

Spotted Dog WMA Working Group Meeting Notes

Elks Lodge, Deer Lodge, Montana

October 29, 2013

Attributes identified by group to be discussed (not limited to, but including)

- Road access
- Rangeland resources
- Water quality and quantity
- Recreation
- Forest health
- Fire and fuel – threats and opportunities
- Fisheries
- Non-game wildlife
- Building “Showcase” management and relationships

The group determined to address rangeland resources beginning at this meeting and produced the following results:

Rangeland Resource Issues

- Invasive plants
- Economic impacts of WMA on county and surrounding landowners, and opportunity to generate revenue from user fees including grazing leases.
- Water resources
- Fire management
- Distribution of grazing use
- Season of grazing use
- Achieve and maintain healthy plant communities
- Include forest health in rangeland considerations
- Support wildlife populations
- Manage and maintain recreation/access

Invasive plant management should include:

- Apply appropriate management tools including herbicides, biological tools, and hand pulling to minimize adverse ecologic impacts on the WMA from invasive plant species

- Utilize appropriate grazing and/or mowing strategies to manage existing invasive plants and minimize threats of new infestations
- Provide signage at entry points to elevate public awareness about invasive plants, and encourage users to minimize exposure of the WMA to new invasive plants and/or seeds.
- Initiate an active and effective resource monitoring program to aid in making informed management decisions about invasive species.

Distribution/Season of Use

A range rider was suggested as an effective tool to aid in achieving many of the following management ideas.

- Assure appropriate levels of riparian resource use. Including the following tools:
 - Fencing
 - Off stream water development
 - Mineral and salt placement
 - Spring developments
 - Emphasize proper timing of grazing
- Upland concerns
 - Under use in some specific places leading to decadent forage resources
 - Occasional over use on some SW facing slopes in winter – could be a result of loafing areas for elk
 - Time of use particularly in spring to assure that turn out does not occur at the same time at the same place every year. Emphasis on May time frame related to cool season grass response to defoliation

It was determined that most rangeland issues of concern are associated with the west side of the WMA, and that the primary concern for the east side is trespass grazing. The trespass grazing will be addressed with appropriate fencing, and is anticipated to be completed in 2014.

The following points are considered to be important to address appropriate range management on the West side of the WMA

- Proper timing of grazing mid-May to Late October. It was noted that mid-May could be too early in some years and a good range ready indicator may need to be established.
- Additional fencing may be necessary to achieve different turn out points for spring use
- Specific grazing lease holders may provide additional opportunities for different turn out points.

- Riparian area resources may provide a good “trigger” for indicating a need to move livestock
- Multiple routes to and from the east side of the WMA from the west side will improve distribution and season of use concerns
- Opportunities exist to utilize livestock/wildlife interactions to enhance habitat attributes for wildlife while providing critical grazing resources for livestock producers.
- Establish and actively utilize resource monitoring protocols to aid in achieving resource management goals and adjusting management actions to realize those goals.

It has been determined that there will be no permitted livestock grazing on the Spotted Dog WMA for 2014. This time frame will provide an opportunity for the Working Group to address identified opportunities and concerns with due process.