

ISSUE #1

How will riparian and upland vegetation be managed to achieve healthy rangelands and provide for livestock grazing and fish and wildlife habitat?

The Standards for Rangeland Health developed by the Western Montana Resource Advisory Council (RAC) and adopted in 1997 will provide the baseline land health standards in the RMP. The extensive use of the planning area for livestock grazing, coupled with an abundance and diversity of wildlife and over 950 miles and several thousand acres of riparian/wetland resources in this same area results in a high level of interest in how this issue will be addressed in the RMP. As a result many comments have been offered on particular guidelines and procedures that should be considered in the planning process.

The RMP will establish objectives and guidelines to address the current land health standards, as well as procedures on how guidelines will be applied. The RMP will also identify a variety of tools that can be applied during activity level planning. Subsequent activity level plans (such as Allotment Management Plans and Watershed Management Plans) would identify site-specific objectives and management actions to achieve the broader RMP goals and objectives.

Some major factors and considerations in alternative formulation and estimation of effects include:

- riparian condition
- upland condition
- grazing systems
- current guidelines for livestock grazing
- range improvements
- available forage and allocations
- suitability for grazing or other activity
- water quality and impaired streams
- fragile soils
- fuel loading
- biodiversity/loss of diversity
- native species
- threatened and endangered species
- species of special concern
- sage grouse
- Tribal treaty uses
- opportunities for economic activity