

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Glenwood Springs Field Office
50629 US Highway 6 & 24
Glenwood Springs, CO 81601**

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NUMBER: CO-140-2009-0013 EA

CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER: 0502901

PROJECT NAME: Grazing Permit Changes Based on Land Health Concerns

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: T.5S., R.91W., Sec. 16-22

See attached map, Hogback Common Allotment # 18026

APPLICANT: Grazing Permittee

DESCRIPTION OF BACKGROUND, PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES:

BACKGROUND: A Land Health Assessment was completed for the Hogback Common Allotment on May 10, 2007. The allotment was not meeting Standard 3 for Healthy Plant and Animal Communities due to the lack of perennial grasses and native forbs expected for the site. The area is co-dominated by cheatgrass and sagebrush. The permittee was consulted and agreed that earlier spring grazing would help by grazing cheatgrass when most palatable and allowing growing season rest for perennial grasses. Also, winter sheep use would induce browsing pressure on sagebrush, helping to reduce the sagebrush dominance and allowing for a more diverse plant community. The analysis should address these two questions: 1) “Is it more likely than not that existing grazing management practices or levels of grazing use are significant factors in failing to achieve the Standards or conform with the guidelines?” 2) “Is it more likely than not that existing grazing management needs to be modified to ensure that the Fundamentals of rangeland health are met, or making significant progress toward being met?”

PROPOSED ACTION (Alternative 1): The Proposed Action is to change the season-of-use on the Hogback Common Allotment in response to Land Health concerns. The season-of-use adjustment would allow perennial grasses and native forbs a competitive advantage over cheatgrass and sagebrush. This could bring the land health condition closer to what is expected. The season of use would be changed as follows:

Current Grazing Schedule:

Allotment Name/No.	Livestock No./Kind	Grazing Period	%PL	AUMS
Hogback Common 18026	37 Cattle	05/15 - 06/24	100	50
	950 Sheep	5/15 - 6/14	100	194
	300 Sheep	6/15 - 7/15	100	61

Proposed Grazing Schedule:

Allotment Name/No.	Livestock No./Kind	Grazing Period	%PL	AUMS
Hogback Common 18026	37 Cattle	05/15 - 06/24	100	50
	750 Sheep	05/01 - 05/25	100	123
	550 Sheep	12/15 - 1/20	100	134

Grazing Preference (AUMS)

Allotment Name/No.	Total	Suspended	Active
Hogback Common 18026	445	140	305

The following terms and conditions will be included on the permit:

Maintenance of range improvements is required and shall be in accordance with all approved cooperative agreements and range improvement permits. Maintenance shall be completed prior to turnout.

The permittee and all persons specifically associated with grazing operations must be informed that any objects or sites of cultural, paleontological, or scientific value such as historic or prehistoric resources, graves or grave markers, human remains, ruins, cabins, rock art, fossils, or artifacts shall not be damaged, destroyed, removed, moved, or disturbed. If in connection with allotment operations under this authorization any of the above resources are encountered, the proponent shall immediately suspend all activities in the immediate vicinity and notify the BLM authorized officer of the findings. The discovery must be protected until notified in writing to proceed by the authorized officer (36CFR800.110 & 112, 43CFR 0.4).

Average utilization levels by livestock should not exceed 50% by weight on key grass species, and 40% of the key browse species current year's growth. Once these levels are reached, livestock should be moved to another portion of the allotment, or removed from the allotment entirely for the remainder of the growing season. Application of this term may be flexible to recognize livestock management that includes sufficient opportunity for regrowth, spring growth prior to grazing, or growing season deferment.

Permittee may supplement winter sheep with screened corn along road ways. Hay is not permitted. Winter use will occur when there is sufficient snow cover to provide a water source for sheep. Sheep use will not be focused in small areas. Sheep are to be moved frequently to new areas for grazing. Snow plowing is not authorized by this permit.

NO ACTION (Alternative 2): The alternative to this change would be to maintain the current grazing use and continue the current grazing schedule. Under this alternative current grazing use would not be considered a significant contributing factor to the current land health conditions and modifying the current use would not make significant progress toward Standards being met.

http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/BLM_Programs/grazing/rm_stds_guidelines.html

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT ELIMINATED:

The No Grazing alternative has been eliminated from further consideration. No unresolved conflicts involving alternative use of available resources have been identified. Discontinuing grazing use would not lead to significant improvements to Land Health. For this reason, discontinuance of grazing use (No Grazing) will not be considered or assessed.

NEED FOR PROPOSED ACTION:

The action is needed for the following reasons: (1) to meet the livestock grazing management objective of the Resource Management Plan of providing 56,885 animal unit months of livestock forage commensurate with meeting public land health standards, (2) to continue to allow livestock grazing on the specified allotment, (3) to meet the forage demands of local livestock operations, (4) to provide stability to these operations and help preserve their rural agricultural lands for open space and wildlife habitat, (5) to allow use of native rangeland resource for conversion into protein suitable for human consumption, and (6) to meet the Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management and the Standards for Land Health.

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW: The proposed action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3):

Name of Plan: Glenwood Springs Resource Management Plan.

Date Approved: Jan. 1984, revised 1988, amended in November 1991 - Oil and Gas Leasing and Development - Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement; amended Nov. 1996 - Colorado Standards and Guidelines; amended in August 1997 - Castle Peak Travel Management Plan; amended in March 1999 - Oil and Gas Leasing & Development Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement; amended in November 1999 - Red Hill Plan Amendment; and amended in September 2002 – Fire Management Plan for Wildland Fire Management and Prescriptive Vegetation Treatment Guidance.

Decision Number/Page: The action is in conformance with Administrative Actions (pg. 5) and Livestock Grazing Management (pg. 20).

Decision Language: Administrative actions states, “Various types of actions will require special attention beyond the scope of this plan. Administrative actions are the day-to-day transactions required to serve the public and to provide optimal use of the resources. These actions are in conformance with the plan”. The livestock grazing management objective as amended states, “To provide 56,885 animal unit months of livestock forage commensurate with meeting public land health standards.”

Standards for Public Land Health:

In January 1997, Colorado BLM approved the Standards for Public Land Health. The five standards cover upland soils, riparian systems, plant and animal communities, threatened and endangered species, and water quality. Standards describe conditions needed to sustain public land health and relate to all uses of the public lands. The BLM is in the process of completing land health assessments on a landscape basis. This allotment is part of the Elk Creek Landscape which had a formal land health assessment completed in 2007 and a Determination Document signed on September 23, 2008. The allotment was determined not to be meeting the Standards, due to the abundance of cheatgrass and lack of perennial grasses and forbs on the allotment. There was insufficient monitoring data available for the team to determine whether existing livestock grazing was a significant contributing factor to the current land health conditions but altering the use on the allotment could result in a site condition closer to what is expected. The

altered use would allow for more rest and deferment of grazing during critical growth periods for perennial grasses and native forbs and would focus more use on cheatgrass and sagebrush.

This environmental analysis must address whether the proposed action or alternatives being analyzed would result in impacts that would maintain, improve, or deteriorate land health conditions relative to these five standards.

COMPLIANCE WITH SECTION 302 OF FLPMA RELATIVE TO THE COMB WASH DECISION

A review of applicable planning documents and a thoughtful consideration of new issues and new demands for the use of the public lands involved in this allotment have been made. This analysis concludes that the current land and resource uses are appropriate.

Reasons for the conclusion are: No new issues or new demands for the use of public lands involved in this grazing allotment have been identified since approval of the land use plan and amendments.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This section provides a description of the human and natural environmental resources that could be affected by the proposed action and no action alternative. In addition, the section presents comparative analyses of the direct and indirect consequences on the affected environment stemming from the implementation of the various actions.

A variety of laws, regulations, and policy directives mandate the evaluation of the effects of a proposed action and alternative(s) on certain critical environmental elements. Not all of the critical elements that require inclusion in this EA are present, or if they are present, may not be affected by the proposed action and alternative (Table 2). Only those mandatory critical elements that are present and affected are described in the following narrative.

In addition to the mandatory critical elements, there are additional resources that would be impacted by the proposed action and alternative. These are presented under Other Affected Resources.

Table 2. Critical Elements of the Human Environment									
<i>Critical Element</i>	<i>Present</i>		<i>Affected</i>		<i>Critical Element</i>	<i>Present</i>		<i>Affected</i>	
	Yes	No	Yes	No		Yes	No	Yes	No
Air Quality		X		X	Prime or Unique Farmlands		X		X
ACECs		X		X	Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species*	X			X
Cultural Resources	X			X	Wastes, Hazardous or Solid		X		X
Environmental Justice	X			X	Water Quality, Surface and Ground*	X		X	
Floodplains		X		X	Wetlands and Riparian Zones*		X		X
Invasive, Non-native	X		X		Wild and Scenic Rivers		X		X

Species									
Migratory Birds					Wilderness/ WSAs		X		X
Native American Religious Concerns		X		X					

* Public Land Health Standard

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

AREAS OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

Affected Environment: There are no Areas of Critical Environmental Concern within or adjacent to the Hogback Common Allotment that would be affected by the proposed action.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: N/A

CULTURAL RESOURCES and NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS CONCERNS

Affected Environment: Range permit renewals are undertakings under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Additional range improvements (e.g., fences, spring improvements) are subject to compliance requirements under Section 106 and will undergo standard cultural resources inventory and evaluation procedures. During Section 106 review, a cultural resource assessment (GSFO #1009-5) was completed for the Hogback Common, allotment on December 12, 2008 following the procedures and guidance outlined in the 1980 National Programmatic Agreement Regarding the Livestock Grazing and Range Improvement Program, IM-WO-99-039, IM-CO-99-007, IM-CO-99-019, CO-2001-026, and CO-2002-029. The results of the assessment are summarized in the table below. A copy of the cultural resource assessment is available at the GSFO office.

Allotment Number	Acres Inventoried at a Class III level	Acres NOT Inventoried at a Class III Level	Percent (%) Allotment Inventory data Class III level	Number of Cultural Resources known in allotment	High Potential of Historic Properties (yes/no)	Management Recommendations (Additional inventory required and historic properties to be visited)
Hogback Common	362	1956	16	3	no	No additional acres need to be inventoried. 54% of the allotment has 30%+ slopes.
Total	362	1956	16	3		

Nine Class III cultural resource inventories (145, 1005, 1022, 1003-26, 1105-12, 1006-4, 2295-1, 5497-19, and 15404-2) have been conducted within these allotments. No historic properties have been identified that are considered eligible or potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Based on available data, there is a

low potential for historic properties within these allotments. Unidentified historic era sites within this allotment could represent a time frame from the late 1800's through the 1950's; prehistoric sites could represent a time range from 5,000 to 10,000 years before present.

Subsequent site field visits, inventory, and periodic monitoring may have to be done to identify adverse grazing impacts on the historic properties identified within the term of the permit and as funds are made available. If the BLM determines that grazing activities will adversely impact the properties, mitigation will be identified and implemented in consultation with the Colorado SHPO.

At present, there are no known areas of Native American concern within these allotments. On November 7, 2008 the Glenwood Springs Field Office mailed an informational letter and maps to the Ute Tribe (Northern Ute Tribe), Southern Ute Tribe, and the Ute Mountain Ute Tribes, identifying the proposed 2009 grazing permit renewals. No response has been received. In the past the Tribes have not had any concerns with grazing permit renewals. If new data is disclosed, new terms and conditions may have to be added to the permit to accommodate their concerns. The BLM will take no action that would adversely affect these areas or location without consultation with the appropriate Native Americans.

Environmental Consequences: The direct impacts that occur where livestock concentrate include trampling, chiseling, and churning of site soils, cultural features, and cultural artifacts, artifact breakage, and impacts from standing, leaning, and rubbing against historic structures, above-ground cultural features, and rock art. Indirect impacts include soil erosion, gulying, and increased potential for unlawful collection and vandalism. Continued grazing may cause substantial ground disturbance and cause cumulative, long term, irreversible adverse effects to undiscovered historic properties.

The change in season of use and reduction in the number of AUM might reduce the potential of livestock damage to undiscovered cultural resources as well as reduce the potential for soil erosion.

If additional historic properties are located during the subsequent range developments field inventory, these properties will also be assessed for livestock grazing impacts within the term of the permit which could be beneficial for cultural resources.

Mitigation: Maintenance of range improvements not previously inventoried or new improvements may require cultural resource inventories. These allotments may be found to contain historic properties and/or resources protected under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), American Indian Religious Freedom Act, Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, E.O. 13007, or other statutes and executive orders. The BLM may require modification to development proposals to protect such properties, or disapprove any activity that is likely to result in damage to historic properties or areas of Native American concern.

Education/Discovery stipulation needs to be added to the lease renewal. The permittee and all persons specifically associated with grazing operations must be informed that any objects or sites of cultural, paleontological, or scientific value such as historic or prehistoric resources, graves or grave markers, human remains, ruins, cabins, rock art, fossils, or artifacts shall not be damaged, destroyed, removed, moved, or disturbed. If in connection with allotment operations under this authorization any of the above resources are encountered, the proponent shall immediately suspend all activities in the immediate vicinity of the discovery that might further disturb such materials and notify the BLM authorized officer of the findings. The discovery must be protected until notified in writing to proceed by the authorized officer (36CFR800.110 & 112, 43CFR 0.4).

No Action:

Environmental Consequences: This alternative would be less likely to protect cultural resources and potentially increase possible damage to undiscovered cultural resources.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Affected Environment: Review of 2004 data from US Census Bureau indicates the median annual income of Garfield County averages \$50,119 and is neither an impoverished or wealthy county. Median annual income of Mesa County averages \$40,045 and is not an impoverished or wealthy county. U.S. Census Bureau data from 2006 shows the minority population of Garfield and Mesa County comprises less than 0.7 % of the total population of Colorado^a.

Garfield County	Mesa County
Median Household Income (2004)	Median Household Income (2004)
Estimate	Estimate
\$50,119	\$40,045

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: The proposed action and alternatives are not expected to create a disproportionately high and adverse human health impact or environmental effect on minority or low-income populations within the area.

INVASIVE, NON-NATIVE SPECIES

Affected Environment: Houndstongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*), musk thistle (*Carduus nutans*), Russian knapweed (*Acroptilon repens*), Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), and Cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) have been documented occurring in the Hogback Common Allotment.

^a Source U.S. Census Bureau: State and County QuickFacts. Data derived from Population Estimates, Census of Population and Housing, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, State and County Housing Unit Estimates, County Business Patterns, Nonemployer Statistics, Economic Census, Survey of Business Owners, Building Permits, Consolidated Federal Funds Report
Last Revised: Wednesday, 02-Jan-2008 15:11:03

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation:

Proposed Action: Wind, water, vehicles, animals, and people transport weeds. Weeds generally germinate and become established in areas of surface disturbing activities such as road construction and maintenance, vehicular traffic, big game and livestock grazing. Livestock grazing can contribute to the establishment and expansion of noxious weeds through various mechanisms. Improperly managed grazing, (over-grazing), can cause a decline in desirable native plant species and ground cover which provides a niche for noxious weed invasion. In addition, noxious weed seed can be transported and introduced to new areas by fecal deposition or by seed that clings to the animal's coat. Conversely, properly managed livestock grazing which does not create areas of bare ground and which maintains the vigor and health of native plant species, particularly herbaceous species, is not expected to cause a substantial increase in noxious weeds. The proposed season-of-use adjustments are designed to improve the overall range health of the allotment. By improving rangeland health, noxious or invasive weeds would less likely become established and a reduced rate of spread would result.

No Action: Under the no action alternative, adjustments to the grazing season would not change and a continuation of rangeland degradation would ensue. Noxious and invasive weeds would continue to spread at an increased rate due to poor rangeland health.

MIGRATORY BIRDS:

Affected Environment:

The Hogback Common allotment is comprised primarily of sagebrush and scattered pinyon juniper in the flats and mixed mountain shrub (serviceberry, mountain mahogany, snowberry, oakbrush) at the base of the hogback and on the steeper slopes. Given the mix and diversity of vegetation present, these allotments provide cover, forage and nesting habitat for a variety of migratory bird species. Priority species on the USFWS Birds of Conservation Concern List that may nest in the area include: sage sparrow, Virginia's warbler, pinyon jay and black-throated gray warbler. Golden eagles, red tailed hawks and other raptors likely forage on the allotment.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation:

Proposed Action:

The newly proposed grazing schedule coincides with the breeding season of the above bird species. However, it is unlikely that livestock grazing as proposed would reduce the extent or severely impair the quality of habitat available for migratory bird breeding functions. Vegetation on the allotment would receive more growing season rest and more recovery time. This should help to improve the native grass and forb component, as early spring use would be concentrated on invasive cheatgrass. Winter grazing by sheep would occur when adequate snow cover exists on the allotment. This would focus use on shrubs and leave residual grasses and forbs largely untouched under the snow. This should allow for an adequate supply of nesting substrate for migratory birds the following spring.

No intentional take of native bird species is anticipated under the proposed action. Grazing by cattle could result in the accidental destruction of ground nests through trampling. This impact is expected to be minimal and isolated and would not influence populations of migratory birds on a landscape level.

No Action:

Under the No Action alternative, no changes in the season of use would be implemented. Sheep would continue to be grazed in spring through mid summer. This would not allow for sufficient growing season rest and allow for recovery of plant species. Cheatgrass would not be keyed in on as intensively during spring green up, and winter use would not occur which would eliminate the proposed reduction of dense decadent sagebrush on select portions of the allotment. Habitat condition would not move toward meeting Land Health Standard 3.

THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND SENSITIVE SPECIES (includes an analysis on Standard 4)

Affected Environment:

Federally Listed, Proposed, or Candidate Plant Species

According to the latest species list from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) (<http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/endspp/CountyLists/COLORADO.pdf>), the following federally listed, proposed, or candidate plant species may occur within or be impacted by actions occurring in Garfield County: Uinta Basin hookless cactus (*Sclerocactus glaucus*), Ute ladies'-tresse orchid (*Spiranthes diluvialis*), Parachute beardtongue (*Penstemon debilis*), and DeBeque phacelia (*Phacelia submutica*).

The Hogback Common Allotment does not provide suitable habitat for any of the species listed above.

BLM Sensitive Plant Species

BLM sensitive plant species with habitat and/or occurrence records in Garfield County include adobe thistle (*Cirsium perplexans*), DeBeque milkvetch (*Astragalus debequaeus*), Naturita milkvetch (*Astragalus naturitensis*), Roan Cliffs blazing star (*Mentzelia rhizomata*), Piceance bladderpod (*Lesquerella parviflora*), and Harrington's penstemon (*Penstemon harringtonii*).

Previous surveys have found no BLM Sensitive plant species or suitable habitat for these species within the Hogback Common Allotment.

Federally Listed, Proposed, or Candidate Animal Species

According to the latest species list from USFWS (<http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/endspp/CountyLists/COLORADO.pdf>), the following federally listed, proposed, or candidate animal species may occur within or be impacted by actions occurring in Garfield County, Colorado: Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), Mexican spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*), yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*), bonytail chub (*Gila elegans*), humpback chub (*Gila cypha*), razorback sucker (*Xyrauchen texanus*), and Colorado pikeminnow (*Ptychocheilus lucius*).

The Hogback Common Allotment does not provide occupied or suitable habitat for any of the species listed above.

BLM Sensitive Animal Species

The bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) was removed from the list of threatened or endangered species in August 2007. The BLM now considers the bald eagle a sensitive species. Bald eagles are known to winter along major waterways and their tributaries within the GSFO, using adjacent upland habitat as scavenging areas primarily for winter or vehicle killed mule deer and elk. Mapped winter habitat for this species is located along West Elk Creek and Elk Creek and on uplands adjacent to these creeks. No winter roosts are located on BLM lands within the allotment. No other BLM sensitive species are known to reside within the allotment.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation:

Proposed Action:

Federally Listed, Proposed or Candidate Plant Species

There are no federally listed, proposed or candidate plant species or suitable habitat for these species within the project area. Therefore, the proposed action would have “**No Effect**” on these species.

BLM Sensitive Plant Species

Due to the absence of any BLM Sensitive plant species within the project area, the proposed action should have no impact on these species.

Federally Listed, Proposed, or Candidate Animal Species

Due to a lack of suitable/occupied habitat, no listed fish or wildlife are found in the project area. The proposed action should have “no effect” on any listed fish or wildlife species.

BLM Sensitive Animal Species

Bald Eagle

The proposed action would have no conceivable impact to wintering bald eagles. Grazing in the allotments would not coincide with bald eagle use of winter habitat. Grazing upland habitats adjacent to the creeks would not impact bald eagle’s ability to use these waterways and would not impact prey availability. In addition, livestock grazing would not impact bald eagle’s ability to feed on carrion in upland habitats within the allotment.

No Action:

Under the No Action alternative, no changes in the season of use would be implemented. Sheep would continue to be grazed in spring through mid summer. This would not allow for sufficient growing season rest and allow for recovery vegetation on the allotment. Cheatgrass would not be keyed in on as intensively during spring green up,

and winter use would not occur which would eliminate the proposed reduction of dense decadent sagebrush on select portions of the allotment. Habitat condition would not move toward meeting Land Health Standard 3. Despite a lack of improvement, it is unlikely that the No Action alternative would have any impact on any federally listed, proposed or candidate fish, wildlife, or plant species or any BLM sensitive fish, wildlife, or plant species because these species and their habitats do not occur in the area of influence.

Analysis on the Public Land Health Standard for Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species: A Land Health Assessment was conducted for the area in 2007 and a Determination Document was signed on September 24, 2008. This allotment was not meeting Standard 3 for healthy plant and animal communities. However, given the absence of Special Status Species or their habitat, the area was found to be meeting Standard 4. Neither the proposed action nor the no action alternative would have any bearing on the ability of the landscape to meet Standard 4 for threatened, endangered, and other special status species.

WATER QUALITY, SURFACE AND GROUND (includes an analysis on Standard 5)

Affected Environment: The Hogback Common Allotment is located northwest of the Town of New Castle within the 7,228 acre Mouth of Elk Creek (east portion) and the 5,974 acre Tributary to West Elk Creek (west portion) 6th field watersheds. The Hogback Common allotment contains numerous ephemeral drainages that are directly tributary to the perennials West Elk Creek and Elk Creek.

According to the *Stream Classifications and Water Quality Standards* (CDPHE, Water Quality Control Commission, Regulation No. 37) list, the ephemeral tributaries mentioned above are within the Lower Colorado River Basin segment 7 that includes the mainstem of Elk Creek and all tributaries, wetlands, lakes and reservoirs. This segment has been classified aquatic life cold 1, recreation 1a, water supply, and agriculture. Aquatic life cold 1 indicates that this water course is capable of sustaining a wide variety of cold water biota. Recreation class 1a refers to waters in which primary contact recreation is presumed to be present. In addition, this segment is suitable or intended to become suitable for potable water supplies and agricultural purposes that include irrigation and livestock use.

The ephemeral drainages mentioned above are not currently listed on the State of Colorado's *303(d) List of Water Quality Limited Segments Requiring TMDLS* (CDPHE, Water Quality Control Commission, Regulation No. 93) or the *Monitoring and Evaluation List* (CDPHE, Water Quality Control Commission, Regulation No. 94) as waterbodies suspected to have water quality problems. In addition, no water quality data are currently available for these ephemeral drainages.

Proposed Action

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: Grazing activities would result in soil compaction and displacement that increase the likelihood of erosional processes, especially on steep slopes and areas devoid of vegetation. Soil detachment and sediment transport are likely to occur during runoff events associated with spring snowmelt and short-duration high intensity thunderstorms. In addition, the number of livestock in the area would increase the amount of feces present in close proximity to nearby drainages. The introduction of livestock feces to waterbodies often leads to water quality degradation by increasing fecal coliform bacteria levels. Due to the close proximity of the proposed activities to area drainages, there is a high potential that additional sediment associated with grazing practices as well as fecal coliform bacteria from livestock feces could reach the numerous ephemeral drainages mentioned above and could in turn be transported to West Elk Creek and Elk Creek.

While some negative impacts associated with grazing are anticipated as stated above, the proposed action would eliminate sheep grazing in June and July giving perennial grasses and native forbs an opportunity to become established. The intent is to provide better vegetative cover than the current grazing schedule which would in turn minimize erosional processes in the early summer and decrease the likelihood of sediment delivery to nearby drainages. In addition, anticipated fecal coliform bacteria levels in nearby drainages would be much lower than if sheep grazing were to continue into July.

No Action Alternative

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: Under the no action alternative, the current grazing schedule would continue with sheep grazing into July. Under this alternative, the impacts would be similar to the proposed action without giving perennial grasses and native forbs the opportunity to become established in June and July, thus intensifying negative impacts to soils and groundcover and increasing the likelihood of sediment delivery to nearby drainages. In addition, fecal coliform bacteria levels are anticipated to be higher in nearby drainages under the current grazing schedule.

Analysis on the Public Land Health Standard for Water Quality: While no water quality problems were observed during the 2007 assessment of Elk Creek Landscape Unit, both the proposed action and no action alternative could have local short duration impacts on water quality if runoff events are significant enough to transport contaminants to the nearby perennial drainages. However, given the distance of the Hogback Common Allotment from West Elk Creek and Elk Creek it is assumed that both the proposed action and the no action alternative would not likely prevent Standard 5 for Water Quality from being met.

WETLANDS and RIPARIAN ZONES (includes an analysis on Standard 2)

Affected Environment: There are no known riparian or wetland systems on this allotment.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: N/A

Analysis on the Public Land Health Standard for riparian systems: There are no known riparian or wetland systems on this allotment.

WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS

Affected Environment: There are no un-studied rivers, rivers found to eligible or designated Wild and Scenic Rivers within the proposed project area.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: N/A

WILDERNESS

Affected Environment: There are no designated Wilderness areas, Wilderness Study Areas or citizens' wilderness proposal areas within the proposed project area.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: N/A

NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS

SOILS (includes an analysis on Standard 1)

Affected Environment: According to the *Soil Survey of Rifle Area, Colorado: Parts of Garfield and Mesa Counties* (USDA 1985), the Hogback Common Allotment contains 10 different soil map units that can be identified by the numerical code assigned by the soil survey (7, 9, 24, 31, 56, 58, 66, 67, 69, 70). These soil map units are scattered throughout the allotment and many of them have been identified as having severe erosion hazards. In addition, the higher elevations within the allotment which are found on the northern slopes of the Grand Hogback are mapped as CSU 4 (Controlled Surface Use) for erosive soils on slopes greater than 30% and NSO 15 (No Surface Occupancy) for slopes greater than 50% regardless of soil type. Following is a brief description of the 10 soil map units found within the Hogback Common Allotment.

- Ascalon-Pena complex (7) – This soil map unit is found on the sides of valleys and alluvial fans at elevations ranging from 5,000 to 6,500 feet and on slopes of 6 to 25 percent. The Ascalon soil makes up about 65 percent of the unit and is found on lower angle slopes while the Pena soil makes up about 25 percent of the unit and is found on steeper slopes. The Ascalon soil is deep, well drained and has medium surface runoff with moderate erosion hazard. The Pena soil is deep, well drained and has slow surface runoff with moderate erosion hazard. Primary uses for this complex include wildlife habitat and limited grazing.
- Badland (9) – This soil map unit consists of steep, barren land that has been dissected by intermittent drainages. This unit occurs in soft shale, sandstone, and siltstone of the Green River, Wasatch, Mancos, and Mesa Verde Formations. This soil map is approximately 85 percent unvegetated, has very severe erosion hazard, and frequent active erosion.
- Dollard-Rock outcrop, shale, complex (24) – This complex consists of shale

outcrops and shale derived soils that are found on hills and mountainsides at elevations ranging from 6,000 to 7,500 feet and on slopes of 25 to 65 percent. Approximately 60 percent of the complex is the Dollard soil and 20 percent is shale outcrop. The Dollard soil is moderately deep, well drained and has rapid surface runoff with severe erosion hazard. Surface runoff for the Rock outcrop is rapid and the erosion hazard is very severe. This complex is primarily used for limited grazing and wildlife habitat.

- Heldt clay loam (31) – This deep, well drained soil is found on alluvial fans and sides of valleys at elevations ranging from 5,000 to 6,000 feet and on slopes of 12 to 25 percent. Parent material for this soil is shale and sandstone. Erosion hazard for this soil is moderate and surface runoff is medium. Primary uses for this soil include grazing and wildlife habitat.
- Potts loam (56) – This deep, well drained soil is found on mesas, benches, and the sides of valleys at elevations ranging from 5,000 to 7,000 feet and on slopes of 6 to 12 percent. Parent material for this soil includes sandstone, shale, and basalt. Surface runoff for this soil is medium and the erosion hazard is severe. Primary uses for this soil include grazing, wildlife habitat, and dryland farming.
- Potts-Ildefonso complex (58) – This complex is found on mesas, alluvial fans, and the sides of valleys at elevations ranging from 5,000 to 6,500 feet and on slopes of 12 to 25 percent. Parent material for this soil complex consists of sandstone, shale, and basalt. This soil complex is deep, well drained, and has medium surface runoff and moderate erosion hazard. Uses for this soil complex include limited grazing and wildlife habitat.
- Torriorthents-Camborthids-Rock outcrop complex, steep (66) – This soil map unit consists of sandstone and shale bedrock and soils of variable depth occurring on slopes of 15 to 70 percent. About 45 percent of this complex is Torriorthents, 20 percent is Camborthids, and 15 percent is Rock outcrop. The Camborthids occur on the lower toe slopes on foothills and mountainsides while the Torriorthents are found on the foothills and mountainsides below the Rock outcrop. The Torriorthents are shallow to moderately deep, and clayey to loamy with gravel, cobbles, and stones. The Camborthids are shallow to deep and clayey to loamy. Rock outcrop primarily consists of Mesa Verde sandstones and Wasatch shales with occasional basaltic boulders and stones. This complex is characterized by moderate to severe erosion hazard. Primary uses for this complex include grazing, wildlife habitat, and recreation.
- Torriorthents-Rock outcrop complex, steep (67) – This complex consists of stony soils and exposed outcrops of Mesa Verde sandstone and Wasatch shale that occur on slopes of 15 to 70 percent. Approximately 60 percent of this complex is Torriorthents and 25 percent is Rock outcrop. The Torriorthents are clayey to loamy and contain gravel, cobbles, and stones; many of which are basaltic in origin. They are found on mountainsides below the Rock outcrop. Erosion hazard for this complex varies from moderate to severe. Primary uses for this complex include limited grazing, wildlife habitat, and recreation.

- Vale silt loam (69) – This deep, well drained, moderately sloping soil is found on mesas, benches, and alluvial fans at elevations ranging from 5,000 to 7,200 feet and on slopes of 6 to 12 percent. This soil is derived from calcareous eolian material. Surface runoff for this soil is medium and the erosion hazard is classified as moderate. Primary uses for this soil include irrigation for crops and hay with some areas being used for grazing.
- Vale silt loam (70) – This deep, well drained, strongly sloping soil is found on mesas, mesa sides, and alluvial fans at elevations ranging from 5,000 to 7,200 feet and on slopes of 12 to 25 percent. This soil is derived from calcareous eolian material. Surface runoff for this soil is medium and the erosion hazard is severe. Primary uses for this soil include wildlife habitat, recreation, and grazing.

Proposed Action

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: As mentioned above, a high percentage of the Hogback Common Allotment occurs on soils with severe erosion hazards and on slopes greater than 30% (17°). Grazing activities would result in soil compaction and displacement that increase the likelihood of erosional processes, especially on steep slopes and areas devoid of vegetation. Soil detachment and sediment transport are likely to occur during runoff events associated with spring snowmelt and short-duration high intensity thunderstorms. Due to the close proximity of the proposed activities to area drainages, there is a high potential that additional sediment associated with grazing practices could reach the numerous ephemeral drainages mentioned above and could in turn be transported to West Elk Creek and Elk Creek.

While some negative impacts associated with grazing are anticipated as stated above, the proposed action would eliminate sheep grazing in June and July giving perennial grasses and native forbs an opportunity to become established. The intent is to provide better vegetative cover than the current grazing schedule which would in turn minimize erosional processes in the early summer and decrease the likelihood of sediment delivery to nearby drainages.

No Action Alternative

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: Under the no action alternative, the current grazing schedule would continue with sheep grazing into July. Under this alternative, the impacts would be similar to the proposed action without giving perennial grasses and native forbs the opportunity to become established in June and July, thus intensifying negative impacts to soils and groundcover and increasing the likelihood of sediment delivery to nearby drainages.

Analysis on Public Land Health Standard 1 for Upland Soils: The proposed action and no action alternatives would occur within the Elk Creek Landscape (north of Rifle to Glenwood Springs) Unit, which had land health assessment field work conducted in 2007 and a determination document signed in September 2008. During that time, it appeared that area soils were achieving or moving towards achieving Standard 1 for Upland Soils. While both the proposed action and the no action alternative could have short term

localized effects on area soils, it is anticipated that these alternatives would not likely prevent Standard 1 for Upland Soils from being met.

VEGETATION (includes an analysis on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: The Hogback Common Allotment is on the north side of the Grand Hogback. Vegetation on the allotment is comprised primarily of big sagebrush and pinyon-juniper woodlands, with oakbrush/mixed mountain shrublands on the steeper slopes. Cheatgrass and annual forbs dominate the understory within the sagebrush and some of the sagebrush communities are old, decadent and denser than expected under healthy conditions. Other noxious weeds, such as houndstongue and musk thistle are also noted in the allotment. Native perennial grasses found on the allotment include Sandberg bluegrass, Indian ricegrass, and Prairie junegrass, but these species are less abundant than expected. Mountain shrub communities found on the steeper slopes are in better condition.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation:

Proposed Action:

The proposed action would implement a change in the season of use for sheep grazing in the allotment. Approximately half of the sheep use would change from late spring-early summer to midwinter use. The other half of the sheep use would occur earlier in the spring than under the current permit. Winter sheep grazing would occur only when sufficient snow is present to provide an adequate water source. In the winter, sheep graze primarily on sagebrush, especially when the grasses and forbs are covered by snow. Winter use should not result in any reduction in the vigor or cover of perennial grasses or forbs.

The remainder of the sheep use would occur early in spring when cheatgrass is green and actively growing. At this time of year, sheep would graze on cheatgrass in addition, and often in preference to, cool-season perennial grasses, thereby helping to reduce the competitive advantage of cheatgrass on the allotment. The proposed action, i.e. earlier spring grazing and a shorter period of grazing during the growing season, should result in an improvement in the cover and abundance of native perennial grasses and forbs over the long-term. Noticeable improvements in range condition are likely to be slow and gradual, however, without vegetative treatments to reduce the cover of cheatgrass and sagebrush.

No Action Alternative:

Under the current permit, sheep graze the allotment for 61 days from 5/15 to 7/15. When cheatgrass is green and actively growing, it will likely constitute a majority of the forage for livestock. However, the period of sheep use on the current permit extends beyond the period when cheatgrass would be green and palatable. After the cheatgrass produces seed and dries up, it is unpalatable to livestock and grazing use would be concentrated entirely on perennial grasses and forbs. This period of use also coincides with most of the active growing season for cool-season perennial grasses which means the grasses would not

have an opportunity for rest and recovery or seed dissemination following grazing. Continuation of the currently permitted grazing season would not result in any improvements in range condition and may result in further degradation of range conditions.

Analysis on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Wildlife, Aquatic and Wildlife, Terrestrial): A Land Health Assessment was conducted for the area in 2007 and the Determination Document was signed on September 24, 2008. The Hogback Common allotment was not meeting Standard 3 for healthy and productive plant and animal communities. Given the proposed changes in season of use, it is anticipated that upland habitat condition should improve over time and the allotment should move toward meeting Standard 3. Monitoring of grazing use and vegetative trends will help to determine the success of implemented changes. The No Action alternative is not likely to result in any progress towards achieving Standard 3 for healthy plant communities.

WILDLIFE AQUATIC (includes an analysis on Standard 3)

Affected Environment:

The Hogback Common allotment contains no perennial waters. The closest perennial waters are Grass Valley Reservoir located approximately 0.2 miles to the west and West Elk Creek and Elk Creek located approximately 0.2 miles to the north. Grass Valley Reservoir contains a variety of fishes including northern pike, yellow perch, rainbow and brown trout, and bass. Elk Creek contains speckled dace, rainbow, brown, and brook trout, and mottled sculpin. In addition, all of these perennial waters contain an abundance of aquatic insects.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation:

Proposed Action:

The proposed action calls for a change in the season of use in the allotment. Cows will still be grazed at the same time each year, but sheep would be grazed earlier in the season to take advantage of cheat grass green up and then during the winter when snow is present so that they may key in on sagebrush. These changes are being proposed so that cheatgrass can be taken advantage of more intensively during the spring green up period when it is most palatable, and so that old, decadent, and high density sagebrush can be reduced when grasses and forbs are under snow. Both of these actions are being proposed in order to try and improve allotment condition and move toward meeting Standard 3.

Changing the season of use should help to provide growing season rest for perennial grasses and forbs while allowing for more use on cheat grass in the spring when it is more palatable. This should reduce some site-specific soil compaction and displacement, especially in areas where livestock concentrate such as waters, salt block sites, and along stock trails. This should allow for better perennial grass and forb condition and result in better soil stability. Concentrated, intensive winter use should help to reduce sagebrush

density so as to allow for the establishment of more grasses and forbs. Soil compaction and displacement should decrease especially as sheep are herded to new areas and not concentrated for too long in any one area. As conditions improve, the likelihood of erosional processes such as soil detachment and sediment transport should be reduced.

Due to the close proximity of livestock grazing to area drainages, there is a potential that sediment associated with grazing practices could be transported to any of the identified perennial waters. Sediment can impact trout species by silting in spawning substrates and limited pool habitats. This can smother eggs and reduce productivity, and can reduce the quality of summer and winter thermal refuge (pool) habitats needed for survival. Sediment can impede aquatic insect productivity which can result in reduced food sources for resident fishes. Given the proposed timing of grazing, the planned reduction in sagebrush and increase in herbaceous cover, and the improved growing season rest which should allow for recovery and improvement of upland vegetation, it is unlikely that sediment concerns caused by grazing would result in negative impacts to aquatic wildlife in the area.

No Action:

Under the No Action alternative, no changes in the season of use would be implemented. Sheep would continue to be grazed in spring through mid summer. This would not allow for sufficient growing season rest and allow for recovery of plant species. Cheatgrass would not be keyed in on as intensively, and winter use would not occur which would eliminate the proposed reduction of dense decadent sagebrush on select portions of the allotment. Habitat condition would not move toward meeting Land Health Standard 3.

Analysis on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Vegetation and Wildlife, Terrestrial): A formal Land Health Assessment was completed for the area in 2007. The Hogback Common allotment was not meeting Standard 3 for healthy and productive plant and animal communities. Given the proposed changes in season of use, it is anticipated that upland habitat condition should improve over time and the allotment should move toward meeting Standard 3. Allotment/grazing monitoring will help to determine success of implemented changes.

WILDLIFE TERRESTRIAL (includes an analysis on Standard 3)

Affected Environment:

This allotment is comprised primarily of sagebrush and pinyon juniper with some mountain mahogany, serviceberry, and snowberry on the upper slopes. These communities typically provide habitat for big game species as well as small mammals, reptiles and birds. Portions of the allotments are mapped as important big game winter habitat - winter concentration area (CDOW 2008).

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation:

Proposed Action: The proposed action calls for a change in the season of use in the allotment. Cows will still be grazed at the same time each year, but sheep would be

grazed earlier in the season to take advantage of cheatgrass green up and then during 35 days in the winter when sufficient snow is present so that they may key in on old, decadent sagebrush. These changes are being proposed so that cheatgrass can be taken advantage of more intensively during the spring green up period when it is most palatable, and so that old, decadent, and high density sagebrush can be reduced when grasses and forbs are under snow. Both of these actions are being proposed in order to try and improve allotment condition and move toward meeting Standard 3.

Changing the season of use should help to provide growing season rest for perennial grasses and forbs while allowing for more use on cheatgrass in the spring when it is more palatable. This should allow for better perennial grass and forb condition and help to reduce sagebrush density so as to allow for the establishment of more grasses and forbs and spur regeneration of younger, more palatable sagebrush, and other browse species. This should improve habitat for all wildlife in the area and mule deer winter range in particular. It is possible that some competition between sheep and big game could occur during the proposed winter sheep grazing period as sheep and big game, primarily mule deer, compete for forage resources and space. However, overlap of habitat use would only occur for 35 days and sheep would be moved to fresh feed often which should reduce potential site specific conflicts.

No Action: Under the No Action alternative, no changes in the season of use would be implemented. Sheep would continue to be grazed in spring through mid summer. This would not allow for sufficient growing season rest and allow for recovery of plant species. Cheatgrass would not be keyed in on as intensively, and winter use would not occur which would eliminate the reduction of dense decadent sagebrush on select portions of the allotment. No winter grazing would eliminate potential competition for forage and space with big game during the winter months, but overall habitat condition would not likely improve or move toward meeting Land Health Standard 3.

Analysis on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Vegetation and Wildlife, Aquatic): A formal Land Health Assessment was completed for the area in 2007. The Hogback Common allotment was not meeting Standard 3 for healthy and productive plant and animal communities. Given the proposed changes in season of use, it is anticipated that upland habitat condition should improve over time and the allotment should move toward meeting Standard 3. Allotment/grazing monitoring will help to determine success of implemented changes.

OTHER NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS: For the following elements, those brought forward for analysis will be formatted as shown above.

Non-Critical Element	NA or Not Present	Applicable or Present, No Impact	Applicable & Present and Brought Forward for Analysis
Travel/Access		X	
Cadastral Survey	X		
Fire/Fuels Management	X		
Forest Management	X		
Geology and Minerals	X		

Law Enforcement		X	
Paleontology		X	
Noise	X		
Range Management			X
Realty Authorizations	X		
Recreation		X	
Socio-Economics	X		
Soils		X	X
Transportation		X	
Visual Resources		X	

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY:

In February of 2008, BLM approved a project for “targeted sheep grazing” on the Hogback Common Allotment. The project was designed to focus winter sheep grazing on a small sagebrush flat on the allotment while snow was covering the ground. In midwinter, sheep will browse almost exclusively on sagebrush (and other browse species when available). The project site was also seeded with native grasses on top of the snow prior to sheep grazing so that sheep trampling would help incorporate the seed into the soil. The purpose of the project was to reduce the cover of sagebrush by approximately 50% in a small area by heavy browsing that would result in mortality of a portion of the sagebrush. The project treated approximately 18 acres and visually appeared to reduce sagebrush cover. Photos were taken following treatment but quantitative monitoring studies have not been conducted to determine whether or not sagebrush density has been reduced and grass density has increased.

In addition, the sagebrush stands on portions of the Hogback Common Allotment were mechanically treated in the fall of 2007 to reduce sagebrush density. This project treated approximately 80 acres of sagebrush. These projects combined with the proposed change in season of use should result in a reduction of sagebrush cover and a corresponding increase in cover of perennial grasses on the allotment.

Mitigation: Maintenance of range improvements not previously inventoried or new improvements may require cultural resource inventories. These allotments may be found to contain historic properties and/or resources protected under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), American Indian Religious Freedom Act, Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, E.O. 13007, or other statutes and executive orders. The BLM may require modification to development proposals to protect such properties, or disapprove any activity that is likely to result in damage to historic properties or areas of Native American concern.

PERSONS/AGENCIES CONSULTED:

Warren Roberts
Ute Indian Tribe
Southern Ute Indian Tribe
Ute Mountain Ute Tribe

INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Area of Responsibility</u>
Isaac Pittman	Rangeland Management Specialist	Range, NEPA Lead
Mike Kinser	Rangeland Management Specialist	Riparian Zones
Jeff O'Connell	Hydrologist/Geologist	Soil, Air, Water, Geology
Kay Hopkins	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Wilderness, VRM
Carla DeYoung	Ecologist	ACEC, T/E/S Plants, Standards, Vegetation
Cheryl Harrison	Archaeologist	Cultural & Native American Concerns
Tom Fresques	Fisheries Biologist	Wildlife Aquatic, T/E/S Fish
Brian Hopkins	Wildlife Biologist	Wildlife Terrestrial, T/E/S Terrestrial Wildlife
Dereck Wilson	Range Management Specialist	Invasive, Non-native Species

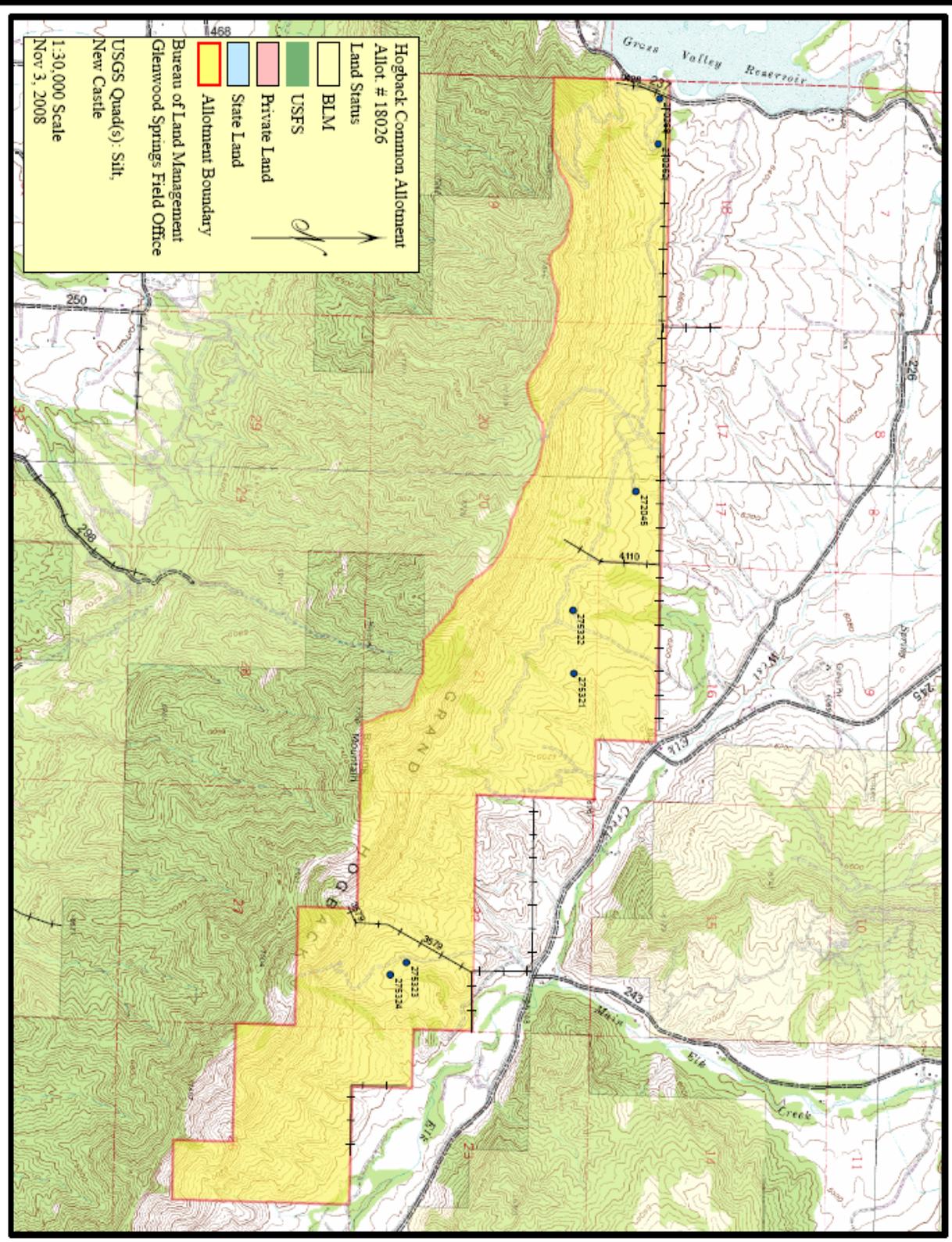
SIGNATURE OF PREPARER:



DATE SIGNED:

12/12/2008

ATTACHMENT: Allotment Map



UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
GLENWOOD SPRINGS FIELD OFFICE
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

**Changes in Grazing Use on the Hogback Common Allotment
DOI-BLM-CO140-2009-0013-EA**

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the attached environmental assessment, and considering the significance criteria in 40 CFR 1508.27, I have determined that the Proposed Action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. An environmental impact statement is therefore not required.

BACKGROUND

A Land Health Assessment was completed for the Hogback Common Allotment on May 10, 2007. The allotment was not meeting Standard 3 for Healthy Plant and Animal Communities due to the lack of perennial grasses and native forbs expected for the site. The area is co-dominated by cheatgrass and sagebrush. The permittee was consulted and agreed that earlier spring grazing would help by grazing cheatgrass when most palatable and allowing growing season rest for perennial grasses. Also, winter sheep use would induce browsing pressure on sagebrush, helping to reduce the sagebrush dominance and allowing for a more diverse plant community. This analysis addresses these two questions: 1) "Is it more likely than not that existing grazing management practices or levels of grazing use are significant factors in failing to achieve the Standards or conform with the guidelines?" 2) "Is it more likely than not that existing grazing management needs to be modified to ensure that the Fundamentals of rangeland health are met, or making significant progress toward being met?"

Context

There are two permits on this allotment. One permittee has 63 cattle on the allotment from 5/15 to 6/4. This use was not determined to have an impact on the reasons for land health standards not being met and altering the use would not lead to any noticeable improvements. Likewise no changes were made to the other cattle permit. Cattle use is early enough in the season to focus use on cheatgrass and avoid perennial grasses during critical growth periods. The sheep permit was addressed in this EA. Current sheep use was not identified as a significant causal factor in not achieving the standards but altering the season of use could help reduce use on perennial grasses and forbs.

Intensity

I have considered the potential intensity/severity of the impacts anticipated from the grazing permit changes on the Hogback Common allotment decision relative to each of the ten areas suggested for consideration by the CEQ. With regard to each:

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The beneficial impacts of continued grazing on this allotment are that rangeland health standards are more likely to be achieved due to focused grazing pressure on the non-native and invasive cheatgrass and browsing pressure on an old growth sagebrush stand. This use will give rest to the perennial grasses and forbs which are desired species in this system that were lacking in the rangeland health assessment. Adverse impacts could include direct competition with wildlife for winter forage. This will be monitored and adjustments made as necessary.

2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health and safety.

This action does not affect public health and safety.

3. *Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity of historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.*

This allotment is adjacent to the Harvey Gap State Park. Sheep may be moved on and off the allotment on the public access road adjacent to the park. The change in use on this allotment from early summer to winter would benefit summer seasonal visitors at the park.

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

Effects to the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial.

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

The possible effects to the human environment are not highly uncertain. Sheep use in the winter may drive wintering wildlife to other areas. It is expected though that wildlife will not leave the area entirely since sheep will only be there in early winter and for a short period of time. Wildlife viewing and hunting experience would continue and may improve with a more diverse plant community.

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.*

This change in season of use will be issued as a ten year permit and will be analyzed further upon expiration of the permit. It represents no precedent for future actions. All actions of this nature will be analyzed separately.

7. *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*

There have been recent habitat improvement treatments in this allotment. These treatments were focused on improving habitat by taking out juniper trees encroaching in sagebrush and reducing the dominance of old growth sagebrush by mechanical cutting and focused grazing use by sheep. These methods were successful in achieving a more diverse stand of sagebrush in the areas of treatment. The cumulative impacts of continuing to pressure sagebrush will need to be monitored but it is expected that sheep use in the winter with prescribed mitigation measures will not have a cumulatively negative impact.

8. *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or 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.*

No listing for the National Register of Historic places have been identified in this allotment.

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.*

No threatened or endangered species have been identified in this allotment.

10. *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

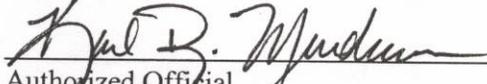
No laws are violated by the proposed action.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

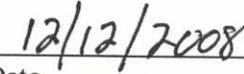
On the basis of the information contained in the EA, and all other information available to me, it is my determination that: (1) the implementation of the Proposed Action or alternatives will not have significant environmental impacts beyond those already addressed in the "Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan," (Jan. 1984, revised 1988); (2) the Proposed Action and alternatives are in

Action and alternatives do not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement or a supplement to the existing environmental impact statement is not necessary and will not be prepared.

This finding is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the context and to the intensity of the impacts described in the EA or as articulated in the letters of comment.



Authorized Official
Glenwood Springs Field Office



Date

