



The Murphy Complex Wildfire Report on Livestock Grazing, Vegetation Type, and Fire Behavior

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Larger and more frequent wildland fires are a growing reality in the management of Western rangelands. The Murphy Wildland Fire Complex burned more than 650,000 acres of sagebrush grasslands in southern Idaho and northern Nevada in the summer of 2007. The Idaho Bureau of Land Management (BLM) established a team of scientists, habitat specialists, and land managers to examine the fire, with specific attention to the influence of livestock management and vegetation type on the fire's extent and behavior. The team report was released in August 2008 and included the following findings and recommendations. Under the extreme weather and fuel conditions in the Murphy Complex fire, grazing levels probably had little effect on fire behavior. Modeling suggests that in more moderate conditions, grazing can reduce the rate of spread and the intensity of fires and that the potential for using grazing to manage fuels is greater in grasslands (both current years and carryover fuels) than in shrublands. The team recommended that a technical guide summarizing existing knowledge on using livestock to reduce wildfires be developed and that one or more pilot projects be established to evaluate the effectiveness of targeted grazing for fuels management at a landscape level. The team also recommended improvements in fire behavior models, remote sensing technology, and burn severity mapping for rangelands. Strategic livestock grazing can provide opportunities to reduce wildfire impacts to natural and fiscal resources.

2009. 62nd Society for Range Management Annual Meeting. Paper No. 1030-21.