

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF STATE LANDS



Rangeland News – Spring 2014

Lessees provide input at winter meetings

Thank you to the more than 50 people who attended a series of grazing lessee meetings held in Prineville, Lakeview, Burns and Jordan Valley in January. Topics discussed included the upcoming forage lease renewal process, drought reductions, sage grouse conservation plans, Annual Operating Plans, and fire suppression.

A letter will be sent out soon providing a summary of the questions asked, along with the Department of State Lands (DSL) responses.

Implementation of drought reductions

Letters explaining the Department's drought reductions on all larger blocked rangeland parcels were sent out in December 2013. The letters included the rationale, along with how this reduction will be implemented. In short, authorized AUMs were reduced 25 percent on larger blocked leaseholds, and billings were based on this reduction. It's important to note that Approved Annual Operating Plans are required to be in place before turnout.



Following receipt of actual use in the fall, reimbursements/credits for AUMs not used will be issued. For the smaller isolated

parcels, commensurate reductions will be implemented with prior authorization. A minimum \$250 lease fee will be assessed.

Much of eastern Oregon is getting some precipitation, filling stock ponds and recharging dry soils and springs, but other areas are still relatively dry. Because of this variability, the Department may allocate the AUM rate back to the original carrying capacity on a case-by-case basis. This requires prior approval, and typically a site visit by Eastern Region rangeland staff.

2015 Lease renewals and lease inventories

The majority of state forage leases will be up for renewal in 2015. Formal notification, including a renewal application, will be sent out in August.

Renewals must be returned to the Bend office by the end of November 2014.

Concurrent with the renewal process, rangeland staff are updating inventories of all existing structural and non-structural improvements, including fences, water developments, seedings, and noxious weed treatments.

Inventory work began in summer 2013, and lessees are encouraged to be involved by accompanying staff inventorying your leased area. A copy of the completed inventory sheet will be mailed to each lessee for your review and any additional information.



Reporting wildfires

As everyone is aware, wildfire plays a large role in shaping and impacting rangelands. We know many producers are heavily involved in Rangeland Protection Associations (RPAs) and fight wildfires in their local areas. Please give the Bend office a call when fires are on or threaten state lands. In many cases, the BLM may have already notified us,

but this is not always the case. It is crucial the Department be involved primarily as resource advisors to the BLM, or by having staff on site with BLM fire crews.

In addition to suppression activities, assessing wildfires for rehabilitation work is extremely time-sensitive as late summer fires may need weed treatments before fall sets in.

The Department currently pays dues to many RPAs and seeks to do so in all areas where we have land. In addition, our rangelands are covered by a fire suppression agreement with the BLM, whereby they will respond with available resources when a fire occurs on our land. However, this agreement is expensive – in 2013 our costs were more than \$223,000 – so we continually look for more cost-effective ways to handle wildfires on state land.

Grazing revenues support range improvements

Since 2001, the Department has allocated 12.5 percent of grazing receipts for a variety of range improvements, including fencing, wells and waterlines, stock ponds/reservoirs, stock tanks, seeding, brush control, cattle guards, juniper clearing and noxious weed treatments. 2013 completed projects included:

- Installing five miles of livestock fence and seven miles of waterline (\$75,000)
- Spraying 800 acres of medusahead (\$33,000)
- Clearing 130 acres of juniper (\$9,800)

Although remaining monies for the 2013-15 biennium are already allocated, we are planning for projects in the 2015-17 biennium (July 1 – June 30 for the two-year period). If you would like to propose a range improvement project, contact the Bend office for an application form, or go to the State Lands website: www.oregon.gov/dsl/LW/Pages/rangeland.aspx



Converting state leaseholds to ag production

In addition to 630,000 acres of rangelands, the Department leases about 5,500 acres for production of such crops as wheat, alfalfa hay, potatoes, onions and poplar trees.

We have recently completed conversion of 750 acres from open rangelands to irrigated agriculture in



eastern Deschutes and Harney counties. On these projects the state paid for below-ground infrastructure, including well drilling and electrical service, and lessees paid for above-ground improvements such as land clearing, planting, and central-pivot installation and equipment. We are currently evaluating nine additional locations where conditions appear favorable for development, and where water permits may be available.

If you're interested in converting a portion of your leasehold to agricultural production, it's important to be aware of the timeframe, which is usually two to three years to obtain permits and complete the conversion.

Cultural resource surveys a key part of rangeland management

When range improvements are proposed, DSL's archaeologist Gary Curtis surveys the project area before construction to ensure the project will have little or no impact on historic or prehistoric sites. In 2013, lessees proposed 3.5 miles of water lines, 5.3 miles of fence line, and 90 acres of range-to-ag conversions. All these projects were surveyed and cleared for development.

It is important to note, however, that even after a project is given "cultural resource clearance" artifacts may still be discovered during construction.

If this occurs, all work must stop immediately until an archaeologist can provide recommendations.



Two cultural resource laws protect archaeological sites in Oregon: ORS 358.905-358.961 (archaeological objects); and ORS 97.740-

97.760 (Indian graves and protected objects law).

Any questions about cultural resources should be directed to Gary in the Bend office.

Sage grouse conservation plan nearing completion

The topic of listing sage grouse as a “threatened or endangered species” is not a new one for the eastern Oregon ranching community. In response to a potential listing, the Department has been working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to develop a Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) to cover state-owned rangelands. The state CCAA will mirror Harney County’s version and will only apply to qualifying land.



It’s important to note that as the landowner, the Department of State Lands will be the one dealing with the USFWS, not our lessees. We are close to completion of the agreement and will circulate a copy to all grazing lessees for your review. Questions may be addressed to the Eastern Region staff.

Noxious weed control continues

Grazing and recreational uses on a wide variety of state rangelands have historically introduced noxious weeds from adjacent land ownerships. State lease agreements require the lessee to control noxious weeds on their leasehold. Due to influences such as general recreation use and restrictions preventing control on some adjacent lands, DSL works cooperatively with lessees on weed control where it can be most effective.



The agency’s own efforts include participation in three cooperative weed management areas (CWMAs) through contract ground spraying along roads, and initiating efforts to control some larger

patches of noxious weeds. DSL contributes funds to the CWMAs, which enables their weed coordinators to better treat across ownership boundaries between state and private lands.

This past year DSL began restoration efforts to control a large patch of medusahead on the border of Harney and Malheur counties. The project began in March 2013 with cool-season burning the heavy thatch layer, followed by an aerial herbicide application in late summer.

Weed control work this year will entail spot spraying followed by broadcast-seeding competitive perennial bunchgrasses where native bunchgrasses are not present.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service is initiating planning efforts in some areas to allocate monies on private lands for the control of annual invasive species for protection of sage grouse habitats. If you’re interested in this project, contact your local NRCS representative.

Noxious weed identification is very important. DSL rangeland staff is willing to provide basic weed identification instruction to your ranch employees, or get you in contact with local experts in weed management. Call Randy Wiest for more information.

Contact the Eastern Region Staff

We encourage you to contact DSL staff regarding any of the topics in this newsletter or other matters regarding state lands and leases.

Rangeland leases, lease renewals, range improvements, CCAA, wildfires

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Agricultural leases, rights of way, other authorized uses of state lands and waterways

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