



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Ridgecrest Field Office
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Ridgecrest, California 93555

www.blm.gov/ca



In Reply Refer To:
DOI-BLM-CA-D05000-2011-062-EA
LLCAD05000.37

TO: Affected Interests, Interested Public, & Government Agencies

FROM: BLM Ridgecrest, CA

REGARDING: Comments on Upper Cactus Flat Boundary Fences

The BLM Ridgecrest Field Office is proposing to build three short drift fences on the Lacey-Cactus-McCloud grazing allotment to close gaps in the China Lake NAWS boundary fence. The purpose of the drift fences is to prevent the movement of cattle from the LCM grazing allotment on to the Naval Air Weapons Station.

The comment period on EA-DOI-BLM-CA-D05000-2011-062 will last thirty days (30) from the receipt of the document. Comments received after that date will not be considered. All comments must be sent to the Ridgecrest Field Office of the BLM at the address shown above. Comments may be emailed to csymons@blm.gov or stfitton@blm.gov.

Sincerely,

Carl B. Symons
Field Manager

Encl: EA-DOI-BLM-CA-D05000-062 FONSI

Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-CA-D05000-2011-0062

Upper Cactus Flat Boundary Fences

Location: Township 20 South, Range 38 East, Section 33 SESE, Township 21 South, Range 38 East, Section 11, NENE and Township 21 South, Range 38 East, Section 14, SENE - Mount Diablo Meridian, County of Inyo, State of California.

*Prepared By: Bureau of Land Management
300 South Richmond Road
Ridgecrest, CA 93555*

Summary: This document complies with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements for an Environmental Assessment of the proposed construction of a drift fence in the area of Upper Cactus Flat. This document examines the impacts of the proposed project, alternatives, and no action alternative.

- _____, Chief, Resources
- _____, Archaeologist
- _____, Livestock
- _____, Natural Resources (Air, Soils, Water, Vegetation)
- _____, Recreation
- _____, Threatened & Endangered Species
- _____, Wilderness
- _____, Wild Horse & Burro
- _____, Wildlife

**Upper Cactus Flat Boundary Drift Fences
EA # DOI-BLM-CA-D05000-2011-0062**

4.1 PURPOSE & NEED

4.2 Introduction

This Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared to analyze the placement of three (3) drift fences at strategic sites (see title page) along the eastern boundary of the Lacey-Cactus-McCloud (LCM) Allotment and the western boundary of the China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station (NAWS). The Navy has an existing fence delineating its boundary on the western edge of Upper Cactus Flat. There is a need to cover three open areas in the fence which would, if left open, allow cattle from the LCM Allotment to wander onto the NAWS. If this were to happen it creates a safety hazard for the Navy. Therefore, the purpose of the fences is to control cattle movement.

The EA is a site-specific analysis of potential impacts that could result with the implementation of a proposed action or alternatives to the proposed action. The EA assists the BLM in project planning and ensuring compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and in making a determination as to whether any “significant” impacts could result from the analyzed actions. “Significance” is defined by NEPA and is found in regulation 40 CFR 1508.27. An EA provides evidence for determining whether to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or a statement of “Finding of No Significant Impact” (FONSI). A Decision Record (DR), which includes a FONSI statement, is a document that briefly presents the reasons why implementations of the proposed action will not result in “significant” environmental impacts (effects) beyond those already addressed in California Desert Conservation Area Plan (CDCA Plan) approved in 1980 and last amended in 1993 and the West Mojave Plan (WEMO) approved in 2006. 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 Decision Record may be signed for the EA approving the alternative selected.

4.3 Background

The Navy discontinued grazing on the NAWS in 2000. Since that time there has been a fence on the western boundary of the Upper Cactus Flat area which delineates the LCM Allotment and the NAWS boundary. With the intended resumption of grazing on the LCM Allotment the fence was checked and it was found that there were three areas where cattle could stray off the LCM Allotment and on to the NAWS (see maps). It is important to erect fences in these areas because cattle on the NAWS pose a safety hazard to Navy operations.

4.4 Purpose & Need for the Proposed Action

The primary purpose of the proposed action is to stem the movement of cattle from LCM Allotment on to the NAWS. The need for the action is that the Navy no longer permits grazing of cattle and that they present a safety hazard to Navy weapons testing.

4.5 Conformance with BLM Land Use Plan(s)

The proposed action is subject to the California Desert Conservation Area Plan ("CDCA Plan") approved in 1980 and last amended in 1993 and the West Mojave Plan (WEMO) 2006. The proposed action also conforms to the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934, the Federal Lands Policy and Management Act of 1976, the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978, and the California Desert Protection Act of 1994. The proposed action has been reviewed to determine whether it conforms to the terms and conditions of the land use plan as required by Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1610.5 – 3.

4.6 Land Use

The proposed action or alternatives will take place in an area that is managed under a Multiple Use Class designation of M (Moderate Land Use). The proposed action will also entail fencing on the Coso Range Wilderness boundary for 230 feet. The wilderness is Class C land which is controlled use.

4.7 Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, or other Plans

This proposed action is subject to all applicable Federal, State and local laws and regulations, specifically:

- * Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979, 16 U.S.C. 470aa to 470ll
- * National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, 16 U.S.C. 470 et. seq.
- * National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, 42 U.S.C. 4321 et. seq.
- * Clean Air Act of 1970, as amended, 42 U.S.C. 7401 et. seq.
- * Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, 16 U.S.C. 1531 et. seq.
- * Federal Land Policy Management Act of 1976, 43 U.S.C. 1701 et. seq.
- * Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978
- * Council on Environmental Quality, Title 40 Code of Federal Regulations, part 1500
- * Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations, part 2920
- * California Environmental Quality Act of 1970, 3 Cal. Code of Regulations 200 et. seq.
- * California Desert Conservation Area Plan of 1980
- * California Desert Protection Act of 1994

4.8 Air Quality

The Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District (GBUAPCD) has state air quality jurisdiction over the project area. The GBUAPCD has rules that include the need for permits for stationary sources such as engines, screening plants and such, and fugitive dust emissions.

The Federal Clean Air Act as amended (42 U.S.C. 7401 et seq. Section 176 (c)) and USEPA regulations (40 CFR part 93 subpart W)state in part "no department, agency or instrumentality of the Federal Government shall engage in, support in any way or provide financial assistance for, license or permit, or approve any activity which does not conform to an applicable

implementation plan". They further state that a Federal agency must make a determination that Federal actions conform to the applicable implementation plan before the action is taken.

4.9 Special Status Plant Species

It is BLM's policy to carry out management, consistent with the principals of multiple use, for the conservation of Special Status Plant Species and their habitats and will ensure that actions authorized, funded, or carried out do not contribute to the need to federally list any of the species as threatened or endangered.`

4.10 Cultural Resources

California BLM has explicit responsibility to manage cultural resources on public lands under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et .seq.); Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 (16 U.S.C. 470aa-mm); Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (25 U.S.C. 3001); American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 (42 U.S.C. 1996); and other law and implementing regulation. General compliance with these requirements is outlined in the Programmatic Agreement among the BLM, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers Regarding the Manner in which BLM Will Meet Its Responsibilities Under the National Historic Preservation Act (National PA), and the Protocol Agreement between California BLM and the California State Historic Preservation Officer Regarding the Manner in which BLM Will Meet Its Responsibilities Under the National Historic Preservation Act (Protocol Agreement).

4.11 DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING PROPOSED ACTION

NEPA requires that the EA analyze the proposed action and other alternatives to provide a comparison among feasible alternatives, "thus sharply defining the issues and providing a clear basis for choice among the options by the decision maker and the public." (Title 40 CFR 1502.14) This EA analyzes the impacts of the proposed action and of the no action alternative. The no action alternative is the alternative of not approving the construction of the drift fences, thereby leaving the site in its current state.

4.12 Proposed Action

General

This project consists of building three fence segments totaling approximately 1700 feet. The north segment is approximately 230 feet long and rests on the boundary between LCM and the NAWS. At this point there is the Coso Range Wilderness on the LCM Allotment side and the fence will intrude less than a foot into it. This northern segment begins at the north end of the existing Navy fence and simply extends the existing fence along the same line. The middle

segment is approximately 120 feet and begins at the south end of the existing Navy fence and ties off in the rocks on BLM land. The southern segment of the drift fences is approximately 1350 feet long and the two most easterly points are on the same GPS line as the beginning of the middle segment. Most of the southern segment will be built within BLM territory, only the two most easterly points are on the NAWS boundary line. The fences would be constructed to avoid cultural and Threatened & Endangered resources. (See Maps at end of document.)

Specific

1. Construct three fence segments of 4- strand wire fence along the boundary separating LCM Allotment and China Lake NAWS.
2. Specifications for 4 strand (3 barbed, 1 smooth bottom wire) cattle fence will be used. Fence height will be 42" with the following spacing between wires from the ground up- 16", 8", 6", 12". Distance between the top 2 wires is wide (12 inches) to prevent a deer's foot from getting trapped if it leaps and catches on the top wire. Smooth wire at the bottom allows smaller mammals to scoot under and not get snagged.
3. Wooden stress panel posts will be installed. T-posts will be spaced 22' apart.
4. This project is a cooperative effort between BLM and the permittee. The permittee will construct the fence. The BLM will supply the materials and monitor the project. The permittee will be responsible for routine maintenance resulting from wear and tear or minor vandalism.

Operating Procedures:

The fences would be constructed using the following measures in Section **D**, below. BLM or a representative will monitor construction to ensure the measures are followed.

1. Access to the northern site will be by horseback, and possibly by pack mule through the Coso Range Wilderness. Only hand tools and no mechanical tools will be used to access or construct the fence.

Environmental Protection Measures

1. The fence lines will follow along routes designated by a BLM archaeologist to avoid cultural resources and agreed upon by the lessee.
2. In the event that cultural or paleontological resources, not previously identified, are discovered during development activities, operations in the vicinity of the discovered resources shall cease immediately and the BLM archaeologist will be notified. The BLM will, as appropriate, evaluate the significance of the site and determine the need for mitigation.
3. No blading of the fence line is permitted.
4. Garbage shall be kept in closed containers to discourage scavengers from coming to the site.

5. Post holes should not be left open over night or for the weekend.
6. Specifications for the fence will follow those for a standard 4-strand wire cattle fence – top 3 wires barbed and bottom wire smooth. The wire spacing will be (from ground to the top) 16”, 8”, 6”, & 12”.
7. BLM and the permittee will monitor the movement of cattle to identify any problems.
8. Prior to any additional proposed fencing, an evaluation will be conducted to assess the potential impacts to the free roaming nature of wild horses/burros.
9. In the wilderness segment of the fence (the northern segment) no mechanized tools will be used during construction of the fence.

4.13 Alternatives to the Proposed Action (40 CFR 1502.14)

Under Section 102(2)(E) of NEPA, the BLM is required to study, develop, consider, and describe a reasonable range of alternatives. Thus, the BLM is required to consider appropriate alternatives to the proposed action, as well as their environmental consequences. The Ridgecrest Field Office interdisciplinary team (Team) identified and considered a range of alternatives to the Proposed Action. Within this range of alternatives, the Team determined a “reasonable” range based on following criteria:

- * The alternative meeting the purpose, need and objectives of the Proposed Action;
- * The alternative does not conflict with a specific provision of the land use plan (CDCA Plan)
- * The alternative does not directly conflict with federal, state and local laws and regulations.
- *The alternative is technically and economically feasible.

4.14 ALTERNATIVES REJECTED FROM FURTHER ANALYSIS

After review and analysis, the Team identified no other alternatives that met the above mentioned criteria. Therefore, this EA (DOI-BLM-CA-D05000-2011-0062) will only analyze the impacts of “reasonable” alternatives i.e. the impacts of the proposed action and the no action alternative.

An alternative to the placement of the southern segment was considered, however, it was more costly, and tended to encourage cattle to congregate in a corner created by the fence line.

4.15 Alternative B – No Action

Consideration of the No Action alternative forms the basis from which all impacts are considered. This would mean a continuation of present management policies. Under the No Action alternative, the proposed action would be denied and the fences would not be built.

4.16 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

This chapter discusses the affected resources. The critical elements of the human environment that were identified by BLM resource specialists as **likely to be impacted** by the proposed action or alternatives are: Cultural, Native American, Livestock, Threatened and Endangered Wildlife, Vegetation, Invasive Species, Wilderness, and Wildlife. Refer to the table for all other elements negatively dismissed.

4.17 Air Quality

The project area falls within the Great Basins Valleys Air Basin. The regional Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District (GBUAPCD) has jurisdiction over point and area sources in the project area. Air quality throughout the project area is generally good. There are, however, times that the area has not meet air quality standards due to locally generated and/or transported in pollutants. The USEPA has placed the area within the Coso Junction PM10 Planning Area which is currently classified as attainment/maintenance for PM10 under the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). According to the SIP, air pollution in the Coso Junction PM10 Planning Area (CJPA) is dominated by wind blown dust transported from Owens Lake, which is located outside the planning area. Air pollution sources within the nonattainment have not been found to have a significant impact on PM10 concentrations. Ozone pollutants occur in the area primarily from transport in from the South Coast Air Basin and the San Joaquin Valley Air Basin. The USEPA is considering classifying the area as a nonattainment area for the new 8 hour ozone standard.

4.18 Cultural

A review of cultural resource records and site files within the Ridgecrest Field Office Bureau of Land Management Heritage Division archives was conducted for the proposed areas of potential effect for all alternatives in August 2010. Five previously recorded sites are located within one mile of the proposed project area, but do not fall within the area of potential effect for the proposed action. The subsequent Class III pedestrian inventory of all three fence locations conducted by BLM cultural resource specialists in August 2010 encountered one previously unrecorded cultural resource site along the access route for one portion of the fenceline: CFFS-1, a prehistoric habitation site recommended eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. The site extends on both sides of a current boundary fence between BLM and NAWS China Lake jurisdiction. The site will be avoided by using an alternative access route determined by the NAWS China Lake Environmental Management Staff. Additionally, a cultural resource monitor will be present on site during fence construction.

4.19 Invasive and Non-native Plants

A number of non-native plant species occur in the project vicinity and several noxious weeds are found in the area. Russian thistle (a state listed noxious weed) occurs on Cactus flat. In addition to the current non-native and noxious species in the area there is concern for the introduction

of new noxious weeds. One common vector for the movement of weed seeds is construction equipment that moves from infested areas to non-infested sites carrying weed seeds. The Ridgecrest BLM Field Office Integrated Weed Management Plan calls for equipment washing as a preventative measure.

4.20 Vegetation

The project area is located at the western edge of the Desert Floristic Province as described in the *Jepson Manual, Higher Plants of California*. It is adjacent to the California Floristic Province and the Great Basin Floristic Province. This has resulted in components from all these provinces occurring in the area. Sawyer and Keeler-Wolf in *A Manual of California Vegetation* describe the vegetation as Alliances (communities) dominated by shrubs. The primary vegetation is a mixed great basin saltbrush shrub Alliance. The primary plant species in this Alliance include shadscale (*Atriplex confertifolia*), spiny menodora (*Menodora spinescens*), bud sage (*Artemisia spinescens*) and spiny hop-sage (*Grayia spinosa*). The creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*) Alliance is also found in the study area. In addition to the Creosote bush, this Alliance contains burro-bush or bursage (*Ambrosia dumosa*) and number of other common species. The Joshua tree (*Yucca brevifolia*) Alliance is also found in the study area. This Alliance is similar to the Creosote Series with the inclusion of emergent Joshua trees. The vegetation on the site is typical for the area and does not contain any specialized endemic plants or habitats. Several Special Status Plants are known from the project area. The NDDDB data base was checked for special status plants, Darwin Mesa milkvetch (*Astragalus atratus var mensanus*), Watson's oxytheca (*Oxytheca watsonii*) and Ripley's cymopterus (*Cymopterus ripleyi*) were found to occur in the general area. No special status plants are known from the specific project site. No special status plants have been found on the project site.

4.21 Wildlife (including T & E species)

A diverse wildlife fauna is present within the project area which is located in an upland area dominated by creosote bush.

The Mohave ground squirrel is a state threatened species and could occur at the proposed project site. The project is within the Mohave ground squirrel Conservation Area. About 54% of all Mohave ground squirrel records are from Mojave creosote bush scrub, with about 20% from desert saltbush scrub and 9% from Mojave mixed woody scrub. There are many factors (like rainfall, etc) that regulate the Mohave ground squirrel population, but winterfat (*Krascheninnikovia lanata*), spiny hopsage (*Grayia spinosa*) and saltbush (*Atriplex sp*) are especially important in the diet of the species

Using 1500 meters (about 5,000 feet) as the upper limits of its habitat, MGS is likely to be present.

Upland bird species include migrants, winter residents, breeders, and all others that depend on the upland habitat to survive. Most of the native bird species within the project area are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, but some have additional status. The burrowing owl, a BLM sensitive species, requires a productive vegetative community around their nest because they do not forage great distances as do other raptors. They do, however, prefer shorter vegetation around their nest site.

The Le Conte's thrasher occurs over the desert scrub portion of the project area and needs large shrubs, cactus, or Joshua trees for nesting and a productive vegetative community for foraging.

Raptors as a group use this upland primarily for hunting prey, so they need a vegetative community that produces an abundance of rodents, rabbits, and other prey species. The prairie falcon also occurs in this area. It forages over a wide area.

The federally threatened Desert Tortoise occurs in slightly lower elevation (from sea level to around 3500 ft). The fencing crew could come upon a tortoise as they travel to the site, but none were found in the immediate project area which occurs at 4500 ft. elevation.

Other species that are likely to occur in this area include bobcats, kit foxes, coyotes, and deer.

4.22 Livestock and Grazing

The environment in the vicinity of the proposed fences is generally desert scrub plants in washes and on the plain but is interspersed with numerous rocky outcrops that make movement difficult in some places. The prevailing wind is from the west. The south site is at approximately 5000 feet while the north site is about 5700 feet in elevation. The area is dry with the nearest source of water being the earthen water tank at McCloud Flat about a mile and a half away. The rancher would like to graze cattle in the BLM portion of this area and the installation of the gap fences would make this possible by reducing the possibility of cattle straying on to the Navy base.

4.23 Wild Horses & Burros

The CDCA Plan identified two HMAs within the Centennial HA. One is for the management of wild horses and the other is for the management of burros.

The Centennial HMA for wild horses comprises approximately 318,468 acres which includes 232,897 acres China Lake NAWS; 71,369 acres BLM; 9,121 acres private; and 5,081 acres State lands. The CDCA Plan established the appropriate management level (AML) at 168 wild horses, based on the allocation of 2020 AUMs and that a single horse consumes 1 AUM. The 2008 and 2010 aerial census counted 254 and 459 wild horses, respectively. Based on the census data, approximately 95 percent of the lands utilized by the wild horses are within the China Lake NAWS. The census data indicates there is approximately 55-60 head of wild horses utilizing lands along the boundary of the Navy and BLM lands, which would have the potential to be in the existing L-C-M Allotment any time throughout the year. The level of use by the wild horse population within the current L-C-M Allotment is very low. It is suspected the lack of perennial water in the area has not been conducive for the wild horses to inhabit this area.

The 1981 Amendment 24 to the CDCA plan, deleted the Centennial HMA for burros, because of the conflicts that they were imposing on the Naval Air Weapons Station. Historically, the Centennial burro HMA comprised of approximately 665,366 acres with 80 percent of the HMA within the China Lake NAWS. The CDCA Plan established the AML at 1,137 burros, based on the allocation of 9,551 AUMs and that a single burro consumes 0.7 of an AUM. Current population estimate for the Centennial HA is 120 burros. No burros were sighted during the 2008 and 2010 aerial census in the proximity of the L-C-M Allotment. There is a known population of approximately 30 burros in the Darwin Hills area, most eastern boundary of the L-C-M Allotment.

4 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

This section forms the scientific and analytic basis for comparisons of the impacts of the proposed action and alternatives (40 CFR 1502.14).

This section discusses anticipated direct and indirect impacts of the proposed action and the no action alternative on the affected resources identified in the previous section. In addition, irreversible and irretrievable commitment of the resources and residual impacts are also addressed in this section.

When a residual impact is identified, mitigation measures not included in the proposed action or alternatives (40 CFR 1502.14 (f)), would be recommended per (40 CFR 1502.16 (h)).

The following discussion explains the mitigation that would occur for each resource, and then describes the residual impacts of the alternatives after application of that mitigation. Mitigation can come from the applicant’s proposal, existing statute or regulation, or stipulations imposed by BLM as a condition for the construction of the fence. Impacts include all direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts. Cumulative impacts are the result of all past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future impacts, added together.

4.1 Critical Elements of the Human Environment

Critical Element	No Impact	May Impact	Not Present	Rationale
Air Quality		X		Conformity applies
ACEC			X	No ACECs are present near the proposed location
Cultural	X			No adverse effect to cultural resources
Environmental Justice			X	There are no low income households impacted by the action
Farmlands, Prime or Unique			X	No farmlands are present in the project area
Floodplains			X	The proposed area is not adjacent to or in a floodplain

Invasive, nonnative Weeds		X		Some in area
Native American	X			No known TCPs or concerns
T&E Species (Wildlife)		X		State threatened MGS possible, a little high in elevation for Tortoise
Vegetation		X		Some vegetation will be disturbed during construction.
Wastes- Hazardous Wastes	X			No waste or hazardous waste conditions have been identified in the project area.
Water Quality			X	There are no water resources in the project area.
Wetlands/Riparian			X	There are no water resources in the project area.
Wild & Scenic Rivers			X	There are no wild or scenic rivers in the project area
Wilderness		X		The Coso Range wilderness will be minimally intruded upon by the northern fence segment. The fence will extend the existing fence by 230 feet and may intrude on the wilderness at the north end for less than a foot. The fence should not

				change the character of the wilderness experience.
Wildlife		X		There will be minimal impact on wildlife during the construction of the fence. The fence is designed to allow movement of small animals underneath it and is also designed so that deer will not become entangled in the top wire.

4.2 Other Issues and Concerns

The resources, uses, and issues that may be affected are described in the Affected Environment section of this environmental assessment and are analyzed in the Environmental Consequences section. Those potential issues or resources that would not be affected are also identified in the table below and a brief rationale for not considering them further is provided.

Issue/Concern	No Impact	May Impact	Rationale
Forestry	X		There are no forests in the project area.
Fire Management	X		Fire management capabilities are not impacted by the fences beyond what they are now.
Geothermal	X		No Geothermal resources are within the project area
Lands	X		Class M lands allow grazing.
Minerals	X		No resources are present
Range/Livestock		X (positive impact)	Cattle movement will be controlled and

			trespass on to Navy lands should be absent.
Recreation & Open Spaces	X		Recreational activity will not be impacted because the fences only restrict movement on to Navy lands which are off limits to begin with.
Soils	X		Soils will be minimally impacted by driving T-Posts and placing wood posts.

4.3 AIR QUALITY

Emissions from the proposed action will be minimal. No significant offsite impacts are anticipated. An increase in fugitive dust during wind storms could occur due to the soil disturbance as a result of the proposed action. Vehicle use on the access road will generate PM10 emissions throughout the project. All of these emission levels would be small. The project as proposed does not exceed the de minimus emission levels and conforms to the SIP and no further conformity analysis or determination is necessary.

4.4 CULTURAL RESOURCES

Impacts

Class III cultural resource inventory conducted by BLM cultural resource specialists identified a single, newly recorded prehistoric cultural resource site eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places within the area of potential effect for the proposed action. The site has the potential to be impacted by the route proposed to access one portion of the fence. An alternate route using an existing two-track road near the site but still within distance of the fence area was inventoried by NAWS Environmental Management Staff. The new route will be used to access the project area and avoid the site. As per request of the NAWS staff, a BLM cultural resource specialist must be present during construction activities in this portion of the project area to monitor ground disturbing activities associated with the proposed action.

To reduce the possibility of impacts to existing cultural sites the rancher may elect to haul fence materials and non-mechanized equipment to the site by horse and pack mule.

Irreversible and irretrievable commitment of resources

There will be no irreversible and irretrievable commitment of cultural resources by using the alternative access route.

Recommended mitigation measures

1. Any cultural and/or paleontological resources (historic or prehistoric site or object) discovered by the Bureau of Land Management or any person working on the Bureau of Land Management's behalf, on public or Federal land shall be immediately reported to the Authorized Officer, Field Manager-BLM, Ridgecrest, CA. The BLM or its contractors shall suspend all operations in the immediate area of such discovery until written authorization to proceed is issued by the Authorized Officer. An evaluation of the discovery will be made by the Authorized Officer to determine the appropriate actions to follow to prevent the loss of significant cultural or scientific values. The BLM will be responsible for the cost of the evaluation. Any decision as to proper mitigation measures to be taken will be made by the Authorized Officer after consultation with the California State Historical Preservation Office.

2. Collection or disturbance of artifacts and other archaeological, historical, and paleontological materials by the BLM, its representatives, contractors, or employees, shall not be allowed. Offenders shall be subject to prosecution under the appropriate State and Federal laws.

3. A BLM Cultural Resources specialist must be on site during construction activities in the vicinity of the National Register of Historic Places eligible property.

Residual Impacts

The proposed action will have no residual impacts to cultural resources. The single, newly identified National Register of Historic Places eligible resource will be avoided by the use of an alternative access route.

Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts from the proposed action include the added protection to nearby cultural resources from livestock trampling and grazing. However, the single newly recorded cultural resource occurs on both sides of the existing fence line, where livestock are prone to create trails and hummocks. Over time, the site where it exists on BLM land may be impacted by cattle following the fence line. The majority of the artifacts and features identified as part of the site fall within the NAWS boundary and will be protected from further impact by cattle.

No Action Alternative

There will be no impacts to cultural resources listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places if the No Action Alternative is selected.

4.5 WEEDS & INVASIVE SPECIES

Impacts

The proposed action should not have any impact on existing invasive non-native species and ongoing control activities. There is a low potential to introduce new invasive non-native species to the site.

Irreversible and irretrievable commitment of resources

None

Mitigation

None

Residual Impacts

None

Cumulative Impacts

None

No Action Alternative

None

4.6 VEGETATION

Impacts

Some common species of plants and seeds may be directly destroyed by the action. No special status plants will be impacted by the proposed action.

Irreversible and irretrievable commitment of resources

Vegetation would not be irreversibly damaged.

Mitigation

None

Residual Impacts

None

Cumulative Impacts

The impacts to vegetation would be temporary and not cumulative.

No Action Alternative

No impacts to vegetation would occur

4.7 WILDLIFE

Impacts

A 100% clearance survey occurred in August of 2010. Sensitive species surveyed for were desert tortoises (not likely), Mohave ground squirrel, Le Conte's thrasher, burrowing owl, American badger, and kit foxes. No sensitive species or their sign were found, but many rodent and lizard burrows were observed, some of which could be Mohave ground squirrel burrows.

Irreversible and irretrievable commitment of resources

None

Mitigation

All fences would be comprised of 3-4 strands of barbed and smooth wire following BLM standards for wire placement for cattle and in wildlife habitat. Specifically, the bottom wire would be at least 16" above ground level and the spacing between the uppermost two wires would be at least 12" to accommodate leaping deer.

In addition, the following should be incorporated as conservation measures in the Proposed Action for burrowing animals, especially Mojave Ground Squirrel:

1. Wooden and steel posts should be put in well away from existing burrows. Posts could be moved along the fence lines to avoid damaging a burrow.
2. No vegetation should be removed along the fence lines, vegetation may be crushed, cut back or trimmed, but entire plants should not be removed.
3. Birds' nests should be avoided. Shrubs with nests in them should not be severely trimmed back.
4. Work should take place outside of the breeding season (Spring), if possible.
5. The area of disturbance shall be confined to the smallest practical area.
6. To the extent possible, previously disturbed areas within the project site shall be utilized for the stockpiling equipment and parking of vehicles.

Residual Impacts

No residual impacts are expected and habitat can be restored.

Cumulative Impacts

Loss of habitat over time is a limiting factor for most wildlife.

No Action Alternative

No fence would be put in and therefore the habitat would not be damaged.

4.8 RANGE/LIVESTOCK

Impacts

Building the proposed fences would further define the boundary between the BLM and the Navy. The fence segments would prevent cattle from crossing over into Navy property. Therefore the cattle would not be a safety hazard or impede the Navy's capability to conduct weapons testing.

Irreversible and irretrievable commitment of resources

No irreversible or irretrievable commitment of range resources would result.

Mitigation

None

Residual Impacts

None

Cumulative Impacts

There would be no cumulative impacts to the livestock operation.

No Action Alternative

Under the no action alternative the fence segments would not be built and there would be a greater likelihood of cattle straying on to Navy property and posing a safety issue.

4.9 WILD HORSES & BURROS

Impacts

The fences are on the border of a proposed grazing area. The current wild horse use level in the area where the proposed cattle grazing would occur is very low. The majority of the wild horse use occurs within China Lake NAWS. The census data indicates there are approximately 3-10 wild horses utilizing lands along the boundary of the Navy and BLM lands which they would have the potential to be within the proposed L-C-M Allotment any time throughout the year. There would be no adverse impacts to wild horses or burros. The majority of the wild horse use occurs within China Lake NAWS.

Irreversible and irretrievable commitment of resources

None

Mitigation

None

Residual Impacts

None

Cumulative Impacts

The current number and type of fencing projects within the L-C-M Allotment would not affect the ability of wild horses and burros to be able to move between public and China Lake NAWS lands. The wild horses and burros would still have the ability to move between public and China Lake NAWS lands utilizing access that go around the existing and proposed fencing.

No Action Alternative

There would not be the potential of the proposed fence lines to impede the wild horses and burros route of travel.

5 CONCLUSION

Based upon these considerations, and upon the recommended operating and mitigation measures that would be applied to the proposed action and any potential future actions to cover the range of impacts anticipated, the effects of other existing and reasonably foreseeable future activities including the proposed action would not significantly affect an environmental resource or the continuation of existing land use.

6 CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION:

The following were consulted during the writing of this E.A.:

Ashley A. Blythe, Archaeologist
Marty Dickes, Wilderness Specialist
Sam Fitton, Natural Resource Specialist
Glenn Harris, Natural Resource Specialist
Alex Neibergs, Wild Horse & Burro Specialist
Dan Tyree, Contract Archaeologist
Carrie Woods, Wildlife Biologist
Craig Beck, Recreation Branch Chief
Robert W. Pawelek, Resources Branch Chief

LCM Boundary Fences at Upper Cactus Flat
Finding of No Significant Impact
February 2014

It is my determination that the action analyzed in DOI-BLM-CA-D05000-2011-062 will not result in significant negative impacts to the quality of the human environment. Anticipated impacts are within the range of impacts addressed by the West Mojave Plan Amendment to the California Desert Conservation Area Plan. Thus, the project does not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement (EIS) is not necessary and will not be prepared. This conclusion is based on my consideration of CEQ's following criteria for significance (40 CFR, Section 1508.27), regarding the context and intensity of the impacts described in the EA and based on my understanding of the project:

- 1) Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. The proposed action would impact resources as described in the Environmental Assessment (EA). None of the environmental effects discussed in detail in the EA are considered significant, nor do the effects exceed those described in the West Mojave Plan Amendment to the CDCA Plan.
- 2) The degree to which the selected alternative will affect public health and safety. The proposed action will not affect public health or safety. The fences plug gaps in an existing fence and are critical to containing livestock but do not block any existing human route of travel.
- 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. The northernmost fence segment is in the proximity of an archeological site. Care has been taken to delimit the site and map a route around the archeological site to reach the project site. The following Critical Elements of the Human Environment and other resource issues are not affected because they are not present in the project area; Prime or unique farmlands, flood plain management, other cultural resource concerns, environmental justice, hazardous or solid wastes, wild and scenic rivers, water quality, and riparian habitat. In addition, the following Critical Elements of the Human Environment, although present, would not be negatively affected by the proposed action; land use, recreation, livestock grazing, air and climate resources, and fire management. The Critical Element of vegetation will be impacted because vegetation along the fence lines will be minimally and temporarily disturbed.
- 4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial. The proposed action is within the purview of the allotment management plan and the West Mojave Plan Amendment to the CDCA plan. It is not controversial.
- 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 environmental effects to the human environment are analyzed in the EA and are not considered to be highly uncertain.
- 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 proposed action were considered by an interdisciplinary team within the context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future action. Significant negative cumulative effects are not predicted.
- 7) Whether the action is related to other action with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts – which include connected actions regardless of land ownership. The

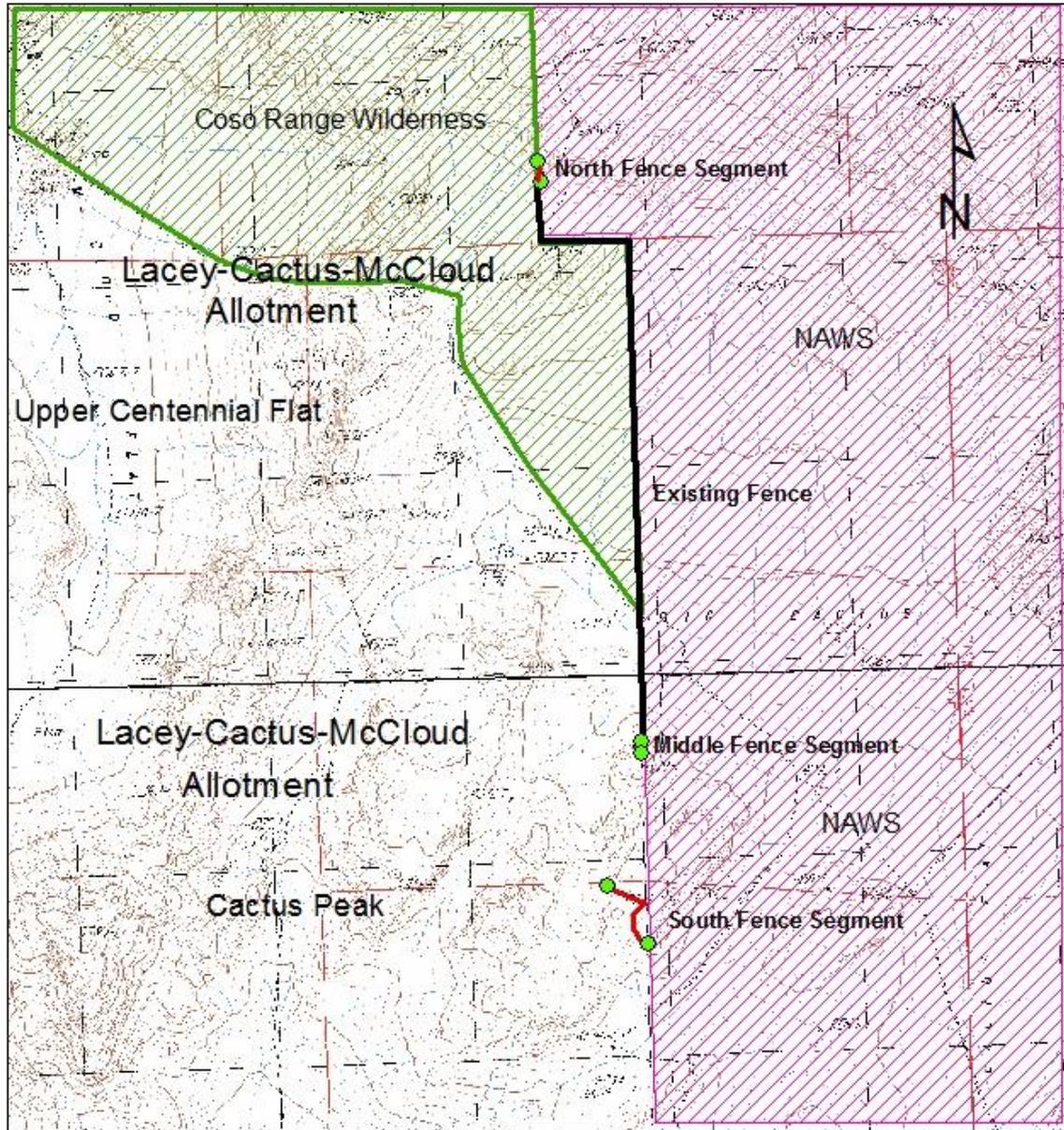
interdisciplinary team evaluated the possible actions in the context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. Significant cumulative effects are not predicted.

- 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 historic 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 historic resources.
- 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 species to be listed as an endangered or threatened species or its habitat, or a species on BLM's sensitive species list. The routes of the fences were surveyed for disturbance of desert tortoises and other fauna. The area is not designated as desert tortoise habitat and Mohave ground squirrels were not encountered.
- 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.

Carl B. Symons, Field Manager, Ridgecrest FO

Date

LACEY-CACTUS-McCLOUD BOUNDARY FENCES



-  China Lake NAWS
-  Coso Range Wilderness
-  Existing Fence
-  New Fence Segments

1:32,783

0 0.275 0.55 1.1 Miles