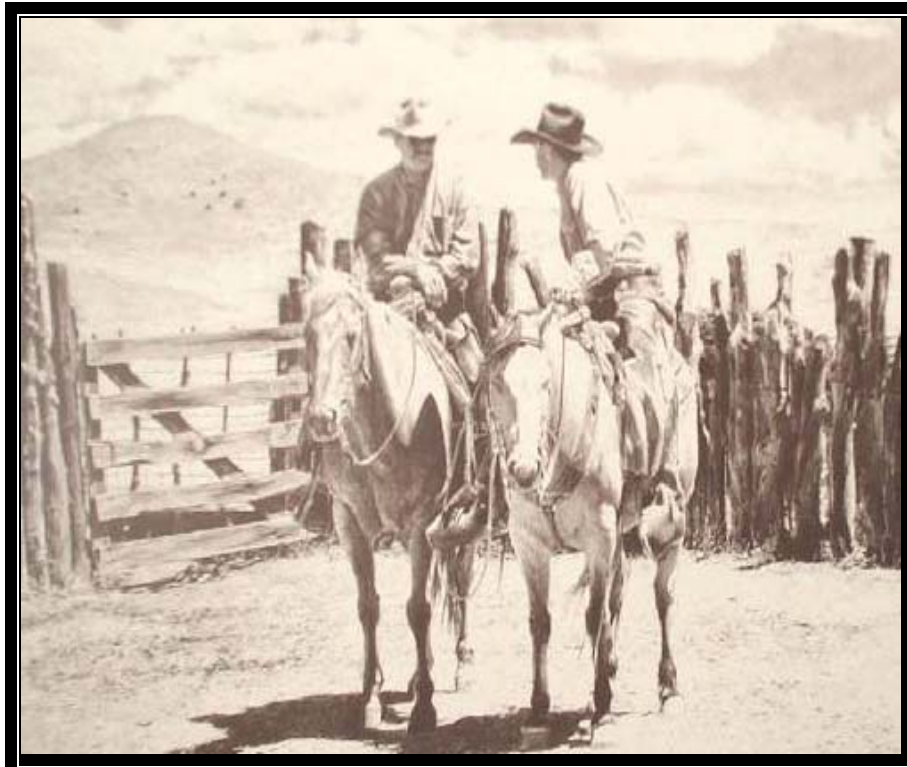


# **MARTIN BASIN RANGELAND PROJECT EIS**

**AND**

**Alternative 4 to the Martin Basin EIS**



**How does it affect you as a Forest Service  
Permittee?**

**Retain for future reference**

### **Why was Alternative 4 Developed?**

The Humboldt/Toiyabe National Forest is in the process of completing their EIS's for grazing allotments for compliance with the Rescission Act. This Act requires environmental impact analyses (EIS's) be completed on all Forest Service grazing allotments prior to renewal of ten year permits. The Humboldt/Toiyabe is scheduled to have all allotment EIS's for grazing completed by 2010. The Forest Service is accomplishing this task by lumping allotments together within each Forest Ranger District and issuing a programmatic EIS for each District. Martin Basin in the Santa Rosa Ranger District is the first with a completed draft EIS. The Martin Basin Draft EIS is generally negative regarding grazing, inferring poor resource conditions in the Martin Basin with little, or no, supportive data and inferring further negative impacts if grazing continues at current utilization levels. Especially of concern is the tightening of Forest Service utilization standards on both uplands and riparian areas and the adoption by FS of vegetation and resource "communities" with descriptions of ranges of functioning or nonfunctioning conditions that are not based on soils information or ecological site descriptions. These are defined in matrices in the EIS.

This is the prototype EIS for the FS for each Ranger District in the Humboldt Toiyabe Forest. It is also the manner which Forest Supervisor Robert Vaught intends to update the 1986 Forest Plan relative to livestock grazing. Decisions resulting from these grazing EIS's will ultimately affect every FS permittee on the Humboldt/Toiyabe National Forest.

### **What is Martin Basin Alternative 4?**

This alternative was developed at the request of the Martin Basin Project permittees by:

Martin Basin Permittees, Nevada Cattlemen's, Farm Bureau, Nevada Dept. of Agriculture staff, Resource Concepts, Inc. and Intermountain Range Consultants staff, UNR Animal Biotechnology, Environmental & Resource Sciences and Nevada Cooperative Extension Service staff.

Development of this alternative was funded, in part, by the Nevada Rangeland Resources Commission.

The alternative was developed on a few very basic and simple principles:

- 1) Permittees would have the option to initiate completion or updating Allotment Management Plans (a Forest Service responsibility). These plans would describe desired specific resource conditions of allotments and identify site specific issues. Upon mutual agreement between permittee and Forest Service (FS) range staff, the permittees would initiate developing draft Allotment Management Plans (AMP) including an appropriate grazing management system defining resource goals and objectives, identifying the desired plant communities or conditions needed to meet land use goals consistent with site capabilities. Alternative 4 accepts FS use of Vegetation Matrices as defined in the EIS. The management system would be implemented as an active adaptive management approach which would ensure that resource conditions are not adversely affected on an annual basis and desired resource conditions are met or trending towards achievement over a three year or longer term. FS provides input from the beginning to end in the process from identification and description of resource conditions and issues to review and acceptance of the grazing and monitoring plan.

Time frames are set forth to ensure that both permittees and FS respond to the need to develop AMP's in a timely manner.

- 2) Alternative 4 would maintain existing utilization standards defined in Amendment 2 to the Forest Plan by FS on each allotment. Once a permittee develops site specific and FS approved AMP, utilization standards may or may not be retained, rather they could be used as within-season triggers and annual short-term indicators as described in the Idaho University Stubble Height Report. Utilization standards would not continue to be used by FS as performance standards. Utilization Standards as described in Amendment 2 to the Forest Plan were intended to clarify the definition of minimum standards to achieve satisfactory ecological condition. The development of AMP's and site specific resource objectives and active adaptive management accomplishes this directive. Amendment 2 further provides that utilization standards set forth in the amendment may be exceeded if supporting evidence is provided. This is accomplished and quantified through trend monitoring in Alternative 4. The intent of Amendment 2 was to achieve satisfactory ecological conditions throughout the Forest on an allotment by allotment basis. That is also the intent of Alternative 4 with a shared burden between the FS and permittee and a defined time frame.
- 3) Alternative 4 accepts FS use of Vegetation Matrices as defined in the EIS. However, the Alternative conditions this acceptance upon determination of site capability to achieve matrix descriptions through construction and monitoring of exclosures for validation. It is also intended that FS use the MB project which has soils and ecological site descriptions provided by NRCS to further validate the matrices.
- 4) This alternative does not require an amendment to the Forest Plan; rather it requires a different interpretation of Amendment 2 by FS than has historically been the case.

Proper analysis and implementation of Alternative 4 by FS will require a change in the management paradigm historically employed by FS that utilization standards and conformity with those standards will automatically result in achievement of satisfactory ecological conditions.

What is being offered to FS through Alternative 4 is a scientifically proven and accepted management approach that:

- Accurately identifies physically possible resource conditions
- Establishes measurable and achievable objectives, understood and mutually acceptable to FS and permittee
- Provides a highly responsive and flexible grazing management system (required by law and desired by all) that does not merely protect resources but actually guides management actions towards achievement
- Ultimately reduces resource conflicts that have escalated on the Forest since implementation of Amendment 2 and provides for multiple resource values and reduced expense by FS

### **Additional Points**

Forage utilization is more than the amount of plant growth removed by grazing. Utilization cannot be addressed without considering the timing of defoliation, the frequency of defoliation, and potential for plant regrowth to occur. Focusing solely on percentage of plant growth removed will not adequately address grazing issues. An excessive focus on the percentage of growth removed will not address the underlying mechanisms (i.e., timing and frequency of defoliation) about how the plant responds to removal of leaves and stems, and its ability to produce above and below ground mass (stems, leaves and roots).

When utilization is measured is also important. FS currently considers forage utilization as the percentage use of current year's production at the time of measurement. By definition utilization is the measurement of the percentage use of annual growth, measured at the end of the growing season (October, November) or before initiation of growth the following growing season. Utilization measured early in the growth phase is not the same as utilization measured after the growing season. The effects of grazing (i.e., utilization) will/must be interpreted differently based on when the data are collected. Where data is to be collected has been addressed by the Forest Supervisor directing Key area monitoring for utilization, not critical area.

**What can you do about the Martin Basin EIS and the upcoming District EIS's?**

The livestock industry must become aware of the Martin Basin EIS; what it means to the Martin Basin permittees and what it will mean to all Forest Service permittees in Nevada. It will require a unified and knowledgeable coalition of people to address the potentially devastating economic effects of FS grazing management proposed in the Martin Basin Draft EIS.

The final Martin Basin EIS is scheduled for release to the public December 2004 with a 45 day comment period. The environmental community will be responding negatively, **in force**, to Alternative 4. It is important that industry counter with positive input supporting alternative 4.

The Mountain City/Jarbridge District EIS has been drafted but not released to the public for comment. The Bridgeport and Ely Districts are in the process of drafting their EIS's. When the final EIS is released the livestock industry must respond correctly and in force with comments supporting adoption of Alternative 4 as the preferred alternative.

Industry must develop a unified comprehensive strategy to deal with the upcoming EIS's and Forest Plan update scheduled for public scoping in 2005. This strategy must be developed early in 2005, with industry support for the Martin Basin Permittees and alternative 4.

If you have any further questions or require additional information, please contact Rachel Buzzetti at the Nevada Cattlemen's Association or Gary McCuin at the Carson City office of the Nevada Department of Agriculture.

The Martin Basin EIS can be obtained in written form from the Santa Rosa Ranger District at the following address:

Jose Noriega, District Ranger  
1200 Winnemucca Blvd. East  
Winnemucca, NV 89445  
(775) 623-5025 ext. 115  
or online at the address below:  
<http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/htnf/projects/04apr/attatchments/martin.shtml>

Copies of Alternative 4 developed for the Martin Basin EIS, and the University of Idaho Stubble Height Report are available upon request from:

Gary McCuin  
NV Department of Agriculture  
251 Jeanell Dr.  
Carson City, NV 89703  
Tel. (775) 684-5333  
Fax (775) 684-5340  
Email gmccuin@agri.state.nv.us

Rachel Buzzetti  
NV Cattlemen's Association  
285 10th Street - P.O. Box 310  
Elko, NV 89803  
(775) 738-9214  
(775) 738-5208  
Email nca@nevadabeef.org