



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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CA-170.40

NOTICE OF PROPOSED ACTION

Dear Interested Party:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Bishop Field Office, is proposing to reissue eight 10-year grazing permits to livestock operators to authorize continued livestock grazing on existing public land allotments. To ensure appropriate rangeland resource stewardship, the reissued 10-year grazing permits would include grazing terms and conditions based on specific allotment needs and derived from the BLM Bishop Resource Management Plan (RMP) and the Central California Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management (Rangeland Health S&Gs).

During 2008, the Bishop Field Office will prepare 5 environmental assessments (EAs) to analyze the impacts of re-authorizing the eight 10-year grazing permits on 19 existing public land allotments. Allotments with similar topography, soils, vegetation, and resource values will be grouped together for analysis in each EA.

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the opportunity to review the proposed action and to help us identify issues and concerns that should be addressed in the individual EAs. Table 1 provides a schedule of livestock grazing authorization EAs to be completed during 2008. Maps 1 through 4 provide an overview of allotments to be analyzed during 2008.

Need for the Proposed Action

Seventeen 10-year grazing permits were reissued in 2007. Associated EAs were prepared for the permits prior to permit issuance. The remaining eight 10-year grazing permits administered by the Bishop Field Office have expired, however, interim grazing permits have been issued in accordance with Sec. 325, Title III, H.R. 2691, Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2004 (P.L. 108-108), which was enacted on November 10, 2003. Renewing permits under this Appropriations Act authorized existing grazing use to continue, while allowing BLM time to complete rangeland health allotment assessments and applicable National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements. Pursuant to NEPA, an environmental assessment (EA) must be prepared to analyze the affects of livestock grazing to determine if re-authorizing the 10-year grazing permit(s) is appropriate. The proposed action is needed to authorize grazing in accordance with grazing regulation 43 CFR 4100 and to be consistent with the provisions of the Taylor Grazing Act, the Public Rangelands Improvement Act, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, and for some allotments, BLM's Interim Management Policy for Lands under Wilderness Review (H-8550-1).

Plan Conformance

The proposed action is subject to the Bishop Resource Management Plan (RMP), approved on March 23, 1993, as amended by the Record of Decision, Central California Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management (Rangeland Health S&Gs), approved by the Secretary of the Interior on July 13, 2000.

The proposed action is in conformance with the Bishop RMP, as amended, as required by regulation (43 CFR §1610.5-3(a)).

Remarks:

The proposed action would occur in areas identified for livestock grazing in the Bishop Resource Management Plan. The proposed action is consistent with the land use decisions and resource management goals and objectives of the plan. Analysis of potential impacts to Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep and appropriate consultation with U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service will be conducted on affected domestic sheep allotments.

Rangeland health assessments were completed on all grazing allotments under jurisdiction of the Bishop Field Office in conformance with the Record of Decision, Central California Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management, approved by the Secretary of the Interior on July 13, 2000 (Rangeland Health S&Gs, Decision, pg 12).

For portions of Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) within allotments, continued livestock grazing within these allotments complies with BLM's Interim Management Policy for Lands under Wilderness Review (H-8550-1). The law provides for, and the BLM's policy is to allow, continued grazing uses on lands under wilderness review in the manner and degree in which these uses were being conducted on public land at the time of the passage of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (October 21, 1976). Grazing within WSAs is subject to reasonable regulations, policies, and practices.

Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) containing a portion of acreage within grazing allotments to be analyzed in the EAs during 2008 are Masonic Mountain WSA (CA-010-102), Bodie WSA (CA-010-100), Bodie Mountain WSA (CA-010-099), Mt. Biedeman WSA (CA-010-095), Mormon Meadow WSA (CA-010-094), Walford Springs WSA (CA-010-092), Granite Mountain WSA (CA-010-090), Excelsior WSA (CA-010-088) and Chidago Canyon WSA (CA-010-079). Table 1 and Maps 1 through 4 summarize and depict the WSAs and allotment boundary overlap for those allotments to be analyzed during 2008.

Proposed Action

The proposed action is to continue present livestock grazing management, livestock numbers, livestock kind, and season of use, but with revised terms and conditions to the expiring grazing permits. The revised terms and conditions were developed from the Bishop Resource Management Plan (RMP) and the Central California Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management (Rangeland Health S&Gs). Some guidelines would be applicable regardless of the specific rangeland health condition, as they were designed to help protect and sustain rangeland health and were not intended to be applied only to remedy problems (Rangeland Health S&Gs, Appendix 1, pg 2). Terms

and conditions would be specific for each allotment and would be incorporated into the reissued 10-year grazing permits to ensure compliance with the Bishop RMP and the Central California Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines.

Proposed Terms and Conditions (that would be applied to allotments with minor, site specific modifications):

The goal of the following terms and conditions is to provide the permittee the opportunity to realize the highest, long-term, agricultural, economic return with the least risk to rangeland health. Livestock will be managed to improve progress toward maintaining or promoting adequate amounts of vegetative ground cover, and maintaining soil moisture storage and soil stability appropriate for the ecological sites within the management units. Maintaining adequate ground cover should allow soil organisms, plants, and animals to support the hydrologic, nutrient, and energy cycles.

1. Sagebrush Grassland, Semi-desert Grass & Shrubland, or Pinyon-Juniper Woodland Rangelands: Livestock grazing operations will be conducted so that forage utilization on key perennial species does not exceed 40 percent on the average. Key areas will be selected and utilization on key species will be estimated in accordance with the current BLM technical reference. Utilization monitoring will be conducted by a BLM employee, permittee, and/or trained range consultant. Then, all key area data for the allotment will be averaged and checked by a BLM employee to determine if this term and condition has been met. If utilization guidelines on the average of the upland key areas across the allotment are exceeded for 2 consecutive years or in any 2 years out of every 5 years, BLM will consult with the permittee to address the situation, potentially with a management change (e.g. change in livestock distribution). Because of the potential long-term damage to perennial grass species associated with severe grazing, when grazing utilization exceeds 70% in any upland key area for more than 2 consecutive years, immediate management action will be taken to remedy the problem in the area of the allotment that the key area represents.

2. Riparian Areas & Wetlands: Grazing practices should maintain a minimum herbage stubble height of 4-6 inches on the average on all stream-side, riparian, and wetland areas at the end of the growing season. There should be sufficient residual stubble or regrowth at the end of the growing season to meet the requirements to sustain plant vigor, maintenance, bank protection, and sediment entrapment.

3. Within identified critical mule deer winter range and migration habitat (Bishop RMP, 1993) within the allotments, there will be no more than an average of 20 percent utilization of the current year's annual growth on key browse species (bitterbrush) prior to October 1.

4. No salt, or other nutrient supplement, or sheep bedding is allowed within ¼ mile of creeks, aspen groves, meadows, sage grouse strutting grounds, or special status plant populations. No salt or nutrient supplement is allowed within ¼ mile of any identified archeological or petroglyph site.

5. No supplemental feeding (i.e. hay, pellets/cubes, or other forages) is allowed at any time on public lands without the BLM's authorization. If authorization is granted, the permittee will be required to obtain "certified weed-free" feed for supplemental feeding of livestock.
6. Range improvements in each pasture/allotment will be functioning properly prior to livestock turnout.
7. No trailing through a neighboring allotment without prior authorization by the BLM. Prior to trailing through a neighboring allotment, the trailing permittee will notify the BLM and all identified interested parties.
8. Minimize or stop the spread of weeds by checking livestock for weed seed, or other plant material from species such as 'perennial pepperweed,' coming from private land or other areas where known weed infestations exist. A guide on preventing the spread of weeds along with specific species of concern is described in the Eastern Sierra Weed Management Area Noxious Weed Identification Handbook.
9. Notify BLM of noxious weed locations when encountered on allotments.

Current Management (No Action) Alternative

This alternative involves reissuing eight new 10-year grazing permits with the same terms and conditions as under the existing authorizations. Mandatory terms and conditions including livestock number, livestock kind, season of use, percent public land and allocated animal unit months are required for each allotment in accordance with 43 CFR 4130.3-1.

No Grazing Alternative

Under this alternative, BLM would not reissue the 10-year grazing permits for these allotments. As a result, grazing would not be authorized on these allotments. If this would be a permanent cancellation, BLM would initiate a process in accordance with the 4100 regulations to permanently eliminate grazing on these allotments. The BLM would be required to complete an RMP plan amendment in accordance with BLM planning regulations.

Public Comment

We welcome any comments or questions you may have regarding the proposed action and/or the associated environmental assessment (EA) process. Please send written comments to:

Bureau of Land Management
Bishop Field Office
Attention: Jeff Starosta
351 Pacu Lane, Suite 100
Bishop, CA 93514

All EAs developed by our field office will be posted on the BLM internet site for public review and comment at <http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/bishop.html> If you are unable to access the internet and would like a hardcopy of a particular EA, please contact our office.

Thank you for your interest in this environmental analysis process. Please contact Jeff Starosta at (760) 872-5032, or jstarost@ca.blm.gov should you have any questions, concerns, or comments regarding this letter or the environmental assessment process.

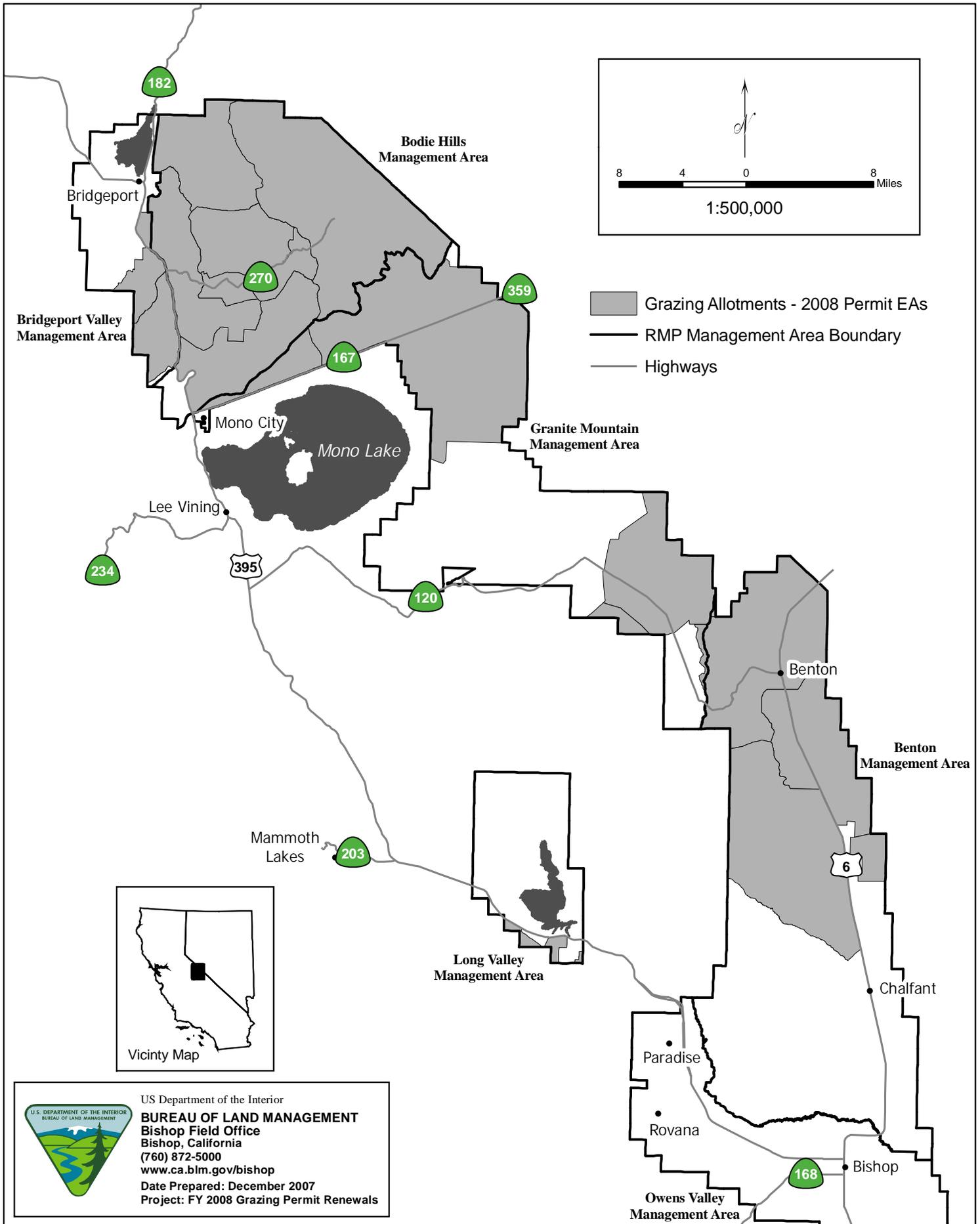
Sincerely,

Signed by Bill Dunkelberger 12/14/2007

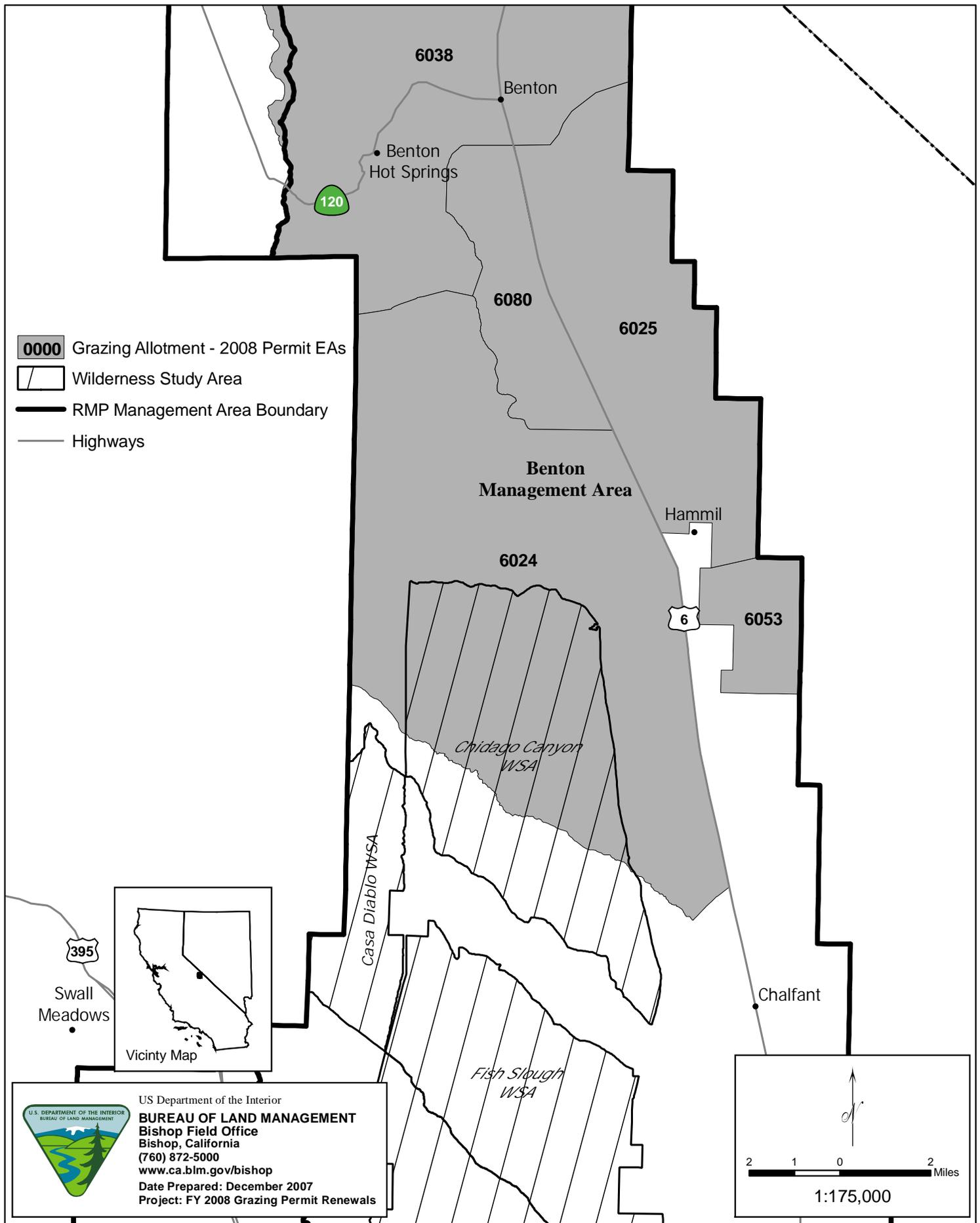
Bill Dunkelberger
Bishop Field Office Manager

Enclosures: Table (1) and Maps (1 – 4)

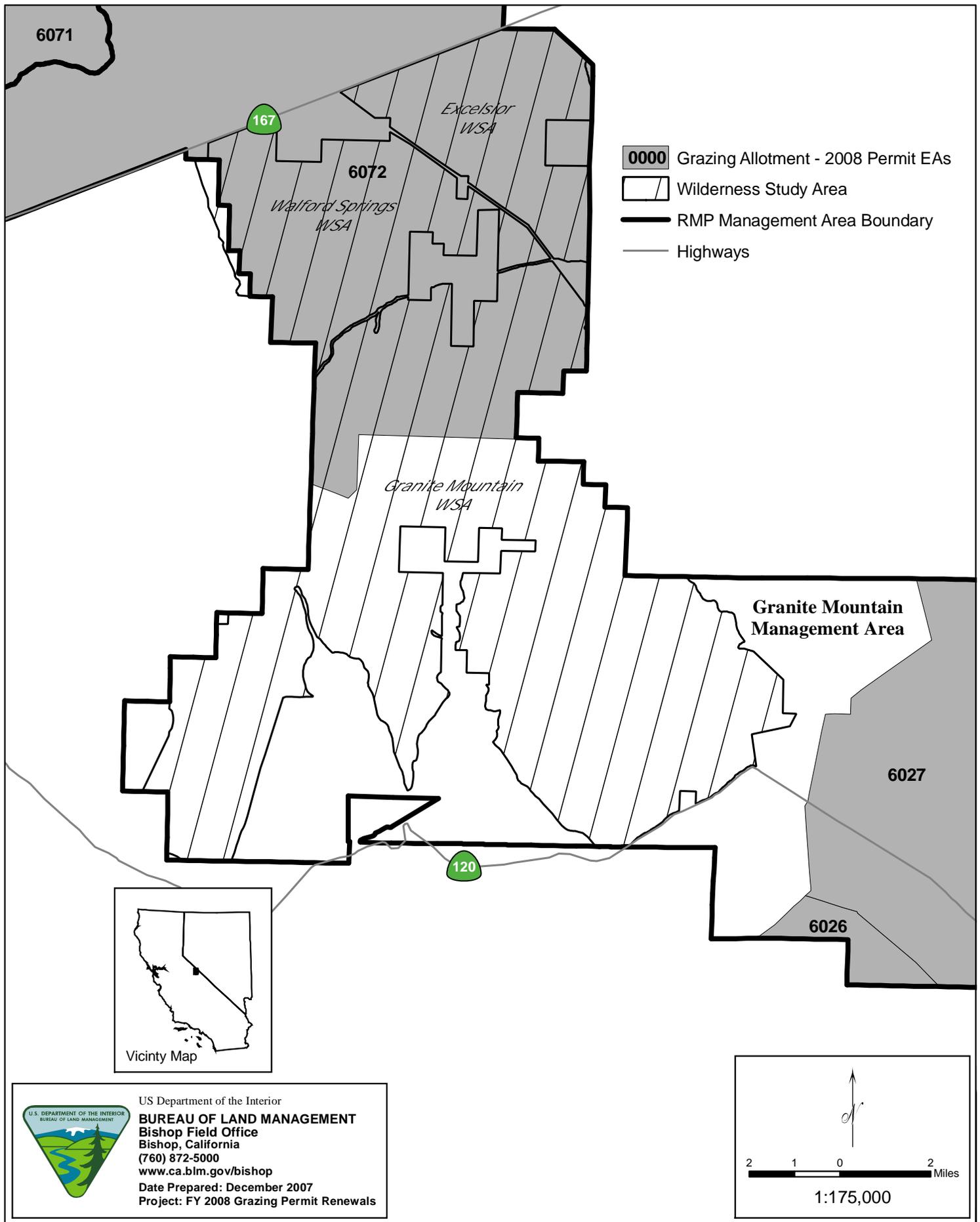
Table 1											
Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Bishop Field Office											
Schedule of Livestock Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment (EA) for 2008											
Operator Name	Allotment Number	Allotment Name	Allotment Acreage*	Livestock Type	WSA* Number	WSA Name	WSA within Allotment	EA Completed in 2007	2008 Batch EA*	Plan for EA Completion	Fully Processed Grazing Permit
A-B Partnership	6038	Bramlette	33,308	Cattle	NA				7	January	March
Echenique, Joe	6020	Little Round Valley	1,118	Sheep	NA				12	February	April
F. M. Fulstone, Inc.	6073	Potato Peak	18,243	Cattle	CA-010-099	Bodie Mountain	39%		10	April	June
	6083	Aurora Canyon	17,832	Cattle	CA-010-095	Mt. Biedeman	<1%		10	April	
					CA-010-099	Bodie Mountain	23%				
					CA-010-102	Masonic Mountain	100%				
F. I. M. Corp.	6058	Dog Creek	5,340	Sheep	NA				8	July	September
	6059	Rancheria Gulch	15,213	Sheep	CA-010-094	Mormon Meadow	56%		11	June	
					CA-010-095	Mt. Biedeman	44%				
	6062	Travertine Hills	8,947	Sheep	CA-010-099	Bodie Mountain	35%		11	June	2007
	6066	Slinkard Valley ^{*2}	7,923	Sheep				CA 170-07-14			
	6070	Little Mormon	8,616	Sheep	CA-010-094	Mormon Meadow	39%				
						CA-010-095	Mt. Biedeman	11%		11	June
6084	Mt. Biedeman	4,859	Sheep	CA-010-095	Mt. Biedeman	31%		11	June		
Hilton Family Trust	6071	Bodie Mountain	46,547	Cattle	CA-010-095	Mt. Biedeman	3%		10	April	June
					CA-010-100	Bodie	100%				
	6072	Mono Sand Flat	59,188	Cattle	CA-010-088	Excelsior	100%		10	April	
					CA-010-090	Granite Mountain	20%				
					CA-010-092	Walford Springs	100%				
					CA-010-095	Mt. Biedeman	<1%				
I & M Sheep Company	6007	Volcanic Tablelands ^{*2}	44,006	Sheep				CA 170-07-10		2007	September
	6055	Mono Mills	35,932	Sheep	CA-010-090	Granite Mountain	40%	CA 170-07-11		2007	
	6074	Mormon Ranch	3,358	Sheep	CA-010-094	Mormon Meadow	5%		11	June	
					CA-010-095	Mt. Biedeman	11%				
					CA-010-099	Bodie Mountain	3%				
	6076	Green Creek	3,838	Sheep	CA-010-099	Bodie Mountain	<1%		8	July	
6078	Walters Ranch	516	Sheep	NA			CA 170-07-13		2007		
Lone Tree Cattle Co.	6024	Hammil Valley	41,320	Cattle	CA-010-079	Chidago Canyon	63%		7	January	March
	6025	Marble Creek	14,791	Cattle	NA				7	January	
	6026	Mathieu	1,950	Cattle	NA				7	January	
	6027	Adobe Valley	24,043	Cattle	NA				7	January	
	6053	Lone Tree	3,559	Cattle	NA				7	January	
	6080	Blind Springs	5,870	Cattle	NA				7	January	
Taylor, Gary	6027	Adobe Valley ^{*2}	24,043	Cattle	NA				7	January	March
	6028	Black Lake	885	Cattle	NA			CA 170-07-11		2007	
*2 - Common allotment with two permittees											
Allotment Acreage* - Public Land Acres from Bishop Resource Management Plan Record of Decision, April 1993											
*WSA - Wilderness Study Area											
Batch EA* - EA combines multiple allotments because of similar eco-types (e.g. vegetation and soils)											



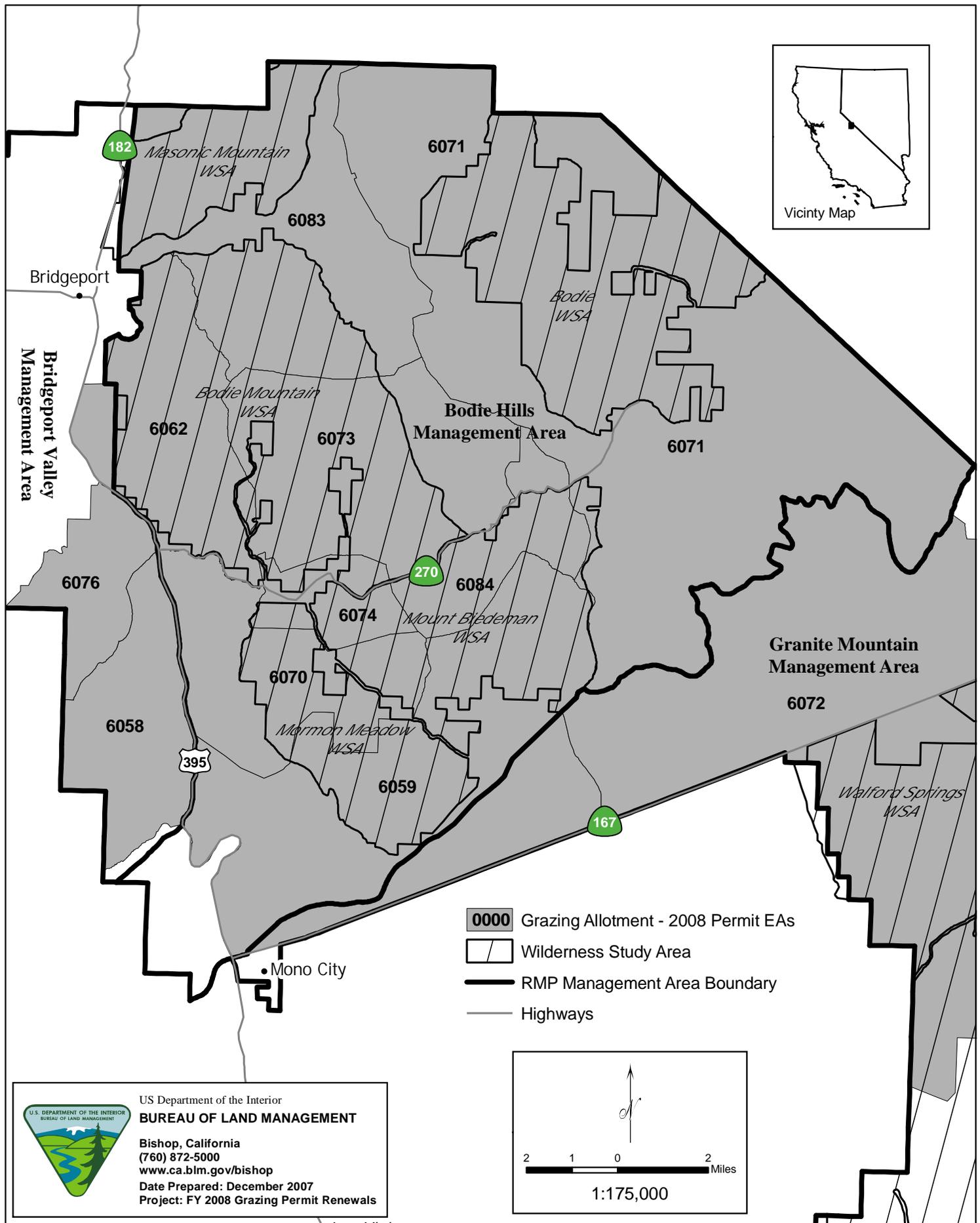
Map 1. Overview of Allotments to be Analyzed in Livestock Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessments (EAs) during 2008. Bishop Field Office.



Map 2. Portions of Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) within Allotments to be Analyzed in Livestock Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessments (EAs) during 2008. Benton Management Area.



Map 3. Portions of Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) within Allotments to be Analyzed in Livestock Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessments (EAs) during 2008. Granite Mountain Management Area.



Map 4. Portions of Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) within Allotments to be Analyzed in Livestock Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessments (EAs) during 2008. Bodie Hills Management Area.