SCOPING/INFORMATION PACKAGE
Crater Rings and Squaw Creek Allotments Grazing Permit Renewal
Morley Nelson Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area (NCA)
Four Rivers Field Office

This information package summarizes a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) review of an application to renew the grazing permits for Mrs. Jean M. Smith (Operator #1102853) in the Crater Rings (00828) and Squaw Creek (00886) allotments, with appropriate modifications to make significant progress toward meeting Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management (S&Gs), in accordance with the Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area (NCA) Resource Management Plan. Federal actions must be analyzed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations to determine potential environmental consequences.

The purpose of this scoping/information package is to inform interested and affected parties of Mrs. Smith's application and solicit scoping comments to assist BLM with the NEPA review of the proposed action and alternatives. Analysis of alternatives will be documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA) with an estimated completion date of September 2011. Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential issues related to the proposed action and to identify alternatives to the proposed action that will meet the purpose and need for the project.

Need for and Purpose of Action

Rangeland Health Assessments (RHA) conducted in the Crater Rings and Squaw Creek allotments showed that both allotments have been impacted by wildfire, emergency fire rehabilitation projects, grazing, drought, invasive exotic plants, and off-road recreational vehicle activity.

Evaluation of RHA data collected in the Crater Rings Allotment indicated the following RHA standards were not being met: Watersheds (Standard 1), Seedings (Standard 5), and Threatened and Endangered Plants and Animals (Standard 8).

Evaluation of RHA data collected in the Squaw Creek Allotment indicated the following RHA standards were not being met: Native Plant Communities (Standard 4), Seedings (Standard 5), and Threatened and Endangered Plants and Animals (Standard 8).

Timing and intensity of livestock grazing were suspected causal factors contributing to not meeting these standards in both allotments (with the exception of Standard 8 in the Crater Rings Allotment).

Repeated wildfires have caused the loss of most native shrubs, and have exacerbated the influx of exotic invasive annual weeds and grasses.

The Proposed Actions should meet the following objectives:

- Implement a grazing management system using a combination of appropriate season of use and periodic rest/deferred rotations to make significant progress towards meeting multiple use resource objectives and the Idaho S&Gs.
- Livestock grazing would be managed to maintain or enhance prey habitat and reduce competition for forage in perennial pastures between livestock and Piute ground squirrels. (RMP Record of Decision, page 2-16)
- Leave sufficient residual litter after grazing for small mammal food and cover and watershed protection in annual dominated areas. (RMP ROD, page 2-17)
- Review and assess the permittee's application for permit renewal for compliance with federal grazing regulations, standards for rangeland health, and management plan objectives.

Existing Condition

General

The Crater Rings and Squaw Creek allotments are located approximately seven miles northwest of Mountain Home, Idaho (Map 1). The area is characterized by relatively flat to gently rolling topography with elevations ranging between approximately 2,900-3,200 ft. The majority of the public lands within both allotments are located within the NCA. The two allotments include eight pastures, one in Crater Rings and seven in Squaw Creek, for a total land area of approximately 21,666 acres (Table 1).

Table 1. Ownership (acres) by pasture for the Crater Rings and Squaw Creek allotments, Elmore County, Idaho.

Allotment		**Pasture**	**Acres by Land Ownership Type**			**Total Acres**	**% Public Land**
Number	**Name**		**Public**	**State**	**Private**		
00828	Crater Rings	Crater Rings	3,290	29	3	3,322	99
00886	Squaw Creek	Sheep Butte	2,396	12	168	2,576	93
		Farm to Market	1,975	92	594	2,661	74
		Railroad	289	393	404	1,086	27
		Crater II	2,394	3	3	2,400	100
		East Rock House	2,985	685	6	3,676	81
		West Rock House	4,096	670	322	5,088	81
		Small Arms	844	13	0	857	98
Total/average % Public Land			**18,269**	**1,897**	**1,500**	**21,666**	**84**

Livestock grazing is currently permitted in the Crater Rings Allotment from 4/5 through 5/31 and in the Squaw Creek Allotment from 4/1 through 6/30 and 11/1 through 1/5 (Table 2).

Table 2. Current livestock grazing authorization for Jean M. Smith on Crater Rings (00828) and Squaw Creek (00886) allotments, Elmore County, Idaho.

Allotment		Livestock		Season of Use		%	Preference		
Number	**Name**	**Type**	**Number**	**Start**	**End**	**PL**	**Active**	**Suspended**	**Total**
00828	Crater Rings	Cattle	400	4/5	5/31	100	750	0	750
00886	Squaw Creek	Cattle	735	4/1	6/30	91	2,001	0	2,001
		Cattle	492	11/1	1/5	91	971	0	971

Grazing occurs annually in both allotments during the critical spring growth period of desired perennial plants, resulting in reduced plant vigor and reproduction, as well as the dominance of plant interspaces by invasive annual grasses and weeds. Utilization of herbaceous perennials in excess of permitted levels has been observed, especially in drought years.

The Crater Rings Allotment is grazed only during spring. Squaw Creek Allotment's pastures are not subject to a specific pasture rotation system; grazing occurs primarily during spring with one pasture grazed intermittently in the fall,

Soils

The soils in the two allotments are representative of a Loamy 8" to 10" ecological site (Elmore County Natural Resource Conservation Service soil survey maps). The predominantly loess soils were formed in alluvium and residuum derived from sedimentary materials and basalt, and occur on nearly level to moderately sloping basalt plains and alluvial terraces. Plant communities associated with these soil types are discussed in the vegetation section below.

Vegetation

Species present in vegetation communities have been greatly altered by fire. Most of the land within the two allotments has burned at least once since 1957. Some portions of the allotments have been burned as many as five times. The majority of areas in the Crater Rings, Crater II, and Sheep Butte pastures that burned in the 1980s and early 1990s were seeded with crested wheatgrass. The majority of the seedings were successful; however, significant downward trends have been observed for crested wheatgrass at all long-term sampling sites. The downward trends are occurring as a result of a combination of wildfire and repeated moderate to heavy grazing during the critical growing season.

Scattered remnant shrub communities occur in most pastures except Farm to Market, Sheep Butte, and Small Arms; however, they account for less than 5% of vegetation communities. The majority of the allotments are dominated by Sandberg bluegrass, cheatgrass, and invasive annual forbs (e.g., bur buttercup, tumble mustard). Isolated stands of crested wheatgrass are present in several pastures. Forage kochia is predominant on >30% of the Sheep Butte Pasture and occurs along the western edge of the Rock House West Pasture and in isolated patches in the Farm to Market and Crater II pastures.

The areas dominated by annual grasses and forbs are vulnerable to erosion processes which adversely affect watershed health. As vegetative cover is depleted and species composition is changed, site productivity is reduced through erosion and lack of biological diversity.

Threatened and Endangered and Special Status Plant Species
One occurrence of slickspot peppergrass (*Lepidium papilliferum*), (a federally listed threatened species) exists in the Squaw Creek Allotment (Map 1). This species occurs on micro-sites known as slickspots, which form in specific soils in Wyoming big sagebrush habitat. The permit for the Squaw Creek Allotment was amended in 2004 to incorporate conservation measures from the 2003 CCA; however, the occurrence has not been fenced to eliminate livestock access.

There are two known occurrences of Davis' peppergrass (*Lepidium davisii*), a Type 3 special status plant species, in the Squaw Creek Allotment. This species occurs on hard bottom playas. The species is known to be present in Ada, Elmore, Owyhee, and Twin Falls counties in Idaho, and Malheur County, Oregon.

Invasive and Non-native Species
Invasive species such as cheatgrass, medusahead, tumble mustard, Russian thistle, and bur buttercup, are common throughout the allotments. Two noxious weed species [rush skeletonweed (C*hondrilla juncea)* and Scotch thistle (*Onopordum acanthium)*] have been recorded in the allotments. It is possible that noxious weed populations exist that have not yet been discovered.

Wildlife/Special Status Animals
The NCA was established to conserve, protect, and enhance the densest known nesting population of raptors, and their supporting habitat, in North American. Although some raptors nest in the allotments (e.g., red-tailed hawk, burrowing owl), they primarily provide habitat for raptor prey species. The Piute ground squirrel is the most important prey species for migrant, wintering and breeding raptors, ravens, some mammalian predators, and some reptiles. The greatest population density of Piute ground squirrels is found in sagebrush grasslands. Ground squirrels can be abundant following years of above average precipitation in many habitat types, including exotic grasslands. However, severe population declines have been observed in annual grass areas following below normal precipitation years.

There are no known threatened, endangered, or candidate animals or their habitat in the two allotments. The allotments provide habitat for two special status mammal species (Piute ground squirrel and spotted bat), seven special status bird species (peregrine falcon, prairie falcon, northern goshawk, ferruginous hawk, loggerhead shrike, Brewer's sparrow, and sage sparrow), and four special status reptile and amphibian species (Mojave black-collared lizard, longnose snake, western ground snake, and Woodhouse toad). The allotments provide limited habitat for sagebrush dependent species, due to the fractured and limited sagebrush cover.

Preliminary Alternative Development

Livestock type would be shown as cattle for all tables; however this EA would also analyze sheep use for alternatives B, D, and E. As such livestock numbers would increase by a multiple of five (5 sheep = 1 cow AUM), AUM numbers would remain the same.

The following alternatives have been identified through permittee application and the internal scoping process:

Alternative A - Full use based on the current permit, with the allotments stocked at 4.9 ac/AUM, representing a potential for an increase in annual use of 1,646 AUMs (79%) over the ten year average use (as noted in Alternative B below).

Alternative B – Permit issued at the average of actual use over the last 10 years, with the allotment stocked at approximately 8.8 acres/AUM and 2,075 active permitted AUMs, representing a reduction in the permitted use of approximately 1,645 AUMs (suspended) or 44%.

Alternative C – Permittee submitted proposal, implementing an early spring/late spring deferred rotation system. The allotment would be stocked at 6.7 acres/AUM, with 2,721 active AUMs, representing a voluntary reduction in the permitted use of approximately 1,000 AUMs or 27%, and an increase over the 10-year average actual use of 646 AUMs or 31%.

Alternative D - Rest-rotation system, with AUMs adjusted to reflect a stocking rate of 12-14 acres/AUM with 1,539 active AUMs. This alternative would propose a reduction in permitted use of approximately 2,182 AUMs (59%), and would be a reduction from 10-year average use of 536 AUMS (26%).

Alternative E – Implements a fall/winter rest rotation system. This alternative would propose a change in seasons of use from spring/summer to fall/winter. The allotment would be stocked at 10-11 acres/AUM, with 1,790 active AUMs representing a reduction in permitted use of approximately 1,931 AUMs (52%), and would be a reduction from the 10-year average use of 285 AUMS (14%).

Alternative F – No Grazing Alternative

Alternative A – No Action (Currently Permitted Use)

A total of 3,721 AUMs would be permitted on the allotments (Table 3). The majority of use in the Crater Rings and Squaw Creek allotments would occur during the spring (April-June), with some fall use (November-early January) occurring in the Rock House West Pasture of the Squaw Creek Allotment. The operator would be billed based on after the fact actual use reports, adjusted to the allotment's percent public land.

This alternative is presented to provide a baseline comparison for the remaining alternatives. It will not be analyzed in detail because the full permitted AUMs would not be expected to meet Rangeland Health Standards. Rationale for eliminating this alternative from further consideration includes: that it represents a public land stocking rate of 4.9 acres/AUM, a significant increase over the current 8.8 acres/AUM (based on a 10-year average), and season of use would continue to occur during critical growing periods.

Mandatory Terms and Conditions
Table 3. Current permitted use for Jean M. Smith, Crater Rings and Squaw Creek allotments, Alternative A, Elmore County, Idaho.

Allotment		Livestock		Season of Use		%	Preference		
Number	**Name**	**Type**	**Number**	**Start**	**End**	**PL**	**Active**	**Suspended**	**Total**
00828	Crater Rings	Cattle	400	4/5	5/31	100	750	0	749
00886	Squaw Creek	Cattle	735	4/1	6/30	91	2,001	0	2,001
		Cattle	492	11/1	1/5	91	971	0	971
Total									**3,721**

Rangeland Management Projects
No new projects would be constructed.

Proposed Actions Common to Alternatives B, C, D & E

The Crater Rings and Squaw Creek allotments would be combined into the Craters Allotment (Map 2). Billing would be calculated after the fact, based on submitted actual use reports, and adjusted for percent public land by pasture.

Alternative B – Average of Actual Use over 10 Years (2000-2009)

This alternative essentially represents the continuation of current management that is occurring on the ground. The public lands within the allotment would be stocked at approximately 8.8 acres/AUM. A total of 2,075 AUMs would be permitted (Table 4).

Mandatory Terms and Conditions
Table 4. Permitted use for Jean M. Smith, Craters Allotment, Alternative B, Elmore County, Idaho.

Allotment		Livestock		Season of Use		%	Preference		
Number	**Name**	**Type**	**Number**	**Start**	**End**	**PL**	**Active**	**Suspended**	**Total**
00886	Craters	Cattle	669	4/1	6/30	84	1,682[1]	1,645	3,720
		Cattle	201	11/1	1/10	84	393		
Total							**2,075**		

[1]Active use is based on average use for the entire allotment.

Grazing Schedule
The majority of use would occur during the spring (April-June), with some fall use (November-early January) occurring in the Rock House West pasture (approximately 36% of the time) (Table 5).

Table 5. Average (2000-2009) number of livestock, seasons of use, and AUMs by pasture for the Craters Allotment, Alternative B, Elmore County, Idaho.

Pasture Name	Livestock		Season of Use		% PL	Average AUMs (AUR[1])
	Type	Number	Start	End		
Sheep Butte	Cattle	300	4/21	6/5	93	422
Farm to Market	Cattle	114	4/8	6/18	74	200
Crater Rings	Cattle	217	4/2	6/7	99	475
Crater II & Railroad[2]	Cattle	144	4/3	6/13	77	262
Rock House East	Cattle	152	4/4	6/29	81	317
Rock House West[3]	Cattle	165	4/5	6/20	81	347[3]
	Cattle	210	11/7	1/7	81	
Small Arms	Cattle	23	4/12	6/27	98	81

[1] Values in this column are estimates derived from Actual Use Reports (AURs) submitted by permittee (by pasture) following removal of livestock from the allotment.
[2] Crater II and Railroad pastures are used as one.
[3] Pasture was used seven times during spring and four times during fall for the period 2000-2009. Active AUMs would be used in the spring or fall. Average use during the spring was 347 AUMs and average use during the fall was 393 AUMs.

Rangeland Management Projects
No new projects would be constructed.

Alternative C – Permittee Proposal
The permittees would voluntarily reduce use to an overall public land stocking rate of 6.7 acres/AUM. A total of 2,721 Active AUMs would be permitted (Table 6). A four herd partial-deferment spring grazing system would be implemented.

Mandatory Terms and Conditions

Table 6. Permitted use for Jean M. Smith, Craters Allotment, Alternative C, Elmore County, Idaho.

Allotment		Livestock		Season of Use		%L	Preference		
Number	Name	**Type**	**Number[1]**	**Start**	**End**	**PL**	**Active**	**Suspended**	**Total[2]**
00886	Craters	Cattle	696	4/1	6/30	84	1,749	1,000	3,721
		Cattle	386	11/1	1/30	84	973		
		Total					2,722		

[1] Livestock numbers may vary providing the season of use and AUMs are not exceeded.
[2] All AUMs are active; 1,000 AUMs would be voluntarily reduced by the permittee for the term of the permit, but would not be suspended.

Grazing Schedule
Use would occur primarily in the spring (Table 7). Four separate herds (consisting of yearling replacement heifers, first calf cows, second calf cows, mature cows) would graze in pairs of pastures. Each herd would graze one pasture in early spring (April 1 to early/mid May) and graze the second pasture in late spring (early/mid May to June 29). Use in each pasture would rotate between early and late spring use over a two year period. The herds would rotate through the different pairs of pastures through the term of the permit. Pastures used in the early spring (April 1) would be available for use in the fall (November 1) but the total number of AUMs and/or livestock numbers per pasture would not be exceeded in a given year. Livestock would

be moved into the pastures gradually over the course of two weeks beginning April 2 through April 14th, and then removed gradually beginning June 15, over the following two weeks.

Table 7. Seasons of use and AUMs by pasture for the Craters Allotment, Alternative C, Elmore County, Idaho.

Pasture	YEAR 1				YEAR 2			
	Lvstk #	In	Out	AUMs[1]	Lvstk #	In	Out	AUMs
Sheep Butte	150	4/1	5/16	227	150	5/16	6/30	227
Farm to Mkt	150	5/17	6/30	222	150	4/1	5/15	222
Craters II	110	4/1	6/3	231	110	4/28	6/30	231
Railroad	110	6/4	6/30	98	110	4/1	4/27	98
Crater Rings	155	4/1	5/20	255	155	5/21	6/30	209
RH East	155	5/21	6/30	209	155	4/1	5/20	255
RH South West	135	4/1	5/15	200	135	5/16	6/30	204
RH North West	135	5/16	6/30	204	135	4/1	5/15	200
Small Arms	35	4/1	6/30	105	35	4/1	6/30	105
Total Spring AUMs				1,750				1,750
Fall use in spring pastures*	324	11/1	1/30	969	324	11/1	1/30	969
Total AUMs				**2,719**				**2,719**

*Winter use would come from early use (4/1) pasture(s) only

Rangeland Management Projects
The following projects are proposed:

a) Create four pastures by cross-fencing the Rockhouse East and Rockhouse West pastures (would require ≥3 miles of fence).
b) Relocate division fence between Rock House East and Crater II pastures to the north line of T. 3 S. R.5 E. Sec. 15.
c) Construct new fence on west line of T. 3 S. R. 5 E. Sec. 15 to protect slickspot peppergrass (LEPA) EO 21.
d) Remove two miles of fence surrounding the NW¼ of section 8, T. 3 S., R. 5 E. The affected 160 acre public land parcel would be incorporated into the Crater Rings Pasture, but with no additional AUM allocation.

[1] AUMs are calculated using 100% Public land.

e) Construct approximately ¼ mile of fence along the north boundary of the NW¼ of Section 5, T. 3 S., R. 5 E., and transfer the NW¼ of Section 5, T. 3 S., R. 5 E. (currently located within the Farm to Market Pasture) into the Crater Rings Pasture.
f) Remove one mile of fence along the east and south boundaries of the NW¼ of Section 5, T. 3 S., R. 5 E.

Alternative D – Rest-Rotation System

Pastures would be used in a spring, fall, rest, rotation system. The public lands within the allotment would be stocked at approximately 12-14 acres/AUM. A minimum of 1,317 AUMs and a maximum of 1,503 AUMs would occur within any one year of the three-year system. Average annual use would be 1,392 AUMs (Table 8).

Mandatory Terms and Conditions
Table 8. Permitted use for Jean Smith, Craters allotment, Alternative D, Elmore County, Idaho.

Allotment		Livestock		Season of Use		% PL	Preference		
Number	Name	Type	Number	Start	End		Active	Suspend	Total
00886	Craters	Cattle	310	04/01	06/29	84	771	2,179	3,721
		Cattle	232	11/01	02/28	84	771		
		Total					1,542		

Grazing Schedule
For each pasture, spring use would be followed by fall use the following year then by a rest year (Table 9).

Table 9. Permitted use for Jean M. Smith, Craters Allotment, Alternative D, Elmore County, Idaho.

Pasture	Lvstk #	Year 1	AUMs	Year 2	AUMs	Year 3	AUMs
Crater Rings	166	11/1-1/1	338	REST	0	4/1-6/1	338
Crater II	114	4/1-6/1	232	11/1-1/1	232	REST	0
Farm to Market	123	4/1-6/1	251	11/1-1/1	251	REST	0
Railroad	50	4/1-6/1	102	11/1-1/1	102	REST	0
Rock House East	172	11/1-1/1	351	REST	0	4/1-6/1	351
Rock House West	239	REST	0	4/1-6/1	487	11/1-1/1	487
Sheep Butte	120	REST	0	4/1-6/1	245	11/1-1/1	245
Small Arms	40	11/1-1/1	82	REST	0	04/1-6/1	82
Spring use			585		732		771
Fall use			771		585		732
Totals			1,356		1,317		1,503
Average AUMs	1,392						

Rangeland Management Projects

a) Remove two miles of fence surrounding the NW¼ of section 8, T. 3 S., R. 5 E. The affected 160 acre public land parcel would be incorporated into the Crater Rings Pasture, but with no additional AUM allocation.
b) Construct approximately ¼ mile of fence along the north boundary of the NW¼ of Section 5, T. 3 S., R. 5 E., and transfer the NW¼ of Section 5, T. 3 S., R. 5 E. (currently located within the Farm to Market Pasture) into the Crater Rings Pasture.
c) Remove one mile of fence along the east and south boundaries of the NW¼ of Section 5, T. 3 S., R. 5 E.
d) Relocate division fence between Rock House East and Crater II pastures to the north line of T. 3 S. R.5 E. Sec. 15.
e) Construct new fence on west line of T. 3 S. R. 5 E. Sec. 15 to protect slickspot peppergrass (LEPA) EO 21.

Alternative E - Fall/Winter Rest Rotation.

The pastures would be used in a fall/winter rest rotation system. The allotment would be stocked at 10-11 acres/AUM. Depending on the rotation schedule, a total of 1,664 to 1,790 AUMs would be permitted (Table 11).

Mandatory Terms and Conditions

Table 11 permitted use for Jean M. Smith, Crater Rings and Squaw Creek allotments, Alternative E,

Allotment		Livestock		Season of Use		%	Preference		
Number	Name	Type	Number[1]	Start	End	PL	Active	Suspended	Total
00886	Craters	Cattle	476	10/16	2/28	83	1,790	1,931	3,721

Grazing Schedule

Use would occur in the fall/winter on a rest rotation basis, wherein each pasture would be grazed two out of every three years (Table 10).

Table 10. Proposed grazing schedule for Jean M. Smith, Craters Allotment, Alternative E, Elmore County, Idaho.

Pasture	Lvstk #	Year 1	AUMs	Year 2	AUMs	Year 3	AUMs
Craters	106	REST	0	10/16-2/28	460	10/16-2/28	460
Crater II	76	10/16-2/28	340	REST	0	10/16-2/28	340
Farm to Market	85	10/16-2/28	281	10/16-2/28	281	REST	0
Railroad	35	10/16-2/28	42	REST	0	10/16-2/28	42
Rock House East	117	10/16-2/28	424	REST	0	10/16-2/28	424
Rock House West	166	10/16-2/28	601	10/16-2/28	601	REST	0
Sheep Butte	82	REST	0	10/16-2/28	341	10/16-2/28	341
Small Arms	27	10/16-2/28	118	REST	0	10/16-2/28	118
Total/Yr			1,806		1,683		1,725

Pasture	Lvstk #	Year 1	AUMs	Year 2	AUMs	Year 3	AUMs
Average AUMs	1,738						

Rangeland Management Projects
Projects for this alternative would be the same as those proposed in Alternative D.

Alternative F – No Grazing Alternative

Grazing would not be authorized for a ten year period (Table 12).

Mandatory Terms and Conditions
Table 12. Permitted use for Jean M. Smith, Crater Rings and Squaw Creek allotments, Alternative F.

Allotment		Livestock		Season of Use		%L	Preference		
Number	Name	Type	Number	Start	End	PL	Active	Suspended	Total
00886	Craters	Cattle	0	3/1	2/28	84	0	3,721	3,721

Terms and Conditions common to alternatives A – E.

The following Standard terms and conditions and Allotment Specific Terms and Conditions would appear on the permit for the Craters Allotment under all alternatives.

1) Livestock grazing within the Craters Allotment would be in accordance with this final decision, dated _____.
2) Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(b), the permittee must notify the BLM Field Manager, by telephone with written confirmation, immediately upon the discovery of human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony on federal lands. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(c), you must immediately stop any ongoing activities connected with such discovery and make a reasonable effort to protect the discovered remains or objects.
3) Livestock numbers may vary annually within the period of use as long as AUMs are not exceeded.
4) Turn-out date is subject to Boise District range readiness criteria.
5) A certified actual use report is due 15 days after each authorized use period has been completed.
6) Livestock exclosures located within your grazing allotment are closed to all domestic grazing use.
7) Operator is required to coordinate trailing activities across public lands, and to obtain and pay for a trailing permit or similar authorization, prior to crossing public lands.
8) Salt and/or supplement shall not be placed within one quarter (¼) mile from any springs, streams, meadows, aspen stands, playas, special status plant populations, or water developments(including temporary water troughs).
9) Changes to the scheduled use require prior approval by the Authorized Officer.

10) The allowable use level for perennial upland vegetation is 50% of the current year's available forage growth. Livestock shall be removed from the use area, pasture, or allotment when this utilization has been reached.
11) You are required to maintain range improvements in accordance with the cooperative agreements and range improvement permits in which you are a signatory or assignee.
12) All appropriate documentation regarding base property leases, lands offered for exchange-of-use, and livestock control agreements must be approved prior to turn-out.
13) Permittee will supplement federal and state agency surveys and monitoring by surveying their allotments or use areas for slickspots and slickspot peppergrass plants, including existing occurrences, during their normal course of business. Permittees would report survey information to the Conservation Data Center for the purposes of aiding monitoring efforts and contributing to the Conservation Agreement adaptive management strategy.
14) Permittees shall place salt/supplements to minimize trampling of LEPA and of slickspots, respectively. Supplements would be placed at least 1/2 mile, preferably 3/4 mile from occurrences. Supplement placing shall be considered in the annual LEPA tour with the BLM range specialist, based on the previous year's grazing season. Supplements that are attractants should be placed so that cattle would not trail through an element occurrence to the supplement or a water source. Attractants should be placed so that cattle are drawn away from the area of the element occurrence.
15) Permittee would not trail livestock through element occurrences within the management area when soils are saturated.
16) Confine vehicle use to existing roads and tracks where slickspot peppergrass element occurrences are present.
17) Grazing is prohibited in the area containing LEPA EO #21 (Mountain Home Management Area).

Preliminary Issues

Utilization levels have exceeded the 50% level prescribed as a term and condition of the permit.

Consistent spring use does not meet the physiological needs of perennial grasses and forbs.

A slickspot peppergrass occurrence in the Rock House West pasture is exposed to livestock grazing use.

Annual fluctuations in precipitation and weather (e.g., timing and intensity) impact available early spring forage.

Water is provided at temporary water haul sites. Repeated same area use may cause localized degradation and/or overutilization/impacts of vegetation and soils.

Salt and mineral blocks are placed adjacent to water haul sites.

Decision to be Made

The NCA Manager is the authorized officer responsible for the decision regarding management of the allotments. Based on the results of the NEPA analysis, the NCA Manager will issue a decision document that includes a determination of the significance of the environmental effects and whether an environmental impact statement (EIS) would be required. If the NCA 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, season of use, allowable utilization standards, and terms of the permit.

Public Input Needed

Comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, preliminary issues, and alternatives. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received by June 3, 2011 and are directly relevant to the proposal and project area. 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 mespil@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.

The primary contact for questions and comments for this analysis is Martin M. Espil Rangeland Management Specialist, Four Rivers Field Office, (208) 384-3224.

MAPS
Crater Rings EA Map 1- Crater Rings Allotment and Squaw Creek Allotment
Crater Rings EA Map 2 – Craters Allotment #886