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Dear Stakeholders,

The Bridger-Teton National Forest (BTNF) is a large forest with a relatively large domestic livestock grazing program. There are a range of external interests in the program, many of which have a keen interest on the disposition and management of the allotments. The number of active allotments on the forest is currently less than historic levels due to a variety of circumstances, mostly due to permittee action of waiving without preference due to a third-party incentive payment. While the Forest is not directly involved in these actions, the result is a vacated allotment. Post-waiver, the Forest has chosen several management options for these allotments, including administrative closure, managing the allotment as a forage reserve or leaving vacant for potential future restocking after appropriate analysis. There are many resource reasons for vacating a particular allotment, which in turn affects the complexity of restocking the allotment as well as the interests of future permittees to use an allotment. A primary reason has been reducing potential disease transmission between domestic sheep and core native bighorn sheep herds that occupy the Forest. Additionally, allotments have been vacated due to repeated predator conflicts, primarily associated with grizzly bear recovery and expansion outside the Primary Conservation Area (PCA). As a result of these actions, there are currently 18 vacant and 13 forage reserve allotments on the BTNF.

Due the number of vacant allotments, the BTNF has expressed an interest in understanding the priorities of restocking the vacant allotments from the range of external interests. All of the forage reserves have explicit language defining the terms of use, which has proven to add complexity to the use of these as intended. The Forest was also asked by the Wyoming Stock/Wool Growers Associations, Wyoming Department of Agriculture, County Conservation Districts, and potential permittees to evaluate the potential for re-stocking select allotments. Conversely, there are many other external interest groups concerned about the potential for re-stocking vacant allotments.

In response to this interest, multiple meetings have occurred to better understand the interests, concerns and opportunities for the 18 vacant allotments and 13 forage reserves. Dialogue has occurred at various Wyoming Stock/Wool Growers Associations meetings, culminating in a December, 2018 meeting hosted by Wyoming Stock/Wool Growers Associations. This meeting was primarily looking at these allotments from the livestock industry lens. The results of this meeting was feedback to the Forest on the livestock industry and permittee priorities for NEPA and identifying key points (i.e., is there interest in re-stocking or not). The BTNF took the results and conducted a review, focusing on differences in NEPA priority status between what we had developed internally vs. what was identified in the meeting. A draft vacant allotment spreadsheet was developed.



Recognizing that this meeting was livestock interest focused, the BTNF hosted a second meeting in June, 2019 and included representatives from a variety of interests, including, Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD), Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation, Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA), Wyoming Stockgrowers Association, Wyoming Woolgrowers Association, congressional staff and others. The intent of the meeting was to utilize the updated spreadsheet from the December meeting and identify key points and assign a NEPA priority again from this larger group. Although there was disagreement for the most part on moving forward with NEPA to re-stock most allotments, there was some consensus. Both groups identified six allotments as low priority for re-stocking, most of these were located in the northern part of the forest where grizzly bear conflicts are common. The other 12 vacant allotments were considered “Medium-High” by the livestock interests and “Low” from the conservation interests in regards to initiating NEPA for re-stocking (Table 1).

Table 1. Vacant allotments with NEPA priority feedback from livestock interests and conservation interests as identified in the June meeting.

District	Allotment	Key Points	Priority	Ongoing Work or Forest Plan Issues
Greys River	Black Canyon	Two rams were seen in the allotment 2 years ago. WGFD not concerned with re-stocking (follow state plan in regards to Darby Herd). Allotment was bought-out, conservation interests very opposed to re-stocking. Concern over tall forb conditions and continuing monitoring. WDA and livestock interests would like to move forward with the NEPA process for re-stocking with sheep.	Low: conservation interests High: WDA/livestock interests for initiating the NEPA process for re-stocking.	Contracted Range Report that will be completed in May 2020. Issue with Forest Plan consistency regarding Darby Herd
Greys River	Blind Bull Blind Trail Deadman Cabin Creek Griz. Basin Stewart	WGFD not concerned with re-stocking (follow state plan in regards to Darby Herd). Allotment was bought-out, conservation interests very opposed to re-stocking. Concern over tall forb conditions and continuing monitoring. WDA and livestock interests would like to move forward with the NEPA process for re-stocking with sheep.	Low: conservation interests High: WDA/livestock interests for initiating the NEPA process for re-stocking.	Contracted Range Report that will be completed in May 2020 for Cabin Creek Issue with Forest Plan consistency regarding Darby Herd Rangeland Health Assessment Program (RHAP):

				Allotments Funded in FY20: Griz. Basin Blind Bull Deadman
Pinedale	Blair Creek	This is a relatively small allotment that would potentially be available for consideration as a forage reserve. A fence was built between it and the Sweetwater allotment. Veg data was collected in 2010. Wilderness makes-up nearly half the allotment.	Low: conservation interests Med: WDA/livestock interests for initiating the NEPA process for re-stocking.	
Pinedale	Elk Ridge Lime Creek Rock Creek Tosi Creek	Possible re-stock with cattle in suitable areas. Concern with predator conflicts; however, the additional space may help reduce conflicts in other areas of the Upper Green Allotment. Most interests were in agreement that there would be no expansion of AUM's. Other issues involve fencing or reconfiguring fencing for cattle management vs historic sheep grazing.	Low: Most conservation interests Med-High: WDA /livestock interests For initiating the NEPA process for re-stocking.	Potential to convert to Cattle Riparian Assessment Planned for FY20

In summary, the BTNF recognizes there is significant support from livestock interests to continue to provide opportunities for term grazing on some of the vacant allotments. We also recognize there is significant opposition, from some interests, on re-stocking many of the vacant allotments. The Forest is anticipating additional funds for the following projects:

- Conduct grazing suitability analysis and NEPA for portions of 4 allotments (Lime Creek, Rock Creek, Tosi Creek and Elk Ridge) on the Pinedale Ranger District. These are vacated sheep allotments that were closed to domestic sheep re-stocking due to overlap with core native bighorn sheep herds but have portions suitable for cattle. Conversion to cattle requires NEPA and there is strong support from adjacent cattle permittees for this. These allotments could help reduce grizzly bear conflicts in the Upper Green allotments. We anticipate doing the grazing suitability in 2020, with the intent to complete NEPA in 2021.
- Develop proposed action and conduct scoping for a Forest Plan amendment in 2020 with NEPA completion in 2021. The purpose of the amendment is to better clarify bighorn sheep management across the forest as it relates to core herds and non-emphasis herds.
- Complete additional field inventory and establish the existing condition by resource for Black Canyon and Cabin Creek allotments on the Greys River Ranger District in 2020; which is necessary for development of a proposed action.

We appreciate the work and continued collaboration with the Wyoming Department of Agriculture on the creation of a Good Neighbor Authority agreement and are hopeful this may increase our capacity. Potential projects for Good Neighbor Authority, if additional funding becomes available in 2020, include ecologic site description (ESD) development, and ongoing monitoring of vacant and forage reserve allotments. These projects are integral to support future analyses for any vacant allotment NEPA.

Sincerely,



DEREK J.S. IBARGUEN
Acting Forest Supervisor