

**Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)
for
Calcutta Allotment
10 Year Grazing Authorization**

**Surprise Field Office
DOI-BLM-CA-N070-2010-0009-EA**

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INTRODUCTION:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has conducted an environmental analysis (DOI-BLM-CA-N070-2010-0009-EA) analyzing the impacts of authorizing grazing on the Calcutta Allotment (#01100) for the next ten years.

The EA analyzes (5) alternatives from which I have selected Alternative 1 (Proposed Alternative).

1. Alternative 1, the selected alternative, is described on pgs. 16-25 of the attached EA and consists of:

The BLM proposes to continue authorizing grazing on the Calcutta Allotment (#01100) for the next ten years.

The proposed action includes changes to current management terms of livestock numbers, class, and grazing period. It also includes additional terms and conditions.

The proposed action addresses the underlying need for the proposal and accomplishes the following objectives:

These objectives were developed from the Surprise Field Office Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Record of Decision, April 2008, and Standards and Guidelines (S&Gs).

Objective 1: Sustainable, ecologically sound, and economically viable livestock grazing opportunities would be provided, where suitable, in the Surprise Field Office management area.

Objective 2: Adequate forage would be produced to support sustainable levels of livestock grazing where compatible with objectives for other resources and resource users.

Objective 3: Continue to modify and adjust grazing management within individual grazing allotments to ensure that a vigorous plant community is sustained in combination with livestock grazing.

PLAN CONFORMANCE AND CONSISTENCY:

The proposed action is subject to and conforms with the "Surprise Field Office Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Record of Decision, April 2008. The RMP supports the proposed authorized use in the Calcutta Allotment as identified in Section 2.8.5 (p. 2-35)":

Livestock grazing would be available on 49 allotments (1,445,443 acres). The Surprise Field Office would continue to authorize approximately 92,465 AUMs of livestock use annually. Review of existing permitted use-levels (AUMs) would be conducted on individual allotments through assessment of existing activity plans (allotment management plans, livestock grazing decisions, habitat management plans, watershed management plans, biological opinions, multiple-use decisions). Decisions regarding adjustments to existing levels of use, forage allocation, allotment boundaries, and changes to management

level categories would be made at the activity plan level. When additional forage becomes available on a sustained yield basis, suspended AUMs can be appointed to permittees.

The action is also in accordance with 43 CFR 4100 and to be consistent with the provisions of the Taylor Grazing Act, Public Rangelands Improvement Act, and Federal Land Policy and Management Act.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT DETERMINATION:

Based upon a review of the attached EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that Alternative 1, the proposed action is not a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. For this reason no environmental impact statement needs to be prepared. This finding is based on the following rationale and discussion of context and intensity of the action.

Rationale:

Following is the rationale for why the identified issues discussed in the EA will not be significantly affected or affect the action.

Cultural Resources

Cultural resources are predicted or known to occur within the allotment.

There have been two archaeological inventories conducted on the Calcutta allotment. The first inventory was conducted in preparation for the Cowhead/Massacre Planning Unit, Environmental Impact Statement and was 640 acres in size. The survey strategy implemented for this project was Class II, or greater than 30 meter transects, and was approved by the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office. Eight prehistoric archaeological sites associated with limited resource processing activities were recorded during this inventory. None of the eight sites were evaluated for National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) eligibility. Although all eight of the sites were noted as undergoing natural erosion and sheet wash activity, cattle grazing were not affecting the sites at the time of recordation.

The second archaeological inventory on this allotment was completed for the Jeep Fire rehabilitation projects and was 2,200 acres in size. Eleven prehistoric archaeological sites were recorded within the project area. Four of the sites are fairly large with complex artifact components. Two of the four large sites constitute large temporary camps or base camps. One of the smaller sites recorded also appears to be a small base camp. The remaining six sites are small diffuse lithic scatters, one of which appears to be a small hunting station. None of the eleven sites have been formally evaluated for NRHP eligibility. However, two of the eleven sites appear to be NRHP eligible. At the time of recordation no cattle grazing impacts were noted, but natural erosion was noted in addition to some fire effects.

Sage-grouse Habitat

Sage-grouse habitat occurs within the Calcutta Allotment. The allotment is not considered a high-use area for sage-grouse, nor are any active leks (strutting grounds) known to occur within it. Livestock grazing within the SFO is managed in compliance with land health standards and livestock grazing standards and guidelines. Compliance with these standards, among other objectives, are designed to minimize adverse effects to sage-grouse and other wildlife species. In addition, the use areas are managed following guidelines from the Conservation Strategy for Sage-Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) and Sagebrush Ecosystems within the Vya Population Management Unit (Northeast California Sage-Grouse Working Group, 2006).

Re-establish Carrying Capacity

The current Rangeland Health Assessment determined that all standards were met except the riparian and biodiversity standards. Issues associated with non-attainment of the riparian standard were heavy use on the riparian areas from current livestock grazing. Riparian conditions also contributed to the non-attainment of biodiversity standards. Biodiversity standard non-attainment was also based in part on a lack of wildrye in the Dry Floodplain site, however this is due to historic and not current livestock grazing. Utilization studies conducted throughout the allotment have shown that utilization does not exceed the objective (60%) except in certain riparian areas. Carrying capacity analysis conducted in 2008 confirmed findings of 1981 that additional forage was available on a sustained yield basis. Comparison of actual use and climate data confirmed that this forage was available even on years of below average precipitation. The level of use authorized in this alternative is less than carrying capacity analyses indicated were available. Projects proposed in the selected alternative are designed to address issues identified that created non-attainment of the riparian standard. The partial deferred rotation pasture management is designed to increase opportunities for wildrye to increase cover in the Dry Floodplain site. Additional terms and conditions, utilization objectives and monitoring objectives included in the selected alternative are designed to ensure that Rangeland Health Standards will continue to be achieved and that progress will be made towards achievement.

Resource(s)/Concerns discussed but Eliminated as an Issue

Eight resources and/or potential concerns were identified during internal and external scoping. These are listed and discussed in Chapter 3 of the EA, starting on pg. 30. I have reviewed the rationale provided for each resource or concern and support their elimination as an issue.

Context: The proposed action is in a project area involving a grazing allotment with three pastures totaling approximately of 12,535 acres of BLM administered land that by itself does not have international, national, regional, or state-wide importance, but on a local level it is important to the local economy and public land health.

Intensity: The following discussion is based on the relevant factors that should be considered in evaluating intensity as described in 43 CFR 4100:

1. Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial.

I have determined that none of the direct, indirect or cumulative impacts associated with the selected alternative are significant, individually or combined.

2. The degree to which the selected alternative will affect public health or safety.

The proposed action is located within a rural setting. Grazing at similar levels as described in the selected alternative has occurred in the same location for over 20 years in combination with other human activities (OHV, hunting, hiking). Since grazing has been authorized within the affected area there have been no known instances where public health or safety has been affected or a conflict has occurred.

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.

A discussion of these unique geographic areas and anticipated environmental issues is located in Chapter 3 of the EA, starting on pg. 30. The unique characteristics associated with the Calcutta Allotment were analyzed in the EA and are discussed above. Based on the EA and above rationale I have determined that the selected alternative will not have a significant impact on the unique characteristics within affected area.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

Scoping for the proposed action and background information was sent to known affected and interested publics. After review of the comments and issues identified from the scoping process and those analyzed in the EA, I have determined that the effects described in the EA are not highly controversial.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

Grazing is a widespread action authorized by the BLM, the effects from which have been thoroughly analyzed in NEPA documents, including the recent RMP, and scientific publications. The analysis provided in the attached EA does not indicate that this action would involve any 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 issuance of a grazing permit is not precedent setting. Grazing has been authorized on the allotment since the allotments' establishment in 1980. Grazing use occurred prior to that under different management.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts – which include connected actions regardless of land ownership.

A cumulative effects analysis was conducted as part of the EA, and it determined that there were no cumulative effects associated with the selected alternative.

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.

Mitigation measures for managing sites that are determined to be impacted by grazing may include: fencing, relocation of improvements, removal of natural attractants for livestock from archaeological sites, removal of the archaeological site(s) from the allotment, livestock herding away from cultural resource sites, using salt to move livestock away from cultural resource areas.

Additional management practices may be developed after consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office. Implementation of grazing under Alternative 1 will likely help stabilize existing sites through improving the vigor of perennial vegetation and by allowing litter accumulation.

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 (ESA) of 1973.

The action does not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species, or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the ESA.

The greater sage-grouse, a BLM sensitive species, and habitat for this species, occurs within and/or in the vicinity of the Calcutta Allotment. Sage-grouse is an issue discussed within the EA and rationale is provided above as to why significant impacts would be avoided.

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 nonfederal requirements are consistent with federal requirements.

The action does not violate any known federal, state, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

Shane DeForest, Field Manager

Date