient information to determine rangeland health; they are used in combination to provide information necessary to determine rangeland health. Alternatively, just because a standard is being met doesn't mean that the conditions on the ground represent desired resource condition or objectives. For example an upland site with reduced composition of bunchgrasses may meet the upland health standard if it sustains a native plant community, even if it is dominated by low producing, low palatability grasses, shrubs and or forbs. While such a site may have stable soils and allow for proper hydrologic function, it won't provide the livestock forage or wildlife cover that it would if it was dominated by taller, more palatable plants.

Table 1 summarizes the determination of rangeland health standards by BLM management unit. As required by 43CFR 4180 this Determination of Standards document also discloses if existing grazing management practices or levels of grazing use on public lands are significant contributing factors in failing to achieve the Standards for Rangeland Health and conform with the eleven guidelines for livestock grazing management established for BLM lands in Western Montana.

The UBHW assessment and evaluation report describes the existing condition of BLM lands within the watershed. The assessment and evaluation also presents management and project recommendations for improving resource conditions where needed. Please refer to the *Upper Big Hole River Watershed Assessment Report* for a complete discussion of resource conditions, concerns and management opportunities.

**Table 1. Land Health Summary by BLM Management Unit**

Allotment Name & Number	Are Rangeland Health Standards Being Met?					Significant Factors in Failing to Achieve Standards
	Uplands	Wetlands & Riparian Areas	Water Quality	Air Quality	Providing Habitat	
Big Swamp #10141	n/h	NO	1	YES	NO	Existing grazing management; Reduced beaver activity, Irrigation diversions; Historic drainage ditches
Big Swamp Creek #20715	n/h	NO	1	YES	NO	Existing grazing management; Reduced beaver activity, Irrigation diversions; Historic drainage ditches
Doolittle Tracts #20196	YES	YES	No <sup>2</sup>	YES	YES	Big Hole River, BLM management not a factor
Dry Creek #20104	YES	YES	1	YES	YES <sup>3</sup>	None
Foxtail #30616	YES	YES	1	YES	YES <sup>3</sup>	None
Jumbo Mountain #20721	YES	YES	No <sup>2</sup>	YES	YES <sup>3</sup>	Rock Creek, BLM management not a factor
Moose Horn #00142	YES	YES	1	YES	YES <sup>3</sup>	None
Mussigbrod On & Off #20705	YES	NO	1	YES	NO	Existing grazing management
North Fork Big Hole #10742	YES	NO	No <sup>2</sup>	YES	NO <sup>3</sup>	Existing grazing management; Irrigation diversions; Historic drainage ditches
Steel Creek #10743	YES	NO	1	YES	YES <sup>3</sup>	Existing grazing management
Warm Springs #20596	YES	NO	No <sup>2</sup>	YES	NO <sup>3</sup>	Existing grazing management; Reduced beaver activity; Non-native species
Wildwood Individual #30250	YES	YES	1	YES	YES <sup>3</sup>	None
<b>Unallotted Parcels</b>						
Fox Gulch - Unleased	YES	YES	1	YES	YES <sup>3</sup>	None
Swamp Creek - Unavailable	NO	NO	1	YES	NO	Existing grazing management; Irrigation diversions; Noxious weeds
Dry Creek - Unavailable	YES	n/h	n/a	YES	YES <sup>3</sup>	None
Miner Creek - Unavailable	YES	n/h	n/a	YES	YES <sup>3</sup>	None
Inabnit Butte - Unavailable	YES	n/h	n/a	YES	YES	None

n/h - Negligible or no habitat present in management unit

n/a - Not applicable

<sup>1</sup> Tributary streams in the UBHW are not on the 303(d) list, are not priority streams, and are not scheduled to be evaluated by the DEQ.

<sup>2</sup> 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. Upper Big Hole River, North Fork of Big Hole River, Rock Creek and Warm Springs Creek flow through BLM administered land, have been evaluated by Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and beneficial use support determinations have been completed.

<sup>3</sup> Forest Health Concerns noted, see Assessment Report.

**Authorized Officer's Determination:**

Based on my review of the *Upper Big Hole River Watershed Assessment Report*, the interdisciplinary team's recommendations and other relevant data and information, I have determined that the following allotments and unallotted parcels **meet** all five Standards for Rangeland Health and conform with the eleven guidelines for livestock grazing management for BLM lands in Western Montana.

- 1. Foxtail
- 2. Dry Creek
- 3. Moose Horn
- 4. Dry Creek – Unavailable
- 5. Wildwood Individual
- 6. Fox Gulch – Unleased
- 7. Miner Creek – Unavailable
- 8. Inabnit Butte - Unavailable

The **Doolittle Tracts** and **Jumbo Mountain** allotments aren't meeting the Water Quality Standard, but BLM authorized activities including livestock management aren't significant causal factors in failing to meet the standard. These allotments are included with other allotments that met the Standards because no change in management is recommended.

I have determined that the following allotments and unallotted parcel **do not meet** one or more of the Standards for Rangeland Health and/or don't conform with the guidelines established for livestock grazing management. I have also determined that current livestock management is a significant contributing factor in these standards not being met.

- 1. Steel Creek
- 2. Warm Springs
- 3. Big Swamp Creek
- 4. North Fork Big Hole
- 5. Mussigbrod On & Off
- 6. Swamp Creek - Unavailable
- 7. Big Swamp

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.

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 and conform with the guidelines that are made effective under this section. Appropriate action means implementing actions that will result in significant progress toward fulfillment of the standards and significant progress toward conformance with the guidelines. Practices and activities subject to standards and guidelines include the development of grazing-related portions of activity plans, 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.

An environmental assessment which will propose and analyze management alternatives necessary to address or correct identified resource concerns will be prepared in early 2010.

Authorized Officer's Signature:

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dillon Field Manager

Date: \_\_\_\_\_