

# Proposed Action Report Slickear-Deer Sheep Allotment

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October 26, 2004



## 1 Introduction

The Slickear-Deer Sheep Allotment is scheduled for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis to comply with direction contained in the Rescission Act of 1995. The act requires the Forest Service to complete NEPA analyses on all allotments where needed to authorize permitted grazing activity. An environmental analysis report was completed for the Slickear Allotment and Deer Creek Allotment in 1980. Based on changes in grazing activities and Forest management direction that have occurred during the past 24 years, the District Ranger determined that NEPA analysis should be conducted again.

While most proposed actions undergoing NEPA analysis involve new land management activities or substantial changes to ongoing activities, there is no known need for the Slickear-

Deer Allotment proposed action to include any changes to the existing grazing management. Over the years, the grazing permit and annual operating instructions have incorporated numerous incremental changes in management direction to improve livestock management and protect resources. Because the grazing management on the Slickear-Deer Allotment has been continuously revised to reflect direction contained in the Inland Native Fish Strategy (INFISH), the Boise National Forest bull trout biological opinion and the revised Boise National Forest Plan, there are no known urgent problems necessitating specific management changes.

## **2 Location**

The Slickear-Deer Allotment is located on the Mountain Home Ranger District, Boise National Forest within Elmore County approximately 2 miles east of Pine, Idaho. The allotment is within the drainage tributaries of Anderson Ranch Reservoir and the South Fork Boise River. The allotment encompasses approximately 22,337 acres of National Forest System land.

The principal access route from Mountain Home is along Highway 20 to the Pine-Featherville Road, Forest Highway (FH) 61. The lower end of the allotment can be accessed from National Forest System (NFS) Road 181 and the upper end can be accessed from NFS Road 166. The legal description of the allotment is sections 1, 2, 3, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 T1N R10E; sections 5, 6, 7, 8, 17, 18 T1N R11E; sections 12, 13, 14, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 34, 35, 36 T2N R10E; sections 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 17, 18, 19, 20, 29, 30, 31, 32 T2N R11E; sections 23, 24, 25, 26 T3N R10E; and sections 19, 20, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33 T3N R11E, Boise Meridian, Elmore County, Idaho.

## **3 Background Information**

The Slickear-Deer allotment has been grazed by sheep since the establishment of the National Forest. The first records available indicate J.T. and Manning Patterson were running sheep in the area in 1957. Numbers varied between 2,000 and 2,100 head and the season of use was from late May to August 31. In 1960, the Slickear-Deer allotment was combined with the Grouse Butte allotment to form the Slickear-Deer-Grouse Butte allotment, which permitted 2,000 head of sheep from 5/20 to 8/31. In 1976, the permit was modified to 2,100 head of sheep, which grazed in two separate bands, for a season of 5/26 to 8/30. In 1980 the allotment was split into the Slickear and Deer Creek allotments to follow Regional direction of one band per allotment. Then in the mid 1990s, the Slickear and Deer Creek allotments were combined and through an agreement with the permittee, numbers were reduced to one band of 1,100 head of ewes/lambs for the allotments for resource protection.

The old Lime Creek-Yuba River sheep driveway runs through the middle of the area, and was a major sheep trail in the early 1900s between sheep range in the South and Middle Forks of Boise River and the railroad at Hill City. Each band used the driveway four times, amounting to about 110 crossings per year by 27 bands. Reductions in numbers and trucking of lambs reduced the number of crossing to 19, and in 1966 an agreement with the permittees eliminated spring trailing over most of the driveway, but allowed 12 bands to use the trail to leave allotments in the fall.

The driveway varied in width from 200 feet to over 1 mile. Approximately half the length of the

driveway followed creek bottoms and the other half crossed high steep granitic ridges across the heads of numerous drainages. The heavy use caused large gully patterns in Cayuse Creek, South Fork of Grouse Creek, Deer Creek, and Camp Gulch. Deer Creek and the head of the South Fork of Grouse Creek are within the analysis area. Ground cover on many of the areas along the trail was less than 10 percent, and the topsoil was completely eroded away in other places.

The driveway was completely closed at the end of the grazing season in 1970. The permittee is allowed to cross the driveway but not trail on it. Rehabilitation of different drainages was started after the closure.

The area today still shows the scars from the historic use of the driveway, but it has improved considerably since the closure and changes in the grazing management. Following open herding, light once over grazing practices, and limited use in the riparian areas has allowed the area to recover while being grazed. Some areas are still sparsely vegetated due to the soil conditions and land types, but erosion is not currently occurring. The gullies are still present but are stable, and vegetation is established in the bottoms and banks. Overall the condition of the allotment is in an upward trend.

## **4 Purpose and Need**

The need for this action is to comply with the Rescission Act of 1995 (Public Law 104-19), which directed the Forest Service to complete NEPA analysis and decisions on all allotments where needed and to incorporate relevant management direction to meet agency objectives. The NEPA analysis on the Slickear-Deer Allotment is 24 years old. While relevant management direction has been incorporated into the grazing permit and annual operating instructions over the years, a site-specific analysis and decision on the allotments and grazing activities are needed.

The objectives of the action are to do the following:

1. Comply with Public Law 104-19, Section 504(a), which requires the Forest Service to complete NEPA analyses on all allotments where needed to authorize permitted grazing activity.
2. Authorize continued livestock use within the project area under updated management direction to achieve management objectives and move existing resource conditions towards desired conditions.

## **5 Proposed Action**

The proposed action is to continue to authorize livestock grazing on Slickear-Deer allotment consistent with Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines, Management Prescriptions, and Monitoring Requirements.

The grazing permit and annual operating instructions would continue to authorize 1,100 ewe/lamb pairs and 5 horses for a grazing season from May 26 to August 30. There would continue to be some flexibility allowed for weather conditions, range readiness, and livestock needs. If the forage is fully utilized or the Forest Service determines that further grazing will damage the resources, the permittee may be required to remove livestock early.

An annual once over grazing system would continue to be used, and open or loose sheep herding would continue to be practiced. Bed grounds would continue to be used for one night/one time. The proposed action would continue to allow forage utilization at the level allowed under the Boise National Forest Plan as follows. Maximum forage utilization of representative areas within each pasture would not exceed the values shown at the end of growing season.

- Riparian Areas: Maximum 45 percent use or retain a minimum 4-inch stubble height of hydric greenline species, whichever occurs first.
- Upland Vegetative Cover Types: Early season or season long pastures – 40 percent use. Vegetative slow growth, after seed ripe conditions, or late season pastures – 50 percent use.

The proposed action includes continued monitoring of the allotment through grazing permit administration, which includes monitoring once over grazing, open herding, bedding practices, forage utilization, and inspections of range improvements (water developments, fences, corrals, etc.) as needed.

## **6 Forest Plan Direction**

The Boise National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) determined the National Forest System lands within the Slickear-Deer Allotment are both suitable and capable for livestock grazing. The Forest Plan also contains direction for proper management of livestock grazing within the area of the allotments. That direction provides for a sustainable level of forage, consistent with other resource management direction, and forage is available for use through the Forest Service grazing permit system. The Forest Plan directs that in areas where vegetation management projects and range management actions occur, rangeland forage quality is maintained or improved. This direction makes riparian areas the focal point for providing vegetative diversity; landscape capability, soil productivity, wildlife habitat, and proper stream channel function and water quality important to sustaining beneficial uses. The direction also insures that riparian areas are functioning properly and/or have improving trends in vegetative composition, age class structure, and vigor. Upland range vegetation is contributing to proper hydrologic function. The composition and densities of shrubs, grasses and forbs are variable and dynamic across the landscape.

The Slickear-Deer Allotment is mainly located in Management Area 1, Lower South Fork Boise River. There is a small portion of the north end of the allotment in Management Area 2, Rattlesnake Creek/Feather River.

The allotment is in two Management Prescription Categories. Over half is in the 4.1c Management Prescription Category (Undeveloped Recreation: Maintain Unroaded Character with Allowance for Restoration Activities). This prescription applies to lands where dispersed recreation uses are the primary emphasis. Providing dispersed recreation opportunities in an unroaded landscape is the predominant objective. Both motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities may be provided. Other resource uses are allowed to the extent that they do not compromise recreation opportunity settings. The area has a predominantly natural-appearing environment, with slight evidence of the sights and sounds of people.

The remainder is in the 5.1 Management Prescription Category (Restoration and Maintenance Emphasis within Forested Landscapes). This prescription applies to lands that are predominantly forested. Emphasis is on restoring or maintaining vegetation within desired conditions in order to provide a diversity of habitats, reduced risk from disturbance events, and sustainable resources for human use. Commodity production is an outcome of restoring or maintaining the resilience/resistance of forested vegetation to disturbance events; achievement of timber growth and yield is not the primary purpose. The full range of treatment activities may be used. Restoration occurs through management activities and succession. Combinations of mechanical and fire treatments are used to restore forested areas while maintaining or improving resources such as soils, water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and recreation settings. The risk of temporary and short-term degradation to the environment is minimized, but impacts may occur within acceptable limits as resources are managed to achieve long-term goals and objectives.

## **7 Further Information**

For further information on the proposal and how to submit comments, please contact Tina Ruffing, Project Leader, or Jane Beaulieu, District Planner, Mountain Home District Ranger at 208-587-7961 or email [truffing@fs.fed.us](mailto:truffing@fs.fed.us) or [jbeaulieu@fs.fed.us](mailto:jbeaulieu@fs.fed.us).

### Slickear-Deer Sheep and Goat Allotment Vicinity Map

