

APPENDIX M

Watershed Planning Process

The watershed planning process was developed as a practical means to implement decisions made in approved Resource Management Plans, assess and determine the health of the public land, review and update grazing permits/leases and incorporate Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management to meet Standards for Rangeland Health.

Watershed plan areas are identified by grouping public land grazing allotments which have similar resource values, are in a common geographic area, and have common or similar resource concerns. Once the watersheds are identified, each is prioritized on the basis of resource management needs, amount of public land, relative amount of public land and resource values in relationship to private, state and other landowners, current and anticipated uses, and practical management opportunities for the public land.

Once prioritized, issues are identified for the priority watershed, applicable RMP decisions are assembled, and existing resource information and authorizations for the public land are reviewed. Issue identification includes participation by the public and affected interests. Through media notices, letters to interested or affected parties, discussions with current users of the public land, public meetings and coordination consultation meetings with groups, other agencies and governmental entities, issues and concerns for the watershed are refined and a desired future condition is outlined.

Under Standards for Rangeland Health (August 1997) (43 CFR 4180), it is necessary to assess and make determinations whether Standards are being met. These assessments and determinations are prepared for each allotment in a watershed. If a finding of not meeting Standards is made, then a determination of cause is identified and a recommended course of action or alternatives are developed to meet Standards. Concurrent with this process is a review of the grazing authorizations for allotments to verify that they include appropriate guidelines for livestock grazing management to meet Standards for Rangeland Health.

Alternatives for management to meet the desired future conditions are developed in consultation with affected and interested publics. Alternatives include a no action alternative and one or more additional alternatives.

The resource information and the alternatives for proposed management/projects and their impacts are addressed in a Watershed Plan and Environmental Assessment (EA) document. In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the EA involves public participation and is subject to comment and appeal processes. The EA is sent to affected interests for public review, and public meetings and a comment period are held to provide an opportunity for public participation.

A grazing decision is prepared for each operator in accordance with the grazing regulations (43 CFR 4160) and sent to the operator and any affected interests for the allotment or permit/lease. The decision includes details of the grazing privilege(s) and terms and conditions that will apply for the specific allotment and permit/lease. This decision is subject to protest and/or appeal of the decision within specific timeframes. If there is no protest/appeal, or following resolution of a protest or appeal, an updated term (usually 10 years) grazing permit/lease is issued in accordance with the decision.

Monitoring of Standards for Rangeland Health, other resource conditions and compliance is a continuous process to ensure management goals and objectives are being met. Monitoring results are documented in periodic evaluation reports. If management goals are not being met, needed changes are identified and implemented in accordance with an appropriate management strategy and applicable laws and regulations.

An illustration of the watershed planning process is shown on the following page.

The Watershed Planning Process

