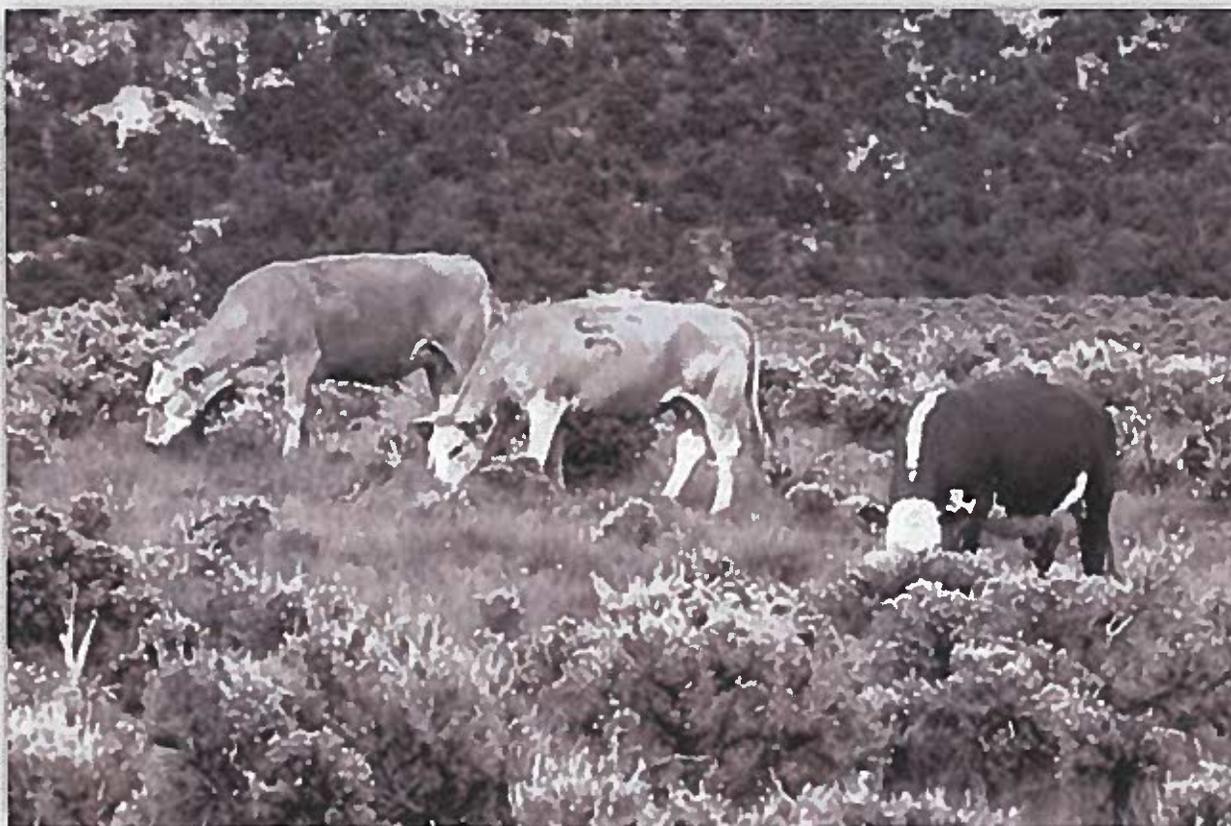


ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

DOI-BLM-CO-040-2015-0039 EA

Renew a Grazing Permit for the Moniger Ridge 2 (Number 08646) Allotment



Prepared by:

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LOCATION.

Moniger Ridge 2 (No. 08646) Allotment located in Garfield & Eagle Counties, northwest of Dotsero, CO.

LEGAL DESCRIPTIONS.

T4S R87W Sec. 1, 2, 11, 12

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION.

Grazing permits/leases are subject to renewal or transfer at the discretion of the Secretary of the Interior for a period of up to ten years. The U.S. Bureau of Land Management has the authority to renew the livestock grazing permits/leases consistent with the provisions of the Taylor Grazing Act, Public Rangelands Improvement Act, Federal Land Policy and Management Act, 2015 Colorado River Valley Field Office (CRVFO) Resource Management Plan (RMP), and the Colorado Public Land Health Standards.

The mission of the BLM is “to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations”. Land Health Standards and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management were developed between the BLM and the Colorado Resource Advisory Council to ensure that the mission of the BLM will be achieved.

This action is needed to determine whether or not to reissue a grazing permit on the following allotment and if so under what terms and conditions to ensure that Public Land Health Standards and objectives for resource management will be or will continue to be achieved.

SCOPING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND ISSUES.

The BLM National NEPA Register (https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/nepa/nepa_register.do) allows the public to review and comment BLM NEPA actions and projects. No public comments were received.

PROPOSED ACTION.

The Proposed Action is to renew a grazing permit with the following terms and conditions. These are substantially the existing terms and conditions and are used as a baseline for

comparison with the other alternatives described hereafter. The permits will be issued for a 10-year period, unless the base property is leased for less, but for purposes of the EA we are assuming 10 years of grazing by this or another applicant (in case of transfer). The proposed action is in accordance with 43 CFR 4130.2. Scheduled grazing use, grazing preference, and terms and conditions for the proposed grazing permit are summarized below in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. Proposed Grazing Schedules.

Operator Name	Auth. No.	Allotment	Livestock Number	Livestock Kind	Begin Date	End Date	% BLM Land	AUMs
Kerr, Della	0504433	Moniger Ridge 2	20	Cattle	05/16	09/30	30	27

Table 2. Proposed Permitted Use AUMS.

Operator Name	Auth. No.	Allotment	Active	Suspended	Total
Kerr, Della	0504433	Moniger Ridge 2	27	0	27

Terms and Conditions.

1. An actual use report shall be submitted annually to the BLM office no later than 15 days after livestock have been removed (i.e. the grazing end period on the bill or permit/lease).
2. Salt, mineral block and supplemental feed will be placed a minimum of .25 miles and preferably .5 miles from riparian areas and other water sources, including springs.
3. Rotational grazing will be practiced and grazing use will not occur in any given area of public land for more than 1.5 months. The number of livestock can be adjusted from what is indicated on the permit so full permitted use of 27 AUMs is activated.
4. Average utilization levels by livestock should not exceed 50% by weight on key grass species, and 40% of the key browse species current year’s growth. Grazing in riparian areas should leave an average minimum 4-inch stubble height of herbaceous vegetation. If utilization is approaching allowable use levels, livestock should be moved to another portion of the allotment, or removed from the allotment entirely for the remainder of the growing season. Application of this term may be flexible to recognize livestock management that provides sufficient opportunity for regrowth, spring growth prior to grazing, opportunity for seed dissemination and seedling establishment, or growing season deferment to promote plant health.
5. Maintenance of range improvements is required and shall be in accordance with all approved cooperative agreements and range improvement permits/leases. Maintenance

shall be completed prior to turnout. Maintenance activities shall be restricted to the footprint (previously disturbed area) of the project as it existed when it was initially constructed. The Bureau of Land Management shall be given 48 hours advance notice of any maintenance work that will involve heavy equipment. Disturbed areas will be reseeded with a certified weed-free seed mixture of native species adapted to the site.

6. The permittee/lessees and all persons associated with grazing operations must be informed that any person who injures, destroys, excavates, appropriates or removes any historic or prehistoric ruin, artifact, object of antiquity, Native American remains, Native American cultural item, or archaeological resources on public lands is subject to arrest and penalty of law. If in connection with allotment operations under this authorization any of the above resources are encountered, the proponent shall immediately suspend all activities in the immediate vicinity of the discovery that might further disturb such materials and notify the BLM authorized officer of the findings. The discovery must be protected until further notified in writing to proceed by the authorized officer.

NO GRAZING ALTERNATIVE.

Under this alternative the grazing permit described in the Proposed Action would be cancelled. As a result, no grazing would be authorized on the Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment. This alternative would initiate the process in accordance with 43 CFR parts 4100 and 1600 to eliminate grazing on these allotments and would require amending the 2015 CRVFO Resource Management Plan.

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. 2015 Colorado River Valley Field Office (CRVFO) Record of Decision (ROD) and Approved Resource Management Plan (RMP) (BLM 2015a).

Date Approved. June 2015.

Decision Number/Page.

- Decision Number GRZ-GOAL-01. Livestock Grazing Management page 68.
- Decision Number GRZ- OBJ-01. Livestock Grazing Management page 68.

Decision Language.

- **GRZ-GOAL-01.** Apply flexible and sustainable livestock grazing, in accordance with BLM Colorado Standards for Public Land Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management to contribute to local economies, ranching livelihoods, and the rural western character integral to many communities.

- **GRZ-OBJ-01.** Meet the forage demands of livestock operations based on active use, by providing approximately 441,600 acres for livestock grazing, and provide approximately 35,500 AUMs of livestock forage.

RELATIONSHIP TO STATUTES, REGULATIONS, OTHER PLANS.

- Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 as amended;
- Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976;
- Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978;
- Title 43 of the Code of Federal Regulations Subpart 4100 – Grazing Administration;
- Noxious Weed Act of 1974;
- Endangered Species Act of 1973;
- National Environmental Policy Act of 1969;
- Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918;
- National Historic Preservation Act (16 USC 470f);
- Archeological Resources Protection Act;
- Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act;
- Indian Sacred Sites – EO 13007; and
- Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments – EO 13175
- Colorado Public Health Standards and Livestock Grazing Management Guidelines - March 1997

STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC LAND HEALTH.

In January 1997, Colorado Bureau of Land Management (BLM) approved the Standards for Public Land Health. The five standards cover upland soils, riparian systems, plant and animal communities, threatened and endangered species, and water quality. Standards describe conditions needed to sustain public land health and relate to all uses of the public lands.

A Formal Land Health Assessment was conducted in the Deep Creek Landscape in 2008 which included the Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment (BLM 2009). Diverse mesic mountain shrub plant communities were noted and no land health issues were observed, except for top-killed oakbrush which was resprouting. No evidence of recent livestock use was seen. The allotment was considered to be achieving all the standards at the time of the assessment.

The effects analysis in this EA addresses whether the proposed action or any alternatives being analyzed would result in impacts that would maintain, improve, or deteriorate land health conditions for each of the five standards.

DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS, MITIGATION MEASURES.

This section provides a description of the human and natural environmental resources that could be affected by the proposed action and no action alternative. In addition, the section presents comparative analyses of the direct and indirect consequences on the affected environment stemming from the implementation of the various actions.

A variety of laws, regulations, and policy directives mandate the evaluation of the effects of a Proposed Action and alternative(s) on certain environmental elements. Not all programs, resources or uses are present in the area, or if they are present, may not be affected by the proposed action and alternatives. Only those elements that are present and potentially affected are described and brought forth for detailed analysis (Table 3).

Table 3. Programs, Resources, and Uses (Including Supplemental Authorities).

Programs, Resources, and Uses	Potentially Affected?	
	Yes	No
Access and Transportation		X
Air Quality		X
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern	X	
Cadastral Survey		X
Cultural Resources	X	
Native American Religious Concerns	X	
Environmental Justice		X
Farmlands, Prime or Unique		X
Fire/Fuels Management		X
Floodplains		X
Forests		X
Geology and Minerals		X
Law Enforcement		X
Livestock Grazing Management	X	
Noise		X
Paleontology		X
Plants: Invasive, Non-native Species (Noxious Weeds)	X	
Plants: Sensitive, Threatened, or Endangered	X	
Plants: Vegetation	X	
Realty Authorizations		X
Recreation		X
Social and/or Economics	X	
Soils	X	
Visual Resources		X

Wastes, Hazardous or Solid		X
Water Quality, Surface and Ground	X	
Water Rights		X
Wetlands and Riparian Zones	X	
Wild and Scenic Rivers		X
Wilderness/WSAs/Wilderness Characteristics		X
Wildlife: Aquatic / Fisheries	X	
Wildlife: Migratory Birds	X	
Wildlife: Sensitive, Threatened, and Endangered Species	X	
Wildlife: Terrestrial	X	

AREAS OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT.

The Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment, which includes 314 acres of public land and 406 acres of private land. Approximately 40 acres of the Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment fall within the boundaries of the Lyons Gulch Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). This ACEC was designated in the Colorado River Valley Field Office Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan (BLM 2015) “to protect one of the larger and more intact populations (a core population) of the BLM sensitive plant, Harrington’s penstemon.”

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

Proposed Action. The Proposed Action would renew a grazing permit for this allotment. Livestock could impact Harrington’s penstemon directly through grazing or trampling, or indirectly through changes in vegetative species composition and the introduction of noxious weeds which compete with the penstemon. (See the Plants: Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive section for a more detailed discussion of impacts.) Little or no grazing use has been observed on the public lands within the allotment and there is no live water within the ACEC to attract livestock use. Given this information, continuation of livestock grazing as proposed should not result in any reduction in the Harrington’s penstemon population or degradation of its habitat. The resource values of the ACEC would be maintained.

No Grazing Alternative. Under this alternative, no livestock grazing would occur on the allotment and there would be no direct or indirect impacts to the ACEC values from livestock use. Given the minimal amount of livestock use currently occurring on public land, cessation of grazing would result in little change in effects to Harrington’s penstemon or its habitat. Some wildlife grazing would continue to occur, but long-term viability of the Harrington’s penstemon population would be maintained.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT.

Grazing authorization renewals are undertakings under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. During Section 106 review, a cultural resource assessment (CRVFO#1015-19) was completed for the Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment on May 21, 2014 by Erin Leifeld, Colorado River Valley Field Office Archaeologist. The assessment followed 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-01-026. The results of the assessment are summarized in the table below. Copies of the cultural resource assessments are available at the Colorado River Valley Field Office archaeology files.

Data developed here was taken from the cultural program project report files, site report files, and base maps filed at the Colorado River Valley Field Office as well as information from General Land Office (GLO) maps, BLM land patent records, and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) site records, report records, and GIS data.

The table below is based on the allotment specific analysis for the allotment in this EA. The table shows known cultural resources, the potential of Historic Properties, and Management recommendations.

Table 4. Cultural Resources Assessment Summary.

Allotment Name and Number	Land Status	Acres Inventoried at a Class III level	Acres NOT Inventoried at a Class III Level	Percent Allotment Inventoried at a Class III Level (%)	Number of Cultural Resources known in Allotment	Potential of Historic Properties	Management Recommendations (Additional inventory required and historic properties to be visited)
Moniger Ridge 2 #08646	BLM	52.79	256.1	16.8%	0	Moderate	Historic ditch segment from GLO, 1.5 acres new survey and no sites to monitor
	Private	6.01	399.3	1.5%			

A total of three cultural resource inventories (CRVFO CRIR# 927, 978, 5409-11) have been previously conducted within the Moniger Ridge 2 (No. 08646) resulting in the survey coverage of 58.8 acres at a Class III level. No cultural resources have been documented with these inventories within the allotment. Looking at the GLO records from 1890 there is potential for historic sites within the allotment based on a historic cabin on private land near the BLM/private land boarder. From the 1933 there is a segment of a historic ditch that is recommended to be documented.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

The direct impacts that occur where livestock concentrate, during normal livestock grazing activity, can include trampling, chiseling, artifact breakage, and churning of site soils, cultural features, and cultural artifacts. Impacts from livestock standing, leaning, and rubbing against historic structures, above-ground cultural features, and rock art can also have direct impacts to cultural resources. Indirect impacts include soil erosion and gullyng, which can lead to increased ground visibility which has the potential to increase unlawful collection and

vandalism. Continued livestock use in these concentration areas has the potential to cause substantial ground disturbance and in turn, irreversible adverse effects to historic properties.

Proposed Action. There are no changes to the livestock kind, livestock number, or season of use; therefore, this alternative will likely not change ground disturbing impacts to cultural resources. Additionally, the requirement to have average utilization levels and minimum stubble height will have little change on cultural resource impacts. The use of this management technique might in fact be beneficial to lessen ground disturbance because it requires four inches of new growth on grasses and therefore livestock will not be grazing when soils are more exposed or when the area is more susceptible to erosion.

Twenty acres was recommended to be inventoried during the previous environmental analysis, of which eight have been accomplished. An additional 1.5 acres is recommended to be inventoried for this analysis based on the potential for a historic ditch in the allotment. No cultural resources need to be monitored.

No Grazing Alternative. Under this alternative, direct and indirect impacts to cultural resources from grazing would be reduced based on the absence of livestock and no related surface disturbing activities.

NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS CONCERNS

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT.

American Indian religious concerns are legislatively considered under the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 (PL 95-341), the Native American Graves Environmental Assessment Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (PL 101-601), and Executive Order 13007 (1996; Indian Sacred Sites). These require, in concert with other provisions such as those found in the NHPA and Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA), that the federal government carefully and proactively take into consideration traditional and religious Native American culture and life. This ensures, to the degree possible, that access to sacred sites, the treatment of human remains, the possession of sacred items, the conduct of traditional religious practices, and the preservation of important cultural properties are considered and not unduly infringed upon. In some cases, these concerns are directly related to “historic properties” and “archaeological resources”. In other cases, elements of the landscape without archaeological or other human material remains may be involved. Identification of these concerns is normally completed during the land use planning efforts, reference to existing studies, or via direct consultation.

The Ute have a generalized concept of spiritual significance that is not easily transferred to Euro-American models or definitions. The BLM recognizes that the Ute have identified sites that are of concern because of their association with Ute occupation of the area as part of their traditional lands. The cultural resource evaluation of these allotments describing known cultural resources and their condition was sent to the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and the Uinta and Ouray Agency Ute Indian Tribe. The letter, sent on November 19, 2014, requested the

tribes to identify issues and areas of concern within the allotments. No comments were received at that time.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

Proposed Action. No traditional cultural properties, unique natural resources, or properties of a type previously identified as being of interest to local tribes, were identified during the overview of the cultural resources inventory of the project area. Therefore, areas of concern to Native American tribes will not be affected.

No Grazing Alternative. Under this alternative, direct and indirect impacts to cultural resources from grazing would be reduced based on the absence of livestock and no related surface disturbing activities. Therefore, areas of concern to Native American tribes would not be affected.

LIVESTOCK GRAZING MANAGEMENT

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT.

The Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment consists of approximately 319 acres of public land and 401 acres of private land. The public land acreage ranges in elevation from approximately 7,000 to 9,000 feet. The Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment is located in Garfield and Eagle Counties and is located approximately 10 miles northwest of Dotsero, CO. The allotment receives an average of 19 inches of precipitation annually (HPRCC). The steeper, south-facing slopes are dominated by pinyon-juniper woodlands, while north-facing slopes are covered in a mosaic of mountain big sagebrush/rabbitbrush with Gambel oak/serviceberry and other mesic mountain shrubs.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

Proposed Action. The Proposed Action would authorize the same level of use as the existing expiring permit. The Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment would be permitted at a stocking rate of 12 acres per AUM. Existing resource conditions are expected to be maintained at these stocking rates.

No Grazing Alternative. Under this alternative the grazing permit would be cancelled. Cancelling grazing use on these allotments may result in economic impact to the permittee. This alternative would initiate the process in accordance with 43 CFR parts 4100 and 1600 to eliminate grazing on the allotment and devote the land to some other purpose and would require an amendment to the 2015 CRVFO RMP.

PLANTS: INVASIVE NON-NATIVE SPECIES (NOXIOUS WEEDS)

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT.

Effects of Livestock. Livestock grazing can contribute to the establishment and expansion of noxious weeds and other invasive species through numerous mechanisms. Areas of disturbance provide an optimal location for noxious weed establishment and subsequent invasion (Sheley, et. al 2011). When livestock utilize an allotment they create localized areas of disturbance (i.e., bare ground), especially where animals congregate such as trails, loafing areas, salting areas, water sources, and other range improvements. When over-utilization occurs on a large scale, extensive areas of disturbance can develop, which can open up areas to the establishment of noxious weeds and other invasive species.

Risks of noxious weed introduction and spread would generally be greater with more AUMs unless livestock grazing management is specifically adjusted - by changing the season of use, duration, or intensity - to accomplish defined vegetation or weed reduction goals.

Seed Dispersal. Seed dispersal is another mechanism through which noxious weeds are spread. Livestock handlers, stock dogs, horses, feed, and equipment can potentially serve as vectors for seeds to be introduced or dispersed. Livestock can transport weed seeds from infested areas to uninfested areas through incomplete digestion and the attachment of seeds to body parts.

Additional Vectors for Seed Dispersal. People recreating and vehicles traveling across BLM lands can bring weeds from infested areas to non-infested areas through seed dispersal. Pack and saddle stock users can spread weeds through weed infested feed, incomplete digestion, and the attachment of seeds to body parts. Wind and wildlife also spread weeds. Surface disturbances such as fire and construction projects increase the risk for weed establishment.

Inventory. Preventing and controlling noxious weed encroachment depends on early detection (Sheley, et al. 2011). Landscape-wide weed inventories can help with early detection and controlling noxious weeds and other invasive species infestations. Although a landscape-wide inventory has not been completed on the Moniger Ridge 2 (No. 08646) Allotment, infestations known to occur within or adjacent to the Allotment are listed in Table 5. It is assumed that these and other noxious weeds/invasive species may be found in areas throughout the allotment.

Table 5. Known Noxious Weeds within the Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment.

Common Name	Scientific Name	State Designation
Houndstongue	<i>Cynoglossum officinale</i>	B
Canada thistle	<i>Cirsium arvense</i>	B
Musk thistle	<i>Carduus nutans</i>	B
Plumeless thistle	<i>Carduus acanthoides</i>	B

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

Proposed Action. A grazing permit would be renewed with the existing terms and conditions as previously authorized. The permit authorizes grazing for nearly the entire grazing season (mid-June to mid- October). The allotment is composed of 70% private land forage with a 30% public land portion which implies that cattle spend the majority of their time on private land. Utilization levels reported on BLM portions of the allotment have been light and no large areas of disturbance have been noted. Thus no substantial increase in noxious weeds and non-native invasive species are expected to occur due to the Proposed Action. Localized weed infestations will likely continue around in areas where livestock have traditionally congregated (e.g., trails, loafing areas, range improvements) unless consistently sprayed with multi-year treatments. Wind, wildlife, wildfire, recreation use and vehicles also will be vectors for seed transport and weed expansion.

No Grazing Alternative. Under this alternative, no livestock grazing would occur on the allotment and there would be no direct or indirect spread of weeds from livestock use or management activities associated with grazing. Wind, wildlife, wildfire, recreation use and vehicles will continue to be vectors for seed transport and weed expansion.

SENSITIVE, THREATENED, AND ENDANGERED PLANTS

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT.

The Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment lies northwest of Dotsero, CO straddling Irrawaddy Creek. Table 6 includes the Federally listed, proposed, or candidate plant species from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service’ Information for Planning and Conservation (IPaC) website (USFWS 2015) and the BLM sensitive plants from the Colorado BLM State Director’s Sensitive Species List (BLM 2015b) that may occur within the action area and/or be impacted by the proposed action. The table also summarizes their habitat descriptions and potential for occurrence in the immediate action area.

Table 6. Special Status Plant Species in Eagle County.

Federally Listed, Proposed or Candidate Plant Species		
Species	Habitat	Potential for Occurrence
Ute ladies’-tresses orchid (<i>Spiranthes diluvialis</i>) Threatened	Habitat for this threatened species is found in seasonally flooded or subirrigated alluvial soils along streams, lakes or in wetland areas; 4,500 to 7,200 feet.	Low: There are no perennial streams or other suitable habitat on public lands within the Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment and no lands below 7,400 feet on private lands within the allotment.

BLM Sensitive Plant Species

Species	Habitat	Potential for Occurrence
Harrington's penstemon (<i>Penstemon harringtonii</i>)	Wyoming or mountain big sagebrush or mixed mountain shrub communities on rocky loam or rocky clay loam soils between the elevations of 6,200 to 10,000 feet. Soils usually of basaltic or calcareous nature.	Yes: Harrington's penstemon populations exist in multiple places on the allotment.

The BLM sensitive plant, *Penstemon harringtonii*, occurs in sagebrush habitat between 6,400 and 10,000 feet in elevation, generally on rocky loam or rocky clay loam soils. A substantial population of Harrington's penstemon is known to occur within the Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment, and a portion of the allotment has been designated as an ACEC to protect core populations and important habitat for this species.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

Proposed Action. Due to a lack of suitable habitat and species occurrence records for ESA-listed plant species, continuation of livestock grazing will have *No Effect* on any listed species.

The flower stalks of Harrington's penstemon are quite palatable to both livestock and wildlife. Reductions in populations could result if excessive grazing removes a high percentage of the flower stalks annually thereby inhibiting seed dissemination and reproduction. The proposed period of grazing use on the allotment is from May 16-September 30, which overlaps the flowering period for Harrington's, thus the potential for adverse impacts during this time is greater. If flower stalks are removed by grazing, a new flower stalk will not develop that year regardless of the length of the recovery period. In addition, concentrated grazing at any time of year can result in trampling damage which can cause mortality to individual plants and reductions in long-term viability of populations.

Proper livestock grazing in which the animals are well distributed and graze lightly on a variety of herbaceous vegetation may balance the competition between Harrington's penstemon and other herbaceous vegetation which compete with it for sunlight, water, and nutrients. Light grazing, therefore, can be beneficial to penstemon populations.

A site visit to a portion of the allotment in 2004 found no signs of livestock use and it was unclear whether the allotment was being grazed at all. In 2008 and 2010, hardly any evidence of livestock use was found on public land. A few cattle were observed on private land. Given this information, continuation of livestock grazing as proposed should not result in any loss of long-term viability of the Harrington's penstemon populations.

No Grazing Alternative. Under this alternative, no livestock grazing would occur on the allotment and there would be no direct or indirect impacts to special status plants from livestock

use. Given the minimal amount of livestock use currently occurring on public land, cessation of grazing would result in little change in effects to Harrington's penstemon. Some wildlife grazing would continue to occur, but long-term viability of the Harrington's penstemon population would be maintained.

ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC LAND HEALTH STANDARD 4 FOR SPECIAL STATUS PLANTS.

The Proposed Action is located within the Deep Creek Land Health Assessment area (BLM 2009). A determination of findings from the assessment found that the Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment was achieving Standard 4 for threatened, endangered and other special status plants at the time of the assessment. With continuation of grazing in the same manner and at the same level as before, Standard 4 should continue to be achieved.

VEGETATION

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT.

The Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment lies west of the Colorado River and south of Sweetwater Creek on the eastern flanks of Monegar Ridge. The allotment consists of approximately 319 acres of public land in three parcels surrounding 401 acres of private land. The allotment ranges in elevation from 7,400 to 8,400 feet. Topography on the allotment consists generally of eastward-trending ridges and swales straddling Irrawaddy Creek. The steeper, south-facing slopes are dominated by pinyon-juniper woodlands, while north-facing slopes are covered in a mosaic of mountain big sagebrush/rabbitbrush with Gambel oak/serviceberry and other mesic mountain shrubs. The stony ridgetops are dominated by mountain big sagebrush. The land health assessment noted that the herbaceous and woody plant species were diverse and ground cover was abundant.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

Direct impacts to vegetation from livestock grazing include removal of vegetation and trampling damage. Well-managed livestock grazing can stimulate plant growth by removing old or dried vegetation thereby improving photosynthetic activity of live plant material. Hoof action from livestock may be used to improve seed contact with the soil which promotes the germination and establishment of new plants. If the timing or intensity of grazing does not allow adequate recovery and regrowth periods between grazing events, grazing has the potential to significantly alter vegetative community composition and cover. Livestock grazing may cause direct mortality of individual plants from trampling, uprooting, or excessive grazing that depletes root reserves to the point where plants cannot recover. The risk of trampling mortality is greatest in areas where livestock congregate, such as near water sources, salting locations, or along fence lines. Livestock can also change plant species composition through selective grazing. Livestock graze more heavily on the most palatable plant species, which can cause these species to decrease and allow less preferred species to increase. Surface disturbances may result where livestock congregate. Surface disturbances create a niche for the invasion and proliferation of

noxious weeds and other invasive species which can compete with the native plant community for limited resources.

Proposed Action. Vegetation on the Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment was in good-to-excellent condition during the land health assessment. Although the current and proposed grazing permit would authorize season-long grazing (from 5/16-9/30), there has been little or no livestock utilization occurring on the public lands. There are two ponds and over a mile of Irrawaddy Creek, a perennial stream, on private lands, and only one short, steep section of Irrawaddy Creek on public land. If the allotment is grazed at all, the private lands would likely support the bulk of the grazing use. Thus, it is unlikely that the proposed action would contribute to a decline in plant vigor, ground cover, species composition or overall vegetative conditions. Continuation of grazing in the current manner and at the current levels should continue to maintain plant health. Small-scale and localized disturbances would likely be limited to trails or salting areas.

No Grazing Alternative. Under this alternative, no livestock grazing would occur on the allotment and there would be no direct or indirect impacts to vegetation from livestock use. Given the minimal amount of livestock use currently occurring on public land, canceling the grazing permit would result in little change in effects to vegetation. Some wildlife grazing and browsing would continue to occur, but overall vegetative conditions would be maintained.

ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC LAND HEALTH STANDARD 3 FOR HEALTHY PLANT COMMUNITIES.

Based on the Deep Creek Land Health Assessment, the Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment was achieving Standard 3 for healthy plant communities (BLM 2009). The Proposed Action is not anticipated to cause a decline in current vegetative conditions.

SOCIO-ECONOMICS

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT.

Regionally, livestock operations are dependent on both federal lands (BLM and U.S. Forest Service) and nonfederal lands (state and private). The federal grazing fee for public lands managed by the BLM and the U.S. Forest Service is \$1.35 per animal unit month (AUM). An AUM is the amount of forage needed to sustain one cow and her calf, one horse, or five sheep or goats for a month. The annually adjusted grazing fee is computed by using a 1966 base value of \$1.23 per AUM for livestock grazing on public lands in the western states. The figure is then adjusted according to three factors - current private grazing land lease rates, beef cattle prices, and the cost of livestock production. The formula used for calculating the grazing fee, established by Congress in the 1978 Public Rangelands Improvement Act, has continued under a presidential Executive Order issued in 1986. Under that order, the grazing fee cannot fall below \$1.35 per AUM, and any increase or decrease cannot exceed 25 percent of the previous year's level.

Public land grazing in the CRVFO supports a traditional and historical way of life. Although historically livestock grazing in the region was at a higher intensity than at the present time, the

livestock business has, and continues to be a traditional way of life for many permit holders. Income derived from public land grazing permits continues to comprise a moderate to substantial portion of their individual livelihoods.

The total economic contribution from ranching operations on BLM lands is statistically low within the region. Jobs and labor income associated with BLM grazing accounts for less than 1 percent of the area's total jobs and labor income (BLM 2014).

Fees paid to the federal government for livestock grazing permits generate revenue for the U.S. Treasury, of which 12.5 per cent is returned to the local Grazing Advisory Board to fund range improvements and maintenance projects. This provides a direct economic benefit to the permit holders who pay the fees. The support of livestock operations contributes to the economic support of local communities and to the livestock industry in the West in general.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

Proposed Action. The Proposed Action would a renew ten year term grazing lease for the livestock operator, thereby continuing an historical and traditional way of life for this area. The social value of retaining a rural, agricultural lifestyle would be preserved and would align with many of the public's perception of the western Colorado culture.

Issuance of the grazing leases would allow the lease holders to continue their grazing operations with some degree of predictability during the ten-year period of the term lease.

The local economy is benefited from capital spent to establish and maintain a ranching operation and contributions to the labor force. The Proposed Action would support some direct employment. Additional employment would be generated as the affected livestock operators purchase services and materials as inputs ("indirect" effects) and ranchers spend their earnings within the local economy ("induced" effects).

No Grazing Alternative. Under the No Grazing Alternative, the ten year term grazing lease would not be renewed. The individual lease holders could be negatively impacted in the short term by loss of income. If livestock grazing was terminated, there would also be adverse impacts to the base property owner(s). There could be an annual loss of income because they may not be able to lease their private lands without having the BLM land grazing allotments. Consequently, the value of their properties could be reduced because of the elimination of the federal grazing preference. Such a loss of income would be important to the individuals, but would likely not measurably or adversely impact the local economies.

SOILS

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT. A review of the soil survey by the NRCS for the *Soil Survey of Aspen-Gypsum Area, Colorado, Parts of Eagle, Garfield and Pitkin Counties* indicate 8 soil map units occur within the proposed allotment (NRCS 1992). The NRCS soil map unit descriptions (NRCS 2015) are provided below for the three dominant soils:

Torriorthents-Rock outcrop complex, steep (67) – This complex consists of stony soils and exposed outcrops of Mesa Verde sandstone and Wasatch shale that occur on slopes of 15 to 70 percent. Approximately 60 percent of this complex is Torriorthents and 25 percent is Rock outcrop. The Torriorthents are clayey to loamy and contain gravel, cobbles, and stones; many of which are basaltic in origin. They are found on mountainsides below the Rock outcrop. Erosion hazard for this complex varies from moderate to severe. Primary uses for this complex include limited grazing, wildlife habitat, and recreation.

Millerlake loam (75) – This deep, well-drained soil is found on alluvial fans and valley sides at elevations ranging from 8,500 to 10,500 feet and on slopes of 15 to 30 percent. It is derived from sandstone alluvium. Surface runoff is medium and the water erosion hazard is moderate.

Torriorthents-Camborthids-Rock outcrop complex (104) – This soil map unit occurs on south-facing mountainsides, hills, and ridges with slopes ranging from 6 to 65 percent. Approximately 45 percent of this unit is Torriorthents, 20 percent Camborthids, and 15 percent Rock outcrop. The Torriorthents are shallow to moderately deep, well drained, and are derived from sedimentary rock. Surface runoff is rapid and the water erosion hazard is severe. The Camborthids are shallow to deep, well drained, and are derived from sandstone, shale, and basalt. Surface runoff is rapid and the water erosion hazard is severe. The Rock outcrop component of this unit consists of exposed sandstone, shale, and basalt.

Soil health was evaluated in summer of 2008 during the Deep Creek Land Health Assessment. BLM staff concluded that soils were meeting land health standards throughout the allotment, with only slight to moderate departures from expected conditions due to higher percentages of bare ground observed (BLM 2009).

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

Proposed Action. Grazing activities may result in direct soil compaction and displacement that increase the likelihood of erosional processes, especially on steep 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. Indirect impacts include soil erosion and gullyng. Based on existing soil conditions and generally good vegetative cover; the likelihood of livestock grazing contributing to excessive soil degradation and transport to nearby drainages is not expected. Grazing activities on the proposed allotment would not likely create long term effects that would compromise soil stability on a large scale. Small-scale and localized disturbances would likely be limited to trails and watering areas.

No Grazing Alternative. Under this alternative, no livestock grazing would occur and there would be no direct impacts to soils from livestock use. Indirectly, soil health may benefit from livestock rest. However, trampling or removal of plant material may still occur from wildlife grazing.

ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC LAND HEALTH STANDARD 1 FOR SOILS.

Based on the Deep Creek Land Health Assessment, BLM staff concluded that soils are meeting Standard 1 (BLM 2009). Implementation of the proposed action is not anticipated to degrade soil health from current conditions.

SURFACE AND GROUND WATER QUALITY

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT. The Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment lies within the Sweetwater Creek 6th level watershed, which is tributary to the Colorado River. The allotment is drained by Irrawaddy Creek and several unnamed intermittent and ephemeral tributaries. These drainages mainly flow in response to snowmelt and summer rain storms. Very limited water quality data are available for these drainages because they are generally dry. However, one water quality sample was taken on Irrawaddy Creek during the land health assessment in summer of 2008 and results (shown below) indicate overall good quality (BLM 2009).

Table 7. Water Quality Data.

Stream Name	Date	Discharge (cfs)	Temp. (°C)	Cond. (µS/cm)	pH	Salinity ppt	Dissolved Oxygen		Total Alkalinity methyl orange (mg/L)	Hardness (mg/L)
							%	mg/l		
Irrawaddy Creek	8/13/2008	0.04 (18.85 gal/min)	14.7	488	10.2	0.3	48	4.73	320	380

The State of Colorado has developed *Stream Classifications and Water Quality Standards* that identify beneficial uses of water and numeric standards used to determine allowable concentrations of water quality parameters (CDPHE 2014). Irrawaddy and the unnamed tributaries in the allotment are listed under the Upper Colorado River Basin and have water use classifications described below:

Table 8. Stream Classifications.

Stream Segment Description	Classifications
7b. Mainstems of Rock Creek, Deep Creek, Sheephorn Creek, Sweetwater Creek and the Piney River, including all tributaries and wetlands, from their sources to their confluences with the Colorado River, which are not on National Forest lands.	Aq Life Cold 1 Recreation E Water Supply Agriculture

Aquatic life cold 1 indicates that a stream segment is capable of sustaining a wide variety of cold water biota. Recreation E refers to stream segments in which surface waters are used for primary contact recreation. Water supply and agriculture refer to stream segments that are suitable or intended to become suitable for potable water supplies and suitable for irrigation or livestock use.

The State of Colorado has developed a *303(d) List of Impaired Waters and Monitoring and Evaluation List* (CDPHE 2012) that identifies stream segments that are not currently meeting water quality standards with technology based controls alone. No streams in the Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment are on this list, suggesting water quality standards are currently being met.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

Proposed Action. Direct impacts to water quality from livestock grazing may result in elevated turbidity, nutrients and fecal coliform bacteria, if livestock begin to congregate near water sources for extended periods of time. Hoof action can cause surface compaction, stream bank shearing, elevated erosion rates and subsequent deterioration of water quality. Indirect impacts may result from excessive utilization in upland watershed areas reducing effective vegetative cover, elevating erosion potential and increasing sediment delivery to streams, which could negatively impact water quality. The proposed stocking rates and duration are not expected to have a negative effect on water quality. Any sediment that is produced in areas where livestock may congregate would likely be captured by the existing vegetative ground cover.

No Grazing Alternative. Under this alternative, no livestock grazing would occur and there would be no direct impacts to water quality from livestock use. Indirectly, water quality may benefit from livestock rest. However, trampling or removal of plant material may still occur from wildlife grazing.

ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC LAND HEALTH STANDARD 5 FOR WATER QUALITY

Based on the Deep Creek Land Health Assessment, BLM staff concluded that water quality is meeting Standard 5 (BLM 2009). Implementation of the proposed action is not anticipated to degrade water quality from current conditions.

WETLANDS AND RIPARIAN ZONES

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT.

Riparian and wetland areas on Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment are found along Irrawaddy Creek, an intermittent stream. Approximately 1.25 miles of Irrawaddy Creek is on private land. Only two short segments, one less than 200 feet in lower Irrawaddy Creek and the other approximately 0.35 miles long in upper Irrawaddy Creek, occur on public land. Flow in this upper reach is minimal and the riparian zone is confined by steep, narrow walls. The riparian zones on public land appear to consist of Gambel oak and riparian shrubs such as birch, alder and a few willows.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

Proposed Action. Livestock can impact riparian zones through direct herbivory, trampling of riparian vegetation and damage to stream banks via hoof shear. The upper portion of Irrawaddy Creek is confined to a fairly steep, narrow canyon, so would likely receive little livestock use

relative to the flatter, more accessible water sources available on private land. Continuation of livestock grazing, as proposed, should not result in a decline in riparian conditions.

No Grazing Alternative. Under this alternative, no livestock grazing would occur and there would be no direct or indirect impacts to the riparian zone from livestock use. Some trampling or removal of plant material may still occur from wildlife grazing, but should not result in a decline in riparian condition.

ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC LAND HEALTH STANDARD 2 FOR RIPARIAN SYSTEMS.

The lower segment of Irrawaddy Creek was achieving Standard 2 for riparian systems when evaluated by BLM staff in 2008 during the Land Health Assessment (BLM 2009). The upper segment of Irrawaddy Creek has not been assessed for functioning condition; however, aerial photography reveals no obvious trailing patterns or breaks in riparian coverage which might indicate grazing-related impacts. With continuation of grazing in the same manner and at the same level as before, Standard 2 should continue to be achieved.

AQUATIC WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT.

Table 9 summarizes Federally listed, proposed and candidate aquatic wildlife species potentially occurring in Garfield and Eagle Counties (USFWS 2015) and species on the Colorado BLM State Director’s Sensitive Species List (BLM 2015a) that may occur in the allotment.

Table 9. Special Status Aquatic Wildlife Species Summary.

Federally Listed, Proposed or Candidate Aquatic Wildlife Species		
Species and Status	Habitat/Range Summaries	Occurrence/Potentially Impacted
Green lineage cutthroat trout (<i>Oncorhynchus clarki stomias</i>) Threatened	The greenback cutthroat trout is the subspecies of cutthroat trout native to the Platte River drainage on the Eastern Slope of Colorado. The USFWS is advising federal agencies to consider green lineage cutthroat trout on the Western Slope of CO as threatened until such time as review and interpretation of recent genetics and meristic research has been completed.	Absent/No
Colorado pikeminnow (<i>Ptychocheilus lucius</i>) Endangered	Primarily exists in the Green River below the confluence with the Yampa River, the lower Duchesne River in Utah, the Yampa River below Craig, Colorado, the White River from Taylor Draw Dam near Rangely downstream to the confluence with the Green River, the Gunnison River in Colorado, and the Colorado River from Palisade, Colorado, downstream to Lake Powell. Colorado pikeminnow populations in the upper Colorado River basin are now relatively stable or growing. Designated Critical Habitat includes the Colorado River and its 100-year floodplain west (downstream) from the town of Rifle.	Absent /No

Razorback sucker (<i>Xyrauchen texanus</i>) Endangered	The razorback sucker was once widespread throughout most of the Colorado River Basin from Wyoming to Mexico. In the upper Colorado River Basin, they are now found only in the upper Green River in Utah, the lower Yampa River in Colorado and occasionally in the Colorado River near Grand Junction. Because so few of these fish remain in the wild, biologists have been actively raising them in hatcheries in Utah and Colorado and stocking them in the Colorado River. Designated Critical Habitat for the razorback sucker includes the Colorado River and its 100-year floodplain west (downstream) from the town of Rifle.	Absent /No
Colorado BLM Sensitive Aquatic Wildlife Species Present or Potentially Present in the Allotment		
Species	Habitat/Range Summaries	Occurrence/ Potentially Impacted
Northern leopard frog (<i>Rana pipiens</i>)	Generally found in wet meadows and in shallow lentic habitats between 3,500 to 11,000 feet. They require year-round water sources deep enough to provide ice free refugia in the winter. Within the CRVFO, this species has been documented in locales where quality riparian vegetation exists in conjunction with perennial water sources. Larger populations have been documented northwest of King Mountain within the small drainage that feeds King Mountain (Ligon) Reservoir, June Creek and East Divide Creek south of Silt, and in portions of the Rifle Creek watershed north of Rifle. There are no known populations in the allotment.	Potential/No
Boreal toad (<i>Bufo boreas boreas</i>)	Occurs between 7,000-12,000 feet in the Southern Rocky Mountains in the vicinity of mountain lakes, ponds, meadows, and wetlands in subalpine forest (e.g., spruce, fir, lodgepole pine, aspen). Adults often feed in meadows and forest openings near water, but sometimes in drier forests. Restricted to areas with suitable breeding habitat in spruce-fir forests and alpine meadows. Breeding habitat includes lakes, marshes, ponds, and bogs with sunny exposures and quiet, shallow water.	Absent/No
Bluehead sucker (<i>Catostomus discobolus</i>), Flannelmouth sucker (<i>Catostomus latipinnis</i>), and Roundtail chub (<i>Gila robusta</i>)	Primarily found in larger rivers, but may also be found in smaller tributaries with good connectivity to larger river systems. These fish are endemic to the Colorado River basin and reside within the mainstem Colorado River and its major tributary streams. Given their biology, feeding habits, habitat needs, and niche in the ecosystem, these species can persist in the face of actions that increase sediments to streams and rivers containing these species.	Absent /No
Mountain sucker (<i>Catostomus platyrhynchus</i>)	Found primarily in small, low- mid elevation streams in northwestern Colorado with gravel, sand or mud bottoms. They inhabit undercut banks, eddies, small pools, and areas of moderate current. Young fish prefer backwaters and eddies. Within the CRVFO, the only known occurrence is in Piceance Creek.	Absent /No
Colorado River cutthroat trout (CRCT) (<i>Oncorhynchus clarkii pleuriticus</i>)	Prefers clear, cool headwaters streams with coarse substrates, well-distributed pools, stable streambanks, and abundant stream cover. CRCT occur in Trapper Creek, Northwater Creek, East Fork Parachute Creek, and JQS Gulch within the action area.	Absent/No

Multiple intermittent streams, including Irrawaddy Creek, flow through the allotment, but do not support fish due to their low flows.

Amphibians in Colorado need access to ponds, lakes, seeps, springs, or other bodies of water. They avoid cold winter temperatures and dry midday summer heat by taking refuge in buffered microenvironments such as underground burrows, crevices beneath rocks, or bodies of water. Amphibian records within the CRVFO are limited, and extensive surveys have not been conducted. There are no known populations of special status amphibians in the allotment. Western chorus frogs (*Pseudacris triseriata*) and Woodhouse's toads (*Bufo woodhousii*) occur throughout Colorado. Western chorus frogs are found primarily in wetland marshes and pond margins, also including seasonal waters, and across a wide range of elevations. Woodhouse's toads are present in ponds and slow-flowing streams, including seasonal waters, below 7,000 feet in Colorado. Great Basin spadefoot toads in Colorado generally breed in temporary pools and flood waters along perennial streams. They typically inhabit pinyon-juniper woodlands, sagebrush, and semi-desert shrublands, mostly below 6,000 feet in elevation. Tiger salamanders (*Ambystoma tigrinum*) occur throughout Colorado near ponds, lakes, and water impoundments up to 12,000 feet in elevation (Hammerson 1999).

Aquatic habitats within the allotment support aquatic macroinvertebrates, which are organisms without backbones that are visible without a microscope. They live on, under, and around rocks and sediment in the bottoms of lakes, rivers, and streams for at least part of their life cycles. Major groups include arthropods (i.e., crustaceans and insects), mollusks, sponges and nematode worms. The most abundant are typically aquatic insect larvae such as mayflies, stoneflies, and caddis flies. Aquatic insects are good indicators of stream health, and are an important link in the aquatic food chain, particularly as a food source for fish, amphibians, and many terrestrial animals such as birds and bats. A lack of adequate aquatic invertebrates can negatively impact fish productivity.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

Proposed Action. Livestock grazing can alter riparian vegetation structure, composition, and function. Effects on aquatic wildlife are dependent on grazing: numbers, timing (season of use), frequency, and intensity. Because livestock use of the upper reach of Irrawaddy Creek is expected to be minimal, continued livestock grazing is not expected to have a measurable effect on aquatic wildlife.

No Grazing Alternative. No livestock grazing would occur, and there would be no direct or indirect impacts to aquatic wildlife or their habitat from livestock use. Riparian vegetation biomass would likely increase without the presence of livestock.

ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC LAND HEALTH STANDARD 3 FOR AQUATIC WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES

The Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment was meeting Standard 3 for Aquatic Wildlife and Fisheries according to the Deep Creek Land Health Assessment (BLM 2009). This standard should continue to be met under the Proposed Action.

MIGRATORY BIRDS

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT.

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) provides protections to native birds, with the exception of certain upland fowl managed by state wildlife agencies for hunting. Within the context of the MBTA, migratory birds include non-migratory resident species as well as true migrants. For most migrant and resident species, nesting habitat is critical for supporting reproduction in terms of both nest sites and food. Also, because birds are generally territorial during the nesting season, their ability to access and utilize sufficient food is limited by the quality of the occupied territory. During non-breeding seasons, birds are generally non-territorial and able to feed across a larger area and wider range of habitats.

The allotment provides cover, forage, breeding, and/or nesting habitat for a variety of migratory birds that summer, winter, or migrate through the area. Migratory bird species that are federally listed and classified by the BLM as sensitive species are addressed in the Wildlife: Sensitive, Threatened, and Endangered Species section of this EA.

BLM Instruction Memorandum No. 2008-050 provides guidance toward meeting the BLM's responsibilities under the MBTA and the Executive Order 13186. The guidance directs Field Offices to promote the maintenance and improvement of habitat quantity and quality and to avoid, reduce or mitigate adverse impacts on the habitats of migratory bird species of conservation concern to the extent feasible, and in a manner consistent with regional or statewide bird conservation priorities.

The MBTA prohibits the "take" of a protected species. Under the Act, the term "take" means to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or to attempt to engage in any such conduct. The USFWS interprets "harm" and "kill" to include loss of eggs or nestlings due to abandonment or reduced attentiveness by one or both adults as a result of disturbance by human activity, as well as physical destruction of an occupied nest.

The 1988 amendment to the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act mandates the USFWS to "identify species, subspecies, and populations of all migratory nongame birds that, without additional conservation actions, are likely to become candidates for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973." The *Birds of Conservation Concern 2008* (USFWS 2008) is the most recent effort to carry out this mandate. The CRVFO is within the Southern Rockies/Colorado Plateau Bird Conservation Region 16.

The allotment includes the following plant communities and potentially associated migratory bird species.

Pinyon-juniper Woodlands. Pinyon and juniper trees provide food, cover and nest sites for numerous migratory birds. Species on the Birds of Conservation Concern (BCC) list that occur in the CRVFO and are associated with pinyon-juniper woodlands include the pinyon jay (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*), juniper titmouse (*Baeolophus ridgwayi*) and Ferruginous Hawk (*Buteo regalis*). Other migratory species associated with this plant community within the

CRVFO include the broad-tailed hummingbird (*Selasphorus platycercus*), black-chinned hummingbird (*Archilochus alexandri*), Say's phoebe (*Sayornis saya*), ash-throated flycatcher (*Myiarchus cinerascens*), gray flycatcher (*Empidonax wrightii*), Townsend's solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*), American robin (*Turdus migratorius*), Western bluebird (*Sialia mexicana*), mountain bluebird (*S. currucoides*), bushtit (*Psaltriparus minimus*), blue-gray gnatcatcher (*Polioptila caerulea*), plumbeous vireo (*Vireo plumbeus*), Western scrub-jay (*Aphelocoma californica*), Clark's nutcracker (*Nucifraga columbiana*), black-throated gray warbler (*Dendroica nigrescens*), Virginia's warbler (*Oreothlypis virginiae*), chipping sparrow (*Spizella passerina*), lesser goldfinch (*Spinus psaltria*) and house finch (*Haemorhous mexicanus*). Winter visitors to pinyon-juniper habitats include the Cassin's finch (*Carpodacus cassinii*), a BCC species, which typically nests in montane and subalpine forests, though occasionally nests in pinyon-juniper woodlands.

Sagebrush Shrublands. Sagebrush and the associated native perennial grasses and forbs provide food, cover and nest sites for migratory birds. Sagebrush obligates that potentially occur in the CRVFO include the sagebrush sparrow (*Artemisiospiza nevadensis*), sage thrasher (*Oreoscoptes montanus*) and Brewer's sparrow (*Spizella breweri*), a BCC species. Other migratory species associated with sagebrush shrublands within the CRVFO include the western kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*), western meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*), green-tailed towhee (*Pipilo chlorurus*), vesper sparrow (*Pooecetes gramineus*) and lark sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*). Some species are associated with both pinyon-juniper woodlands and sagebrush shrublands, including the Say's phoebe and gray flycatcher.

Mixed Mountain Shrublands. The vegetation of mixed mountain shrublands varies substantially depending on elevation, slope, aspect, and soil. More mesic (moist) sites such as on north-facing slopes and along minor drainages are typically dominated by Gambel's oak and serviceberry, while more xeric (dry) sites such as south-facing slopes are typically dominated by mountain-mahogany, bitterbrush, snowberry, and sagebrush. The dense cover, tall height, and abundant acorns and berries of mesic oak-serviceberry stands provide cover, forage, and nesting habitat for numerous species including spotted towhees (*Pipilo maculatus*), Virginia's warblers (*Oreothlypis virginiae*), black-headed grosbeaks (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*), black-billed magpies (*Pica hudsonia*), broad-tailed hummingbirds (*Selasphorus platycercus*), green-tailed towhees (*Pipilo chlorurus*), mourning doves (*Zenaidura macroura*), Western scrub-jays (*Aphelocoma californica*) and lazuli buntings (*Passerina amoena*).

Riparian Woodlands and Shrublands. Riparian woodlands consisting primarily of linear stands of cottonwoods along major streams and aspen, willows, and other tall shrubs along smaller streams provide cover, feeding, and nesting habitats for a much greater number of species and individuals than adjacent vegetation communities due to the vertical and horizontal diversity of the community, the proximity to water, and typically the proximity to other vegetation communities. Forbs and insects can be more abundant in moist areas. Bird species found in cottonwood forests in the CRVFO include three BCC species: the bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), Lewis's woodpecker (*Melanerpes lewis*) and willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii*). Other migrants include the cordilleran flycatcher (*Empidonax occidentalis*), warbling vireo, house wren, Bullock's oriole (*Icterus bullockii*), yellow warbler (*Dendroica petechia*), and American goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*) in cottonwood woodlands and the willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii*), song sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*) and fox sparrow (*Passerella iliaca*) in

willow shrublands. Raptors commonly associated with cottonwood woodlands include the red-tailed, Cooper's, and sharp-shinned hawks, the great horned owl (*Bubo virginiana*) and the long-eared owl (*Asio otus*). A large wading bird, the great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*), nests singly or colonially in mature cottonwoods and may travel several miles to hunt for fish in streams, ponds, and lake margins.

Raptors. Many raptors forage over wide areas, so even if they aren't known to nest in a specific area, they may still fly over searching for food. Raptors on the BCC list that occur in portions of the CRVO include the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), Ferruginous Hawk (*Buteo regalis*), prairie falcon (*Falco mexicanus*), peregrine falcon (*F. peregrinus*) and flammulated owl (*Psiloscops flammeolus*). Prairie falcons nest on rocky ledges and cliffs and hunt in grasslands and semi-desert shrublands. Peregrine falcons hunt near nest sites and along rivers and lakes, but can be found in nearly any open vegetation community during migration and winter. Flammulated owls typically nest in ponderosa pine and aspen forests, but have been found nesting in mixed forests, and reportedly use old-growth pinyon-juniper woodlands.

A variety of raptors not on the BCC list are known to occur in the CRVO including the American kestrel (*Falco sparverius*), northern harrier (*Circus cyaneus*), Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*), sharp-shinned hawk (*Accipiter striatus*), red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*), long-eared owl (*Asio otus*), great horned owl (*Bubo virginianus*), northern pygmy owl (*Glaucidium gnoma*) and northern saw-whet owl (*Aegolius acadicus*). The northern goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*), a BLM sensitive species, is an occasional winter visitor to pinyon-juniper woodlands from its nesting habitat in montane and subalpine forests.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

Proposed Action. Livestock grazing can alter vegetation structure, composition, and function. Effects on migratory birds are dependent on the species of interest and may be adverse or beneficial depending on grazing timing, frequency, and intensity. Aerial, bark and canopy insectivores may be less influenced by grazing than species feeding on nectar, insects, or seeds in the understory or on the ground. Birds may be displaced as a result of grazing. Trampling of nests, eggs, or young could occur. Losses or decreases in vegetation from overgrazing can decrease rodent prey species and affect local populations of raptors. Areas lacking vegetative structure and complexity would be expected to be lacking bird species richness. This is especially important in riparian areas, which provide habitat for many species in the arid and semiarid west, including upland birds, waders, shorebirds, raptors, neotropical migrants and passerines. Migratory birds could be temporarily displaced from vehicular traffic or human presence during maintenance of infrastructure or tending to livestock. As long as acceptable utilization levels are maintained and land health standards are achieved, any negative impacts to migratory birds from livestock grazing are expected to be minimal and isolated, and should not influence migratory bird populations on a landscape level.

No Grazing Alternative. No livestock grazing would occur, and there would be no direct or indirect impacts to migratory birds from livestock use. Perennial grass and forb cover should increase and riparian vegetation should recover over time in the absence of livestock, thereby improving conditions for many migratory birds. There would also be no disturbance to

migratory birds from vehicular traffic or human presence during maintenance of infrastructure or tending to livestock.

ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC LAND HEALTH STANDARDS 3 AND 4 FOR MIGRATORY BIRDS.

Based on the Deep Creek Land Health Assessment, the allotment was meeting standards 3 and 4 for terrestrial wildlife, including migratory birds, based on the overall condition of upland and riparian habitats (BLM 2009). Because no changes in livestock grazing are proposed, the allotment is expected to continue to achieve standards 3 and 4.

SENSITIVE, THREATENED AND ENDANGERED TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT.

Table 10 summarizes Federally listed, proposed and candidate aquatic wildlife species potentially occurring in Garfield and Eagle Counties (USFWS 2015) and species on the Colorado BLM State Director’s Sensitive Species List (BLM 2015a) that may occur in the allotment.

Table 10. Special Status Terrestrial Wildlife Species.

Federally Listed, Proposed, or Candidate Terrestrial Wildlife Species		
Species and Status	Habitat/Range Summaries	Occurrence/Potentially Impacted
Canada lynx (<i>Lynx Canadensis</i>) Threatened	Canada lynx occupy high-latitude or high-elevation coniferous forests characterized by cold, snowy winters and an adequate prey base. In the western US, lynx are associated with mesic forests of lodgepole pine, subalpine fir, Engelmann spruce, and quaking aspen in the upper montane and subalpine zones, generally between 8,000 and 12,000 feet in elevation. Although snowshoe hares (<i>Lepus americanus</i>) are the preferred prey, lynx also feed on mountain cottontails (<i>Sylvilagus nuttallii</i>), pine squirrels (<i>Tamiasciurus hudsonicus</i>), and blue grouse (<i>Dendragapus obscurus</i>). The Forest Service has mapped suitable denning, winter, and other habitat for lynx within the White River and Routt National Forests. The mapped suitable habitat comprises areas known as Lynx Analysis Units (LAUs) that are the approximate size of a female’s home range. Several LAUs include small parcels of BLM lands. There are no LAUs or mapped lynx linkage areas in the allotment.	Absent/No
Mexican spotted owl (<i>Strix occidentalis lucida</i>) Threatened	This owl nests, roosts, and hunts in mature coniferous forests in canyons and foothills. The key habitat components are old-growth forests with uneven-age stands, high canopy closure, high tree density, fallen logs and snags. The only extant populations in Colorado are in the Pikes Peak and Wet Mountain areas of south-central Colorado and the Mesa Verde area of southwestern Colorado.	Absent/No

<p>Yellow-billed cuckoo (<i>Coccyzus americanus</i>)</p> <p>Threatened</p>	<p>This secretive species occurs in mature riparian forests of cottonwoods and other large deciduous trees with a well-developed understory of tall riparian shrubs. Western cuckoos breed in large blocks of riparian habitats, particularly woodlands with cottonwoods (<i>Populus fremontii</i>) and willows (<i>Salix</i> sp.). A few sightings of yellow-billed cuckoo have occurred in western Colorado along the Colorado River near Grand Junction. There is no proposed critical habitat in the Colorado River Valley Field Office.</p>	<p>Absent/No</p>
<p>Uncompahgre fritillary butterfly (<i>Boloria acrocnema</i>)</p> <p>Endangered</p>	<p>The butterfly has been verified at only two areas in the San Juan Mountains in Colorado. There is anecdotal evidence of other colonies in the San Juans and southern Sawatch ranges in Colorado. The butterfly exists above treeline on north and east facing slopes in patches of its larval host plant, snow willow. The greatest threat is butterfly collecting. Climatological patterns, disease, parasitism, predation, and trampling of larvae by humans and livestock pose additional threats.</p>	<p>Absent/No</p>

Colorado BLM Sensitive Terrestrial Wildlife Species Present or Potentially Present

Species	Habitat/Range Summaries	Occurrence/Potentially Impacted
<p>Townsend's big-eared bat (<i>Corynorhinus townsendii</i>)</p> <p>Fringed myotis (<i>Myotis thysanodes</i>)</p> <p>Spotted bat (<i>Euderma maculatum</i>)</p>	<p>Townsend's big eared bats and fringed myotis occur as scattered populations at moderate elevations on the western slope of Colorado. Habitat associations are not well defined. Both bats will forage for aerial insects over pinyon-juniper, montane conifer and semi-desert shrubland communities. These species roosts in caves, rock crevices, mines, buildings and tree cavities. Both species are widely distributed and usually occur in small groups. Townsend's big-eared bats are not abundant anywhere in its range due to patchy distribution and limited availability of suitable roosting. Spotted bats have been detected in Colorado in ponderosa pine woodlands or montane forests, pinyon-juniper woodlands, and riparian vegetation; over sand and gravel bars; and in open semidesert shrublands. The species needs access to water and suitable cracks and crevices in rocky cliffs for roosting. Limited information is available for this species in the CRVFO. No roosts or hibernaculum for any of these species are documented in the allotment.</p>	<p>Possible/No</p>
<p>Rocky mountain bighorn sheep (<i>Ovis canadensis</i>)</p>	<p>Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep typically inhabit steep, precipitous mountain and canyon terrain with good visibility and escape terrain. The CRVFO includes the Glenwood Canyon, Derby Creek, Deep Creek and Battlement Mesa herds. Additional herds inhabit nearby USFS lands.</p>	<p>Absent/No</p>
<p>Northern goshawk (<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>)</p>	<p>Montane and subalpine coniferous forests and aspen forests; may move to lower elevation pinyon-juniper woodlands in search of prey during winter. Preys on small-medium sized birds and mammals. Breeds in coniferous deciduous and mixed forests. Nests are typically located on a northerly aspect in a drainage or canyon and are often near a stream. Nest areas contain one or more stands of large, old trees with a dense canopy cover. A goshawk pair occupies its nest area from March until late September. The nest area is the center of all movements and behaviors associated with breeding from courtship through fledging.</p>	<p>Possible During Fall-Winter/No</p>
<p>Ferruginous hawk (<i>Buteo regalis</i>)</p>	<p>Open, rolling and/or rugged terrain in grasslands and shrubsteppe communities; also grasslands and cultivated fields; nests on cliffs and rocky outcrops. Fall/ winter resident, non-breeding.</p>	<p>Possible During Fall-Winter/No</p>
<p>Golden eagle (<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>)</p>	<p>Nesting/Roosting: cliffs and trees. Forages widely over open habitats, including grasslands and sagebrush, particularly in areas with abundant rabbits. Suitable mixes of sagebrush and cliffs can support high concentrations. Primary forages include small rodents, hares, and rabbits, and carrion during winter.</p>	<p>Possible/No</p>

Bald eagle (<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>)	Nesting/Roosting: mature cottonwood forests along rivers. Foraging: fish and waterfowl along rivers and lakes; may feed on carrion, rabbits and other foods in winter.	Possible/No
American Peregrine Falcon (<i>Falco peregrinus anatum</i>)	Rare spring and fall migrant in western valleys. Peregrine falcons inhabit open spaces associated with high cliffs and bluffs overlooking rivers. The falcon nests on high cliffs and forages over nearby woodlands.	Possible/No
Greater Sage-grouse (<i>Centrocercus urophasianus</i>)	Sage-grouse are found only in areas where sagebrush is abundant, providing both food and cover. Sage-grouse prefer relatively open sagebrush flats or rolling sagebrush hills. In winter, sagebrush accounts for 100% of the diet for these birds. It also provides important escape cover and protection from the elements. In late winter, males begin to concentrate on traditional strutting grounds or leks. Females arrive at the leks 1-2 weeks later. Leks can occur on a variety of land types or formations (windswept ridges, knolls, areas of flat sagebrush, flat bare openings in the sagebrush. Breeding occurs on the leks and in the adjacent sagebrush, typically from March through May. Females and their chicks remain largely dependent on forbs and insects for food well into early fall. Within the CRVFO, sage-grouse are present in the northeast part of the Field Office in the Northern Eagle/Southern Routt population. While small (<500 birds), this population probably has, or had, a relationship with the larger population in Moffat, Rio Blanco and western Routt counties, and probably with the Middle Park population to the east. The allotment does not include lands allocated as priority habitat management areas (PHMA) or general habitat management areas (GHMA).	Absent/No
Columbian sharp-tailed grouse (<i>Tympanuchus phasianellus columbian</i>)	Use a variety of habitats within sagebrush, mountain shrub, and riparian areas. From spring to fall a component of denser riparian or mountain shrub vegetation is important for escape cover. Winter habitat contains a dominant component of deciduous trees and shrubs. In Colorado, leks typically occur in sagebrush.	Absent/No
Black swift (<i>Cypseloides niger</i>)	Nest in colonies on vertical rock faces, near waterfalls or in dripping caves. Birds arrive in Colorado in June and take all summer to raise a single nestling. Adults forage widely on aerial insects.	Absent/No
Brewer's sparrow (<i>Spizella berveri</i>)	Summers in western Colorado mountain parks and is a spring/fall migrant at lower elevations. Sagebrush obligate with an apparently secure conservation status in Colorado. Primary habitat is mature big sagebrush 1.6-3 ft. tall with low to moderate canopy cover, and habitat patches ≥ 15 acres. Mesic sites, particularly riparian areas within sagebrush habitats, are also an important primary habitat component.	Possible/Yes
White-faced ibis (<i>Plegadis chihi</i>)	Primarily inhabits freshwater wetlands, especially cattail (<i>Typha</i> spp.) and bulrush (<i>Scirpus</i> spp.) marshes. Rare, non-breeding, summer migrant to western Colorado valleys and mountain lakes. Feeds in flooded hay meadows, agricultural fields, and estuarine wetlands. Breeds in isolated colonies in mainly shallow marshes with "islands" of emergent vegetation.	Absent/No
Midget faded rattlesnake (<i>Crotalus viridis concolor</i>)	Found in northwestern Colorado, including western Garfield County. Sagebrush communities with an abundance of south-facing rock outcroppings and exposed canyon walls. Rocky outcrops are essential for cover, variable thermal conditions and hibernation.	Absent/No

Special Status Raptors. Bald eagles were removed from the federal threatened and endangered species list in 2007, but are still protected under the MBTA and Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and are currently listed as a BLM sensitive species. Most of the allotment area overlaps with bald eagle winter range and winter forage range as mapped by Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW). Peregrine falcons have not been documented nesting in this allotment, but could utilize the area. Northern goshawks and ferruginous hawks could use parts of the allotment during fall and winter.

Brewer's Sparrow. Alteration of vegetation in sagebrush habitats due to livestock grazing may affect Brewer's sparrow abundance. Grazing may occasionally affect Brewer's sparrow nests through trampling or disturbance (Vasquez 2005).

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

Proposed Action. Livestock grazing can alter vegetation structure, composition, and function. The response of special status wildlife to livestock grazing varies by habitat, species, and grazing (e.g., numbers, timing, frequency, intensity). Direct impacts include the removal and/or trampling of vegetation that would otherwise be used for food and cover; trampling of nests, eggs, or young; and livestock-wildlife interactions that may result in wildlife displacement or disease transmission. Wildlife could be displaced by vehicular traffic or human presence during maintenance of infrastructure or tending to livestock. Indirect impacts result from changes in plant community composition, structure, and productivity which together largely determine the suitability of wildlife habitat and habitat for insect and rodent prey species. Conversely, livestock grazing can have a beneficial effect on forage quality by removing the rough or dried seedheads and stems, while leaving or creating the more palatable leaves.

Under the Proposed Action, there would be no changes to livestock grazing, so impacts to special status species from livestock grazing would not be expected to change. As long as acceptable utilization levels are maintained and land health standards are achieved, any negative impacts to special status species from livestock grazing are expected to be minimal and isolated, and should not influence special status species populations on a landscape level.

Special Status Raptors. Understory vegetation would be expected to remain the same on the Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment, therefore small mammal abundance and diversity would be expected to remain the same on the allotment.

Brewer's Sparrow. Grazing pressure would remain the same on the allotment, so vegetation conditions for this species would likely remain the same. The chance of trampling by livestock would not be reduced.

No Grazing Alternative. Ending livestock grazing would benefit special status wildlife occurring in the allotment by eliminating all direct and indirect competition with livestock for forage, cover and space. There would also be no disturbance to wildlife from vehicular traffic or human presence during maintenance of infrastructure or tending to livestock.

Special Status Raptors. Perennial grass and forb cover would be expected to increase in some areas throughout the allotment. Improving the condition of understory vegetation could lead to increased small mammal abundance and diversity, potentially improving the prey base for special status raptors.

Brewer's Sparrow. There would be no chance of trampling by livestock, and some vegetative conditions would be expected to improve.

ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC LAND HEALTH STANDARD 4 FOR SPECIAL STATUS WILDLIFE.

According to the Deep Creek Land Health Assessment, the Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment was meeting Standard 4 for special status wildlife (BLM 2009). Since no changes are proposed to grazing, the allotment is expected to continue to achieve Standard 4 for special status wildlife.

TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT.

Diverse plant communities across the CRVFO support a variety of terrestrial wildlife that summer, winter, or migrate through the area. Wildlife need to move across the landscape for food, cover and in response to seasonal conditions. Human development and activities have fragmented habitat, and in some cases, created barriers to wildlife movement. Factors contributing to wildlife disturbance or degradation and fragmentation of habitat include power lines, pipelines, fences, public recreation use, residential and commercial development, vegetation treatments, livestock and wild ungulate grazing, oil and gas development, fire suppression, roads and trails.

Big Game. Mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) and Rocky Mountain elk (*Cervus elaphus nelsonii*) are recreationally important species that occur in the allotment. BLM managed lands provide a large portion of the undeveloped habitat for big game in Colorado. Mule deer and elk typically occupy higher elevation, forested areas during summer and migrate to lower elevation sagebrush-dominated ridges and south-facing slopes during winter. The allotment overlaps with CPW mapped mule deer and elk overall, summer, and winter range. Winter range is often considered the most limiting habitat type for mule deer, so effective management of these areas is particularly important to the health of deer populations.

Other Mammals. Numerous small mammals could reside within the planning area, including mice (*Peromyscus* spp.), woodrats (*Neotoma* spp.), ground squirrels (*Spermophilus* spp.), chipmunks (*Neotamias* spp.), rabbits (*Sylvilagus* spp.), skunks (*Mephitis mephitis*), raccoons (*Procyon lotor*) and porcupines (*Erethizon dorsatum*). Many of these mammals are prey for raptors and larger carnivores. Larger carnivores expected to occur include bobcats (*Lynx rufus*) and coyotes (*Canis latrans*). CPW has mapped the entire allotment as mountain lion (*Felis concolor*) and black bear (*Ursus americanus*) habitat. Mountain lions are most likely to be in the vicinity when mule deer are present. Bats documented in Northwest Colorado that could occur in the CRVFO that are not on the BLM special status species list include pallid bats (*Antrozous pallidus*), big brown bats (*Eptesicus fuscus*), spotted bats (*Euderma maculatum*), silver-haired bats (*Lasiurus noctivagans*), hoary bats (*Lasiurus cinereus*), California myotis (*Myotis californicus*), Western small-footed myotis (*M. ciliolabrum*), long-eared myotis (*M. evotis*), little brown myotis (*M. lucifugus*), long-legged myotis (*Myotis volans*), Yuma myotis (*M. yumanensis*), big free-tailed bats (*Nyctinomops macrotis*), canyon bats (*Parastrellus hesperus*), and Brazilian free-tailed bats (*Tadarida brasiliensis*).

Reptiles. Reptile species most likely to occur in the allotment include sagebrush lizards (*Sceloporus graciosus*), prairie and plateau lizards (*S. undulatus*), tree lizards (*Urosaurus ornatus*), gopher snakes or bullsnakes (*Pituophis catenifer*), and western terrestrial garter snakes (*Thamnophis elegans*). Gopher snakes can be found throughout Colorado in most plant communities, including riparian areas, semidesert and mountain shrublands, pinyon-juniper woodlands, and ponderosa pine and other montane woodlands. Western terrestrial garter snakes occur throughout most of western Colorado, usually below 11,000 feet. Smooth green snakes (*Opheodrys vernalis*) can be present in riparian areas, but in western Colorado, may also be common in mountain shrublands far from water (Hammerson 1999).

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

Proposed Action. Domestic livestock can compete with wild ungulates for herbaceous forage, although moderate levels of grazing can also help promote shrub growth by limiting grasses. Conversely, livestock grazing can have a beneficial effect on forage quality by removing the rough or dried seedheads and stems, while leaving or creating the more palatable leaves for deer or elk to graze later in the season. As long as acceptable utilization levels are maintained and land health standards are achieved, particularly on big game winter range, livestock grazing would not have a significant effect on big game and other terrestrial species.

No Grazing Alternative. No livestock grazing would occur, and there would be no direct or indirect impacts to terrestrial wildlife from livestock use. Perennial grass and forb cover as well as riparian vegetation should increase over time in the absence of livestock, thereby improving conditions for many wildlife species. There would also be no disturbance to wildlife from vehicular traffic or human presence associated with infrastructure maintenance or tending to livestock.

ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC LAND HEALTH STANDARD 3 FOR TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE.

According to the Deep Creek Land Health Assessment, the Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment is currently achieving Standard 3 for terrestrial species (BLM 2009). Based on habitat condition and current livestock management, the continuation of livestock grazing should have no impact on the continued achievement of Standard 3 for terrestrial wildlife.

CUMULATIVE EFFECTS.

Soil and Water. Cumulative impacts to soil and water resources may occur from existing roads and trails throughout the allotment. Roads and trails may contribute to increased surface runoff and accelerated erosion, especially where proper drainage is lacking. Based on existing and future land management activities occurring across the allotment, it is assumed that cumulative effects to soil and water are negligible if proper best management practices are implemented.

Wildlife (including special status species). The area covered by the Proposed Action only comprises a small portion of the watershed. Many other land use activities (e.g., recreation, housing, road maintenance, oil and gas development) occur within the watershed. All of these

activities have altered the amount of suitable and potentially suitable habitats for terrestrial wildlife species. Cumulatively, many of the future actions planned on private and other lands may have some undetermined effect on wildlife including special status species habitat. The Proposed Action would create negligible landscape-level cumulative impacts to wildlife when viewed in comparison with those activities currently occurring and reasonably certain to occur on adjacent private/other lands.

CONSULTATION.

The following stakeholders were contacted:

- Southern Ute Indian Tribe
- Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
- Uinta and Ouray Agency Ute Indian Tribe
- Grazing permittee/lessees

LIST OF PREPARERS.

Members of the CRVFO Interdisciplinary Team who participated in the impact analysis of the Proposed Action and alternative, development of appropriate mitigation measures, and preparation of this EA are listed in Table 8, along with their areas of responsibility.

Table 11. BLM Interdisciplinary Team Authors and Reviewers.

Name	Title	Areas of Participation
Kristy Wallner	Rangeland Management Specialist	NEPA lead, Invasive, Non-Native Species (Noxious Weeds), Livestock Grazing
Carla DeYoung	Ecologist	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern: Special Status Plants; Vegetation; Wetlands & Riparian Zones; Land Health Standards
Kimberly Leitzinger	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Wilderness, Wild and Science Rivers, Recreation
Pauline Adams	Hydrologist	Soil, Water, Air, Geology
Hilary Boyd	Wildlife Biologist	Terrestrial and Aquatic Wildlife (including Special Status Species), Migratory Birds
Erin Leifeld	Archeologist	Cultural Resources and Native American Religious Concerns
Brian Hopkins	Assistant Field Manager	NEPA Compliance

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Appendix A – Map of Grazing Allotment

Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment



Legend

-  Interstate
-  County Road
-  Grazing Allotment
-  Bureau of Land Management
-  Private



DOI-BLM-CO-N040-2015-0039-EA
 T4S R87W Sec. 1, 2, 11, 12
 Dotsero USGS Quad
 Garfield and Eagle Counties, Colorado
 Colorado River Valley Field Office
 Bureau of Land Management

No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data. Original data were compiled from various sources. This information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This project was developed through digital means and may be updated without notice.

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
COLORADO RIVER VALLEY FIELD OFFICE
SILT, COLORADO

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
for
DOI-BLM-N040-2015-0039-EA

Finding of No Significant Impact.

I have reviewed the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of the proposed action documented in the EA referenced above. The effects of the proposed action are disclosed in the Alternatives and Environmental Effects sections of the EA. Implementing regulations for NEPA (40 CFR 1508.27) provide criteria for determining the significance of the effects. Significant, as used in NEPA, requires consideration of both *context* and *intensity* as follows:

(a) Context. This requirement means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human, national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. For instance, in the case of a site-specific action, significance would usually depend upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Both short and long-term effects are relevant (40 CFR 1508.27):

(b) Intensity. This requirement refers to the severity of the impact. Responsible officials must bear in mind that more than one agency may make decisions about partial aspects of a major action. The following are considered in evaluating intensity (40 CFR 1508.27).

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and/or adverse.

Impacts associated with issuing these livestock grazing permits are identified and discussed in the Affected Environment and Environmental Effects sections of the EA. The Proposed Action will not have any significant beneficial or adverse impacts on the resources identified and described in the EA.

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

The proposed activities will not significantly affect public health or safety. The purpose of the proposed action is to allow for multiple uses while maintaining or improving resource conditions to meet standards for rangeland health in the allotment. Similar actions have not significantly affected public health or safety.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as prime and unique farmlands, caves, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness study areas, or ACECs.

Little or no grazing use has been observed on the public lands within the allotment and there is no live water within the ACEC to attract livestock use. Given this information, continuation of livestock grazing as proposed should not result in any reduction in the Harrington's penstemon population or degradation of its habitat. The resource values of the ACEC would be maintained.

4. The degree to which the effects are likely to be highly controversial.

The possible effects of continued livestock grazing are not likely to be highly controversial.

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

The possible effects on the human environment are not highly uncertain nor do they involve unique or uncertain risks. The technical analyses conducted for the determination of the impacts to the resources are supportable with use of accepted techniques, reliable data, and professional judgment. Therefore, I conclude that there are no highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks.

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

This EA is specific to the Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment. It is not expected to set precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future management consideration in or outside of these allotments.

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

The area covered by the Proposed Action only comprises a small portion of the watershed. Cumulatively, many of the future actions planned on private and other lands may have some undetermined effect on wildlife including special status species habitat. The Proposed Action would create negligible landscape-level cumulative impacts to wildlife when viewed in conjunction with those activities currently occurring and reasonably certain to occur on adjacent private/other lands.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect scientific, cultural, or historical resources, including those listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

No cultural resources have been documented within the Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment. There is moderate potential for additional cultural resources to be documented within the allotment, specifically in areas with known historic activities. Subsequent site field visits, inventory, and periodic monitoring may have to be done to identify if other historic properties are present as well as determine if there are impacts to these properties within the term of the permit and as funds are made available. If the BLM determines that

grazing activities adversely impact the properties, mitigation will be identified and implemented in consultation with the Colorado SHPO. The EA discloses the adverse impacts that could occur to cultural resources from livestock grazing.

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Properly managed livestock grazing (i.e. meeting land health standards) is generally compatible with all wildlife species. The development and maintenance of water sources for livestock may unintentionally provide beneficial effects to foraging bat and bird species. As long as acceptable utilization levels are maintained and land health standards are achieved there would be no anticipated direct or indirect impact of grazing on special status bat or bird species.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The Proposed Action does not violate or threaten to violate any Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Based upon the review of the test for significance and the environmental analyses conducted, I have determined that the actions analyzed in the EA will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Accordingly, I have determined that the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not necessary for this proposal.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL.



Brian Hopkins
Assistant Field Manager
Colorado River Valley Field Office

1-12-16

Date



United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Colorado River Valley Field Office
2300 River Frontage Road
Silt, CO 81652



IN REPLY REFER TO:
ON 0504433 (CON040)

CERTIFIED MAIL 70132630000027329926
RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED

Kerr, Della Trust
c/o Della Kerr
P.O Box 459
Gypsum, CO 81637

NOTICE OF PROPOSED DECISION

Dear Mrs. Kerr:

Introduction & Background.

On December 03, 2014 you applied to renew your grazing permit on the Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment. The review and NEPA compliance has been completed as documented in the Environmental Assessment (EA) No. DOI-BLM-CO-N040-2015-0039. A copy of the EA is enclosed. Renewal of the permit has also been reviewed for compliance with 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 4110.1(b)(1) which requires a satisfactory record of performance prior to renewal.

Finding Of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

The environmental assessment, analyzing the environmental effects of the action, has been reviewed. The action with mitigation measures result in a finding of no significant impact on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary to further analyze the environmental effects of the proposed action.

Rationale.

The analysis of the action with mitigation measures did not identify any impacts that would be significant in nature either in context or intensity. The grazing authorization allows for adequate plant growth recovery and promotes healthy rangelands as it relates to rangeland standards. In addition, there is nothing to indicate the action is highly controversial or that it is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant actions.

Proposed Decision.

As a result of this process, it is my proposed decision to renew grazing lease #0504433 for a period of 10 years (February 15, 2016 – December 31, 2025). My proposed decision results in the following authorized use and terms and conditions:

Table 1. Proposed Grazing Schedules.

Operator Name	Auth. No.	Allotment	Livestock Number	Livestock Kind	Begin Date	End Date	% BLM Land	AUMs
Kerr, Della	0504433	Moniger Ridge 2	20	Cattle	05/16	09/30	30	27

Table 2. Proposed Permitted Use AUMS.

Operator Name	Auth. No.	Allotment	Active	Suspended	Total
Kerr, Della	0504433	Moniger Ridge 2	27	0	27

Terms and Conditions.

The following terms and conditions will be included on the renewed permit:

1. An actual use report shall be submitted annually to the BLM office no later than 15 days after livestock have been removed (i.e. the grazing end period on the bill or permit/lease).
2. Salt, mineral block and supplemental feed will be placed a minimum of .25 miles and preferably .5 miles from riparian areas and other water sources, including springs.
3. Rotational grazing will be practiced and grazing use will not occur in any given area of public land for more than 1.5 months. The number of livestock can be adjusted from what is indicated on the permit so full permitted use of 27 AUMs is activated.
4. Average utilization levels by livestock should not exceed 50% by weight on key grass species, and 40% of the key browse species current year's growth. Grazing in riparian areas should leave an average minimum 4-inch stubble height of herbaceous vegetation. If utilization is approaching allowable use levels, livestock should be moved to another portion of the allotment, or removed from the allotment entirely for the remainder of the growing season. Application of this term may be flexible to recognize livestock management that provides sufficient opportunity for regrowth, spring growth prior to grazing, opportunity for seed dissemination and seedling establishment, or growing season deferment to promote plant health.
5. Maintenance of range improvements is required and shall be in accordance with all

approved cooperative agreements and range improvement permits/leases. Maintenance shall be completed prior to turnout. Maintenance activities shall be restricted to the footprint (previously disturbed area) of the project as it existed when it was initially constructed. The Bureau of Land Management shall be given 48 hours advance notice of any maintenance work that will involve heavy equipment. Disturbed areas will be reseeded with a certified weed-free seed mixture of native species adapted to the site.

6. The permittee/lessees and all persons associated with grazing operations must be informed that any person who injures, destroys, excavates, appropriates or removes any historic or prehistoric ruin, artifact, object of antiquity, Native American remains, Native American cultural item, or archaeological resources on public lands is subject to arrest and penalty of law. If in connection with allotment operations under this authorization any of the above resources are encountered, the proponent shall immediately suspend all activities in the immediate vicinity of the discovery that might further disturb such materials and notify the BLM authorized officer of the findings. The discovery must be protected until further notified in writing to proceed by the authorized officer.

Rationale for the Proposed Decision.

Renewal of the grazing permit/lease is in conformance with the Colorado River Valley Field Office Record of Decision (ROD) and Approved Resource Management Plan (RMP), approved June, 2015.

The Proposed Action helps to achieve the goal of the plan by applying flexible and sustainable livestock grazing, in accordance with BLM Colorado Standards for Public Land Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management to contribute to local economies, ranching livelihoods, and the rural western character integral to many communities. It also achieves the objective of the plan by meeting the forage demands of livestock operations based on active use, by providing approximately 441,600 acres for livestock grazing, and provide approximately 35,500 AUMs of livestock forage.

An interdisciplinary team prepared an EA (No. DOI-BLM-CO-N040-20-0039) for the proposed grazing lease renewal. My proposed decision is based on the findings of the analyses contained in the EA. The analysis of the Proposed Action indicated that the current conditions and land health standards in the Moniger Ridge 2 Allotment are expected to be maintained or improved. The grazing use proposed allows for adequate plant growth recovery and promotes healthy rangelands as it relates to rangeland standards.

Other terms and conditions have been included to mitigate potential impacts from grazing use and to authorize flexibility in the lease.

Authority.

43 CFR 4100.0-8 states: "The authorized officer shall manage livestock grazing on public lands under the principle of multiple use and sustained yield, and in accordance with applicable land use plans. Land use plans shall establish allowable resource uses (either singly or in

combination), related levels of production or use to be maintained, areas of use, and resource condition goals and objectives to be obtained. The plans also set forth program constraints and general management practices needed to achieve management objectives. Livestock grazing activities and management actions approved by the authorized officer shall be in conformance with the land use plan as defined at 43 CFR 1601.0- 5(b).”

43 CFR 4110.2-2(a) states: “Permitted use is granted to holders of grazing preference and shall be specified in all grazing permits or leases. Permitted use shall encompass all authorized use including livestock use, any suspended use, and conservation use, except for permits and leases for designated ephemeral rangelands where livestock use is authorized based upon forage availability, or designated annual rangelands. Permitted livestock use shall be based upon the amount of forage available for livestock grazing as established in the land use plan, activity plan or decision of the authorized officer under § 4110.3-3, except, in the case of designated ephemeral or annual rangelands, a land use plan or activity plan may alternatively prescribe vegetation standards to be met in the use of such rangelands.”

43 CFR 4130.2(a) states: “Grazing permits or leases authorize use on the public lands and other BLM-administered lands that are designated in land use plans as available for livestock grazing. Permits and leases will specify the grazing preference, including active and suspended use. These grazing permits and leases will also specify terms and conditions pursuant to §§4130.3, 4130.3-1, and 4130.3-2.”

43 CFR 4130.2(d) states: “The term of the grazing permits or leases authorizing livestock on the public lands and other lands under the administration of the Bureau of Land Management shall be 10 years unless -- (1) The land is being considered for disposal; (2) The land will be devoted to a public purpose which precludes grazing prior to the end of 10 years; (3) The term of the base property lease is less than 10 years, in which case the term of the Federal permit or lease shall coincide with the term of the base property lease; or (4) the authorized officer determines that a permit or lease for less than 10 years is the best interest of sound land management.”

43 CFR 4130.3 states: “Livestock grazing permits and leases shall contain terms and conditions determined by the authorized officer to be appropriate to achieve the management and resource condition objectives for the public lands and other lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management, and to ensure conformance with the provisions of subpart 4180 of this part.”

43 CFR 4130.3-1(a) states: “The authorized officer shall specify the kind and number of livestock, the period(s) of use, the allotment(s) to be used, and the amount of use, in animal unit months, for every grazing permit or lease. The authorized livestock grazing use shall not exceed the livestock carrying capacity of the allotment.”

43 CFR 4130.3-2 states: “The authorized officer may specify in grazing permits or leases other terms and conditions which will assist in achieving management objectives, provide for proper range management or assist in the orderly administration of the public rangelands.”

43 CFR 4160.1(a) states: “Proposed decisions shall be served on any affected applicant, permittee or lessee and any agent and lien holder of record, who is affected by the proposed

actions, terms or conditions, or modifications relating to applications, permits and agreements (including range improvement permits) or leases, by certified mail or personal delivery. Copies of the proposed decisions shall also be sent to the interested public”.

Protest and/or Appeal.

Any applicant, permittee, lessee or other interested public may protest a proposed decision under Sec. 43 CFR 4160.1 and 4160.2, in person or in writing to Brian Hopkins, Assistant Field Manager, Bureau of Land Management, 2300 River Frontage Road, Silt, Colorado 81652 within 15 days after receipt of such decision. The protest, if filed, should clearly and concisely state the reason(s) as to why the proposed decision is in error.

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

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

Any applicant, permittee, lessee or other person whose interest is adversely affected by the final decision may file an appeal in accordance with 43 CFR 4.470 and 43 CFR 4160.3 and 4160 .4. The appeal must be filed within 30 days following receipt of the final decision, or within 30 days after the date the proposed decision becomes final. The appeal may be accompanied by a petition for a stay of the decision in accordance with 43 CFR 4.471 and 4.479, pending final determination on appeal. The appeal and petition for a stay must be filed in the office of the

authorized officer, as noted above. The person/party must also serve a copy of the appeal on any person named [43 CFR 4.421(h)] in the decision and the Office of the Solicitor, United States Department of Interior, 755 Parfet Street, Suite 151, Lakewood, Colorado 80215. The BLM does not accept appeals by facsimile or email.

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

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

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

As noted above, the petition for stay must be filed in the office of the authorized officer and serviced in accordance with 43 CFR 4.473. Any person named in the decision from which an

appeal is taken (other than the appellant) who wishes to file a response to the petition for a stay may file with the Hearings division a motion to intervene in the appeal, together with the response, within 10 days after receiving the petition. Within 15 days after filing the motion to intervene and response, the person must serve copies on the appellant, the office of the Solicitor and any other person named in the decision (43 CFR 4.472(b)).

Please take a moment to review your enclosed grazing lease. **If you do not have any concerns with the permit as offered, please sign, date, and return both copies to our office.** If you have any questions, contact Kristy Wallner of my range staff at (970) 876-9023.

Sincerely,


Brian Hopkins,
Assistant Field Manager
Colorado River Valley Field Office

1-12-16
Date

Enclosure(s):
Environmental Assessment (No. DOI-BLM-CO-040-2015-0039)
BLM Form 4130-2a (Grazing permit)