

Big Field FFR 0594

INITIAL ALLOTMENT AND PERMIT/LEASE REVIEW and RANGELAND HEALTH ASSESSMENT

2013 Supplement to the Big Field FFR Allotment Initial Allotment Review and Rangeland Health Assessment

The Initial Allotment Review and Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines Assessment for the Big Field FFR allotment was drafted in 2006 as a portion of the grazing permit renewal process. Until 2013, no rangeland health determination was completed and the permit authorizing grazing use in this allotment has not been fully processed for renewal. The current document consists of the 2006 rangeland health assessment, in full, supplemented by new information available since the 2006 document was completed. Portions of this 2013 document that supplement the 2006 document are presented in this two-field table format with the header above, while those portions carried forward unchanged from the 2006 document are outside the two-field tables. The 2013 Supplement to the document includes data compiled between 2006 and 2013, as well as the completion of the 2013 evaluation report and determination consistent with the Livestock Grazing Permit Renewal Desk Guide for Idaho Bureau of Land Management, May 2009. The 2013 determination is found at the end of this document.

Field Office: **Owyhee**

Date: December 2006

1. Allotment Name/Number: **Big Field FFR / 0594**
2. Name(s) of Permittee(s)/Preference Code: **Morgan Properties LP DBA Morgan Ranches / 1101510**
3. Permit Expiration Date(s): 08/21/2011
4. Acres of: Public: **919** Private: **1,717** State: Other:
5. Percent public land in the allotment: **35**
6. Is public land large contiguous block(s) of public land, isolated parcel(s) or both?
The public land is part of a larger contiguous block of public land surrounding the core of private land within the allotment.
7. Is the public land fenced separately from the private land? **No**
8. Is any public land within the allotment identified for exchange/disposal in the land use plan?
Yes Percent of Public land? **50%** If yes, two year notification sent? **No**
9. Does BLM have administrative access separate from the grazing permit/lease? **No**
10. Does public have legal access to the allotment? **Yes**
11. Is the public land physically isolated from the adjoining public land? **Yes, They are isolated by two large canyons and allotment boundary fences.**
12. What is the livestock grazing management category? (M, I, or C) **M**
13. List all Land Use Plan (LUP) objectives and decisions (consider resource list for No. 14 below for objectives and decisions in the LUP), other grazing decisions, and other NEPA documents pertaining to the allotment:

Owyhee RMP (December 30, 1999) and Proposed Owyhee RMP and EIS (July 1999) - See Land Use Plan Review below

Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management (August 12, 1997) - see guidelines 1-20 below

14. Check the Standards, Guidelines, and Resources that are applicable to this allotment. Following ID Team disclosure of information and data (monitoring data, studies, inventories, etc, information from other agencies, local governments, and the public) and the ensuing discussions, briefly describe in the comment section any issues (with supporting information). This information will be used to determine if existing data is adequate, or if more information is needed to determine compliance with the Idaho Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health.

Standard	Applicable	Comments
Watershed (Standard 1)	X	<p>RH1A represents a Shallow-claypan site, the watershed health rated “None to Slight” in departure. Historic soil loss or degradation was observed in flow paths but it was noted as being stabilized. Idaho fescue dominated the shrub interspaces, shrubs were as expected and the forbs were abundant. A gravel residuum was present throughout the site. The site was considered to be very near reference area condition.</p> <p>RH1B represents a Loamy 13-16” ecological site. This site showed considerably more departure than the shallow claypan site. Part of the departure is attributed to the encroachment of the western juniper which was described as a mature stand with heavy recruitment observed. “Moderate” departure was noted for the indicators of bare ground; soil surface loss or degradation; and plant community composition. However, water flow patterns nearly matches reference area expectations. The soil surface resistance to erosion showed an unstable surface with loose soil and exposed roots. It rated in the “Moderate to Extreme” departure category. The “A” horizon was churned and showed considerable degradation. The biological crust was reduced but there was little sign of soil loss. The field observers noted trailing impacts associated with this site.</p>
Riparian Areas, Wetland (Standard 2)	X	<p>North Boulder – North Boulder Creek flows along the northeast boundary of the allotment for 1.2 miles. The riparian resources were inventoried in September 2001. The stream segment was determined to be Functional-At Risk (FAR)/high. The riparian vegetation was generally in high vigor and in good condition. It was controlling erosion, stabilizing streambanks, shading water areas. Riparian/wetland vegetation with deep strong binding roots was generally sufficient to stabilize streambanks and shorelines. Invader and shallow rooted species were a minor component of the floodplain. Age class and structural diversity of riparian/wetland vegetation was appropriate. However, leafy spurge occupied over 35 percent of the riparian zone. A trace of Canada thistle was recorded.</p> <p>Combination Creek - Combination Creek runs on public lands in two segments for a total of 1.21 miles in the Big Field FFR Allotment. The north segment COM-001 was inventoried in September 2001. This 0.91 mile segment was determined to be Functional-At Risk low/mid. The apparent trend was not identified. The southern 0.3 mile segment was also rated as Functional-At Risk low/mid without an apparent trend identified. Vegetation resources</p>

Standard	Applicable	Comments
		<p>on portions of both segments were in good condition. However, other portions were not up to expectations. On some sections vegetation was controlling erosion, stabilizing streambanks, and shading water areas. Riparian/wetland vegetation with deep strong binding roots was sufficient to stabilize streambanks and shorelines in some areas. Invader and shallow rooted species are a minor component of the floodplain vegetation in some portions. Age class and structural diversity of riparian/wetland vegetation was not appropriately diverse in some cases.</p> <p>Use levels observed in 2001 on Combination Creek were so high that only a 1 inch stubble height was measured and recorded. North Boulder Creek had a 6 to 8 inch stubble height.</p>
Stream Channel, Flood Plains (Standard 3)	X	<p>North Boulder – North Boulder Creek flows along the northeast boundary of the allotment for 1.2 miles. The riparian resources were inventoried in September 2001. The stream segment was determined to be Functional-At Risk (FAR) high. This segment of North Boulder Creek is not entrenched and generally supports appropriate riparian-wetland species. Stream width/depth ratio, gradient, and sinuosity are appropriate. Generally, the stream had access to the floodplain. There was little evidence of excessive soil compaction due to livestock. Streambanks were within an appropriate range of stability. Leafy spurge was found on over 35 percent of the floodplain and there were scattered Canada thistle plants.</p> <p>Combination Creek - Combination Creek runs on public lands in two segments for a total of 1.21 miles in the Big Field FFR Allotment. The north segment COM-001 was inventoried in September of 2001. This 0.91 mile segment was determined to be Functional-At Risk low/mid. The apparent trend was not identified. The southern 0.3 mile segment was also rated as Functional-At Risk low/mid without an apparent trend identified. Riparian vegetation resources on portions of both segments were in good condition. However, other portions were not up to expectations for age distribution and diversity of composition. The stream channel was vertically stable and not entrenching. Stream width/depth ratio, gradient, and sinuosity were not appropriate for significant segments. The expected level of the stream’s access to the floodplain was not evident. There was limited pugging from livestock. Streambanks were not within an appropriate range of stability. Noxious weeds were not increasing.</p>
Native Plant Communities (Standard 4)	X	<p>RH1A represents a shallow claypan site, all structural and functional groups were present and near expected conditions. Abundant forbs were present. All grasses were highly vigorous and productive. The reproductive capability was near reference area conditions.</p> <p>RH1B located in the loamy ecological site. The rangeland health condition at this evaluation site showed considerably more departure than the shallow claypan site. A part of the departure is attributed to the encroachment of the western juniper which was described as a mature stand with heavy recruitment. Bulbous bluegrass was also present. Field observations note trailing impacts associated at this site. All functional and structural groups were present and only showed a Slight to Moderate departure, Idaho fescue and bluebunch wheatgrass were present but mostly in protected areas. Shrub and forb diversity and abundance was lower</p>

Standard	Applicable	Comments
		<p>than expected. Low plant vigor, and poor seedhead representation were linked to the reproductive capability rating in the 'Moderate' category.</p> <p>The grazing permittee submitted Actual Use Reports from 1990-1991, 2003, and 2005. In 1990, cattle numbers ranged from 40-180 from 9/15-11/16 consuming 425 AUMs. In 1991, 30 cattle from 9/10-10/25 consumed 45 AUMs. In 2003, 70 cattle from 8/15-10/15 consumed 104 AUMs. In 2005, 49 cattle from 6/1-8/31 consumed 150 AUMs. No horse use was reported from 1990-2005.</p> <p>There is no utilization data or trend information for this allotment.</p>
Seedlings (Standard 5)		NA
Exotic Plant Communities (Standard 6)		NA
Water Quality (Standard 7)	X	<p>North Boulder Creek flows through 1.2 miles of the allotment and Combination Creek has one reach of 0.9 miles and one reach of 0.3 miles that flow through the allotment. The two creeks within the allotment have not been assessed and have not been assigned water quality standards by Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ). BLM records indicate North Boulder Creek is not meeting Cold Water Aquatic Life (CWAL) criteria for temperature in 2001 and 2004. <i>E. coli</i> is within standards when collected in 2004. Combination Creek is mostly dry in 2004 and levels of <i>E. coli</i> were elevated.</p>
Threatened & Endangered Plant & Animals (Standard 8)	X	<p>RH1A, for native plant communities, generally was concluded as being close to what was expected for the site and is likely providing adequate habitat for most dependant special status and other wildlife species. RH1B was concluded as having a 'moderate' departure from the reference area, generally. The lack of large bunchgrasses, reduced shrub cover and dense juniper was limiting cover structure and forage for sage grouse, numerous song birds, pygmy rabbits and others including a diversity of insects, rodents, birds and others that are critical prey for most raptors including prairie falcons, northern harriers and ferruginous hawks.</p> <p>The allotment has unclassified habitat that is considered to be unsuitable for sage grouse. A breeding habitat assessment was conducted at T.7S, R.5W Section 3 (NESE) in 2004. The overall site evaluation was rated as unsuitable habitat. The juniper encroachment is the most limiting factor for sage grouse. However vigor, cover, diversity of grasses and forbs were also limited.</p> <p>This allotment is within elk and mule deer spring/summer/fall habitats. Current rangeland health conditions at RH1B are providing minimally adequate big game habitat at this time.</p> <p>Redband trout are known to occupy North Boulder Creek and portions of or seasonally Combination Creek. Riparian departure from Proper Functioning Condition and high water temperatures were noted by the BLM in 2001 and 2004 are limiting factors for both creeks. North Boulder was FAR/high and generally providing adequate habitat. Combination Creek habitat was limited by low or no water flows and is considered to be providing poor wildlife habitat. The Owyhee RMP lists portions of both creeks as having</p>

Standard	Applicable	Comments
		<p>unsatisfactory fish habitat.</p> <p>Columbia spotted frog inventory failed to find occupied habitat.</p> <p>Botany - No federally listed plant species are known to occur in this allotment, although the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) considers all of Idaho to be within the potential range of Ute ladies'-tresses (<i>Spiranthes diluvialis</i>), a federally threatened orchid species (USFWS 2002). No BLM special status plants are known to occur within this allotment.</p>

Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management		Data Adequacy, Comments, Concerns
1	Use grazing management practices and/or facilities to maintain or promote significant progress toward adequate amounts of ground cover to support infiltration, maintain soil moisture storage and stabilize soils.	Adequate data exists; and grazing practices appear to be adequate to maintain current soil, plant, and infiltration conditions. However, improvement is not likely under current grazing management.
2	Locate livestock management facilities away from riparian areas wherever they conflict with achieving or maintaining riparian-wetland functions	NA
3	Use grazing management practices and/or facilities to maintain or promote soil conditions that support water infiltration, plant vigor, and permeability rates and minimize soil compaction appropriate to site potential.	See Number 1, above
4	Implement grazing management practices that provide periodic rest or deferment during critical growth stages to allow sufficient regrowth to achieve and maintain healthy, properly functioning conditions, including good plant vigor and adequate vegetative cover appropriate to site potential.	See Number 1, above. Periodic rest or deferment would require fencing and periodic rest of private lands (which comprise 65% of the allotment).
5	Maintain or promote grazing management practices that provide sufficient residual vegetation to improve, restore, or maintain healthy riparian-wetland functions and structure for energy dissipation, sediment capture, ground water recharge, streambank stability, and wildlife habitat appropriate to site potential.	Adequate data exists; and as was stated under Standard 2, it appears that maintenance of riparian areas along North Boulder Creek is occurring; however, data exists to indicate that riparian conditions along Combination Creek are not supporting a healthy riparian system.
6	The development of springs, seeps or other projects affecting water and associated resources shall be designed to protect the ecological functions, wildlife habitat, and significant cultural and historical/ archaeological/ paleontological values associated with the water source.	NA

Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management		Data Adequacy, Comments, Concerns
7	Apply grazing management practices to maintain, promote, or progress toward appropriate stream channel and streambank morphology and functions. Adverse impacts due to livestock grazing will be addressed.	Adequate data exists; and as was stated under Standard 3, stream width/depth ratio, gradient, and sinuosity were not appropriate along portions of Combination Creek. Furthermore, streambanks were rated as not being within an appropriate range for stability.
8	Apply grazing management practices that maintain or promote the interaction of the hydrologic cycle, nutrient cycle, and energy flow that will support the appropriate types and amounts of soil organisms, plants and animals appropriate to soil type, climate and landform.	See Number 1, above
9	Apply grazing management practices to maintain adequate plant vigor for seed production, seed dispersal, and seedling survival of desired species relative to soil type, climate and landform.	See Numbers 1, above
10	Implement grazing management practices and/or facilities that provide for complying with the Idaho Water Quality Standards.	See Standard 7, above.
11	Use grazing management practices developed in recovery plans, conservation agreements, and Endangered Species Act, Section 7 consultations to maintain or improve habitat for federally listed threatened, endangered, and sensitive plants and animals.	See discussions under Standard 8 and Number 1 (above).
12	Apply grazing management practices and/or facilities that maintain or promote the physical and biological conditions necessary to sustain native plant populations and wildlife habitats in native plant communities.	See discussions under Standard 8 and Number 1 (above). Current grazing management practices are providing for maintenance and not improvement of general wildlife habitats in the uplands on public lands.
13	On areas seeded predominantly with non-native plants, use grazing management practices to maintain or promote the physical and biological conditions to achieve healthy rangelands.	NA
14	Where native communities exist, the conversion to exotic communities after disturbance will be minimized.	See Number 1, above
15	Use non-native plant species for rehabilitation only in those situations where: a) native species are not readily available in sufficient quantities, b) native plant species cannot maintain or achieve the standards or c) non-native plant species provide for management and protection of native rangelands Include a diversity of appropriate grasses, forbs, and shrubs in rehabilitation efforts.	NA
16	On burned areas, allow natural regeneration when it is determined that populations of native perennial shrubs, grasses, and forbs are sufficient to re-vegetated the site. Rest burned or rehabilitated areas to allow recovery or establishment of perennial plant species.	NA
17	Carefully consider the effects of new management facilities (e.g., water developments, fences) on healthy and properly functioning rangelands prior to implementation.	NA
18	Use grazing management practices, where feasible for wildfire control, and to reduce the spread of targeted undesirable plants (e.g., cheatgrass, medusahead wildrye, and noxious weeds) while enhancing vigor and abundance of desirable native or seeded species.	NA

Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management		Data Adequacy, Comments, Concerns
19	Employ grazing management practices that promote natural forest regeneration and protect reforestation projects until the Idaho Forest Practices Act requirements for timber stand replacement are met.	NA
20	Design management fences to minimize adverse impacts, such as habitat fragmentation, to maintain habitat integrity and connectivity for native plants and animals.	NA

Land Use Plan Review		
Livestock Grazing	X	<p>This allotment is identified as a "Maintain" allotment in the 1999 Owyhee RMP. It is a Fenced Federal Range (FFR) allotment. Generally, these allotments include less than 50% public lands intermingled with unfenced private and State lands. Livestock grazing is generally authorized as season long (3/1 - 2/28) and at the grazing permittee's discretion, as long as grazing management guidelines are adhered to.</p> <p>Active Permitted Use - 147 AUMs</p> <p>LVST 1: Provide for sustained level of livestock use compatible with meeting other resource objectives. VEGE 1: Improve unsatisfactory and maintain satisfactory vegetation health/condition on all areas. SOIL 1: Improve unsatisfactory and maintain satisfactory watershed health/condition on all areas. SOIL 2: Achieve stabilization of current, and prevent the potential for future, localized accelerated soil erosion problems (particularly on streambanks, roads, and trails).</p>
Botanical	X	SPSS1: Manage special status species and habitats to increase or maintain populations at levels where their existence is not longer threatened and there is no need for listing under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended.
Cultural	X	There are no recorded sites within the allotment boundaries.
Fire, Fuel		NA
Fisheries	X	FISH 1-Improve or maintain perennial stream/riparian areas to attain satisfactory conditions to support native fish.
Forestry		NA
Land		Under Objective LAND 2 of the Owyhee RMP a portion of these lands are in Zone 3 and may be made available for potential disposal. The remainder of the public lands within this allotment is identified for retention under Zone 1.
Minerals		NA
Recreation	X	Lands are managed as Extensive Recreation Management Areas (ERMA) - where recreation is unstructured and dispersed with minimal regulatory constraints and where minimal recreation related investments are required.
Special Status Species	X	SPSS1: Manage special status species and habitats to increase or maintain populations at levels where their existence is not longer threatened and there is no need for listing under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended.
Wild Horses		NA
Wildlife	X	WLDF1: Maintain or enhance the condition, abundance, structural stage and distribution of plant communities and special habitat features required to support a high diversity and desired populations of wildlife.
Water Quality	X	WATR 1-meet or exceed State of Idaho water quality standards
Riparian	X	RIPN 1-maintain or improve riparian-wetland areas to attain proper functioning and satisfactory conditions. The 1999 Owyhee RMP Table RIPN-1 lists 0.21 miles of North Boulder Creek as having unsatisfactory riparian conditions.
Soils/Watershed	X	SOIL 1-Improve unsatisfactory and maintain satisfactory watershed health/condition on all areas.

15. Describe BLM's ability or inability to manage the allotment by considering the following, as applicable: Whether there is legal access; whether % federal land comprises majority of the allotment; whether the public land acreage is small (less than 640 acres) and surrounded by private land(isolated); whether the federal land is fenced separate from the private land; etc.

The Big Field FFR Allotment includes 919 acres of public land (1,717 acres of unfenced private lands). The allotment is 35 percent public land. Fifty percent of the public land has been identified as available for exchange or disposal. The allotment is formed around a core of private land along creeks. Approximately a mile of the allotment boundary is North Boulder Creek and its canyon rim. Public lands are separated into three tracts ranging from approximately 100 – 500 acres in size.

BLM is unable to adequately manage this allotment due to its limited access and public lands being comprised of isolated parcels separated by large blocks of private lands. The actions on private lands determine how this allotment is used and managed.

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Although the total acreage of public land and the percent public land may be minimal in this allotment, public and/or administrative access may be limited, and the absence of high-value resources may lead to the categorization of this allotment with a low priority for management attention, the BLM's obligation is to manage public lands.

Based on the information above the following is recommended to the field manager: (check the appropriate category)

1. Review of existing information indicates that there is no livestock grazing or other issue. Available information is adequate to complete the evaluation and determination. (see numbers 5,6,7,8, 11, and 15 above). **This is the RHA. Complete the evaluation/Determination Form.**
2. Review of available information indicates that grazing or other issues are known to exist. However, the allotment has no or limited potential for management (see numbers 5,6,7,8,11, and 15 above). Available information is adequate to complete the evaluation and determination. **This is the RHA for this allotment. Complete the Evaluation/Determination form and consider the public land for disposal.**
3. Review of existing information indicates the physical characteristics (e.g., slope, rock, location on the landscape, and lack of livestock forage) of the tract deter livestock grazing use on the public land. **Consider not issuing a new livestock grazing permit or lease. Further documentation is not recommended.**
4. Review of existing information indicates that an issue(s) may or may not exist. The allotment is considered manageable (see #s 5,6,7,8,11, and 15 above). **Available information is adequate to complete the RHA. Complete RHA and the evaluation/determination.**
5. Review of existing information indicates that an issue(s) exists. The allotment is considered manageable (see #s 5,6,7,8,11, and 15 above). More information is needed to

determine current conditions. **Gather additional information and data. Complete the RHA and evaluation/determination.**

List the names and title of the member of the ID team involved with this review:

Name	Title
Jake Vialpando	Supervisory Rangeland Management Spec.
Bruce Zoellick	Fisheries Biologist
John Doremus	Wildlife Biologist
Kathi Kershaw	Natural Resource Specialist
Mike Mathis (retired)	Wildlife Biologist
Dianna Sampson	GIS Specialist
Brian McCabe	Archaeologist
Kelley Moore	Lands/Realty
Zig Napkora	Hydrologist
Pam Druliner	Fisheries
Pat Kane	Weeds/Range
Ryan Homan	Recreation Specialist
Paul Seronko	Environmental Protection Specialist/Soils

Prepared by: Ecosystem Management Inc., Contractor November 2006

Modified by: Jake Vialpando – Team Lead December 18, 2006

Field Manager’s Finding and Rationale:

Field visits completed in 2003 indicate that healthy, productive, and diverse plant communities are being maintained as they are appropriate to soil type, climate, and landform to provide for nutrient cycling, hydrologic cycling, and energy flow on public lands in this allotment. However, available data associated with riparian/wetland areas and stream bank/floodplains has identified current resource conditions are in adequate to support healthy systems and habitats along Combination Creek. Based on the monitoring information available, current livestock grazing management in the Big Field FFR Allotment is adequate for maintenance of upland and riparian resources, but not for improvement.

This allotment includes only 35% Federal land (919 BLM, and 1,717 Private) and 50% of these lands are identified for disposal in the 1999 ORMP. Livestock grazing is authorized as season long (3/1-2/28) and at the grazing permittee’s discretion, as long as, grazing management guidelines are adhered to. BLM lands found within this allotment are separated by 1,717 acres of private land, with approximately 400 acres of public lands being inaccessible without acquiring permission from the private land owners. BLM does not have legal access, along with limited ability to appropriately manage livestock grazing in this allotment.

Therefore, it is my conclusion to: (1) accept the above mentioned recommendation from the ID Team that there are livestock grazing or other issues known to exist. However, the allotment has no or limited potential for management without fencing alternatives; (2) conclude that the available information is adequate to complete the evaluation and determination; (3) accept this Initial Allotment Review as the Rangeland Health Assessment; and (4), move forward and complete the Evaluation and Determination for this allotment.

Field Manager

Date

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Name	Title
Jake Vialpando	Project Manager
Bonnie Claridge	Fisheries Biologist
James Priest	Wildlife Biologist
Jayson Murgoitio	GIS Specialist
Brian McCabe	Archaeologist
Carmela Romerio	Range Management Specialist
Ryan Homan	Recreation Specialist
Gina Rone	Soils
Susan Filkins	Botanist
Jessica Gottlieb	Writer-Editor

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Livestock Grazing Management

Livestock use in the Big Field FFR allotment is authorized for 147 animal unit months (AUMs) active use annually through a term grazing permit, currently issued to Morgan Ranches. The permit authorizes cattle grazing on the Big Field FFR allotment in accordance with mandatory terms and conditions as presented in Table LVST-1.

Table LVST-1: Terms and conditions of permitted livestock use

Operator Name & No.	Livestock Kind & No.	Season of Use	Public Land	AUMs		
				Active	Suspended	Permitted
Morgan Ranches (1101510)	142 Cattle	12/1-12/31	100 %	147	21	168

The permit includes a term and condition allowing the number of cattle and the season of use to be determined at the permittee’s discretion concurrent with grazing management scheduled for the private land fenced in conjunction with public land in the Big Field FFR allotment.

Actual Use

Actual use data ranged from 104 to 181 AUMs, with average actual use of 140 AUMs (Table LVST-2).

Table LVST-2: Actual use Big Field FFR allotment pasture 1 from 2003 to 2012

	Date	AUMS
2012	6/15-10/15	142
2011	7/2-10/1	106

2009	6/15-10/15	142
2008	7/1-7/31	145
2007	6/15-8/15	150
2005	6/10-10/25	181
2004	6/1-8/31	150
2003	8/15-10/15	104

Utilization

Utilization data was collected in 2009; there was slight to light use (0 to 20 percent) on the BLM portion of the area assessed. Use varied greatly on the private land.

Upland Watersheds

Review of the available data and the summarized findings for Standard 1 (see above) show that heavy trailing, churned soils, bare ground, plant mortality, and degradation of nearly all interspatial surface soils are present and negatively affect soil stability and watershed health. A comment suggests the presence of horses while encroachment of juniper is apparent. Hoof shearing from mechanical damage and reduction in biological soil crusts was also noted at another site that otherwise appears to be more stable. This review demonstrates that current grazing practices are not adequate to maintain current soil, plant, and infiltration conditions and improvement is not likely under existing grazing management.

Riparian Areas and Wetlands

The reach of North Boulder Creek discussed above was re-assessed in 2011 and was in proper functioning condition (PFC). Conditions had improved and vegetation was sufficient to protect stream banks. The shorter reach of Combination Creek that occurs on BLM lands in the southern half of the allotment was re-visited in 2011. The PFC protocol was not applied because there were influences affecting the reach that were outside of BLM’s control. However, the pictures indicated the reach was still functioning-at-risk (FAR) (Map RNGE-1).

Special Status Species

Plants

No population of special status plant species are known to occur in this allotment. There is insufficient information to determine site-specific impacts of livestock grazing on any special status plants that may occur in this allotment. Records show no reported special status plants in this allotment, so this standard is not applicable.

Information sources

Elemental Occurrences (EOs) for special status plant (SSP) populations is recorded in the Idaho Fish and Wildlife Information System (IFWIS) Species Diversity database (IDFG, 2011). EOs are derived by completion and review of an Idaho rare plant observation report. Other sources that were used to assess and evaluate the composition and condition of SSP habitats within the Big Field allotment include RHAs, photographs, field notes, Plants database (USDA NRCS, 2013), literature search, and information summarized above in this document. Records show no reported special status plants in this allotment.

Wildlife

Upland Habitat

The Big Field FFR allotment is managed as native plant community. Plant community information in Standard 4 shows that the herbaceous understory component is transitioning from a bluebunch wheatgrass reference community to a Sandberg bluegrass-cheatgrass community with juniper encroachment occurring. The downward trend in the plant community composition is favoring more grazing-tolerant, shallow-rooted grass species and conifer species. These smaller understory grasses do not have the robust growth form or stature such as bluebunch wheatgrass and do not provide the plant composition, structure, and function for sagebrush steppe-dependent species. The encroachment of juniper overtime will become a dominant species and will eventually change the composition and structure of the sagebrush steppe community and the wildlife community as well.

Riparian Habitat

Combination Creek is a perennial stream that flows within this allotment and has been assessed as functioning-at-risk. Riparian habitat issues included inadequate vegetation composition and age-class structure, excessive erosion and deposition, poor width-to-depth ratios, and no plant establishment on point bars due to scour.

Focal Species

Sage-grouse

On March 5, 2010, the USFWS (USDI USFWS, 2010) published a finding in the Federal Register that found that listing the greater sage-grouse was warranted but precluded by the need to take action on other species facing more immediate and severe extinction threats. The finding has changed the status of sage-grouse from a BLM Type 2 sensitive species to a candidate species under the ESA.

This allotment lies within the regional Snake River Plain Management Zone for sage-grouse. In 2012, preliminary priority habitat (PPH) and general priority habitat (GPH) were modeled to identify lands in Idaho important to sage-grouse sustainability. PPH includes breeding, late brood-rearing and winter concentration areas. General priority habitat are lands that may serve as important corridors between PPH and habitat islands within corridors, or occupied habitats characterized by low lek densities (Makela & Major, 2012). The BLM collaborated with respective state wildlife agencies to identify these areas. Modeling results indicate that there are 523 acres (19 percent) of PPH and 1,107 acres (40 percent) of GPH in this allotment (Table WDLF-1, Map WDLF-1). This allotment has limited value as seasonal breeding, upland summer, riparian, and winter habitat for sage-grouse and no active leks are known to occur. No sage-grouse habitat assessments have been collected in this allotment.

Table WDLF-1: Acres¹ and portions of preliminary priority and general priority habitat within the Big Field FFR allotment (Map WDLF-1)

Allotment/Pasture Name	Acres of PPH Sagebrush Habitat in Allotment ²	Acres of PPH Perennial Grassland in Allotment	Acres of PPH Juniper Encroachment in Allotment	Acres of PGH in Allotment	Portion of Allotment in PPH/PGH
Allotment Total	0	0	523 (19%)	1,107 (40%)	1,630 (59%)

¹PPH/PGH habitat acreage totals include public lands, state lands, and private property.

²PPH sagebrush can also include small amounts of perennial grasslands, conifer encroachment, and non-habitat.

Columbia Redband Trout

Combination Creek and Big Boulder Creek are perennial systems within this allotment and are identified as redband trout waters (Map WDLF-2).

Evaluation Findings and Determinations

Standard 1 (Watersheds)

Watersheds 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.

Standard

- Standard does not apply
- Meeting the Standard
- Not meeting the Standard; Current livestock grazing management practices are significant factors
- Not Meeting the Standard; Making significant progress toward
- Not Meeting the Standard; Current livestock grazing management practices are not significant factors

Guidelines

- Conforms with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management
- Does not conform with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management; Guideline No(s). 1, 3, 8

Rationale for Evaluation Finding and Determination

Current and past livestock grazing management practices are significant causal factors for not meeting watershed Standard 1 in the Big Field FFR allotment. Accelerated erosional processes and water flow patterns have caused an increase in bare ground and pedestaling of plants; trails and mechanical disturbance are common and have affected the biological soil crust component in the interspatial areas, have churned soils, and reduced soil stability.

Past and current grazing has caused a reduction in deep-rooted bunchgrasses and an increase in plant decadence and mortality. As a result, soil degradation associated with mechanical damage by livestock hoof action is common due to a reduction in protective vegetation. In addition, western juniper has been encroaching and is affecting hydrologic function and soil stability.

The decreased ecological function and physically impaired soils indicate that soil and hydrologic function are compromised. Current and historic livestock management is the primary contributing factor for not meeting Standard 1 and ORMP soil management objectives of improving unsatisfactory watershed health/conditions in the Big Field FFR allotment.

Standard 2 (Riparian Areas and Wetlands)

Riparian-wetland areas are in properly functioning condition appropriate to soil type, climate, geology, and landform to provide for proper nutrient cycling, hydrologic cycling, and energy flow.

Standard

- Standard does not apply
- Meeting the Standard
- Not meeting the Standard, Current livestock grazing management practices are significant factors
- Not Meeting the Standard; Making significant progress toward
- Not Meeting the Standard; Current livestock grazing management practices are not significant factors

Guidelines

- Conforms with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management
- Does not conform with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management; Guideline No(s).

5

Rationale for Evaluation Finding and Determination

Standard 2 is not being met in the Big Field FFR allotment. Approximately 1.2 miles of Combination Creek were most recently assessed FAR. The 0.9-mile reach that traverses BLM land along the western boundary of the allotment had areas of inadequate composition and inadequate age class of riparian species present to provide deep roots that aid in protecting the stream banks. The point bars were not re-vegetating and were scoured, and there were areas where the sinuosity and width-to-depth ratios were out of balance and areas with excessive erosion and deposition. The shorter 0.3-mile reach that was assessed FAR in 2001 was re-visited in 2011. Although the PFC protocol was not applied, according to the photos, the reach still appears to be FAR.

Current livestock grazing management practices are a significant causal factor for not meeting Standard 2. The recent grazing schedule has not provided periodic rest, and sufficient residual vegetation has not been maintained to provide for healthy riparian-wetland areas. Therefore, current livestock grazing management practices are not in conformance with the Idaho Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management applicable to Standard 2.

Standard 3 (Stream Channel/Floodplain)

Stream channels and floodplains are properly functioning relative to the geomorphology (e.g., gradient, size shape, roughness, confinement, and sinuosity) and climate to provide for proper nutrient cycling, hydrologic cycling, and energy flow.

Standard

- Standard does not apply
- Meeting the Standard
- Not meeting the Standard, Current livestock grazing management practices are significant factors
- Not Meeting the Standard; Making significant progress toward
- Not Meeting the Standard; Current livestock grazing management practices are not significant factors

Guidelines

- Conforms with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management
- Does not conform with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management; Guideline No(s).

Rationale for Evaluation Finding and Determination

See information under Standard 2 above.

Standard 4 (Native Plant Communities)

Healthy, productive, and diverse native animal habitat and populations of native plants are maintained or promoted as appropriate to soil type, climate, and landform to provide for proper nutrient cycling, hydrologic cycling, and energy flow.

Standard

- Standard does not apply
- Meeting the Standard
- Not meeting the Standard, Current livestock grazing management practices are significant factors
- Not Meeting the Standard; Making significant progress toward
- Not Meeting the Standard; Current livestock grazing management practices are not significant factors

Guidelines

- Conforms with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management
- Does not conform with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management; Guideline No(s).

Rationale for Evaluation Finding and Determination

Rangeland Health Standard 4 is not being met in the Big Field FFR allotment. Evidence of historic grazing impacts are present throughout the allotment, with the reduced composition of deep-rooted native perennial bunchgrasses (e.g., bluebunch wheatgrass and Idaho fescue) from reference site conditions, a greater dominance by increaser species (e.g., Sandberg bluegrass and squirreltail), juniper encroachment, and invasive annuals. Historic grazing is a causal factor in the failure to meet Standard 4.

Qualitative rangeland health assessment data indicate that Standard 4 is not met due to moderate to extreme departure of plant mortality, decadence, and soil surface resistance to erosion in the RHAs, with moderate departure ratings in annual invasives, including juniper encroachment. This conclusion is supported by current ecological site descriptions and correlation to vegetation inventories.

The Owyhee Resource Management Plan management objective to improve unsatisfactory and maintain satisfactory vegetation health/condition on all areas is also not met. Vegetation communities are shifting to shallow-rooted bunchgrasses, with the expansion of annual invasive grasses and juniper encroachment and moderate ratings of reproductive capabilities of perennial plants. Thus, the vegetation management objective is not met.

Rangeland Seeding

This standard does not apply in this allotment.

Exotic Plant Communities

This standard does not apply in this allotment

Standard 7 (Water Quality)

Surface and ground water on public lands comply with the Idaho Water Quality Standards.

Standard

- Standard does not apply
- Meeting the Standard
- Not meeting the Standard, Current livestock grazing management practices are significant factors
- Not Meeting the Standard; Making significant progress toward
- Not Meeting the Standard; Current livestock grazing management practices are not significant factors

Rationale for Evaluation Finding and Determination

Although reaches of both North Boulder Creek and Combination Creek occur on BLM land within the allotment, Standard 7 is not applicable to the Big Field FFR allotment because IDEQ has not assessed the streams. Beneficial uses have not been assigned, nor have pollutants been identified.

Standard 8 (Threatened and Endangered Plants and Animals)

Habitats are suitable to maintain viable populations of threatened and endangered, sensitive, and other special status species.

Standard

- Standard does not apply
- Meeting the Standard
- Not meeting the Standard, Current livestock grazing management practices are significant factors
- Not Meeting the Standard; Making significant progress toward
- Not Meeting the Standard; Current livestock grazing management practices are not significant factors

Guidelines

- Conforms with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management
- Does not conform with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management; Guideline No(s). 5, 7, 8, 11, and 12

Rationale for Evaluation Finding and Determination

Botany

Standard 8 for botany is met in the Big Field FFR allotment. There are no federally listed plant species and there is insufficient information to determine site-specific impacts of livestock grazing on any special status plants that occur in this allotment.

Upland Habitat

Evaluation of Standard 4 determined that the Big Field FFR allotment is not meeting rangeland health standards due to past grazing practices (see Standard 4). Currently, the plant community is transitioning from a dominance of large perennial grasses such as bluebunch wheatgrass to a community dominated by smaller, more grazing-tolerant species such as Sandberg bluegrass and squirreltail. These species do not have the robust growth form or stature such as bluebunch wheatgrass and do not provide the plant composition, structure, and function for sagebrush steppe-dependent species. This situation allows for the further encroachment of juniper. Because upland plant community composition has not improved under the current grazing practices, this allotment therefore is not providing adequate upland habitat cover and forage values for sagebrush steppe species and is not meeting Standard 8 due to historic grazing practices.

Riparian Habitat

Evaluation of Standards 2 and 3 identified streams within this allotment that are not properly functioning or meeting water quality parameters due to historic and current grazing practices and therefore do not meet Standard 8. Streams, springs, and wetlands that are FAR or development in disrepair are lacking adequate riparian vegetation composition and distribution to provide the structure and function to support a productive riparian environment. If Standard 2 is not being met, this allotment is failing to provide adequate riparian conditions to support viable aquatic and terrestrial species populations and therefore is not meeting Standard 8 due to historic and current grazing practices.

Focal Species

Sage-grouse

No sage-grouse habitat assessments have been conducted in this allotment. Limited PPH habitat occurs in this allotment, and advancing junipers are encroaching in this zone. GPH habitat is fragmented and largely occupied by juniper habitat. The current value of this allotment for sage-grouse is further reduced when combined with the transition of the upland plant community to smaller-stature grasses from bluebunch wheatgrass to Sandberg. This allotment is not meeting Standard 8 for sage-grouse due to historic grazing practices that have contributed to the decline in the plant community composition and the expansion of junipers into once-dominated sagebrush steppe habitats.

Redband trout

Columbia River redband trout are known to occur within the Combination Creek system. Evaluation of Standard 2 identified Combination Creek as functioning-at-risk due to historic and current grazing practices. Redband trout require intact channels with well-developed riparian communities that stabilize banks to minimize erosion and create undercuts, minimize impacts of flood events and filters sediments, provide shade to reduce water temperatures, and contribute woody debris to create channel structure and regulate seasonal flow. Because these in-stream and near-stream habitat characteristics are not fully represented, this allotment is not providing adequate riparian conditions to sustain viable populations of redband trout and therefore is not meeting Standard 8 due to historic and current grazing practices.

Determination

I have determined that Standards 1, 2, 3, 4 and 8 of the applicable Standards for Rangeland Health are not being met in the Big Field FFR allotment, whereas Standards 5, 6, and 7 are not applicable to resources present within the allotment. Current livestock grazing management practices are significant factors in not meeting Standards 1, 2, 3 and 8. Livestock management practices do not conform with the applicable Livestock Grazing Management Guidelines 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 11, and 12.



Field Manager
Owyhee Field Office

8/22/13
Date

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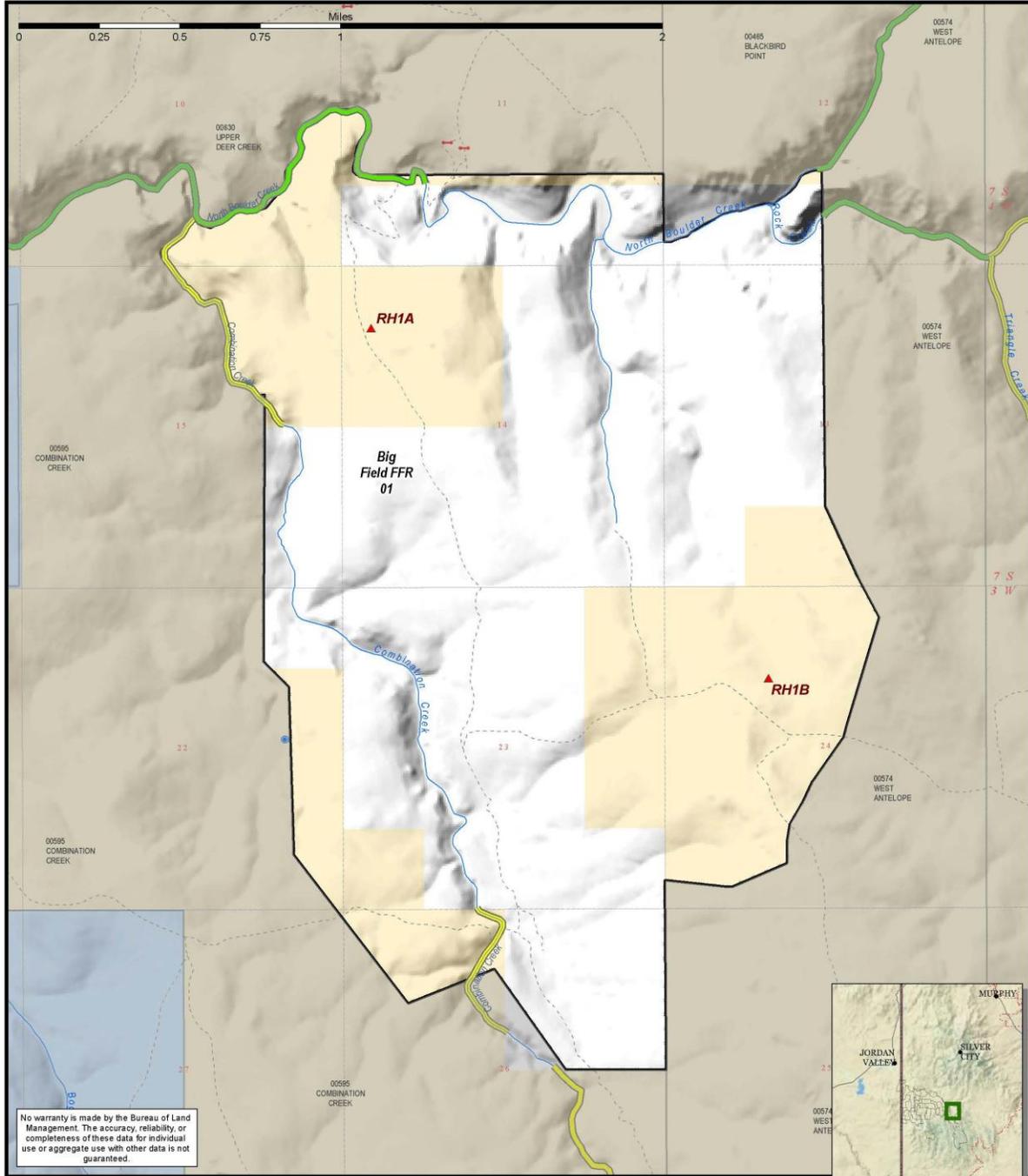
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2013 Supplement to the Big Field FFR Allotment Initial Allotment Review and Rangeland Health Assessment – Maps

APPENDIX A – Maps



RNGE-1: Big Field FFR (00594) Range and Riparian Overview



- Nested Plot Frequency Trend
- Rangeland Health Assessment Point
- Allotment of Interest Boundary
- Pasture Boundary
- Other Allotment Boundary
- Exclosure

- Spring/Stream Assessment Rating
- PFC (Proper Functioning Condition)
- FAR (Functioning At Risk)
- NF (Non-Functioning)
- MIM Riparian Monitoring
- Perennial Stream

- Improved Road
- Gate
- Stock Pond
- Spring
- Trough

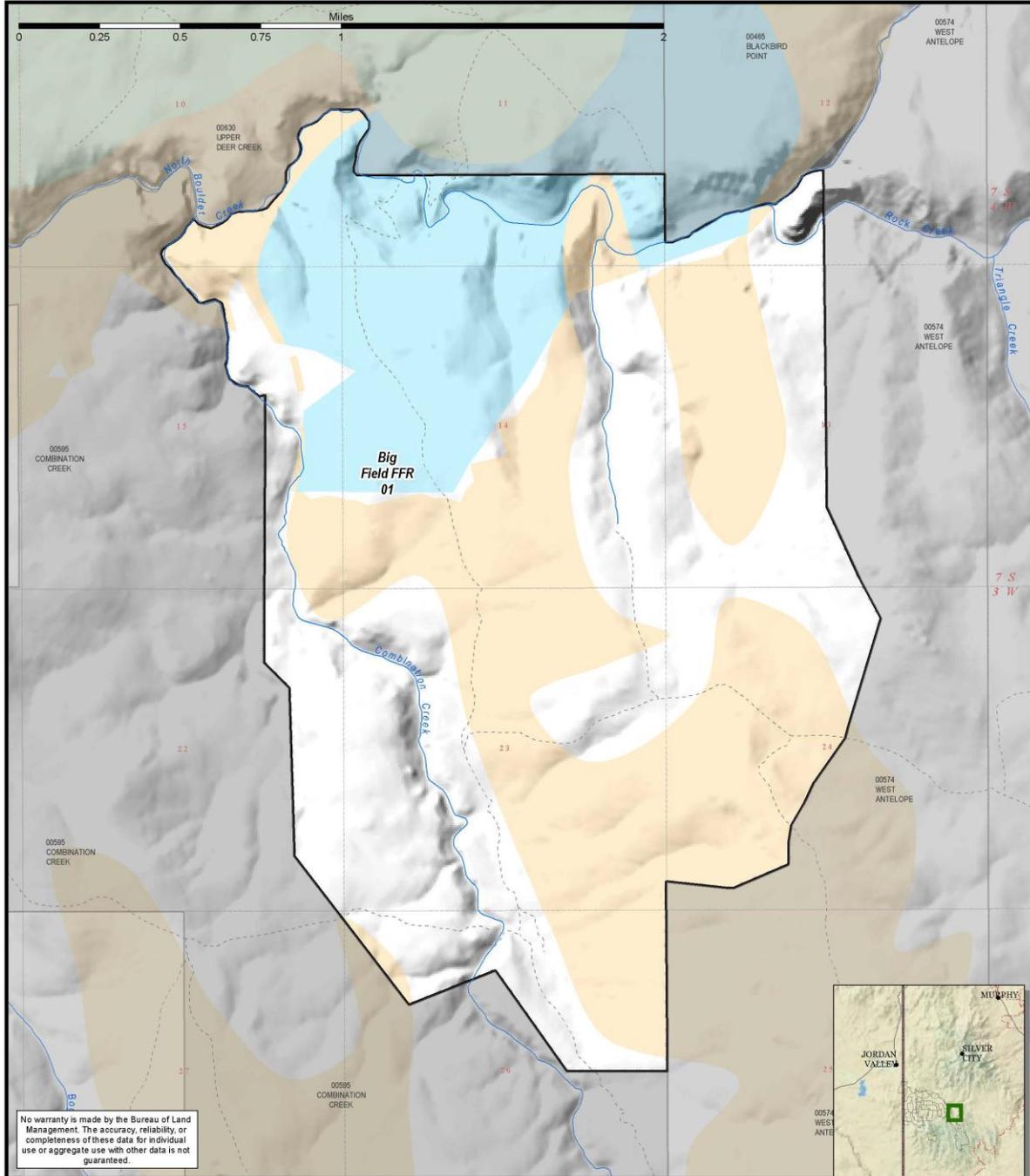
- Management
- BLM
- State
- Private
- Lake/Reservoir



1:25,000



WDLF-1: Big Field FFR (00594) Sage-grouse Habitat and Leks



No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management. The accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregate use with other data is not guaranteed.

- Allotment of Interest Boundary
- Pasture Boundary
- Other Allotment Boundary
- Improved Road
- Perennial Stream
- Lake/Reservoir

- Idaho Occupied Sage-grouse Leks**
Maximum Count (2008-2012)
- 2 - 9
 - 10 - 29
 - 30 - 49
 - More than 50

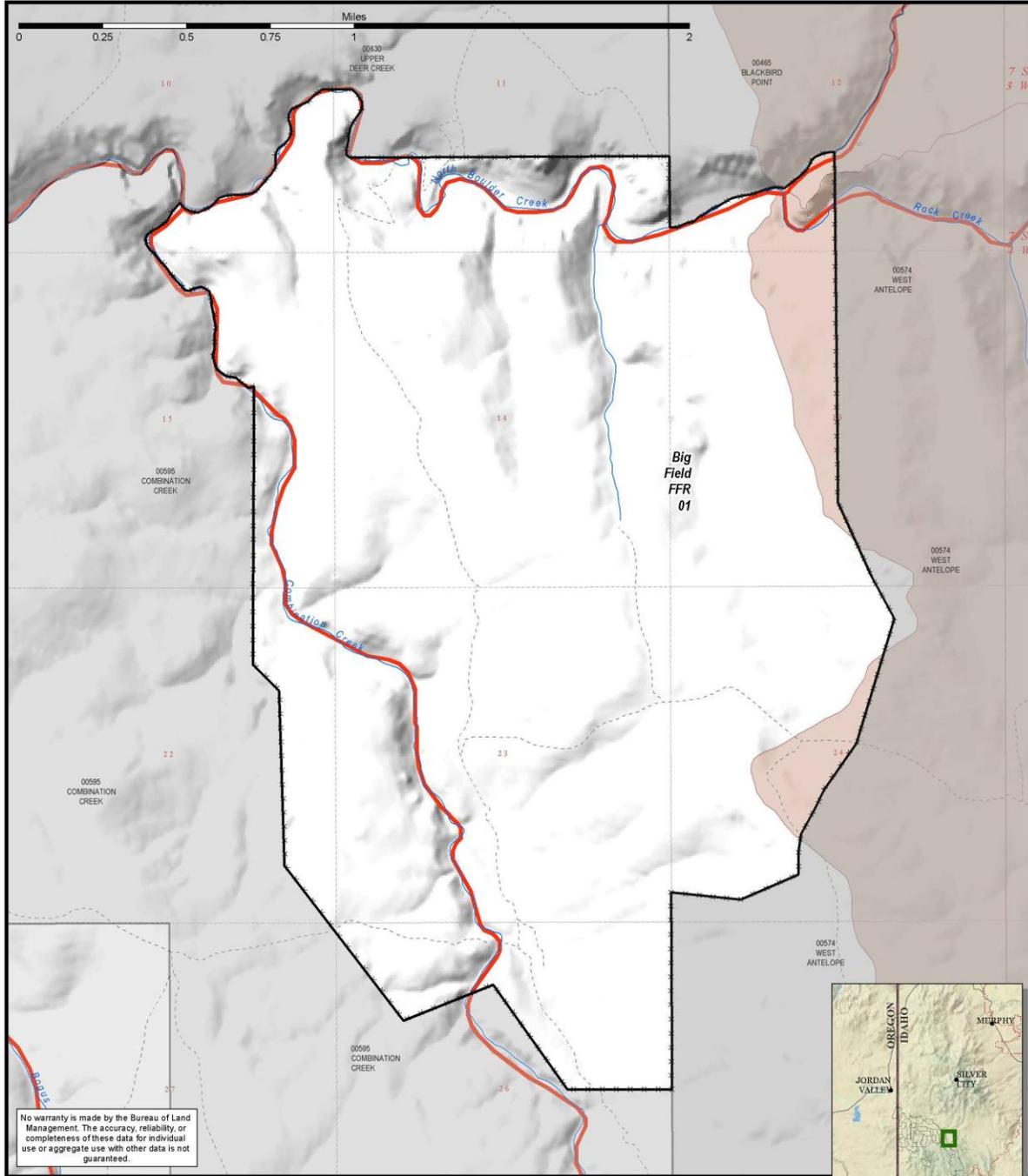
- Idaho Sage-grouse Habitat Classes**
- PPH - Sagebrush
 - PPH - Perennial grassland
 - PPH - Conifer encroachment
 - PGH - All subtypes
 - Habitat Assessment Site



1:25,000



WDLF-2: Big Field FFR (00594) Columbia Spotted Frog Distribution and Columbia River Redband Trout Presence



No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management. The accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregate use with other data is not guaranteed.

- Allotment of Interest Boundary
- Pasture Boundary
- Other Allotment Boundary
- Improved Road
- Lake/Reservoir
- Perennial Stream
- Columbia River Redband Trout Presence
- Columbia Spotted Frog Habitat
- Columbia Spotted Frog Presence



1:24,000