

**Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)**  
**Trout Springs Allotment Permit Renewal**  
**Environmental Assessment # DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2009-0030-EA**

**-Grazing Permit Issuance and Authorization to Construct Range Improvements-**

I have reviewed the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (CEQ) for significance (40 CFR 1508.27) and have determined the actions analyzed in Environmental Assessment (EA) # DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2009-0030-EA (incorporated by reference into this document) for the issuance of a grazing permit to Payne Family Grazing Association, LLC (Authorization #1101594) along with range improvements analyzed for the Trout Springs Allotment, Owyhee County, Idaho, would not constitute a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment; 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 (rest/rotation or deferment) and enforcement of objectives, as will be described in the decision document. The following factors, as described in the above EA, were used in defining significance:

***1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.***

The beneficial effects of Alternative E are:

1. Reduces negative grazing effects to vegetation and soil surface, and allows for faster vegetative response and less soil disturbances due to hoof impacts in Pastures 1A, 1B, 2B, and 3. Increased growth, vigor, and cover (both herbaceous and letter) is expected due to the shortened grazing schedule, decreased livestock numbers and reduced stocking rate (Section 3.1.2.5; Section 3.2.2.5).
2. Provides a reduction of stressors to biotic function and is anticipated to mitigate the additive stressors induced by climate change (Section 3.2.2.5)
3. Pasture rest/rotation or deferment and fall of use would improve livestock distribution and increase plant vigor and residual litter/cover/forage resulting in less erosion, improved vegetative composition, and increased vegetative diversity (Section 3.2.2.5).
4. Herbaceous riparian vegetation is less likely to be overgrazed in the fall due to cooler air temperatures which result in decreased demands for water and a shift of use back to the uplands (Section 3.3.2.2; Section 3.3.2.5).
5. Fall use with pasture rest/rotation for Pastures 1A, 1B, and 2A will result in fewer livestock in the riparian areas, resulting in reduced stream bank alteration and increased stubble height, and would increase riparian vegetation that wildlife use for nesting substrate, cover, and foraging habitat. Riparian vegetative health, vigor, reproduction and establishment would improve at a faster rate (shorter time periods for short and long-term effects) (Section 3.3.2.2; Section 3.3.2.5; Section 3.4.2.5).

6. Reductions in stream temperature and sediment would occur as the riparian vegetation communities develop into mature, late-seral communities which would create both canopy cover to increase stream shading and the root mass resulting in increased bank stability (Section 3.4.2.2; 3.4.2.5).
7. Stream channels would narrow and deepen due to improved bank stability, further enhancing stream temperatures resulting in improved fisheries habitat (Sections 3.4.2.2 and 3.4.2.5).
8. Rest/deferment would allow plants to improve vigor in upland and riparian areas. This would result in making significant progress towards all Standards for Rangeland Health (Sections 3.1.2.5; 3.2.2.5; 3.3.2.5; 3.4.2.5; 3.5.5.5).
9. Range improvements would better facilitate the livestock management system to further insure the benefits to soils/watersheds, upland vegetation, riparian functionality, water quality, and wildlife habitats (Sections 3.1.2.2; 3.1.2.5; 3.2.2.2; 3.2.2.5; 3.3.2.2; 3.3.2.5; 3.4.2.2; 3.4.2.5)

The adverse effects of Alternative E are:

1. Temporary minor impacts to soils, vegetation and wildlife due to range improvements (Sections 3.1.2.2; 3.2.2.2; 3.2.2.5; 3.3.2.2; 3.3.2.5; 3.4.2.2; 3.4.2.5)
2. The analysis documented in EA # DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2009-0030-EA did not identify any individual significant adverse short-term or long-term impact.

**2) *The degree to which the selection of Alternative E for the Authorization #1101594 and construction of range improvements affects public health or safety.***

The selection of Alternative E and construction of range improvement projects will not result in substantial or adverse impacts to public health or safety. Grazing of livestock and the construction of range improvements has occurred within the area for decades with limited affects to public health and safety, and are familiar activities 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, or areas of critical or environmental concern (ACECs) within the geographic area. However, the North Fork Owyhee Wilderness occurs within the Trout Springs Allotment; the North Fork Owyhee River corridor serves as the northern boundary of the allotment. As identified in the EA Section 3.8.2.2 and 3.8.2.5, changes identified with grazing as analyzed in Alternative E would improve the health and scenic quality within the North Fork Owyhee Wilderness, therefore improving the naturalness of the wilderness. Range improvements outside the wilderness area would improve distribution and management of livestock, therefore helping to improve overall ecological health, scenic quality, and naturalness throughout the allotment as a whole. The gap fence within wilderness would affect the area's naturalness by leaving an imprint of human work within the wilderness area. However,

fencing would be less than 100 feet in length, would be constructed of native materials, and would eliminate the access point cattle have to North Fork Owyhee River corridor. The fencing would have no impact on the areas solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation. Impacts to the areas naturalness and scenic value would be negligible due to the excellent topographic and vegetative screening of the area.

Fencing would conform with RECT 7 of the ORMP which states: “...*Prohibit the construction of new rangeland (livestock, watershed, and wildlife) facilities within the primitive settings of the SRMA lands associated with the Owyhee River system, except for a maximum of one linear mile of gap fences if needed to exclude livestock from river corridors.*”

Various cultural resources have been identified within the allotment, but due to rest, deferment, and site avoidance during construction of range improvements, effects to sites (known or unknown) are expected to be negligible (Section 3.10.2.2 and 3.10.2.5).

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

Public input regarding the Proposed Action has been solicited during an extensive project planning process, initiated in 2009 (Section 1.4 and Appendix C). All affected grazing permittees, interested publics, and other State and local governments of record for the Trout Springs Allotment. The initial scoping document was sent on August 14, 2009. Comments were received by Mike Hanley – Hanley Ranch Partnership, Chad Gibson – Owyhee Range Science Service, Ron Kay – Idaho Department of Agriculture, Western Watersheds Projects (WWP).

Through the scoping and interdisciplinary team process, the BLM identified several issues concerning livestock management in the Trout Springs Allotment. The foremost issues are identified (but not limited to) below:

1. Hot season grazing encourages increased impacts to riparian areas, wetlands, and fish habitat;
2. Juniper encroachment and livestock grazing have adversely affected and altered upland vegetation and watershed conditions away from reference conditions;
3. Sage-grouse habitat may have been reduced due to juniper encroachment and livestock grazing;
4. Improper livestock grazing promotes the spread and establishment of noxious and invasive weeds; and,
5. Proposed prescribed juniper burning would increase carbon emissions and may alter wildlife habitat.

The draft DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2009-0030-EA was issued for a 30-day comment period on July 12, 2013. Comments were received from the Southwest Region of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Owyhee Range Service (on behalf of Hanley Ranch Partnership), Ted and Dorothy Payne, Brett Nelson and Western Watersheds Project.

The EA addresses the foremost issues in the analysis of the various alternatives. Although the act of grazing on public land and construction of range improvements are 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 C and Sections 3.1.2.5, 3.2.2.5, 3.3.2.5, 3.4.2.5, 3.5.2.5, 3.6.2.5, 3.7.2.5, 3.8.2.5, 3.9.2.5, 3.10.2.5, 3.11.2.5, and 3.12.2.5).

**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 has been the primary use in this area for at least 78 years (Taylor Grazing Act, 1934). Grazing management and range improvement projects similar to those proposed by this decision have been completed in other parts of the Owyhee Field Office (OFO). Several published documents (Section 6.0) were used to complete EA # DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2009-0030-EA and to verify effects from various alternatives. Different grazing management strategies have been in place throughout the OFO for decades. This research and decades of grazing management has given the BLM and public good knowledge of anticipated effects from livestock grazing, range improvements, and juniper treatments. 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 fall use/rest rotation and various range improvements for livestock management/riparian protection. The activities are not connected to any other future actions of this nature. Management and resource issues may be similar in nature; however, all future actions regarding permit renewals and range improvements 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 3.13). 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, range improvements, wildfire, juniper treatments, noxious weed treatments/infestations, agriculture, and roads were all identified as past, present, and foreseeable future activities. No individually or cumulatively significant impacts were identified in the EA in combination with all of these activities. Although there are similar actions within the analysis area, they are completed and analyzed according to their own merits. Therefore, they are included in the analysis as cumulative, but not connected, action. Any adverse impacts identified for the preferred alternative, in conjunction with any adverse impacts of other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future actions will result in negligible to minor impacts to natural and cultural resources.

**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-B030-2009-0030-EA showed that only negligible effects to cultural or historical resources would occur through implementation of Alternative E (Sections 3.10.2.2, 3.10.2.5 and 3.13.6). The terms and conditions of the grazing permit under the Proposed Decision provide a reasonable level of general protection for cultural resources. Proposed range improvement projects have been surveyed and no cultural resources will be impacted.

**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 Trout Springs Allotment, although several candidate animal species are present. Selection of Alternative E will improve habitat conditions (both upland and riparian) at a faster rate than other alternatives analyzed. Range improvements have been designed to avoid special status plant species present within the allotment (Section 3.2.2.2 and 3.2.2.5). Fence construction could adversely affect candidate animal species habitat, but is short-term in nature. Injury or mortality of wildlife species due to fence collisions and impediments to daily or seasonal travel could occur until wildlife acclimates to the new fence. All fence construction will be to wildlife specifications in order to allow for movement of big game. Fence collision models for sage grouse species identify the risk as negligible as all new fences occur outside of the collision area identified in the model (Section 3.4.2.2; 3.4.2.5).

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

Alternative E of EA # DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2009-0030-EA, as it relates to grazing management and authorization to construct range improvements identified will not violate or threaten to violate any Federal, State, or local law for the protection of the environment (Sections 1.7).

/s/ Loretta V. Chandler

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Date