

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management**

DOI-BLM-MT-C020-2016-0010-EA
(DOI-BLM-MT-C020-2015-0154-EA)

October 7, 2015

**THOMPSON CREEK ALLOTMENT
Grazing Transfer**

Location: Powder River County, MT

T. 8 S., R. 47 E., Sections: 25, 26, 35
T. 8 S., R. 48 E., Sections: 28, 29, 30, 31, 32

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**UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT REVIEW

OFFICE/AREA: Miles City Field Office		DOI-BLM-MT-C020-2016-0010-EA DOI-BLM-MT-C020-2015-0154-EA
		DATE POSTED: 9/10//2015
NAME: Thompson Creek Allotment Transfer		DATE DUE: 9/25/2015
		FUNDING: 1020
LOCATION: Powder River County, MT Thompson Creek Allotment (#10197) T. 8 S., R. 47 E., Sections: 25, 26, 35 T. 8 S., R. 48 E., Sections: 28, 29, 30, 31, 32 (See attached maps)		
ORIGINATOR DATE/INITIALS	TITLE	ASSIGNMENT
Philip Reiersen	Rangeland Management Specialist	Completion

REVIEWERS	TITLE	ASSIGNMENT	DATE/INITIALS
Jesse Hankins	Wildlife Biologist	Wildlife	<i>JCH 9/28/15</i>
Doug Melton	Archeologist	Cultural/Paleontological Resources	11/22/15 DM Cultural Report MT-020-16-017
Reyer Rens	Supv RMS	Review	RR 12/2/2015

/s/ Kathy Bockness
ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR

12/3/2015
DATE

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

EA NUMBER: DOI-BLM-MT-C020-2016-0010-EA
(DOI-BLM-MT-C020-2015-0154-EA)

GR#. 2503424

PROPOSED ACTION/TITLE TYPE: Thompson Creek Allotment Transfer

LOCATION OF PROPOSED ACTION: Powder River County, MT
Thompson Creek Allotment (#10197)
T. 8 S., R. 47 E., Sections: 25, 26, 35
T. 8 S., R. 48 E., Sections: 28, 29, 30, 31, 32

(See attached maps)

PREPARING OFFICE: Miles City Field Office

DATE OF PREPARATION: September 2015

CONFORMANCE WITH APPLICABLE LAND USE PLAN: This proposed action is in accordance with the BLM 2015 Miles City Field Office Approved Resource Management Plan (ARMP), The ARMP states on page 3-11, Livestock Grazing Authorization, MD LG 7 “Approximately 2,700,000 acres and an estimated 546,496 animal unit months (AUMs) are available for livestock grazing; and page 3-10, MD LG 2: “The BLM will follow the BLM’s 1997 Record of Decision for Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management Final Environmental Impact Statement for Montana and North and South Dakota.”

BACKGROUND: The base property for the Thompson Creek Allotment (#10197) was purchased by the base property owners of an adjoining allotment and will be grazed in conjunction with that adjoining allotment. The allotment was analyzed and determined to be meeting the Standards for Rangeland Health in 1999 and 2015.

SCOPING: This action was posted on Montana/Dakotas BLM webpage in September, 2015 for public information request. Internal scoping identified the issues below.

ISSUES IDENTIFIED THROUGH SCOPING:

- Livestock Administration and Grazing:
 - Effects to current management
- Wildlife:
 - Effects to game and non-game species
- Vegetation:
 - Effects on native vegetation

PURPOSE AND NEED: The purpose of this action is to issue a grazing permit to the new base property owners for the Thompson Creek Allotment (#10197). The allotment was analyzed and determined to be meeting the Standards for Rangeland Health in 1999 and 2015. The allotment has been and is expected to continue to meet the standards.

PROPOSED ACTION: The proposed action for the Thompson Creek Allotment (#10197) is to issue the grazing permit with an expiration date of 02/28/2025 as follows:

GR#2503424

Allotment Name and Number	Pasture	Livestock		Grazing Period		% PL	Type Use	AUMs
		Number	Kind	Begin	End			
Thompson Creek #10197	River	2	Cattle	03/01	02/28	100	Custodial	29
	L. Thompson Cr.	1	Cattle	03/01	02/28	100	Custodial	18
	Thompson Creek	60	Cattle	05/15	12/20	63	Active	273

Total Active AUMs: 320

Terms and Conditions:

Grazing is authorized during the listed season for the recognized capacity of the public land. Livestock will not be on the public land continuously for the entire season. Livestock numbers are not restricted.

Supplemental feed (includes salting) will not be placed within one quarter of a mile of stock watering facilities, riparian zones, hardwood draws or wetlands. Supplemental feed defined as feed that provides for improved livestock nutrition or rangeland management, but does not replace forage available from public lands.

ALTERNATIVE 1 - NO ACTION: The no action alternative for the Thompson Creek Allotment (#10197) would be to issue the grazing permit with an expiration date of 02/28/2025 as follows:

GR#2503424

Allotment Name and Number	Pasture	Livestock		Grazing Period		% PL	Type Use	AUMs
		Number	Kind	Begin	End			
Thompson Creek #10197	River	2	Cattle	03/01	02/28	100	Custodial	29
	L. Thompson Cr.	1	Cattle	03/01	02/28	100	Custodial	18
	Thompson Creek	115	Cattle	05/15	12/20	63	Active	107
	Thompson Creek	120	Cattle	6/15	6/30	63	Active	40
	Thompson Creek	115	Cattle	10/30	12/21	63	Active	126

Total Active AUMs: 320

Terms and Conditions:

Grazing will not exceed the surveyed carrying capacity of the public lands. Grazing is authorized in the River and Lower Thompson Pastures for the recognized capacity of the public land. Livestock will not be on the public land continuously for the entire season. Livestock numbers are not restricted. The grazing season and livestock numbers are restricted, as scheduled above, in the Thompson Creek Pasture.

Supplemental feed (includes salting) will not be placed within one quarter of a mile of stock watering facilities, riparian zones, hardwood draws or wetlands. Supplemental feed defined as feed that provides for improved livestock nutrition or rangeland management, but does not replace forage available from public lands.

The terms and conditions of your permit may be modified if additional information indicates that revision is necessary to conform with CFR 4180.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT ELIMINATED FROM DETAILED ANALYSIS:

The following alternatives are not reasonable since they do not respond to the Purpose and Need of this environmental assessment. Site specific circumstances do not warrant suspending permitted use, closing the allotment, or otherwise modifying authorized grazing use.

Closure to Livestock Grazing: An alternative that would identify all public lands in the grazing allotment as not available for livestock grazing was considered but eliminated from detailed analysis since this alternative was already analyzed in detail in the national Rangeland Reform 1994 Environmental Impact Statement (BLM 1994). Livestock grazing is authorized by law and regulation and is a well-established use within the BLM's multiple-use mandate.

For this allotment, the resource conditions on BLM-administered public lands, including range vegetation, watershed, and wildlife habitat, as reflected in land health assessments do not warrant prohibition of livestock grazing. This determination is based on several factors, including monitoring studies, review of current range management science, input from livestock operators and interested parties, and grazing authorization to meet the Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management for Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota (BLM 1997).

The Increase or Decrease in Permitted Uses: An alternative that would increase or decrease the permitted use for the grazing allotment was considered but eliminated from further detailed analysis since the change in permitted use would not address any unresolved conflicts of alternative uses of available resources. For this allotment, the resource conditions and land ownership pattern of BLM administered public lands, including range vegetation, watershed, and wildlife habitat, as reflected in land health assessments do not warrant the development of a defined grazing system. This determination is based on several factors, including monitoring data, land ownership patterns, review of current range management science, input from livestock operators and interested parties, and grazing authorization to meet the Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management for Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota (BLM 1997).

No Grazing: This alternative has been analyzed in detail in the National Rangeland Reform 1994 Environmental Impact Statement. Livestock grazing is authorized by law and regulation an in well-established use within the BLM's multiple use mandates. Implementation of a no grazing alternative is not considered feasible or necessary except in specific, localized situations where livestock use may be incompatible with attainment of proposed standards, or with other management objectives.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT: The following critical resources have been evaluated and are not affected by the proposed action or the alternatives in this EA:

Mandatory Item	Potentially Impacted	No Impact	Not Present On Site
Threatened and Endangered Species			X
Floodplains		X	
Wilderness Values			X
ACECs		X	
Water Resources		X	
Air Quality		X	
Cultural or Historical Values		X	
Prime or Unique Farmlands			X
Wild & Scenic Rivers			X
Wetland/Riparian		X	
Native American Religious Concerns		X	
Wastes, Hazardous or Solids			X
Invasive, Nonnative Species		X	
Environmental Justice			X

The following non-critical resources will not be impacted by this proposed action; therefore they will not be analyzed in detail by this Environmental Assessment: Forestry, Lands/Realty, Geology/Minerals, Recreation, Socio-economics, Soils, VRM

Cultural/ Paleontology: A review of BLM and Montana SHPO Cultural Resource Records databases indicates that one cultural site and no paleontological localities have been recorded on public lands within the allotment. The cultural site is the Reynold’s Battlefield (24PR89). The battle was March 17, 1876 battle between the U.S. Calvary and members of the Sioux and Northern Cheyenne Tribes. The battlefield is a BLM Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). Grazing is allowed in the ACEC. The battlefield has been identified as a site of concern to the Northern Cheyenne Tribe. Geologically, the area is scoria and Quaternary Alluvium (PFYC ratings of 2 and 3aa) and is not expected to produce paleontological remains.

The proposed action meets the inventory exemption criteria found in BLM’s Montana/Dakotas Cultural Resources Handbook H-8110-1, Appendix One, Range 1 and Instruction Memorandum No. 2009-011: Guidelines for Assessment and Mitigation of Potential Impacts to Paleontological Resources. Issuance of a grazing permit is an action that generally does not involve any direct surface disturbance and as a non-surface disturbing type of activity, has little or no potential or ability to significantly affect cultural properties or paleontological resources. As a result, no cultural resource or paleontological inventory is necessary prior to approving and authorizing this undertaking to proceed. Consequently, no cultural resource values considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places or paleontological resources would likely be impacted or affected by this undertaking (see report number: MT-020-16-017). As there are no impacts to Cultural or Paleontological Resources, Cultural/ Paleontology will not be addressed further.

Grazing Administration: The Thompson Creek Allotment consists of 2,519 acres of BLM land rated at 320 AUMs, 813 acres of deeded and 1,037 acres of state land. The previous permit was issued as follows:

Allotment Name and Number	Pasture	Livestock		Grazing Period		% PL	Type Use	AUMs
		Number	Kind	Begin	End			
Thompson Creek #10197	River	2	Cattle	03/01	02/28	100	Custodial	29
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Total Active AUMs: 320

Terms and Conditions:

Grazing will not exceed the surveyed carrying capacity of the public lands. Grazing is authorized in the River and Lower Thompson Pastures for the recognized capacity of the public land. Livestock will not be on the public land continuously for the entire season. Livestock numbers are not restricted. The grazing season and livestock numbers are restricted, as scheduled above, in the Thompson Creek Pasture.

Supplemental feed (includes salting) will not be placed within one quarter of a mile of stock watering facilities, riparian zones, hardwood draws or wetlands. Supplemental feed defined as feed that provides for improved livestock nutrition or rangeland management, but does not replace forage available from public lands.

The terms and conditions of your permit may be modified if additional information indicates that revision is necessary to conform with CFR 4180.

Livestock Grazing: Cattle are the primary grazers on the allotment with the Thompson Creek Pasture being grazed from 5/1 to 6/30 and from 10/30 to 12/21 every year.

Vegetation: The public lands within the allotment are split between 3 pastures, Thompson Creek, Lower Thompson Creek and the River Pastures. Most of the BLM land in the Thompson Creek Pasture is comprised of native plant species including western wheatgrass, bluebunch wheatgrass, blue grama, needle and thread, green needlegrass, prairie junegrass, Sandberg's bluegrass, threadleaf sedge, red threeawn, plains muhly, sideoats grama, fringed sagewort, cudweed sagewort, scarlet globemallow, scarlet gaura, broom snakeweed, salsify, silverleaf scurfpea, *Astragalus spp.*, western yarrow, prairie coneflower, purple prairie clover, Hood's phlox, *Oxytropis spp.*, wavy leaf thistle, winterfat, skunkbrush sumac, rabbitbrush, serviceberry, currant, greasewood, green ash, snowberry, silver sagebrush and Wyoming big sagebrush are found throughout the allotment. Ponderosa pine and Rocky Mountain juniper are scattered to abundant throughout the pasture. Thompson Creek is an intermittent lotic riparian reach that runs through the pasture. The stream channel is dominated by prairie cordgrass, three square bulrush, spikerush, Canada wildrye, Dudley rush with areas of sandbar willow, peachleaf willow and salt cedar. Leafy spurge and Canada thistle are also common on Thompson Creek. The Lower Thompson Creek Pasture has scattered small tracts of public lands with similar upland species as the Thompson Creek Pasture. The River Pasture is dominated by smooth brome, leafy spurge and mature cottonwood trees. The banks of the Powder River are dominated by three square bulrush, spikerush, sedges, sandbar willow and cottonwoods. Most of the allotment has good species composition but there are areas that show signs of heavier historic use. Overall the BLM lands within the allotment are in good ecological health.

Wildlife: The allotment provides habitat for numerous types of native fauna including pronghorn, mule deer, white-tailed deer, numerous small mammals, reptiles, passerines and non-game species including migratory bird species. The entire allotment is within mule deer winter range and elk yearlong range. White-tailed deer winter range exists in the allotment which is adjacent to the Powder River (corridor). There are no known leks or raptor nests within this area. Bald eagles may occasionally use this allotment for foraging.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS:

DESCRIPTION OF IMPACTS FROM PROPOSED ACTION:

Cultural: The proposed action would not impact cultural resources. Grazing is allowed under the existing ACEC and the proposed action is likely to lessen impacts to the ACEC. Transferring the grazing permit would have no effect to historic properties.

Grazing Administration: Permit would be issued as follows:

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Allotment Name and Number	Pasture	Livestock		Grazing Period		% PL	Type Use	AUMs
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Livestock Grazing: Cattle would continue to be the primary grazers on the allotment. The season of use would be expanded to allow the permittee to defer the Thompson Creek Pasture rather than graze it from 5/1 to 6/30 every year.

Vegetation: More flexibility in the grazing period of the permit would allow for deferment of grazing until after seed ripe of cool season vegetation. This deferment should beneficially impact the cool season vegetative component in the pasture. Vegetation within the Thompson Creek Allotment is expected to maintain overall health and vigor and continue to meet Standards for Rangeland Health.

Wildlife: The grazing allocation and terms and conditions prescribed for this allotment would be expected to maintain habitat for wildlife species within this area. The rough topography and lack of developed water throughout much of the allotments does leave areas often void of livestock, which is expected to help maintain wildlife habitat. However, the potential does exist for shifts in vegetation if livestock are grazed in

the same fashion for multiple years. Continued grazing use in the same fashion creates potential for heavy utilization of forbs as well as reduced residual cover for the following year's ground nesting species. Potential also exists later in the season for a grazing shift toward shrub species if available herbaceous forage has been removed.

DESCRIPTION OF IMPACTS FROM NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE:

Cultural: The no action alternative would have no effect on cultural properties listed on or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Grazing Administration: Under the no action alternative, grazing administration would remain the same as it was under the previous permit. The terms and conditions would be as described in the no action alternative above.

Livestock Grazing: Livestock grazing would continue as currently permitted, which has allowed the allotment to meet rangeland objectives.

Vegetation: With continued implementation of current management, vegetation conditions would be expected to remain the same under the no action alternative. Conditions would be expected to continue to meet standards for rangeland health.

Wildlife: With no changes to management, habitat conditions are expected to remain suitable for wildlife within this allotment.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

There will be no other cumulative impacts from this project in addition to those identified in the BLM 2015 Miles City Field Office Approved Resource Management Plan which brings forward the Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management EIS completed in August of 1997. Those cumulative impacts include population increase or decrease, agricultural subsidies, economic competition, and restructuring, wildlife use, management practices and land use changes such as increase recreation use. A detailed discussion of these cumulative impacts can be found on Pages 27 and 28 of the Standards and Guidelines EIS.

CONSULTATION/COORDINATION:

Permittee

LIST OF PREPARERS:

Philip Reiersen - Rangeland Management Specialist

Jesse Hankins - Wildlife Biologist

Doug Melton – Archeologist

Reyer Rens - Supervisory Rangeland Management Specialist

Kathleen Bockness - Planning and Environmental Coordinator