



United States Department of the Interior  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
Shoshone Field Office  
400 West F Street  
Shoshone, Idaho 83352-5284  
(208) 732-7200



In Reply Refer To:  
80235

December 14, 2009

Dear Permittee/Interested Public:

We want to inform you that the Idaho BLM is no longer using pre-decisional Environmental Assessments (EA) as a means to seek public input to help us analyze project proposals through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Instead, Idaho BLM will be soliciting your thoughts and comments for individual projects by informing you of upcoming projects through a Scoping/Information Package document. Soliciting your comments at the start of the NEPA process helps us to ensure that pertinent issues are identified and studied early, and items that are of minimal concern do not unnecessarily consume your time and effort.

This letter is to notify you that the Shoshone Field Office is asking for your thoughts and comments for the Muldoon Canyon Allotment Grazing Permit Renewal EA, Project # ID-230-2009-EA-315. The Scoping/Information Package for this project proposal can be found on the internet at: <http://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/info/nepa.html>.

Your comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, preliminary issues, and alternatives. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received on or before [January 14, 2010](#) and are directly relevant to the proposal and project area. The BLM will accept feedback beyond this date, however, such comments may be considered secondary to comments received in a timely manner.

Please submit your comments in writing to either the Shoshone Field Office or to [id\\_shoshone\\_fo@blm.gov](mailto:id_shoshone_fo@blm.gov). The primary contact for questions and comments related to this analysis is Joanna Tjaden, Rangeland Management Specialist, and she can be reached at (208) 732-7292.

Sincerely,  
/s/ Ruth A. Miller

Ruth A. Miller  
Shoshone Field Manager

cc:

EE-DA-HO Ranch

Flat Top Grazing Association

Blaine County Commissioners, 206 1<sup>st</sup> Ave S Suite 300, Hailey, ID 83333

Committee for the High Desert, P.O. Box 2863, Boise, ID 83701

ICL Public Lands Office, P.O. Box 844, Boise, ID 83701

Idaho Department of Fish and Game, 319 S. 417 E., Highway 93 Business  
Park, Jerome, ID 83338

Idaho State Department of Agriculture, Division of Animal Industries, Attn:  
Ron Kay, P.O. Box 7249, Boise, Idaho 83701

Idaho Department of Lands, South Central Supervisory Area, 324 S 417 E,  
Suite 2, Jerome, ID 83338

Idaho Wildlife Federation, P.O. Box 6426, Boise, ID 83707

Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, P.O. Box 306, Fort Hall, ID 83203

The Wilderness Society, Idaho Regional Office, 950 W. Bannock St. Suite  
605, Boise, ID 83702

Western Watersheds Project, P.O. Box 1770, Hailey, ID 83333 AND  
P.O. Box 2863, Boise, ID 83701

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

**Twin Falls District  
Shoshone Field Office  
400 West F Street  
Shoshone, ID 83352**

**SCOPING/INFORMATION PACKAGE**

**MULDOON CANYON ALLOTMENT (#80235)  
GRAZING PERMIT RENEWAL**

Project # ID-230-2009-EA-315

The information in this package summarizes a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to authorize permit renewals in the Muldoon Canyon Allotment #80235. The action being analyzed is the renewal of a livestock grazing permit in the Muldoon Canyon Allotment per 43 Code of Federal Regulations (43CFR), Subpart 4180-Fundamentals of Rangeland Health and Standards and Guidelines for Grazing Administration in accordance with the 1981 Sun Valley Management Framework Plan (MFP). 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 document is to inform you and other interested and affected parties of this proposal, and to solicit your comments to assist us with the NEPA review of the proposal. The analysis of this proposal is currently ongoing, and will eventually be documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA) with an estimated completion date of 2010. Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential environmental issues related to the proposed action and to identify alternatives to the proposed action that meet the purpose and need for the project.

**Purpose and Need for Action**

The Sun Valley MFP identifies the Muldoon Canyon Allotment as available for domestic livestock grazing. Where consistent with the goals and objectives of the MFP and Idaho's Standards and Guidelines for Grazing Management (1997), it is BLM policy to authorize allocation of forage for livestock grazing to qualified operators. The purpose of the proposed action is to authorize livestock grazing consistent with BLM policy and in a manner that maintains or improves project area resource conditions and achieves the objectives and desired conditions described in the Sun Valley MFP. The analysis and authorization are needed because the allotment is not meeting Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health for Riparian Areas and Wetlands but Muldoon Canyon Creek is making significant progress towards meeting those standards in the future.

## **Existing Condition**

The Muldoon Canyon Allotment is located in Blaine County; approximately one mile east of Bellevue, Idaho (refer to Map). Elevations in this allotment range from 5,475 to 7,988 feet. The allotment is located south of the Martin Canyon Allotment, west of the Flat Top Allotment, north of the Cove Allotment and Dry Creek Allotment and in the mouth of the Muldoon Canyon lays private lands owned by the EE-DA-HO Ranch. The Muldoon Canyon Allotment is comprised of 6,926 federal acres managed by the BLM, 1,627 acres managed by Idaho Department of State Lands and 922 private acres owned by the EE-DA-HO Ranch.

The allotment is mainly one large gulch that runs east and west with many other smaller gulches that run north and south into the main gulch. Flat Top Grazing Association, in care of John Peavey, and EE-DA-HO Ranch, in care of Bob Marcroft, are the current permittees in the Muldoon Canyon Allotment.

EE-DA-HO Ranch has a permit to graze cattle during the summer months and Flat Top Grazing Association has a permit to graze sheep in the spring and fall. Most of the use made by cattle occurs in Big Dry Canyon, Italian Gulch and Sharps Canyon. These areas are on the eastern portion of the allotment. The sheep typically graze the allotment in late spring but do occasionally graze the allotment again in late summer or early fall. Flat Top Grazing Association typically uses Sharps Canyon and Big Dry Canyon.

The EE-DA-HO Ranch grazing permit allows for 82 head of cattle to graze from 5/15 to 10/15. Typically, the permittee turns more head of cattle out on the Muldoon Canyon Allotment in early or mid June and is off of the allotment by mid September. This grazing prescription was adapted in the late 1990s in order to improve the riparian areas. The Flat Top Grazing Association grazing permit allows for 71 head of sheep to graze from 5/15 to 11/10. Typically, this permittee uses the Muldoon Canyon Allotment as a trailing route and tends to herd a larger amount of sheep for a shorter time through the allotment in the spring or fall. The current authorizations are shown in Table 2.

There were previous permit holders in the Muldoon Canyon Allotment. Up until 1976, Flat Top Grazing Association was the sole permittee and holder of both the sheep AUMs and the cattle AUMs. From 1977 to 1989, Flat Top Grazing Association held sheep AUMs while James West held the cattle AUMs and sheep AUMs. While James West held his permit, he wanted to retire his sheep AUMs in the Muldoon Canyon Allotment and only run cattle. This decision was approved and accepted by the BLM as well as Flat Top Grazing Association in order to only have one sheep permittee and one cattle permittee. James West thought that it was in the best interest of the allotment as well as in the big game species that use this area. In 1990, James West transferred his cattle AUMs to the EE-DA-HO Ranch and they currently hold the permit today. The AUMs that were retired while James West held the permit are reflected in the current active AUMs.

The BLM is required to assess resource conditions on the allotment in conjunction with Technical Reference 1731-6 *Interpreting Indicators of Rangeland Health* (2000) and the final *Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management* (1997). Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines are used as management goals by the BLM for the betterment of the environment, protection of cultural resources, and sustained productivity of the range. They were developed with the specific intent of providing for the multiple use of the public lands. The regulations direct that existing grazing management be modified through the term permit to ensure that rangeland health standards are achieved. Ultimately, the intent of the fundamentals of rangeland health and the Idaho standards is to ensure that the resources within the allotment are meeting the Standards for Rangeland Health or are making significant progress towards meeting the Standards.

A Rangeland Health field assessment for the Muldoon Canyon Allotment was completed in 2005 and sent to permittees and interested publics on May 3, 2006. Public comments were received for Muldoon Canyon Allotment in regard to the Rangeland Health Assessment from the Idaho Fish & Game on April 13, 2005 and will be considered in this document.

Livestock grazing use within this allotment was analyzed in the 1981 Sun Valley MFP. In that document, no decreases in permitted use were proposed for the Muldoon Canyon Allotment because there was not a need for them at the time. There was however a deferment in the season of use from May 1<sup>st</sup> to May 15<sup>th</sup>. The action of re-issuing term grazing permits for this allotment would not result in a change in the scope of the resource uses or a change in the terms, conditions, and decisions made. Establishing management practices and the appropriate grazing authorization through the incorporation of the Fundamentals of Rangeland Health and Guidelines would continue to allow allotment management to comply with the long-range direction outlined in the Sun Valley MFP. The Proposed Action described in this document is in conformance with the 1981 Sun Valley MFP and decision.

### **Proposed Action**

Issue the grazing permit for a ten-year term which authorizes livestock use in the Muldoon Canyon Allotment and incorporates the Fundamentals of Rangeland Health and Standards and Guidelines for Grazing Administration (43 CFR 4180). This alternative describes the on-the-ground management action that the BLM proposes to implement and represents the proposed Management Guidelines. This alternative renews the grazing permit with the inclusion of utilization limits for the native grasses. The Muldoon Canyon Allotment grazing permit would authorize livestock use as specified in Table 1. No AUMs are proposed to be suspended in the allotment. No range improvements are proposed.

The proposed grazing permit will allow some flexibility in the livestock numbers in order for two typical bands of sheep to be authorized. Flexibility in the sheep numbers would be authorized as long as grazing does not occur outside of the season of use, utilization levels are within 40% and the active preference on the grazing permit is not exceeded. Any livestock use outside of the Terms and Conditions of the permit that has not been approved by the Authorized Officer will be in violation of the grazing permit and a trespass may be warranted.

Under the Proposed Action, the Management Guidelines would include:

- Utilization of native grasses would be limited to 40% of current growth in key areas, i.e., up to one half mile from water features, including perennial/intermittent streams, springs, ponds, canals, or troughs. Utilization would be conducted based on the Height-Weight methodology described in Interagency Technical Reference 1734-3, *Utilization Studies and Residual Measurements*.

**Table 1: Proposed Grazing Permit Authorization**

Current Permittee	Livestock #	Days	Grazing Begin End	%PL	Active AUMs	Suspended AUMs	Total AUMs
EE-DA-HO Ranch c/o Bob Marcroft	300 Cattle	28	5/15 to 10/15	66%	<b>276</b>	249	525
Flat Top Grazing Association c/o John Peavey	2,500 Sheep	5	5/15 to 11/10	100%	<b>85</b>	21	105

### **Preliminary Issues**

The BLM has identified several preliminary issues that are being considered for detailed analysis.

The soils in the Muldoon Canyon Allotment are mostly dark colored, gravelly loams, gravelly silt loams and clay loams over 40 inches deep and are derived from volcanic, metasedimentary, or granitic materials. The Muldoon Canyon Allotment is currently meeting the rangeland health standard for watersheds; however, there is some concern about the degree of mechanical impacts from livestock use and recreational use to the soil resource.

On the southern slopes, many of the desired perennial grasses and forbs native to the site are present but the plant species composition and abundance are below what has been described for the ecological site. Cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) is also more abundant on these south facing slopes than on the north facing slopes and this may be a factor in the decreased populations of grasses and forbs. Historic sheep grazing and past wildfires have both influenced the decreased productivity of native plant communities. The north facing slopes in the Muldoon Canyon Allotment are meeting the Native Plant Communities Standard and there are no native plant communities issues.

The Muldoon Canyon Allotment has known populations of diffuse knapweed (*Centaurea diffusa*), Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) and Cheatgrass since the 1980's. Diffuse knapweed and Canada thistle are both on the Noxious Weed list for the State of Idaho and cheatgrass is an invasive species. The BLM is actively controlling the weed infestations in the Muldoon Canyon Allotment using both chemical and biological means. The chemical treatments are occurring along road sides while the noxious weeds biological control agents are used in areas off the main roads. These infestations could potentially pose the threat of not being able to provide a healthy, diverse, and productive native plant community on the allotment in the future.

The Muldoon Canyon Allotment is considered to be crucial winter range for elk and mule deer as well as suitable or marginal winter habitat, late brood-rearing habitat and breeding habitat for the sage grouse. Due to the urbanization of the Wood River Valley, this area has become more

important over the years for wildlife species. In the Muldoon Canyon Allotment the grazing permit for sheep is from May 15 to November 10 so there is the potential for a dietary overlap between sheep and big game in the spring and late fall as well as sage grouse nesting displacement during the spring. Since the early 1970s, the sheep use has not occurred in the allotment before the start date or past October. The only exception was in 1985 when the sheep were present until November 7<sup>th</sup>. This potential conflict will be analyzed in the environmental assessment.

The Muldoon Canyon Allotment has Seaman’s Creek located in the center of the allotment and it was assessed as a lotic riparian area. This stream runs southwest and has intermittent water flowing mostly in the spring and late fall. Most of the portions of this stream within the allotment are on either private or state lands managed by Idaho Department of Lands and only 1.2 miles of the stream are on BLM managed lands. Over the past decade the condition in the creek has made significant progress towards meeting the riparian and wetland standards. The continuation of progress for Muldoon Canyon Creek will be analyzed in the upcoming EA and some changes in livestock use may be assessed in order to keep the creek in an upward trend.

**Preliminary Alternative Development**

The BLM is currently considering the following alternative:

**Alternative B – The Proposed Action with the inclusion of the relocation of the Italian Spring Trough and Spring Box.**

Under this alternative, all of the conditions in the proposed action will be implemented along with some modifications to the Italian Spring trough and pipeline. The trough was originally placed in an area that is not conducive for water capture and under this alternative the spring development would be moved approximately 200 feet south of the existing project. The old project site would be rehabilitated and seeded under this alternative and the new project would be built to BLM standards. After the proposed completion of the project, the permittee will be expected to conduct maintenance and repairs in the future.

**Alternative C - No Action:**

Under this alternative, there would be no change from current management; the terms and conditions of the permit, the season of use, the number of livestock, as well no addition of the utilization limits. The grazing permits in Muldoon Canyon Allotment would be renewed for the same livestock numbers, kind of livestock, and grazing season shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Current Grazing Permit Authorization**

Current Permittee	Livestock #	Days	Grazing Begin End	%PL	Active AUMs	Suspended AUMs	Total AUMs
EE-DA-HO Ranch c/o Bob Marcroft	82 Cattle	153	5/15 to 10/15	66%	<b>276</b>	249	525
Flat Top Grazing Association c/o John Peavey	71 Sheep	180	5/15 to 11/10	100%	<b>85</b>	21	105

## **Decision to be Made**

The Shoshone Field Manager will decide whether to authorize livestock grazing activities as described in the proposed action. The Field Manager will make a decision with management actions, mitigation measures, and monitoring requirements will be prescribed, including permitted number of animals, season of use, allowable utilization standards, and terms of the permit.

## **Public Input Needed**

Comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, preliminary issues, and alternatives. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received within 30 days of receiving this document and are 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 comments 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.

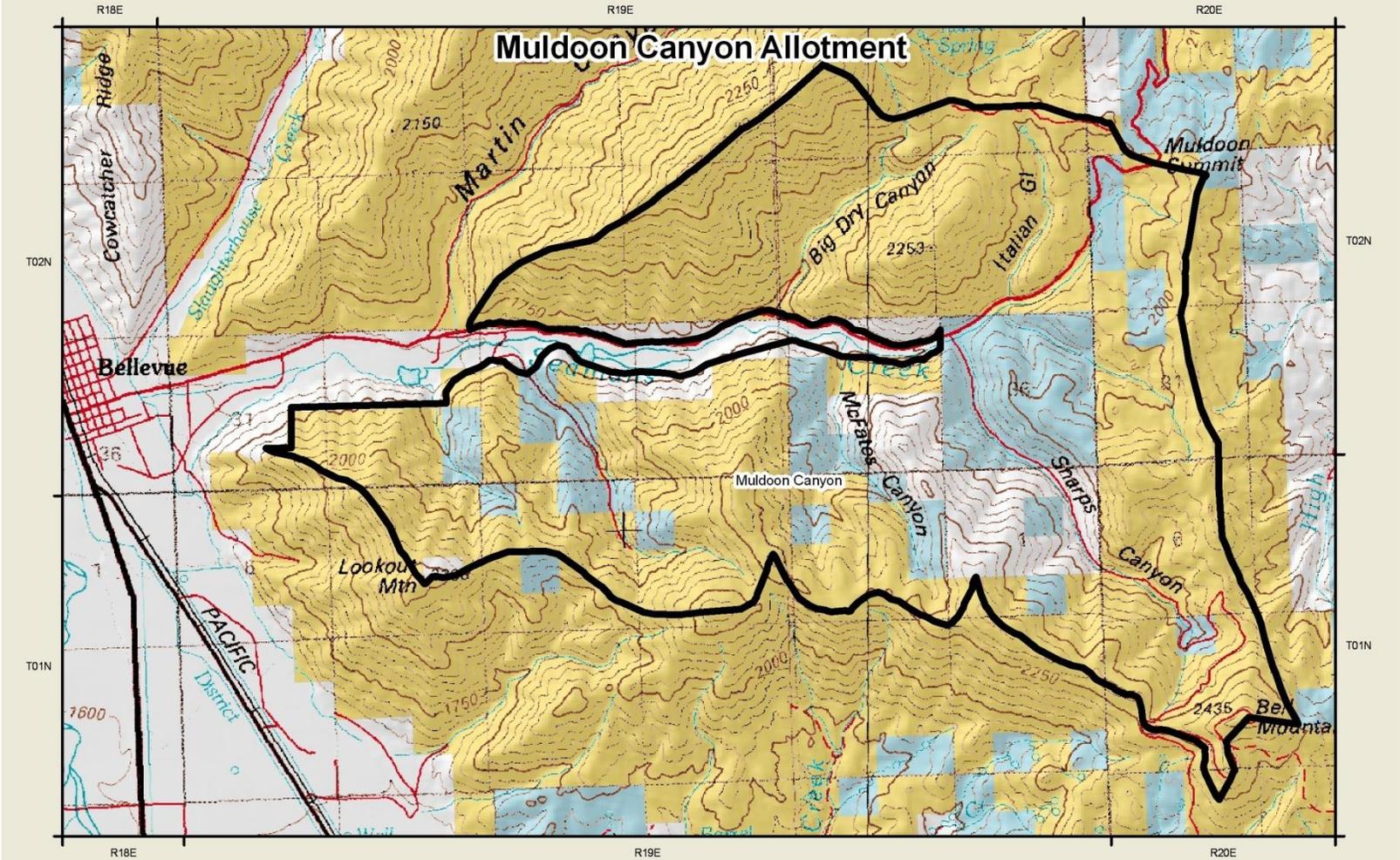
Written comments must be submitted to Ruth A. Miller, Shoshone Field Manager, Shoshone Field Office, 400 West F Street, Shoshone, ID 83352. The office business hours for submitting hand-delivered comments are 7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), Word (.doc), or portable document format (.pdf) to **id\_shoshone\_fo@blm.gov**. E-mails submitted to e-mail addresses other than the one listed, in other formats than those listed, or containing viruses will be rejected. To be most helpful, comments sent electronically should include 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.

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, be advised that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold from public review your personal identifying information, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

For questions or comments you can contact Joanna Tjaden, Rangeland Management Specialist, at (208) 732-7292.

Enclosures:

Muldoon Canyon Allotment Map



- Range Allotment selection
- Bureau of Land Management
- Forest Service
- National Park Service
- Private
- State

Miles

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