

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BLM, BOISE DISTRICT
Scoping Document for EA # DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2011-0006-EA**

Applicant (if any):	Proposed Action: Nickel Creek FFR Allotment (#00675)			EA No. DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2011-0006-EA
State: Idaho	County: Owyhee	District: Boise	Field Office: Owyhee	Authority: FLPMA & Taylor Grazing Act
Prepared By: OFO ID Team	Title: Various			Report Date: August 2011

LANDS INVOLVED

Meridian	Township	Range	Sections	Acres
Boise	9S-13S	2W-4W	Various (See Map)	1644

This information packet summarizes the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to renew a term (ten year) grazing permit and to modify livestock grazing management practices in the Nickel Creek Fenced Federal Range (FFR) Allotment # 00657 in accordance with the Owyhee Resource Management Plan (ORMP). Federal actions must be analyzed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant federal and state laws and regulations to determine potential environmental consequences.

The purpose of this scoping document is to inform the grazing permittees, local government, tribes and interested public of the proposal and to solicit comments for consideration in preparation of the environmental assessment (EA). Analysis of the proposal is ongoing and will be documented in the EA with an estimated completion date of October 1, 2011. Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential environmental issues related to the Proposed Action and to identify alternatives to the Proposed Action that meet the purpose and need for the action.

Public Input Needed

Comments are specifically requested on the alternatives, preliminary issues and alternatives. Comments are due by **April 11, 2011** for due consideration in developing the EA. Comments must be directly relevant to the proposal and the Nickel Creek FFR allotment. The BLM will not reject public feedback outside established public involvement timeframes; however, these comments may be considered secondarily to comments received in a timely manner and may

only be assessed to determine if they identify concerns that would substantially alter the assumptions, proposal, design, or analysis presented in the EA.

Please send your comments with the title of this project in the subject line by means of hard copy or electronically to:

Peter Torma
Rangeland Management Specialist
BLM Owyhee Field Office
20 First Ave. West
Marsing, ID 83639
ptorma@blm.gov

Please identify whether you are submitting comments as an individual or as the designated spokesperson on behalf of an organization. Issues that are outside the scope of the proposal will not be addressed at this planning level.

Need for and Purpose of Action

The purpose of this action is to respond to a grazing application received from the Juniper Mt. Grazing Association (LLC) for the renewal of the grazing permit #1103720 that authorized livestock grazing on allotment # 00657 (Nickel Creek FFR). The need for the action is established by The Federal Land Policy Management Act, Taylor Grazing Act and the ORMP.

Existing Condition/Affected Environment

The Nickel Creek FFR Allotment is located approximately 30 miles south of Jordan Valley, Oregon. The allotment is comprised of 10 pastures (4, 6, 9, 11, 14, 19, 21, 23, 24 and 25). The number of livestock and season of use is at the discretion of the permittee as long as Animal Units Months (AUMs) on public lands does not exceed 109 AUMs. This flexibility is due to the allotment being composed of a large percentage of private lands compared to public (BLM; 1,651 acres; private 6,201 acres; State of Idaho Lands 316 acres)

Vegetation found within this allotment varies based on soil, water and topography. Generally, the private lands' vegetation is a mix of irrigated and/or sub-irrigated meadows. This has resulted in more productive forage for wildlife and livestock. The BLM lands are a mixture of sagebrush types with an understory of grasses and forbs that are less productive due to shallow well-drained soil. Generally, the overstory vegetation in this allotment includes Wyoming big sagebrush, low sagebrush, basin big sagebrush, mountain big sagebrush and western juniper. Common grasses and forb species found in the allotment include Bluebunch wheatgrass, Idaho fescue, Sandburg bluegrass, phlox and lupine.

Although no T&E species are known to occur in the allotment, various sensitive and special status species such as redband trout, sage grouse, and Columbian spotted frog have been documented. Other wildlife that may be found in the allotment includes mule deer, pronghorn,

California bighorn sheep, native fish, non-native fish, a variety of shrub-obligate avian species, golden eagles and prairie falcons.

In 2003, the Assessment and Determination for achieving Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and conformance to guidelines for livestock grazing management was completed for the allotment. It was determined that Standards 1, 2, 3, 4, 7 and 8 are not being met in the Nickel Creek FFR Allotment. Current livestock grazing management practices are significant factors in not meeting Standards 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, and 8 and livestock management practices do not conform with Livestock Grazing Management Guidelines 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, and 12.

The following is a summary of the standards that did not meet Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health:

Standard 1 (Watersheds) is not being met in Pastures 4, 9, 14, 21 and 24 because livestock grazing has resulted in accelerated erosional processes (pedastalling, flow patterns, physical crusting), high amounts of shrubs, and a lack of biological soil crust among other factors. Encroachment of western juniper has also had a negative influence on the hydrological, nutrient, and energy cycles of these systems in some pastures.

Standard 2 (Riparian Areas and Wetlands) is not being met on approximately, .75 miles of Smith Creek in Pasture 11. Also, monitoring data indicated riparian health may be impacted as livestock extensively used riparian plants along 0.25 miles of Castle Creek in Pasture 19.

Standard 3 (Stream Channel/Floodplain) is not being met on 0.75 miles of Smith Creek in pasture 11 due to overly wide, shallow streams that lack sufficient sinuosity. There is excessive erosion and deposition on most of the streams, indicating that they are out of balance with the landscape setting. Within pasture 21, .25 miles of Deep Creek is not meeting due to excessive deposition of fine sediment.

Standard 4 (Native Plant Communities) is not being met in any pasture for varying reasons. Generally, more palatable grasses and biological crusts are less than expected.

Standard 7 (Water Quality) is not being met on 1.3 miles of Castle, Deep and Smith Creeks in Pastures 11, 19 and 21 due to high water temperatures as determined by the State of Idaho. Castle and Deep Creek were found to have high levels of sediment resulting in impaired waters as determine by the State of Idaho.

Standard 8 (Threatened and Endangered Plants and Animals) is functioning at risk or not meeting standards due to a lack of adequate hydric vegetation on Smith Creek, affecting neotropical birds and Columbian spotted frog habitat. A lack of desirable grasses in most pastures provides inadequate nesting cover for sage grouse and northern harriers and redband trout.

In 2011 follow up monitoring, assessments and evaluations within this allotment may be completed to verify change in land health conditions since the 2003 Assessment and Determination.

Preliminary Resource Issues

- Current livestock grazing management practices are significant factor in not meeting Standards 1,2,3,4,7 and 8
- Juniper is encroaching into bitterbrush, sagebrush, and riparian communities resulting in altered hydrologic, nutrient, and energy cycles of these systems.
- Riparian areas and wetlands are dominated by early serial species and riparian vegetation is inadequate to protect streambanks during high flows.
- Water quality is not being met in portions of Castle and Smith Creek.

Preliminary Alternatives

Alternative A

Alternative A would renew livestock grazing permit # 01103720 with changes to the season of use on Allotment # 0657 (Nickel Creek FFR) for a period up to 10 years. Currently, the number of livestock and season of use on this allotment is at the discretion of the permittee. This alternative would authorize livestock use from 3/15-12/1 within Pastures 4, 6, 9, 11, 14, 19, 21, 23, 24 and 25. Rest and/or deferment during the critical growing season may be required in one or all of the pastures in order to bring this allotment into compliance with Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health. There would be no change in permitted AUMs under this alternative.

The permit would include the following:

Allotment	Active AUMs*	Suspended AUMs	Total AUMs
00657 Nickel Creek FFR	109	0	109

* AUMs = animal unit months = the amount of forage needed to sustain one cow and calf for one month.

Alternative A would authorize livestock grazing in the following manner:

Number of Livestock	Kind of Livestock	Grazing Season Start	Grazing Season End	% Public Land*	Type of Use	AUMs
12	Cattle	03/15	12/1	100	Active	109

*% Public Land is the percentage of forage within the public land (BLM) portion of the allotment.

Alternative B

Alternative B would not authorize livestock use on the BLM lands for a period of 10 years. This would result in 109 AUMs not being available for grazing.

Alternative C

Alternative C would require a reduction of 33 Active AUMs for a period of 10 years. The season of use would be authorized from 3/15-11/1 within Pastures 4, 6, 9, 11, 14, 19, 21, 23, 24, and 25. Rest and/or deferment during the critical growing season may be required in one or all of the pastures in order to bring this allotment into compliance with Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health.

The permit would include the following:

Allotment	Active AUMs*	Suspended AUMs	Total AUMs
00657 Nickel Creek FFR	76	33	109

* AUMs = animal unit months = the amount of forage needed to sustain one cow and calf for one month.

Alternative C would authorize livestock grazing in the following manner:

Number of Livestock	Kind of Livestock	Grazing Season Start	Grazing Season End	% Public Land*	Type of Use	AUMs
10	Cattle	03/15	11/1	100	Active	76

*% Public Land is the percentage of forage within the public land (BLM) portion of the allotment.

Decision to be Made

The Owyhee Field Manager is the authorized officer responsible for the decision regarding management of this allotment. Based on the results of the NEPA analysis, the Field Manager will issue a decision document that includes a determination of the significance of the environmental effects and whether an environmental impact statement (EIS) would be required. If the field manager determines that it is not necessary to prepare an EIS, the manager will decide which management actions, mitigation measures, and monitoring requirements will be prescribed for the allotment.