

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)
Environmental Assessment No. OR-030-08-004
Pedro Mountain Geographic Unit Grazing Permit Renewal
Environmental Assessment

The attached Environmental Assessment (EA) contains a description of the proposed action; an analysis of expected impacts on affected interests, land and resources; and measures to reduce negative impacts. The EA analyzes the impacts of a range of alternatives developed through scoping, and indicates that the proposed action with specific design criteria would not significantly affect the human environment.

The BLM first established proposed priorities for GU evaluations and for preparations of Coordinated Activity Plans in the Baker RMP (1989). These plans would have addressed all resource issues in one plan. The Planning Update of February 2000 refined this direction to focus on the Healthy Rangelands initiative. The Update established the schedule for evaluation of the GUs using the rangeland standards and guidelines process.

The permittees for the Pedro Mountain allotments were informed about the field work being done in their allotments in 2006 and were invited to participate in rangeland utilization and trend monitoring, Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) assessments, and rangeland health assessments (S&Gs). The monitoring and assessments were completed by multiple members of BLM's staff over many different trips to the allotments.

Letters notifying the public, newspapers, permittees, other agencies, and tribal representatives regarding the process and the upcoming public meeting, were sent out in early November of 2007. The BLM offered to meet individually with the tribes involved. A public meeting was held on November 13, 2007 to provide an overview of the process, distribute the Evaluation and Determinations documents and to answer questions. BLM accepted comments on the Evaluation and Determinations document at the public meeting (and 30 days subsequent to it) and at individual meetings with the permittees in 2007 and 2008. Comments were received about some of the riparian zones, whether they were truly significant enough to be called riparian, and about the fencing and grazing date changes being recommended. No written comments or proposals were provided to BLM to describe an alternative; therefore no permittee proposals are being analyzed as an alternative.

After careful review and consideration of impacts of the various alternatives, I have chosen Alternative 3. This alternative changes season of use, reduces AUMs in some of the allotments, implements utilization standards, allows gap fence, riparian enclosure, and continuation of allotment fence line construction, and includes consequences for exceeding utilization limits. A reasonable level of livestock management flexibility and sustained forage availability would be provided to permittees with this alternative. Customary permittee grazing practices would be changed in order to protect riparian/wetland and upland vegetation health. Financial commitments necessary to implement the alternative would be secured by BLM as funding becomes available, and through cooperation with grazing permittees. Improved protection of cultural resources and traditional foods would result with this alternative. The implementation of Alternative 3 will allow the allotments to make significant progress toward meeting standards for healthy rangelands.

Alternatives 1 and 2 were not selected for the following reasons:

Alternative 1 would continue the current terms and conditions of the grazing use. This would mean that standards would continue to be unmet; therefore, this alternative would not meet legal and land-use planning requirements.

Alternative 2 would require total (on BLM lands) and temporary elimination and/or reduction of livestock grazing (from those allotments where standards were not met). Alternative 2 would help jump-start recovery by closing the pastures to grazing until standards are met, however, this alternative would cause economic stress on the permittees during the implementation. The socio-economic impacts of this alternative, combined with BLM's multiple-use mandate, make this alternative less viable than Alternative 3.

Alternative 3 implements AUM reduction, livestock season-of-use changes, utilization limits, 13 acres juniper treatment, riparian gap and enclosure construction, and approximately 5 miles of new allotment fence line, multiple project-design features, and monitoring requirements that BLM believes will result in significant progress toward meeting standards for healthy rangelands while limiting socio-economic impacts to the permittees.

Beneficial and adverse effects. The cumulative effects are positive, there will be no significant effects (positive or negative) as described by the CEQ definition. Rangeland and watershed health, ecological functions, productivity, upland wildlife habitat, and riparian habitat will be protected and improved by the combined benefits of the proposed actions. Cultural resources and special status species will be protected. Outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation will remain, and naturalness will be enhanced. Grazing operations will be more costly to operate, but will remain sustainable.

Public health or safety. There will be no significant effects on public health or safety. Herbicide use for weed treatments will meet district and state requirements. The proposed gap fences and implementation of the new grazing systems will not significantly affect public health and safety. Any threats will be localized, limited to those involved with construction and maintenance activities, and within accepted norms for such work.

Unique areas. There are no unique, specially managed areas within the Pedro Mountain Geographic Unit, including WSAs, WSRs, and ACECs; thus, none would be significantly affected. Opportunities for primitive recreation and solitude will not be diminished. Fences can be removed and the physical impacts associated will be temporary in nature. Grazing systems and fence maintenance will allow for improved health of riparian systems and will maintain health and function of uplands.

Highly Controversial Effects. The new grazing systems will place new burdens on the affected ranchers, as livestock will be moved more often. The cost of project construction will be partially borne by the permittees and the maintenance responsibility will be totally borne by them. These new costs will be added to the operational costs they already bear and will certainly have negative impacts on their profits. Nevertheless, the grazing operations will remain sustainable, and rangeland health and productivity will

be protected and enhanced. Similar measures have been successfully initiated by voluntary agreement with permittees (as under the interim grazing measures initiated in accordance with 43 CFR 4180 in the spring of 2003) and elsewhere on the Vale District. Therefore, they should not be considered controversial. Any effects on the human environment which are related to “land use” allocation issues were addressed and decided in the Baker RMP and Ironside EISs and the subsequent Records of Decision (ROD), and are outside the scope of this EA.

Unique or unknown risks. There are no unique or unknown risks associated with the implementation of the proposed action. The Baker RMP and Ironside EISs, and this EA, cover the anticipated impacts thoroughly. They rely on applicable scientific findings, monitoring, rangeland health assessments, published studies, professional contacts, and stated mitigation measures and project design criteria to address and/or preclude impacts.

Precedent for future actions. There are no precedents, relative to future actions with significant effects, which will be established. The specific actions involved in the proposed action have all been done before, separately and collectively, in the course of management of public lands over the past 50 years. There are no irreversible commitments of resources involved with the proposed action. The structural projects involved could be eliminated and the physical disturbance rehabilitated.

Cumulative Effects. The impact of proposed actions have been analyzed and considered, separately and cumulatively, at multiple scales of analysis by considering the ICBEMP science findings, Baker RMP and Ironside EISs, and this EA. Impacts are either not significant, are mitigated below significance, or were declared and addressed in the Baker RMP and Ironside EISs. The cumulative effect of implementation of the proposed action is also not significant and is within the scope of the cumulative effects analysis disclosed in the Baker RMP and Ironside EISs, which this EA incorporates by reference.

Impacts to significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources. Cultural, historical and/or scientific resources in the area are protected by design features and monitoring, and will not be adversely affected by the proposed action. The combination of management actions and design features under the proposed action will facilitate dispersed distribution of livestock and reduce grazing effects on soils, riparian and upland vegetation, which would be beneficial for protection of cultural resources. Design features, described in section 2.5 of the EA, include inventories prior to any surface disturbing development or project maintenance, continued sampling inventories, and consultation with the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and Tribes on potential effects and appropriate mitigation measures for any identified eligible or potentially eligible historic properties. Cultural resource surveys have occurred and will be ongoing. The Oregon SHPO and the Tribes will be consulted regarding this EA.

Federally listed endangered or threatened species. There are no known federally listed species in Pedro Mountain Geographic Unit. The proposed livestock management, which implements a timing and duration of livestock use that is appropriate for riparian areas, will be beneficial for all wildlife and aquatic species present. If special status species are discovered, additional mitigation measures such as inventory and avoidance of special status plants, and surveys prior to land treatment, would be done in conformance with Oregon/Washington special status species policy. Greater sage-grouse habitats will be protected as a result of livestock utilization limits, reduction of AUMs, changes in season of use, limited project development, project design features, specific mitigation measures associated with projects, and by improvement and maintenance of riparian and upland systems through vegetation treatments. These

changes will assist in meeting moderate levels of livestock use as recommended by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's ODFW Sage-Grouse Conservation Assessment Strategy and the Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Assessment and Strategy for Oregon 2005 (Hagen, 2005).

Compliance with federal, state, or local law. The proposed action is in compliance with federal, state, and local law and requirements relative to environmental protection. Further, it is in conformance with the Baker RMP and Ironside EISs and RODs.

The proposed action allows BLM to strike a balance between natural values and commodity uses in a manner consistent with the principles of multiple use and applicable law. Specific resource objectives are identified in the Baker RMP. The proposed action provides the opportunity to achieve RMP objectives as well as meet The Standards for Rangeland Health (USD1 1997) through a variety of management actions, standard design features, and projects, without creating significant impacts.

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the Environmental Assessment and all other available information, I have determined that the proposed action does not constitute a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is unnecessary and will not be prepared.

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Date