

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**

**Wenatchee Field Office
915 Walla Walla Ave.
Wenatchee, Washington 98801**

SCOPING/INFORMATION PACKAGE

**Wild Horse Coordinated Resource Management Area
Grazing Management Plan Environmental Assessment**

Introduction

This information package summarizes a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to authorize cattle grazing on 260 acres of BLM lands within the Wild Horse Coordinated Resource Management (CRM) area.

Federal actions must be analyzed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal laws and regulations to determine potential environmental consequences.

The purpose of this information package is to inform interested and affected parties of the proposal and to solicit comments to assist with the environmental review of the proposal. The analysis of the proposal is underway and will be documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA). Public comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential environmental issues related to the proposed action and to identify alternatives to the proposed action that also fulfill the purpose of and need for the project.

Project Area

The Wild Horse CRM area is located along the old Vantage Highway approximately five miles northeast of the town of Ellensburg, Washington in Kittitas County and is within the BLM's Wenatchee Field Office. The CRM area encompasses approximately 22,814 acres of private, state, and federal lands, which are divided into seven pastures. The proposed action would only apply to the 260 acres of BLM lands within the Vantage Highway pasture (see attached map) of the CRM area. The legal descriptions of the BLM lands within the Wild Horse CRM area are as follows:

T17N R21E Sec 8: NW¹/₄, W¹/₂NE¹/₄, NW¹/₄SW¹/₄ (north of the old Vantage Highway)

Overall, the Wild Horse CRM area is characterized by steep, rocky slopes, and a rolling series of ridges and canyons that generally drain west to east. The parent bedrock material in the region consists of basaltic rock, and includes fractured and folded lava flows. The basalt material has weathered into coarse gravels, cobbles, and boulders, with fine silts and clays. The overlying

soil is composed of fine-grained loess, deposits of volcanic ash, sandy loams, and silt loams. Streams and springs provide narrow bands of riparian habitat.

The pastures are dominated by sagebrush-steppe and scablands, with narrow bands of riparian habitat occurring along the coulee bottoms. A mosaic of sagebrush-steppe and scabland plant communities typically covers north-facing hillslopes. The scablands are dominated by rock, stiff sagebrush, buckwheat, and Sandberg's bluegrass while the sagebrush-steppe is dominated by big sagebrush and bluebunch wheatgrass with various other bunchgrass and native forbs. South-facing hillslopes are generally an intricate mosaic of rock and scabland, and sagebrush-steppe vegetation. Ridgelines and benches are usually dominated by scablands. The soil surface between plant bases often supports a biological crust composed of mosses, lichens, and a variety of soil algae and bacteria. Basin wildrye, rushes, and deciduous shrubs and trees typically occupy the riparian habitat.

Background

The Wild Horse CRM is a collaborative group of local land managers including the BLM, the State of Washington, and private landowners, ranchers, and citizens that have worked together to develop a grazing plan for the proposed area.

In 2006, the BLM began working with Puget Sound Energy (PSE), the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), other agencies, and interested publics on a Coordinated Resource Management Plan for the Wild Horse CRM area.

The goal of the group is to develop a coordinated resource management plan for the entire CRM area that addresses social, economic, and ecological needs of the stakeholders, including:

- 1) healthy watersheds that support a variety of native plant communities with few invasive/undesirable species,
- 2) enhanced habitat for wildlife that use the area,
- 3) improved water availability in the area, and
- 4) properly managed and sustainable grazing practices that balance wildlife and livestock use and result in an upward trend in ecological condition for both uplands and riparian areas and contribute to a viable cattle operation.

Preliminary Proposed Action

The BLM proposes to authorize a lease to graze cattle on a 260-acre parcel of public lands administered by the BLM within the Wild Horse CRM area. The Wild Horse CRM area is divided into seven pastures. The BLM parcel is within the Vantage Highway pasture.

The BLM is proposing to authorize grazing from 04/01 to 08/31 on BLM lands in coordination with private landowners and PSE and consistent with the recent decision to graze adjacent WDFW lands, as analyzed in the *Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for Livestock Grazing Management on the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's Quilomene and Whiskey Dick Wildlife Areas in Kittitas County, Washington* (November 2009). The grazing lease would be issued for a 10-year period (03/01/2012 - 02/28/2022).

Per the WDFW FEIS, grazing use would be managed under the requirements of the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) 528A Prescribed Grazing Standards which state that each pasture be deferred, or not grazed, at least every third year during the growing season. The standards also require that each pasture be grazed no more than one in three years during the key grass species' critical growth period. Because the growing season and key grass species' critical growth period differ across the proposed grazing area, yearly rotations would be developed in cooperation with the WDFW, NRCS, DNR, and the lessee prior to turnout.

The BLM's preliminary proposed action was developed cooperatively with WDFW and is consistent with their 2009 FEIS and decision and the terms of the court ordered Western Watershed Project v. WDFW *Settlement and Stipulation of Dismissal* (No. 10-2-00128-7), filed January 12, 2011 with Thurston County Superior Court.

Preliminary Purpose and Need

Action is needed at this time because the BLM has received a request to graze livestock on BLM land in the CRM area consistent with the current grazing plan on adjacent CRM lands.

The purpose of this action is to provide for multiple uses of public lands and resources, which includes livestock grazing, as required by the Federal Lands Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 and the Federal Rangeland Management Regulations (43 CFR Part 4100), and the Spokane Resource Management Plan Record of Decision (BLM 1987). In addition, this action would facilitate meeting the goals and objectives of the Wild Horse CRM group.

Although the group developed the proposed action, the BLM is solely responsible for making decisions regarding grazing on the BLM-administered parcels. As part of the NEPA review process, the BLM will decide:

- Should the BLM authorize grazing on the Vantage Highway pasture?
- What, if any, measures should be included in the grazing lease to improve or protect resource conditions?

Preliminary Issues

The following issues or factors have been identified preliminarily for further analysis or consideration in the EA:

- The effects of grazing on sage grouse habitat.
- The effects of grazing on elk winter range.
- The effects of grazing on sensitive plant species.
- The effects of grazing to weedy species.

Public Input Needed

Please submit your comments on the proposed action and other issues to be considered to the address noted below by **July 27, 2011**. Comments will be most useful if they provide additional information about the preliminary issues identified above, identify new issues or concerns, or propose alternative actions to accomplish the purpose and need and/or to resolve issues.

Public comments may be submitted electronically or by U.S. Mail to the addresses noted below.

Please send electronic comments to:

BLM_OR_WN_Mail@blm.gov with “**Wild Horse CRM Grazing Management Plan EA**” in the subject line.

Please send U.S. Mail comments to:

Attn: **Wild Horse CRM Grazing Management Plan EA**
BLM–Wenatchee Field Office
915 Walla Walla Ave.
Wenatchee, WA 98801

For all comments submitted, please identify whether you are submitting comments as an individual or as the designated spokesperson on behalf of an organization.

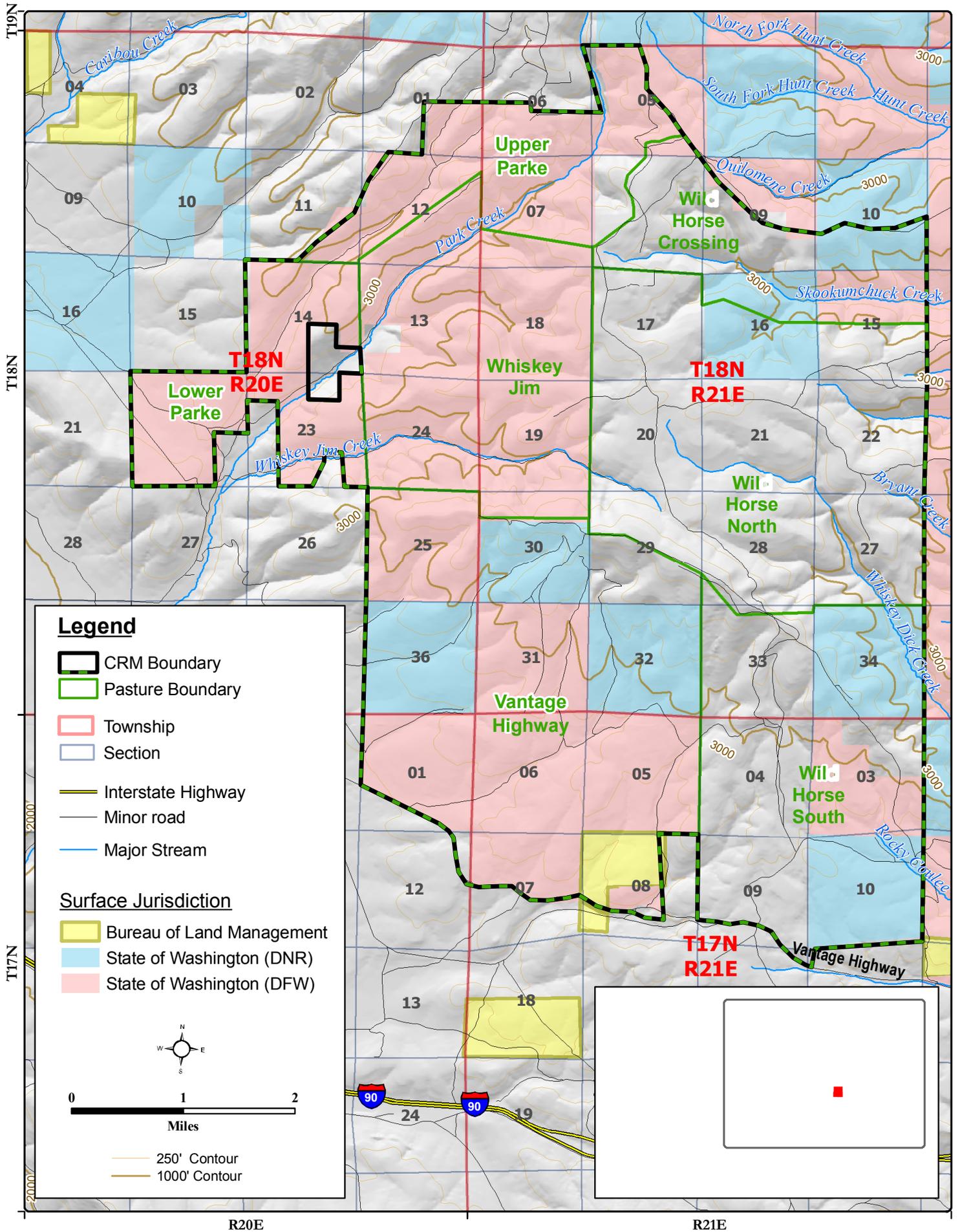
Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, be advised that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold from public review your personal identifying information, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

If you have questions, please contact Angie Link, Rangeland Management Specialist, at 509-665-2100.

Enclosures:

Project Area Map

Wild Horse CRM

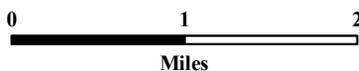


Legend

- CRM Boundary
- Pasture Boundary
- Township
- Section
- Interstate Highway
- Minor road
- Major Stream

Surface Jurisdiction

- Bureau of Land Management
- State of Washington (DNR)
- State of Washington (DFW)



- 250' Contour
- 1000' Contour

R20E

R21E