

Rangeland Health Assessment Program Update 2015-16

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, and a \$100,000 going to the University of Wyoming for the development of white papers and a database containing peer reviewed literature. 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.

The programs principal focus is centered on the cooperative involvement of all parties, beginning with the design of the project, education related to methodology, through all phases of monitoring, leading to sustainable grazing now and into the future. This program provides an avenue for the permittees to be more involved in adaptive management strategies, founding decisions based on scientifically defensible data, and credible monitoring data for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements essential for permit renewals.

To date, forty-five projects have received \$747,662 in program funding for on the ground monitoring efforts and training for the permittees. The forty-five projects equate 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.

In 2015 – 2016 the WDA provided four opportunities for interested parties and eligible governmental agencies to identify on-the-ground projects and apply for funding. Twenty-five proposals were received and reviewed by a committee composed of a technical expert from each of the following agencies: Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, Office of State Lands and Investments, University of Wyoming and two employees from the WDA. The review committee provided their rankings for the WDA Director's review. The Director considers the review committees information and provides his own recommendations for the Board of Agriculture's (BOA) consideration. The BOA weighed the review committee ranking, consider the Director's recommendations, and awarded eighteen projects funding. (Primary information relating to all approved projects for 2014 – 2016 see the "2015-16 RHAP Update - Table 2" attachment).