

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management**

**Environmental Assessment
for the Renewal of the Grazing Leases on the
South Blacktail Mountain Allotment #04180,
North Hunt Creek Allotment #04189,
South Hunt Creek Allotment #04192,
Watson Creek Allotment #04193, and
West Trapper Allotment #04195**

Little Snake Field Office
455 Emerson Street
Craig, Colorado

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 IDENTIFYING INFORMATION

PROJECT NAME: Renewal of the grazing leases on the South Blacktail Mountain Allotment #04180, North Hunt Creek Allotment #04189, South Hunt Creek Allotment #04192, Watson Creek Allotment #04193, and West Trapper Allotment #4195.

CASEFILE/ALLOTMENT NUMBER:

0501243 #04180 South Blacktail Mountain

0500125 #04189 North Hunt Creek

0501301 #04192 South Hunt Creek

0501961 #04192 South Hunt Creek

0501969 #04193 Watson Creek

0504617 #04195 West Trapper

1.2 PROJECT LOCATION AND LEGAL DESCRIPTION

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: See Summary Map Attachment #1.

04180 South Blacktail Mountain T4N R 84W parts of Sec. 20, 28, 29

291 acres BLM

04189 North Hunt Creek T3N R85W parts of Sec. 19

83 acres BLM

04192 South Hunt Creek Pasture 1:
T2N R86W parts of Sec. 12,13
T2N R85W parts of Sec. 8, 17, 18

810 acres BLM

Pasture 2:
T2N R85W parts of Sec. 8

72 acres BLM

04193 Watson Creek T2N R86W parts of Sec. 13, 24
T2N R85W parts of Sec. 17, 18, 19

1,885 acres BLM

04195 West Trapper T2N R85W parts of Sec. 35

292 acres BLM

COUNTY AND GENERAL LOCATION: Routt County, Colorado; Located along Highway 131 near Oak Creek and Yampa.

LANDSCAPE DESCRIPTION: Lands within these allotments consist of high elevation sagebrush and mountain shrub communities. Elevation ranges around 7,000-8,000 feet. The BLM allotments are mostly rolling hills adjacent to more mountainous areas.

CLIMATE/PRECIPITATION SUMMARY: Precipitation ranges from 14-28 inches throughout the allotment areas with relatively cool average temperatures ranging from 37-40 degrees.

1.3 BACKGROUND

These allotments are small, scattered BLM parcels surrounded by private lands in southern Routt County, CO. The records on these allotments date back to the 1970s as the earliest recorded grazing authorizations with the exception of the South Hunt Creek Allotment #04192 since 1938 and the Watson Creek Allotment #04193 since 1954. Grazing authorizations include primarily cattle grazing with a small percent of the AUMs authorized for horses. The base properties on these allotments have changed hands, some multiple times, and the base property has been adjusted over the life of the grazing allotments. The location and size of the BLM parcels associated with these allotments has resulted in minimal administration of these grazing authorizations. Historical information reflected in the records contains information from grazing permit forms and bill payments. In 2013 a site visit was made to each allotment with a interdisciplinary team consisting of a BLM rangeland management specialist and a wildlife biologist. Additionally, each of the permit holders was contacted to discuss the renewal process.

1.4 PURPOSE AND NEED

BLM grazing leases #0501243, #0500125, #0501301, #0501961, #0501969, #0504617, which authorize livestock grazing on the South Blacktail Mountain Allotment #04180, North Hunt Creek Allotment #04189, South Hunt Creek Allotment #0419 – Pasture 2, South Hunt Creek Allotment #0419 – Pasture 1, Watson Creek Allotment #04193, and West Trapper Allotment #04195 expired on February 28, 2013. The grazing leases were extended for 10 years under *Section 411 Consolidated Appropriation Act, 2012*. These leases are subject to renewal at the discretion of the Secretary of the Interior, who delegated the authority to BLM, for a period of up to ten years. BLM has the authority to renew the livestock grazing permits and leases consistent with the provisions of the *Taylor Grazing Act, Public Rangelands Improvement Act, Federal Land Policy and Management Act*, and Little Snake Field Office's *Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan*. This plan includes the *Colorado Public Land Health Standards* and the *Guidelines for Grazing Management*.

BLM is required to provide for public uses of public land resources under the principles of multiple use and sustained yield. Among these uses is the allocation of forage for the purposes of domestic livestock grazing. BLM allocates grazing privileges in a manner that ensures orderly and sustainable consumption of forage while ensuring that wildlife habitat, vegetative, and soil resources remain healthy and provide for a wide array of other public benefits.

The following Environmental Assessment (EA) will analyze the impacts of livestock grazing on public land managed by the BLM. The analysis will recommend terms and conditions to the permit/lease which improve or maintain public land health. The proposed action will be assessed for meeting land health standards.

In order to graze livestock on public land, the livestock producer (permittee/lessee) must hold a grazing permit/lease. The grazing permittee has a preference right to receive the permit if grazing is to continue. The land use plan allows grazing to continue. This EA will be a site specific look to determine if grazing should continue as provided for in the land use plan and to identify the conditions under which it can be renewed.

1.4.1 Decision to be Made

The BLM will decide whether or not to issue these grazing leases and if issued, the terms and conditions grazing would be subject to.

1.6 PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW

The proposed action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3):

Name of Plan: Little Snake Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan (RMP)

Date Approved: October 2011

Decision Language: The proposed action and all alternatives are consistent with the Little Snake Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan, Livestock Grazing Management goals to manage resources, vegetation, and watersheds to sustain a variety of uses, including livestock grazing, and to maintain the long-term health of the rangelands; provide for efficient management of livestock grazing allotments; and contribute to the stability and sustainability of the livestock industry.

Section/Page: 2.14 Livestock Grazing/RMP-41

1.7 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1.7.1 Scoping: NEPA regulations (40 CFR §1500-1508) require that the BLM use a scoping process to identify potential significant issues in preparation for impact analysis. The principal goals of scoping are to allow public participation to identify issues, concerns, and potential impacts that require detailed analysis.

External Scoping Summary: The action in this EA is included in the NEPA log posted on the LSFO web site: http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/BLM_Information/nepa/lso.html. No requests for information or comments were received.

The Little Snake Field Office sent out a Notice of Public Scoping to all interested parties on December 16, 2011 to determine the level of public interest, concern, and resource conditions on

the grazing authorizations that were due for renewal in fiscal year 2013. A Notice of Public Scoping was posted on the Internet, at the Colorado BLM Home Page, asking for public input on grazing permit and lease renewals. Individual letters were sent to the affected permittee/lessee informing them that their permit and/or lease was due for renewal and requesting any information they wanted included or taken into consideration during the renewal process. The issuance of a grazing permit is being carefully analyzed within the scope of the specific action being taken, resources issues or concerns, and public input received.

Persons/Agencies Consulted: Each of the lessees was contacted regarding the grazing lease renewals.

Internal Scoping Summary: Internal scoping occurred during site visits with the LSFO wildlife biologist. Additionally, the proposed action was discussed during the LSFO NEPA Priorities meeting on August 18, 2014.

Issues Identified: No issues were identified during internal or external scoping.

CHAPTER 2 - PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide information on the proposed action and alternatives. Alternatives considered but not analyzed in detail are also discussed.

2.2 ALTERNATIVES ANALYZED IN DETAIL

2.2.1 Proposed Action

0501243 #04180 South Blacktail Mountain- Robert & Elaine Gay Family Ltd. Partnership
 Renew the grazing lease on the South Blacktail Mountain Allotment #04180 for 10 years, expiring February 28, 2024. No changes would be made to the existing terms and conditions of the current lease. The lease would be renewed as follows:

<u>Allotment Name & Number</u>	<u>Livestock Number & Kind</u>	<u>Dates</u>		<u>%PL</u>	<u>AUMs</u>
		<u>Begin</u>	<u>End</u>		
South Blacktail Mountain #04180	18 Cattle	05/01	09/30	100	91
				Unscheduled	<u>3</u>
				Total	94

The above lease would be subject to the Standard and Common Terms and Conditions, see Attachment #2.

0500125 #04189 North Hunt Creek – Longs Road Ranch, LLC

Renew the grazing lease on the North Hunt Creek Allotment #04189 for 10 years, expiring February 28, 2024. No changes would be made to the existing terms and conditions of the current lease. The lease would be renewed as follows:

<u>Allotment Name & Number</u>	<u>Livestock Number & Kind</u>	<u>Dates</u>		<u>%PL</u>	<u>AUMs</u>
		<u>Begin</u>	<u>End</u>		
North Hunt Creek	1 Cattle	05/01	07/31	100	3
#04189	1 Cattle	05/01	10/31	100	6
				Total	9

Special Terms and Conditions:

1. Up to 2 AUMs of horse use will be allowed.

The above lease would be subject to the Standard and Common Terms and Conditions, see Attachment #2.

ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIONS:

The name on the authorization has been changed from Ira Wertenteil to Longs Road Ranch, LLC to reflect the name on the base property deed. The allotment boundary and associated base property has also been updated for this allotment. These changes can be found in the authorization case file.

0501301 #04192 South Hunt Creek – Cloverleaf Ranch

Renew the grazing lease on the South Hunt Creek Allotment #04192 for 10 years, expiring February 28, 2024. No changes would be made to the existing terms and conditions of the current lease. The lease would be renewed as follows:

<u>Allotment Name & Number</u>	<u>Livestock Number & Kind</u>	<u>Dates</u>		<u>%PL</u>	<u>AUMs</u>
		<u>Begin</u>	<u>End</u>		
South Hunt Creek	4 Cattle	05/01	06/30	100	8
#04192 - Pasture 2				Unscheduled	1
				Total	9

The above lease would be subject to the Standard and Common Terms and Conditions, see Attachment #2.

ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIONS:

The name on the authorization has been changed from Carl & Rita Herold to Cloverleaf Ranch to reflect the name listed on the base property deed.

0501961 #04192 South Hunt Creek – Dean & Jim Rossi

Renew the grazing lease on the South Hunt Creek Allotment #04192 for 10 years, expiring February 28, 2024. The lease would be renewed as follows:

From:

<u>Allotment Name & Number</u>	<u>Livestock Number & Kind</u>	<u>Dates</u>		<u>%PL</u>	<u>AUMs</u>
		<u>Begin</u>	<u>End</u>		
South Hunt Creek #04192 - Pasture 1	20 Cattle	05/01	10/01	100	101
				Unscheduled	2
				Total	103

To:

<u>Allotment Name & Number</u>	<u>Livestock Number & Kind</u>	<u>Dates</u>		<u>%PL</u>	<u>AUMs</u>
		<u>Begin</u>	<u>End</u>		
South Hunt Creek #04192 - Pasture 1	20 Cattle	06/01	10/30	100	100
				Unscheduled	3
				Total	103

The above lease would be subject to the Standard and Common Terms and Conditions, see Attachment #2.

Additionally, a stock pond would be constructed in an upland tributary drainage west of Watson Creek on the BLM parcel within T2N R85W Sec. 17. This pond would provide an additional water source for livestock and wildlife. The pond would be constructed according to BLM specifications (see Attachment #3). Construction of the pond would entail mechanical clearing of brush and construction of a water retention pit by dozer. The pit would be lined with bentonite to improve water retention. For construction of the pond, total direct surface disturbance would be 0.1 acre or less. Water storage of the pond would be 0.1 ac ft or less.

The construction of this pond would be subject to the following stipulations:

1. Access to and from the site will be on existing roads or trails. Where cross-country travel is mandatory, the same tracks will be used in and out. While traveling, the dozer blade will be kept up.
2. Top soil would be stockpiled and used to cover the disturbed area to the greatest extent possible.
3. Noxious weeds would be controlled by the permittee on any area disturbed as a result of these projects. Any spraying of weeds will need to be cleared through BLM prior to spraying.
4. No hazardous materials/hazardous waste or trash shall be disposed of on public lands. If a release does occur, it shall be reported to the Little Snake Field Office immediately at 970-826-5000.
5. All surface disturbances would be reseeded with native species adapted to the area.

6. Surface disturbing activities associated with the construction of the proposed livestock pond in the S. Hunt Creek allotment would be avoided during the greater sage-grouse nesting and early brood rearing timing stipulation (March 1 to June 30).

ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIONS:

The name on the authorization has been changed from R&R Land and Livestock to Dean and Jim Rossi to reflect the name listed on the base property deed.

0501969 #04193 Watson Creek – Fish & Cross Ranch, LLC

Renew the grazing lease on the Watson Creek Allotment #04193 for 10 years, expiring February 28, 2024. Attachment #1d outlines pastures described below. The lease would be renewed as follows:

From:

<u>Allotment Name & Number</u>	<u>Livestock Number & Kind</u>	<u>Dates</u>		<u>%PL</u>	<u>AUMs</u>
		<u>Begin</u>	<u>End</u>		
Watson Creek	90 Cattle	06/01	06/30	100	89
#04193	98 Cattle	07/01	08/31	100	200
				Total	289

Special Terms and Conditions:

1. The current lease is based upon a yearling operation. The lessee must notify the BLM if there are plans to change the class of livestock from yearlings to cow/calf operation.
2. Use in Pasture 1 will be limited to no more than 3 weeks in June.
3. Use in Pasture 2 will be limited to no more than 6 weeks during months of July and August.

To:

<u>Allotment Name & Number</u>	<u>Livestock Number & Kind</u>	<u>Dates</u>		<u>%PL</u>	<u>AUMs</u>
		<u>Begin</u>	<u>End</u>		
Watson Creek	95 Cattle	06/01	08/31	100	287
#04193				Unscheduled	2
				Total	289

Special Terms and Conditions:

1. The Trantham Pasture will be used in alternating seasons of use 2 out of every three years (06/01–7/15 or 7/15–8/31).
2. If AUMs are available post season, livestock can trail through the Hughes Creek Pasture between 9/15 to 10/31.

The above lease would be subject to the Standard and Common Terms and Conditions, see Attachment #2.

ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIONS:

The base property and allotment boundary for the allotment have been redefined in coordination with the lessee. Changes have been documented in the case file.

0504617 #04195 – Joe and Kristi Schanlus

Renew the grazing lease on the West Trapper Allotment #04195 for 2 years, expiring February 28, 2016 concurrent with the existing base property lease from Tom Belaustegui. The lease would be renewed as follows:

From:

<u>Allotment Name & Number</u>	<u>Livestock Number & Kind</u>	<u>Dates</u>		<u>%PL</u>	<u>AUMs</u>
		<u>Begin</u>	<u>End</u>		
West Trapper #04195	10 Cattle	06/01	10/30	100	50
				Unscheduled	1
				Total	51

To:

<u>Allotment Name & Number</u>	<u>Livestock Number & Kind</u>	<u>Dates</u>		<u>%PL</u>	<u>AUMs</u>
		<u>Begin</u>	<u>End</u>		
West Trapper #04195	11 Cattle	06/01	10/15	100	50
				Unscheduled	1
				Total	51

The above lease would be subject to the Standard and Common Terms and Conditions, see Attachment #2

Cultural Resource Stipulation (applies to all grazing allotments)

If eligible sites are located during the recommended field inventory, the BLM would determine if livestock grazing activities are adversely affecting the sites. Mitigation measures, identified in consultation with the SHPO, would then be implemented.

2.2.2 No Action Alternative

Renew the leases with the existing mandatory and special terms and conditions. The Standard and Common Terms and Conditions would continue to apply.

2.2.3 No Grazing Alternative

The applications for renewal of the grazing authorizations on the allotments would be denied. As a result, livestock grazing would not be authorized. The BLM would initiate a process in accordance with the 43 CFR 4110.3 regulations to remove authorized grazing on these allotments. No new range improvement projects would be approved for construction.

CHAPTER 3 – AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND EFFECTS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Affected Resources:

The CEQ Regulations state that NEPA documents “must concentrate on the issues that are truly significant to the action in question, rather than amassing needless detail” (40 CFR 1500.1(b)).

While many issues may arise during scoping, not all of the issues raised warrant analysis in an environmental assessment (EA). Issues will be analyzed if: 1) an analysis of the issue is necessary to make a reasoned choice between alternatives, or 2) if the issue is associated with a significant direct, indirect, or cumulative impact, or where analysis is necessary to determine the significance of the impacts. Table 1 lists the resources considered and the determination as to whether they require additional analysis.

Table1. Resources and Determination of Need for Further Analysis

Determination ¹	Resource	Resource Issue/ Rationale for Determination	Specialist Initials	Date
Physical Resources				
NI	Air Quality	Activities associated with grazing that may affect air quality, namely dust and exhaust from ranch operation vehicles as well as dust from livestock hoof action, fall below EPA emission standards for the six criteria pollutants of concern (sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, ground-level ozone, carbon monoxide, particulate matter [both PM2.5 and PM10], and lead). Furthermore, ranch operation and livestock activities are not a significant source of these pollutant emissions that do occur in Routt County. Impacts to air quality caused by any of the alternatives are therefore considered negligible.	CR	8/21/14
NP	Floodplains	There are no 100-year floodplains present on public lands within the allotments.	CR	8/21/14
NI	Hydrology, Ground	There would be no impact to ground water hydrology with any alternative.	CR	8/21/14
PI	Hydrology, Surface	See Water Quality, Surface Chapter 3.2 for detailed analysis.	CR	9/2/14
NI	Minerals, Fluid	There would be no impact to fluid minerals with any alternative.	SW	08/26/14
NI	Minerals, Solid	There would be no environmental consequences to solid minerals from any of the alternatives.	JM	8/27/14
PI	Soils	See Chapter 3.2 for detailed analysis	CR	8/29/14
NI	Water Quality, Ground	There would be no impact to ground water quality from any alternative.	CR	8/21/14
PI	Water Quality, Surface	See Chapter 3.2 for detailed analysis	CR	9/2/14
Biological Resources				
PI	Invasive, Non-native Species	See Chapter 3.3 for detailed analysis	SW	08/27/14
PI	Migratory Birds	See Chapter 3.3 for detailed analysis	SW	08/27/14
PI	Special Status Animal Species	See Chapter 3.3 for detailed analysis	SW	08/26/14

Determination¹	Resource	Resource Issue/ Rationale for Determination	Specialist Initials	Date
NP	Special Status Plant Species	There are no federally listed threatened, endangered, or BLM sensitive plant species populations identified on these allotments.	ARH	8/22/14
PI	Upland Vegetation	See Chapter 3.3 for detailed analysis	CR	9/2/14
PI	Wetlands and Riparian Zones	See Chapter 3.3 for detailed analysis	CR	9/2/14
NI	Wildlife, Aquatic	There would be no impact to aquatic wildlife from any of the alternatives.	SW	08/27/14
PI	Wildlife, Terrestrial	See Chapter 3.3 for detailed analysis	SW	08/27/14
NP	Wild Horses	The grazing allotments in the proposed action are not adjacent to an HMA	CR	8/15/2014
Heritage Resources and the Human Environment				
PI	Cultural Resources	See Chapter 3.4 for detailed analysis	BN	9/11/14
NI	Environmental Justice	According to Census 2013, the only minority population of note in the impact area is the Hispanic community of Routt County. Hispanic or Latino represented 7% of the population, considerably less the Colorado state figure for the same group, 21.0%. Blacks, American Indians, Asians and Pacific Islanders accounted for around 2% of the population, below the comparable state figure in all cases. The census counted 7.5% of the Routt County population as living in families with incomes below the poverty line, compared to 12.9% for the entire state. Both minority and low income populations are dispersed throughout the county therefore no minority or low income populations would suffer disproportionately high and adverse effects as a result of any of the alternatives.	LM	8/22/14
NP	Hazardous or Solid Wastes	There are no hazardous waste concerns in the allotments.	CR	8/21/2014
NP	Lands with Wilderness Characteristics	Subject to WO-IM 2011-154 and in accordance with BLM policy, the proposed projects are in areas that did not meet the minimum size requirements for inventory finding of the presence of lands with wilderness characteristics. Size requirements are based on whether parcels are within roadless areas greater than 5,000 acres or are directly adjacent to designated wilderness or WSAs.	GMR	8/18/2014
NP	Native American Religious Concerns	See Chapter 3.4 for detailed analysis	BN	9/11/14
NI	Paleontological Resources	There would be no environmental consequences from any of the alternatives.	JM	8/27/14

Determination¹	Resource	Resource Issue/ Rationale for Determination	Specialist Initials	Date
NI	Social and Economic Conditions	There would not be any change to local social or economic conditions under any of the alternatives.	LM	8/22/14
NI	Visual Resources	The proposed projects are located in a VRM Class III area where moderate change to the characteristic landscape would be allowed as long as the existing characteristics of the landscape are partially retained. Any visual impacts would be to vegetation cover by congregation of livestock resulting in possible trampling or overgrazing, especial around watering holes, which would create a visual scar.	GMR	8/18/2014
Resource Uses				
NI	Access and Transportation	The proposed action or alternatives are not likely to influence existing conditions. OHV will be limited to existing and or designated roads and trails only, unless authorized by BLM.	DA	8/26/2014
NI	Fire Management	All alternatives would have no impact to fire management.	CR	8/21/14
NI	Forest Management	All alternatives would have no impact to forest management.	CR	8/21/14
NI	Livestock Operations	No impacts to livestock operations would be incurred under either alternative that continues grazing. If the No Grazing Alternative were selected, livestock grazing adjustments on private land would be required to continue grazing on adjacent private lands and Forest Service permits.	CR	8/21/14
NP	Prime and Unique Farmlands	No federally designated Prime and/or Unique Farmlands are present on public lands within these allotments.	CR	8/21/14
NI	Realty Authorizations, Land Tenure	All alternatives would have no impact to existing realty authorizations. There are no proposed changes to land tenure in the project area.	LM	8/22/14
NI	Recreation	The proposed action or alternatives are not likely to influence existing conditions.	DA	8/26/2014
Special Designations				
NP	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern	There are no ACECs within or in close proximity to these allotments.	GMR	8/18/2014
NP	Wild and Scenic Rivers	There are no WSRs within or in close proximity to these allotments.	GMR	8/18/2014
NP	Wilderness Study Areas	There are no WSAs within or in close proximity to these allotments.	GMR	8/18/2014

¹ NP = Not present in the area impacted by the proposed action or Alternatives. NI = Present, but not affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required. PI = Present with potential for impact analyzed in detail in the EA.

3.2 PHYSICAL RESOURCES

3.2.1 Soils

Affected Environment: The primary soils in these allotments are clay loam soils that are stony and rocky. The soils are deep and well drained. The water erosion hazard rating for these soils is high. Vegetation within these areas provides protection from erosion. Based on recent upland site assessments within each allotment, upland soils are stable with a good perennial grass and sagebrush canopy present to help protect from accelerated erosion.

Environmental Consequences, proposed action and No Action: Soils within the allotments are largely clay loam-based, which are least susceptible to damage and compaction when dry (late spring through early fall). Both the current and proposed grazing periods occur during this period, reducing the likelihood of long-term adverse impacts. Grazing activities could result in soil compaction and displacement that increase the likelihood of erosional processes, especially on steeper slopes and areas devoid of vegetation. Soil detachment and sediment transport are likely to occur during runoff events associated with spring snowmelt and short-duration, high intensity thunderstorms. In addition, the number of livestock in the area could lead to an increase in stream bank trampling on the BLM parcel in the Pasture 1 of the South Hunt Creek Allotment.

Given the good condition of the vegetation within the allotments, both the proposed and no action alternatives would maintain sufficient plant cover to both protect the soil surface from erosion, and allow the plant community to continue to produce litter in sufficient amounts to sustain appropriate water permeability.

Environmental Consequences, proposed action: Pond construction in the South Hunt Creek Pasture #1 would cause less than one acre of disturbance to the soil resource and would benefit the soil resource by improving livestock distribution and reducing the potential overuse of the vegetative resource that provides soil cover and reduces potential erosion throughout the allotment.

Environmental Consequences, No Grazing Alternative: Removal of livestock from public lands would decrease hoof compaction of soil surfaces. Over time, the lack of compaction, combined with the annual freeze-thaw cycle, would lead to a decrease in soil bulk density and improved soil moisture conditions, which facilitates vegetation germination and root development. Removing livestock would also result in an increase of both plant litter and live vegetative ground cover that would provide more protection from wind and water erosion. Any existing livestock trails and the resulting erosion would heal over time.

If grazing were to continue on adjacent private or other non-federal lands in the allotment, additional fences would have to be built by the landowner to prevent trespass onto federally-managed lands. Given the natural tendency of cattle to congregate and trail along fencelines, it is likely that paths and forage depletion would occur to some localized degree along new and existing fences within the allotments. The resulting decrease in vegetation would fail to decrease the impact of raindrops on the soil surface, while the expected increase in compaction would increase runoff from both rain and snowmelt. These factors would combine to increase the likelihood of both wind and water erosion in the areas adjacent to fences. This would result in blowouts and gullies which could indirectly impact federal lands through deposition or by the eroded area actually spreading onto federal lands.

Environmental Consequences, Cumulative Impacts: Past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions that affect soils in these areas include ranching, recreation, mineral exploration and development, and the infrastructural development necessary to support these two activities. The majority of livestock grazing impacts to soils occur around existing water sources such as springs, troughs, stock ponds, areas providing cover or shade, and along fencelines and drainage bottoms where livestock tend to trail. The soils within and closely surrounding these areas receive heightened use and may exhibit signs of soil compaction, erosion, and reduced productivity. Overall, when combined with other impacts in the areas these effects are minimal.

3.2.2 Water Quality, Surface

Affected Environment: Surface runoff from these allotments flows into tributaries of the Yampa River. Water quality for these tributaries is use protected and must support Aquatic Life Cold 1, Recreation E, Water Supply, and Agricultural uses. There are no water quality impairments or suspected water quality issues for perennial waters within or influenced by any of the allotments considered in the proposed action.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed and No Action Alternatives: Grazing activities could result in soil compaction and displacement that increase the likelihood of erosional processes, especially on steeper slopes and areas devoid of vegetation. Soil detachment and sediment transport are likely to occur during runoff events associated with spring snowmelt and short-duration, high intensity thunderstorms. In addition, the number of livestock in the area could lead to an increase in stream bank trampling on the BLM parcel in the Pasture 1 of the South Hunt Creek Allotment. The introduction or increase in amount of livestock feces to waterbodies can lead to water quality degradation by increasing fecal coliform bacteria levels and often leads to algal blooms which increase water temperatures.

The proposed grazing intensity and timing under either alternative would not compromise soil stability or vegetation community health, two important factors in maintaining water quality, given the good condition of the vegetation within these allotments. Surface waters influenced by grazing on the allotment are currently supporting classified uses. Permitting livestock grazing as proposed is consistent with land uses throughout the watershed and is not likely to result in changes to water quality.

Environmental Consequences, No Grazing Alternative: No obvious beneficial impacts to water quality would be incurred with the No Grazing Alternative.

Environmental Consequences, Cumulative Impacts: Past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions that affect surface water quality in these areas include ranching, recreation, fluid mineral exploration and development, and the infrastructural development necessary to support these activities.

Reference: Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment Water Quality Control Commission. 2012. Regulations #33, 37, and 93. <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/regulations/wqccregs/index.html>

3.3 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

3.3.1 Invasive/Non-Native Species

Affected Environment: Invasive plant species and noxious weeds occur within or near the affected allotments. Canada thistle, biennial thistles, white top, Dalmatian toadflax, and Hound's tongue are common noxious weeds within or near these allotments. Additional annual invasive species present include allysum and cheatgrass. Other species of noxious weeds could be introduced by vehicle traffic, livestock, wildlife and other means of dispersal. Invasive species are currently within an acceptable threshold on these allotments. Principals of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) are employed to control noxious weeds on BLM lands in the Little Snake Field Office.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action and No Action Alternatives: Access to public lands for dispersed recreation, hunting, livestock grazing management, livestock and wildlife movement, as well as wind and water, can cause weeds to spread. Surface disturbance from livestock concentration and human activities associated with grazing operations can increase weed presence. The largest concern in these allotments would be for biennial and perennial noxious weed infestations to establish and not be detected. Once an infestation is detected it could be controlled with various IPM techniques. Land practices and land uses by the livestock operator and their weed control efforts and awareness would largely determine the identification of potential weed infestations within the allotment.

Proposed construction of the livestock pond in the South Hunt Creek Allotment #04192 would have a temporary disturbance of excavated and bare soil during construction. Once reclamation of the area is complete there would be minimal opportunity for invasive species establishment.

Environmental Consequences, No Grazing Alternative: This alternative removes the spread and introduction of weeds by livestock on the BLM parcels. Additional sources of seed dispersal would still be present throughout the allotments. However, under this alternative there would be no presence by the grazing lessee to assist with detection of infestations.

Environmental Consequences, Cumulative Impacts: Under the proposed action and no action alternatives weed infestation and dispersal through livestock transport has the potential to increase on a potential of 3,433 acres of BLM land. This increased risk would be an acceptable level as managed under the proposed grazing leases.

3.3.2 Migratory Birds

Affected Environment: Migratory bird habitats on the allotments are comprised primarily of sagebrush stands, oakbrush/mixed mountain shrublands and grass communities. Aspen woodlands and mixed coniferous forests can be found on some of the allotments in higher elevations. A variety of migratory birds may utilize these vegetation communities during the nesting period (May through July) or during spring and fall migrations. The five allotments in the proposed action provide potential habitat for several species on the USFWS's Birds of Conservation Concern (BCC) List in Region 16 (Southern Rockies/Colorado Plateau). Those species associated with the BCC Region 16 list and the five allotments are presented by habitat affiliation below.

The primary BCC species associated with shrubland habitats in the LSFO is Brewer's sparrow. Brewer's sparrows are a summer resident in Colorado and nest in sagebrush stands. Nests are constructed in sagebrush and other shrubs in denser patches of shrubs. This species would likely be nesting in the proposed lease area from mid-May through mid-July.

BCC species that utilize mixed conifer and aspen stands include Cassin's finch and flammulated owl. Cassin's finch are a year round resident of Colorado. This species nests in higher elevation forests and move to lower elevations for the winter. Flammulated owls nest in tree cavities and inhabit higher elevation aspen and conifer forests during the summer months.

Raptor species are tied to several different habitat types within these allotments. Sagebrush and other shrublands provide open spaces for hunting, while rocky outcrops, woodlands, sporadic trees and cottonwood forests provide nesting substrates. Red-tailed hawk, golden eagle, bald eagle, northern goshawk and ferruginous hawk likely nest and hunt near several of the parcels. Because many of these raptors are also BLM sensitive species, more information is provided in the T&E and Sensitive Animal Section of this EA.

More generally, birds associated with these allotments are well distributed in extensive suitable habitats throughout the LSFO and northwest Colorado and habitat-specific bird assemblages appear to be composed and distributed appropriately to the normal range of habitat.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action: While livestock grazing can directly impact reproductive success of migratory songbirds by trampling of nests, it is more likely that it indirectly influences reproductive success due to changes in vegetation such as species composition, height or cover. The grazing systems in this alternative would allow for ample growing season rest on the allotments as a whole and adequate plant recovery periods.

Grazing would coincide with migratory bird nesting under this alternative. Spring grazing has the potential to reduce the amount of herbaceous cover available for nest concealment. Herbaceous cover is an important component for several ground nesting species. Standard terms and conditions would limit utilization to a moderate rate. This, combined with movement of livestock through the allotment would minimize any potential impacts to ground nesting species. During land health assessments and recent allotment visits, the uplands were found to be in good condition, providing suitable habitat for migratory bird species. These conditions are expected to continue under the grazing systems described in the proposed action. Overall, the proposed action would be compatible with maintaining local migratory bird populations.

The livestock pond construction in the South Hunt Creek Allotment would have minimal impacts to migratory birds. Nesting attempts may be disrupted and some nests may be accidentally destroyed if the water developments were constructed during the breeding season (May – July). As this would only impact a small area of habitat, potential for impacts would remain low.

Environmental Consequences, No Action Alternative: Impacts from the current grazing system would be similar to those described in the proposed action. However, if the livestock pond were not constructed under this alternative the benefits associated with this project, such as more

dispersed grazing utilization and an upland water source providing reduced utilization of the riparian area, would not occur.

Environmental Consequences, No Grazing Alternative: This alternative would lead to increases in vertical structure, composition and density of herbaceous understory on the allotment. Benefits associated with livestock removal would be most expected in those areas that currently experience concentrated livestock use (such as water sources). Response by migratory birds to vegetative changes would depend on the species, likely providing the greatest benefit to ground and low shrub nesters.

Environmental Consequences, Cumulative Impacts: The primary uses of the allotments and the surrounding area are livestock grazing and recreation (hunting). Continuation of grazing would not be expected to add substantially to existing or proposed disturbances.

3.3.3 Special Status Animal Species

Affected Environment: There are no Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed or proposed species, but are several BLM Sensitive Species which inhabit or derive important benefit from habitats in the general area. BLM Sensitive Species in the five allotments in the proposed action are bald eagle, Columbian sharp-tailed grouse, and greater sage-grouse.

All five of the allotments in the proposed action provide winter range habitat for bald eagle, though there are no nest or roost sites inventoried within any of the allotments.

South Blacktail Mountain #04180

There are no Columbian sharp-tailed grouse leks within the allotment boundary, but there are several active leks nearby. The allotment is mapped as nesting and winter range for Columbian sharp-tailed Grouse.

North Hunt Creek #04189

There are no Columbian Sharp-tailed grouse leks within the allotment boundary, but there are active leks nearby. The allotment does provide limited winter range for Columbian sharp-tailed Grouse. A Land Health Assessment (LHA) conducted 10/13 indicated that the population is stable and the habitat is in good condition due to cover and forbs. Fragmentation of habitat due to roads and private land has limited the amount of suitable habitat.

The allotment contains a small amount of Preliminary Priority Habitat (PPH) for the greater sage-grouse that is used for nesting.

South Hunt Creek #04192

There are no Columbian sharp-tailed grouse leks within the allotment boundary, but there are active leks nearby. The allotment is mapped as nesting and winter range for Columbian sharp-tailed grouse.

The allotment lies entirely in PPH for the greater sage-grouse and contains one lek site. The allotment provides production and winter range habitat throughout and also has small areas designated for severe winter range. LHAs conducted 08/12 and 10/13 indicated that this

allotment contains good brood rearing areas due to healthy sage, forbs, and a good residual grass component. Fragmentation of habitat due to roads, agriculture, and private land has limited the amount of suitable habitat.

Watson Creek #04193

There are no Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse leks within the allotment boundary, but there are active leks nearby. The allotment is mapped as nesting and winter range for Columbian sharp-tailed grouse.

PPH for the greater sage-grouse covers the majority of this allotment with some areas of Preliminary General Habitat (PGH) along Moody Creek and the Roaring Fork Ditch. The allotment provides nesting habitat throughout and winter range in the northwestern portion. A LHA conducted 10/13 indicated that the allotment was largely sagebrush and perennial grasses.

A prior BLM brush beating project to improve sagebrush has resulted in a revegetation primarily of rabbitbrush.

West Trapper #04195

There are no Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse leks within the allotment boundary, but there are several active leks nearby. The allotment is mapped as nesting and winter range for Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse.

PGH for the greater sage-grouse covers the majority of this allotment with only small areas of PPH. The allotment contains two active leks.

A LHA conducted 10/13 indicated that there was a good grass and forb component, but that moderate to high use may have impacted the sagebrush. Populations of both species of grouse are small and possibly limited due to fragmented habitat.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action:

Bald eagle

No bald eagle nests are located within any of the allotments. However, this species likely hunts in upland habitats in the general area and uses winter roost sites along the Yampa River. During the winter, bald eagles are likely present within the allotment, feeding on road or winter killed big game. The proposed action would improve or maintain vegetative conditions in the allotments, which would continue to provide suitable habitat for upland prey species. Overall, this alternative would be compatible with maintaining healthy habitat for bald eagles and prey species.

Columbian Sharp-Tailed Grouse

Impact to Columbian sharp-tailed grouse and their habitat would be similar to impacts described in the following for greater sage-grouse.

Greater Sage-Grouse

Livestock grazing has the potential to reduce residual grass cover, an important habitat component for sage-grouse nest concealment. All five allotments are meeting Land Health Standards and adequate cover for nest concealment in the form of new growth and residual cover is present. Overall, the proposed action would be compatible with maintaining suitable habitat for greater sage-grouse.

The construction of the proposed livestock pond would have minimal impacts to greater sage-grouse if implemented in accordance with the stipulations in the design features. Nesting attempts may be disrupted and some nests may be accidentally destroyed if the water development was constructed during the breeding and nesting season (March 1 – June 30).

Environmental Consequences, No Action Alternative: Impacts from the current grazing system would be similar to those described in the proposed action. However, the stock pond would not be constructed under this alternative and benefits of dispersed utilization and an upland water source to alleviate the riparian area associated with the project would not occur.

Environmental Consequences, No Grazing Alternative: This alternative would lead to increases in vertical structure, composition and density of herbaceous understory on the allotments as a whole. Benefits associated with livestock removal would be most expected in those areas that currently experience concentrated livestock use (such as existing water sources and riparian areas). Improvements in herbaceous understory (height and density) would enhance nesting conditions for greater sage-grouse throughout the allotment as a whole.

Environmental Consequences, Cumulative Impacts: The primary use of the allotments and the surrounding area is livestock grazing and recreation (hunting). Continuation of grazing would not be expected to add substantially to existing or proposed disturbances.

3.3.4 Upland Vegetation

Affected Environment: These allotments are located in the foothills of the Flat Tops Mountains. Vegetation consists of upland mixed shrub, brush and grass communities. Vegetation present within the area includes Sandberg bluegrass, Indian ricegrass, prairie junegrass, big bluestem, smooth brome, basin wildrye, yarrow, wild onion, Oregon grape, sego lilly, kinikinik, dandelion, serviceberry, snowberry, Wyoming big sagebrush, fringed sagebrush, oak brush, and chokecherry. The plant communities in these allotments are very diverse and productive.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action and No Action Alternatives: Over the course of the growing season vegetative vigor and growth exceeds grazing use within these allotments. There is no monitoring or visual observations that indicate grazing or utilization is a resource concern under these alternatives. The resilience of the plant communities in these allotments combined with the proposed grazing terms, would result in no negative impact to the upland vegetation.

The proposed construction of the livestock pond on the South Hunt Creek Allotment #04192 would remove vegetation from the project area for a temporary period. Once reclamation is complete, there would be a higher utilization level in that area resulting from the water source.

The vegetation resilience in this area is high enough to maintain an acceptable threshold for this impact to the plant community.

Environmental Consequences, No Grazing Alternative: The absence of grazing within these allotments would be of negligible effect to the upland vegetation. Adjacent private lands would likely continue to be grazed. This could result in additional infrastructure created in the form of fences to utilize private lands without trespassing on BLM.

Environmental Consequences, Cumulative Impacts: All facets of the plant communities on the allotments are affected by climate, wildlife, and direct disturbance through the presence of roads and other physical facilities both within and adjacent to the allotments. Past agricultural practices along with recreation use have, and would continue to, affect the vegetation community within these areas. When added to the existing activities in and adjacent to these allotments, approval of the proposed action would not cause undue damage to upland vegetation.

3.3.5 Wetlands and Riparian Zones

Affected Environment: With the exception of South Hunt Creek Allotment #04192, the remainder of the allotments have no riparian resources on BLM. Approximately 0.25 miles of Watson Creek bisects the South Hunt Creek Allotment. This reach of the creek was assessed on August 6, 2012 and found to be in proper functioning condition. This section of the creek runs parallel to RCR 11 and a historic irrigation ditch. Many upper elevation riparian grasses and forbs are present and productive. Willows are present in the riparian area as well. Beaver dams are present and stable but not active. Little to no sign of use by livestock was observed. The reach itself was stagnant and the primary source of water was leaking in from the adjacent irrigation ditch. Watson Creek was rated as PFC when assessed in 2002 as well.

Watson Creek Springs are also within the South Hunt Creek Allotment. They were assessed in 2012 and 2002 as well. In 2002, they were rated as Functioning at Risk with no apparent trend. In 2012, they were rated as Function at Risk with conditions improving. One location is simply a stock water pond area (T2N R86W Sec. 12, 13). The second location (T2N R85W Sec 17) is between the historic irrigation ditch and the Watson Creek reach with water supplied from the leaking ditch.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed and No Action: Livestock use as proposed under these alternatives, would not adversely impact existing form and function of Watson Creek or the springs.

Environmental Consequences, No Grazing Alternative: Generally speaking, removing livestock grazing would likely improve riparian and wetland resource conditions over the long-term. A decrease in herbivory on riparian vegetation and trampling pressure caused by livestock in riparian areas would increase soil moisture and reduce the potential for erosion and any associated changes to channel geomorphology and wetland form/function, particularly in low and moderate gradient stream where the presence of riparian vegetation is one of the most important factors in maintaining stability.

However, current and proposed livestock use has maintained Proper Functioning Condition of this reach. Furthermore, the benefits of removing livestock may not fully be realized if the riparian resource is used by wildlife, particularly large ungulates, since wildlife can also have similar impacts to riparian resources, especially during periods of drought. Also, livestock grazing on adjacent private and other non-federal lands would continue to produce direct effects to riparian resources that may indirectly affect riparian resources on federally managed lands.

Environmental Consequences, Cumulative Impacts: Past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions that affect riparian areas in the Upper Yampa watershed primarily include ranching and the infrastructural development necessary to support it. The region has been historically grazed (for more than 50 years) and the intensity of livestock use has generally decreased over time. All alternatives would not contribute to any adverse cumulative impact.

3.3.6 Wildlife, Terrestrial

Affected Environment: These five allotments are located in the foothills of the Flat Tops Mountains. Vegetation consists of upland mixed shrub, brush and grass communities and a variety of wildlife habitats and their associated species occur in the general area. Common species such as black bear, coyotes, cottontail rabbits, golden eagles, ground squirrels, and mountain lions likely use these habitats.

The four more northern allotments (South Blacktail Mountain, North and South Hunt Creek, and Watson Creek) provide winter range habitat for elk with smaller areas of elk winter concentration at lower elevations. South Blacktail Mountain provides some habitat for elk calving grounds, as well as moose summer range.

North and South Hunt Creek and Watson Creek allotments are within mule deer winter range habitat, with very limited areas of severe winter range.

The four more southern allotments (North and South Hunt Creek, and Watson Creek, and West Trapper) provide overall range for pronghorn.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action: Livestock grazing can alter vegetation structure, composition and function. Effects on terrestrial wildlife are dependent on the species of interest and may be adverse or beneficial depending on grazing: numbers, timing, frequency and intensity. The grazing system described in the proposed action incorporates deferment and rotation, which allows for ample growing season rest and adequate plant recovery periods. During land health assessments and recent allotment visits, the uplands were found to be in good condition, providing suitable habitat for wildlife species. These conditions would continue under the grazing system described in the proposed action.

The proposed livestock pond would have minimal impacts to wildlife species. Habitat in the immediate vicinity of the livestock pond would be degraded by livestock congregation. However, this would not affect the productivity of the surrounding habitat. The water development would also provide an additional water source for wildlife species.

Environmental Consequences, No Action Alternative: Impacts from the current grazing system would be similar to those described in the proposed action. However, the stock pond would not be constructed under this alternative and benefits associated with this project would not occur.

Environmental Consequences, No Grazing Alternative: This alternative would lead to increases in vertical structure, composition and density of herbaceous understory on the allotment as a whole from current conditions. Benefits associated with livestock removal would be most expected in those areas that currently experience concentrated livestock use (such as water sources). Overall, wildlife species that would receive the most benefit would be grazing species and species that use herbaceous understory for hiding cover and nest concealment.

Environmental Consequences, Cumulative Impacts: The primary use of the allotments and the surrounding area is livestock grazing and recreation (hunting). Continuation of grazing would not be expected to add substantially to existing or proposed disturbances. The proposed livestock pond could also provide additional water sources for wildlife species.

3.4 HERITAGE RESOURCES AND HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

3.4.1 Cultural Resources

Federal agencies are mandated by various laws to consider the effect of proposed land use activities on cultural resources (i.e. historic and archaeological sites). The National Environmental Policy Act directs the federal government to preserve important historic and cultural aspects of the national heritage. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) requires federal agencies to take into account the effect of federal undertakings on cultural resources that are eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). In Colorado, the Bureau of Land Management meets the requirements of the NHPA under the terms of the Protocol Agreement with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO).

Range permit renewals are federal undertakings under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Range improvements associated with the allotment (e.g., fences, spring improvements) are subject to compliance requirements under Section 106 and will undergo standard cultural resource inventory and evaluation procedures. During Section 106 review, a cultural resource assessment was completed for each allotment on 9/9/2014 following the procedures and guidance outlined in the 1980 National Programmatic Agreement Regarding the Livestock Grazing and Range Improvement Program, IM-WO-99-039, IM-CO-99-007, IM-CO-99-019, and IM-CO-02-29.

Affected Environment: The results of the cultural resource assessments for each of the five allotments are summarized in the following table. Copies of the cultural resource assessments are in the Little Snake Field Office archaeology files.

A total of five cultural resource inventories have been completed within the five allotments, resulting in the coverage of 325 acres and recording of only one cultural resource. An isolated basal fragment of a stone projectile point was found in the West Trapper allotment, recorded as 5MF3181, and determined to be not eligible to the NRHP. The point has a concave basal edge

and lateral edges that are heavily ground. These and other characteristics of the point suggest it may be a specimen of the Angostura type of Late Paleoindian age or else a McKean Lanceolate point of the Middle Plains Archaic period. Angostura points date from 9,400 to 8,100 radiocarbon years before present (B.P.) and McKean Lanceolate points range in age from 5,000 to 3,000 B.P.

Allotment Name & Number	BLM Acres Thoroughly Inventoried (at the Class III Level)	BLM Acres NOT Thoroughly Inventoried at a Class III Level	Percent -%- of BLM Acres in Allotment Inventoried at a Class III Level	Number of Cultural Resources on BLM Land Known in Allotment	High Potential for Historic or Archaeological Sites ? (Yes / No)	Management Recommendations (Additional Inventory Required and Sites to be Visited)
S. Black-tail Mtn. 04180	0	280	0%	0	No	No further work
N. Hunt Creek 04189	40	0	100%	0	No	No further work
S. Hunt Creek 04192	0	480	0%	0	No	Areas measuring about 4 acres in extent and positioned around the following geographic features should be inventoried for cultural resources: 1) Watson Creek Springs in T 2 N, R 85 W, Section 17, NE ¼ of NE ¼; 2) a proposed livestock reservoir to be constructed in T 2 N, R 85 W, Section 17, NE ¼; 3) two existing reservoirs, one in T 2 N, R 85 W, Section 8, SW ¼ of SW ¼ and one in T 2 N, R 86 W, Section 13 NE ¼ of NE ¼.
Watson Creek 04193	5	1,090	0%	0	No	A four-acre area around an existing livestock reservoir in T 2 N, R 85 W, Section 18, SW ¼ of NW ¼ should be inventoried for cultural resources.
West Trapper	280	0	100%	1	No	No further work is required.

Based on available information, a low potential for cultural resources exists in the five allotments, but additional inventory is recommended to assess if unrecorded eligible sites are being adversely affected by livestock grazing. As discussed below, the greatest impact from grazing on cultural resources takes place in areas where livestock tend to concentrate. Such areas do not exist in the two BLM tracts within the South Blacktail Mountain Allotment and therefore no needed cultural resource inventory was identified. The BLM tracts include moderate to steeply sloping terrain on Blacktail Mountain that is mostly wooded with conifers and aspen. The potential for eligible sites in these tracts is low. It is recommended that several small inventory areas be surveyed for cultural resources at sources of water used by livestock in two of the five allotments. The recommended inventory areas will each be about 4 acres in extent and will total roughly 20 acres.

Within the South Hunt Creek Allotment #04192, a proposed reservoir to be constructed as part of the lease renewal must be inventoried for cultural resources. If the grazing lease on the allotment is to be renewed, it is recommended that areas around other sources of water for livestock in the allotment also be inventoried for cultural resources, including two existing reservoirs and Watson Springs. Finally, it is recommended that an existing livestock reservoir in the Watson Creek Allotment be inventoried for cultural resources. If the grazing leases for the two allotments are to be renewed, the recommended cultural resource inventory is to be completed within the ten-year period of the lease.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action and No Action Alternatives: Leasing the allotments for livestock grazing would produce direct and indirect effects on cultural resources. The direct impacts that occur where livestock concentrate include trampling and churning of site soils and cultural features exposed on the ground surface, artifact breakage, and impacts from leaning and rubbing against historic structures, above-ground cultural features, and rock art. Indirect impacts include soil erosion, gullying, and increased potential for unauthorized collection of uncovered artifacts and vandalism of exposed archaeological features.

If sites are located during the recommended field inventory, the BLM would assess livestock grazing impacts to the sites. The livestock impacts would be assessed within the ten-year period of the lease.

Environmental Consequences, No Grazing Alternative: While a no grazing alternative alleviates potential damage from livestock activities, cultural resources are constantly subject to site formation processes or events after creation. These processes can be both cultural and natural, and may occur instantly or over thousands of years. Cultural formation processes include activities directly or indirectly caused by humans. Natural processes include chemical, physical, and biological processes of the natural environment that impinge upon and/or modify cultural materials.

Environmental Consequences, Cumulative Impacts: In certain situations, continued grazing could cause substantial ground disturbance and cause cumulative, long-term, irreversible adverse effects to eligible sites, if present. If eligible sites are identified during cultural resource

inventory, the BLM will assess if continued livestock grazing will cause a cumulative adverse effect on the sites.

3.4.2 Native American Concerns

A number of laws direct federal land managing agencies to consider the views of Native Americans as part of the process of making land use decisions. The National Environmental Policy Act directs the federal government to preserve important historic and cultural aspects of the national heritage. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) requires federal agencies to consult with Native Americans regarding the effect of federal undertakings on sites that may be of cultural or religious importance to Indian people to ensure that tribal values are taken into account to the extent feasible. Finally, federal land managing agencies are directed by the American Indian Religious Freedom Act to consider the views of Indian people regarding sites or areas of religious importance when making decisions regarding land management.

Affected Environment: Because renewing a grazing lease is a federal undertaking, the Little Snake Field Office of the BLM contacts relevant Native American groups to inquire if issuance of leases that are up for renewal in upcoming years will affect sites or areas of cultural or religious concern. In historic times, the Little Snake field area was inhabited by the Utes and the Shoshone. In ca. 2011, letters soliciting input were sent to the three branches of the Ute tribe in Colorado and Utah and to the branch of the Shoshone in Wyoming. No comments were received. Based on the available information, no sites or areas of cultural or religious concern to native peoples are present within the grazing allotments.

Environmental Consequences, All Alternatives: Renewal of the grazing leases on the allotments would not affect sites or areas of cultural or religious concern to Native Americans.

Environmental Consequences, Cumulative Impacts: None

CHAPTER 4– PUBLIC LAND HEALTH STANDARDS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The South Blacktail Mountain Allotment #04180, North Hunt Creek Allotment #04189, South Hunt Creek Allotment #04192, Watson Creek Allotment #04193, and West Trapper Allotment #4195 were assessed for compliance with the Colorado Standards of Public Land Health by an interdisciplinary team consisting of a Rangeland Management Specialist and a Wildlife Biologist on October 28, 2013. The South Hunt Creek Allotment #04192 was also assessed on August 6, 2012 by a Rangeland Management Specialist, Wildlife Biologist and an Ecologist.

4.2 COLORADO PUBLIC LAND HEALTH STANDARDS

In January 1997, the Colorado State Office of the BLM approved the Standards for Public Land Health and amended all RMPs in the State. Standards describe the conditions needed to sustain public land health and apply to all uses of public lands.

4.2.1 Standard 1 Upland soils exhibit infiltration and permeability rates that are appropriate to soil type, climate, land form, and geologic processes.

Finding of most recent assessment: Based on the 2013 assessments, this standard is being met.

Proposed Action and No Action Alternative: This standard would continue to be met under either alternative.

No Grazing Alternative: This standard would continue to be met, no beneficial impacts would be incurred.

4.2.2 Standard 2 Riparian systems associated with both running and standing water function properly and have the ability to recover from major disturbance such as fire, severe grazing, or 100-year floods.

Finding of most recent assessment: Watson Creek Allotment # 04193 is the only allotment that contains riparian resources on BLM. Based on the 2012 PFC assessments, this standard is being met.

Proposed Action and No Action Alternative: This standard would continue to be met under either alternative.

No Grazing Alternative: This standard would continue to be met, no beneficial impacts would be incurred.

4.2.3 Standard 3 Healthy, productive plant and animal communities of native and other desirable species are maintained at viable population levels commensurate with the species and habitat's potential.

Finding of assessments (Plant): The plant communities within these allotments are very diverse and productive. Plant species are appropriate for the sites and are contributing to desired objectives. This standard is being met in all allotments.

Proposed Action and No Action Alternative: This standard would continue to be met for the plant community under either alternative.

No Grazing Alternative: This standard would continue to be met for the plant community under this alternative. No beneficial impacts would be incurred.

Finding of assessments (Animal): These five allotments provide habitat for a variety of wildlife species. Elk and mule deer utilize this area for winter and limited severe winter habitat, as well as overall use by pronghorn. Sagebrush stands, mixed shrub, and grass communities within the allotments are in good condition, providing suitable habitat for terrestrial wildlife species. Shrub cover was adequate to provide winter habitat for browsing species.

West Trapper was the only allotment with moderate to high utilization and the sagebrush was heavily browsed with standing dead, but was still maintaining appropriate seral stages and adequate structure for wildlife.

Proposed Action and No Action Alternatives: This standard would continue to be met under both alternatives maintaining healthy, productive, and resilient animal communities.

Grazing Alternative: Removal of livestock grazing would allow animal communities to continue meeting this standard.

4.2.4 Standard 4 Special status, threatened and endangered species (federal and state), and other plants and animals officially designated by the BLM, and their habitats are maintained or enhanced by sustaining healthy, native plant and animal communities.

Finding of most recent assessment (Plants): There are no federally listed threatened, endangered, or BLM sensitive plant species populations identified on these allotments. This standard does not apply.

Finding of assessments (Animal): There are no threatened or endangered species or habitat for such species within any of these grazing allotments. Site visits have been conducted on all of the allotments and all were found to be meeting the standard for special status species. All the allotments provide winter range habitat for bald eagle. The majority of the allotments provide nesting and winter habitat for Columbian sharp-tailed grouse. Four of the allotments, excluding South Blacktail Mountain, contain PGH and PPH for the greater sage-grouse.

Proposed Action and No Action Alternatives: This standard would continue to be met under both alternatives maintaining healthy, productive, and resilient plant and animal communities.

No Grazing Alternative: Removal of livestock grazing would allow plant and animal communities to continue meeting this standard.

4.2.5 Standard 5 The water quality of all water bodies, including ground water where applicable, located on or influenced by BLM lands will achieve or exceed the Water Quality Standards established by the State of Colorado.

Finding of most recent assessment: The water quality standard is being met on all allotments.

Proposed Action and No Action Alternative: This standard would continue to be met under either alternative.

No Grazing Alternative: This standard would continue to be met under the No Grazing Alternative. No beneficial impacts would be incurred.

SIGNATURE OF PREPARER:

SIGNATURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEWER:

DATE SIGNED:

Finding of No Significant Impact
DOI-BLM-CO-N010-2014-0055-EA

Based upon a review of this Environmental Assessment and the supporting documents, I have determined that the proposed action is not a major federal action and will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity, as defined at 40 CFR 1508.27 and do not exceed those effects as described in the Little Snake Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan (2011). An environmental impact statement is not required. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described below.

Context: The project is a site-specific action directly involving BLM administered public lands that do not in and of itself have international, national, regional, or state-wide importance.

Intensity: The following discussion is organized around the 10 Significance Criteria described at 40 CFR 1508.27. The following have been considered in evaluating intensity for this proposed action:

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse

The beneficial effects of the proposed action include: in authorizing public land grazing this action sustains the local economy as grazing operations would continue to supply personal income to the operator and employees, and would have a proportional influence on the regional, Colorado, and national economy. This action supports the western livestock industry. The authorized livestock operator(s) have mandatory and special terms and conditions that must be met to maintain their grazing preference. This provides a certain level of stewardship of public lands in that if these lands were to become degraded by any activity or event, natural or human in origin, grazing and or other authorized uses would be terminated. This stewardship role of the livestock operator not only mandates proper livestock and forage management but also provides communication with the BLM as to other activities or events that could cause degradation to public lands. Long term effects would be limited in scope.

2. Degree of effect on public health and safety

There would be no effects on public health and safety.

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

There are no park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas in the area of proposed action. As described in the EA, impacts to cultural resources were identified for the proposed action. As this action is not a new action but a continuation of historic land uses in this area there would be no affect to unique characteristics of the geographic area.

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

Public input regarding the proposed action has been solicited during the planning process. The BLM Little Snake Field Office sent out a Notice of Public Scoping on December 16, 2011 to determine the level of public interest, concern, and resource conditions on the grazing authorizations that were up for renewal in FY 2013. A Notice of Public Scoping was posted on the Internet, at the Colorado BLM Home Page, asking for public input on permit/lease renewals. Individual letters were sent to the affected permittees/lessees, informing them their permit/lease was up for renewal and requesting any information they wanted included in or taken into consideration during the renewal process. No comments were received.

5. Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risk

No highly uncertain or unknown risks to the human environment were identified during analysis of the proposed action.

6. 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 neither establishes a precedent for future BLM actions with significant effects nor represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

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

No individually or cumulatively significant impacts were identified for the proposed action. Any adverse impacts identified for the proposed action, in conjunction with any adverse impacts of other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future actions will result in negligible impacts to natural and cultural resources.

8. Degree to which the action may adversely affect district, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed on the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources:

There would be no loss or destruction to these resources. A cultural resources study is initiated prior to any action considered an undertaking under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Any adverse effects to Historic Properties are mitigated in consultation with the Colorado Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (SHPO).

9. Degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat

There are no threatened or endangered species or habitats for such species present within these allotments.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, state, or local environmental protection law

The proposed action violates no federal, state, or local environmental protection laws.

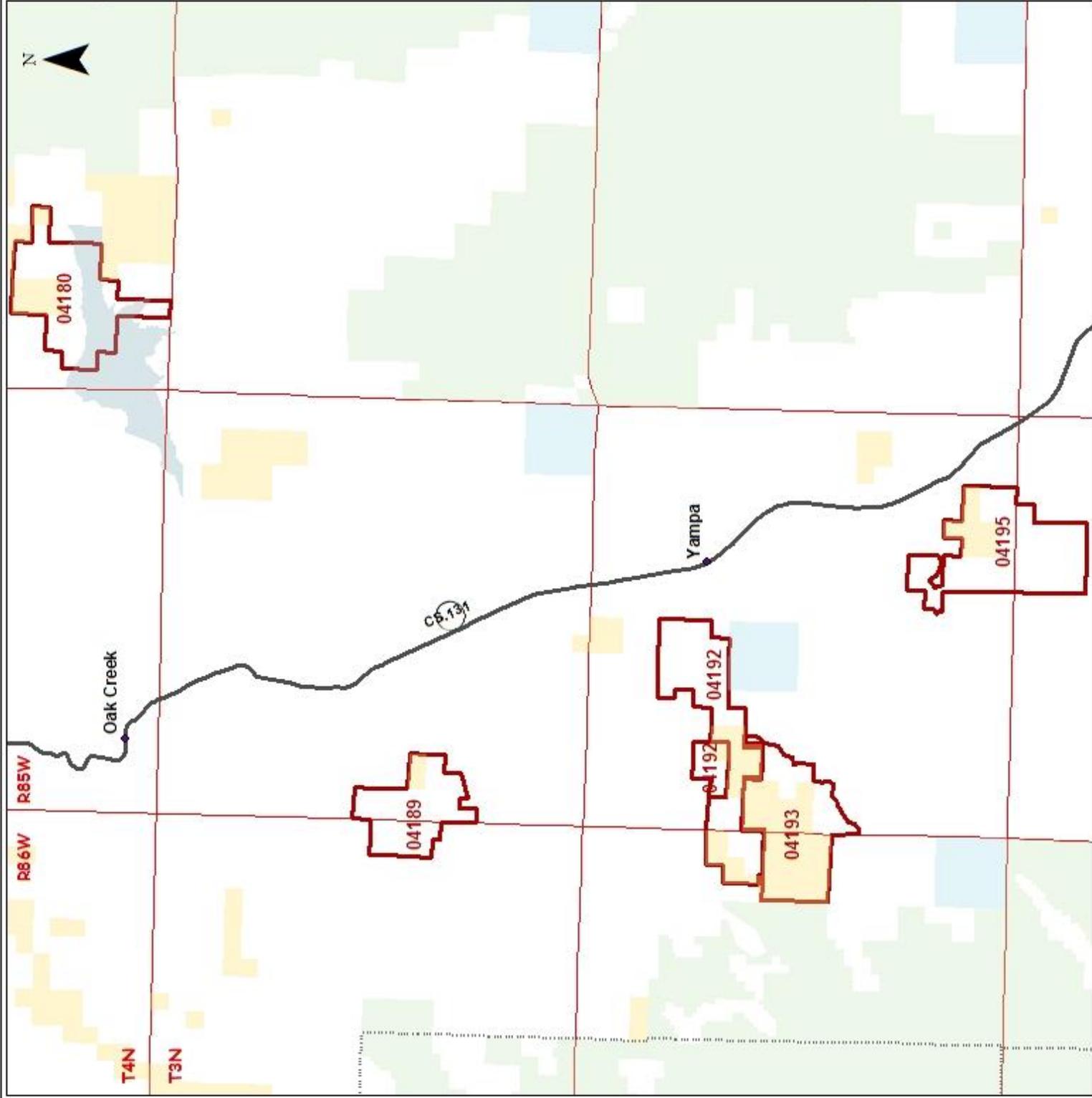
SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL: /s/ Timothy Wilson
Tim Wilson, Acting Field Manager

DATE SIGNED: 09/12/14

Grazing Allotments:
04180 South Blacktail Mountain
04189 North Hunt Creek
04192 South Hunt Creek
04193 Watson Creek
04195 West Trapper

Surface Management Status

	Private
	State DOW
	State Land Board
	State Park
	US FS
	US BOR
	US BLM
	US BLM LU
	US FWS
	US NPS
	Allotment Boundary



1:124,000



No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregation use with other data. All boundaries are an approximate representation.

08/14/2014

Attachment #1a

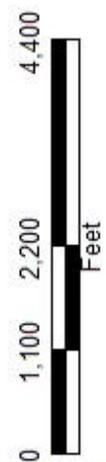
#4180
South Blacktail Mountain

Surface Management Status

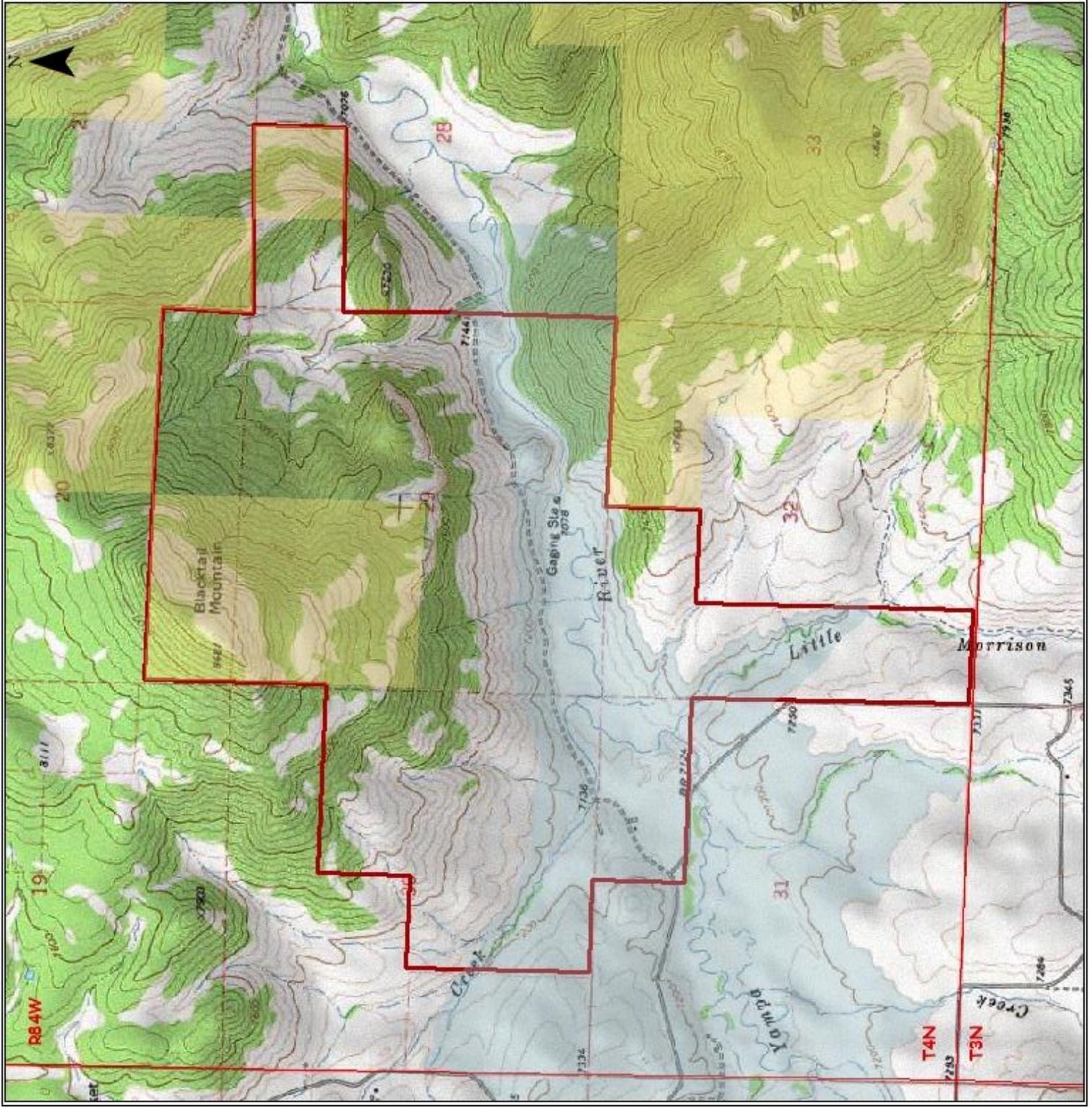
Private

- State Land Board
- State Park
- US FS
- US BLM

Blacktail Mountain



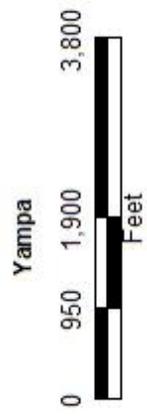
No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregation use with other data. All boundaries are an approximate representation.



Attachment #1b

#4189
North Hunt Creek

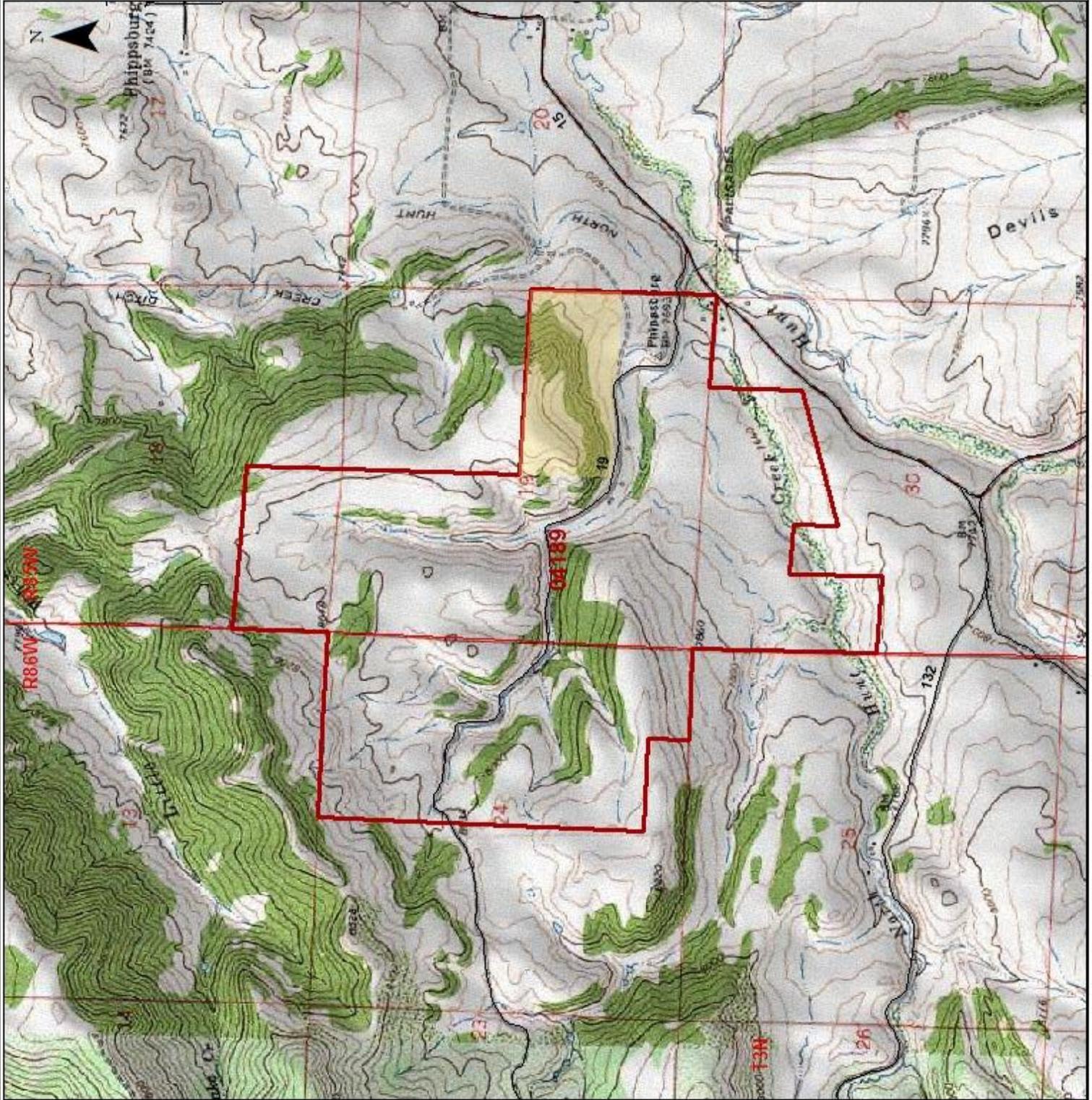
	Allotment Boundary
	Private
	State DOW
	State Land Board
	US FS
	US BLM



1:24,000



No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregation use with other data. All boundaries 08/14/14 CR are an approximate representation.



Attachment #1c

#04192
South Hunt Creek

Allotment Boundary

Surface Management Status

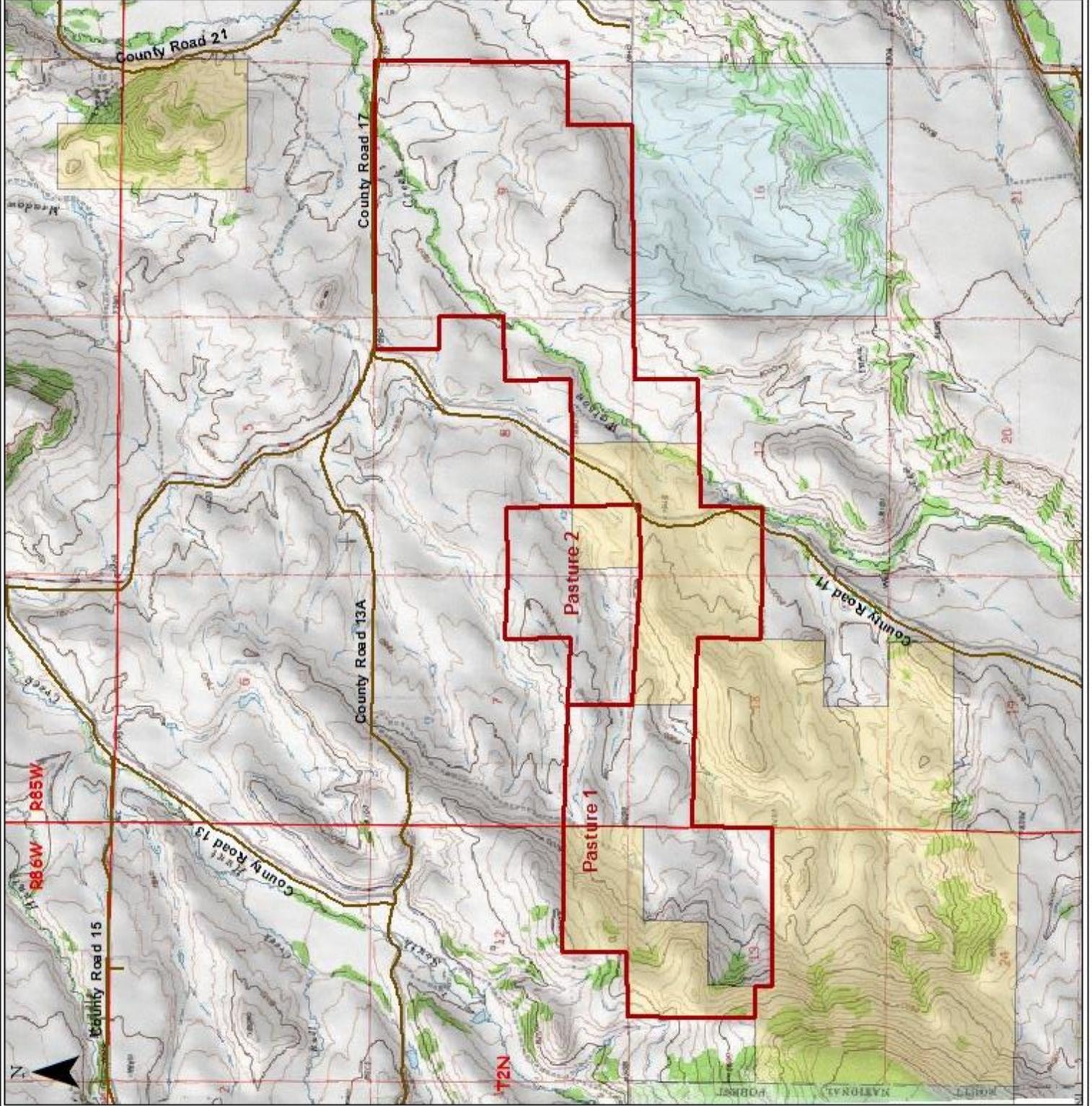
- Private
- State Land Board
- US FS
- US BLM



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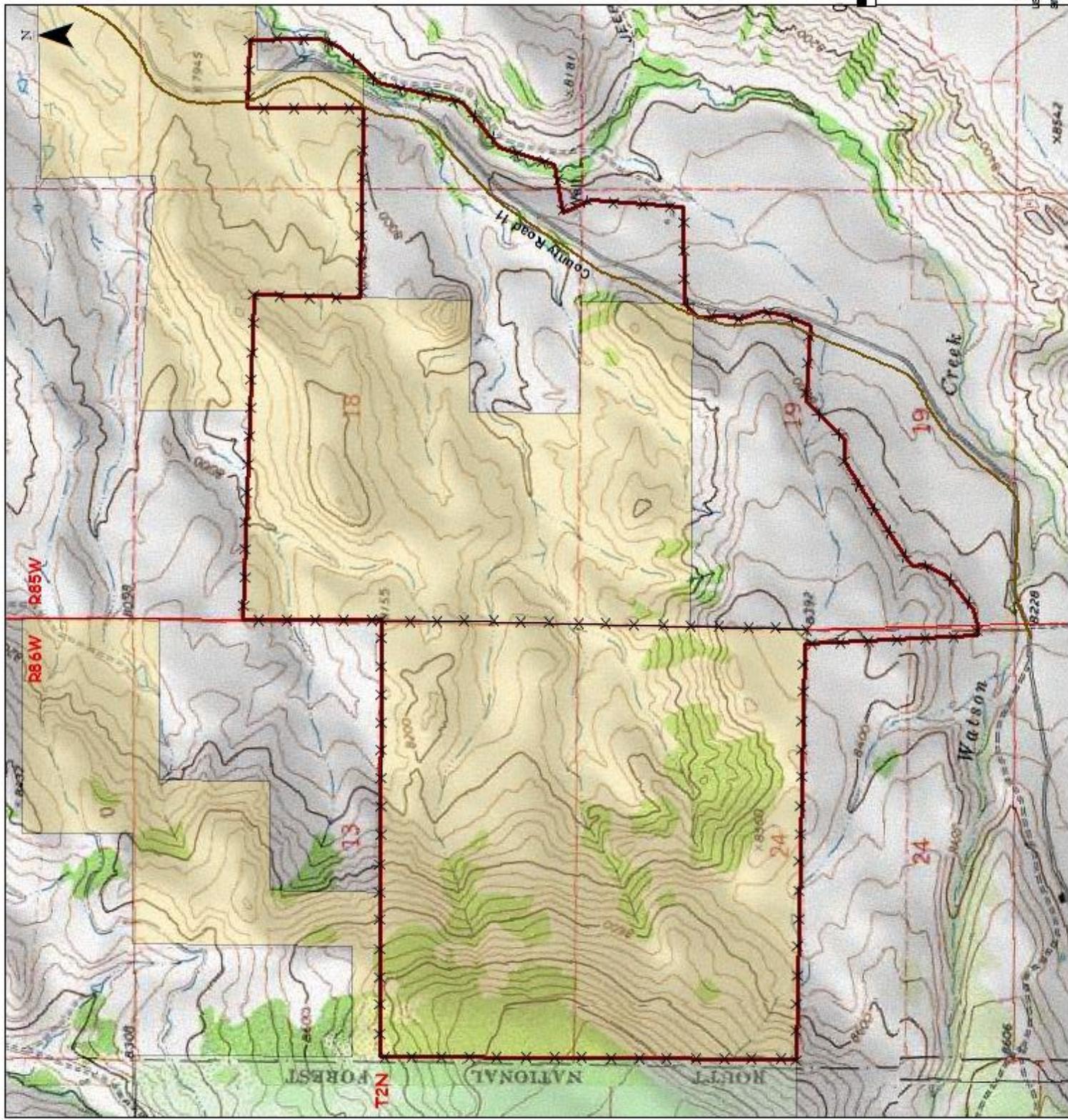


No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregation use with other data. All boundaries are an approximate representation.



Attachment #1d
 #04193
 Watson Creek

4193 Watson Creek Fencelines
 Allotment Boundary 04193
Surface Management Status
 Private
 State Land Board
 US FS
 US BLM



Yampa
 Trapper
 Orno Peak
 Sand Point
 1,200 2,400 4,800
 Feet

1:26,000



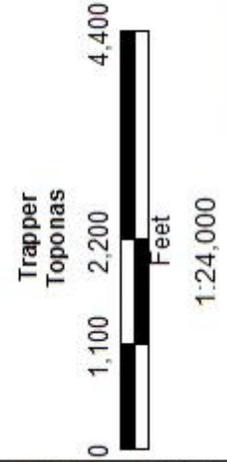
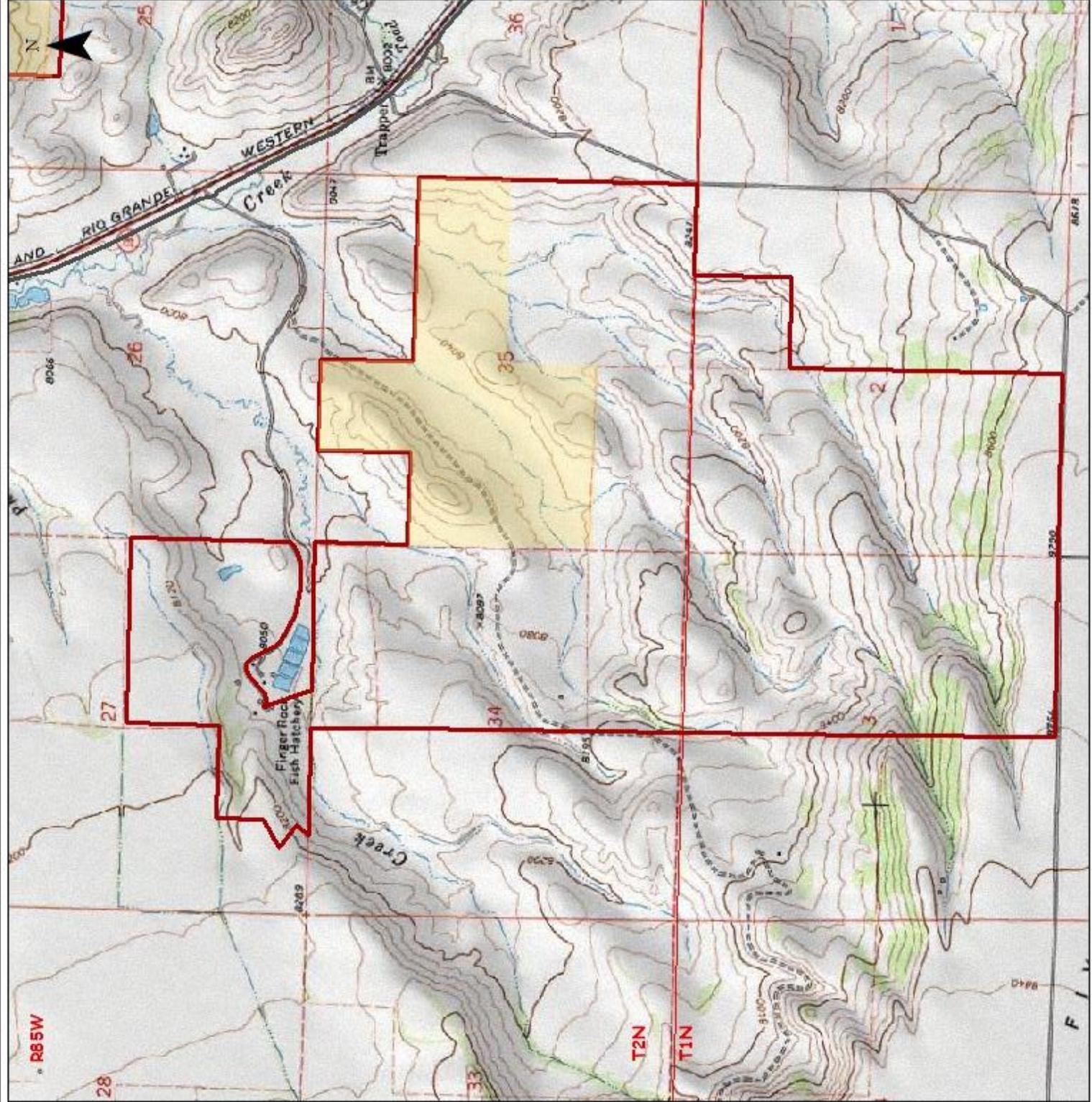
No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregation use with other data. All boundaries are an approximate representation. 8/14/14 CR

Attachment #1e

#4195 West Trapper

Surface Management Status

- Private
- State Land Board
- US FS
- US BLM



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8/14/14 CR

ATTACHMENT #2
DOI-BLM-CO-N010-2014-0055-EA
TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Standard Terms and Conditions

- 1) Grazing permit or lease terms and conditions and the fees charged for grazing use are established in accordance with the provisions of the grazing regulations now or hereafter approved by the Secretary of the Interior.
- 2) They are subject to cancellation, in whole or in part, at any time because of:
 - a. Noncompliance by the permittee/lessee with rules and regulations;
 - b. Loss of control by the permittee/lessee of all or a part of the property upon which it is based;
 - c. A transfer of grazing preference by the permittee/lessee to another party;
 - d. A decrease in the lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management within the allotment(s) described;
 - e. Repeated willful unauthorized grazing use;
 - f. Loss of qualifications to hold a permit or lease.
- 3) They are subject to the terms and conditions of allotment management plans if such plans have been prepared. Allotment management plans **MUST** be incorporated in permits and leases when completed.
- 4) Those holding permits or leases **MUST** own or control and be responsible for the management of livestock authorized to graze.
- 5) The authorized officer may require counting and/or additional or special marking or tagging of the livestock authorized to graze.
- 6) The permittee's/lessee's grazing case file is available for public inspection as required by the Freedom of Information Act.
- 7) Grazing permits or leases are subject to the nondiscrimination clauses set forth in Executive Order 11246 of September 24, 1964, as amended. A copy of this order may be obtained from the authorized officer.
- 8) Livestock grazing use that is different from that authorized by a permit or lease **MUST** be applied for prior to the grazing period and **MUST** be filed with and approved by the authorized officer before grazing use can be made.
- 9) Billing notices are issued which specify fees due. Billing notices, when paid, become a part of the grazing permit or lease. Grazing use cannot be authorized during any period of delinquency in the payment of amounts due, including settlement for unauthorized use.

- 10) Grazing fee payments are due on the date specified on the billing notice and MUST be paid in full within 15 days of the due date, except as otherwise provided in the grazing permit or lease. If payment is not made within that time frame, a late fee (the greater of \$25 or 10 percent of the amount owed but not more than \$250) will be assessed.
- 11) No member of, or Delegate to, Congress or Resident Commissioner, after his/her election of appointment, or either before or after he/she has qualified, and during his/her continuance in office, and no officer, agent, or employee of the Department of Interior, other than members of Advisory committees appointed in accordance with the Federal Advisory Committee Act (5 U.S.C. App. 1) and Sections 309 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.) shall be admitted to any share or part in a permit or lease, or derive any benefit to arise therefrom; and the provision of Section 3741 Revised Statute (41 U.S.C. 22), 18 U.S.C. Sections 431-433, and 43 CFR Part 7, enter into and form a part of a grazing permit or lease, so far as the same may be applicable.

Common Terms and Conditions

- A) Grazing use will not be authorized in excess of the amount of specified grazing use (AUM number) for each allotment. Numbers of livestock annually authorized in the allotment(s) may be more or less than the number listed on the permit/lease within the grazing use periods as long as the amount of specified grazing use is not exceeded.
- B) Unless there is a specific term and condition addressing utilization, the intensity of grazing use will insure that no more than 50% of the key grass species and 40% of the key browse species current year's growth, by weight, is utilized at the end of the grazing season for winter allotments and the end of the growing season for allotments used during the growing season. Application of this term needs to recognize recurring livestock management that includes opportunity for regrowth, opportunity for spring growth prior to grazing, or growing season deferment.
- C) Failure to maintain range improvements to BLM standards in accordance with signed cooperative agreements and/or range improvement permits may result in the suspension of the annual grazing authorization, cancellation of the cooperative agreement or range improvement permit, and/or the eventual cancellation of this permit/lease.
- D) In consideration of laws intended to protect important historic, archaeological, and paleontological sites, the lessee will ensure that employees do not collect artifacts and fossils from public lands. (Federal regulations do allow for collection of common invertebrate fossils and certain amounts of petrified wood.)

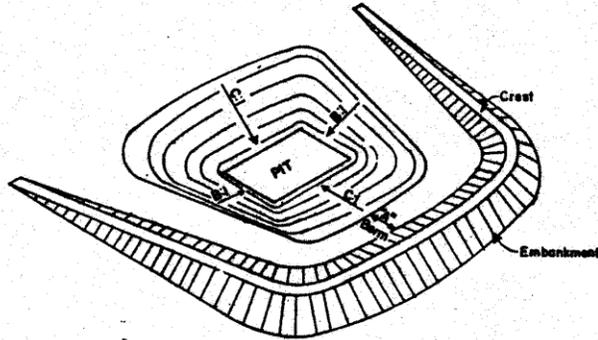
If artifacts, archaeological features, or fossils are discovered during earth moving activities on BLM land within the allotment, the lessee shall stop activities that would cause further disturbance and contact the authorized officer of the BLM. The authorized

officer will consult with the lessee and determine the necessary actions, if any, to mitigate disturbance to the site and to avoid or mitigate further disturbance.

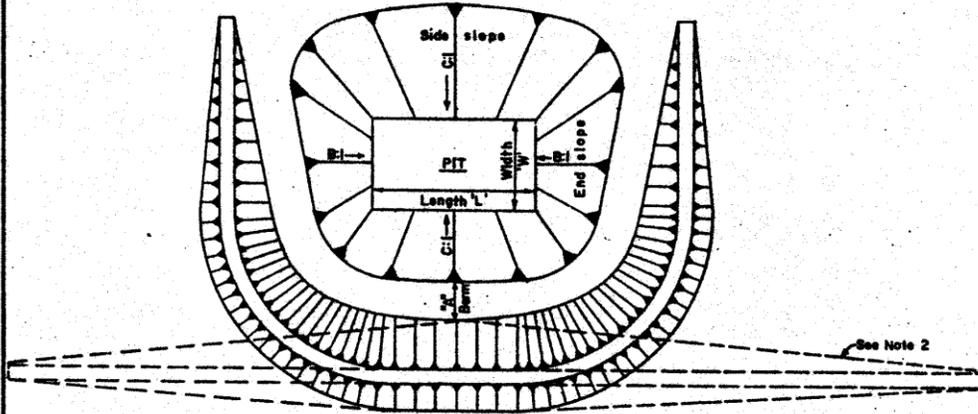
If Native American or other human remains are discovered during earth moving or other activities, the lessee shall stop activity in the vicinity of the discovery and immediately notify the authorized officer of the BLM.

- E) No hazardous materials/hazardous or solid waste/trash shall be disposed of on public lands. If a release does occur, it shall immediately be reported to this office at (970) 826-5000.
- F) The permittee/lessee shall provide reasonable administrative access across private and leased lands to the BLM and its agents for the orderly management and protection of public lands.
- G) Application of a chemical or release of pathogens or insects on public lands must be approved by the authorized officer.
- I) The terms and conditions of this permit/lease may be modified if additional information indicates that revision is necessary to conform with 43 CFR 4180.

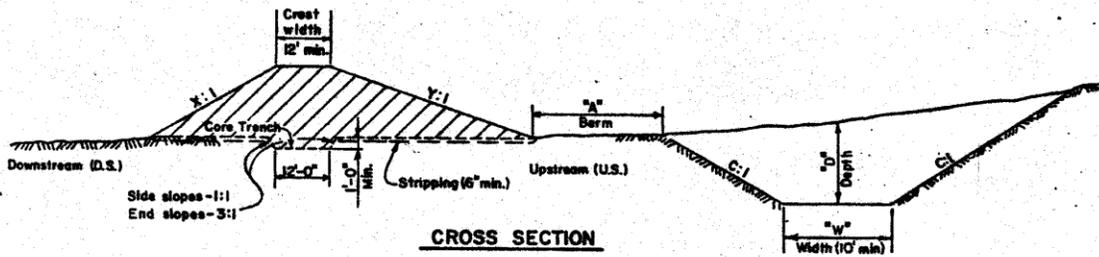
**ATTACHMENT #3
DOI-BLM-CO-N010-2014-0055-EA**



PERSPECTIVE VIEW



PLAN



CROSS SECTION

NOTES:

1. Pit & embankment slopes & dimensions shall be as shown on the Work Summary Chart.
2. Embankment may be "U" Or "L" shape or straight line. Construct as indicated on the Work Summary Chart.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
DIVISION OF ENGINEERING SYSTEMS DENVER SERVICE CENTER

**TYPICAL
WATER RETENTION PIT**

DESIGNED *[Signature]*
REVIEWED *[Signature]*
APPROVED *[Signature]*

DRAWN J.D.Sedillo SCALE NONE
DATE MARCH 9, 1984 SHEET OF

DRAWING NO. 02294-1

