



United States Department of the Interior



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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT ELKO DISTRICT OFFICE

MANAGEMENT AND MITIGATION FOR DROUGHT IMPACTED RANGELANDS REVISED ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT DOI-BLM-NV-E000-2013-0003-EA

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The Revised Environmental Assessment (EA) DOI-BLM-NV-E000-2013-0003-EA, dated May 27, 2014, has been reviewed through an interdisciplinary team process, and includes changes received through the comment process. The EA has been sent to the Nevada State Clearinghouse, local governments, and the public for two 30-day review periods. A scoping letter with the proposed action was also sent to the public for a 30-day comment period on October 15, 2012. The original scoping letter, as well as a link to the EA on the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) website, was sent to 358 individuals, organizations, companies, agencies and Native American Tribes.

After consideration of the potential environmental effects of the Proposed Action as described in the EA and the supporting documentation, a determination has been made that the Proposed Action does not constitute a major federal action (which is defined as an action which would significantly affect the quality of the human environment). No environmental effects meet the definition of "significant," in the context or intensity, as described in 40 CFR § 1508.27. Therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required, per section 102(2) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

LAND USE CONFORMANCE

The Proposed Action and Alternatives described below are in conformance with the following plans:

- Elko Resource Management Plan (RMP) Record of Decision (ROD), 1987
- Elko RMP Rangeland Program Summary (RPS), 1987
- Wells RMP ROD, 1985
- Wells RPS, 1985

- Wells RMP Wild Horse Amendment, 1992
- Northeastern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council (RAC) Standards and Guidelines, 1997, as amended
- Elko RMP Wild Horse Amendment, 2004

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANCE

I have reviewed the Revised EA, DOI-BLM-NV- E000-2013-0003-EA, dated May 27, 2014. After consideration of the environmental effects, as described in the EA and incorporated herein, I have determined that the Proposed Action, with the project design specifications including adopted environmental protection measures and required mitigation measures identified in the EA, will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required to be prepared.

This finding and conclusion is based on the Council for Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (43 CFR § 1508.27), both with regard to the context and the intensity of the impacts described in the EA and summarized below.

CONTEXT

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Nevada experienced one of the hottest and driest years on record during 2012 and 2013. Field monitoring indicates that many areas within the Elko District are experiencing drought impacts including substantial reductions in forage production and reduced spring and stream flows. It is likely that a continuation of the conditions will impair forage and water resources on many more areas within the Elko District. The Proposed Action in this EA is needed to ensure that livestock and wild horse management during drought does not add additional stresses to already impacted rangelands.

The Proposed Action allows for a rapid response to drought 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 effects of drought are often times far reaching, impacting the environment, and subsequently the economy of an area. This EA focuses primarily on environmental impacts of drought. Specific impacts depend on drought severity and often include:

- An increase in 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
- Increased mortality of wildlife, wild horses, and livestock
- Increased erosion of soils containing eligible cultural resources
- Increased invasion of invasive and noxious weeds
- Increased erosion of soils containing paleontological resources

The Proposed Action includes a range of drought response actions that would be used to mitigate the effects of drought and to address emergency situations for livestock grazing management, wild horse management, wildlife needs, riparian resources, and a variety of other resources. These Drought Response Actions 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; and temporary fencing. The Proposed Action and Alternatives analyzed in the EA will allow the BLM to quickly respond to drought conditions, to ensure the long-term health and sustainability of public lands within the Elko District.

INTENSITY

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The EA 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 EA.

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

Beneficial impacts associated with the implementation of the Proposed Action include minimized potential for soil loss through erosion; reduced particulate matter in the air; reduced potential for degradation of wildlife habitat; increased resistance of rangelands to weed and invasive species; 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 during drought.

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 and or mortality to wild horses and burros resulting from gather activities; change to population dynamics, age structure, sex ratios and genetic diversity of wild horses (should gathers be required). Adverse impacts would be avoided or minimized through application of standard operating procedures (SOPs), Best Management Practices (BMPs) and or other design measures or protection criteria identified in the EA or the accompanying Drought Monitoring and Mitigation Plan or Drought Monitoring Worksheet.

With implementation of the SOPs and or other documents noted above, none of the impacts discussed in detail in Chapters 3 and 4 of the EA are considered significant.

2. The degree to which the Proposed Action affects public health and safety.

If drought conditions warrant the removal of wild horses, the Wild Horse Standard Operating Procedures (Appendix A of Attachment 2) would be used to conduct gather activities and are designed to protect human health and safety. Implementation of the Proposed Action would have minimal affects to public health or safety.

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

Nearly 17,500 cultural resource properties have been identified and documented within the Elko District. Of these, approximately 35% of the sites have been determined eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places and approximately 25% of the sites have not been evaluated. Where possible, those historic properties determined eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places and those that are unevaluated, would be avoided. Where this is not possible, such sites will be treated with an approved Historic Properties Treatment Plan. Implementation of the Proposed Action would act to reduce the severity of potential impacts to cultural resources generated by livestock and wild horses and burros.

The Elko District administers 10 Wilderness Study Areas. Implementation of the Proposed Action would protect rangeland and riparian areas within these areas. Implementation of the Proposed Action would help maintain riparian and wetland vegetation; thereby, sustaining the health of these areas. There are no park lands, prime farmlands, or wild and scenic rivers within the Elko District.

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

Some members of the public feel that no wild horses or burros should be removed from any 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 gathers and appropriate livestock management during drought on the quality of the human environment are well documented through of management experience.

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

Implementation of the Proposed Action has no known effects on the human environment which are considered highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. This is demonstrated through the effects analysis in the EA.

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with

significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The Proposed Action will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision about a future consideration. Completion of this EA and approval of the Proposed Action does not establish a precedent for other assessments. Any future projects within the Elko District would be analyzed on their own merits and carried out, or not, independently of the actions currently selected.

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 EA (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 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 or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.

The Proposed Action and Alternatives would not affect significant scientific, cultural or historical resources. A cultural resource inventory would be completed prior to implementing drought response actions that make up the Proposed Action. Temporary range improvements and gather sites and holding facilities would be inventoried to determine the presence of 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.

There are no Threatened or Endangered Plant species (T&E) in the Elko District, however there are two candidate species: White-bark Pine (*Pinus albicaulis*) and Goose Creek Milkvetch (*Astragalus anserinus*). Potential impacts to T&E candidate plant species would be reduced 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 Elko District include: Greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*); Lahontan cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus henshawi*); Independence Valley speckled dace (*Rhinichthys osculus lethoporus*), Clover valley speckled dace (*R. osculus oligoporus*), bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), and the Columbia spotted frog (*Rana luteiventris*).

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 between wildlife, livestock, and wild horses; 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 displacement 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 best management practices such as installing flight diverters on temporary or new fences. The Proposed Action also includes seasonal and spatial buffer stipulations for Special Status Species such as Greater Sage-Grouse and breeding raptors. Temporary increases in forage utilization are not considered significant.

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 will not violate or threaten to violate any federal, state, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

/s/

7/17/2014

Jill Silvey
District Manager
Elko District Office

Date