



**File Code:** 1950, 2210 -Mystic Range  
Project

**Date:** June 5, 2009

Greetings from the Black Hills National Forest:

The Forest Service has initiated planning to evaluate grazing allotments on the Black Hills National Forest, Mystic Ranger District. The Mystic Range Project falls under the authority and guidelines of the 1996 schedule the Forest Service provided the US Congress in response to the 1995 Rescission Act. The 1995 Rescission Act directed the Forest Service to complete environmental analysis on grazing allotments on National Forest System lands. I ask that you take a few minutes to learn about the actions we are proposing for the National Forest lands within the Mystic Ranger District of the Black Hills National Forest.

The Mystic Range Project area generally lies within the central portion of the Mystic Ranger District, which is located in western South Dakota (see vicinity map). The project area encompasses eight grazing allotments: Bald Horse (27,828 acres), Deerfield (7,874 acres), Palmer Gulch (14,190 acres), Porcupine (9,858 acres), Redfern (11,573 acres), Rimmer (2,011 acres), Slate Prairie (5,896 acres), and Tigerville (5,825 acres). The project area consists of approximately 85,055 acres of National Forest System lands. All of these allotments are due for environmental review, and if necessary, revision to current rangeland management practices.

The project's main focus is to determine whether or not livestock grazing should continue on the eight allotments and, if so, whether any changes may be needed to meet the Black Hills National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended (Forest Plan).

The Mystic Ranger District proposes to reauthorize grazing of domestic livestock on eight grazing allotments and improve livestock management as needed. The underlying needs for this proposal include:

- Improve livestock management so that it is consistent with the goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines of the Forest Plan, as amended
- Improve species composition of upland vegetation
- Improve streambank stability
- Improve riparian vegetation diversity and abundance
- Reduce opportunities for livestock conflicts with vehicle traffic

The Proposed Action is designed to maintain or improve resource conditions in rangeland health, vegetation, watershed health, designated Botanical Areas, and wildlife habitat relative to livestock grazing. It provides for a range of alternate actions that may be implemented to achieve desired conditions in an acceptable timeframe. This approach is known as "Adaptive Management." Some grazing practices would be changed to resolve grazing related resource issues.

Successful Adaptive Management requires timely monitoring of resource conditions and trends. The Proposed Action also includes a monitoring plan for each allotment designed to focus on specific areas with livestock related resource problems. If monitoring results indicate that resource concerns



persist, adaptive management options are identified that would be implemented in cooperation with each permittee to effect improvement in resource conditions.

The Proposed Action for each respective allotment is summarized below. For all allotments: livestock will be moved by the permittee when proper use criteria for upland rangelands and riparian areas are reached and continued use would exceed Forest Plan guidelines and standards. Most range improvements would be constructed by the permittee with the Forest Service providing most of the materials. Adaptive Management Options that may also be considered for all allotments are displayed in Table 1 (see attached).

### **Bald Horse Allotment**

This allotment covers 27,828 acres, with 299 cows with calves permitted to graze from June 1 to October 26 each year. It is managed as a nine pasture deferred rotation grazing system. The term grazing permit (ten years) is issued to one permittee.

The proposed action includes annually adjusting the order of pasture use to increase the extent of riparian vegetation, improve willow age class distribution, and increase streambank stability. Due to some water resource and riparian concerns on this allotment, the proposed action also modifies herding and changes salt placement to influence livestock behavior.

Proposed range improvements are intended to gain better distribution of livestock and control their movement. These improvements include approximately 12 water developments, ten miles of fencing (for highway, pasture/allotment boundary, and/or riparian enclosure purposes), three cattleguards, and construction of one small corral. This includes fencing along Sheridan Lake Road to reduce the potential for cattle – vehicle accidents.

If these actions do not reduce livestock impacts to riparian areas, adaptive management options may include additional water sources that would be developed to better distribute livestock, or days of use would be adjusted, redistributed, or reduced on a pasture by pasture basis.

### **Deerfield Allotment**

This allotment covers 7,874 acres, with 102 cows with calves permitted to graze from June 6 to October 25 each year. It is managed as a six pasture deferred rotation grazing system. The term grazing permit (ten years) is issued to one permittee.

The proposed action includes reducing the number of grazing days in the Heely Pasture to increase the extent of riparian vegetation, reduce streambank alteration, reduce fine sediments in the stream, and increase streambank stability. The proposed action includes continued use of a range rider to influence livestock behavior. The number of grazing days in the Gold Run Pasture could be increased after a water source is developed, one cattleguard installed, and approximately one mile of pasture boundary fence is constructed to prevent livestock access to the Deerfield Road.

Proposed range improvements are intended to gain better distribution of livestock and control their movement. These improvements include approximately one water development, two miles of fencing (for highway, pasture/allotment boundary, and/or riparian enclosure purposes), and one cattleguard. This includes extending existing fencing along the south side of the Deerfield Road to reduce livestock – vehicle accidents. Once this fence is in place, the Lake Shore Pasture would no longer be grazed since fencing the north side of the road is cost prohibitive.

If these actions do not improve resource conditions in Heely Creek, adaptive management options may include a reduction in permitted livestock use.

### **Palmer Gulch Allotment**

This allotment covers 14,190 acres. There are two permittees each with a ten year term grazing permit. The north half of the allotment is grazed by 74 cows with calves permitted to graze from June 1 to October 25 each year. It is managed as a six pasture deferred rotation grazing system. The south half of the allotment is grazed by 67 cows with calves from June 1 to October 21. Approximately 20 acres (Summit Pasture) is grazed from October 22 to May 31 with three cows with calves.

The proposed action includes dividing this allotment into two separate allotments since the existing permittees run individual purebred herds, and already graze two unique and separate pasture rotations. The north half (renamed the Oblivion Allotment) would contain the Dump, Ford, Keystone, Samalias, and Sawmill Pastures. The south half would remain named the Palmer Gulch Allotment, which would contain the East Zimmer, Lower Bear, Palmer, Rabbit, Summit, Sunday, and Upper Bear Pastures. Each herd is geographically separated and movement between herds is difficult due to the arrangement of private land in-holdings, major highways, and recreation sites.

Sawmill Pasture is currently not grazed due to lack of private land line fencing and is proposed to be removed from the permitted grazing area. The Dump Pasture has not been grazed since 2003. If this pasture continues to be ungrazed due to the lack of railroad cattleguards needed to control livestock movement, then the permitted season of use for the remaining pastures in this rotation (Ford, Keystone, and Samalias) will be reduced. To prevent cattle trailing down the Old Hill City Road to Keystone, a pasture boundary fence and cattleguard is proposed along the railroad right of way near the Twin Springs Road.

Boundary fencing for Upper Bear and Lower Bear Pastures would be reconstructed to incorporate ungrazed but suitable rangelands to the west of State Highway 89.

Proposed range improvements are intended to gain better distribution of livestock and control their movement. These improvements include approximately 13 water developments, five miles of fencing (for highway, pasture/allotment boundary, and/or riparian enclosure purposes), three cattleguards, and drive in or excavate small openings for placing approximately eight steel plates for a stream restoration project.

If these actions do not reduce the impacts of livestock to riparian areas, adaptive management options may include additional fencing and water sources that would be developed to better distribute livestock or days of use would be adjusted, redistributed, or reduced on a pasture by pasture basis.

### **Porcupine Allotment**

The Porcupine Allotment has been under Holistic Management (HM) since 1988. An interdisciplinary management team meets several times a year to evaluate and plan allotment grazing use and development. The team is comprised of the permittee, and representatives from the Black Hills National Forest, Sierra Club, South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks Department, and South Dakota State University's Range program. The management team helps to manage the relationships between land, grazing animals, and water in ways that mimic nature.

This allotment covers 9,858 acres, with 334 cows with calves permitted to graze from June 9 to September 30 each year. This permit allows variable numbers and a variable season of use to be annually applied for by the permittee. It is managed as a 12 pasture deferred rotation grazing system. The term grazing permit (ten years) is issued to one permittee.

The proposed action includes modifying herding and changing salt placement to influence livestock behavior, adding more livestock/big game watering locations, and cross-fencing some existing pastures. The objective is to reduce the amount of bare ground created by the Jasper Fire and continue to enhance upland plant species diversity.

Proposed range improvements are intended to gain better distribution of livestock and control their movement. These improvements include approximately seven water developments, eight miles of fencing (for highway, pasture/allotment boundary, and/or riparian enclosure purposes), one cattleguard, construct one corral, construct/bury eight miles of new/existing pipeline, and prescribed burning approximately 6,600 acres of dead and downed trees

Any adaptive management option may be considered to continue progress in reducing bare ground and enhancing plant diversity. More cross fencing and additional water sources may be developed to better distribute livestock or days of use would be adjusted or numbers redistributed.

### **Redfern Allotment**

This allotment covers 11,573 acres, with 195 cows with calves permitted to graze from June 11 to October 25 each year. It is managed as a four pasture deferred rotation grazing system. The term grazing permit (ten years) is issued to one permittee.

The proposed action includes continued use of a range rider to influence livestock behavior, and fencing a portion of Slate Creek up stream from Slate Dam to restore the channel's bank stability and sustainable water flows. The fenced off portion of Slate Creek would receive limited grazing use. All actions are based on specialist reviews and studies that indicate the allotment may be overstocked. There are concerns with unstable streambanks, incised channels, and high amounts of streambank alteration in Slate Creek and Queen Bee drainage.

Proposed range improvements are intended to gain better distribution of livestock and control their movement. These improvements include approximately three water developments, three miles of fencing (for highway, pasture/allotment boundary, and/or riparian enclosure purposes), one cattleguard, and reconstructing two existing corrals.

If upland water developments do not increase livestock distribution and utilization studies find forage is lacking to support current livestock numbers, adaptive management options may include a reduction in permitted livestock use.

### **Rimmer Allotment**

This allotment covers 2,011 acres, with 33 cows with calves permitted to graze from June 11 to October 10 each year. It is managed as a two pasture deferred rotation grazing system. The term grazing permit (ten years) is issued to one permittee.

The Proposed Action incorporates the West School Pasture and the west one-third of Slate School Pasture from the Slate Prairie Allotment into the Rimmer Allotment to form a third pasture (to be named "188 Pasture"). The incorporated pastures or portions thereof from the Slate Prairie Allotment are directly adjacent to the Rimmer Allotment. It would also modify present herding efforts and change salt placement to influence livestock behavior, adds more

livestock/big game watering locations and reduces the number of days the Rimmer Pasture is grazed by spreading livestock use into the “188 Pasture”. All actions are based on specialist reviews and studies that indicate concerns with livestock and big game impacts to riparian areas, streambanks, and associated vegetation throughout the allotment.

Proposed range improvements are intended to gain better distribution of livestock and control their movement. These improvements include approximately one water development, three miles of fencing (for highway, pasture/allotment boundary, and/or riparian enclosure purposes), three cattleguards, and update two Trail 40 gates.

If these actions do not improve resource conditions in the Rimmer Pasture, adaptive management options may include a reduction in permitted livestock use.

### **Slate Prairie Allotment**

This allotment covers 5,896 acres, with 200 cows with calves permitted to graze from June 1 to October 20 each year. It is managed as a five pasture deferred rotation grazing system. The term grazing permit (ten years) is issued to one permittee.

The proposed action includes incorporating the west one-third of the Slate School Pasture and the entire West School Pasture into the Rimmer Allotment, as well as increased herding and changing of salt placement to influence livestock behavior. Twenty mature cows with calves from this allotment will temporarily graze on the Rimmer Allotment in a trial effort to reduce grazing use on the Slate Prairie Allotment. All actions are based on specialist reviews and studies that indicate the allotment may be overstocked due to a combination of reasons: livestock numbers and duration of use, big game use, and conifer encroachment. Three of the five pastures have instances of exceeding allowable proper use due to livestock and big game, and there are streambank alteration, streambank stability, and bare ground concerns.

Proposed range improvements are intended to gain better distribution of livestock and control their movement. These improvements include approximately six water developments, and two miles of fencing (for highway, pasture/allotment boundary, and/or riparian enclosure purposes).

If these actions do not improve resource conditions in the Rimmer Pasture, adaptive management options may include a reduction in permitted livestock use.

### **Tigerville Allotment**

This allotment covers 5,825 acres, with 112 cows with calves permitted to graze from June 1 to October 25 each year. It is managed as a five pasture deferred rotation grazing system. The term grazing permit (ten years) is issued to one permittee.

The proposed action would combine the West Side and Lena Pastures by removing the existing downed fence; this pasture boundary is non-functional and livestock have grazed both pastures as one entity for several years. It includes modifying present range rider herding efforts and changing salt placement to influence livestock behavior. The Mini Pasture would be grazed only once a year, with either the Tigerville or Redfern Pasture. The current corral location in the Marshall Pasture will be downsized to a smaller facility for retrieval of strays or injured livestock, while a new corral may be authorized for the Redfern Pasture. All actions are based on specialist reviews and studies that indicate some concerns with livestock and big game impacts to riparian areas, streambanks, and associated vegetation in scattered locations throughout the allotment.

Proposed range improvements are intended to gain better distribution of livestock and control their movement. These improvements include approximately one water development, two miles of fencing (for highway, pasture/allotment boundary, and/or riparian enclosure purposes), two cattleguards, and construct one new corral and reconstruct one small corral.

If these actions do not improve resource conditions, adaptive management options from the attached table may be implemented.

National Forests are your lands. We need your help in identifying opportunities, concerns, and issues related to these proposed activities. You can also get more involved by obtaining more detailed information on our proposal; such as maps and additional site-specific data. To provide input, please fill out and mail the enclosed comment form or write to us at the above address. Electronic comments may be sent to: **comments-rocky-mountain-black-hills-mystic@fs.fed.us** with 'Mystic Range' as the subject. Comments are due to us by July 13, 2009. Please respond to this letter if you wish to receive subsequent mailings regarding the Mystic Range Project.

The next step in this process is to further develop and refine the actions proposed based on your comments and other information collected, conduct an analysis, and prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). We will then ask for public comments on the Draft EIS and use those comments to refine the Draft EIS and issue a Final EIS and Record of Decision.

If you have any questions or need additional information on the Mystic Range Project, please contact Mark Vedder, Range Specialist, Katie Van Alstyne, Team Leader or me at the Mystic Ranger District office in Rapid City, SD, at (605) 343-1567.

Sincerely,

*/s/ Robert J. Thompson*

ROBERT J. THOMPSON  
District Ranger

Enclosure:  
Mystic Range Project Vicinity Map  
Adaptive Management Options Table  
Mystic Range Project Scoping Comment Form