

Mother Lode Field Office
July 2025

Granite Springs Allotment Grazing Use EA

DOI-BLM-CA-C080-2025-0020-EA



INTRODUCTION

This Environmental Assessment (EA) is prepared to disclose and analyze the environmental consequences of changing the terms and conditions of the Granite Springs allotment #04142.

The EA is a site-specific analysis of potential impacts that could result with the implementation of one of the alternatives. The EA assists the BLM in project planning and ensuring compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and in compliance with other laws and policies affecting the alternatives. If the decision maker determines that the proposed action has “significant” impacts following the analysis in the EA, then an EIS would be prepared for the project. If not, a grazing decision will be issued along with a FONSI statement, documenting the reasons why implementation of the selected alternative would not result in “significant” environmental impacts.

Background

Table 1

Name	County	Acres	Type and # of Livestock	Season of Use	AUMs	Current Exp. Date
Granite Springs - 04142	Mariposa	Current – 982	Current – 97 cows	Current – 3/1 – 4/30	Current - 195	7/21/2027
		Proposed – Same	Proposed – Same	1/1 – 4/30	Proposed – 383	

Purpose and Need for the Action

The purpose of the action is to consider changing the terms and conditions of the Granite Springs allotment #04142. If authorized, the permittee would be allowed to utilize the allotment for an additional two months (Jan & Feb). Grazing would be in accordance with 43 CFR 4100 and consistent with the provisions of the Taylor Grazing Act, Public Rangelands Improvement Act, and Federal Land Policy and Management Act. The purpose of the action is also to ensure that all authorizations implement provisions of, and are in conformance with, the Sierra Resource Management Plan (February 2008), and are in conformance with the Central California Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health (2000).

The action is needed to allow the grazing permittee to fully utilize the allotment as the allotment has been underutilized in the past. This action would help reduce fire danger in the area.

Scoping and Issues

The proposed action underwent internal, interdisciplinary scoping.

Prevention of Unnecessary or Undue Degradation

In addition to the management prescriptions discussed in this EA, including all terms and conditions, BLM may use its authority to close an area the allotment to grazing use or take other measures to protect resources at any time, if needed. Therefore, issuance of a grazing lease with appropriate terms and conditions is consistent with BLM’s responsibility to manage the public’s use, occupancy, and development of the public lands and prevent unnecessary or undue degradation of the lands. (43 USC 1732(b)).

Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, and Plans

The Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA) requires federal agencies to complete formal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) for any action that “may affect” federally listed species or critical habitat. The ESA also requires federal agencies to use their authorities to carry out programs for the conservation of endangered and threatened species.

In August 2004, the State Director, California Bureau of Land Management and the California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) addressed the issue of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) Section 106 compliance procedures for processing grazing permit lease renewals for livestock as defined in 43 CFR 4100.0-5. The State Director and the SHPO amended the 2004 State Protocol Agreement between California Bureau of Land Management and The California State Historic Preservation Officer with the 2004 Grazing Amendment, Supplemental Procedures for Livestock Grazing Permit/Lease Renewal. This amendment allows for the renewal of existing grazing permits prior to completing all NHPA compliance needs as long as the 2004 State Protocol direction, the BLM 8100 Series Manual Guidelines, and specific amendment direction for planning, inventory methodology, tribal and interested party consultation, evaluation, effect, treatment, and monitoring stipulations are followed. The 2004 Grazing Amendment remains in effect as a part of the 2012 State Protocol Agreement. The Mother Lode Field Office did not need to invoke the amendment to complete its Section 106 obligations to renew the grazing leases under the proposed alternative.

Plan Conformance

Determination:

The proposed action is in conformance with the Sierra Resource Management Plan (RMP), approved in February 2008, including the Central California Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health.

Rationale:

The proposed action would occur in areas identified as available for livestock grazing in the Sierra Resource Management Plan (RMP). The proposed action is consistent with the land use decisions and resource management goals and objectives of the plan, as described in the RMP on pages 23-24. The key decisions, goals, and objectives include: manage livestock to achieve the four fundamentals of rangeland health; change authorized grazing preference and/or season of use to meet or make progress toward meeting standards established by the Central California Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health approved in July 2000.

Rangeland Health

The Central California Standards for Rangeland Health are as follows:

Soils: Soils exhibit functional biological and physical characteristics that are appropriate to soil type, climate, and land form.

Species: Viable, healthy, productive, and diverse populations of native species, including special status species (Federal T&E, Federal proposed, Federal candidates, BLM sensitive, or California State T&E) are maintained or enhanced where appropriate.

Riparian/Wetland: Riparian/wetland vegetation, structure and diversity, and stream channels and floodplains are functioning properly, and meeting regional and local management objectives.

Water Quality: Surface and groundwater quality complies with objectives of the Clean Water Act and other applicable water quality requirements, including meeting the California State standards.

Table 3

Allotment Name and Number	Date of Assessment	Date of Determination
Granite Springs – 04142	June 26, 2025	June 26, 2025

CHAPTER 2: PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVE

Proposed Action

This proposed action is to authorize a change in terms and conditions of the Granite Springs allotment. As the lessee has a 3-year lease on the base property and only two years remain on the lease, the authorization will be for two years. In two years, if all standards for Rangeland Health are being met, the lease will be renewed for a period of three years to match base property lease.

A. Mandatory Terms and Conditions

Table 4

Allotment	Acreage	Percent BLM	Number of Livestock	Kind	From	To	AUMs	Lease Length
Granite Springs #04142	982	100	97	Cows	1/1	4/30	383	2 yrs

Alternative 1 – (No Action)

Under this alternative, no action would occur to the terms and conditions of the grazing authorization.

Current Livestock Management

The lessee leases approximately 1300 acres of a private base ranch that he grazes in-kind with the BLM allotment during the grazing season of March 1 through April 30. The cows are allowed to drift between private and public lands.

CHAPTER 3: ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

The following supplemental authorities are not relevant to this project because related resources or conditions are not present: areas of critical environmental concern; essential fish habitat; prime or unique farmlands; floodplains; Native American cultural values; solid or hazardous wastes; wild and scenic rivers; wilderness; or wild horse and burro herds.

Air Quality

Affected Environment

The project area is in the Mountain Counties Air Basin which is classified as federal non-attainment for ozone 8-hour standard under the National Ambient Air Quality Standards. A state implementation plan (SIP) for California identifies sources of emissions which include motor vehicles, consumer products, and pesticides. The SIP also includes control measures to reduce emissions.

Impacts of Proposed Action and Alternative 1

The relatively small livestock operation and slight vehicle use would not affect air quality under the proposed action and no action alternative.

Cultural Resources

The BLM conducted studies pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) for the proposed action in 2021 during the renewal of the grazing permit. The studies included background record searches, Native American consultation outreach, focused fieldwork, and other reasonable-and-good faith efforts to identify and consider effects to significant cultural resources within the proposed action's area of potential effects (APE). Tribal consultation resulted in no response concerning the proposed action. An additional two months of grazing does not significantly change the impacts to cultural resources and does not warrant renewed consultation efforts.

Affected Environment

To date, one site has been identified within the allotment (within and near the APE): CA-018-TM-236 (historic-era house site). The site was revisited in association with this undertaking and was determined not eligible to the NRHP. The site is fenced due to Tribal concerns identified in the 2007 consultation effort.

Impacts of Proposed Action

CA-018-TM-236 is not eligible to the National Register of Historic Places. There is fencing in place to protect the historic artifacts. There will be no impact to historic properties from the proposed action.

Impacts of Alternative 1 (No Action)

Elimination of grazing on this allotment would not affect cultural resources.

Invasive, non-native species

Medusahead, Italian thistle, and tocalote are present in small amounts on the allotment. Non-native species are not affecting native species or contributing to other potential environmental problems, such as fire hazard or erosion.

Impacts of the Proposed Action

Invasive weed species are present on the allotment. Allowing the leasee to graze an additional two months will reduce vegetation across the allotment but would not result in a notable change in invasive weed species.

Impacts of Alternative 1 (No Action)

Not changing the terms and conditions would not be expected to noticeably reduce invasive species on the allotment.

Recreation

Affected Environment

The allotment is accessible to hunters and hikers; however, usage is limited.

Impacts of the Proposed Action

The primary impact of grazing on recreation opportunities will be the presence of domestic livestock and the livestock operator in the area during the grazing season. However, no impacts are anticipated due to limited recreational use.

Impacts of Alternative 1 (No Action)

Not changing the terms and conditions would have no effect on recreational use within the allotment.

Soils

Affected Environment

Four soil types on the allotment include: Auburn stony loam, 30 to 75% slopes; Auburn rocky loam, 30 to 75% slopes; Auburn very rocky loam, 30 to 75% slope; and Maymen gravelly loam, 30 to 75% slopes. Predominant soil types are Auburn stony loam and Auburn rocky loam. The allotment has sufficient forage, and residual dry matter is adequate to sustain soil health. The allotment was assessed to be achieving the rangeland health standard for soil health.

Impacts of the Proposed Action

There is little evidence of erosion or compaction on the allotment. Therefore, the proposed action is not expected to result in deterioration of soil health.

Impacts of Alternative 1 (No Action)

Elimination of grazing would not affect soil productivity or stability on the allotment.

Water Quality

Affected Environment

The allotment is located within the San Joaquin River Basin portion of the Upper Merced Watershed. The San Joaquin River is the principal waterway in the basin. There are six intermittent creeks and a permanent spring on the allotment.

The allotment was assessed to be achieving the rangeland health standard for water quality. The allotment is not in a watershed designated by California as a 303d impaired water bodies under the Clean Water Act.

Impacts of the Proposed Action

Due to the small nature of the livestock operations, and the good health of the riparian areas in the allotment, the proposed action will have little to no impact on water quality. In addition, the watershed is not listed as 303d impaired by the State of California and beneficial uses of the watersheds will not be impacted by the livestock grazing that is occurring within the allotment.

Impacts of Alternative 1 (No Action)

Not changing the term and conditions is expected to have no impact on water quality.

Wetlands/Riparian

Lotic (moving water) riparian areas are functioning properly when adequate vegetation, landform, or large woody debris is present to dissipate stream energy associated with high waterflows, thereby reducing erosion and improving water quality; filter sediment, capture bedload, and aid floodplain development; improve flood-water retention and ground-water

recharge; develop root masses that stabilize streambanks against cutting action; develop diverse ponding and channel characteristics to provide the habitat and the water depth, duration, and temperature necessary for fish production, waterfowl breeding, and other uses; and support greater biodiversity. The functioning condition of riparian-wetland areas is a result of interaction among geology, soil, water, and vegetation.

Lentic (still water) wetland areas are functioning properly when adequate vegetation, landform, or debris is present to: dissipate energies associated with wind action, wave action, and overland flow from adjacent sites, thereby reducing erosion and improving water quality; filter sediment and aid floodplain development; improve flood-water retention and ground-water recharge; develop root masses that stabilize islands and shoreline features against cutting action; restrict water percolation; develop diverse ponding characteristics to provide habitat and the water depth, duration, and temperature necessary for fish production water-bird breeding, and other uses and support greater biodiversity.

Affected Environment

There are six intermittent streams and one permanent spring on the allotment. The spring is the only source of perennial water on the allotment. A fence was constructed in 2021 to protect the spring from cattle usage. To provide water for the livestock a water trough was installed at the same time as the fence was constructed. The allotment was assessed to be achieving the rangeland health standard for wetland/riparian

Impacts of the Proposed Action

As the spring is protected, allowing the cattle to graze for an additional two months is anticipated to have little impact on wetland/riparian area.

Impacts of Alternative 1 (No Action)

Not changing the term and conditions is expected to have no impact on wetlands/riparian zones.

Wildlife

Affected Environment

A mosaic of non-native annual grassland and chaparral dominates much of the allotment. There are also oak woodland and riparian stringers in the drainages. The allotment is within the year-long range of the Mariposa deer herd. It is not considered critical area for the herd. Surveys of the allotment indicate an array of typical, native wildlife species for the area, such as coyote, deer, and several species of songbirds.

Special Status Species

No special status species occur within the allotment.

Impacts of all Alternatives

As no special status species occur within the allotment, neither the proposed action nor alternative are expected to impact wildlife.

Vegetation

Affected Environment

Dominant woody upland species include chamise, white leaf manzanita, common manzanita, buckbrush, yerba santa, blue oak, and gray pine. Interior live oak, California buckeye, willow, and poison oak are often associated with drainages. Filaree is prominent in the grasslands.

Special Status Species – Four occurrences of Mariposa clarkia, *Clarkia biloba ssp. australis*, a BLM sensitive species (California Rare Plant Rank 1B.2), overlap with the western edge of the Granite Springs allotment.

Impacts of all alternatives:

Due to a recent fire, impacts of grazing on Mariposa clarkia are unknown. Monitoring of the population will begin in spring 2026. Any impacts of grazing on individuals will be assessed and mitigation measures will be implemented as needed to minimize damage.

Cumulative Impacts

Because no site-specific adverse impacts are expected for any resources (described above), cumulative impacts at the larger, watershed scale are not anticipated for the proposed alternative.

CHAPTER 4: CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Persons, Groups, and Agencies Consulted

- Chris Ellis

Public Participation

The EA will be available on BLM's website for a 15-day public review period.

List of Preparers and Reviewers

- Lynn Robinson, Cultural
- Taylor Edwards, Botanist
- Jeff Jones, Wildlife Biologist, Range and NEPA Lead
- Noah Triplett, Recreation Planner

Reviewers:

Cultural

Botany

Wildlife and Range

Recreation