

Proposed Demonstration Project on the Dakota Prairie Grasslands

Background:

The Record of Decision for the Dakota Prairie Grassland FEIS and LRMP was signed in July of 2002. The grazing portion was separated out and assigned an “interim decision”.

An eight member Scientific Review Team was appointed with approval from the ND Governor’s office and was charged with affirming the science used in the Planning process, and determining whether the grazing portion of the Plan could be implemented and if grazing levels on the 64 “sample AMPs” reviewed did indeed reflect projected numbers in the Plan. This was to be a “test drive” over a two-year period.

The Report of the Scientific Review Team came out in May of 2005. Its overall conclusions affirmed the DPG Plan while outlining issues perceived and making recommendations. The Grazing Associations were not satisfied.

Nationwide release of revisions to the FS Grazing Handbook and range chapters in the Forest Service Manual on July 19, 2005 brought a firestorm to the Dakota Prairie Grasslands. Revisions included sunsetting the practice of leased headquarter ranches folding in the federal grazing permits attached to those base properties – a common practice on the Dakota Prairie Grassland, found to a lesser extent in only two other Grasslands.

Ranking member Senator Byron Dorgan called for a Field Hearing of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior in Bismarck, North Dakota on August 30, 2005 at the behest of an enraged ranching community. The Senator and invited ND Congressman Earl Pomeroy berated the Forest Service, threatened transfer of the National Grasslands to the Natural Resource Conservation Service, and called for rescission of the Handbook and Manual revisions.

The Forest Service did indeed rescind all revisions and amendments to the Grazing Handbook and Forest Service Manual on Range Management on September 9, 2005, notice published in the Federal Registry on September 20, 2005.

In taking further advised action to appease the ND Congressional delegation and local public lands ranchers, the Dakota Prairie Grasslands Supervisor Dave Pieper is now proposing continued delay in implementation of the grazing portion of the DPG Plan. A Demonstration Project adopting a “working group” or other collaborative approach would be applied at the landscape or multiple allotment level.

Points of Contention:

- The Scientific Review Team completed its charge, giving a green light to implementation. Draft language for the Demonstration Project, used as basis for need, misquotes the SRT in context and content.
- DPG Land and Resource Management Plan **standards** relative to livestock grazing will be relegated to the unbinding status of guidelines. No supplemental analysis to assess impacts of this significant action is included.
- Inclusion of the Demonstration Project in the ROD for the grazing portion of the DPG Plan establishes an open-ended, undefined timeframe for implementation.
- Limitation of conservation interests is proposed in process.

Action:

Do not allow this significant prairie landscape to go unattended, and in so doing, threaten management of the 20 National Grasslands nationwide. The Little Missouri National Grassland on the DPG is the largest in the Grassland system and ranks near the top for potential preservation and restoration. Similarly, the Shyenenne is the largest remnant of tallgrass prairie and oak savannah in public ownership. The Cedar and Grand lie either within or contiguous to the Standing Rock Indian Reservation and offer unique opportunities.

Protest by large national environmental organizations and smaller interests across the country are needed to put the Forest Service on notice that this is public land valued by all, and not merely property of a self-limiting livestock grazing elite.

Mail your protest to:

Dakota Prairie Grasslands
Dave Pieper, Supervisor
240 West Century AVE
Bismarck, ND 58501
dpieper@fs.fed.us