

**East Fishtrap Allotment Management Plan
& Environmental Assessment #OR135-04-EA-03
For Grazing Allotment 0561**

**Bureau of Land Management
Border Resource Area
Spokane District**

August 2004

**East Fishtrap Allotment Management Plan
& Environmental Assessment #OR135-04-EA-03
For Grazing Allotment 0561**

Introduction

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Spokane District is proposing an Allotment Management Plan (AMP) to reissue grazing allotment 0561. This parcel is situated about 9 miles northeast of the community of Sprague, in Spokane County, in eastern Washington (see map). This area is in the Upper Crab Creek Management Area of the Spokane District's Border Resource Area.

Purpose and Need

The purpose and need of the proposal and this assessment is to evaluate the proposed renewal of a 10-year grazing lease and to develop an allotment management plan to provide site-specific management guidance in compliance with *Standards for Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management, August 12, 1997*.

Background

The lands in BLM grazing allotment 0561 were acquired by BLM in 1994 and have been grazed by livestock since then. Grazing over the last 10 years on this allotment has generally been light to mostly moderate. Prior to BLM ownership, these lands were used for livestock grazing for longer time periods and with more livestock than has been authorized by BLM since acquisition.

Compliance with Other Planning Documents and Laws

Proposed grazing plans incorporate management goals consistent with multiple use objectives of livestock grazing, wildlife habitat, and watershed needs, as outlined by the Spokane Resource Management Plan ROD, 1987, and consistent with the Fundamentals for Rangeland Health and the Standards for Rangeland Health. The Spokane Resource Management Plan (August 1985, p.55) specifies that allotment management plans will be developed to establish livestock use levels, grazing systems, seasons of use and the need for range improvements. This Allotment Management Plan conforms to that direction.

Description of Alternatives

Two alternatives (Proposed Action/No Action and No Grazing) were analyzed, as described below.

Alternative 1 - Proposed Action/No Action

This Proposed Action is the same grazing plan that is currently being used for this parcel. This grazing plan allows livestock grazing to be deferred until after the critical growing and seed

production time period of key forage plant species. This grazing plan has been used for several years on this parcel and has resulted in an upward trend in desirable plant communities. This Proposed Action represents No Action or no change from the previous grazing plan.

The Proposed Action is to issue a 10-year grazing lease on the allotment that comprises one fenced pasture of approximately 765 acres of BLM-administered land (see attached map).

Up to 132 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) would be authorized. The permitted number of AUMs could be changed to ensure that livestock use is consistent with BLM's multiple use management objectives.

The proposed grazing plan is to offer a season of use from August 1 to November 30 each year. Utilization will be evaluated throughout the grazing season to ensure proper use in accordance with the Spokane Resource Management Plan/EIS (August 1985). Seasons of use and livestock numbers may vary from those described above as determined by the authorized officer. Among the environmental and management factors that may be considered are weather conditions, wild fire activity, and monitoring data. Any proposed changes in use will be coordinated with the BLM Interdisciplinary Team and the grazing lessee.

Alternative 2: No Grazing

This alternative is to not renew the grazing.

Management Actions/Project Design Features for Alternative 1 (Proposed Action)

General Use Guidance

- The grazing plans for the uplands will not allow more than 50 percent use during the growing season, or more than 60 percent use during the dormant season of key plant species. Cattle would be removed from the allotment when stubble height requirements of 6 inches on key plant species are achieved in riparian areas, or before browsing or mechanical damage to shrubs by livestock could limit site capability and potential criteria.
- Activities undertaken as part of this grazing lease will comply with procedures set forth in the Programmatic Biological Assessment completed in August 2002 between Spokane BLM and the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS 1-9-02-I-0532). This Biological Assessment found that livestock grazing "may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect" the listed plant Spalding's catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*).
- If monitoring determines that the grazing guidelines for forage utilization, shrub browsing, or use in the vicinity of Spalding's catchfly sites are being met or exceeded, livestock would be removed from the allotment.

Range Improvements

- Range improvements (such as fences or water developments) may be constructed based on monitoring data, to help achieve or maintain rangeland health standards, as required by 43 Code of Federal Regulations, Subpart 4180 (Rangeland Health). Also range improvements could include any project construction within the rangeland ecosystem that is designed to

achieve or maintain Rangeland Health Standards as described in Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Grazing Management (USDI 1997). All range improvement projects would be reviewed by the interdisciplinary team prior to implementation.

- The grazing lessee will maintain all range improvements. The BLM may contribute building materials for maintenance and major repair work. BLM will maintain riparian exclosures.

Resource Inventories

- Resource inventories (including cultural, botanical and wildlife) will be conducted prior to implementing specific projects on the allotment. If cultural resources are found in the project area during project implementation, the project will be redesigned to avoid impacting the site. If the site cannot be avoided, consultation will be conducted with the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation and the Colville Confederated Tribes. If cultural remains are encountered during project implementation, the disturbing activity will be halted, a BLM Archaeologist will be contacted, and the resource protected until a BLM archaeologist has assessed the historic significance of the resource.

Noxious Weeds and Invasive Plants

- Noxious/invasive weeds will be treated or controlled using chemical or biological methods, according to the *Final EIS for Vegetation Treatment on BLM Lands in Thirteen Western States* dated July 1991, the Spokane District Noxious Weed Control Environmental Assessment, and any subsequent updates, revisions, or replacements to either of these documents.
- Invasive species in the vicinity of Spalding's catchfly sites will be monitored and control measures applied on populations determined to present encroaching concerns.

Monitoring and Evaluation

- Monitoring and evaluation on the upland plant communities will continue to be done using photo plots and nested frequency/point cover transects to record plant community composition and trend over time in accordance with the Spokane District monitoring Plan.
- Utilization levels of key upland plant species will not be more than 50% utilization of the current year's growth by weight during the growing season and 60% during the dormant season. Ocular estimation and mapping techniques will be used in accordance with the Spokane District monitoring Plan.
- Monitoring of riparian and wetland plant communities will consider site potential, hydrologic function, and be consistent with Rangeland Health Standards.
- Herbaceous stubble height in riparian areas and wetlands will be measured using the Photographic Guide to Median Stubble Heights technique (USDI 1999).
- Riparian vegetation and Spalding's catchfly sites will be monitored to assess the effects of grazing and to determine any needed changes in management.
- Other evaluations of the allotment use and resource values, in addition to the Rangeland Health Assessment, will be conducted, as needed, after reviewing the monitoring reports.

Other Measures

- In the event of a wildfire, important resource values (including Spalding's catchfly sites) on BLM-administered lands in the Fishtrap area will be protected. Such protection may include providing a fireline around the resource or allowing the area to burn to avoid the impacts of fire suppression activities on the site. The protection will be coordinated with assigned resource advisors on fires 10 acres in size or greater.

Affected Environment & Environmental Impacts

The allotment was used to evaluate the effects analysis for direct, indirect and cumulative effects. The analysis of cumulative effects considered past, present and future actions within the allotment. Reasonable foreseeable actions included all forms of recreation (fishing, hunting, hiking, special recreation permits for hang-gliding, etc.), grazing, and vehicular road use. Reasonably foreseeable future actions are those activities that may occur over the next 10 years, which is the length of the proposed grazing lease.

Rangeland Soils and Hydrology

Affected Environment: The predominant soil within this area is a Tucannon-Rock outcrop complex, with zero to 15 percent slopes. This soil complex ranges from very shallow to moderately deep, and poorly to well drained. Its main use is for rangeland.

About 306 acres of the uplands in the allotment have Cheney Uhlig complex soils, and about 190 acres have Cheney Very Rocky Complex as the predominant soil

In the summer of 2002, the uplands in the allotment were rated for soil/site stability, hydrologic function, and biotic integrity. The indicators that were rated included: rills, water flow patterns, pedestals and terraces, bare ground, gullies, wind scours, litter movement, physical and chemical soil crusts, soil surface organic matter, microbiotic crusts, soil compaction layers, plant functional and structural groups, and litter amount and distribution. These indicators are used to rate rangeland health. The uplands rating concluded that all upland soils are stable and that the water cycle (hydrologic function) is functioning well.

Impacts – Soils/Hydrology: Considering the proposed grazing system in Alternative 1 (Proposed Action), impacts to the soils resources are expected to be minimal. Under Alternative 2 (No Grazing), soil erosion could occur from natural climatic conditions. Under both alternatives, upland soils would remain stable and the water cycle would continue to function well.

Water Resources/Riparian Areas

Affected Environment - The northwest portion of the allotment borders Fishtrap Lake, and there some intermittent ponds within the allotment. The allotment contains about 52 acres of wetland habitat, but no stream habitat. Proper functioning condition (PFC) determinations, originally performed in 1995 and repeated in 2002, determined that all wetland systems were in proper functioning condition. According to the 2002 reassessment, about 26 percent of the wetlands did not have a diverse age-class distribution of riparian/wetland vegetation, and a few wetlands (13%) did not have a diverse composition of wetland vegetation. These wetlands are not in a desired future condition necessary for habitat maintenance, a condition that may partially be

attributed to the lack of standing water over the last several years and the resulting spread of reed canary grass dominating the site. Overall, the wetland condition indicates that these habitats are meeting the standard for watershed function.

Impacts - Water Resources/Riparian Areas: Because of the steeper topography of the northwest area of the allotment that borders Fishtrap Lake and the fall grazing schedule, livestock do not frequent the lake shore. The intermittent ponds on the allotment do not flow off the parcel, so water quality for streams is not a concern.

Vegetation

Affected Environment: The allotment area is within Daubenmire's threetip sagebrush/Idaho fescue zone, near the boundary with the Idaho fescue/snowberry zone. Shrub-steppe plant associations on the allotment include threetip sagebrush/Idaho fescue (restricted to north-facing slopes), stiff sagebrush/Sandberg's bluegrass (on shallow rocky soils), big sagebrush/Idaho fescue, and Idaho fescue/snowberry. Annual grasses, including cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), Japanese brom (*B. japonicus*) and ventenata (*Ventenata dubia*) have displaced native perennial grasses on parts of the allotment. Ponderosa pine forest is also present on the allotment; the primary forested plant association is ponderosa pine/Idaho fescue. Quaking aspen and black hawthorn stands occur around the edges of seasonal and semi-permanent wetlands.

The rangeland was surveyed and mapped in 2001 by range site and ecological status (often referred to Ecological Site Inventory), and range health. The ecological status was evaluated by comparing current vegetation composition by weight to the composition of the Potential Natural Community (PNC) for the area's various soil types. The current plant community is then classified into seral stage, based on the percent composition of PNC as follows: PNC (76-100%), late seral (51-75%), mid seral (26-50%) and early seral (0-25%). The PNC composition is provided in the Ecological Site descriptions developed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

The uplands with Cheney Uhlig complex soils have plant communities dominated by bluebunch wheatgrass and Idaho Fescue (especially on north-facing slopes), and are in high mid-seral to early late-seral ecological status (about 80% similarity to the climax community) with upward trends. In addition, the microbiotic crust is intact. About 36% of the uplands with Cheney Extremely Rock Complex soils are dominated by Sandberg's Bluegrass, and 24% of these soils have invasive cheatgrass. Due to the low amount of available moisture on these rocky sites, cheatgrass will not likely ever be replaced by native species due to its being such a strong competitor for available resources. These plant communities are in the mid-seral state. The area with Cheney Very Rocky Complex soils has swales of soil with good stands of Idaho Fescue (35%) and Bluebunch Wheatgrass (13%). Pockets of Basin Wild rye (15%) are present. The soil type on this site is at 78% of the climax community, putting it in the late-seral state due to invasive weedy species.

Impacts – Vegetation: Under Alternative 1 (Proposed Action/No Action), upland and riparian native plant communities would likely maintain existing levels of cover, and existing seral stages would be maintained or advanced. Monitoring of utilization levels and vegetation condition, and moving livestock where such monitoring indicates, will help maintain range health standards.

Under Alternative 2 (No Grazing), upland and riparian native plant communities would likely maintain or increase their cover. Because annual grasses such as cheatgrass are not readily displaced once established, the absence of grazing would not likely cause rapid changes in native cover.

Special Status Species

Affected Environment: One federally listed plant species, Spalding's catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*) occurs within the allotment. Transects for long-term monitoring of vegetation have been set up in the vicinity of selected Spalding's catchfly patches. Wetlands on the allotment have been surveyed for another federally listed plant species (water howellia), but it has not been found.

Impacts - Special Status Plant Species: Under Alternative 1, Spalding's catchfly plants could be eaten or trampled by livestock; however, use supervision and monitoring is expected to minimize or eliminate adverse impacts. Another measure that provides some protection for this plant is removal of livestock from the allotment if monitoring indicates that continued grazing would be likely to have adverse effects, as set forth in the Programmatic Biological Assessment completed in August 2002 (FWS 1-9-02-I-0532). The late summer/fall grazing season proposed in Alternative 1 has been in place for at least the last 10 years; during this time of the year, livestock tend to be concentrated around moist areas where green forage remains available, and utilization of the uplands where Spalding's catchfly occurs has been observed to be light. Stem breakage and removal of upper portions of Spalding's catchfly plants have been observed both before and after livestock turnout, indicating that some of the damage is attributable to native animals such as deer.

Under Alternative 2, no impacts from livestock grazing are expected on Spalding's catchfly.

Wildlife Habitat

Affected Environment: Species of amphibians, reptiles, migratory land birds, and mammals are known to utilize the wetland and upland habitats. In particular, wetland habitats and the associated shrub communities provide important ecological services (nesting structure and cover, predator evasion, forage, etc.) for many species of wildlife. The presence of these species is an index of the diversity of animal populations and plant communities on which they depend. There is a diversity of waterfowl species present on the allotment and in the vicinity of Fishtrap Lake. Portions of the wetland areas appear to be used extensively by waterfowl for foraging and probably breeding due to vegetative cover. The allotment also provides habitat for a diversity of migratory land birds, some of which are shrub-steppe obligate birds (species of concern). Snags present on the allotment also provide habitat for birds and bats. Many snags are present around wetlands as well as in the uplands, there are a moderate number of large and small diameter snags, and most contain cavities available for nesting species.

Special Status Wildlife Species: General wildlife surveys, as well as surveys for sharp-tailed grouse (state threatened, federal species of concern) and Columbia spotted frogs (state candidate, federal species of concern) were conducted in 2002. The parcel is mapped as historic sage grouse and sharp-tailed grouse habitat. Sharp-tailed grouse were sighted on this parcel in 1993. Although the parcel and general vicinity contain likely lek and winter habitat, no sharp-tailed grouse were observed during a 2002 survey. Columbia spotted frog egg masses were detected

during 2002 surveys, thus this allotment currently provides breeding habitat for Columbia spotted frog.

No Federally proposed, listed threatened or endangered wildlife species are known to currently occur within the parcel or general vicinity (10-mile radius). Some special status species are known to use habitat with a 10-mile radius of the allotment within the last 10 years (see table below). The following special status bat species have been identified in the area: long-eared myotis (state monitor, federal species of concern), yuma bat (federal species of concern), and big brown bat (state priority species).

Special Status Species in 10-mile Radius of Allotment Within Last 10 Years	
Species	Status
Columbia spotted frog	state candidate, federal species of concern
common loon	state sensitive
ferruginous hawk	state threatened, federal species of concern
great blue heron	state monitor
long-billed curlew	state monitor
sage grouse	state threatened, federally proposed
sandhill crane	state endangered
sharp-tailed grouse	state threatened, federal species of concern
Swainson's hawk	state monitor
white-tailed jackrabbit	state candidate

Impacts – Wildlife: Under Alternative 1 (Proposed Action/No Action), riparian habitat quality would likely be maintained at existing levels. Dormant season grazing would not likely affect nesting waterfowl or spotted frog egg masses directly, although decreased cover could result in reduced nesting/egg laying habitat quality. Upland wildlife habitat quality would likely be maintained. Use supervision and monitoring would minimize impacts to riparian vegetation by removing livestock if utilization levels exceed standards. This alternative is expected to have a “no effect” determination to federally listed and/or proposed wildlife species since these species are not known to occur in the area and critical habitat is not present.

Under Alternative 2 (No Grazing), waterfowl and spotted frog foraging and nesting/egg laying habitat would likely improve as riparian vegetation is re-established. Upland wildlife habitat would likely improve as plant cover increases, and therefore increasing the quality and quantity of habitat for shrub-steppe obligate species.

Cultural/Paleontological Resources

Affected Environment: The allotment area is part of the territory traditionally used by members of the Spokane Tribe as a source of many important plant materials. Prominent among plant resources are the edible roots that can be harvested in large quantities from the rocky soil. Although roots are no longer a staple food, many Native Americans still come to traditional locations in the Scablands to dig them. Fishtrap Lake and surrounding marshy ponds would also have provided Native American residents with access to such riparian resources as fish, waterfowl, and the rushes used to roof winter houses. This area is a likely location for evidence of Native American activity.

Early Euro-American settlements in the Channeled Scablands were concentrated on the area's flood plains and well-watered bottomlands, with the uplands used largely for grazing. Since open range grazing leaves little physical evidence, most remains of 19th Century settlement are expected to occur primarily on flood plains. This land form is not well represented in the allotment. The portions bordering on Fishtrap Lake are very steep, but some areas near the center of Section 31 and the north half of Section 6 are similar to historic settlement areas on the west side of Fishtrap Lake.

A search of OAHF and BLM databases and other BLM files indicates that parts of Section 31 amounting to slightly over 100 acres were included in BLM Class III Cultural Resources inventories in 1998 and 2002. Although no cultural sites were recorded, a rock ring was noted and three caves or rock overhangs were noted as possible rockshelter sites. There is no record of any cultural resources survey/inventory activity in Section 6 and no known cultural sites in the section.

Because this allotment includes resources and potential settlement areas attractive to members of both aboriginal and Euro-American cultures, and because there are known sites in surrounding areas, this allotment is an area of high probability for occurrence of cultural sites.

There are no known paleontological resources in this allotment, and probability for the occurrence of such resources is low.

Impacts – Cultural Resources: The late summer and fall grazing proposed in Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) would be outside the growing season of native root plants (late March through May). Therefore, impacts to native root crops are not expected .

There are no known cultural resources sites in the area, and the possible rock shelters and the rock ring show no evidence of impact from present grazing. No additional impact from grazing is expected. The construction of range improvements (fences, spring developments) and the construction of fire lines may damage previously undiscovered cultural sites.

Alternative 2 (No Grazing): This alternative would allow native root crops and other culturally significant native plants to complete their annual cycles without grazing pressure from cattle. The effect of competition with non-native weed species after grazing pressure is removed is unknown. No negative impact to native plants is expected.

Recreation

Affected Environment: This allotment is within the dispersed recreation area (wild land recreation area) and is valued for scenic qualities as part of the Channeled Scablands. The area offers one-half mile of Fishtrap Lake frontage. Recreation use in the general primarily consists of upland bird and deer hunting, and fishing in nearby Fishtrap Lake. Other recreational uses may include hiking, wildlife viewing, and dispersed camping. To date, grazing has not conflicted with these activities.

Impacts on Recreation: Under Alternative 1 (Proposed Action), the grazing use is not expected to permanently impact recreational uses in this area, although the presence of livestock could discourage some recreational activities. Future conflicts with grazing activity are unlikely, but

could occur with projected increases in recreational use on public land.

Under Alternative 2 (No Grazing), recreational uses of the area would not likely be impacted.

Socioeconomic

Affected Environment: This allotment provides approximately 132 AUMS of forage for one rancher, which equates to one-third of the annual forage for this lessee's herd of cattle.

Impacts – Socioeconomic: Alternative 1 (Proposed Action/No Action) would continue to provide the approximately 132 AUMs of forage. Alternative 2 (No Grazing) would not support grazing use in this area and result in non-availability of 132 AUMs of forage. In 2002, the average private non-irrigated grazing fee rate in Washington for an AUM was \$9.60 (USDA 2003). The value of the AUMs used in the allotment is approximately \$1,267 at the above rate.

The BLM collects approximately \$190 per year in lease rental, half of which is designated for range improvements on BLM lands. The other 50 percent of this amount is distributed to Spokane County.

Other Resource Elements Analyzed

Environmental Justice: No disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority or low-income populations are expected to result from implementation of any of the alternatives addressed in this EA.

Critical Elements That Were Considered:

- Air quality – No effect.
- Wild and scenic rivers – None on allotment.
- Prime/unique farmlands – Allotment not considered farmland.
- Floodplain – No effect.
- Wastes (Hazardous or Solid) – None known on allotment.
- Special area designations (including Areas of Critical Environmental Concern) – Allotment not within any special area designation.
- Wilderness – Allotment not within wilderness area.
- Invasive non-native species – Discussed above in vegetative section.
- Adverse impacts to energy – No effect.

Cumulative Impacts

This allotment is within the Upper Crab watershed/subbasin (1,172,104 acres), approximately 4 percent of which is managed by BLM (51,276 acres). Approximately 40,756 acres of this watershed are managed as grazing allotments by BLM. The acreage in the East Fishtrap Allotment represents approximately 1.5 percent of the total BLM lands in the sub-basin. Most private land within the watershed/sub-basin is used for farming and ranching.

Coordination/Consultation With Other Agencies, Groups and Individuals

This allotment management plan and environmental assessment was prepared by an interdisciplinary team of BLM resource specialists representing various resource values, including rangeland management, soils, hydrology (water), wildlife habitat, cultural values, and botany.

Consultation on this and other allotment renewals was initiated by letters, dated January 2, 2003, sent to the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation, the Spokane Tribe, the Yakama Indian Nation and the Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (OAHP). A letter dated January 7, 2003 was received from the OAHP, concurring with the BLM's definition of the Area of Potential Effect. A letter from the Spokane Tribe dated January 9, 2003 stated that the allotment contained no cultural or religious areas of historical importance to the tribe.

Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was accomplished through a Programmatic Biological Assessment completed in 2002, which addressed various anticipated activities, including issuance and renewal of grazing leases. This document found a "may affect, but not likely to adversely affect" determination for Spalding's silene, and a "no effect" determination for other listed plant species and for fish and wildlife species. The document outlines mitigation and monitoring measures to protect Spalding's catchfly. Coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service during an annual project review in 2003 determined that there was no new information for the project area, and therefore, no site-specific Biological Assessment was required.

The BLM grazing lessee was informed about the grazing plan and will be sent a copy of the EA.

The EA will be made available for public review and comment through a legal publication in *The Spokesman Review*, a regional newspaper. A news release about the EA availability will be sent to the *Odessa Record* and the *Davenport Times*, which are rural newspapers in the general area of the grazing lease. In addition, the environmental assessment will be mailed by request and also be posted on the Spokane BLM Internet website <www.or.blm.gov/spokane.>