

Livestock Grazing Management

Human Uses Management

This section of the Guide is organized into two parts: 1) SRLA direction for grazing management, 2) Grazing Questions and Answers, 3) SRLA direction for human use projects, and 4) Human Uses Questions and Answers. Also attached to this section is a copy of the June 10, 2009, Forest Service letter clarifying SRLA management direction related to ski areas.

Part 1. SRLA Direction for Grazing Management

LIVESTOCK MANAGEMENT (GRAZ): The following objectives and guidelines apply to grazing projects in lynx habitat in lynx analysis units (LAUs) in occupied habitat. They do not apply to linkage areas.

Objective GRAZ O1

Manage livestock grazing to be compatible with improving or maintaining lynx habitat.

Guideline GRAZ G1

In fire- and harvest-created openings, livestock grazing should be managed so impacts do not prevent shrubs and trees from regenerating.

Guideline GRAZ G2

In aspen stands, livestock grazing should be managed to contribute to the long-term health and sustainability of aspen.

Guideline GRAZ G3

In riparian areas and willow carrs, livestock grazing should be managed to contribute to maintaining or achieving a preponderance of mid- or late-seral stages, similar to conditions that would have occurred under historic disturbance regimes.

Guideline GRAZ G4

In shrub-steppe habitats, livestock grazing should be managed in the elevation ranges of forested lynx habitat in LAUs, to contribute to maintaining or achieving a preponderance of mid- or late-seral stages, similar to conditions that would have occurred under historic disturbance regimes.

Part 2. Questions and Answers on Grazing Management

1. *GRAZ G1: “In fire- and harvest-created openings, livestock grazing should be managed so impacts do not prevent shrubs and trees from regenerating.” How do we measure and differentiate impacts from wildlife (e.g., elk, moose) from livestock?*

Answer: The Biological Opinion and Record of Decision do not include specific direction for how to implement this guideline. That is left to the local expertise on the Forest and should be coordinated between the biology and range staffs. Field monitoring of timing and intensity of browsing and wildlife and/or livestock sign are recommended. If in doubt, exclosures may be used to reduce grazing pressure, regardless of source. It is important to keep in mind that SRLA direction is focused on management and outcomes we have influence over, while factoring cumulative grazer impacts locally in the grazing management strategies. For areas affected by fire and tree harvest activities, the point is to ensure that managers are assessing the timing, duration, and season of use (utilization) by livestock in ways that the local grazing pressure *we have control over* is managed in actual or potential lynx habitat to promote, rather than further detract from, timely vegetation and habitat recovery.

2. *GRAZ G1: “Do we have to manage for shrub and tree regeneration when fire and harvest activities are used to retain openings being encroached upon by shrubs and trees (e.g., desired/natural conditions are openings but fire exclusion, etc. has resulted in woody species encroachment)?”*

Answer: The intent of the guideline is to allow for woody species recovery within lynx habitat in areas where such species were set back or removed by wildfire or timber harvest. If the desired or natural condition of these areas is as openings, woody species recovery may not be appropriate and other management objectives would prevail.

3. *GRAZ G2: “In aspen stands, livestock grazing should be managed to contribute to the long-term health and sustainability of aspen.” Clarify/quantify what this means.*

Answer: The intent of this guideline is founded in some of the original guidance in the Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy (page 2-13). Aspen provides important winter habitat where it occurs as a seral species in subalpine forests, and where it occurs as a climax species in proximity to conifer forest. Young, densely regenerating aspen stands with a well-developed understory provide summer habitat for hares and other alternate prey types. Livestock grazing can be a factor in the decline or loss of aspen when heavy browsing retards growth of young stems. Most, if not all, Forest Plans provide management standards and/or guidelines that establish livestock utilization objectives for woody browse to accomplish the same long-term health and sustainability objectives. Allotment Management Plans provide additional guidance for desired conditions.

4. *GRAZ G3: “In riparian areas and willow carrs, livestock grazing should be managed to contribute to maintaining or achieving a preponderance of mid- or late-seral stages, similar to conditions that would have occurred under historic disturbance regimes.” Define and clarify these concepts.*

Answer: The Record of Decision Glossary (ROD Attachment 1-12; see *Section 1* of this *Guide*) defines ‘mid-seral or later’ successional stage for riparian areas as areas where ‘willows or other shrubs have become established.’ The intent of this guideline can be found in the Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy (page 2-13 and 14; *available on the Binder CD*). Because woody riparian habitats often serve as connections between patches of prime lynx habitat within a home range, and provide summer and fall hare habitat within high elevation forested matrices, managing riparian systems for the woody species/shrub stage maintains summer lynx habitat and habitat connectivity and helps address recovery objectives like those discussed on page 28 of the SRLA ROD.

5. *GRAZ G4: “In shrub-steppe habitats, livestock grazing should be managed in the elevation ranges of forested lynx habitat in LAUs, to contribute to maintaining or achieving a preponderance of mid- or late-seral stages, similar to conditions that would have occurred under historic disturbance regimes.” Is this already stated in the ARP Forest Plan?*

Answer: The SRLA decision and management direction supersedes previous management direction in all Forest Plans of the Southern Rockies National Forests, *except* where existing Forest Plan direction is likely more beneficial to lynx conservation than the SRLA on the management issue. In the situation, the Forest Plan direction prevails.

Use of Herbicides

6. *“In the ROD, page 30 invasive species are addressed. However, I didn’t see any direction addressing the use or effects of herbicides on lynx habitat. In the recent PEIS “Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides on BLM Lands in 17 Western States” (USDI 2007), several herbicides were restricted within lynx habitat (e.g. 2,4-D). Is BLM direction compatible with FS direction?”*

Answer: The ROD addresses invasive species only in the context of “Findings Required by other Laws, Regulation and Policies” under Invasive Species Executive Order 13112. No herbicides are restricted by the SRLA; however several VEG objectives, standards and guidelines may apply to a herbicide use project, if the proposed project will reduce dense horizontal snowshoe hare cover by reducing shrub and herbaceous species. The pre-screened activities in the Colorado lynx screens also provide some guidance for assessment of noxious weed treatments relative to lynx habitat effects: biological control and roadside treatments are considered ‘No Effect’; remote treatments are “Outside the Blanket Concurrence” and require individual concurrence/consultation of predicted effects with FWS. BLM direction, at this time, appears more restrictive, but not inconsistent with, SRLA direction. However, it is possible that Forest Service herbicide project analyses could lead to site-specific

herbicide restrictions in lynx habitat. This should be determined based on the site-specific analyses that precede proposed activities.

Part 3. SRLA Direction for Human Use Projects

HUMAN USE PROJECTS (HU): The following objectives and guidelines apply to human use projects, such as special uses (other than grazing), recreation management, roads, highways, and mineral and energy development, in lynx habitat in lynx analysis units (LAUs) in occupied habitat, subject to valid existing rights. They do not apply to vegetation management projects or grazing projects directly. They do not apply to linkage areas.

Objective HU O1

Maintain the lynx's natural competitive advantage over other predators in deep snow, by discouraging the expansion of snow-compacting activities in lynx habitat.

Objective HU O2

Manage recreational activities to maintain lynx habitat and connectivity.

Objective HU O3

Concentrate activities in existing developed areas, rather than developing new areas in lynx habitat.

Objective HU O4

Provide for lynx habitat needs and connectivity when developing new or expanding existing developed recreation sites or ski areas.

Objective HU O5

Manage human activities, such as special uses, mineral and oil and gas exploration and development, and placement of utility transmission corridors, to reduce impacts on lynx and lynx habitat.

Objective HU O6

Reduce adverse highway effects on lynx by working cooperatively with other agencies to provide for lynx movement and habitat connectivity, and to reduce the potential for lynx mortality.

Guideline HU G1

When developing or expanding ski areas, provisions should be made for adequately sized inter-trail islands that include coarse woody debris⁴, so winter snowshoe hare habitat is maintained.

Guideline HU G2

When developing or expanding ski areas, lynx foraging habitat should be provided consistent with the ski area's operational needs, especially where lynx habitat occurs as narrow bands of coniferous forest across mountain slopes.

Guideline HU G3

Recreation development and recreational operational uses should be planned to provide for

lynx movement and to maintain the effectiveness of lynx habitat.

Guideline HU G4

Remote monitoring of mineral and energy development sites and facilities should be encouraged to reduce snow compaction.

Guideline HU G5

A reclamation plan should be developed (e.g., road reclamation and vegetation rehabilitation) for closed mineral and energy development sites and facilities that promote the restoration of lynx habitat.

Guideline HU G6

Methods to avoid or reduce effects to lynx habitat connectivity should be used when upgrading unpaved roads to maintenance levels 4 or 5, where the result would be increased traffic speeds and volumes, or contribute to development or increases in human activity.

Guideline HU G7

New permanent roads should not be built on ridge-tops and saddles, or in areas identified as important for lynx habitat connectivity. New permanent roads and trails should be situated away from forested stringers.

Guideline HU G8

Cutting brush along low-speed, low-traffic-volume roads should be done to the minimum level necessary to provide for public safety.

Guideline HU G9

If project level analysis determines that new roads adversely affect lynx, then public motorized use should be restricted. Upon project completion, these roads should be reclaimed or decommissioned, if not needed for other management objectives.

Guideline HU G10

Designated over-the-snow routes or designated play areas should not expand outside baseline areas of consistent snow compaction, unless designation serves to consolidate use and improve lynx habitat. This may be calculated on an LAU basis, or on a combination of immediately adjacent LAUs.

This does not apply inside permitted ski area boundaries, to winter logging, to rerouting trails for public safety, to accessing private inholdings, or to access regulated by Guideline HU G12.

Use the same analysis boundaries for all actions subject to this guideline.

Guideline HU G11

When developing or expanding ski areas and trails, consider locating access roads and lift termini to maintain and provide lynx security habitat.

Guideline HU G12

Winter access for non-recreation special uses and mineral and energy exploration and development should be limited to designated routes or designated over-the-snow routes.

Part 4. Questions and Answers for Human Use Projects

HU – Ski Areas

7. *How will this SRLA impact ski areas wanting to expand outside their permit boundary with additional ski lifts, trails, roads, snowmaking, snowgrooming, brush cutting, etc.?*

Answer: Human Use Objective HU O3 directs that activities should be concentrated in existing developed areas, rather than developing new areas in lynx habitat. In the context of ski areas, HU O3 refers to development of new ski areas, rather than additional developments within the current permit boundary or Forest Plan allocation associated with existing ski areas. This objective is not intended to prohibit ski area expansions within the existing permitted ski area boundary or Forest Plan allocation (which may be different), recognizing that further developments remain subject to site-specific planning and analysis. HU O3 also does not preclude the amendment or revision of Forest Plan management area allocations or changes to ski area permit boundaries. When amending, revising or changing management area allocations or permit boundaries, this objective must be taken into consideration.

For further details, refer also in this section of the Guide to the June 10, 2009, memo from the Region 2 Deputy Regional Forester to the SRLA Forests clarifying SRLA management direction relative to ski areas.

8. *HU G1: Define/quantify “adequately sized inter-trail islands.”*

Answer: There is no clear “size” of inter-trail islands. Biologist should focus on the function of the inter-trail islands by evaluating within the local context of habitat present and human use impacts locally. The intent of the guideline is to maintain inter-trail islands that provide a visual and auditory buffer for lynx during the daytime.

9. *Do the SRLA vegetation management standards apply to ski areas?*

Answer: In general, the SRLA vegetation management standards do not apply to permanent developments and removal of vegetation associated with ski areas, such as ski runs and associated infrastructure. Permanent losses of vegetation and habitat are not governed by the SRLA VEG standards and guidelines, which are focused on vegetation regenerating projects. Vegetation management practices and activities in ski areas are governed primarily by the “habitat connectivity” requirements of the SRLA decision (ALL O1 and ALL S1). Project design features and mitigation, such as providing inter-trail islands and lynx security habitat, should be incorporated into project decisions as needed to be consistent with the SRLA. With the ongoing beetle outbreak, the ski areas may increasingly propose salvage activities within the permit boundaries in order to remove dead and dying trees. Salvage is a vegetation management project and could be governed by the vegetation management standards of the SRLA. This has yet to be explored further given the lack of any substantial proposals so far.

10. *Is a ski run considered a recreation site or special use permit improvement allowing treatment within 200 feet?*

Answer: The 200 feet refers to an exception for thinning around structures that applies only to vegetation management standards. The vegetation standards largely do not apply to ski runs. See also Question #9.

11. *Can we have LAA determinations outside of listed exemptions/exceptions? Example: Large ski area expansion inconsistent with HU guidelines or simply a desire to harvest winter foraging habitat beyond S6 allowances.)*

Answer: Yes, we can have “May Affect, Likely to Adversely Affect” determinations outside exemptions and exemptions. The Forest Service can do a harvest beyond VEG S6 allowances but would need to do a site-specific Forest Plan amendment and section 7 consultation.

HU 05 (Oil and Gas)

12. *Question: What guidance is there for oil and gas activities in lynx habitat?*

Answer: HU G4, G5 and G12 address oil and gas activities in lynx habitat. The road guidelines, HU G6 and G7, would also be relevant. Possibly others depending on the site-specific nature of the proposed activities, but those are the main ones.

HU G9

13. *Can we have LAA determinations outside of listed exemptions/exceptions? Example: If project level analysis determines that new roads adversely affect lynx, then public motorized use should be restricted. Upon project completion, these roads should be reclaimed or decommissioned, if not needed for other management objectives. Could the Forest decide to leave roads open for public use?*

Answer: The ROD (page 29; *Implementation Guide: Section 1*) states that further consultation will occur on future site-specific projects and activities if they may affect lynx. “Future consultations will reference back to the Biological Opinion issued on this decision to ensure the effects of the specific projects are within the effects anticipated in the Biological Opinion.” However, the Biological Opinion goes on to say that the effects analysis assumes “...guidelines will be followed unless such compelling reasons exist” (page 42). Finally, the Biological Opinion (page 55) states that the SRLA “...may allow for some new project-specific roads to receive motorized use if the Forest Service determines that the impacts to lynx will be insignificant and discountable.” The incidental take statement in the Biological Opinion covers effects resulting from the exemptions and exceptions for vegetation management only. If, in the above example, HU G9 is not followed (and the ‘compelling reason’ is documented), formal consultation resulting in a new Biological Opinion and new incidental take statement would be necessary.

HU G10

- 14. Can the Forests make changes to the snow compaction base maps if there were snow routes that were accidentally excluded? If so, what is the process?*

Answer: Yes, if the forest can document that the routes were open and being regularly used (at least once per week) in 2000, which is the baseline year.

- 15. How do we address outfitting and guide proposals that want to ski, snowshoe, snowmobile off existing trails or roads?*

Answer: If they are proposals that use existing snow compaction baseline routes it is allowable with no extra effort. If they are proposing a new snow compaction, then some consolidation of routes or other route closures should be considered.

- 16. Is snow compaction based on individual LAUs or a combination of LAUs? How do we track/update the compaction baseline?*

Answer: Guideline HU G10 as described in the ROD says that “Designated over-the-snow routes or designated play areas should not expand outside baseline areas of consistent snow compaction, unless designation serves to consolidate use and improve lynx habitat. This may be calculated on an LAU basis, or on a combination of immediately adjacent LAUs.” The Forest needs to track those LAUs that are combined for snow compaction purposes.

- 17. Do the exceptions for HU G10 (no net increase in snow compaction) include ANILCA and non-ANILCA cases?*

Answer: The exception for accessing private inholdings would apply to any access for private inholdings, both ANILCA and non-ANILCA.

- 18. What is the intent of the exception for rerouting trails for public safety: Swap trails of similar length? Rerouting versus adding trails?*

Answer: This direction refers to the approach that best resolves the safety issue while also minimizing net increase of established compacted routes. Whether that involves rerouting or “swapping” trails should be based on a site-specific analysis and guided by this SRLA management objective.