



THUNDER BASIN NATIONAL GRASSLAND PLAN IMPLEMENTATION: *THE ALIENS HAVE LANDED*

By Robert M. Sprentall

Abstract—The Thunder Basin National Grassland Land and Resource Management Plan (Grassland Plan) was released in July 2001, at which time it went under a six-month review and comment process. After the review and comment process was completed, an addendum was completed for the Grassland Plan. In July 2002, a Record of Decision was signed that implemented the Grassland Plan. The question that now arose was How does one implement a Grassland Plan? The Grassland Plan for the Thunder Basin National Grassland suggests the framework to guide the day-to-day resource management operations and provides broad guidance.

The planning process used by the USDA Forest Service is a staged decision-making process. In the first stage, the Grassland Plan provides direction for all resource management programs, practices, uses and protections measures. The second stage is the project plan. This is the process of analysis and implementation of management practices designed to achieve the goals and objectives of the Grassland Plan. So in essence, you implement the Grassland Plan based on the projects proposed.

The Grassland Plan contains goals, objectives, standards and guidelines. *Goals* are concise statements that describe desired conditions expected to be achieved sometime in the future. *Objectives* are concise, time-specific statements of measurable planned steps taken to accomplish a goal. *Standards* are then actions that must be followed, or are required limits to activities, in order to achieve Grassland goals and objectives. Finally, *guidelines* are advisable actions that should be followed to achieve Grassland goals and objectives. So when activities or projects are proposed, they must contain or follow the standards and guidelines outlined in the Grassland Plan that would achieve the goals and objectives.

The Grassland Plan is divided into three sections or levels that provide direction. Grassland-wide includes national and regional goals and grassland-wide goals, objectives, standards and guidelines. Geographic Area direction includes management direction that is too specific to apply across the entire grassland. Management Area direction is applied to areas for a particular emphasis. When projects or activities are proposed, direction is provided by all three sections or levels of the Grassland Plan.

In summary, implementation of the Grassland Plan does not take place until a project or activity is proposed. These projects or activities such as livestock grazing, energy development, recreation use, or any other types of occupancy and use must follow the actions outlined in the standards and guidelines contained in the Grassland Plan from all three sections or levels. These standards and guidelines are the actions outlined in the Grassland Plan to achieve the goals and objectives.

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