

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
LIVESTOCK GRAZING AUTHORIZATION
REVISION TO GREEN SPRING RUN TRIBUTARY
#4140 (KISTLER)

EA # CA-180-10-56

Mother Lode Field Office
August 2010

INTRODUCTION

This Environmental Assessment (EA) is prepared to disclose and analyze the environmental consequences of re-authorizing a livestock grazing lease with the following terms and conditions for the Green Spring Run Tributary allotment #04140 (previously Kistler):

Allotment	Acreage	Percent BLM	Number of Livestock	Kind	From	To	AUMs	Lease Length
Green Spring Run Tributary 04140	BLM – 160 Private – 2000	7	200	Cows	11/15	5/15	84	10 years

A previous EA (EA #180-10-48) analyzed the impacts of several range renewals, including this range renewal. However, the terms and conditions did not clearly reflect the actual use of the allotment. After further review of this lease and discussion with the lessee, it was determined that the actual grazing use is different than what was authorized in 2000 and what is proposed in EA #180-10-48. The actual use is as described in the table above. The use differs in terms of number of cows/AUMs and season of use. Also refer to Table 1 to see a comparison of 2000, EA-10-48, and now. Although the AUMs in this revision are higher, the actual grazing on the allotment has not changed in years. The terms and conditions now would simply reflect the use of the allotment by the livestock. An evaluation of the allotment in 2010 found that it met the Central California Standards for Rangeland Health. The terms and conditions in EA #180-10-48 are:

Allotment	Acreage	Percent BLM	Number of Livestock	Kind	From	To	AUMs	Lease Length
Green Spring Run Tributary 04140	BLM – 160	15	40	Cows	11/15	6/15	36	10 years

The EA is a site-specific analysis of potential impacts that could result with the implementation of this alternative. The EA assists the BLM in project planning and ensuring compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and in compliance with other laws and policies affecting the alternatives. If the decision maker determines that this project has “significant” impacts following the analysis in the EA, then an EIS would be prepared for the project. If not, a grazing decision will be issued along with a FONSI statement, documenting the reasons why implementation of the selected alternative would not result in “significant” environmental impacts.

Background

Table 1

Name	Legal Description/ County	Acres	Type of Livestock	AUMs	Season of Use	Current Exp. Date
Green Spring Run Tributary 04140	T1S R13E Sec 9 S ½ NE ¼, N ½ SE ¼. See Map 1 and 2.	Current (160)	Current (Cows)	Current (27)	Current (year-round)	02/28/10
		EA # 180-10-48 (160)	EA # 180-10-48 (Cows)	EA # 180-10-48 (36)	EA # 180-10-48 (11/15 – 6/15)	
		Revision (160)	Revision (Cows)	Revision (84)	Revision (11/15 – 5/15)	

Purpose and Need for the Action

The purpose of the action is to consider whether to authorize grazing on the Green Spring Run Tributary allotment #04140 (previously Kistler). If authorized, grazing would be in accordance with 43 CFR 4100 and consistent with the provisions of the Taylor Grazing Act, Public Rangelands Improvement Act, and Federal Land Policy and Management Act. The purpose of the action is also to ensure that all authorizations implement provisions of, and is in conformance with, the Sierra Resource Management Plan (February 2008), and is in conformance with the Central California Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health.

The action is needed to respond to expired leases.

Scoping and Issues

The proposed action underwent internal, interdisciplinary scoping. No significant issues surfaced regarding the lease.

Prevention of Unnecessary or Undue Degradation

In addition to the management prescriptions discussed in this EA, including all terms and conditions, BLM may use its authority to close an area of any of the allotments to grazing use or take other measures to protect resources at any time, if needed. Therefore, issuance of a grazing lease with appropriate terms and conditions is consistent with BLM's responsibility to manage the public's use, occupancy, and development of the public lands and prevent unnecessary or undue degradation of the lands. (43 USC 1732(b)).

Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, and Plans

The Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA) requires federal agencies to complete formal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) for any action that "may affect" federally listed species or critical habitat. The ESA also requires federal agencies to use their authorities to carry out programs for the conservation of endangered and threatened species.

In August 2004, the State Director, California Bureau of Land Management and the California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) addressed the issue of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) Section 106 compliance procedures for processing grazing permit lease renewals for livestock as defined in 43 CFR 4100.0-5. The State Director and the SHPO amended the 2004 State Protocol Agreement between California Bureau of Land Management and The California State Historic Preservation Officer with the 2004 Grazing Amendment, Supplemental Procedures for Livestock Grazing Permit/Lease Renewal. This amendment allows for the renewal of existing grazing permits prior to completing all NHPA compliance needs as long as the 2004 State Protocol direction, the BLM 8100 Series Manual Guidelines, and specific amendment direction for planning, inventory methodology, tribal and interested party consultation, evaluation, effect, treatment, and monitoring stipulations are followed. The 2004 Grazing Amendment remains in effect as a part of the 2007 State Protocol Agreement. The Mother Lode Field Office did not need to invoke the amendment to complete its Section 106 obligations to renew the grazing lease under the proposed alternative.

Plan Conformance

Determination:

The proposed action is in conformance with the Sierra Resource Management Plan (RMP), approved in February, 2008, including the Central California Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health.

Rationale:

The proposed action would occur in an area identified as available for livestock grazing in the Sierra Resource Management Plan (RMP). The proposed action is consistent with the land use decisions and resource management goals and objectives of the plan, as described in the RMP on pages 23-24. The key decisions, goals, and objectives include: manage livestock to achieve the four fundamentals of rangeland health; change authorized grazing preference and/or season of use to meet or make progress toward meeting standards established by the Central California Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health approved in June, 2001.

Rangeland Health

The allotment was assessed on April 15, 2010, and determined to meet the Central California Standards for Rangeland Health on July 14, 2010. The standards are as follows:

Soils: Soils exhibit functional biological and physical characteristics that are appropriate to soil type, climate, and land form.

Species: Healthy, productive, and diverse populations of native species, including special status species (Federal T&E, Federal proposed, Federal candidates, BLM sensitive, or California State T&E) are maintained or enhanced where appropriate.

Riparian/Wetland: Riparian/wetland vegetation, structure and diversity and stream channels, and floodplains are, or are making significant progress toward, functioning properly and achieving an advanced ecological status.

Water Quality: Surface and groundwater quality complies with California or other appropriate (e.g. Nevada or Tribal) water quality standards.

U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2001. Central California Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health. Central California Resource Advisory Council. Approved June 2001.

CHAPTER 2: PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1 – Proposed Action

This proposed action is to authorize grazing on the Green Spring Run Tributary #04140 (previously Kistler) with applicable provisions as discussed further in this section. We propose changes to the terms and conditions on this lease based on further discussion with the lessee regarding how the allotment is actually used. The proposed change is illustrated in Table 3 below. To understand how the Proposed Action (Alternative 1) differs from the Current Management Action (Alternative 2), compare Table 3 with Table 4 under the Current Management (no action) alternative below. Also refer to Table 1 above.

A. Mandatory Terms and Conditions

Table 2

Allotment	Acreage	Percent BLM	Number of Livestock	Kind	From	To	AUMs	Lease Length
Green Spring Run Tributary 04140	BLM – 160 Private – 2000	7	200	Cows	11/15	5/15	84	10 years

No mitigation or range improvements are being proposed on this allotment.

Alternative 2 – Current Management (No Action)

A 10-year permit would be issued for this lease with the terms and conditions unchanged from the previous lease. This action is illustrated in Table 4 below. Under this alternative the terms and conditions of the Green Spring Run Tributary (04140) would not be changed to more accurately reflect actual grazing use of the allotment. See Table 2 in proposed action section to compare terms and conditions to this alternative. Also refer to Table 1 for a comparison of the current and proposed. The existing terms and conditions are as follows:

Table 3

Allotment	Acreage	Percent BLM	Number of Livestock	Kind	From	To	AUMs	Lease Length
Green Spring Run Tributary 04140	160	100	2	Cows	2/28	3/1	24	10 years

No mitigation or range improvements are being proposed on this allotment.

Alternative 3 - No Grazing

This alternative would cancel the lease on the Green Spring Run Tributary (04140) allotment. As a result, grazing would not be authorized on this allotment. Under this alternative, BLM would

initiate the process in accordance with the 43 CFR parts 4100 and 1600 to eliminate grazing on this allotment and amend the Sierra Resource Management Plan.

Current Livestock Management

Green Spring Run Tributary (04140) – The entire private ranch and leased lands is 2,760 acres, of which 2,000 acres occur on the north side of the Highway, the same side as the allotment area. Steve Kistler has about 200 cows total that run from November 15 to May 15 each year north of the Highway. BLM land comprises 7 percent of the total grazed land on the north side of the Highway. There was evidence of cattle grazing along the Green Springs run tributary in the form of fairly extensive cattle trails, cow pies, and forage use.

CHAPTER 3: ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

The following supplemental authorities are not relevant to this project because related resources or conditions are not present: Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC); essential fish habitat; prime or unique farmlands; floodplains; wild and scenic rivers, wilderness; wild horse and burro herds; solid or hazardous wastes; or environmental justice.

Air Quality

Affected Environment

The project area is in the Mountain Counties Air Basin in an area classified as federal non-attainment for ozone under the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (www.arb.ca.gov/desig/adm.htm). A state implementation plan (SIP) for California identifies sources of emissions which include motor vehicles, consumer products, and pesticides (www.arb.ca.gov/planning/sip/94sip/sipvoll.htm). The SIP also includes control measures to reduce emissions.

Impacts of all Alternatives

The small livestock operation and slight vehicle use would not affect air quality. Cancellation of this small lease similarly would not affect air quality.

Cultural Resources

Affected Environment

0404140 – Green Spring Run Tributary – An inventory conducted in 2000 by BLM archaeologist, Dean Decker, found no cultural resources on the allotment.

Impacts of Proposed Action, Current Management (no action), and No Grazing

No grazing impacts to cultural resources have been identified.

References

Barnes, J. 2010. Section 106 compliance for the Kistler grazing lease renewal, Tuolumne County. Memorandum to the Field Manager. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Mother Lode Field Office, El Dorado Hills, California. 5 pp.

Vegetation

Affected Environment

0404140 – Green Spring Run Tributary – The lease area is dominated by 2 plant communities; 1) blue oak savannah, and 2) interior live oak woodland, the latter often found on lower slopes of the drainages. Associated woody species include gray pine, California buckeye, toyon, common manzanita, buckbrush, redbud, poison oak, hoary coffeeberry, yerba santa, bush monkeyflower, snowberry, holly-leaf redberry, blue elderberry; and red willow in small stretches of the drainage with riparian character.

Special status species – None found.

Impacts of the Proposed Action and Current Management

0404140 – Green Spring Run Tributary – None to special status species.

Impacts of No Grazing – Elimination of grazing is not expected to impact vegetation.

References

Franklin, A. 2010. Botanical Resource Inventory Report (Green Springs Run Tributary grazing lease renewal). Unpubl. rep. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Mother Lode Field Office, El Dorado Hills, California. 1 p.

Invasive, non-native species

0404140 – Green Spring Run Tributary – Italian thistle is prominent, dominating portions of the main drainage that runs north through the lease.

Impacts of the Proposed Action and Current Management

Italian thistle is abundant the length of the Green Spring Run tributary, and at other locations in the allotment. It is the most important weed present. Although invasive weed species are present on this allotment, they do not appear to be substantially impacting the abundance or cover of native species. Cattle can spread weed seed through their scat and on their hair. Disturbance by hoof action can also create microsites for weed establishment. The proposed level of grazing that will occur on this allotment would not substantially affect the spread of invasive weeds.

Impacts of No Grazing

Under the no grazing alternative, the potential for dispersal of seeds through livestock hairs and scat would decrease throughout the allotment. Once weeds are established, moderate grazing during their growth period and when they are palatable can help control some important herbaceous weed species. Elimination of grazing could exacerbate existing weed problems in some areas. Because current levels of grazing do not appear to be substantially affecting weed spread, elimination of grazing would not be expected to noticeably reduce invasive species on the allotment, and could potentially exacerbate existing weed problems.

Franklin, A. 2010. Botanical Resource Inventory Report (Green Springs Run Tributary grazing lease renewal). Unpubl. rep. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Mother Lode Field Office, El Dorado Hills, California. 1 p.

Recreation

Affected Environment

The allotment is only accessible through private land. Signs of recreation use were not observed on the allotment.

Impacts of the Proposed Action and Current Management

The primary impact of grazing on recreation opportunities will be the presence of domestic livestock and the livestock operator in the area during the grazing season. Due to limited access and no observed recreation, the proposed action is not impacting recreational opportunities.

Impacts of No Grazing

Due to limited access and no observed recreational use, elimination of already low/no impact grazing is not expected to affect recreation in the allotment.

Social and Economic Values

Due to the size and nature of this allotment, it is expected that the lessee employs few if any individuals in the community. Livestock grazing on the scale of this allotment contribute little economic value to the community. Economic impacts of all of the alternatives are insignificant. For example, according to an online profile (http://www.tuolumnecountyprofile.org/economy_and_infrastructure/economy_and_infrastructure_pg43.htm), in 2007 (before the start of the current recession) Tuolumne County had 290 jobs in “Natural Resources and Mining” which presumably includes livestock ranching. There was a total of 17,782 jobs in the county in all sectors in 2007. Therefore, jobs in “Natural Resources and Mining” accounted for approximately 2 percent (1.6 percent) of jobs in the county. This is an extremely small portion of the county’s overall job picture (and remember that this category also includes jobs in mining and other natural resource industries).

Using official government statistics to look at the economic role of the cattle industry statewide (http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Statistics/PDFs/AgResourceDirectory2008/5_2008_LivestockAndDairy.pdf), in 2009 Tuolumne County had 12,000 cattle. This was less than 10 percent of central Sierra Nevada cattle which stood at 119,000. Overall, the central Sierra Nevada district was ranked 5th out of 8 districts/regions in terms of cattle production in 2009. It is clear from these statistics that the central Sierra Nevada is not an economically important player in California’s cattle industry. It is also notable that the cattle industry is not one of the state’s important agricultural industries. The lease renewal analyzed in this EA is part of very small cattle operations in the central Sierra Nevada. It is not economically important at either at local or statewide/regional levels.

Because the lease has been in the family for a number of years, livestock grazing has become a way of life and a tradition passed from generation to generation through the years. Social impacts of the lease cancellation would impact the lessee’s way of life.

Soils

Affected Environment

0404140 – Green Spring Run Tributary – Soil Vegetation mapping of the Copperopolis Quadrangle (1975) classified the soils of the lease area into 3 soil series. The majority of the parcel was mapped as Whiterock soil series. Small portions of the northeast corner of the lease area were mapped as Auburn and Dorado soil series.

Impacts of the Proposed Action and Current Management

There is little evidence of erosion or compaction on the allotment. Therefore, livestock grazing is not seriously impacting soils on the allotment.

Impacts of the No Grazing Alternative

Elimination of grazing will not affect soil productivity or stability.

Franklin, A. 2010. Botanical Resource Inventory Report (Green Springs Run Tributary grazing lease renewal). Unpubl. rep. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Mother Lode Field Office, El Dorado Hills, California. 1 p.

Water Quality

Affected Environment

0404140 – Green Spring Run Tributary – The allotment is in the Upper Tuolumne watershed. Approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of an intermittent drainage, a tributary to Green Spring Run, goes through the allotment. Green Spring Run drains into Tullock Reservoir. There are no developed water sources.

Impacts of the Proposed Action and Current Management (no action)

Because the State has not identified these rivers as water quality impaired, further grazing at current or proposed levels are not expected to substantially affect water quality or beneficial water uses.

Impacts from the No Grazing Alternative

Elimination of grazing is not expected to substantially improve water quality on the allotment.

References

California Regional Water Quality Board, Central Valley Region. Revised 2009. The Water Quality Control Plan (Basin Plan) for the Sacramento River and San Joaquin River Basins.

Wetlands/Riparian

Riparian-wetland areas are functioning properly when adequate vegetation, landform, or large woody debris is present to dissipate stream energy associated with high waterflows, thereby reducing erosion and improving water quality; filter sediment, capture bedload, and aid floodplain development; improve flood-water retention and ground-water recharge; develop root masses that

stabilize streambanks against cutting action; develop diverse ponding and channel characteristics to provide the habitat and the water depth, duration, and temperature necessary for fish production, waterfowl breeding, and other uses; and support greater biodiversity. The functioning condition of riparian-wetland areas is a result of interaction among geology, soil, water, and vegetation.

Affected Environment

0404140 – Green Spring Run Tributary – Approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile of intermittent stream with bedrock control, a tributary to Green Springs run, goes through the allotment. Less than 10% of the stream shows true riparian characteristics. Often there is no floodplain. There is no opportunity for erosion and little opportunity for deposition. The short riparian reaches are not fully vegetated. Willows are old with little reproduction. Italian thistle and other exotics are prominent. None the less the creek functions pretty much as it would without grazing; like a concrete “floodway”. This appears to be the natural condition. This reach was assessed as PFC in 1999. Due to the increased prevalence of Italian thistle and the non-native bullfrog, the reach was reassessed as functional at risk in 2010. The stream has little natural potential to develop true riparian characteristics.

Impacts of the Proposed Action and Current Management (no action)

The proposed action and current management are not substantially impacting the riparian area on the allotment.

Impacts of No Grazing Alternative

Cattle grazing is not substantially impacting riparian habitat on the allotment, therefore elimination of grazing will have no affect on riparian habitat.

References

U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2010. Grazing Use Management/Rangeland Health Assessment and Determination for the Green Springs Run Tributary allotment. Mother Lode Field Office, El Dorado Hills, California. 2 pp.

Wildlife

0404140 – Green Spring Run Tributary – The allotment is part of the year-long range of the Mariposa deer herd and provides high habitat value for mule deer. An adult bald eagle was observed flying out of a tree by the intermittent drainage. Several other bird species were present, including Cooper’s hawk, turkey vulture, California quail, and lark sparrow. Bull frogs were prevalent in the drainage.

Special status species: Elderberry bushes are present on the allotment. The bush is the host plant for valley elderberry longhorn beetle, an invertebrate listed as threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Impacts of all Alternatives

Neither proposed, existing grazing or elimination of grazing are expected to impact wildlife because grazing does not appear to be adversely affecting special status species known to occur

on the allotment or their habitats, and there is no apparent competition for forage between wildlife and livestock.

References

Mayer, K.E., and W.F. Laudenslayer, Jr., Editors. 1988. A guide to wildlife habitats of California. California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Sacramento, CA. 166 pp.

U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 1982. Proposed Livestock Grazing Management for the Sierra Planning Area Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Sacramento, California. 145 pp.

Cumulative Impacts

Because no site specific adverse impacts are expected for any resources (described above), cumulative impacts at the larger, watershed scale are not anticipated, for the proposed alternative. Lease cancellation could lead to cumulative social impacts. The rural way of life is being impacted in these areas due to expanding development and urbanization. Livestock grazing is a tradition and lifestyle choice for the lessee. Lease cancellation would impact this lifestyle and tradition.

CHAPTER 4: CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Persons, Groups, and Agencies Consulted

- Chicken Ranch Rancheria of Me-Wuk
- Tuolumne Me-Wuk Tribal Council
- Steve Kistler

Public Participation

The EA will be available on BLM's website for a 15-day public review period.

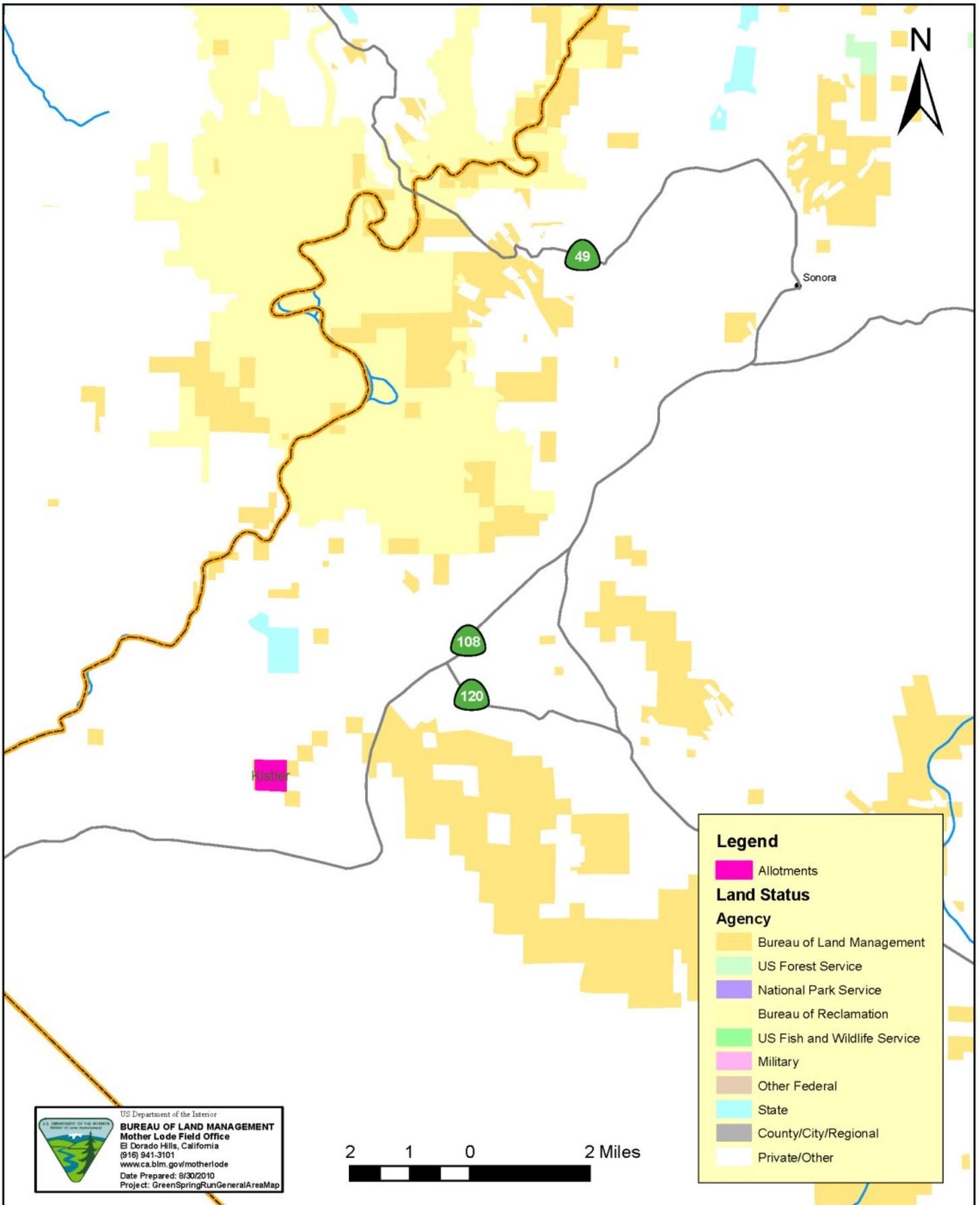
List of Preparers and Reviewers

- Peggy Cranston, Wildlife Biologist and Range Program Lead
- Al Franklin, Botanist
- James Barnes, Archaeologist and NEPA Coordinator

Reviewers:

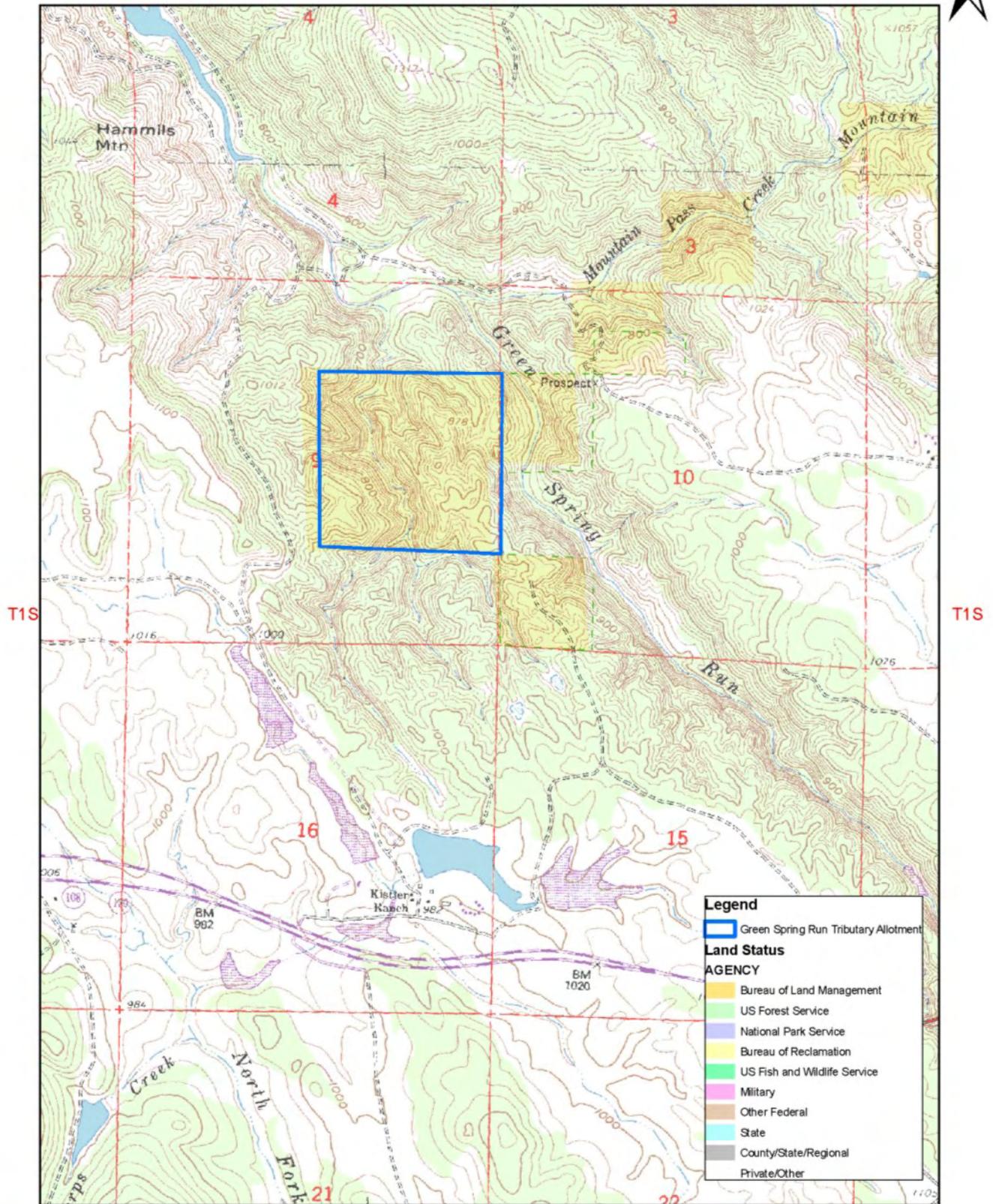
<i>/s/ James Barnes</i>	<i>8-30-10</i>
_____ NEPA Reviewer/Cultural Resources	_____
<i>/s/ Albert Franklin</i>	<i>8-30-10</i>
_____ Botany	_____
<i>/s/ Peggy Cranston</i>	<i>8-30-10</i>
_____ Wildlife	_____

Map 1 - Green Spring Run Tributary/Kistler Allotment



Map 2 - Green Spring Run Tributary Allotment

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