

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

South East Fork Allotment
Rangeland Health Determination

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Twin Falls District
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SOUTH EAST FORK ALLOTMENT DETERMINATION

Achieving Standards for Rangeland Health and Conforming with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management

Field Office: Shoshone			Watershed Name: Big Wood
Allotment Name/Number: South East Fork/80227			
Public Land (acres)			Streams on Public Land (miles): . .75 Miles
Upland: 1,908	Riparian: < 1	Total: 1909	
Date(s) of Field Assessment: July 21, 2000 (1 field day) July 14 th and 19 th , August 10, 2010			Name of Permittee(s): Lava Lake Land & Livestock LLC c/o Mike Gordon
Assessment Participants (Name & Discipline or Interest): In 2000: Kimberly Hackett, Rangeland Management Specialist & Gary Wright, Wildlife Biologist In 2010: Joanna Tjaden, Rangeland Management Specialist, Danelle Nance, Natural Resource Specialist & URS Corporation for riparian surveys			

Standard 1 - Watersheds

Check those that apply: *[One or more boxes must be checked.]* Standard doesn't apply

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Meeting the Standard.	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Meeting the Standard, Livestock Grazing Management Practices are Significant Factors.
<input type="checkbox"/> Not Meeting the Standard, but making significant progress to meeting the Standard.	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Meeting the Standard, Livestock Grazing Management Practices are not Significant Factors.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Conforms with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management.	<input type="checkbox"/> Does not conform with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management Guideline No(s) .

Rationale/Information Sources: The South East Fork Allotment is currently meeting Standard 1 (Watersheds) for Rangeland Health and grazing conforms with guidelines for livestock management. Overall, the watershed condition is adequate for maintaining soil stability and hydrologic cycling. The overall rating for Standard 1 is none to slight with six indicators (55%) marked none to slight and five indicators (45%) marked slight to moderate. There are areas of flow patterns, however flow patterns are stable and short. This site occurs on a steep slope and some of these watershed characteristics may be due to the steepness of the slope. The soil surface is well armored with rock. There are no major rills or gullies in the allotment which indicates that the soils are generally stable.

Site 1. South Slope Stony 12-16" Mountain Big Sagebrush/ Bluebunch wheatgrass

Field measurements found that vascular plants provide 62% of the cover, rock 24%, biotic crust 0%, litter in contact with soil 6%, and standing litter 2% with bare ground found on 6% of the transect points. On Site 1, cheatgrass was found in the transect and it was calculated to be 18% cover. Per the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) ecological site description, ground cover by litter, rock, and vegetation should be 75 to 90 percent. According to the data collected, the appropriate range site guide reveals that this site is within acceptable limits.

Standard 2 - Riparian Areas and Wetlands & Standard 3 - Stream Channel/Floodplain

Check those that apply: [*One or more boxes must be checked.*] Standard doesn't apply

<input type="checkbox"/> Meeting the Standard.	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Meeting the Standard, Livestock Grazing Management Practices are Significant Factors.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Meeting the Standard, but making significant progress to meeting the Standard.	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Meeting the Standard, Livestock Grazing Management Practices are not Significant Factors.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Conforms with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management.	<input type="checkbox"/> Does not conform with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management Guideline No (s).

Rationale/Information Sources: The South East Fork Allotment is not meeting the Rangeland Health Standard 2 (Riparian Areas & Wetlands) and Standard 3 (Stream Channel & Floodplain); but current livestock grazing is not a factor in the failure of these standards and significant progress is being made in meeting these Standards in the future. Grazing in the South East Fork conforms with guidelines for livestock management. PFC is the minimum requirement for achieving Standards 2 & 3. Cove Creek, which is located on the east end of the allotment, was assessed as a lotic site. There are other streams in the South East Fork Allotment as well as some springs but they are all intermittent and do not flow every year. This stream runs south and has water flowing all year, but more so in late spring and early fall.

Under the current livestock management, Cove Creek is experiencing an upward trend. The selection of the proposed action has the potential to have a positive impact on the riparian zones in Cove Creek and allow make progress toward meeting Rangeland Health Standards in the future. There was evidence that the riparian system did shift frequently in the floodplain but currently vertical stability is improving with the increase in deep rooted vegetation along the banks. The recruitment of willow seedlings and other desirable shrubs along the stream bank are increasing. The streambanks are beginning to acquire vegetation appropriate for soil stability and the stream is anchored well with natural rock and gravel. There are populations of Kentucky bluegrass along some portions of the stream which has lead to bank instability in the past.

The riparian vegetation in the South East Fork Allotment is dominated by Nebraska sedge (*Carex nebrascensis*), rush (*Eleocharis spp.*), quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) and willows (*Salix spp.*). Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*) is present in many areas but it appears to be receding from the streambanks. The dominant woody species present on the site is willow.

Standard 4 (Native Plant Communities)

Check those that apply: [*One or more boxes must be checked.*] Standard doesn't apply

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Meeting the Standard.	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Meeting the Standard, Livestock Grazing Management Practices are Significant Factors.
<input type="checkbox"/> Not Meeting the Standard, but making significant progress to meeting the Standard.	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Meeting the Standard, Livestock Grazing Management Practices are not Significant Factors.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Conforms with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management.	<input type="checkbox"/> Does not conform with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management Guideline No(s) .

Rationale/Information Sources: *Mountain Big Sagebrush/ Bluebunch wheatgrass Site*
 South East Fork Allotment is currently meeting Standard 4 (Native Plant Communities) for Rangeland Health and grazing conforms with guidelines for livestock management. Cover data indicates that bluebunch wheatgrass, cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) and mountain big sagebrush are the dominant plant species with lesser amounts of Nevada bluegrass, Sandberg bluegrass, goatsbeard, Hood’s phlox, epliobium and antelope bitterbrush. Many of the desired perennial grasses, forbs and shrubs native to the site are present and the plant species composition is similar to what has been described for the range site. The vegetation species abundance for forbs and shrubs is slightly lower than what would be accepted for the ecological site. Cheatgrass is one of the dominant species on this site and the main reason why the shrubs and forbs are present in lesser quantities. The presence of cheatgrass is due to historic livestock grazing and the development of the road and subsequent recreation activities.

Overall, the South East Fork Allotment is meeting Standard 4 (Native Plant Communities) and current livestock grazing is in conformance with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management. Vegetation present in the allotment during the assessment consisted of species that were listed on the NRCS site guide descriptions for the South East Fork Allotment and healthy, productive and diverse native plants are being maintained or promoted. Diffuse Knapweed is present in small populations but it is in small, localized areas. The shrub component is present within acceptable limits in the allotment and the understory vegetation has an abundance of the desirable grasses and forbs.

Standard 5 (Seedings)

X *Standard doesn't apply*

Standard 6 (Exotic Plant Communities, Other than Seedings)

X *Standard doesn't apply*

Standard 7 (Water Quality)

Check those that apply: [*One or more boxes must be checked.*] Standard doesn't apply

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Meeting the Standard.	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Meeting the Standard, Livestock Grazing Management Practices are Significant Factors.
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<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Conforms with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management.	<input type="checkbox"/> Does not conform with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management Guideline No (s).

Rationale/Information Sources: South East Fork Allotment is currently meeting Standard 7 for Rangeland Health and grazing conforms with guidelines for livestock management. An updated 303(d) List was released in 2008 by the Idaho DEQ and in that report, the Cove Creek segment that is within the allotment (*ID17040219SK011_03 East Fork Wood River - source to Hyndman Creek*) has been delisted. “Delisted” refers to the allotment now having the information needed in order to make approved or established changes for improvement. Sediment and siltation in Cove Creek now has approved or established levels appropriate to the stream. DEQ has determined that a load reduction of 32.3% is needed for sedimentation and siltation, a load reduction of 41.9% is needed for phosphorus. It has also been determined that nutrient, eutrophication and biological indicators are currently meeting the State water quality standard.

Standard 8 (Threatened and Endangered Plants and Animals)

Check those that apply: [*One or more boxes must be checked.*] Standard doesn't apply

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Meeting the Standard.	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Meeting the Standard, Livestock Grazing Management Practices are Significant Factors.
<input type="checkbox"/> Not Meeting the Standard, but making significant progress to meeting the Standard.	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Meeting the Standard, Livestock Grazing Management Practices are not Significant Factors.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Conforms with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management.	<input type="checkbox"/> Does not conform with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management Guideline No(s) .

Rationale/Information Sources: The South East Fork Allotment is currently meeting Standard 8 (Threatened and Endangered Plants and Animals) for Rangeland Health and the allotment conforms with guidelines for livestock grazing management. The variation in habitat conditions and habitat structural components that currently exist on the allotment likely provides marginal or suitable habitat conditions for each of the threatened and sensitive plant or animal species.

Plants: One BLM Sensitive plant, Bug-leg goldenweed (*Haplopappus insecticuriis*), has been identified in neighboring allotments but has not been documented in the South East Fork Allotment. The South East Fork Allotment is able to support many of the associated vegetative species which means that the probability of this sensitive plant occurring in the allotment is high. This species tolerates livestock grazing and the potential of the species decreasing under the proposed action is minimal.

Animals: The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) lists three Candidate wildlife species that occur within the Shoshone Field Office: greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*), and wolverine (*Gulo gulo*). Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), a Threatened species, also occurs within the Shoshone Field Office; however, none of the field office is designated as lynx critical habitat. The bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) and gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) were previously listed on the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife but were removed on August 8, 2007 and May 5, 2011, respectively. The bald eagle is now protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and the gray wolf is managed under the BLM Type 2-Rangewide/Globally Imperiled Species Special Status Animal Species.

Although Canada lynx have been documented throughout northern portions of the Shoshone Field Office, none of the field office is designated as lynx critical habitat. The suspected very low, incidental use level of the project area by the species is expected to result in “No Effect” to the Canada lynx, and a discussion of the species will not be carried through the analysis.

Greater sage-grouse require large areas of contiguous sagebrush with perennial grass and forb understory to survive. The current Idaho Greater Sage-grouse Habitat Map indicates that the habitat on public land in the South East Fork Allotment is currently not mapped as sage-grouse habitat. Records at the Shoshone Field Office show there are no known active or historic sage-grouse leks within the allotment. The present habitat on the allotment only provides for marginal habitat conditions for sage-grouse due to the steepness of slope and depth of snow.

Within the South East Fork Allotment, the East Fork of the Big Wood River contains patches of suitable habitat for yellow-billed cuckoos; however, there are no known occurrences of cuckoos. The suspected very low, incidental use level of the project area by the species is expected to result in "No Effect" to the yellow-billed cuckoo, and a discussion of the species will not be carried through the analysis.

The wolverine occupies a large home range and may occupy the South East Fork Allotment during any season of the year while searching for prey. Although there are no ICDC records of wolverines in the allotment, sightings have been confirmed within two air miles of the South East Fork Allotment. The suspected very low, incidental use level of the project area by the species is expected to result in "No Effect" to the wolverine, and a discussion of the species will not be carried through the analysis.

There are six Type 2 BLM Sensitive Species that may be found in the South East Fork Allotment: gray wolf, bald eagle, pygmy rabbit, northern leopard frog, redband trout and Wood River sculpin but there is really only suitable habitat for four of these species: gray wolf, bald eagle, redband trout and Wood River sculpin. Gray wolves could occur in the South East Fork Allotment during any season of the year; however, wolves are most likely to occupy the allotment during late fall and winter when elk and mule deer are present.

The presence of bald eagle in the general project area would most likely occur during the winter. Bald eagles may make incidental use within the allotment boundary while wintering in the Big Wood River or Little Wood River drainages. Bald eagles would be expected to make rare, incidental use in this allotment. Additionally, there is potential for occurrences of

Redband trout are documented in the East Fork of the Wood River upstream and downstream of the South East Fork allotment. Redband trout likely occur in the East Fork of the Wood River within the allotment as habitat is suitable. Redband trout have also been identified in the Cove Creek drainage upstream of the South East Fork allotment but are not known to occur in Cove Creek within the allotment. Within the South East Fork allotment, Cove Creek is an intermittent stream.

Wood River sculpin are documented in the East Fork of the Wood River upstream and downstream of the South East Fork allotment. Wood River sculpin may occur in the East Fork of the Wood River within the allotment as suitable habitat exists. Wood River sculpin have also been identified in the Cove Creek drainage upstream of the South East Fork allotment but are not known to occur in Cove Creek within the allotment. Within the South East Fork allotment, Cove Creek is an intermittent stream.

SOUTH EAST FORK ALLOTMENT RANGELAND HEALTH DETERMINATION

I have determined that Standard 1 (Watersheds), Standard 4 (Native Plant Communities), Standard 7 (Water Quality) and Standard 8 (Threatened and Endangered Species) are being met in the South East Fork Allotment. Standard 2 (Riparian Areas and Wetlands) and Standard 3 (Stream Channel and Floodplains) are making significant progress towards meeting these two standards in the future. Standard 5 (Seedings) and Standard 6 (Exotic Plant Communities) do not apply to the South East Fork Allotment. The actions listed below will be considered in the South East Fork Grazing Permit Renewal Environmental Assessment.

1. Renew a 10 year grazing permit in the South East Fork Allotment for the same active preference of 146 AUMs.
2. Analyze changes to the terms and conditions of the grazing permit per the permittees request.

/s/ Holly Crawford
Acting Shoshone Field Manager

September 19, 2014
Date