

**2009 ANNUAL OPERATING INSTRUCTIONS  
FOR THE  
SMITH MOUNTAIN and SURDAM on/off S&G ALLOTMENTS**

These Annual Operating Instructions are for implementing grazing management activities on the **Smith Mountain and Surdam on/off S&G Allotments** for the 2009 grazing season. This AOI is made part of the Term Grazing Permits as specified in Part 1, item 3 and Part 2, Item 8 (a) of the permit. The plan was developed with the participation of the livestock permittee on January 8, 2009. The interdisciplinary resource personnel and livestock permittee who participated in development of this plan are Ron Shirts of Shirts Brothers Sheep, Rangeland Management Specialist & Acting Council District Ranger Maura Laverty, and Rangeland Management Specialist Jennifer Gebauer.

Sheep grazing will not be authorized in 2009 in Hells Canyon NRA (Deep Creek & Echols Butte pastures) or on the west half of the Smith Mountain Allotment (Snake River/Indian Creek & the north and west half of the Smith Mountain pastures). The area not authorized for grazing in 2009 includes portions of the following 6<sup>th</sup> Order Hydrologic Units within the Smith Mountain Allotment: Deep Creek, Kinney Creek, McGraw Creek, Herman Creek, Indian Creek, Bear Creek, and Upper Rapid River. Trailing off the allotment is not authorized in 2009. You will be required to truck sheep to and from the allotment.

These instructions are a guideline for grazing management. It is necessary to contact the Forest Service if there are any changes or additions to these instructions throughout the grazing season. Situations may develop during the grazing season which requires changes to these instructions. If this becomes necessary, or if you cannot comply with some part of these instructions, contact the Rangeland Management Specialist and obtain approval before initiating changes or deviating from these instructions. Refer to Part 2 of your term grazing permit for general terms and conditions, which apply to these Annual Operating Instructions.

Grazing fees must be paid before livestock are authorized to enter the National Forest. Grazing fees must be paid prior to livestock entering the National Forest. Payment must be made to: USDA Forest Service, P.O. Box 894183, Los Angeles, California 90189-4183. The Council District Office must receive confirmation from Lockbox that payment has been made prior to sheep entering the Forest.

**2009 AUTHORIZED USE:**

<u>Livestock</u>	<u>Allotment</u>	<u>Livestock Numbers</u>	<u>Season</u>
Sheep	Surdam on/off Allotment	27 Head Months	4/1 – 6/16
Sheep	Non Use	1300 ewe/lambs	6/18 - 10/15
Sheep Band #1	Unload in Butter Gulch	900 ewe/lambs	6/6
	Butter Gulch area	900 ewe/lambs	6/7 - 6/21
	East Fork Lost Creek	900 ewe/lambs	6/22 - 7/13

	Lost Creek	900 ewe/lambs	7/14 – 8/4
	Upper East Fork Lost Creek	900 ewe/lambs	8/5 – 8/24
	Ship lambs from Railroad Saddle		8/25
	Lost Creek & EFLC	900 dry ewes	8/26 – 10/15
	Truck sheep from Railroad Saddle		10/15
Sheep Band #2	Unload in Grouse Creek	900 ewe/lambs	6/8
	Grouse Creek	900 ewe/lambs	6/9 - 6/23
	Sheep Creek	900 ewe/lambs	6/24 – 7/15
	Corral Creek	900 ewe/lambs	7/16 – 8/6
	West side East Fork Lost Creek	900 ewe/lambs	8/7 – 8/24
	Ship lambs from Railroad Saddle		8/25
	East ½ Smith Mountain pasture	900 dry ewes	8/26 – 10/15
	Truck sheep from Railroad Saddle		10/15
Horses/pack stock	Smith Mountain Allotment (Traveling with sheep herders)	up to 15 mature	6/6 – 10/15

**TERMS AND CONDITIONS PERTAINING TO SEASON OF USE AND LIVESTOCK NUMBERS:**

The District Ranger may modify the season of use and livestock numbers permitted on any given year. The season of use is especially dependent upon weather conditions (annual precipitation) which influences annual forage production and range readiness. Range readiness is measured by soil moisture and plant growth. Soils may be damp, but not saturated. They should be firm to avoid excessive compaction by livestock. Grass species other than bulbous bluegrass and cheatgrass must be a minimum of 6 inches in height. Arrowleaf balsamroot should be in bloom or past bloom. The District Ranger's authority to modify term grazing permitted use is further described in Part 2, Section 8 (b) & (c) of your permit.

These dates are tentative and may vary according to range conditions and utilization levels.

Please notify the Forest Service at least 3 days before you turn onto the allotment.

**Actual Use:** The permittee is **required** to complete an "Actual Use" form which includes a record of livestock losses and the permittee's maintenance costs. Any format that provides the information requested is acceptable.

**Credits:** All requests for refunds or credits for unused portion of grazing fees for Forest System Lands must be received in the Council Ranger District office by March 1, following the grazing season.

## GRAZING PRESCRIPTION AND LIVESTOCK ROTATIONS:

The grazing prescriptions are designed to meet the resource needs of the soils and vegetation. Additionally, Fisheries Biologists have completed Biological Assessments on the grazing prescriptions. The known or potential problem areas have been identified below, along with the respective mitigation measures designed to eliminate each adverse effect.

**Resource Concern:** 30% utilization on all upland sites.

- **Monitoring:** Upland monitoring will occur in each grazing unit throughout the grazing season. Forage utilization will be based on height/weight measurements on key grass species. These include Mountain brome and Columbia needlegrass. Monitoring forage utilization on upland sites will begin two weeks after sheep enter the first grazing unit and will progress through the grazing season until the proper use criteria is reached or the term grazing season is over. This is estimated to be once every two weeks.

**Resource Concern:** 30% utilization on all riparian sites, or 4-6 inch stubble height or 10% maximum stream bank trampling.

- **Monitoring:** Riparian monitoring will occur on key riparian areas where sheep graze. Additional sites will be monitored during the grazing season. Monitoring will be conducted using stubble height, utilization and/or stream bank stability methods. Forage utilization in riparian areas will be based on key forage species. The method for collecting stubble height is at specified intervals, measure the stubble height of the key species nearest to the toe of the right foot and record on the Stubble Height form. Measurements will be taken along both sides of the stream. Key plant species to be measured include Water sedge and Tufted hairgrass. In addition to forage utilization in riparian areas, the impacts of sheep use along stream banks will be monitored. This is generally referred to as trampling damage or mechanical damage of the stream bank. A maximum of 10% (of natural level) of the stream bank is allowed to be disturbed. Pace transects along the stream bank will be used to monitor stream bank disturbance.

### Allowable Use Standards

Allowable use on uplands and riparian areas is 30%, which generally is equivalent to once over grazing. When the permittee observes proper use standards being reached, the sheep will be moved to the next unit /pasture or off the Forest, and the permittee will notify the Forest Service. The permittee is responsible for not exceeding the proper use criteria.

One time bedding and watering per location are authorized.

### Salting Requirements

Salting is restricted to the following:

- No less than ¼ mile from water, and not be placed in meadow bottoms.
- Only at bed grounds.
- Placed at a minimum distance of 100 yards from roads and out of sight from roads, if possible.
- At least 1/4 mile from NIDGS sites.
- Should be moved yearly unless present salt ground is located in a rocky area where no vegetation grows.

- Must be contained and not placed directly on the ground.
- Unconsumed salt will be removed from the site.
- 1/4 mile from timber plantations with trees less than 15 feet tall. If this can't be accomplished, the District Range and Reforestation personnel will work with you to find acceptable locations.

**Band #1:**

2 weeks prior to trucking, the site in Butter Gulch to be used for unloading the sheep will need to be coordinated by the permittee and Wildlife Biologist Bill Rautsaw, due to the presence of northern Idaho ground squirrels. Sheep will unload off trucks in Butter Gulch on June 6, or when the range is ready. Sheep will use the Butter Gulch area for a couple of weeks and then move to the East Fork Lost Creek area for approximately 3 weeks. In mid-July the sheep will move to the Lost Creek area for approximately 3 weeks, and then to the upper East Fork Lost Creek until shipping lambs from Railroad Saddle around August 25<sup>th</sup>. The dry ewes will then spend the remainder of the grazing season in Lost Creek and East Fork Lost Creek until trucked from Railroad Saddle and off the Forest October 15<sup>th</sup>.

**Band #2:**

2 weeks prior to trucking, the site in Grouse Creek to be used for unloading the sheep will need to be coordinated by the permittee and Wildlife Biologist Bill Rautsaw, due to the presence of northern Idaho ground squirrels. Sheep will unload off trucks in Grouse Creek on June 8, or when the range is ready. Sheep will use the Grouse Creek area for a couple of weeks and then move to the Sheep Creek area for approximately 3 weeks. In mid-July the sheep will move to the Corral Creek area for approximately 3 weeks, and then to the west side of East Fork Lost Creek until shipping from Railroad Saddle around August 25<sup>th</sup>. The dry ewes will then spend the remainder of the grazing season on the east ½ of the Smith Mountain pasture until trucked from Railroad Saddle and off the Forest October 15<sup>th</sup>.

**Smith Mountain Allotment:**

After shipping lambs, the band of dry ewes will cross over from the Lost Creek pasture below the Lick Creek Lookout and graze the east side of the Smith Mountain pasture east of Trail 231, moving back through the Lost Creek pasture to Railroad Saddle by 10/15, when they are to be trucked from the Forest. You are required to have all sheep off National Forest Lands by October 15, 2009.

**MAINTENANCE OF RANGE IMPROVEMENTS:**

All range improvements must be maintained prior to turning livestock into the unit scheduled for use. If an existing range improvement has been properly maintained but requires reconstruction, a cooperative effort can be made between the Forest Service and permittee to reconstruct the development. Those projects to which the permittee contributes normally receive higher priority for funding by the Forest Service.

Maintenance of structural range improvements is the responsibility of the permittee. Standards to which your assigned improvements are to be maintained are explained in Part 3 of your Term Grazing Permit and are attached to this annual operating plan. Improvements in the unit to be grazed must be maintained prior to cattle entering the unit. The fences need to be maintained prior to cattle being on either side of the fence. Nonuse does not relieve a permittee from maintenance responsibility. If an existing range improvement has been properly maintained but requires reconstruction, a cooperative effort may be made between the Forest Service and the permittee to reconstruct the development, depending on the availability of materials. Those projects to which the permittee contributes, normally receive higher priority for funding by the Forest Service.

Maintenance of spring developments is vitally important to the health of your livestock and to the grazing allotment. If you are aware of spring developments that require reconstruction or extensive maintenance, please discuss this with the Rangeland Management Specialist.

You will need to work around the downfall trees and are not authorized to cut new paths.

Portable corrals will be utilized at Railroad Saddle for shipping.

The permittee is responsible for ensuring there is no trash left behind when moving sheep herder camps.

#### **MONITORING OF THE ANNUAL LIVESTOCK GRAZING ACTIVITY:**

We are requiring you to report actual use information for each unit grazed because we are required to report this grazing use to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). If you have any questions completing the form, please call Maura at 208-253-0100. **Actual Use needs to be turned in no later than December 1, 2009.**

#### **MULTIPLE USE REQUIREMENTS:**

All plantation grazing must be coordinated with the Forest Service Plantation Guards prior to grazing the plantations. The permittee is responsible for contacting the Forest Service prior to livestock accessing an area with plantations.

If there is damage to Forest System trails by the permittees livestock, the permittee will need to repair or pay for the damage to be repaired.

#### **SPECIAL MANAGEMENT:**

Several known populations of the ESA threatened Northern Idaho Ground Squirrel (NIDGS) are located on the Smith Mountain Allotment. These sites must be avoided, as well as other sites in

the vicinity, including Hoo Hoo Gulch, Butterfield Gulch, Lick Creek Lookout, and west of Cold Springs Creek. Mitigation of livestock grazing effects includes avoiding grazing, bedding, or trailing through these areas, as well as no salting within ¼ mile of these sites. All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) or Off Highway Vehicles (OHVs) are not authorized off roads near NIDGS sites. These sites will be shown to your shepherders to prevent any accidental use of the areas. There is also a site near the Lick Creek Lookout and you will need to avoid the area around the lookout when trailing. We will sign this area before the grazing season begins, and provide you with a new map of the area to be avoided.

In the event a designated mitigation measure fails to protect a species listed under the Endangered Species Act, a change in the authorized grazing activity will occur. If proper utilization levels are reached, then livestock will be moved to the next grazing area or off the forest. If livestock grazing does not comply with the terms and conditions of these Annual Operating Instructions, then the Forest Service policy and procedures dealing with administrative permit actions will be followed.

We ask you or your employees to report the date, time, and location of each bighorn sheep seen to the Council Ranger District immediately following the siting.

You are responsible for ensuring your herders are informed and understand the standards, guidelines, and other management direction in this plan.

**Hay/Straw:** The weed seed free program for National Forests in Idaho is in effect. All hay, straw or mulch used on the National Forest must be certified by cooperating Idaho State Department of Agriculture officials as being noxious weed or noxious weed seed free.

In addition to these instructions, you identified additional management practices you would implement for the 2007 grazing season, in your letter to me dated April 19, 2007. I am including these management practices for the 2009 grazing season. The management practices are:

1. Perform a careful health inspection of all domestic sheep and remove any old, unthrifty, or sick animals from the band prior to turnout onto the Forest. Cull any old, unthrifty, or sick animals from the band as soon as they are identified throughout the grazing season and when the lambs are shipped.
2. Double the number of guard dogs for each band of sheep (2 guard dogs per band).
3. Double the number of herders for each band of sheep (2 herders per band). Each herder typically has at least one sheepdog, so there will typically be at least 4 dogs tending each band of sheep (2 guard dogs and 2 sheepdogs per band).
4. Each band of sheep will have its own pack string, rather than a single pack string to service all three bands. Each pack string will camp immediately adjacent to its band of sheep each night. Having two herders and a dedicated pack string for each band of sheep will allow for continuous supervision of all three bands for the entire time they are on the Forest, 24 hours a day (even if an individual herder must temporarily leave service).

5. Each pack string will carry a cell phone to maintain direct communication with the permittee for the entire grazing season. This will allow more frequent reporting to the owner regarding herd health and death losses. It will also allow for the coordination of more frequent and accurate counts of an entire band each time it moves through areas where such counts are feasible.
6. Herders will count marker sheep (black, horned, belled, etc.) daily to assure that no small groups of sheep have separated from the main band.
7. Each pack string will carry binoculars to improve their ability to spot bighorn sheep.
8. If the herders or pack strings spot any bighorn sheep within the Smith Mountain S&G Allotment, they will adjust their grazing path or haze the bighorns out of the area to minimize the possibility of direct contact with the domestic sheep.
9. The permittee will immediately report any bighorn sheep sightings within the Smith Mountain S&G Allotment to the USFS and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game.
10. Ewes with mastitis (blue bag) will not be left behind to recover and catch back up to the band later, but will be removed from the band or killed.
11. Predator attacks, primarily wolf attacks, create the most significant risk for stray domestic sheep because they cause sheep to scatter from the main band. In such cases, the permittee will immediately notify the USFS, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and Idaho wildlife services and begin efforts to identify the sheep that were killed and to locate and re-gather any scattered sheep.
12. In 28 years of experience, Shirts Brothers Sheep have never observed a bighorn sheep intermingle with their domestic bands. However, we are willing to implement the IDFG's *Emergency Response Plan* which allows representatives of the IDFG or a permittee to kill any bighorn sheep that come into contact with domestic sheep on a grazing allotment. See letter from IDFG to Hells Canyon Preservation Council dated August 12, 2004 (wherein the *Emergency Response Plan* is referenced). This will ensure that if we observe any intermingling between a bighorn sheep and a domestic sheep, then the bighorn sheep will be killed and not allowed to return to its home herd. We certainly will immediately advise you and IDFG if the authority exercised in this *Emergency Response Plan* is implemented.
13. Shirts Brothers Sheep will allow the IDFG to remove or kill its domestic sheep which are located outside of private lands or permitted public land grazing allotments, or are located within public land grazing allotments outside of the permitted season of use (hereafter referred to as offending livestock), provided that the following conditions have been met: a) the offending livestock are found to be in immediate association with bighorn sheep and pose a health risk to said bighorn sheep; and, b) reasonable but unsuccessful attempts have been made over a 5-day period to notify Shirts Brothers Sheep regarding the offending livestock so they can remove said livestock; or, c) Shirts Brothers Sheep is notified and agrees that IDFG field personnel can remove or kill the offending livestock; or, d) Shirts Brothers Sheep is notified, but fails to remove the offending livestock within 10 days of said

notification; and, e) the IDFG makes a reasonable attempt to notify the office of the Idaho state veterinarian prior to any removal action, or as soon as possible after the removal action is taken if the attempt at prior notification fails; and, f) the IDFG immediately turns over to Shirts Brothers Sheep or to the Idaho State veterinarian any offending livestock removed or killed pursuant to the preceding provisions.

*Maura Laverty*

MAURA LAVERTY  
Acting District Ranger

*2/9/2009*

Date

RON SHIRTS, Shirts Brothers Sheep  
Permittee

Date