

# EVALUATION REPORT

## Salmon Tract-U2 Allotment

### Achieving the Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health

**Field Office:** Burley Field Office

**Allotment Name/Number:** Salmon Tract-U2 #04109

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

#### **Introduction:**

The Salmon Tract-U2 Allotment is approximately three miles north of Hollister, Idaho (See Map 1). The allotment is bordered by private land to the west, north and south. To the east, Highway 93 separates it from adjacent public land. The allotment is approximately 315 acres of public land and 64 acres of private land. There is a total of 72 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) licensed for cattle grazing on the allotment.

The Salmon Tract-U2 Allotment has been grazed seasonally in the spring since privileges were established in 1962. Since then there have been four permittees, including the current operator. Grazing privileges were transferred to C.E. Brackett Cattle Co. in 2009. This allotment was last evaluated in 1988. In March 1990 an Addendum to the 1983 Cooperative Resource Management Agreement (CRMA) was signed between the BLM and the permittee at the time. 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 objectives set forth in the land use plan. It was also agreed upon, that this agreement will remain in effect until such time as the monitoring and evaluation studies indicate that a change is needed.

On August 5, 2012 lightning ignited the East Hollister Fire that burned approximately 340 acres of the Salmon Tract-U2 Allotment. As a consequence of this incident, an Emergency Stabilization (ES) Plan was approved to seed the public land within this allotment and rest it for at least two growing seasons or until monitoring shows that ES treatment objectives have been met or it is determined to be a failure. In 2014 a recommendation was approved to resume livestock grazing on the allotment due to objectives being met.

The allotment's elevations range from approximately 4370 to 4480 feet. Approximately 82% of the public acres burned in the 2012 East Hollister Fire and was drill seeded with a non-native/native like seed mix consisting of Snake River wheatgrass and crested wheatgrass. Other vegetation observed, included; Wyoming big sagebrush, rabbitbrush, Sandberg's bluegrass, western wheatgrass, bottlebrush squirreltail, cheatgrass, milkvetch, yarrow, death camas, Indian paintbrush, phlox, death camas, larkspur, prickly pear and tumble mustard. There are no riparian/wetland vegetation types found on public lands within this allotment.

There are no known listed Threatened & Endangered (T&E) plant or animal species within the allotment. The Salmon Tract-U2 Allotment is outside Preliminary Priority Habitat (PPH) for sage grouse.

**Standards Applicable:** There are three Rangeland Health Standards associated with the Salmon Tract-U2 Allotment. The *Watersheds* standard, *Seedings* standard and *T & E Plants and Animal* standard apply. The other five Rangeland Health Standards, i.e. *Riparian Areas and Wetlands*, *Stream Channel/Floodplains*, *Seedings*, *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 Salmon Tract-U2 Allotment consists of approximately 315 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, as denoted on the applicable “Range Condition Worksheet”, documented one specific site within the allotment that had a “stable” erosion Condition Indicator.

### 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 2010 cover data, bare ground was at 6% and 16% in 2014, below what is expected for this site (30-40%). Litter amount was as expected for the site two years post fire and rehab, with most of the litter still standing. Due to the success of rehab efforts, perennial grass cover is also adequate for this site. Therefore, there has been no watershed site stability issues observed.

*Evidence of Accelerated Erosion* - Recent inspections indicate that there was no evidence of accelerated erosion taking place, and the allotment was providing satisfactory watershed protection. Rills, water-flow patterns, pedestals and/or terracettes, gullies and wind-scoured, blowouts and/or deposition areas were not observed. The Salmon Tract-U2 Allotment has a somewhat flat aspect.

Evaluation Finding – Allotment/Watershed:

  X   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 in recent years that have been made on the allotment, the desired watershed conditions were being met. The 2012 wildfire removed approximately 82% of the vegetative cover throughout the BLM portion of the Salmon Tract-U2 Allotment and exposed the soil to potential erosion. As a result, the ES Plan approved the drilling of an aggressive seed mix on 257 acres of BLM land. Due to this fire and change in the vegetative community, the amount and distribution of bare ground has increased from 6% to 16%. The plan was to rest the burned area from livestock grazing until monitoring showed that the ES treatment objectives had been met or it is determined to be a failure by providing the opportunity for existing vegetative resources to stabilize the burn area and seeding efforts to establish. 2014 post treatment monitoring suggest objectives have been met and the resumption of livestock grazing may continue.

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

Evaluation Finding – Allotment/ Riparian Areas and Wetlands:

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

Rationale for Evaluation Finding:

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

Evaluation Finding – Allotment/ Stream Channel/Floodplain:

       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:

- 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 Salmon Tract-U2 Allotment consists of approximately 315 acres of public land. The following information discusses the existing data, assessment indicators and the on-site observations of the Seedings for the allotment.

**Existing Data**

- *Annual Production* – Total 2014 annual production is just above the range (400-900 lbs/acre) of production at 944 lbs/acre. Seeded perennial bunchgrasses make up the majority of the composition by weight at 553 lbs/acres.
- *Livestock Grazing Season of Use* – The season of use is May 1 to June 24. Seasonal grazing during the growing season may not be adequate to maintain the plant composition and vigor that currently exist on the allotment.

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

- *Seeded Plant Community* –According to the 2014 post fire treatment and allotment evaluation monitoring, the treatment appears to have established. Cover appears to be appropriate two years post fire and treatment with 16% bare ground. Seeded perennial grasses appear healthy and vigorous. However, annuals (tumble mustard and cheatgrass) are abundant within the interspaces of the perennial bunchgrass plants as expected after a fire.
- *Diversity* – Overall plant diversity is adequate for seeded range within the allotment. Species observed were, crested wheatgrass, Snake River wheatgrass, Sandberg’s bluegrass, western wheatgrass, bottlebrush squirreltail, cheatgrass, milkvetch, yarrow, death camas, Indian paintbrush, phlox, death camas, larkspur, prickly pear, salsify, tumble mustard 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. With the previous and current year’s climatic conditions and timing of precipitation, perennial vegetation shows adequate growth and potential for reproductive capability.

• *Noxious Weeds* – Idaho has fifty-seven (57) state listed noxious weeds. Presently, there are no known noxious weeds located within the Salmon Tract-U2 Allotment. However, there is record of rush skeletonweed being treated near the allotment boundary fence along Highway 93. Most weed control work within the Burley Field Office has concentrated on the knapweed species, leafy spurge and scotch thistle. No inventory of these species has been recorded in the allotment. BLM will continue to monitor and treat noxious weeds adjacent to and in the allotment boundary.

• *Adequate Litter and Standing Dead Material* –Litter and standing dead material is limited on this allotment due to the 2012 fire.

Evaluation Finding – Allotment/ Seedings:

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

Rationale for Evaluation Finding:

The Salmon Tract-U2 Allotment is composed primarily of seeded species now with 82% of the public acres drill seeded post fire. As a result, the allotment is being managed as seeded rangeland. The apparent success of the treatment has resulted in overall healthy rangeland conditions. According to the 2014 S&G evaluation monitoring, plant community diversity and structure appear adequate on the seeded rangeland in the allotment two years post treatment. Shrub cover was noted as being low, but is beginning to become established again. Plant health and cover appears to be appropriate with evidence of continued seeded species germination. Forb observations are as expected given range site potential and recent seeding efforts.

Although this allotment was found to be achieving Standard 5, the evaluation was based on data collected after two years of grazing rest and recent restoration treatment. Based on review of the current grazing management, the ID team is concerned whether this allotment would be achieving Standard 5 in the long term (10+ years) if this management were to continue without changes.

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

  X   Standard Doesn't Apply

Evaluation Finding – Allotment/ Exotic Plant Communities, Other Than Seedlings:

- 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:

- 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 Salmon Tract-U2 Allotment consists of approximately 315 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**

In 2010 prior to the fire, the shrub cover was comprised of fairly large shrubs with branches sprawling from top to bottom. An occupied Brewers sparrow nest was discovered inside a large green rabbitbrush shrub suggesting that this type of shrub structure was an important component of the vegetation on this site with the absence of big sagebrush. Further investigation of historic records indicated that the allotment maintained this state for at least the last 30 years.

A fire during the summer of 2012 burned most of the allotment and nearly all the original shrub cover was removed. Currently, the vegetation of seeded perennial grass species appears to be recovering nicely and rabbitbrush appears to be increasing as well. Data collected during the assessment determined that the primary shrub cover type was rabbitbrush (2% cover) with no sagebrush cover collected within the transect.

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

*Native/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:

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

Rationale for Evaluation Finding:

The Salmon Tract-U2 allotment is limited in its capacity to support Threatened and Endangered or BLM sensitive plants and animals due to its small size, proximity outside of sage grouse habitat, the reduced shrub cover (due to fire) and distance from larger contiguous blocks of wild rangelands. Given the lack of sage grouse habitat, the lack of sagebrush cover was not a concern. However, the allotment did provide most of the structure necessary for BLM sensitive species (prior to the fire) that can utilize fragmented environments such as loggerhead shrike and Brewers sparrow. Brewers sparrows were found to be successfully nesting in the allotment so it was therefore suitable for this species. Although the habitat has recently burned, it is recovering well and already has all the components of suitable habitat established, so it is only a matter of a short time before shrub nesting songbirds will occupy this site.