

Categorical Exclusion Documentation

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management, Spokane District
Wenatchee Field Office
915 Walla Walla Avenue
Wenatchee, WA 98801

A. Background

BLM Office: Wenatchee Field Office

Lease/Serial/Case File No.: 3600774

NEPA Log Number: DOI-BLM-ORWA-W020-2016-0001-CX

Proposed Action Title: Slack Canyon Grazing Lease Renewal

Location of Proposed Action: The Slack Canyon allotment is located approximately 9 miles southeast of Waterville in Douglas County, Washington. The allotment is in the Moses Coulee management area. See attached map. The legal description of the allotment is T. 23 N., R. 23 E. Section 2, NW¼SW¼, Willamette Meridian.

Proposed Action: The lessee has applied to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to renew the existing term grazing lease. The BLM is proposing to renew (fully process) the term grazing lease with the same terms and conditions as the expiring lease. The proposed action would authorize grazing by livestock under the grazing lease as shown in the following table for a term not to exceed 10 years:

Allotment Name	Allotment Number	Authorization Number	Livestock Type	Livestock Number	Season of Use	Active Animal Unit Months (AUMs)
Slack Canyon	0774	3600774	Cattle	30	6/1-7/31	3

The lessee is a qualified applicant for the purposes of a lease renewal. Pursuant to 43 CFR part 4110.1(b)(1), a grazing lease may not be renewed if the lessee seeking renewal has an unsatisfactory record of performance with respect to the previous grazing lease. The BLM reviewed the record of performance for the grazing lease holder for allotment 0774 and determined that the lessee has a satisfactory record of performance relative to compliance with terms and conditions of the existing lease.

B. Land Use Plan Conformance

Land Use Plan Name: Spokane Resource Management Plan (RMP)

Date Approved/Amended: Approved 1987/Amended 1992

The proposed action is in conformance with the Spokane RMP because it is specifically provided for in the following:



The Spokane RMP Record of Decision, Rangeland Program Summary (p. 24) provides for continued grazing of custodial allotments. Custodial allotments, such as Slack Canyon, are mostly unfenced, small tracts which are intermingled with much larger acreages of non-BLM rangelands which limit BLM management opportunities. In this case, the 40 acres of BLM-administered land associated with this allotment is within 1,360 acres of private land owned by the lessee. Allotment 0774 is specifically identified as a C2 allotment; allotments categorized as C2 would remain as custodial management. Page 46 of the RMP Record of Decision, Rangeland Program Summary shows allotment 0774 includes the use of 6 AUMs on 40 acres with a season of use from April 15 to August 15. The proposed action is within the parameters of this use.

Renewing the lease on the Slack Canyon allotment for a period of 10 years is consistent with the livestock grazing management direction contained in the RMP. The BLM-administered lands within the allotment have been identified as available for livestock grazing.

C. Standards for Rangeland Health

A land health evaluation for the Slack Canyon allotment was completed in 2014. The allotment is achieving the 1997 Oregon/Washington Standards for Rangeland Health and was conforming to the Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management. The Oregon/Washington standards are:

1. Watershed Function- Uplands
2. Watershed Function- Riparian
3. Ecological Processes
4. Water Quality
5. Native, Threatened or Endangered (T&E) and Locally Important Species

D. Other Applicable Plans/Strategies

The BLM's National Sage Grouse Strategy (USDI BLM 2004) directs BLM to manage public lands to maintain, enhance, and restore sage-grouse and sagebrush habitats while continuing to provide for multiple uses. This strategy was considered during the land health evaluation. The BLM also used the State of Washington's Greater Sage-Grouse Recovery Plan (Stinson et al. 2004) as a technical reference when developing management consistent with the National Sage Grouse Strategy.

The allotment contains suitable habitat for greater sage-grouse, a locally important species. The Wenatchee Field Office used the Habitat Assessment Framework (HAF) (Stiver et al. 2010) to assess greater sage-grouse habitat in the Slack Canyon allotment. The results of the HAF analysis of site conditions are described in Appendix C of the Douglas Creek Watershed Evaluation (BLM 2014). Based on the HAF analysis of site conditions in the assessment area and influences at larger spatial scales, Allotment 0774 supports healthy, productive, and diverse populations of native plant and animals. Through the land health evaluation process for Douglas Creek (BLM 2014), BLM considered and disclosed the impacts of current grazing management on sage-grouse. Based on the fact that current grazing management has played a role in maintaining suitable conditions for sage-grouse, continuing current grazing management by

renewing the grazing lease (i.e. the proposed action) would not have a significant effect on sage-grouse.

E. Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act

The proposed action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement for two reasons. First, a CX is appropriate in this situation because the proposed lease is consistent with Section 402(h)(1) of the Federal Lands Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1752) as amended by the National Defense Authorization Act 2015. Section 402(h) states:

(1) In general.--The issuance of a grazing permit or lease by the Secretary concerned may be categorically excluded from the requirement to prepare an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.) if (A) the issued permit or lease continues the current grazing management of the allotment; and (B) the secretary concerned--(i) has assessed and evaluated the grazing allotment associated with the lease or permit; and (ii) based on the assessment and evaluation under clause (i) has determined that the allotment--(I) with respect to public land administered by the Secretary of the Interior--(aa) is meeting land health standards.

Second, the proposed action must be screened for extraordinary circumstances. A list of extraordinary circumstances is found at 43 CFR 46.215. These extraordinary circumstances are restated in the lettered paragraphs below. If any are found to apply, an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement is required. The extraordinary circumstances, listed below, have been reviewed and none of them apply to this lease renewal.

a. The proposed action would not have significant impacts on public health or safety.

Continued livestock grazing would not result in impacts on public health or safety.

b. The proposed action would not have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order 11990); floodplains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas.

None of the above mentioned resources except migratory birds are present on the allotment. Consequently, none of these resources would be affected by continued livestock use in this area. Migratory birds were considered within the species groups of sagebrush obligate, shrub-steppe associated and riparian associated, and the allotment is achieving Standard 5 for all of these species groups. Therefore, no impacts to migratory birds were identified. The allotment is within Greater Sage Grouse (GSG) habitat. Based on the land health evaluation, current livestock grazing is not causing a decline in GSG habitat on the Slack Canyon allotment.

c. The proposed action would not have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA Section 102(2)(E)].

There are no highly controversial environmental effects or unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources. The proposed action is to re-authorize an existing grazing lease within the Slack Canyon allotment that continues the current grazing management. The nature of effects associated with authorizing livestock grazing in this allotment is well understood. A land health assessment and evaluation was completed and the allotment was achieving the standards for land health.

d. The proposed action would not have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.

There are no highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or effects that involve unique or unknown environmental risks. The proposed lease renewal is to continue grazing for 10 years within the Slack Canyon allotment. Grazing on the Slack Canyon allotment by this lessee has been occurring since 1984. The effects of grazing on this allotment are well understood and the allotment is meeting land health standards.

e. The proposed action would not establish a precedent for future actions or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.

Implementation would not set precedence for future actions or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects. The 1987 RMP Record of Decision (p. 24) acknowledges that management opportunities within most custodial allotments are limited because these unfenced, small tracts of land are intermingled with larger acreages of non-BLM lands. Any future proposal on lands in the Slack Canyon allotment would undergo separate analysis.

f. The proposed action would not have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.

Implementation does not have any known direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects. The Slack Canyon allotment is a custodial allotment on 40 acres of BLM-administered land. This parcel of BLM-administered land is intermingled with non-BLM lands that are primarily used for livestock grazing. The effects of grazing on this allotment were considered within the context of livestock grazing on both private and BLM-administered land and the allotment is meeting land health standards.

g. The proposed action would not have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by the bureau.

On January 14, 2016, the BLM issued consultation letters regarding proposed 2016 allotment lease renewals, including the Slack Canyon allotment (#0774). Intensive, Class III cultural resource inventory undertaken by the BLM in areas of the 'highest sensitivity' for cultural resources, and those areas potentially most vulnerable to grazing impacts, would be considered adequate to capture the nature of cultural resources within the allotment. The Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP), the Colville Confederated Tribes

(CCT), and the Yakama Indian Nation (YIN) concurred with that determination on January 20, January 28, and February 25, 2016, respectively.

The BLM completed inventory as proposed and identified and recorded a single cultural resource site. The site is not considered significant under any of the National Register criteria; permit renewal will have no adverse effect to Historic Properties. On May 31, 2016, the DAHP, CCT and YIN were consulted regarding inventory results and the BLM determination of No Adverse Effect; the DAHP concurred with that determination June 1, 2016; no response was received from the CCT or YIN.

h. The proposed action would not have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated critical habitat for these species.

No listed species of wildlife are known to occur in the area. The area is near the boundary of the historic range of endangered Columbia Basin pygmy rabbit, but the species has not been documented on this allotment during recent or historic surveys. The proposed action would not have significant impacts on the species since no issues were identified with wildlife habitat on this allotment, and the proposed action of continuing the same grazing management would not affect this. The allotment is within Greater Sage Grouse (GSG) habitat. Based on the land health evaluation, current livestock grazing is not causing a decline in GSG habitat on the Slack Canyon allotment.

No listed species of plants are known to occur in the area.

i. The proposed action would not violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

Implementation would not violate any known law or regulation imposed for the protection of the environment.

j. The proposed action would not have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898).

Continuing livestock grazing in Allotment 0774 for 10 years would not have a disproportionately high or adverse effect on low income or minority populations. Estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau for 2010 data indicate that Douglas County contained at least one minority group at higher concentrations than their respective shares statewide. In other words, Douglas County is considered to contain environmental justice populations because the county contains meaningful greater shares of minority populations when compared to the State of Washington. The proposed action would continue the current level of livestock grazing and associated economic activity within Douglas County.

k. The proposed action would not limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (Executive Order 13007).

The proposed action would authorize grazing with the same terms and conditions as the expiring lease. Because the proposed action would not alter any access to the allotment, continued livestock grazing would not alter access to or ceremonial use of sacred sites on federal lands.

l. The proposed action would not contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and Executive Order 13112).

The proposed action is consistent with BLM regulations and Spokane RMP guidance relevant to non-native species. Rangeland conditions were documented by the 2014 Douglas Creek Watershed Land Health Evaluation that concluded the Slack Canyon Allotment was meeting the OR/WA standards for rangeland health.

Surveys completed during the land health evaluation found that competitive native grass species were present and are expected to limit the resources available to support the growth of non-native species. The percentage of bare ground was near reference condition and is expected to limit the amount of soil available for seed germination by nearby noxious weed and invasive plant species.

Considering the land health evaluation findings, the renewal of the grazing lease is not expected to create conditions that would measurably change the rate of introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or invasive plant species. Non-native invasive plant species present are expected to remain at the same levels after project implementation.

F. Management Determination

This categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because it meets the conditions described above and there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment. The proposed action has been reviewed, and, as described above, none of the extraordinary circumstances described in 43 CFR 46.215 apply.

Based upon review of this proposal, I have determined the Proposed Action is in conformance with the Spokane RMP, qualifies as a categorical exclusion, and does not require further NEPA analysis.

/s/ Linda Coates-Markle
Linda Coates-Markle
Field Manager

7/6/16
Date

G. Contact Person and Reviewers

For additional information concerning this Categorical Review, contact Angela Link, Range Management Specialist 509-665-2116.

Reviewers	Resource	Initials	Date
J.A. Vacca	Wildlife, Special Status Wildlife	JAV	3/11/16
Molly Boyter	Botany, Special Status Plants	mjb	3/10/2016
Kat Russell	Historic/Cultural	klr	06/27/16
Katherine Farrell	NEPA	kf	2/22/16
Pete Sargent	Weeds	PBS	06/02/2016
Angela Link	Range/Grazing	AL	7/6/16
Diane Priebe	Recreation/Visual	DP	2/29/2016
Angela Link	Socio-economics	AL	1/13/16
Keith Anderson	Soil, Water, Air	KAA	3-2-2016

Note: A separate decision document has been prepared for the action covered by this CX.

H. References

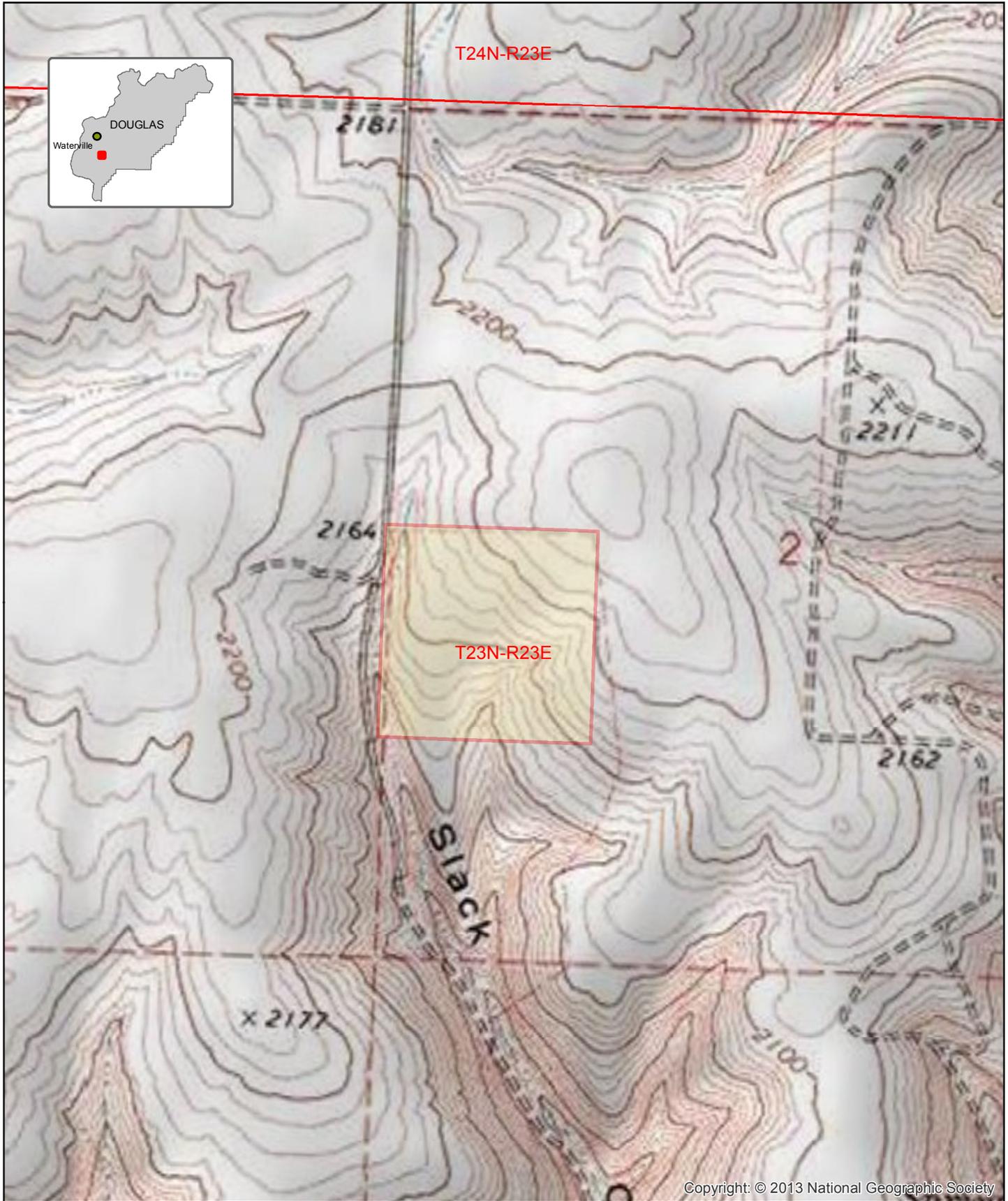
BLM. 2014. Douglas Creek Watershed Assessment. On file at the Wenatchee Field Office, Wenatchee, WA.

Stiver, S.J., Rinkes, E.T., and Naugle, D.E. (eds). 2010. Sage-grouse Habitat Assessment Framework. Unpublished Report. USDI Bureau of Land Management: Idaho State Office, Boise, ID.

USDI BLM 2004. National Sage Grouse Strategy

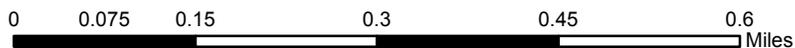
Slack Canyon Grazing Lease

DOI-BLM-ORWA-W020-2015-0001-CX



Legend

-  BLM land in Allotment
-  Township-Range



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