



Range Bulletin

Pawnee National Grassland



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Oil and Gas Final Environmental Impact Leasing Analysis

Forest Supervisor Glenn Casamassa released a Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Draft Record of Decision (ROD) addressing oil and gas leasing on the Pawnee National Grassland. The draft ROD proposes to make nearly all federally owned and unleased areas of the Grassland available for leasing, subject to a condition of No Surface Occupancy (lessee cannot locate roads, wells or equipment on PNG surface). This allows resource development while reducing the overall environmental impact of that activity in the region.

Current oil and gas lease management on the PNG is conducted under 1997 Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests and Pawnee National Grassland Forest Plan direction. New analysis was needed to consider

changes in technology, resource demand, and changing uses of the PNG since 1997. The Bureau of Land Management oversees leasing and royalties for federal minerals, including oil and gas, and is responsible for environmental reviews of potential subsurface impacts of proposed leases.

The EIS analyzed three alternatives in detail, including a No Action Alternative (continuing to utilize 1997 Forest Plan direction), a No Lease Alternative and a No Surface Occupancy Alternative (the Forest Service preferred alternative). The No Surface Occupancy Alternative is preferred because it allows for potential extraction of the underlying oil and gas while providing the most protection of surface resources and opportunities for other uses of the PNG. This alternative results in no surface disturb-

ance on any new leases that would be issued on the PNG and the least amount of projected disturbance on adjacent private and state lands. In comparison, the No Leasing Alternative would result in 10 to 60 percent more surface disturbance on adjacent private and state lands.

The draft ROD is subject to the Forest Service's objection process before a final Record of Decision is made. Under the objection process, objections will only be accepted from those who have previously submitted timely and specific written comments regarding the proposed project during scoping or other designated opportunities for public comment.

Detailed information on the EIS and draft ROD are available online at: www.fs.usda.gov/goto/arp/PNGLeasingAnalysis.

Range Update

The 2014 growing season on the grasslands was a favorable year with cooler than average temperatures and higher than average precipitation amounts.

The west side of the PNG received approximately 30% more precipitation (13.20 inches) than the 72-year average (10.08 inches) between the months of May and October. The east side of the PNG received approximately 40% more precipitation (15.05 inches) than the 72-year average (10.73 inches).

These conditions resulted in ample forage amounts and will aid in the process of drought recovery moving forward. End of the year pasture inspections showed that most pastures have more residual structure than we have seen in years, thus increasing moisture capture and retention throughout the winter months.

Kersey Students Visit the PNG

In late October, 83 Platt Valley Elementary School third-graders from Kersey, Colo. and their teachers learned all about the Pawnee National Grassland at the Steward J. Adams Education Site in the Crow Valley Recreation Area.

Last term, third graders made the same trek in the spring as their teachers changed their curriculum. However, the teachers decided the fall visit was a better fit for what students were learning in the classroom. Grassland employees Mary Ann Chambers, Mike Salazar, Susan Coppelli, Randy Reichert, along with volunteer naturalist Dick Maxfield, introduced students to grassland human history and resource management and provided special water resources demonstration. Dick Maxfield turned the students into birders as they searched the skies for raptors and songbirds.

Everyone enjoyed a hike on the Mourning Dove trail and finished the day with a scavenger hunt for some elusive "creatures" that magically turned into sweet treats to eat on the ride home. This is the fifth school year the Pawnee has hosted this event for Platte Valley Elementary.

Pawnee National Grassland

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Message from the New Ranger...

Hi folks,

I hope everyone had an enjoyable Thanksgiving and is moving into the rest of the holiday season without too much trouble.

As things have slowed down somewhat for the winter, I just wanted to say that my first couple of months as the Ranger for the Pawnee National Grassland has been a good thing for me. I have met many new people and had a chance to talk to them about the things that make the grasslands special to them. I've learned about some of the history and heard some things about what folks would like to see in the future. I am looking forward to attending the annual grazing association meetings in the new year and meeting some of the folks I know about but have not yet met.

I have also been very pleased to meet and work with a number of volunteers and partners. Coming from very rural parts of the country, I am amazed to meet so many enthusiastic people, who contribute their time, skills and funding in such a way.

Not having much else to report this month, I wanted to wish all a merry holiday season.

Curtis Youngman

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

PNG News...

Look for the next Range Bulletin in February 2015!

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Northern Colorado Rocketry's special use permit to hold rocket launches on the Pawnee National Grassland will expire at the end of the year. They have requested a new permit and we are evaluating that request. If you have questions or concerns, please contact Jon Halverson at 970-295-6723 or jhalverson@fs.fed.us before the end of December.

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The **Main OHV** area is once again open from Nov. 1 to April 9.



**Happy Holidays
from the Pawnee
National Grassland!**