BLM News

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
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DROUGHT FORCES GRAZING REDUCTIONS

The effects of a five-year drought have caused the closure of portions of seven grazing allotments on public lands in eastern Elko County south of Wendover.

Approximately 77,000 acres in seven allotments have been closed to grazing and will be rested for two years or until monitoring indicates that vegetation has recovered sufficiently to resume grazing. The allotments total about 300,000 acres.

Four permittees, all sheep operators from Utah, are working with BLM to remove or reduce the size of their herds and/or find other pastures. Nearly 8300 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) are affected.

BLM Elko Rangeland Management Specialist Bruce Thompson explained, "All of the allotments involved are winter use areas for sheep. We've been concerned about the condition of the range because of the lack of moisture. Last spring we went out and assessed the resources conditions to see if there was enough forage for the upcoming year. In the areas being closed, the plants showed severe drought stress. A high percentage of the shrubs – which makes up a large portion of a sheep's diet - are dying because of no moisture."

"We also assessed soil moisture," continued Thompson. "Last May, the soil measured between the absolute driest and second driest categories on the scale developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Essentially, there was no new growth on the shrubs this past growing season."

"Closings allotments or portions of allotments is not something we do lightly," said Clint Oke, BLM Elko Associate District Manager for Renewable Resources. "We'll continue to work with permittees and monitor the allotments. Their summer pastures in Utah have been affected by the continuing drought as well. The permittees have been very understanding and good to work with. Moisture and plant growth will determine when we're able to reopen the allotments."

“Our family has been grazing in the area since my great grandfather immigrated to the United States over 100 years ago,” said BLM permittee Jerry Petersen of Hyrum, Utah. “We’re making other arrangements now as you have to be careful grazing on the desert. You do what you have to do to protect desert range because it takes so long to recover if it’s damaged.”

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