



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS (FONSI)

for

EA CA 170-07-09

10 Year Grazing Authorization on the Hot Creek (6018), Wilfred Creek (6022), Long Valley (6044), Tobacco Flat (6045), Wells Meadow (6051), and Casa Diablo (6081) Allotments

Introduction:

One of the primary purposes for conducting an environmental assessment (EA) is to determine whether or not a proposed action will have a significant impact on the human environment and therefore will require the preparation of an EIS. As defined in 40 CFR 1508.13, the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is a document that briefly presents the reasons why an action will not have significant effect on the human environment. The regulations further define the term “significantly” in 40 CFR 1508.27 and require that the context and intensity of impacts be considered in analyzing significance. Context means “that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human, national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality.” 40 CFR 1508.26(a) Intensity “refers to the severity of the impact.” 40 CFR 1508.26(b) The analysis to make a determination whether to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is based on the following criteria.

Rationale for Finding of No Significant Impact:

I have reviewed EA CA 170-07-09 regarding the Hot Creek (6018), Wilfred Creek (6022), Long Valley (6044), Tobacco Flat (6045), Wells Meadow (6051), and Casa Diablo (6081) allotments, including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant environmental impacts. The EA details the effects of the project and provides the basis for the conclusions in this FONSI. None of the effects identified including direct, indirect, and cumulative effects, are considered significant based on seasonal use of the allotments, stocking rates, and minimal impacts to the native vegetative community. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not needed.

Intensity: This issue is addressed through the ten “significance” criteria described in 40 CFR 1508.27, and discussed below:

1) Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse.

The Rangeland Health Assessments conducted, indicate that there are no significant environmental impacts from current use and the allotments all meet Rangeland Health Standards. Authorizing grazing with revised, allotment specific terms and conditions would not create

negative impacts to livestock operations. The terms and conditions are designed to help protect and sustain rangeland health and to keep the ecosystem functioning properly.

2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

Public health and safety was not identified as an issue.

3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

Based on the EA, the Hot Creek, Wilfred Creek, Long Valley, Tobacco Flat, Wells Meadow, and Casa Diablo allotments serve as fringe allotments to Los Angeles Department of Water and Power leased land where more desirable water and suitable vegetation occur. As a result, livestock use on these BLM allotments is generally highly dispersed with light use. Furthermore, these allotments do not occur within any congressionally designated Wilderness or Wilderness Study Area.

The cultural assessments conducted on these allotments indicate that grazing impacts to cultural resources on BLM administered lands are minimal, but continued monitoring is recommended for the Hot Creek allotment. The Hot Creek allotment serves as a fringe allotment to adjacent LADWP leases and private property in Long Valley. Field evaluations were focused on the perennial Hot Creek stream corridor and spring sites. Eighty acres were surveyed and five new sites recorded and CA-MNO-699 was rerecorded and CA-MNO-1788 was visited. While cattle use is heavy in the meadow/spring source within site MNO-699, cultural deposits are not receiving much impact due to their location above the meadow complex outside of the congregation area. At MNO-1788, the site is mainly on private and a boundary fence segregates private from public lands. Trailing occurs along the fence, but no significant cultural deposits were found on BLM and impacts on the BLM portion of the site are minimal.

Based on the EA, the Wilfred Creek, Long Valley, Tobacco Flat, Wells Meadow, and Casa Diablo allotments contain no designated or eligible segments of Wild and Scenic Rivers. However, the Hot Creek allotment contains approximately one mile of Hot Creek, determined to be eligible for wild and scenic rivers study within the Bishop RMP (1993). It is classified as recreational. The proposed action alternative will not create new impacts. There are no impacts occurring from current grazing on public land to the identified wild and scenic river values associated with the Hot Creek River segment

Within the Hot Creek and Wilfred Creek allotment, there are several hot springs and developed tubs which have become popular recreation destinations. Some of these tubs are on Los Angeles Department Water and Power (LADWP) land, with access via public land. Some tubs are on public land, with access via LADWP land. Livestock frequent these areas and are sometimes at the hot tubs, within a few feet of bathers. There have been no documented livestock conflicts to date. Encounters with livestock occur and are expected as the landscape is open range.

Based on the EA, riparian vegetation at the spring sources in the Hot Creek and Wilfred Creek allotments consists mainly of sedge, rush, and grass species in various proportions depending on the local soil and water conditions. There are no woody riparian species like willow (*Salix* sp.) at any of the geothermal spring areas. Riparian vegetation in the immediate vicinity of the geothermal springs is typically at or near 100% ground cover. Each of the geothermal springs provides some small amount of acreage that meets the definition of a wetland. Implementation of the proposed action in the Hot Creek allotment should maintain or slightly improve riparian vegetation conditions at geothermal springs and their meadows by positively influencing plant vigor, physical structure, and reduced soil trampling effects. Achieving the minimum overall average stubble height on geothermal spring fed meadows in the Wilfred Creek allotment should occur as long as the operator moves cattle frequently between the LADWP property and public lands. The spring fed meadows in the Wilfred Creek allotment will require regular monitoring to ensure the required overall average minimum stubble height is achieved.

Lastly, there are no park lands, prime farmlands, or ecologically critical areas within these six allotments.

4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

No effects that may occur as a result of the approval of this proposed action were identified in the Environmental Assessment that are likely to be controversial.

5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The proposed action is not unique or unusual. The environmental effects to the human environment were analyzed in the Environmental Assessment. There are no predicted effects on the human environment, which are considered to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

6) The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The proposed action does not set a precedent for future actions that may have significant effects, nor does it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. The proposed action continues a traditional use of public lands with consideration for sensitive species and the native plant communities. Any future grazing permit renewals will be evaluated through the National Environmental Policy Act process, consistent with current laws and regulations.

7) Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

The proposed action was evaluated in the context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions. These cumulative effects are identified in the EA. Significant cumulative effects were

not identified from the proposed action, based on grazing permit issuance that would occur as a result of the decision herein.

8) The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

Based on the EA for the Hot Creek, Wilfred Creek, Long Valley, Tobacco Flat, Wells Meadow, and Casa Diablo allotments, the proposed action will not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

On the Long Valley, Tobacco Flat, and Casa Diablo allotments, impacts to cultural properties are predicted to be minimal as a result of the proposed action for the following reasons. The allotments in general do not receive heavy use and serve as fringe allotments to LADWP leases where more desirable water and suitable vegetation occur. Cattle use on the BLM allotments is generally highly dispersed with light use.

Based on the EA, the Hot Creek, Wells Meadow, and Wilfred Creek allotments, water improvements and congregation areas were assessed following the cultural resource grazing allotment assessment research design. Some areas of the Wells Meadow allotment are receiving concentrated use, but field assessments revealed no cultural resources in the heavily used areas. On the Wilfred Creek allotment, two troughs were evaluated and no sites were found to occur in the vicinity. For the Hot Creek allotment, field evaluations were focused on the perennial Hot Creek stream corridor and spring sites. Eighty acres were surveyed and five new sites recorded, CA-MNO-699 was rerecorded, and CA-MNO-1788 was visited. While cattle use is heavy in the meadow/spring source within site MNO-699, cultural deposits are not receiving much impact due to their location above the meadow complex outside of the congregation area. At MNO-1788, the site is mainly on private and a boundary fence segregates private from public lands. Trailing occurs along the fence, but no significant cultural deposits were found on BLM and impacts on the BLM portion of the site are minimal.

In general, the cultural assessments indicate that grazing impacts to cultural resources on BLM administered lands are minimal, but continued monitoring is recommended for the Hot Creek allotment.

9) The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

There will be no effect on threatened or endangered species as a result of the action. There is no designated critical habitat for any federally listed species on the Hot Creek, Wilfred Creek, Long Valley, Tobacco Flat, Wells Meadow, and Casa Diablo allotments and no federally listed species are known to occupy these allotments.

10) Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The approved action does not violate any Federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. The EA contains discussion pertaining to the Endangered Species Act, National Historic Preservation Act, Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, and Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice). State, local, and tribal interests were consulted during the environmental analysis process. No violations or inconsistencies of these interests were noted or left unresolved. Furthermore, the approved proposed action is consistent with applicable land management plans, policies, and programs.

Finding of No Significant Impact:

I have determined that the proposed action is in conformance with the Bishop Resource Management Plan approved on March 23, 1993, as amended by the Central California Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing approved on July, 13, 2000. This plan has been reviewed, and the proposed action conforms with the land use plan terms and conditions as required by 43 CFR 1610.5.

Based upon a review of the EA and the supporting documents, I find that the proposed action will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity as defined in 40 CFR 1508.27 and an environmental impact statement is not needed. Therefore, it is my decision to implement the proposed action from EA CA 170-07-09 for the Hot Creek (6018), Wilfred Creek (6022), Long Valley (6044), Tobacco Flat (6045), Wells Meadow (6051), and Casa Diablo (6081) allotments and authorize livestock grazing for 10-years with revised, allotment specific terms and conditions to the grazing operators.

Authorized Official:

Field Manager, Bishop Field Office

Date: _____