

# EVALUATION REPORT

## Loughmiller Allotment

### Achieving the Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health

**Field Office:** Burley Field Office

**Allotment Name/Number:** Loughmiller #04076

**Name of Permittee(s):** C.E. Brackett Cattle Co.

#### **Introduction:**

The Loughmiller Allotment is approximately four miles north of Hollister, Idaho (See Map 1). The allotment is surrounded by private and public land. On the western boundary Highway 93 separates the allotment from adjacent public land. The allotment is approximately 1,675 acres of public land and 160 acres of private land. There is a total of 610 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) licensed for cattle grazing on the allotment.

Grazing privileges were transferred to C.E. Brackett Cattle Co. in 2005. This allotment was first evaluated in 1988. In March 1990 an Addendum to the 1983 Cooperative Resource Management Agreement (CRMA) was signed between the BLM and the permittee. Within this addendum, it was determined, from the analysis, interpretation and evaluation process completed in 1988, that preference, season of use and management is sufficient to meet the objective set forth in the land use plan. It was also indicated that some seeding maintenance may become necessary in the future.

The allotment's elevations range from approximately 4300 to 4380 feet. Eighty-five percent of the allotment was successfully seeded to crested cheatgrass in the mid-1960s. Other vegetation observed, includes; Wyoming big sagebrush, rabbitbrush, Sandberg's bluegrass, cheatgrass, and a variety of forbs. There are no riparian/wetland vegetation types found on public lands within this allotment.

There are no known listed Threatened & Endangered (T&E) or sensitive plant or animal species within the allotment. The Loughmiller Allotment is not within sage grouse habitat because it is isolated from larger contiguous portions of rangeland and it is outside the habitat for sage-grouse as identified in the sage-grouse habitat planning and preliminary priority habitat maps.

**Standards Applicable:** There are three Rangeland Health Standards associated with the Loughmiller Allotment. The *Watersheds*, *Seedings* and *T & E Plants and Animal* standards apply. The other five Rangeland Health Standards, i.e. *Riparian Areas and Wetlands*, *Stream Channel/Floodplains*, *Native Plant Communities*, *Exotic Plant Communities*, *Other than Seedings* and *Water Quality* standards, do not apply.

## **EVALUATE STANDARDS**

### **Standard 1 – Watersheds**

\_\_\_\_\_ Standard Doesn't Apply

The desired watersheds conditions, as described in the “Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management”, is to “...provide for the proper infiltration, retention, and release of water appropriate to soil type, vegetation, climate, and landform to provide for proper nutrient cycling, hydrologic cycling, and energy flow.”

The Loughmiller Allotment consists of approximately 1,675 acres of public land. The following information discusses the existing data, assessment indicators and the on-site observations of the Watersheds for the allotment.

#### **Existing Data**

The 1979 range condition survey documented three specific sites within the allotment, one of which as having a “slightly active” erosion Condition Indicator as denoted on the applicable “Range Condition Worksheet”.

According to the 2005 evaluation and 2012 Standards and Guidelines (S&G) validations, the watershed appears healthy. Rangeland health attributes measuring soil/site stability and hydrologic function were very similar to what is expected to occur on the ecological range sites. Ground cover and soil structure appears adequate on the sites and there were no signs of accelerated erosion.

#### **Assessment Indicators (As summarized in the Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health)**

*Amount and Distribution of Ground Cover* – On-site inspections of the allotment have not identified any watershed issues associated with the amount and distribution of ground cover. According to 2012 monitoring, the average cover information is as follows: 7% shrubs, 43% perennial grass, 1% perennial forbs, 1% annual grass, 0.7% annual forbs, 12% biological crust, 11% litter and 22% bare ground. Average shrub height is approximately 26 inches and average perennial grass height is approximately 10 inches. Cover amount and distribution, mainly from crested wheatgrass, is as expected for the site. Therefore, there are no watershed site stability problems known.

*Evidence of Accelerated Erosion* - Inspections indicate that there is no evidence of accelerated erosion taking place, and the allotment is providing satisfactory watershed protection. Rills, water-flow patterns, pedestals and/or terracettes, gullies and wind-scoured, blowouts and/or deposition areas have not been observed.

**Evaluation Finding – Allotment/Watersheds is:**

- Standard Achieved
- Standard Not Achieved, but making significant progress towards achieving
- Standard Not Achieved

**Rationale for Evaluation Finding:**

Based on the information provided above, and coupled with the on-site inspections that have been made on the allotment, the desired watershed conditions are being met at this time. The deferred rotation system appears to be maintaining resources associated with current livestock grazing within the allotment.

**Standard 2 – Riparian Areas and Wetlands**  Standard Doesn't Apply

**Evaluation Finding – Allotment/Riparian Areas and Wetlands is:**

- Standard Achieved
- Standard Not Achieved, but making significant progress towards achieving
- Standard Not Achieved

**Rationale for Evaluation Finding:**

**Standard 3 – Stream Channel/Floodplain**  Standard Doesn't Apply

**Evaluation Finding – Allotment/Stream Channel/Floodplain is:**

- Standard Achieved
- Standard Not Achieved, but making significant progress towards achieving
- Standard Not Achieved

**Rationale for Evaluation Finding:**

**Standard 4 – Native Plant Communities**

  X   Standard Doesn't Apply

**Evaluation Finding – Allotment/Native Plant Communities is:**

- Standard Achieved
- Standard Not Achieved, but making significant progress towards achieving
- Standard Not Achieved

**Rationale for Evaluation Finding:**

**Standard 5 – Seedings**

       Standard Doesn't Apply

The desired seeding conditions, as described in the “Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management”, is to ensure that “*Rangelands seeded with mixtures, including predominately non-native plants, are functioning to maintain life form diversity, production, native animal habitat, nutrient cycling, energy flow, and the hydrologic cycle.*”

The Loughmiller Allotment consists of approximately 1,675 acres of public land. The following information discusses the existing data, assessment indicators and the on-site observations of the Seedings for the allotment.

According to the 2005 evaluation and the 2012 S&G validations, plant community diversity and structure is adequate on the seeded rangeland in the allotment. Sagebrush cover was noted as being low; however, according to photos shrub cover appears to be increasing. Plant health and cover appears to be appropriate with evidence of plant recruitment. Forb cover was as expected given range site potential and past seeding efforts.

**Existing Data**

- *Utilization* – Overall, utilization levels have averaged 37% from 2005 to 2013. Utilization averages have been recorded at 29% in 2010, 34% in 2011, 27% in 2012 and 58% in 2013.
- *Trend Studies* – Trend photos were last taken in 2012. Trend monitoring plots indicate that vegetative trend across the allotment appears not to have changed. Photos at all three established plots depict a stable trend in the cover of crested wheatgrass. Photos also indicate that the cover of Sandberg’s bluegrass, Wyoming big sagebrush and rabbitbrush is slowly increasing.
- *Annual Production* – Total 2014 annual production is within the range (400-900 lbs/acre) of production at 437 lbs/acre. Seeded perennial bunchgrasses make up the majority of the composition by weight at 280 lbs/acre.
- *Livestock Grazing Season of Use* – The season of use is April 20 to August 30. The grazing season and rotation system appears to be adequate for this allotment, as indicated by the appropriate utilization levels, and should continue to provide healthy, vigorous seeded species.

**Assessment Indicators (As summarized in the Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health)**

- *Seeded Plant Community* – The 1979 range condition survey indicated that the seeded range was rated as being in excellent condition. According to the 2005 evaluation and 2012 S&G Validations, the allotment appears to be healthy. Crested wheatgrass dominates the allotment and Wyoming big sagebrush is increasing.
- *Diversity* – Overall plant diversity is adequate for seeded range within the allotment. Crested wheatgrass dominates the allotment. Other species observed were, Sandberg’s bluegrass, bottlebrush squirreltail, western wheatgrass, cheatgrass, daisy, phlox, milkvetch, death camas, hawks beard, salsify, annual mustard, burr buttercup, pepper weed, Wyoming big sagebrush and rabbitbrush.
- *Plant Vigor* – From year to year plant vigor is somewhat associated with the amount and timing of precipitation and other climatic conditions occurring during the year. According to recent visits to the allotment, the current condition of the seeding appears to be healthy and vigorous. Average utilization of the key species of 37% is leaving adequate residual growth throughout the allotment while supporting permitted AUMs.
- *Noxious Weeds* – Idaho has fifty-seven (57) state listed noxious weeds. Presently, there are six noxious weeds species identified within the Loughmiller Allotment. Species treated are; Russian knapweed, diffuse knapweed, whitetop, scotch thistle, Canada thistle and musk thistle. The majority of noxious weeds that are found are within a reclaimed gravel pit, a canal system and along roads and fence lines adjacent to private land. Noxious weeds are being treated and appear not to be increasing across the allotment.
- *Adequate Litter and Standing Dead Material* –There appears to be adequate litter and standing dead plant material present for site protection and for annual decomposition to replenish soil nutrients relative to the sites’ potential. Currently, the average utilization of the key species is 37%, which leaves an abundance of unused standing material for site stability. According to 2012 cover data, litter cover is at approximately 11%.

**Evaluation Finding – Allotment/Seedings is:**

- Standard Achieved
- Standard Not Achieved, but making significant progress towards achieving
- Standard Not Achieved

**Rationale for Evaluation Finding:**

The Loughmiller Allotment is composed primarily of crested wheatgrass. As a result, the allotment is being managed as seeded rangeland. The current season of use, levels of forage utilization and grazing rotation are resulting in overall healthy rangeland conditions. Trend monitoring plots indicate that vegetative trend across the allotment is stable with crested wheatgrass dominating the allotment and sagebrush increasing.

**Standard 6 – Exotic Plant Communities, Other Than Seedings**

  X   Standard Doesn't Apply

**Evaluation Finding – Allotment/Exotic Plant Communities, Other Than Seedings is:**

- Standard Achieved
- Standard Not Achieved, but making significant progress towards achieving
- Standard Not Achieved

**Rationale for Evaluation Finding:**

**Standard 7 – Water Quality**

  X   Standard Doesn't Apply

**Evaluation Finding – Allotment/Water Quality is:**

- Standard Achieved
- Standard Not Achieved, but making significant progress towards achieving
- Standard Not Achieved

**Rationale for Evaluation Finding:**

**Standard 8 – Threatened and Endangered Plants and Animals**

       Standard Doesn't Apply

The desired threatened and endangered plants and animals conditions, as described in the “Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management”, are to ensure that *“Habitats are suitable to maintain viable populations of threatened and endangered, sensitive, and other special status species.*

The Loughmiller Allotment consists of approximately 1,675 acres of public land habitat. The following information discusses the existing data, assessment indicators and the on-site observations of the Threatened and Endangered Plants and Animals within the allotment.

**Existing Data**

No threatened, endangered, candidate species are known to occur within this allotment. Data collected during the assessment determined that Wyoming big sagebrush cover is limited within the crested wheatgrass seedings throughout the allotment but is increasing. Further investigation of historic records indicated that the allotment has maintained this state for at least the last 30 years. Low utilization and lack of sagebrush in surrounding lands may have allowed the grasslands to dominate. Eventually, enough sagebrush is expected to colonize the allotment and provide a seed source to sufficiently increase the cover. Regardless, the allotment is not expected

to provide any habitat for sage grouse because it is isolated from other sagebrush steppe habitats. The areas which do have shrubs are suitable for Brewer's sparrow, sage sparrow and loggerhead shrike. Brewer's sparrows and loggerhead shrikes were observed during a visit to the allotment during 2012. Long-billed curlews were also observed at this time. The larger expanses of grasslands are suitable for migratory bird species of conservation concern including grasshopper sparrow, burrowing owl, short-eared owl, long-billed curlew and northern harrier. At the landscape level, the amount of shrub dominated lands and the amount of grass dominated lands are appropriate for the diversity of wildlife this allotment is capable of supporting.

**Assessment Indicators (As summarized in the Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health)**

*Seeded Plant Communities* – (See the discussion for Standards 5.)

*Diversity* – (See the discussion for Standard 5.)

*Amount and Distribution of Ground Cover* – (See the discussion for Standard 1.)

*Noxious Weeds* - (See the discussion for Standard 5.)

**Evaluation Finding – Allotment/ Threatened and Endangered Plants and Animals is:**

- Standard Achieved
- Standard Not Achieved, but making significant progress towards achieving
- Standard Not Achieved

**Rationale for Evaluation Finding:**

The Loughmiller Allotment is limited in its capacity to support sage grouse due to its small size, lack of the appropriate amount of shrub species and isolation. However, Wyoming big sagebrush is present, is increasing and provides suitable habitat for all the other potential BLM sensitive species. The deferred rotation system appears to be maintaining resources associated with current livestock grazing within allotment.