

United States Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management

Environmental Assessment CA-180-12-53

Finding of No Significant Impact

**Grand Point Ranch #04014, Merced #04149, and Drunken Gulch
(formerly Cavagnaro) #4200 Grazing Authorizations**

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Mother Lode Field Office
5152 Hillside Circle
El Dorado Hills, CA 95762
Phone: (916) 941-3102
FAX: (916) 941-3199

July 2012

**Finding of No Significant Impact
Mother Lode Field Office**

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT DETERMINATION:

Based upon a review of the EA and the supporting documents, I find that the proposed action is not a major federal action, and 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 do not exceed those effects described in the Sierra RMP. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not needed. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described:

Context: The project is a site-specific action cumulatively (all 3 allotments), directly involving approximately 12,400 acres of BLM administered land that by itself does not have international, national, regional, or state-wide importance.

Intensity: The following discussion is organized around the Ten Significance Criteria described in 40 CFR 1508.27 and incorporated into BLM's Critical Elements of the Human Environment list (H-1790-1), and supplemental Instruction Memorandum, Acts, regulations and Executive Orders. The following have been considered in evaluating intensity for this proposal:

1. **Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse.** The proposed action would impact resources as described in the EA. None of the environmental effects discussed in detail in the EA and associated appendices are considered significant, nor do the effects exceed those described in the Sierra RMP FEIS.
2. **The degree to which the selected alternative will affect public health or safety.** No health and safety issues are associated with the proposed action.
3. **Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.** Portions of the Limestone Salamander and Merced River ACECs occur within the Merced allotment. Twelve miles of the Merced River are designated as Wild and Scenic River. Eleven miles are on the Merced allotment. The Merced River Wilderness Study Area (WSA) CA-040-203 encompasses 12,835 acres of which approximately 1,800 acres occur on the Merced allotment and approximately 200 acres occur on the Drunken Gulch allotment. Wilderness values include naturalness, solitude, primitive recreation, and special resource characteristics. The WSA was recommended as non-suitable for designation as wilderness by the Bureau in its report to Congress. No adverse impacts to Wild and Scenic River, wilderness or ACEC values were identified.
4. **The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.** There is no scientific controversy over the nature of the impacts.
5. **The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.** The project is not unique or unusual. The BLM has experience implementing similar actions in similar areas. The environmental effects to the human environment are fully analyzed in the EA. There are no predicted effects on the human environment that 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 actions considered in the selected alternative are not precedent setting. They were considered by the interdisciplinary team within the context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. A complete analysis of the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the selected alternative and all other alternatives is described in Chapter 3 of the EA.
7. **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts – which include connected actions regardless of land ownership.** The interdisciplinary team evaluated the possible actions in context of past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions. Because no site specific adverse impacts are expected for any resources, cumulative impacts at the larger, watershed scale are not anticipated. Even the elimination of grazing would probably not have a significant cumulative socio-economic effect because of the relatively small size and economic input of the grazing use that would be authorized.
8. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.** The project will not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor will it cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. A cultural inventory has been completed for the proposed action in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). A finding of “no historic properties affected” on cultural resources completes BLM’s obligations under Section 106 of the NHPA, pursuant to the statewide Protocol Agreement (2007) between BLM California and the State Historic Preservation Officer. These reports are on file with BLM. If negative effects are detected during monitoring, then BLM will work with the lessees to take steps to eliminate or reduce these effects.
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, or the degree to which the action may adversely affect: 1) a proposed to be listed endangered or threatened species or its habitat, or 2) a species on BLM’s sensitive species list.** Although elderberry bushes (potential host plant for the valley elderberry longhorn beetle, a species listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act) occurs on the Merced allotment, there is no evidence that these bushes are being degraded as a result of grazing. Therefore, the proposed action is not anticipated to affect endangered or threatened species or their habitat. The limestone salamander, a state-listed and BLM sensitive amphibian species, occurs within the Merced allotment. Western pond turtle was observed on Camp Creek in 2005 on the Grand Point Ranch. The southwestern pond turtle is considered a BLM sensitive species. It is unknown whether the pond turtle observed on Camp Creek was a northwestern or southwestern pond turtle. The allotment is in an area that is shown on the range maps as an area where either subspecies may occur. Two BLM sensitive plant species, Mariposa clarkia (*Clarkia biloba ssp. australis*) and Parry’s horkelia (*Horkelia parryi*), were found during botanical surveys of the Merced allotment. Beaked clarkia, *Clarkia rostrata*, a BLM-sensitive plant species, occurs on the Drunken Gulch allotment. No adverse effects to special status species were identified.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of a federal, state, or local, regulation or policy imposed for the protection of the environment, where non-federal requirements are consistent with federal requirements. The project does not violate any known federal, state, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. State, local, and tribal interests were given the opportunity to participate in the environmental analysis process. Furthermore, letters were sent to appropriate Native American tribes concerning consulting party status, and there was no response from any of the tribes. In addition, the project is consistent with applicable land management plans, policies, and programs.

William S. Haigh, Mother Lode Field Manager

Date

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
LIVESTOCK GRAZING AUTHORIZATION

EA Number CA-180-12-53

Allotment Names

Grand Point Ranch (4014)

Merced (4149)

Drunken Gulch (4200)

Mother Lode Field Office

July 2012

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This Environmental Assessment (EA) is prepared to disclose and analyze the environmental consequences of re-authorizing a livestock grazing lease as proposed in Alternative 1 on the Grand Point Ranch #04014, Merced #04149, and Drunken Gulch #04200 allotments. The EA is a site-specific analysis of potential impacts that could result with the implementation of one of the alternatives. 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. See table below for public acres, county, elevation range, and vegetation communities.

Name	#	Acres	County	Elevation	Vegetation Communities
Grand Point Ranch	4014	500	El Dorado	2000' - 2900'	Valley foothill riparian, mixed chaparral, blue/live oak woodland, montane hardwood, and annual grassland.
Merced	4149	11,200	Mariposa	850' - 3150'	Valley foothill riparian, mixed chaparral, chamise, annual grassland, montane hardwood, blue oak woodland
Drunken Gulch	4200	700	Mariposa	850' - 3850'	Valley foothill riparian, mixed chaparral, chamise, annual grassland, montane hardwood, blue oak woodland

Purpose and Need for the Action

The purpose of the action is to consider whether to authorize grazing on the Grand Point Ranch allotment #04014, Merced allotment #04129, and Drunken Gulch allotment #04200 (previously Cavagnaro). 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, leases that will expire within the next couple years, and leases issued under the appropriation act.

Scoping and Issues

The proposed action underwent internal, interdisciplinary scoping. Possible special status plant issues were raised for the Merced and Drunken Gulch allotments. Possible cultural resource issues were raised for the Merced allotment. Possible Native American interest and weed issues were raised for the Grand Point Ranch allotment.

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 leases 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 areas 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 July, 2000.

Rangeland Health

The Central California Standards for Rangeland Health are as follows:

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

Species: Viable, 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 functioning properly, and meeting regional and local management objectives.

Water Quality: Surface and groundwater quality complies with objectives of the Clean Water Act and other applicable water quality requirements, including meeting the California State standards.

The three allotments being evaluated in this EA have been determined to be achieving all of the standards for rangeland health.

Table 2

Allotment Name and Number	Date of Assessment	Date of Determination
Grand Point Ranch 04014	June 1, 2012	July 11, 2012
Merced 04149	May 16, 2012	July 11, 2012
Drunken Gulch 04200	May 17, 2012	July 11, 2012

U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2000. Central California Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health. Central California Resource Advisory Council. Approved July 13, 2000.

U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2012. Grazing Allotment Assessment and Determination for the Grand Point Ranch Allotment. Unpubl. Rep. Mother Lode Field Office. 2 pp.

U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2012. Grazing Allotment Assessment and Determination for the Drunken Gulch Allotment. Unpubl. Rep. Mother Lode Field Office. 3 pp.

U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2012. Grazing Allotment Assessment and Determination for the Merced Allotment. Unpubl. Rep. Mother Lode Field Office. 3 pp.

CHAPTER 2: PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1 – Proposed Action

This proposed action is to authorize grazing on the Grand Point Ranch #04014, Merced #04149, and Drunken Gulch #04200 (previously Cavagnaro) allotments with applicable provisions as discussed further in this section. We propose changes to the terms and conditions on all of the leases based on discussions with the lessees regarding how the allotments are actually used, or how the allotment is anticipated to be used by new lessees. In addition, the Merced allotment will be reduced in size by approximately one-half, using the North Merced as the boundary, as well as eliminating scattered parcels within the allotment near Hornitos. These parcels will not be used for cattle grazing by the current lessee. The new lessee does not own the base property associated with these small scattered parcels, or the base property that was associated with the larger portion of the allotment west of the North Fork Merced. The Merced allotment will continue to be administered as an Actual Use allotment. This means that although the lessee must stay within the terms and conditions of the lease, the lessee will submit an actual use form each year of how many cattle used the allotment during which months. In addition, the Drunken Gulch allotment will be reduced in size from 2,300 acres to 700 acres so that the allotment reflects the area of actual grazing use. These proposed changes are 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.

Mandatory Terms and Conditions

Table 3

Allotment	Acreage	Percent BLM	Number of Livestock	Kind	From	To	AUMs	Lease Length
Grand Point Ranch #04014	500	100	20	Cows	9/15	12/15	60	10 years
Merced #04149	11,200	100	60	Cows	4/1	9/15	330	3 years
Drunken Gulch #04200	700	100	60	Cows	4/1	5/15	90	10 years

In addition, the Merced allotment will require additional fencing to contain the livestock on the private base property during the non-grazing season. Currently, cattle are trespassing on BLM lands surrounding the lessee's base property. A plan will be developed to address the fencing requirements, and necessary fencing will be installed by 2014. The lease associated with the Merced allotment is proposed to be issued for three years to assure that needed fencing is installed, and that the cows can be contained on the private base property.

Cultural site annual monitoring will occur on the Merced and Drunken Gulch allotments, with provisions for protection of cultural sites should monitoring indicate that the sites are being

adversely impacted by cattle grazing. These improvements include, but are not limited to, range improvements, change in the season-of-use, or change in the number of livestock.

Alternative 2 – Current Management (No Action)

A 10-year permit would be issued for each lease with the terms and conditions unchanged from the previous leases. This action is illustrated in Table 4 below. Under the Current Management alternative, the lease terms and conditions would remain the same, and therefore not reflect how the allotment is currently being used by cattle, or how the allotment is anticipated to be used by cattle by the new lessees. On the Merced allotment, the allotment acreage would not reflect the portions of the allotment that are associated with the base property which the lessee owns. The portion of the allotment associated with the base property is the only portion of the allotment that the lessee can use for cattle grazing. Additional fencing would not be installed to contain the Merced allotment cattle to the private base property, therefore leading to trespass of public lands during the non-grazing season. The lease associated with the Merced allotment would be for 10-years which would not allow for an assessment of the new lessee’s capability in containing his livestock within his private base property. The allotment size for the Drunken Gulch allotment would not be reflective of the area of cattle use. Cultural site monitoring and protective measures would not occur under this alternative. See Table 3 in proposed action section to compare terms and conditions to this alternative. The existing terms and conditions are as follows:

Table 4

Allotment	Acreage	Percent BLM	Number of Livestock	Kind	From	To	AUMs	Lease Length
Grand Point Ranch #04014	500	100	6	Cows	3/1	2/28	72	10 years
Merced #04149	23,351	100	244	Cows	3/16	9/15	1476	10 years
Drunken Gulch #04200	2,328	100	21	Cows	3/1	8/31	127	10 years

Alternative 3 - No Grazing

This alternative would cancel the lease on the Grand Point Ranch #04014, Merced #04149, and Drunken Gulch #04200 allotments. As a result, grazing would not be authorized on these allotments. Under this alternative, BLM would initiate the process in accordance with the 43 CFR parts 4100 and 1600 to eliminate grazing on these allotments and amend the Sierra Resource Management Plan.

Current Livestock Management

Grand Point Ranch (04014) – The lessee owns 250 acres with irrigated pastures as his base property. The lessee grazes approximately 20 cow/calf in fall/winter on the BLM parcel. The

lessee indicates that his cows do not access BLM-administered land within the lease area north of Camp Creek. His cows move eastward along the prominent ridge (including Grand Point) to an old logging area on private land adjacent to the lease area, to the east, in the northwest quarter of the northwest quarter of Section 2. The cows use an old road in this area to access the south side of Camp Creek for water. More grazing pressure is being applied to the private pasture adjacent to the allotment. Rangeland conditions tend to improve (i.e., less weeds) within the allotment as you move to the east of the existing fence line, watering facilities, and adjacent private pasture along the western boundary of the lease area. The public land is fenced.

Merced (04149) – The lessee owns the base property near the top of the allotment between BLM and Forest Service lands on Bull Creek Road, approximately 640 acres. The allotment has been ungrazed since the Telegraph Fire in 2008, except for cows owned by the lessee occasionally grazing on BLM lands. This fire burned extensive acreage within the allotment, and a decision was made to allow the vegetation to recover before allowing cattle use again. The lessee is a new lessee, and will not be using the allotment in the same manner as the prior lessee. The prior lessee used the allotment largely as a trailing permit between the BLM allotment and his Forest Service allotment. He grazed approximately 25 head from mid-May to mid-July. The new lessee is interested in grazing 60 cow/calf from April 1 – September 15. The lessee feels the cows will only use a portion of the allotment closest to the private base property, and will generally be limited by a desire to stay close to water sources. The lessee felt the cattle will probably use the less steep portion of Halls Gulch and riparian areas close to the road, but will not venture as far as the Merced River or the North Fork Merced. Some fencing exists between the private base property and the BLM parcel. The fencing situation (locations/condition) needs to be assessed, and additional fencing requirements need to be determined.

Drunken Gulch (04200) – The lessee owns approximately 1,200 acres as base property adjacent to the allotment. The allotment has been ungrazed since the Telegraph Fire in 2008. This fire burned large portions of the allotment, and a decision was made to allow the vegetation to recover before allowing cattle use again. The lessee is a new lessee, and will not be using the allotment in the same manner as the prior lessee. The prior lessee used the top of the allotment in conjunction with his private parcel and privately-leased land. He would put out approximately 50 cows in March and usually have them out by June. The new lessee intends to graze 60 cows in April and May on the BLM allotment. The lessee does not anticipate that cattle will use the bottom of the allotment along Sherlock Creek and the Merced River. Although not as densely covered with brush, there are areas of dense brush that did not burn during the fire. This dense brush, in addition to the limited time on the allotment, and lack of water will most likely deter the cows from reaching the bottom of the allotment. These areas will no longer be included in the allotment boundary.

CHAPTER 3: ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

The following supplemental authorities are not relevant to this project because related resources or conditions are not present: environmental justice, essential fish habitat; prime or unique farmlands; floodplains; Native American cultural values; solid or hazardous wastes; or wild horse and burro herds.

Air Quality

Affected Environment

The project areas are in the Mountain Counties Air Basin in an area classified as federal non-attainment for ozone 8-hour standard under the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (<http://www.epa.gov/oar/oaqps/greenbk/oindex.html>). 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/sipvol1.htm). The SIP also includes control measures to reduce emissions.

Impacts of all Alternatives

The small livestock operations and slight vehicle use would not affect air quality. Cancellation of these small leases similarly would not affect air quality.

Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)

Affected Environment

A portion of the Limestone Salamander ACEC (approximately 140 acres) is within the Merced allotment along the North Fork Merced. Much of the Limestone Salamander ACEC is south of the Merced River, and therefore not within the allotment. Most of the Merced River ACEC (approximately 11 of its 12 miles) is also within the Merced allotment on the north side of the river.

BLM designated the Limestone Salamander ACEC in 1986 to include confirmed sites and potential habitat of the limestone salamander. The ACEC was expanded in the Sierra Resource Management Plan (2008) to include additional sites and habitat. The ACEC currently encompasses 1,728 acres. The limestone salamander is one of California's rarest native amphibians. Except for a population on the USFS land northeast of Briceburg, the species' known range is restricted to 33 population sites along a 20-mile stretch of the Merced River between the headwaters of Lake McClure, near the community of Bagby, and the mouth of Sweetwater Creek, near Briceburg. Of these, 23 population sites occur on BLM lands. The species occurs nowhere else in the world. Entirely terrestrial, the species is found largely on north and east facing rocky outcrops and talus slopes. It is dependent on moist conditions and good cover. The species spends much of the year deep within the talus, and only emerges on the land surface during the rainy season.

To further protect the unique resources of the Merced River, the ½-mile-wide corridor (1/4 mile on each side of the river) designated under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act has also been designated as an ACEC. The Merced River ACEC was designated by the Bureau's California State Director in 1988. The Merced River from Highway 49 to El Portal is included in the designation. The Bureau manages twelve miles of the main fork of the Merced River that was included in the National Wild and Scenic River system under Public Laws 100-149 and 102-432. Thus a total of 12 miles of the Merced River and the ½-mile-wide corridor on either side is

included in the ACEC. The Limestone Salamander ACEC and the Merced River ACEC overlap to a large extent on the south side of the river.

Impacts of Proposed Action and Current Management (no action)

Due to the steep, brush-covered nature of the Merced allotment, it is not anticipated that cattle will reach areas designated as ACECS. None of the AUMs are derived from lands within the river corridors (Merced and North Fork Merced) as the slope is so steep that the lands are rated as ungrazable. If a small number of cattle happen to stray into the Limestone Salamander ACEC, which is unlikely to occur, there should be no direct impact to limestone salamander since they retreat deeply into the talus during the dry season (no longer on the surface by mid-March), and are not on the surface during the grazing period. There could be some impact to habitat from cattle slipping on the talus slopes and dislodging moss-covered rocks and talus. For the most part, it is believed that the cows would avoid the steep north and east-facing, slippery, moss-covered slopes that limestone salamanders prefer. It is also anticipated that the cattle would avoid the steep river canyon on the Merced River. There are no grazing impacts to ACEC values or Wild and Scenic River Outstandingly Remarkable Values.

Impacts of the No Grazing Alternative

Elimination of grazing on this allotment would not affect ACEC values.

References:

U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2008. Sierra Resource Management Plan Record of Decision. Mother Lode Field Office, El Dorado Hills, California.

Cultural Resources

Affected Environment

0404014 – Grand Point Ranch – Various cultural resource inventories have been conducted in 1992, 1993, and 1996 by BLM archaeologist Dean Decker on the south side of Camp Creek within the allotment. These inventories were done for timber salvages and the removal of an occupancy trespass cabin. No cultural resources were identified. In 2011 and 2012 BLM archaeologist James Barnes conducted additional field inventory along the north side of Camp Creek and in the Grand Point area, near the western boundary of the allotment, on the south side of Camp Creek. No cultural resources were identified. To date, the only cultural resource identified within the allotment is the Crawford Ditch which was originally constructed during the 1850s for mining and later acquired and operated by the Eldorado Irrigation District. The Clear Creek segment of the ditch, located west of the allotment, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1991.

In 2012, BLM archaeologist James Barnes conducted monitoring of the cultural resources within the portion of the allotment where grazing is expected. Overall, the inventory coverage and reliability are adequate for the proposed action.

0404149 – Merced – Numerous cultural resource inventories have been conducted by archaeologists within this allotment. Most of the inventories have focused on lands immediately adjacent to the Merced River and the North Fork of the Merced River, where grazing would not occur due to access/steep terrain, lack of forage, etc. For instance, L. Kyle Napton and Elizabeth Greathouse, with students from California State University at Stanislaus, performed a field inventory conducted under contract to BLM (*Archeological Investigations - Merced Canyon Area*, Cal State Stanislaus, 1977). This was a proactive inventory, focusing mainly on prehistoric resources, and resulted in the recordation of nine different groups of Indian grinding rock (bedrock mortars) and one prehistoric Indian habitation site (midden and bedrock mortars) overlain with historic-era features (foundations, etc.) along the Merced River.

Numerous historic-era cultural resources have also been identified and recorded by archaeologists within the allotment. These resources include placer and hardrock gold mining evidence (placer tailings, prospects, etc.), mining-related cabins, roads/trails, an abandoned railroad grade and related features and settlement remains. Of note, the abandoned grade of the Yosemite Valley Railroad parallels the river within the allotment. The railroad operated during the period 1907-1945, and it is well-documented in books by Jack Burgess (*Trains to Yosemite*, Signature Press, Berkeley, 2004) and Hank Johnson (*Railroads of the Yosemite Valley*, Trans-Anglo Books, Los Angeles, 1966). Since removal of the tracks, the grade has been used as an access road, with the historic integrity further compromised by loss of trestles. BLM and the State Historic Preservation Office have agreed, the integrity of the grade from Briceburg to Railroad Flat has been compromised due to its use as a road and would not qualify it for the National Register Historic Places. However, this property has a significant historic association and should be afforded protection. Also of note, Burma Grade/a portion of Bull Creek Road within the allotment was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the 1930s. The road needs further investigation to determine whether it is National Register eligible or not.

For the purposes of the proposed action discussed in this environmental assessment, perhaps the most relevant inventory was conducted in 1979 by BLM archaeologists Richard Kardash and George Meckfessel for the “Sierra Range EIS Cultural Inventory”. They identified and recorded four prehistoric sites within the Merced allotment, in areas where grazing is occurring and would occur under the proposed action and no action alternatives. Two additional prehistoric sites were identified and recorded by other BLM archaeologists within this area, also around 1979. The UC Davis archaeology field school conducted inventory for prehistoric sites in 2009 within the allotment, to the south, and identified isolates as well as one prehistoric site. This area is probably outside the area that would be actually affected by grazing. Overall, the existing inventory coverage and reliability are adequate for the proposed action.

0404200 – Drunken Gulch – In 2000, BLM archaeologist Dean Decker conducted field inventory within this allotment for a grazing lease renewal. About 7500 ft of random transects were walked in two areas of the lease, yielding intensive coverage of about 17 acres. Ground visibility was variable but generally poor, due to thick vegetative cover. Decker identified and recorded three cultural resources within the allotment: a section of rock wall; a portion of a nineteenth-century homestead and prehistoric occupation site; and an extensive area of mid-nineteenth century placer diggings, with numerous building sites, ruins, and other associated features. The rock wall is unlikely to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

Although further work would have to be done to establish their eligibility, the other site appears to be significant cultural resource. The rock wall and homestead/prehistoric site are located within an area where grazing is expected.

In 2012, BLM archaeologist James Barnes conducted monitoring of the rock wall and homestead/prehistoric site, where grazing use is expected. Overall, the existing inventory coverage and reliability are adequate for the proposed action.

Impacts of Proposed Action and Current Management (no action)

Cultural resource inventories have been completed for the proposed action and no action alternatives. The inventories included background records searches, field inventories, and Native American consultations. Cultural resources have been identified within areas of the allotments potentially affected by grazing under the proposed action. These resources include prehistoric resources (occupations sites and bedrock mortars) and historic-era resources (rock wall and homestead/occupation related). To date, no Native American traditional use areas or other Native American issues have been identified. BLM is in the process of making management recommendations in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and BLM's statewide Protocol Agreement.

The prehistoric sites within the Merced allotment appear to contain archaeological deposits that are sensitive to grazing use. Some of these sites are being negatively affected by grazing. There is some trailing and other surface disturbance evidence of cattle use at three of the prehistoric sites monitored by the BLM archaeologist in 2012. This level of impact is considered very minor (if not negligible). Similar types of impacts were reported by BLM archaeologists in 1979 when the sites were first identified and recorded, and were also observed by the BLM archaeologist in 2008 related to Telegraph Fire post fire suppression/rehab work. There are indications that the level of impact to these sites has not changed since 1979. The situation is not expected to change under the proposed action.

The historic-era homestead/prehistoric site within the Drunken Gulch allotment is located within an area that could be affected by grazing under the proposed action. The site is sensitive to grazing impacts. Monitoring of this site in 2012 indicated that the site has not noticeably been affected by grazing, though it is clear that grazing has occurred here in the past. It is unclear whether the situation at the site would change under the proposed action.

Therefore, annual monitoring of the vulnerable sites within the Merced and Drunken Gulch allotments will be conducted by the BLM archaeologist. Should undesirable grazing impacts be occurring, BLM will implement protective measures including, but not limited to, range improvements, change of season-of-use, and change to number of livestock. Cultural monitoring and protective measures would reduce or eliminate undesirable grazing impacts

Impacts of the No Grazing Alternative

Elimination of grazing on these allotments would not affect cultural resources.

References

Barnes, J. 2012. Section 106 compliance for the Grand Point Ranch grazing lease renewal, El Dorado County. Memorandum to the Field Manager. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Mother Lode Field Office, El Dorado Hills, California.

Barnes, J. 2012. Section 106 compliance for the Merced grazing lease renewal, Mariposa County. Memorandum to the Field Manager. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Mother Lode Field Office, El Dorado Hills, California.

Barnes, J. 2012. Section 106 compliance for the Drunken Gulch grazing lease renewal, Mariposa County. Memorandum to the Field Manager. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Mother Lode Field Office, El Dorado Hills, California.

Invasive, non-native species

Affected Environment

0404014 – Grand Point Ranch – Small patches of Italian thistle, tocalote, medusahead, barb goatgrass, and rush skeletonweed occur on the allotment, particularly on the south side of the allotment near Grand Point and on the western portion of the allotment near the private pasture. Weed densities observed within the allotment were similar to those observed on currently ungrazed lands within the field office that are of similar elevation, topography, and habitat types. Weeds in the allotment tend to follow the road corridor which is likely serving as a source for weed seed introductions. The private pasture adjacent to the allotment is receiving the greatest pressure from grazing. Rangeland conditions tend to improve (i.e., weeds decrease) within the allotment as you move to the east of the existing fence line, watering facilities, and adjacent private pasture along the western boundary of the allotment.

0404149 – Merced – Most of the invasive weeds in the allotment are found along the Merced River Road corridor where grazing doesn't occur. Weeds like yellow starthistle and Italian thistle were likely introduced from vehicle and recreational use along the road. The Telegraph Fire resulted in the spread of Italian thistle up Halls Gulch and Good Gulch. A small occurrence of yellow starthistle was found along the Burma Grade Road, likely the result of weed seed on a vehicle. Tocalote is found in low densities throughout the allotment. A few mullein were found along the access road on top near the base property. Aside from pineappleweed and bulbous bluegrass which were found in the flatter areas on top where the cows seem to spend more time, weeds do not appear to be attributed to cattle use.

0404200 – Drunken Gulch – Very few invasive weeds were observed in this allotment. Italian thistle and tocalote were found sporadically but were not widespread.

Impacts of the Proposed Action and Current Management

Although invasive weed species are present on these allotments, they do not appear to be significantly impacting the abundance or cover of native species. Cattle can spread weed seed

through their scat and on their hair. If grazing is not properly timed, it can result in an increase of certain weed species such as Italian thistle. In the Grand Point Ranch allotment where patches of Italian thistle occur, avoidance of overgrazing in the summer and early fall (CDFA 2012) would help to prevent the expansion of Italian thistle. The proposed, low level of grazing that would occur on these allotments would not significantly affect the spread of invasive weeds.

Impacts of No Grazing

Under the no grazing alternative, there would be no potential for weed seed dispersal by livestock in the allotments. For those weed species that already occur in the allotments, moderate grazing during their growth period and when they are palatable can provide some control. Elimination of grazing could exacerbate existing weed problems in some areas. Because current, low levels of grazing do not appear to be significantly affecting weed spread, elimination of grazing would not be expected to noticeably reduce invasive species on the allotments.

References

<http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/plant/ipc/weedinfo/carduus.htm>

Recreation

Affected Environment

Very little or no recreation is occurring on two of the allotments, Grand Point Ranch and Drunken Gulch. These two allotments are both accessed through locked gates controlled by the lessees. Although, some small amount of dispersed recreation from individuals entering by foot or mountain bike may be occurring, it is occurring at a low level. The Merced allotment may be receiving more dispersed recreation than the other two allotments, because it is accessible from a county road that runs through the allotment from Briceburg below to Forest Service at the top. The level of recreation is still believed to be fairly low, since signs of recreation use are not noticeable from the road.

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 low levels of dispersed recreation, the proposed action is not impacting recreational opportunities.

Impacts of No Grazing

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

Social and Economic Values

Due to the size and nature of these allotments, it is expected that the lessees employ few if any individuals in the community. Livestock grazing on the scale of these allotments contribute little economic value to the community. Economic impacts of all of the alternatives are insignificant.

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 Mariposa County had 19,000 cattle. This was less than 20 percent of central Sierra Nevada cattle which stood at 119,000. El Dorado County had 7,000 cattle constituting less than 6 percent of the central Sierra Nevada cattle. These two counties combined make up about 22 percent of cattle in the central Sierra Nevada (District 60). 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 renewals analyzed in this EA are part of very small cattle operations in the central Sierra Nevada. They are not economically important at either local or statewide/regional levels.

Soils

Affected Environment

0404014 – Grand Point Ranch – Mariposa very rocky silt loam, 3 to 50 percent slopes is the most prevalent soil on the allotment, making up 39% of the allotment. Josephine very rocky silt loam, 50 to 70 percent slopes and Mariposa-Josephine very rocky loams, 50 to 70 percent slopes together make up approximately 50% of the allotment. The remaining 13 percent of the allotment comprises of Holland very rocky coarse sandy loam, 50 to 70 percent slopes and Sites loam, 30 to 50 percent slopes. Erosion is not occurring on this allotment.

0404149 – Merced – The soils on the subject land are in the Blasingame-Los Posas and Auburn series. They are relatively shallow, ranging from one to 25 inches in depth. Textures range from clay loam to very rocky loam. Fertility is low; nitrogen and sulphur are deficient. The majority of the lands within the allotment are in stable condition. However, erosion hazard is moderate to high, depending on slope. This means that there would be a serious erosion problem if the vegetation is removed or the soil otherwise disturbed. Over surface flow of water is evident, but few rills or gullies have formed. Allotment monitoring since 1988 has indicated Residual Dry Matter (RDM) levels well above minimum standards. Both ocular estimates and clippings have indicated RDM between 1000 and 2200 pounds per acre.

0404200 – Drunken Gulch – The allotment is part of the Penon Blanco Formation, i.e., coarse greenstone tuff breccia with some andesite, basalt, and chert lenses. The allotment is also within the Briceburg Formation, i.e., mostly black slate and phyllite. Primary soils include: Maymen gravelly loam, 30%-75% slopes, severely eroded; Auburn very rocky loam, 30%-75% slopes, eroded; Auburn rocky loam, 30%-75% slopes, severely eroded; and Boomer cobbly loam, 15%-50% slopes, eroded. Less extensive soils are: Blasingame rocky loam, 15%-30% slopes;

Auburn stony loam, 30%-50% slopes, eroded. Small areas are soil-mapped as Rock land. Most of the soils on the allotment have high to very high erosion potential. Erosion is not occurring on this allotment.

Impacts of the Proposed Action and Current Management

There is little evidence of erosion or compaction on any of the allotments. Therefore, livestock grazing is not impacting soils on these allotments.

Impacts of the No Grazing Alternative

Elimination of grazing will not affect soil productivity or stability.

References

<http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/> Accessed June 25, 2012.

U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2001. Environmental Assessment CA-180-02-04. Livestock grazing authorization for the Meyer Allotment. Folsom Field Office, Folsom, California. 24 pp.

U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2005. Environmental Assessment CA-180-05-39. Livestock grazing authorization for the Stembridge and Burgess Allotments. Folsom Field Office, Folsom, California. 19 pp.

Water Quality

Affected Environment

See wetland/riparian section below for information on perennial, intermittent, and springs located on each of the allotments. All three allotments are assessed as meeting the water quality standard. No water quality monitoring was conducted on any of the allotments.

Several beneficial uses are designated for the various watersheds listed above in the Sacramento/San Joaquin Basin Plan. These include domestic water supply, irrigation and stock watering, power generation, recreation, warm and cold water fisheries migration and spawning, and wildlife habitat.

0404014 – Grand Point Ranch – The allotment is located in the Upper Cosumnes River watershed. Approximately one mile of Camp Creek, a perennial stream, runs through the allotment.

0404149 – Merced – The allotment is located in the Upper Merced River watershed which is not identified as a State 303d impaired water body. The allotment was assessed to be meeting the standard for water quality. The allotment contains approximately 7 miles of the Merced River, approximately 5 miles of the North Fork Merced River, and approximately 10 miles of

intermittent streams. Major perennial tributaries include Halls Gulch and Good Gulch. Small reservoirs, stock ponds, and developed springs do occur on the allotment. The status of these developments is unknown, and several may well be abandoned. However, at least two ponds are still well-developed and functional. Although, cattle use is evident at the ponds, the ponds are assessed as properly functioning.

0404200 – Drunken Gulch – The allotment is in the Upper Merced River watershed which is not identified as a State 303d impaired water body.

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

Because the State has not identified the streams within the allotments as water quality impaired, further grazing at current levels are not expected to affect water quality or beneficial water uses.

Impacts from the No Grazing Alternative

Elimination of grazing is not expected to significantly improve water quality on the allotments.

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.

http://ofmpub.epa.gov/waters10/attains_state.report_control?p_state=CA&p_cycle=2006&p_report_type=T Accessed June 25, 2012.

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.

Lentic riparian/wetland area are functioning properly when adequate vegetation, landform, or debris is present to: dissipate energies associated with wind action, wave action, and overland flow from adjacent sites, thereby reducing erosion and improving water quality; filter sediment and aid floodplain development; improve flood-water retention and ground-water recharge; develop root masses that stabilize islands and shoreline features against cutting action; restrict water percolation; develop diverse ponding characteristics to provide habitat and the water depth, duration, and temperature necessary for fish production water-bird breeding, and other uses and support greater biodiversity.

Affected Environment

0404014 – Grand Point Ranch – Approximately one mile of Camp Creek, a perennial stream, runs through the allotment. Camp Creek is assessed as properly functioning. No cattle use was evident on the north side of the creek, and the lessee reports that the cattle do not cross the creek. The cattle use an old road to access the south side of the creek for water.

0404149 – Merced – The allotment contains approximately 7 miles of the Merced River, approximately 5 miles of the North Fork Merced River, and approximately 10 miles of intermittent streams. Major perennial tributaries other than the river reaches include Halls Gulch and Good Gulch. Small reservoirs, stock ponds, and developed springs do occur on the allotment. The status of these developments is unknown, and several may well be abandoned. However, at least two ponds are still well-developed and functional. Although, cattle use is evident at the ponds, the ponds are assessed as properly functioning. The Merced River and North Fork Merced within the allotment are both assessed as properly functioning. The lessee does not anticipate that the cattle will reach the North Fork Merced, the Merced River, or Good Gulch due to lack of water, dense brush, and steep slopes. In the past, cows did not enter these areas. The lessee does anticipate that the cattle will use portions of Halls Gulch; however the cows will not use the portions of Halls Gulch as it becomes steeper, closer to the Merced River. In addition, cows are using two ponds within the allotment. These ponds are assessed as properly functioning.

0404200 – Drunken Gulch – Two intermittent streams totaling a little over 1 mile run through the allotment. Due to their intermittent nature, these streams are not appropriate for assessment of riparian functioning condition.

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

It is anticipated that the major tributaries within the Merced allotment will not receive much, if any grazing pressure, due to lack of water, steep slopes, and dense brush. The exception would be Halls Gulch on the Merced allotment, as well as two ponds on the allotment. If grazing pressure remains as it has for the last two years which is anticipated with the lease renewal, the riparian areas should remain in good condition. The current level of grazing has not caused impacts to riparian areas on the allotment. On the Grand Point Ranch allotment, the cattle do reach Camp Creek via an old road. The level of grazing pressure has not created riparian impacts to Camp Creek, and no impacts are anticipated with lease renewal.

Impacts of No Grazing Alternative

Cattle grazing is not impacting riparian habitat on any of the allotments, therefore elimination of grazing will have no effect on riparian habitat.

References

- U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2001. Environmental Assessment CA-180-02-04. Livestock grazing authorization for the Meyer Allotment. Folsom Field Office, Folsom, California. 24 pp.
- U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2002. Lotic Checklists for three reaches of the Main Stem Merced. Folsom Field Office, Folsom, California. 6 pp.
- U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2004. Lotic checklist for North Fork Merced. Folsom Field Office, Folsom, California. 2 pp.
- U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2005. Environmental Assessment CA-180-05-39. Livestock grazing authorization for the Stembridge and Burgess Allotments. Folsom Field Office, Folsom, California. 19 pp.
- U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2005. Lotic checklist for Camp Creek. Folsom Field Office, Folsom, California. 2 pp.
- U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2005. Lotic checklist for Lyons Gulch. Folsom Field Office, Folsom, California. 2 pp.
- U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2005 and 2008. Lotic checklists for Sherlock Creek. Folsom Field Office, Folsom, California. 4 pp.

Wild and Scenic River

Affected Environment

The Merced River from Highway 49 to El Portal is designated as Wild and Scenic. The Bureau manages twelve miles of the main fork of the Merced River that was included in the National Wild and Scenic River system under Public Laws 100-149 and 102-432. Of the 12 miles of the Merced River designated as Wild and Scenic, 11 miles occur in the Merced allotment. The Merced River corridor contains important natural, historical, cultural, recreational, and scenic values that led to its designation as a Wild and Scenic River. The Merced Wild and Scenic River Management Plan written in 1991, provides management direction for the Bureau administered lands along the Merced River, in Mariposa County, California. In addition, the North Fork Merced is under study for inclusion in Wild and Scenic River System. Approximately 5 miles of the North Ford Merced occur on the Merced allotment.

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

None of the AUMs on the Merced allotment are derived from lands within the corridor as the slope is so steep that the lands are rated as ungrazable. No cattle use is anticipated to occur on the Merced River due to lack of water, steep slopes, and dense brush. Cattle grazing is not impacting the Wild and Scenic River Outstandingly Remarkable Values on this allotment.

Impacts of No Grazing Alternative

Cattle grazing is not impacting the Wild and Scenic River corridor on any of the allotments, therefore elimination of grazing will have no effect on Wild and Scenic River values.

References

U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2001. Environmental Assessment CA-180-02-04. Livestock grazing authorization for the Meyer Allotment. Folsom Field Office, Folsom, California. 24 pp.

U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2005. Environmental Assessment CA-180-05-39. Livestock grazing authorization for the Stembridge and Burgess Allotments. Folsom Field Office, Folsom, California. 19 pp.

Wilderness

Affected environment

The Merced River Wilderness Study Area (WSA) CA-040-203 encompasses 12,835 acres of which approximately 1,800 acres occur on the Merced allotment and approximately 200 acres occur on the Drunken Gulch allotment. Wilderness values include naturalness, solitude, primitive recreation, and special resource characteristics. Uses that conflict with wilderness designation include recreational ORV use and mining. The WSA was recommended as non-suitable for designation as wilderness by the Bureau in its report to Congress. The rationale for this proposal are: (1) the wilderness values of the area are not outstanding; (2) the area has a high probability for mineral development on the large number of placer and lode claims found throughout the area – development of these claims and the noise and visual intrusions associated with this development will further hinder effective management of the area as wilderness; and (3) current management has proven effective in maintaining the area's existing resources, including the limestone salamander, a State-listed threatened and BLM sensitive species. There is no wilderness management plan for this area. In the Final Environmental Impact Statement, Preliminary Wilderness Recommendations for the Central California Area, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, 1986, livestock grazing was not considered a factor affecting wilderness values.

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

On the Merced allotment, the cows are not expected to enter the WSA due to lack of water, dense brush, and steep topography. Although, the cattle may enter the WSA on the Drunken Gulch allotment, the number of cows, the limited season-of-use, dense brush, and steep topography will preclude any significant number of cattle from entering the WSA. Current levels of livestock use on both allotments do not appear to be impacting wilderness values.

Impacts of No Grazing Alternative

No grazing alternative would eliminate any possible impacts to wilderness values.

References

U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 1989. South Fork Merced and the Merced Wild and Scenic River Boundary Environmental Assessment. Unpubl. Rep. Folsom, California.

Wildlife (General)

Affected environment

0404014– Grand Point Ranch – The following habitats occur within the allotment: valley foothill riparian, mixed chaparral, blue/live oak woodland, montane hardwood, and annual grassland. These habitats support a wide variety of wildlife. Surveys of the allotment indicate a diversity of typical, native wildlife species for the area, such as gray fox, bobcat, coyote, deer, western skink, California quail, American robin, red-tailed hawk, and several other bird species. The allotment is considered critical winter range for the Grizzly Flat deer herd.

0404149 – Merced – The following habitats occur within the allotment: valley foothill riparian, mixed chaparral, chamise, annual grassland, montane hardwood, and blue oak woodland. These habitats support a wide variety of wildlife. A portion of the allotment is critical winter range for the Yosemite Deer Herd.

0404200 – Drunken Gulch – The following habitats include: valley foothill riparian, mixed chaparral, annual grassland, montane hardwood, and blue oak woodland. These habitats support a wide variety of wildlife. Surveys of the allotment indicate a diversity of typical, native wildlife species for the area, such as spotted towhee, acorn woodpecker, California quail, common bushtit, wild turkey, Anna’s hummingbird, scrub jay, ruby-crowned kinglet, plain titmouse, black phoebe, wren, belted kingfisher, Cooper’s hawk, mourning dove, black bear, coyote, deer, and muskrat. The allotment is within year-round habitat of the Mariposa deer herd.

Wildlife (Special Status)

Affected Environment

0404014– Grand Point Ranch – Western pond turtle was observed on Camp Creek in 2005. The southwestern pond turtle is considered a BLM sensitive species. It is unknown whether the pond turtle observed on Camp Creek was a northwestern or southwestern pond turtle. The allotment is in an area that is shown on the range maps as an area where either subspecies may occur.

0404149 – Merced – The limestone salamander, a state-listed and BLM sensitive amphibian species, occurs within the allotment near the North Fork Merced. The limestone salamander is one of California’s rarest native amphibians. Except for a population on the USFS land northeast of Briceburg, the species’ known range is restricted to 33 population sites along a 20-mile stretch of the Merced River between the headwaters of Lake McClure, near the community of Bagby, and the mouth of Sweetwater Creek, near Briceburg. Of these, 23 population sites occur on BLM lands. The species occurs nowhere else in the world. Entirely, terrestrial, the species is found largely on north and east facing rocky outcrops and talus slopes. It is dependent on moist

conditions and good cover. The species spends much of the year deep within the talus, and only emerges on the land surface during the rainy season.

In addition to limestone salamander, blue elderberry bushes occur on the allotment. Blue elderberry bushes are a host for the valley elderberry longhorn beetle, a species listed as threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under the Endangered Species Act. The elderberry bushes showed no evidence of grazing, and are in an area that the lessee does not anticipate will be used by cattle.

0404200 – Drunken Gulch – No special status wildlife species occur on the allotment.

Impacts of all Alternatives

Neither proposed, current management 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 allotments or their habitats. This is largely because cattle grazing would not be occurring in the portions of the allotments that contain special status wildlife species. There is no evidence of cattle currently impacting special status species on the allotments. 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.

U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2001. Environmental Assessment CA-180-02-04. Livestock grazing authorization for the Meyer Allotment. Folsom Field Office, Folsom, California. 24 pp.

U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2005. Environmental Assessment CA-180-05-39. Livestock grazing authorization for the Stembridge and Burgess Allotments. Folsom Field Office, Folsom, California. 19 pp.

Vegetation (General)

Affected Environment

0404014 – Grand Point Ranch – Dominant vegetation types include blue oak woodlands on the ridge tops and south and west facing slopes, montane hardwood (including mixed conifer and live oak) on the north and east facing slopes, valley foothill riparian, and annual grasslands. The blue oak woodlands consist of an annual grass understory with dominant species such as brome grass and wild oats. Needlegrass, a native perennial grass, was present occasionally along the ridgeline. Associated shrub species included California buckeye and poison-oak. The montane hardwood overstory includes Douglas-fir, Ponderosa pine, incense cedar, interior live oak and

California black oak. Understory species include bigleaf maple, vetch, twining brodiaea, gumweed, and non-native annual grasses such as hedgehog dogtail. Annual grasslands occur in the lower elevations of the allotment around the base property as well as in the understory of the blue oak woodlands and mainly consist of brome grass and wild oats. Riparian vegetation such as willows and alder occur along Camp Creek.

0404149 – Merced – Vegetation within the allotment is typical of the foothills of the west central Sierra Nevada. Major types include mixed grey pine - oak woodlands, chamise - dominated chaparral, ponderosa pine woodlands, and riparian deciduous woodlands (Verner and Boss 1980). Grey pine-oak woodlands predominate on moist north- and east-facing slopes, giving way to the chaparral on drier south- and west-facing slopes. Small, localized stands of ponderosa pine occur primarily on ridge tops and at the higher elevations of the allotment. A narrow strip of riparian vegetation occurs along the river corridor. Here, alder and willow predominate, along with fewer numbers of ponderosa pine. The majority of the allotment produces a dense chamise-manzanita, live-oak brush cover. This brush is impenetrable and is nonuseable for grazing. Annual grasses such as soft chess and wild oats are found along drainages and in the previously burned areas on the south-facing slopes of the Merced River Canyon. Buckbrush is the most desirable browse plant for deer.

0404200 – Drunken Gulch –Near the top of the ridge of Mt. Bullion, blue oak woodlands dominate. On the north facing slope of the ridge, there is a more diverse community of woody species including interior live oak, gray pine, black oak, western mountain mahogany, poison oak, serviceberry, buckbrush, California ash, holly leaved redberry, mewukka manzanita, and toyon. In the lower canyon, upland species include interior live oak, canyon live oak, gray pine, toyon, holly leaved redberry, poison oak, and redbud. Riparian species include Oregon ash, willows, western spicebush, brickellbush, and wild grape.

Vegetation (Special Status):

Affected Environment

0404014 – Grand Point Ranch – No special status plants are known to occur in the vicinity of the allotment, nor was habitat suitable for any special status plant species.

0404149 – Merced – Two BLM sensitive plant species were found during botanical surveys of the allotment. One species, Mariposa clarkia (*Clarkia biloba ssp. australis*), occurs in the road cuts of the Merced River and Burma Grade Roads where grazing is not known to occur. Two occurrences of Parry's horkelia (*Horkelia parryi*) were found along the ridgetops in the eastern portion of the allotment. There was no sign of grazing near either of these populations and it doesn't appear likely to occur there in the future. Four other sensitive plant species are known to occur within the Merced River corridor between El Portal and Briceburg. The Yosemite onion (*Allium yosemitense*), a state-listed rare species; Merced clarkia (*Clarkia lingulata*), a state-listed endangered and Federal Candidate 1 species; Congdon's woolly sunflower (*Eriophyllum congdonii*), a state-listed rare species; and Congdon's lewisia (*Lewisia congdonii*), another state-listed rare species, are not known to occur on BLM lands. While their proximity suggests the possibility that these plants may occur in the allotment, none were found during botanical surveys.

0404200 – Drunken Gulch – Beaked clarkia, *Clarkia rostrata*, a BLM-sensitive plant species, occurs on the allotment. An extensive beaked clarkia occurrence was located on the north and northeast facing slopes of the upper canyon. There were pockets further to the west as well.

Impacts of the Proposed Action and Current Management

0404014 – Grand Point Ranch – Although the allotment has some weed issues and suffers from low oak recruitment, the vegetation on the allotment does not appear to differ from vegetation on currently ungrazed areas within the field office of similar elevation, topography, and vegetation types. The low oak recruitment and generally weedy conditions in the Grand Point area/western boundary of the lease area are not necessarily attributable to the lessee’s grazing activity. Weed densities appear to increase in areas that are within/adjacent to the private pasture where grazing pressure is greatest. Weed densities observed within the lease area were similar to those observed on currently ungrazed lands within the field office of similar elevation, topography, and vegetation types. The proposed and current level of grazing does not appear to be significantly impacting vegetation on the allotment.

0404149 – Merced – Cattle appeared to be only grazing the lands in the vicinity of the base property which were dominated by non-native annual grasses and oak woodlands. Special status plant occurrences are located far away from this area and are not expected to be impacted by grazing. Weed spread from cattle grazing appeared minimal and should not result in negative impacts to vegetation.

0404200 – Drunken Gulch – Native vegetation in the allotment looked healthy and vigorous and weeds were few. Oak recruitment was good, with multiple age classes represented. While no impacts to the beaked clarkia were noted during plant surveys, cattle could potentially affect beaked clarkia if grazing occurred during the time of year when it was in flower or fruit (mid-May to mid-June) and clarkia were grazed. If grazing occurs outside this window, impacts to the clarkia would not be expected to occur.

Impacts of No Grazing

Elimination of grazing would result in the presence of more vegetative biomass in the allotments and would eliminate the risk of negative impacts to beaked clarkia and the potential for future weed introduction and spread.

References

U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2001. Environmental Assessment CA-180-02-04. Livestock grazing authorization for the Meyer Allotment. Folsom Field Office, Folsom, California. 24 pp.

U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2005. Environmental Assessment CA-180-05-39. Livestock grazing authorization for the Stembridge and Burgess Allotments. Folsom Field Office, Folsom, California. 19 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, and changes within the livestock industry. Livestock grazing is a tradition and lifestyle choice for many of the current lessees. Lease cancellation would impact this lifestyle and tradition.

CHAPTER 4: CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Persons, Groups, and Agencies Consulted

- John White
- Richard Hill
- Brandon Baba
- Indian tribes

Public Participation

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

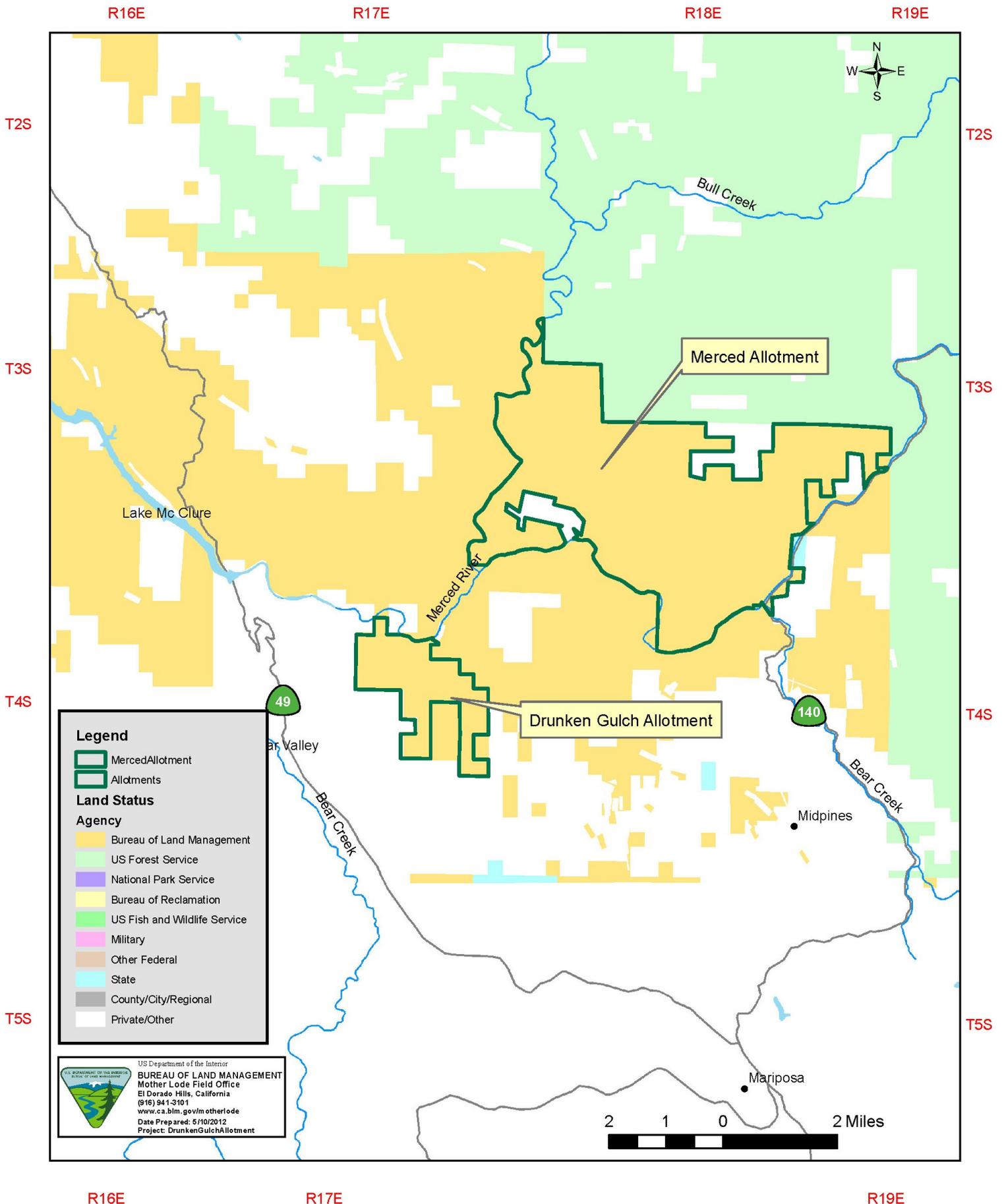
List of Preparers and Reviewers

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

Reviewers:

<i>/s/ James Barnes</i>	<i>7-13-12</i>
_____	_____
NEPA Reviewer/Cultural Resources	
<i>/s/ Lauren Fety</i>	<i>7-12-12</i>
_____	_____
Botany - Acting	
<i>/s/ Peggy Cranston</i>	<i>7-12-12</i>
_____	_____
Wildlife	

Merced and Drunken Gulch Allotments -- General Map



Grand Point Ranch Allotment

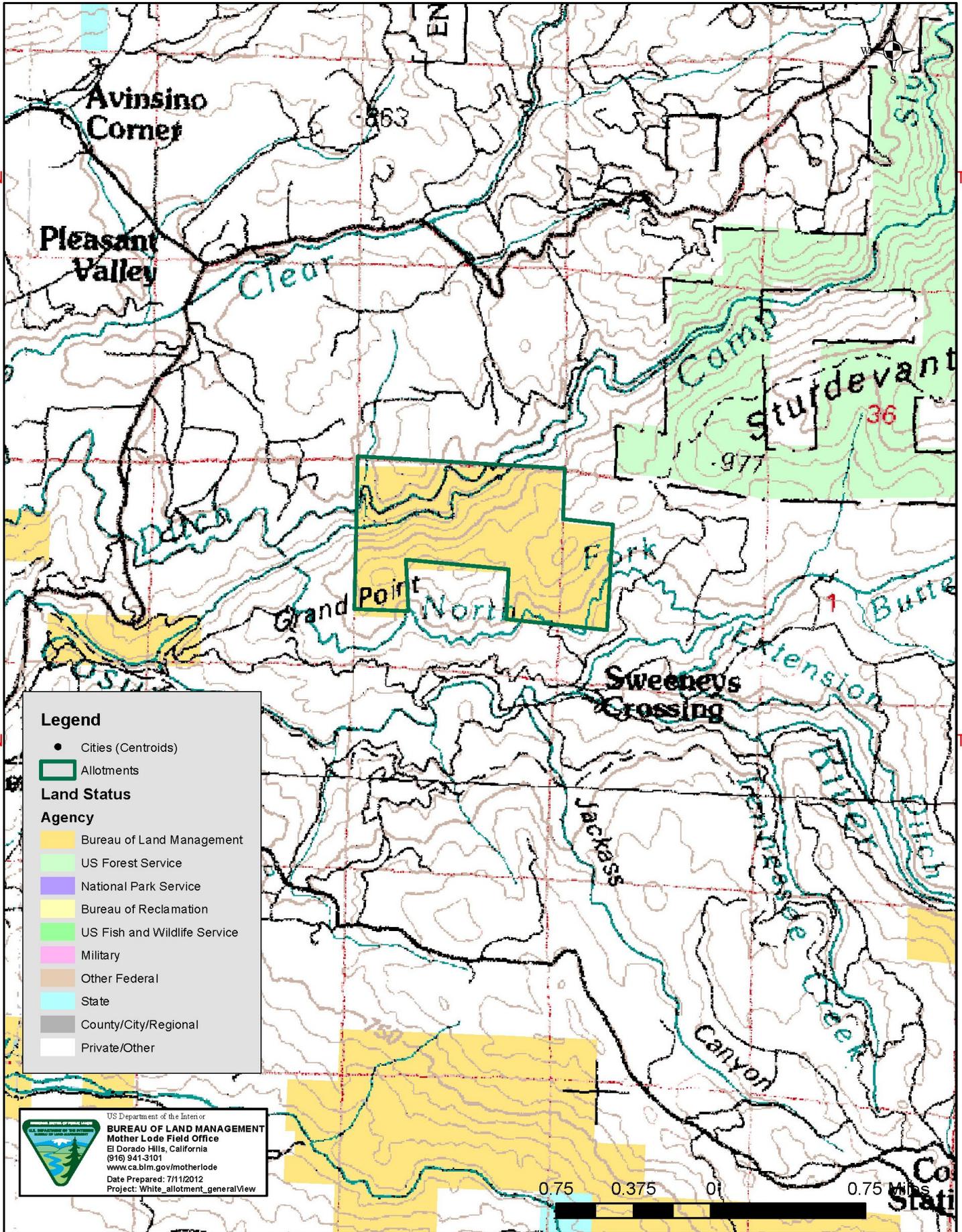
R12E

T10N

T10N

T9N

T9N



Legend

- Cities (Centroids)
- Allotments

Land Status

Agency

- Bureau of Land Management
- US Forest Service
- National Park Service
- Bureau of Reclamation
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- Military
- Other Federal
- State
- County/City/Regional
- Private/Other



US Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
 Mother Lode Field Office
 El Dorado Hills, California
 (916) 941-3101
www.ca.blm.gov/motherlode
 Date Prepared: 7/11/2012
 Project: White_allotment_generalView



R12E

Merced Allotment

R17E

R18E

R19E

T2S

T2S

T3S

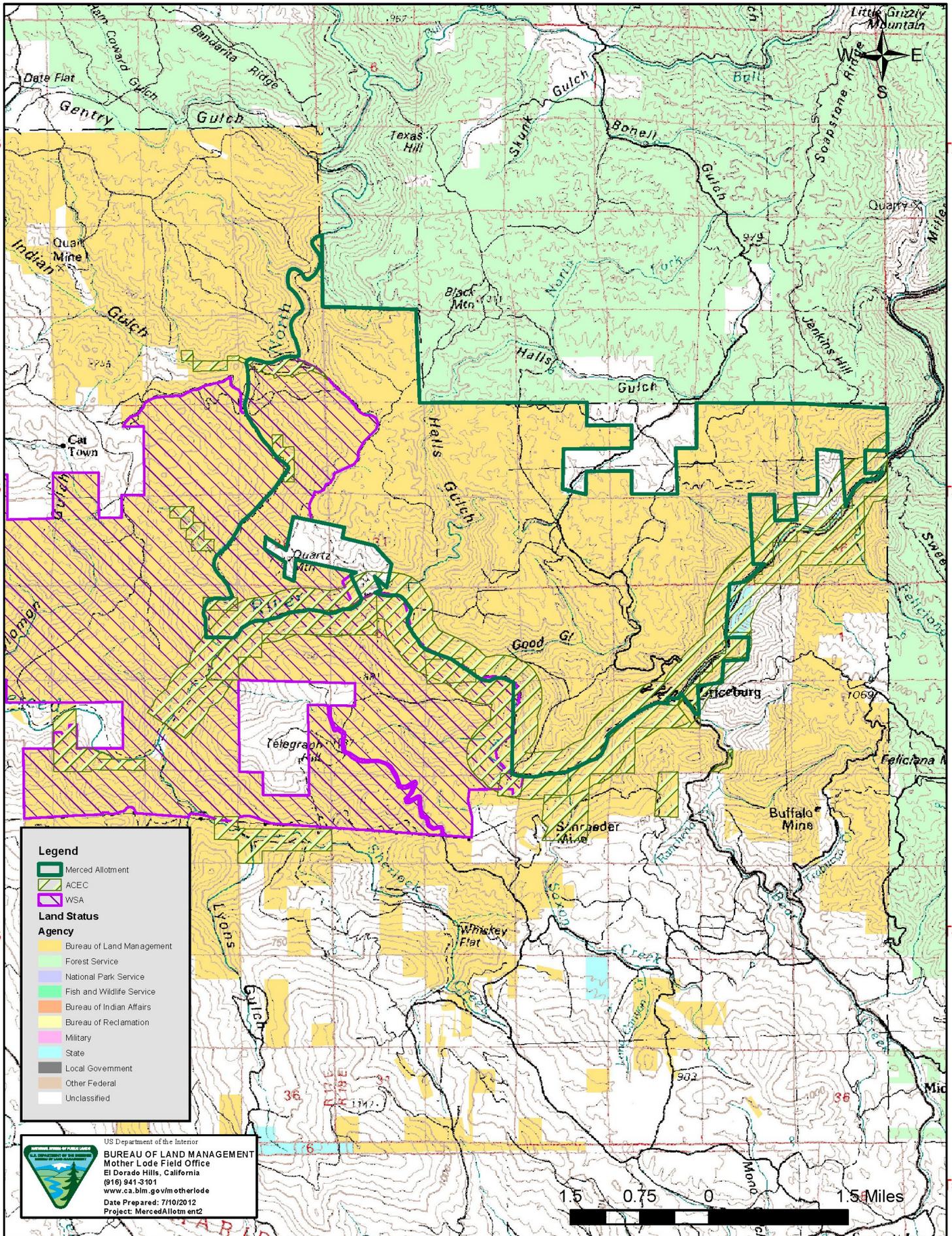
T3S

T4S

T4S

T5S

R19E



Legend

-  Merced Allotment
-  ACEC
-  WSA
- Land Status**
-  Bureau of Land Management
-  Forest Service
-  National Park Service
-  Fish and Wildlife Service
-  Bureau of Indian Affairs
-  Bureau of Reclamation
-  Military
-  State
-  Local Government
-  Other Federal
-  Unclassified

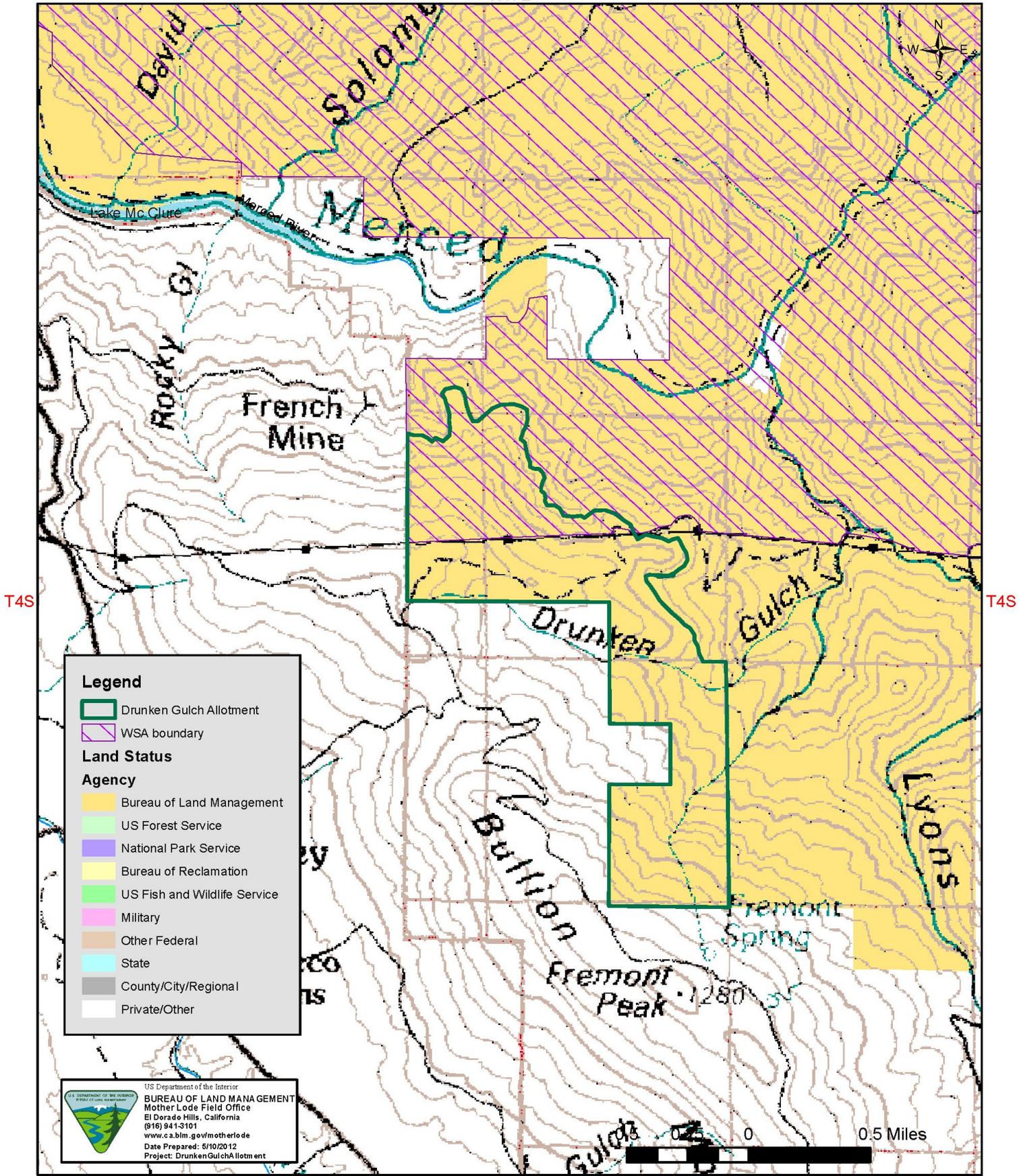


US Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
 Mother Lode Field Office
 El Dorado Hills, California
 (916) 941-3101
www.ca.blm.gov/motherlode
 Date Prepared: 7/10/2012
 Project: MercedAllotment2



Drunken Gulch Allotment

R17E



T4S

T4S

Legend

- Drunken Gulch Allotment
- WSA boundary

Land Status

Agency

- Bureau of Land Management
- US Forest Service
- National Park Service
- Bureau of Reclamation
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- Military
- Other Federal
- State
- County/City/Regional
- Private/Other



US Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
 Mother Lode Field Office
 El Dorado Hills, California
 (916) 941-3101
www.ca.blm.gov/motherlode
 Date Prepared: 5/10/2012
 Project: Drunken Gulch Allotment



R17E