

File Code: 1950

Date: 6/22/2026

Subject: Review of Environmental Compliance Documents,
Elk Ridge Complex
USFS-BTNF-Pinedale RD

To: File

A. Background

The Elk Ridge Complex Environmental Assessment (EA, 1978) was developed to evaluate management actions on a forested landscape that had departed from its natural ecological condition due to factors such as fire suppression and past land uses. This EA evaluates and sets livestock grazing levels and management within the Elk Ridge Complex.

The primary focus of the EA was on:

- Grazing for both cattle and sheep
- Determining appropriate stocking rates and seasons of use
- Evaluating what impacts grazing has on the landscape such as:
 - Vegetation
 - Soils
 - Watershed conditions
 - Wildlife habitat

The need for the project stemmed from concerns that existing grazing practices may have been exceeding the land's capacity, which could be leading to resource degradation and the need to adjust the use to be in line with sustainable conditions. Also, the need for these allotments to be grazed by either sheep or cattle.

B. Previous Decision

The EA selected alternative "C" Extensive Management of Environment and Livestock which states "Management systems and techniques, including fencing and water developments, are applied as needed to obtain relatively uniform livestock distribution and plant use and to maintain plant vigor. Full utilization of the Animal Unit Months (AMUs) and no attempt will be made to maximize livestock forage production by cultural practices such as seeding. The native forage is used in a uniform fashion. The strategy may include sage brush spraying or burning only if it is done for distribution and not for forage production.

This alternative modified existing grazing practices rather than eliminating grazing. The alternative selected was a managed use alternative designed to bring livestock use in line with what the lands capabilities are. The selected alternative established; an adjusted AMU for both cattle and sheep, defined grazing seasons and pasture rotations, and potentially reducing or redistributing grazing pressure from sensitive areas.

- Defining grazing capacity (AMUs)
 - The maximum allowable AUMs for both cattle and sheep are based on the available forage, the range conditions, and soil and watershed protection needs.
- Allotment based management
 - The project area was divided into specific grazing allotments this decision assigned AUMs to each allotment. It recognized that different areas had different carrying capacities. It also allowed management to be tailored by location rather than a one size fits all.
- Grazing system implementation

- One of the key parts to this selected alternative was establishing a grazing system such as a rest rotation where different allotments would be rested during certain years. As well as a deferred rotation where grazing would be delayed in order to protect the plant growth periods. By having these grazing systems, it would allow for vegetation to recover periodically, it would improve the long-term forage productivity, and it would reduce continuous pressure on the same areas.
- Season of use Controls
 - In the selected alternative it set specific timing for grazing such as when the livestock can enter and leave the designated allotments. By doing this it will limit grazing during times of early plant growth and during particularly wet times of year avoiding or limiting soil damage.
- Resource protection measures
 - In this selected alternative there were protections for areas such as riparian areas (streams, wetlands), erosion prone soil areas, and wildlife habitat. This will be accomplished by reducing or excluding grazing in these sensitive areas as well as spreading livestock use more evenly across the landscape.

This alternative was chosen because it balanced both livestock production along with resource protection. It addressed concerns about the decline in the range condition. It avoided the economic impact of eliminating grazing entirely. And it would be able to be implemented using existing management tools.

C. Modification

The primary modification to the original project is that we are intending to use these acres as relief from fire burned areas adjacent to this portion of the landscape through a temporary grazing authorization to multiple pastures in the Upper Green Rangeland Grazing decision, areas which burned in the 2025 Dollar Lake fire creating the need. For the NEPA, changed conditions include changes to the ESA species list, including the listing of grizzly bears as Endangered within the project area, and the Gros Ventre Wilderness designation which occurred by the Wyoming Wilderness Act of 1984.

D. Context and Justification

Impacts to grizzly bears are being addressed with the US Fish and Wildlife service but will not lead to significant effects to the species. All other ESA species and their habitat within the project area will not be impacted.

The activity of grazing predates the Wilderness act and thus is allowed to persist on the landscape within the area of special designation. The proposed action would not have significant effects on the character of the Gros Ventre Wilderness.

This temporary grazing authorization will allow for up to two seasons of grazing within the Elk Ridge Allotment complex and the proposed grazing falls within the scope of the proposed action for both seasonality and maximum allowable use. The goal here is to move cows off of the burned Moose-Gypsum pastures that burned in the 2025 Dollar Lake fire and move them temporarily to the vacant Elk Ridge Allotments for the summer of 2026 and/or 2027 as far as range conditions allow. Allowing rest for recovery of burned areas is a benefit at the landscape and this temporary grazing authorization will allow for this recovery without detrimental impacts to our permittees.

E. Determination

After reviewing the environmental compliance documents, holding multiple discussions with Forest staff and cooperating agencies, I find that:

No additional effects beyond what have already been disclosed in environmental compliance documents (the Management Plan and EA) will occur as a result of allowing permittees to temporarily graze the Elk Ridge Allotment for two seasons.

I have determined that this action will not have a reasonably foreseeable significant impact on the quality of the human environment (7 CFR Part 1b.6(b)(3)).

Kate Olsen

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