

Weatherly Unit Grazing Permit

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Summary Sheet

Meeting dates: May 15, 2015
Agenda item: Weatherly Grazing Permit in Garfield County
Presenter(s): Paul Dahmer and Clay Sprague, Lands Division, Wildlife Program

Background:

The Weatherly Unit of the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area was purchased in 1990, primarily to provide elk habitat. Prior to acquisition this area was managed for cereal grain and cow-calf grazing operations. Two pastures existed comprising 1,100 acres which included 300 acres of agricultural fields. After acquiring title, WDFW successfully seeded the fields with an orchardgrass/alfalfa mix. Grazing was permitted on the area thru 2005.

The Weatherly Unit is managed to protect, restore, and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitats, and to provide sustainable fish- and wildlife-related recreational and commercial opportunities (WDFW 2006). Managing for big game populations is a primary objective, especially Rocky Mountain elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, and bighorn sheep. The use of prescriptive grazing to manipulate vegetation and habitat to this end is allowed by Policy C-6003 and is specifically included in the Wildlife Area Management Plan.

The grazing objective is to provide attractive forage for elk on areas grazed earlier in the year and thereby minimize elk use on private property. Light to moderate utilization, or an approximate 6 inch stubble height is attractive to elk.

The term of the proposed grazing permit runs from July 2015 thru August 2019 allowing no more than 60 Animal Unit Months (AUM = one cow/calf pair for one month) allocated between two pastures encompassing 1,100 acres. The grazing period will run from approximately July 4 thru August 31 each year dependent on growing season conditions. Animals will spend approximately one month in each pasture. This grazing proposal has cleared cross-program agency review. Furthermore, an Ecosystem Standards (HB1309) review has been completed for the proposed permit in fulfillment of RCW 77.12.204.

Monitoring for ecological integrity will be conducted prior to turnout in 2015 and then again in five years to measure change. Utilization monitoring will occur approximately every two weeks to ensure protection of the habitat.

The permit area will be surveyed for rare plants including Spalding's catchfly prior to turnout. If rare plants are detected in large numbers different strategies may be undertaken to mitigate any potential impacts. For example if the plants are distributed in a small concentrated area, the permittee and WDFW may fence the area. On the other hand if plants are distributed across a broad area, it may require that the cattle are moved into a different pasture. Further, depending upon the plant species found, they may be able to withstand some grazing pressure with no mitigation measure

Policy Issue(s) you are bringing to the Commission for consideration:

- WAC 232-12-181, Livestock Grazing on Department of Fish and Wildlife Lands, provides the opportunity for Commission review of new grazing permits prior to Director approval to ensure conformity with Commission policy. Commission policy requires that the grazing permit maintains ecological integrity, is subject to a cross-program review, and includes a
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grazing plan.

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

WDFW is actively working on a committee with local landowners and Asotin County on issues related to WDFW land acquisition and management in Asotin County. A key value of the group is maintaining working lands on WDFW property as an important contribution to the local economy and community culture. This permit has been fully vetted with the committee and is fully supported. This permit is exempt from SEPA since the area has been subjected to a grazing permit in the previous 10 years.

Action requested (identify the specific Commission decisions you are seeking):

Commission review of the grazing permit to ensure conformance with commission policy.

Draft motion language:

I move to authorize the Director to approve the proposed Weatherly grazing permit as proposed.

Justification for Commission action:

This action is prescribed to provide attractive forage for elk, minimize elk use of private property, and support the local economy and community culture.

Communications plan:

Wildlife Area staff will bid the grazing opportunity to the general public in an open, competitive process.

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

DRAFT GRAZING PERMIT

THIS PERMIT is between the WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE, hereinafter referred to as "WDFW", and _____, hereinafter referred to as "THE PERMITTEE" whose mailing address is _____.

WDFW grants this permit to the undersigned Permittees, subject to the following mutually agreed terms and conditions:

1. TERM: The term of this permit shall be 5 grazing seasons commencing July 4, 2015 and terminating August 31, 2019.

2. LAND DESCRIPTION:

Township 9, Range 43 W.M.
Section 4, 5, 6, and 7

Said description is located in Garfield County and contains 1,100 acres more or less. (See Exhibit A - map attached).

3. DEFINITIONS:

- a. Animal Unit (AU):
 - (1) Bull..... 1 AU
 - (2) Cow with calf under age 6 months..... 1 AU
 - (3) Animal age 6 months to yearling..... .6 AU
 - (4) Horse..... 1.25 AU

NOTE: A cow with a calf under age 6 months when entering the range will be counted as one Animal Unit (AU) during that grazing period, regardless of age of the calf when the cow and calf are removed.

b. Animal Unit Month (AUM): One AU, as defined above, grazing on the land for a period of thirty days.

4. AUM ALLOTMENT: The AUM allotment per year shall be no more than 60 AUMs. This allotment may be changed as provided in paragraph 7.

5. AUM FEE: The AUM fee under this permit shall be established annually based on the Fair Market Value derived from the Agricultural Statistics Board (USDA figures for the State of Washington).

6. GRAZING PLAN: A grazing management plan to which the permit is subject is attached as Exhibit B and incorporated by reference into this permit as if recited herein.

7. CHANGE IN SIZE OF AREA AND CHANGE IN NUMBER OF AUM'S IN ALLOTMENT: WDFW reserves the right to alter and change the provisions of the grazing use plan to include reduction in acres of pasture available and number of AUMs authorized when WDFW determines that such changes are required to benefit fish or wildlife management or public hunting and other recreational uses.

8. HB 1309 ECOSYSTEM STANDARD: This permit is subject to and complies with HB 1309 Ecosystem Standards as required on State owned agricultural and grazing land. A copy of said document is attached and by reference hereto is made part of this permit.

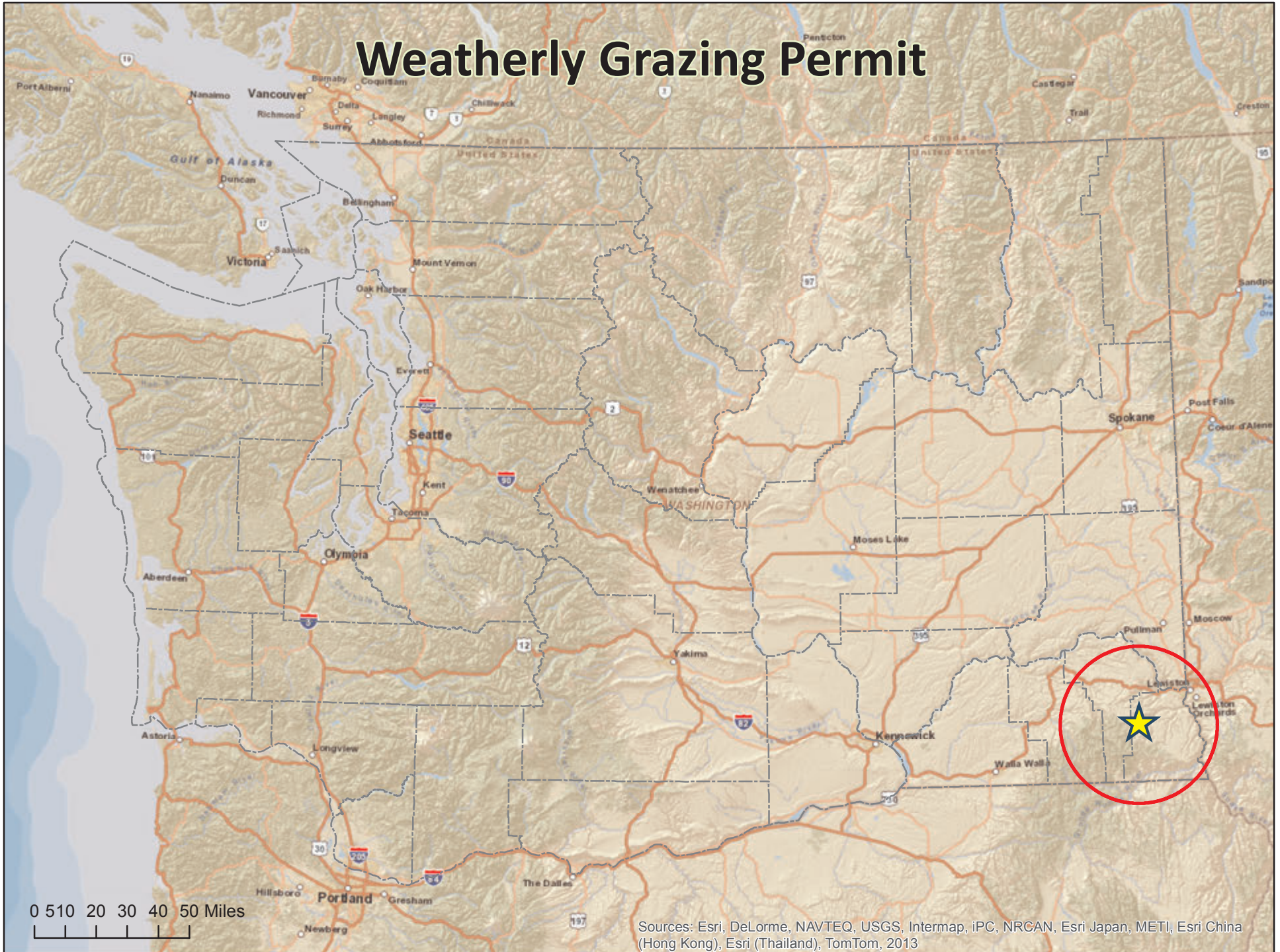
9. CASH BONUS BID CREDIT: If Permittee in acquiring or renewing this permit paid a cash bonus bid and in the event WDFW, as provided in paragraph 7, reduces the total number of AUMs of grazing permitted during the term of this permit and such reduction exceeds five per cent (5%) of said total AUMs, a credit of an equal percentage of the cash bonus bid shall be applied toward the grazing fees due for the last year this permit is in effect. Such a credit will not apply as a result of Permittee's failure to utilize all or part of the total AUMs permitted. The same credit procedure shall apply in the event WDFW cancels the permit as provided in paragraph 10, except in case of cancellation for noncompliance or cancellation by Permittee, in which case the cash bonus bid shall become forfeited as liquidated damages, without further process.

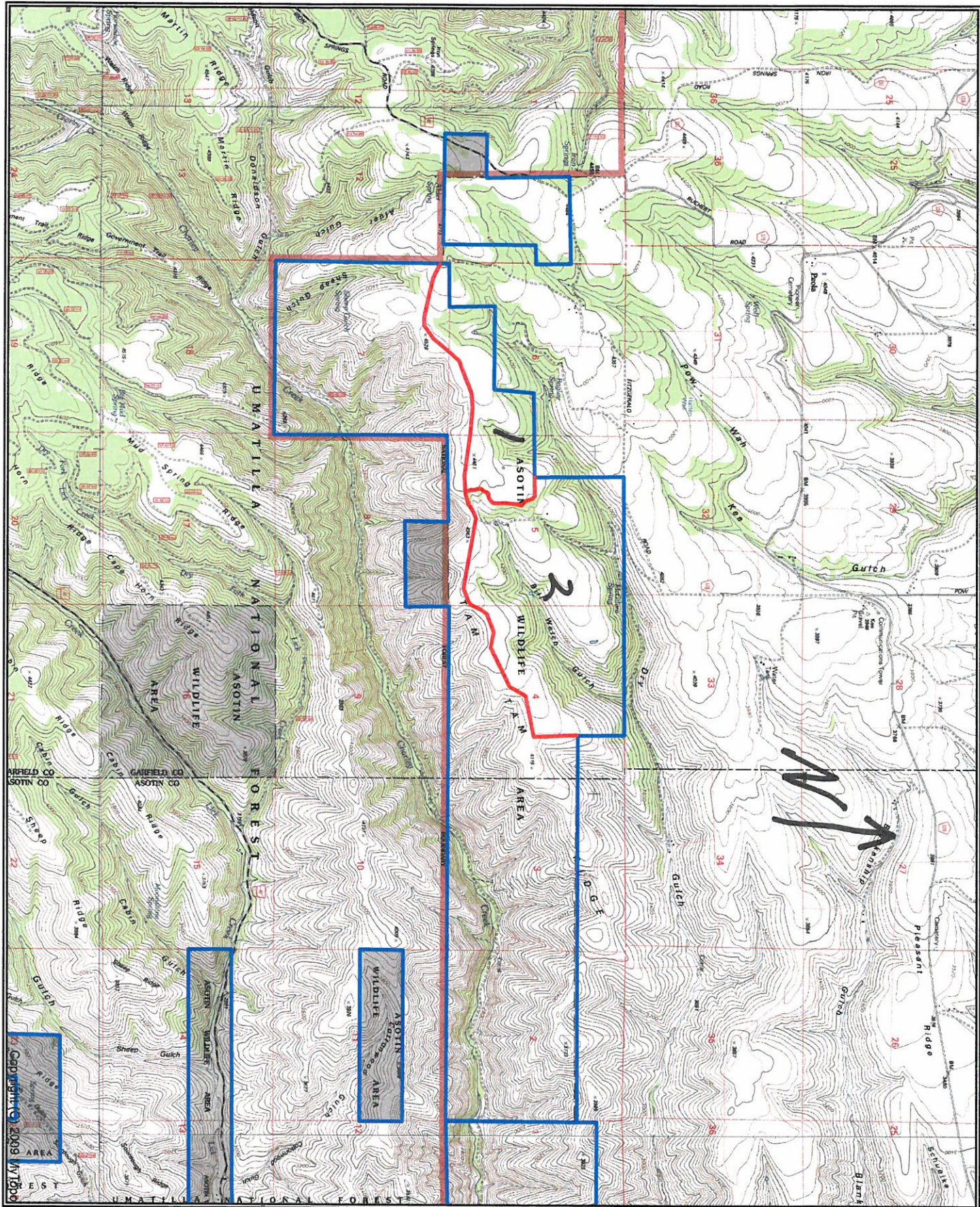
10. CANCELLATION OF PERMIT: WDFW reserves the right to cancel this permit entirely in the event the area described in this permit is included in a use plan determined by WDFW to be a higher and better use. Such cancellation shall be in writing and shall state the reason for cancellation. Notice shall be given as far in advance of cancellation as possible, and not less than ninety (90) days. In the event of the Permittee's noncompliance with any term or condition of this permit, this permit may be canceled by WDFW by written notification, and all investment in improvement projects made by the Permittee, as provided in paragraph 12 shall become forfeit as liquidated damages, without further process.

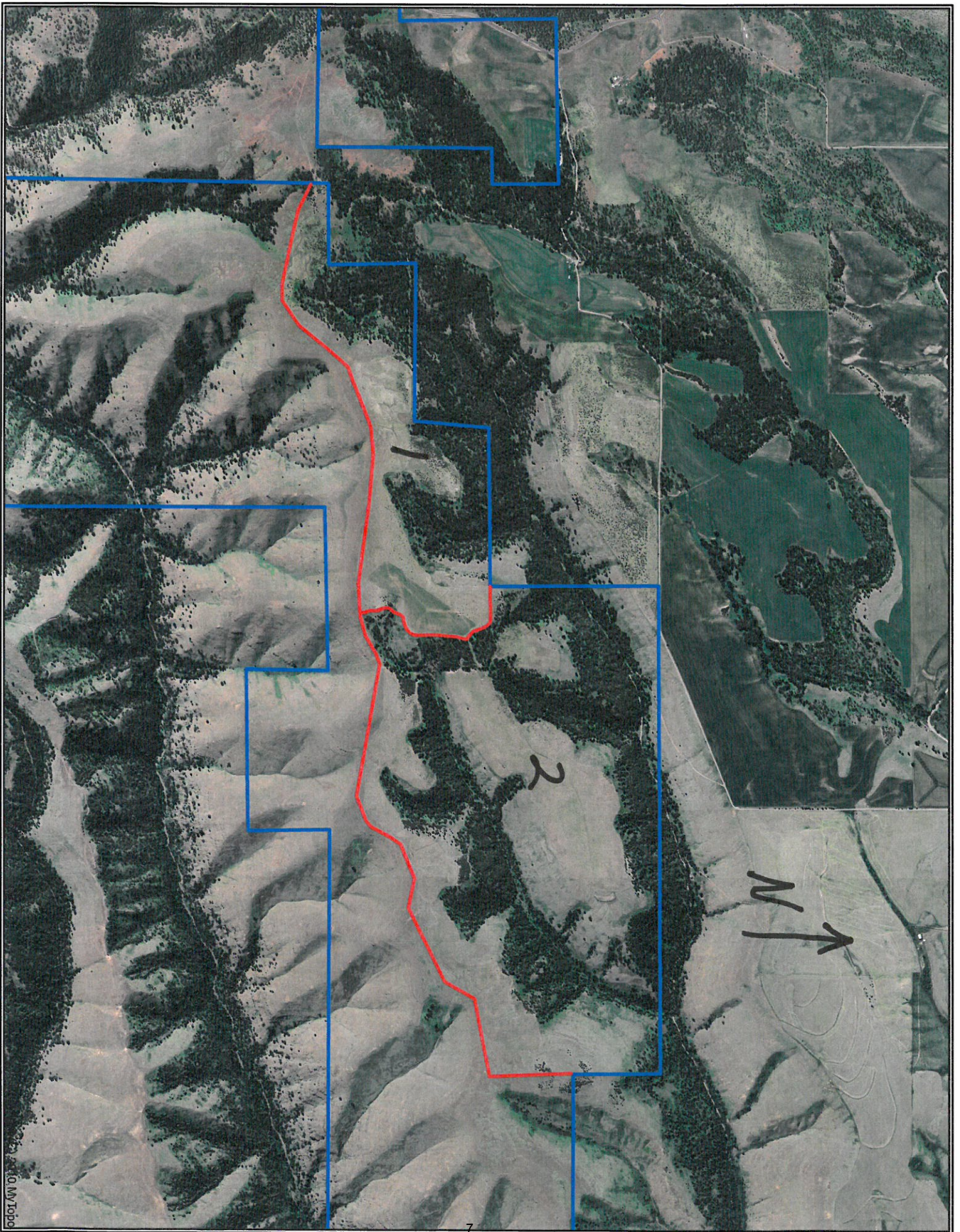
- 11. MONTHLY REPORT OF NUMBER OF AU'S ON LEASED AREA:** Permittee shall report at the end of thirty (30) days, or calendar month, to WDFW the number of Animal Units (AU's) grazed on the leased area and the expected use for the next thirty (30) days. A report need not be submitted for those 30-day periods or calendar months cattle are not grazed on the area. Sufficient copies of a form to conveniently make this report will be supplied by WDFW.
- 12. RANGE IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS BY PERMITTEE:** Range improvements, such as seeding, water developments, fertilization, etc., may be agreed upon and performed by the Permittee only with written approval of WDFW. Written approval shall be attached to this permit and become a part hereof, and shall contain a description and/or plan of the approved project, a schedule of performance, a statement of cost and plan of crediting Permittee for his share of costs during the term of this permit.
- 13. MAJOR AND MINOR FENCE REPAIR:**
- a. Major repair of a fence consists of complete replacement by WDFW when WDFW's examination of existing posts, wire and tension braces, and any other devices used in the fence, reveals that replacement is warranted. Said replacement will be accomplished within a reasonable period of time consistent with Permittee's use of the land and WDFW's operations. The Permittee is expected to inform and consult with WDFW regularly as to general fence condition and particularly when, in the Permittee's experience, replacement appears necessary.
 - b. Minor fence maintenance shall be the responsibility of the Permittee. As is usual and customary in the industry, the Permittee is expected to inspect and make minor repairs on a regular basis to assure the fences will contain and control his livestock.
- 14. RESERVATION OF USE:** All lands covered by this permit shall at all times remain open to the public for lawful hunting and fishing and other recreational uses.
- 15. NO ASSIGNMENT OF PERMIT:** This permit, or the rights and privileges granted herein, shall not be assigned, transferred or sublet, in whole or in part.
- 16. LIABILITY:** The Permittee shall not hold WDFW, its employees, agents, successors or assigns, liable for any damages or injuries caused by the Permittee's exercise of the rights herein granted and the Permittee further agrees to indemnify and hold harmless WDFW and its agents and employees, successors and assigns from damages or claims of damages by whomsoever made and of any nature whatsoever arising out of or in any manner connected with the Permittee's exercise or failure to exercise the rights herein described.
- 17. VENUE:** In the event of a lawsuit involving this permit, jurisdiction and venue shall be proper only in the State of Washington, Thurston County Superior Court.
- 18. SEVERABILITY:** If any covenant or provision of this permit shall be adjudged void, such adjudication shall not affect the validity, obligation or performance of any other covenant or provision, or part thereof, which in itself is valid if such remainder conforms to the terms and requirements of applicable law and the intent of this permit.
- 19. ENTIRE AGREEMENT/INTERGRATION:** This document contains the entire agreement between the parties, and no statement, promise, representation, inducement or agreement made by WDFW or its agents or employees that is not contained in this written agreement shall be valid, binding or enforceable. By signature below, the parties warrant that they have read and understood this instrument and agree to be bound by its terms.

NO SIGNATURES

Weatherly Grazing Permit







Asotin Creek Wildlife Area - Weatherly Unit Grazing Plan, 2015

Background.

History. The Weatherly unit of the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area was purchased in 1990, primarily to provide elk habitat. In the past, this area was managed for cereal grain and cow-calf operations. Two pastures used in a deferred rest rotation comprised 1100 acres, which included 300 acres of agricultural fields. After acquiring title, WDFW successfully seeded the fields with an orchardgrass/alfalfa mix. These pastures, last grazed in 2005, are located entirely within the unit, while neighboring properties are privately owned.

Purpose and Regulations. As a Blue Mountains Wildlife Area Complex, the Weatherly unit is managed to protect, restore, and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitats, and to provide sustainable fish- and wildlife-related recreational and commercial opportunities (WDFW 2006). Managing for big game populations is a primary objective, especially Rocky Mountain elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, and bighorn sheep. The use of prescriptive grazing to manipulate vegetation and habitat to this end is allowed by Policy C-6003 and is specifically included in the Wildlife Area Management Plan. This document has cleared cross-program agency review and fulfills section 5 of WAC 232-12-181, livestock grazing on Department of Fish and Wildlife lands. Furthermore, an Ecosystem Standards (HB1309) review has been completed for the proposed permit in fulfillment of RCW 77.12.204. Ecological implications are discussed below.

Resource Description

Overview. The permitted pastures are located along Tam Tam Ridge between Charley Creek and Dry Gulch, approximately 19 miles west of Asotin. The ridge runs east-west, with steep slopes dropping off to the north and south, but the ridgetop is relatively broad with intermittent stands of conifers. Canyon grasslands occupy unseeded range areas. Vehicle access is from the north via Fitzgerald Road.

Physical Environment. See exhibit A. Elevations range from about 4000 to 4500 feet. Several water sources are available. All aspects occur, but most of the area drains to the north or to the south. The broad ridge is relatively gentle, and very little acreage exceeds 45% slope. Annual average precipitation is estimated to range from 18-20 inches.

The soils in this area have not been formally field-correlated with specific ecological sites. Based on other work in the Blue Mountains, it is likely that Dry Stony 15+” PZ, Stony 15+” PZ, Cool Stony 15+” PZ, and Cool Loamy 15+” PZ ecological sites may be present, as well as several grazeable forested plant associations. The dominant ecological systems in the NatureServe classification hierarchy are Columbia Basin Foothill and Canyon Dry Grassland,

Northern Rocky Mountain Ponderosa Pine Woodland and Savanna, Northern Rocky Mountain Dry-Mesic Montane Mixed Conifer Forest, and Rocky Mountain Subalpine-Montane Mesic Meadow. Other systems are relatively minor components.

Current Condition. North-facing slopes are dominated by fir or pine, with a mixed shrub understory of ninebark/snowberry and pinegrass/bluebunch wheatgrass. These timbered north slopes are interspersed with open grasslands of Idaho fescue and bluebunch wheatgrass. Vegetation on southern slopes generally consists of canyon grasslands dominated by bluebunch wheatgrass. Canada thistle is generally the most common invasive weed species present. The deepest soils are located atop the ridges and support the seeded areas. No wetlands or perennial streams occur in these pastures.

Priority Habitats and Species and sensitive species. Elk and mule deer were listed as priority species in 2005, and only riparian areas were listed as a priority habitat. Wolves have recently been reported on the wildlife area. No state or federally designated sensitive plant species, including Spaulding's catchfly, are known to occur on the permit area (Washington Natural Heritage Program, accessed 2012).

Goals and Objectives.

Goals. While game-focused management is still an important agency function, WDFW also emphasizes ecosystem-level management. The main goal is therefore to maintain or improve ecosystem function. Policy C-6003 stipulates that livestock grazing for habitat purposes also protect ecological integrity, which is defined as an ecosystem's structure, composition, and function as compared to reference systems operating within the bounds of natural or historic disturbance regimes (Lindenmayer and Franklin 2002). An ecosystem with integrity should be relatively functional as demonstrated by various attributes at multiple spatial and temporal scales (Karr 1994). This permit is expected to result in elk being attracted to the fields and grasslands having been grazed earlier in the year.

Objectives. During the term of the permit: 1) Maintain or increase ecological integrity. Quantification of ecological integrity is currently in initial stages, and different versions of a "scorecard" have been drafted. For the purposes of this permit, the vegetation attributes of the "Condition" section of applicable ecological systems described by Schroeder et al. (2011) will be tracked. At a minimum, these attributes include relative cover of all species, density of species by life form, and ground cover of plants, soil crust, and bare ground; 2) Effect light to moderate utilization, or approximately 6" average stubble height, of the rangeland areas to attract elk away from private property.

Grazing Prescription

Pastures. Currently two pastures exist as approximately designated in Exhibit A. Pasture one is 350 acres, which includes 100 seeded acres, and pasture two is 750 acres, including 200 seeded acres. The combined seeded acreage may be capable of producing over one ton/acre of high quality forage. According to the accessibility model seen in Exhibit A, the two pastures are calculated to be 83% accessible by slope. Allowed livestock forage harvest is 60 animal unit months (AUM's; 900 pounds of forage per AUM), which equates to a stocking rate of over 18 acres per AUM, which is much more conservative than previously grazed pastures in the now-completed pilot grazing project which was conducted nearby. Soils in this area have not yet been formally associated with particular ecological site descriptions, but average production values for ecological sites typical for the region range from 450 to 1700 pounds of forage per acre per year.

Time and Timing. Precise timing, location, and duration of livestock use will depend on growing season conditions, utilization monitoring from current and previous years, and the wildlife area manager's judgment regarding soil and vegetation conditions. In general, allowable use dates in a given year will be from approximately July 4th to July 31st for one pasture and from approximately August 1st to August 31st for the other one. To prevent conflicts with fall hunting, August 31st will be a hard off-date regardless of whether additional AUM's could be harvested or not. A pasture used in July during one year should be used during August of the next year, and vice versa. The wildlife area manager may adjust these dates 1) to account for the larger size and potentially larger forage base of pasture two relative to pasture one, or 2) if unusual weather conditions introduce resource concerns.

Responsibilities. During the term of this permit the wildlife area manager shall determine the "on" and "off" dates. A minimum of one week's notice will be given for these dates. Any necessary reductions in AUM numbers will be determined by the Wildlife Area Manager. In addition, **WDFW shall:** provide fence construction and repair materials and retain ownership of these materials; collect fees based on current grazing fee rates in the form of cash, in-kind payment services performed, or goods provided, as agreed upon by the permittee and wildlife area manager, with WDFW determining the form of payment; conducting vegetation monitoring, including long-term trend, utilization, and ecological integrity. The **permittee shall:** observe the terms of the prescription outlined above; prevent livestock-associated degradation of wet areas as described below; provide a telephone number that affords 24-hour, 7 days/week contact; repair and maintain all perimeter and division fences (except the elk fence) to contain cattle in desired pastures and keep unauthorized livestock out of lands covered by permit, including fences in present condition, with all repairs and improvements requiring pre-approval by wildlife area manager; gather any stray cattle immediately upon notification; keep livestock well distributed across pastures using riders, salt, protein or low moisture blocks, or other means, with salt being placed on previously used sites (locations to be provided by wildlife area manager); check livestock at least once every seven days; and pay fees as previously determined and described above.

Weed control will be a coordinated effort between the permittee and WDFW. The permittee shall immediately notify WDFW of any new sightings of noxious weeds on the permitted lands, particularly rush skeleton weed.

Benefits and Impacts

Wildlife. Properly managed grazing is compatible with wildlife and is sometimes associated with increased diversity (Tubbs 1980). Some research has suggested that grazing livestock can lead to increased forage nutritional quality (Anderson and Scherzinger 1975, Pitt 1986). Anderson and Scherzinger (1975) in particular found that elk, and livestock, seemed to prefer areas that had previously been grazed. Cattle grazing improved forage quality for elk in a very low-precipitation regime in Utah in a variety of different seasons (Burritt and Banner 2013), and researchers also found elk preferring areas previous grazed by cattle in Wyoming (Crane et al. 2001). While Wagoner et al. (2013) failed to document an increase in forage nutritional value for deer in Washington due to livestock grazing, Peek (2014) observed that moderate dormant season grazing in Oregon shrub steppe did not significantly influence yield, but had the potential to increase forage nutritional value. Forbs and primary successional species, are generally associated with sites disturbed by livestock grazing, or logging (Schneegas and Bumstead 1977). Some literature suggests that nongame wildlife might also benefit from the current plan, although proposed monitoring focuses on vegetation and might not detect this. Johnson et al.(2012) concluded that grassland managed for livestock in northeastern Oregon appeared to be compatible with conserving ground-nesting passerines such as savannah sparrows and horned larks. Livestock utilization of forage is rarely if ever uniform, which can have the effect of increasing vegetation heterogeneity, which is associated with improved avian (Ryder 1980) and invertebrate (DeKeyser et al. 2013) habitat quality.

Vegetation. Managed grazing by livestock can change the species composition of plant communities, increase production of selected species, and increase habitat diversity by changing plant community structure across the landscape (Vavra 2005). The level of proposed grazing has been consistent with maintenance or increase of plant diversity compared to ungrazed areas (Olf and Ritchie 1998, Rambo and Faeth 1999, Mainer and Hobbs 2006). Although many cool-season bunchgrasses might tolerate up to 60% use during the dormant season (Laycock 1967), moderate to heavy livestock grazing during the critical growth period for native bunchgrasses (i.e., boot stage to seed ripe phenological stages, usually late spring to early summer) can result in reduced vigor, as evidenced by fewer seed stalks, lower vegetative production, and smaller crown size (Mueggler 1972, Pyke 2011). Buechner (1952) concluded that southeastern Washington bluebunch wheatgrass ranges could be maintained in good condition as long as utilization remained under 50%. Heavy grazing during the critical growth period for several years can lead to mortality of key species and a concomitant increase in less palatable plants (Wilson et al. 1966). Many examples exist of resource damage caused by inappropriate grazing

(Fleischner 1994, Belsky et al. 1999, Reisner et al. 2013), but the proposed grazing system avoids critical period use, and the late spring rest should serve to increase herbaceous plant growth and reproduction (Miller et al. 1994).

Special Concerns and Contingencies

PHS and Sensitive Species. Habitats will be protected as outlined above. With respect to wolves, refer to the attached document summarizing wolf-livestock prevention measures.

Utilization Triggers. As conditions can be expected to deteriorate if more than 50% of annual production is utilized on a yearly basis (Holechek et al. 1982), the permittee will be notified that livestock must be moved to the next pasture in the rotation, or off of the wildlife area as appropriate, if average seasonal utilization of a given pasture is found to have exceeded 50% of perennial grass production. This will also be the result if browse use is found to have exceeded 40% of seasonal production in a riparian area. Permittee is aware that range condition and utilization may be stringently monitored during a drought year, owing to the potential for lasting damage from a combination of significant drought and heavy utilization (Anderson 1991, Evers et al. 2013).

Weed Control. Any class A weeds will be treated as soon as possible upon discovery, because models indicate that seeking, identifying, and treating small new infestations is more effective and cost-effective than treating large, highly visible, well-established invasive populations (Frid et al. 2013). Control of these and other weeds consumes a substantial portion of the wildlife area's annual budget, so disturbed or other areas susceptible to invasion will be observed closely with particular precaution for rush skeleton weed.

Fire. In the event that permitted lands are affected by a wildfire or prescribed fire, livestock may be prohibited from accessing the affected areas for at least one, and possibly two, growing seasons following the fire (Bunting et al. 1998). If taken, this action will be at the wildlife area manager's discretion, for the purpose of allowing perennial grasses and forbs to recover without the additional stress of grazing (Knick et al. 2011).

Water. Water for pasture 1 is available from a series of three seasonal ponds. Water for pasture 2 is available from one seasonal pond and a water trough at McGilvra Spring. The seasonal ponds on the ridge, and the immediate area around the trough, which is fed by water piped from McGilvra spring, may be especially attractive to cattle. Permittee and WDFW staff will observe conditions in these vicinities frequently and move cattle or adjust the season if necessary to prevent degradation of soil or vegetation resources. The spring itself is somewhat armored and protected from potential damage from livestock. If forage utilization is greater than 60% within 200 yards of any water source, the permittee will move the cattle to the next pasture, or the grazing season will end.

Monitoring

Utilization. WDFW staff will conduct height-weight monitoring (BLM 1999) of native bunchgrass utilization. This will occur at key areas which are highly accessible to livestock. The wildlife area manager may designate additional transects if it is felt that existing transects are not accounting for utilization, and the wildlife area manager will in any event see that the minimum twice-yearly monitoring required by WAC 232-12-181 is completed. Specifically, utilization checks will occur approximately every two weeks for a given pasture's period of use. For the dates listed above, that would result in monitoring about halfway through the grazing period, and then again at the end, for each pasture.

Long-term and Ecological Integrity. WDFW staff will also use a series of vegetation monitoring plots to track longer-term effects of livestock grazing on plant communities and soil conditions. This includes the collection, analysis, and interpretation of quantitative data to evaluate rangeland health and determine whether progress toward management objectives is occurring. Current assessments emphasize ecological criteria rather than seral stage or increaser/decreaser status (Knick et al. 2011). The National Research Council (1994) developed the rangeland health model to promote a standard method of evaluating rangelands, and the Task Group on Unity and Terminology defined rangeland health as "the degree to which the integrity of the soil, vegetation, water, and air, as well as the ecological processes of the rangeland ecosystem are balanced and sustained" (1995). Because direct measures of site integrity and ecological processes are difficult and costly to gather, biological and physical components are used as indicators of these processes. Pellant et al. (2005) developed a standardized, qualitative assessment protocol that focuses on three key ecosystem attributes: soil and site stability, hydrologic function, and biotic integrity. To provide the necessary quantitative data that informs these attributes, WDFW will follow the procedure outlined by Herrick et al. (2005), which comprises photo points (for visual records), line-point intercept (for cover and composition), macro-plots (for species richness), and micro-plots or quadrats (for plant density). These metrics are similar to some of those used in WSU's recent Pilot Grazing Project on the Asotin Creek unit. The locations of these plots will be randomly selected from highly livestock accessible locations and stratified by ecological site as suggested by multiple authors (Knick et al. 2011, Pyke 2011). Initial long-term data will be collected in 2015 (see below) and will be collected in the final year of the permit and approximately every five years thereafter should the permit be renewed. Additional sampling may be conducted in the event of significant disturbance such as fire.

Monitoring for ecological integrity will be conducted prior to turnout in 2015. Furthermore, it may be supplemented by coordinating with interagency staff to perform rare plant surveys. The Washington Natural Heritage Program has not documented any sensitive species on the permit

area itself, but several are known to occur in the larger Blue Mountains ecoregion. One of these is Spalding's catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*). The permit area will be surveyed for Spalding's catchfly, although correlating its behavior with specific causal factors is unlikely. A recent study found that a certain amount of Spalding's catchfly abundance was positively correlated annual forb cover and exotic cover, while its reproductive output was negatively correlated with the same factors (Heinse and Hardesty 2014). A similarly inconsistent pattern of vegetative/reproductive response to weather variables was also observed, which when combined with the prolonged dormancy this plant often exhibits (Heinse and Hardesty 2014), suggest that it might not be a particularly useful indicator of ecological integrity. Results of ecological integrity and rare plant monitoring will be shared with district team members as soon as practicable, and WDFW reserves the right, if it deems it necessary, to adjust the grazing prescription and/or monitoring schedule to conserve habitat resources. If rare plants are detected in large numbers different strategies may be undertaken to mitigate any potential impacts. For example if the plants are distributed in a small concentrated area, the permittee and WDFW may fence the area. On the other hand if plants are distributed across a broad area, it may require that the cattle are moved into a different pasture. Further, depending upon the plant species found, they may be able to withstand some grazing pressure with no mitigation measure. This can be determined with the assistance of WDFW range staff and/or federal or state agency botanists.

Results of Previous Management.

Ecosystem Standards. See attached evaluation. Current resource conditions generally meet the intent of applicable ecosystem standards for state-owned agricultural and grazing land, and it is expected that livestock will focus on the old seeded agricultural fields rather than the native rangeland. The ecosystem standards are defined to be the site potential of the monitoring locations, and by extrapolation the permitted area as a whole. Site potential is also informed by the Ecological Systems descriptions produced by the WDFW and DNR (Rocchio and Crawford 2008, Schroeder et al. 2011), and by which ecological integrity is calculated. These protocols are still undergoing development and potential revision.

Initial Conditions. Baseline data are not yet available: using the protocols outlined above for evaluating range trend, baseline data will be collected during summer 2015, and means and confidence intervals will be generated for foliar canopy cover by species, ground cover, and plant density. Subsequent sampling would occur either in 2020 or in the final year of the permit, if permit duration is for fewer than 5 years. Given the land use history of these parcels, comparisons to ungrazed conditions are not possible because such conditions do not exist on this permit.

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FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION POLICY DECISION

POLICY TITLE: Domestic Livestock
Grazing on Department
Lands

POLICY NUMBER: C-6003

Cancels: N/A

Effective Date: December 6, 2002

Termination Date: Not Applicable

See Also: RCW 79.01.295
WAC 232-12-181
WAC 232-12-174
RCW 77.12.204
RCW 90.58

Approved by: 

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife acquires and manages land to protect fish and wildlife and their habitats, maintain biodiversity and provide opportunities for fish and wildlife related recreation.

GENERAL POLICIES: Domestic livestock grazing on Department owned or controlled lands may be permitted if determined to be consistent with desired ecological conditions for those lands, or with the Department's Strategic Plan.

1. Livestock grazing on Department lands is a practice that can be used to manipulate vegetation for fish and wildlife, accomplish a specific habitat objective, or facilitate coordinated resource management. If permitted, livestock grazing must be integrated with other uses to ensure the protection of all resource values, the most important of which is maintaining ecological integrity.
2. Grazing permits are of agency-wide interest. The Department will develop procedures that include a cross-program review to ensure all grazing permits are subject to the best available science.
3. New grazing permits will be made available for Commission review before being forwarded to the Director for approval. All grazing permits, excluding temporary permits, must include a domestic livestock grazing management plan that includes a description of ecological impacts, fish and wildlife benefits, a monitoring and evaluation schedule, and a description of the desired ecological conditions.
4. Coordinated Resource Management Plans will be encouraged where appropriate.
5. The Department will promote adaptive management and continued improvement of programs and practices as new knowledge and understanding of habitat ecology becomes available.