

Considerations for Enhanced Biosecurity for Sheep Grazing on Public Land Allotments



This document supplements material presented in the *SSWS Self-Assessment Checklist and Information Manual for Enhanced Biosecurity for FMD Prevention: Sheep on Pasture/Rangeland* available at: <https://securesheepwool.org/producers/biosecurity/>. The guidance in those documents is primarily focused on sheep grazing private pasture and rangelands. There are unique factors regarding **public land grazing** which pose serious FMD virus exposure threats to some of the largest sheep flocks in North America.

Introduction

Enhanced biosecurity aims to protect animals from foot and mouth disease (FMD) virus exposure risks. Approximately 46% of the U.S. ewe inventory resides in the 11 public lands states in the West. Nearly one-half of these sheep graze on some form of public land for part of the year. Generally, public lands are very remote with limited access and livestock are sparsely distributed across the landscape. These animals may be at a decreased FMD virus exposure risk when compared with areas of high livestock density. However, in an FMD outbreak, public land grazers need to be aware of the exposure risks and implement strict, enhanced biosecurity procedures wherever possible to protect the flock.

The considerations described here pertain to an FMD outbreak where the public lands are located in a regulatory Control Area. This assumes there is an infected sheep flock, cattle herd, or wildlife within the same geographic area and a risk of FMD virus exposure. In some instances, FMD outbreaks in other countries have been spread by infected yet undetected sheep grazing near other livestock, as well as contaminated vehicles and people movement in livestock grazing areas.

During an FMD outbreak, the State Animal Health Official will work together with USDA and federal and state agencies that oversee public lands. These agencies have the authority to regulate access and use of public lands. All flocks/herds permitted to graze those lands may have the same risk of FMD virus exposure and are subject to regulatory movement controls.

Exposure Risks on Public Lands

FMD virus exposure risks on public lands include:

- **Common-use roads:** Most public lands are located in remote regions with limited access via few roads. A single transport carrier that has recently transported an FMD-infected animal could contaminate the roadway, potentially exposing other transport vehicles and the livestock they carry.
 - Livestock grazers may be required to use the same road system when transporting livestock to and from public land grazing allotments.
 - Public land recreationalists may use the same road for activities, including transport of animals for recreational use (e.g., horses, pack goats).
- **Common-use corrals/trailheads:** Multiple grazing allotments used by different producers commonly share the unloading/loading areas to access their permitted allotment. These corrals may also be used by recreationalists with animals (e.g., horses, pack goats). A single animal infected with FMD virus moved through the corral could expose other susceptible livestock to FMD virus.

- Common-use trail system: The U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and most state land systems allow producers to use livestock trail venues to herd animals to and from public land allotments. It is common for multiple producers to use the same trail in a grazing season. A single animal infected with FMD virus on the trail could expose other susceptible livestock to FMD virus.
- Grazing associations: Some producers form grazing associations and graze livestock (sheep, cattle, or both) on the same public land allotment at the same time either as separate or commingled groups. If one flock or herd is infected with the FMD virus, the risk of exposure increases for other flocks/herds in the association.
- Wildlife interactions: Mingling with wildlife infected with FMD virus or serving as a vector (e.g., carrying the virus on their hooves/feet) increases the risk of exposure for livestock grazing on public lands.

Protecting the Flock

Creating an effective Line of Separation (LOS) for livestock grazing vast open rangelands is not realistic. Instead, efforts should be focused on advanced coordination with state and federal land and wildlife management agencies. Public land grazing permittees should proactively work with their State Animal Health Officials and livestock associations to develop proposals for livestock separation and movement strategies on public land allotments in the event of an FMD outbreak. Proposals should then be presented to the state/federal agency managing the grazing permit. While grazing public land allotments, the following steps can help protect the flock:

- Shepherds/herders and their livestock guardians, herding dogs, and/or horses should attempt to maximize distance between their flock and other grazing flocks or herds.
- Limit who has contact with the flock; those handling sheep should not have contact with other livestock, including moving between bands on separate allotments, unless they have changed into clean clothes and footwear prior to minimize exposure.
- Report dead animals to the regulatory officials managing the outbreak so they can work with the agency that issued the grazing permit to determine appropriate disposal options.
- Wildlife interactions should be reported to regulatory officials managing the outbreak, the agency managing the grazing permit, and state/federal wildlife management agencies to determine control options.