

Implementing Grazing Management Collaboratively Across All Lands

Livestock grazing on western rangelands, like management for a variety of other resources (e.g. fish and wildlife, recreation, open space, energy development), is dependent on a network of ownerships (state, federal, tribal and private) across the landscape. In an effort to create a coordinated grazing management plan that benefits habitat conditions across all lands, key non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and livestock producers need to be involved collaboratively with federal, tribal and state land managers in developing grazing management alternatives. These alternatives will meet the diverse needs of the economic, social, and ecological aspects of this Western landscape and its associated human and natural resources. Livestock grazing is often recognized as the dominant use of rangelands for economic benefit and rural community stability. According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service in 2015, gross cattle sales were nearly two billion dollars in Idaho. Grazing is also influential because it affects wildlife, recreation, open space and wildland fire. There is a need to ensure the sustainability of these large intact landscapes and the critical forage resources and habitat that people and wildlife depend upon. Throughout the year, livestock producers rely on a network of ecologically complex state, federal and privately managed lands that currently are administered under various missions, administrative plans, and grazing systems that may not be responsive to annual changes in weather, plant phenology, wildland fire or market conditions.

Livestock producers depend on federal permits and state leases for a large portion of their annual forage balance, yet often have a limited amount of flexibility to change season of use or to provide adequate rest and recovery during critical periods. This can result in decreased rangeland condition, soil health, and less productive ecosystems that the people and wildlife depend on. In arid landscapes private lands often produce the most forage and provide critical water resources for wildlife and livestock. Across Idaho, grazing permittees and public land managers alike have identified a need for the development of grazing management plans to allow more flexible use across ownership boundaries (all lands) that will improve the landscape ecosystem in its entirety. Grazing practices that utilize these lands in a cohesive manner are far more likely to achieve desired outcomes than managing within the limits of individual jurisdictional units.

We propose the assembling of a diverse group of local stakeholders who will inform the process of resource inventory, grazing management alternatives, and monitoring development that encompasses all lands utilized throughout the year by individuals or groups of permittees. Buy-in on the part of the livestock producer/landowner/permittee is critical to the process of developing solutions that fit their operation and improve the ecological benefit and wildlife habitat conditions across the landscape. Grazing periods and facilitating practices, planned and applied, will be supported by monitoring. This will allow for adjustment in timing and intensity of grazing as well as provide adequate rest and recovery periods across the entire range. This collaboration will be supported at the local, state, tribal and federal levels to guarantee sustainable outcomes.

While maintaining compliance with governing laws and statute, this approach will require collaboration across administrative/ownership boundaries and will likely deviate from the traditional planning, inventory and alternative development process for grazing management on the associated federal permits and state leases. As a result, this collaborative process offers opportunities for adaptive management and will produce results that achieve desired ecological, aesthetic, economic, and social outcomes. Decisions made during the process should focus on the long term goals and objectives of the landscape being managed, in combination with the informed consent and benefit of local stakeholder group(s).

This white paper, "Implementing Grazing Management Collaboratively Across All Lands," is signed by:

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