



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Surprise Field Office
P. O. Box 460
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www.ca.blm.gov/surprise

April 7, 2010

In Reply Refer To:
4130 (CAN070) P

Notice of Proposed Action and Initiation of Public Scoping Grazing Permit Renewal for the Massacre Lakes Allotment and Appropriate Management Level Determination for the Massacre Lakes Herd Management Area

Dear Interested Party:

The BLM proposes to reissue the livestock grazing permit for the Massacre Lakes Allotment and will be reviewing the Appropriate Management Level (AML) for wild horses in the Massacre Lakes Herd Management Area (HMA) and is seeking public input regarding the proposed reissuance. This notice and scoping also provides an opportunity for the public to participate in the National Historic Preservation Action Section 106 process.

The need for the proposed action is to ensure that future management of livestock and wild horses are in conformance with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Surprise Field Office Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Record of Decision of April 2008, and the Northeastern California and Northwestern Nevada, Standards for Rangeland (Land) Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management of July 2000, and the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act.

The BLM has been directed to renew all grazing permits using the information from the Land Health Standards Determination, Monitoring Evaluation, and to complete environmental impact analysis (EA). In accordance with that policy, the Surprise Field Office will analyze the environmental impacts of a reasonable range of alternatives, including a no grazing alternative and an alternative to issue a 10 year livestock grazing permit to a qualified applicant on the Massacre Lakes Allotment. The grazing permit and authorization (including crossing or trailing permits) would state the kind and number of livestock, period of use, and the amount of active use in animal unit months (AUMs), grazing management actions, terms and conditions.

All grazing permits are issued in accordance with 43 CFR 4100. Grazing permits must be consistent with the provisions of the Taylor Grazing Act, Public Rangelands Improvement Act, and Federal Land Policy and Management Act. Wild horse decisions are issued in accordance with 43 CFR 4700.

The current Appropriate Management Level (AML) for the Massacre Lakes HMA is also being reviewed and adjusted as necessary using resource data and other information collected from the Massacre Lakes Allotment/HMA. This monitoring information is also summarized in the Massacre Lakes Monitoring Evaluation.

Background Information

The Bureau of Land Management has completed a Land Health Assessment, Determination, and draft Monitoring Evaluation for the Massacre Lakes Allotment and Herd Management Area. This determination concluded that the standards for upland soils and biodiversity are not met and not progressing towards meeting the standard. The standard for riparian/wetland areas was not met, but is progressing towards meeting the standard. Standards for water quality and stream health were not applicable.

Current livestock and wild horse grazing use is contributing to the nonattainment of the upland soils, and biodiversity standards for upland and riparian/wetland areas. In accordance with regulation and policy, the Bureau of Land Management must modify grazing use to address this non-attainment of Land Health Standards.

The Monitoring Evaluation summarizes grazing use by livestock and wild horses that has occurred on the Massacre Lakes Allotment and Herd Management Area. The Monitoring Evaluation along with Land Health Determination are used to measure whether current management practices are making satisfactory progress toward meeting resource objectives, and Land Health Standards. Recommended actions have not been completed in the Monitoring Evaluation to modify grazing use where standards and objectives have not been met. Any comments regarding changes in grazing use would be considered in the final Monitoring Evaluation and Environmental Assessment (EA).

The Massacre Lakes Determination and Monitoring Evaluation are posted for your information and review on the Surprise Field Office homepage at http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/surprise/grazing_permit_renewals.html.

Overview of Affected Resources

The Massacre Lakes Allotment is located in northwestern Washoe County Nevada at T 42- 44 N, R 20-21 E; the allotment is comprised of 46,890 acres of public land and 2,410 acres private land. Elevation ranges from 4,400 and 7,100 feet and precipitation varies from 2 to 13 inches. See attached map.

The Massacre Lakes Allotment is categorized as “I” (Improve) meaning the allotment generally has potential for increasing resource production or producing desired conditions. There may be conflicts or controversy involving resource conditions and uses, but there are realistic opportunities to improve resource conditions.

Grazing Management

The Massacre Lakes Allotment is currently authorized for up to 582 cattle to utilize 3,215 Active AUMs from April 16 to September 30, annually. The current permit was issued under provisions of the Appropriations Act.

Livestock grazing is managed under a four pasture rest rotation grazing system and the fifth pasture is managed for deferred grazing use each year. The current grazing system is designed to use the East Seeding and Juniper pastures early and mid season and the Sand Spring pasture deferred use (late season) during year 1 and then during year 2 use the Lake Field and West Seeding pastures early and mid season and the Sand Spring pasture deferred use. April 16 is the expected date for range readiness for the lower pastures and approximate livestock turnout date.

Wilderness Study Areas

Approximately 30,793 acres of the Massacre Rim Wilderness Study Area (WSA) occurs on the north side of the allotment. Most of the WSA overlaps with the Massacre Rim Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

National Conservation Area

Approximately 3,815 acres within the allotment is designated as the Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails NCA.

Area of Critical Environmental Concern

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern are BLM-administered lands that require a higher level of protection in order to prevent, exclude, or modify land uses and activities that would otherwise cause irreparable damage to important ecosystems, wildlife, or fisheries. ACECs are also created to protect areas of high scenic value, preserve important cultural resources, or guard human life and property from natural hazards. Approximately 25,278 acres of the Massacre Lakes allotment are within the Massacre Rim Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The ACEC was designated to protect and better manage important cultural and wildlife resources.

Cultural

The Massacre Lakes Allotment contains a number of prehistoric and historic cultural resource sites. Several sites are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Wildlife

The allotment contains important wildlife values. Mule deer generally use the higher elevations of the allotment. Pronghorn antelope use the entire allotment. Several BLM sensitive species occur on or adjacent to the allotment including sage-grouse, pygmy rabbit and California bighorn sheep. The diverse landscape and vegetative communities provide habitat for a wide variety of non-game animals.

Wild Horses

The Massacre Lakes Herd Management Area encompasses all of the Massacre Lakes Allotment except the Sand Spring Pasture. The current Appropriate Management Level (AML) was established at 25-35 wild horses by the Surprise RMP. The current population is between 136 and 202 wild horses within the HMA. The BLM will review the AML, and as necessary the AML would be adjusted to meet Land Health Standards and resource objectives.

The Land Health Determination

The Rangeland Health Standard Assessment, Determination, and draft Monitoring Evaluation was completed in 2008 and 2009 for the Massacre Lakes Allotment. The following table contains a determination summary. For purposes of standard determination, if an assessment site does not meet a standard, then the standard was considered not met for the entire allotment.

Table 2 Achievement of Rangeland Health Standards – Massacre Lakes Allotment

Rangeland Health Standard	Meets Standard	Does Not Meet Standard	Current livestock and wild horses are a causal factor for not meeting Yes or No	Remarks (locations, etc.)
Upland Soils		✓	Yes	All sites sampled lack foliar and basal cover from deep rooted perennial grasses. Two sites are exhibiting surface erosion and pedestalling that is not natural for the site. Mitigation measures are required.
Stream Health			N/A	There are no streams in the allotment.
Riparian/ Wetland		✓	YES	The Standard for Riparian Wetland Areas is not met on several riparian sites. These riparian areas are functional-at-risk with either static or downward trends and non-functional. These sites are receiving impacts from livestock and wild horse grazing. Mitigation measures are required.
Water Quality			N/A	Surface and groundwater is associated with ephemeral drainages, seeps, pit reservoirs and wells and neither surface water nor groundwater within the allotment has been listed for exceeding State water quality standards.
Bio-diversity		✓	Yes	A Rangeland Health Assessment was completed on the five most common upland ecological sites. The shrub community is intact with no large scale disturbances. Upland areas of the allotment have adequate cover and diversity of shrubs, but are lacking important grasses throughout the allotment. Based on utilization information this is due to past and present grazing levels and practices. Riparian vegetation is mostly protected by exclosures, trend on unprotected sites is generally static, and one site had a downward trend. One site was non-functional.

Request for Input

Your comments need to be submitted to the Surprise Field Office by May 7, 2010. We will use comments received from interested parties to identify issues for the recommended management action section of the Monitoring Evaluation and for alternatives to be analyzed in the EA. Please provide detailed comments if identifying an alternative for consideration. A copy of the EA and related documents will be available when completed.

The public was first notified of BLM's proposal to review and update the Massacre Lakes Appropriate Management Level (AML) through the "Notice of Proposed Action and Initiation of Public Scoping for Wild Horse Gather and Removal Plans" dated May 15, 2009. Many of comments received for this action were addressed in the draft Monitoring Evaluation. Previously submitted comments do not need to be resubmitted.

Your comments can be submitted to the following address, fax, or e-mail. If you are not interested in receiving additional information related to this proposed action, or would like to be removed from our mailing list, please contact us.

By Mail:
Bureau of Land Management
Surprise Field Office
Attn: Steve Surian
PO Box 460
Cedarville, CA 96104

By E-mail: casrpubcom@blm.gov

By fax: (530) 279-2171

Sincerely,



Steve Surian Acting for

Shane DeForest,
Surprise Field Manager

Massacre Lakes Allotment Map attached,

