ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
LIVESTOCK GRAZING AUTHORIZATION

EA # CA-180-09-37

Banks
Hope
Turpin
Haigh

Mother Lode Field Office
July 2009

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This Environmental Assessment (EA) is prepared to disclose and analyze the environmental consequences of re-authorizing a livestock grazing permit/lease as proposed in Alternative 1 on the Banks, Hope, Turpin, and Penon Blanco (Haigh) 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.

Background

Name	Legal Description/ County	Acres	Type of Livestock	AUMs	Season of Use	Lease Expiration Date
Banks	T1S, R15E, Section 4: public land north of the Tuolumne River 5: Lots 1, 6, 7, E1/2 Lot 9, Lot 10. See Figure 1 and 2. Tuolumne County	Current – 1141 Proposed – 464	Current Cows Proposed Horses	Current - 58 Proposed - 25	Current Year-round Proposed February 1 – June 1	02/28/2009
Hope	T2S, R15E, Section 7: public land east of Don Pedro Reservoir 8: all public lands 9: all public lands 17: NW ¼, NW ¼ SE ¼ 18: public land east of Don Pedro Reservoir in N ½. See Figure 1 and 3. Tuolumne County	483	Cows	220	11/1 – 5/31	02/28/2009
Turpin	T3S, R15E, Section 1, 2, 12: all public lands in these secs 13: N ½ NE ¼, NE ¼ SE ¼ T3S, R16E, Section 7: W ½, W ½ SE ¼, SW ¼ NE ¼ 18: NW ¼, NW ¼ NE ¼, NW ¼ SW ¼ See Figure 1 and 4 Mariposa county	Current – 1778 Proposed – 1778	Cows Cows	281 281	3/1 – 7/31 9/1 – 10/31 10/1 – 7/1	02/28/2009

Haigh	T2S, R16E, portions of sections 31, 32, 33 T3S, R16E, portions of sections 4, 5, and 6 north of Highway 132 See Figure 1 and 5 Mariposa County	1209	Cows	49	5/15 – 10/31	02/28/2009

Purpose and Need for the Action

The purpose of the action is to consider whether to authorize grazing on the Banks, Hope, Turpin, and Penon Blanco (Haigh) allotments. 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 permits.

Scoping and Issues

The proposed action underwent internal, interdisciplinary scoping. Some issues surfaced regarding the Turpin allotment. These include invasive weed and riparian issues. A concern regarding riparian issues on the Stone Corral portion of the Hope allotment was also raised.

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 106 obligation 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 an area identified as available for livestock grazing in the Sierra Resource Management Plan. 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 page 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 allotments do/do not meet the Central California Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health as follows:

Rangeland Health Standard	Meets Standard	Does Not Meet Standard	Livestock are the causal factor for not meeting Yes or No	Remarks (locations, etc.)
Soil	All			
Species	Banks and Penon Blanco (Haigh)	Hope and Turpin	Yes	Weedy species are dominating the some riparian zones on both allotments. Iberian star thistle occurs in the Ned Gulch riparian area on the Turpin allotment. Upland areas on the Hope allotment also has tocalote.
Riparian	Banks and Penon Blanco (Haigh)	Hope and Turpin	Yes	Cattle are trampling and/or heavily browsing the woody riparian vegetation in some of the riparian zones. Weeds are contributing to the degradation of the riparian areas.
Water quality	Yes for all			

Allotment Name	Date of Assessment	Date of Determination
Banks	December 12, 2008	July 23, 2009
Hope	June 12 and June 30, 2009	July 23, 2009
Turpin	July 2, 2009	July 23, 2009
Haigh	May 22 and July 1, 2009	July 23, 2009

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 Banks, Hope, Turpin, and Penon Blanco (Haigh) allotments with applicable provisions as discussed further in this section. Terms and conditions, range improvements, and monitoring requirements are as follows:

A. Mandatory Terms and Conditions

Allotment	**Number of Livestock**	**Kind**	**From**	**To**	**AUMs**	**Lease Length**
Banks	5	Horses	2/1	6/1	25	10 years
Hope – Brunette Hope – Hope	18 18	Cows	11/1 11/1	5/31 5/31	108 108	2 years
Turpin	Actual use schedule so varies	Cows	10/1	7/1	281	10 years
Haigh – Hwy. 132 Haigh – East	3 5	Cows	5/15 5/15	10/31 10/31	19 30	10 years

On the Banks allotment, the portion of the allotment south of the Tuolumne River will be eliminated from the lease, reducing the allotment area from 1141 acres to 464 acres. This is being done because the lessee does not use the allotment south of the river.

The Hope lease will be renewed for a 2-year period rather than the traditional 10-year renewal. This is being done because Mr. Hope has constructed unauthorized range improvements and conducted unauthorized brush clearing. The lease will only be renewed after the 2-year period if the lessee has no further unauthorized actions.

A term and condition for the Turpin lease is that the lessee will remove his cattle from the pasture that includes Ned Gulch when requested by BLM, to aid in effort to control Iberian starthistle.

Another proposed mitigation would be to require locking of the lease gates along Highway 132 on the Penon Blanco (Haigh) and Turpin allotments. The locking of the gates would prevent public vehicle-use on existing roads which is consistent with the 2008 Sierra RMP. This road closure might discourage marijuana cultivation which is abundant in the area. It might also discourage “mining” activity, where one or more individuals have been digging up the alluvium along the creek, causing

down-cutting, and dewatering small creekside meadow areas, thus degrading the condition of the riparian area. In addition, the road closure would reduce impacts to cultural resources.

Range Improvements

Invasive weed issues that are impacting the riparian areas within the Turpin allotment are extensive. These invasive species include Iberian star thistle, which was treated this year (2009) with the herbicide, glyphosphate. Cattle are also heavily browsing woody riparian vegetation in Ned Gulch. In addition, "mining" activity, mentioned above, is degrading the condition of the riparian area. The riparian area is assessed as functional at risk with a downward trend. Portions of Ned Gulch are ideal for riparian fencing. This riparian fencing would exclude cattle, assist in the control of invasive weed species, and possibly discourage mining activity, and thus improve the riparian functioning of the stream. A plan will be developed regarding where the fencing will be erected, followed by fence installation where prescribed. In addition, Ned Gulch season of use will be modified as indicated in the table below to allow riparian vegetation to be ungrazed for a longer portion of the growing season. Currently the lessee is grazing this pasture year-round.

The Stone Corral area of the Hope allotment provides the only water for cattle in this portion of the allotment. The cows naturally congregate in this area, and heavy grazing use occurs. This heavy use is trampling the riparian vegetation. There is also several invasive species within the riparian area, including tocalote and Italian thistle. The riparian area is assessed as functional at risk with a downward trend. The lessee developed a spring, installed piping, a water tank, and a trough, without formal approval and coordination with the BLM. Only the spring was fenced. It is proposed that riparian fencing occur in the Stone Corral portion of the allotment, as mitigation for the unauthorized range improvements that were made by the lessee. Approximately 2 to 3 acres of brush in the Stone Corral area was cleared by the lessee. The brush clearing was done without BLM authorization.

Alternative 2 – Current Management (No Action)

A 10-year permit would be issued with the terms and conditions as illustrated in the table below. The Haigh lease terms and conditions are the same as the proposed action. Specifically, the Banks and Hope lease is changed in the proposed alternative to more accurately reflect grazing use and allotment area, and Turpin's season of use is changed to lessen the pressure on riparian vegetation. A new term and condition has also been added to the Turpin lease regarding Iberian star thistle. A new term and condition regarding locking lease gates has been added to the Haigh and Turpin leases. The Hope lease will be renewed for a 2-year period versus 10 years. This alternative also differs from the proposed alternative in that Alternative 2 would not include the range improvements proposed in Alternative 1.

Allotment	**Number of Livestock**	**Kind**	**From**	**To**	**AUMs**	**Lease Length**
Banks	5	Cows	3/1	2/28	58	10 years
Hope – Brunette Hope – Hope	48 18	Cows	3/1 11/1	5/31 2/28	145 75	10 years
Turpin	Actual use schedule so varies	Cows	3/1 9/1	7/31 10/31	201 80	10 years
Haigh – Penon Blanco Haigh – Hwy. 132 East	3 5	Cows	5/15 5/15	10/31 10/31	19 30	10 years

Alternative 3 - No Grazing

This alternative would cancel the permit on the Banks, Hope, Turpin, and Penon Blanco (Haigh) 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 the allotment and amend the Sierra Resource Management Plan.

Current Livestock Management

Banks – Mr. Banks reports that he puts the horses on the BLM allotment beginning in February and takes them off around May or June as the forage dries up. The horses drift onto the BLM allotment during this time through an open gate between Bank's private land and the adjacent BLM allotment. Generally, the private property offers greater foraging opportunities for the horses than the BLM allotment. However, there is approximately 80 acres of shrub/oak woodland that does provide grazing forage on the BLM allotment. Much of the allotment is steep canyon bordering the Tuolumne River. There are two springs that provide water for the horses on the allotment. Mr. Banks reports that he does not graze the allotment south of the river.

Hope – Mr. Hope reports that he has 35 to 40 cows, and that the cows use the allotment during the spring, prior to the grasses drying up. The cows drift through open gates between the private ranch and the BLM allotment. The cows tend to concentrate in the riparian areas, particularly the Stone Corral area. Mr. Hope has developed a spring, and is piping water through a 500-gallon water tank to a trough. This was conducted without BLM authorization or coordination. He wishes to develop a second spring in this area. He will request BLM authorization before constructing any future range improvements.

Turpin – The allotment is divided into two pastures: Picture Gallery Gulch/Rancho del Oro Gulch (south of Highway 132) and Ned Gulch (North of Highway 132). The cows go into Picture Gallery as soon as the stock ponds fill up with water, around November or December. The cows are taken off in June. This area is too dry to use during the summer. In Ned Gulch, approximately 10 cattle graze year-round. Year-round grazing of Ned Gulch is outside the current terms and conditions of the lease, which calls for seasonal grazing. The lease is on an actual use basis. The lessee turns in a report stating his actual use during the prior year.

Haigh – Very little apparent use is being made of much of the Haigh allotment. The cows drift onto the allotment during spring and fall of each year. There is evidence of cattle grazing on one spring on private land adjacent to the BLM allotment. It is uncertain whether these cattle are Haigh's or the private land owner on which the spring occurs.

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 areas are 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/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.

Cultural Resources

Affected Environment

0404105 – Banks – No inventory of the proposed Banks allotment was conducted, and no previous inventory has been conducted on this allotment.

0404136 – Hope – Cultural resources on this allotment include a rock foundation and a bed rock mortar site.

0404179 – Turpin – Cultural resources on this allotment include two lithic scatters and three mid-1900s house sites.

0404193 – Penon Blanco (Haigh) – Cultural resources on this allotment include a bed rock mortar, trash scatter, and a possible mid-1900s house site.

Impacts of Proposed Action

The cultural resources on all of the allotment s have not been, and are not being negatively affected by cattle grazing. The situation would not change under the proposed lease renewals. The level of grazing use would not change, and there are no range improvements proposed that would affect cultural resources. Given the brushy, dry nature of much of the allotments and the relatively low, dispersed level of grazing proposed, it is very unlikely that there would be any conflicts between grazing and cultural resources, significant or not. Renewing the leases, as proposed, would not affect significant cultural resources. A cultural inventory has been completed for the proposed action, and consultation with SHPO has been completed in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).

Impacts of Current Management (no action)

Same as proposed action.

Impacts of the No Grazing Alternative

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

References

Barnes, J. 2009. Section 106 compliance for the Turpin and Haigh grazing lease renewals, Mariposa County. Memorandum to the Field Manager. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Mother Lode Field Office, El Dorado Hills, California. 39 pp.

Barnes, J. 2009. Section 106 compliance for the Hope, Gaiser, and Banks grazing lease renewals, Tuolumne County. Memorandum to the Field Manager. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Mother Lode Field Office, El Dorado Hills, California. 82 pp.

Invasive, Non-native Species

Affected Environment

0404105 – Banks – Weed species present on the allotment include some small patches of tocalote. The portion of the allotment surveyed was relatively weed-free. The allotment is meeting the species standard for rangeland health.

0404136 – Hope – Italian thistle was prominent especially in disturbed areas and around riparian areas. Sow thistle and fig are also found in drainages. Tocalote was significant in some upland areas. The weedy annual catch-fly, *Silene gallica*, appears to be one of the dominant species of the "bathtub ring" surrounding the lake. The allotment is not meeting the species standard for rangeland health due to the presence of invasive weeds.

0404179 – Turpin – Weeds are prominent in the drainages, especially from Willow Creek north. Of particular importance is the presence of the California Department of Food and Agriculture Class A rated weed, Iberian starthistle, that is largely confined to Ned Gulch, but a handful of plants have been found in two tributaries of Ned Gulch. Giant reed and fig are well established in Willow Creek. Italian thistle is also prominent in the drainages in the northern portion of the lease. There is a large colony of French broom between Hwy 132 and Willow Creek. Other weeds include bull thistle and tocalote.

0404193 – Penon Blanco (Haigh) – Italian thistle is prominent in the drainages in the western portion of the allotment. Despite the occurrence of Italian thistle, the allotment is meeting the species standard for rangeland health.

Impacts of the Proposed Action

Banks and Haigh - 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 and horses can spread weed seed through their scat and on their hair. The proposed, low level of grazing that will occur on these allotments would not significantly affect the spread of invasive weeds.

Hope and Turpin – Invasive species such as tocalote, Italian thistle, Iberian star thistle (Turpin only), and others are prominent in the disturbed and riparian areas of these allotments. Giant reed, fig, and tree-of-heaven are also present, especially in Willow Creek on the Turpin allotment. Cattle grazing is almost certainly contributing to the spread of these invasive species and the suppression of native riparian perennials, such as willows, that would otherwise successfully compete with these non-natives. The fencing of the riparian areas most impacted by weedy species should assist in the control of invasive weed species, and assist in controlling the spread of invasive species in the riparian areas.

Adding a term and condition to the Turpin lease regarding the removal of cattle from the pasture that includes Ned Gulch when requested by BLM, to aid in efforts to control Iberian starthistle, will assist in control of this invasive weed.

Impacts of Current Management

Banks and Haigh - Impacts of current management are the same as for the proposed action.

Hope and Turpin - Invasive species such as tocalote, Italian thistle, Iberian star thistle (Turpin only), and others are prominent in the disturbed and riparian areas of these allotments. Cattle grazing is almost certainly contributing to the spread of these invasive species, and making the control of the invasive species difficult. With current management, invasive species would continue to proliferate and would be difficult to control.

Impacts of No Grazing

Banks and Haigh - Under the no grazing alternative, the potential for dispersal of seeds through livestock hairs and scat would decrease throughout the allotments. 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.

Hope and Turpin – Elimination of grazing on the allotments would allow for the reestablishment of riparian vegetation which would compete with, and possibly shade out the invasive weedy species. It would also allow for more effective control of the invasive weeds. Weed spread would be noticeably reduced.

References

Franklin, A. 2009. Botanical Resource Inventory Report (Banks grazing lease renewal). Unpubl. rep. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Mother Lode Field Office, El Dorado Hills, California. 2 pp.

Franklin, A. 2009. Botanical Resource Inventory Report (Hope grazing lease renewal). Unpubl. rep. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Mother Lode Field Office, El Dorado Hills, California. 3 pp.

Franklin, A. 2009. Botanical Resource Inventory Report (Turpin grazing lease renewal). Unpubl. rep. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Mother Lode Field Office, El Dorado Hills, California. 3 pp.

Franklin, A. 2009. Botanical Resource Inventory Report (Haigh grazing lease renewal). Unpubl. rep. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Mother Lode Field Office, El Dorado Hills, California. 3 pp.

Recreation

Affected Environment

Very little or no recreation is occurring on any of the allotments. The Banks allotment and Hope allotment are only accessible through private land, with a locked gate. Signs of recreation use were not observed on these two allotments. The other allotments can be accessed through unlocked gates along Highway 132. Small amounts of dispersed recreation, including off-road vehicle use, are occurring on the Penon Blanco (Haigh) and Turpin allotments. The Hope allotment is accessible by boat from the shores of Don Pedro Reservoir. The small amount of recreation that is occurring on the Hope

allotment, is mostly occurring near the shoreline.

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 types of potential recreation, which would not necessarily conflict with grazing, the proposed action is not impacting recreational opportunities.

Impacts of No Grazing

Due to limited access and low 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 all of the alternatives are insignificant.

Because the leases have been in the families 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

Banks – 0404105 – The soils are mapped as Paleozoic metasedimentary rock. Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) is in the process of producing the first County soil map for Tuolumne County. According the Soil Vegetation Maps of California (1977), among the dominant soil series are Los Gatos, Mariposa, Maymen, and Rancheria. The allotment is currently meeting the soil standard for rangeland health. It has good ground cover with a residual dry matter of 1'000 plus lbs/acre and no evident erosion/compaction.

Penon Blanco (Hope) – 0404136 –The soils are mapped as Mesozoic volcanic and metavolcanic rock. NRCS is in the process of producing the first County soil map for Tuolumne County. According to Soil Vegetation Maps of California (1977), among the dominant soil series are Stonyford, Trabuco, Auburn, Exchequer, and Rescue. The allotment is currently meeting the soil standard for rangeland health. It has good ground cover with a residual dry matter of 1,000 lbs/acre and no evident erosion/compaction.

Turpin – 0404179 – Two soil mapping units cover most of the lease area: Blasingame-Las Posas stony loams, 9% to 30% slopes, eroded; and Auburn stony loam, 30% to 50% slopes, eroded. Other soil units include: Auburn rocky loam, 30% to 75% slopes, severely eroded; Auburn very rocky loam, 15% to 30% slopes; Auburn loam, 15% to 30% slopes, eroded; Blasingame loam, 2% to 15% slopes; and Trabuco clay loam, 2% to 15% slopes, eroded. The soils are of the BLasigame-Las Posas and Auburn series and are relatively shallow. Soil depth is generally 0 to 36 inches and textures range from clay loams to very rocky loams. The soils have a moderate to high erosive hazard. The allotment is currently meeting the standard for rangeland health. It has good ground cover with a residual dry

matter of 700-1,000 lbs/acre and no evident erosion.

Haigh – 0404193 – The dominant soil map units are: Auburn rocky loam, 30% to 75% slopes, severely eroded; Maymen gravelly loam, 30% to 75% slopes, severely eroded; and Blasingame-Las Posas stony loams, 9% to 30% slopes, eroded. Other soil map units in the allotment are: Auburn very rocky loam, 30% to 75% slopes, eroded; Auburn very rocky loam, 15% to 30% slopes; and Auburn stony loam, 30% to 50% slopes. The soils are relatively shallow. Soil depth is generally 0 to 36 inches and textures range from clay loams to very rocky loams. The soils have a moderate to high erosive hazard and oversurface flow is evident, although rills and gullying are not noticeable. There is no evidence of wind erosion. The allotment is currently meeting the standard for rangeland health. It has good ground cover with a residual dry matter of 700-1000 lbs/acre and no evident erosion/compaction.

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

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

Franklin, A. 2009. Botanical Resource Inventory Report (Banks grazing lease renewal). Unpubl. rep. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Mother Lode Field Office, El Dorado Hills, California. 2 pp.

Franklin, A. 2009. Botanical Resource Inventory Report (Hope grazing lease renewal). Unpubl. rep. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Mother Lode Field Office, El Dorado Hills, California. 3 pp.

Franklin, A. 2009. Botanical Resource Inventory Report (Turpin grazing lease renewal). Unpubl. rep. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Mother Lode Field Office, El Dorado Hills, California. 3 pp.

Franklin, A. 2009. Botanical Resource Inventory Report (Haigh grazing lease renewal). Unpubl. rep. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Mother Lode Field Office, El Dorado Hills, California. 3 pp.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service. 1977. Soil Vegetation Maps of California.

Water Quality

Affected Environment

The Banks allotment is in the Upper Tuolumne River watershed. Surface runoff flows into Don Pedro Reservoir and the Tuolumne River. Two intermittent streams, totaling approximately 1 mile, drain into the lake from the allotment. There is one developed spring box on the allotment.

The Hope allotment is in the Upper Tuolumne River watershed. Surface runoff flows into Don Pedro Reservoir. The allotment is drained by three streams totaling approximately 1 mile. There is one developed spring on the allotment.

The Turpin allotment is in the Upper Merced River watershed. The allotment has a generally southern exposure and is drained by primarily one drainage, Willow Creek, which runs in an east-west direction through the middle of the allotment, and flows into Lake McClure. There are 5 perennial creeks totaling approximately 3 miles on the allotment.

The Penon Blanco (Haigh) allotment is in the Upper Merced River watershed. Surface runoff flows into Lake McClure. There are 2 perennial creeks totaling approximately one mile on the allotment.

The Upper Tuolumne and Upper Merced are not on the State 303d list for water quality impairment. Beneficial water uses identified in the basin plan for the allotment areas include municipal and domestic water supply, irrigation, stock watering, hydropower generation, recreation, freshwater habitat (warm and cold water ecosystems), and wildlife habitat.

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 levels are not expected to affect water quality or beneficial water uses. The riparian mitigation proposed on the Hope and Turpin allotments would benefit water quality in the fenced off riparian areas.

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 2007. The Water Quality Control Plan (Basin Plan) for the Sacramento River and San Joaquin River Basins.

Wetlands/Riparian

Affected Environment

0404105 – Banks – Two intermittent streams totaling approximately 1 mile occur on the allotment. These streams were inappropriate for functioning condition assessment.

0404136 –Hope – Three perennial streams totaling approximately 1 mile occur on the allotment. These streams drain directly into Don Pedro Reservoir. All of the streams have a weed component, but two of the streams are assessed as properly functioning. The stream associated with the Stone Corral area provides the only water on this portion of the allotment during several months of the year. The cattle naturally congregate in this area. The riparian vegetation in the flatter portions of the stream is being trampled by the cattle, and invasive weeds, such as tocalote thistle and Italian thistle are prominent. This stream is assessed as functional at risk with a downward trend. As the riparian areas steepen, the cattle impacts are greatly reduced.

0404179 – Turpin – There are 5 perennial creeks totaling approximately 3 miles on the allotment. Riparian reaches with impenetrable trees and brush are functioning properly. However, in many areas that are accessible to cattle, especially from Willow Creek north, are compromised, with little woody riparian vegetation and abundant weeds. One of the streams, Ned Gulch, is assessed as functional at

risk with a downward trend. The riparian area contains several invasive weed species, including Iberian starthistle. The Iberian starthistle was sprayed with the herbicide glyphosphate in 2009 (EA # CA-180-09-28). In addition, woody riparian vegetation is being heavily browsed by year-round cattle grazing.

0404193 – Penon Blanco (Haigh) – There are 2 perennial creeks totaling approximately one mile on the allotment. Both of these are assessed as properly functioning.

Impacts of the Proposed Action

The proposed action which includes riparian fencing on the Hope and Turpin allotments would improve riparian functioning in the perennial streams and springs where the livestock concentrate. Riparian fencing would allow for the riparian vegetation to recover, and assist in the control of invasive weeds. The revised season of use for the Turpin allotment would allow the riparian vegetation to recover. The riparian vegetation will benefit from having a longer period of its growing season without grazing pressure.

Impacts of Current Management (no action)

Cattle grazing impacts to riparian habitat in the Banks and Penon Blanco (Haigh) allotments have not kept the stream reaches from properly functioning. Cattle grazing impacts on the Hope and Turpin allotments are more severe and cattle use is affecting riparian function. These impacts include the trampling/browsing of riparian vegetation, and the introduction and proliferation of invasive weeds. These riparian impacts would continue with the current management.

Impacts of the No Grazing Alternative

Elimination of grazing on the Banks and Penon Blanco (Haigh) allotments would minimally improve riparian condition on the allotments, since livestock are either minimally impacting or hardly using the riparian zone. Elimination of grazing on the Hope and Turpin allotments would allow the riparian areas to rest and recover. It would be beneficial to the riparian areas to exclude them from the current grazing pressure.

References

U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2009. Grazing Use Management/Rangeland Health Assessment and Determination for the Banks allotment. Mother Lode Field Office, El Dorado Hills, California. 2 pp.

U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2009. Grazing Use Management/Rangeland Health Assessment and Determination for the Hope allotment. Mother Lode Field Office, El Dorado Hills, California. 2 pp.

U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2009. Grazing Use Management/Rangeland Health Assessment and Determination for the Turpin allotment. Mother Lode Field Office, El Dorado Hills, California. 2 pp.

U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2009. Grazing Use Management/Rangeland Health Assessment and Determination for the Penon Blanco (Haigh) allotment. Mother Lode Field Office, El Dorado Hills, California. 2 pp.

Wildlife

0404105 – Banks – No special status species were found on the allotment. Wildlife habitat on the allotment comprises of mixed oak woodland, mixed chaparral, and chamise. There is no apparent competition between wildlife and livestock. The allotment is in the yearlong range of the Mariposa deer herd, but is not considered a critical area for the herd. Surveys of the allotment indicate a diversity of typical, native wildlife species for the area, such as coyote, deer, California quail, wild turkey, and several species of songbirds. The Tuolumne River canyon may be important to raptors, such as the Bald Eagle.

0404136 – Hope – One elderberry bush was found on the allotment. These shrubs could host the federally threatened valley elderberry longhorn beetle. The elderberry bush showed no evidence of grazing. The lease underwent brush conversion during the late 1950's. This involved prescribed burning, followed by aerial application of an herbicide, and aerial seeding. After two years of treatment, the conversion took, and there are large areas of the lease that are open grassland habitat. The natural habitat on the allotment is largely dense chaparral/chamise. There are a few scattered oaks and gray pine. Riparian vegetation, such as willow, coffeeberry, rushes, and cattails, is supported by 3 perennial streams that drain into Don Pedro Reservoir. Available forage is abundant, with no apparent competition between wildlife and livestock. The allotment is within the yearlong range of the Mariposa deer herd. Wildlife species (sight or sign) observed during a field exam included coyote, California quail, spotted towhee, western kingbird, black phoebe, Nuttall's woodpecker, mourning dove, bullfrog, and crawdads.

0404179 – Turpin – Three drainages within the allotment have a few elderberry bushes each, occurring in them. These shrubs could host the federally threatened valley elderberry longhorn beetle. The elderberry shrubs show no evidence of grazing. Wildlife habitat on the allotment consists largely of mixed chaparral and chamise, with some grassy openings where past brush conversion treatment has occurred. There is also riparian vegetation, such as willow, coffeeberry, rushes, and cattails, in the springs and perennial steams within the lease. The allotment is within the yearlong range of the Mariposa deer herd but is not considered a critical area for the herd. Wildlife species (sight or sign) observed during a field exam included deer, coyote, evening grosbeak, western scrub jay, western kingbird, Nuttall's woodpecker, and turkey vulture. Available forage is abundant, with no apparent competition between wildlife and livestock.

0404193 – Penon Blanco (Haigh) – No special status species were found on the allotment. Wildlife habitat on the allotment consists largely of mixed chaparral and chamise, with some grassy openings, and scattered oaks and gray pine. There is also riparian vegetation, such as willow, coffeeberry, rushes, sedge, wild grape, and cattails, in the springs and perennial drainages. The allotment is within the yearlong range of the Mariposa deer herd but is not considered a critical area for the herd. Wildlife (sight or sign) observed on the allotment included deer, coyote, Bewick's wren, spotted towhee, brown towhee, California quail, common bushtit, black phoebe, mourning dove, blue-gray gnatcatcher, turkey vulture, common raven, song sparrow, ruby-crowned kinglet, Anna's hummingbird, western scrub jay, wrentit, aquatic garter snake, bullfrog, and Pacific tree frog tadpoles.

<u>Impacts of all Alternatives</u>

Neither existing grazing nor 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, and there is no apparent competition for forage between wildlife and livestock. On the Hope allotment, the proposed riparian fencing will fence off the elderberry bush, and exclude it from grazing pressure. It is not currently being impacted by cattle grazing, however, fencing will ensure that future grazing will not impact the shrub. Riparian fencing as proposed will benefit wildlife species using these riparian areas.

References

Cranston, P. 2009. Biological Resource Inventory Report, Banks grazing lease renewal. Unpubl. rep. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, El Dorado Hills, California. 1 p.

Cranston, P. 2008. Biological Resource Inventory Report, Hope grazing lease renewal. Unpubl. rep. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, El Dorado Hills, California. 2 pp.

Cranston, P. 2009. Biological Resource Inventory Report, Turpin grazing lease renewal. Unpubl. rep. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, El Dorado Hills, California. 2 pp.

Cranston, P. 2009. Biological Resource Inventory Report, Haigh grazing lease renewal. Unpubl. rep. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, El Dorado Hills, California. 2 pp.

U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 1982. Proposed livestock grazing management for the Sierra Planning Area draft environmental impact statement. Bakersfield District Office, Bakersfield, California. 145 pp.

Vegetation

0404105 – Banks – The allotment is mostly mixed chaparral with areas of blue and live oak woodland and Mediterranean annual grassland. Woody species include: interior live oak, blue oak, canyon live oak, ponderosa pine (infrequent), toyon, buckbrush, poison oak, whiteleaf manzanita, bush monkeyflower, golden fleece, holly-leaf redberry, flowering ash, western redbud, deer brush, common manzanita, chamise, deer weed, and keckiella.

No special status plant species were found on this allotment.

0404136 – Hope – Chaparral and non-native annual grassland dominate the lease area. Small stands of gray pine and oaks are mostly associated with drainages. Apparently the grassland is mainly the result of range-improvement/brush-control projects begun in the 1950's and maintained (extended?) by the lessee in the years since. Woody species of uplands include gray pine, blue oak, interior live oak, chamise, toyon, common manzanita, whiteleaf manzanita, flowering ash, buckbrush, western redbud, poison oak, holly-leaf redberry, and yerba santa. In mesic drainage locations (borderline riparian), there is California buckeye, fig, and western spicebush.

No special status plant species were found on this allotment.

0404179 – Turpin – The allotment has large areas of chaparral, mostly chamise chaparral. There are also large areas of non-native annual grassland, mostly resulting from brush conversion efforts by BLM and the lessee dating back to the 1950s and 1960s. Maintenance of some of these areas has

probably occurred since. There is some blue oak savannah and interior live oak woodland. The woody species of these upland communities include: blue oak, gray pine, interior live oak, California buckeye, chamise, buckbrush, poison oak, toyon, whiteleaf manzanita, silver lupine, holly-leaf redberry, deerweed, rush-rose, and yerba santa. Woody riparian vegetation includes red willow, button willow, Fremont cottonwood, California coffeeberry, California wild grape, western spicebush, large leather root, rose, and a number of non-native species such as fig, Spanish broom, privet, zelkova, oleander, and olive.

No special status plant species were found on this allotment.

0404193 – Penon Blanco (Haigh) – Five communities dominate: chamise chaparral; mixed chaparral with white leaf manzanita, toyon, and chamise; blue oak savannah; interior live oak woodland; and foothill riparian. Besides those species already mentioned, woody species of upland sites include: gray pine, California buckeye, buckbrush, western redbud, pitcher sage, holly-leaf redberry, keckiella, gooseberry, yerba santa, California coffeeberry, California broom, and poison oak. Western spicebush, red willow, button willow, lemonade berry, large leather-root and California grape were found in the riparian areas.

Fritillaria agrestis (stinkbells) was found near the west boundary of the allotment----according to the BLM GIS layer for land status, the population is on private land. (This GIS layer is not entirely accurate, and a portion of the population might be on public land.) This species is not currently on the BLM sensitive species list, although it was at one time.

Impacts of the Proposed Action

Banks and Penon Blanco (Haigh) - The species standard is being met on these two allotments. Native vegetation is diverse and healthy. Grazing does not appear to be impacting vegetation on these two allotments. Grazing is not impacting special status species on these two allotments, including the *Fritillaria agrestis* population near (on?) the Penon Blanco allotment. Current management at the *Fritillaria agrestis* site appears favorable for the species. The botanist reports this is the densest population of the species that he has seen.

Hope and Turpin – The Hope and Turpin allotments do not meet the species standard for rangeland health due to invasive weedy species, especially prevalent in the riparian areas. Also, apparent is the non-native species that are prevalent in the formerly treated areas of these allotments. These include Texas rose clover (Hope) and Harding grass (Turpin). Despite weedy species and non-native species in areas of these allotments, in the majority of the allotment and especially in the upland area, native vegetation is diverse and healthy, and not being impacted by livestock grazing. Grazing is not impacting special status species on these two allotments. By assisting in controlling weeds, and allowing recovery of riparian vegetation, the proposed fencing of riparian areas, will benefit native vegetation in these areas.

Impacts of Current Management

Same as for the Proposed Action.

Impacts of no grazing:

Elimination of grazing is not expected to impact vegetation.

References

Franklin, A. 2009. Botanical Resource Inventory Report (Banks grazing lease renewal). Unpubl. rep. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Mother Lode Field Office, El Dorado Hills, California. 2 pp.

Franklin, A. 2009. Botanical Resource Inventory Report (Hope grazing lease renewal). Unpubl. rep. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Mother Lode Field Office, El Dorado Hills, California. 3 pp.

Franklin, A. 2009. Botanical Resource Inventory Report (Turpin grazing lease renewal). Unpubl. rep. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Mother Lode Field Office, El Dorado Hills, California. 3 pp.

Franklin, A. 2009. Botanical Resource Inventory Report (Haigh grazing lease renewal). Unpubl. rep. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Mother Lode Field Office, El Dorado Hills, California. 3 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. Current grazing management could lead to cumulative impacts for riparian areas on the Hope and Turpin allotments. Current grazing management could also lead to cumulative impacts for weeds in the general area of the allotments, especially Iberian star thistle on the Turpin allotment. 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 life style choice for many of the current lessees. Lease cancellation would impact this life style and tradition.

CHAPTER 4: CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Persons, Groups, and Agencies Consulted

- American Indian Council of Mariposa County
- Tuolumne Me-Wuk Tribal Council
- Chicken Ranch Rancheria

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

5.1 BLM Interdisciplinary Team

Reviewers:

/s/ James Barnes _____
NEPA Reviewer/Cultural Resources

/s/ Al Franklin _____
Botany

/s/ Peggy Cranston _____
Wildlife

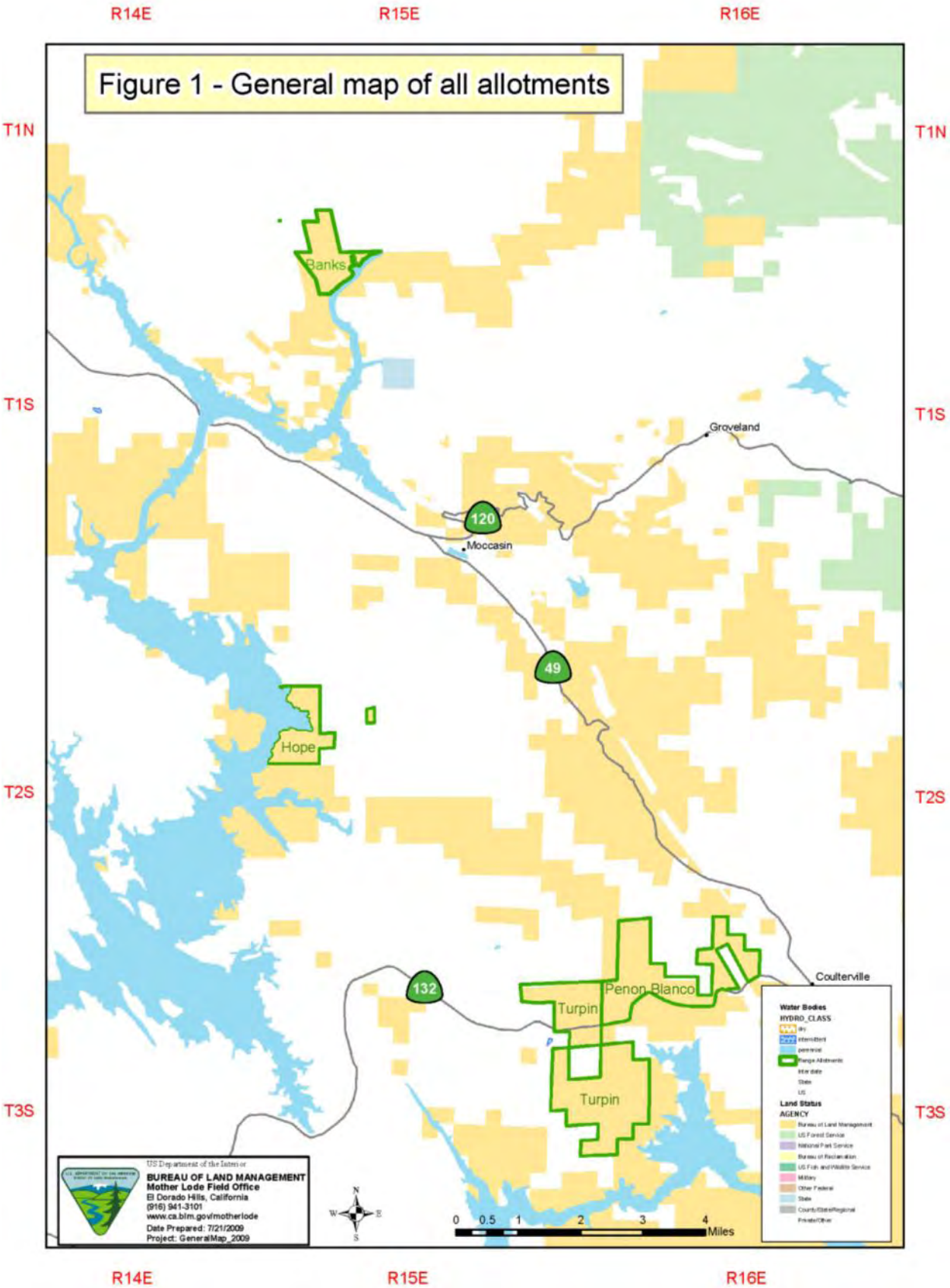
Figure 1 - General map of all allotments
R14E
R15E
R16E
T1N
T1S
T2S
T3S
Banks
Groveland
120
Moccasin
49
Hope
132
Penon Blanco
Turpin
Turpin
Coulterville
Water Bodies
HYDRO_CLASS
Land Status
AGENCY
US Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Mother Lode Field Office
El Dorado Hills, California
(916) 941-3101
www.ca.blm.gov/motherlode
Date Prepared: 7/21/2009
Project: GeneralMap_2009
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United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Environmental Assessment CA-180-09-37

Finding of No Significant Impact

Banks, Hope, Turpin, and Haigh Livestock Grazing Authorizations

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

July 2009

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 renewal of four grazing leases, as proposed under Alternative 1, 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 Resource Management Plan. 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 4 allotments), directly involving approximately 3,934 acres of BLM administered land that by itself does not have international, national, regional, or state-wide importance.

Intensity: 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. Mitigating measures to reduce impacts to riparian areas on the Hope and Turpin allotments were incorporated in the design of the action alternatives. 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**. No unique characteristics occur on the allotments.

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 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, for the proposed alternative. Current management and lease cancellation could have riparian, weeds, and social cumulative impacts.

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, and consultation with SHPO has been completed in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). A finding of "no effect" 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.

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, a single elderberry bush, potential host plant for the valley elderberry longhorn beetle, occurs on the Hope allotment, there is no evidence that these bushes are being grazed. However, riparian fencing which will also fence off this elderberry bush is proposed for the project. Thus, any future grazing will not impact the bush. Therefore, the proposed action is not anticipated to affect endangered or threatened species or their habitat.

10. **Whether the action threatens a violation of a federal, state, local, or tribal law, 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 three Native American tribes concerning consulting party status, and one response came back from the Tuolumne Band of Me Wuk. A subsequent meeting was held with the this tribe, and no issues were raised. In addition, the project is consistent with applicable land management plans, policies, and programs.

_____ _____

William S. Haigh, Mother Lode Field Manager Date

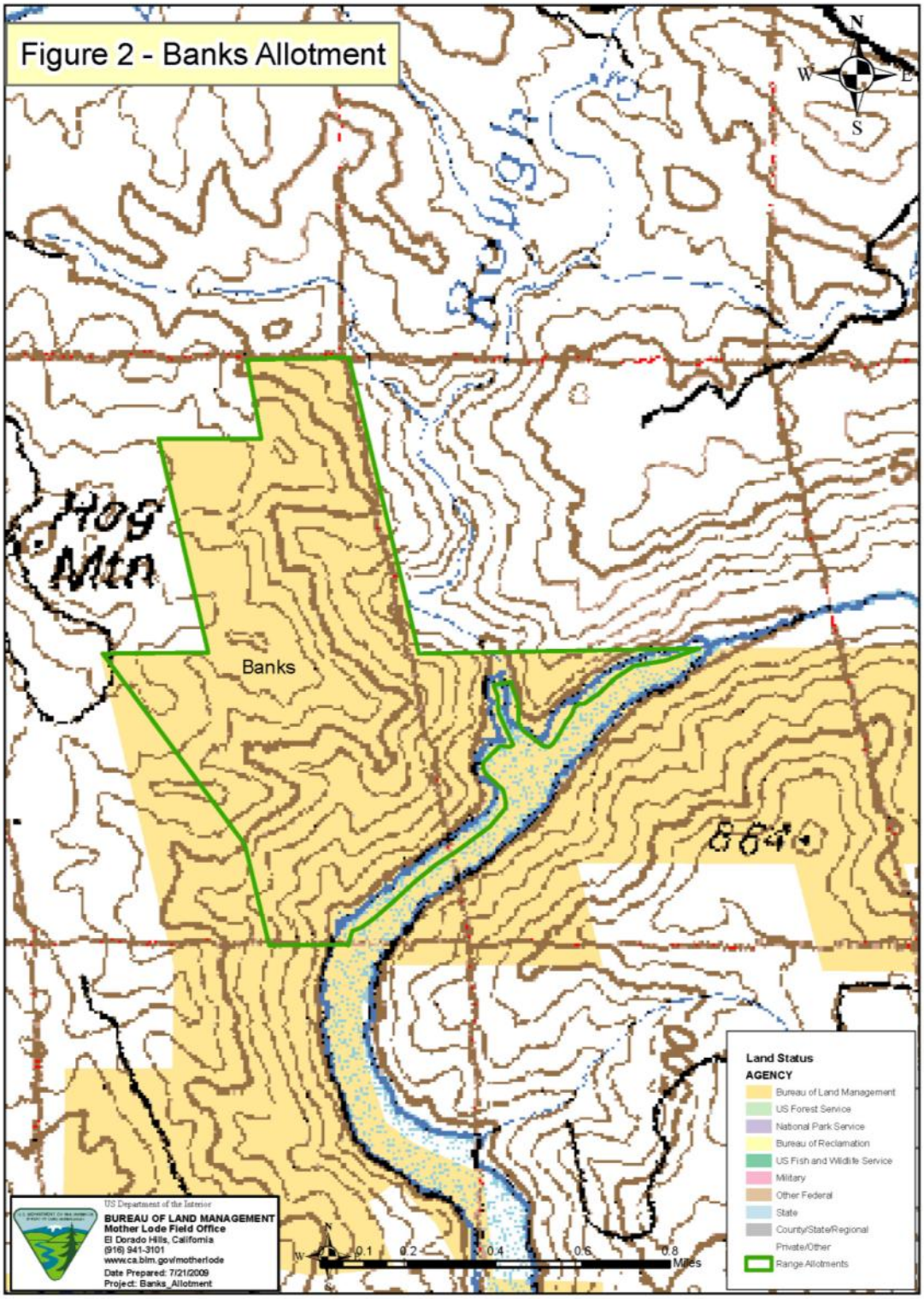
R15E

T1N

T1N

T1S

T1S



R15E

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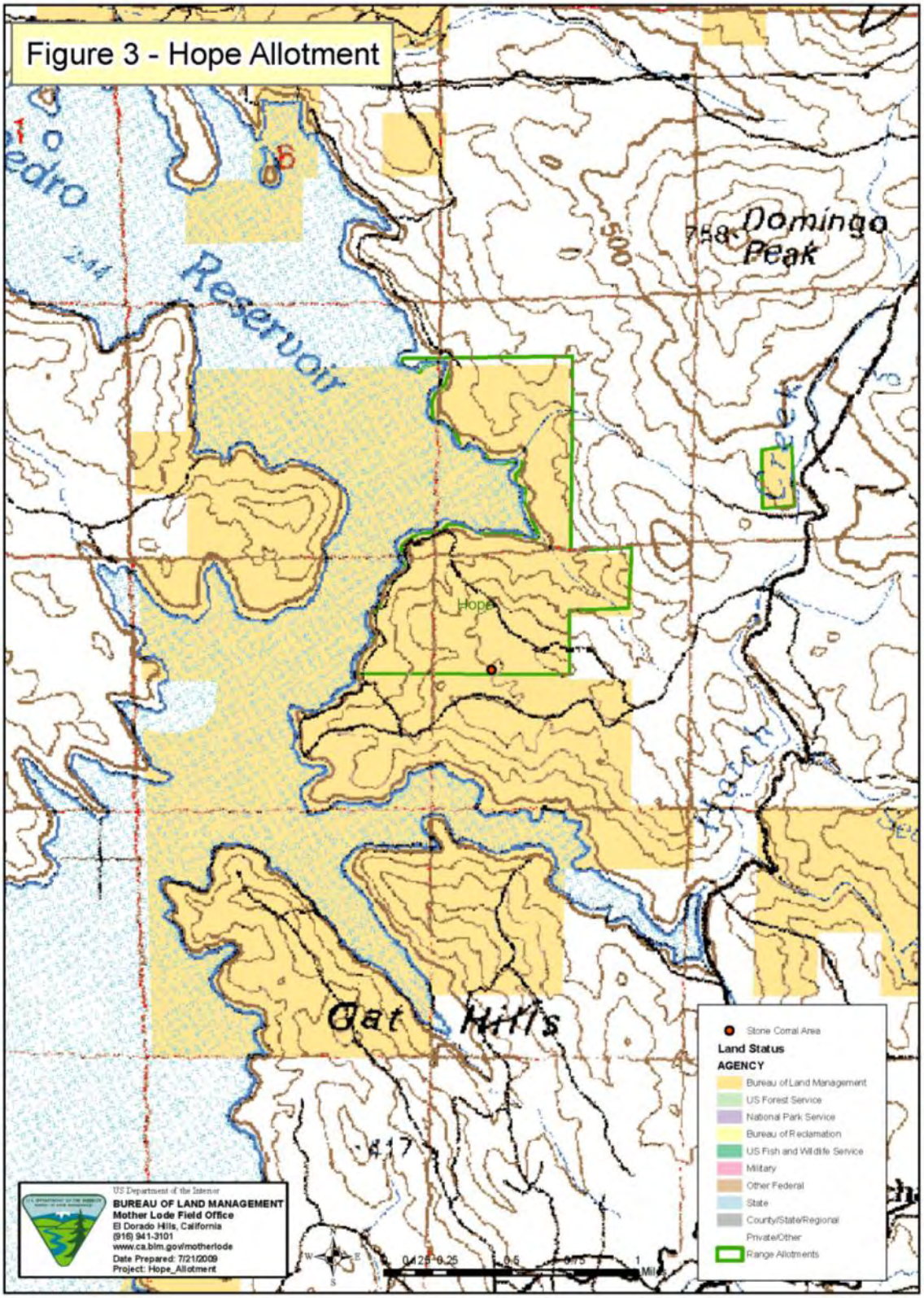

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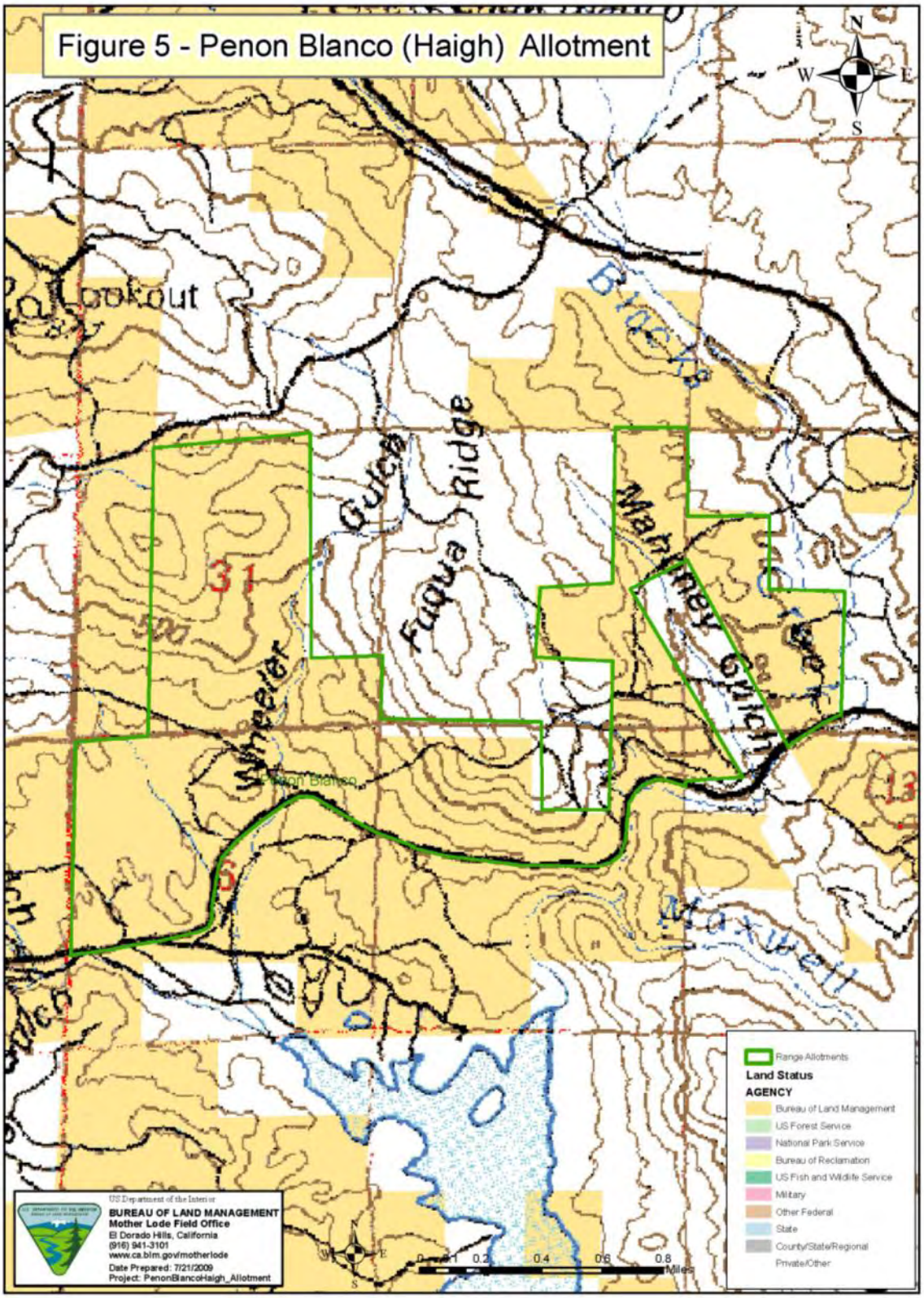

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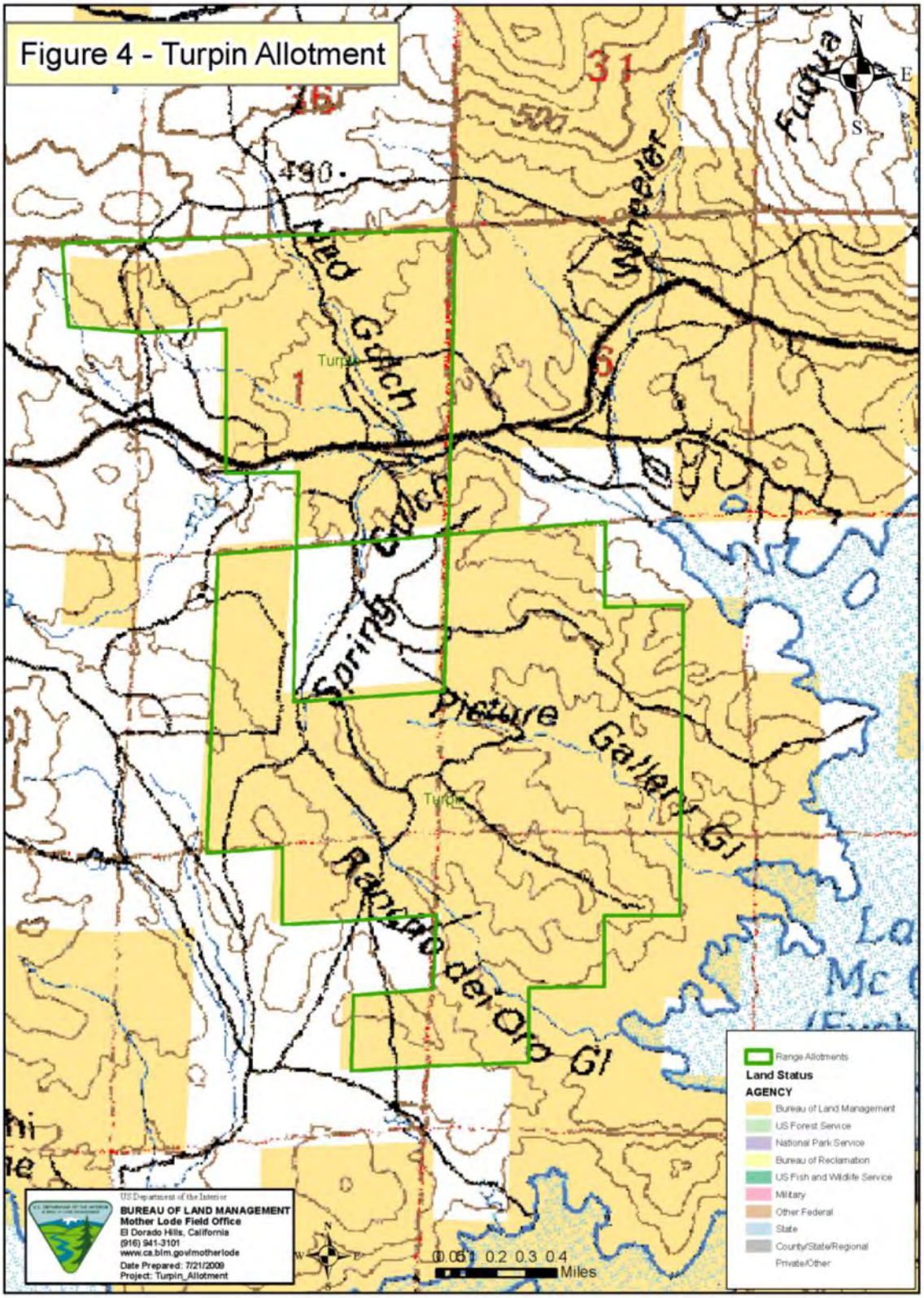

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