



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS (FONSI) for EA CA 170-08-50 10 Year Grazing Authorization on the Mono Mills (6055) allotment

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 the environmental assessment (EA) CA 170-08-50 regarding the Mono Mills (6055) allotment, 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 allotment, low 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 allotment meets 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 Mono Mills allotment does not occur within any congressionally designated Wilderness Area. However, approximately 40% (21,916 acres) of the Granite Mountains WSA (CA-170-010-090) occurs within the Mono Mills allotment. Wilderness values are described in the 1979 Final Wilderness Intensive Inventory Report while the WSA's existing range and other improvements are identified in the 1990 California Statewide Wilderness Study Report. The Interim Management Policy for Lands Under Wilderness Review (IMP) provides direction for grazing management in WSAs until they are designated wilderness or released from the wilderness review process. Grazing existed on the Mono Mills allotment at the time the WSA was designated by BLM in the 1980's and is a use grandfathered by Section 603(c) of FLPMA. Grazing may continue to the same manner and degree as took place in 1976. Continuance of proposed grazing in the Granite Mountain WSA would conform with the BLM IMP and would not impair Congress's ability to designate the WSA as Wilderness.

Lastly, there are no park lands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas within Mono Mills allotment.

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 Mono Mills allotment, 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. Impacts to cultural properties are predicted to be minimal as a result of the proposed action for the following reasons. The allotment in general does not receive heavy use and is grazed in conjunction with a Forest Service lease. As a result, livestock use on the BLM allotment is generally highly dispersed with light use.

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 Mono Mills allotment and no federally listed species are known to occupy the allotment.

The extreme western portion of the Mono Mills allotment is within 23 kilometers of the boundary of the Northern Recovery Unit for Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep (Department of Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2007. Recovery Plan for the Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep. Sacramento, CA. 199 pp). The 23 kilometer distance was used in the final Recovery Plan for the Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep to narrow the focus for analysis when considering potential physical contact between domestic and wild sheep. The nearest population of Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep is found in the Mt. Gibbs herd unit in the Sierra Nevada, approximately 18 kilometers west of the western most boundary of the Mono Mills allotment. The location and timing of domestic sheep presence on the Mono Mills allotment along with: 1) the terms and conditions of the grazing permit specific to monitoring and responding to Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep movements relative to allotments east of Highway 395, 2) the lack of suitable Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep habitat on the Mono Mills allotment and between the allotment and the Mt. Gibbs herd unit, 3) the combination of distance and impediments to movement by either wild sheep or domestic sheep between the Mono Mills allotment and the Mt. Gibbs herd unit, 4) the characteristic behavior of wild sheep to exhibit group living, a strong preference for rocky escape terrain, and occupation of alpine ranges (females) and lower elevation subalpine habitat near the Sierra Nevada crest (males) in the summer and, 5) the reluctance of wild sheep to disperse from their home range (USFWS 2007) combine to ensure sufficient safeguards are in place to prevent physical contact between the two species.

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 170-08-50 for the Mono Mills (6055) allotment and authorize livestock grazing for 10-years with revised, allotment specific terms and conditions to the grazing operator.

Authorized Official:

/s/ Bill Dunkelberger

Field Manager, Bishop Field Office

Date: /s/ September 22, 2008