



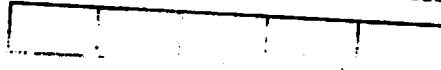
RECEIVED

File Code: 1950

Date: January 10, 2012

JAN 12 2012

Ravalli County Commissioners



Dear Interested Party,

The Stevensville Ranger District, Bitterroot National Forest, proposes to reauthorize grazing on the Ambrose Grazing Allotment. The allotment is located ten miles east of Stevensville, Montana and includes the headwaters and upper tributaries of Ambrose Creek. Livestock currently graze on suitable rangelands within this allotment on the Stevensville District. The following proposal includes features that reduce livestock grazing pressure while maintaining or improving resource conditions as needed to meet Forest Plan objectives.

Background

The Ambrose Allotment encompasses about 1,670 acres on National Forest System lands. The current Term Grazing Permit for the allotment allows twenty-five (25) cattle (cow/calf pairs) to graze from June 15 to August 31 each year. The permitted numbers and season equals a stocking rate of sixty three (63) animal unit months. Livestock grazing is an authorized ongoing activity on the Ambrose Allotment with records dating back to 1947 (64 years). Previous analysis states that the area has received varying levels of livestock use since 1929 (82 years).

Purpose and Need for Action

In 1995, Congress passed the Reversion Bill (Public Law 104-19, Section 504a), which requires National Forests to schedule and complete NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) analysis on all allotments, where needed, to support permitted grazing activity. The Bitterroot National Forest developed a Reversion Bill schedule for the grazing allotments needing analysis in accordance with this national direction. The schedule identified 2012 as the year to complete the NEPA analysis for the Ambrose Allotment.

Proposed Action

In general, upland soil conditions throughout the allotment fall within Region One soil quality standards. Riparian soils and function on some sites rate below Forest Plan desired condition with a static trend. Other riparian and stream sites are steep-sided with rocky substrate, dense timber and minimal livestock impacts.

The proposed action would institute a progressive management approach that facilitates compliance with annual standards and guidelines leading to improved resource conditions. The Forest Service proposes to reauthorize livestock grazing on the Ambrose Allotment while:

- 1. Periodically timing grazing to avoid the hottest part of the season;



2. Reducing the annual duration of livestock grazing on the allotment from the current permitted range of ten (10) weeks to six (6) weeks with an annual option for extending the duration of grazing if impacts hold below allowable limits.
3. Establishing a cycle of frequent periodic yearlong rest.
4. Tailoring forage utilization and stream impact guidelines to match site-specific resource tolerance thresholds on the allotment.
5. Including an adaptive management strategy that could adjust allowable impact thresholds, stocking rates and frequency of rest as needed to meet resource objectives and respond to changing resource conditions.

The permittee has voluntarily rested the allotment four years in the last six years.

What are the next steps in the process?

We will use your comments to fine tune the proposal and help identify issues. Your comments may be used also to develop alternative actions for analysis in the environmental analysis document. At this time, we anticipate that an Environmental Assessment (EA) will provide the adequate level of analysis for this project. When we complete the EA, we will send copies to all the parties who responded to this scoping letter and to any individuals or groups who request a copy. Recipients of the EA will have thirty days to comment on the document. After comments are received, the Interdisciplinary Team and District Ranger will determine if the project will generate any potential significant impacts. If there are no significant impacts, we will document that determination in a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). The Interdisciplinary Team will then prepare a Decision Notice (DN) that includes the comments submitted about the EA and describes how those comments are addressed in the final decision. After the District Ranger signs the DN, the document becomes subject to the administrative appeal process during which individuals may request that a higher organizational level of the Forest Service review the decision.

How to Comment / Timeframe for Comment

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral and electronic comments will be accepted through January 25, 2012. In submitting comments, please include: (1) your name, address, telephone number and organization represented, if any; (2) reference to the Ambrose Grazing Allotment in your comment; (3) information and rationale regarding the proposed action that you believe we should consider; and (4) your signature.

Submit written comments to: Responsible Official: Dan Ritter, District Ranger, Stevensville Ranger District, 88 Main St, Stevensville, MT 59870. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays (FAX Number = 406-777-7423. Oral comments must be provided at the Responsible Official's office during normal business hours via telephone (406-777-5461) or in person. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record and will be available for public inspection.

Electronic comments must be submitted in rich text format (.rtf), Word (.doc) or Word Perfect format to: comments-northern-bitterroot-stevensville@fs.fed.us The subject line must contain

the name of the project for which you are submitting comments. For electronically mailed comments, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgement of the receipt of comments, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means. For further information concerning this proposal, please contact Dan Ritter, Stevensville District Ranger, or Gil Gale, Forest Rangeland Specialist, at the Stevensville Ranger District, 88 Main St, Stevensville, MT 59870, or by phone at 406-777-5461.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Ritter', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

DANIEL G. RITTER
District Ranger

Attachments: allotment map

