

**DAKOTA PRAIRIE GRASSLAND
DEMONSTRATION PROJECT**

Background: The Record of Decision (ROD) implementing the Dakota Prairie Grassland (DPG) Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) was signed on July 31, 2002. Due to uncertainty and considerable controversy, the ROD established a "phased in" approach for the livestock grazing program and the creation of an independent Scientific Review Team (SRT) to examine the Plan's supporting science and estimated effects.

Issues: The Forest Service estimated a nine percent reduction in livestock grazing levels while other interests have estimated reductions of 43 to 69 percent. Sixty-nine "mock up" sample allotment management plans (AMPs) were developed for SRT review during the two year review process.

SRT Conclusions: The SRT members' comments on the sample AMP reports stated that "Yes, the LRMP can be implemented." However, the general qualifier to that statement was, "But the outcome is uncertain." On the question "Are grazing levels in the sample AMPs similar to those projected in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS)?" the SRT stated, "...it is impossible to determine whether the projected stocking rates are appropriate to meet management goals and objectives."

Demonstration Project Purpose

Based on the SRT's findings and conclusions, the continuing controversy over the livestock grazing portion of the DPG Plan and the national grassland mandate to demonstrate sound and practical principles of land used for the areas in which they are located, a pilot demonstration project is being proposed. The purpose of the demonstration project will be to develop and implement integrated allotment management plans to monitor progress towards meeting resource objectives, and to determine if Plan Goals and Objectives are achievable or need modification.

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Demonstration Project Proposal

Objective: To provide for long-term sustainable multiple use management on the DPG, to build a common vision for national grassland resources, and to demonstrate sound and practical management of grassland ecosystems.

Strategy: Adopt a "working group" model or other collaborative approaches, such as Coordinated Resource Management (CRM), to the allotment management planning process at the landscape or multiple allotment level. Participation may include livestock grazing permittees and associations; Soil Conservation Districts; interested stakeholders; and local, state and federal agencies.

Pilot Provisions:

- 1) The Demonstration Project will be included in the Record of Decision for the livestock grazing portion of the Plan.
- 2) The ROD will authorize livestock grazing, meeting Rescission Act requirements.
- 3) The Project will last until all allotments have updated allotment management plans or until the demonstration project purpose has been achieved.
- 4) To provide maximum flexibility to "work groups" all LRMP standards relative to livestock grazing will become guidelines, except those which are based on law and regulation (i.e., Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, etc.). Goals and objectives may also be modified or changed to meet on-the-ground conditions and/or capabilities. One goal will be to maintain or improve current on-the-ground conditions. Site-specific amendments to the DPG Plan to incorporate these changes will be done, as needed.
- 5) As described in upcoming DPG Final Position on the Scientific Review Team Report, the SRT Recommendations will be incorporated into the livestock grazing planning process. The SRT or similar independent group or entity may be used to monitor the Demonstration Project.
- 6) The working groups' proposals would be carried forward in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process as the Forest Service's proposed action.
- 7) A full range of alternatives may include, but are not limited to: 1) A "permitted" and/or "preference" livestock alternative, 2) A Forest Service generated alternative based on Plan goals, objectives and guidelines and 3) A "no grazing" alternative to establish baseline condition. The required "No Action" alternative in the NEPA process will use the 20 year average livestock numbers.
- 8) Project level livestock grazing monitoring to measure progress towards meeting resource objectives will be based on the LRMP Monitoring and Evaluation direction (Chapter 4) and the Memorandum of Understanding between the Public Lands Council (PLC) and the Forest Service.
- 9) Lessons learned from this Demonstration Project will provide the foundation for future DPG LRMPs.