Rangeland Resources

Introduction

The Monongahela National Forest currently manages 48 grazing allotments comprising approximately 6,000 acres. The average size of an allotment is 140 acres; allotments range in size from 18 to 993 acres. Not all allotments are actively grazed every year. An allotment may intentionally be excluded from grazing due to resource concerns or ongoing repairs to facilities. All grazing on the Forest is seasonal, from May to October. These allotments are offered under competitive bidding, with the highest bidder receiving the grazing permit. Grazing permits are 1 to 10 years in length depending on the type of permit issued.

Grazing allotments on the Monongahela National Forest are unique in that they are large, mostly non-forested openings. They provide livestock owners with a place to graze their livestock during the summer months so that they may use their own lands to produce winter feed for their herds. They also provide visual diversity and vistas in the primarily forested landscape of West Virginia, allow for wildlife viewing, and are popular hunting areas for some game species.

In FY06, the Range Program was restructured so that the Forest Soil Scientist is now also the Forest Range Program Manager. The Assistant Forest Soil Scientist is the Assistant Range Program Manager.

2007 Program Accomplishments

The following Range Program activities were accomplished in FY 2007:

1. District biological/range technicians worked cooperatively with permittees or contractors to:
   a. Develop and administer 9 fee credit agreements for a total dollar value of $7,944,
   b. Advertise available allotments, award high bidders, prepare and process annual operating instructions for all operable allotments, and
   c. Conduct compliance checks on allotments.

2. Completed and tracked range bills.

3. Updated the Range INFRA database with year-end reporting information.

4. Conducted program management activities in range, noxious weeds, and rangeland vegetation (work planning, budget tracking and input, accomplishment reporting, and the Annual Monitoring Report).

5. Administered 4500 acres to standard (100% of target acres).

6. Completed an Environmental Assessment, FONSI and Decision Notice for four allotments on the Marlinton Ranger District (Beale-Hacking, Day Run, Mullenax, and Kramer).

7. Continued an ongoing fencing and water improvement project on Big Run Allotment with Trout Unlimited. It was approximately 60% complete at the end of FY07.

8. Closed the Queens Allotment on the Cheat Ranger District so that wetland restoration can occur, either via natural processes over time or through partnership with Ducks Unlimited.

9. Treated 160 acres in the Allegheny Battlefield Allotment to control thistle (NNIS).

10. Conducted archeological surveys for the Coberly Sods North water trough and the Forinash fence line on the Cheat Ranger District, and for the Shearer South fence line on the Marlinton Ranger District.

11. Improved 441 acres of habitat/range condition by mowing brush and noxious weeds on 15 of 18 allotments on the Marlinton Ranger District.

12. The Whitmer (Cheat Ranger District) and Rimel (Marlinton/White Sulphur Springs District) allotments are planned for liming in FY 2008. Soil samples were taken in 2007 by permittees and sent to West Virginia University for testing. Lab results are pending.

13. Resolved non-compliance on two allotments on the Marlinton Ranger District.

The Range Program developed a timeline of annual activities to provide Districts with key items to be worked on throughout the year. This timeline should allow for prioritization of various activities during busier times of the grazing year.

The 2008 budget was developed. The Range Program Manager worked with the Forest Program Managers and District Rangers to help prioritize where limited funds should best be used across the Forest in order to meet assigned targets. The 2007 targets were monitored and reported to the RO at the end of the FY. The Range budget was spent to 99 percent of its allotted amount.

The 2008 NEPA schedule for range was negotiated and developed by the District Rangers. It was determined that the NEPA emphasis for compliance with the Rescissions Act would be moved to the North Zone. The Cheat-Potomac District Ranger decided to focus the efforts in the Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks NRA. The workload and budget was planned in Work Plan.

Monitoring and Evaluation

FOREST PLAN MONITORING FOR RANGE RESOURCES

There are no monitoring questions in the 2006 Forest Plan that are specific to Range Resources. However, there are three required monitoring questions applicable to Range Management that come from the Code of Federal Regulations, as follows:

1. *How close are projected outputs and services to actual?* [from CFR 219.12(k)(1)]

2. *How close are projected costs to actual costs?* [from CFR 219.12(k)(3)]

6. *Are the effects of Forest management, including prescriptions, resulting in significant changes to productivity of the land?* [from CFR 219.12.(k)(2)].

Monitoring results for these items are reported below.

Monitoring Question 1. How close are projected outputs and services to actual?

The outputs and services projected in the 2006 Forest Plan (pages II-43 and II-44) are the goals and objectives (outputs) stated for Rangeland Resources:

- Manage grazing allotments to provide open areas for forage, wildlife habitat, visual diversity, and dispersed recreation.

- Establish grazing capacities based on sound range inventory and analysis processes. Vary forage utilization between allotments based on grazing management systems in use, Management Prescription emphasis, and other factors, such as the dominant forage species.

- Manage grazing disturbance at levels that support movement toward desired ground cover conditions and maintenance or restoration of inherent soil quality and function.

- Maintain or improve existing range allotments by:
  - Refining or implementing more appropriate grazing systems,
  - Applying lime and fertilizer where needed,
  - Seeding to improve vegetation quality, and/or
  - Selectively controlling undesirable vegetation (e.g., brush, non-native invasive species).

Specific range-related outputs are displayed in Table RA-1, below.

Table RA-1. Grazing Summary, 2000-2004* and 2006-2007

Indicator	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2006	2007
Animal Unit Months (AUM) Grazed[1]	5304	5454	5858	5727	6185	5405	5504
Head Months Grazed[2]	4420	4494	4783	4721	5267	4341	4234
Permittees	37	37	44	42	41	37	26
Cattle Grazed	764	777	829	864	861	817	802
Horses Grazed	20	17	28	22	33	28	16
Sheep Grazed	56	56	56	56	56	30	30
Total Animals Grazed	840	850	913	942	950	875	848
Active Allotments	39	47	48	47	46	48	48

* Data from 2005 is not available.

[1] An animal unit month is the amount of forage required by a 1,000-pound cow, or the equivalent, for one month.. For example, a bull eats more than a cow. A mature cow eats more than a yearling.

[2] A head month is the time in months that livestock spend on National Forest System land.

Monitoring Question 1. Evaluation, Conclusions, and Recommendations

There are no targets or estimated output numbers in terms of animals grazed in the 2006 Plan. Table RA-1 displays grazing trends since 2000. The number of AUMs grazed in 2007 follows a trend of fairly steady numbers as shown above. These numbers are quite a bit lower than historic levels of grazing, which reflects that the need for allotments on federal land is not as great as in the past, and that the Forest has taken some allotments out of grazing for resource and other reasons. The Forest strives to strike a balance between providing what is needed and executing the program in a sustainable manner in order to meet economic, social, and resource needs.

Recommendations: Work to meet Range Resources desired conditions in the new Forest Plan. Desired conditions describe the goal of well-maintained and operated allotments and properly functioning ecosystems.

Monitoring Question 2. How close are projected costs to actual costs?

Costs of management practices, such as those done under fee credit agreements (fence repair, pond restoration, etc.) are tracked by district technicians. At the Supervisor's Office level, we budget for yearly projects done by Forest personnel or contracts such as herbicide application and brush-hogging. The cost of administration of the range program has gone down for the Forest, as there is no longer one full-time position dedicated to running the program.

Significant improvements to range structural and non-structural facilities have been made on Forest grazing allotments over the past several years through small contracts, fee credit agreements with permittees, partnerships, and Forest Service employees. However, there is still a large backlog of range work to be accomplished.

Monitoring Question 2. Evaluation, Conclusions, and Recommendations for Costs

There is a large backlog of range improvements/facilities that need replacement. Inventories indicate there are an estimated 132 miles of boundary and interior fences on Forest allotments. Many of these need major maintenance or replacement, as do the corrals. There are 26 corrals, so just over half of the allotments have corrals/loading chutes. Many livestock watering facilities, such as ponds or spring developments, are also in need of work. Additional watering facilities are needed on some allotments but must first be approved through the NEPA process.

Recommendations: Continue to prepare environmental analyses for grazing allotments to allow for additional improvements to be made to grazing allotments and to comply with the Rescissions Act of 1995 and meet the 2010 deadline.
Continue to use fee credit agreements as well as Forest Service funds to replace, repair, and/or upgrade range improvements.

Place more emphasis on using fee credit agreements to replace fence, to upgrade other failing facilities, and to lime and fertilize pastures. District technicians should continue to encourage, develop, and administer fee credit agreements each year with permittees on their units.

The Forest should request additional funding in range through the out-year budget process and through Congressional requests.

The Forest should request from the Regional Office that deferred maintenance funding be provided for range work, in addition to deferred maintenance funding for roads.

Monitoring Question 6. Are the effects of Forest management, including prescriptions, resulting in significant changes to productivity of the land?

This item is primarily monitored through on-site allotment visits or inspections. Each year selected allotments are visited/inspected by Forest technicians. In many instances, these visits are done specifically to inspect the allotment and are referred to as compliance checks. Examples of the questions that the inspectors look to answer during compliance checks include:

- Have range improvements/facilities—such as fences, watering facilities, gates, mineral feeders, and corrals—been maintained by the permittee, and are they functioning properly?
- Has there been vandalism to improvements or facilities?
- Have any livestock escaped the allotment?
- Is the permittee complying with the permit and annual operating instructions regarding number and kind of livestock permitted and season of use?
- If the annual operating plan calls for rotational grazing, are livestock being properly rotated?
- Is the area being overgrazed?
- Are erosion, slides and slumps occurring?
- Are riparian areas being damaged?
- Is woody brush encroachment or non-native invasive species infestation a problem?

Observations are recorded in field notes or inspection reports. If technicians discover problems, they report them to the District Ranger and the District contacts the permittee if immediate action is needed. Problems that require repair to facilities are placed on a list of future improvement work to be accomplished. Depending on such factors as the timing, available funding, and personnel availability, repair work may be scheduled and accomplished that fiscal year or placed in future year work plans for accomplishment. Work may be done by the permittee through fee credit agreements, by the Forest Service through contracts, or by Forest employees.

Sometimes technicians visit allotments in conjunction with other duties. For example, while Forest Service personnel are on an allotment inspecting a contractor's eradication of non-native brush, they also look at other aspects of the allotment. The entire allotment may not get inspected as it would under a compliance check, but portions of the allotment and its facilities are observed, and problems are noted and reported as needed.

Due to other duties and lack of range funds, not every allotment is visited or inspected every year. Some allotments are visited more than once in a particular year. Most visits to allotments are done during the grazing season, but some occur before or after the grazing season. In 2007, 17 allotments were inspected.

Monitoring Question 6. Evaluation, Conclusions, and Recommendations

There were no significant effects or changes to land productivity reported from the inspections. A number of minor concerns were noted (NNIS, improvement needs, etc.), and these will be addressed through a combination of operational processes described above.

Recommendations: Continue allotment visits/inspections to document conditions of concern and needed repairs as a basis for future work project priorities.

Continue to control noxious weeds, non-native invasive species and brush by cutting/mowing until the use of more effective and longer-lasting control measures such as herbicides is approved through the environmental analysis process.

Follow-up on Ours Allotment resource concerns as documented in the 2006 Monitoring Report (possible NEPA in 2009).

ADDITIONAL ITEM FOR FY 2007

The USDA-Agricultural Research Service out of Beaver, West Virginia visited several allotments in order to plan research on terrestrial species response to field edges/condition and silvipastures on their experimental farms; they are also interested in the allotments from an agro-ecology standpoint.

Figure RA-1. The Forinash Allotment after Brush Hogging in 2007