

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BLM, BOISE DISTRICT
DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2011-0014-EA**

Applicant (if any): BLM Action	Proposed Action: Construction of a fence in Pasture 1 of the Nickel Creek Allotment	EA No. DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2011-0014-EA
State: Idaho	County: Owyhee	District: Boise
Prepared By: OFO ID Team	Title: Various	Report Date: May 31, 2011

LANDS INVOLVED

Meridian	Township	Range	Sections	Acres
Boise	9 S.	4 W.	25, 26, 27, 35, 36	± 4 ac.

<u>Consideration of Critical Elements</u>	N/A or Not Present	Applicable or Present, No Impact	Discussed in EA
Air Quality	x		
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern		x	
Cultural Resources	x		
Environmental Justice (E.O. 12898)	x		
Farm Lands (prime or unique)	x		
Fish Habitat	x		
Floodplains	x		
Forests and Rangelands			x
Migratory Birds			x
Native American Religious Concerns	x		
Invasive, Nonnative Species		x	
Wastes, Hazardous or Solid	x		
Threatened or Endangered Species	x		
Social and Economic			x
Water Quality (Drinking/Ground)	x		
Wetlands/Riparian Zones			x
Wild and Scenic Rivers (Eligible)			x
Wilderness Study Areas	x		

**Environmental Assessment # DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2011-0014-EA
Nickel Creek Fence**

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Nickel Creek Fence

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose and Need for Action

The permittee for the Nickel Creek Allotment (Juniper Mountain Grazing Association L.L.C.) has offered to voluntarily donate 190 AUMs of their authorized grazing permit, as provided for in Section 1503(b)(3)(D) of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act (OPLMA) of 2009. Based on the above legislative direction, the BLM Idaho State Director (on behalf of the Secretary of the Interior) would accept the voluntary, partial grazing permit donation, and permanently retire the 190 AUMs. The BLM would then modify the allotment boundary to ensure that livestock are permanently excluded from the portion of Pasture 1 affected by the AUM retirement, as required by the above legislation.

1.2 Summary of Proposed Action

The BLM proposes to accept the Juniper Mountain Grazing Association's voluntary donation of 190 AUMs of active grazing use in the North Fork Owyhee Wilderness Area, and to permanently retire the 190 AUMs from the Nickel Creek Allotment. The BLM also proposes to construct 2¼ miles of fence along an existing road, and an additional ¾ mile of fence across a portion of the North Fork Owyhee Wilderness Area to preclude future livestock use of the approximately 3270 acres of wilderness associated with the retired AUMs.

1.3 Location and Setting

The proposed action affects a portion of the Battleground Pasture (Pasture 1) of the Nickel Creek Allotment in southwest Owyhee County, Idaho. The lands affected by the proposed action lie north of Mud Flat Road in the North Fork Owyhee Wilderness Area, and abutting the eastern boundary of the North Fork Owyhee Wild and Scenic River corridor.

1.4 Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plan

The Proposed Action lies within the area administered under the 1999 Owyhee Resource Management Plan (RMP). Two objectives in the RMP affect the proposed Action.

Management Action No. 1 under Wilderness Objective No. 2 (WNES 2) requires designated wilderness to be managed in accordance with enabling legislation and other applicable Federal legislation and policies.

Management Action No. 1 under Recreation Objective No. 7 (RECT 7) prohibits the construction of new rangeland facilities within primitive settings of the North Fork Owyhee Backcountry SRMA, except for a maximum of one linear mile of gap fences if needed to exclude livestock from river corridors. Although the North Fork Owyhee Backcountry SRMA has since been designated as the North Fork Owyhee Wilderness Area, the proposed fence discussed herein would terminate at a rock outcropping above the North Fork Owyhee River canyon, and thus, would not be within the river corridor.

While the Proposed Action conforms to Management Action No. 1 under WNES 2, it does not appear to conform to Management Action No. 1 under RECT 7. The enabling wilderness legislation (OPLMA), however, specifically provides for voluntary AUM donations within wilderness areas, and directs the Secretary's (BLM's) subsequent permanent retirement of the donated AUMs (see Section 1.5 below). The OPLMA also directs BLM to ensure a permanent end to grazing on lands affected by voluntary AUM donations. The OPLMA was passed subsequent to the RMP, and thus, over-rides or supersedes affected RMP decisions. As such, the proposed fence, which would otherwise not be in conformance with the RMP, is allowable pursuant to requirements in the OPLMA.

1.5 Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, and Other Requirements

Section 1503(a) of Subtitle F of OPLMA established the North Fork Owyhee Wilderness Area. Section 1503(b)(3)(D) provides for the voluntary donation (whole or partial) of grazing permits that affect the designated wilderness areas. The section states that "The Secretary shall accept the donation of any valid existing permits...authorizing grazing on public land...within the wilderness areas..."

The above section also states that the Secretary shall "...ensure a permanent end to grazing on the land covered by the permit or lease."

If a grazing permittee proposes a partial donation of their grazing permit, the above section states the following:

"If a person holding a valid grazing permit or lease donates less than the full amount of grazing use authorized under the permit or lease, the Secretary shall –

- (aa) reduce the authorized grazing level to reflect the donation; and
- (bb) modify the permit or lease to reflect the revised level.

Further, the section states:

"To ensure that there is a permanent reduction in the authorized level of grazing on the land covered by permit or lease donated under subclause (i), the Secretary shall not allow grazing use to exceed the authorized level established under that subclause."

Executive Order 13186 expressly requires that Federal agencies evaluate the effects of proposed actions on migratory birds (including eagles) pursuant to NEPA "or other established environmental review process;" restore and enhance the habitat of migratory birds, as practicable; identify where unintentional take reasonably attributable to agency actions is having, or is likely to have, a measurable negative effect on migratory bird populations; and, with respect to those actions so identified, the agency shall develop and use principles, standards, and practices that will lessen the amount of unintentional take, developing any such conservation efforts in cooperation with the Service.

Cultural Resource Laws and Executive Orders

The BLM is required to consult with Native American tribes to “help assure (1) that federally recognized tribal governments and Native American individuals, whose traditional uses of public land might be affected by a proposed action, will have sufficient opportunity to contribute to the decision, and (2) that the decision maker will give tribal concerns proper consideration” (U.S. Department of the Interior, BLM Manual Handbook H-8120-1). Tribal coordination and consultation responsibilities are implemented under laws and executive orders that are specific to cultural resources, referred to as “cultural resource authorities,” and under non-specific regulations that are termed “general authorities.” Cultural resource authorities include: the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended (NHPA); the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 (ARPA); and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990, as amended (NAGPRA). General authorities include: the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1979 (AIRFA); the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA); the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA); and Executive Order 13007-Indian Sacred Sites. The proposed action is in compliance with the aforementioned authorities.

Southwest Idaho is the homeland of two culturally and linguistically related tribes: the Northern Shoshone and the Northern Paiute. In the latter half of the 19th century, a reservation was established at Duck Valley on the Nevada/Idaho border west of the Bruneau River. The Shoshone-Paiute Tribes residing on the Duck Valley Indian Reservation today actively practice their culture and retain aboriginal rights and/or interests in this area. The Shoshone-Paiute Tribes assert aboriginal rights to their traditional homelands as their treaties with the United States, the Boise Valley Treaty of 1864 and Bruneau Valley Treaty of 1866, which would have extinguished aboriginal title to the lands now federally administered, were never ratified.

Other tribes that have ties to southwestern Idaho include the Bannock and the Nez Perce. Southeast Idaho is the homeland of the Northern Shoshone and the Bannock Tribes. In 1867, a reservation was established at Fort Hall in southeastern Idaho. The Fort Bridger Treaty of 1868 applies to BLM’s relationship with the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes. The northern part of the BLM’s Boise District was also inhabited by the Nez Perce Tribe. The Nez Perce signed treaties in 1855, 1863 and 1868. The BLM considers off-reservation treaty-reserved fishing, hunting, gathering, and similar rights of access and resource use, on public land it administers, for all tribes that may be affected by a proposed action.

2.0 Description of the Alternatives

Without the permittee’s voluntary donation of all or a portion of their grazing permit, there would be no purpose or need for the proposed fence. Thus, only two alternatives are being discussed herein – the Proposed Action and No Action.

2.1 Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives

2.1.1 Alternative A - Proposed Action

- a. The BLM proposes to accept the Juniper Mountain Grazing Association's voluntary donation of 190 AUMs of active grazing use in a portion of Pasture 1 of the Nickel Creek Allotment, and to permanently retire them, thereby reducing the total authorized AUMs in the allotment. Further, to ensure a permanent end to grazing on the land covered by the affected AUMs, BLM proposes to construct an approximately three mile-long, four-strand wire fence (top three barbed and one smooth bottom wire) to preclude future livestock use of the 3270 acres associated with the 190 AUMs being retired. The fence would be constructed as a let-down fence to reduce impacts to migrating wildlife.

The majority of the proposed fence would follow a designated 60-foot wide cherrystem road located wholly outside of the North Fork Owyhee Wilderness Area. The fence would begin near the southeast corner of Section 36, T. 9 S., R. 4 W., Boise Meridian, Idaho, at the existing fence line dividing pastures 1 and 2 of the Nickel Creek Allotment, and would extend northwesterly for approximately 2¼ miles along the northeastern side of the designated cherrystem to the road's northern terminus in the NE¼SW¼ of Section 26. From the cherrystem's northern terminus, the fence would extend in a northwesterly direction another ¾ mile, approximately, to a rock outcrop on the rim of the North Fork Owyhee River canyon in the SW¼NE¼ of Section 27 (see attached map).

During construction, all motorized or mechanized vehicles and equipment would be limited to the confines of the 60-foot wide cherrystem. Any access or construction activity conducted outside of the cherrystem would be limited to non-motorized and non-mechanized means.

If required, metal fence posts shall be green in color to minimize visual intrusion to the surrounding wilderness environment.

Existing fences within Pasture 1 that become surplus or redundant as a result of the fence construction proposed herein, would be removed by BLM. However, fence removal, if warranted, would not be conducted as part of this fence construction project.

2.1.2 Alternative B - No Action/Continue Present Management

Under the No Action Alternative, BLM would not build a fence as described in the Proposed Action. Without a fence to exclude grazing from the affected 3270 acres of the Nickel Creek Allotment, the Juniper Mountain Grazing Association would not donate their 190 AUMs of grazing use, and livestock grazing would continue at current authorized levels throughout the entirety of Pasture 1.

3.0 Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences

3.1 Vegetation, including Special Status Plants

3.1.1 Affected Environment – (Vegetation, including Special Status Plants)

The affected portion of Pasture 1 is dominated by a western juniper (*Juniperus occidentalis*), mountain and low sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata* ssp. *vaseyana* and *A. arbuscula*), Idaho fescue (*Festuca idahoensis*) community, as well as riparian communities along streams and in wetland meadows. No known special status plants inhabit the project area. Pasture 1 contains 661 acres (about 10%) of the North Fork Juniper Woodland ACEC, which was designated to protect old-growth and mature stands of western juniper. In 2003, the standard for native vegetation was not being met in Pasture 1, and livestock use was determined to be a factor (USDI 2003b). The ecological condition of Pasture 1 was in a downward trend (USDI 2003a).

3.1.2 Environmental Consequences – Vegetation, including Special Status Plants

3.1.2.1 Alternative A – Proposed Action

Direct impacts would include site disturbance related to project construction and subsequent livestock trailing and concentrations along the fence, which could lead to soil trampling and vegetation displacement. Livestock trailing impacts would occur predominately along the $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of fence crossing the wilderness area. Trailing that might occur along the cherrystem road would most probably occur on the road itself, which has already sustained vehicle impacts.

During construction, if special status plants are found along the proposed fence line, the fence would be rerouted to avoid the plants. Restricting vehicle travel to the existing cherrystem would minimize site disturbance during project construction. Disturbed areas can, and often do, foster the colonization of invasive species.

The proposed fence would extend along about 0.4 miles of the edge of and about 0.1 mile through a portion of the North Fork Juniper Woodland ACEC. Fence construction would cause some localized vegetation disturbance within the ACEC, but the fence would also protect approximately 30 acres from future grazing-related impacts.

The proposed fence would eliminate livestock grazing on approximately 3270 acres of the Nickel Creek Allotment, thereby allowing key forage species to better meet their physiological and phenological needs, which would increase plant vigor, seed production, and reestablishment, resulting in short- and long-term indirect benefits. The exclusion of grazing would result in more ground cover, in terms of plant canopy and litter. Special status plants, if they exist in the project area, would likewise benefit from livestock removal.

3.1.2.2 Alternative B – No Action

The proposed fence would not be constructed, and thus, livestock grazing-related impacts to vegetation would continue in the 3270 acres of the Nickel Creek Allotment. No fence construction impacts would occur.

3.2 Soils

3.2.1 Affected Environment – Soils

Soils are shallow to moderately deep and well drained, and were formed in mixed alluvium and residuum from welded rhyolitic tuffs and breccia. The Hat, Cleavage, Wickahoney, Monasterio, and Yatahoney series represent the soils that have frigid soil temperature and xeric soil moisture regimes. Currently, accelerated erosional processes are evident in Pasture 1 (USDI 2003a), including accelerated overland flow and subsequent flow patterns, pedestalled plants, and soil surface physical alterations (mechanical damage and physical crusting).

3.2.2 Environmental Consequences – Soils

3.2.2.1 Alternative A – Proposed Action

Actions associated with fence construction would have minimal impacts on the soil resource. Livestock concentrations along the $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of fence crossing the wilderness area could result in reduced vegetation and increased opportunities for erosion; however, these disturbances would occur in relatively limited areas and would be mitigated by general improvements in watershed condition. Livestock-related impacts along the existing road would be minimal since livestock would be trailing along a road previously impacted by vehicles.

Elimination of livestock grazing on 3270 acres would increase site productivity and improve watershed health. Mechanical damage to the soil surface from livestock hoof action would not occur. Perennial grass species would increase in density and canopy cover; surface litter, above ground structural material, and fibrous root matter would also increase, all of which would aid in protecting soil from wind and water erosion. Further, the resulting increase in the amount of fine fuels in the understory would enhance the natural role of fire in the management of this juniper system.

3.2.2.2 Alternative B – No Action

The proposed fence would not be constructed, and fence-related livestock trampling would not occur, but grazing-related impacts would continue, especially along riparian areas and wetlands. The grazing plan instituted in 2003 reduced the amount of hot season grazing to only one year out of four; thus, while grazing would continue to impact riparian areas, the effects would be much less than what occurred prior to 2003.

3.3 Fish and Wildlife, Special Status Animals/Migratory Birds

3.3.1 Affected Environment – Fish and Wildlife, Special Status Animals/Migratory Birds

Pasture 1 of the Nickel Creek Allotment contains habitat for mule deer, elk, pronghorn antelope, mountain lion, bobcat, badger and a variety of other mammalian predators, sage grouse, chukar, California quail, various raptors, and a number of migratory and resident nongame birds, small mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. The Nickel Creek Allotment also contains crucial winter habitat for mule deer. Although no nest sites have been identified within the project area, uplands within the allotment and surrounding area provide habitat for the occasional wintering bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*). One Federal candidate species, the Columbia spotted frog, inhabits wetlands within portions of the allotment, while one other candidate species, the yellow-billed cuckoo, may occur, but has not been recorded. A number of other special status animal species are known or are likely to occur within the allotment. These include the prairie falcon, ferruginous hawk, calliope hummingbird, willow flycatcher, loggerhead shrike, sage sparrow, Brewer's sparrow, spotted bat, Townsend's big-eared bat, fringed myotis, pygmy rabbit, California bighorn sheep, western toad, and common garter snake (USDI 2003a).

Abundant mature western juniper stands throughout the pasture are providing important habitat for a diversity of songbirds, bats, and other species. Shrubs are also abundant at most locations, while desirable grasses are less common than expected and often occur primarily under the protection of shrubs. While shrubs are generally providing good woody cover, structure, and forage for many songbirds, pygmy rabbits, sage grouse, and others, the lack of desirable bunchgrasses, at many locations, is limiting cover for ground nesting and foraging species, along with production and availability of seeds and insects, critical food items for sage grouse, songbirds, and bats (insects only), and for small mammals that are, in turn, critical prey for most raptors.

3.3.2 Environmental Consequences – (Fish and Wildlife, Special Status Animals/Migratory Birds)

3.3.2.1 Alternative A – Proposed Action

Human activities in the vicinity of fence construction would disturb and inhibit wildlife activities, but the effects would be negligible and short-term. Post-construction livestock trailing, along the $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of fence crossing the wilderness area, could result in minor affects to some burrowing animals. The fence could also impact big game movements. This effect would be mitigated during the non-grazing season since it will be a “let down” fence. Also, once the proposed fence is constructed, fences existing within the closed portion of Pasture 1 could be removed, thereby reducing impacts to wildlife movement.

The 3270 acres north of the proposed fence would show marked wildlife habitat improvement from the elimination of livestock grazing. In this area, livestock-related disturbance of habitats and populations would be eliminated; forage, cover, and structure would improve and be present at all times to adequately meet the needs of most, if not all, special status animals and other wildlife. Improvement in the ecological condition of 3270

acres of habitat resulting from elimination of livestock grazing is also consistent and compatible with the goal of increasing or stabilizing breeding populations of raptors and other migratory birds.

3.3.2.2 Alternative B – No Action

The proposed fence would not be constructed, the permittee would not donate the 190 AUMs, and livestock grazing would continue in the 3270 acres of Pasture 1 at current authorized levels. Livestock grazing would continue to impact wildlife forage, cover, and structure, both in upland habitats and in riparian areas and wetlands.

3.4 Cultural Resources

3.4.1 Affected Environment – Cultural Resources

Cultural inventory data is incomplete for the Nickel Creek Allotment in general. Surveys in the vicinity include the Boise District BLM Class 11 Inventory (Young 1987). Recorded allotment sites include a habitation, 19 lithic scatters, two historic trash scatters, two rockshelters, five rock cairns, and three rock alignments. The Shoshone-Paiute and Bannock Tribes inhabited this area. Past human use includes camping, food gathering and hunting. Historically, it has been used for livestock grazing and recreation. A Class III cultural inventory of the area affected by the proposed fence project was conducted on June 15, 2011, and identified one can scatter (recent trash), but no significant cultural or historic artifacts or sites.

3.4.2 Environmental Consequences – Cultural Resources

3.4.2.1 Alternative A – Proposed Action

The Proposed Action could potentially increase livestock trampling along the ¾ mile of fence crossing the wilderness area, which could cause breakage of buried artifacts if they exist. These affects would not occur along the existing cherrystem road. The elimination of livestock grazing on 3270 acres would improve vegetative cover and stabilize soils, which would contribute to protecting and preserving cultural resources.

3.4.2.2 Alternative B – No Action

While livestock grazing would continue in the 3270 acres of the Nickel Creek Allotment, the proposed fence would not be constructed, and thus, there would be no increased fence-related livestock soil trampling. However, continued grazing, even at levels deemed appropriate for the area, would slow vegetative recovery when compared to the Proposed Action, thus allowing continued soil erosion, with associated localized effects to buried cultural resources if they exist.

3.5 Wetlands/Riparian Areas and Water Quality

3.5.1 Affected Environment – Wetlands/Riparian Areas and Water Quality

Intermittent streams and wetland meadows in Pasture 1 were historically grazed primarily in summer. The majority of riparian areas and wetlands were functioning-at-risk with a static trend in condition during the 2003 grazing permit renewal process (USDI 2003a). Livestock grazing was determined to be the primary factor negatively impacting the health of these streams

and wetlands (USDI 2003b). However, riparian areas are no longer consistently grazed in the hot season based on the rotational grazing system implemented in the 2003 Final Grazing Decision. The Pasture 1 area affected by the Proposed Action supports no known special status fish species.

A small section along the southern end of the proposed fence would be located in close proximity to Current Creek. During the 2003 rangeland health assessment, water quality in Current Creek did not comply with the State of Idaho's water temperature criteria for full support of cold water biota and salmonid spawning beneficial uses (USDI 2003b). However, Current Creek now meets State standards, and is no longer listed as a water quality-limited stream. A July 2009 assessment found Current Creek in proper functioning condition (PFC). Channel sinuosity was functionally appropriate, and increasing. Riparian areas were increasing in size. Perennial vegetation consisted of sedges (*Carex* spp.) and various willows (*Salix* spp.) of all ages. Beaver dams existed, and the entire floodplain width was dominated with >10' tall willows. Sediment load was appropriate for the stream type. Current year grazing was not apparent, and hoof impactation was minimal to nonexistent. Trout of all sizes, up to 10 inches were noted, and numerous schools of minnow were located in the backwaters of the beaver dams.

3.5.2 Environmental Consequences – Wetlands/Riparian Areas and Water Quality

3.5.2.1 Alternative A – Proposed Action

Riparian areas and wetlands and associated water quality in the 3270 acres where grazing will be eliminated and Current Creek is located, would continue to improve in condition under this alternative. Cover and vigor of obligate riparian plants such as willows and sedges would improve. Wetlands that have improved in functioning condition since 2003 would continue to function at PFC. While the northern extent of the proposed let-down fence would dead-end into a rock outcrop near the eastern rim of the North Fork Owyhee Wild and Scenic River, the fence would cause no adverse effects to the river corridor.

3.5.2.2 Alternative B – No Action

The grazing plan developed in 2003 reduced hot season grazing in riparian areas, and has led to significant improvement in the condition of riparian areas and wetlands and associated water quality. Continued grazing under the existing plan is expected to continue this trend, albeit not as quickly as under the proposed action.

3.6 Socio-Economic

3.6.1 Affected Environment – Socio-Economic

Historically, the livestock industry in Owyhee County is an important component of the local economy. Recreation, including backpacking, horseback riding, camping, hunting, fishing, hiking, sightseeing, boating, and nature study, is increasing on public land in the Nickel Creek area, which was designated by OPLMA as part of the North Fork Owyhee Wilderness Area.

The North Fork Owyhee River was also designated as a component of the Wild and Scenic River System. Livestock impacts, in some riparian and upland areas, have caused some deterioration of natural settings which detract from recreational experiences or visitors. It would be anticipated that economic impacts (income) associated with recreation use on public land would increase over time for local communities and businesses. Since BLM only has access to County and State yearly statistics, it is impossible to adequately quantify the economic effect of the Proposed Action.

3.6.2 Environmental Consequences – Socio-Economic

3.6.2.1 Alternative A – Proposed Action

The retirement of 190 AUMs of grazing use would likely have few if any negative short or long-term economic effects to the grazing permittee, since the permittees are being compensated by outside interests for their voluntary AUM donation.

Construction of a fence inside a wilderness could negatively affect visitors by reducing the area's open-space nature. On the other hand, the 3270 acres that would be ungrazed as a result of the proposed fence would improve the area's "naturalness", thus, protecting and preserving its wilderness character and benefitting visitors. Further, the proposed fence would restrict livestock from accessing over three miles of the wild and scenic river corridor, thus improving recreational experiences along the river.

3.6.2.2 Alternative B – No Action

Continuing livestock grazing in the Nickel Creek Allotment's Pasture 1 (3,270 acres) could potentially cost the permittee more than the grazing benefits realized, due to the scarcity of usable forage growing under the moderately dense juniper canopy, and the difficulty of managing cattle in this remote and rugged terrain.

3.7 Visual

3.7.1 Affected Environment – Visual

Public land within Pasture 1 is a mix of Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class I and II (USDI 1999). The objective in Class I areas is to preserve the existing character of the landscape; construction of new rangeland facilities is not permitted. Within VRM Class II areas, the objective is also to retain the existing character of the landscape, but very limited construction of new facilities may be permitted. As stated in Section 1.5, the proposed fence, which crosses a mostly VRM Class II area, with a small amount of Class I, is allowed under the auspices of OPLMA. Within the Nickel Creek Allotment, the natural character of some landscapes in Class I and II areas was being degraded by heavy livestock grazing prior to the 2003 Final Decision implementation. Impacts included increased amounts of bare ground, streambank alteration, and inadequate diversity and structure of plant communities. Visual impacts from the proposed fence would be minimized due to its location in a moderately dense mature juniper forest.

3.7.2 Environmental Consequences – Visual

3.7.2.1 Alternative A – Proposed Action

The elimination of grazing on 3270 acres would have a positive impact on visual resources. Improvements in vegetative condition and diversity, streambank structure and stability, and elimination of trampling and other evidence of livestock use would enhance the area. Improvements in vegetation and soil conditions would result in a more primitive and natural landscape, which would enhance the area's scenic quality in the short- and long-term. Construction of ¾ mile of fence through the wilderness area would detract from the natural and open vistas. The effect would be partially mitigated because most of the fence traverse areas of moderately dense juniper forest, which tends to hide or limit visual intrusion. Fence construction and maintenance would be accomplished with motorized and mechanized vehicles and equipment limited to the designated cherrystem road, thus minimizing project-related disturbance to the adjacent wilderness.

3.7.2.2 Alternative B – No Action

The No Action alternative would have no effects to visual resources since the area would remain as it is at present.

3.8 Recreation and Wilderness

3.8.1 Affected Environment – Recreation and Wilderness

The Proposed Action lies within the North Fork Owyhee Wilderness Area, and the northern fence extension approaches the North Fork Owyhee Wild and Scenic River corridor. The main recreational activities within these designated areas include float boating, backpacking, horseback riding, camping, hunting, fishing, sightseeing, and nature study. Livestock impacts prior to the 2003 Final Grazing Decision caused deteriorated natural settings in some riparian, wetland, and upland areas, which detracted from recreational experiences, such as along Current Creek. Motorized and mechanized vehicles and equipment are excluded from the Wilderness Area and the Wild and Scenic River corridor.

3.8.2 Environmental Consequences – Recreation and Wilderness

3.8.2.1 Alternative A – Proposed Action

The Proposed Action would have both positive and negative effects on recreation and wilderness. While a new fence would detract from the natural and open space nature of the wilderness, and would affect, at least seasonally, recreational movements through the area, the improvement in vegetative and riparian condition, with no livestock grazing in the area north of the proposed fence, would have a positive impact on scenic quality and recreational experiences. Further, the proposed fence would restrict livestock from accessing over three miles of the wild and scenic river corridor, thus improving recreational experiences along the river. Scenic quality, one of the special features of the North Fork Owyhee Wilderness Area, would improve as livestock grazing and trampling are eliminated, vegetative cover and diversity increase, and streambank stability improves. Elimination of livestock-related impacts would make previously undesirable areas attractive for camping, hiking, riding, and nature study. Improvements in stream function

and water quality would eventually lead to improved opportunities for fishing. Improvements in wildlife habitat would lead to increased opportunities for both consumptive and non-consumptive wildlife-related recreation. Improvements in scenic quality, recreational opportunities, and wildlife habitat would also enhance the wilderness character and wild and scenic river values. Further, once the proposed fence is constructed, existing fences within the closed portion of Pasture 1 could be removed, further enhancing wilderness character and recreational values.

3.8.2.2 Alternative B – No Action

The No Action alternative would allow continued livestock grazing in the affected 3270 acres of the North Fork Owyhee Wilderness Area. As such, adverse impacts on recreational activities, including camping, hiking, riding, and nature study, would remain static or increase.

3.9 Cumulative Impacts

3.9.1 Environmental Consequences – Cumulative Impacts

The cumulative impacts of the Proposed Action are considered in context with activities occurring in a region that covers the portion of Owyhee County located west of the Bruneau River canyon. Livestock grazing and recreation are the primary past, present, and future actions and land uses that could cumulatively impact the resource values in the analysis region. Livestock grazing is the primary use of these lands; however, there has been substantial juniper treatment (cutting, burning) on some state and private lands, primarily to the north, east, and west of the Nickel Creek Allotment. In addition, juniper treatment projects are proposed for public lands in the Trout Springs and Pole Creek grazing allotments, which are located west of the Nickel Creek Allotment. Changes within the immediate watershed would have the greatest beneficial effect on local upland and riparian resources. Changes in adjacent watersheds would have the greatest beneficial effect on wildlife and recreational resources. Recreational uses, such as dispersed camping, hunting, rafting, etc., are expected to increase over time.

3.9.1.1 Alternative A – Proposed Action

The Proposed Action would have negligible to no cumulative impacts. Excluding livestock grazing on 3270 acres would have beneficial ecological effects, but cumulatively, direct and indirect impacts to vegetation, soils, and watersheds would be negligible in both the short and long-term when considered with other ongoing and reasonably foreseeable future activities in the region. The effects of fencing would not overlap in time or space with the future juniper treatment projects proposed for the Trout Springs and Pole Creek allotments.

3.9.1.2 Alternative B – No Action

The No Action alternative would have negligible short and long-term cumulative adverse effects to the environment.

3.10 Mitigation

No mitigation would be needed for this project.

4.0 Consultation and Coordination

4.1.1 List of Preparers

BLM Interdisciplinary Team

John Sullivan	Supervisory Resource Management Specialist
Buddy Green	Field Manager
Brian McCabe	Archaeologist
Beth Corbin	Botanist/Ecologist
John Biar	Rangeland Management Specialist
Chris Robbins	Rangeland Management Specialist
Richard Jackson	Hydrologist
Shane Wilson	Park Ranger
Jon Beck	Planning and Environmental Coordinator
Barbara Albiston	Writer-Editor

4.1.2 List of Individuals, Agencies, and Organizations Consulted

Dennis Stanford - Permittee, Juniper Mountain Grazing Association

Mike Stanford - Permittee, Juniper Mountain Grazing Association

Mike Hanley - Permittee, Juniper Mountain Grazing Association

Phil Ryan, Backcountry Horsemen of Idaho

Dr. Chad Gibson

Owyhee Initiative Inc. Board of Directors

Shoshone-Paiute Tribe

4.1.3 Public Participation

2008: Potential AUM buy-outs were discussed by individuals and organizations involved in development of the Owyhee Initiative Agreement. Voluntary grazing permit donations were subsequently authorized under Section 1503(b)(3) of the OPLMA.

May 6, 2011: Field visit to the project site with BLM staff, permittees, and interested publics to identify and flag a portion of the proposed fence line.

June 15, 2011: Field visit by BLM staff to flag the remaining portion of the fence line and conduct a cultural inventory of the affected public land.

June 20, 2011: Discussed proposed project with Owyhee County Commissioners at monthly BLM/Owyhee County coordination meeting.

July 7, 2011: Presentation at the Shoshone-Paiute Wings and Roots meeting at the BLM Boise District Office.

August 24, 2011: Shoshone-Paiute Tribe concurs with the proposal during the monthly Wings and Roots meeting at the BLM Boise District Office.

5.0 Literature Cited

- USDI. 1999. Owyhee Resource Management Plan (RMP). BLM Lower Snake River District, Boise, ID. 190 pp.
- USDI. 2003a. Assessments for Nickel Creek (0548) and Nickel Creek FFR (0657) Allotments. BLM Lower Snake River District, Owyhee Field Office, Boise, ID. 143 pp.
- USDI. 2003b. Nickel Creek Allotment (0548) Determination for Achieving Standards for Rangeland Health and Conforming with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management. BLM Lower Snake River District, Owyhee Field Office, Boise, ID. 12 pp.
- Young, J. M. 1987. Class II Cultural Resource Inventory of the BLM Boise District's Owyhee, Bruneau, Jarbidge, and Cascade Resource Areas. BLM Boise District, Boise, ID. 118 pp.

6.0 Map

