

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
HOLLISTER FIELD OFFICE**

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
DOI-BLM-CA-0900-2009-015-EA
FLTFA Lands Sale (Ramsey Gulch)**

DATE INITIATED: October 1, 2008

CONTROL NUMBER: DOI-BLM-CA-0900-2009-015-EA

CASE FILE/SERIAL NUMBER: CACA 50168-6

PROPONENT: BLM

PROJECT: FLTFA Lands Sale

LOCATION: Ramsey Gulch, Santa Cruz County

AFFECTED ACREAGE: 12.55 acres

7.5' QUADRANGLE: Loma Prieta

LAND STATUS: Public

SPECIAL DESIGNATION AREA: N/A

AUTHORITY: Federal Land Management and Policy Act (FLPMA)
Federal Land Transactions Facilitation Act (FLTFA)

LAND USE PLAN CONFORMANCE:

The proposed action is subject to and in conformance with the Hollister Resource Management Plan of 2007 in accordance with Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations 1610.5-3. The management plan provides “the goal for lands and realty management is to provide lands, interests in land, and authorizations for public and private uses while maintaining and improving resource values and public land administration.”

To achieve the goal for lands and realty management, the following objectives are established:

- Make public land available for disposal that meets the disposal criteria contained in Section 203(a) of the FLPMA;

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANS, PROGRAMS, AND POLICIES

On July 25, 2000, Congress passed the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act (FLTFA), which authorized the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture to retain a percentage of the funds received from land sales to use to purchase private lands in federally designated areas. The BLM is considering a number of lands sales in the Hollister Field Area to implement the RMP and raise funds to acquire land as authorized by FLTFA.

This environmental assessment addresses the proposed sale of 12.55 acres located T.10S., R.2E., Sec.. 20, Lots 1, 2, 9.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL ZONING AND GENERAL PLAN:

Correspondence was submitted to the County offices on October 14, 2008 and no adverse comments were received concerning any planning or zoning issues

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR PROPOSED ACTION:

The purpose of the proposed action is to transfer small parcels of public lands into private ownership and to generate funds pursuant to the Federal Land Transactions Facilitation Act (FLTFA). The proposed action is needed to dispose of lands which are difficult and uneconomic to manage as part of the public lands and because the existing available funds in the FLTFA land disposal are not sufficient to purchase lands that have been nominated for acquisition in California.

The sale would implement a major goal of the RMP, to improve management of public lands, by disposing of scattered parcels while potentially raising funds which could be used to acquire lands in areas where Federal management for recreation and resource enhancement is appropriate.

PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES:

Proposed Action

The proposed action is a modified competitive bid sale of approximately 12.55-acre public land parcel described as: T.10 S., R.2 E., Sec. 20, Lots 1, 2, 9, MDM.

The parcel will be sold using a modified competitive sale method allowing adjoining landowners an opportunity to bid. There are three adjoining landowners that the bidding would be opened up to; Mr. and Mrs. Roger Burch, Mr. and Mrs. Jeffery Bradford and Mr. and Mrs. Alan Reid. The lands would be sold for not less than \$53,000, which is the appraised fair market value of the land. The sale would include the conveyance of both the surface and mineral estate, although the U.S. would retain reservation for ditches and canals.

No Action Alternative

The proposed land sale would not be undertaken. Existing management and use of the site would continue subject to applicable statutes, regulations, policy and land use plans.

The Federal land parcel would continue to be available for disposal as directed, in the RMP. Other sales or exchange opportunities would be considered in order to benefit acquisition of private property within a designated managed unit identified in the RMP. The Federal lands would be re-opened to the location of mining claims and locatable mineral development (subject to appropriate BLM regulations for administration of the 1872 General Mining Law).

Alternatives Considered but not Analyzed in Detail:

BLM considered other public lands in Santa Cruz County for possible sale. In evaluating other public lands for possible sale, the BLM considered such factors as conformance with the Hollister RMP, expected land values, market interest, physical and legal access, existing resource issues and information and management efficiencies. Ultimately the public lands BLM is proposing for sale at this time were selected for the following reasons: 1) the lands were identified for disposal in the 1984 Hollister RMP and remain available for sale under the 2007 Hollister RMP revision, 2) existing resource information indicated the lands had no important resource values, 3) and the lands had no physical or legal public access. BLM may in the future consider other public lands for sale that were not considered in detail in this environmental assessment.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Affect Critical Element?	Yes	No	Affected Critical Element?	Yes	No
Air Quality		X	Native American Values		X
ACEC/RNA		X	T & E Species		X
Cultural Resources		X	Vegetation		X
Environmental Justice		X	Wastes, Hazardous/Solid		X
Farmlands, Prime/Unique		X	Water Quality (ground/surface)		X
Fish and Wildlife		X	Wetlands/Riparian Zones		X

Affect Critical Element?	Yes	No	Affected Critical Element?	Yes	No
Floodplains		X	Wild & Scenic Rivers		X
Invasive Weeds		X	Wilderness		X

The following elements of the human environment, subject to review specified in statute, regulation or executive order, are not located within the project area: Ecologically Critical Area, Floodplains, Prime or Unique Farm Lands, Wetlands and Riparian Zones, and Wild and Scenic Rivers, Wilderness, or Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC).

Lands & Realty

The Hollister Field Office administers approximately 284,000 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) public lands, primarily located in Monterey, San Benito, and western Fresno counties. Many of the other public lands managed by the Hollister Field Office in San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Alameda, Contra Costa, Stanislaus, and Merced counties consist of small, scattered parcels with little to no public access and are commonly used for unauthorized activities such as illegal dumping, illicit drug operations, and some limited non-motorized recreational opportunities (i.e. hunting, target shooting, etc.).

In 2007, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) approved the Record of Decision (ROD) for the Hollister Resource Management Plan (RMP) providing guidance for management of public lands administered by the Hollister Field Office. The RMP identified the need to pursue land tenure adjustments to ensure more efficient management of the public lands, to reduce conflicts with other public and private landowners, and to provide more consistency and logic in land use patterns within the Hollister Resource Area.. As a result, the 2007 ROD identifies a total of approximately 46,500 acres of public lands for disposal in Section 3.12.2. Figures 22-27 in the 2007 ROD show where these parcels are located.

The 2007 ROD also directs BLM to acquire lands with high resource values, including biological resources and recreation opportunities, especially in special management areas, including wilderness study area (WSAs) and Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs). Other management actions, including LTEN-C5, LTEN-C6, & LTEN-C7 (ROD, pg. 3-37), describe stipulations for public lands available for disposal and other provisions for acquiring lands from willing sellers to enhance management efficiency or to contribute to the fulfillment of resource management goals and objectives.

Since the RMP was approved, the BLM has completed a number of exchanges to dispose of isolated parcels of public land and acquire private land in larger management units.

Air Quality

The parcel is within the North Central Coast Air Basin. The North Central Coast Air Basin is comprised of a single air district, the Monterey Bay Unified APCD, and consists of Santa Cruz, San Benito, and Monterey Counties. The entire air basin currently violates both the State 24-hour and the annual average PM10 standards. However, the air basin is designated as attainment for the State PM2.5 annual average standard. The air basin currently is in non-attainment for ozone. Ozone is produced when reactive organic gases and oxides of nitrogen chemically react in sunlight.

Surface and Ground Water Quality

Surface waters occur on the parcel in an unnamed tributary to Ramsey Gulch, but only during wet winter months.

Soils

Soil series (Bowman and Estrada, 1980) within the parcel include the following:

Soil Series	Slope	Erosion Hazard	Unit	Soil Survey
Maymen stony loam	15-30%	High	150	Santa Cruz County, 1980
Maymen stony loam	30-75%	High-Very High	151	Santa Cruz County, 1980
Lompico-Felton complex	50-75%	Very High	144	Santa Cruz County, 1980

Slope on this very narrow parcel is variable, but mostly steep. Soil erosion hazard is high to very high.

Biological Resources

Fish and Wildlife

Fish and wildlife on the parcel are those species expected in coastal chaparral habitat, including Columbia black tailed deer (*Odocoileus hemionis*), red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*), mountain lion (*Puma concolor*), coyote (*Canis latrans*) and various small mammals, songbirds, reptiles, and insects.

Vegetation

The Ramsey Gulch parcel contains two primary vegetation series including woolyleaf manzanita and knobcone pine (Sawyer and Keeler-Wolf 1995). Redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) and Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) are occasional on the parcel.

Special Status Species

According to the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB), no listed plant species are known to exist on or near the Ramsey Gulch parcel. No listed plant species were observed on the parcel during the site visit in early spring. A record of BLM sensitive (CNPS list 1B) Santa Cruz manzanita

(*Arctostaphylos andersonii*) exists for a location approximately 0.5 mile east of the parcel. No Santa Cruz manzanita or other CNPS list 1B plant species were observed on the parcel during the site visit.

No threatened or endangered animals are expected on the site. Although some second growth Douglas firs and redwoods are present, no groves are substantial enough to support marbled murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmorata*). Furthermore, no breeding habitat for murrelets is available anywhere higher in the canyon. Therefore the parcel is likely not a flyway for murrelets. No aquatic habitat for California red-legged frogs or California tiger salamander is located on or near the site, and the steep chaparral terrain provides no suitable upland habitat for either species.

Noxious and Invasive Plants

No noxious and invasive species are known to exist on the parcel.

Cultural Resources and Native American Values

Expected cultural resource types in this region are prehistoric habitation sites attributed to the Costanoan/Ohlone California Indians or historic logging and/or homestead sites from the 19th and early 20th centuries. There are no known Native American values associated with this particular parcel.

Environmental Justice

No minority communities or low income communities are located within or adjacent to the proposed project areas.

Hazardous or Solid Wastes

An Environmental Preliminary Analysis was completed on December 1, 2009 by Hollister Field Staff. No evidence of “recognized environmental conditions” (RECs) was discovered.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES: Proposed Action

Lands & Realty

The proposed action would have direct minor long-term beneficial impacts on BLM’s lands and realty program because it would allow the Hollister Field Office to dispose of a scattered parcel that is difficult and uneconomic to manage as part of the public lands. Minor indirect benefits would also result from the proposed land sale because the revenue generated would supplement the existing funds in the FLTFA lands account, which are currently insufficient to purchase lands that have been nominated for acquisition in California. Funds from the sale and future property taxes would also provide minor short-term and long--term benefits on revenue for Santa Cruz County.

The proposed land sale would also support a major goal of the RMP, to improve management of public lands, and potentially raising funds which could be used to acquire lands in areas where Federal management for recreation and resource enhancement is appropriate. Moreover, the proposed action would have long-term beneficial impacts on lands and realty administration because it would assure more efficient management of public lands, reduce conflicts with other public and private landowners, and provide more consistency and logic in land use patterns within the Hollister Field Office.

Air Quality

There would be no expected air quality impacts due to the sale of this parcel, unless it was developed for timber harvest. If so, a timber harvest plan (THP) is required to mitigate any impacts for this logging activity.

Surface and Ground Water Quality

No expected impacts to water resources are expected by the sale of this parcel. If timber harvesting is allowed by the State of California, it will require a THP to mitigate any impacts to the water resources.

Soils

The Ramsey Gulch parcel is very narrow and dominated by chaparral. The parcel has only a small amount of harvestable timber. None of the vegetation on the parcel is suitable for grazing. These conditions will largely preclude any land use changes from its current use as wildlife habitat.

Biological Resources

Fish and Wildlife

Due to the low likelihood that habitat conversion will occur on the site following the land sale, no impacts to wildlife species or their habitat is expected from the land sale.

Vegetation

Since vegetation is dominated by chaparral and land use from its current condition of wildlife habitat is not expected to change, no negative impact to vegetation is expected as a result of the land sale.

Special Status Species

Due to the absence of threatened or endangered species on or near the site, the proposed action would have no effects on special status species.

Noxious and Invasive Plants

Due to the absence of noxious and invasive plant species and the expectation that there will not be any change in land use as a result of the land sale, no changes in the abundance of noxious and invasive plant species is expected.

Cultural Resources and Native American Values

There are no known archeological or cultural resources within the Area of Potential Affect (APE). The proposed action would not adversely affect archeological, cultural, or Native American values.

Environmental Justice

The proposed action would not result in disproportionately high or adverse human health or environmental effects on low-income or minority communities.

Hazardous or Solid Wastes

Due to the absence of any hazardous or solid wastes from the site, no impacts would be expected from the land sale.

MITIGATION MEASURES

No mitigation measures have been identified.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES: No Action Alternative

Under the no action alternative, the public land would not be sold and it would still be available for disposal in the Hollister RMP (2007). No active BLM management is anticipated. Funds from the sale would not be placed in the FLTFA land disposal account and Santa Cruz County's tax base would not benefit from the transfer of these lands.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Cumulative impacts are those impacts on the environment which result "from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions." (40 CFR 1508.7). In this case, past and presently on-going actions and activities in the project vicinity include the following:

BLM is considering a number of lands sales in the administrative boundary of the Hollister Field Office under the FLTFA. Specifically, the Hollister Field Office is considering 15 parcels of land for disposal that total 528.96 acres of public lands that would potentially be sold through competitive bid or direct sale

In analyzing cumulative impacts, BLM considered existing environmental information as a relevant baseline for considering future impacts and has not attempted to list past actions in the area. The baseline information identified in the affected environment (above) is considered sufficient for determining the significance of cumulative effects and for making a reasoned choice between alternatives.

BLM has also not attempted to exhaustively list all present and reasonably foreseeable private actions, but has considered a summary of planned development from Santa Clara County's General Plan (1994). The parcel proposed for sale is in the Corralitos Creek watershed and the impacts of the proposed sale are primarily relevant or important only within this region.

The appropriate geographic area for considering cumulative effects is based on whether the incremental impacts of the proposed sale would be felt locally, regionally or nationally. The incremental impact of increased water usage, although difficult to quantify, would also most likely be limited to Ramsey Gulch, Browns Creek, and Corralitos Creek. Incremental impacts to biological resources would be negligible because the existing condition of the parcel would remain unchanged. The incremental impacts on aesthetics/visual resources would also be negligible because the existing condition of the parcel would remain unchanged.

The Final EIS (2006) determined cumulative impacts from management of lands and realty are limited to indirect on-the-ground impacts on other resources such as aesthetics, water quality, and biological resources that would occur as a result of land use authorizations. These impacts, combined with impacts from previous land acquisitions and improvements as well as the existing land uses and impacts, would cause localized and permanent cumulative impacts on those resources. These impacts are described in each respective resource section of Chapter 4.

Funds generated from the sale of the public lands would be available for future acquisitions of lands from willing sellers to support the goals and objectives outlined in the Record of Decision for the Hollister RMP (2007). Therefore, it is reasonably foreseeable that the proposed action would lead to future acquisitions that would off-set the reduction of public land acres as a result of disposal and even potentially lead to an increase in the amount public lands in the Hollister Field Office.

Potential off-site impacts, if any, are expected to be minor and would largely depend on the public lands disposals and acquisitions carried through. For example, acquisitions of areas with high recreation potential could result in off-site impacts on local access roads. Additionally, land use authorizations, including communications, utility corridors, and energy development, could also result in off-site impacts on local access roads.

Overall, these land tenure adjustments would have a long-term beneficial effect on BLM's lands and realty program because they would promote management efficiency and improve opportunities for multiple use management of public lands.

REFERENCES

- Bowman, R.H. and Estrada, D.C. 1980. Soil Survey of Santa Cruz County, California. United States Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service, Sacramento, California, USA. 148 pp.
- Sawyer, J. O., and T. Keeler-Wolf. 1995. A manual of California vegetation. California Native Plant Society. Sacramento, California, USA. 471 pp.

CONSULTATION

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NOTIFICATION

Notification of the proposed action and analysis has been posted on the Hollister Field Office NEPA web page during its undertaking.

DOCUMENT REVIEW

Planning and Environmental Coordinator

Date

Figure 1: Ramsey Gulch Parcel (CACA 5016812; APN 106-121-02)

