

coordination between the PACFISH effort and BLM range program is essential. The Rangeland Reform '94 EIS considered cumulative impacts of PACFISH and rangeland reform.

Nothing in subpart 4180 is intended to affect special planning efforts such as those related to anadromous fish habitat (PACFISH) or the Upper Columbia River Basin EIS. These are separate efforts that will be coordinated, as appropriate, with activities under subpart 4180.

Concerning the comment that the standard and guideline provisions are too strict and will drive livestock operators out of business, the guiding principles for the State or regional standards and guidelines are designed to allow State and regional issues to be considered while still resulting in significant progress toward established goals. Specific quantitative assessment methods for the listed items were not proposed because the Department believes specific assessment methodologies should be chosen in light of more site-specific considerations.

The guiding principles for standards and guidelines require that State or regional standards and guidelines address the basic components of healthy rangelands. The Department believes that by implementing grazing-related actions that are consistent with the fundamentals of § 4180.1 and the guiding principles of § 4180.2, the long-term health of public rangelands can be ensured. The fallback standards and guidelines will also lead to improved rangeland health, but the fallbacks do not provide the same opportunities for tailoring to meet more-local resource conditions and livestock management practices.

Standards and guidelines will be implemented through terms and conditions of grazing permits, leases, and other authorizations, grazing-related portions of activity plans (including AMPs), and through range improvement-related activities. The Department anticipates that in most cases the standards and guidelines themselves will not be terms and conditions of various authorizations but that the terms and conditions will reflect the standards and guidelines. For example, a standard for maintaining water quality may be implemented via a condition of a permit that livestock will not be allowed to occupy specified riparian areas during a certain time of year. In assessing the health of rangelands to determine whether action of the authorized officer is necessary, the BLM will generally consider the extent to which standards are being met and guidelines followed across the area of a grazing allotment or group of

allotments. The Department intends that failing to comply with a standard in an isolated area would not necessarily result in corrective action.

The Department recognizes that it will sometimes be a long-term process to restore some rangelands to properly functioning condition. The Department intends that the standards and guidelines will result in a balance of sustainable development and multiple use along with progress towards attaining healthy, properly functioning rangelands. For that reason, wording has been adopted in this final rule that will require the authorized officer to take appropriate action upon determining that existing grazing management practices are failing to ensure significant progress toward the fulfillment of the standards and toward conformance with the guidelines.

Also, the Department recognizes that it is not possible to complete all assessments of rangeland health and to take appropriate corrective action, pursuant to § 4180.2(c) of this final rule, immediately upon completion of the State or regional standards and guidelines or upon the fallbacks taking effect. The Department intends that assessments and corrective actions will be undertaken in priority order as determined by BLM.

In some areas, it may take many years to achieve healthy rangelands, as evidenced by the fundamentals, established standards, and guidelines. The Department recognizes that, in some cases, trends may be hard to even document in the first year. The Department will use a variety of data including monitoring records, assessments, and knowledge of the locale to assist in making the "significant progress" determination. It is anticipated that in many cases it will take numerous grazing seasons to determine direction and magnitude of trend. However, actions will be taken to establish significant progress toward conformance as soon as sufficient data are available to make informed changes in grazing practices.

Many commenters had suggestions or concerns specific to one or more of the guiding principles or fallback standards or guidelines. Commenters asserted the requirement pertaining to A-horizon soils was unrealistic, that suitability determinations need to be addressed, and that greater specificity should be provided for water quality and the protection of riparian areas. Commenters also stated that the standards and guidelines should include a prohibition on exceeding the livestock-carrying capacity and should

require an upward trend in soil and vegetation.

The Department agrees that the A-horizon requirement would not serve as a useful standard on some BLM-administered lands since some naturally-occurring soil structures do not conform to this requirement. The standard that referenced "A" soil horizons has not been carried forward in this final rule. Comments suggesting the addition of suitability determinations have been addressed in the section-by-section analysis for § 4130.2. This final rule does not add a requirement for suitability determinations. The Department has decided not to add more detailed guidance pertaining to water quality or riparian areas but the wording of the guiding principles and fallbacks has been modified from that of the proposed rule to provide greater focus on watershed function. The Department intends that more specific provisions will be considered in the development of State or regional standards and guidelines following consideration of public input and the site-specific characteristics of the public rangelands. The concern that grazing use not be allowed to exceed the livestock carrying capacity is dealt with in §§ 4110.2-2 and 4110.3 of this final rule. The suggestion that public rangelands be required to exhibit an upward trend in condition is adopted, in part, through the addition of the requirement that action be taken to ensure significant progress toward the fulfillment of the standards and toward conformance with the guidelines when the authorized officer determines that grazing management practices or levels of use are significant factors in failing to meet the standards or conform with the guidelines.

References to meeting the minimum requirements of the ESA and State water quality standards have been removed from the fallback standards and guidelines. Both ESA requirements and water quality standards are included in the fundamentals presented in § 4180.1 of this final rule and, therefore, do not need to be restated in the fallbacks. The fallback guidelines retain reference to promoting the restoration and maintenance of habitats of special status species, to make clear that it is the Department's intent to take reasonable measures to interrupt the decline of such habitats.

References to minimum ESA requirements and State water quality standards have been retained in the guiding principles for the development of State or regional standards and guidelines. The Department intends that, as State or regional standards and