USDI, Bureau of Land Management
Andrews Resource Area, Burns District

Finding of No Significant Impact

for
Reicken's Corner Allotment Management Plan
Environmental Assessment
OR-07-06-042

INTRODUCTION/SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTION

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is proposing a new Reicken's Corner Allotment Management Plan (AMP). The changes to the 1991 AMP are: 1) provide for deferred grazing on the seeding pastures, 2) issue a nonrenewable grazing permit on an annual basis when forage is temporarily available, and 3) rerouting a pasture boundary fence at permittee's request.

Reicken's Corner Allotment is located in the Andrews Management Unit (AMU) in the northern portion of Catlow Valley which is in the southern portion of Harney County, Oregon. This allotment contains 9,363 public land acres and 517 private land acres. These are divided into three pastures - Gene Miller Seeding, Sand Hollow Seeding, and Reicken's Corner. The term permit is currently authorized for 688 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) from April 1 to October 31. All authorized livestock grazing is by cattle. Other forage allocations include 3 AUMs for mule deer and 4 AUMs for pronghorn. Reicken's Corner Allotment is a Management Category "M" (maintenance) allotment. The "maintenance" category identifies allotments with low or no management and resource concerns. These allotments receive lower priority for monitoring, and are targeted for effectiveness and performance monitoring, unless monitoring data indicate need for a change to management strategy.

Proposed Action

The goal of the proposed Reicken's Corner AMP is to improve the condition of the seeding pastures (Resource Management Plan [RMP] Appendix J-34) in a manner consistent with AMU RMP management direction for Social and Economic Values, Vegetation, and Grazing Management, including:

1. Resource Use - Provide for sustainable livestock grazing that meets allotment management (natural resource) objectives and the Standards and Guidelines (S&Gs) (Social and Economic Values, RMP p. 45).

2. Resource Enhancement - Maintain, restore, or improve the integrity of desirable vegetation communities including perennial native and desirable introduced plant species. Provide for their continued existence and normal function in nutrient, water, and energy cycles (Vegetation, RMP p. 30).

3. Resource Use - Implement administrative solutions and rangeland projects to provide proper management for livestock grazing while meeting resource objectives and requirements for S&Gs (Grazing Management, RMP pp. 54-56).

The proposed action is to implement a new Reicken's Corner AMP which would incorporate the following changes: 1) provide for deferred grazing on the seeding pastures, 2) issue a nonrenewable grazing permit on an annual basis when forage is temporarily available, and 3) rerouting a pasture boundary fence at the permittee's request.

Proposed Reicken's Corner Allotment Management Plan

The AMP consists of allotment objectives, rangeland health standards, stocking capacity, grazing system with flexibility description, a list of proposed range improvements and maintenance responsibility of range improvements.

Objectives

Objective 1. Increase the amount of crested wheatgrass grass plants within the Sand Hollow and Gene Miller Seeding Pastures within the next 5 years.

Meeting this objective achieves the following standards: Watershed Function – Uplands, Ecological Processes, and Native, Threatened and Endangered (T&E), and Locally Important Species.

Meeting this objective addresses the following resource concerns: Range condition, wildlife habitat, noxious weeds, and forage allocations for:

livestock - 688 AUMs
wildlife - 3 AUMs (deer)
- 4 AUMs (antelope)

The following management actions would meet the above objective: Implement the proposed grazing system for the allotment that provides deferment for the seeding. The BLM would monitor the area for noxious weed introductions and would treat any noxious weed infestations that are found using the most appropriate methods as funds become available. Allow mosaic brushbeating of sagebrush, no more than 60 percent, in crested wheatgrass seedings to reduce canopy cover of sagebrush and improve vigor of seeded species. Experiment with methods to reduce the amount of gray rabbitbrush in crested wheatgrass seedings.

Monitoring of this objective: This objective would be measured, at the trend sites, by Pace 180°, analysis of photo trend, observed apparent trend, and supporting field observations. After 5 years the BLM would evaluate the monitoring data to determine at what level of Temporary Non-Renewable (TNR) AUMs is available on a sustainable yield basis.

Objective 2. Maintain the percent composition of native perennial plant species by frequency of occurrence for needleandthread grass and Thurber's needlegrass within Reicken's Corner Pasture within the next 10 years.

Meeting this objective achieves the following standards: Watershed Function – Uplands, Ecological Processes, and Native, T&E, and Locally Important Species.

Meeting this objective addresses the following resource concerns: Range Condition and Wildlife Habitat, Noxious Weeds and forage allocations for:

livestock - 688 AUMs
wildlife - 3 AUMs (deer)
- 4 AUMs (antelope)

The following management actions would meet the above objective: Implement the recommended grazing system for the allotment that provides deferment 2 out of 4 years the first grazing cycle and 3 out of 4 years the second grazing cycle for Reicken's Corner Pasture (Tables 2 and 3). The BLM would be monitoring the area for noxious weed introductions and would treat any noxious weed infestations that are found using the most appropriate methods.

Monitoring of this objective: This objective would be measured, at the trend site, by rereading Pace 180° trend plot with analysis of photo trend, observed apparent trend, and supporting field observations within the next 10 years.

Objective 3. Maintain current stands of big sagebrush in native vegetation and increase the occurrence of big sagebrush in the burned portion of the Reicken's Corner Pasture to be measured every 10 years.

Meeting this objective achieves the following standards: Watershed Function – Uplands, Ecological Processes, and Native, T&E, and Locally Important Species.

Meeting this objective addresses the following resource concerns: Wildlife and Special Status Species Habitat and Range Condition.

The following management actions would meet the above objective: Implement proposed grazing system that provides deferment in the allotment. If sagebrush is not returning naturally to the burned areas, seedlings may be planted or seed may be drilled into the sites to facilitate establishment.

Monitoring of this objective: This objective would be measured by establishing a Pace 180° trend plot with analysis of photo trend, observed apparent trend, and supporting field observations every 10 years.

Rangeland Health Standards

Standard 1 Watershed Function – Uplands
Standard 3 Ecological Processes
Standard 5 Native, T&E, and Locally Important Species

*Note: Standard 2 Watershed Function – Riparian/Wetland Areas and Standard 4 Water Quality are not present.

Stocking Capacity

The permitted use would remain at 688 AUMs, with 60 Exchange-of-Use AUMs for 748 total active use AUMs. The permittee would be able to apply for up to 452 TNR AUMs for a total 1,200 AUMs (Table 1). Approval would depend on managing livestock grazing within the AMP along with seasonal growing conditions and maintaining less than 60 percent utilization within seeding pastures and 50 percent in the native pasture. At the end of the 2011 grazing season monitoring data would be analyzed to determine if there would be an increase in permitted AUMs.

Table 1

Pasture	Active AUMs	Exchange-of-Use (Private Lands)	TNR AUMs	Total AUMs
Sand Hollow Seeding	169	0	128	297
Gene Miller Seeding	169	16	216	401
Reicken's Corner Pasture	350	44	108	502
TOTALS	688	60	452	1,200*

Grazing System

Tables 2 and 3 show the grazing rotation between pastures and dates. The grazing system is designed for a 250 head of livestock grazing system.

Table 2

Pasture	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Sand Hollow	07/15 – 08/19	04/15 – 05/20	09/14 – 10/20	09/02 – 10/07
Gene Miller	08/20 – 10/07	09/14 – 10/31	04/15 – 06/02	07/15 – 09/01
Reicken's Corner Pasture	04/15 – 06/14	07/15 – 09/13	07/15 – 09/13	04/15 – 06/14
*Note: When livestock are not scheduled to be on public lands they would be on adjacent private lands.				

Table 3

Pasture	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Sand Hollow	04/15 – 05/21	06/03 – 07/09	09/02 – 10/07	04/15 – 05/21
Gene Miller	09/14 – 10/31	04/15 – 06/02	07/15 – 09/01	05/22 – 07/09
Reicken's Corner Pasture	07/15 – 09/13	07/09 – 09/08	04/15 – 06/14	07/10 – 09/08
*Note: When livestock are not scheduled to be on public lands they would be on adjacent private lands.				

At the end of the 8 years the permittee would repeat Years 5 through 8.

Prior to the start of each grazing year, the permittee would submit an annual grazing application, which includes planned stocking rates by pasture. This application would be reviewed and any use authorized would be in conformance with the Reicken's Corner AMP.

The permittee is required to implement appropriate actions (e.g., riding, herding, and salting) to ensure multiple-use objectives and rangeland health standards are being met.

Flexibility

Depending on weather, plant phenology, and other factors that determine range readiness the permittee would be allowed to turn out as early as April 1 with approval from the Andrews Resource Area Field Manager.

The permittee would be allowed a 5-day flexibility period from the outlined move dates (i.e., 5 days prior to turning out livestock and/or 5 days after scheduled date to remove livestock) without prior approval from the Andrews Resource Area Field Manager.

Proposed Range Improvement Projects

1. Readjustment of Pasture Boundary Fence

   The proposed fence would be approximately one-half mile long (Appendix 2). The permittee would construct the rerouted fence reusing existing fence material that he would pull. The rerouting of the fence between Gene Miller Seeding and Sand Hollow Seeding Pastures would allow cattle to access Sand Hollow well from Gene Miller Seeding Pasture. At this time livestock only have access to the well from Sand Hollow Seeding Pasture.

Fence - Project Design Features

1. The fence would be constructed to BLM specifications for a 4-strand barbed wire fence, including 22-foot line post spacing. Wire spacing would be 16 inches, 22 inches, 32 inches, and 42 inches up from the ground, with a smooth bottom wire. The livestock permittee would be responsible for fence maintenance as defined in a cooperative agreement to be developed.

2. No blading, grading, or scalping of the fence line would be allowed.

3. Prior to final inspection all construction trash and excess debris would be removed from the public lands and disposed of at a site approved by the BLM Contracting Officer.

4. Fence construction activities would occur after the ground is dry and before weeds have set seed. Seed set generally occurs from approximately June 1 through July 1.

5. Vehicles and equipment would be cleaned prior to entry to the site for fence work.

6. A two-track trail adjacent to the fence would remain available for maintenance access.

Maintenance of Range Improvement Projects

All range improvements projects within Reicken's Corner Allotment would be required to be maintained by the permittee.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

This attached Environmental Assessment (EA) is tiered to the AMU RMP and Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and relevant information contained therein is incorporated by reference. The proposed action has been designed to conform to the following documents, which direct and provide the legal framework for management of BLM lands within the Burns District:

- Taylor Grazing Act (43 U.S.C 315 - 1934)
- National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S.C. 4321-4347)1970
- Federal Land Policy and Management Act (43 U.S.C. 1701, 1976)
- Public Rangelands Improvement Act (43 U.S.C. 1901. 1978)
- Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management for Public Lands Administered by the Bureau of Land Management in the States of Oregon and Washington (1997)
- Greater Sage-Grouse and Sagebrush-Steppe Ecosystems Management Guidelines (Interagency - 2000)
- Bureau of Land Management National Sage-Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy (2004)
- Local Integrated Noxious Weed Control Plan (2004)
- Andrews Management Unit Resource Management Plan/Record of Decision (July 15, 2005)

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the EA and all other information, I have determined that the proposal and the alternatives analyzed do not constitute a major Federal action that would significantly impact the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an EIS is not necessary and will not be prepared.

Rational: This determination was based on the following: The following critical elements of the human environment and other potential concerns were considered and determined not to be known to be affected nor impacted by the proposed action or alternatives:

Areas of Critical Environmental Concerns, Air Quality, American Indian Traditional Practices, Environmental Justice, Farmlands (prime or unique), Flood Plains, Hazardous Materials, Paleontology, Special Status Species – Flora, Water Quality (drinking or ground water), Wild and Scenic Rivers, and Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas.

All potential impacted resources were analyzed in the EA specific to the proposed action. The following resources were analyzed in the EA:

Special Status Species – Fauna, Cultural Heritage, Paleontology, Noxious Weeds, Migratory Birds, Grazing Management, Social and Economic Values, Soils, Vegetation, Visual Resources, and Wildlife

A. Critical Elements

Impacts to these resources are all considered to be nonsignificant (based on the definition of significance in 40 CFR 1508.27) for the following reasons:

1. Special Status Species – Fauna

The proposed grazing system should improve habitat for Special Status Species in the seeded pastures while maintaining or improving habitat in the native pastures as well.

2. Cultural Heritage

Selection of the proposed action would not affect cultural properties differently than the no action alternative because the two alternatives are not appreciably different. The only difference between the two that could affect cultural properties is the proposed boundary fence adjustment. This proposed one-half mile fence could create new livestock congregation areas. If cultural properties exist in these new congregation areas the cultural properties could be affected by livestock trampling to a greater degree than prior to fence construction.

Cultural properties can be affected by livestock trampling, loss of ground cover and potential sediment erosion annually. Livestock tend to congregate in the same locations year after year and only change when range improvements such as fencing and spring developments change the routes that livestock use in their movements within an allotment. Gradual accumulation of effects on cultural sites occurs over time with surface and subsurface artifacts being broken and moved horizontally and vertically. As the disturbance increases in depth, the integrity of the site is reduced proportionately.

3. Paleontology

Effects on cultural resources discussed above also apply to paleontological resources.

4. Noxious Weeds

Managing Reicken's Corner Allotment for improving the trend in the seeding pastures and maintaining range condition in the native pasture should provide conditions that would create resistance to noxious weed introduction and spread.

If noxious weeds are found, they would be treated using the most appropriate methods.

5. Migratory Birds

The proposed grazing system would result in improvement of the condition of the seeded pastures as well as maintaining or improving the native vegetation pasture. This would result in an improvement of habitat for migratory birds in the seedings as well as maintain or improve habitat in the native pasture.

B. Noncritical Elements

The following noncritical elements are known to be present and may be affected by the proposed action.

1. Grazing Management

This alternative would allow for periodic deferment during the critical growth periods for herbaceous rangeland vegetation by using a graze/defer treatment improving the seeding pastures and maintaining the good range condition on the native pasture. Doing this would ensure meeting the allotment objectives and achieving the rangeland health standards.

The rationale for the TNR use is during this evaluation period the average actual use for the allotment has been 1,495 AUMs. There has been only one year that utilization was exceeded.

2. Social and Economic Values

The permittee would incur some small costs for reconstructing and maintaining the fence. Collection of grazing permit fees would not differ from the no action alternative. The area's intrinsic value as part of a larger recreational use area would be maintained. Maintaining the economic viability of the grazing operation would continue the contribution to the local economy.

3. Soils

There would be no effect to soils under the proposed grazing system and with the proposed fence realignment.

4. Vegetation

Proposed Action Alternative - This action that conforms to guidelines for grazing management has taken into consideration the health and life cycle requirements of rangeland vegetation.

This alternative would allow for periodic rest during critical growth periods in all pastures. Typical results from this type of system are increased vigor, reproduction, and productivity of perennial forage species. This would maintain the current stable trend in the Reicken's Corner Pasture and cause an upward trend in the two seeding pastures.

5. Visual Resources

The proposed brushbeating and one-half mile of new fence would be observable, but would not dominate the view of the casual observer and would comply with Class III and IV management objectives.

6. Wildlife

Proposed Action Alternative - The results of this action would be maintained or increased vigor and productivity of seeding pastures. This also results in maintained or improved habitat for most wildlife species.