

# The Corner Post

The Wyoming Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources & Policy Division  
Newsletter



WY. Dept. of Agriculture  
Natural Resources & Policy Division  
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### Quotable Quotes

“In levying taxes and in shearing sheep it is well to stop when you get down to the skin.”  
-Austin O'Malley

\* Banner Photo Courtesy of Michelle MacDonald

# Sage-Grouse: Habitat Assessment Framework

Joe Budd, Senior Policy Analyst

Although we are headed into Fall, sage-grouse will continue to be an issue. As monitoring and assessments for sage-grouse ramp up, there are some things permittees should be aware of.

The BLM and USFS will use similar monitoring methods, including the Habitat Assessment Framework (HAF). (See: the web address for the multiscale assessment tool on page 5). HAF protocols do not change from one agency to another but values (e.g., grass height objectives) may change based upon location and habitat (e.g., Pinedale vs. Wright).

However, without final guidance from either agency (e.g., Instruction Memorandum, Implementation Guides, etc.) it is hard to know what exactly things will look like.

Here is what we expect:  
Most plan objectives for sage-grouse

habitat should be monitored using protocols from the HAF or similar. Nearly all allotments will have some level of monitoring for sage-grouse but that does NOT mean there will be adjustments to all allotments (e.g., livestock numbers). Allotments in Core areas will likely differ from those that are outside of Core.



The BLM has started using their Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring strategy, or “AIM”, much more. (See: <http://aim.landscapetoolbox.org/>) Portions of AIM are very similar to the HAF and could be confusing, but in a broad sense: AIM is a strategy that guides the BLM on how to collect, store and manage data; the HAF is an assessment of data to create reports for sage-grouse habitat only. There is some likelihood AIM sites would land in a location that would also work for the HAF and therefore, AIM data could inform portions of the HAF and vice versa.

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# WHY MEDIATION WORKS

Clarifying Communication

Solution Brainstorming

Lucy Pauley, Mediation Coordinator

- An appeal of a USFS adverse decision regarding a term grazing permit.
- A tough conversation coming up with family members over the future of the farm.
- A denial of a loan application from USDA or your local bank.
- A growing conflict between a group of co-workers that's starting to affect productivity and customer service.

Mediation can be an effective tool to help each of the parties in the preceding examples. One of the primary goals of mediation is to open up communication, help the participants talk about the situation and clear up any confusion or miscommunication that has already happened. When parties are involved in a dispute, both sides stop communicating in a healthy manner and misinformation flies around. The mediator can help the parties talk about the events that led to the conflict and help everyone get back on the same page regarding the situation.

Once the parties are ready to look at potential solutions, the

mediator can help them brainstorm ideas. “What would the perfect solution look like to you” or “what are your ideas for solving this problem in a way that will work for everyone” are the types of questions that mediators ask. The mediator can help the parties focus on solutions that meet everyone’s needs and help them discover what they want, as opposed to what they don’t want. If the parties decide on an agreement that works for all of them, the mediator will help them talk about the “what-if’s” and develop an agreement that will address future unknowns.

The mediation process can help disputing parties come together and talk about their situation and brainstorm ways to resolve it in a way that works for both sides. Mediation is not appropriate for all conflicts but the Mediation Program can help you decide if mediation is right for you. ✦

**For more information** or to inquire about mediation services, contact Lucy Pauley at (307) 777-8788, email [lucy.pauley@wyo.gov](mailto:lucy.pauley@wyo.gov) or visit our website at <http://agriculture.wy.gov/divisions/nrp/mediation-program>.

## Rangeland Health Assessment Program

Justin Caudill, Ag Program Coordinator

The Rangeland Health Assessment Program (RHAP) began in 2010 with the Wyoming Legislature passing the RHAP bill providing \$20,000 to the Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA) to develop rules and processes. Over the past six years program funding has grown from \$100,000 in the 2011-12 to \$300,000 for the 2015-16 biennial budgets. To date, forty-five projects have received \$747,662 in program funding for on the ground monitoring efforts and training for permittees. The forty-five projects have led to 3,502,175 acres of federal, state, and private lands being cooperatively monitored. These projects have generated

a combined total In-Kind/Match of \$480,433 equaling a 64% match.

The program’s principal focus is centered on gaining credible rangeland data with the cooperative involvement of all parties, including but not limited to; local government, conservation districts and/or institutions of higher learning, federal land managing agencies, State Lands and Investment, and always the permittee(s). The programs goal is to have all of these parties involved in the design of the project, receiving education related to methodologies, establishment

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# ADVENTURES of a WDA Intern

Gina Dickerson, NR&P Intern

As the Natural Resources and Policy intern, I experienced a wide variety of activities that the members of this division cover in their full-time positions. Every day brought something new and I enjoyed all the opportunities I had to meet new people and learn new things.

I started the summer by traveling to Rock Springs with Lucy Pauley to help with a Basic Mediation Training Workshop, where I was able to participate and become certified to mediate for the Wyoming Department of Agriculture. It was a fun and interesting workshop; I learned a lot about how different people handle conflict and how to recognize the underlying issues that people really need resolved. I am hoping to get to observe a real mediation sometime this summer, or co-mediate to get some more experience under my belt. I think the mediation skills I'm learning will really benefit me in the future as I pursue a law degree, and help me in personal and professional relationships to understand and help people resolve disputes.

I also had the opportunity to travel to Sheridan for the Wyoming Stock Growers' Association Environmental Stewardship Tour. The 2016 winner was the Kane Family of SR Cattle Company. We traveled to the ranch for a day

full of tours, good food, and meeting new people. It was really interesting to see the ways that the Kanes developed pipelines for water, and unique methods of sagebrush and leafy spurge control. After growing up on my family's ranch, I always enjoy seeing other people's operations and the different ways people manage their livestock and natural resources.

Throughout the summer I've had the chance to attend meetings in Douglas, Pinedale, and Cheyenne, as well as sit in on some conference calls with federal agencies and other partners. These have helped me meet people and learn more about the current issues the Wyoming agriculture industry faces. I have done some research on the concern over bighorn sheep and domestic sheep interaction on forest service grazing allotments, and have read and searched for court cases that may help us establish case law for some important issues in Wyoming agriculture. I have enjoyed this part of my internship and I think the skills and knowledge I'm gaining will be valuable to me in my future legal career. I am very interested in agricultural law, and helping defend ranchers and property owners from excessive federal government overreach and those who don't support grazing and livestock production. ✦



## RHAP (continued from page 2)

or confirmation of monitoring locations, along with the collection of the data creating a project that not only tracts rangeland health but also guides sustainable grazing now and into the future.

Through RHAP projects, permittees should become more involved in adaptive management discussions and decisions, due to the educational experiences and increased communication with governmental agencies. These discussions can lead to longer lasting outcomes because decisions are based on jointly collected scientifically defensible data. For the past three years 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 WDA staff has updated a three part description of the RHAP program from 2010 to early 2106. The report is found on the WDA's website at <http://agriculture.wy.gov/divisions/nrp/rangeland-health>. ✦ **For more information about the RHAP program, please visit our website or contact Justin Caudill at 307-350-5480.**



# THINK BIG PICTURE

## Commenting on Landscape Scale Documents

Justin Williams, Senior Policy Analyst

Haying, calving, branding, and shipping are all important tasks for Wyoming ranchers. If you are a federal lands grazing permittee, another important task is commenting on National Environmental Policy Act projects, including permit renewals and landscape planning documents. Last September, the 9 Plan Amendment for sage-grouse for Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and US Forest Service (USFS) was finalized. In the near future, a BLM Resource Management Plan (RMP) in Rock Springs and USFS Land Use Plan (LUP) will begin on the Bridger Teton National Forest. These landscape planning documents are updated approximately every 20 years and guide future management and direction within the agency boundary.

Society and agency priorities and preferences may use RMPs and LUPs to shift federal management away from current levels of livestock grazing in favor of managing habitat for sensitive wildlife species or more pristine conditions for recreationists by creating or designating wilderness areas. While the RMPs and LUPs may seem daunting to read, current grazing permittees have an important role in ensuring future generations have the same opportunity to continue livestock grazing on federal lands.

General areas for permittees to keep an eye on in the RMPs or LUPs include:

### BLM RMPs:

- Water Resources: Ensure riparian exclusions are not in perpetuity
- Lands with Wilderness Characteristics, Wilderness Study Areas, Areas of Environmental Concern: Ensure grazing continues as it is grandfathered in and predates designation
- Fire/Vegetation Management: Avoid blanket grazing restriction statements such as “No grazing for two years.”

Instead utilize vegetation objectives and monitoring to resume grazing

- Riparian and Wetlands: Avoid agreeing to meet Proper Functioning Condition in a certain timeframe, which you may not achieve, as improvements may require years before you see results
- Wild Horses: Ensure Wild Horse populations and areas do not expand beyond current levels or take precedence over livestock grazing and wildlife
- Livestock Grazing: Ensure “current” permitted AUMs, not just “active” continue. Review distance requirements for salt and mineral placements.

### USFS LUPs:

- Recreation: Ensure grazing levels and locations are not reduced in favor of recreation
- Wilderness: Avoid statements permanently closing allotments if permits are waived in wilderness
- Wild and Scenic River: Ensure grazing continues and range improvement projects are permitted
- Sensitive Species: Ensure viability of species is not based on an allotment scale
- Fire: Ensure livestock grazing is used as a management tool to reduce fine fuels
- Socio-Economic: Provide the historic use, including number of allotments and AUMs, in comparison to current use

Wyoming Department of Agriculture policy staff serves as a Cooperating Agency on RMPs and LUPs from the early stages and drafts. It's our mission to continue livestock grazing across the state for future generations. If you have questions about how and when permittees have the opportunity to comment, please feel free to contact us. ✦

# Division **BUDGET** Update and **IMPACTS** to Programs



Chris Wichmann, Manager

By now most people are aware of the budget cuts that have been requested or occurred by the state. The state has experienced massive shortfall in revenue due to low mineral prices and an overall decrease in mineral extraction. With these shortfalls the state was forced to reduce its budget in accordance with projected future revenues. This equated to an approximate \$248-million dollars cut or reduction to the State's 2017-18 budget. The Wyoming Department of Agriculture was asked to take its share with approximately \$2.4-million reduction.

The Natural Resource and Policy Division took several cuts to our operating budgets and our programs. This will provide a quick summary of some of the cuts.

## Rangeland Health Assessment Program (RHAP)

The RHAP program was established in 2010 to provide opportunities for joint cooperative monitoring, monitoring for rangeland health and assist in fostering relationships with land managers. Currently, RHAP has enrolled over 4-million acres of land into its program. RHAP was budgeted for \$300,000 and was cut to \$200,000. The program will continue to provide opportunities for permittees and landowners to benefit from valuable rangeland monitoring.

## Water Quality and Conservation District (CD) Funding

The various programs in this area took the same percentage cut as the Department consisting of approximately a 5% cut off the top and a planned additional 8% cut. The Base Funding to CD will be maintained at its previous

level, ensuring CD will have certainty in base operations; however, water quality grants, lab and technical assistance and training will all be impacted differently based on the CD Board's direction.

## Agriculture Producer Research Grant Program (APRGP)

The APRGP program was established in 2012 to provide applied agriculture research to Wyoming's producers. It is meant to identify practices, issues and potential solutions found in Wyoming that could help other producers around the state with their operations. The original funding for this program was \$200,000 and currently will have no grant funds available for projects this budget period. The program will resume once funding is restored.

## Contracting Services

In addition to the reductions to programs the Division also had to take a reduction of approximately \$74,000 in our contracting service, which may affect other services and programs down the line.

In summary, the budget cuts will not only affect the Department but will also affect those producers and individuals utilizing these programs. It is during these times of fiscal lows that it is important that we prioritize our efforts while continuing to provide excellent service to our constituents. We will maintain our commitment to providing continued excellent service in customer service, education and program management to those we serve and represent. ✦

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## Sage-Grouse (continued from page 1)

The USFS will likely use a similar approach but does not use AIM. We expect them to inventory USFS lands and then use the HAF. The USFS is currently working on Implementation Guides (See: <http://www.fs.fed.us/science-technology/fish-wildlife-plants/sage-grouse/implementation-guide>).

Permittees should participate as much as possible when agencies are in the field looking at their allotment. We will continue our involvement with the implementation of the recent land use plans, including monitoring and assessments with the agencies. If you have any questions please contact the NR&P staff. ✦

For more information on the Habitat Assessment Framework (HAF), please visit:  
[http://www.blm.gov/style/medialib/blm/wo/blm\\_library/tech\\_refs.Par.34086.File.dat/TR\\_6710-01.pdf](http://www.blm.gov/style/medialib/blm/wo/blm_library/tech_refs.Par.34086.File.dat/TR_6710-01.pdf)



# Upcoming Events

|                  |   |                 |   |
|------------------|---|-----------------|---|
| September 7:     | CD Area III Meeting, Meeteetse              | November 10-12: | WY Farm Bureau Annual Meeting, Laramie              |
| September 8:     | CD Area V Meeting, Jackson                  | November 11-12: | Farm to Market Conference, Cheyenne                 |
| September 9:     | CD Area IV Meeting, Dubois                  | November 14-17: | WACD Annual Convention, Riverton                    |
| September 13:    | CD Area I Meeting, Buffalo                  | November 16-20: | West Central Wool Growers Meeting, Idaho            |
| September 14:    | CD Area II Meeting, Douglas                 | December 5:     | Board of Agriculture Meeting, Casper                |
| September 14-16: | NACD Southwest Regional Meeting, Sacramento | December 5-7:   | WY Stock Growers Association Winter Roundup, Casper |
| October 11:      | Board of Agriculture Conference Call        | December 12:    | Grazing Permit Renewal Workshop, Mt. View           |
| October 17-21:   | Conflict Resolution Week                    | January 10:     | Legislative General Session Convenes                |
| October 24-27:   | Basic Mediation Training, Jackson           | January 25-28:  | American Sheep Industry Convention, Denver          |

#### Americans with Disabilities Act

To obtain this publication in an alternative format, contact the Wyoming Department of Agriculture at (307) 777-7323.

If you have questions or comments about the information in this newsletter, or to obtain an email copy, please contact Michelle MacDonald, Natural Resources & Policy Division at: 307.777.7323 or [michelle.macdonald@wyo.gov](mailto:michelle.macdonald@wyo.gov).

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