

CROW'S NEST  
ALLOTMENT  
MANAGEMENT  
PLAN/AGREEMENT

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
OR-06-025-095

Three Rivers Resource Area  
Bureau of Land Management  
Burns District Office  
28910 Hwy 20 West  
Hines, Oregon 97738

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION: PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

A. Background

The Crow's Nest Allotment is located 31 miles south of Burns, Oregon, and contains 2,876 acres of public land (Appendix A: Vicinity Map). These acres are divided into two pastures, North and South (Appendix B: Land Status Map). The elevation of this allotment ranges from 4,125 to 4,207 feet with vegetation types being primarily crested wheatgrass and a basin big sagebrush/bottlebrush squirreltail–greasewood/bottlebrush squirreltail complex.

The allotment supports a diversity of wildlife. Species commonly found on the allotment are bobcat, coyote, deer, antelope, marsh hawks, long-billed curlew and ferruginous hawk, along with many small birds and mammals associated with sagebrush ecosystems.

Prior to 2000, the Crow's Nest Allotment was set aside as a forage bank for permit holders needing to rest their allotment(s) due to various conditions such as drought relief, forage competition with wild horses, wildfires, and range improvement projects. The 1999 Crow's Nest Allotment Management Plan (AMP) allowed a season of use from April 1 through October 15, annually. Grazing management was designed on a 3-year rotation. The allotment was to be grazed early on the first year, followed by a year of growing season use and the third year it was to be either deferred or grazed early (Appendix C: Grazing Treatment Descriptions). In 2000, the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Act (Steens Act) (Public Law 106-399) created the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area and outlined land exchanges with Rex Clemens Ranch, Inc., in which the Crow's Nest Allotment was allocated in exchange for part of the grazing permit that was allocated to the ranch on Steens Mountain. In 2001 the Rex Clemens Ranch, Inc., transferred ownership of the base property to Roaring Springs Ranch, Inc. In 2002 Roaring Springs Ranch, Inc., transferred ownership of the base property to Home Ranch LLC.

The 1999 AMP was not implemented, and was not listed as a term and condition of the grazing permit, once the base property was transferred to Home Ranch LLC as a result of the Steens Act. The permitted season of use authorized to Home Ranch LLC in 2000 was from April 15 through July 15. This season of use does not allow for an early or deferred grazing treatment. Therefore, since 2000 the grazing treatments recommended from the 1999 AMP have not been followed.

The 1999 Crow's Nest AMP was prepared when the allotment was still managed as a forage bank. The grazing management objectives and actions were analyzed in a formal allotment evaluation conducted in 2006. This AMP/Environmental Assessment (EA) is being prepared in order to include recommendations and new data from the most recent evaluation. The objectives for this AMP/EA have been brought forward from the 1999 AMP/EA and the 2006 evaluation. The grazing management action recommended in this evaluation was for one pasture to "receive growing season rest (e.g., total rest or graze after seed set defer) annually." (Appendix C: Grazing Treatment Descriptions)

B. Purpose

This EA has been written to analyze the recommended management actions developed through the evaluation process for the Crow's Nest Allotment. These management actions are designed to accomplish resource objectives and achieve the Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management.

This AMP/EA is needed to address the achievement of the Oregon and Washington Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management, allotment-specific objectives and the land use plan objectives for the Crow's Nest Allotment set forth in the 1992 Three Rivers Resource Management Plan (RMP) GM 1.4 and Appendix 9, Page 52.

The recommended resource objectives from the 2006 Crow's Nest Allotment Evaluation are as follows.

1. Objective: Maintain all seeded areas in excellent or good condition over the next 10 years to provide approximately 800 AUMs each year for livestock and wildlife. This will be measured by relative frequency of occurrence in crested wheatgrass as compared with total ground cover.
2. Objective: Provide rearing and nesting opportunity for long-billed curlew in either of the pastures from May 1 through June 30 each year.
3. Objective: Manage for stable to upward trend in condition in sagebrush/bottlebrush squirreltail and greasewood/bottlebrush squirreltail range sites over the next 10 years. Monitoring to assess and determine the health and condition of these native species will include visual observations and a permanent photo point with photos taken in 10-year intervals.

C. Need

The current grazing management does not provide for life cycle requirements of native desirable plants and sensitive wildlife species and, therefore, does not conform to the guidelines, for livestock grazing management in that periodic rest for rangeland vegetation during the critical growth periods has not been provided. Range condition in the seeded areas at this time is excellent, however; the native plant area is in poor condition and the current grazing management is continuous seasonal during critical growth periods for key forage species. The current grazing management would not maintain the plant populations and communities that fully occupy the potential rooting volume of the soil. Seasonlong grazing can degrade habitat for long-billed curlew and ferruginous hawk. Grazing that conforms to guidelines would likely provide suitable habitat for curlew and ferruginous hawk. Grazing management that conforms to guidelines should ensure sustainable grazing management which provides for healthy rangelands. This management would improve habitat for long-billed curlew and ferruginous hawk.

D. Conformance with Land Use Plans, Laws, Regulations, and Policy

This AMP/EA is also in conformance with applicable Tribal, State, and County Land Use Plans. (This analysis is tiered to the 1992 Three Rivers RMP/Environmental Impact Statement and incorporates by reference, the information and analysis contained within.)

## CHAPTER II: ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

A. No Action Alternative

The no action alternative would maintain the growing season use periods in both pastures that have generally been followed for the past 6 years. Growing season rest to crested wheatgrass and native vegetative communities would not occur under this alternative. The permitted season of use would continue from April 15 to July 15. Permitted use would remain at 800 AUMs of active preference.

B. Proposed Action Alternative

The proposed action is to implement the recommendations from the 2006 Crow's Nest Allotment Evaluation. There are two parts to the recommendations; Grazing Management actions and Resource Objectives. The proposed action is to extend the permitted season of use from April 1 through October 15, which would allow for greater flexibility in grazing management. The general season of use that would be followed within that permitted season of use would be from June 1 through July 31 allowing for deferment of one pasture within the allotment until after the critical growing season.

Although the pastures would generally be grazed from June 1 through July 31, the extended permitted season would also allow for grazing to be earlier or later in the season. The extended permitted season of use allows for grazing management options while still allowing the objectives to be met.

The recommended resource objectives are as follows:

1. Objective: Maintain all seeded areas in excellent or good condition over the next 10 years to provide approximately 800 AUMs each year for livestock and wildlife. This will be measured by relative frequency of occurrence in crested wheatgrass as compared with total ground cover.

- a. Addresses the following resource concerns:

Wildlife forage, range condition, resistance to noxious weed introduction and spread, Special Status Species (SSS) long-billed curlew (*Numenius americanus*), and SSS ferruginous hawk (*Buteo regalis*) or its habitat.

- b. Achieves the following standards:

Watershed Function-Uplands  
Ecological Processes  
Native, Special Status, and Locally Important Species

- c. Management actions needed to address the objective and conform to the guidelines:

Grazing management that allows for periodic rest or deferment for rangeland vegetation during critical growth periods would be implemented. The target utilization level for key forage species is set at 60 percent and would be monitored annually. The 2006 Crow's Nest Allotment Evaluation recommends one pasture to receive growing season rest allowing for 50 percent of plants in the allotment to have a full reproductive cycle. The general season of use, within the permitted season, to be followed would be from June 1 through July 31 each year, with grazing on one of the pastures being deferred to July 1 each year (Appendix D: Grazing Schematic).

In order to allow for one pasture in the allotment to receive growing season rest, and to allow for 50 percent of the plants in the allotment to have a full reproductive cycle, the permitted season of use would be extended from April 15 through July 15 to April 1 through October 15. Extending the permitted season of use would allow for more flexibility to allow for the growing season rest, by deferment, in one pasture each year.

d. Monitoring needs and schedule:

Conduct utilization studies on each pasture annually. Ensure that utilization levels remain at or below the target level of 60 percent unless otherwise determined that heavier levels are necessary to prevent or remove wolf plants.

Progress toward or away from this objective would be measured by upland trend studies. In 2006 Pace 180° transects and 3x3 plots were established near the existing photo sites so transects run in the same directions as seen in existing photos. These monitoring areas are located in key areas representative of the pastures (Appendix E: Range Improvements Map). Trend data and photos shall be collected again in 10 years prior to the next scheduled allotment evaluation. Plots will be read prior to July 15 to maximize identification of forb species.

Monitor the area for noxious weed introductions and report weed infestations as soon as they are discovered. Treat any noxious weed infestations found using the most appropriate methods.

2. Objective: Provide rearing and nesting opportunity for long-billed curlew in either of the pastures from May 1 through June 30 each year, and provide breeding and forage habitat for ferruginous hawk each year.

a. Addresses the following resource concerns:

SSS long-billed curlew (*Numenius americanus*), SSS ferruginous hawk (*buteo regalis*) or its habitat.

b. Achieves the following standards:

Native, Special Status, and Locally Important Species

c. Management actions needed to address the objective and conform to the guidelines:

Grazing management that allows for periodic rest for rangeland vegetation during critical growth periods would be implemented. The target utilization level for key forage species is set at 60 percent and would be monitored annually. The 2006 Crow's Nest Allotment Evaluation recommends one pasture to receive growing season rest, by deferment, allowing for 50 percent of plants in the allotment to have a full reproductive cycle and this habitat would be available for long-billed curlew nesting. The general season of use to be followed will be from June 1 through July 31 each year, with one of the pastures being deferred to July 1 each year (Appendix D: Grazing Schematic).

In order to allow for one pasture in the allotment to receive growing season rest, and to allow for 50 percent of the plants in the allotment to have a full reproductive cycle as well as be available for long-billed curlew nesting, the permitted season of use will be changed from April 15 through July 15 to April 1 through October 15. Extending the permitted season of use will allow for more flexibility to allow for growing season rest, by deferment, in one pasture each year.

d. Monitoring needs and schedule:

Conduct utilization studies on each pasture annually. Ensure that utilization levels remain at or below the target level of 60 percent unless otherwise determined that heavier levels are necessary to prevent or remove wolf plants.

Progress toward or away from this objective would be measured by upland trend studies. Pace 180° transects have been established near the existing photo sites so that the transects run in the same directions as seen in existing photos, but the 3x3 plots were established, and the photo sites relocated in 2006 to be outside of livestock congregation areas (e.g., along fences and roads), allowing for a more accurate reading of plant composition and cover in an area representative of the pasture. Trend data and photos shall be collected again in 10 years when the next allotment evaluation is scheduled. Plots are to be read prior to July 15 to maximize identification of forb species.

Monitor the area for noxious weed introductions and report weed infestations as soon as they are discovered. Treat any noxious weed infestations found using the most appropriate methods.

Continue to complete use supervision reports on the allotment periodically to confirm that the use periods authorized are being followed.

3. Objective: Manage for stable to upward trend in condition in sagebrush/bottlebrush squirreltail and greasewood/bottlebrush squirreltail range sites over the next 10 years. Monitoring to assess and determine the health and condition of these native species will include visual observations and a permanent photo point with photos taken in 10-year intervals.

a. Addresses the following resource concerns:

Wildlife forage, range condition, Special Status ferruginous hawk.

- b. Achieves the following standards:

Watershed function – Uplands; Ecological Processes; Native, Special Status, and Locally Important Species

- c. Management actions needed to address the objective and conform to the guidelines:

The two pastures within the Crow's Nest Allotment would be managed for the maintenance and improvement of the crested wheatgrass seeding that makes up approximately 68 percent of the allotment. However, authorizing grazing management that allows for periodic growing season rest for both pastures would maintain or improve the existing trend in condition of the native range sites (Appendix J: Grazing Schematic).

- d. Monitoring needs and schedule:

A permanent photo point established in a key area of the native range sites would allow progress toward or away from this objective to be measured. Success would be determined by analysis of photo data collected and visual observations of the health and condition of the sites. Photos shall be collected in 10-year intervals or when the next evaluation is scheduled. Plots are to be read prior to July 15 to maximize identification of forb species.

### CHAPTER III: DESCRIPTION OF THE AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

#### A. Critical Elements

The following critical elements of the human environment are not known to be present or would not knowingly be affected by the proposed action.

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Air Quality, American Indian Traditional Practices, Environmental Justice, Prime or Unique Farmlands, Flood Plains, Hazardous Materials, Paleontology, SSS-Flora, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas, Wetlands, Riparian Zones, and Water Quality

The following critical elements are known to be present and may be affected by the proposed action.

## 1. Special Status Species – Fauna

Long-billed curlew (*Numenius americanus*) and ferruginous hawk (*Buteo regalis*) are seen regularly in the allotment. Long-billed curlew can generally be found using the allotment in the spring for breeding habitat. Long-billed curlew commonly use the crested wheatgrass seedings in Crow's Nest Allotment for nesting and rearing.

Ferruginous hawks use the allotment frequently during the spring and summer seasons. The Crow's Nest Allotment and the adjacent landscape provide ideal breeding and foraging habitat for ferruginous hawks. There is one ferruginous hawk nest found within the North Pasture of the allotment and another nest that occurs just west of the allotment.

## 2. Cultural Heritage

The allotment has potential to contain important sites of three types. First, it is near the 4,120-foot elevation which is associated with a 10,000+ year old Malheur Lake shoreline. This shoreline is home to the earliest known sites in the Harney Basin. Generally, very old sites are important as they are rarer than later sites. Second, the allotment is in the general vicinity of the Lost Dune Site, a regionally important 1500 AD bison butchering camp occupied by Shoshone people. Other sites of similar age and function could be located within the allotment. Third, the allotment is in very close proximity to the marshlands of the Donner und Blitzen River. The site density on the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge side of the fence is extremely high. It is very likely the site density on the public land side of the fence is similar.

## 3. Noxious Weeds

There are currently no recorded noxious weeds in the Crow's Nest Allotment. There are a number of Canada thistle sites in close proximity to the allotment. These sites are small and occur along roadways. The allotment borders the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge and its canal system due west of the allotment, which contains perennial pepperweed sites.

## 4. Migratory Birds

While no formal monitoring for migratory birds has been conducted on this allotment, it is known that migratory birds use the allotment for nesting, rearing of young, and foraging. Birds also use the allotment for resting as they pass through on their yearly migrations. Any migratory bird that uses grassland and sagebrush habitats in eastern Oregon could be expected to occur on this allotment.

## B. Noncritical Elements

The following noncritical elements are known to be present and may be affected by the Proposed Action.

### 1. Grazing Management

The grazing management outlined in the 1994 allotment evaluation and 1999 AMP was an early or graze/defer treatment (Appendix C: Grazing Treatment Descriptions). This management has not been followed since either document was written. The current permittee has a season of use from April 15 to July 15 making it difficult to provide critical growing season rest for key plant species.

This continuous growing season use does not allow for periodic rest during the critical growth periods for rangeland vegetation, nevertheless the perennial vegetative component has continued to remain in a stable to upward trend.

### 2. Vegetation

The vegetative community type of this allotment is crested wheatgrass and a basin big sagebrush/bottlebrush squirreltail–greasewood/bottlebrush squirreltail complex. According to 1992 Ecological Site Inventory (ESI) data, excellent range condition exists within the seeded area while the native complex is in poor condition. Rangeland trend analyzed in the 2006 allotment evaluation found trend to be stable to upward within the crested wheatgrass seeding area. There has been no formal monitoring of the condition of the native plant community.

### 3. Wildlife

No formal wildlife monitoring has been conducted; however, antelope and deer are seen regularly within the Crow's Nest Allotment. Antelope use occurs year-round, while deer use in the allotment generally occurs in winter.

Other wildlife species known to occur, or suspected to use the allotment, include: coyote, badger, jackrabbit, numerous small mammals and songbirds associated with grassland and sagebrush habitats.

### 4. Recreation

No formal recreation monitoring has occurred. Recreation in the area includes big game hunting for mule deer and antelope, and some for upland game birds.

5. Social and Economic Values

Those engaged in ranching and forage production make up a strong component of the fabric of local society. The highest individual agricultural sales revenue in Harney County is derived from cattle production, which is inextricably linked to the commodity value of public rangelands. According to information derived from Harney County the "...cattle industry is counted on to provide an average of \$28,000,000 per year to the economy of the county" (www.harneycounty.com 2003). In addition, nearly half of the county taxes come from the ranching community (ibid). There is currently one ranch relying partially on the land within the Crow's Nest Allotment.

6. Soils

The 1992 ESI data, found the major soils in this area to be Raz-Brace Anawalt and Poujade-Ausmus-Swalesilver.

Raz-Brace Anawalt soils are predominantly found in a 10 to 12-inch precipitation zone from 4,100 to 4,700 feet in elevation, on landforms of hills, tablelands, and depressions. Soils are moderate to very deep in depth; lightly erosive for water; moderately erosive for wind, and textures are cobbly sandy loam to fine sandy loam. The general range association is a Wyoming big sagebrush/low sagebrush/needlegrass/bluebunch wheatgrass, on slopes of 2 to 20 percent.

Poujade-Ausmus-Swalesilver soils are predominantly found in a 10 to 12-inch precipitation zone on seasonal flood plains, dry basins, and playas. The soils are very deep with textures ranging from very fine sandy loam to fine sandy loam. These soils are lightly erosive for water and moderately erosive for wind. The general range association is a silver sagebrush/big sagebrush/wildrye/Nevada bluegrass site on 0 to 2 percent slopes.

## CHAPTER IV: ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

### A. Critical Elements

Critical elements known to be present and may be affected by the proposed action.

1. Special Status Species – Fauna

a. No Action Alternative

Under the current grazing management, key forbs and perennial grass species preferred by long-billed curlew and ferruginous hawk are not receiving critical growing season rest.

Livestock continue to be present on the allotment during breeding, nesting, and early brood-rearing seasons. Annual livestock use during these periods likely disturbs nesting curlews, and nests or fledglings could be trampled by livestock.

b. Proposed Action Alternative

The proposed graze/defer system would allow periodic rest from growing season grazing for one pasture within the allotment. This would allow vegetation to grow and provide suitable cover for curlew nest and brood-rearing habitat and provide suitable habitat for ferruginous hawk prey species. This would reduce impacts to long-billed curlew during the breeding, nesting, and early brood-rearing seasons.

c. Cumulative Effects

The direction of rangeland trend is stable to upward for the area, but without periodic rest during critical growing season, plants may begin to lose vigor and become less productive. The habitat needs for long-billed curlew and ferruginous hawk may then be compromised. The proposed graze/defer system is designed to improve vigor, reproduction, and productivity in key forbs and perennial grass species. Long-billed curlew and ferruginous hawk can also be found in many of the surrounding areas as the surrounding allotments are generally managed with a periodic rest which compliments these species. The proposed action would improve and/or maintain the good range condition present in the allotment for the foreseeable future, thereby improving conditions for long-billed curlew and ferruginous hawk within this allotment.

2. Cultural Heritage

a. No Action Alternative

It is unknown at this time whether or not cultural heritage would be affected by this alternative due to the lack of allotmentwide cultural surveys. The site-specific surveys that have been conducted on 17 acres in this allotment did not result in any findings. Trampling damage could be occurring under the current grazing management if sites do exist on this allotment. However, these potential effects will remain unknown until additional surveys are conducted in the allotment.

b. Proposed Action Alternative

It is not certain at this time whether or not cultural heritage would be affected by this alternative due to the lack of allotmentwide cultural surveys and site assessments. Trampling damage could be occurring currently and could continue under the proposed alternative if sites do exist on this allotment. However, these potential effects will remain unknown until additional surveys are conducted in the allotment.

c. Cumulative Effects

It is difficult to measure or estimate the cumulative effects of livestock grazing to cultural resources in this allotment because no allotmentwide. Future inventory, focusing on known livestock congregation areas and other locations where livestock are likely to gather, would provide data that would make it possible to establish baseline site condition. Once site condition is established, it would be possible to assess condition change and quantify effects.

3. Noxious Weeds

a. No Action Alternative

There are currently no recorded noxious weeds in the Crow's Nest Allotment. There are a small number of Canada thistle sites recorded in close proximity to the allotment. These sites are very small and occur along roadways. This allotment borders the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge and its canal system due west of the allotment, which could contain perennial pepperweed sites. Management under the no action alternative allows for no periods of rest to rangeland vegetation which may cause it to decline in production and to become less competitive allowing for noxious weed introduction.

b. Proposed Action Alternative

Grazing management which promotes healthy, productive plant communities creates ecosystems that are resistant to noxious weed establishment and spread. The proposed action would promote healthy plant communities and would, therefore, be beneficial for noxious weed management.

c. Cumulative Effects

The proposed action would allow for periods of rest to rangeland vegetation, allowing it to remain competitive which would help prevent future noxious weed introduction.

#### 4. Migratory Birds

##### a. No Action Alternative

The no action alternative would maintain current management practices. The current management does not provide growing season rest for any vegetation within the allotment. Nesting, brood rearing, and foraging habitat in both pastures could be degraded during critical periods for migratory bird species under current management.

##### b. Proposed Action Alternative

The proposed action would reduce impacts to migratory bird species that use habitat in the allotment. Many species of migratory birds produce two broods per year. Migratory birds that begin producing a second brood in the deferred pasture may be impacted by livestock but it would have less effect with the proposed grazing management than with the current management.

##### c. Cumulative Effects

The direction of trend is upward for the area, but without periodic rest during critical growing season plants may begin to lose vigor and become less productive. The habitat needs for migratory birds may then be compromised. Migratory birds can often be found in the area as the area is near the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge and is adjacent to allotments which are generally managed with a periodic rest that compliments migratory bird use. The proposed graze/defer management is designed to improve vigor, reproduction, and productivity in key forb and perennial grass species. The proposed action would improve and/or maintain the good range condition present in the allotment for the foreseeable future, thereby improving conditions for migratory birds.

#### B. Noncritical Elements

Noncritical elements known to be present and may be affected by the proposed action.

##### 1. Grazing Management

##### a. No Action Alternative

Under the no action alternative livestock would continue to graze annually in both pastures during the active growth period which includes critical growth periods for all herbaceous rangeland vegetation. This type of grazing management has the potential to reduce plant vigor and productivity.

b. Proposed Action Alternative

This alternative would allow for periodic rest during the critical growth periods for herbaceous rangeland vegetation by using a graze/defer treatment. A longer season of use would be authorized, April 1 through October 15, for the current permit holder allowing for more flexibility in grazing management use periods. This greater flexibility would aid in providing for proper management of multiple resources.

c. Cumulative Effects

The current condition of the rangeland in this allotment is good, but could be compromised with the current grazing management (no action alternative) that does not allow for any critical growing season rest. This may in effect cause a decline in the overall range condition and negatively effect four of the Standards for Rangeland Health; Watershed Function – Uplands; Ecological Processes; Water Quality (through runoff); and/or Native, Special Status, and Locally Important Species. Grazing management that allows periodic rest during the critical growth season for rangeland vegetation (proposed action alternative) would maintain or improve the resources associated with meeting these standards in the foreseeable future.

2. Vegetation

a. No Action Alternative

Under the no action alternative livestock would continue to graze annually in both pastures during the active growth period which includes critical growth periods for native rangeland vegetation. Continuous growing season use would eventually reduce the vigor of the crested wheatgrass seeding as well as the native community. If crested wheatgrass and/or healthy native plant communities decline, then less desirable species and/or noxious weeds may invade, resulting in poor condition rangelands.

b. Proposed Action Alternative

This proposed action that conforms to guidelines for grazing management has taken into consideration the health and life cycle requirements of rangeland vegetation.

The proposed action would allow for periodic rest during critical growth periods. Typical results from this type of management are increased vigor, reproduction, and productivity of most plant species. The expected response of the current vegetative community would be increased vigor on those plants more readily available to livestock and maintained condition of those already in good condition. A majority of the allotment is in good condition, however, those areas in poor condition would be given the chance to improve by providing forage species an opportunity to reproduce and maintain plant vigor.

c. Cumulative Effects

If the overall health of vegetative communities in this allotment is compromised due to continuous grazing during critical growth periods, the overall range condition would decline. Poor condition range usually provides areas for noxious weed introductions, decreases availability of wildlife habitat, impacts ecological processes and upland watershed function. This would happen over time with the no action alternative. The proposed action avoids all of the results described above and conforms to the guidelines for grazing management. The foreseeable future with the proposed action is a continuous upward trend in rangeland condition.

3. Wildlife

a. No Action Alternative

The no action alternative would maintain current management practices. The current grazing management does not provide growing season rest for any vegetation within the allotment. Nesting and brood-rearing habitat in both pastures could be degraded during critical periods for curlew and migratory bird species under current management, thus causing them to move on to surrounding and more suitable areas. Big game habitat for forage would likely not improve with selection of the no action alternative. Small rodents and other wildlife are likely to be negatively impacted due to decrease in cover with selection of this alternative.

b. Proposed Action Alternative

The proposed action would change current management to a graze/defer treatment. The deferred pasture would not be used until after seed-set. The deferred pasture would provide suitable cover for nesting curlews and migratory birds, as well as suitable cover in surrounding areas. Curlew chicks would most likely be mobile when cows enter the deferred pasture.

Some migratory birds may be nesting on their second brood and may be disturbed and have nests or fledglings trampled. Allowing pastures to grow to seed-set and reducing the impacts of nesting/rearing season grazing under current management would improve wildlife habitat.

c. Cumulative Effects

If the health of rangeland vegetation were to decline with either action, wildlife would move to find habitat in other areas. By outlining proper grazing management for this allotment, impacts to wildlife would likely be reduced and rangeland trend would improve.

4. Recreation

a. No Action Alternative

The no action alternative would maintain current management practices. The current management does not provide growing season rest for any vegetation within the allotment. Big game habitat for forage would likely not improve with selection of the no action alternative, thus decreasing the availability for big game and upland bird hunting.

b. Proposed Action Alternative

The proposed action would change current management to a graze/defer treatment. Allowing pastures to grow to seed-set and reducing the impacts of seasonlong grazing under current management would improve game habitat and allow for improved big game hunting.

c. Cumulative Effects

If the health of rangeland vegetation were to decline with either action, big game would likely move to habitat in other surrounding areas. By outlining grazing management designed for overall improved rangeland health in this allotment, impacts to wildlife would likely be reduced and rangeland trend would improve.

5. Social and Economic Values

a. No Action Alternative

With the no action alternative, this allotment would continue to be grazed annually during the active growth period, which includes critical growth periods for all herbaceous rangeland vegetation. This type of grazing management has the potential to reduce plant vigor and productivity. There would be no effort made to provide periodic growing season rest.

The aforementioned activities under this no action alternative could lead to administrative and ecological consequences, thus affecting the ranch economically (there is one ranch partially relying on the land in this allotment). The no action alternative could have an impact on the permittee's ranching livelihood as well as the economy of Harney County.

b. Proposed Action Alternative

Applying the proposed action would result in meeting the objectives of this AMP, helping to meet the Standards for Rangeland Health, and conforming to the Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management. This would result in a continued and viable ranching livelihood for the livestock operators and enhancement of the economy of Harney County.

c. Cumulative Effects

The no action alternative could cause difficulty in authorizing grazing on this allotment in the future while the proposed action would result in a continued ranching livelihood for the livestock operators and would prolong the contribution to the economy of Harney County.

6. Soils

a. No Action Alternative

Grazing the allotment seasonally during the growing season could eventually weaken or remove the existing perennial forage species, especially where livestock congregate near watering or salting sites. This kind of disturbance could open the highly disturbed area to bare ground or exotic or noxious weed establishment. Soil could be lost through wind or water erosion without the cover of perennial plant species.

b. Proposed Action Alternative

The proposed grazing management allows a growing season of rest from grazing which should keep the perennial forage species vigorous and healthy. A healthy perennial grass cover would prevent or limit the loss of soil by wind or water erosion.

c. Cumulative Effects

The cumulative effects of the no action alternative in relation to other activities could be a potential weakening of the vegetation resource in the allotment even during years of average or above average rainfall. If the region would return to drought conditions, perennial vegetation could become weakened and die much sooner, leaving bare soil open to wind and water erosion on many parts of the allotment.

The cumulative effects to soils in the proposed action alternative in relation to other activities would be a general maintenance of the existing situation. The perennial grasses would remain healthy and vigorous and continue to populate the interspaces where soil could be lost through erosion processes. The greater the perennial grass cover, the better the protection would be for the soils resource.

As the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), in guidance issued on June 24, 2005, points out, the "environmental analysis required under NEPA is forward-looking," and review of past actions is required only "to the extent that this review informs agency decision-making regarding the proposed action." Use of information on the effects of past action may be useful in two ways according to the CEQ guidance. One is for consideration of the proposed action's cumulative effects, and secondly as a basis for identifying the proposed action's effects.

The CEQ stated in this guidance that "[g]enerally, agencies can conduct an adequate cumulative effects analysis by focusing on the current aggregate effects of past actions without delving into the historical details of individual past actions." This is because a description of the current state of the environment inherently includes the effects of past actions. The CEQ guidance specifies that the "CEQ regulations do not require the consideration of the individual effects of all past actions to determine the present effects of past actions." Our information on the current environmental condition is more comprehensive and more accurate for establishing a useful starting point for a cumulative effects analysis, than attempting to establish such a starting point by adding up the described effects of individual past actions to some environmental baseline condition in the past that, unlike current conditions, can no longer be verified by direct examination.

The second area in which the CEQ guidance states that information on past actions may be useful is in "illuminating or predicting the effects of a proposed action." The usefulness of such information is limited by the fact that it is anecdotal only, and extrapolation of data from such singular experiences is not generally accepted as a reliable predictor of effects.

In this case, the basis for predicting the direct and indirect effects of the proposed action and its alternatives is based on published empirical research and/or the general accumulated experience of the resource professionals in the agency with similar actions.

## CHAPTER V: PERSONS, GROUPS, AND AGENCIES CONSULTED

Home Ranch LLC, c/o Stacy Davies, Grazing Permittee

## CHAPTER VI: PARTICIPATING STAFF

Bill Andersen, District Rangeland Management Specialist

Jim Buchanan, Natural Resource Specialist/Staff Supervisor

Lindsay Davies, Fishery Biologist

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Lisa Norfolk, Rangeland Management Specialist

Lesley Richman, District Weed Coordinator

Jeff Rose, Fire Ecologist

Scott Thomas, District Archaeologist

## CHAPTER VII: APPENDICES

Appendix A: Vicinity Map

Appendix B: Land Status Map

Appendix C: Grazing Treatment Descriptions

Appendix D: Grazing Schematic

Appendix E: Range Improvement Map