SCOPING/INFORMATION PACKAGE

Goodrich Grazing Permit Renewal of Seven Allotments

Four Rivers Field Office

This information package summarizes a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to renew seven livestock grazing permits in the Goodrich Management Area (MA), in accordance with the Cascade Resource Management Plan (RMP) dated July 1, 1988. Federal actions must be analyzed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations to determine potential environmental consequences.

The purpose of this report is to inform interested and affected parties of the proposal, and solicit comments regarding the NEPA review of proposed alternatives. Analysis is ongoing, and will be documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA), with an estimated completion date of September 2011. Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential environmental issues related to the proposed action, and to identify alternatives that meet the purpose of and need for the project.

Purpose and Need for Action

The BLM vacated seven grazing decisions, dated September 28, 2007, as a result of a settlement negotiated between the U.S. Department of Justice and Western Watersheds Project to resolve litigation (WWP v. Lane, Case No. 07-cv-394-BLW) challenging BLM's use of certain categorical exclusions (CEs) to satisfy NEPA requirements. A court-ordered Stipulated Settlement Agreement, dated July 17, 2009, required the BLM to analyze renewal of the grazing permits in an environmental assessment (EA). The allotments in the Four Rivers Field Office that relied on the grazing permit issuance CE are: Armacost Individual (00012), Boyd Individual (00040), Deer Creek (00151), East Pine Creek (00172), Gambril Individual (00090), North Fork (00293), and West Pine Creek (00268). The North Fork Allotment was combined with the Thorn Creek Allotment (00292) in EA# ID-110-2005-EA-011; therefore, it will not be included in this assessment. Livestock grazing management in these allotments are currently meeting all Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health (S&Gs).

A recent analysis in the Payette National Forest Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Record of Decision found that bighorn sheep in close proximity to domestic sheep are at risk for disease transmission. There is a risk of contact and disease transmission that may occur from any overlap between source habitat for bighorn sheep and domestic sheep allotments and the travel corridors that bighorn sheep traverse between their source habitats. With the Payette National Forest FEIS findings, the BLM must address the risk of contact, potential of disease transmission, and population viability of bighorn sheep.

The Cambridge Allotment (00082) is also included with this permit renewal. Livestock grazing management in this allotment is currently meeting all S&Gs. However, the issue of potential bighorn sheep and domestic sheep (BHS/DS) interactions has arisen since the previous permit renewal process was completed. In order to address this issue for the Cambridge and West Pine Creek allotments, BLM will be analyzing a range of alternatives in the EA.

The objectives are to 1) implement grazing management decisions that maintain and improve rangeland health conditions (i.e., meeting all applicable S&Gs) through the permit renewal process, 2) reduce the potential for interactions and disease transmission between BHS/DS on public land, and 3) to meet objectives identified in the Cascade RMP.

Existing Condition

General

The Armacost Individual Allotment is the most northern allotment within this group, located approximately 10 miles northwest of Council, Idaho, in Adams County. East Pine Creek Allotment is located nine miles northwest of Cambridge, Idaho, east of Highway 71, in Washington County. West Pine Creek Allotment is located seven miles west of Cambridge, west of Highway 71, in Washington County. The Cambridge Allotment is located two miles north of Cambridge, in Washington County. The Boyd Individual, Deer Creek, and Gambril Individual allotments are located approximately two miles southwest of Cambridge, west of Highway 95, in Washington County (Map 1).

Table 1 shows each allotment's ownership of public, state, and private land (acres). Table 2 shows the current livestock grazing authorization for each allotment.

Table 1. Ownership (acres) by allotment for the seven relevant allotments in Adams and Washington counties, Idaho.

Allotment			Acres by Land Ownership			Total	% Public
Number	Name	County	Public	State	Private	Acres	Land
00012	Armacost Individual	Adams	530	0	920	1,450	50%
00040	Boyd Individual	Washington	408	0	1,710	2,118	100%
00082	Cambridge	Washington	358	0	624	982	20%
00090	Gambril Individual	Washington	199	590	300	1,089	11%
00151	Deer Creek	Washington	80	0	528	608	14%
00172	East Pine Creek	Washington	79	0	123	202	20%
00268	West Pine Creek	Washington	994	315	7,727	9,036	9%

Table 2. Current livestock grazing authorizations

Allotment		Livestock		Season of Use		%Public Land	Grazing Preference AUMs		
Number	Name	Type	Number	Start	End		Active	Suspended	Total
00012	Armacost Ind.	C	50	4/01	4/30	50	25	0	25
00012	Armacost Ind.	C	50	11/01	11/30	50	25	0	25
00040	Boyd Ind.	C	62	4/16	5/15	100	62	0	62
00082	Cambridge	S	1,050	4/1	05/15	36	81	0	81
00090	Gambril Ind.	C	50	4/10	5/31	11	9	0	9
00151	Deer Creek	C	40	4/16	5/30	14	8	0	8
00172	East Pine Creek	C	20	5/15	7/15	20	8	0	8
00268	West Pine Creek	S	4,700	4/1	06/15	9	211	0	211

Rangeland Health Assessments were conducted in 2002. In the Evaluations and Determinations for Achieving Idaho's Standards for Rangeland Health and Conformance with the Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management, it was determined in 2006 and 2007 that all seven allotments were meeting all applicable standards for rangeland health and authorized use was in conformance with the guidelines for livestock grazing management (Table 3).

Table 3. Summary of Applicable Rangeland Health Standards (RHSs) for the seven allotments in the Goodrich MA.

Allotment		**Rangeland Health Standards***							
Number	**Name**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
00012	Armacost Individual	X[1]	X	X	X	n/a[2]	n/a	X	X
00040	Boyd Individual	X	n/a	n/a	X	n/a	n/a	n/a	X
00082	Cambridge	X	n/a	n/a	X	n/a	n/a	n/a	X
00090	Gambril Individual	X	n/a	n/a	X	n/a	n/a	n/a	X
00151	Deer Creek	X	n/a	n/a	X	n/a	n/a	n/a	X
00172	East Pine Creek	X	n/a	n/a	X	n/a	n/a	n/a	X
00268	West Pine Creek	X	n/a	n/a	X	n/a	n/a	n/a	X

[1] RHSs applicable to the allotment [2] RHSs not applicable to the allotment

***Standards for Rangeland Health**

Standard 1: Watersheds
Standard 2: Riparian Areas and Wetlands
Standard 3: Stream Channel/Floodplain
Standard 4: Native Plant Communities
Standard 5: Seedings
Standard 6: Exotic Plant Communities, other than Seedings
Standard 7: Water Quality
Standard 8: Threatened and Endangered Plants and Animals

Vegetation

Rangeland Health Standards 1 and 4 apply to upland vegetation. Standard 1 addresses the soil stability of a site, and the site's ability to perform ecological processes, such as cycle nutrients and water, based on the amount and type of plants and other ground cover present. Standard 4 addresses the maintenance and promotion of productive, diverse native plant populations. Productive and diverse native plant communities, in turn, provide habitat better suited for sensitive wildlife and plant species. The seven allotments in the Goodrich MA are meeting Standards 1 and 4.

The soils on the allotments' range from deep and loamy to very shallow. Approximately 53% of the BLM land is in the loamy category. Xeric, big sagebrush communities with bluebunch wheatgrass, Idaho fescue, and an array of native perennial forbs (e.g., arrowleaf balsamroot, lupine, and biscuitroot) typically occupy loamy soils. Shrubs including antelope bitterbrush, rabbitbrush, snowberry, and chokecherry are also occasionally present.

Shallow soils, which account for approximately 33% of the BLM land, generally support a mosaic of xeric and stiff sagebrush communities, with antelope bitterbrush scattered throughout. Sandberg bluegrass and bluebunch wheatgrass are the common native perennial grasses in the shrub understories; forbs include arrowleaf balsamroot, yarrow, wild onion, and biscuitroot.

Bulbous bluegrass is also present to varying degrees in all soils, as are cheatgrass and other weedy or invasive species. However, these species are not present in large enough quantities to detract from the overall ecological condition of the allotments or preclude them from meeting rangeland health standards. The remaining soils (14%) support forest vegetation (e.g., Douglas fir and ponderosa pine), and are not evaluated as rangelands.

Noxious Weed Species
Occurrences of leafy spurge (3), rush skeletonweed (4), and Scotch thistle (3) were identified in the Boyd Individual, Deer Creek, and Gambril allotments between 2002 and 2005. Larger occurrences (1-5 acres) of leafy spurge were treated in 2004 and 2005. An additional 30 occurrences of these species occur within 0.5 miles of the allotments.

Threatened and Endangered and Special Status Plant Species
There are no known populations of threatened, endangered, or special status plant species on the allotments.

Riparian Areas/Water Quality
Two stream segments occur in the Armacost Individual Allotment, including Left Fork Hornet Creek (0.6-stream miles), and Badger Gulch (0.3-stream-miles). None of the other allotments have streams on public land.

The Left Fork Hornet Creek and Badger Gulch public land segments are vegetated with healthy, native plant assemblages. These stream segments are very stable, with less than ten percent active erosion. Both streams were rated in proper functioning condition and meet applicable water quality standards.

Wildlife/Special Status Animals (SSAs)/Fish
General Wildlife
Standards 4 and 8 are being met in all allotments for wildlife and special status animals. Grasses, forbs, and shrubs are vigorous and abundant, and have a moderate to high degree of species diversity to provide food and cover for wildlife species. This intact habitat will also produce an abundance of insect life to provide food for birds and other species dependent upon them. Streams in the Armacost Individual Allotment are providing suitable habitat and water quality for resident redband trout populations.

The Boyd Individual, Cambridge, Deer Creek, Gambril Individual, and West Pine allotments are in crucial elk winter range.

Species Specific Accounts (SSA) – The species listed below are identified as occupying the allotments of interest or adjacent habitat. Species subject to management under the Endangered Species Act (ESA, 1973, as amended) are indicated by “T” for Threatened status, “E” for

Endangered Status, or "C" for Candidates for listing under the ESA. Species which have ESA-designated Critical Habitat (CH) are indicated by "CH," and species subject to de-listed management by "DM". Species which are given special status by BLM are also included. Based upon numerous criteria like risk of extinction, population size, distribution, and trend, SSAs are assigned a 'Type' number. Species at highest risk are classified Type 1 and those at lowest risk are Type 5. Specifically, BLM Type 2 (Rangewide/Globally Imperiled) and Type 3 (Regional/State Imperiled) SSAs are listed below.

Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep (*Ovis canadensis*)
Public lands are between 0.6 miles (East Pine Creek Allotment) and nine miles from bighorn sheep habitat identified by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG). Radio-collared bighorn sheep have been observed in West Pine Creek. The Armacost Individual (12% public land), Gambril Individual (44%), and West Pine Creek (1%) Allotments include small amounts of bighorn sheep summer source habitat, as identified through modeling conducted by the Payette National Forest in 2010. Bighorn sheep generally use shrub steppe and low density forested communities for foraging, with associated steep, rocky terrain providing escape cover.

Gray Wolf (*Canis lupus*) – DM
The allotments occur within the range of two separate wolf packs, the Hornet Creek and Blue Bunch packs. No dens or pack rendezvous sites are known to occur on public lands, but wolves may use the areas to hunt or in movements across the area.

Northern Idaho Ground Squirrel (*Urocitellus brunneus*) - T
In 2004, a population of northern Idaho ground squirrels (NIDGS) was recorded 0.25 miles south of the Armacost Individual Allotment. They occupy semi-wet or dry, open areas of grasses, forbs, and shrubs surrounded by shrub- or conifer-dominated communities, and are active between late March and early August, feeding on high quality grass and forb vegetation and seeds.

Greater Sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) - C
With the exception of Armacost Individual, the allotments provide Key habitat (intact sagebrush/perennial grass dominated; Boyd Individual, Deer Creek, East Pine Creek, Gambril Individual, West Pine Creek) or Type 1 (perennial grass dominated; Cambridge) for sage-grouse. The allotments are between 1-12 miles of an active (21 birds in 2010) located adjacent to the Boyd Individual Allotment. A lek with 3 birds, last monitored in 2001, is located on private land in the Boyd Individual Allotment.

Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus*) – Type 3
With the exception of Armacost Individual, the allotments also provide habitat for sharp-tailed grouse, and are within 4-13 miles of the Hixson Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse Habitat Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The allotments are between 4.5 and 15 miles from the closest known sharp-tailed grouse lek, located southeast of the Boyd Individual Allotment.

Bull Trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) – T, CH
No resident or fluvial populations of bull trout are known to occur in Left Fork Hornet Creek. However, bull trout populations occur lower in the greater Hornet Creek watershed, which

includes U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) designated critical habitat occurring on Olive Creek, a tributary to the main Hornet Creek, approximately 12 miles from the allotment.

Bull trout, a type of char, require high quality cold, clean, and well oxygenated water. Bull trout need complex aquatic habitats which include deep pools, undercut banks, and in-channel woody debris. In addition, bull trout prefer lower velocity streams with less than two percent slope.

Redband Trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss gibbsi*) – Type 2 and IDFG sensitive
Left Fork Hornet Creek has excellent aquatic habitat and supports a healthy population of redband trout. Badger Gulch has no perennially-occupied fisheries habitat, but may be temporarily occupied by redband trout early in the spring.

Preliminary Alternative Development

The following alternatives have been identified through the internal scoping process:

Alternative A – No Action Alternative, full permitted use based on the current grazing permit (Table 2).
Alternative B – Grazing use by cattle only
Alternative C – Grazing use by sheep or cattle (one or the other annually)
Alternative D – No Grazing Alternative- (No grazing for the term of the ten year permit)

Alternative A- No Action (Current Management)
Livestock grazing authorizations would continue as currently permitted (Table 2) with the same terms and conditions (mandatory or otherwise) as noted on the current permit. The majority of use for all allotments would occur in the spring (April-June); the Armacost Individual Allotment has both spring (April) and fall (November) use (Table 2).

Alternative B- Grazing use by cattle only on all allotments
Livestock authorizations would continue as currently permitted in the five allotments that currently authorize grazing by cattle (Table 2). These allotments are meeting S&Gs. The Cambridge and West Pine Creek allotments, currently authorized for sheep, would be analyzed for cattle grazing only.

Alternative C- Livestock grazing authorizations would continue as currently permitted on five of the allotments (Table 2). However, **t**he Cambridge and West Pine Creek allotments, currently authorized for sheep, would be analyzed for cattle or sheep grazing (one or the other annually).

Alternative D – No Grazing Alternative
Livestock grazing would not be authorized for a term of ten years. No Grazing is an action which removes grazing from the allotment for a period of time coinciding with the duration of the permit (10-years).

Preliminary Issues

General Vegetation Conditions - The most recent vegetation monitoring was conducted in 2002. Turn-out is in early April for five out of the seven allotments. Even though all allotments are meeting standards, spring turnout is a concern, based on range readiness data, because the general area isn't always ready by April 1.

Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep - There are identified resource conflicts in the Cambridge and West Pine Creek allotments regarding the potential for BHS/DS interactions. When domestic sheep come into contact with bighorn sheep, there is potential for the domestic sheep to transmit diseases to the bighorns. Because bighorn sheep do not have any natural, disease immunity, significant declines in affected populations can result. The BLM's current policy is to ensure separation between bighorn and domestic sheep on public land.

Northern Idaho Ground Squirrels (NIDGS) – The NIDGS were listed as a Threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 2000. The influence of livestock grazing on plant species composition and availability could be a factor in NIDGS habitat quality.

Greater Sage-Grouse - The Greater sage-grouse were listed as a Candidate species under the ESA in 2010. Impacts from livestock grazing were rated as the fourth greatest threat to them in Idaho (2006 Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Plan, IDFG). Issues associated with livestock grazing include utilization levels or seasons of use that reduce the amount or quality of suitable habitat for nesting and early or late brood-rearing, interference of breeding activities by sheep bands near leks, trailing of sheep or cattle through breeding or nesting habitat, placement of salt or mineral supplements in key habitat, presence of fencing in important seasonal habitat, and development of water sources in previously unused or lightly used breeding or early brood habitat.

Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse - Issues for sharp-tailed grouse are expected to be similar to those of sage-grouse.

Decision to be Made

The Four Rivers Field Manager is the authorized officer responsible for allotment management decisions. Based on the NEPA analysis, the Field Manager will issue a decision document that includes a determination of the environmental effects' significance and whether an environmental impact statement (EIS) would be required. If he determines it is unnecessary to prepare an EIS, the Manager will decide which management actions, mitigation measures, and monitoring requirements will be prescribed for the allotments, including permitted number of animals, season of use, allowable utilization standards, and permit terms.

Public Input Needed

Comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, preliminary issues, and alternatives, and should be received by June 13, 2011 to be the most effective. Comments must be directly relevant to the proposal and project area.

The BLM will not reject public feedback outside established public involvement timeframes; however, these comments may be considered secondary to those received in a timely manner, and may only be assessed to determine if they identify concerns that would substantially alter the assumptions, proposal, design or analysis presented in the EA.

Comments sent electronically should be sent to chandy@blm.gov with the title of this project in the subject line. Please identify whether you are submitting comments as an individual or as the designated spokesperson on behalf of an organization. Issues that are outside the scope of the proposal will not be addressed at this planning level.

The primary contact for questions and comments for this analysis is Christina Handy, Rangeland Management Specialist, Four Rivers Field Office, (208) 384-3375.

MAP - Goodrich Permit Renewal