

Appendix 9: Future Grazing Management on Acquired Non-Federal Lands

Approximately 85 percent of the non-federal tracts are within BLM grazing allotment boundaries, and most of these lands are currently used for livestock grazing by their owners. Exceptions include portions of the Gerard and WDFW tracts, which are not used by their owners nor leased. The portion of the Gerard land outside a grazing allotment boundary is not grazed due to steep terrain, whereas most of the WDFW tract is intentionally excluded from grazing. If the WDFW parcel is acquired by BLM, the existing livestock enclosure may be expanded to include additional riparian habitat. No grazing would be allowed within this area.

Through the environmental assessment process, BLM would analyze impacts of livestock grazing prior to authorizing grazing use on any tracts not previously grazed. In addition, the BLM would monitor livestock use levels in allotments having acquired tracts. Grazing on the other acquired tracts would be authorized in accordance with the Spokane District RMP and BLM regulations, including the Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health for Eastern Oregon and Washington (Standards and Guidelines).

The Standards and Guidelines were developed in consultation with BLM Resource Advisory Councils, Provincial Advisory Committees, Indian tribes, the academic community, and others. The Standard and Guidelines were developed to meet rangeland health regulations (43 CFR, subpart 4180 [Rangeland Health]). The objectives of the rangeland health regulations are “to promote healthy sustainable rangeland ecosystems; to accelerate restoration and improvement of the public rangelands to properly functioning conditions; to promote the orderly use, improvement and development of the public lands; ...and to provide for the sustainability of the western livestock industry and communities that are dependent upon the productive, healthy public rangelands.” The Standards and Guidelines require functional watersheds, healthy functional riparian and wetland areas, healthy and diverse plant and animal populations and communities, consideration of water quality, and preservation of native and threatened/endangered species.

Billingsley Ranch Partnership: All non-federal lands from the Billingsley partnership to be acquired are currently being grazed by cattle. Grazing use of these acquired lands would be managed in accordance with guidelines discussed above. In addition, an Allotment Management Plan (AMP) is being developed with the current owner (who also leases adjacent to BLM lands). The AMP would emphasize riparian and upland plant community condition maintenance and improvement, as well as management for sage grouse and other sagebrush obligate species. The AMP would establish livestock stocking rates that do not exceed moderate levels of forage utilization, except in small, localized areas adjacent to livestock water sources and mineral supplements. The livestock stocking rates would be established using inventory and utilization information, the latter of which would be collected over the next two grazing seasons. The Billingsley AMP would include the following elements:

1. A rotational grazing system designed to: maintain native plant communities in high seral condition; and to improve, where feasible, plant communities in low and mid-seral condition. Some low and mid-seral plant communities (such as those dominated by sagebrush/cheatgrass, or sagebrush/Sandberg’s bluegrass) do not necessarily improve from changes in grazing use. The grazing system would include appropriate use levels and seasons of use; the anticipated season of use for the pastures, including acquired lands, would be March to November. As noted above, stocking rates would be adjusted to stay within moderate forage utilization levels.
2. Establishment of an additional pasture to improve cattle management. Cattle could be moved and kept off an area of historically heavy use before the desired moderate use level is exceeded by dividing the largest pasture on the ranch. Currently, because the largest pasture is almost half of the acreage of the grazing unit, cattle remain in the same area for the majority of the grazing season, causing heavier than desired use in certain areas within the pasture.
3. Development of new upland water sources and improvement of existing water developments. Development of livestock water sources helps keep cattle use away from the riparian zones, allowing for improvement of the riparian condition.
4. Construction of more small enclosures to protect seeps and springs and their attendant riparian vegetation. Two larger enclosures were previously constructed on public lands within the allotment. Within these enclosures, BLM has observed an increase in vegetative cover and individual plants of

both woody and herbaceous species.

Additional livestock handling facilities may be constructed to facilitate rotating pastures for the seasons of use. Presently, pasture use is limited by their proximity to corrals or other facilities where livestock can be handled. Other elements to be addressed by the AMP may include vegetation manipulation, such as seeding and thinning of sagebrush, to improve habitat for sage grouse and other sagebrush obligates. Areas in extremely low-seral condition may also be seeded to increase forage production, which would help maintain and improve high-seral condition areas.

Mittlestaedt Ranch: These lands proposed for acquisition are currently grazed by cattle. In the short term, the area would continue to be grazed at the current level. Field observations indicate that lands to be acquired are in high-seral condition, with current livestock management resulting in satisfactory conditions. Grazing use of the area would be monitored annually, and use levels would be adjusted to meet the Standards for Rangeland Health and the Spokane RMP. In addition, grazing management would be adjusted, if necessary, to meet the habitat requirements for sage grouse. Condition of the riparian areas within the acquired lands would also be evaluated, and management actions would be taken to improve riparian condition and function, if needed. These actions might include excluding grazing from the riparian area, changing the season of use, or changing stocking levels.

Weiss: This parcel lies within the Hungate-Petrified pasture of the Billingsley Ranch allotment; therefore, refer to the above discussion of the Billingsley Ranch parcels for anticipated impacts. The BLM has been establishing seasons of use in the Hungate-Petrified pasture for the 1998 and 1999 grazing seasons. Grazing use was to occur during the cooler months of the spring and fall to reduce use of the canyon areas that support riparian vegetation. Two exclosures were constructed to exclude grazing from area with high riparian recovery potential. The authorized season of use during the 2000 grazing season was June 1 to August 30, 2000. The purpose of alternating the use season is to not graze the upland forage species during their critical growth period every year, and also to allow for recovery of the riparian plants during the years of cool season grazing. Developing water sources outside the riparian zone would also reduce overuse of riparian species.

Gerard: As discussed in the EA Affected Environment chapter, most of these lands lie within allotments currently being grazed. Grazing use of the lands to be acquired would remain as currently authorized for the BLM lands within the allotments. See the Affected Environment chapter for grazing use authorization for BLM lands within the same pastures as lands to be acquired. These lands would be assessed to determine if the current level of use is meeting the Standard for Rangeland Health.

Hazzard: This parcel is within the East Saddle Mountain allotment, which includes approximately 17,140 acres. As stated in the Affected Environment chapter, grazing use in this allotment is authorized as follows: 613 cattle from March 10 to May 10, resulting in a use level of approximately 14 acres per AUM. Grazing use of this parcel is minimal due to its distance from livestock water and location at the southeast corner of the allotment.