



State of Washington
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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Main Office Location: Natural Resources Building, 1111 Washington Street SE, Olympia, WA

MITIGATED DETERMINATION OF NONSIGNIFICANCE (MDNS)

Name of Proposal: MDNS 20-043: WDFW GRAZING GUIDANCE AND GRAZING MANAGEMENT TOOLS

Description of Proposal:

WDFW proposes to update the oversight and implementation of grazing on WDFW owned and controlled lands. This proposal includes the draft WDFW Grazing Guidance and Grazing Management Tools document. The document includes content regarding a vision and roles of grazing to meet WDFW's mission, WDFW's statutory authority for land management, managing the risks associated with grazing, components of grazing management plans, monitoring and adaptive management, and ecological integrity.

The document also includes proposed changes to both the grazing policy and WAC focused on clarifying inconsistencies and ambiguities between the two, proposed direction regarding wolf-livestock management, and a framework to evaluate potential new grazing on WDFW lands.

These guidelines and tools are not project specific but will provide direction for grazing permits on WDFW lands including over 50 existing grazing permits on approximately 110,000 acres, and potential new grazing permits. Potential new grazing on WDFW lands, where grazing has not been permitted in the previous 10 years, may require project specific SEPA review.

1) Proposed changes to existing Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) Grazing Policy C-6003

a. Clarify roles of grazing on Department lands by adding the role of grazing to enhance recreational opportunity. Further clarify the role of grazing to protect community character which is consistent with the existing policy that allows grazing when consistent with the Department's strategic plan. The most recent strategic plan, 2017-2019, includes a goal to protect community character.

b. Maintain requirement that permitted grazing must ensure that ecological integrity is maintained, and add requirement that grazing must be consistent with acquisition funding requirements.

c. Remove language requiring that grazing must ensure protection of all resource values. This language lacks specificity found in the proposed WAC language stating that grazing must be consistent with WDFW's mission, management objectives and strategic plan.

d. Require Department cross-program review of grazing permits. Existing language merely directs the Department to develop such review procedures.

e. Eliminate language already found or proposed for inclusion in grazing WAC 220-500-200, having to do with grazing plans and Commission review. Require consistency with grazing WAC and the Department's conservation mission.

2) Proposed changes to existing Grazing WAC 220-500-200

a. Clarify that grazing must be consistent with WDFW's mission, management objectives AND strategic plan. This language replaces existing language that says that grazing must be consistent with desired ecological conditions.

b. The Commission currently does not review grazing permits being renewed. New language would clarify that permits up for renewal include permits where grazing has occurred within the last ten years. Grazing permit renewals are not issued where only temporary permits have previously occurred. Existing WAC states that temporary permits are those permits that have been issued for a period of not more than one year.

c. Add the requirement that the Commission must approve, rather than just review, all non-temporary grazing activity on lands that have not been grazed within the past ten years. Existing WAC specifically excludes temporary grazing activity from the requirement of Commission review.

d. Clarify that grazing plans are not required for permits where livestock grazing will last for fewer than 14 days. Current language says permits lasting less than two weeks. This clarifies that the 14 days need not necessarily be consecutive.

e. Add that Commission review is not required for permits for land acquired within the previous 12 months, but such permits are limited to a duration of 3 years after which time a grazing permit must be approved by the Commission before it can be renewed.

f. Add a specific provision allowing the Department to discontinue a grazing permit upon expiration of the permit.

3) Proposed Wolf-Livestock Conflict Grazing Permit Language

a. All grazing permits will include livestock sanitation measures and nonlethal wolf deterrence measures that exceed the expectations outlined in WDFW's wolf-livestock interaction protocol. For those grazing permits where wolf habitat may be present, a procedure will facilitate development of an Annual Operational Plan (AOP) if and when wolves occur in the applicable area. The AOP, just one component of an existing grazing management plan, may include additional customized measures as negotiated with the permittee, and if necessary, temporary livestock removal or deferral. In cases of temporary livestock removal or deferral, WDFW will attempt to locate—but cannot guarantee—alternate pasture.

4) Proposed Grazing Evaluation Framework which is a tool used on a case-by-case basis to evaluate the risks and benefits of potential new grazing on WDFW lands.

a. The department may receive grazing proposals for WDFW-managed lands from a variety of sources, including staff, grazing operators, state government personnel, and other members of the general public. These proposals are sometimes associated with acreage being considered for, or undergoing, acquisition by WDFW. The Grazing Evaluation Framework was drafted with cross-program review to provide staff a consistent method of responding to grazing proposals. It directs staff to identify objectives, risks, costs, and income associated with a grazing proposal. When WDFW applies the Grazing Evaluation Framework to a given grazing proposal, staff will

develop a recommendation to management regarding the proposal. Management will decide whether or not staff will move forward to prepare a full permit for district team review.

The proponent shall incorporate the following mitigation measures into the project:

- Development of individual comprehensive grazing management plans for each grazing permit location to assess and manage grazing risk to species and habitats
- Restrict the footprint size and location in the state where grazing is permitted
- Limit grazing intensity (stocking rate)
- Limit grazing duration/period
- Rest rotation schedule where a pasture is rested (not grazed) for a year
- Implement post-fire recovery periods restricting grazing after wildfire until habitat has recovered
- Set conservative forage utilization levels
- Monitor grazing utilization and intensity to ensure compliance to grazing management plan conditions/measures
- Monitor ecological conditions to ensure that ecological integrity is maintained
- Build and maintain fencing to restrict livestock access to water and riparian habitat
- Locate livestock watering stations away from streams and riparian habitat to avoid livestock movement into these areas.

Proponent/Applicant: Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)
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Location of Proposal: WDFW public wildlife areas statewide.

Lead Agency: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)

WDFW has determined that this proposal will likely not have a significant adverse impact on the environment. Therefore, state law¹ does not require an environmental impact statement (EIS). WDFW made this mitigated determination of nonsignificance (MDNS) after we reviewed the environmental checklist and other information on file with us.

We issued this MDNS according to state rules.² **We will not act on this proposal for 21 days** from the date we issued the MDNS. Agencies, affected tribes, and members of the public are invited to comment on this proposal or MDNS. We must receive your comments within 21 days of the date of this letter. The comment period will end at **5:00 pm on September 24, 2020.**

Method of Comment:

The following procedures shall govern the method to comment on agency SEPA proposals. Comments received through these procedures are part of the official SEPA record for this proposal.

Please submit your comments online through the WDFW SEPA website comment links at:

- <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DFWGRAZING20> for specific comments on the proposed rules only, and
- <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SEPA2020> for comments on the rest of the proposal.

Responsible Official: Lisa Wood

Position/Title: SEPA/NEPA Coordinator, WDFW Habitat Program, Protection Division

Address: P.O. Box 43200, Olympia, WA 98504-3200

After the comment period closes, applicants may view the updated status of this proposal on the WDFW SEPA website: <https://wdfw.wa.gov/licenses/environmental/sepa/closed-final>. Once the status is posted as final, applicants and permittees may take action on the proposal. When a proposal is modified or withdrawn, notice will be given in accordance with state law.¹

If you have questions about this MDNS or the details of the proposal, contact Lisa Wood at the address above or email SEPADesk2@dfw.wa.gov.

DATE OF ISSUE: September 3, 2020

SIGNATURE:



Footnotes

1. RCW 43.21C.030(2)(c)
2. WAC 197-11-350

SEPA Log Number: 20-043.mdns

Individuals who need to receive this information in an alternative format or language, or who need reasonable accommodations to participate in WDFW-sponsored public meetings or other activities may contact Dolores Noyes at (360-902-2349), or TTY 771, or email (dolores.noyes@dfw.wa.gov). For more information https://wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/reasonable_request.html.