

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

DOI-BLM-MT-C020-2016-0110-EA

June 21, 2016

McGee Allotment Grazing Transfer

Location: Fallon County
T 8N, R 56E, Section 32

U.S. Department of the Interior
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**UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT REVIEW

OFFICE/AREA: Miles City Field Office	DOI-BLM-MT-C020-2016-0110-EA
	DATE POSTED: 6/21/2016
NAME: McGee Unit Allotment Transfer	DATE DUE: 7/05/2016
	FUNDING: 1020
LOCATION: Fallon County T 8N, R 56E, Section 32 (see attached Map 1)	GSGH Management Area: General

ORIGINATOR	TITLE	DATE/INITIALS
Kim Dolatta	Rangeland Management Specialist	7/6/16 <i>KD</i>

REVIEWERS	TITLE	ASSIGNMENT	DATE/INITIALS
Doug Melton	Archaeologist	Cultural/Paleo	06/21/16 <i>DM</i> Cultural Report MT-020-16-126
Andy Daniels	Wildlife Biologist	Wildlife	07/05/16 <i>AJD</i>
Reyer Rens	Supervisory RMS	Review	RR 7/8/2016

ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR

DATE

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

EA NUMBER: DOI-BLM-MT-C020-2016-0110-EA

GR#: 2502521

PROPOSED ACTION/TITLE TYPE: McGee Unit Allotment Transfer

LOCATION OF PROPOSED ACTION: Fallon County
T 8N, R 56E, Section 32 (see attached Map 1)

PREPARING OFFICE: Miles City Field Office

APPLICANT: Rieger Cattle Company, LLC

DATE OF PREPARATION: June 17, 2016

CONFORMANCE WITH APPLICABLE LAND USE PLAN

The proposed action is in conformance with the BLM 2015 Miles City Field Office Approved Resource Management Plan (ARMP). The ARMP states on page 3-11, Livestock Grazing Authorization, MD LG 7 “Approximately 2,700,000 acres and an estimated 546,496 animal unit months (AUMs) are available for livestock grazing; and page 3-10, MD LG 2: “The BLM will follow the BLM’s 1997 Record of Decision for Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management Final Environmental Impact Statement for Montana and North and South Dakota.” The Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management FEIS for Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota ROD states on page 12 “Terms and conditions are a tool to achieve resource conditions in the standard” and on Page 14 that “guidelines are provided to maintain or improve resource conditions in uplands and riparian habitats available to livestock grazing.”

BACKGROUND

The McGee Unit Allotment (01022) is located in Fallon County approximately ten miles west of Plevna, MT. The allotment consists of 640 acres of Land Use land and 1,904 acres of private land. The Land Use land is fenced separate from the private lands. There are 154 Active AUMs permitted in the allotment for cattle to graze from May 1 to November 3. The applicant provided a lease showing control of the base property for the McGee Unit Allotment. They have submitted the appropriate grazing application forms and have applied for a change in the grazing period. The allotment was assessed for and met Land Health Standards in 2012.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the action is to fully process the term grazing permit on the McGee Unit Allotment (01022) in accordance with all applicable laws, regulations, and policies and in accordance with Title 43 CFR § 4130.2(a) which states, “Grazing permits or leases shall be issued to qualified applicants to authorize use on the public lands and other lands under the administration of the Bureau of Land Management that are designated as available for livestock grazing through land use plans.”

The need for the action is to issue the grazing permit with terms and conditions for grazing use that would meet the Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health, Approved MCFO Resource Management Plan, and other pertinent multiple use objectives for the allotment.

SCOPING

This project was posted on Montana/Dakotas BLM ePlanning site on 06/20/2016 for public information requests. Internal scoping identified the issues below. No issues were brought forth by the public.

ISSUES IDENTIFIED THROUGH SCOPING:

- Cultural:
 - Effects to cultural sites, paleontological localities, or sacred sites of interest to Tribes
- Livestock Grazing and Administration:
 - Effects to livestock management on the allotment and permitted use
- Vegetation:
 - Effects to vegetative condition and meeting Standards for Rangeland Health
- Wildlife:
 - Effects to habitats of game and nongame wildlife species, including sage grouse.

PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action is for BLM to issue a grazing permit for the McGee Unit Allotment (01022) with changes to the number of livestock and grazing dates. The term of the permit will be for nine years May 11, 2016 through February 28, 2025. The permit will be issued as follows:

GR# 2502521

Allotment Name & Number	Livestock Number	Kind	Grazing Begin	Period End	%PL	Type Use	AUMs
McGee Unit (01022)	22	Cattle	04/01	10/30	100	Active	154

Total Active AUMs: 154

Terms and Conditions:

Grazing is authorized during the listed season for the recognized capacity of the public land and is not to exceed the allotted AUMs. A herd of 100 head of cattle can graze for a total of 47 days.

Supplemental feed (includes salting) will not be placed within one quarter of a mile of stock watering facilities, riparian zones, hardwood draws or wetlands. Supplemental feed is defined as feed that provides for improved livestock nutrition or rangeland management, but does not replace forage available from public lands.

ALTERNATIVE 1 - NO ACTION

The no action alternative would continue the current management. Under the no action alternative the permit would continue to be authorized as shown below:

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Allotment Name & Number	Livestock Number	Kind	Grazing Begin	Period End	%PL	Type Use	AUMs
McGee Unit (01022)	25	Cattle	05/01	11/03	100	Active	154

Total Active AUMs: 154

Terms and Conditions:

Grazing is not to exceed the carrying capacity of the public land.

Supplemental feed (includes salting) will not be placed within one quarter of a mile of stock watering facilities, riparian zones, hardwood draws or wetlands. Supplemental feed is defined as feed that provides for improved livestock nutrition or rangeland management, but does not replace forage available from public lands.

COMMON TO ALL ALTERNATIVES

The public lands in the project area will continue to be monitored according to the Miles City Field Office Monitoring Plan to ensure Land Health Standards and Habitat Objectives are met. Monitoring is consistent with BLM Core Terrestrial Indicators and Methods and the BLM Technical Reference - Interpreting Indicators of Rangeland Health.

Range Improvements listed on Form 4120-8, Assignment of Range Improvements, will be maintained and used in connection with the authorized grazing permit.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The following resources have been evaluated in this EA:

ELEMENTS

Determination*	Resource	Rationale for Determination
NI	Air Quality	No impacts are anticipated. The allotment meets the air quality standard. The current activities on the allotment follow the Section 176 Clean Air Act.
NP	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern	There are no ACECs located in the project area.
PI	Cultural/Paleontology Resources	No cultural or paleontological resources are affected. Meets inventory waiver requirements.
NI	Environmental Justice	Environmental justice concerns associated with this project are not anticipated. Full analysis is not needed.
NP	Farmlands (Prime or Unique)	There are no prime or unique farmlands in the project area.
NI	Fire	Wildfire potential or severity will not be affected.
NI	Floodplains	Floodplains in the project area will not be adversely impacted from occupation or modification; therefore, the proposed action will be in compliance with Executive Order 11988.

NP	Forestry	There are no forest resources located within the project area.
NI	Geology/Minerals	There will be no impacts to geological or mineral resources associated with this project.
NI	Invasive, Non-native Species	There are some small patches of Canada thistle along the creek, but the proposed action should have no impact to the infestation.
NI	Lands and Realty	No impacts would occur to existing land use authorizations.
NP	Lands With Wilderness Characteristics	There are no Lands With Wilderness Characteristics present in the project area.
PI	Livestock Grazing/ Administration	Will be analyzed in the affected environment and environmental impacts.
NI	Native American Religious Concerns	There are no known or anticipated Native American Religious Concerns for this allotment.
NI	Recreation	There would be no impacts to recreation associated with this project.
NI	Socio-economics	The proposed action would not affect the economy of the community in ways that would result in impacts to its character, so full analysis is not needed.
NI	Soils	The proposed action will maintain the current conditions and meet soil health standards.
NP	Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Plant Species	There are no known populations of special status plant species within the project area.
NP	Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Animal Species	T&E species habitat does not exist within this area.
PI	Vegetation	Will be analyzed in the affected environment and environmental impacts.
NI	VRM	The project is located within VRM Class II and IV. The proposed action will have no changes to the visual character of the landscape and there will be no impact to the Visual Resource Management rating.
NP	Wastes (hazardous or solid)	There is no potential for hazardous or solid waste concerns associated with this project.
NI	Water Quality (surface/ground)	The allotment continues to meet the water quality standard. The current activities support designated beneficial uses and meet State water quality standards.
NI	Wetlands/Riparian Zones	The proposed action will maintain the current rating of proper functioning condition along O' Fallon Creek.
NP	Wild and Scenic Rivers	The project area does not contain any Wild and Scenic Rivers.
NP	Wilderness	There are no designated Wilderness areas in the project area.
PI	Wildlife	Will be analyzed in the affected environment and environmental impacts.
PI	GRSG Habitat (General)	Will be analyzed in the affected environment and environmental impacts.

NP	GRSG Habitat (Priority)	The project area is not within a GRSG Priority Habitat Management Area.
NP	GRSG Habitat (Restoration)	The project area is not within a GRSG Restoration Habitat Management Area.

*

NP = not present in the area impacted by the proposed or alternative actions

NI = present, but not affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required

PI = present and may be impacted to some degree. Will be analyzed in affected environment and environmental impacts. (NOTE: PI does not mean impacts are likely to be significant in any way).

Cultural Resources: A review of Montana SHPO and BLM Cultural and Paleontological Databases shows that no cultural sites and no paleontological localities have been recorded on public lands in the allotment (see BLM Cultural Resources Report MT-020-16-126).

Livestock Grazing and Administration: There are 154 Active AUMs permitted in the McGee Unit Allotment for cattle to be used between May 1 and November 3. Terms and conditions of the permit address the grazing season and placement of supplemental feed and salting.

The Land Use land in Section 32 is fenced as one pasture. There are other private land pastures that are utilized along with the BLM pasture as part of a deferred rotational grazing system. Other than the fence, there are no range improvements in the allotment. O' Fallon Creek runs through the central portion of the pasture from south to north and is used for watering livestock along with range improvements located on private land.

Vegetation: Uplands in the allotment are dominated by crested wheatgrass. Silver sagebrush is the dominate shrub in the uplands with only slight browsing. There is abundant species diversity along and adjacent to O' Fallon Creek which was determined to be at Proper Functioning Condition. Bare ground is minimal with abundant litter and residual cover throughout the allotment. The allotment was found to be meeting all standard and guidelines during the last assessment and found management was maintaining stable conditions. Grazing has been slight to moderate.

Wildlife: The allotment provides habitat for pronghorns, mule deer, sage grouse, sharp-tailed grouse and prairie dogs. The allotment also provides habitat for a variety of songbirds, raptors, small mammals, and other non-game. The project area lies within General Sage Grouse Habitat. There are no known sage grouse leks located within the allotment; the nearest lek is approximately three miles to the south of the allotment. The allotment provides winter range for mule deer and pronghorn; however, winter range habitat has not been delineated in the project area.

The allotment is located within the General Habitat for Greater Sage-Grouse, and is on the marginal end of usability. Sage grouse use portions of this allotment to lek and breed (seasonally from early March to mid-May); and then likely move to other adjacent areas for the remainder of their life cycle annually. Portions of this allotment may be used for winter habitat in low precipitation years.

Habitat for T&E species does not occur within or adjacent to this allotment.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

DESCRIPTION OF IMPACTS FROM PROPOSED ACTION

Cultural Resources: The proposed action would have no effect to cultural properties listed on or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The proposed action meets the inventory exemption criteria found in BLM's Montana/Dakotas Cultural Resources Handbook H-8110-1, Appendix One, Range 1. Issuance of a grazing permit is an action that generally does not involve any direct surface disturbance and as a non-surface disturbing type of activity, has little or no potential or ability to significantly affect cultural properties. As a result, no cultural resource inventory is necessary prior to approving and authorizing this undertaking to proceed. No cultural resource values considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places would be impacted by this undertaking.

Livestock Grazing and Administration: Grazing administration would remain similar to what it is under the current permit. Total Active AUMs would remain at 154 AUMs, but there would be a change in the grazing period. It would change from May 1 through November 3 to April 1 through October 30. There would be a slight change in the terms and conditions of the permit by clarifying language that grazing cannot exceed the recognized capacity of the public land. The proposed changes should allow the allotment to continue to meet Standards for Rangeland Health. Management of livestock will still be rotated through a deferred grazing system.

Vegetation: Under the proposed action, only slight changes in management are proposed. The changes should continue to allow for conditions to meet standards for rangeland health. According to the assessment conducted in 2012, conditions are meeting standards. The overall condition of the vegetation in the allotment would be expected to continue to meet the Standards for Rangeland Health.

Wildlife: The proposed action may have immeasurable effects on breeding, nesting and brood rearing activities. The renewal of the permit would adjust the season of use and reduce the number of livestock but would not change AUM numbers or livestock usage type. This process would not be expected to change the existing use of the vegetation on the ground in any appreciable way (amount used would remain the same) and as such will not result in habitat loss or degradation and will not require a net conservation gain (MCFO ARMP pg. 2-8, MD-1). The same resources would be available to SSS wildlife species, including sage grouse.

DESCRIPTION OF IMPACTS FROM ALTERNATIVE 1 - NO ACTION

Cultural Resources: Cultural and paleontological resources would not be impacted if the no action alternative was selected. No cultural resource values considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places would be affected by this alternative.

Livestock Grazing and Administration: Under the no action alternative, livestock grazing would continue as currently permitted. There would be no changes to the terms and conditions of the

permit. Current management would result in similar conditions to those found on the allotments.

Vegetation: With continued implementation of current management, vegetation conditions would be expected to remain the same under the no action alternative. Conditions would be expected to continue to meet standards for rangeland health.

Wildlife: With no changes to management, habitat conditions are expected to remain suitable for wildlife within this allotment.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

There will be no other cumulative impacts from this project in addition to those identified in the Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management EIS completed in August of 1997 and carried forward into the new MCFO ARMP, approved September 21, 2015. Those cumulative impacts include population increase or decrease, agricultural subsidies, economic competition, and restructuring, wildlife use, management practices and land use changes such as increase recreation use. A detailed discussion of these cumulative impacts can be found on Pages 27 and 28 of the Standards and Guidelines EIS.

There will be no cumulative impacts to wildlife species or their habitat as a result of this permit transfer action.

MITIGATION

None

CONSULTATION/COORDINATION

Rieger Cattle Company, LLC

LIST OF PREPARERS

Kim Dolatta, Rangeland Management Specialist

Andy Daniels, Wildlife Biologist

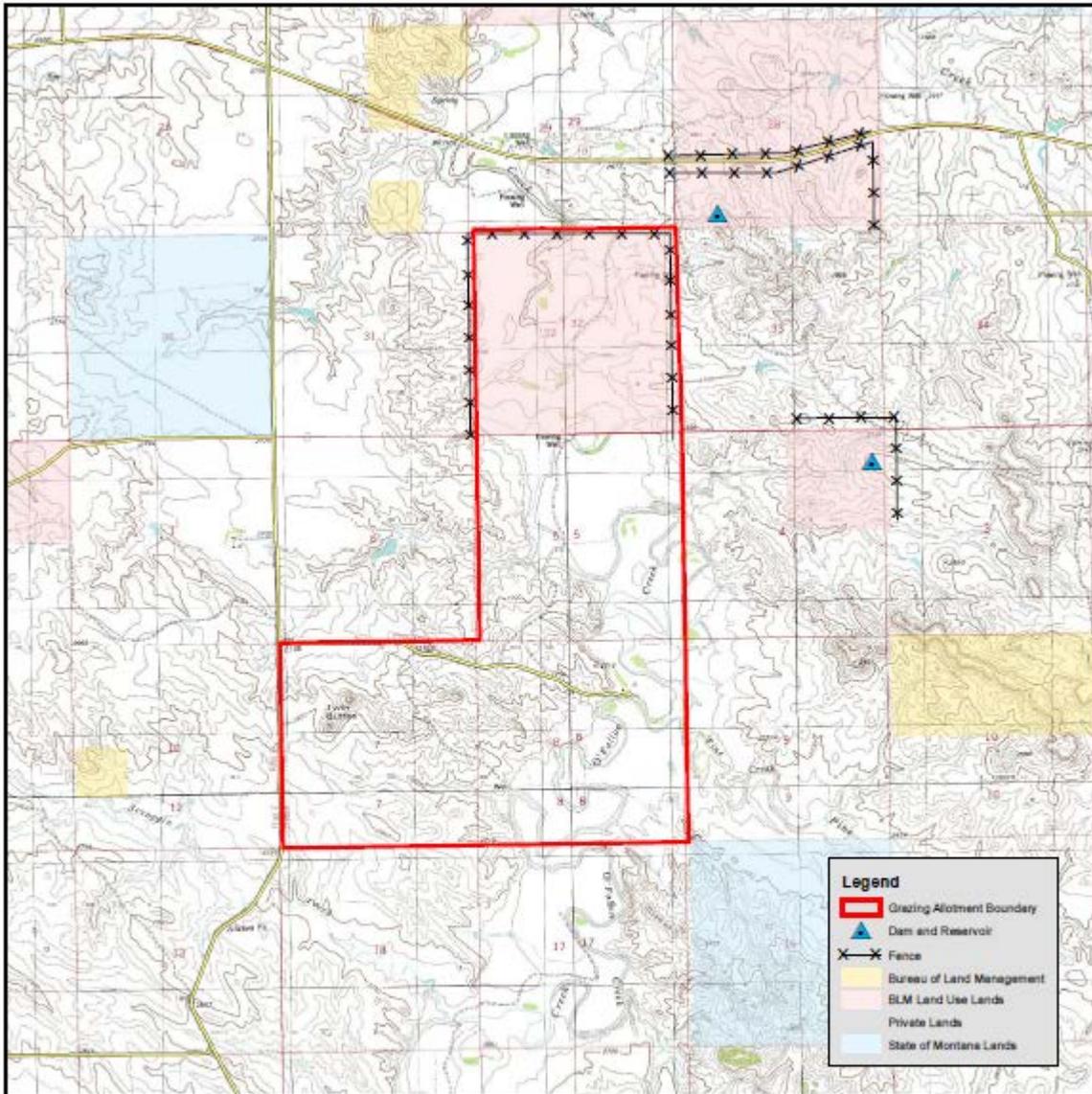
Doug Melton, Archaeologist

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Kathleen Bockness, Planning and Environmental Coordinator

Map 1.

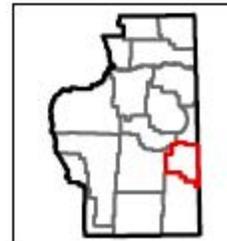
McGee Unit - 01022



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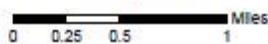
T 8N, R 56E
Section 32



CAUTION:
Land ownership data is derived from less accurate data than the 1:24,000 scale base map. Therefore, land ownership may not be shown for parcels smaller than 40 acres, and land ownership lines may have plotting errors due to source data.



1:48,000



Date: 6/10/2016