

Little Missouri Grazing Association
201 Inman Street
Amidon, ND 58620
lmga201@hotmail.com
701-523-6471

April 2, 2021

U.S. Forest Service, Director,
Forest Management, Range Management, and Vegetation Ecology
201 14th St SW, Suite 3SE
Washington, DC 20250-1124

Re: Little Missouri Grazing Association Rangeland Management Directives
#ORMS - 2514

Dear Director:

The Little Missouri Grazing Association (LMGA) submit the following comments on the **Standard Grazing Agreement Only for Grazing Associations Operating on National Grasslands in R-1** (23 Exhibit 02, FSH 2209.13, Chapter 20).

The LMGA was dismayed to read the three distinct changes to the original Dakota Prairie Grasslands Standard Grazing Agreement (SGA) that was accepted and signed in early 2020. The Forest Service changed two definitions and the Statement of Purpose. Those alterations change the intent of the negotiated Agreement. The DPG Grazing Associations' comments describe our response to the changes made, but the LMGA emphasizes that the definitions went through extensive review by all parties involved.

The DPG SGA definition for "Association Administered Lands" mean all lands administered by the Association for livestock use and rangeland resources including, but not limited to, private, state, other agency, and National Grasslands" should remain as written.

The FS restates the definition as "Association Administered Lands mean all lands *identified in the grazing agreement upon which the grazing the association is responsible for managing the rangeland resources and their member's livestock use including, but not limited to, private, State, other agency, and National Grasslands.*"

The DPG SGA definition for "Grazing Agreement authorizes Grazing Associations, established under State law and recognized by the Forest Service, to administer the livestock grazing program on National Grasslands, acting as agents of the Forest Service for a period of 10 years or less."

The FS restates the definition in the Exhibit as "Grazing Agreement Authorizes Grazing Associations, established under State law and recognized by the Forest Service, to administer the

livestock grazing *use made by its members* on the National Grasslands identified in the grazing Agreement for a period of 10 years or less.

The DPG SGA Statement of Purpose was negotiated to “The purpose of this Agreement is to:

1. Authorize the Association to administer the livestock grazing program on National Grasslands covered by this Agreement which includes the provision for the Association to issue and administer grazing permits consistent with applicable federal law, regulation (CFRs), applicable Forest Service policies, and direction in the Grassland Plan. Such administration must conform to this Agreement and the Rules of Management developed by the Association and concurred with by the Forest Service.”

The FS restated the Statement of Purpose in the Exhibit SGA as: “The purpose of this Agreement is to:

1. Authorize the Association to administer its members livestock grazing activities on National Grasslands covered by this Agreement which includes the provision for the Association to issue and administer grazing permits consistent with applicable federal law, regulation (CFRs), applicable Forest Service policies, and direction in the Grassland Plan. Such administration must conform to this Agreement and the Rules of Management developed by the Association and concurred with by the Forest Service.”

The FS re-statements cast doubts on the Forest Service’s intentions. Through the ND Department of Agriculture’s MOU group, the DPG SGA was negotiated in good faith that 36 CFR Part 213 remained in effect for the National Grasslands: “*...for administration under the provisions and purposes of Title III of the Bankhead Jones Farm Tenant Act.*” The DPG Grazing Associations believed that the DPG, with Regional Office approval, would identify the applicable federal law and regulations and applicable Forest Service policies. Region 1 has two Standard Grazing Agreements: Exhibit 2 and Exhibit 3. Is the DPG SGA going to disappear in 10 years because the FS beyond the Dakota Prairie Grasslands had no intention of honoring this Standard Grazing Agreement?

All of the associations in the DPG, the Forest Service, ND Congressional delegates, the ND Agriculture Commissioner and his staff spent countless hours reviewing, negotiating, and writing the Standard Grazing Agreement. Over the last three years, there have been no fewer than 13 meetings to create a final product that everyone involved agreed on. The FS had plenty of opportunities to make changes during the exhaustive process. With that being said, not a single word, no matter how small, should be changed from that final product when adding it to the Handbook. It took an unbelievable amount of sacrifice and dedication of all involved. To willfully make changes without consent to a signed document in the early years of its lifespan is a slap in the face.

The LMGA requests that the FS correct FSH 2209.13, Chapter 20 23-Exhibit 02 to the original DPG SGA as written.

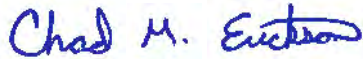
The LMGA is frustrated that after 44 years of requesting the Forest Service to develop separate regulations, policies, and procedures for the National Grasslands, the Forest Service still refuses to develop them. The LMGA reviewed the draft directives and found **334** comments and requests from the DPG Grazing Associations that the FS specify or clarify when the National Grasslands regulations, policies, and procedures differ from the National Forests.

The DPG Grazing Associations, notably the Little Missouri Grazing Association, experience a revolving door of FS staff from the Supervisor's office to the ranger districts. Separate regulations, policies, and procedures devoted to the National Grasslands' uniqueness are required to restore efficiency in a chaotic employment environment. The DPG Grazing Associations Vegetation Management Projects and conservation practice design and approval are perpetually stalled and backlogged.

The LMGA requests that FS issue separate regulations, policies, and procedures for the National Grasslands.

The LMGA has enclosed a matrix summarizing LMGA's comments.

Thank you for your consideration,



Chad Erickson
President
Little Missouri Grazing Association

Little Missouri Grazing Association
201 Inman St
Aridon, ND 58620

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US Forest Service, Director
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Washington, DC 20250-1124

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