



*Pend Oreille County*

# *Board of Commissioners*

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November 1, 2016

## **RE: LeClerc Grazing Allotment Alternative D**

Pend Oreille County is responsible for protecting the economy of the county and to retain current businesses as well as the health, safety and welfare of its citizens. Our duty to protect agriculture is clear not only for our local economy and farming families but also for food production for our nation. The advantages of cattle grazing rather than cattle being fed in a confined area are many. Food security is important to Americans who will continue to eat beef. Additionally, a well-managed allotment helps take care of the fire hazard in hazardous unmanaged grasses.

Current and historic policy supports:

- Increased availability for grazing of livestock is in the public interest of Pend Oreille County residents and is to be continually sought after; that reductions in grazing on publicly held lands can only damage the culture and economy of Pend Oreille County (Resolution 2015-45).
- September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2011 letter by a previous board indicating impact the loss of grazing rights would have on the economy as well as the importance of our food supply.
- Comments submitted to the USFS on July 5, 2016 regarding the Colville National Forest Plan Revision, the Board of County Commissioners require that:
  - a. 6- to 8-inch stubble height should not be a consideration of riparian health and should not be required;
  - b. Riparian area standards are too restrictive and must be revised;
  - c. Grazing is an effective fire management tool. Grazing creates more foliage and stimulates improved topsoil.
- That the Forest Service continue to work with the permit holder to come to a workable solution. (Board of County Commissioners letter dated May 9, 2016 to CNF District Ranger)

The Pend Oreille County Board of County Commissioners, in compliance with Federal law and Resolution 2015-46, are continuing our coordination efforts with USFS on LeClerc Allotment in a good faith effort to reach consistency and a reasonable alternative.

An allotment tour was held on August 17, 2016 to view the areas of concern and learn about a proposed solution to drifting cattle. Rangeland Management Specialist Chase Bolyard prepared an amendment to alternative D and presented the information on site with the help of maps. In attendance were Forest Supervisor Rodney Smolden, District Ranger Gayne Sears, Supervisory Environmental Coordinator Michelle Paduani, Rangeland Management Specialist Travis Fletcher, Range Specialist Tip Hudson from WSU, Representative Shelly Short, Mike Poulson from Cathy McMorris Rogers's office, Commissioner Karen Skoog, Permittee Steve Fountain and previous permittee Ann Dennis Hastings.

Observations and discussion revealed several important issues that should trigger further study and documentation.

- Yearly monitoring has never failed to meet standards.
- In a dry year (2015) the herd was moved back to Hanlon meadow a second time to be moved due to threat of fire. The following year (2016) showed adequate recovery of forage.
- The short term trend is improving.
- Riparian health was evident in adequate stubble height.
- Young alders recovering well from a caterpillar kill around 2000 that impacted them but they are not browsed down.
- Deeper rooted species are increasing.
- There is an expanded flood plain, banks are not being grazed.
- A hardened crossing could be appropriate at Hanlon meadow.
- The location of a new drift fence that would prevent cattle from revisiting sensitive areas was viewed and discussed. This will be explained in the amendment to Alternative D.

The habitat study completed in 2009 for PUD resulted in some adaptive management. A long term analysis of these changes has not been made and yet this study has formed the basis for the alternatives. Some of these changes made after the study include:

- A hardened creek access with fence panels has shown effective at restricting uncontrolled access and improving the riparian area.
- The permittee has changed to delay cattle going to allotment from June 1 to June 15 which resulted in a better start for the forage.
- A reduced stocking rate.
- The road in the riparian area was removed AFTER the study was done.

The short term indicators have been improving from this management and there has not been enough long term data collected. In compliance with the Information Quality Act we think the latest information is not adequate to form a scientifically sound determination.

While moving the cattle to another allotment may seem like a reasonable alternative it is not for the following reasons.

- This would result in a net reduction to grazing in the county and be an impact on our economy and those of the people who live here (grazing resolution).
- The currently empty Lost Creek and Lost Lake allotments should be made available to new permittees. People entering the agricultural industry need to have options available.
- The permittee has expressed the new allotment would increase the work load and retraining of the herd.

The permittee has shown good faith efforts to be a working partner by accommodating the cultural concerns of the Kalispel tribe in agreeing to reduce allotment size by eliminating the 4<sup>th</sup> of July pasture and the upper areas.

The county has asked for another on the ground meeting to discuss this win-win solution with the interested parties. To date the Kalispel tribe is unwilling to learn about this reasonable alternative. We hope to address any concerns before the release of the revised alternative D for comment by meeting at the location on November 4<sup>th</sup>. We will depart the Camas Center at 1:30.

Working through the concerns on this allotment is obtainable. The permittee is presenting a win-win solution. We believe the most reasonable alternative is to have the best and highest uses of this unit that has been in continued grazing for 50 years.

1. The Board of County Commissioners would like to know the process for reviewing the quality (including the objectivity, utility, and integrity) of information, specifically the Trout Habitat Restoration Program, MIDDLE BRANCH LECLERC CREEK GENERAL AND TARGET HABITAT SURVEYS, prepared for: Box Canyon Hydroelectric Project; Fish Sub-Committee submitted by the PUD in 2010
2. As a long-term trend has not been determined and analysis has not been made of adaptive management, grazing should continue till further information is collected that includes the already implemented changes in management subsequent to cited studies.
3. Because of the incomplete monitoring we are requesting the National Riparian Service Team to review this watershed.

Sincerely,

PEND OREILLE COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

  
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Karen Skoog, Vice-Chair

  
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