

## **Summary of USFS Water Quality Standards and Guidelines for Grazing Allotments**

The following briefly describes the process and how the Northern Province Forests within the Regional Water Board's North Coast Region address water quality on grazed allotments:

### **USFS Guidance:**

#### **Northwest Forest Plan Aquatic Conservation Strategy ("ACS") and Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment Aquatic Management Strategy (AMS)**

- Directives to "maintain and restore" water quality with all actions.

#### **Southern California Forest Plans?**

#### **Forest Land and Resource Management Plans ("LRMPs")**

- Set Standards & Guidelines for Range Management.
- Set Goals & Objectives for water quality consistent with ACS or AMS.

#### **NEPA: Environmental Assessment, Environmental Impact Statement, or Categorical Exclusion**

- Analysis for NEPA compliance specific to an allotment or group of allotments that is to be completed in compliance with all applicable laws, regulation and policies. Listed on the Rescissions Act Schedule<sup>1</sup> (see Table 1).
- Allotment analyses must be in accordance with water quality goals and the Forest LRMP.
- Not all allotments have NEPA compliance completed (see Table 1-to be updated in the next few months)

#### **Rangeland Management Manual (FSM 2200)**

- Sets objectives for protecting water resources and improving or maintaining environmental quality.
- Sets policy to implement and monitor measures to restore and enhance water quality.

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<sup>1</sup> The Rescissions Act of 1995 (PL 104-19), Section 504 addresses allotment analysis, grazing permit issuance, and compliance with NEPA and other environmental laws. Term grazing permits which expire or are waived before the NEPA analysis and decision are completed must be issued on the same terms and conditions and for the full term of the waived or expired permits. Upon completion of the scheduled NEPA analysis and decision for the allotment, the terms and conditions of existing grazing permits may be modified or re-issued, if necessary to conform to such NEPA analysis.

The 2004 Interior Appropriations Act (PL 108-108), Section 325 provides that the USFS has the discretion to periodically update the allotment NEPA schedules and reprioritize which allotments will be done based on emerging environmental issues and available funding for allotment NEPA analyses.

### **Range Management Handbook (FSH 2209.13)**

- Sets procedures and standards for rangeland management decisionmaking, administering permits, and handling non-compliance issues.

### **USFS Water Quality Management Plan (WQMP):**

***Water Quality Management for Forest System Lands in California, Best Management Practice, Chapter 2,, Range Management***

### **Grazing Allotment Decision**

USFS generally<sup>1</sup> makes project-level decisions to authorize grazing on one or more allotments based upon NEPA environmental analysis. The major focus of the NEPA-based decision document is on maintaining or achieving the desired land condition. The subsequent accompanying allotment management plan (AMP), grazing permit, and annual operating instructions (AOIs) all serve to implement the project-level decision to authorize grazing.

Subsequent modifications to grazing or related management activities may be made as long as those changes are within the scope of the NEPA-based project-level decision. An allotment may be renewed, but not significantly modified unless NEPA has been completed for that modification. An allotment may be “vacant” with no current permit, or “active” with a current permit to graze held by a permittee. An active allotment may be in “non-use” in any given year, in which case it will be either not grazed, or grazed with reduced numbers of animals.

#### **1. Allotment Management Plan (AMP)**

- a. An AMP contains the pertinent livestock management direction from the project-level NEPA-based decision and may refine that direction as deemed necessary to implement the decision.
- b. An AMP should be developed concurrently with the completion of the site-specific analysis and project-level decision. It becomes a part of the grazing permit.
- c. If an AMP currently exists, it should be revised to reflect new information from the most recent project-level decision. The grazing permit is then modified to include the revised AMP.

#### **2. Grazing Permit**

- a. A permit are issued to a permittee to authorize grazing of owned livestock on designated lands administered by the Forest Service.
- b. It includes a description of the range including a map of the grazing allotment(s) and specifies the number, kind, and class of livestock, period of use, and grazing allotment on which the livestock are permitted to graze. At most, a term grazing permit is for a renewable, 10-year term.

- c. It contains terms and conditions which outline permittee responsibilities for construction and maintenance of structural improvements or for range rehabilitation, as well as standards, guidelines, and other provisions that specify requirements related to the management of vegetation, soil, water, and other resources affected by livestock grazing that may be found in the LRMP, AMP, AOIs, etc.

### **3. Annual Operating Instructions (AOIs)**

- a. AOIs address any resource protection issues that may have arisen since the issuance of a permit and communicate these instructions to the permittee.
- b. They are only issued if allotment NEPA is completed and must be in accordance with the allotment NEPA, the Forest LRMP, and the ACS/AMS.
- c. They specify those annual actions that are needed to implement the allotment NEPA-based decision. Being within the scope of the allotment NEPA decision, they are not required to undergo any additional site-specific environmental analysis.
- d. They set forth the following:
  - i. The maximum permissible grazing use authorized on the allotment for the current grazing season and should specify numbers and timing and duration of use.
  - ii. The planned sequence of grazing on the allotment, or the management prescriptions and monitoring that will be used to make changes.
  - iii. Structural and non-structural improvements to be constructed, reconstructed, or maintained and who is responsible for these activities.
  - iv. Allowable use or other standards to be applied and followed by the permittee to properly manage livestock.
  - v. Monitoring for the current season that may include, among other things, documentation demonstrating compliance with the terms and conditions in the grazing permit, AMP), and AOI. Where adaptive management prescriptions are being followed, this section of the AOI must provide details about those monitoring items and decision points needed to determine when a change is necessary and to guide the direction that those changes take.

### **4. Other Permit Administration**

- a. Over time, administrative changes in grazing permit terms and conditions may be needed, based on changes in laws, regulations, policies, ESA consultation requirements, and LRMPs, as well as court decisions. In addition, monitoring results may point out the need for adjustments to achieve the established objectives. Such changes can include annual adjustments of numbers and dates for grazing, changes in grazing system or livestock numbers based on evaluation of monitoring results.
- b. If changes are based on current or previous-year monitoring results, the permittee may be required to: i) defer placing livestock on the allotment at the beginning of the use season or ii) remove them early if available forage has been consumed.

- c. Grazing permits may be totally or partially suspended or cancelled due to non-compliance with permit terms and conditions). Suspensions are the temporary withholding of some or all of a permit holder's grazing privileges. Cancellations are the permanent invalidation of some or all of a permit holder's grazing privileges. Suspensions and cancellations can apply to permitted livestock numbers, seasons of use, or grazing allotments.
- d. When allotment NEPA is not completed, mitigation of resource impairment issues is handled on a case by case basis, in accordance with the ACS/AMS and LRMP.

Compliance and effectiveness monitoring:

1. Allotment inspections: performed periodically to ensure stocking rates, season of use, allotment boundaries, and range improvement terms are being complied with.
2. Utilization monitoring: performed at a minimum at the end of the grazing season to ensure compliance with forage utilization limits and other requirements included in the terms and conditions of the permit.
3. Riparian (Greenline) monitoring: performed once every five years on selected sites and allotments in key areas to track the ecological trend of riparian vegetation and streambank stability. The long term goal Regionally is to identify additional sites as funding and resources allow based on identified needs.
4. Assessments of rangeland condition and trend: performed once every five years on selected allotments in key areas to track the ecological trend of upland and meadow vegetation. Currently there are over 900 permanent monitoring locations established on 17 National Forests in California.
5. BMP Evaluation Program: performed annually at one or more, randomly selected site on each forest to assess implementation and effectiveness of BMPs identified in the USFS WQMP. This monitoring assesses whether site-specific BMPs have been developed and implemented, as well as vegetation and riparian condition.

Examples of practices used to comply with the ACS/AMS, Forest LRMP and Allotment NEPA

1. Management of livestock numbers and season of use.
2. Use of drift fencing, fence enclosures, salt blocks, water developments, and herding to manage livestock distribution and forage utilization.
3. Prohibition on the use of salt blocks closer than ¼ mile from water.
4. Locating new and relocating existing animal handling structures (i.e. corrals) outside of riparian reserves if existing facilities are posing a risk to riparian objectives.
5. Use of spring developments and pipelines to reduce impacts to sensitive and impaired wetlands.
6. Other forest activities also address vegetation and watershed management (prescribed fire, fuels management, noxious weed control, habitat management, timber harvest, road management), with planning that includes the analysis of the cumulative effects of multiple activities.

Figure 1. Grazing Allotments (Active and Vacant) (note this is being updated in the next several months and a revised version will be available then)

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