

BRUNEAU FIELD OFFICE
SCOPING/INFORMATION PACKAGE
PERMIT RENEWALS FOR CAMAS CREEK POCKET (#0807) AND NAHAS FFR (#0892)
ALLOTMENTS
Project # ID-120-2009-EA-3838

This information package summarizes a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to renew grazing permits for Camas Creek Pocket (#0807) and Nahas FFR (#0892) allotments in accordance with the Bruneau Management Framework Plan (MFP). Federal actions must be analyzed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations to determine potential environmental consequences.

The purpose of this report is to inform interested and affected parties of the proposal and to solicit comments to assist with the NEPA review of this proposal. Analysis of the proposal is ongoing, and will be documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA) with an estimated completion date of June 1, 2010. Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential environmental issues related to the proposed action and to identify alternatives to the proposed action that meet the purpose of and need for the project.

Purpose and Need for Action

The Bruneau Field Office has completed the evaluation process for these two allotments that is required by current guidance. Current permit renewal guidance requires that new permits be issued after periodic reevaluation in areas available for livestock grazing and that they must conform to the Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health (SRH) and to Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management (GLGM). Current guidance and regulations also require that reissued permits conform to MFP decisions providing for watershed protection, vegetation improvement, and suitable wildlife habitat characteristics.

These allotments were both recently found to be meeting SRH and GLGM, and no conflicts between the currently permitted grazing management and MFP decisions were identified. No determination document is required since all standards are met and there is conformance with the guidelines. The MFP identifies both areas as available for livestock grazing. Current guidance, the Idaho SRH and GLGM, and Bruneau MFP decisions require that desirable conditions be maintained and that acceptable grazing practices continue.

Current guidance also directs that BLM solicit, consider, and incorporate appropriate suggestions or formal applications to modify existing grazing permits from current permittees. While neither permittee (Joseph Black & Sons for Camas Creek Pocket and Sierra Del Rio for Nahas FFR) has requested modification of their current terms and conditions, the allotment boundaries of the Nahas FFR as originally authorized are incorrect, and would be resolved as part of the permit renewal.

Existing Condition

The allotments are located in Owyhee County, Idaho, approximately 43 miles south of Murphy, and 75 miles south-southwest of Boise (Maps 1 and 2).

The Camas Creek Pocket Allotment is located south of the Mud Flat Road along the access road to the Big Springs Ranch (Map 1). It consists primarily of public land with a few small corners of private land for a total of 3,675 acres (3,630 public acres and 45 private acres). Elevation on the Camas Creek Pocket Allotment ranges from 5,800 feet to 6,100 feet. The public lands in the allotment are grazed in late summer and fall after cattle are removed from Big Springs Allotment. Since 1993, Big Springs and Camas Creek Pocket allotments have been grazed in rotation with several other fields (primarily private) under the Joseph Black & Sons Holistic Resource Management Plan. From July 1 through November 15, 449 AUMs are permitted annually.

The Nahas FFR Allotment is located at the northern end of Big Springs Allotment (#0803) along the Mud Flat Road, also known as the Owyhee Upland Backcountry Byway (Map 2). Elevation on the Nahas FFR ranges from 5,200 feet to 5,700 feet. The public lands in Nahas FFR are grazed primarily in fall after cattle are removed from the Big Springs Allotment. FFR status was granted by decision in 1997, giving Sierra Del Rio discretion in numbers and season of use. An annual bill for 80 AUMs is issued for use of the 1,112 acres of included federal lands between 4/1 and 11/30, providing that such use is in conformance with the MFP objectives, the SRH, and GLGM. The Nahas FFR contains approximately 309 acres of the Pole Creek Wilderness Area.

The two allotments are located in the same geographic area, and include similar upland plant communities. They are authorized under different grazing permits and livestock operators, but both are primarily grazed after seed ripe of perennial grasses. No federally listed plant or animal species occur on public lands where permitted grazing would occur. Columbia spotted frogs, a candidate species, occur in a grazing enclosure within Nahas FFR.

Proposed Action

The action of reissuing term grazing permits for these allotments would not result in a change in the scope of the resource uses or a change in the terms, conditions, and decisions made in the MFP. Livestock grazing permits for these allotments would be reissued for a term of ten years effective on March 1, 2011 and expiring on February 28, 2021, with modifications to mandatory terms and conditions and also to other terms and conditions. Mandatory terms and conditions, in compliance with 43 CFR 4130.3-1 (a), would be as shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Proposed Grazing Permit Authorization for Camas Creek Pocket Allotment (0807)

Operator Name, Number	Livestock		Grazing Period		% Public Land	Animal Unit Months		
	Number	Kind	Begin	End		Active	Suspended	Permitted
Joseph Black & Sons, (1100235)	69	C	5/1	11/15	100	449	0	449

Key components of the Camas Creek Pocket portion of the decision would include utilization limits (Annual Indicator Criteria) for native grasses and shrubs, limitations on salt block placement, and flexibility in numbers and a change in season of use to facilitate adaptive actions that address bitterbrush mortality and promote recruitment.

- The allowable use level for riparian and upland vegetation would be 50% of the current year’s growth at key areas. Livestock would be redistributed to lighter used areas or removed when this utilization level was reached.
- Existing salt block locations relative to Mud Flat milkvetch populations would be authorized. New salt block locations would need prior approval.
- Livestock number and periods of use within the allotment may vary annually as long as such use conforms to the mandatory terms and conditions. Livestock grazing season of use may be adjusted appropriately prior to turnout to avoid livestock use during August through November in order to reduce consumption of woody species.
- If bitterbrush mortality is detected (e.g. >20%), a livestock seasonal grazing rotation may be needed to reduce further stress on the plant community. Livestock grazing would occur earlier in the season when livestock typically graze on grasses rather than shrubs.
- Bitterbrush plantings would occur, if bitterbrush are not naturally regenerating.
- The timing, intensity, and frequency of use would be planned each year to reduce repetition of the same use period and to provide for rotation.

Table 2. Proposed Grazing Permit Authorization for the Nahas FFR Allotment (0892)

Operator Name, Number	Livestock		Grazing Period		% Public Land	Animal Unit Months		
	Number	Kind	Begin	End		Active	Suspended	Permitted
Sierra Del Rio, (1100227)	16	C	7/1	11/30	100	80	0	80

The permit would be renewed with an earlier turnout date and shortened season to more closely reflect the actual period of use on included public lands. Existing utilization limits (Annual Indicator Criteria) for the native grasses and shrubs, limitations on salt block placement, and flexibility granted under the FFR status would be retained.

Key components of the Nahas FFR portion of the decision include:

- Sierra Del Rio would continue to have broad discretion in numbers and season of use under FFR status.
- The turnout date would be changed to July 1 to more accurately reflect the actual use period on the allotment.

Preliminary Issues

Although the SRH evaluations did not reveal any resource issues resulting from currently permitted grazing use, several other issues were considered during BLM's internal scoping process.

On the Camas Creek Pocket Allotment, there are concerns over the condition of the bitterbrush and future actions that may be needed to ensure that SRH continue to be met. Tent caterpillars have infested bitterbrush throughout the allotment if the outbreak continues it could have a detrimental effect on bitterbrush recruitment and recovery and thus, wildlife habitat.

On the Nahas FFR Allotment there is a need to repair the berm at Circle Pond and conduct maintenance activities on the vegetation at the pond to preserve and enhance spotted frog habitat. Circle Pond captures water from a developed spring within an enclosure constructed and maintained for Columbia spotted frogs, a candidate species under the Endangered Species Act. The spring also supplies water to a livestock trough outside the enclosure.

Also on Nahas FFR, portions of the southern allotment boundary fence within the Pole Creek Wilderness are down along stretches of the boundary which limits control of livestock drift into the Wilderness from the Nahas FFR. Along much of the southern boundary, fence does not exist separating Nahas FFR from the adjoining Big Springs Allotment. BLM has corrected erroneous data regarding the location of the Nahas FFR Allotment external boundary fences.

Preliminary Alternative Development

BLM is currently considering the following alternatives:

Alternative A – No Action:

There would be no change from current management, the terms and conditions of these permits, the season of use, the number of livestock, or the amount of permitted use. The grazing permits for Camas Creek Pocket and Nahas FFR allotments would be renewed as shown in Tables 3 and 4, respectively.

Table 3. Current Grazing Permit Authorization for Camas Creek Pocket Allotment (0807)

Operator Name, Number	Livestock		Grazing Period		% Public Land	Animal Unit Months		
	Number	Kind	Begin	End		Active	Suspended	Permitted
Joseph Black & Sons, (1100235)	99	C	7/1	11/15	100	449	0	449

Table 4. Current Grazing Permit Authorization for the Nahas FFR Allotment (0892)

Operator Name, Number	Livestock		Grazing Period		% Public Land	Animal Unit Months		
	Number	Kind	Begin	End		Active	Suspended	Permitted
Sierra Del Rio, (1100227)	10	C	4/1	11/30	100	80	0	80

No Grazing Alternative

This alternative equates to “not issuing a new grazing permit” for the Camas Creek Pocket and Nahas FFR allotments. Subsequently, the public lands would be closed to livestock grazing. This alternative was considered, however, it will not be analyzed in detail because it does not conform to the Taylor Grazing Act or to the Bruneau Management Framework Plan.

Decision to be Made

These permits were renewed for ten years in September 2008 (Sierra Del Rio) and in February 2009 (Joseph Black & Sons), respectively. Since the Evaluations have now been completed, with the finding that all SRH and GLGM were met, the Bruneau Field Manager is not required by 43 CFR 4180 to modify these permits prior to the next grazing season. No current conflicts with MFP decisions were identified.

However, several resource or administrative concerns that could be addressed by permit modifications or by other actions were identified during the internal scoping process, including the adjustment of boundaries for Nahas FFR Allotment. Other suggestions or issues may be identified by members of the public in response to this Scoping/Information Package. Any new alternatives to the proposed action must also meet the purpose of and need for this proposal.

The Bruneau Field Manager will then decide whether to authorize or to further modify livestock grazing activities described in the Proposed Action. The Field Manager will prescribe grazing practices and mitigation measures through terms and conditions, Annual Indicator Criteria, and monitoring requirements during the new term of these permits.

Public Input Needed

Comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, preliminary issues, and alternatives. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received by April 27, 2010 and are directly relevant to the proposal and project area. The BLM will not reject public feedback outside established public involvement timeframes; however, these comments may be considered secondary to comments received in a timely manner and may only be assessed to determine if they identify concerns that would substantially alter the assumptions, proposal, design, or analysis presented in the EA.

Please identify whether you are submitting comments as an individual or as the designated spokesperson on behalf of an organization. Issues that are outside the scope of the proposal will not be addressed at this level. Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying

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information in your comment, be advised that your entire comment, including your personal information, may be made publicly available at any time.

The primary contact for questions and comments for this analysis is Tim Carrigan, Assistant Bruneau Field Manager, 3948 Development Ave., Boise, ID 83705, (208) 384-3341. The office business hours for submitting hand-delivered comments are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

Comments sent electronically should be sent to timothy_carrigan@blm.gov with the title of this project in the subject line. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an e-mail message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), Word (.doc), or portable document format (.pdf). E-mails submitted to e-mail addresses other than the one listed, in other formats than those listed, or containing viruses will be rejected.

Enclosures:

Camas Creek Pocket Allotment Map

Nahas FFR Allotment Map

MAPS



