

Slate Creek AMP Meeting Notes February 29, 2012

Notes Compiled and Typed by Spencer Allred (BLM)

In Attendance:

Tom Schulthess – Private Land Owner
Seth Schulthess – Private Land Owner
Wally Schulthess – Private Land Owner
Mary Thoman – Slate Creek Permittee
Bill Taliaferro – Big Sandy and Green River Land & Livestock (Slate Creek Permittee)
Levi Walker – Walker Ranch (Slate Creek Permittee)
Truman Julian – Julian Land & Livestock (Slate Creek Permittee)
Deb Wolfley – Lincoln County Commissioner
Army Larson – Larson Ranch (Slate Creek Permittee)
Patrick Netherly – Consultant for Lincoln County Conservation District
Blaine Thoman – Slate Creek Permittee
Tom Thrash – Private Land Owner
Michael Henn – Wyoming State Land Office
Joshua Freeman – BLM Wildlife Biologist
Phillip Lockwood – BLM Fire/Fuels Technician
Spencer Allred – BLM Rangeland Management Specialist

Minutes:

Spencer Allred opened the meeting by having everyone introduce themselves. From there, he gave an update on the requested cultural clearances to maintain existing water developments within the Slate Creek allotment. The BLM archeologist has identified the level of difficulty (and therefore the amount of time required) associated with clearing each existing reservoir for maintenance actions. From here Spencer will submit clearance requests to the BLM archeology staff. Once the clearance has been approved, then maintenance actions may occur on the identified reservoirs.

Spencer then turned some time over to Wally Schulthess who is planning on fencing some of his family's private land within the Slate Creek allotment. He would prefer to run the fence all the way down and tie it into the highway fence. This would involve enclosing ~480 acres of BLM land in with his private land. Spencer wanted to get input from the other permittees to determine if they had any concerns with this. There were no outright objections, however, Bill Taliaferro worried that this would force Clint Proffit to push his cattle over onto Bill's private land, since the section that would be fenced out was where Clint usually put his cattle. Spencer determined that we should discuss this with Clint, give people time to think about it for a while and then discuss it again at a later date.

After the initial discussion the group began to talk about monitoring on the Slate Creek allotment. Spencer pointed out the general location of existing monitoring points and discussed what type of monitoring data was currently being collected. Then the group discussed what kind of future monitoring might be beneficial. This discussion covered a broad range of topics. Those topics and a brief description of what was discussed are included below.

Topics discussed:

- Cooperative Monitoring
 - The benefits of ranchers, or others, being able to conduct monitoring if the BLM Range Specialist is unable to do so.
 - Wyoming Department of Agriculture programs that might assist with monitoring.
 - How the BLM handles 3rd party monitoring
 - It is up to the discretion of the BLM Field Manager, whether or not 3rd party monitoring data is accepted as part of the official BLM record.
 - Establishing cooperative monitoring plans can help with this, but it is not a guarantee
 - The BLM does not seek to side step their responsibility to monitor through 3rd party monitoring.
 - While 3rd party monitoring may not be accepted as BLM record, it can still be presented during a court case.
- Livestock & Wildlife
 - Many were concerned that the Wyoming Game & Fish Department (WGFD) increases wildlife numbers without checking to see if there are AUMs available for the additional wildlife. They are concerned that down the road, the WGFD will try to push for a reduction in livestock AUMs in order to support wildlife numbers, which have been allowed to increase with no thought to AUM availability, and the impacts that additional wildlife will have on the range.
- Monitoring Methods
 - We discussed what historical monitoring data is present, and how it can be used in the future.
 - We discussed general monitoring methods such as utilization, greenline, and MIM (Multiple Indicator Monitoring). There was a discussion about whether more complicated methods, such as MIM, should be used. More complicated monitoring required more training and expertise, which made it difficult for the permittees to participate in the monitoring. However, more intense monitoring typically provides more statistically significant data, which is more useful for determining if management goals and objectives are being met.
 - There was some discussion about whether or not monitoring data was helpful. Some felt that common sense was more useful than intense, detailed monitoring. Others felt that monitoring data could be helpful during litigation.
 - There was some discussion about how sites were picked. Spencer pointed out that we would use a group approach to selecting new monitoring sites, involving a BLM Interdisciplinary Team as well as input from interested parties and livestock operators.
 - There was some discussion as to who would do the monitoring.
 - Some were concerned that the BLM wouldn't have the time or resources to continue any monitoring we establish for the Slate Creek allotment. To this Spencer responded that the Slate Creek allotment is a high priority allotment, and that monitoring on that allotment will be a high priority for him and the BLM Kemmerer Field Office management. This meant that it would be unlikely that monitoring on the Slate Creek allotment would go by the wayside.
 - Some of the permittees stated that they wouldn't do any monitoring for the BLM. Spencer agreed that it was not their responsibility to fulfill the BLM's monitoring needs, and that the BLM recognized their responsibility to conduct monitoring activities.

- Some felt that it would be helpful to document the presence of eagles and ravens when out on the allotment. This could be helpful when looked at along with Sage grouse population data, to potentially show a correlation between predator numbers and changes in Sage grouse populations.
- Some of the permittees mentioned that it is important to monitor localized precipitation data as well. This meant setting up rain gauges and reading them regularly, as time of precipitation can be just as important as the amount of precipitation received.
- There needs to be a correlation between the timing of livestock use, and the timing of monitoring.
- In management we should use tools available to help improve the range. Such as potentially converting some of the livestock use, back to sheep use, in order to reduce impacts to streams.
- We need to take care of weed problems and hold oil and gas companies responsible for taking care of those problems.
- Lack of a real pasture system in most of Slate Creek is a real challenge for managing for healthy rangelands.
- Lincoln County has a Land Use Plan that supports the idea of multiple uses on the land.

Towards the end of the meeting the group compiled the previous discussions into some potential Management Goals, and what general monitoring methods could be used to determine if those goals are being met.

Goals:

1. Maintain/Improve Range Habitat Where Needed
 - a. Vegetation composition (upland and riparian)
 - i. Cover for Sage Grouse
 - ii. Photo Monitoring
 - iii. Utilization
2. Maintain Multiple Use
 - a. Grazing
 - b. Wildlife
 - c. Recreation
 - d. Energy
 - e. Etc...
 - i. Could also look at local tax base to determine if there are changes in land use from that perspective.

The meeting ended with everyone looking at a map of Slate Creek and discussing general areas where they thought monitoring might be beneficial.