

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)
Fossil Butte Group FFR Allotment Permit Renewal
Environmental Assessment # DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2011-0010-EA

- Grazing Permit Issuance and Authorization of Water Haul Sites -

I have reviewed the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (CEQ) for significance (40 CFR 1508.27) and have determined the Preferred Alternative identified in Environmental Assessment (EA) # DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2011-0010-EA (incorporated by reference into this document) is not a major Federal Action and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area; therefore an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. This finding was made by considering both the context and intensity of the potential effects of the grazing alternative selected and its season of use, grazing management system and enforcement of objectives, as will be described in the decision document. The following factors, as described in the EA, were used in defining significance:

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

Both beneficial and adverse impacts of all management actions were assessed for the Fossil Butte Group allotments. Timing, intensity and duration of the permitted grazing use prescribed under the Preferred Alternative for the Fossil Butte Group allotments will provide for benefits to vegetative community structure and function for both uplands and riparian areas. Additionally, the analysis concluded that riparian soils would be maintained within the Fossil Butte Group allotments. As a result, habitat for focal wildlife species and overall watershed function should be maintained at a minimum. Therefore, the BLM finds that there would be a benefit to overall ecological function of the public lands within the Fossil Butte Group allotments.

The BLM identified adverse impacts with some aspects of the Preferred Alternative. Specifically these include localized impacts associated with the authorization of water haul sites. However, the Preferred Alternative authorizes a minimum number of water haul facilities to reduce adverse impacts to specific resources such as sage-grouse and cultural resources. The water haul sites are in previously used sites that have already been heavily impacted. Therefore they do not present any new impacts compared to the No Action alternative. It is also important to note that these facilities provide for better distribution of livestock across the allotment and especially out of the riparian areas.

BLM found that the selection of Alternative D had the least adverse impacts while still allowing for grazing use to occur on the Fossil Butte Group allotments, and greater overall benefits to ecological function. None of the environmental impacts, beneficial or adverse disclosed in the EA for the Preferred Alternative, are considered significant.

2. *The degree to which the selection of Alternative D affects public health or safety.*

The selection of Alternative D will not result in substantial or adverse impacts to public health or safety. Grazing of livestock has occurred within the area for decades with limited effects to public health and safety; this is a familiar activity to the public land user.

3. *Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.*

There are no park lands, areas designated to be prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, ACECs or wetlands with unique characteristics within the geographic area. The Guffey Butte/Black Butte district buffers the Snake River and intersects the Fossil Butte Group allotments. It will not be significantly impacted by the Proposed Action as much of the district is inaccessible to livestock (Section 3.1.8.2).

4. *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.*

The EA addresses the foremost issues (Section 1.7.2) in the analysis of the various alternatives. Although the act of grazing on public land is considered controversial by some groups and individuals, the effects on the quality of the human environment from this proposal are not considered highly controversial based on: 1) the number and content of the comments received from the public, and 2) our review of the scientific literature conducted when completing the effects analysis (Appendix B and Section 6 of the EA).

5. *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.*

The analysis did not identify any effects on the human environment that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. Grazing (under several different management strategies) has been the primary use in this area for at least 78 years (Taylor Grazing Act, 1934). Grazing management similar to that proposed by this decision has been implemented in other parts of the Owyhee Field Office (OFO). Several published documents (Section 6.0) were used to complete EA # DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2011-0010-EA and to verify effects from various alternatives. This research and decades of grazing management has provided the BLM and the public with an awareness of anticipated effects from livestock grazing. Therefore the effects of the Proposed Action on the human environment are not highly uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risks.

6. *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*

The analysis showed how the alternatives would implement direction in the Owyhee Resource Management Plan (ORMP) and would not establish precedent for any future actions. The Proposed Action is to implement a grazing system for public lands, some of which have large tracts of privately managed lands within them. The activities are not connected to any other future actions of this nature. Management and resource issues for other allotments within the field office may be similar in nature; however, all future actions regarding permit renewals will be assessed on an individual and site-specific basis.

7. *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*

The analysis did not identify any known significant cumulative or secondary effects (Section 3.4). Outside this project area, additional standards and guidelines assessments, determinations and subsequent decisions have been made, resulting in changes in livestock management actions, stocking levels, and seasons of use. In addition to livestock grazing; past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future activities include range improvement construction, maintenance, and/or removal; wildfire; noxious weed treatments/infestations; agriculture; roads & trails management; and recreation. No individually or cumulatively significant impacts were identified in the EA. Based on the cumulative effects analysis, presented in the EA, the authorization of livestock grazing permits in the Fossil Butte Group allotments will not have a measurable addition to the cumulative effects present in the analysis areas.

8. *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the NRHP or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

The action complies with the National Historic Preservation Act. The analysis in EA # DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2011-0010-EA showed that only negligible effects to cultural or historical resources would occur through implementation of Alternative D (Sections 3.2.1.8; 3.3.1.2.4.6; 3.3.2.2.4.6; 3.3.3.1.9.7; 3.3.3.1.11.7; 3.3.4.2.2.6; 3.3.4.2.4.7; 3.3.5.2.2.6; 3.3.5.2.4.6; 3.3.6.2.3.1; 3.3.6.2.4.5). The permit terms and conditions and authorization of specified water haul sites provide a reasonable level of general protection for cultural resources within the Fossil Butte Group allotments.

9. *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973.*

No threatened and endangered plant or animal species listed under the ESA occur within the Fossil Butte Group allotments. Implementation of Alternative D will maintain, at a minimum, identified candidate species' habitat conditions. Maintenance and/or long-

term improvements to upland and riparian systems as analyzed will therefore have similar effects to habitats for special status species identified in the EA. This action complies with the Endangered Species Act, in that potential effects of this decision on listed species have been analyzed and documented.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, and local laws or requirements imposed for protection of the environment.

The grazing management system identified through Alternative D will not violate or threaten to violate any Federal, State, or local law for the protection of the environment (Section 1.8).

/s/ Loretta Chandler
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Date