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East Fork Allotment

Grazing Permit Renewal Environmental Assessment

EA Number: ID-040-9039

Date of Preparation: 01/00

INTRODUCTION

Background:

The Challis Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS) (1999) describes management for the East Fork Allotment as a three pasture rest rotation grazing system in accordance with the 1982 Allotment Management Plan (AMP). Grazing within this allotment and the adjacent Forest Service Lower East Fork C & H Allotment are coordinated with the Salmon-Challis National Forest (NF) and the Sawtooth National Recreation Area (SNRA) through two memorandums of understanding (MOUs). The BLM portion of the system outlines early use and complete rest rotated through three pastures. Two pastures are used early each year while the third is rested. After early use (ending 6/22) is made on the BLM allotment (East Fork Allotment) livestock are moved to the contiguous Forest allotment (Lower East Fork C & H Allotment) for summer use under a separate three pasture rest rotation system. Livestock are then trailed back through BLM in the fall to the appropriate home ranch. The pastures were designed to minimize and facilitate livestock handling such that two of the three pastures are defined use areas contiguous to the home ranches while the third is a combined use area. This arrangement is displayed as follows:

Big Boulder/Baker Basin Pasture	E. & E. Baker
Ziegler Basin/BLM Marco Pasture	R.L. Baker and W & M Baker
Big Lake/Corral Cr Pasture	Combined use

Requirements of the Endangered Species Act have necessitated changes to management on the allotment to comply with the law and to protect critical fishery habitat. In addition, grazing regulations affecting public lands administered by the BLM require meeting the fundamentals of rangeland health and standards and guidelines for grazing administration (43CFR subpart 4180). In July, 1999 the field assessment portion of this process was completed on the allotment. The upland plant communities were assessed using protocols described in the 1997 Rangeland Health Assessment Handbook. However, the compilation and analysis of this assessment and the final determination of achieving or making progress towards achieving the Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health has not been completed. A preliminary review indicates the uplands to be functioning and healthy while some stream reaches are functioning-at-risk and not fully meeting the standards.

East Fork Allotment incorporates approximately 21,765 acres, of which 14,761 are managed by BLM, 3,264 acres are managed by the Salmon-Challis National Forest, and 3,740 acres managed

by the SNRA. State lands managed by the Idaho Department of Lands comprise 1520 acres within the allotment, of which 1280 acres are under an Exchange of Use by E. and E. Baker. Also included are minimal amounts of private lands. Historically, 532 AUMs have been permitted on the BLM administered land among three permittees. During development of the AMP in 1982, the season of use was changed to spring only, allotment boundaries were modified through transfer of grazing privileges, the big horn sheep pasture was developed to exclude livestock, and a 46% reduction in grazing preference was imposed. The BLM issues separate permits for use of BLM lands, and the Forest Service does the same for use on NF and SNRA lands. Two (E&E and W&M) of the three BLM grazing permits are expiring in 1999, however all permits are being proposed for renewal to allow the BLM to consider management of the entire BLM administered portion of the allotment.

Applicants: Wayne & Melodie Baker, Eddie E. and Eddie (Junior) Baker, Richard L. Baker.

Type of Action: Livestock Grazing Permit renewal for three permittees on the East Fork Allotment.

Purpose and Need: To authorize appropriate livestock grazing management on the East Fork Allotment located in Custer County, Idaho, consistent with applicable laws and regulations.

Location of Proposed Action: T. 9 & 10 N., R. 17, 18 E. Boise Meridian (see attached Map A). East Fork Allotment is bordered on the south and west by the Sawtooth National Recreation Area, on the north by the National Forest Lands administered by the Yankee Fork Ranger District, and on the east by the East Fork of the Salmon River. The allotment is approximately four miles south of Clayton, Idaho.

Conformance with Applicable LUP: The proposed action is in conformance with the Challis RMP (July, 1999) under Livestock Grazing, Goal 1, Decision #1 (manage livestock grazing activities to ensure achievement, maintenance, or progress towards achieving the fundamentals of rangeland health) and Decision #2 (continue existing livestock grazing preference allocations for the short term).

Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, or Other Plans: The proposed action is in conformance with the 1982 AMP developed in coordination with the Salmon-Challis National Forest. Permitting requirements for the Clean Water Act have been met and appropriate water rights claims have been filed with the State of Idaho. Consultation in accordance with the Endangered Species Act has been completed with a "may affect, not likely to adversely affect" concurrence from the National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Consultation under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (as amended) has been conducted in accordance with BLM's National Programmatic Agreement and the implementing Protocol agreement between Idaho BLM and the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office. Management within the Wilderness Study Areas is in compliance with the Bureau's Interim Management Policy and Guidelines for Lands Under Wilderness Review (BLM Handbook H-8550, USDI

1995).

PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES:

Alternative 1: Continuation of Existing Permit Authorization in Accordance with the 1982 AMP

Livestock grazing would be permitted from May 23 extending into June and from 10/15 through 10/16 for an active grazing preference of 288 AUMs, distributed among three permittees. With the loss of the licensed fall use in 1982, in order to authorize a two day fall trailing period a two day delay in spring turnout is indicated. The fall trailing is shown as occurring in mid October but may occur anytime from late September into November depending upon the scheduled use on the adjacent forest allotment. Grazing would follow the rest rotation grazing system outlined in the 1982 AMP and consolidate forest and BLM administered lands into three grazing pastures. Rotation of spring use would continue on two pastures while complete rest is applied to the third. Individual permits would be issued for use as follows:

<u>Permittee</u>	<u>Livestock Number/Kind</u>	<u>Season of Use</u>	<u>%PL</u>	<u>Active AUMs</u>	<u>Suspended AUMs</u>	<u>Total AUMs</u>
Eddie & Eddie Jr. Baker	188 cattle	5/23 to 6/10	100	118	157	275
	2 horse	5/23 to 6/10	100	3	—	3
	188 cattle	10/15 to 10/16	100	13		13
Richard L. Baker	30 cattle	5/23 to 6/22	50*	16	8	24
	30 cattle	10/15 to 10/16	50*	1		1
Wayne & Melodie Baker	256 cattle	5/23 to 6/22	50*	131	79	210
	256 cattle	10/15 to 10/16	50*	<u>9</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>9</u>
		total		291 [^]	244	535 [^]

* The percent public land is shown at 50% for R.L Baker and W & M Baker due to permitted grazing on the adjacent Marco Forest permit and Spud Forest permit grazed consecutively with East Fork Allotment.

[^] Totals differ due to rounding.

Grazing use terms and conditions from the 1982 AMP include an upland spring utilization standard of 30%. No additional grazing use standards would apply under this alternative.

The big horn sheep range would remain closed to livestock grazing until an assessment of habitat conditions and Herd Management Plan (HMP) objectives is completed.

Alternative 2: Continuation of Existing Permit in Accordance with the 1982 AMP with Terms and Conditions Added

This alternative would authorize livestock grazing in accordance with the 1982 AMP outlining a three pasture rest rotation system that consolidates the forest and BLM administered lands.

Rotation of spring use would continue on two pastures while complete rest is applied to the third. Permit information describing season of use, livestock numbers, AUMs, etc. would duplicate that shown in Alternative 1. The big horn sheep range would remain closed to livestock grazing until an assessment of habitat conditions and Herd Management Plan (HMP) objectives is completed. Grazing use standards and guidelines would be applied through incorporation of the following terms and conditions into the grazing permits. Failure to comply could result in the cancellation of the grazing permits in whole or in part.

1. Upland utilization on bluebunch wheatgrass during the critical growth period (boot to flower) would be limited to 40% of current growth. Grazing outside the critical period (usually ending June 20) would not exceed 60% utilization. (*Challis RMP, July 1999, Livestock Grazing, Goal 1 #7*)
2. Manage livestock use to maintain a minimum 4" to 6" median stubble height during the scheduled grazing period along BLM administered streams. Specific riparian stubble height standards would be considered on the basis of current riparian conditions, stream function, and season of use. Livestock will be managed to maintain a minimum 4" herbaceous stubble height along Marco Creek, Jimmy Smith Creek, Corral Creek, Big Lake Creek, Bluett Creek, Little Boulder Creek, Big Boulder Creek, Wickiup Creek, East Fork Salmon River, and Baker Creek when grazed prior to July 10. Grazing along these streams after July 10 will be subject to a 6" herbaceous stubble height (*Challis RMP, July, 1999, Riparian Areas, Goal 1 #5 (a)(b)(c)*).
3. Livestock use will not be scheduled after September 15 along the East Fork Salmon River and along Big Boulder, Little Boulder, and Wickiup Creeks (Big Boulder/Baker Basin Pasture) to avoid conflicts with spawning bull trout. A two day supervised trailing would be allowed after September 15, when necessary, however access to streams and adjacent riparian areas would be minimized.
4. Manage livestock use on known or suspected sensitive fish bearing streams (East Fork Salmon River, lower Big Lake, Big Boulder, Little Boulder, Wickiup Creeks) so that no more than 10% of the streambank is sheared by livestock hoof action. Manage livestock on known or suspected non-sensitive fish bearing and non-fish bearing streams (Corral, Jimmy Smith, Marco, Bluett, and Baker Creeks) so that no more than 20% of the streambank is sheared by livestock hoof action. (*Challis RMP, July, 1999, Riparian Areas, Goal 1 #6*).
5. Manage livestock use so that no more than 50% frequency of nipping on current year leaders on woody species occurs along BLM administered portions of perennial streams (see Affected Environment for stream list).

6. As provided in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 4130.3-2(d), the submission of an actual use report within 15 days after completion of the scheduled grazing use is required.
7. The East Fork Allotment shall meet the requirements as described in 43 CFR 4180--Fundamentals of Rangeland Health and the Standards and Guidelines for Grazing Administration. This permit or lease shall be modified, if necessary, to meet or make significant progress towards meeting these requirements.

Proposed Action Alternative 3: Livestock Controlled Timed Grazing

This alternative describes a combination of systems designed around the individual permittee's overall grazing operation.

E & E Baker would continue the 1982 rest rotation grazing system on two pastures (Big Boulder/Baker Basin and Big Lake/Corral Cr) rotating early use and complete rest every other year. The grazing use standards described in Alternative 2 would be applied as terms and conditions to the grazing permit. Permit information describing season of use, livestock numbers, AUMs, etc. would duplicate that shown in Alternative 1.

R.L. Baker and W & M Baker would be authorized a use area ("timed grazing") deferment system coordinated with the adjacent Lower East Fork C & H forest allotment. This coordinated grazing program would allow for spring and fall use as warranted. The BLM administered portions of their two pastures (Ziegler Basin/BLM Marco and Big Lake/Corral Cr) would be divided into several (approximately 5) BLM use areas (paddocks) based on topographic features ranging in size from 1000 to 3500 acres. These paddocks would be grazed with their entire herd for a period of 5 to 20 days depending upon the size of the paddock, productivity, season of use, and in consideration with other resource issues and concerns. The following year individual paddocks or groups of paddocks may be grazed at the same time as the previous year, at different times than the previous year, or totally rested. Paddock rotations are not cycled in a defined system but rather are developed through an annual operating plan in response to site specific resource conditions or needs. Site specific concerns may include avoiding areas at specified times (e.g. wet or erodible soils, weed infestations, or special status plant populations) or avoiding areas for extended periods to promote site improvement (e.g. cultural sites or fragile riparian areas). Annual operating plan development is through inter-agency, grazing association, and interested public coordination. The permitted use on the Marco Forest and Spud Forest allotments would be included in the rotation as additional paddocks. The short duration grazing provides for extensive rest each year (350+days) with additional rest (either seasonal, growing season or yearlong) the following year. It provides maximum flexibility for livestock grazing but necessitates absolute livestock control within and between paddocks through modifying livestock behavior and intensive herding practices. This alternative generally reflects R.L. and W & M Bakers current grazing program employed on the allotment since 1997.