

SUITABILITY ANALYSIS FOR HORSE BUTTE VACANT  
LIVESTOCK GRAZING ALLOTMENT

USDA Forest Service  
Hebgen Lake Ranger District  
Gallatin National Forest  
Gallatin County, Montana

SUMMARY

The recommendation to close the Horse Butte allotment is to bring final resolution to the future of this allotment which has been held vacant for approximately 8 years. The Forest Plan Management Area (MA) allocation for this area is MA 5 (areas adjacent to Hebgen Lake which receives heavy recreation use), MA 7 (riparian areas) and MA 15 (grass lands located in occupied grizzly bear habitat). All of these MA areas allow for livestock grazing.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- No grazing permittees are affected by this decision. All previous permittees waived their grazing permits back to the Forest Service at least 8 years ago with no intention of re-establishing them at a later date. In 2008, there was a request to use the area for horse grazing; however the request was withdrawn when the applicant was informed about the time delay involved in the completion of NEPA, the requirements for being a qualified applicant, and the cost associated with building new fences. There has been no further interest in domestic livestock grazing this allotment.
- Threatened, endangered, and sensitive plants or animals are known to inhabit the planning areas. More specifically the area contains habitat suitable for grizzly bear, grey wolf, bald eagle, western toads (*Bufo boreas*), and purple monkey flower (*Mimulus nanuse*). Closure of the allotment will lessen the chance of these species being affected by potential future domestic livestock grazing.
- The fences and cattle guards have been removed from this allotment. Installing new infrastructure would require additional funding and potentially create new barriers for wildlife movement.
- Horse Butte peninsula is used by bison. Consequently, cattle grazing in this area may contribute to the controversy associated with bison management and could be perceived as a barrier to year-round bison use of Horse Butte peninsula. Some believe that if cattle are not on Horse Butte, then bison would be allowed to use

the area all season long. Removing cattle from Horse Butte would allow the opportunity for this discussion to proceed and focus on resolving any safety, private property or other concerns that exist on the butte relative to bison.

- The project is consistent with management direction in the Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) for the Gallatin National Forest where it directs the evaluation of vacant allotments (page II-20, Forest Plan).

## INTRODUCTION

The Horse Butte allotment, on the Hebgen Lake Ranger District of the Gallatin National Forest, has been a vacant horse and cattle allotment since 2002. This analysis provides the background information, relative to suitability for livestock grazing, as a basis for a Forest Supervisor decision on whether it should be permanently closed. Vacant allotments can be closed with a letter to the allotment folder signed by the Forest Supervisor (FSM 2204.2 Number 6 and R1 Supplement 2204.3 Number 23).

## ANALYSIS

### BACKGROUND:

Horse Butte Allotment – This allotment is located on the Horse Butte Peninsula between Grayling and Madison Arms of Hebgen Lake, and is roughly five miles northwest of West Yellowstone, Montana. Prior to 2002, this allotment permit allowed for 142 cow/calf pairs and 30 horses, under a seasonally deferred rotation schedule.

The Horse Butte Peninsula is utilized by bison and the cattle allotment on Horse Butte has been very controversial. Some believed that if cattle were removed from the allotment, then bison would be free to forage in Hebgen Basin. This has not proven true as cattle still exist on other lands (both private and federal) within the basin.

This allotment includes approximately 2065 acres within the Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone and provides habitat for a few grizzly bears. There has been no history of grizzly bear depredation on cattle in this allotment.

### SUMMARY OF SUITABILITY FOR FUTURE DOMESTIC GRAZING:

Access: readily accessible;  
Wildlife Values: High;  
Potential for Conflicts: High;  
Forage Value for Livestock: Moderate

DETERMINATION: This allotment has high value for rare plants and wildlife, including grizzly bears, bald eagles and bison, and there is no demand for domestic livestock grazing. Therefore, the recommendation is to close it permanently.

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DATE