

Joint Cooperative Monitoring Qs and As  
Washington Office Instruction Memorandum 2004-179

**Background/Purpose**

The Public Lands Council (PLC) asked BLM and the U.S. Forest Service to develop a letter to encourage permittees and the agencies to enter into joint cooperative monitoring. As a representative of many public land grazing permittees, PLC expressed a desire to find a way to encourage permittees and the agency to cooperatively develop a monitoring plan, collect data, and evaluate information that would assure informed decision making for grazing permits. The BLM and PLC entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to encourage permittees/lessees and local BLM offices to work together to monitor and evaluate resource conditions, progress toward achieving resource objectives and land health standards, and to share information for making grazing decisions.

The following questions and answers were developed to assist the field office staff in understanding the intent of the letter and IM WO 2004-179 and implementation of the MOU.

**Questions and Answers (responses with the term “permittee” refer to both permittee and lessee)****Cooperation, Consultation, and Coordination (involving others)****1. Should we contact other parties?**

Response: Consultations between the BLM and permittee(s) to determine whether to jointly conduct monitoring pursuant to the Monitoring MOU between the BLM and the PLC do not require involvement by the interested public. There are, however, two points in the monitoring process when BLM must contact other parties interested in the monitoring and management of the allotment.

The first is when BLM develops a new monitoring plan or modifies an existing monitoring plan that would become, or is, a part of an Allotment Management Plan. In these instances, the grazing regulations at 43 CFR 4120.2 require BLM to provide the public an opportunity for comment. The BLM also must engage in careful and considered consultation, cooperation, and coordination with affected permittees, landowners, Resource Advisory Councils (RACs), State(s) having lands or responsibility for managing resources within the area to be covered by the plan, and other interested public.

The second is when BLM prepares reports that evaluate monitoring and other data used to modify grazing use or terms and conditions of a permit. 43 CFR 4130.3-3 requires BLM to provide affected permittees or lessees, States having

responsibility for managing resources within the affected area, and the interested public an opportunity to review and comment on these reports.

The MOU with the PLC and resulting cooperative monitoring complements BLM's policy to provide permittees and interested publics the opportunity to participate in existing monitoring and evaluation programs. As noted above, BLM is required to provide opportunities for public participation, including the development of proposed plans affecting the administration of grazing prior to implementing the plans; however, this should not be interpreted as somehow prohibiting or limiting the ongoing working relationship and communication between the permittee and the BLM. All parties interested in the administration of an allotment should be informed and provided an opportunity to be involved with the process, but this does not mean the authorized officer would compromise their ability to work with an individual permittee. Although we cannot assure an interested public that they will be involved in every conversation or each day to day detail of the monitoring and/or management of the allotment, they should be given an equal opportunity to provide comments during the formulation or modification of the monitoring plan. Nothing in this process, including the consultation process, compromises BLM's ability to conduct or oversee the collection of scientifically based monitoring data for the purpose of evaluating progress toward meeting identified resource objectives.

## **2. What if other parties ask to initiate joint/cooperative monitoring?**

Response: We encourage participation in our monitoring program whenever possible. Although the MOU with the PLC is focused on joint cooperative monitoring with permittees, this does not preclude other parties from proposing joint cooperative monitoring with BLM. In all cases, BLM will evaluate management priorities and availability of resources before deciding whether to participate in joint cooperative monitoring. The presence of critical resources, current resource conditions on the affected allotment and the availability of management resources to devote to the effort, are among the primary considerations that factor into BLM's decisions concerning participation in joint cooperative monitoring.

### **Workload**

## **3. How will this affect my workload?**

Response: Requests for joint cooperative monitoring should be considered in the context of existing priorities, workload, the need for data collection and the commitment of BLM resources. Requests for collecting data on high priority areas should receive first consideration. Requests for joint cooperative monitoring on low priority areas that would require substantial commitment of BLM resources and would divert resources from higher priority work should receive lower consideration or even be deferred. Field offices should not disrupt

other priority efforts to engage in this effort; they should promote this effort to the extent it is practical and manageable for the workforce and resources. A request for joint cooperative monitoring from a permittee or other interested party does not obligate BLM to commit resources to develop a plan and collect data, particularly in low priority areas.

Monitoring should already be an integral part of land health standards evaluations in high priority areas and grazing permit renewals. Congress has provided additional funding specifically to conduct monitoring on high priority areas so that BLM can complete land health standards evaluations and permit renewals.

If range specialists are already working with permittees in the collection of monitoring data, there should not be much affect on workload. If, on the other hand, there is currently no involvement of permittees in collection of data, then there will be time involved to coordinate with permittee. Initially there will be an increased workload with coordination of field data collection and developing a monitoring plan (if none exists); however, over the long-term the potential exists to decrease workload by accepting for consideration monitoring data collected by the permittees, as they are often on the allotments more frequently than BLM personnel.

**4. What if a permittee with a low priority allotment requests joint cooperative monitoring?**

Response: The BLM's response should be to welcome a request for joint cooperative monitoring. The BLM needs to focus resources on high priority areas, so low priority allotments may be a good choice for joint cooperative monitoring with permittees or others collecting data because BLM is not likely to collect data in the area. Initially, BLM personnel may participate in collection of data and the development of a monitoring plan. However, with training the permittee can collect data and allow BLM to focus more time on the high priority (I and M) allotments.

**5. How does joint cooperative monitoring fit with my other priorities?**

Response: Joint cooperative monitoring should be ranked according to priority (described in #6 below) as it would be if BLM were doing the monitoring without permittee assistance. Joint cooperative monitoring should be used to assist in completing priority work, and should not be competing for time and resources with other high priority efforts (permit renewals, land health standards evaluations).

## Land Health Standards

### 6. How does this fit with land health standards evaluations?

Monitoring data should be one of the primary sources of information for evaluating land health standards (Manual Handbook 4180-1 Chapter III B.3 through 5). Allotments with the highest priority for monitoring should also have a high priority for evaluating land health by using the same criteria to set those priorities. Monitoring data will be helpful in future land health standards evaluations, so joint cooperative monitoring should be related primarily to indicators of land health, or of trend.

If you have already completed an evaluation and have proposed or made adjustments in grazing use based on that evaluation, you should consider monitoring the effectiveness of those management changes a high priority. Monitoring will help you determine progress toward achieving, or achievement of land health standards.

### 7. Would joint cooperative monitoring change our land health standards schedule?

Response: No, your schedule should be based on the criteria found in Manual Handbook 4180-1, Chapter 111 A.3.a.

## Data Quality Control (training others)

### 8. Who will select the appropriate monitoring method for a specific area? What if there is a disagreement (monitoring location, type of monitoring to be conducted, results, etc.) between BLM and permittee, or their representative?

Response: The purpose of the MOU is to encourage communication when developing the monitoring plan, and when collecting and interpreting data. This includes discussing what data needs to be collected to evaluate status of objectives/land health standards, where that data will be collected, the method used to collect the data, and who will collect the data. You may want to explain to permittees and other parties why it is important to document how information is collected.

As stated in the MOU, BLM has the final decision authority concerning the planning, collection and interpretation of monitoring data collected under the terms of the MOU, same as data otherwise collected and submitted for consideration. If the permittee or other parties desire to collect additional information and submit it for consideration to the authorized officer during the evaluation, the authorized officer will be responsible for determining the appropriateness of that information. The authorized officer should consider 1)

whether submitted data relates to the objectives or indicators of land health, 2) the methods used to collect data, 3) whether the data represents a small or larger area, 4) the conditions under which the data is collected (timing related to season, use, etc.).

**9. What if the permittee wants to work with a non-PLC member as their advisor or the one to do their monitoring? What if the permittee hires a consultant who has a proven record of poor quality or biased work?**

Response: Membership in PLC is not a requirement for joint cooperative monitoring, or for data collection. Consideration of data submitted should be based on the criteria listed above, not on who collects the data. It is important to clearly communicate what methods and quality are expected and acceptable **before** data is collected and submitted. The BLM may check data and conduct random quality control reviews of data presented by a representative prior to using the data.

**10. Who is going to train permittees to monitor?**

Response: Some permittees and others may express a desire to collect monitoring data for submission to BLM. Others may just want to be involved in planning and evaluation processes. Those who want to assist BLM by collecting data will need to use the methods and protocols set during the planning stage (or already being used). Some field offices already have annual “calibration” days attended by BLM staff, permittees, county extension agents, and other agencies that can be used for training. Other offices have permittees in attendance when collecting data, which can become training opportunities. This can be as simple as one-on-one training by a range management specialist on site with a permittee, to a field office sponsored training opportunity in the field for a group of permittees.

**11. Who is going to do quality control on their monitoring?**

Response: As stated in the MOU, BLM may review the quality of the data at its discretion. When permittees, consultants, or other parties are independently collecting data, quality control by BLM should be based on complexity of monitoring method, the data collector’s experience with the method, and consistency in results. Quality control issues should be discussed when joint cooperative monitoring is initiated.

**12. BLM manages on a multiple use basis. What assurances do we have that the permittees and/or their consultants will maintain an unbiased look at all resources?**

Response: Agreement on the data to be collected, timing of data collection, methods used to collect data, and the area represented by the study site should occur when developing the monitoring plan or strategy. This should insure that appropriate monitoring occurs to evaluate appropriate resources.

## Other

### **13. How can I fit this with a current Resource Management Plan development where Land Use Plan objectives may change within the next year or two?**

Response: The collection of monitoring data is important regardless of the stage of RMP preparation possible changing of LUP objectives. A possible change of LUP objectives that may require a change in parameters to monitor can be addressed after LUP approval. If a permittee or other party proposes joint cooperative monitoring in this situation, determine if they would prefer to wait until the RMP is complete to develop a monitoring plan, and if they would want to assist in data collection for the current objectives until that time.

### **14. Permittees will want to use the data they acquired. There is a concern that this may lead to litigation problems. How will the BLM be protected from being forced into management that may not be the best for all resources (such as the initiation of Temporary Non-Renewable use)?**

Response: The BLM will use appropriately collected data to make informed decisions. Decisions will conform to land use plans, which are the basis for management actions to achieve multiple use objectives. Permittees or others may acquire data to help BLM make informed decisions, but allocation of resources is a public process normally accomplished during the land use planning process.

Section A under Administrative Provisions of the MOU includes a statement regarding data collected by consultants whereby BLM shall accept for consideration monitoring data collected using BLM-approved techniques when the data meets BLM standards as determined by the authorized officer. The BLM may check data and conduct random quality control reviews of data presented by a representative prior to using the data. Monitoring data not collected as referenced above or found not to accurately reflect on-the-ground condition may not be used.

Part B states that prior to implementing joint cooperative monitoring both parties shall agree to the methods for collecting data as specified in BLM-approved protocols (several technical references were cited).

**15. How will consistency between the States, Districts and Field Offices, regarding implementation of the MOU, be maintained? Is consistency really needed?**

Response: Yes, consistency in application of this program is important. States and their field offices should agree upon a strategy on how training for permittees on collection of monitoring data will be conducted. This can be as simple as one-on-one training by a range management specialist on site with a permittee, to a field office sponsored training opportunity in the field for a group of permittees. Washington Office will determine status of this cooperative monitoring program while conducting program evaluations annually for selected states.

**16. How will the appearance of managing private lands be avoided?**

Response: Refer to page 2 of the MOU, item 3 under PLC, that addresses including private land to the extent such inclusion is consistent with the scope of Federal jurisdiction, and only with written permission from the owner/lessee.

**17. What are we monitoring?**

Response: Field offices should determine which attributes to monitor in order to collect data needed to evaluate progress towards meeting land health standards, LUP or activity plan objectives. Page 3 of the MOU provides a partial list of technical references of BLM-approved methods to use for collection of data. Attributes to monitor could include any of the following: utilization, frequency, cover, density, production, structure, composition.