



United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Pocatello Field Office
4350 Cliffs Drive
Pocatello, Idaho 83204-2105
(208) 478-6340



In Reply Refer To:

March 26, 2010

Dear Permittee/Interested Public:

This letter is to notify you that the Pocatello Field Office is asking for your comments on the Soda Hills 2 Allotment Grazing Lease Renewal/Issuance and Grazing Management Adjustment. We will use your comments and those received from other interested parties and affected interests to determine potential issues and/or conflicts with the proposed action. Enclosed with this letter is a scoping information package containing a summary of the proposed action and other relevant information. The Scoping/Information Package for this project proposal can be found on the internet at: <http://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/info/nepa.html>.

Your comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, preliminary issues, and alternatives. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received on or before April 16, 2010 and are directly relevant to the proposal and project area. The BLM will accept feedback beyond this date, however, such comments may be considered secondary to comments received in a timely manner.

Please submit your comments in writing to either the Pocatello Field Office or to id_pocatello_fo@blm.gov. The primary contact for questions and comments related to this analysis is Michael Kuyper, Natural Resource Specialist, and he can be reached at (208) 478-6344.

Sincerely,

/s/ David A. Pacioretty

David A. Pacioretty
Field Manager

Enclosure:

Scoping /Information Package

cc:

Idaho Department of Agriculture, Attn: Ron Kay, Range Program Manager, Division of Animal Industries, Box 7249, Boise, Idaho 83707-9985

Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Southeast Region, Attn: Mark Gamblin, Regional Supervisor, 1345 Barton Road, Pocatello, Idaho 83204

Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, Attn: Alonzo Coby, Chairman, P. O. Box 306, Fort Hall, Idaho 83203

Western Watersheds Project, Attn: Jon Marvel, P.O. Box 1770, Hailey, ID 83333

Caribou County Commission, 159 South Main, Soda Springs, Idaho 83276

Craig Ozburn

S. Criss James

Lessee(s):

Rigby Family Partnership

Terry Johnson

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

**Idaho Falls District
Pocatello Field Office
4350 Cliffs Drive
Pocatello, ID 83204**

SCOPING/INFORMATION PACKAGE

SODA HILLS 2 ALLOTMENT (#04324) GRAZING LEASE RENEWAL & GRAZING MANAGEMENT ADJUSTMENT

The information in this package summarizes a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to authorize livestock grazing in the Soda Hills 2 Allotment #04324. The action being analyzed is the renewal of a grazing lease, authorization and construction of range improvements, and modification of grazing management within the Soda Hills 2 Allotment per 43 Code of Federal Regulations (43CFR), Subpart 4100-4180 Grazing Administration and in accordance with the 1988 Pocatello Resource Management Plan (RMP). Federal actions must be analyzed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations to determine potential environmental consequences.

The purpose of this document is to inform you and other interested and affected parties of this proposal, and to solicit your comments to assist us with the NEPA review of the proposal. The analysis of this proposal is currently ongoing, and will eventually be analyzed in an environmental document with an estimated completion date of 2010. Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential environmental issues related to the proposed action and to identify alternatives to the proposed action that meet the purpose and need for the project.

Purpose and Need for Action

Action is needed to address several needs within the Soda Hills 2 Allotment and achieve the following objectives:

Grazing Lease Renewal/Issuance:

The Pocatello RMP identifies the Soda Hills 2 Allotment as available for domestic livestock grazing. Where consistent with the goals and objectives of the RMP and Idaho's Standards and Guidelines for Grazing Management (1997), it is BLM policy to authorize allocation of forage for livestock grazing to qualified operators. There is currently one grazing lease issued for the allotment, which expired in 2009 and was reissued under the appropriations act until the lease could be fully processed in compliance with applicable laws and regulations. The purpose of the proposed action is to authorize livestock grazing consistent with BLM policy and in a manner that maintains or improves project area resource conditions and is in conformance with the Pocatello RMP.

Grazing Authorization On Acquired Lands:

The current grazing lease authorizes grazing use on approximately 5,300 acres of public land within the Soda Hills 2 Allotment boundary designated in the RMP. In 1997 approximately 2,555 acres of private land, located within and adjacent to the allotment, was purchased using mitigation funds from the Bonneville Power Administration. The enclosed map (Map A) shows the allotment and acquired lands. These lands were transferred into public ownership to be managed by the BLM. The Environmental Assessment # EA-ID-030-97-091 and Decision Record dated 1997 documenting the BLM's acquisition of these lands, identified the current grazing lessee as having preference to graze the acquired lands. In 2003 an additional 1,100 acres of private land was acquired by the BLM within and adjacent to the allotment. The acquired lands are unfenced and intermingled with the original leased public land. These lands were farmed and/or grazed by the current lessee prior to public ownership. These acquired lands are needed for the grazing system described in the proposed action. Authorization of grazing use within these acquired lands would eliminate the potential for livestock trespass and/or extensive fencing.

Deer Winter Range Management :

The project area falls within the Soda Springs Hills Wildlife Habitat Area, which was designated following the approval of the Soda Springs Hills Habitat Management Plan (HMP) in 1981. The HMP emphasizes management of the lands within the Soda Springs Hills for deer winter range. The 3,600 acres of private land acquired since 1997 are also to be managed primarily for deer winter range and secondarily for other multiple uses purposes. The BLM manages the 2,555 acres acquired in 1997 in cooperation with the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes and IDFG with the primary goal of maintaining and/or improving winter habitat. Based on deer winter habitat requirements, the mountain slopes and drainages have been focused on for habitat improvement projects due to their higher winter habitat value. Fuels and ecosystem restoration projects have been occurring within the project area since 2005 with projects planned over the next 10-15 years. These and other projects have and continue to improve the winter habitat by focusing on aspen restoration by removal of conifer and juniper encroachment, maintenance of mountain shrub communities through removal of juniper and prescribed fire, and increasing wildlife forage through planting of bitterbrush, sagebrush, and curl leaf mountain mahogany. These treatment areas are scattered throughout the allotment and require protection from livestock grazing until their objectives are met. Under current grazing management, numerous temporary fences have been and will need to be constructed in the future to keep livestock out of the planned treatment units until their objectives are met. The objective of the proposed action is to concentrate use on approximately 350 acres of acquired, previously farmed ground, that has low value as deer winter range and limit use on the rest of the allotment (approximately 7,900 acres) that has higher deer winter habitat value. By permitting use under the proposed action temporary fences that have been constructed to protect vegetation treatments could be removed and future protection fences would not have to be constructed.

Riparian Areas:

Two springs are located within the allotment. Prior to the private land acquisitions, these springs were privately owned and were developed to provide water to pipelines. Assessments of the riparian areas was conducted in 2009 and it was determined that Chandler Spring was Non-Functioning and Big Spring was Functioning at Risk with a non-apparent trend. Factors contributing to Chandler Spring's rating were found to be associated with the historical development of the spring source, and heavy utilization by wildlife big game species. The primary factor associated with Big Spring rating was found to be associated with the spring's development and continued source of water for an existing

pipeline. The pipeline currently provides water to troughs and flows freely without any means of turning off when troughs are full. Therefore, water is continually drained from the spring sources. Off Highway Vehicles (OHV) have also impacted the riparian area associated with Big Spring. The purpose of the proposed action is to provide protective barriers to keep OHV's out of Big Spring and protect the spring source at Chandler Spring from over utilization and trampling by wildlife. Increasing the amount of water being retained at the springs is another objective which should improve the associated riparian condition.

Existing Condition

Grazing

The Soda Hills 2 allotment is located in the Soda Spring Hills northwest of Soda Springs, Idaho (see map A). Approximately 5,300 acres of public land is leased for grazing within the Allotment. These lands were grazed in combination with adjacent and intermingled private lands, a large portion of which was owned by the lessee, prior to the private lands acquisitions that occurred in 1997 & 2003. Grazing is authorized for 150 cattle from June 1 through September 30 for a total of 604 active AUMs on the leased lands.

The intermingled private lands acquired since 1997 have yet to be incorporated into the lands leased for grazing, however the current lessee has preference for the lands as outlined in the 1997 land acquisition Decision Record.

Existing Improvements / Structures On Acquired Lands

Several structures exist on the lands that were acquired. These structures have not been analyzed for their impacts. If it is determined that these structures are needed for management purposes then authorization would be given to use these structures and maintenance assigned. Structures that exist on the acquired lands consist of the following:

Structure Type	Size/Length	Comment
Gates (5)	12' powder river pipe gates	Gates currently used to seasonally close access to public lands
Fencing	Approx. 2 miles total	Several short segments of fence are associated with the above gates. Other segments of fence are associated with the previously farmed fields.
Irrigation Pipe	8,400 feet on Public Land	Buried main irrigation pipe line coming from private land. Provided water to previously farmed ground. Currently provides water to two 10,000 gallon water storage tanks.
Poly Pipe	5,700 feet.	Carries water from Big Springs to two trough locations in Upper Valley. Connected to an authorized pipeline that was located on the original leased public land.
Water Troughs	800+ gallon	Three watering sites with troughs are located within the previously farmed ground in Upper Valley. These are feed by both Big Spring and from the irrigation pipeline
Water Storage Tank (2)	10,000 gallon +/-	These are connected to the irrigation pipeline.

Acquired Lands

Of the 3,600 acres acquired by the BLM, approximately 480 acres were previously farmed. The majority of these farmed lands were planted into Smooth Brome pastures and entered into the CRP program prior to public ownership. Forage production was calculated within the previously farmed lands located in Upper Valley, Swenson Valley and Ninety Percent Canyon (350 ac), and it was determined that there was sufficient forage to support all of the leased AUM's allocated to the Soda Hills 2 Allotment. Upper valley has three watering sites established. Ninety Percent Canyon does not have water available on public land, however there is water located within a quarter mile on the lessees adjacent private land. Swenson Valley has minimal available water which is provided by Chandler Spring. This spring has limited flow and is located approximately one mile to the north.

The remaining acquired acres are diverse in topography and native vegetative composition.

Land Health

A land health assessment of the land within the Soda Hills 2 Allotment was conducted in 2009-2010. A Land Health Evaluation is currently being completed. Issues raised during the land health assessment were associated with juniper encroachment, aspen stand health, riparian condition, noxious weed infestations and possible forest stand condition.

Proposed Action Development

The proposed action was developed in cooperation and coordination with the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) and the grazing lessee. Actions were developed through several group meetings and field trips to the allotment.

Proposed Action

I. Authorize grazing use on 2900 acres of acquired land:

Authorize use on approximately 2,900 acres of acquired land that is intermixed with the currently leased 5,300 acres of public land for a total of 8,200 acres within the Soda Hills 2 Allotment. Authorized Active Use would not be increased beyond the existing grazing preference of 604 AUMs. Grazing would be restricted to the proposed grazing management system.

II. Grazing Management System:

Implement a deferred rotation grazing system concentrating use on previously farmed lands (acquired by the BLM since 1997) located in Upper Valley (210 ac), Swenson Valley (105 ac) and 90% canyon (35 ac). These three areas would be fenced creating three pastures. Spring turn out would rotate between the Upper Valley and Swenson pastures with livestock entering the 90% pasture in the fall. Flexibility would be part of the rotation to allow spring turn out in 90% or multi-year turn out within the same pasture if needed to address unforeseen circumstances (ie. wildfire, range improvement failure, etc.). Livestock movement between pastures would be conducted through trailing.

Grazing use on the remaining portion of the proposed leased lands (7,900 ac) would be prescriptive in nature and require a separate grazing application (form 4130-1) specifying the location to be grazed. Livestock use of these areas would require prior authorization from the authorized office and would entail consultation with the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes and IDFG. Use made outside of the pastures

would fall under the grazing lease and would not exceed the total active AUM's.

II. Grazing lease renewal/issuance:

A grazing lease would be issued for use on the Soda Hills 2 Allotment (8,200 ac). The Mandatory Terms and Conditions of the grazing lease would continue to be the same as the current lease.

Grazing Lease Mandatory Terms & Conditions

Livestock #	Livestock Kind	Grazing Period		Active Use (AUMs)
		Begin	End	
150	Cattle	06/01	09/30	604

Other terms and conditions that would be made part of the grazing lease:

1. An actual use report will be submitted to the BLM following annual use.
2. Grazing may occur 15 days prior to the begin date and/or be extended up to 15 days beyond the end date identified in the Mandatory Terms and Conditions, however the AUMs will not exceed the Active Use identified in the lease.
3. Grazing use will be restricted to the identified use areas in Upper Valley, Swenson Valley, and 90 %, with the exception of trailing use during movement between use areas or unless otherwise authorized by the Authorized Officer as documented on a grazing application (form 4130-1).
4. The allotment(s) shown on this permit/lease shall meet the requirements as described in 43 CFR Subpart 4180 – Fundamentals of rangeland health and the standards and guidelines for grazing administration. Any changes in management will be based upon the resource evaluations and analysis as scheduled and completed by the area manager.

III. Range Improvements:

Several range improvement projects are proposed associated with the proposed grazing system and for protection of riparian resources. In addition to the proposed new projects, several existing improvements need to be analyzed.

Range Improvements

NEW STRUCTURES		
Structure Type	Size/Length	Comment
Wood Fence	3,400 ft	Two wood fences are proposed. 3,200 feet of fence would be associated with an enclosure around Big Spring. This would be a 2-3 rail fence to keep OHV from entering the riparian zone. The Big Spring fence may only be 3 sided (along the current roadway) with would reduce the length by 1,600 ft. The remaining 200 feet would be associated with protecting Chandler Spring.
Well		A well would be drilled at the upper end of Swenson

		Valley within the previously farmed ground. The well would be near existing roads.
Water Storage Tank	10,000 Gallon	This tank would be supplied from the existing pipeline located in Upper Valley.
Pipeline	Approx. 5,000 ft	The pipeline would be plumbed into the water storage tank and well. The pipeline may be laid on the surface or buried.
Troughs (2-3)	500 gal.	Troughs would be on a float system. Actual size of the troughs may vary .
Cattle Guards (5)	12-14 ft wide	Cattle Guards (CG) are proposed at the locations that currently have pipe gates. The CG would also have a gate associated with them that could keep vehicles from crossing the CG.
EXISTING STRUCTURES		
Gates (5)	12' powder river pipe gates	Gates currently used to seasonally close access to public lands
Fencing	Approx. 2 miles total	Several short segments of fence are associated with the above gates. Other segments of fence are associated with the previously farmed fields.
Irrigation Pipe	8,400 feet on Public Land	Buried main irrigation pipe line coming from private land. Provided water to previously farmed ground. Currently provides water to two 10,000 gallon water storage tanks.
Poly Pipe	5,700 feet.	Carries water from Big Springs to two trough locations in Upper Valley. Connected to an authorized pipeline that was located on the original leased public land.
Water Troughs	800+ gallon	Three watering sites with troughs are located within the previously farmed ground in Upper Valley. These are feed by both Big Spring and from the irrigation pipeline
Water Storage Tank (2)	10,000 gallon +/-	These are connected to the irrigation pipeline.

Allotment Boundary:

The allotment boundary would be modified to include the lands authorized for grazing.

Preliminary Issues

The BLM has identified several preliminary issues that are being considered for detailed analysis.

1. Wildlife (Big Game): The lands within and surrounding the allotment are classified as deer winter range.
2. Riparian: Riparian areas associated with two springs occurring within the allotment are below a Proper Functioning Condition level.
3. Noxious/Invasive Weeds: Several species of weeds are present within the allotment. Some of the more prevalent species are black henbane, Canada thistle, field bindweed, houndstongue,

musk thistle, and yellow toadflax. The majority of the infestations occur along roads and within the previously farmed fields.

Preliminary Alternative Development

The BLM is currently considering the following alternative:

Alternative B –Issue Grazing Lease With No Changes To Management & No New Range Improvements

Under this alternative a grazing lease would be authorized under the current terms and conditions with the same livestock numbers, season of use and active AUM's as is currently authorized. Existing improvements that do not have current authorization would be evaluated and their impacts analyzed.

Grazing Lease Mandatory Terms & Conditions

Livestock #	Livestock Kind	Grazing Period		Active Use (AUMs)
		Begin	End	
150	Cattle	06/01	09/30	604

Other terms and conditions:

1. The grazing use must not exceed 50% utilization or be detrimental to the range's soils or vegetation.
2. Salt and mineral supplements shall be placed at least ¼ mile from water source(s) to improve livestock distribution.
3. Areas of isolated public land may be grazed concurrently with private lands. To initiate proper management of the lands, a management plan developed cooperatively with the permittee/lessee, may be placed in force at any time during the effective period of this permit/lease. In lieu of a plan, a grazing system may be stipulated as a condition. By accepting this grazing permit/lease. The permittee/lessee agrees that the authorized officer or his representatives and contractors shall have the right of ingress and egress over lands controlled by the permittee/lessee for the purpose of achieving the management objectives and orderly administration of public rangelands under this grazing permit/lease.
4. The allotment(s) shown on this permit/lease shall meet the requirements as described in 43 CFR Subpart 4180 – Fundamentals of rangeland health and the standards and guidelines for grazing administration. Any changes in management will be based upon the resource evaluations and analysis as scheduled and completed by the area manager.

Public Input Needed

Comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, preliminary issues, and alternatives. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received within 15 days of receiving this document and are directly relevant to the proposal and project area. The BLM will not reject public feedback outside established public involvement timeframes; however, these comments may be considered secondary to comments received in a timely manner and may only be assessed to determine if they identify concerns that would substantially alter the assumptions, proposal, design, or analysis presented in the environmental document.

Written comments must be submitted to David A. Pacioretty, Field Manager, Pocatello Field Office, 4350 Cliffs Drive, Pocatello, ID 83204. The office business hours for submitting hand-delivered comments are 7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), Word (.doc), or portable document format (.pdf) to **id_pocatello_fo@blm.gov**. E-mails submitted to e-mail addresses other than the one listed, in other formats than those listed, or containing viruses will be rejected. To be most helpful, comments sent electronically should include the title of this project in the subject line. Please identify whether you are submitting comments as an individual or as the designated spokesperson on behalf of an organization. Issues that are outside the scope of the proposal will not be addressed at this planning level.

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, be advised that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold from public review your personal identifying information, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

For questions or comments you can contact Michael Kuyper Natural Resource Specialist, at (208) 478-6392.

Enclosures: (Maps)

R.40E

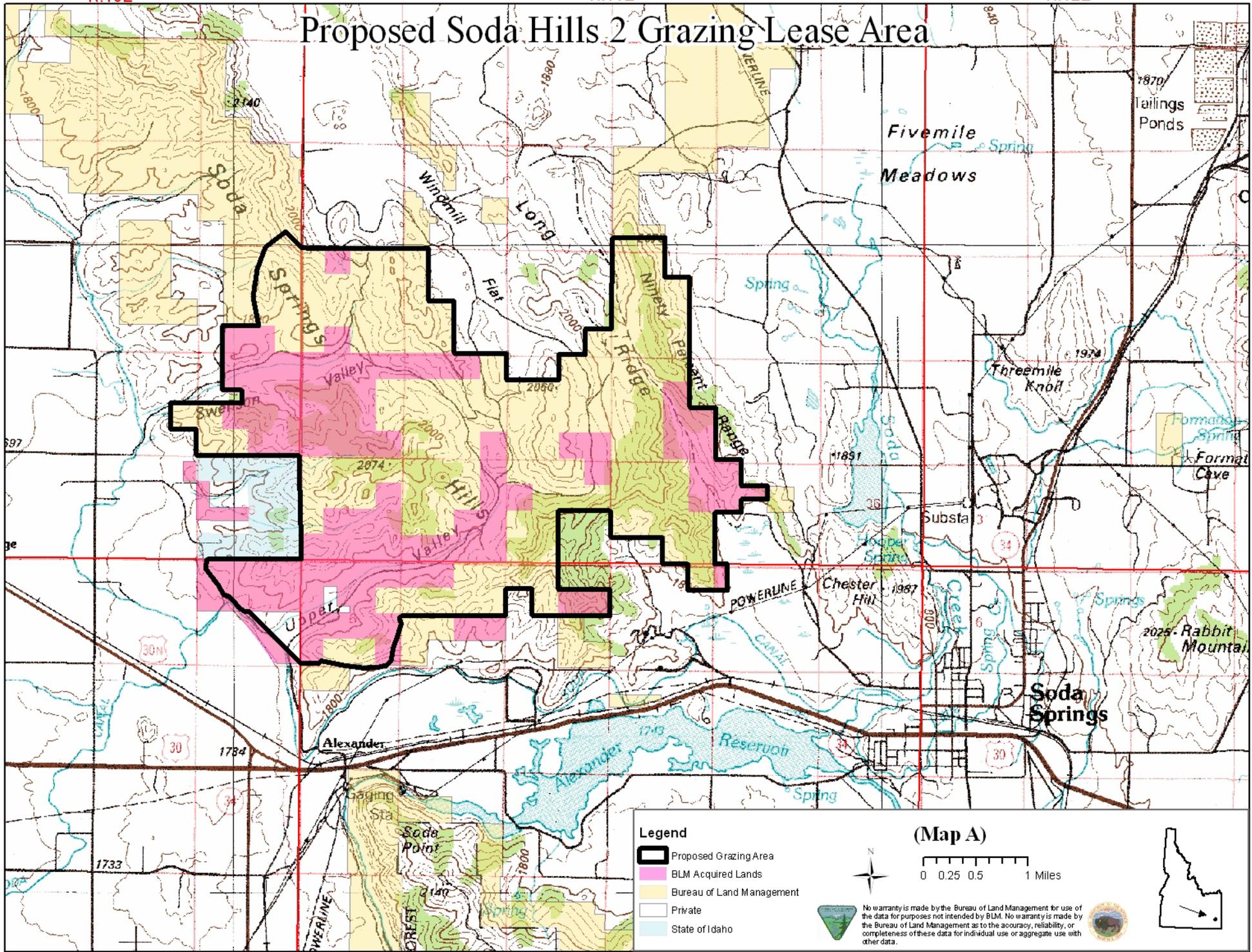
R.41E

R.42E

Proposed Soda Hills 2 Grazing Lease Area

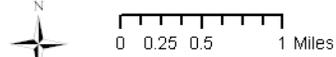
T.8S.

T.9S.



- Legend**
- Proposed Grazing Area
 - BLM Acquired Lands
 - Bureau of Land Management
 - Private
 - State of Idaho

(Map A)



No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management for use of the data for purposes not intended by BLM. No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregate use with other data.



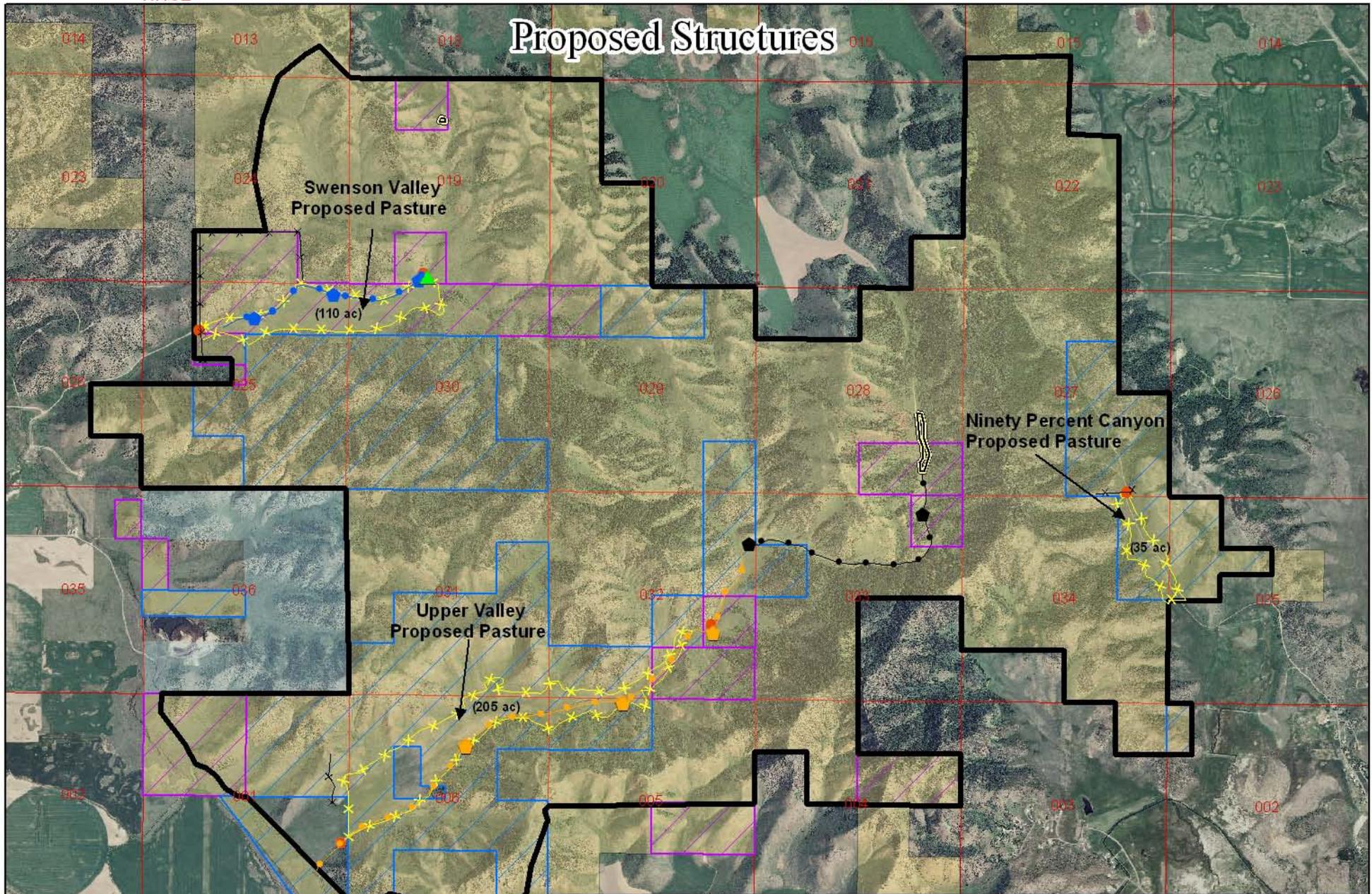
R.40E

R.41E

Proposed Structures

T.8S.

T.9S.



Proposed Structures		Existing Structures		Proposed Grazing Area	 (Map B)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Swenson Well / Tank Swenson Trough Swenson Pipeline Pasture Fence Line Riparian Fence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unauthorized Pipe gate Authorized Trough Unauthorized Trough Unauthorized Pipeline Authorized Pipeline Old Fence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BLM Acquired 1997 BLM Acquired 2003 BLM Private State of Idaho 			

No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management for use of the data for purposes not intended by BLM. No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregate use with other data.