



Date: July 23, 2018

Subject: Supplemental Information Report

To: Project Records

This supplemental information report has been prepared to document the review and consideration of several pieces of information, determine if the information has significant or relevant bearing on the analysis of the proposed action in the FEIS, and determine if additional analysis is needed in accordance with 40 C.F.R. 1502.9(c).

Project Background

The USDA, Agricultural Research Service (ARS), U.S. Sheep Experiment Station (Sheep Station) near Dubois, Idaho proposes to continue historical and ongoing grazing and associated activities to achieve their mission of developing integrated methods for increasing production efficiency of sheep and simultaneously improving the sustainability of rangeland ecosystems. The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Sheep Station Grazing and Associated Activities Project was released by Dr. Robert Matteri on July 28, 2017.

Information Considered in this Report

1. A June 2018 decision by the Forest Service to not authorize any domestic sheep grazing or trailing on the Snakey-Kelly allotments until a NEPA analysis is completed.
2. Information relating to grizzly bear conflicts and alleged encounters.
3. Letters submitted after the FEIS was issued.

Review of Information on Each Item.

1. NO GRAZING ON SNAKEY-KELLY ALLOTMENTS

As described under the preferred modified alternative 1, the action includes grazing the Forest Service Snakey-Kelly allotments with a proportion of the flock from November through early January each year. The remaining proportion of the flock graze at the Sheep Station's headquarters or are housed at the Mud Lake unit. The number of sheep at each location is based on research needs, available forage, climate conditions, and efficiency of use.

The Sheep Station will not graze the Forest Service Snakey-Kelly allotments until the Forest Service completes a NEPA analysis. During the period that the Snakey-Kelly allotments remain unavailable for sheep grazing:

- The flock inventory will be reduced from the targeted 3,000 mature sheep but remain within the range that is necessary to accomplish research objectives (FEIS, p. 36).
- A proportion of the sheep that would normally be scheduled to graze Snakey-Kelly allotments will be maintained at the headquarters unit.
- The remaining proportion of the sheep that would normally be scheduled to graze Snakey-Kelly allotments will be placed in the care of the University of Idaho for temporary re-location from as early as November through as late as January. The University of Idaho is an ARS cooperator at the Sheep Station and is the owner of the sheep flock.

The agency has determined that these interim actions do not exceed the magnitude of use or the environmental effects that were considered in the analysis for the headquarters unit. Specifically, the effects of reducing the number of mature sheep and grazing a proportion of remaining sheep at the headquarters unit falls within the maximum potential environmental effects considered in the analysis (FEIS, pp. 36 and 40) and addressed in the environmental consequences (FEIS, pp. 91-227) for Alternative 1.

The University of Idaho's temporary re-location of sheep in their care is not within the authority of the agency to determine.

2. GRIZZLY BEAR CONFLICTS AND ALLEGED ENCOUNTERS

After the FEIS was issued, ARS was presented with purportedly "new information" related to grizzly bear encounters germane to the proposed action. The information presented includes e-mails and journal entries from USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services (APHIS) Wildlife Services (APHIS-WS), which provides wildlife management services as discussed and analyzed in the FEIS. Specifically, APHIS-WS noted in a 2008 journal entry that a herder had been chased by a "g. bear." APHIS-WS was not able to confirm if the herder had been chased by a grizzly or black bear because signs of both species were found in the area. In a 2007 journal entry, APHIS-WS noted the presence of a grizzly bear near a sheep carcass. Neither APHIS-WS nor the Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) could assign the killing of the sheep to a grizzly bear because evidence of both black and grizzly bears was found in the area.

The Biological Opinion (p. 26) states that "...grizzly bear/human encounters encompass any interaction between a grizzly bear and a human, including sightings to altercations that result in the death or injury of either the bear or the human." Biologists working on the FEIS and the FWS did not consider the APHIS-WS journal entries as evidence of a "grizzly bear/human encounter" because neither the herder nor the bear were harmed. However, these incidents were considered as grizzly bear/sheep conflicts because evidence of grizzly bears was found in the immediate areas of both incidents, and the confirmed conflicts were used in developing the conservation measures and to model potential impact of grazing activities on grizzly bears. The 2008 journal entry noting a herder being chased was considered and included in the analyses of the Biological Opinion (p. 26) and FEIS (p. 124). The 2007 journal entry noting bear depredation was considered and included in the analyses of the Biological Opinion (p. 26) and FEIS (p. 124).

In addition to the APHIS-WS journal information, a 2012 down collar report was incorrectly presented as new information or information not considered related to grizzly encounters. In 2012, a grizzly bear collar was found in the action area. The bear associated with the collar was not found, and it is unknown if the bear was killed. The FWS investigated the incident and did not draw any conclusions connecting the bear collar to the Sheep Station or its employees. This 2012 down collar information was considered and included in the analyses of the Biological Opinion (p. 24) and FEIS (pp. 117 and 124).

3. LETTERS SUBMITTED AFTER THE FEIS WAS ISSUED

After the FEIS was issued, letters were submitted by the Gallatin Wildlife Association, Western Watershed's Project, and the Idaho Governor's Office. All comments and issues raised in these letters were considered, and if necessary, minor adjustments were made to the FEIS. The items are listed below.

On August 30, 2017, Gallatin Wildlife Association submitted an e-mail requesting that the publications of Brock et al. (2006) and Couey (1950) be included in the final record.

During the development of the SDEIS and finalization of the FEIS, the habitat/management areas and grizzly bear/bighorn sheep populations that were mentioned in both Brock et al. (2006; grizzly bears and bighorns) and Couey (1950; only bighorns) were addressed in literature considered by the agency in the FEIS. Responses to similar comments received during the SDIES comment period were addressed under Public Concerns 065 and 068 on pp. 387-391 of the FEIS.

On September 8, 2017, Western Watersheds Project (WWP) submitted a letter requesting consideration of various concerns related to grizzly bears, bighorn sheep, and environmental justice, which WWP also submitted during the open comment period for the SDIES (FEIS, pp. 322-413).

Comments regarding grizzly bears (53-11, 53-12, 53-52, and 53-53) were addressed in the response to Public Concern 061 on pp. 382 and 383 of the FEIS. Comments regarding bighorn sheep (53-23, 53-26, 53-27, 53-29, 53-32, 53-33, 53-34, 53-36, 53-37, 53-39, and 53-41) were addressed in the response to Public Concerns 064, 065, 066, 068, and 074 on pp. 385-387, 387-388, 388-390, 391-392, and 399-400, respectively, of the FEIS. Comments regarding environmental justice (53-97, 53-98, 53-99, and 53-100) were addressed in the response to Public Concern 082 on p. 404 of the FEIS.

On September 11, 2017, the Governor of Idaho, C. L. Butch Otter, submitted a compendium of letters, from the Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG), requesting clarification of statements and correction of typographical errors identified in the FEIS. The letters have been added to the project record.

The IDFG commented, "Please disclose what and where the two small herds are referenced in this statement." The FEIS has been clarified to address this concern; see the FEIS Errata.

The IDFG commented in connection with a reference to California bighorn sheep on page 145, "These are Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep." The FEIS has been corrected to address the subspecies name error; see the FEIS Errata.

The IDFG commented, "There are no measures...to deal with stray domestic sheep or notification of IDFG in the event of bighorn sheep being in the vicinity of (or contacting) domestic sheep on or near the

allotment.” As a part Forest Service permitting process, measures to minimize contact between domestic and bighorn sheep and manage stray domestic sheep are included in Forest Service’s Annual Operating Instructions for the permittee, which is available to the public through the Forest Service, Caribou-Targhee District Office. Clarification has been made that IDFG is the first point-of-contact for bighorn conflicts; see the FEIS Errata.

In reference to the statement “Grazing Sheep Station sheep on Forest Service lands has only a minimal risk of contact between bighorn sheep and domestic sheep because of geographical and temporal separation” (FEIS, p. 149), the IDFG commented, “Data shows bighorn sheep locations on and near the Snakey-Kelly Forest Service allotment during the time period the Sheep Station has domestic sheep on the allotment. IDFG recommends that you delete this statement [in the FEIS] or more fully explain specific spatial and temporal attributes supporting this conclusion.” The FEIS has been clarified by replacing the statement in the FIES with “The resident bighorn herd could be negatively affected if contact with domestic sheep results in disease transmission. However, measures are in place to minimize the risk of contact between domestic and bighorn sheep;” see the FEIS Errata.

In reference to the statement “Although the risk of contact from Sheep Station activities overlapping bighorn sheep range can only be completely eliminated in alternative 2, additional sources for spread of respiratory disease occur throughout known or suspected bighorn sheep range. Thus, bighorn populations are expected to continue in their current condition and trend, regardless of which alternative is selected,” the IDFG commented, “...identify the additional sources and clarify the statement regarding continuation of current condition and trend was not addressed.” During the development of the SDEIS and finalization of the FEIS, the analysis considered other public land allotments in the nearby area that are designated for sheep grazing. Whether occupied or unoccupied, these allotments remain a notable source for spread of respiratory disease as long as sheep grazing is a designated use of the land.

The IDFG commented, “The reference to stray sheep is in the document but not the dates of detection or removal.” During the development of the SDEIS and finalization of the FEIS, the analyses considered actual and unsubstantiated evidence of stray sheep specific to the Sheep Station. The information regarding the stray domestic sheep was unsubstantiated and the exact date and circumstances were never specified. Nevertheless, ARS determined it was important information to consider, and did in fact account for the information in its analysis.

The ISDA commented, “[ISDA] respectfully disagrees with the selection of any alternatives which significantly reduce, or eliminate livestock grazing or livestock related research at the ARS Station.” As stated on pages ii and 35-54 of the FEIS, the Sheep Station proposes an action which maintains livestock grazing and related research regarding grazing, production, disease, fire, sagebrush steppe management, climate, invasive weeds, remote sensing technology, and habitat.

The ISDA commented, “...address an error in the FEIS on page 416. Brian Oakey submitted comments in 2011 on behalf of the Idaho State Department of Agriculture and not the Idaho Department of Fish and Game.” A correction has been made to address name designation errors; see the FEIS Errata.

Conclusion

1. The unavailability of the Snakey-Kelly allotments was considered as new information, and the agency concludes that this information does not necessitate a correction, supplement, or revision to the FEIS for the Sheep Station Grazing and Associated Activities Project. The analysis included in the July 28, 2017 FEIS encompasses potential effects of the temporary loss of the Snakey-Kelly allotments. If and when the Forest Service Snakey-Kelly allotments become available, grazing will resume as described under alternative 1 of the FEIS.
2. Information about alleged grizzly bear encounters and the 2012 down collar is not new and was considered in the Biological Opinion and FEIS. Suspect grizzly bear/human encounters were thoroughly considered, and the analysis of the project adequately addressed the effects of grazing activities on grizzly bears in the project area. A correction, supplement, or revision to the FEIS for the Sheep Station Grazing and Associated Activities Project is not necessary.
3. The letters received after issuance of the FEIS do not represent substantial new information that would alter the analyses presented in the FEIS. The project analyses adequately addressed the effects of the proposed project, and a correction, supplement, or revision to the FEIS for the Sheep Station Grazing and Associated Activities Project is not necessary. For typographical errors or points of clarification an erratum to the FEIS was created.

For additional information concerning this supplemental information report, contact Gary Mayo, Legislative Affairs Officer USDA, Agricultural Research Service via email at gary.mayo@ars.usda.gov.



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