



United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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In Reply Refer To:
4160 ID130

November 21, 2013

REGISTERED MAIL

Thenon Elordi
2222 Cliffs Road
Jordan Valley, OR 97910

Notice of Field Manager's Proposed Decision

Dear Thenon:

Thank you for working with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) throughout this permit renewal process. I appreciate your interest in grazing the Wilson Creek FFR allotment in a sustainable fashion and am confident that this proposed decision achieves that objective.

The BLM recently evaluated grazing practices and conditions in the Wilson Creek FFR allotment. This effort was undertaken to ensure that any renewed grazing permit on the allotment is consistent with the BLM's legal and land management obligations. As part of the BLM's Rangeland and Health Assessments, Evaluations and Determinations were completed. This proposed decision incorporates those documents by reference and the information contained therein.

On January 11, 2013, the BLM Owyhee Field Office initiated by letter the collective public scoping process for Groups 3 through 5 of the Owyhee 68 grazing permit renewal process. These groups are referred to as the Toy Mountain, South Mountain, and Morgan groups, respectively. The letter informed recipients that the purpose of the public outreach effort was to identify resource and management issues associated with the Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management (Idaho S&Gs) and the Owyhee Resource

Management Plan (ORMP) for the purpose of developing grazing management alternatives for all three groups, including the South Mountain Group (Group 4) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document. The letter also served to request additional resources and monitoring information that could help the BLM to complete the permit renewal process. The letter encouraged comments and information to be received by February 25, 2013 for each group of allotments but did not set a closing date for the receipt of public comments.

Your application was received by our office on August 29, 2011, and a supplemental allotment management plan was received by our office on August 12, 2013.

The Initial Allotment Review and Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines Assessment for the Wilson Creek FFR allotment was drafted in 2006 as a portion of the grazing permit renewal process. Until 2013, no rangeland health determination had been completed and the permit authorizing grazing use in this allotment had not been fully processed for renewal. On August 30, 2013, BLM issued the completed 2013 Rangeland Health Assessments, Evaluations, and Determinations for the Group 4 South Mountain allotments (which included the Wilson Creek FFR allotment) to you and all interested publics of record. Issuance of the Rangeland Health Assessments, Evaluations, and Determinations afforded you an opportunity to meet with my staff to discuss any additional grazing management changes, your application, and your input for completion of the Group 4 Environmental Assessment (EA)¹. Additionally, a preliminary environmental assessment (without a FONSI) was issued to the public on October 18, 2013, for 15-day review and comment. Issuance of the preliminary EA afforded yet another opportunity for grazing permittees and interested publics to provide additional input on the EA and inform me in preparation of completing a proposed grazing decision. In regards to both documents, we did not receive comments or information from you to assist in the development of alternatives and eventually this proposed decision.

After evaluating conditions on the land and review of information received from the public, it became clear that resource concerns currently exist on the Wilson Creek FFR allotment. As a focus of addressing the impacts of renewing your livestock grazing permit, my office prepared and issued the South Mountain Group EA in which we considered a number of options and approaches to maintain and improve resource conditions within the twenty allotments of the South Mountain Group. Specifically, the BLM considered and analyzed in detail five alternatives. We also considered other alternatives that we did not analyze in detail. Our objective in developing alternatives was to consider options that were important to you as the permittee, and to consider options that, if selected, would ensure that the Wilson Creek FFR allotment's natural resources conform to the goals and objectives of the ORMP and the Idaho S&Gs). This proposed decision incorporates by reference the analysis contained in the EA.

I am now prepared to issue a proposed decision to renew your permit to graze livestock within the Wilson Creek FFR allotment. Upon implementation of the decision, your permit to graze

¹ EA number DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2013-0022-EA analyzed 5 alternatives for livestock grazing management practices to fully process permits within the South Mountain Group of allotments.

livestock on this allotment will be fully processed using the revisions to the grazing regulations promulgated² in 1995, the Idaho S&Gs adopted in 1997, and the ORMP, adopted in 1999.

This proposed decision will:

- Describe current conditions and issues on the allotments;
- Briefly discuss the alternative grazing management schemes that the BLM considered in the EA;
- Respond to the application for grazing permit renewal for use in the Wilson Creek FFR allotment;
- Outline my proposed decision to select Alternative 3 in the Wilson Creek FFR allotment; and
- State the reasons why I made that selection.

Background

Allotment Setting

The Wilson Creek FFR allotment (see Map 1) is located in Owyhee County, Idaho, approximately 14 miles southeast of Jordan Valley, Oregon. In the Owyhee Resource Management Plan, the Wilson Creek FFR allotment is listed as a Maintain (M) category allotment. Categorization of allotments in that land use plan prioritized development and implementation of grazing systems to meet multiple use resource objectives and rangeland health standards based on resource conditions, potentials, and concerns, as well as economics, present management, and other criteria.

The allotment is subdivided into five pastures with 78 AUMs of permitted grazing. Although the existing permit identifies a season of use from December 1 to December 31, it also includes a term and condition that the number of livestock and season of use within the allotment is at your discretion. Actual use has been submitted, but is lacking accuracy to the pasture level. The data indicate alternating years of spring and late fall or winter use for the allotment as a whole (2005, 2007-2010). There are 2,823 acres in the allotment; a summary of the acres of land are provided in Table 1.

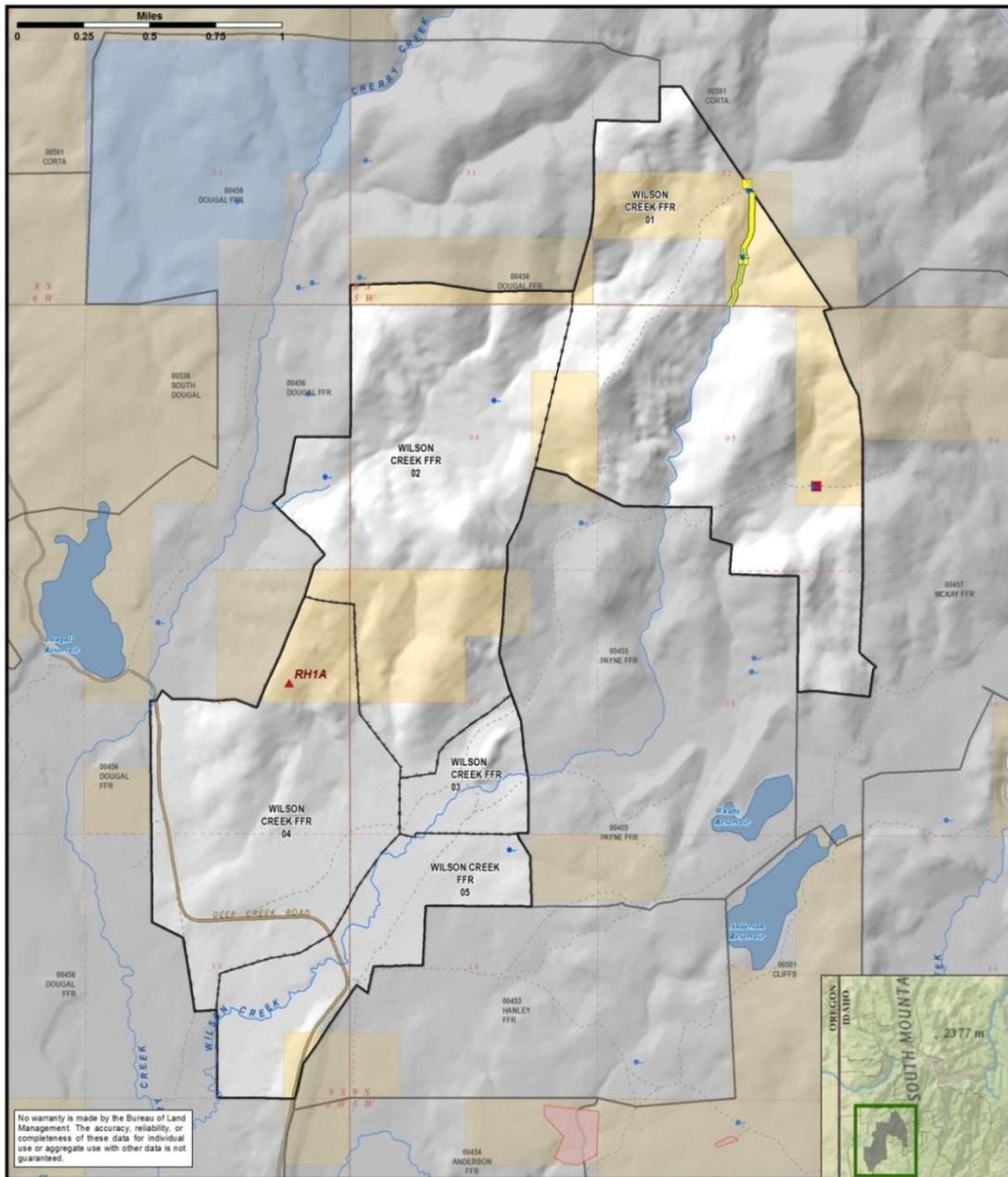
Table 1: Wilson Creek FFR Allotment (Acres)

Pastures	Public	State	Private	Total
1	314	0	697	
2	218	0	590	
3	0	0	112	
4	70	0	525	
5	14	0	283	
Total	616 (22%)	0 (0%)	2,207 (78%)	2,823 (100%)

² 43 CFR Subpart 4100 is the federal regulations that govern public land grazing administration.



Map 1: Wilson Creek FFR (00537) Allotment



No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management. The accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregate use with other data is not guaranteed.

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|------------|------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Allotment of Interest Boundary | Stock Pond | PFC Assessment Rating | Perennial Stream | Management |
| Pasture Boundary | Spring | PFC | Improved Road | BLM |
| Monitoring | Trough | FAR | 4WD Road | State |
| Nested Plot Frequency Trend | Exclosure | NF | Water Body | Private |
| RHA Point | | | | |



1:30,000

The Wilson Creek allotment is situated within the Owyhee Uplands and Canyons Ecoregion (see Map 1), which is characterized by deep canyons, badlands, and rocky outcrops covered predominantly with low sagebrush steppe and juniper woodland vegetation communities. It is composed of one major ecological site, loamy mountain big sagebrush/bluebunch wheatgrass-Idaho fescue (558 acres, or 91 percent), with the shallow claypan low sagebrush/Idaho fescue site making up the remainder (58 acres, or 9 percent). Much of the allotment is above 5,000 feet in elevation.

Across ecological sites within the allotment, effective average annual precipitation ranges from 12 to 16 inches. Mapping done by the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory using 2000/2001 Landsat satellite imagery, and updated for vegetation treatments and fire, indicate the current vegetation in the Wilson Creek FFR allotment is dominated by mountain big sage (32 percent), juniper (25 percent), low sagebrush (18 percent), bunchgrass (6 percent), exotic annual (6 percent), big sagebrush (5 percent), and mountain shrub (4 percent). Juniper trees are common to dominant members of the plant community at upper elevations of the allotment, and juniper encroachment is a contributing factor to the allotment not meeting Standard 4 (Native Plant Communities). No noxious weeds are known to occur, although cheatgrass, Japanese brome and bulbous bluegrass occur on the allotment.

Most slopes range between 10 and 30 percent, about one-third of slopes are under 10 percent, and a small percentage of slopes are over 30 percent. A fire in 2013 burned in Greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*; from this point on referred to as sage-grouse) Preliminary Priority Habitat (PPH) and Preliminary General Habitat (PGH), but it largely occurred in juniper stands. Approximately 0.5 mile of Wilson Creek traverses pasture 1, and there is severe bank erosion, a lack of riparian species, and heavy use of herbaceous vegetation that has caused the allotment to fail Standards 2 (Riparian Areas and Wetlands) and 3 (Stream Channel/Floodplain).

Current Grazing Authorization

You currently graze livestock within the Wilson Creek FFR allotment pursuant to a grazing permit issued by the BLM (see Table 2). The terms and conditions of that grazing permit are as follows:

Table 2: Mandatory and Other Terms and Conditions for the Wilson Creek FFR Allotment

Livestock		Grazing Period		% PL	Type Use	AUMs
Number	Kind	Begin	End			
77	Cattle	12/1	12/31	100	Active	78
Terms and Conditions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Grazing use will be in accordance with the grazing schedule identified in the final decision of the Owyhee Field Office Manager dated _____. Livestock grazing will be in accordance with your allotment grazing schedule(s). Changes to the scheduled use require approval. Turn-out is subject to the Boise District range readiness criteria (Appendix I). The permittee’s certified actual use report is due within 15 days of completing the authorized annual grazing use. Salt and/or supplements shall not be placed within one-quarter (1/4)-mile of springs, streams, meadows, aspen (<i>Populus tremuloides</i>) stands, playas, special status plant 						

populations, or water developments.

5. Trailing activities must be coordinated with the BLM prior to initiation. A trailing permit or similar authorization may be required prior to crossing public lands.
6. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(B), the permittee must notify the BLM field manager, by telephone with written confirmation, immediately upon the discovery of human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony (as defined in 43 CFR 10.2) on federal lands. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4 (C), the permittee must immediately stop any ongoing activities connected with such discovery and make a reasonable effort to protect the discovered remains or objects.
7. Livestock exclosures located within the grazing allotment are closed to all domestic grazing use.
8. Range improvements must be maintained in accordance with the cooperative agreement and range improvement permit in which you are a signatory or assignee. All maintenance of range improvements within designated Wilderness requires prior consultation with the authorized officer.
9. All appropriate documentation regarding base property leases, lands offered for exchange-of-use, and livestock control agreements must be approved prior to turn out. Leases of land and/or livestock must be notarized prior to submission and be in compliance with Boise District Policy.
10. Failure to pay the grazing bill within 15 days of the due date specified shall result in a late fee assessment of \$25.00 or 10 percent of the grazing bill, whichever is greater, not to exceed \$250.00. Payment made later than 15 days after the due date shall include the appropriate late fee assessment. Failure to make payment within 30 days may be a violation of 43 CFR § 4140.1(b)(1) and shall result in action by the authorized officer under 43 CFR § 4150.1 and § 4160.1.
11. Livestock grazing will be in accordance with your allotment grazing schedule(s). Changes in scheduled pasture use dates will require prior authorization.
12. Utilization may not exceed 50 percent of the current year's growth.
13. The number of livestock and season of use on the Fenced in Federal Range (FFR) allotment 04537 is at your discretion.

United States District Court for the District of Idaho Imposed Terms and Conditions:

- Key herbaceous riparian vegetation, where streambank stability is dependent upon it, will have a minimum stubble height of 4 inches on the streambank, along the greenline, after the growing season;
- Key riparian browse vegetation will not be used more than 50 percent of the current annual twig growth that is within reach of the animals;
- Key herbaceous riparian vegetation on riparian areas, other than the streambanks, will not be grazed more than 50 percent during the growing season, or 60 percent during the dormant season; and
- Streambank damage attributable to grazing livestock will be less than 10 percent on a stream segment

Livestock Management

Under this permit, you are authorized 78 AUMs of permitted grazing between December 1 and December 31. Your permit includes a term and condition that the number of livestock and season of use within the allotment is at the permittee's discretion; thus the potential season of use is for 365 days. Because of limited actual use information, we cannot identify a clear season of use. Even though actual use and utilization data are not available for the Wilson Creek FFR allotment, it is likely a pasture rotation was utilized in the current management that provides rest/deferment combined with a utilization level that would maintain the plant community at hand.

Actual use is important when considering the renewal of a grazing permit because it was actual use and not authorized levels of use that resulted in current conditions on the allotments. In other words, the current condition of the allotments is not the result of what was authorized under the current permit; rather, it is the result of a varied number of AUMs and seasons of use over the past several years.

Resource Conditions

The BLM completed a land health assessment, evaluation, and a determination for the Wilson Creek FFR allotment in 2013. The Initial Allotment Review and Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines Assessment for the Wilson Creek FFR allotment was drafted in 2006 as a portion of the grazing permit renewal process. Until 2013, no rangeland health determination was completed, and the permit authorizing grazing use in this allotment had not been fully processed for renewal.

These documents concluded that some of the resources on the Wilson Creek FFR allotment were not meeting the Idaho S&Gs. Specifically, the BLM determined the allotment did not meet Standards 1 (Watersheds), 2 (Riparian Areas and Wetlands), 3 (Stream Channel/Floodplain), 4 (Native Plant Communities), and 8 (Threatened and Endangered Plants and Animals). Current livestock grazing management practices are significant factors in not meeting Standards 2, 3, and 8. However, current livestock management practices are not significant factors toward the failure to meet Standards 1 and 4. Standards 5, 6, and 7 are not applicable to this allotment. Livestock management practices do not conform to the applicable livestock grazing management guidelines 5, 6, and 7 for several standards.

Vegetation - Uplands³

The Wilson Creek FFR allotment does not meet Standard 4 (Native Plant Communities), although the determination did not identify current livestock management practices as a contributing factor. The allotment is not meeting Standard 4 because a shift in species composition away from site potential has occurred; this is primarily due to juniper encroachment related to an altered fire regime in conjunction with past grazing management.

Juniper encroachment is an issue on BLM-administered acres within all pastures of the allotment. Recent fires have affected both pastures 2 and 4, with 55 percent and 77 percent of BLM-

³ For more detailed discussion, please refer to EA number DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2013-0022-EA, Section 3.3.7.1.1 and Appendix E.

administered lands being affected by the fire in those pastures. Apart from the areas affected by juniper encroachment, a shift away from site potential has been observed in the reduction of deep-rooted perennial native grasses and presence of invasive grasses (cheatgrass, Japanese brome, and bulbous bluegrass). The ecological sites show that under natural disturbance regime, the Wilson Creek FFR allotment should be dominated by sagebrush/bunchgrass communities. Other vegetation types such as western juniper and riparian areas are expected to occur as unmapped inclusions within the larger ecological sites, and each should make up only a small percentage of the area.

Past grazing and extended fire frequency from natural disturbance regimes contribute to juniper invasion and, subsequently, to not meeting the Standard in those areas where juniper is present. Although the 2013 Tank Fire potentially decreased juniper presence in pasture 2 and pasture 4, areas outside of this burn are still subject to the effects of juniper encroachment. The departure from reference condition is also evidenced by the strong presence of juniper displayed in the 2011 aerial imagery. This type of vegetation mapping does not show changes in the understory, but information from the 2001 rangeland health assessment indicates a shift in species composition (departure from reference condition) evidenced by a reduction in deep-rooted perennial grasses and biological soil crusts and higher than expected presence of Sandberg bluegrass and juniper. This shift in species composition towards more grazing tolerant species is likely due to past livestock grazing. Although present in only low percentage, the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory mapping identifies a cover type of 'Exotic annuals', further illustrating a departure from reference condition.

While not finding current livestock grazing to be a causal factor for not meeting Standard 4, the determination did acknowledge the shift from deep-rooted perennial grasses to shallow-rooted perennial grasses and the presence of invasive grasses. This depressed ecological condition of Wilson Creek FFR allotment is largely a product of grazing management practices in the late 1800s and early 20th century. Although most vegetation communities have undergone this shift (to shallow-rooted native perennials, invasive annuals, and juniper), intact remnant vegetation communities exist in the allotment. While these remnant communities retain an adequate composition of native perennial species to provide for proper nutrient cycling, hydrologic cycling, and energy flow, they do not represent conditions on the allotment overall.

Standards 5 (Seedings) and 6 (Exotic Plant Communities, Other Than Seedings) do not apply in the Wilson Creek FFR allotment.

Watersheds/Soils⁴

The Wilson Creek FFR allotment is not meeting Standard 1 (Watersheds), although current livestock grazing management practices are not significant factors for this allotment's failure to meet the land health standard. A field team evaluated rangeland health in 2001 at a location representative of the majority of BLM-administered public land in the allotment. The field team documented a network of long water-flow patterns throughout the evaluation area. Inch-high pedestals and terracettes were common throughout the site, particularly in water-flow paths. The

⁴ For more detailed discussion, please refer to EA number DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2013-0022, Section 3.3.7.1.2.

water-flow paths, pedestals, and soil surface degradation indicate accelerated erosion has occurred. Soils on the allotment are generally well to excessively drained, and water-flow patterns and pedestals rarely occur on this site under the reference plant community phase. Various age classes of juniper were common throughout the site, and the field team estimated juniper canopy cover between 6 and 15 percent; the 2001 assessment noted that juniper appeared to be adversely affecting infiltration.

Members of the BLM interdisciplinary team visited the allotment again in 2013; evidence of bare ground or accelerated erosion was not plainly obvious during the site visit to pastures 2 and 5. The watershed was well vegetated; plant assemblages are providing litter to the soil each year, cycling nutrients and providing pathways for energy flow; and bare ground was within normal ranges for the soils.

Juniper trees were common to dominant members of the plant community at upper elevations of the allotment. In pasture 1, relatively large patches of bare ground beneath juniper canopies indicated a high potential for erosion. However, the multiple age classes of juniper trees growing in varying densities, combined with little if any evidence of juniper mortality, indicate a high potential for downward trends in watershed function in the future.

This allotment fails to meet the watershed standard due to juniper encroachment, rather than current livestock grazing. Indications of accelerated erosion are likely the result of a transition away from the reference plant community composition to a phase that supports too much juniper and lacks the deep-rooted perennial bunchgrasses necessary to interrupt overland flow and dissipate runoff for proper infiltration, retention, and release of water. Current livestock grazing has not caused this condition. Although it is possible that historic season-long grazing practices could have accelerated juniper encroachment indirectly by removing the fine fuels necessary to carry juniper-killing fires, season-long grazing hasn't occurred in this allotment recently. Also, when livestock are in the allotment, utilization is likely focused on private land because it is gentler terrain and generally more productive than the BLM-administered public land, which is rugged by comparison.

Water Resources and Riparian/Wetland Areas⁵

The Wilson Creek FFR allotment is not meeting Standards 2 (Riparian Areas and Wetlands) and 3 (Stream Channel/Floodplain) due to current livestock management. Although recent actual use reports indicate relatively short periods of use during the spring and winter, the recent grazing schedule has not allowed for rest years, and cattle have congregated in the spring areas in pasture 1. Residual vegetation has not been sufficient to maintain or improve riparian-wetland function, and the existing spring developments were not designed to protect the ecological function of the riparian-wetland areas. Three springs occur on BLM lands in pasture 1 and were assessed in 2012; the two springs adjacent to Wilson Creek were rated functioning-at-risk (FAR). The spring that was rated non-functioning (NF) is located southeast of Wilson Creek. One of the unnamed springs rated FAR had headcuts present, creating vertical instability and mechanical alteration (hoof action) of the soils, causing drying and loss of the riparian area extent. The third FAR-rated spring was heavily trampled; erosion was occurring; the area was heavily grazed; and the spring source was

⁵ For more detailed discussion, please refer to EA number DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2013-0022-EA, Section 3.3.7.1.3.

not protected. The NF unnamed spring was identified as NF because upland species were encroaching into the spring area; the spring developments were in disrepair; and the spring source was not protected from livestock impacts.

Approximately 0.5 mile of Wilson Creek traverses pasture 1. The reach was assessed FAR based on a 1995 field report and the 2012 condition of springs in the allotment. The riparian vegetation had been primarily replaced by upland vegetation, and the upland vegetation appeared unsuitable for controlling erosion, stabilizing streambanks, and shading water areas; severe bank erosion, a lack of riparian species, heavy use of herbaceous vegetation, and trampling was evident. Invader and shallow-rooted species were a major component of the floodplain, and age class and structural diversity of riparian/wetland vegetation were not appropriate. Based on both the prior information as well as the more recent observations of the condition of the two springs immediately adjacent to the reach of stream, it was assumed that the stream remains in similar condition. Current livestock grazing management practices do not conform to the Idaho S&Gs applicable to Standards 2 and 3.

Standard 7 is not applicable to the Wilson Creek FFR allotment because the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ) has not assessed the streams that occur within the allotment. Beneficial uses have not been assigned nor have pollutants been identified. However, BLM has documented springs in poor condition.

Special Status Plants⁶

No known special status plants are on BLM-administered lands within this allotment.

Wildlife/Wildlife Habitats and Special Status Animals⁷

No federally listed threatened or endangered animals are known to occur in the Wilson Creek FFR allotment. One candidate species, the Columbia spotted frog, could potentially occur in the allotment, as potential habitat does exist on private lands within the allotment. A second candidate species, the sage-grouse, does have habitat on the allotment. However, only 5 percent of PPH occurs on BLM-administered lands in the allotment (135 acres), and only 17 percent of preliminary general habitat occurs on BLM-administered lands (481 acres) in the allotment. Most sage-grouse habitat (2,203 acres, or 78 percent) occurs on private lands in the allotment. As many as 11 mammal, 21 bird, 2 amphibian, 2 fish, and 3 reptile species with BLM special status (including Watch List Species) potentially occur within the allotment. One special status animal species, Brewer's sparrow, is recorded in the Idaho Fish and Wildlife Information System within the allotment; additionally, ferruginous hawks have been identified within 0.1 mile of the allotment and Western toads were discovered in 2013 on BLM-administered land in pasture 1.

The evaluation and determination for special status animals (Standard 8) was based on evaluations for Standards 1 (currently not meeting due to juniper encroachment), 2 (currently not meeting due to poor riparian condition related to currently livestock management), and 4 (currently not meeting due to historic grazing and juniper encroachment), as their analyses directly reflect conditions of

⁶ For more detailed discussion, please refer to EA number DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2013-0022-EA, Section 3.3.7.1.4.

⁷ For more detailed discussion, please refer to EA number DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2013-0022-EA, Section 3.3.7.1.5 and Appendix F.

wildlife habitat on uplands, riparian areas, and springs in the allotment⁸. Because Standard 2 (Riparian/Wetland) was found to be not meeting due to current livestock management, Standard 8 also does not meet for riparian/wetland species because of current livestock management. The failure to meet Standards 1 and 4 are indicative of the quality of habitat available for upland species, particularly sagebrush-obligate species, such as sage-grouse. Standard 8 for uplands is not met for these reasons.

Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management

The Wilson Creek FFR allotment is not conforming to all guidelines. The BLM's 2013 determination for the Wilson Creek FFR allotment identified grazing management practices that did not conform to the BLM's Idaho S&Gs. Specifically, grazing management did not conform to the following guidelines:

Guideline 5: Maintain or promote grazing management practices that provide sufficient residual vegetation to improve, restore, or maintain healthy riparian-wetland functions and structure for energy dissipation, sediment capture, ground water recharge, streambank stability, and wildlife habitat appropriate to site potential.

Guideline 6: The development of springs, seeps, or other projects affecting water and associated resources shall be designed to protect the ecological functions, wildlife habitat, and significant cultural and historical/archaeological/paleontological values associated with the water source.

Guideline 7: Apply grazing management practices to maintain, promote, or progress toward appropriate stream channel and streambank morphology and functions. Adverse impacts due to livestock grazing will be addressed.

Since the Wilson Creek FFR allotment is not meeting one or more of the Idaho S&Gs and is not in conformance with one or more of the Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management due to current livestock management practices, the BLM used these guidelines as a starting point for developing grazing schemes to bring the authorized actions within the allotment into compliance with resource objectives.

Issues⁹

Through the scoping process and development of the Rangeland Health Assessment/Evaluation Reports and Determinations, the BLM interdisciplinary team identified the following issues concerning livestock grazing management in one or more of the South Mountain Group allotments:

1. *Habitat conditions for sage-grouse*
2. *Fish and amphibian habitat conditions*

⁸ For more detailed discussion, please refer to EA number DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2013-0022-EA, Section 3.3.7.1 and the 2013 Determination.

⁹ For more detailed discussion, please refer to EA number DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2013-0022-EA, Section 1.6.3.

3. *Soil compaction*
4. *Riparian vegetation conditions*
5. *Climate change*
6. *Upland vegetation and watershed conditions*
7. *Special status plant species*
8. *Noxious and invasive weeds*
9. *Livestock trailing*
10. *Cultural resources*
11. *Paleontological resources*
12. *Wildfire fuels*
13. *Socioeconomic impacts*

Analysis of Alternative Actions

Based on the current condition of the Wilson Creek FFR allotment, the BLM considered a number of alternative livestock management schemes in the EA to ensure that any renewed grazing permit would result in maintaining good conditions and improving unsatisfactory conditions on the allotments. Overall, 11 alternatives were considered and analyzed in the EA, although only Alternatives 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 were considered in detail and analyzed for the Wilson Creek FFR allotment. The range of alternatives developed include: Alternative 1 - No Action/Current Condition, Alternative 2 - Applicants' Proposed Action, and Alternatives 5 - No Grazing; Alternative 3 and Alternative 4 were developed based on resource constraints. The following sections describe the theme of each of the alternatives and the allotment-specific authorizations and actions under each alternative.

Alternative 1 - No Action/Current Condition¹⁰

Under alternative 1, BLM would renew the livestock grazing permit for the use in the Wilson Creek FFR allotment in accordance with the current permit and the current situation that led to conditions on the ground.

Alternative 2 - Permittee Applications¹¹

Under alternative 2, BLM would renew the 100 percent public land livestock grazing permit for the use in the Wilson Creek FFR allotment in accordance with the application and grazing system received from Thenon Elordi.

¹⁰ For more detailed discussion, please refer to EA number DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2013-0022-EA, Section 2.4.7.1.

¹¹ For more detailed discussion, please refer to EA number DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2013-0022-EA, Section 2.4.7.2.

Alternative 3¹² -

Under Alternative 3, the BLM would renew grazing on the Wilson Creek FFR allotment using resource constraints and constraints on seasons, intensities, duration, and frequency of grazing use to a degree necessary to meet or make significant progress toward meeting all land health standards and Owyhee RMP objectives.

Alternative 4¹³ -

Under Alternative 4, the BLM would renew grazing on the Wilson Creek FFR allotment using resource constraints and constraints on seasons, intensities, duration, and frequency of grazing use to a degree necessary to meet or make significant progress toward meeting all land health standards and Owyhee RMP objectives as described in the proposed action and alternatives, with added emphasis on high value resources. A 3-year rotational grazing system would be implemented that authorizes livestock use based on soil and vegetation resource constraints, with increased emphasis on the high value resources and sage-grouse.

Alternative 5 - No Grazing

Under Alternative 5, the BLM would not authorize livestock to use public lands within the Wilson Creek FFR allotment for the next 10 years.

The draft EA number DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2013-0022-EA detailing the above alternatives was made available for public review and comment for a 15-day period ending November 4, 2013. While we did not receive comments from you, a number of government entities and agencies, interest groups, and members of the public provided comments on the public review draft EA.

Proposed Decision

After considering the current grazing practices, the current conditions of the natural resources, and the alternatives and analysis in the EA, comments received from you and other interested publics, as well as other information, it is my proposed decision to renew your grazing permit for 10 years consistent with Alternative 3 (see Table 3). Implementation of Alternative 3 over the next 10 years will allow the Wilson Creek FFR allotment to make significant progress toward meeting the Idaho S&Gs while also moving toward achieving the resource objectives outlined in the ORMP.

The terms and conditions of the renewed grazing permit will be as follows in Table 3:

¹² For more detailed discussion, please refer to EA number DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2013-0022-EA, Section 2.4.7.3.

¹³ For more detailed discussion, please refer to EA number DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2013-0022-EA, Section 2.4.7.4.

Table 3: Wilson Creek FFR Allotment Terms and Conditions

Livestock		Grazing Period		% PL	Type Use	AUMs
Number	Kind	Begin	End			
6	Cattle	3/1	2/28	100	Active	72 ¹¹
<p>Terms and Conditions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The number of livestock on the Fenced in Federal Range (FFR) allotment 0437 is at your discretion so long as authorized active use of 78 AUMS from public land is not exceeded. 2. Grazing use will be in accordance with the grazing schedule identified in the final decision of the Owyhee Field Office Manager dated _____. Livestock grazing will be in accordance with your allotment grazing schedule(s). Changes to the scheduled use require approval. 3. Turn-out is subject to the Boise District range readiness criteria (Appendix I). 4. The permittee’s certified actual use report is due within 15 days of completing the authorized annual grazing use. 5. Salt and/or supplements shall not be placed within one-quarter (1/4)-mile of springs, streams, meadows, aspen (<i>Populus tremuloides</i>) stands, playas, special status plant populations, or water developments. 6. Trailing activities must be coordinated with the BLM prior to initiation. A trailing permit or similar authorization may be required prior to crossing public lands. 7. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(B), the permittee must notify the BLM field manager, by telephone with written confirmation, immediately upon the discovery of human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony (as defined in 43 CFR 10.2) on federal lands. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4 (C), the permittee must immediately stop any ongoing activities connected with such discovery and make a reasonable effort to protect the discovered remains or objects. 8. Livestock exclosures located within the grazing allotment are closed to all domestic grazing use. 9. Range improvements must be maintained in accordance with the cooperative agreement and range improvement permit in which you are a signatory or assignee. All maintenance of range improvements within designated Wilderness requires prior consultation with the authorized officer. 10. All appropriate documentation regarding base property leases, lands offered for exchange-of-use, and livestock control agreements must be approved prior to turn out. Leases of land and/or livestock must be notarized prior to submission and be in compliance with Boise District Policy. 11. Failure to pay the grazing bill within 15 days of the due date specified shall result in a late fee assessment of \$25.00 or 10 percent of the grazing bill, whichever is greater, not to exceed \$250.00. Payment made later than 15 days after the due date shall include the appropriate late fee assessment. Failure to make payment within 30 days may be a violation of 43 CFR § 4140.1(b)(1) and shall result in action by the 						

¹¹ The AUM figure portrayed in this table is the result of a calculation performed in the BLM’s Rangeland Administration System program; the active and permitted use will be 78 AUMs.

Livestock		Grazing Period		% PL	Type Use	AUMs
Number	Kind	Begin	End			
authorized officer under 43 CFR § 4150.1 and § 4160.1. 12. Livestock grazing will be in accordance with your allotment grazing schedule(s). Changes in scheduled pasture use dates will require prior authorization. 13. Utilization may not exceed 50 percent of the current year's growth.						

Grazing Schedule

The grazing schedule for the Wilson Creek FFR Allotment (identified in Table 4) must be followed:

Table 4: Wilson Creek FFR Allotment Grazing Schedule

Year	Pasture	Date On	Date Off	Days
1	1	6/1	6/30	30
	2	3/1	2/28	365
	4	3/1	2/28	365
	5	3/1	2/28	365
2	1	4/1	4/30	30
	2	7/16	2/28	228
	4	7/16	2/28	228
	5	7/16	2/28	228
3	1	4/1	4/30	30
or				
3	1	10/1	11/1	32
	2	3/1	4/30	61
or				
3	2	7/16	2/28	228
	4	3/1	4/30	61
or				
3	4	7/16	2/28	228
	5	3/1	4/30	61
or				
3	5	7/16	2/28	228

Notes on the Terms and Conditions

You will be offered a grazing permit(s) for a term of 10 years for the Wilson Creek FFR allotment, with 78 Active AUMs and with no suspension AUMs (see Table 5). Implementation of Alternative 3 will not result in a reduction of Active AUMs on the Wilson Creek FFR allotment compared to

your current permit. Permitted use within the Wilson Creek FFR allotment will be as follows in Table 5:

Table 5: Wilson Creek FFR Allotment Permitted Use

Active Use	Suspension	Permitted Use
78 AUMs	0 AUMs	78 AUMs

Other Notes on the Proposed Decision

Although the determination stated that spring developments in pasture 1 were in disrepair and spring sources were not protected, it is my proposed decision to not authorize additional projects. The existing coordinated process to identify, analyze, and authorize as appropriate the restoration, improvement, or development of livestock water sources and other projects is retained for project-specific consideration outside the permit renewal process. Project maintenance obligations identified in current range improvement permits and cooperative agreements for range improvements are unchanged by this proposed decision. Implementation of this proposed decision is contingent upon maintenance of projects in a functioning condition (i.e., boundary and internal fences are in such good and functioning condition as to assure their ability to accomplish the purposes for which they were constructed, barriers to livestock movement).

Rationale

Record of Performance

Pursuant to 43 CFR § 4110.1(b)(1), a grazing permit may not be renewed if the permittee seeking renewal has an unsatisfactory record of performance with respect to its last grazing permit. Accordingly, I have reviewed your record as a grazing permit holder for the Wilson Creek FFR Allotment, and have determined that you have a satisfactory record of performance and are a qualified applicant for the purposes of a permit renewal.

Justification for the Proposed Decision

Based on my review of EA number DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2013-0022-EA, specialist reports, and other documents in the grazing files, it is my proposed decision to select Alternative 3 for the Wilson Creek FFR allotment. I have made this selection for a variety of reasons, but most importantly because of my understanding that implementation of this decision will best fulfill the BLM's obligation to manage the public lands under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act's multiple use and sustained yield mandate, and it will result in the Wilson Creek FFR allotment meeting or making significant progress towards meeting the resource objectives of the ORMP and the Idaho S&Gs.

Issues Addressed

Earlier in this decision I outlined the major issues that drove the analysis and decision-making process for the Wilson Creek FFR allotment. I want you to know that I considered the issues

specific to this allotment through the lens of each alternative before making my decision. My selection of Alternative 3 for the Wilson Creek FFR allotment is based in large part on my understanding that this selection best addresses resource conditions on the Wilson Creek FFR allotment in light of the BLM's legal and land management responsibilities¹⁵.

1. *Habitat conditions for sage-grouse:* The evaluation and determination for special status animals (Standard 8), including sage-grouse, was based on evaluations for Standards 1 - Watersheds (currently not meeting due to juniper encroachment), 2 - Riparian Areas and Wetlands (currently not meeting due to poor riparian condition related to currently livestock management), and 4 - Native Plant Communities (currently not meeting due to historic grazing and juniper encroachment), as their analyses directly reflect conditions of wildlife habitat on uplands, riparian areas, and springs in the allotment¹⁶. Because Standard 2 (Riparian/Wetland) was found to be not meeting due to current livestock management, Standard 8 also does not meet for riparian/wetland species because of current livestock management. The failure to meet Standards 1 and 4 are indicative of the quality of habitat available for upland species, particularly sagebrush-obligate species, such as sage-grouse.

Alternative 3 defines a 3-year rotation for each pasture with specific seasons of use. Primary changes that will affect wildlife habitat are the initiation of a 3-year deferred grazing system and constraints designed to avoid sensitive seasons when resources are most vulnerable. Grazing management under this alternative primarily targets pastures 1 and 2 because most public land resources are located in those two pastures.

¹⁵ Your allotments are, as you know, members of one group of six groups of allotments forming the Owyhee 68 Allotments, which are the subject of a permit renewal process to be completed by December 31, 2013. The NEPA process for the Owyhee 68 consists of five-plus EAs and the EIS which supports this particular set of decisions. This multiple-allotment process has required me, as the Field Manager responsible for signing these grazing decisions, to look at these allotments, and the other allotments analyzed in the EAs and the EIS, not just individually but as a members of a group of allotments located in a particular landscape, the BLM Owyhee Field Office. That is, I am looking not just at your individual allotment; reviewing its Rangeland Health Assessments, Evaluations, and Determinations; and selecting an alternative that will best address this allotment's ecological conditions and BLM's legal responsibilities (for the purposes of this decision). I am also looking at this allotment from a landscape perspective. Viewed this way, it is clear that there are problems common to the Owyhee 68 allotments.

Of the approximately 60 allotments that have riparian areas, at least 47 are not meeting Standards for riparian/water issues due to current livestock management; of approximately 73 allotments total, 43 are not meeting the Standards for upland vegetation ; in many cases, performance under Standard 8 tracks these results. In spite of the efforts of BLM and the ranching operators, resource conditions are not good. Some of these allotments have seen spring use year after year; some have had summer-long riparian use every year. As Owyhee Field Manager, I have a steward's responsibility to further the health and resilience of this landscape.

Adding to these considerations, we live in a time of uncertainty. Climate change presents an uncertainty whose impacts we cannot clearly discern, but as land stewards, we must factor into our decisions a consideration of how best to promote resiliency on the landscape. Add to this the uncertainty associated with the BLM's organizational capacity to manage this landscape; in a time of budget cutting, staff reductions and reduced revenues, land management decisions must factor in considerations of the level of on-the-ground management we can reasonably expect to accomplish.

¹⁶ For more detailed discussion, please refer to EA number DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2013-0022-EA, Section 3.3.7.1 and the 2013 Determination.

In both pastures 1 and 2, grazing during the critical growth period will occur only 1 of every 3 years. The remaining 2 years of every 3-year cycle must be grazed early, prior to the start of the critical growth period or late, after the critical growth period has ended. In 2 of every 3 years, upland plants will have the opportunity to complete a full reproductive cycle and restore root carbohydrate reserves. This grazing schedule avoids repetitive grazing during this critical growth time for upland vegetation; the most productive and palatable forage species are provided ample opportunity to maintain adequate photosynthetic material to increase carbohydrate production for reproduction. This will provide bunchgrasses, especially the remnant native perennial grasses adversely affected by past grazing, additional vigor for reproduction and competition as well as a slow increase towards reference site condition, thus improving upland habitat for sage-grouse. The improved health and vigor provided by the grazing schedule offers greater resilience of the plant communities to better combat further invasion of juniper and invasive grasses.

While this grazing prescription will, on 1 of 3 years, remove biomass during the period when most wildlife species are nesting or seeking nutritious forage to attain breeding condition, grazing will be limited to 30 days to allow for regrowth. For 2 of 3 years, grazing will not occur during this timeframe. The short-term impacts to wildlife in the form of reduced nesting cover and reduced available forage will be negative; however, long-term effects to their habitat will be positive because grass and forb vigor and health will increase because of management on the other 2 years (grazing outside the critical growth period); and sage-grouse habitat conditions will improve.

Special status animal species and wildlife in general, dependent on these habitats, will see an increase in herbaceous cover and height during the nesting season for ground nesting birds, including sage-grouse. Likewise, small mammals, big game, and other terrestrial species will see an increase in cover and available standing biomass during the critical spring and early-summer seasons versus Alternative 1. The allotment will make progress towards meeting Standard 8 and will meet ORMP objective WDLF-1 for upland wildlife species under this alternative, including sage-grouse.

Although the allotment will still not meet or make significant progress toward meeting Standard 4 because of limitations from causal factors (juniper encroachment, historic livestock grazing), improvement in upland vegetation conditions will be expected in the long term (greater than 10 years), which will, over time, improve greater sage-grouse habitat conditions. This alternative will meet the ORMP vegetation management objective to improve unsatisfactory and maintain satisfactory vegetation health/condition.

Because there will be no hot season grazing in pasture 1, where Wilson Creek and all three springs occur, riparian/wetland vegetation regrowth and recovery will occur. The riparian/wetland areas (potential late brood-rearing habitat) in pasture 1 will improve under this alternative.

I am quite convinced that additional and sometimes substantial (but not significant) improvement to the upland plant communities can be made by instituting changes to grazing management. In other words, even if a minimal degree of progress was currently being made on the allotment, progress at a faster rate is achievable and more desirable

given the long-term potential benefits to plant communities, soils, riparian habitats, and wildlife resources. Moreover, it is within my discretion and responsibility to strive for such improvement based on FLPMA, the objectives described in the Owyhee RMP, and the BLM's 2010 National Sage-grouse Policy with its attendant goal to maintain and enhance sage-grouse populations in the Western United States.

2. *Fish and amphibian habitat conditions:* Because the implementation of Alternative 3 will result in Standards 2 (Riparian Areas and Wetlands) and 3 (Stream Channel/Floodplain) meeting or moving towards meeting the Standard, fish and amphibian habitat conditions will consequentially improve. This is because there will be no hot season grazing in pasture 1, where Wilson Creek and all three springs occur; all grazing in this pasture will occur during the timeframes of April 1 to April 30, June 1 to June 30, or October 1 to November 1. Riparian/wetland vegetation regrowth and recovery will occur along Wilson Creek and at all springs each year, which will increase bank stability and reduce sedimentation, thus improving conditions for fish and amphibians. ORMP objective WDLF-1 will be met because habitat conditions will be maintained and improved over the long term. Likewise, progress will be made towards meeting Standard 8 for riparian-dependent wildlife species such as Western toads.
3. *Soil compaction:* Soils on the BLM-administered public land in the Wilson Creek FFR allotment are generally well to excessively drained. The potential for livestock to trample wet soil in year 1 and possibly year 3 of each 3-year grazing cycle will exist, although it will be minimized because the Boise District range readiness criteria will have to be met. Since most soils are well to excessively drained, most soils will have a low likelihood of compaction during this timeframe. Compaction may occur on saturated soils (such as along Wilson Creek); however, these areas will not be grazed during the hot season and the combination of plant regrowth after June 30, and freeze-thaw cycles in the winter will loosen soils and lessen the degree of compaction that may have occurred during the grazing season. Livestock grazing will not prevent the allotment from meeting Standard 1 and ORMP objectives.

Overall, the presence of juniper has impacted the functionality of the watershed and has resulted in levels of erosion and degradation that should not occur on the site; Standard 1 is not being met for these reasons, not because of soil compaction. Although overall soil conditions under this proposal will improve compared to the current condition, juniper will continue to encroach, increasing the risk of depressed watershed function and accelerated erosion. Ultimately, juniper encroachment, not livestock grazing, will prevent the allotment from meeting Standard 1 and ORMP objectives over the long term. The proposed level of livestock grazing will have no effect on the rate of encroachment.

4. *Riparian vegetation conditions:* The implementation of Alternative 3 will result in Standards 2 (Riparian Areas and Wetlands) and 3 (Stream Channel/Floodplain) meeting or moving towards meeting the Standard. This is because there will be no hot season grazing in pasture 1, where Wilson Creek and all three springs occur. All grazing in this pasture will occur during April, June, or October, and in 2 of 3 years, grazing will occur either early, in April, or late, in October. During these years, riparian vegetation will experience little to no livestock grazing pressure in the riparian growing season, and most plants will

complete full reproductive cycles. Riparian/wetland vegetation regrowth and recovery will occur along Wilson Creek and at all springs every year, which will increase bank stability and reduce sedimentation.

5. *Climate change:* Climate change is another factor I considered in building my decision around Alternative 3 for the Wilson Creek FFR allotment. Climate change is a stressor that can reduce the long-term competitive advantage of native perennial plant species. Since livestock management practices can also stress sensitive perennial species in arid sagebrush steppe environments, I considered the issues together, albeit based on the limited information available on how they relate in actual range conditions. Although the factors that contribute to climate change are complex, long term, and not fully understood, the opportunity to provide resistance and resilience within native perennial vegetation communities from livestock grazing-induced impacts is within the scope of this decision. The selected alternative combines seasons, intensities, and durations of livestock use to promote long-term plant health and vigor. Assuming that climate change affects the arid landscapes in the long term, the native plant communities on this allotment will be better armed to survive such changes. The native plant health and vigor protected under these alternatives will provide resistance and resilience to additional stressors, including climate change.
6. *Upland vegetation and watershed conditions:* The allotment is not meeting Standards 1 and 4 because of a shift in species composition triggered by historic grazing and invasion of juniper as a result of altered fire regimes. While Alternative 3 retains some aspects of the current situation, specifically, the number of AUMs to be authorized, it differs by defining a 3-year rotation for each pasture with specific seasons of use. Primary changes that will improve wildlife habitat are the initiation of a 3-year deferred grazing system and constraints designed to avoid sensitive seasons when resources are most vulnerable.

Grazing management under this alternative primarily targets pastures 1 and 2 because most public land resources are located in those two pastures. Pasture 1 will be grazed during the critical growth period in only 1 of 3 years. During the remaining 2 years of the 3-year cycles, pasture 1 will be grazed early (April 1 to April 30) and either early or late (October 1 to November 1). Pasture 2 can be grazed any time in year 1, will be deferred in year 2, and will be grazed either early or will be deferred in year 3.

Repetitive grazing during this critical growth time for upland vegetation will not occur; the most productive and palatable forage species will be provided ample opportunity to maintain adequate photosynthetic material to increase carbohydrate production for reproduction. This will provide bunchgrasses throughout the allotment, especially the remnant native perennial grasses adversely affected by past grazing, additional vigor for reproduction and competition, and a slow increase towards reference site condition. The improved health and vigor provided by the grazing schedule offers greater resilience of the plant communities to better combat further invasion of juniper and invasive grasses. The allotment will make progress towards meeting Standard 8 and will meet ORMP objective WDLF-1 for upland wildlife species under this alternative.

Although the allotment will still not meet or make significant progress toward meeting

Standard 4 because of limitations from causal factors (juniper encroachment, past livestock grazing that reduced large bunchgrasses, invasive plants), improvement in upland vegetation conditions will be expected in the long term (greater than 10 years). This alternative will meet the ORMP vegetation management objective to improve unsatisfactory and maintain satisfactory vegetation health/condition. Ultimately, juniper encroachment, not livestock grazing, prevents the allotment from meeting Standard 1 and ORMP objectives over the long term. The proposed level of livestock grazing will have no effect on the rate of encroachment.

7. *Special status plant species*: This issue does not apply to the Wilson Creek FFR allotment.
8. *Noxious and invasive weeds*: Any grazing has the potential to introduce and spread invasive weeds and non-native annual grasses through soil surface disturbance and transportation of seed to and from the allotment in fur, on hooves, and in their digestive system. As compared to Alternatives 1 and 2, the risk of invasive species spreading is lower under Alternative 3 as perennial species health and vigor will improve and progress will be made toward the ORMP vegetation management objective; these plant communities will become more resistant and resilient to noxious and invasive weeds. Available sites for invasive species establishment will be reduced through competition with healthy native perennial species. Although Alternatives 4 and 5 would further reduce or eliminate the potential for livestock to introduce and spread invasive and non-native annual species as compared to Alternative 3, livestock remain only one of a number of vectors for seed dispersal and soil surface disturbance. BLM's coordinated and ongoing weed control program would still be required in the absence of livestock grazing in the allotment. Vegetative community resistance to noxious and invasive annual invasion will increase over time as this more limited grazing strategy is implemented. Although the allotment will still not meet or make significant progress toward meeting Standard 4 because of limitations from causal factors (juniper encroachment, historic grazing practices, invasive plants), improvement in upland vegetation conditions are expected in the long term (greater than 10 years). This alternative will meet the ORMP vegetation management objective to improve unsatisfactory and maintain satisfactory vegetation health/condition.
9. *Livestock trailing*¹⁷: No new trailing routes were identified in the Wilson Creek FFR allotment, and no new trailing routes were proposed. Trailing or moving animals across Federal, State, or private land is a component of regular grazing management practices in the South Mountain Group 4 allotments. Livestock are primarily actively trailed on the existing roads, where no or limited forage is consumed and the trailing occurs for short durations. For the majority of situations, trailing activities have not been documented, nor are they expected to substantially affect resources. Thus, they are not affecting the ability of these allotments to meet or make significant progress toward meeting the Standards.
10. *Cultural resources*: No previously recorded sites occur within the Wilson Creek FFR allotment.

¹⁷ For more detailed discussion, please refer to EA number DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2013-0022-EA Section 2.1.3.

11. *Paleontological resources:* No recorded fossil sites are within the South Mountain Group. The lack of fossil discoveries can be directly related to the absence of any fossil-bearing strata underlying the allotments.
12. *Wildfire fuels:* During the NEPA process, some asked the BLM to consider using grazing to limit wildfire. The BLM has considered the issue and determined that it would be theoretically possible to use targeted grazing to create fuel breaks on these allotments with the hope that those fuel breaks would help control the spread of large wildfires in the area. However, the resource costs associated with this strategy are such that I have decided against it. Ultimately, implementation of Alternative 3 for the Wilson Creek FFR allotment will not significantly alter the BLM's ability to fight wildfire in the area.

Although a number of sources identify the potential to use grazing to reduce fine fuels on a landscape scale, identified benefits are greatest with targeted grazing that strategically maintains fuel-breaks to aid fire suppression actions. Landscape-scale fuels reduction with livestock grazing has its greatest application in grass-dominated vegetation types, specifically within seedings of grazing tolerant introduced grasses and annual grasses, conditions that do not exist on the allotment. In addition, the levels of livestock grazing and the season of yearly use necessary to reduce fine fuels prior to the fire season are not conducive to sustaining native perennial herbaceous species. This is one of the main reasons a targeted grazing system to control fire is not viable on these allotments at this time. The BLM's current permit renewal is focused on improving native upland and riparian plant communities on these allotments, and targeted grazing to create fuel breaks would not support that improvement.

The selected alternative retains a level of grazing use that reduces the accumulation of fine fuels, and thus will lessen the spread of large wildfires when fire weather conditions are less extreme. More importantly, it is designed to benefit and promote the health and vigor of native perennial species on the allotment, thereby limiting the dominance of annual species and so limiting the accumulation of continuous fine fuels and extreme fire behavior while enhancing post-fire recovery.¹⁸

13. *Socioeconomic impacts:* During the NEPA and public comment process, some raised the concern that selection of certain alternatives considered in the EA could impact regional socio-economic activity. I share this concern and have taken these concerns into consideration in making my decision; however, my primary obligation is to ensure that the new grazing permit protects resources in a manner consistent with the BLM's obligations under the Idaho S&Gs and the ORMP. As noted above, I have selected Alternative 3 for the Wilson Creek FFR allotment, in large part because the selection will accomplish those latter goals.

Consideration of Alternatives 1 and 2 for the Wilson Creek FFR allotment disclosed that neither of those alternatives would allow the allotment to meet or make progress towards

¹⁸ For more detailed discussion, please refer to EA number DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2013-0022-EA, Section 2.3 Wildfire Fuels (Alternative 8).

meeting Idaho S&Gs or the ORMP resource objectives; therefore, I could not select them despite the lesser economic impacts they may have. Over the long term, your grazing operation relies upon maintenance of the natural resources, including productive and healthy rangelands capable of supplying a reliable forage base. Selection of an alternative based in unsustainable grazing practices that do not meet rangeland health standards would result in less reliable amounts of forage over the long term, in addition to reducing economic opportunities from ecosystem services and alternate socio-economic resources, such as recreation, that rely on healthy, functional, and aesthetically pleasing open spaces and wildlife habitats.

I have considered a wide range of issues at the allotment level, including the social and economic impacts that result from modifying grazing authorizations. I have minimized reductions in grazing use levels where current levels are compatible with meeting rangeland health standards and ORMP objectives, and where not compatible, I have attempted to select alternatives designed to meet resource needs. In cases of particular or particularly acute resource needs, I have selected the alternative most responsive to such needs, with the aim of best promoting rangeland health; in the case of your allotment, the Wilson FFR allotment, reductions of authorized active AUMs will not occur, although modifications to seasons of use will occur.

Additional Rationale

Much thought and effort went into developing grazing management that is responsive to your allotment's specific resource needs, geography, and size. These considerations were made to address all concerns and requirements mandated to the BLM. Each allotment has different ecology and management capability due to the size and location/topography that result in various issues and priorities. All attempts to coordinate grazing throughout the entire allotment were made by me and my staff with you and the interested public. I recognize the difficulty of not only providing the mandated needs for the resources but also for the needs and capability that you, the permittee have. I believe I have balanced those needs of the resource and your capabilities with the information I have to the extent possible.

While I did consider selecting Alternative 5 (No Grazing) for this allotment, based on all the information used in developing my decision, I believe that the BLM can meet resource objectives and still allow grazing on the allotment. In selecting Alternative 3 for the Wilson Creek FFR allotment rather than Alternative 5, I especially considered (1) BLM's ability to meet resource objectives using the selected alternatives, (2) the impact of implementation of Alternative 5 on your operation and on regional economic activity, and (3) your past performance under previous permits. The resource issues identified are primarily related to the improper seasons and site-specific intensities of grazing use. By implementing these alternatives, the resource issues identified will be addressed. The suspension of grazing for a 10-year period is not the management decision most appropriate at this time in light of these factors.

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

A FONSI was signed on November 18, 2013, concluding that the proposed decision to implement Alternative 3 is not a major federal action that will have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. That finding was based on the context and intensity of impacts organized around the 10 significance criteria described at 40 CFR § 1508.27. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. A copy of the FONSI for EA number DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2013-0022-EA is available on the web at:

http://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/prog/nepa_register/owhee_grazing_group/grazing_permit_renewal2.html

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is my decision to select Alternative 3 for the Wilson Creek FFR allotment over other alternatives because livestock management practices under this selection best meet the ORMP objectives allotment-wide and the Idaho S&Gs in locations where standards were not met due to current livestock management practices. Alternatives 1 and 2 fail to implement livestock management practices on the Wilson Creek FFR allotment that would meet the objectives and standards. Specifically, both alternatives fail to implement actions that would meet Standard 2 (Riparian Areas and Wetlands), Standard 3 (Stream Channel/Floodplain), and Standard 8 (Threatened and Endangered Animals). Alternative 5 removes economic activity from Owyhee County and southwest Idaho, a region where livestock production and agriculture is a large portion of the economy. That, in conjunction with current resource conditions and the improvement anticipated by implementation of the alternatives, lead me to believe elimination of livestock grazing from the Wilson Creek FFR allotment is unnecessary at this point.

Authority

The authorities under which this decision is being issued include the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934, as amended, and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, as promulgated through Title 43 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Subpart 4100 Grazing Administration - Exclusive of Alaska (2005). My decision is issued under the following specific regulations:

- 4100.0-8 Land use plans. The ORMP designates the Wilson Creek FFR allotment available for livestock grazing;
- 4130.2 Grazing permits or leases. Grazing permits may be issued to qualified applicants on lands designated as available for livestock grazing. Grazing permits shall be issued for a term of 10 years unless the authorized officer determines that a lesser term is in the best interest of sound management;
- 4130.3 Terms and conditions. Grazing permits must specify the term and conditions that are needed to achieve desired resource conditions, including both mandatory and other terms and conditions; and
- 4180 Fundamentals of Rangeland Health and Standards and Guidelines for Grazing Administration. This proposed decision will result in taking appropriate action to modifying existing grazing management in order to make significant progress toward achieving rangeland health.

Right of Protest and/or Appeal

Any applicant, permittee, lessee, or other interested public may protest the proposed decision under 43 CFR §§ 4160.1 and 4160.2, in person or in writing within 15 days after receipt of such decision to:

Loretta V. Chandler
Owyhee Field Office Manager
20 First Avenue West
Marsing, Idaho 83639

The protest, if filed, should clearly and concisely state the reason(s) why the proposed decision is in error.

In accordance with 43 CFR § 4160.3(a), in the absence of a protest, the proposed decision will become the final decision of the authorized officer without further notice unless otherwise provided in the proposed decision.

In accordance with 43 CFR § 4160.3(b), upon a timely filing of a protest, after a review of protest received and other information pertinent to the case, the authorized officer shall issue a final decision.

Any applicant, permittee, lessee, or other person whose interest is adversely affected by the final decision may file an appeal in writing in for the purpose of a hearing before an administrative law judge in accordance with 43 CFR §§ 4160.3(c), 4160.4, 4.21, and 4.470. The appeal must be filed within 30 days following receipt of the final decision or within 30 days after the date the proposed decision becomes final. The appeal may be accompanied by a petition for a stay of the decision in accordance with 43 CFR § 4.471 pending final determination on appeal. The appeal and petition for a stay must be filed in the office of the authorized officer, as noted above. In accordance with 43 CFR § 4.401, the BLM does not accept fax or email filing of a notice of appeal and petition for stay. Any notice of appeal and/or petition for stay must be sent or delivered to the office of the authorized officer by mail or personal delivery.

Within 15 days of filing the appeal, or the appeal and petition for stay, with the BLM officer named above, the appellant must also serve copies on other persons named in the copies sent to section of this decision in accordance with 43 CFR § 4.421 and on the Office of the Field Solicitor located at the address below in accordance with 43 CFR §§ 4.470(a) and 4.471(b).

Boise Field Solicitor's Office
University Plaza
960 Broadway Ave., Suite 400
Boise, Idaho 83706

The appeal shall state the reasons, clearly and concisely, why the appellant thinks the final decision is in error and otherwise complies with the provisions of 43 CFR § 4.470.

Should you wish to file a petition for a stay, see 43 CFR § 4.471 (a) and (b). In accordance with 43 CFR § 4.471(c), a petition for a stay must show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

- (1) The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied;
- (2) The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits;
- (3) The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted; and
- (4) Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

As noted above, the petition for stay must be filed in the office of the authorized officer and served in accordance with 43 CFR § 4.471.

Any person named in the decision that receives a copy of a petition for a stay and/or an appeal, see 43 CFR § 4.472(b) for procedures to follow if you wish to respond.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 208-896-5913.

Sincerely,



Loretta V. Chandler
Owyhee Field Manager

Copies sent to:

- See attached Group 4 - Proposed Decisions Mailing List

Group 4 - Proposed Decisions Mailing List

Organization	Name		Address	City	ST	Zip	#
Friends of Mustangs	Robert	Amidon	8699 Gantz Ave.	Boise	ID	83709	1
Soil Conservation District	Cindy	Bachman	PO Box 186	Bruneau	ID	83604	2
	Bill	Baker	2432 N. Washington	Emmett	ID	83617-9126	3
	Conrad	Bateman	740 Yakima St.	Vale	OR	97918	4
Idaho Dept. of Agriculture	John	Biar	PO Box 790	Boise	ID	83707	5
Boise District Grazing Board	Stan	Boyd	PO Box 2596	Boise	ID	83701	6
	Craig & Rhonda	Brasher	4401 Edison	Marsin	ID	86369	7
	Gene	Bray	5654 W El Gato Ln.	Meridian	ID	83642	8
Colyer Cattle Co.	Ray & Bonnie	Colyer	31001 Colyer Rd.	Bruneau	ID	83604	9
	Senator: Mike	Crapo	251 East Front Street STE 205	Boise	ID	83702	10
Owyhee County Natural Resources Committee	Jim	Desmond	PO Box 38	Murphy	ID	83650	11
	Frankie	Dougal	36693 Juniper Mtn. Rd	Jordan Valley	OR	97910	12
Land & Water Fund	William	Eddie	PO Box 1612	Boise	ID	83701	13
	Thenon & Jana	Elordi	59010 Van Buren	Thermal	CA	92274	14
Western Watershed Projects	Katie	Fite	PO Box 2863	Boise	ID	83701	15
Gusman Ranch Grazing Association LLC	Forest	Fretwell	27058 Pleasant Valley Rd.	Jordan Valley	OR	97910	16
	Chad	Gibson	16770 Agate Ln.	Wilder	ID	83676	17
Resource Advisory Council	Chair: Gene	Gray	2393 Watts Lane	Payette	ID	83661	18

Organization	Name		Address	City	ST	Zip	#
	Russ	Heughins	10370 W Landmark Ct.	Boise	ID	83704	19
Jaca Livestock	Elias	Jaca	817 Blaine Ave.	Nampa	ID	83651	20
Idaho Wild Sheep Foundation	President: Jim	Jeffress	PO BOX 8224	Boise	ID	82707	21
	Dan	Jordan	30911 Hwy. 78	Oreana	ID	83650	22
	Floyd	Kelly Breach	9674 Hardtrigger Rd.	Given Springs	ID	83641	23
	Kenny	Kershner	PO Box 300	Jordan Valley	OR	97910	24
	Vernon	Kershner	PO Box 38	Jordan Valley	OR	97910	25
	Lloyd	Knight	PO Box 47	Hammett	ID	83627	26
	Congressman: Raul	Labrador	33 E. Broadway Ave STE 251	Meridian	ID	83642	27
Corral Creek Crazing Assoc.	Tim	Lequerica	P.O. Box 135	Arock	OR	97902	28
The Fund for the Animals, Inc.	Andrea	Lococo	1363 Overbacker	Louisville	KY	40208	29
LU Ranching	Bill	Lowry	PO Box 132	Jordan Valley	OR	97910	30
LU Ranching	Tim	Lowry	PO Box 132	Jordan Valley	OR	97910	31
Idaho Wild Sheep Foundation	Herb	Meyr	570 E 16th N.	Mountain Home	ID	83647	32
R&S Enterprise	Ray	Mitchell	265 Millard Rd.	Shoshone	ID	83352	33
	Sandra	Mitchell	PO Box 70001	Boise	ID	83707	34
	Ed	Moser	22901 N. Lansing Ln.	Middleton	ID	83644	35
	Brett	Nelson	9127 W. Preece St.	Boise	ID	83704	36
	Ramona	Pascoe	PO Box 126	Jordan Valley	OR	97910	37
	Anthony & Brenda	Richards	8935 Whiskey Mtn. Rd.	Murphy	ID	83650	38
-	John	Richards	8933 State Hwy. 78	Marsing	ID	83639	39
	Senator: James E.	Risch	350 N 9th Street STE 302	Boise	ID	83702	40

Organization	Name		Address	City	ST	Zip	#
Idaho Conservation League	John	Robison	PO Box 844	Boise	ID	83701	41
	John	Romero	17000 2X Ranch Rd.	Murphy	ID	83650	42
	Bob	Salter	6109 N. River Glenn	Garden City	ID	83714	43
Intermountain Range Consultants	Bob	Schweigert	5700 Dimick Ln.	Winnemucca	NV	89445	44
	Congressman: Mike	Simpson	802 West Bannock STE 600	Boise	ID	83702	45
Shoshone-Bannock Tribes	Tribal Chair: Nathan	Small	PO Box 306	Ft. Hall	ID	83203	46
Juniper Mtn. Grazing Association	Michael	Stanford	3581 Cliffs Rd.	Jordan Valley	OR	97910	47
	Doug	Terry	P.O. Box 11	Jordan Valley	OR	97910	48
	John	Townsend	8306 Road 3.2 NE	Moses Lake	WA	98837	49
Moore Smith Buxton & Turcke	Paul	Turcke	950 W. Bannock, Ste. 520	Boise	ID	83702	50
Natural Resources Defence Council	Johanna	Wald	111 Sutter St., 20 th Floor	San Francisco	CA	94104	51
Office of Species Conservation	Cally	Younger	304 N. 8 th STE 149	Boise	ID	83702	52
Owyhee County Commissioners			PO Box 128	Murphy	ID	83650	53
Holland & Hart LLP			PO Box 2527	Boise	ID	83701	54
Idaho Cattle Association			PO Box 15397	Boise	ID	83715	55
IDEQ			1410 N. Hilton	Boise	ID	83701	56
Idaho Dept. of Lands			PO Box 83720	Boise	ID	83720	57
Idaho Farm Bureau Fed.			PO Box 167	Boise	ID	83701	58
International Society for the Protection of Horses & Burros	Karen	Sussman	PO Box 55	Lantry	SD	57636	59

Organization	Name	Address	City	ST	Zip	#
Larrusea Cattle Co		P.O. Box 124	Arock	OR	97902	60
Oregon Division State Lands		1645 NE Forbes Rd., Ste. 112	Bend	OR	97701	61
Owyhee Cattlemen's Association		PO Box 400	Marsing	ID	83639	62
Schroeder & Lezamiz Law Offices		PO Box 267	Boise	ID	83701	63
Sierra Club		PO Box 552	Boise	ID	83701	64
State Historic Preservation Office		210 Main St.	Boise	ID	83702	65
State of Nevada Div. of Wildlife		60 Youth Center Rd.	Elko	NV	89801	66
The Nature Conservancy		950 W. Bannock, Ste. 210	Boise	ID	83702	67
The Wilderness Society		950 W. Bannock St., Ste. 605	Boise	ID	83702- 5999	68
U.S.F.W.S. Idaho State Office		1387 S. Vinnell Way, Ste. 368	Boise	ID	83709	69
USDA Farm Services		9173 W. Barnes	Boise	ID	83704	70
Western Watershed Projects		PO Box 1770	Hailey	ID	83333	71