

GRAZING GUIDELINES

Grazing is designated as a secondary use in the southern portion of subunit 5A and is an allowed use everywhere else within the Deception Creek Management Unit except in subunits 2A, 2B, and 5C. Grazing will be allowed under permits only except in the southern portion of subunit 5A where leases are allowed. See further information on grazing in those subunits in Chapter III. Also see discussion of grazing under Management Intent in Section A of this chapter. These guidelines replace those in the *Susitna Area Plan* (SAP) except for SAP guideline number 3 relating to multiple use management of grazing lands. A range management plan is not required prior to issuing grazing permits in this unit unless, as a result of a range survey and/or increased demand, it appears that grazing is likely to be a significant widespread use within this unit.

1. AUTHORIZATION REQUIREMENTS

a. **Permit Required** All grazing of domestic livestock on all state lands not now under permit or lease shall be authorized by a permit. Permits would not be required for incidental grazing use that is generally permitted on state land such as horse travel. Leases are allowed in subunit 5A.

b. Term of Permits

(1) Policy for term of permits

Permits (1 to 5 years) may be issued wherever grazing is not prohibited as long as they do not adversely affect fish and wildlife.

(2) Criteria to be used to determine whether a permit is appropriate are listed below. No criteria should be used exclusively; rather, all the criteria should be considered collectively.

CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING IF A PERMIT IS APPROPRIATE

- (a) Small numbers of animals, generally 25 or less.
- (b) Non-commercial domestic animals.
- (c) Specific area considerations.
 - * Small areas.
 - * Short grazing period requirements.
 - * Few range improvements needed.
 - * Site specific benefits, e.g., research with intensive grazing to determine if it results in reduction of grass competition with other moose browse species.

- c. **Permit Requirements** Prior to issuance of a grazing permit, the following conditions must be met:
- (1) A grazing operation plan will be completed by the permittee with assistance from the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the Division of Agriculture, and the Division of Land and Water Management. (Note: SCS participates only if the permittee is a district cooperator and requests assistance. DNR must consult ADF&G before approving the grazing operation plan and issuing the grazing permit. The intent is that ADF&G's comments be given particular weight in areas where wildlife habitat is a primary use.)
 - (2) The grazing operation plan will be made a part of the grazing permit.
- d. **Grazing Operation Plans** Grazing operation plans for permits will include the elements listed below. Grazing operation plans may be revised annually to allow changes in stocking rates, improvements, etc., as indicated by range conditions and trend information.
- (1) SCS range survey data or sufficient on-site range inspection by DNR, ADF&G, SCS and the applicant to verify existing range conditions.
 - (2) Range conservation practices, including but not limited to:
 - grazing system
 - use guidelines
 - stocking rates
 - seasons of use
 - (3) Range improvements to be required.
 - (4) Monitoring system to be used.
 - (5) Location and legal description.
 - (6) Maps
 - range site map
 - range improvements
 - (7) Any proposed artificial modification of natural vegetation (e.g. clearing, burning, crushing, seeding, etc).
- e. **Common Use Areas** A grazing operations plan is required for common use areas. Common use areas are encouraged in order to fully utilize the range resource and to reduce fencing and facility requirements.

- f. **Public Access** Public access to state lands is not to be restricted by a grazing permittee.
- g. **Termination of Grazing Privileges** Failure to comply with permit terms shall result in termination of all grazing privileges.
- h. **Conservation Agreement** If the permittee unilaterally cancels the "Conservation Agreement" with the DNR Soil and Water Conservation District, the permit will be subject to termination.
- i. **Examination for Disease** Prior to placing stock on the permit area, all livestock shall be examined by a state licensed large animal veterinarian for the diseases and parasites identified in Table 3 (see Appendix IV). All livestock shall be free of visible symptoms of any contagious/infectious disease parasites prior to releasing them in the unit. Livestock found to carry an infectious/contagious disease will be restricted from placement in the unit for a 60-day period to allow for treatment and re-testing by a licensed veterinarian. (Note: Imported feeder cattle are exempt from the BRT test. Therefore, by state law they are restricted to the owner's property, and may not be put on public range land.)
- j. **Parasite Treatment** All livestock shall be treated for and be free of ectoparasites and endoparasites by using standard treatments and acceptable drugs prior to release in the unit.
- k. **Notification** DNR shall be formally notified by the permittee a minimum of 48 hours prior to the release of livestock on state lands. The notification shall include:
 - (1) The number and type of livestock to be released;
 - (2) Doctor of Veterinary Medicine certification that the livestock have been inspected for infectious diseases that are a threat to wildlife and are found by visual examination to be free of infectious and contagious diseases, ecto- and endoparasites.
- l. **Overutilization of Moose Browse Species** Stock shall be removed from that portion of the management unit where the annual production of moose forage species (willow, aspen, and birch) has been determined by SCS and ADF&G to be overutilized. (Overutilization is considered to have occurred if approximately ten percent (10%) of the existing annual growth has been consumed over what the moose normally consume annually.)

2. RANGE CONSERVATION PRACTICES

- a. **Forage Utilization** Utilization of key species (Blue joint and fescues) shall be limited to no more than 30 percent of the annual forage production of those species. Modification of this guideline may occur as a result of range condition, trend studies, and utilization checks if those studies or checks prove a higher utilization will be beneficial for forage production without adverse effect on wildlife habitat. Modification may also be authorized if higher utilization is desired for wildlife habitat enhancement or recreation management reasons. Consultation with ADF&G is necessary prior to modification of the 30 percent utilization guideline.
- b. **Grazing Systems**
- (1) Where season-long grazing occurs, utilization shall be no more than approximately 40 percent of the allowable forage during any given 30-day period.
 - (2) Other systems may be developed as a result of research and utilized if approved by the ADF&G and DNR (Division of Agriculture).
 - (3) A multiple-pasture (rotational) grazing system is generally preferred for areas where grazing is expected to be a continuing use.
- c. **Stocking Rates** Initial stocking rates will be determined using range survey data as a general guide. Modification of the stocking rates may occur as a result of changes identified from conducting annual utilization checks or identifying changes in condition and trend.
- d. **Monitoring** The DNR or its qualified designee shall monitor grazing operations by conducting timely seasonal range condition, trend, and utilization surveys to ensure that overgrazing and environmental degradation does not occur and that recommended stocking rates and densities are followed. Survey findings shall be reported to the permittee, Division of Agriculture (DOA), Division of Land and Water Management (DLWM) and ADF&G.
- If environmental degradation is found to be caused by livestock activities, the grazing operation plan and livestock activities shall be modified to eliminate the undesirable action. Any restoration or rehabilitation needed as a result of overgrazing must be approved by DNR and ADF&G.
- e. **Changes** Stocking rates, densities, length of season, and percent of forage utilization levels may change as a result of research activities sanctioned by the DLWM, Division of Agriculture (DOA) and ADF&G and conducted in cooperation with the ADF&G.
- f. **Riparian Zones** Riparian zones will be recognized as special treatment areas when developing the grazing operation plan. See definition of riparian zones in the Glossary (Appendix 1).

- g. **Waterbodies** The grazing operation plans will identify waterbodies to be given special consideration. These include, but are not limited to, all streams and lakes shown on the U.S.G.S. 1:63,360 topographic maps.
- h. **Access to Certain Identified Waters** Livestock shall be prevented from having open access to certain streams and riparian habitat identified by DNR and ADF&G and noted in the grazing operation plan. Some or all of these riparian zones may be identified as threatened by DNR and ADF&G. Buffers will be established to protect the threatened riparian zones; the buffers will be at least 100-feet wide on each side of the waterbody above the ordinary high water mark. There will be no grazing allowed in these buffers. The grazing operation plan will identify those riparian zones to which this applies. Livestock may have access to these streams at predesignated fenced watering areas if no other water sources are readily available.
- i. **Salting** Salting may be used to disperse concentrations of livestock use.

3. SEASON OF USE

- a. **Range Readiness** Stocking the range shall not occur before Blue Joint (*Calamagrostis* spp.) grass reaches four to eight inches in height. A determination on range readiness shall be made by Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Key locations to determine range readiness shall be established where grass growth can be determined. The Soil Conservation Service (SCS) in cooperation with the DNR shall assist in making the determination on how and where these plots shall be established.
- b. **Maximum Grazing Period** The maximum grazing period in any one grazing season is 75 days.
- c. **Stock Removal Date** Stock removal dates will be specified in each permit. Generally all stock shall be removed from the range two weeks prior to moose hunting season or August 31, whichever comes first. However, in some cases the grazing period and stock removal date may be extended depending on the individual grazing operation plans, current utilization checks, and ADF&G approval. In some cases a date earlier than August 31 may be specified.

4. WILDLIFE

- a. **Brown Bear** Livestock shall not be grazed in areas determined by ADF&G to have spring, summer, or fall concentrations of brown bear.
- b. **Moose** Livestock shall not be grazed in areas having high concentrations of moose in either summer or winter unless it can be demonstrated by the research recommended in guideline number 6 that grazing will not have a negative effect on the moose.

- c. **Browse Species Conservation** Browse species will be conserved for primary use by wildlife through selection of areas and season of use guidelines.
- d. **Livestock Predation** Grazing conducted in known or suspected predator range (wolf or bear) is done at the permittee's own risk. The ADF&G will not conduct predator control activities for the purpose of reducing livestock losses due to predators and will not be responsible for any losses to livestock. Permittees should be advised to comply with regulation 5 AAC 92.410, "Taking Game in Defense of Life or Property."
- e. See Fish and Wildlife guideline number 2c.

5. RANGE IMPROVEMENTS

- a. **Approval** All range improvements must be approved as a part of the grazing operation plan and permit agreement.
- b. **Facilities** No permanent facilities will be authorized as a part of a grazing permit.
- c. **Fencing** Fencing plans should be specified in the grazing operation plan after consultation with ADF&G and DNR during the grazing operation plan development or amendment process.
- d. **Interim Fencing Guidelines** ADF&G and DNR will develop a permanent fencing plan. In the interim, the guidelines below apply.
 - (1) A fencing plan shall be submitted for approval as part of a grazing operation plan. The fencing plan will address the following subjects:
 - * Type of fencing.
 - * Construction specifications
 - * Purpose of fencing (e.g. confine livestock, exclude livestock, sub-divide grazing land).
 - * Location of fencing.
 - * Fence management.
 - Drop down areas/requirements
 - Intersections with recreation trails/roads
 - Maintenance
 - Permanent nature of fence
 - (2) Fences shall to the extent feasible and prudent be located and constructed so as to permit passage by moose through an area while reducing to the minimum the potential injury to moose.

- (3) To this end, ADF&G recommends that barbed wire will not be used for wire fences. The fence height and spacing of wires will be such that potential injury to moose is minimized and passage of adults and juveniles is maximized. (Specific guidelines for fence height and wire spacing will be developed.) One; two; or three-wire electrified fencing is acceptable.
 - (4) Fence construction should be designed so as to allow dropping the fence to the ground if necessary at the end of the grazing season in areas of intensive recreational use, established wildlife travel patterns, and/or areas of heavy snow accumulation.
 - (5) Fence construction will provide for easy passage of people where recreation trails and fences intersect. Foot traffic can be accommodated by pass-throughs or stile construction. Off-road vehicle or snow machine traffic on trail/fence intersections will be accommodated by cattle guards or similar devices to allow safe off-road vehicle passage.
 - (6) Fence lines should be cleared of any obstructions prior to construction so as to allow the fence to be clearly visible by animals and people. Such clearing will be maintained for the life of the fence.
 - (7) Fences should be constructed and maintained so the top wire is made highly visible by use of "poly tape" or other sight barrier material.
 - (8) An alternative permanent fencing method for known moose migration routes may be pole fencing. Sections of pole fencing across known moose trails should be tested as an alternative fencing method to wire fencing.
 - (9) All materials used in the construction of fences shall have a minimum life expectancy of 15 years or the length of the permit.
- e. **Effect on Wildlife** To the extent feasible and prudent, fencing will be designed, constructed, and maintained so as to reduce the adverse effect on wildlife populations or hunting, trapping, and other recreational use. In selected wildlife or recreational areas, some fences will be removed or dropped to the ground at the end of that season's use. ADF&G should be consulted on fencing options.
- f. **Removal at End of Permit** Facilities and fencing will be removed at the end of the grazing permit period if not renewed. The permittee's responsibilities for removal will be specified in the permit.

6. RESEARCH NEEDS

The following interactions between domestic animals and wildlife need field observations, scientific research, and documentation.

Grazing permittees should participate in the process of documenting the effects of grazing in their permit areas. DNR and ADF&G will identify a specific set of observations and documentation requirements for each permit site as a part of the permit.

Moose and livestock food habits and behavior are largely unknown in this management unit although Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) is learning more about moose habitat distribution. In order to intensively manage moose, livestock, and vegetation in this area; research is needed on food habits, forage quantity and quality, plant tolerance to utilization, and habitat manipulation.

- a. **Range Survey** Before this plan is revised, SCS should do a range survey in subunits 2A and 2B that is specific to this area and field verified. The survey will determine the location, quantity, and quality of the grasslands in this unit as well as the number of cattle the area will support.
- b. **Food Habits and Behavior** Information is needed on the physical locations of moose year around and livestock grazing patterns in the summer. Food habits must be identified to determine which species to consider in available forage calculations. Moose are known to browse in both winter and summer and may also graze to some extent in the summer. Livestock are primarily grazers but are known to browse. No detailed food studies have been done in the area. Food items must be identified before one can determine how many animals a range will ultimately support. Information on livestock grazing patterns should be obtained from other areas and applied to this unit to the extent possible.
- c. **Forage Quantity and Quality** The initial stocking rate of a range will be based on quantity of available forage and the nutritional value. At different times of the year lower nutritional levels may be acceptable while at other times, such as prior to calving, higher levels are needed. Before grazing is allowed, DNR will establish control plots within the area to be grazed. Condition and trend plots must also be established to monitor range condition, species composition, and nutrient production.
- d. **Tolerance to Utilization** Most plants that are grazed or browsed require utilization to maintain productivity. However, too much can be harmful, and this varies by species. Conclusions from studies by ADF&G in the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge and by Chugach National Forest indicate that willow should not be browsed beyond a one-fourth-inch diameter. Sometimes grazing and browsing may change the vegetation composition in an area. This could be either beneficial or detrimental depending on management objectives. For instance, overgrazing grass would be harmful to the grass, but this may reduce competition for the woody species. Hence, browse and forest products may increase. Species specific studies are needed to determine the effects of livestock grazing on the main forage species.

- e. **Habitat Manipulation** The Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry, in cooperation with ADF&G, is managing the firewood and commercial cutting in the southwest corner of the Matanuska Valley Moose Range to improve moose browse, to research regeneration of species, and to research cut area shape and size effects on moose. The major component of much of the understory is bluejoint reedgrass, a competitive grass with poor nutrient value at the end of the summer unless it has been grazed. Improvements following the cutting program could include revegetation with a less aggressive, more nutritional grass. Better range would be available and browse and wood products would be increased. An analysis is needed of the results of different cutting practices and regeneration techniques under a variety of physical conditions. Results of this study should be utilized to manage grazing within the Deception Creek Management Unit.