UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BLM, BOISE DISTRICT

EA # DOI-BLM- ID-B030-2011-0010-EA
Scoping Document

Applicant (if any): BLM Action		**Proposed Action:** Renewal of Grazing Permit(s) for the Fossil Butte, Sinker Butte, Montini Fenced Federal Range (FFR), Con Shea, Joyce FFR and Murphy FFR Allotments			**EA No.** # DOI-BLM- ID-B030-2011-0010-EA
State: Idaho	**County:** Owyhee	**District:** Boise	**Field Office:** Owyhee	**Authority:** FLPMA, PRIA, & Taylor Grazing Act	
Prepared By : Owyhee Field Office		**Title:** Various		**Report Date:** March 15, 2011	

LANDS INVOLVED

Meridian	Township	Range	Section(s)	Acres
Boise	1,2,3,4,5 S	1W,2W, 1E	Various	75,854

This information package summarizes a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to authorize livestock grazing on the following grazing allotments; Fossil Butte (0535), Sinker Butte (0578), Montini Fenced Federal Range (FFR) (0654), Con Shea (0571), Joyce FFR (0487) and Murphy FFR (0486) Grazing Authorization is in accordance with the 1999 Owyhee and 2008 Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area (NCA) Resource Management Plans (RMPs). 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 document is to inform the interested public and affected parties of the proposal and to solicit comments to assist with the NEPA analysis of the proposal. The analysis will be documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA) with an estimated completion date of September 30, 2011. Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential environmental issues related to the proposed action and to construct alternatives to the proposed action that meet the purpose of and need for the project.

On May 11, 2009, the Owyhee Field Office (OFO) sent out EA #DOI-BLM-ID-130-2008-312-EA and a Managers Proposed Decision on Fossil Butte, Sinker Butte, Montini FFR, Con Shea, Joyce FFR, and Murphy FFR Allotments. The Proposed Decision was protested. After carefully reviewing all protest points received, the Owyhee Field Manager decided to reconsider the alternatives analyzed in the EA. Subsequently, due to the lengthy pause in the process, the Owyhee Field Manager decided to withdraw the proposed decision and revise the existing EA to

include additional alternatives. Therefore, a new EA number has been assigned and the OFO will resume the permit renewal process at the document scoping stage.

Purpose and Need for Action

The Resource Management Plans (RMPs) identify the Fossil Butte (0535), Sinker Butte (0578), Montini Fenced Federal Range (FFR) (0654), Con Shea (0571), Joyce FFR (0487) and Murphy FFR (0486) Allotments as available for livestock grazing. Consistent with the goals and objectives of the RMPs, Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management (1997), it is BLM policy to authorize livestock grazing to qualified operators. The purpose of the proposed action is to authorize livestock grazing consistent with BLM policy and in a manner that maintains or improves project area resource conditions and achieves the objectives described in the Owyhee Resource Management Plan (RMP) and the Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area (NCA) RMP. This includes managing the authorized use in a manner that will provide for meeting or making progress toward meeting standards where livestock grazing is a key limiting factor.

Assessments of Rangeland Health were completed for each of the allotments and analyzed in Evaluation and Determination documents (June 16, 2003 and August 2007). The Evaluation/Determination identifies where standard(s) are not being met; whether significant progress toward meeting the standard(s) is or is not occurring; and whether or not current livestock grazing is a significant factor contributing to the current condition. Where standards are not being met due to current livestock management, modifications to grazing management practices are necessary to make significant progress towards meeting rangeland health standards.

The following is a summary of findings from the assessments.

- ***Fossil Butte*** – Standard 1-Watershed is being met. Standards 2-Ripirian Areas and Wetlands, 3-Stream Channel and Floodplains and 7-Water Quality are not being met; however, it was determined that current livestock management practices are not a significant factor. Standards 4-Native Plant Communities and 8-Threatened and Endangered Species are not being met. It was determined that current livestock grazing management practices are a significant factor in not meeting the standards. Important causal agents for not meeting these standards included the presence of invasive plants, drought, historic livestock management and use levels, and current livestock use levels. Standards 5-Seedings and 6-Exotic Plant Communities do not apply to this allotment.

  Prior to the 2008 grazing season a voluntary 10% reduction in active Animal Unit Months (AUMs) was taken, to move towards meeting the standard.

- ***Sinker Butte*** – Standards 1-Watershed, 2-Ripirian Areas and Wetlands, 3Stream Channels and Floodplains, 4-Native Plant Communities and 5-Seedings are not being met; however, it was determined that current livestock grazing management practices are not a significant factor in not meeting the standards. Standard 7-Water Quality is not being met. At the time of the assessment, cause was not determined due to a lack of BLM monitoring data. Standard 8-Threatened and Endangered Species is being met. Standard

6-Exotic Plant Communities does not apply to this allotment.

- ***Montini FFR*** – Standards 1-Watershed, 2-Ripirian Areas and Wetlands, 3-Stream Channel and Floodplains, 6-Exotic Plant Communities, and 8-Threatened and Endangered Species are not being met; it was determined that current livestock grazing management practices are not a significant factor. Standard 7-Water Quality is not being met. At the time of the assessment, cause was not determined due to a lack of BLM monitoring data. Standards 4-Native Plant Communities and 5-Seedings do not apply to this allotment.

- ***Con Shea –***Standards 1-Watersheds, 4-Native Plant Communities, 5-Seedings, 7-Water Quality, and 8- Threatened and Endangered Species are not being met. It was determined that current livestock grazing management practices are not a significant factor in not meeting Standards 1, 4, 5, and 7. However, it was determined that current livestock grazing management is a significant factor in not meeting Standard 8. The determination stated that the standard was not being met in pasture 2 due to severe livestock trampling of Mulfords milkvetch habitat. Standards 2-Ripirian Areas and Wetlands, 3-Stream Channel and Floodplains and 6-Exotic Plant Communities are being met.

- ***Joyce FFR –*** Standards 1-Watersheds, 2-Ripirian Areas and Wetlands and 3-Stream Channel and floodplains are being met. Standard 4-Native Plant Communities is not being met, and current livestock grazing management practices are a significant factor. Important causal agents for not meeting this standard include the current season of use and level of livestock use. Standard 7-Water Quality is not being met, and current livestock grazing management practices are not a significant factor. Standard 8-Threatened and Endangered Species is not meeting standards and current livestock grazing management practices are a significant factor. Standard is being met for sage grouse habitat, but not for other upland dependent special status animal species due to increased plant mortality and low vigor of desirable vegetation in pasture 1. Standards 5-Seedings and 6-Exotic Plant Communities do not apply in this allotment.

  Since 2002, authorized use has ranged from 87 to 246 AUMs, with both cattle and horse use being authorized. However, prior to the start of the 2003-2004 grazing season, the permittee agreed to eliminate March 1 through March 31 grazing in this allotment in order to make significant progress towards meeting Standards 4 and 8.

- ***Murphy FFR*** – Standards 1-Watersheds and 6-Exotic Plant Communities are being met. Standard 8-Threatened and Endangered Species is not being met; current livestock grazing management practices are not a significant factor. Standards 2-Ripirian Areas and Wetlands, 3-Stream Channels and Floodplains, 4-Native Plant Communities, 5-Seedings, and 7-Water Quality do not apply to this allotment.

The impacts of renewing grazing permits for the allotments listed above and proposed projects or facilities will be analyzed in the EA. The analysis will provide the BLM authorized officer with information to help formulate informed grazing management decisions that are in conformance

with the land use plan objectives, in compliance with Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health, and consistent with the Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management.

Decision to be Made: The Owyhee Field Manager is the official responsible for decisions regarding management of these allotments. Based on the results of the NEPA analysis, the Field Manager will issue decision documents that include a determination of the significance of the environmental effects and whether an environmental impact statement (EIS) will be prepared. 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 allotments, including permitted number of animals, seasons of use, allowable utilization standards, and the term of the permits.

Affected Environment

Soils/Watershed

The major landforms, for this group of allotments, are structural benches, fan piedmonts, fan terraces, and foothills. The main body of soils formed in mixed alluvium derived pre-dominantly from lacustrine deposits and loess. In general, the soils are shallow to deep (predominantly deep) and well drained. Surface textures are dominantly silty loams and sandy loams. Soils in this allotment have weak to moderate subsurface development. The main soils present in the area include the McKeeth, Escalante, Tindahay, Royal, Bruncan, and Scism. The main ecological sites associated with these soils are the Calcareous loam 8-10", Loamy 8-10", Shallow loam 8-12", and Saline Bottom 8-12". Soils information for the planning area was obtained from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) soil surveys for Owyhee County Area, Idaho (published 2003).

An important component of many of the ecological sites in the allotments is biological soil crusts. Biological crusts play a particularly important role in the lower elevation sedimentary derived soils where they can protect the interspatial areas from various forms of erosion. Occupying the interspatial area between the vascular plants, these crusts play a role in soil stability, soil moisture retention, and site fertility (by fixing atmospheric nitrogen and contributing organic matter). Crusts also limit germination and establishment of invasive annual grasses. Crust cover is often inversely related to the amount of bare ground, which suggests that a decline in crust cover results in an increase in bare ground (rather than an increase in vascular plants with the exception of invasive annuals). The NRCS "National Range and Pasture Book", biologic soil crusts are identified as one of the critical rangeland ecological attributes to be used as an indicator of rangeland health. These crusts may serve as an early indicator to ecological site decline since they appear to be more sensitive to disturbance from livestock and OHV activity than vascular plants.

In areas where historic livestock grazing resulted in a degraded condition of the watershed, an early to mid-seral or disturbance related vegetative condition now exists. This condition is continuing and in combination with climate change and wildfire, the native vegetation is being replaced by less desirable, invasive exotic annual grasses and forbs. Areas in degraded ecological condition are subject to increased erosion and impaired watershed health. As

vegetative cover is depleted and species composition is changed, the productivity of a site can be reduced through erosion and lack of biological diversity (Blackburn et al., 1986). Also affecting watershed health is the amount of mechanical disturbance to the soil surface resulting in compaction and structural breakdown. Trampling by livestock, OHMV and other recreational use, and road /trail building can be major factors. Soil disturbance has been shown to also reduce vegetative composition, vigor, and productivity.

Based on data collected and field observations, most of the current accelerated erosion problems are in the form of water flow patterns and associated pedestalled bunchgrasses. Many of these problems stem from historic, as well as, current grazing practices and in areas, OHV activities. The amount of bare ground and the condition of the vegetative community are the main concerns in many parts of these allotments.

The hazard of water erosion on soils in these allotments is slight to high (depending on slope and surface texture). The hazard of erosion from wind is slight to high based on surface soil texture.

Upland Vegetation

Fossil Butte - In general, vegetation communities across the allotment are in stable condition (USDI-BLM 2007a). Large stature, native perennial bunchgrasses (i.e., Indian ricegrass, Thurber needlegrass and squirreltail) are sparse to scattered in occurrence. In shrub interspaces, a conversion from large bunchgrasses to Sandberg's bluegrass (*Poa secunda*), a small-stature, native perennial grass has occurred. Also, cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), an invasive exotic annual grass is common to abundant throughout the allotment; in some areas, it is the dominant herbaceous species.

Small portions of the allotment have maintained intact native plant communities. Most of the native plant communities are north of Highway 78, with some still present on the south side of the highway. Representatives from each functional/structural component (grasses, forbs, and shrubs) are present in densities characteristic of the ecological sites. In these areas, Indian ricegrass and/or Thurber needlegrass plants are robust and exhibiting recruitment (i.e., multiple age classes are represented).

Standard 4 (Native Plant Communities) is not being met and current livestock management practices are significant factors (USDI-BLM 2007a). Historic utilization of key perennial grasses (Indian ricegrass, Thurber needlegrass and squirreltail) by livestock has contributed to the decline in condition and frequency of these species. Between 1993 and 2000, utilization levels were greater than 60%, on mixed key species across Fossil Butte allotment (USDI-BLM 2007a). In 2007, utilization was estimated between 50% and 60% on perennial bunchgrasses (the 41% utilization reported in the Rangeland Health Assessment reflects the average utilization of cheatgrass and Indian ricegrass/Thurber needlegrass combined).

Sinker Butte - In 1981, a wildfire burned approximately 1,600 acres of pasture 1; a re-seeding project to rehabilitate the burned area was implemented the same year. The seed mix included Siberian wheatgrass (*Agropyron fragile*), Russian wildrye (*Elymus junceus*), sand dropseed (*Sporobolus cryptandrus*), and fourwing saltbush (*Atriplex canescens*). Pasture 2 burned in a 1983 wildfire which burned approximately 190 acres, no re-seeding took place.

The primary seeded perennial grass remaining in pasture 1 is Siberian wheatgrass. Siberian wheatgrass is a long-lived, Eurasian bunchgrass similar to crested wheatgrass (*Agropyron cristatum*), but is more drought tolerant and thrives in sandy soils (Smoliak et al. 2006). Sandberg bluegrass, a small stature, native perennial grass is the dominant herbaceous species and Siberian wheatgrass is sub-dominant in terms of abundance; therefore Pasture 1 was assessed and evaluated under Standard 5 (Seedings).

Standard 5 is not being met primarily due to cheatgrass abundance and below average precipitation. Photographs taken at a photo-plot study site from 1987 to 2002, shows a decline in the occurrence of Siberian wheatgrass and a lack of shrub recruitment into the burned area. Although in decline, Siberian wheatgrass is persisting amid an abundance of cheatgrass. The 2007 rangeland health assessment, identified cheatgrass as a primary resource issue and rated the indicator for invasive species in the moderate to extreme range of departure (i.e., common throughout the site).

Pasture 1 is not meeting Standard 4 due to cheatgrass abundance and recent drought conditions degrading the native vegetation communities. The area burned in the 1983 wildfire is currently dominated by Sandberg bluegrass, with a trace of Indian ricegrass and few Wyoming sagebrush plants. Cheatgrass is the sub-dominant species. Wyoming big sagebrush, Sandberg bluegrass, cheatgrass, spiny hopsage, Indian ricegrass, and Thurber needlegrass (in order of abundance) compose the unburned portion of pasture 1.

Montini FFR - Perennial bunchgrasses are scarce and cheatgrass is the dominant herbaceous species with limited amounts of shrubs, decadent shadscale and greasewood. The upland vegetation community was assessed under Standard 6 (Exotic Plant Communities – other than seedings). The allotment is not meeting Standard 6 due to previous drought conditions. Below average precipitation has lead to poor plant vigor and reduced production (40-60% of expected) of all vegetation (USDI-BLM 2007b).

Con Shea - Prior to 2004, the allotment was used as a five-pasture system. Pastures 1, 2, and 5 were grazed in winter. The southern, disconnected portion of the allotment, Pastures 3 and 4, were used in spring during the critical growth period for perennial bunchgrasses. As presented in the Rangeland Health Assessment and Determination (USDI-BLM 2004), Pasture 3 was not meeting Standard 4 due to historic grazing and drought. Livestock management practices were not a significant factor. Pastures 1, 2, and 5 were in conformance with guidelines for rangeland management, though not meeting the Standard due to historic grazing, fire, and drought. Pasture 4 was meeting Standard 4.

In 2004, the grazing schedule in pastures 3 and 4 changed to match the rest of the allotment. Con Shea became a winter allotment used as one large pasture between November 1 and February 28. For the subsequent three years, the allotment has been administered this way.

Joyce FFR - Standard 4 was not being met in the 2003 determination, and livestock grazing management was a significant factor (USDI 2003). The period of use and level of use were described as factors in failing to meet the standard. The salt-desert shrub communities at the

time of the rangeland health assessment were depleted, with evidence of shrub mortality and low vigor. Fewer large and mid-sized perennial bunchgrasses were observed, and the invasive exotic species cheatgrass and halogeton were noted. Beginning in 2004, fall grazing was implemented, to change from growing season to dormant season use.

Murphy FFR - In the 2003 determination of rangeland health, the existing plant communities were described as having been replaced by invasive exotic species and no perennial grasses were observed. Therefore, Standard 6 was applied and it was determined to be meeting standards, although marginal ground cover remained at the end of the grazing period to provide soil protection.

Special Status Plants

Fossil Butte - The table below lists the special status plant species known to occur in the Fossil Butte Allotment. These species are restricted to sandy or gravelly soils, with the exception of Malheur princesplume (*Stanleya confertifolia*), which grows on clay soils. The associated plant communities for these species are Wyoming big sagebrush or salt-desert shrub communities, which are typical of the Fossil Butte Allotment.

Table 1. Special Status Plants and Habitat in the Fossil Butte Allotment

Species	**# of Element Occurrences**	**Habitat Description**	**BLM Status**[1]
Snake River Milkvetch *Astragalus purshii* var. *ophiogenes*	7	Loosely aggregated moving sand and gravelly sand deposits on bluffs, talus dunes, and volcanic ash beds in big sagebrush, ricegrass, needle grass, and four-wing salt-bush	Type 4
Desert pincushion *Chaenactis stevioides*	5	Open, sandy sites in salt desert shrub communities	Type 4
White eatonella *Eatonella nivea*	1	Sandy or volcanic soils often with sagebrush	Type 4
White-margined waxplant *Glyptopleura marginata*	5	Sandy-gravelly or loose ash soils in salt desert shrub communities	Type 4
Rigid threadbush *Nemacladus rigidus*	2	Sandy or cindery soils in the desert shrub zone	Type 4
Turtleback *Psathyrotes annua*	2	Sandy, well drained soils in salt desert shrub communities	Type 3
Malheur princesplume *Stanleya confertifolia*	2	Dry plains on somewhat sparsely vegetated clay soils	Type 2

[1]Type 2 = Rangewide/Globally Imperiled Species – High Endangerment
Type 3 = Rangewide or State-wide Imperiled Species – Medium Endangerment
Type 4 = Species of Concern

Standard 8 (Threatened and Endangered Plants and Animals) is not being met, livestock grazing management was a significant factor. Important causal agents included off-road vehicle use and cheatgrass invasions. During the current season of use (October through February), perennial special status plants are entering dormancy or already are dormant (the annuals have completed their life cycle) and can better tolerate grazing and/or trampling. However, historic utilization levels of key perennial grasses by livestock have contributed to a decline in condition and frequency of these species. In turn, special status plant habitats associated with heavy use areas

are also degraded. Other concerns are cheatgrass abundance, unauthorized off-highway vehicle use, and drought.

Sinker Butte - Standard 8 is being met in Sinker Butte allotment. The populations of special status plants are present along the eastern edge of the allotment on the tops and sides of buttes. The ground is relatively steep and stony, and not easily accessible to livestock.

Table 2. Special Status Plants and Habitat in the Sinker Butte Allotment

Species	# of Element Occurrences	Habitat Description	BLM Status
Snake River Milkvetch *Astragalus purshii* var. *ophiogenes*	2	Loosely aggregated moving sand and gravelly sand deposits on bluffs, talus dunes, and volcanic ash beds in big sagebrush, ricegrass, needle grass, and four-wing salt-bush	Type 4
Desert pincushion *Chaenactis stevioides*	2	Open, sandy sites in salt desert shrub communities	Type 4
White eatonella *Eatonella nivea*	1	Sandy or volcanic soils often with sagebrush	Type 4
Cowpie buckwheat *Eriogonum shockleyi* var.*packardaei*	1	Gravelly benches on lakebed sediments in shadscale and mixed desert shrub communities	Type 3
White-margined waxplant *Glyptopleura marginata*	1	Sandy-gravelly or loose ash soils in salt desert shrub communities	Type 4
Turtleback *Psathyrotes annua*	1	Sandy, well drained soils in salt desert shrub communities	Type 3

Montini FFR - Standard 8 is not being met due to cheatgrass abundance and drought degrading special status plant habitat.

Table 3. Special Status Plants and Habitat in the Montini FFR Allotment

Species	# of Element Occurrences	Habitat Description	BLM Status
Snake River milkvetch *Astragalus purshii* var. *ophiogenes*	1	Loosely aggregated moving sand and gravelly sand deposits on bluffs, talus dunes, and volcanic ash beds in big sagebrush, ricegrass, needle grass, and four-wing salt-bush	Type 4
Desert pincushion *Chaenactis stevioides*	1	Open, sandy sites in salt desert shrub communities	Type 4
White eatonella *Eatonella nivea*	1	Sandy or volcanic soils often with sagebrush	Type 4
Cowpie buckwheat *Eriogonum shockleyi* var. *packardaei*	1	Gravelly benches on lakebed sediments in shadscale and mixed desert shrub communities	Type 3
Turtleback *Psathyrotes annua*	1	Sandy, well drained soils in salt desert shrub communities	Type 3

Con Shea

Standard 8 is not being met in pastures 1, 2, and 5 due to historic grazing, fire, and drought. Pasture 2 is not meeting Standard 8 as a result of livestock trampling of Mulfords milkvetch habitat, particularly in the northwest part of the allotment.

Table 4. Special Status Plants and Habitat in the Con Shea Allotment

Species	# of Element Occurrences	Habitat Description	BLM Status
Snake River milkvetch *Astragalus purshii* var. *ophiogenes*	2	Loosely aggregated moving sand and gravelly sand deposits on bluffs, talus dunes, and volcanic ash beds in big sagebrush, ricegrass, needle grass, and four-wing salt-bush	Type 4
Mulford's milkvetch *Astragalus mulfordiae*	1	South-facing sandy slopes and ridges with needle-and-thread grass, Indian ricegrass, and bitterbrush	Type 2
Cowpie buckwheat *Eriogonum shockleyi* var.*packardaei*	1	Gravelly benches on lakebed sediments in shadscale and mixed desert shrub communities	Type 3
White-margined waxplant *Glyptopleura marginata*	1	Sandy-gravelly or loose ash soils in salt desert shrub communities	Type 4

Joyce FFR

Standard 8 is being met in Pasture 1, but it is unknown whether it is met in Pasture 2.

Table 5. Special Status Plants and Habitat in the Joyce FFR

Species	# of Element Occurrences	Habitat Description	BLM Status
Snake River milkvetch *Astragalus purshii* var. *ophiogenes*	1	Loosely aggregated moving sand and gravelly sand deposits on bluffs, talus dunes, and volcanic ash beds in big sagebrush, ricegrass, needle grass, and four-wing salt-bush	Type 4
White eatonella *Eatonella nivea*	1	Sandy or volcanic soils often with sagebrush	Type 4
White-margined waxplant *Glyptopleura marginata*	1	Sandy-gravelly or loose ash soils in salt desert shrub communities	Type 4
Rigid threadbush *Nemacladus rigidus*	1	Sandy or cindery soils in the desert shrub zone	Type 4

Murphy FFR

No populations of BLM special status plants are known to occur in this allotment; however, several sub-populations of white margined waxplant (*Glyptopleura marginata*) and rigid threadbush (*Nemacladus rigidus*) occur within ½-mile of the allotment. Due to the fact that soils and environmental factors such as elevation and precipitation within the allotment are similar to those where these populations occur, and being in close proximity to existing populations, it is likely that this allotment could provide habitat for these species.

Noxious Weeds

Weeds establish easily in highly disturbed sites such as areas adjacent to water sources, mineral and salt grounds, overgrazed areas, fencelines, and areas impacted by OHV use. Most noxious and invasive weeds are non-indigenous and have evolved under grazing practices that cause soil disturbance and erosion. These noxious and invasive weeds are also highly competitive and persistent (Sheley and Petroff, 1999). In a relatively short time, invasive species if left untreated, can dominate specific environments of the landscape where they may comprise 70%-100% of the plant community.

In areas within these six allotments where these impacts, along with climate change and wildfire, have degraded the watershed, native vegetation has been replaced with less desirable noxious and invasive species. Vehicles, horses, and livestock can then become potential vectors for the introduction and spread of weeds into these disturbed areas.

The following noxious weeds are known to exist in varying degrees within the allotments listed below. These weeds will continue to receive some form of weed treatment for control and/or eradication under all alternatives.

Table 6. Noxious Weed Summary

Allotment	**Noxious Weed Present**	**Scientific Name**
Fossil Butte	Hoary cress (whitetop) Russian knapweed Scotch thistle Tamarisk (saltcedar)	*Cardaria draba* *Acroptilon repens* *Onopordum acanthium* *Tamarix ramosissima*
Sinker Butte	Hoary cress (whitetop) Russian knapweed Scotch thistle Tamarisk (saltcedar)	*Cardaria draba* *Acroptilon repens* *Onopordum acanthium* *Tamarix ramosissima*
Con Shea	Hoary cress (whitetop) Russian knapweed Scotch thistle Rush skeletonweed	*Cardaria draba* *Acroptilon repens* *Onopordum acanthium* *Chondrilla juncea*
Joyce FFR	Russian knapweed Scotch thistle	*Acroptilon repens* *Onopordum acanthium*
Murphy FFR	No known noxious weeds	n/a
Montini FFR	No known noxious weeds	n/a

Wildlife-Including Special Status Animal Species

There is several wildlife species found on and in the vicinity of the allotments considered in this EA. Fossil Butte, Cons Shea, Montini, and Sinker Butte allotments are bordered on the north by the Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area (NCA). Some raptors use the area seasonally such as bald eagle and ferruginous hawk, while others remain year-round such as golden eagle and prairie falcon. Land in the allotments adjacent to the NCA is important for production of prey species for the high concentration of raptors that exist within the NCA. Piute ground squirrels are an important prey item found in the area. The allotments provide habitat for a myriad of small mammals and reptiles, including several special status species (sensitive), as well as mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) and pronghorn antelope (*Antilocapra americana*). Deer likely use the area most during winter months and pronghorn are yearlong residents. Use by wild ungulates is reduced when livestock are present, reducing available winter forage. Several bird species exist in the allotments and along the river including waterfowl. BLM special status species found within the allotments include loggerhead shrike, Brewer's sparrow, sage sparrow, greater sage-grouse, ferruginous hawk, prairie falcon, western burrowing owl, Great Basin black-collared lizard, western ground snake, and long-nose snake, western toad and Woodhouse's toad. Presence of special status species by allotment is listed below in Table 6.

The Snake River supports white sturgeon and redband trout are found in Snake River and seasonally in the lower portion of Sinker Creek. Because such a small portion of the river is accessible to livestock (1/4 mile), effects to white sturgeon and redband trout in Snake River would be negligible. Redband trout do; however, migrate through the lower section of Sinker Creek which is either bordered by or runs through Fossil Butte, Sinker Butte, Con Shea, Montini FFR, and Joyce FFR allotments.

Table 7. Special Status Species Presence by Allotment

Species/Listing Type[1]	Habitat Type	Allotment Name					
		Fossil Butte	**Sinker Butte**	**Montini FFR**	**Con Shea**	**Murphy FFR**	**Joyce FFR**
Sage-grouse/2[1] (*Centrocercus urophasianus)*	Sagebrush/Uplands	D[2]	NP[3]	NP[3]	NP[3]	LP[4]	D[2]
Pygmy Rabbit/2[1] (*Brachylagus idahoensis*)	Dense stands big sagebrush	UD[5]	UD[5]	UD[5]	UD[5]	UD[5]	UD[5]
Golden Eagle/BGEA[6] (*Aquila chrysaetos*)	Nest on Cliffs/Hunts in open areas	D[2]	D[2]	D[2]	D[2]	D[2]	D[2]
Redband Trout/2[1] (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*)	Sinker Creek/Snake River	D[2]	D[2]	D[2]	D[2]	NP[3]	D[2]
White Sturgeon/1[1] (*Acipenser transmontanus*)	Snake River	D[2]	D[2]	D[2]	D[2]	NP[3]	NP[3]
Spotted Bat/3[1] (*Euderma maculatum*)	Roosts in Cliffs/Rock Crevices	LP[4]	LP[4]	LP[4]	LP[4]	LP[4]	LP[4]
Prairie Falcon/3[1] (*Falco mexicanus*)	Nest on Cliffs/Hunts in open areas	D[2]	D[2]	D[2]	D[2]	LP[4]	LP[4]
Ferruginous Hawk/3[1] (*Buteo regalis*)	Nests on outcrops/low trees, Hunts in open areas	D[2]	D[2]	D[2]	D[2]	LP[4]	D[2]
Loggerhead Shrike/3[1] (*Lanius ludovicianus*)	Sagebrush/Mtn Shrublands	LP[4]	LP[4]	UD[5]	D	LP[4]	LP[4]
Sage Sparrow/3[1] (Amphispiza *belli*)	Large expanses of sagebrush	LP[4]	D[2]	UD[5]	LP[4]	LP[4]	LP[4]
Brewer's Sparrow/3[1] (*Spizella breweri*)	Sagebrush and mountain shrublands	LP[4]	D[2]	UD[5]	LP[4]	LP[4]	LP[4]
Great Basin Collared Lizard/3[1] (*Crotaphytus bicinctores*)	Rocky sparsely vegetated hillsides	D[2]	LP[4]	LP[4]	D[2]	LP[4]	LP[4]
Longnose Snake/3[1] (*Rhinocheilus lecontei*)	Deserts, grasslands, Rocky Canyons	D[2]	D[2]	D[2]	D[2]	LP[4]	LP[4]
Western Ground Snake/3[1] (*Sonora semiannulata*)	Desert Regions with loose sandy soil	D[2]	D[2]	D[2]	D[2]	LP[4]	LP[4]
Long-billed Curlew/5[1] (*Numenius americanus*)	Open, level to gently sloping short grasslands	D[2]	D[2]	LP[4]	D[2]	LP[4]	D[2]
Piute Ground Sqiurrel/3[1] (*Spermophilus mollis idahoensis*)	Native shrub and grasslands	LP[4]	LP[4]	D[2]	LP[4]	LP[4]	LP[4]
Western Toad/3[1] (*Bufo boreas*)	All upland habitats	LP[4]	LP[4]	LP[4]	LP[4]	LP[4]	LP[4]
Woodhouse's Toad/3[1] (*Bufo woodhousei*)	Aird regions of sagebrush and juniper	LP[4]	LP[4]	LP[4]	LP[4]	LP[4]	LP[4]

1= Listing Type is described in Appendix 2. D[2]=Documented, NP[3]=Not Present, LP[4]=Likely Present, UD[5]=Undocumented, BGEA[6]=Bald and Golden Eagle Act

The Fossil Butte, Sinker Butte, Montini FFR, and Con Shea allotments border the Snake River, which provides habitat for Idaho springsnails and bald eagle. These two species were protected under the Endangered Species Act but have recently been delisted. On September 8, 2007 the Idaho springsnail was removed from the Endangered Species List. The Idaho springsnail was determined not to be unique from other springsnail subspecies. Bald eagles were delisted on September 9, 2007. A nationwide five year monitoring program for the bald eagle is being completed to insure the species does not need protection. The species is still protected under the Bald Eagle and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1962 as well as the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. Bald eagles are usually present during winter months along the Snake River and golden eagles can be observed throughout the year. Since grazing occurs during winter months in these allotments and access to the Snake River is limited, effects to these species from grazing is negligible and they will not be discussed further in this document.

Greater Sage-grouse

Due to widespread population declines, greater sage-grouse is currently under status review for possible listing under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Historically, sage-grouse inhabited much of the sagebrush-dominated habitat of North America. Adults can be relatively long-lived but juvenile survival is low, resulting in low productivity (Crawford et al. 2004). Generally, habitat conditions have deteriorated or been altered to some degree throughout the range of sage-grouse. This has caused local extirpations or declines in sage-grouse populations throughout their historical range. Continued reduction in occupied habitat will result in increased fragmentation and isolation of remaining sage-grouse populations (Crawford et al. 2004).

Leks are typically located in areas of low growing vegetation surrounded by sagebrush with few to 100 or more displaying males where strong populations still exist. Leks typically reflect the availability of nesting habitat in the surrounding area. There is no evidence that lek habitat is limiting to sage-grouse populations, and, if needed, lekking habitat can be created by management activity (Schroeder et al. 1999; Crawford et al. 2004; Connelly et al. 2000).

Nests are usually placed under sagebrush plants that provide overhead cover; however, other shrubs are also used for nesting including bitterbrush and rabbitbrush. Bunchgrasses and other forms of herbaceous vegetation provide important screening cover for nests. Exotic grasses such as cheatgrass and medusahead generally do not provide adequate cover for successful nesting (Crawford et al. 2004). Most sage-grouse hens nest within 2 miles from undisturbed lek sites (Crawford et al. 2004; Wakkinen et al. 1992). Hens using leks near disturbance travel greater distances to establish nests (Lyon and Anderson 2003).

Brood-rearing habitat varies depending on availability of forbs and broods are usually found in more mesic areas where forbs are not desiccated. Forbs and insects make up the majority of the diet for sage-grouse chicks until around 12 weeks of age when they begin to forage on sagebrush (Crawford et al. 2004). Insect production has been very low the last two years within the Fossil Butte area and forb production was poor in 2007 and fair in 2008, so production levels have low.

Winter habitat is usually not a limiting factor for sage-grouse unless deep snow buries sagebrush. Sage-grouse utilize medium to tall sagebrush communities south and west facing slopes and wind-swept ridges are also used (Crawford et al. 2004).

Fossil Butte - This allotment provides habitat for several species of wildlife and special status species (Table 8). There are several habitat types in Fossil Butte and a diversity of wildlife is supported. Habitat along the Snake River is thick and heavily vegetated in some areas but other areas are rocky and not as heavily vegetated. The riparian area supports the greatest diversity of wildlife on the allotment especially birds. Bird species commonly observed in the area include herons, egrets, ibis, ducks, osprey, bald eagles, red-tailed and Swainson's hawks, sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawks, northern goshawks, ring-necked pheasants, California quail, Virginia rail, sora, shorebirds, gulls, terns, owls, hummingbirds, flycatchers, swallows, magpies and crows, chickadees, wrens, thrushes, vireos, warblers, sparrows, juncos, blackbirds, and finches. Wildlife species existing in the riparian area of Fossil Butte likely include woodrats, mice, voles, beaver, porcupine, marmot, and muskrat. Other mammals found in riparian/wetlands are shrews, mule and whitetailed deer, red fox, skunks, mink, weasels, raccoon, cottontail, gophers, and bats. Snakes and lizards as well as frogs and toads are also common in the riparian area.

One route of the historic Oregon Trail passes through the northern portion of the allotment. In that area, there is sparse grass cover and the land is mostly bare except for stands of greasewood, rabbitbrush and scattered sagebrush. Various species commonly use this habitat type and may include mule deer, coyotes, cottontails, jackrabbits, raccoons, gophers, western meadowlarks, loggerhead shrikes, sage thrashers, dark-eyed juncos, whitecrowned sparrows, robins, northern harrier, short-eared owls, golden eagles, ring-necked pheasants, California quail, gray partridge, and magpies use greasewood habitat, as do gopher snakes, racers, striped whipsnakes, rattlesnakes, western whiptail lizards, side-botched lizards, leopard lizards, western fence lizard and horned lizards, spadefoot, western and Woodhouse's toads.

A big portion of this allotment is comprised of salt-desert shrub plant community. In the salt desert shrub vegetation, common mammals include kangaroo rats, mice, pronghorn, coyotes, badgers, and jackrabbits. Bird species include horned larks, lark sparrows, prairie falcons, ferruginous and red-tailed hawks, golden eagles, great horned owls, and burrowing owls. Reptiles known to occur in salt desert shrub include whiptail and leopard lizards, horned lizards, side-botched lizards, rattlesnakes and gopher snakes. The southern portion of the allotment transitions from salt desert shrub to low elevation shrubs which are composed of Wyoming big sagebrush, bitterbrush, Great Basin sagebrush, and several forb species. There are some healthy stands of native grasses including Indian ricegrass, bluebunch wheatgrass, and Sandberg's bluegrass but they are not as prevalent as managers would like to see. Cheatgrass is common and medusahead is present on the allotment. The sagebrush habitat supports a variety of wildlife species such as mule deer, pronghorn antelope, coyotes, badger, jackrabbit, cottontail and a myriad of small mammals. Common birds include meadow lark, sage thrasher, sage sparrow, Brewer's sparrow, ravens, and ferruginous hawk.

Rocky areas of this allotment also provide habitat for a wide variety of species. Bobcat, marmot and woodrat are commonly observed in such habitat. Some of the bird species associated with rocky habitat include wrens, rosy finches, swifts, swallows, and chukars. These areas also

support sensitive reptile species such as Great Basin black collared lizards, western ground and long nosed snakes.

Perennial grasses are scattered through much of the allotment but are most prevalent on the southern and western portion. The eastern border of this allotment is the Snake River and livestock have access to a quarter mile reach of the river, which was rated as Properly Functioning.

Standards 4 and 8 were not being met and livestock was a significant factor (USDI 2007). The level of use in this allotment is contributing to the failure to make progress towards meeting the standard. Utilization levels were recorded above 70 percent in 1993 and at 68 percent in 1999. In 2000, use on key species was as high as 70 percent and 55 percent in 2008. Utilization at such levels is most likely not leaving sufficient vegetation for wildlife habitat or foraging. Many of the species listed above that use the various habitat types in this allotment are in need of adequate cover and forage to successfully survive and reproduce. Winter grazing usually has fewer impacts to wildlife but when an area such as Fossil Butte is overgrazed it can make the area unsuitable for several species and while some members of the species may persist in the area they may not be in numbers that insure survival over time.

Greater Sage-grouse

Only the western one-fifth of Fossil Butte Allotment is identified as sage-grouse habitat; the remainder lacks suitable vegetation to support the needs of sage-grouse (Table 8). The one assessment conducted in 2002 concluded that grasses are inadequate for sage grouse habitat. However, four historic sage-grouse leks (breeding grounds) occur either within or immediately adjacent to Fossil Butte Allotment. This is not surprising since salt desert shrub communities provide suitable lekking habitat. Suitable nesting habitat is found mainly to the south where sagebrush and taller shrubs become more prevalent. Surveys during the 1994 to 2007 time-period identified one active lek on the allotment with declining attendance. One male sage-grouse was documented in 2005 and no birds attended the lek in 2006 or 2007.

Table 8. Sage Grouse Breeding Habitat Assessment, Fossil Butte Allotment, 2002

Habitat Indicator	**Suitable Habitat**	**Marginal Habitat**	**Unsuitable Habitat**
Average Sagebrush Canopy Cover	X		
Average Sagebrush Height	X		
Sagebrush Growth Form		X	
Average Grass and Forb Height			X
Average Perennial Grass Canopy Cover			X
Average Forb Canopy Cover			X
Preferred Forb Abundance and Diversity		X	
Overall Site Evaluation			**X**

Sinker Butte - All of Sinker Butte Allotment is contained within the Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area. The allotment is adjacent to the Snake River for 9.1 miles, eight miles of which is public land. Rim rock restricts livestock access except for one road and one

trail; these access points have been gated and gap fencing blocks access to the bench along the river.

The following inventory and monitoring data are available at the Owyhee Field Office: raptor nest inventory and monitoring, curlew inventory and monitoring, reptile inventory, redband trout passage (but not spawning) on Sinker Creek, fish survey data June 15, 1977 and September 10, 1976. Riparian habitat for fisheries is rated as unsatisfactory (FAR, not meeting CWAL for temperature or sediment). Due to the persistence of sagebrush cover, Sinker Butte Allotment does provide nesting habitat for upland dependent special status species such as loggerhead shrike, Brewer's sparrow, sage sparrow, ferruginous hawk, and western burrowing owl. Occupied habitat also exists for sensitive reptile species such as Great Basin black-collared lizard, western ground snake, and long-nose snake.

Sage-grouse Habitat Evaluations
This allotment does not provide sage-grouse habitat.

This allotment was meeting standard 8 for sensitive species, which indicates that adequate forage and cover for wildlife were being maintained on the allotment after the grazing season.

Montini FFR - The north pasture has about 0.5 miles of Sinker Creek and 0.25 miles of Snake River frontage. About 100 yards are accessible to livestock at the mouth of Sinker Creek with the Snake River. The south pasture has approximately 0.25 miles of public land frontage on the Snake River, of which about 100 yards are accessible to livestock. Mitigation consists of herding livestock away from the creek and river. Future fencing could exclude livestock from these access points and reduce impacts to the stream and river banks, and riparian areas.

Surveys and inventories
Data available in the Owyhee Field Office includes: Snake River snail surveys, raptor nest inventory and monitoring; curlew inventory and monitoring; reptile inventory; and redband trout-Sinker Creek- migratory passage, but not spawning.

Although plant communities are in a depleted condition, Montini FFR does provide habitat for sensitive reptile species such as Great Basin black-collared lizard, western ground snake, and long-nose snake. Long-billed curlews, a sensitive species of growing concern, are known to breed in Montini FFR. Additionally, spotted bats are known to occur along the Snake River in the allotment. Montini Allotment does not have suitable habitat for greater sage-grouse.

This allotment was meeting standard 8 for sensitive species, which indicates that adequate forage and cover for wildlife were being maintained on the allotment after the grazing season.

Con Shea - Con Shea Allotment was not meeting the standard for special status animal species, but current livestock grazing management practices were not significant factors. This is primarily due to the lack of perennial native grasses and native shrubs and their subsequent replacement by annual herbaceous species. Past wildfires removed the perennial vegetation. All of Con Shea Allotment with the exception of a small portion in the southern end is contained in the Snake River Birds of Prey Area and as such has a high management priority for raptors and

their prey. Small-mammals, common prey for several raptor species, are maintained at more constant numbers when they have perennial vegetation present that is not as susceptible to annual precipitation fluctuations as annual grasses. Grazing in the allotment occurs between November 1 and February 28 each year, the dormant season for perennial grasses. Even if grazing was curtailed, recovery would be extremely slow and an all native plant communities may take several years to re-establish without intervention. Con Shea Allotment will probably remain as an annual grass/forb habitat type that produces highly fluctuating vegetative production and associated small mammal numbers that will not produce a steady diet for raptors.

The burned areas do provide important habitat for some species including nesting habitat for long-billed curlew and burrowing owls. Several additional sensitive animal species are known to occur within the allotment including ferruginous hawks, prairie falcons, loggerhead shrikes, sage sparrows, Brewer's sparrows, Great Basin black-collared lizard, longnose snake, western ground snake, western toad, and Woodhouse's toad.

Joyce FFR - Joyce FFR is an allotment made up of two pastures and contains a total of 1700 acres of public land. Over 75% of Joyce FFR is comprised of land ownership other than BLM lands. The allotment is located six miles southeast of Murphy and seven miles northwest of Oreana, Idaho; the northern allotment boundary borders Highway 78.

Pasture 1 primarily contains salt-desert shrub habitat. Species present in salt desert shrub are identified in the Fossil Butte section above. Standard 8, the rangeland health standard for special status animal species was not being met in the 2003 determination, and livestock grazing management was a significant factor.

Several special status animal species, specifically Western burrowing owls, ferruginous hawks, and long-billed curlew are all species either known to use the pasture or have been documented adjacent to Pasture 1. Sage grouse are known to occupy Pasture 1, but the majority of BLM lands within the pasture do not contain sagebrush. Three historic leks occur within or immediately adjacent to the pasture. One of the leks adjacent to the pasture (in Fossil Butte Allotment) had attendance as recently as 2005 although there was only one male bird. No birds have been observed at the lek since 2005 and the lek is likely no longer active.

Pasture 2 of Joyce FFR Allotment is located in higher elevation terrain than Pasture 1 and has correspondingly more mesic vegetation. Mule deer, elk, pronghorn, black-tailed jackrabbits, various small mammals, shrub-nesting birds, and reptiles all use or transition through the pasture. Low sagebrush is the predominant shrub, but Wyoming big sagebrush also occurs in the pasture that was generally rated as suitable for sage-grouse nesting and early-brood rearing habitat. Pasture 2 was determined to be meeting Standard 8 in 2003. Other special status animal species that potentially use the pasture include ferruginous hawks, sage sparrows, Brewer's sparrows, prairie falcons, and pygmy rabbits. No threatened or endangered vertebrate species are known to occur in Joyce FFR Allotment.

Murphy FFR - Murphy FFR is a small allotment (306 acres) containing only 56 acres of public land and is located 1.5 miles southeast of Murphy, Idaho along Highway 78. Due to past land uses and wildfires, wildlife habitat has been reduced to annual grasses with no measurable shrub

cover. A complete stand of annual grasses fails to meet the needs of most wildlife species because there is no nesting cover, escape cover, and a lack of palatable vegetation for the majority of the year. Since many small mammals derive their water-intake from green vegetation, the allotment is only suitable during spring of the year. A notable exception is the long-billed curlew which selects areas of low vegetation for breeding habitat in the Great Basin. Murphy FFR provides curlew habitat and the species is known to breed within the allotment. Few other species benefit from annual grass dominated habitats. Some lizards and snakes as well as small mammals may persist in these degraded environments, but population numbers would be low. Greater sage-grouse are known to utilize the allotment on a limited basis, although no breeding habitat exists. When green, annual grasses can provide spring-time forage for ungulates such as mule deer and pronghorn.

Special status animal species that may use the allotment include, but are not limited to, prairie falcons, Western burrowing owls, ferruginous hawks, loggerhead shrikes, greater sage-grouse, long-billed curlews, Great Basin collard lizards, and longnose snakes.

This allotment was meeting standard 8 for sensitive species, which indicates that adequate forage and cover for wildlife were being maintained on the allotment after the grazing season.

Riparian Areas & Wet lands, Stream Channels and Floodplains and Water Quality

Riparian

Riparian areas include approximately 16 miles of the Snake River, three miles of Sinker Creek, and 22 miles of Fossil Creek (Map 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5). There are no known natural lentic sites within the allotments. The Murphy FFR allotment contains no lotic resources.

The Snake River flows east to west and is the northern border of the Con Shea allotment and the eastern border of Sinker Butte, Montini FFR, and Fossil Butte allotments. Riparian vegetation is dominated by diverse herbaceous species including various sedges, rushes, bulrushes, cattails and grasses. Woody species including various willows, cottonwood, Russian olive, and others occur as relatively minor components. Due to bluffs and steep terrain, livestock have limited access to the Snake River and consequently, little affect on riparian and channel morphology. In 2003, 3.9 miles of the Snake River in the Con Shea allotment were assessed as proper functioning.

Sinker Creek is a perennial stream that flows west to east into the Snake River, and is the border between Con Shea-Sinker Butte allotments in the north and Fossil Butte allotment in the south. Sinker Creek also flows through the northern end of the Montini FFR and bisects the Joyce FFR allotment (though only 0.1 miles is on public lands). Woody riparian vegetation includes various willows, cottonwood, and a diversity of other shrubs. Herbaceous communities consist of various rushes, sedges and grasses. A water gap is located near the northwest part of Fossil Butte allotment. In 2003, 1.1 miles of Sinker Creek in the Con Shea allotment was assessed as proper functioning. In 2001 two reaches of Sinker Creek (0.8 mile reach in the Montini FFR and a 1.1 mile reach of Sinker Butte allotment) were assessed as functional at-risk and at the high range of functional at-risk, respectively, because stream channel morphology was out of balance with the landscape setting, and the plant community composition and structure was not adequate

to dissipate energy during high flow events. Dewatering due to upstream diversions was negatively affecting stream channel and floodplain functionality along the 1.1 mile reach. In 2003, a 0.1 mile reach of Sinker Creek within the Joyce FFR was assessed as properly functioning. The current grazing management practices have been assessed and were determined not to be the cause of the Sinker Creek riparian deficiencies (USDI, 2007a; USDI, 2007b; USDI, 2007c; USDI 2004).

Fossil Creek and its tributaries flow from west to east across the middle of the Fossil Butte allotment. A 2.0 mile reach between Rye Patch Ranch and a canal has perennial flow. All stream flow is diverted at the canal, and no water from the drainage reaches the Snake River. Stream flows are ephemeral downstream of the canal diversion.

In 2001, three reaches of Fossil Creek (totaling 3.2 miles) were assessed and riparian data collected. Noxious and invasive weeds (salt cedar, whitetop, and Russian olive) were present on all assessed segments of Fossil Creek. Composition and structure of hydric vegetation was lacking, particularly along the lower portions of the creek, which are ephemeral due to dewatering by upstream diversions. Active bank erosion was low on all three segments. The 0.8 mile stream reach nearest the Snake River (identified as FOS 1) was assessed at the low end of functional at-risk because hydric vegetation was not present in adequate amounts to protect stream banks and dissipate energy, and the floodplain and channel characteristics are inadequate to dissipate stream energy. This reach was not supporting obligate riparian vegetation due to an upstream water diversion into a canal, and lower end of reach was noted as having excessive sediment deposition or erosion. A 1.0 mile stream reach west of FOS 1 (identified as FOS 2) was assessed at the mid to high end of functional at-risk. Water diversions associated with a dam and canals are impacting the lower portion of this reach, as indicated by the lack of floodplain inundation and that stream channel form is out of balance with the landscape setting. A 1.4 mile reach west of FOS 2 (identified as FOS 3) was assessed as proper functioning, though stream sinuosity, width/depth ratio, and gradient were not always in balance with the landscape setting. Herbaceous riparian stubble heights were also measured on the same reaches in 2001, and the mean stubble heights were four, ten, and fourteen inches for FOS 1, 2, and 3, respectively.

Water quality

The Snake River along with two tributaries, Sinker Creek and Fossil Creek, are in the Mid-Snake River/Succor Creek sub-basin (hydrologic unit number 17050103). Idaho Department of Environmental Quality identified the Snake River as water quality limited for bacteria, dissolved oxygen, flow alteration, nutrients, pH, and sediment, and developed TMDLs for nutrients and dissolved gases (IDEQ, 2004). In 2003, IDEQ proposed to remove sediment, pH, and bacteria from the pollutant list. Designated uses for the Snake River include cold water aquatic life (CWAL), primary contact recreation, and domestic water supply. Sinker Creek has also been identified as water quality limited due to flow alteration, sediment, and temperature, and TMDLs were developed for sediment and temperature (IDEQ, 2005). Designated uses for Sinker Creek include CWAL, salmonid spawning, and primary contact recreation. Fossil Creek has not been assigned specific beneficial uses by IDEQ, nor any water quality evaluated, and presumed beneficial uses for Fossil Creek are secondary contact recreation, cold-water biota, agricultural water supply, wildlife habitat, and aesthetics.

Water quality data collected by BLM is limited to one instantaneous water temperature measurement. Fossil Creek (FOS 2 reach) was collected on May 11, 2001 and was measured at 19° Celsius. Sinker Creek in Sinker Butte and Montini FFR allotments is not meeting Standard 7 (Water Quality) of the Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and the cause is undetermined due to the lack of water quality data (USDI, 2007b and USDI, 2007c).

Cultural Resources

The grazing allotments under consideration for this action comprise a landscape that has been associated with humankind for thousands of years. The land provided aboriginal peoples and later Euro-American settlers the opportunity to construct suitable dwellings, acquire needed natural resources and maintain an adequate subsistence.

Under the State Protocol Agreement between the Idaho BLM and the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) concerning grazing permit renewals, a Class I literature search has been conducted. Several project related cultural resources inventories have been completed within the allotment boundaries and as a result of these surveys, 60 cultural sites are known to exist. The sites are of various types and chronologies and none of these cultural properties are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. There are no recorded or known traditional cultural areas within the allotments. None of the recorded cultural sites are known to be adversely impacted by livestock.

All of the proposed range development projects are subject to a cultural resources compliance inventory and review as mandated under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and to SHPO and tribal consultation before implementation. If necessary, mitigation measures to avoid adverse impacts to sites may include but are not limited to: abandoning a project, constructing protective devices, adjusting fence routes and watering locations, changing the grazing season, changing livestock numbers, maintaining or reconstructing old range projects or constructing new range projects to reduce or eliminate impacts to cultural resources.

Range Management

The BLM has completed rangeland health assessments for the Fossil Butte, Sinker Butte, Montini FFR, Con Shea, Joyce FFR and Murphy FFR allotments. These documents are available upon request. The BLM Authorized Officer has determined that in two allotments, existing grazing management practices or levels of grazing use on public lands are significant factors in failing to achieve the standards for rangeland health and in conformance with the guidelines for livestock grazing management. The current acreages by ownership associated with each allotment, and a summary of authorized use is presented in Table 9 below.

Table 9. Season of use and AUMs by allotment

Allot No.	Allot. Name	Season of use	Category	Class of Lvstk	Active Permitted Use	Public Acres	State Acres	Private Acres	Total Acres
0535	Fossil Butte	10/01-02/28	Maintain	Cattle, Horse	1,622 AUMs	40,128	1,940	2,020	44,089
0578	Sinker Butte	11/15-02/28	Maintain	Cattle	707 AUMs	7,076	0	339	7,415
0654	Montini FFR	03/01-02/28	Custodial	Cattle	140 AUMs	2,265	306	1,029	3,600
0571	Con Shea	11/01-02/28	Maintain	Cattle	990 AUMS	12,666	0	904	13,570
0487	Joyce FFR	12/01-12/31	Improve	Cattle	87 AUMs	1,703	958	4,473	7,134
0486	Murphy FFR	12/01-12/31	Custodial	Cattle	5 AUMs	55	0	251	306

Fossil Butte - This allotment is located approximately two miles northeast of Oreana, Idaho in Owyhee County. Elevations range between 2,700 to 3,600 feet. Landforms are generally composed of terraces and slopes with shallow to very deep loamy soils and scattered badlands. The Fossil Butte allotment is a common allotment with three individual operators, utilizing a cow/calve pair one herd system. Additionally, up to 22 horses are authorized to graze on the allotment during the same season of use. This category M (Maintain) allotment consists of one individual pasture.

Sinker Butte - This allotment is located on the bench west of the Snake River approximately seven miles east of Murphy, Idaho. Elevations range from 2300 to 3400 feet. Landforms are generally composed of table lands and plug domes. Soils are very fine sandy and silty loams that vary in subsurface rock fragments. In 1981 a portion of pasture 1 was burned in the Guffey Butte Fire. The burned portion of the pasture was seeded shortly after the fire; however, due to drought conditions, the seeding was not successful. This category M allotment consists of three pastures. One permittee is permitted to operate a cow/calf operation in this allotment.

Montini FFR – This allotment is located approximately nine miles east of Murphy, Idaho in Owyhee County. Elevations within the allotment range from 2,400 feet to 2,600 feet. The Snake River borders the northeast portion of the allotment. Landforms are generally bottomland and structural benches. The majority of the soils are sands to sandy loams. This category C (custodial) allotment consists of one pasture. One permittee is permitted to operate a cow/calf operation on this allotment.

Con Shea – This allotment is located approximately three miles northeast of Oreana, Idaho in Owyhee County. Elevations range between 2,300 to 3,400 feet. The landforms are generally composed of terraces and slopes with shallow to very deep loamy soils and scattered badlands. This category M allotment consists of five pastures. One permittee is permitted to operate a cow/calf operation in the allotment.

Joyce FFR - This allotment is located approximately five miles northeast of Oreana, Idaho in Owyhee County. Elevations range between 3,000 to 5,200 feet. The landforms are terraces and slopes with shallow to very deep loamy soils and scattered badlands. This category I (improve)

allotment consists of two pastures. One permittee is permitted to operate a cow/calf operations in this allotment.

Murphy FFR - This allotment is located approximately three miles northeast of Oreana, Idaho in Owyhee County. Elevations range between 3,000 to 3,100 feet. The landforms are terraces and slopes with shallow to very deep loamy soils and scattered badlands. This category C allotment consists of one pasture. One permittee is permitted to operate a cow/calf operation in the allotment.

Recreation

Allotments in this group lie within three existing Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMA's), where recreation is one of the principal management objectives. A SRMA is an area where special or more intensive types of recreation management are needed and greater investments for recreation management are anticipated due to the intensity of use the area receives. The Joyce and Murphy allotments lie entirely within the Owyhee Front SRMA, while the Fossil Butte allotment is split with the eastern half lying within the Snake River Birds of Prey SRMA, and the western half in the Owyhee Front SRMA. The Sinker and Montini allotments lie completely within the Snake River Birds of Prey SRMA. The majority of the Con Shea allotment lies within the Snake River Birds of Prey SRMA, with a small portion of the western pasture being in the Oregon National Historic Trails SRMA.

With their close proximity to the Treasure Valley, the proposed allotments are popular destinations for motorized recreationists. There is an extensive network of trails throughout the area that are enjoyed by motorized and non-motorized users alike. Other recreational activities in the area include hunting, bird watching, picnicking, sight-seeing, hiking, driving for pleasure, nature study, and camping.

Joyce FFR, Murphy, and a portion of the Fossil Butte allotment that resides on the south and west sides of Highway 78, lie within the Murphy Subregion which has recently undergone travel management planning. Travel management planning is the proactive management of public access and natural/cultural resources in compliance with travel-related regulations and according to the best land use management principles. Implementation of this travel plan will likely begin in the summer of 09.

The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) classification is used to characterize the type of recreational opportunity settings, activities, and experience opportunities that can be expected in different areas of public land. These areas provide for a few different settings for recreationists, with the majority of the allotments being classified as Rural and Semi-primitive motorized, a portion of the Fossil Butte allotment along the western edge being classified as Roaded Natural, and a section within the southernmost Joyce allotment is classified as Semi-primitive non-motorized.

The Rural classification is an area that is characterized by a substantially modified natural environment. Resource modifications and utilization practices are obvious, the sights and sounds of man are readily evident, and the concentration of users is often moderate to high (USDI-BLM, July 1999).

The semi-primitive motorized and the semi-primitive non-motorized classifications are areas that are characterized by a primarily unmodified natural environment. There is evidence of other users in the area; however, management actions encourage limited contacts between users. Semi-primitive motorized classification permit motorized uses within the area, and semi-primitive non-motorized does not (USDI-BLM, July 1999).

The Roaded Natural classification is an area that is characterized by a generally natural environment with only moderate evidence of the sights and sounds of man. Resource modifications and utilization practices are evident, but harmonize with the natural environment (USDI-BLM, July 1999).

The off-highway vehicle designation for the area is limited to designated roads and trails. The over-snow vehicle (OSV) designation in the area is open, with no special restrictions. OHV and OSV regulations apply to permitted uses such as livestock operations, as well as to general public use.

Preliminary Alternative Development

Alternative A - Current Management

Associated grazing permits would be renewed at the same level and without modification to the mandatory terms and conditions found on the 1997 term grazing permits. Other terms and conditions would continue to include Judge B. Lynn Winmill's [interim] terms and conditions as follows:

On February 29, 2000, Judge B. Lynn Winmill, United States District Court for the District of Idaho, issued a Memorandum Decision and Order with the following interim terms and conditions that currently apply to the allotments and permits listed in this alternative:

1. *Key herbaceous riparian vegetation, where streambank stability is dependent upon it, will have a minimum stubble height of 4 inches on the streambank, along the greenline, after the growing season;*

2. *Key riparian browse vegetation will not be used more than 50% of the current annual twig growth that is within reach of the animals;*

3. *Key herbaceous riparian vegetation on riparian areas, other than the streambanks will not be grazed more than 50% during the growing season, or 60% during the dormant season; and*

4. *Streambank damage attributable to grazing livestock will be less than 10% on a stream segment.*

Fossil Butte (0535)
Fossil Butte is located approximately two miles northeast of Oreana, Idaho in Owyhee County. Elevations range between 2,700 to 3,600 feet. Landforms are generally composed of terraces and slopes with shallow to very deep loamy soils and scattered badlands.

A total of 1,622 AUMs of permitted fall/winter use is authorized for cattle (1,519 AUMs) and horses (103 AUMs) (Table 11). This allotment consists of a single pasture with three permitted livestock operators grazing in common (Map 1).

Table 11. Alternative A; Permitted Use for the Fossil Butte Allotment

Operator Name (Number)	Livestock		Season of Use	Federal Land	AUMs		
	Num.	Kind			Active	Suspended	Permitted
Joyce Livestock (1101423)	190[1]	Cattle	10/01-02/28	94%	888	0	991
	31[1]	Horses	11/01-02/15	94%	103	0	
Nick Nettleton (1101482)	76[1]	Cattle	10/01-02/28	100%	380	0	380
Miller/Kershner (1101486)	51[1]	Cattle	10/01-02/28	100%	251	0	251
Total					1622	0	1622

[1]Annually, with prior approval by the authorized officer, livestock numbers could vary as long as season of use and active AUMs are not exceeded.

Sinker Butte (0578)
Sinker Butte is located on the bench west of the Snake River approximately seven miles east of Murphy, Idaho. Elevations range from 2,300 to 3,400 feet. Landforms are generally composed of table lands and plug domes. Soils are very fine sandy and silty loams that vary in subsurface rock fragments. In 1981, a portion of pasture 1 was burned in the Guffey Butte Fire. The burned portion of the pasture was seeded shortly after the fire; however, due to drought conditions, the seeding was not successful.

A total of 707 AUMs are authorized for permitted cattle use (Table 12). The allotment is divided into three pastures with one permitted livestock operator (Map 2). Specific pasture use periods are coordinated annually with BLM personnel prior to turn out.

Table 12. Alternative A; Permitted Use for the Sinker Butte Allotment

Operator Name (Number)	Livestock		Season of Use	Federal Land	AUMs		
	Num.	Kind			Active	Suspended	Permitted
Sierra Del Rio (1100242)	203[1]	Cattle	11/15-02/28	100%	707	0	707

[1]Annually, with prior approval by the authorized officer, livestock numbers could vary as long as season of use and active AUMs are not exceeded.

Montini FFR (0654)
Montini FFR is located approximately nine miles east of Murphy, Idaho in Owyhee County. Elevations within the allotment range from 2,400 feet to 2,600 feet. The Snake River borders the northeast portion of the allotment. Landforms are generally bottomland and structural benches. The majority of the soils are sands to sandy loams.

A total of 140 AUMs are authorized for permitted cattle use (Table 13). The season of use is at the discretion of the permittee. The allotment has one permittee (Map 3).

Table 13. Alternative A; Permitted Use for Montini FFR Allotment

Operator Name (Number)	Livestock		Season of Use	Federal Land	AUMs		
	Num.	Kind			Active	Suspended	Permitted
Sierra Del Rio (1100242)	11[1]	Cattle	03/01-02/28[1]	100%	140	0	140

[1]Annually, with prior approval by the authorized officer, livestock numbers and season of use could vary at the permittees discretion as long as resource degradation doesn't occur on public land.

A minimum of four inches of median stubble height must remain on key hydric herbaceous species at the end of the grazing season along Sinker Creek as measured at key areas where appropriate for stream channel stability.

Con-Shea (0571)
Con-Shea is located approximately three miles northeast of Oreana, Idaho in Owyhee County. Elevations range between 2,300 to 3,400 feet. The landforms are generally composed of terraces and slopes with shallow to very deep loamy soils and scattered badlands.

A total permitted use of 990 AUMs of fall/winter use is authorized for cattle (Table 14). The allotment has one permittee operating in five pastures. The permittee would continue to be responsible for using and maintaining the drift fence eliminating livestock grazing and trailing through the Mulfords milkvetch populations located in the northwest corner of pasture 2 (Map 4).

Table 14. Alternative A; Permitted Use for the Con-Shea Allotment

Operator Name (Number)	Livestock		Season of Use	Federal Land	AUMs		
	Num.	Kind			Active	Suspended	Permitted
Joyce Livestock (1101423)	251[1]	Cattle	11/01-02/28	100%	990	0	990

[1]Annually, with prior approval by the authorized officer, livestock numbers could vary up to 325 cattle as long as season of use and active AUMs are not exceeded.

Joyce FFR (0487)
Joyce FFR is located approximately five miles northeast of Oreana, Idaho in Owyhee County. Elevations range between 3,000 to 5,200 feet. The landforms are terraces and slopes with shallow to very deep loamy soils and scattered badlands.

A total permitted use of 87 AUMs of fall/winter use is authorized for cattle (Table 15). The allotment has one permittee operating in two pastures (Map 5).

Table 15. Alternative A; Permitted Use for Joyce FFR Allotment

Operator Name (Number)	Livestock		Season of Use	Federal Land	AUMs		
	Num.	Kind			Active	Suspended	Permitted
Joyce Livestock (1101423)	85[1]	Cattle	12/01-12/31[1]	100%	87	0	87

[1]Permitted dates of 12/01-12/31 are for billing purposes only. Annually, with prior approval by the authorized officer, livestock numbers and season of use could vary at the permittees discretion as long as resource degradation doesn't occur on public land.

Murphy FFR (0486)

Murphy FFR is located approximately 3 miles northeast of Oreana, Idaho in Owyhee County. Elevations range between 3,000 to 3,100 feet. The landforms are terraces and slopes with shallow to very deep loamy soils and scattered badlands.

A total permitted use of 5 AUMs of fall/winter use is authorized for cattle (Table 16). The allotment has one permittee (Map 6).

Table 16. Alternative A; Permitted Use for the Murphy FFR Allotment.

Operator Name (Number)	Livestock		Season of Use	Federal Land	AUMs		
	Num.	Kind			Active	Suspended	Permitted
Joyce Livestock (1101423)	5[1]	Cattle	12/01-12/31[1]	100%	5	0	5

[1]Permitted dates of 12/01-12/31 are for billing purposes only. Annually, with prior approval by the authorized officer, livestock numbers and season of use could vary at the permittees discretion as long as resource degradation doesn't occur on public land.

Alternative B

Grazing permits for the Con Shea Allotment (0571) would be issued as described in Alternative A.

Fossil Butte (0535)

A total permitted use of 1,622 AUMs of fall/winter use would be authorized for cattle (1,519 AUMs) and horses (103 AUMs) (Table 17). This one pasture allotment would have three permittees operating in common.

Table 17. Alternative B; Permitted Use for the Fossil Butte Allotment.

Operator Name (Number)	Livestock		Season of Use	Federal Land	AUMs		
	Num.[1]	Kind			Active	Suspended	Permitted
Joyce Livestock (1101423)	190	Cattle	10/01-02/28	94%	888	0	991
	22	Horses	10/01-02/28	94%	103	0	
Nick Nettleton (1101482)	76	Cattle	10/01-02/28	100%	380	0	380
Miller/Kershner (1101486)	51	Cattle	10/01-02/28	100%	251	0	251
Total					1622	0	1622

[1]Annually, with prior approval by the authorized officer, livestock numbers could vary as long as season of use and active AUMs are not exceeded.

This alternative proposes the same season of use as alternative A. Fossil Butte failed to meet standards 1, 4, and 8 and livestock was a significant factor at the time. The apparent reason this standards were not being met, was to areas of concentrated use exceeding the desire 50% utilization standard. Limited livestock water sources lead to heavy use in areas where water was available to livestock. Under this alternative we propose to establish additional water sources to eliminate concentrated use and move towards meeting the standard.

Five existing and six new water haul sites would be proposed (Map 7). Permittees would be responsible for hauling water on designated routes and providing and maintaining BLM approved wildlife escape devices in each tank.

Permittees would coordinate with BLM when salting upland areas to protect sensitive plant species. Salting would further enhance the benefits of water hauling.

Sinker Butte (0578)

BLM recently acquired 640 acres within the Sinker Butte Allotment. This pasture and the associated 64 AUMs would be incorporated into the allotment. A total of 771 AUMs of permitted use consisting of 671 active AUMs of fall/winter use and 100 active AUMs of spring use would be authorized for cattle in this allotment (Table 18). The allotment would be divided into 5 pastures (Map 8).

Table 18. Alternative B; Permitted Use for the Sinker Butte Allotment.

Operator Name, Number	Livestock		Season of Use	Federal Land	AUMs		
	Num.	Kind			Active	Suspended	Permitted
Sierra Del Rio (1100242)	149[1]	Cattle	10/15-02/28	100%	671	0	771
	101[1]	Cattle	04/01-04/30	100%	100	0	

[1]Annually, with prior approval by the authorized officer, livestock numbers could vary up to 150 cattle during the fall/winter season of use as long as the season of use and active AUMs are not exceeded; and livestock numbers could vary up to 101 cattle during the spring season of use as long as the season of use and active AUMs are not exceeded.

A five pasture rest rotation system would be implemented as outlined in Table 19. The grazing prescription would involve one year of spring use followed by a year of rest and three years of winter use. This prescribed use would be rotated throughout the five pastures.

Utilization of key riparian browse vegetation along Sinker Creek would be measured in terms of incidence of use. The incidence of use on shrubs such as willow, alder and dogwood would not exceed 25% on those plants generally less than 3 feet in height in any given year.
Stream bank damage attributable to livestock grazing would not exceed 10% on segments of Sinker Creek.

At least a 4-inch median stubble height would be attained for key hydric herbaceous species such as Nebraska sedge and beaked sedge at the end of the grazing period in the riparian areas along Sinker Creek.

Water temperatures and bacterial concentration data would be monitored on a 5 year cycle on Sinker Creek in accordance with the water quality restoration plan.

A 1.5 mile pasture division fence would be constructed to divide pasture 1 into two pastures (Map 8). This division fence would be a barbed three-wire fence constructed to BLM/Boise District-Big Game specifications.

Table19. Alternative B; Grazing Management for the Sinker Butte Allotment

Pastures	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Pasture 1	Spring[1]	Rest	Winter[2]	Winter[2]	Winter[2]
Pasture 2	Winter[2]	Spring[1]	Rest	Winter[2]	Winter[2]
Pasture 3	Winter[2]	Winter[2]	Spring[1]	Rest	Winter[2]
Pasture 4	Winter[2]	Winter[2]	Winter[2]	Spring[1]	Rest
Pasture 5	Rest	Winter[2]	Winter[2]	Winter[2]	Spring[1]

[1]*Spring use would occur between 4/1-4/30*
[2]*Winter use would occur between 10/15-2/28*

A water quality restoration plan (to be included in the final Fossil Butte Group environmental assessment) would be implemented for Sinker Creek in the Sinker Butte Allotment.

Montini FFR (0654)
A total permitted use of 140 AUMs would be authorized for cattle (Table 20). Use would occur at the permittee's discretion as long as resource degradation does not occur in the allotment. The allotment would have one permittee.

Table 20. Alternative B; Permitted Use for Montini FFR Allotment

Operator Name (Number)	Livestock		Season of Use	Federal Land	AUMs		
	Num.	Kind			Active	Suspended	Permitted
Sierra Del Rio (1100242)	11[1]	Cattle	03/01-02/28[1]	100%	140	0	140

[1]Annually, with prior approval by the authorized officer, livestock numbers and season of use could vary at the permittees discretion as long as resource degradation doesn't occur on public land.

A water quality restoration plan (to be included in the final Fossil Butte Group environmental assessment) would be implemented for Sinker Creek in the Montini FFR Allotment.

Utilization of key riparian browse vegetation along Sinker Creek would be measured in terms of incidence of use. The incidence of use on shrubs such as willow, alder and dogwood would not exceed 25% on those plants generally less than three feet in height in any given year.

Stream bank damage attributable to livestock grazing would not exceed 10% on segments of Sinker Creek.

At least a 4-inch median stubble height would be attained for key hydric herbaceous species such as Nebraska sedge and beaked sedge at the end of the grazing period in the riparian areas along Sinker Creek.

Water temperatures and bacterial concentration data would be monitored on a 5 year cycle on Sinker Creek in accordance with the water quality restoration plan.

Joyce FFR (0487)
A total permitted use of 160 AUMs of fall/winter use would be authorized for cattle only (Table 21). The allotment would have one permittee operating in four pastures. Pastures 3 and 4 from the Con Shea (0571) Allotment would become part of the Joyce FFR (0487) Allotment (Map 9). A total of 943 acres of public land and 73 AUMs would be removed from the Con Shea Allotment (and associated grazing permit) and added to the Joyce FFR Allotment (and associated grazing permit).

Table 21. Alternative B; Permitted Use for Joyce FFR Allotment

Operator Name (Number)	Livestock		Season of Use	Federal Land	AUMs		
	Num.	Kind			Active	Suspended	Permitted
Joyce Livestock (1101423)	7[1]	Cattle	03/01-02/28[1]	100%	160	0	160

[1]Annually, with prior approval by the authorized officer, livestock numbers and season of use could vary at the permittees discretion as long as resource degradation doesn't occur on public land.

The grazing rotation would be implemented beginning in grazing year 2012 as outlined in the following table.

Table 22: Alternative B; Grazing Rotation for Joyce FFR Allotment

Pasture	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
1	03/01-03/31	03/01-03/31	Repeat Cycle
2	12/01-12/31	12/01-12/31	
3	10/01-11/15	04/01-05/15	
4	05/15-06/15	05/15-06/15	

Standards 4 and 8 were not being met in Joyce FFR pasture 3, and livestock was a significant factor. It was determined that back to back spring use was a causal agent in the failure to meet Standard 4. Under this alternative, the allotment would be divided into four individual pastures with different seasons of use (Table 22). This rotation would eliminate back to back spring use, except for pasture 2. Public land in pasture 2 has limited access due to steep terrain, and because the majority of useable land is private; this pasture will be managed at the permittees discretion, as long as resource degradation does not occur.

Murphy FFR (0486)

A total permitted use of 5 AUMs of fall/winter use is authorized for cattle (Table 23). The allotment has one permittee.

Table 23. Alternative B; Permitted Use for the Murphy FFR Allotment

Operator Name (Number)	Livestock		Season of Use	Federal Land	AUMs		
	Num.	Kind			Active	Suspended	Permitted
Joyce Livestock (1101423)	1[1]	Cattle	03/01-02/28[1]	100%	5	0	5

[1]Annually, with prior approval by the authorized officer, livestock numbers and season of use could vary at the permittees discretion as long as resource degradation doesn't occur on public land.

Alternative C

Grazing permits for the Sinker Butte, Montini FFR, and Joyce FFR and Murphy FFR allotments would be issued as described in Alternative B.

Fossil Butte (0535)
A total permitted use of 1,460 AUMs of fall/winter use would be authorized for cattle (1,367 AUMs) and horses (93 AUMs) (Table 24). This one pasture allotment would have three permittees operating in common.

Table 24. Alternative C; Permitted Use for the Fossil Butte Allotment

Operator Name (Number)	Livestock		Season of Use	Federal Land	AUMs		
	Num.[1]	Kind			Active	Suspended	Permitted
Joyce Livestock (1101423)	171	Cattle	10/01-02/28	94%	799	89	888
	20	Horses	10/01-02/28	94%	93	10	103
Nick Nettleton (1101482)	68	Cattle	10/01-02/28	100%	375	38	380
Miller/Kershner (1101486)	45	Cattle	10/01-02/28	100%	226	25	251
Total					1,460	162	1,622

[1]Annually, with prior approval by the authorized officer, livestock numbers could vary as long as season of use and active AUMs are not exceeded.

This alternative proposes the same season of use as Alternatives A and B, but with a 10% reduction in total permitted AUM's. This alternative was developed to reduce the livestock utilization to the desired 50% on key species and to eliminate concentrated used in high use areas. Utilization data available (1993, 1995, 1999, and 2000) shows a high of 65%, and a low of 55% , with a four season average of 59% on key species. The 10% reduction in AUMs and six additional water haul sites is expected to make significant progress towards meeting Idaho standards for rangeland health.

Prior to the 2008 grazing season, the permittees in Fossil Butte allotment agreed to a voluntary 10% reduction in active AUMs. Current utilization data shows a significant improvement in overall allotment utilization, 31% (2008), 34% (2009) and 26% (2010) on desirable key species.

In addition to the five existing water haul sites, six new water haul sites would be proposed in this alternative (Map 7). Permittees would be responsible for hauling water on designated routes and providing and maintaining tanks with BLM approved wildlife escape devices.

Permittees would coordinate with BLM when salting upland areas to protect sensitive plant species. Salting would further enhance the benefits of water hauling.

Con-Shea (0571)
A total permitted use of 917 AUMs of fall/winter use would be authorized for cattle (Table 25). The allotment would have one permittee operating in one pasture. Pastures 1, 2, and 5 would be combined and renamed pasture 1 (Map 10). Pastures 3 and 4 would become part of the Joyce FFR (0487) Allotment (Map 9). A total of 943 acres of public land and 73 AUMs would be removed from the Con Shea Allotment (and associated grazing permit) and added to the Joyce FFR Allotment (and associated grazing permit) (see Table 16).

The grazing permittee would continue using and maintaining the drift fence to eliminate livestock use of the Mulfords milkvetch populations located in the northwest corner of pasture 1 (Map 10). Use of the drift fence would ensure that livestock grazing management practices continue to allow for making significant progress towards meeting Standard 8.

Table 25. Alternative C; Permitted Use for the Con-Shea Allotment.

Operator Name (Number)	Livestock		Season of Use	Federal Land	AUMs		
	Num.	Kind			Active	Suspended	Permitted
Joyce Livestock (1101423)	251[1]	Cattle	11/01-02/28	100%	917	0	917

[1]Annually, with prior approval by the authorized officer, livestock numbers could vary up to 325 cattle as long as season of use and active AUMs are not exceeded.

Alternative D

The BLM would close the Fossil Butte, Sinker Butte, Montini FFR, Con-Shea, Joyce FFR, and Murphy FFR Allotments to all livestock grazing and would not reissue the associated grazing permit for this ten-year term. All 3,551 AUMs would be unavailable for livestock grazing on public lands on the allotments above. No range improvements would occur. Upon expiration of the ten-year term, livestock grazing on the allotment would be reevaluated.

Public Input Needed

Comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, preliminary issues, and alternatives. Comments are due by April 30, 2009. For due consideration in developing the final EA, comments must be directly relevant to the proposal and project areas. The BLM will not reject public feedback outside established public involvement timeframes; however, these comments may be considered secondary 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. Comments sent electronically should be sent to Raul Trevino, Rangeland Management Specialist (rtrevino@blm.gov) with the title of this project in the subject line. 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.

Attachments

Allotment Maps 1-10
Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health