



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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CA-170.50

NOTICE OF PROPOSED ACTION

Dear Interested Party:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Bishop Field Office, is proposing to reissue 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 2007, the Bishop Field Office will prepare 7 environmental assessments (EAs) to analyze the impacts of re-authorizing 10-year grazing permits on 43 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 2007. Maps 1 and 2 provide an overview of allotments to be analyzed during 2007.

Need for the Proposed Action

All of the 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 the 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). The proposed action is also needed to maintain or improve resource

conditions including rangeland health.

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 has been determined to be 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.

Rangeland health assessments have been 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) having a portion of acreage within grazing allotments to be analyzed in the EAs during 2007 are Slinkard WSA (CA-010-105), Granite Mountain WSA (CA-010-090), Casa Diablo WSA (CA-010-082), Volcanic Tableland WSA (CA-010-081), Fish Slough WSA (CA-010-080), Chidago Canyon WSA (CA-010-079), Symmes Creek WSA (CA-010-064), Crater Mountain WSA (CA-010-062) and Independence Creek WSA (CA-010-057). Table 1 and Maps 3-7 summarize and depict WSAs and allotment boundary overlap for those allotments to be analyzed during 2007.

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 all allotments with minor, site specific modifications):

The goal of these 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 so that progress is made 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 of plant vigor, maintenance, bank protection, and sediment entrapment.

3. Within identified critical mule deer winter range and migration habitat (Bishop RMP, 1993) within your 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 1/4 mile of creeks, aspen groves, meadows, sage grouse strutting grounds, or special status plant populations.
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 such species 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.

No Grazing Alternative (No Action)

Under this alternative, BLM would not reissue 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.

Alternatives Considered But Eliminated from Further Analysis: Pre-Rangeland Health Management Alternative

Under this alternative, BLM would reissue 10-year grazing permits to authorize livestock grazing under the grazing stipulations contained in the Bishop Resource Management Plan (RMP) with terms and conditions that were developed prior to approval of the Central California Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Management (Rangeland Health S&Gs). The Central California Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines Record of Decision (ROD), approved on July 13, 2000, amended existing BLM land use plans in Central California, including the Bishop RMP, to incorporate applicable Standards and Guidelines and directs evaluation of existing, and development of new, desired plant community (DPC) standards to ensure conformance of the DPCs with the Standards (Rangeland Health S&Gs, Decision, Page 1). This alternative was considered but eliminated from further analysis because it fails to comply with the ROD for the Central California Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines.

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 completed EAs developed by our field office will be posted on the BLM internet site for public review at http://www.blm.gov/ca/bishop/ea_nepa.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.

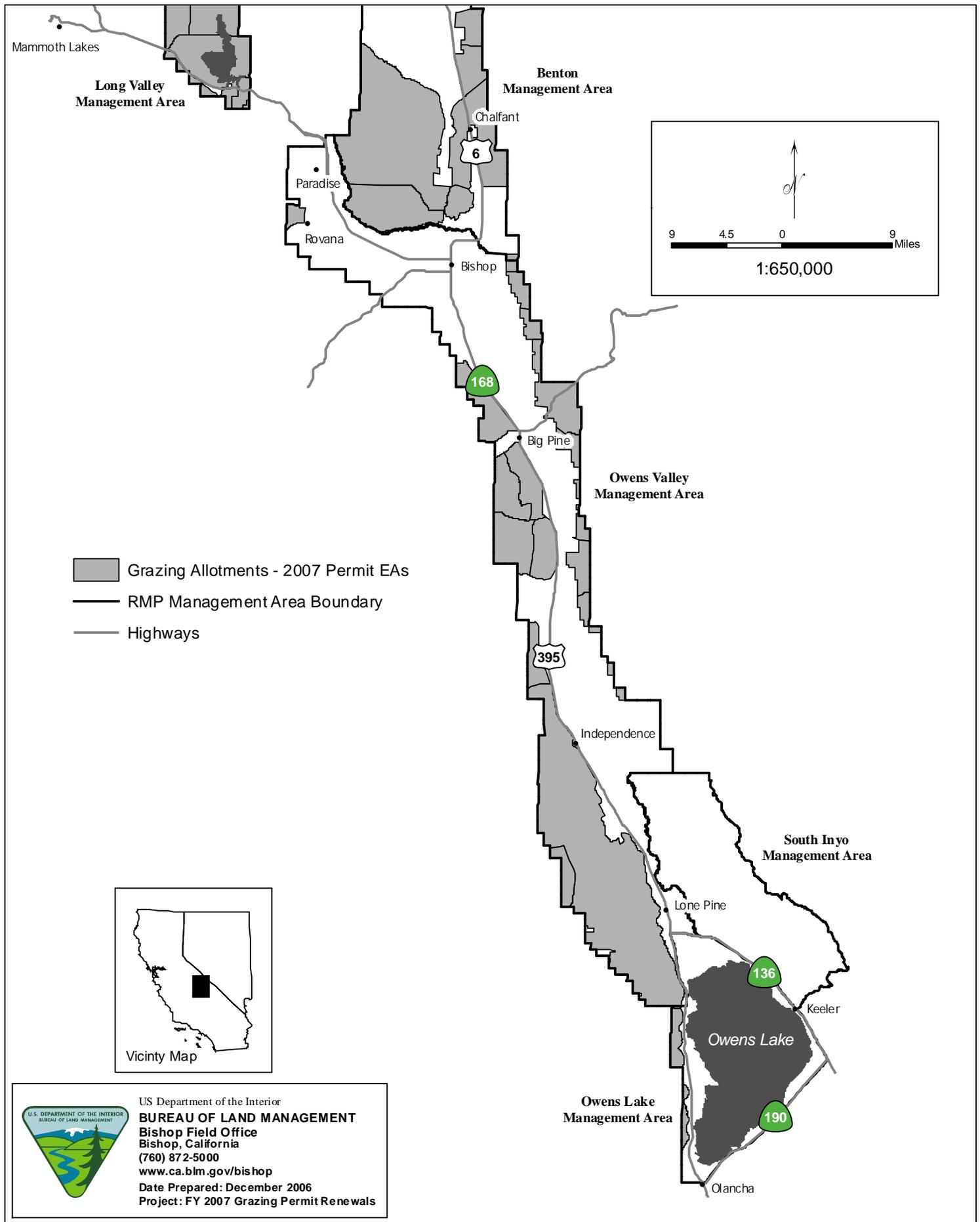
Sincerely,

Signed by Bill Dunkelberger on December 21, 2006

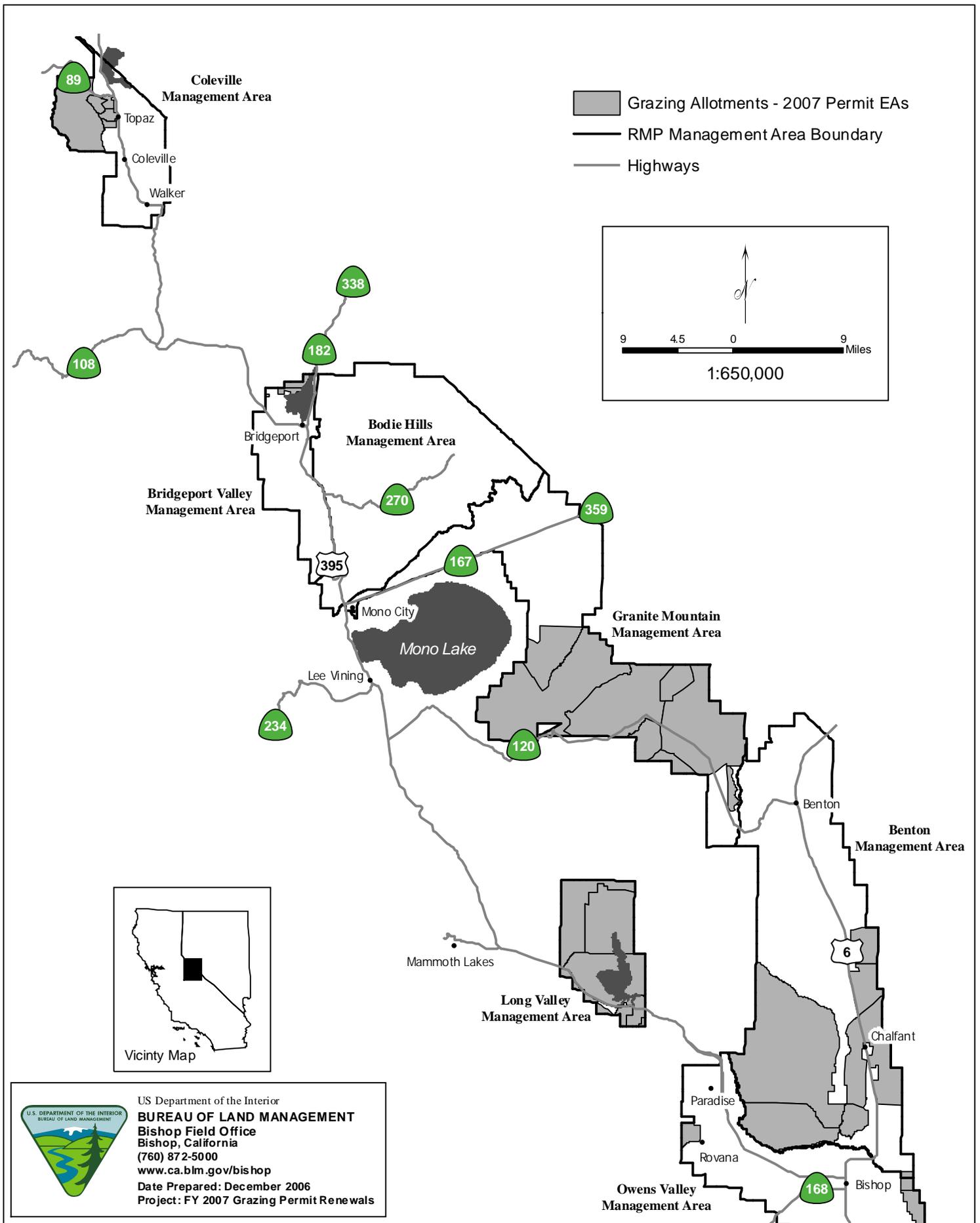
Bill Dunkelberger
Bishop Field Office Manager

Enclosures: Table (1) and Maps (7)

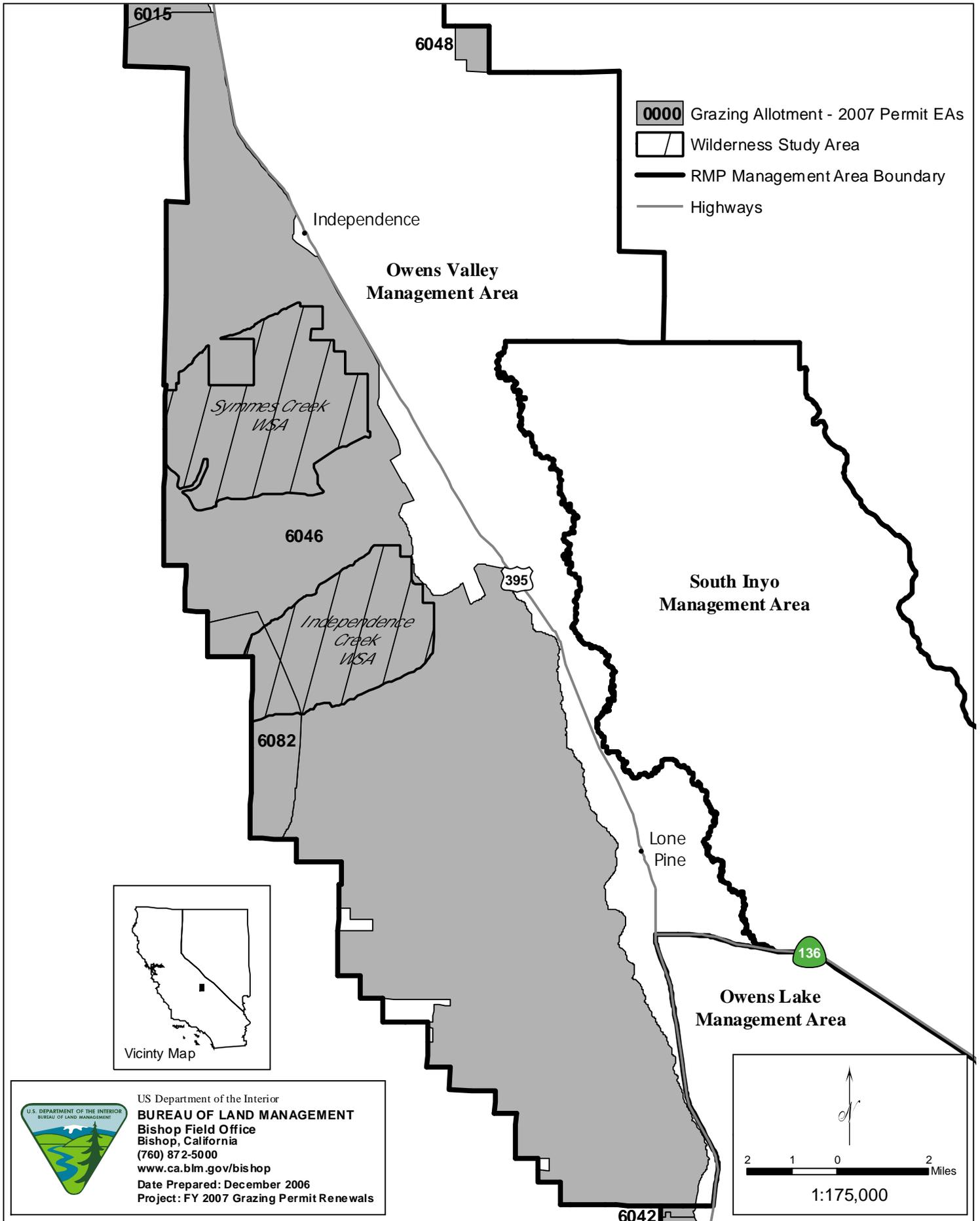
Table 1								
Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Bishop Field Office								
Schedule of Livestock Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment (EA) for 2007								
Operator Name	Allotment Number	Allotment Name	Allotment Acreage*	Livestock Type	WSA* Number	WSA Name	WSA within Allotment	2007 Batch EA*
White Mountain Ranch	6041	Jeffrey	4,600	Cattle	NA			3
Spainhower Anchor Ranch	6042	Ash Creek	3,008	Cattle	NA			5
Stewart, Murt	6019	West Crater Mountain	6,540	Cattle	CA-010-062	Crater Mountain	65%	5
Tatum, Jack R.	6049	Aberdeen	4,279	Cattle	NA			5
	6050	Poverty Hills	4,354	Cattle	NA			5
Chichester, Dwight & Kenneth	6056	West Reservoir	753	Cattle	NA			6
Ansolabehere, Ben	6007	Volcanic Tableland	44,006	Sheep	CA-010-079	Chidago Canyon	37%	3
					CA-010-080	Fish Slough	98%	
					CA-010-081	Volcanic Tablelands	30%	
	6081	Casa Diablo	2,193	Sheep	CA-010-082	Casa Diablo	100%	1
Echenique, Joe	6020	Little Round Valley	1,118	Sheep	NA			1
Taylor, Gary	6027	Adobe Valley	24,043	Cattle	NA			4
	6028	Black Lake	885	Cattle	NA			4
Shoestring Ranch	6065	Aristo Ranch	651	Cattle	NA			9
	6066	Slinkard Valley	7,923	Cattle	CA-010-105	Slinkard	100%	9
Adobe Valley, LLC	6034	Granite Mountain	20,608	Sheep	CA-010-090	Granite Mountain	25%	4
	6036	Adobe Lake	1,804	Sheep	NA			4
	6037	Symons	3,134	Sheep	NA			4
	6054	Mono Lake	8,536	Sheep	CA-010-090	Granite Mountain	15%	4
Ayers, Rod	6015	Sawmill Creek	2,082	Cattle	NA			5
Cashbaugh, James	6012	Zurich	8,839	Cattle	NA			2
	6013	Owens Valley	1,764	Cattle	NA			2
	6016	Owens Valley Common	640	Cattle	NA			2
	6018	Hot Creek	6,203	Cattle	NA			1
	6031	Poleta Canyon	2,345	Cattle	NA			2
Kemp, Ronald C.	6046	Alabama Hills	65,234	Cattle	CA-010-064	Symmes Creek	100%	5
					CA-010-057	Independence Creek	86%	
	6082	George Creek	3,160	Cattle	CA-010-057	Independence Creek	14%	5
Four J Cattle Company	6021	Shannon Cyn/Baker Cr	3,000	Cattle	NA			5
	6022	Wilfred Creek	6,965	Cattle	NA			1
	6023	Black Mine	1,658	Cattle	NA			5
	6047	Red Mountain	4,871	Cattle	NA			5
	6079	East Crater Mountain	3,524	Cattle	CA-010-062	Crater Mountain	35%	5
Mendiburu, Joe	6033	Tinemaha	3,681	Cattle	NA			5
Lacey Livestock	6043	Chalk Bluff	15,607	Cattle	CA-010-081	Volcanic Tablelands	30%	2
					CA-010-080	Fish Slough	2%	
	6044	Long Valley	303	Cattle	NA			1
	6045	Tobacco Flat	380	Cattle	NA			1
	6048	West Santa Rita	321	Cattle	NA			5
Voget, Stan	6051	Wells Meadow	1,263	Cattle	NA			1
Swagger Ranch, Inc.	6063	Dry Canyon	893	Cattle	NA			9
Talbot, William and Thomas	6030	Chalfant Valley	13,140	Cattle	NA			3
Lone Tree Cattle Co.	6026	Mathieu	1,950	Cattle	NA			4
	6027	Adobe Valley	24,043	Cattle	NA			4
Losey, Cornealius	6053	Lone Tree	3,559	Cattle	NA			3
I & M Sheep Company	6007	Volcanic Tablelands *2	44,006	Sheep				3
	6055	Mono Mills	35,932	Sheep	CA-010-090	Granite Mountain	40%	4
	6078	Walters Ranch	516	Sheep	NA			6
*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)								



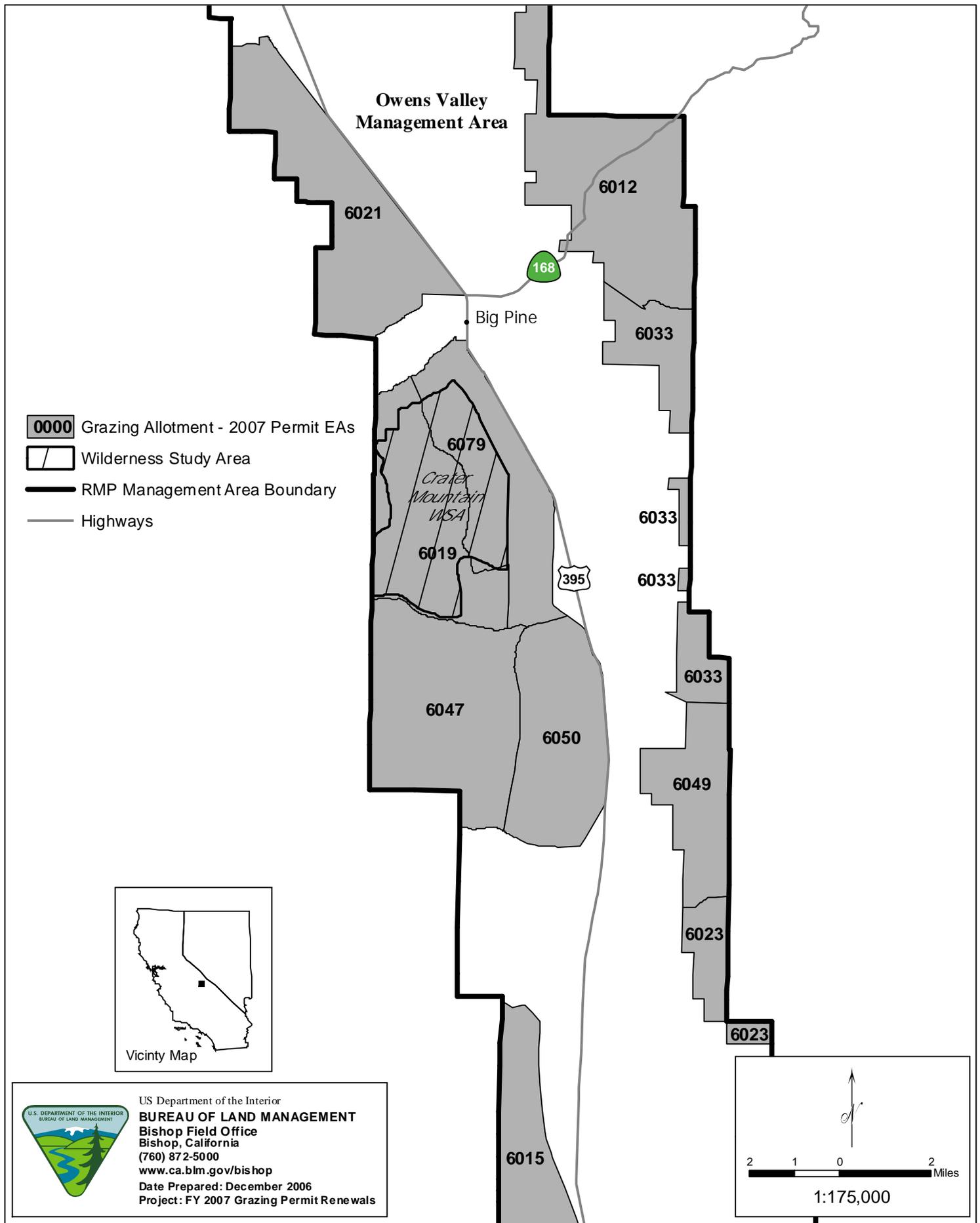
Map 1. Overview of Allotments to be Analyzed in Livestock Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessments (EAs) during 2007. Bishop Field Office, South Portion.



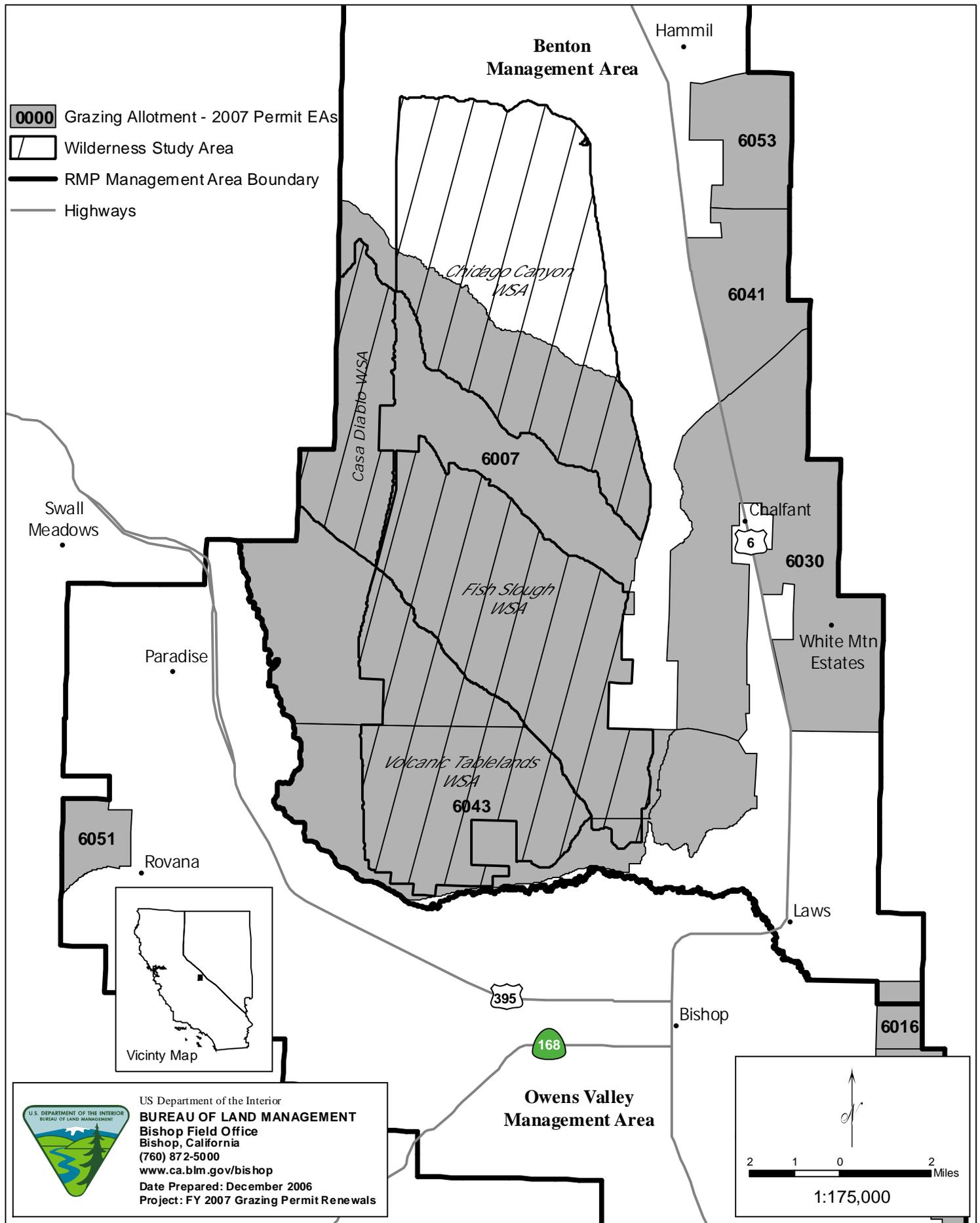
Map 2. Overview of Allotments to be Analyzed in Livestock Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessments (EAs) during 2007. Bishop Field Office, North Portion.



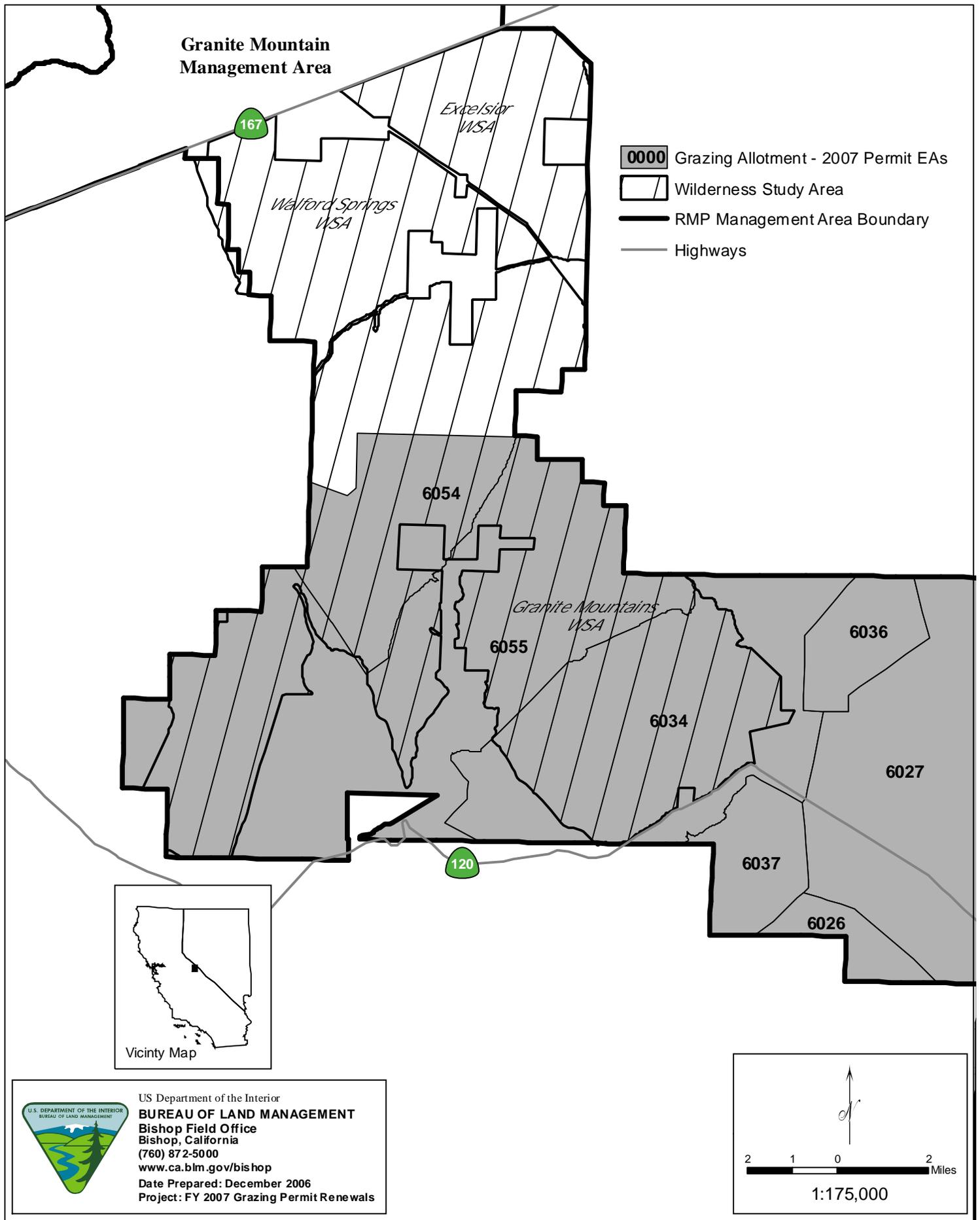
Map 3. Portions of Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) within Allotments to be Analyzed in Livestock Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessments (EAs) during 2007. Owens Valley Management Area, South Portion.



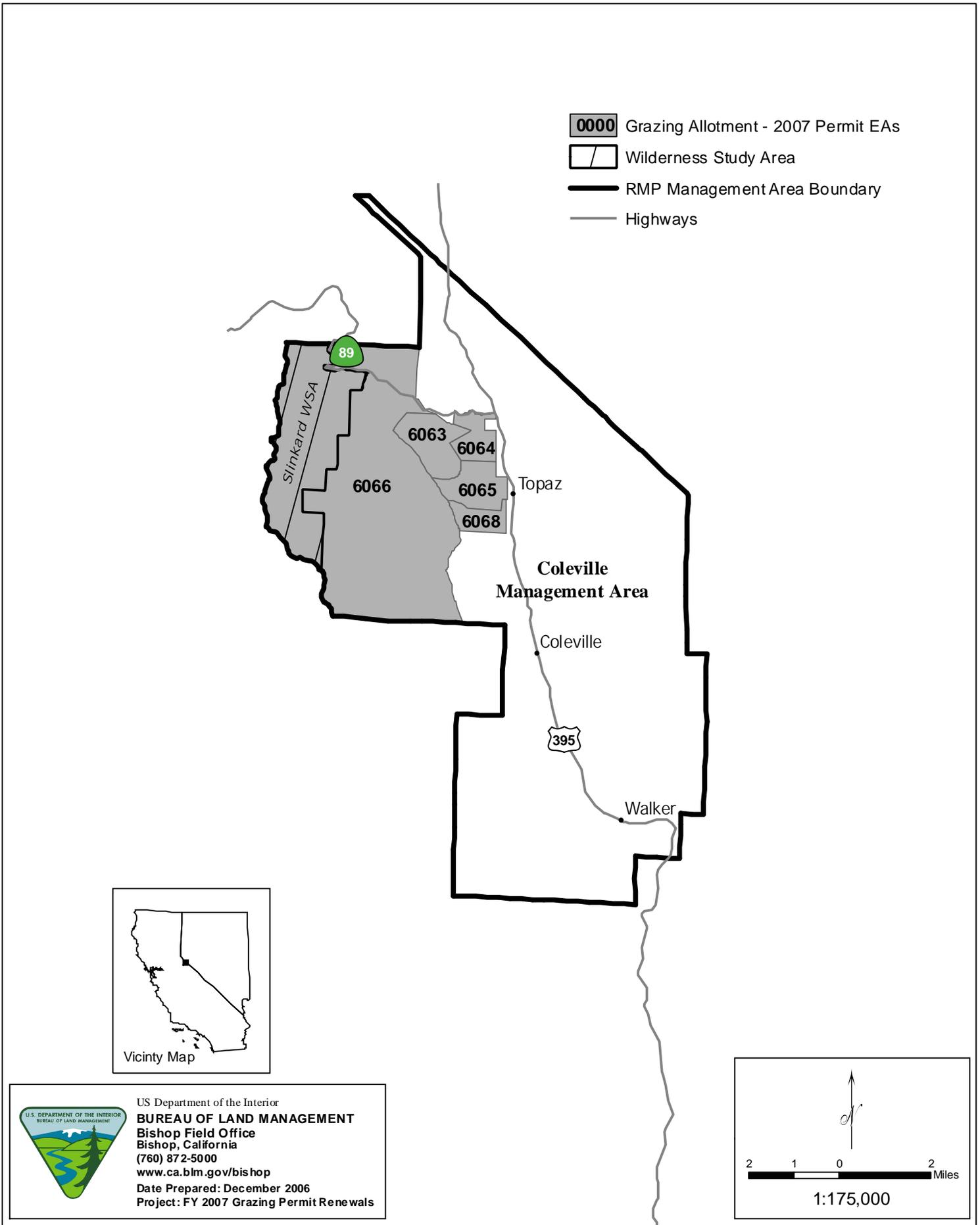
Map 4. Portions of Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) within Allotments to be Analyzed in Livestock Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessments (EAs) during 2007. Owens Valley Management Area, North Portion.



Map 5. Portions of Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) within Allotments to be Analyzed in Livestock Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessments (EAs) during 2007. Benton Management Area.



Map 6. Portions of Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) within Allotments to be Analyzed in Livestock Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessments (EAs) during 2007. Granite Mountain Management Area.



0000 Grazing Allotment - 2007 Permit EAs

 Wilderness Study Area

 RMP Management Area Boundary

 Highways

Slinkard WSA

89

6063
6064
6065
6066
6068

Topaz

Coleville Management Area

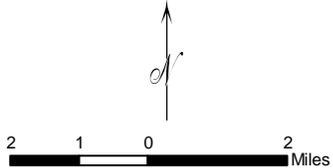
Coleville

395

Walker




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 Date Prepared: December 2006
 Project: FY 2007 Grazing Permit Renewals



2 1 0 2 Miles
 1:175,000

Map 7. Portions of Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) within Allotments to be Analyzed in Livestock Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessments (EAs) during 2007. Coleville Management Area.