

**FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

**Travis Farm Land Sale**

**Finding of No Significant Impact**

DOI-BLM-NV-C010-2012-0018-EA

U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
Carson City District  
Stillwater Field Office  
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It is the mission of the Bureau of Land Management to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

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## **Background**

### **BACKGROUND**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Carson City District (CCD), Stillwater Field Office (SFO) proposes to implement the disposal of public lands through direct sale as authorized by federal regulations 43 CFR 2710 and 43 CFR 2711. The public lands that would be sold are adjacent to private lands owned by the Travis Farm within Edwards Creek Valley, Churchill County, Nevada. The land sale is made under the authority of Section 203 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) (43 United States Code [USC] 1701, 1713, 1740). The BLM CCD manages public land that has been identified for disposal in the BLM Carson City Consolidated Resource Management Plan (CRMP); page LND-3 C. The Proposed Land Sale would consolidate land that is difficult to manage through transfer from federal ownership. The BLM would sell two (2) Subject Parcels (Parcels) totaling 800 acres of federal land. The BLM National Operations Center (NOC) in conformance with the Reclamation Act of 1902 provides that 5% of proceeds of sales of federal lands shall go to the State. This Act applies to a number of western states including Nevada. The 1902 Act provision conforms with the language in the 1861 State Enabling Act specific to Nevada. When BLM receives purchase monies from the Travis Land Sale the BLM financial system automatically distributes 5% of the proceeds into a fund that then is distributed to the State of Nevada. The sale of the public lands will be administered by the SFO.

The Parcels total approximately 800 acres are located in the eastern end of Edwards Creek Valley, Churchill County, Nevada, approximately 30 miles west of the town of Austin, Nevada. The Parcels are near the upper end of Edwards Creek Valley and are defined on the west and north by the Clan Alpine Mountain Range and on the east by the New Pass Range. Elevations for the Parcels range from 5,180 feet to 5,240 feet. The Parcels are sparsely vegetated with high desert scrub brush. Annual precipitation is 8 to 9 inches, mainly from snowfall, although seasonal thunderstorms are not uncommon. Temperatures in the area can range from an average low of 10<sup>o</sup> F (degrees Fahrenheit) in winter to a range of 90 to 100<sup>o</sup> F in summer (Chambers Group, Inc., 2010a).

The Proposed Action under Environmental Assessment (EA) DOI-BLM-NV-C010-2012-0018 (pages 6 and 7) analyzes the direct land sale of approximately 800 acres of public land under the jurisdiction of the BLM CCD to Travis Farm to increase the production of hay, other rotational crops and prevent fragmented land ownership and public land management challenges. Travis Farm currently owns and farms private land adjacent to the two Parcels. The Parcels consist of a northern and southern parcel. The northern parcel is legally described as the MDM, T. 21 N., R. 39 E., sec. 2, SW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>; sec. 3, SE<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>; and sec. 10, NE<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>, containing approximately 480 acres. The southern parcel is legally described as the MDM, T. 21 N., R. 39 E., sec. 14, W<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>, containing approximately 320 acres.

Travis Farm began discussions with the BLM SFO regarding the purchase of approximately 200 acres of land in 2004. In the intervening years Travis Farm requested the total acreage of the sale to increase to approximately 640 acres upon increased availability of irrigation water at the site. The BLM suggested that the SW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> of sec. 14 (approximately 160 acres) be added to the

Proposed Action. BLM regulations require the land to be sold at not less than fair market value, which will be determined by a BLM arranged and approved appraisal. Travis Farm also holds sufficient water rights to farm up to an additional 640 acres. Any additional water used on the described lands would be provided by an established utility or under permit issued by the Division of Water Resources, State Engineer's Office. All waters of the state belong to the public and may be appropriated for beneficial use pursuant to the provisions of Chapters 533 and 534 of the Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS).

Travis Farm uses pivot irrigation farming. The fields are farmed on a 6 year rotational schedule with 5 years of hay development and one year of a rotational crop, such as triticale or other grain type crop. The Proposed Action would provide enough acreage to add four additional pivots and would potentially double the production of the farm while providing a more efficient use of existing resources (personal communication, Travis Farm, 2010). The only anticipated structures to be placed in the foreseeable future on the Parcels would be pivot irrigation infrastructure and fencing. Travis Farm would develop pivot irrigation farms on the northern parcel in its entirety. On the southern parcel, sec. 14, NW¼, would also have pivot irrigation, while the SW¼ would remain undeveloped in the foreseeable future (Figure 1). Any wells to supply the new pivots would be drilled on the existing property. The Subject Parcels would be entirely enclosed with fencing similar to the existing farm fencing (4 wires attached to 1 wooden post every 75 feet and 5 steel posts in between the wooden posts) (personal communication, Travis Farm, 2010).

A Notice of Realty Action (NORA) announcing the proposed sale was published in the Federal Register on August 23, 2010, followed by publication in local newspapers. The notice also segregated the land for a two year period from appropriation under the public land laws and the mining laws.

Announcement of the proposed sale was presented at the October 7, 2010, Churchill County Board of Commissioners meeting. This provided the Board of Commissioners the opportunity to review the Proposed Action and allowed the board and the public to provide comments regarding the proposed sale (Churchill County Board of Commissioners agenda, 2010).

### **Land Use Plan Conformance**

The Proposed Action is in conformance with the Carson City Consolidated Resource Management Plan Record of Decision (ROD) (pgs LND-2 and LND-3) as follows:

- Desired Outcomes – “Transfer lands out of federal ownership that is uneconomic to manage or have been identified for community expansion or agricultural development and have little value for other resource uses.”
- Land Use Allocations 1. “Designate for potential future disposal approximately 185000 acres of BLM managed public lands, under jurisdiction of the CCFO, as a pool of lands which meet preliminary criteria for transfer from federal ownership. In general these lands are those where BLM management is not cost effective. To determine the land tenure designation applicable to specific parcels of BLM managed public lands refer to map LND-1, Land Status, Disposal, Acquisition, Retention...”

- ...”C. Lands with possible agricultural potential (e.g. Smith Valley, mason Valley, Honey Lake Valley, and Edwards Creek).”

## **Finding**

This finding and conclusion is based on the consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality’s criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the context and the intensity of impacts described in the EA.

Based upon the analysis in the EA# DOI-BLM-NV-C010-2012-0018-EA *Travis Farm Land Sale Environmental Assessment*, it is my determination that the implementation of the Proposed Action will not have significant environmental impacts and that the Proposed Action is in conformance with the CRMP adopted in 2001. I have determined that the Proposed Action 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 necessary and will not be prepared for the Proposed Action.

## **Context:**

The Proposed Action is a site-specific action located on public lands administered by the BLM CCDO. The Parcels total approximately 800 acres are located in the eastern end of Edwards Creek Valley, Churchill County, Nevada, approximately 30 miles west of the town of Austin, Nevada. The Parcels are near the upper end of Edwards Creek Valley and are defined on the west and north by the Clan Alpine Mountain Range and on the east by the New Pass Range. Elevations for the Parcels range from 5,180 feet to 5,240 feet. The Parcels are sparsely vegetated with high desert scrub brush. Annual precipitation is 8 to 9 inches, mainly from snowfall, although seasonal thunderstorms are not uncommon. Temperatures in the area can range from an average low of 10° F (degrees Fahrenheit) in winter to a range of 90 to 100°F in summer (Chambers Group, Inc., 2010a).

## **Intensity:**

The following discussion is based on the relevant factors that should be considered in evaluating intensity as described in 40 CFR 1508.27:

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

All resource values have been evaluated for cumulative impacts. It has been determined that cumulative impacts would be negligible as a result of implementation of the Proposed Action. Current uses of the land surrounding the Travis Farm are expected to remain for the foreseeable future and it is unlikely that increases in these or other land uses will occur. I have determined that none of the direct, indirect or cumulative impacts associated with the Proposed Action are significant, individually or combined. The EA evaluated both beneficial and adverse impacts of the Proposed Action.

I have determined that none of the direct, indirect or cumulative impacts associated with the Proposed Action (as analyzed in Chapter 3 of the EA) are significant, individually or combined. The EA evaluated both beneficial and adverse impacts of the Proposed Action for the proposed purchase of approximately 800 acres of land currently under the jurisdiction of the BLM by Travis Farm in order to increase the production of hay and other rotational crops. Impacts to Rights-of-Way, soils, vegetation, livestock grazing, invasive, non-native species, visual resources, wildlife and water quality were analyzed in detail in chapter 3 of the EA.

After the proposed sale the land is expected to become farm land similar to the land which surrounds these parcels. With the implementation of weed control practices by Travis Farm, impacts from invasive and non-native species would not be expected which would be beneficial to surrounding lands as well as the crops on the farm lands. Any fences built would meet BLM standards for antelope to allow continued access by that species.

All of the impacts and identified mitigation measures are described and analyzed in detail in Chapter 3 of the Final EA.

*2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.*

There would be no significant change in the existing soil structure or composition. The Proposed Action would only remove existing vegetative cover and replace it with pivot irrigated crops. Travis Farm would continue to ensure minimal use of any fertilizer, pesticides, or herbicides during farming activities to reduce impacts to the quality of the groundwater resource. Herbicides would be applied according to label instructions. Private parcel fences would meet BLM standards for antelope. Effects to public health and safety would be negligible.

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

The BLM Interdisciplinary Team (ID) scoped the Proposed Action internally to determine if there would be any impacts to any unique characteristics of the geographic area. There are no park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers designated Wilderness Areas/Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) or ecologically critical areas in the vicinity or proposed sale areas.

A Class III cultural resources inventory was conducted (CRR3-2507P) and two isolated artifacts were found. Neither of these were considered eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places per the State Protocol Agreement between the BLM Nevada and the Nevada State Historic Preservation Act 2009, Appendix E. A. (No Properties).

Tribal consultation was conducted with The Fallon Paiute-Shoshone (correspondence 11/10/09, 5/28/10 and 9/7/10; face to face 2/24/10. No concerns were brought forward, however, in the event that human remains are discovered the tribe will be contacted per NRS 383.170 (appendix D).

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

No unresolved issues have been identified following public notification of the proposed action. This is demonstrated through the effects analysis in Chapter 3 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 provided in the EA does not indicate that this action would involve any unique or unknown risks. Relevant components of the human environment which would be either affected or potentially affected by the Proposed Action and other alternatives were addressed through the effects analysis in Chapter 3 of the EA.

- 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.*

Current uses of the land surrounding the Travis Farm are expected to remain cropland for the foreseeable future and it is unlikely that increases in these or other land uses would occur. The proposed action will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision about a future consideration. Completion of this EA does not establish a precedent for other land sales nor does it authorize other land sales in this area that are outside the scope of the EA. Any future projects within the areas that are outside of the scope of EA# DOI-BLM-NV-C010-2012-0018-EA, or in surrounding areas will be analyzed on their own merits, independent of the actions currently proposed.

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

Direct and indirect impacts of the Proposed Action were analyzed in Chapter 3 (Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences) of the Final EA. None of the environmental impacts discussed in Chapter 3 of this EA are considered significant. Past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions have been considered for cumulative impacts and the analysis within Chapter 3 of the EA concludes that the cumulative impacts would not incrementally contribute to significant impacts. In addition, for any actions that might be proposed in the future, further environmental analysis, including assessment of cumulative impacts, would be required.

Current uses of the land surrounding the Travis Farm are expected to remain as croplands for the foreseeable future and it is unlikely that increases in these or other land uses will occur.

- 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.*

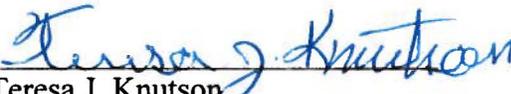
The Proposed Action would not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as discussed in the report prepared for the Class III cultural resources inventory that was conducted (CRR3-2507P) of the area. The Proposed Action has no potential to adversely affect significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

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

After consulting with the BLM wildlife biologist and the USFWS website for Nevada, there are no federally listed threatened or endangered species or their habitat located within the project area ([http://www.fws.gov/nevada/protected\\_species/species\\_by\\_county.html](http://www.fws.gov/nevada/protected_species/species_by_county.html)). There are also no known threatened or endangered plant species in the Subject Parcels (personal communication from Nevada Natural Heritage Program, 2010). The Proposed Action would not adversely affect any federally listed species or their habitat under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

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

The Proposed Action is in compliance with the CRMP. The Proposed Action is consistent with Statutes, regulations and policies of neighboring local, County, State, Tribal governments and other Federal agencies. FLPMA Section 203(a) (3) allows disposal through direct sale of public land if it will serve a public benefit. Disposal through direct sale of the Subject Parcels would serve the public benefit by making public lands available for community expansion and private economic development, increasing the potential for economic diversity, and adding to the municipal tax base, thereby adding revenue to the community for services such as schools and roads. The Proposed Action does not violate or threaten to violate any federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

  
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Date