

SCOPING/INFORMATION PACKAGE

Salmon River Corridor Land Health Environmental Assessment

Salmon Field Office

This information package summarizes a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to improve land health on public lands within the Salmon River Corridor (SRC) area (see Map 1) by restoring/maintaining riparian, wetland and aquatic habitats, upland sagebrush habitats, and forest and woodland habitats through existing and/or revised livestock grazing management, range improvement projects and forestry treatments in accordance with the Lemhi Resource Management Plan, as amended. Federal actions must be analyzed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations to determine potential environmental consequences.

The purpose of this package is to inform interested and affected parties of the proposal and to solicit comments to assist with the NEPA review of the proposal. Analysis of the proposal is ongoing, and will be documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA) with an estimated completion date of February 29, 2012. Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential issues related to the proposed action and to identify alternatives to the proposed action that meet the purpose of and need for the project.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose is to improve land health and enhance habitat conditions on public lands within the SRC area, between Ellis and Salmon, Idaho. The need for this improvement and enhancement is in response to issues described in the SRC Watershed Assessment Report. In addition, there is a need to authorize appropriate grazing on public lands within 16 allotments in the area in accordance with applicable laws and regulations, in a manner that would continue to achieve, or make progress towards meeting, all applicable Standards for Rangeland Health and conform to all applicable Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management within the allotments.

Existing Condition

In September of 2011, the BLM Salmon Field Office concluded a land health assessment process and published a report for the National System of Public Lands administered by the BLM Salmon Field Office within the Salmon River Corridor. The assessment report documents the existing condition and function of public land and portions of National Forest resources within the area, including an evaluation of the eight Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health for sixteen BLM-managed grazing allotments covering approximately 65,000 acres. The assessment report may be reviewed at the Salmon Field Office, or on the internet at:

http://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/prog/planning/salmon_river_cooridor.html

Preliminary Issues

1. Low cover of bluebunch wheatgrass and diversity/cover of forbs in portions of the Perreau Creek, Williams Creek, and Henry Creek Allotments.
2. Riparian and/or spring habitat conditions need improvement at certain locations in the Hot Springs, Lake Creek, Iron-Lime, Perreau Creek, and Williams Creek Allotments.
3. Conifer encroachment into aspen stands in the Cabin Creek and Iron-Lime Allotments.
4. Forest insect and disease are affecting forest health in the Cabin/Ezra/Ringle Creek drainages.
5. Lack of flexibility to use fire management strategies that include the full range of activities to help achieve ecosystem sustainability.
6. Lack of boater access to the Salmon River within the SRC area.
7. Livestock grazing permit applications that have been received need to be addressed according to 43 CFR 4130.2.

Most of these issues were identified in the SRC Watershed Assessment Report; some are the result of internal scoping or applications from the public. Requirements under the Fundamentals of Rangeland Health and subsequent Land Health Standards require the BLM to initiate management actions that ensure, “Watersheds are in, or are making significant progress toward, properly functioning condition, including their upland, riparian-wetland, and aquatic components...” (43 CFR 4180.1 (a)), if an assessment determines one or more of the Land Health Standards are not being met and existing grazing management practices or levels of grazing use on public lands are significant factors in failing to achieve the standards and conform with the guidelines.

Proposed Action

The BLM proposes to renew Term (10-year) Grazing Permits on 16 grazing allotments within the SRC area. In addition, the BLM proposes projects which include water developments (pipeline and trough systems), exclosures, aeration and seeding of rangelands, forest and aspen health projects, and implementation of a fire management strategy that would include the full range of activities to help achieve ecosystem sustainability.

Preliminary Alternative Development

There are currently five alternatives being developed. In addition to the Proposed Action, the four other Alternatives that are being considered include 1) renewing the existing ten-year term grazing permits without change; 2) renewing the ten-year permits reflecting actual use; 3) renewing the ten-year term permits reflecting reduced livestock use; and 4) no grazing. Forest health projects are being considered for each alternative and riparian and rangeland health projects are being considered under each alternative except the “no grazing” alternative.

12/6/2011

Decision to be Made

The BLM will decide whether to implement the Proposed Action or an Alternative. If it is decided to select an Alternative, then the decision would be to select between 1) renewing the existing ten-year term grazing permits without change; 2) renewing the ten-year permits reflecting actual use; 3) renewing the ten-year term permits reflecting reduced livestock use; and 4) not authorize livestock grazing. The BLM authorized officer may also select an alternative that combines aspects of each of the alternatives described above. Forest health projects would occur under each alternative and riparian and rangeland health projects would occur under each alternative except “no grazing” alternative.

Public Input Needed

Comments are specifically requested on the proposed action and alternatives. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received by January 9, 2011 and are directly relevant to the proposal and project area. The BLM will not reject public feedback outside established public involvement timeframes; however, these comments may be considered secondary to comments received in a timely manner and may only be assessed to determine if they identify concerns that would substantially alter the assumptions, proposal, design, or analysis presented in the EA. Please identify whether you are submitting comments as an individual or as the designated spokesperson on behalf of an organization. Issues that are outside the scope of the proposal will not be addressed at this planning level.

The primary contact for questions for this analysis is Kyra Povirk, Rangeland Management Specialist, (208) 756-5411 or email kpovirk@blm.gov.

Comments should be submitted in writing by January 9, 2012 to:

BLM, Salmon Field Office
1206 South Challis Street
Salmon, ID 83467