

For the past three years, 2014-2016, the WDA has been receiving RHAP project Updates and Final Reports containing comments describing outcomes and insights provided by many of the project partners. The following information and comments have been selected to provide views from federal, conservation district, and permittee expressing their own perspectives. They have been chosen to highlight the relationships and results being founded through the RHAP program.

➤ Popo Agie Conservation District (PACD)

**Silver Creek Allotment Project**– This collaborative project brought the permittees, local and federal entities together, creating opportunities for all parties to be student and teacher. The BLM representative noted that: “The opportunity to work together with the NRCS/PACD and with the grazing permittee representative’s was helpful in learning other perspectives and building working relationships.” The permittee representative stated: “This process gave me a better understanding of the terminology and monitoring techniques the BLM uses, and why they are used. This helped to increase communication and understanding with the BLM.” Outcomes beyond the project include the permittee representative stating: “I would like to continue some of the co-operative monitoring with the BLM and other partners.” Overall the permittee feels the collaborative project: “Gave us a better working relationship with our range-con” and the permittees are “able to use monitoring to better adjust pasture move dates to help improve the range condition.”

Education: The permittees gained knowledge, skills and confidence to conduct monitoring on their own. Through the education and increased knowledge related monitoring, the permittees were able to help determine effective pasture move dates. Knowledge about rangeland health increased greatly due to data collection and observations conducted for three summers by private and government personnel. Data such as upland utilization and riparian stubble height was gathered providing invaluable information about the way the allotment was grazed. Riparian trend data was gathered (as a supplemental activity to the RHAP data collected) by locating and duplicating over 150 photos to continue an ongoing photo record from the 1990’s-2000’s. As the BLM representative stated: “The data and knowledge gained throughout this project will help tremendously with the permit renewal process, including evolution of the current AMP.” “There has also been increased understanding of the monitoring that is required in order to meet the permit renewal process in an indirect way- increasing confidence in the monitoring component of potential future grazing alternatives.”

**Granite Mountain Open Allotment Project** – This project was designed to aid in the assessment of rangeland health by filling in data gaps of current monitoring already occurring on the allotment. Specifically, identifying baseline conditions of riparian areas and measuring changes in conditions due to modifications in grazing management. In addition, utilization and upland trend monitoring studies will be maintained in order to identify new infrastructure needs and their effectiveness.

The summer of 2015 saw an extensive effort by the RHAP partners to collect utilization data throughout the allotment every other week. This data was then used to adjust the management within the allotment. Because of this extensive effort and the management actions that followed, the allotment permittees stayed on the allotment with their livestock for the entire grazing season. This was the first

time this has happened in four years. The allotment permittee representative stated: “It has been overwhelmingly successful. We increased our management, moving cattle according to the utilization data that was gathered every two weeks and installed additional water sources to further increase livestock distribution across the allotment. This allowed us to stay on the allotment for the entire allotted grazing season! Although we have had our differences with the managing agency (BLM) this program has given us a starting point – a way to come together, find common ground, develop a plan and start making changes we can all agree upon.”

➤ Teton Conservation District (TCD)

Teton Conservation District seeks to support activities, in cooperation with other interests, to support sustainable grazing on federally managed lands. RHAP has been a consistent and effective resource of funding to cooperatively meet range management goals. The following comment was provided by Dave Cottle, Bridger-Teton National Forest: “I would like to state once again that without RHAP funding to monitor long-term rangeland health indicators on F.S. grazing allotments in Teton County over the past years, we (the Bridger-Teton NF) would have been hard pressed to fulfill our responsibilities in this regard. With the data collected, and with the much needed review of transect locations facilitated by this ongoing assistance, we hope to make better informed decisions related to grazing authorizations in the future. As implemented in collaboration with Teton Conservation District, this effort has been consistent with the goals of the BTNF range program.”

Data collection on the Munger Mountain Allotment has been of value in informing the status of that allotment. A recommendation had been made, internally by the Forest Service, to shift use from an active allotment to a forage reserve, through an administrative action. Management concerns cited included impacts to vegetation and loss of soil cover from cattle. At the request of TCD and WDA, further analysis of vegetation and soil trends were conducted, utilizing historic data and data recently collected. The final decision was to keep the allotment in an active status, with a new permittee. If trend data had not been collected through the RHAP program, inadequate information would have been used to assess trends and conditions on the allotment.

➤ Lower Wind River Conservation District (LWRCD)

The LWRCD has been the lead proponent of four completed and two active RHAP projects. The following statement was provided by Cathy Meyer, LWRCD Manager: “I have seen the BLM Managers move from cautious, “not sure our staff will have time for this program” to full support of the projects that we have submitted. I have learned that there are many methods that can be used to monitor the rangelands. The methods chosen need to be compatible with the amount of time that all involved are willing to spend collecting data. By working together, I have seen BLM employees gain respect for the landowners and their knowledge and vice-versa. This program has enabled those with book knowledge, hands-on experience and common sense to work together. It has enabled us as a district with no mill levy to have funds to encourage folks with sometimes differing viewpoints to work together. The program is worthwhile, growing and needs to be continued.”

Permittees involved with the Sand Draw Monitoring Project stated: “We have had a great experience working with Cathy Meyer.” “Cathy was a key facilitator and her extensive knowledge was essential in keeping the project running smoothly. Jeremy Artery of the BLM was the other key contributor supplying his important range management skills. Overall it was a great educational experience that not only benefited us and our range, but also a pathway to better communication with governmental agencies. We look forward to carrying on with the project with our new management tools and knowledge. This is a great program that we would recommend to other.”

➤ Lincoln Conservation District (LCD)

**Smithfork Allotment Rangeland Monitoring Project** – This is a high priority (cattle, sheep) allotment involving a 2009 Settlement Agreement (SA) between Western Watersheds Project, the BLM and the fifteen permittees. The SA brought about a 10% reduction in AUMs, and a possible 15% reduction in season of use if certain riparian utilization markers exhibited downward trends for two consecutive years. The SA went through several years of stays and appeals, in 2014 a court order was issued, implementing the 10% reduction in AUMs, plus the 15% reduction in season of use.

Actions undertaken during this project included expansion of existing monitoring sites for upland and riparian areas, two livestock spring developments, and two years of planting willow cuttings. The willow plantings along stream banks, and upland spring developments were an outcome of a Technical Review Team Report produced by the Ecosystem Science and Management Department from the University of Wyoming. This report stated, “riparian conditions on the allotment was improving although there were plenty of opportunities for development of better habitat for Bonneville cutthroat trout, a major concern for managers.” “Except for Muddy Creek willows tended to be absent or scarce. Spraying several decades ago apparently removed much of the willows.” Due to the data collected, and actions taken through this cooperative monitoring partnership the Kemmerer BLM Field Office Manager issued a Final Decision terminating the 15% Season of Use Reduction in 2015.