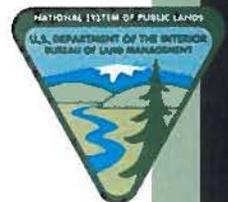


# **Carson City District Drought Management Environmental Assessment**

## **Finding of No Significant Impact**

DOI-BLM-NV-C000-2013-0001-EA

**June 2013**



## **BACKGROUND**

According to the US Drought Monitor, as of May 28, 2013, approximately 64% of the state of Nevada is experiencing severe drought conditions. “On May 26, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) reported that at least 40% of the rangeland and pastures were rated very poor to poor in five of the eleven Western States. New Mexico topped the list, with 91% of its rangeland and pastures rated very poor to poor, followed by Arizona (66%), Nevada (65%), California (55%), and Colorado (45%). Below-average statewide reservoir storage remained a concern in several Western States, including Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Oregon” (US Drought Monitor). Field monitoring indicates that many areas within the Carson City District (CCD) are experiencing drought impacts including substantial reductions in forage production and reduced spring and stream flows. It is likely that a continuation of these conditions would impair forage and water resources on many more areas within the CCD.

As of February 27, 2013, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) had designated the counties of Douglas, Esmeralda, and White Pine and the Independent City of Carson City as primary natural disaster areas due to damages and losses caused by the recent drought. The Independent City is Carson City. Douglas County and Carson City are located within the CCD. Additionally, farmers and ranchers in Nevada counties: Elko, Lincoln, Mineral, Storey, Eureka, Lyon, Nye, and Washoe and California counties: Alpine, El Dorado, Inyo, and Mono also qualify for natural disaster assistance because their counties are contiguous. Mineral, Storey, Lyon, Nye, Washoe and Alpine Counties are located within the CCD.

Therefore, there is a need for action to ensure that livestock, wild horse and burro management and other authorized land uses during drought does not adversely impact the range and compromise the CCD’s ability to meet the fundamentals of rangeland health as mandated by the Land Use Plans and Policies brought forward in sections 1.3 and 1.4 of this document by accomplishing the following drought management goals:

1. Provide for the early detection of and response to drought conditions.
2. Promptly identify and prevent further degradation to affected resources on lands affected by drought within the CCD.
3. Provide for the rapid implementation of Drought Response Actions (DRAs) in order to alleviate the impacts of authorized uses and activities on natural resources that are at risk of being adversely affected by drought.

The Proposed Action as analyzed in Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-NV-C010-2013-0001-EA is needed to ensure that livestock and wild horse and burro management during drought does not adversely impact the range and rangeland health of the range.

The Proposed Action provides numerous DRAs that would allow for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to provide a rapid response to drought situations on public lands in order to alleviate the impacts of authorized uses and activities on natural resources that are at risk of being adversely affected by drought conditions. The effects of drought are often times far reaching, impacting the environment and economy of an area. This Environmental Assessment focuses primarily on the environmental impacts of drought and the potential responses that could

be implemented to alleviate impacts to sensitive resources. Specific impacts depend on drought severity but often include:

- Increased number and severity of fires;
- Lack of forage and drinking water;
- Decreased vigor and production of plants;
- Damage to plant species;
- Increased wind and water erosion of soils;
- Reduction and degradation of fish and wildlife habitat; and
- Increased death loss of wildlife, wild horses and burros, and livestock.

The Proposed Action includes a range of DRAs that would be used to mitigate the effects of drought and to address emergency situations for livestock grazing management, wild horse and burro management, wildlife needs, riparian resource concerns and a variety of other resources. DRAs are designed to reduce the impacts of authorized uses and activities on natural resources that are at risk of being adversely affected by drought conditions. The early detection and prompt response to drought is intended to prevent further degradation to affected resources within the CCD.

These DRAs include partial or complete closures of allotments; reductions in livestock animal unit months; reductions in livestock grazing duration; changes in livestock season of use; changes in livestock management practices; targeted grazing of monotypic annual plant communities; temporary changes in kind or class of livestock; wild horse and burro removals; temporary water hauls; temporary above ground pipelines; temporary fencing, temporary closures to Off Highway Vehicles, temporary water holding facilities for wildlife, restriction of seed collection of forest and vegetative resources, and mitigation measures for other authorized uses. The Proposed Action and Alternatives analyzed in the Environmental Assessment would allow the BLM to quickly respond to drought conditions, to ensure the long-term health and sustainability of public lands within the CCD's jurisdiction.

#### **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT DETERMINATION**

This finding and conclusion is based on the consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 Code of Federal Regulations 1508.27), both with regard to the context and the intensity of impacts described in the Environmental Assessment.

Based on the analysis within the Carson City District Drought Management Environmental Assessment# DOI-BLM-NV-C010-2013-0001-EA, I have determined that the Proposed Action would not have a significant effect on the human environment and an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described in the Environmental Assessment and summarized below.

#### **CONTEXT:**

The general setting of the project area is the administrative boundary of the CCD and six allotments located within the Winnemucca and Battle Mountain BLM Districts in which grazing

is administered by the CCD. The CCD is primarily located in the Central Basin and Range Eco region, which encompasses a total of 120,000 square miles (EPA, 2012 (BLM, REA)). The CCD occupies a portion of northwestern Nevada and a small portion of California. The eastern portion of the CCD is administered by the Stillwater Field Office and the western portion is administered by the Sierra Front Field Office.

The Central Basin and Range encompasses large areas of Nevada and Utah and extends into California and Idaho. It lies to the immediate east of the Sierra Nevada, to the north of the Mojave Basin and Range, to the west of the Wasatch/Uinta Mountains, and south of the Northern Basin and Range Eco regions.

The CCD has a wide range of minimum and maximum monthly temperatures with 15 to 50°F (degrees Fahrenheit) in the winter months and 40 to the mid-90s°F in the summer months. Annual average total precipitation ranges from 5 to 10 inches, about 70 percent of the annual total typically falls between November and April. Occasional summer thunderstorms can cause flash flooding and debris flows. Within the CCD, elevation gain between the basin and range is typically 5,000 to 7,000 feet. Wind conditions reflect the elevation change and temperature gradient between basin and range. Predominately westerly winds disperse air pollution; i.e. wildland and prescribed fires from California and Washoe County's poor air quality, over the Great Basin.

The Central Basin and Range Eco region is internally drained and is characterized by a mosaic of dry basins, scattered low and high mountains, and salt flats. It has a hotter and drier climate, more shrub land, and more mountain ranges than the Northern Basin and Range Eco region to the north. Between the Sierra Nevada to the west and Wasatch ranges to the east, more than three hundred long, narrow, roughly parallel mountain ranges are separated by broad elongated valleys. Basins are generally covered by Great Basin sagebrush or saltbush-greasewood vegetation. Cool season grasses are less common than in the Snake River Plain and Northern Basin and Range Eco regions. The region is not as hot as the Mojave Basin and Range Eco region to the south and it has a greater percent of land that is grazed. Small areas of wetland habitats including perennial streams, wet meadows, springs, and seeps are scattered throughout the CCD.

During the 2012/2013 grazing season the CCD ID Teams for both the Stillwater Field Office and Sierra Front Field Office conducted Drought Monitoring on several livestock grazing allotments to assess conditions of plants, forage, and water availability. Most allotments showed signs of stress from the drought and below average forage vigor. Photographs taken during those site visits to several allotments are located in Appendix 6 of the Environmental Assessment.

**INTENSITY:**

The CEQ regulations include the following ten considerations for evaluating intensity:

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

The Environmental Assessment considered impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse through the analysis of direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of the Proposed Action. These impacts are described in detail in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 of the Environmental Assessment.

Implementation of the Proposed Action would ensure the long-term health and sustainability of public lands managed by the CCD by mitigating the effects of drought on rangeland resources.

Beneficial impacts associated with the implementation of the Proposed Action include minimized potential for degradation of wildlife habitat; increased resistance of rangelands to weeds and non-native species invasion; maintenance of riparian and wetland vegetation; reduced potential for water contamination; long-term sustainability of livestock grazing on public lands; improved opportunities for dispersed recreation; protection of native vegetation; and sustained health of wild horses and burros.

Adverse impacts associated with the implementation of Proposed Action include short-term increases in air particulate matter and vehicle emissions; increased utilization of forage around temporary water sources; increased potential for the spread of weeds during horse and burro gathers; temporary financial impacts to grazing permittees; temporary reductions in recreational access to riparian and wetland areas; soil compaction around trap sites; potential stress, injury or mortality to wild horses and burros resulting from gather activities; change to population dynamics, age structure, sex ratios and genetic diversity. Adverse impacts would be avoided or minimized through application of standard operating procedures and other measures identified in the Environmental Assessment.

None of the environmental effects discussed in detail in the Environmental Assessment (refer to Chapter 3 Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences) are considered significant, nor do the effects exceed any known threshold of significance, either beneficial or adverse.

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

If drought conditions warrant the removal of wild horses and burros, the Wild Horse and Burro Standard Operating Procedures (refer to Appendix 3) would be used to conduct gather activities and are designed to protect human health and safety.

Implementation of the Proposed Action, as described in Chapter 2 of the Environmental Assessment, would have minimal effects to public health or safety.

*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.*

At this time, the vast majority of the recorded cultural resources on the land administered by the CCD are archaeological sites. At present, less than 500,000 acres, about 10 percent, of the land administered by the CCD have been inventoried for cultural resources, although many older inventories do not meet modern Class III standards. Cultural resources surveys have led to the documentation of approximately 9,000 prehistoric and historic archaeological sites. Only a few

sites have been formally nominated for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), but many more have met the eligibility criteria or have not been evaluated for inclusion in the NRHP. Where possible, those historic properties determined eligible for inclusion on the NRHP and those that are unevaluated, would be avoided. Where this is not possible, such sites would be treated with an approved Historic Properties Treatment Plan. The effects of BLM DRAs on cultural resources would be addressed through compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as implemented by following the Nevada State Protocol Agreement between the BLM, Nevada and the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office. Implementation of the Proposed Action would act to reduce the severity of potential impacts to cultural resources caused by livestock, Off Highway Vehicles, wild horses and burros and other authorized uses and sensitive resources.

The CCD administers eight of the nine Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs); within the CCD and six Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. Three WSAs totaling 20,213 acres located within the Sierra Front Field Office (Burbank Canyons, Slinkard [which is also administered by the Bishop Field Office in California] and the Carson-Iceberg WSA) and five WSAs totaling 511,946 acres located within the Stillwater Field Office (Clan Alpine Mountains, Stillwater Range, Desatoya Mountains, Job Peak, and Gabbs Valley Range WSAs). The Augusta Mountains WSA lies within three field offices and is managed by the Humboldt River Field Office in the Winnemucca District. Roughly 52% of the WSA falls within the Stillwater Field Office, 20% in the Mount Lewis Field Office, and 28 % in the Humboldt River Field Office. The Carson-Iceberg and the Slinkard WSAs are located in California but are managed by the CCD due to access issues. In 2009, Douglas County, Nevada submitted the Douglas County Conservation Bill to Congress which contained a proposal to designate the Burbank Canyons WSA as a wilderness area. Portions of nine WSAs over-lapping the CCD boundary are administered by other BLM-Nevada Districts through Inter-District agreements. Implementation of the Proposed Action would protect rangeland and riparian areas within these areas.

Implementation of the Proposed Action would maintain riparian and wetland vegetation; thereby, sustaining the health of these areas. There are State parklands within the boundaries of the CCD, however, implementation of the Proposed Action would be beneficial to the areas near these lands by sustaining the health of the rangeland resources. There are no prime/unique farmlands, national parklands or wild and scenic rivers within the CCD.

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

The Environmental Assessment was sent out for a 30-day scoping period to approximately 150 individuals, state, federal, and tribal agencies on December 17, 2012. . A press release was also distributed to all local media outlets. Scoping comments were received from 23 State agencies, Organizations, Permittees and individuals. The BLM Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team) considered all comments received during the scoping period in the preparation of the Environmental Assessment.

On March 12, 2013, postcards addressed to 147 individuals, organizations and agencies were mailed, emails were sent to 10 individuals, organizations and agencies. Notification of the

availability of the Environmental Assessment was made available to 61 other State and Federal agencies through the Nevada State Clearinghouse on March 14, 2013. The Carson City District (CCD) published a news release on March 12, 2013 that was sent to media outlets listed on the Nevada BLM State Office media list. The CCD also posted the Dear Reader Letter and Environmental Assessment to the agencies webpage and ePlanning web page on March 12, 2013. On March 20, 2013 a BLM representative attended both the Churchill County and Mineral County Commissioners' Meeting and informed the Commissioners and other attendees that the Drought Management Environmental Assessment was out for public review. The representative also provided 5 hard copies of the Environmental Assessment and 20 postcards at each of the meetings for the Commissioners and others.

During the comment period approximately 6,950 comment letters and emails were received from numerous individuals, State agencies, and non-governmental organizations by email, fax or mail. Organizations included the Sierra Club, the Cloud Foundation, and the American Wild Horse Preservation Campaign. State agencies that commented include the Nevada Division of Water Resources, the State Historic Preservation Office, the Nevada State Grazing Board District N-3, and the Nevada Department of Wildlife. Minor non-substantive changes were made to the Environmental Assessment as a result of these comment letters (noted in the response tables). These comments and BLM responses to comments are found in Appendix D "Response to Comments" of the Environmental Assessment.

Some members of the public feel that no wild horses or burros should be removed from public lands and advocate removal of livestock or letting "nature take its course". Conversely, other members of the public feel that wild horses and burros should be removed from public lands before any livestock are removed. The effects of wild horse or burro gathers and appropriate livestock management during drought on the quality of the human environment are well documented through scientific research and years of management experience.

Impacts from implementation of the Proposed Action have been thoroughly analyzed in this Environmental Assessment (refer to Chapters 3 and 4). The Proposed Action is not expected to be highly controversial as the Proposed Action would be beneficial to numerous resources and uses on public lands.

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

There are no predicted effects on the human environment that are considered highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. This is demonstrated through the effects analysis in the Environmental Assessment (refer to Chapters 3 and 4).

*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 Proposed Action would not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision about a future consideration. Completion of this Environmental Assessment and approval of the proposed Action does not establish a precedent for other assessments. All

future proposed actions within the CCD would be analyzed on their own merits under a site-specific environmental analysis and carried out, or not, independently of the actions currently selected for implementation.

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

Past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions have been considered in the cumulative impacts analysis in the Environmental Assessment (Chapter 4). The cumulative impacts analysis examined all of the other known actions and determined that the Proposed Action would not have significant cumulative impacts or incrementally contribute to significant cumulative impacts. In addition, for any actions that might be proposed in the future, further environmental analysis, including assessment of cumulative impacts, would be required prior to authorizing any surface disturbing activities.

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

As described in the Environmental Assessment (refer to Chapter 3 and 4 of the document), implementation of the Proposed Action and Alternatives would not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor would it cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. A cultural resource inventory would be completed prior to implementing any DRAs that make up the Proposed Action. Temporary range improvements, gather sites, and holding facilities would be inventoried to determine the presence of any sites that are unclassified, eligible, or potentially eligible for the NRHP. Archaeological site clearances and avoidance measures would ensure that loss or destruction of known significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources does not occur.

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 Endangered Species Act of 1973.*

One federally listed Threatened and endangered (T&E) plant species is located on the CCD. This plant is the Steamboat buckwheat (*Eriogonum ovalifolium* var. *williamsiae*). While 51.4 acres of occupied habitat has been identified within the CCD for this plant, no designated critical habitat occurs.

Potential impacts to T&E plant species would be reduced to insignificance by implementing mitigation measures, such as pre-construction clearance surveys, buffering and avoiding identified plants, seed collection, reseeding, propagation and out-planting.

T&E proposed and candidate wildlife species of the CCD include the Carson wandering skipper (*Pseudocopaodes eunus obscurus*), Cui-ui (*Chasmistes cujus*), Hiko White River springfish (*Crenichthys baileyi grandis*), Railroad Valley springfish (*Crenichthys nevadae*), and the Lahontan cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki henshawi*). However, no designated critical

habitat occurs. The only population of Railroad Valley springfish (*Crenichthys nevadae*) in CCD is on private land.

There are two federal candidate species on the Nevada sensitive species list; greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) and mountain yellow-legged frog (*Rana muscosa*). Candidate species are managed as BLM sensitive species. There are currently no known populations of mountain yellow-legged frogs in Nevada; all populations are in California on Forest Service land.

Potential beneficial impacts to these wildlife species resulting from the implementation of the Proposed Action include temporary water sources for use by wildlife; reduced impacts on wildlife habitat; reduced competition for forage and water resources between wildlife, livestock and wild horses and burros; and protection of water quality and fish habitat.

Potential adverse impacts to these wildlife species resulting from the implementation of the Proposed Action include increased utilization of forage surrounding temporary water developments; temporary dispersal of wildlife species during gather activities; and potential avian fence-impact mortality. Potential impacts to avian T&E, proposed and candidate species would be reduced to insignificance by implementing mitigation measures such as installing bird deterrent devices on fences. Temporary increases in forage utilization and scattering of wildlife is not considered significant.

These impacts are described in more detail in the Environmental Assessment (Refer to Chapter 3, Sections 3.3.2 and 3.3.13).

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

As described in the Environmental Assessment, the Proposed Action does not violate any known Federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for protection of the environment.

Bernadette Lovato  
Bernadette Lovato  
District Manager  
Carson City District

7/2/13  
Date

