Rail Creek FFR 0627

INITIAL ALLOTMENT AND PERMIT/LEASE REVIEW
and
RANGELAND HEALTH ASSESSMENT

2013 Supplement to the Rail Creek FFR allotment Initial Allotment Review and Rangeland Health Assessment
The Initial Allotment Review and Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines Assessment for the Rail Creek 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 (RHA), 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: **November 2006**

1. Allotment Name/Number: **Rail Creek FFR - 0627**
2. Name(s) of Permittee(s)/Preference Code: **Morgan Properties LP DBA Morgan Ranches / 1101510**
3. Permit Expiration Date(s): **8/21/2011**
4. Allotment Acres: Public land-**122,** Private-**1859,** State-**1,036,** Other-**None.**
5. Public land in the allotment is **4 percent.**
6. Is public land large contiguous block(s) of public land, isolated parcel(s) or both?
   Public land parcels on the edge of private land that are fenced in with the private lands.
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, 100 percent of the Allotment. If yes, has the two year notification been sent? **No**
9. Does BLM have administrative access separate from the grazing permit/lease? **No**
   Does public have legal access to the allotment? **Yes**
10. Is the public land physically isolated from the adjoining public land?

    The public land is partially isolated by allotment boundary fences and South Mountain Creek.
11. What is the livestock grazing management category? (M, I, or C) **C**

List all Land Use Plan (LUP) objectives and decisions (consider resource list for No. 14 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

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

12. 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**	In 2003, two rangeland health evaluations (one in each pasture) were completed on this allotment. The evaluation completed in pasture 1 (RLH1 - 07S05W14) was in a fairly recent burn area. All indicators of the watershed health were placed in the "None to Slight" departure category except pedestals and terracettes, which showed "Slight to Moderate" departure due to historic pedestals. The attribute summary placed the soil site stability and watershed condition as about what can be expected for the site when compared with the reference area. The site represented a good example of post fire recovery of the perennial grass, but the observers had some concerns with the cheatgrass and rabbitbrush invasion. The evaluation site in pasture 2 (RLH2 - 07S04W17 showed more departure than the burn area. Water flow patterns, soil surface loss or degradation and pedestals/terracettes were placed in the "Moderate" departure category. There was little if any compaction layers. The other soil site stability and watershed indicators were placed in the "Slight to Moderate" departure category. The summary attribute rating for the site was Moderate. The field data and photographs indicate this site was very stony, which does not appear to be particularly vulnerable to serious degradation. Rills, gullies or wind blown areas was not found on either site.
Riparian Areas, Wetland (Standard 2)	**X**	Rail Creek and South Mountain Creek; neither creek was identified as having unsatisfactory riparian conditions in Table RIPN-1 of the 1999 Owyhee RMP. **Rail Creek –** Rail Creek crosses public land within Pasture 1 of the Rail Creek FFR Allotment for approximately 100 yards. The inventory for Rail Creek was not specific for the short piece in the Rail Creek Allotment; however, the inventory referenced the abundant willows and high condition within the Rail Creek FFR Allotment. **South Mountain Creek –** South Mountain Creek runs along the northeast boundary of Pasture 2 of the allotment for approximately 0.5 mile. The riparian resources of the stream were inventoried in October of 2000. The segment was rated as Functional-At Risk low and the apparent trend was not identified. The riparian vegetation was not in good condition and in places, it was missing altogether. Riparian vegetation was only partially controlling erosion, stabilizing

Standard	Applicable	Comments
		streambanks, shading water areas. Riparian/wetland vegetation with deep strong binding roots was not sufficient to stabilize streambanks and shorelines. Age class and structural diversity of riparian/wetland vegetation was only partially appropriate. No noxious weeds were identified on the riparian zone. The only monitoring of livestock use levels occurred in October of 2000 when livestock use left only a 3 inch stubble height. Use levels on shrubs were over 50 percent
Stream Channel, Flood Plains (Standard 3)	**X**	**Rail Creek –** Rail Creek crosses public land within Pasture 1 of the Rail Creek FFR Allotment for approximately 100 yards. The inventory for the segment was not specific for the short piece in the Rail Creek Allotment; however, the inventory referenced the abundant willows and high condition within the Rail Creek FFR Allotment. **South Mountain Creek –** South Mountain Creek runs along the northeast boundary of Pasture 2 of the allotment for approximately 0.5 miles. The riparian resources of the stream were inventoried in October of 2000. The segment was rated as Functional-At Risk low and the apparent trend was not identified. The riparian vegetation was not in good condition and in places it was missing altogether. Riparian vegetation was only partially controlling erosion, stabilizing streambanks, shading water areas. Riparian/wetland vegetation with deep strong binding roots was not sufficient to stabilize streambanks and shorelines. Age class and structural diversity of riparian/wetland vegetation was only partially appropriate. No noxious weeds were identified on the riparian zone.
Native Plant Communities (Standard 4)	**X**	In 2003 two rangeland health evaluations (one in each pasture) were completed in this allotment. The evaluation completed in Pasture 1 (RLH1 - 07S05W14) was in a fairly recent burn area. All indicators of the health of the native plant community were placed in the "None to Slight" departure category except for invasive plants, which was placed in the "Moderate" category due to cheatgrass being common and scattered rabbitbrush. The attribute summary placed the biotic integrity as about what can be expected on the site when compared with the reference area. The site represented a good example of post fire recovery of the perennial grass. The evaluation site in pasture 2 (RLH2 - 07S04W17) showed more departure than the burn area. Plant mortality/decadence, invasive plants and reproductive capability of perennial plants, were placed in the "Moderate" departure category. Departures in plant mortality and reproductive capability are probably showing the impacts of the droughts experienced during the year prior to and during the year when the evaluation was completed. The summary attribute rating for the site was between "Slight to Moderate" and "Moderate" departure. The annual grass invasion was most likely due to the wet spring preceding the evaluation. The other indicators showed only "Slight to Moderate." The field data and photographs indicate this was very stony site, which does not appear to be particularly vulnerable to serious degradation. Actual Use Reports were submitted by the grazing permittee in 1990, 1991, 2003, and 2005. Cattle numbers ranged from 13 to 144 head, with a general season of use between 9/1and 11/30. AUMs ranged from 13 in 2005 to 144 in 1991. Actual Use Reports indicate that the allotment was rested in 1990. There is no utilization data or trend information for this allotment.
Rangeland Seedings		NA

Standard	Applicable	Comments
(Standard 5)		
Exotic Plant Communities (Standard 6)		NA
Water Quality (Standard 7)	**X**	Rail Creek is part of the Jordan Creek 1st and 2nd order assessment unit. There is only 100 yards of the creek on public land in Pasture 1 Beneficial uses assigned are Cold Water Aquatic Life (CWAL), Salmonid Spawning (SS), and Primary Contact Recreation (PCR). Rail Creek is not supporting CWAL and PCR uses. SS has not been assessed. Pollutants are bacteria, mercury, oil and grease, pesticides and siltation. A Proper Functioning Condition Inventory just north of the allotment boundary referenced the abundant willows and high condition within the Rail Creek FFR Allotment. South Mountain Creek flows 0.5 miles along the northeast side of Pasture 2. Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ) has not assigned beneficial uses and has not assessed the assessment unit of lower Big Boulder Creek and its tributaries including South Mountain Creek. In 2004, the BLM determined the water temperatures exceeded criteria for salmonid spawning and cold water aquatic life. The riparian area was inventoried in 2000 and rated as Functional-At Risk (FAR) low with no trend indicated. The riparian vegetation did not have the appropriate diversity of riparian-wetland species. The stream channel did have vertical stability and was not entrenching. However, the stream width/depth ratio, gradient, and sinuosity were not appropriate. Portions of the stream had access to the floodplain and portions did not have access to the floodplain.
Threatened & Endangered Plant & Animals (Standard 8)	**X**	**Riparian** See Std 2, 3, & 7. The riparian vegetation did not have the diversity of riparian-wetland species to support many wildlife species. South Mountain Creek is not providing for the needs of dependant special status species **Uplands** Pasture 1 is near reference conditions, The functional and structural groups are generally close to what is expected for the site and are likely to be providing habitat that is adequate for the needs of most dependant special status and other wildlife species. Pasture 2 is not near reference condition, and rated in the Moderate range. Functional and structural groups were not close to expected for the site and are not likely to be providing adequate habitat for the needs of most dependant special status and other wildlife species. The lack of large bunchgrasses limits 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. This allotment is within elk, antelope, and mule deer spring/summer/fall habitats. Current rangeland health conditions at RLH1 are providing adequate big game habitat at this time. The allotment had key habitat for sage grouse. Active leks occur in the vicinity. Sage grouse breeding and brood-rearing cover is limited, especially in the burn. The allotment has habitat for the Columbia spotted frog which was occupied. However, no habitat ratings have been noted. **Redband trout:** Water temperatures were excessive in both creeks. Riparian habitat is unsatisfactory in South Mountain Creek. **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 (*Spiranthes diluvialis*), a federally threatened orchid species

Standard	Applicable	Comments
		(USFWS 2002). No BLM special status plants are known to occur within this allotment.

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 soils, plants, and infiltration conditions.
2	Locate livestock management facilities away form 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. Due to public lands comprising only 4%, and land use controlled by private land ownership, implementation of rest or deferment would be impracticable. To make these management changes would require fencing across private lands and BLM has no control over these kinds of actions.
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 is occurring, however, improvement is unlikely on South Mountain Creek.
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
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.	See Number 5, above.
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.

Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management		Data Adequacy, Comments, Concerns
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). Spotted frog habitat is known to exist, however, not habitat condition evaluations have been completed.
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). In general, uplands appear to be providing adequate wildlife habitat, however, riparian habitats were noted as inadequate.
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
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**	The 1999 Owyhee RMP Table LVST- 1 identified Active Permitted Use as 13 AUMs. This allotment is identified as a "Custodial" category allotment in the 1999 Owyhee RMP. Custodial category allotments are also referred to as Fenced Federal Range (FFR) allotments. 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." 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).
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 recorded sites within the allotments boundaries. The available data are insufficient to determine their current condition. Site monitoring is needed to assess their condition. Site is located on private land.
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 these lands are in Zone 3 and may be made available for disposal.
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.
Soils/Watershed	**X**	SOIL 1-Improve unsatisfactory and maintain satisfactory watershed health/condition on all areas.

13. 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 BLM has legal access to the public lands in the allotment, but it very limited. Public lands comprise only 4 percent of the total acreage. Public land totals 122 acres within three separate tracts in two pastures. Public land is along the exterior boundaries of the allotment and are separated by boundary fences from other public lands. One hundred percent of the public land is identified for exchange/disposal in the land use plan.

BLM is unable to manage the minimal public lands in this allotment due to the limited ownership, lack of separation from private lands, and separation of public lands from other public lands by boundary fences. The actions on private lands determine how the allotment is used and managed.

2013 Supplement to the Rail Creek FFR allotment Initial Allotment Review and Rangeland Health Assessment
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. _X_ 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.**

4.____ 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 2000 and 2003 indicate that resource issues related to Standards 2, 3, 4, and 8 exist. Furthermore, this allotment includes habitat for redband trout, Columbia spotted frog, and sage grouse, although no inventories have been completed. In relation to Standard 4, pasture 1 was concluded at being near reference conditions; however, pasture 2 rated between a "slight to moderate" and "moderate" departure from reference conditions.

This allotment includes only 4% Federal land (122 BLM, 1,036 State, and 1,859 Private) and 100% 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 does not have the ability to appropriately manage this grazing allotment and its associated public land acreage. In addition, this allotment is identified as a "C" category allotment in the 1999 Owyhee RMP meaning management priority is of the lowest priority.

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; (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**

2013 Supplement to the Rail Creek FFR allotment Initial Allotment Review and Rangeland Health Assessment- List of Reviewers	
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

2013 Supplement to the Rail Creek FFR allotment Initial Allotment Review and Rangeland Health Assessment

Livestock Grazing Management

Livestock use in the Rail Creek FFR allotment is authorized for 13 animal unit months (AUMs) active use annually through a term grazing permit, currently issued to Morgan Ranches. The permit authorizes cattle grazing on the Rail Creek 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)	13 Cattle	12/1-12/31	100 %	13	0	13

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 Rail Creek FFR allotment.

Actual Use
Actual use ranged from 13 to 14 AUMs with average use of 14 AUMs (Table LVST-2).

Table LVST-2: Rail Creek FFR actual use 2005 to 2012

	Pasture 1		Pasture 2		Allotment AUMS
	Date	**AUMS**	**Date**	**AUMS**	
2012	7/15-8/15				14
2011	7/1-8/1				14
2010	7/1-7/31				13
2009	5/20-6/20				14
2008	5/1-6/1				14
2007	7/1-31				13
2006	8/1-8/31				13
2005	9/1-9/30				13

Utilization
In pasture 1, utilization of bluebunch wheatgrass was 18 percent in 2012, and in 2011, utilization of squirreltail was 13 percent and Sandberg bluegrass was 11 percent. Utilization of Idaho fescue pasture 2 in 2011 was 13 percent.

Riparian Areas and Wetlands
Approximately 50 percent of the reach of South Mountain Creek that was assessed FAR in 2000 was re-visited in 2011. The PFC protocol was not applied; however, photos were taken and the condition of the reach appeared to be FAR because there was a lack of hydric vegetation and the stream channel and banks had been trampled by livestock.

Special Status Species

Botany
No populations 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 Idaho rare plant observation reports through the Idaho Natural Heritage Program. Other sources that were used to assess and evaluate the composition and condition of SSP habitats within the Rail Creek FFR allotment include RHAs, photographs, field notes, Plants database (USDA NRCS, 2013), literature search, and information summarized above in Standards in this document. Records show no reported special status plants in this allotment.

Wildlife

Upland Habitat
Plant community information in Standard 4 identified a reduced composition of perennial grasses with a greater dominance of more grazing-tolerant species such as Sandberg bluegrass and cheatgrass (see Standard 4). These conditions signal a transition in plant community composition

and structure that is not favorable for sagebrush steppe dependent species.

Riparian Habitat
South Mountain Creek flows within this allotment and has been assessed as functioning-at-risk (Standards 2 and 3). Riparian habitat issues included inadequate vegetation composition and age-class structure and stream bank instability due to lack of deep root binding vegetation.

Evaluation of Standard 7 identified streams on the IDEQ's 303(d) list of impaired steams and that water quality parameters are not being met for the watershed's beneficial uses (see Standard 7). The list of beneficial uses includes water quality standards for cold-water aquatic life.

Focal Species
Sage-grouse
On March 5, 2010, the USFWS (USDI USFWS, 2010) published a finding in the Federal Register which 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 all of the Rail Creek FFR allotment (100 percent) lies within PPH (Table WDLF-1, Map WDLF-1). No active leks are known to occur within this allotment. This allotment provides seasonal breeding, upland summer, riparian, and winter habitat for sage-grouse.

Table WDLF-1: Acres[1] and portions of preliminary priority and general priority Habitat within the Rail Creek 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
Pasture 1	44 (2%)	0	2,082 (98%)	0	2,126 (100%)
Pasture 2	402 (45%)	0	487 (55%)	0	889 (100%)
Allotment Total	446 (15%)	0	2,569 (85%)	0	3,015 (100%)

[1]PPH/PGH habitat acreage totals include public lands, state lands, and private property.
[2]PPH sagebrush can also include small amounts of perennial grasslands, conifer encroachment, and non-habitat.

Columbia Spotted Frog
Pasture 2 is identified within the modeled distribution of the Columbia spotted frog. Potential habitat exists along stream channels, wetlands, and springs (Map WDLF-2A). Inventory/target survey information in 1996 recorded spotted frog occurrence in a cattle pond and tributaries to Rail Creek.

Evaluation Findings and Determination

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).

—

Rationale for Evaluation Finding and Determination

Historic livestock grazing management practices are significant causal factors for not meeting watershed Standard 1 in pasture 2 of the Rail Creek FFR allotment; pasture 1 is meeting the Standard. Accelerated erosional processes and water flow patterns have caused an increase in bare ground, and pronounced pedestaling of plants. Surface sealing is reducing infiltration while historic and some active soil loss has resulted in a degraded soil surface horizon that is otherwise stabilized by rocks and gravel.

A shift from deep-rooted bunchgrasses to more shallow-rooted species is occurring and offers less cover in the shrub interspaces. With the protective vegetative and persistent cover components lacking to provide soil stability and infiltration, soil degradation is widespread.

Since no actual use data are available for earlier years to determine if the impacts are due to spring and active growing season use, and because grazing has been deferred until after the active growing season for all but 2 years since 2005, no information is present to conclude that current livestock management practices are contributing to the failure to meet the standard.

Based on the available data, however, historic grazing management practices have led to the current decreased ecological function and result in a lack of ability for proper nutrient cycling, hydrologic cycling, and energy flow. Impaired watershed health indicates that soil and hydrologic function are compromised and that Rail Creek FFR is not meeting Standard 1 and ORMP soil management objectives of improving unsatisfactory watershed health/conditions.

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 pasture 2 of the Rail Creek FFR allotment. Approximately 0.7 mile of South Mountain Creek that occurs on BLM lands within pasture 2 was assessed FAR in 2000 because the riparian vegetation was not in good condition or absent and was only partially controlling erosion, stabilizing streambanks, and shading the channel. Riparian-wetland vegetation with deep, strong-binding roots was not sufficient to stabilize streambanks, and the age class and structural diversity of riparian-wetland vegetation was not always appropriate. One half of the same reach was re-visited in 2011 and the FAR rating was verified.

Current livestock grazing management practices are significant causal factors for not meeting Standard 2. The recent grazing schedule has not provided periodic rest or deferment, 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).

_7_

Rationale for Evaluation Finding and Determination

Standard 3 is not being met in pasture 2 of the Rail Creek FFR allotment. Approximately 0.7 mile of South Mountain Creek that occurs on BLM lands within pasture 2 was assessed FAR in 2000 because the riparian vegetation was not in good condition or absent and was only partially controlling erosion, stabilizing streambanks, and shading the channel. Riparian-wetland vegetation with deep strong binding roots was not sufficient to stabilize streambanks, and the age class and structural diversity of riparian-wetland vegetation was not always appropriate. One half of the same reach was re-visited in 2011 and the FAR rating was verified.

Current livestock grazing management practices are significant causal factors for not meeting Standard 3. The recent grazing schedule has not provided periodic rest or deferment, and stream channel morphology and function have not been maintained. Therefore, current livestock grazing management practices are not in conformance with the Idaho Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management applicable to Standard 3.

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 met in pasture 2 of the Rail Creek FFR allotment; however, the Standard is being met in pasture 1. 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 and a greater dominance by increaser species (e.g., Sandberg bluegrass and squirreltail); the presence of invasive annuals is a causal factor in not meeting Standard 4.

Qualitative rangeland health assessment data indicate that Standard 4 is not met due to departure of plant mortality and decadence in the RHAs with moderate departure ratings in annual invasives, including juniper, and reproductive capabilities of perennial plants. This conclusion is supported by current ecological site descriptions and correlation with 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 shifting to shallow-rooted bunchgrasses, with the expansion of annual invasive grasses and juniper, and moderate ratings of reproductive capabilities of perennial plants lead to a conclusion that 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

Guidelines

□ Conforms with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management
■ Does not conform with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management; Guideline No(s). _10_

Rationale for Evaluation Finding and Determination

Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ) designates basins, sub-basins, and assessment units in order to manage the state's waterways. The 2010 Integrated Report (303(d)/305(b)) uses assessment units within the sub-basin. Assessment units are groups of similar streams within a sub-basin that have similar land use practices, ownership, or land management. Assessment units are assessed for pollutants and assigned beneficial uses with associated Water Quality Standards. The Beneficial Use Reconnaissance Program (BURP) is a field assessment of stream segments (all IDEQ data and standards mentioned here are available on the IDEQ website http://www.deq.idaho.gov).

According to the Clean Water Act, each state must develop Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) for all the waters on the 303(d) list. The objective of a TMDL is to determine the loading capacity of the water body and to allocate that load among different pollutant sources so that the appropriate control actions can be taken and water quality standards achieved. The TMDL process is important for improving water quality because it links the development and implementation of control actions

to the attainment of water quality standards. Once a TMDL is developed for a particular pollutant or pollution, it is effectively removed from the 303(d) list.

Current IDEQ information identifies that the BLM portions of the two pastures of the Rail Creek allotment contain approximately 0.3 mile of stream that are not supporting the watershed's beneficial uses, and 0.2 mile that is fully supporting the beneficial uses. The allotment contains portions of two AUs with associated beneficial uses and pollutants (Table RIPN-1). AU # ID17050108SW004_02 is currently not supporting the beneficial uses, and all of the streams that occur within the AU are on the 303(d) list of impaired waters based on the pollutants listed below. However, a TMDL has been developed and approved for temperature, and actions have been identified that de-list the streams for temperature. The AU remains 303(d) listed form mercury because a TMDL has not been developed.

Potential Natural Vegetation (PNV) TMDLs were developed for temperature for AU # ID17050108SW004_02. Idaho water quality standards include a provision (IDAPA 58.01.02.200.09), which establishes that if natural conditions exceed numeric water quality criteria, exceedance of the criteria is not considered to be a violation of water quality standards. In these situations, natural conditions essentially become the water quality standard, and the natural level of shade and channel width become the target of the TMDL. The in-stream temperature that results from attainment of these conditions is consistent with the water quality standards, even though it may exceed numeric temperature criteria.

Standard 7 is not being met in pasture 1 of the Rail Creek allotment, and is being met in pasture 2. The allotment is in conformance with the Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management because a TMDL has been developed for temperature, removing it from the 303(d) list, and livestock are not the causal factor for mercury.

Table RIPN-1: IDEQ water quality summary

AU #	AU Name	Pasture AU occurs within	Beneficial Use Not Meeting	Pollutant/ Pollution	TMDL
ID17050108SW004_02	Upper Jordan Creek - 1st and 2nd order tributaries	1	CWAL[1] SCR[2]	mercury temperature	No Yes- all streams
ID17050108SW005_03	South Mountain Creek - 3rd order	2	fully supporting	NA	NA

[1]CWAL = cold water aquatic life
[3]SCR = secondary contact recreation

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, 10, 11, and 12

Rationale for Evaluation Finding and Determination

Botany
Standard 8 for botany is met in the Rail Creek 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 Rail Creek FFR allotment is not meeting Rangeland Health Standard 4 due to past grazing practices and invasive annuals (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 cheatgrass. 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. Because of the downward trend in plant community composition, this allotment therefore is failing to provide adequate upland habitat conditions for sagebrush steppe species and is not meeting Standard 8 due to historic grazing practices and the increased dominance of invasive annual species.

Riparian Habitat
Evaluation of Standards 2, 3, and 7 identified streams and associated riparian areas within this allotment that are not properly functioning or meeting water quality parameters due to historic and current grazing practices (see Standard 2, 3, and 7) and therefore do not meet Standard 8. Streams, springs, and wetlands that are FAR are lacking adequate riparian vegetation composition and distribution to provide the structure and function to support a productive riparian environment. Because Standards 2, 3, and 7 are 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
This allotment is within the distribution of the Columbia spotted frog. Evaluation of Standards 2, 3, and 7 identified streams and springs that are not properly functioning or meeting water quality parameters due to current grazing practices (see Standard 2, 3, and 7). Spotted frogs are usually found along vigorous grassy/sedge margins of streams, lakes, ponds, springs, and marshes not far from sources of quiet permanent water. They migrate along these vegetation corridors between habitats used for spring breeding, summer foraging, and winter hibernation. Because streams and

springs are not functioning properly, this allotment is not providing adequate aquatic conditions to sustain viable populations of spotted frogs and therefore is not meeting Standard 8 due to historic and current grazing practices.

Field Manager's Determination

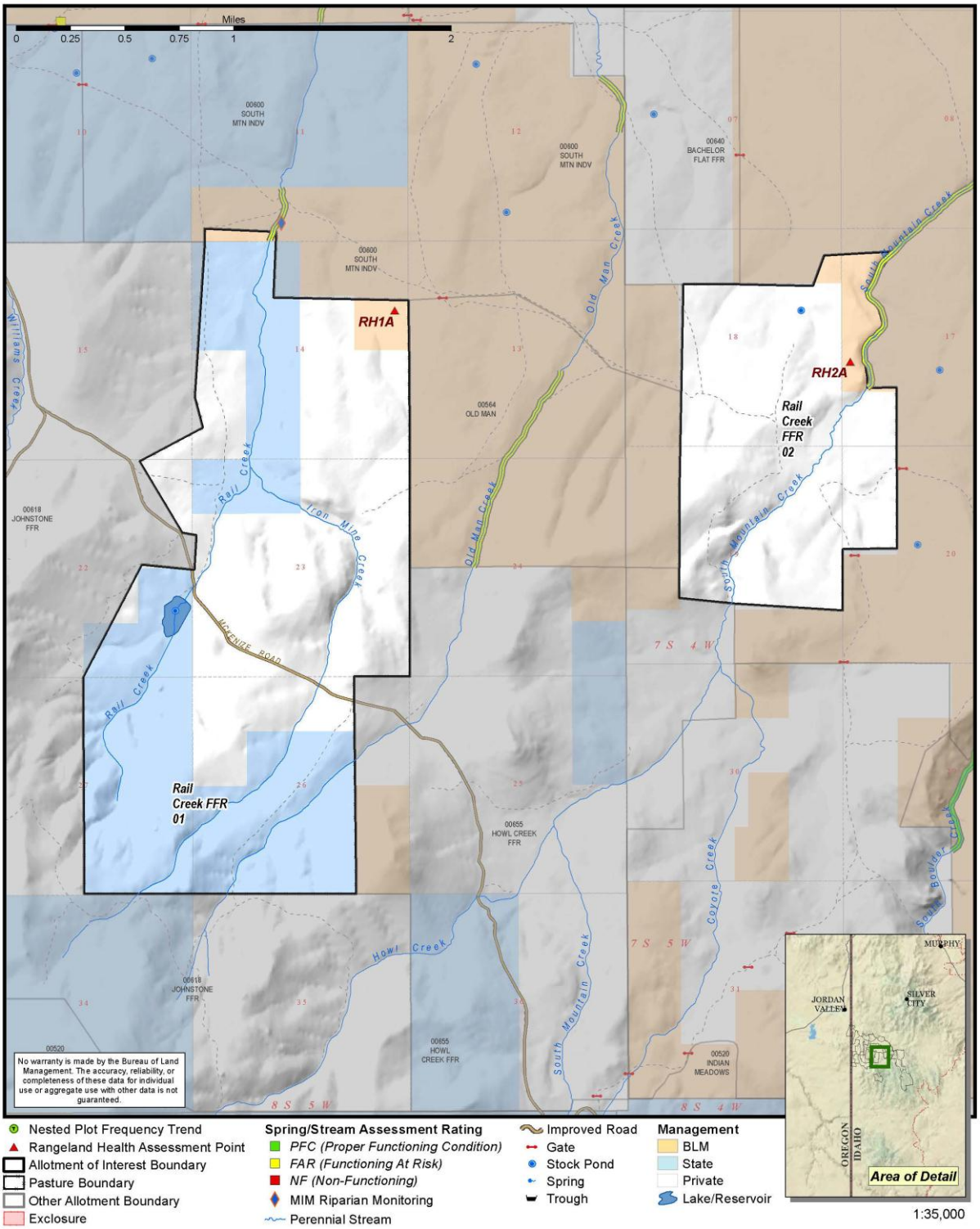
I have determined that Standards 1, 2, 3, 4, 7 and 8 of the applicable Standards for Rangeland Health are not being met in the Rail Creek FFR allotment, whereas Standards 5 and 6 are not applicable to resources present within the allotment. Current livestock grazing management practices are significant factors in not meeting Standards 1, 2, 3, 7 and 8; and are not a significant casual factor in not meeting Standard 4. Livestock management practices do not conform with the applicable Livestock Grazing Management Guidelines 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, and 12.

Field Manager **Owyhee Field Office**	8/22/13 **Date**

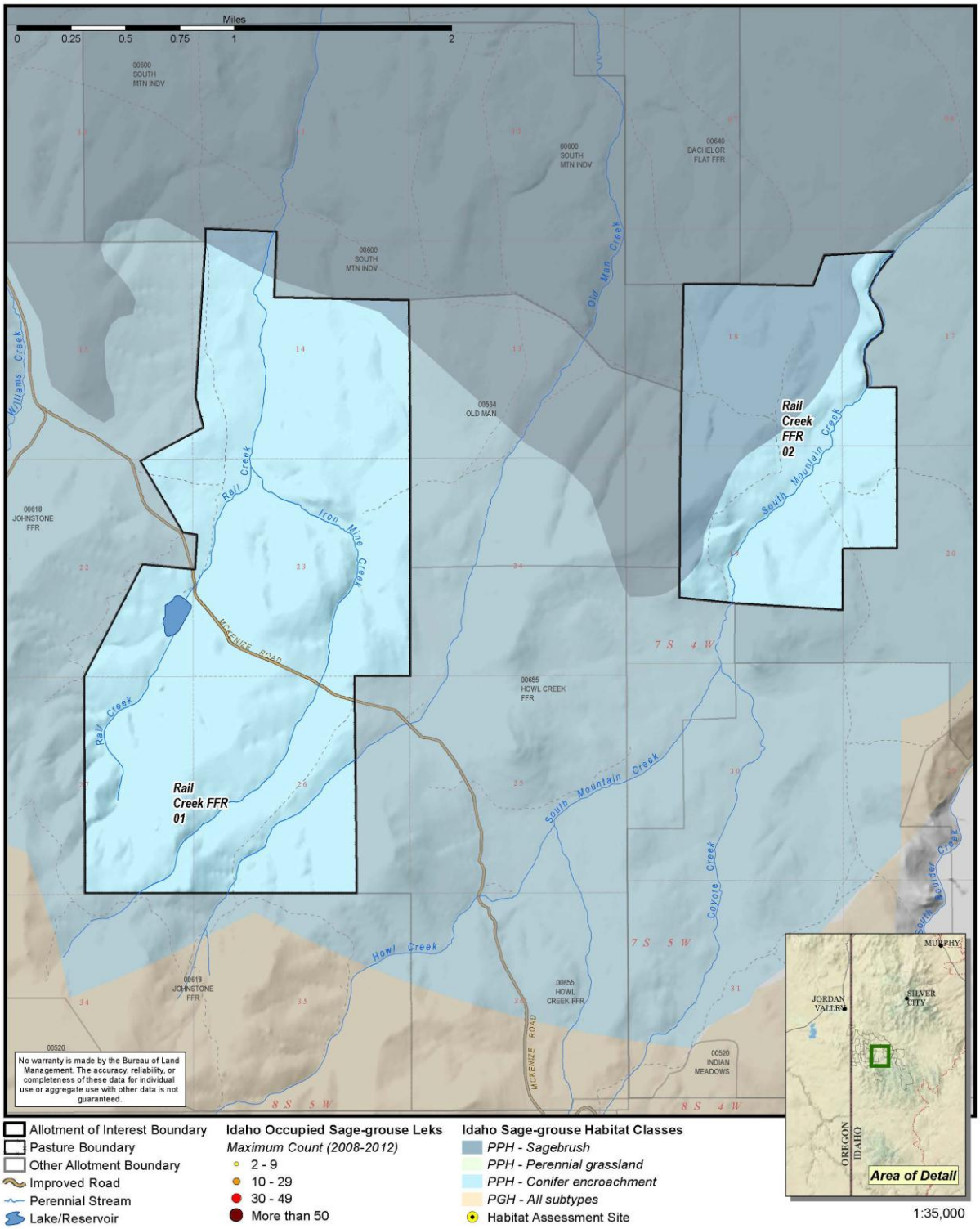
2013 Supplement to the Rail Creek FFR allotment Initial Allotment Review and Rangeland Health Assessment-Maps

APPENDIX A - MAPS

RNGE-1: Rail Creek FFR (00627) Range and Riparian Overview



WDLF-1: Rail Creek FFR (00627) Sage-grouse Habitat and Leks



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

Determination Errata for the Rail Creek FFR Allotment

Pg. 15 **Standard 7 (Water Quality)** - replace with the following:

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

Guidelines

■ Conforms with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management

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

Pg. 18 Field Manager's Determination- replace with the following:

Field Manager's Determination

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

Field Manager 10/30/13 **Date**

Owyhee Field Office