

Forage reserve for displaced animals progresses in E. Idaho

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management and a group of ranchers aim to make the Big Desert Forage Reserve available for use by displaced livestock next summer.

The project, also known as County Line Forage Reserve, has been in the works for around seven years near the border of Power and Bingham counties northwest of American Falls, Idaho. Sited within the 219,000-acre Big Desert Sheep Allotment, the reserve is designed to give applicants a place to graze cattle and sheep whose usual feeding areas are made unavailable by fire, drought or landscape-health projects.

“A lot of producers are using public lands to graze cows,” said Sarah Wheeler, public affairs specialist with the Idaho Falls District BLM. “It provides them an option, a way to still make a living, when things are really tough.”

Long, busy wildfire seasons in recent years point to the need for forage reserve ground, she said.

“Usually when fire occurs, animals are off (affected ground) for about two years,” Wheeler said. “We know there is a need, but developing a forage reserve isn’t easy.”

Challenges include getting cooperation from enough holders of grazing allotments and securing federal National Environmental Policy Act approval. A court in 2016 upheld the Big Desert plan following



Capital Press File

The County Line Forage Reserve in eastern Idaho provides a place for ranchers to graze cattle or sheep after they have lost grazing land to wildfires or drought.

lawsuits filed by the Western Watersheds Project and other environmental groups.

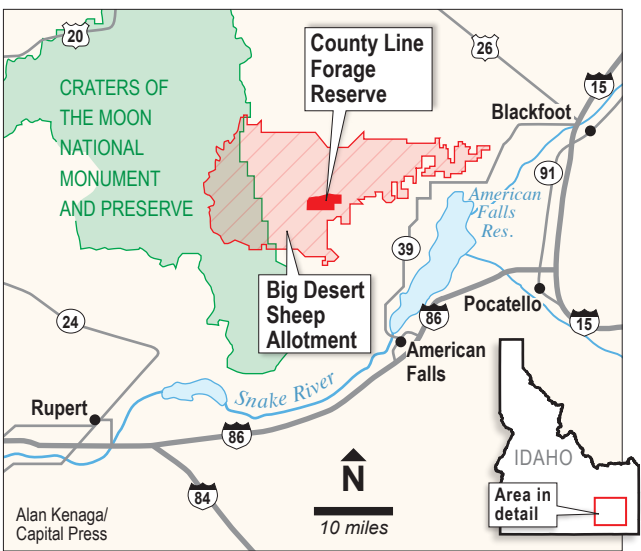
A BLM summary said the forage reserve lies on old homesteads and other “disturbed” areas previously seeded to crested wheatgrass. The site is within priority sage grouse habitat. BLM said grazing cattle and sheep there at different times of year would give juvenile sagebrush and other native vegetation a better chance to compete for water and nutrients, and thus to recover.

“We had the land, permit-

tees and the unused AUMs — animal unit months — so that really helped us put this across the finish line,” Wheeler said.

Fifteen grazing-allotment permit holders within the larger Big Desert Sheep Allotment, where a sizable portion of AUMs had gone unused, gave up some of theirs to help create the forage reserve.

An AUM is a month’s worth of grazing for a cow-calf pair or five sheep. Congress for 2018 set grazing fees at \$1.41 per AUM on BLM land.



Alan Kenaga/
Capital Press

“We will probably charge an additional dollar per AUM to go into the reserve, for maintenance of rangeland infrastructure,” Wheeler said. Some 1,300 AUMs are set aside for permit holders temporarily unable to use their allotments.

“Generally producers will exhaust resources to maintain their herds,” said Adam Duckett, of Duckett Ranches between Melba and Murphy in southwest Idaho. “If there is nothing available, they will start to liquidate a portion of their herd.”

The large Soda Fire in southwest Idaho in August 2015 prompted “an immediate need,” he said. “We had guys hauling cows into our corrals fast. Producers found alternate ground as quickly as they could. People opened up their land.” Rent and transport costs were seen as worthwhile investments since months remained in the grazing season, he said.

The following year, many ranchers impacted by the Soda Fire found longer-term sites to rent, such as private ground to the north, Duckett said. Conservation Reserve Program land often is opened for grazing following a fire, though southwest Idaho does not have a lot of CRP land, he said.

At Big Desert Forage Reserve, any livestock producer will be able to apply to use the forage reserve, Wheeler said, but priority will be given to

grazing permit holders in the BLM Upper Snake Field Office service area on Idaho’s east side.

Fencing work is well underway. Well drilling is expected to be completed by the end of October or early November, weather permitting, she said. BLM by next summer aims to start accepting applications, assuming the well will be in operation.

To the west, outside Burley, Idaho, BLM has overseen an approximately 5,900-acre, 1,200-AUM forage reserve for more than 30 years. This year, a fire near Malta, Idaho, displaced some grazing and prompted usage of the forage reserve.

“We were able to put them out there to make up for that loss and let the burned area recover,” said Scott Sayer, supervisory rangeland management specialist with the BLM Burley Field Office. The forage reserve has four pastures, all of which were used to some extent this year. Animals were on the reserve from May to early October.

The Burley-area reserve, named for former Burley District Grazing Advisory Board member Dale Pierce, is used in most years, he said.

“Generally there is a need, whether from fire, drought issues, restoration or fuels reduction, to rest from grazing, Sayer said. “So it gets a lot of use. It’s not used hard, necessarily, but there is always usually someone out there.”

Old Profanity wolfpack attacks more calves

Calf injured in Smackout territory

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife belatedly confirmed Friday that a wolfpack continues to attack cattle in the Kettle River Range in northeast Washington.

The Old Profanity Territory pack injured three calves between Oct. 5 and 11, according to the department. The cattle were grazing on a Forest Service allotment in the Colville National Forest in Ferry County.

The department has documented 15 attacks by the pack since Sept. 4. The three most recent attacks occurred since the department shot an adult female in the pack Sept. 28. Previously, the department shot a juvenile wolf.

The pack now has at least one adult and one juvenile. The department did not indicate in a statement posted online whether it would remove other wolves. Efforts to reach the department were unsuccessful.

Other sources said that Fish and Wildlife confirmed Sunday that wolves in an area occupied by the Smackout pack in Stevens County killed a calf. Fish and Wildlife did not mention the attack in its statement.

The number of attacks by the Old Profanity Territory pack crossed the three-depredation in 30 days threshold in early September for the department to consider “incremental removal,” killing one or two wolves. If attacks continue, the department will consider removing more wolves, according to the protocol.

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