

Rangeland Health Assessment Program Report

September 6, 2013

Prepared by

Wyoming Department of Agriculture



History

The Rangeland Health Assessment Program began as House Bill 213 in the 2009 Legislative Session. The bill was approved, but subsequently vetoed by then Governor Freudenthal. In 2010, the Legislature approved the Rangeland Health Assessment Program (RHAP) Senate File 0007 with funding appropriated as follows: \$100,000 for the University of Wyoming, \$200,000 for project implementation and \$20,000 for program administration and development. The \$200,000 for projects was later vetoed, leaving a remaining \$120,000.

2010

The University of Wyoming was provided \$100,000 to develop a database of peer-reviewed literature related to grazing, develop white papers interpreting literature and place qualified student interns in Rangeland Ecology and Watershed Management with Conservation Districts or County Extension Offices. To date, the University of Wyoming developed a database consisting of 1,448 records of peer reviewed literature available to interested parties. In addition, they developed a white paper on Grazing and Riparian areas. Finally, the University of Wyoming placed 2 qualified Rangeland Ecologists and Watershed Management Specialist with Conservation Districts and County Extension Offices. The interns worked/monitored in 17 grazing allotments covering approximately 324,541 acres.

The Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA) was provided \$20,000 to develop the program. The development of the program included the development of rules (on website), development of Memorandum of Understanding (on website) with partnering agencies, contracting, public outreach, analysis of comments and administration of the development of the program.

The WDA also developed a Pilot Project with the Wyoming Stock Growers Association for the purpose of establishing prototypes of RHAP applications and projects. The amount of this contract was \$30,000. This contract includes: defining the role of RHAP partners, Bureau of Land Management, and the US Forest Service, implementing monitoring plans on public lands and administering the pilot projects and reports. Two pilot projects were sub-contracted by the Stock Growers, one with Land EKG (private company out of Bozeman, MT) on BLM lands permitted to Clear Creek Cattle Company and the other with Sheridan County Conservation District on Forest Service lands.

- Sheridan County Conservation District:
The pilot project was developed to create a collaborative monitoring effort with Bighorn National Forest permittees and the Sheridan County Conservation District. The allotments are included in the Big 6 Environmental Impact Statement for livestock grazing over 57,333 acres. The contract is for \$14,080 with additional matching funds of \$7,400. The contract completion date is December 31, 2011.
- Clear Creek Cattle Company:
Ranch owner Rob Hendry of the Clear Creek Cattle Company requested their operation be utilized for the pilot project for RHAP. The pilot project cooperators include Land EKG, Clear Creek Cattle Company and BLM to jointly establish long term monitoring

sites, inclusion of site identification, installation of vegetation cages, and identification of key plant species. To date, approximately \$16,400 was spent on the project with an expected completion date and final report of September 30, 2011.

2011

The 2011 Legislature approved \$200,000 in the supplemental budget for project implementation. The WDA provided several opportunities for interested parties and eligible governmental agencies to request funds and identify on-the-ground projects. Twelve Projects were funded and details can be seen in Table 1.

The proposals were reviewed by a committee composed of one technical expert of each of the following agencies: Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Forest Service (FS), Office of State Lands and Investments (OSLI), University of Wyoming (UW) and Wyoming Department of Agriculture. The review committee provides their preliminary recommendations for Director's review. The Board of Agriculture (BOA) reviews the scores of the committee members, considers the Director's recommendations and makes a final decision.

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Partners

Partners for the various RHAP projects consisted of the following: University of Wyoming Renewable Resources, University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, Wyoming Office of State Lands and Investment, Wyoming Conservation Districts, Natural Resources Conservation Service, The Nature Conservancy, numerous permittees, and numerous private landowners.

Table 1 – Project Summary

Project Title	Location	Size (acres)	Budget	Match	Monitoring Plan	Completion Date	Outcomes
2011 Projects							
Pilot Project - Sheridan County Conservation District	Bighorn National Forest	57,333	\$ 14,080	\$ 7,400	Yes	12/31/2011	Completed - This information was used in to support the Big 6 EIS decision / Assisted permittees meet utilization criteria / Improved communication and relationships / The FS credits this program for providing information needed.
Pilot Project - Clear Creek Cattle Company	Bureau of Land Management	50,000	\$ 16,400	\$ 7,400	Yes	9/30/2011	Completed - Proved to BLM and others that Land EKG is an accepted method for monitoring rangelands.
Pole Mountain Robel Pole Project	Medicine Bow National Forest	22,170	\$ 20,000	\$ 12,690	Yes	12/31/2015	Ongoing - Communication with permittees & FS has improved / Set up long-term range monitoring sites, absent in the past / Developed forage production calculations / Calibration for Robel Pole / Data will be used in NEPA document for permit renewal/ Joint Cooperative Monitoring is occurring.

Gros Ventre Rangeland Monitoring Project	Bridger-Teton National Forest	88,375	\$ 18,374	\$ 13,074	Yes	11/30/2011	Ongoing - Improved communication with agencies / work cooperatively / identify existing monitoring sites and identify new monitoring sites / Develop a monitoring plan / Established over 70 new monitoring sites and using over 15 different methods
Snake and Hoback River Watersheds Monitoring Project	Bridger-Teton National Forest	84,871	\$ 16,493	\$ 7,096	Yes	11/30/2011	Ongoing - Improved communication with agencies / work cooperatively / identify existing monitoring sites and identify new monitoring sites / Develop a monitoring plan / Established over 70 new monitoring sites and using over 15 different methods
JC Ranch RHA Project	Bighorn National Forest	57,333	\$ 20,000	\$ 9,800	Yes	12/31/2012	In addition to the Big 6 decision, the information from monitoring is being used to assist annual management decisions in helping the rangelands improve.
Orchard Ranchland Monitoring Project	Bureau of Land Management	85,500	\$ 20,000	\$12,279.50	Yes	12/31/2013	Ongoing - Improved communication with agencies / work cooperatively / identify existing monitoring sites and identify new monitoring sites / Develop a monitoring plan

Diamond X Ranch Monitoring Project	Bureau of Land Management	30,558	\$ 16,360	\$ 4,935	Yes	12/31/2013	Ongoing - Improved communication with agencies / work cooperatively / identify existing monitoring sites and identify new monitoring sites / Develop a monitoring plan
Cameron Ranch Monitoring Project	Bureau of Land Management	7,260	\$ 4,090	\$ 1,799.60	Yes	12/31/2012	
LaBarge Creek Allotment Rangeland Project	Forest Service	47,000	\$ 20,000	\$ 10,996	Yes	12/31/2013	Ongoing - Improved communication with agencies / work cooperatively / identify existing monitoring sites and identify new monitoring sites / Develop a monitoring plan
Silver Creek Allotment Rangeland Project	Bureau of Land Management	38,569	\$ 16,170.75	\$ 7,352	Yes	12/31/2014	Ongoing - Improved communication with agencies / work cooperatively / identify existing monitoring sites and identify new monitoring sites / Develop a monitoring plan
Hillberry Ranches Ranchland Monitoring Project	Bureau of Land Management	59,429	\$ 16,170.75	\$ 19,574	Yes	12/31/2014	Ongoing - Improved communication with agencies / work cooperatively / identify existing monitoring sites and identify new monitoring sites / Develop a monitoring plan / Established over 70 new monitoring sites and using over 15 different methods

Bighorn Basin Rangeland Monitoring Project	Bureau of Land Management / Forest Service	243,422	\$ 16,170.75	\$ 29,000	Yes	12/31/2016	Ongoing - Improved communication with agencies / work cooperatively / identify existing monitoring sites and identify new monitoring sites / Develop a monitoring plan
Little Snake River Conservation District project	Bureau of Land Management	45,611	\$ 16,170.75	\$ 65,000	Yes	12/31/2012	
2012 Projects							
Little Hornet and Fontenelle Allotments Rangeland Monitoring	Bridger-Teton National Forest	21,922	\$ 20,000	\$ 11,956	Yes	12/31/2013	Ongoing - Improved communication with agencies / work cooperatively / identify existing monitoring sites and identify new monitoring sites / Develop a monitoring plan
Delfelder and Shoshoni Road Monitoring Project	Bureau of Land Management	34,699	\$ 8,525	\$ 2,586	Yes	12/31/2014	Ongoing - Improved communication with agencies / work cooperatively / identify existing monitoring sites and identify new monitoring sites / Develop a monitoring plan
Granite Mountain open Allotment Monitoring Project	Bureau of Land Management	82,730	\$ 19,815	\$ 5,985	Yes	12/31/2016	Ongoing - Improved communication with agencies / work cooperatively / identify existing monitoring sites and identify new monitoring sites / Develop a monitoring plan
JC Ranch 2013	Bighorn National Forest	57,333	\$ 20,000	\$ 8,750	Yes	3/31/2014	

Forest Dell & Grover-Blaney Allotments Rangeland Monitoring	Forest Service	20,815	\$ 16,995	\$ 11,581	Yes	6/30/2014	Ongoing - Improved communication with agencies / work cooperatively / identify existing monitoring sites and identify new monitoring sites / Develop a monitoring plan
Spring Creek & Little Greys Allotment Rangeland Monitoring	Forest Service	37,925	\$ 19,995	\$ 18,254	Yes	06-31-2014	Ongoing - Improved communication with agencies / work cooperatively / identify existing monitoring sites and identify new monitoring sites / Develop a monitoring plan
Prospect Mountain Cooperative Monitoring Project	Bureau of Land Management	46,738	\$ 18,659	\$ 14,916	9/1/2013	4/30/2015	Consultants identified errors in BLM monitoring methods/Identified locations that are monitored incorrectly/Located new monitoring sites with BLM and rejected existing monitoring sites not representative of the allotment.
Bridger-Teton National Forest Rangeland Monitoring	Bridger-Teton National Forest	221,602	\$ 19,474	\$ 16,924	Yes	11/30/2013	Ongoing - Improved communication with agencies / work cooperatively / identify existing monitoring sites and identify new monitoring sites / Develop a monitoring plan / Established over 70 new monitoring sites and using over 15 different methods

East Fork Smiths Fork & Gilbert Creek Allotments Rangeland Monitoring	Uintah-Wasatch-Cache	36,147	\$ 20,000	\$ 12,076	Yes	12/31/2013	Ongoing - Improved communication with agencies / work cooperatively / identify existing monitoring sites and identify new monitoring sites / Develop a monitoring plan
Sublette Allotment Cooperative Monitoring Project	Bureau of Land Management	76,369	\$ 16,537	\$ 13,181	8/31/2013	12/31/2014	Ongoing - Improved communication with agencies / work cooperatively / identify existing monitoring sites and identify new monitoring sites / Develop a monitoring plan
Smithsfork Allotment Rangeland Monitoring	Bureau of Land Management	90,937	\$ 20,000	\$ 9,002	12/31/2013	12/31/2014	Identified the BLM utilizing improper monitoring methods/Identified new key areas and monitoring locations/Move on use data has allowed the permittees to meet the settlement agreements terms (first time in 3 years)
TOTALS		1,537,315	\$ 430,480	\$ 333,608			

2011 Project Descriptions

- **Laramie County Conservation District (CD):** Pole Mountain Robel Pole Project for \$20,000 with a 63% match of \$12,690. Five permittees and the Forest Service have signed partnership agreement forms and are committed to the 22,170 acre project. Application was somewhat difficult to pull the specific information out, but we were able to pull out enough to identify the project was in line with the purpose and goals of the program. The Pole Mountain area has been a high profile area for years and is a high priority area for the Forest Service. The BOA approved the funding for the project.
- **Teton CD #1:** Gros Ventre Rangeland Monitoring Project for \$18,374 with a 71% match of \$13,074. Partners for the 88,375 acre project include three permittees, University of Wyoming staff, University of Wyoming Extension staff, Natural Resources Conservation Service staff, Bridger-Teton National Forest Staff, and the Conservation District. All partnership forms have been signed. Applicant brought in outside expertise to include in project. Project provides for long-term data gathering in developing Ecological Site Descriptions (ESDs). The BOA approved the funding for the project.
- **Teton CD #3:** Snake and Hoback River Watersheds Rangeland Monitoring Project for \$16,493 with a 43% match of \$7,096. Partners for the 84,871 acre project include two permittees, University of Wyoming staff, University of Wyoming Extension staff, Natural Resources Conservation Service staff, Bridger-Teton National Forest Staff, and the Conservation District. Applicant brought in outside expertise to include in project. Project provides for long-term data gathering in developing Ecological Site Descriptions (ESDs). The BOA approved the funding for the project.
- **Sheridan County CD:** JC Ranch RHA project for \$20,000 with a 49% match of \$9,800. Two permittees and the Forest Service have signed partnership agreement forms and are committed to the 57,333 acre project. This project is committing to a continuing effort as it was a pilot project in conjunction with the Wyoming Stock Growers Association for 2011. The BOA approved the funding for the project.
- **Washakie County CD:** Orchard Ranchland Monitoring Project for \$20,000 with a 61% match of \$12,279.50. One permittee, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the Office of State Lands and Investments (OSLI) have signed partnership agreement forms and are committed to the 85,500 acre project. It was a well written proposal. Three of the five allotments in the project are categorized as 'I' or "Improvement" category allotments, meaning the allotments need improvements to management to meet standards. Collecting data will help support the permit renewal decision scheduled for 2013. The BOA approved the funding for the project.
- **Lower Wind River CD (Diamond X Ranch):** Diamond X Ranch Monitoring Project for \$16,360.00 with a 30% match or \$4,935.00. One permittee, BLM, and OSLI have signed partnership agreement forms and are committed to the 30,558 acre project. The grazing permit renewal for allotments is past due and is anticipated to be completed by 2013. Encourage the applicant to be aware of conditions of BLM and OSLI in utilizing additional monitoring protocols such as is proposed in this project. One major objective

is to garner more interest in monitoring from other area ranchers once they see the results of this project. The BOA approved the funding for the project.

- **Lower Wind River CD (Cameron Ranch):** Cameron Ranch Monitoring Project for \$4,090.00 with a 44% match. One permittee, BLM, OSLI and UW have signed partnership agreement forms and are committed to the 30,558 acre project. This project brings in outside expertise from the University of Wyoming. This is truly proactive monitoring with no pressure of pending permit renewal. The project simply illustrates a proactive permittee looking to do the right thing and wanting to gather data now to support the permit renewal for the next time. One major objective is to garner more interest in monitoring from other area ranchers once they see the results of this project. The BOA approved the funding for the project.
- **Lincoln County CD:** LaBarge Creek Allotment Rangeland Monitoring project for \$20,000 with a 55% match of \$10,996.00. One permittee and the Forest Service have signed partnership agreement forms and are committed to the approximately 47,000 acre project. This project was identified by the FS to be an area where additional monitoring would be beneficial in the permit renewal process. FS personal proactively approached permittee with the idea of using the RHAP to obtain additional data to support permit renewal. The funds will be utilized by the FS to pay their contractor to expand their capacity for monitoring. We expect the contractor to be directly supervised by the FS. They stated a goal to strengthen relationships between the FS and permittee. The BOA approved the funding for the project.
- **Popo Agie CD (Silver Creek Allotment):** The Silver Creek Allotment Rangeland Project requested a \$20,000 grant with a 37% match of \$7,352. Three permittees, the BLM, the NRCS, State Lands and Investments, along with Popo Agie Conservation District have all signed partnership agreement forms and are committed to the 38,569 acre project. The project is a highly complex due to the ongoing appeals by Western Watershed Project, sage grouse core area, popular recreation area (Sweetwater Canyon), Wilderness Study Area, Wild and Scenic River potential and numerous historic trails all associated with the project area. The project will gather data for the next couple of years to be utilized in the new permit renewal and Rangeland Health Assessments to be completed by 2015. The BOA approved the funding for the project at \$16,170.75.
- **Hot Springs CD (Hillberry Ranches):** Hillberry Ranches Ranchland Monitoring Project requested a \$20,000 grant with a 98% match of \$19,574. One permittee, the BLM, the Nature Conservancy, Meeteetse CD, Hot Springs Conservation District and the OSLI have signed partnership agreement forms and are committed to the 59,429 acre project. The project focus is to develop a new Allotment Management Plan (AMP). Hillberry bought three ranches and desires them all to be placed into one AMP in partnership with the BLM and OSLI. The new management in the AMP would be used in acquiring future permit renewals. The BOA approved the funding for the project at \$16,170.75.

- **UW Coop. Ext. Bighorn County (Bighorn Basin Project):** Bighorn Basin Rangeland Monitoring Project requested a \$20,000 grant with a 145% match of \$29,000. Four permittee, BLM, FS, OSLI, and UW Cooperative Extension have signed partnership agreement forms and are committed to the 243,422 acre project. The project will assess the large area (approximately 13 allotments) and determine where monitoring should occur and then cooperative monitoring would occur to assist in the permit renewal process. The monitoring will continue until 2016. The BOA approved the funding for the project at \$16,170.75.
- **Little Snake River CD (Project #1):** Little Snake River CD – Project #1 requested \$20,000 grant with a 325% match of an estimated \$65,000. Approximately 22 permittees, BLM, OSLI, Sweetwater County Conservation District and the Little Snake River Conservation District have signed partnership agreement forms and are committed to the 45,611 acre project. The project identified the lack of monitoring data on OSLI and the impending permit renewal process for permittees. The project would also look at sage grouse habitats and utilize data in the Little Snake River Conservation District ongoing Watershed Study. The BOA approved the funding for the project at \$16,170.75.

2012 Project Descriptions

- **Lincoln Conservation District (Little Hornet Fontenelle Allotments Rangeland Monitoring):** The proposed project is on the Kemmerer Ranger District of the Bridger-Teton National Forest. The project will relocate and re-read existing rangeland monitoring studies and establish new rangeland monitoring studies to determine if Forest Plan desired conditions are being met and/or moved towards. The project will help to improve and strengthen permittee and Forest Service relationships through joint collaboration and monitoring, when possible. The project is 21,922 acres, with a budget of \$20,000 and \$11,956 in matching funds.
- **Lincoln Conservation District (Smithsfork Allotment Rangeland Monitoring Project):** The Smithsfork Allotment is a high priority allotment for the Bureau of Land Management. The allotment is currently under a settlement agreement between Western Watersheds Project, the BLM and the permittees. The project will involve cooperative monitoring on the existing transects to meet the requirements of the settlement agreement, and to review the vegetative transects for future development of the Allotment Management Plan (AMP). The project is 90,937 acres, with a budget of \$20,000 and \$9,002.32 in matching funds.
- **Lower Wind River Conservation District (Delfelder and Shoshoni Road Monitoring Project):** The project will assess the rangeland health of private, state and federal lands within the allotments. Monitoring sites will be cooperatively established. Data will be gathered annually to determine existing conditions of the rangelands and to establish trends over time. The project is 34,699 acres, with a budget of \$8,524.75 and \$2,586.30 in matching funds.

- **Popo Agie Conservation District (Granite Mountain Open Allotment Monitoring Project):** Green Mountain has occupied Lander BLM's & Western Watershed's focus for many years and now the focus has turned to the adjacent Granite Mountain Open allotment. This allotment is unique in that it is one of the few remaining large allotments with season-long grazing and wild horse use. It routinely makes WWP's list of the Top 10 allotments nationally for focus by environmental groups. Despite this distinction, monitoring data is limited, especially with respect to riparian areas within the allotment. It is an absolute necessity that adequate monitoring be present to serve as baseline data for this allotment as Rangeland Health Assessments are conducted and new management options are prescribed. Any changes on Public Lands would have corresponding effects on unfenced State and Private Lands within the allotment. The producers on this allotment have developed a workable relationship with BLM and are willing to assist and take the lead on any necessary changes on the allotment, but they recognize the need to collect defensible data as a starting point before any management changes take place. This Rangeland Health Assessment Program application is an integral first step in that process. The project is 84,730 acres, with a budget of \$19,815 and \$5,985 in matching funds.
- **Sheridan County Conservation District (JC Ranch Rangeland Health Assessment 2013):** This project is a continuation of the original pilot project. The project is continuing to maintain a collaborative monitoring effort among the Bighorn National Forest, permittees and the SCCD. The project will ground truth and adjust the long term monitoring plans and protocols. The project is 57,333 acres, with a budget of \$20,000 and \$8,750 in matching funds.
- **Star Valley Conservation District (Forest Dell and Grover-Blaney Allotments Rangeland Monitoring):** The Forest Dell & Grover-Blaney Allotments are scheduled to have allotment management planning and NEPA completed by the Bridger-Teton National Forest by 2014. The main purpose of this project is to provide information on current conditions and trends of the riparian and rangelands for the allotment management planning process and NEPA analysis, with dead-end goal of maintaining grazing on these allotments. The project is 20,815 acres, with a budget of \$16,995 and \$11,581 in matching funds.
- **Star Valley Conservation District (Spring Creek and Little Greys Allotments Rangeland Monitoring):** These two allotments are scheduled to have allotment management planning and NEPA analysis completed by the Bridger-Teton national Forest by 2013. This project is intended to provide current conditions and trends for these rangelands and riparian areas on the two allotments to help inform this process. This project has the end goal of maintaining grazing on these allotments. The project is 46,738 acres, with a budget of \$18,659.06 and \$14,916.25 in matching funds.
- **Sublette County Conservation District (Prospect Mountain Cooperative Monitoring):** The project will provide data that will be used for the standards and

guidelines health evaluation and livestock grazing permit renewals for the Prospect Mountain Allotment. Ecological sites and plant community phases will be identified for both existing sites and additional sites. Cover and composition data will be necessary to complete accurate and defensible health assessment. The data will also serve as a baseline so rangeland trend can be determined as monitoring continues into the future. The project is 20,815 acres, with a budget of \$16,995 and \$18,254 in matching funds.

- **Teton Conservation District (Bridger-Teton National Forest Rangeland Monitoring):** The proposed project involves project work on federal grazing lands in the Bridger-Teton National Forest. The project would involve re-reading existing trend monitoring sites, re-reading existing Joint Cooperative Permittee Monitoring (JCPM) sites, and designing and installing new JCPM sites. The project would also strengthen permittee/ land management agency partnerships through continued JCPM planning and implementation efforts. The allotments included in these studies have near future NEPA studies to determine how and if permits will be renewed. A lack of data (for example, trend transects that have not been re-read in 40 years) and scrutiny from advocacy groups necessitate the collection of credible data, in order for good management decisions to be made. The allotments being studied all operate in conjunction with private land grazing, and the private land operation portion is dependent upon utilization of public lands for grazing. The project is 221,602 acres, with a budget of \$19,474 and \$16,924 in matching funds.
- **Uinta County Commissioners (East Fork Smiths Fork Gilbert Creek Allotments Rangeland Monitoring):** The proposed project is on the Mountain View Ranger District of the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest. The proposed project will relocate and re-read existing rangeland monitoring studies and establish new rangeland monitoring studies to determine if Forest Plan desired conditions and standards and guidelines are being met and/or moved towards. The project will help to improve and strengthen permittee and Forest Service relationships through joint collaboration and monitoring, when possible. The project is 36,147 acres, with a budget of \$20,000 and \$12,076 in matching funds.
- **UWW Extension Service (Sublette Allotment Cooperative Monitoring Project):** The proposed project will provide data for the Standards and Guidelines Health evaluation and livestock grazing permit renewals for the Sublette Allotment. Ecological sites and plant community phases will be identified for existing monitoring sites and additional sites as needed. Cover and composition data will be necessary to complete accurate and defensible Rangeland Health Assessments. The project is 76,369 acres, with a budget of \$16,537.19 and \$13,180.56 in matching funds.