Paiute Canyon Grazing Allotment

Finding of No Significant Impact

DOI-BLM-NV-C020-2013-0033-EA

January 2015

BLM

Sierra Front Field Office, Nevada

Background

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Sierra Front Field Office, proposes in this final environmental assessment (EA) to issue a new term livestock grazing permit for the Paiute Canyon Grazing Allotment (Allotment). The Allotment's permit is currently held by Alan or Lillian Mendes and authorizes 400 cattle from March 1 until February 28 each year, for a total of 4,800 animal month units (AUMs). The permit was modified by the 1999 Memorandum, amending the 1989 Allotment Management Plan (AMP), which limits cattle to 350 head for a total of 4,200 AUMs annually.

The Proposed Action is to issue a new 10-year term livestock grazing permit that would authorize grazing use for up to 300 cattle for a maximum period of June 1 to March 31 for a total of 3,000 AUMs. While that would be the maximum permitted use, the allowable use each year would be governed by the new AMP (Attachment C of the final EA). Based on current conditions in 2014, the allowable use would start at 210 cattle from July 1 to March 31 for 1,900 AUMs.

The goal is an increase in sustained recruitment of deep-rooted perennial bunchgrasses. The turnout dates and the number of livestock would be adjusted based on monitoring data and in accordance with the AMP. The standard terms and conditions would apply (Appendix A of the final EA).

The Proposed Action includes range improvements to modify livestock distribution and management. Improvements include a new holding corral on the Shovel Springs Pasture, and catch corrals in the Shovel Springs, Dogskin, Fall and Hungry Valley pastures. The Dogskin Pipeline (RI #545035) would be extended along with new water troughs and water hauls on the west side of the Warm Springs/Hungry Valley Pasture (Figure 4 of the final EA). The BLM does not hold the water rights to the water.

The BLM proposes to treat noxious weeds with herbicides. There are a number of vectors that can spread noxious weeds. Grazing animals, wind, vehicles and equipment, and people can spread vegetative material and/or seed from one site to another. The BLM has an on-going program to monitor and treat non-native plant species and noxious weeds. The BLM has mapped populations of weeds in the Allotment (Figures 5-7 of the final EA), which are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Noxious Weeds and Scientific Name.

Common Name	Scientific Name
Hoary Cress	*Cardaria draba*
Canada thistle	*Cirsium arvense*
Musk Thistle	*Carduus nutans*
Perennial Pepperweed	*Lepidium latifolium*
Scotch Thistle	*Onopordum acanthium*
Yellow Star-Thistle	*Centaurea solstitialis*

For some noxious weed species such as perennial pepperweed, mechanical treatment by hand cutting is ineffective, due to the extensive root and rhizome networks produced by these plants and their capability to grow new shoots in response to cut stems. By chemically treating these

noxious weeds, the BLM would curb their spread in the Allotment and to other areas outside the Allotment.

The BLM proposes to remove juniper trees on approximately 2,173 acres in order to improve greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) habitat characteristics and modify fire behavior by reducing fire intensity and spotting potential (Figure 8 of the final EA). Since the 1860's, many bunchgrass and sagebrush-bunchgrass communities, which dominated the Intermountain West, have shifted to pinyon and juniper woodland (*Pinus monophylla-Juniperus osteosperma*) or introduced annual-dominated communities (West 1984, Miller et al. 1994). Studies conclude that barring some major environmental change or management action, loss of understory species would occur and decreased fire frequency would continue until trees dominate most of the sites favorable to their expansion. This tree dominance then jeopardizes the historic woodland sites because under the right conditions, a crown fire could result in a stand replacement wildfire with catastrophic consequences because of the continuous tree canopy. Studies further show that in pinyon-juniper communities that are overstocked, the ability of the understory to respond after a fire is dramatically reduced and potentially opens the site to the invasion by exotics. Any treatments or rehabilitation of these areas could be difficult and costly.

To address critical habitat for Webber's ivesia (*Ivesia webberi*), the BLM proposes to construct approximately 10,840 feet of fencing and enclose a 90 acre area of public land to protect the occupied/critical habitat (Figure 9 of the final EA). The BLM has documented that over the past two decades, user-created routes caused by off-highway vehicles (OHV) have proliferated in the area and have fragmented the occupied habitat. To prevent further deterioration of the habitat, the BLM proposes to enclose the occupied habitat by fencing, which would result in the closure of approximately 1.3 miles of routes[1].

Determination

On the basis of the information contained in the *Paiute Canyon Grazing Allotment Final Environmental Assessment* (EA) (DOI-BLM-NV-C020-2013-0033-EA), I have determined that the Proposed Action does not constitute a federal action having a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore an environmental impact statement (EIS) is not required.

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

Context

The Allotment is located approximately five miles north of Reno, Nevada. Rural residential development occurs adjacent to and within the Allotment boundary. The Allotment encompasses approximately 69,881 acres of public lands, 17,921 acres of private lands, and 1,975 acres of Bureau of Indian Affairs lands held in trust for the RSIC. The Hungry Valley Recreation Area, which is completely within the Allotment boundary, is a major OHV use area (Figure 2 of the final EA). Topography varies from low lying valleys to high, rugged

[1] A route can be any travel route, from a user-created single track or two-track trail, to a single lane unimproved road. There are no BLM maintained routes within the proposed exclosure area.

mountainous country. Elevations within the Allotment range from 4,240 feet above sea level (asl) to 8,722 feet asl. Big sagebrush/needlegrass (*Artemisia tridentata vaseyana/Achnatherum thurberianum*), and low sagebrush/needlegrass (*A. arbuscula*) plant communities dominate the Allotment. Pinyon-juniper woodlands occur primarily in the higher elevations. Two Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) lie wholly or partially within the boundaries of the Allotment: Incandescent Rocks Natural Scenic, and the Carson Wandering Skipper.

Intensity

1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The final EA has described the effects to all resources that may be affected by the Proposed Action. Under the Proposed Action, vegetative forage would continue to be consumed by cattle, although less than under the current permit and not during the spring. The continuation of livestock grazing would be beneficial, supporting the regional and larger society. Wildlife, plant, and riparian areas would be expected to benefit from the Proposed Action due to reduced grazing and elimination of spring grazing. Impacts to vegetation and riparian areas from livestock grazing would likely be reduced to due reduced grazing and pasture rest and rotation.

Juniper trees would be removed on approximately 2,173 acres. In the short-term these treatments may displace wildlife, but in the long-term these treatments would benefit sagebrush associated species. Herbicide treatments of noxious weeds would expose wildlife and non-target vegetation to side effects from active ingredients in the short-term, but in the long-term wildlife and native plants would be expected to benefit from the removal on noxious weeds. The installation of a perimeter fence would benefit Webber's ivesia (*Ivesia webberi*), although there would be low potential for adverse effects to wildlife from collisions, and loss of foraging habitat for grazing animals such as wild horses.

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

During implementation of the fuels and weed treatments, the BLM would follow standard operating procedures to limit exposure to safety risks associated with cutting trees and applying herbicides. Implementing fuels treatments would likely improve public and firefighter safety by reducing the likelihood of large catastrophic wildfire.

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 Proposed Action would have no effect on historic or cultural resources, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers. The Proposed Action would have negligible effects to ecologically critical areas (the two Areas of Critical Environmental Concern).

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

The effects of the Proposed Action are well known and are not highly controversial. The BLM has a long standing experience in managing livestock, implementing fuels and weed treatments, and construction of range improvements and fencing.

5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.
There are no known effects of the Proposed Action which are considered uncertain or 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 Proposed Action does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects and does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. Any future actions within the Allotment, if they were to occur, would be subject to separate environmental analysis.

7) Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.
No significant cumulative effects were identified in the final EA. Any other actions proposed in the Allotment would be evaluated as to whether the actions effects added to the Proposed Action would cause cumulatively significant effects.

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 of destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.
Based on a review of the cultural resources present within the Allotment, the BLM has determined that no historic properties eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places would be affected by the Proposed Action (CRR 3-3692).

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 or 1973. The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) on the occurrence of the Carson wandering skipper (*Psuedocopaeodes eunus obscurus*), Webber's ivesia and its critical habitat in the Allotment. The BLM has received concurrence on December 18, 2014 from the FWS that the activities in the Proposed Action would result in a "may affect, not likely to adversely affect" determination under the 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 conformance with the Carson City Field Office Consolidated Resource Management Plan (2001). Implementation of the Proposed Action would not violate or threaten to violate any federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

1-9-15

Leon Thomas
Field Manager
Sierra Front Field Office

Date