

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management**

**Environmental Assessment
DOI-BLM-CO-S050-2011-0020 EA**

July 2013

**Allotment Transfer and
Change in Class of Livestock on the
Pipeline, S. Piney, Dry Creek Basin and Franklin Mesa
Allotments**

Location: Montrose County, CO

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Uncompahgre Field Office
2465 South Townsend Avenue
Montrose, CO 81401
Phone: (970) 240-5300**



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ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NUMBER: DOI-BLM-CO-S050-2011-0020 EA

PROJECT NAME: Allotment Transfer and Change in Class of Livestock on the Pipeline, S. Piney, Dry Creek Basin and Franklin Mesa Allotments

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: R95W, T48N, Several Sections (see map below)

APPLICANT: Etchart Ranches

BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION

The applicant has acquired the Pipeline, S. Piney, Dry Creek Basin, and Franklin Mesa allotments, and has requested a transfer of grazing preference. The applicant has requested to add sheep to the class of livestock. Changes would also occur to grazing dates, stocking rates, AUMs, season of use, and utilization.

All allotments are within 15 miles of Montrose (Figure 1). Public land acres and AUMs are depicted in Table 1. In the past the allotments have had either sheep or cattle grazing; they are currently permitted for cattle only.

Table 1

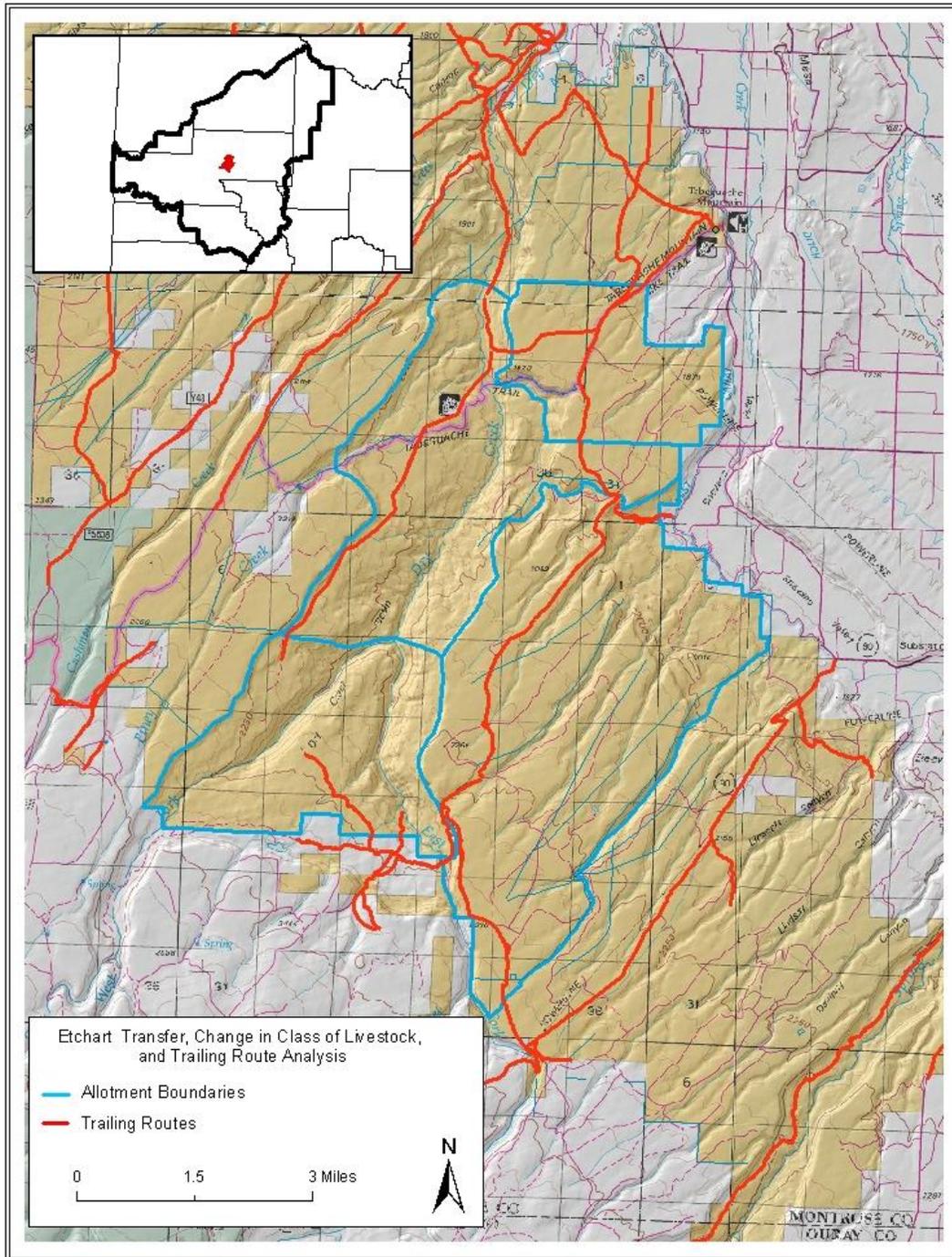
Allotment No.	Allotment Name	Public Land Ac.	AUMs
#05507	Pipeline	10,354	600
#05515	S. Piney	4,525	184
#05513	Dry Creek Basin	5,313	385
#05512	Franklin Mesa	3,711	315

The Land Health Assessment (LHA) was completed for the area in 2005. LHA determinations found the majority of areas meeting but with some concerns which were mostly due to weedy species invasion, previous and current vegetation treatments, drought, travel, recreation, and historic grazing with the concern being amount and nature (yearlong) of historic grazing.

The area has been growing in recreational popularity in the past 5 years; the Dry Creek Travel Management Plan was completed on 2009 to manage this increase in use. With this increase in use, conflicts can occur between user groups (e.g. livestock grazing and recreation).

The applicant has grazing privileges on adjacent allotments. The transfer of these allotments to the applicant, and the addition of sheep to the class of livestock would add greater flexibility to reduce conflicts between user groups, maintain or enhance land health, promote better range management, and increase flexibility within the applicant's grazing management strategies.

Figure 1



PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE ACTION:

The applicant has requested transfer of the grazing permit, and a change in the class of livestock to include sheep. The BLM is required to analyze a change in grazing preference (43 CFR 4110.3(c)). The purpose is to decide whether to grant the change in livestock with changed Terms and Conditions, or to deny the request.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Proposed Action:

The proposed action is to transfer the livestock grazing permits and to change the class of livestock from cattle only to sheep and cattle. The permittee would be authorized only one class of livestock in a season. The affected allotments are: Pipeline #05507; S. Piney #05515; Dry Creek Basin #05513; and Franklin Mesa #05512.

Livestock grazing would be authorized as shown in the following table. (Note: see the No Action Alternative for the current livestock authorization for a comparison.)

Allotment	Livestock		Grazing Period		% PL	AUMs
	Type	Number	Begin	End		
Pipeline #05507	Cattle	197	5/01	5/31	100	201
	Cattle	93	10/10	02/28	100	399
	or					
	Sheep	650	5/01	5/31	100	201
	Sheep	1500	12/15	03/10	100	399
¹ Franklin Mesa #05512	² Cattle	81	10/10	1/20	100	218
	or					
	² Sheep	1500	12/15	3/10	100	215
¹ Dry Creek Basin #05513	Cattle	100	5/01	5/31	100	50
	Cattle	82	12/15	3/10	100	215
	or					
	³ Sheep	500	5/01	5/31	100	50
	Sheep	1500	12/15	3/10	100	215
South Piney #05515	Cattle	71	5/01	5/31	100	73
	Cattle	37	10/10	1/08	100	111
	or					
	Sheep	650	5/01	5/31	100	73
	Sheep	1500	12/15	3/10	100	111

¹ The AUM's associated with Dry Creek Basin and Franklin Mesa allotments would be reduced (approximately 15%) to better reflect forage available.

² The grazing period 5/01 – 5/31 would be eliminated.

³ Upper Pasture only 5/1 – 5/31.

A rest rotation grazing strategy would be developed each year to support compliance with terms and conditions of the permit and promote Land Health Standards. The rest rotation strategy would limit grazing to either spring or fall within a year (see Terms and Conditions #3 for an exception).

Terms and Conditions for the permits:

1. Utilization levels on perennial herbaceous vegetation would be between 40-50 % of the seasonal growth in the higher elevation spring portions of the allotments, and 30-40% seasonal utilization in the lower elevation allotments to support rangeland health in semi-arid rangelands (Holechek et al. 1989).
2. Limit seasonal use on native riparian woody species to 35% or less.
3. Spring and fall use during the same year will be limited to special circumstances such as accommodating grazing deferments associated with fire rehabilitation or vegetation treatments.
4. Limit grazing use to 14 days or less in each pasture (or use area) during the spring and summer growing season. This limitation does not apply to fall or winter grazing periods.
5. Periodic authorization of grazing outside the time period specified in the grazing permit may be allowed. This kind of authorization would be granted only after notification and consultation with the Rangeland Management Specialist.
6. The BLM authorized officer will be contacted prior to any range improvement maintenance activity which would involve soil surface disturbance (e.g. cleaning of ponds or reservoirs).
7. Permitted on/off dates may vary by two weeks in either direction to support range readiness and improve range management flexibility.
8. Grazing will be managed in a way that does not encourage the establishment or spread of noxious weeds or other invasive plants, or significant degradation of the native plant community. Permittees are not authorized to use chemical or biological methods of control on BLM lands unless they have received prior approval from the BLM authorized officer and have an approved Pesticide/Biological Use Proposal.
9. If human remains or historic, archaeological, or paleontological materials are found in the course of any allotment activities, the operator shall refrain from further actions that might impact the materials and contact the BLM. Additional stipulations may be added to this permit if new cultural or paleontological sites are identified that could be affected by livestock grazing.

10. Grazing dates, duration of grazing, stocking rates, and/or AUMs may be adjusted on the permit for drought, vegetation treatments, wildfire, etc. to support land health.

11. Submission of actual use reports is required within 15 days after the end of the grazing season.

12. Salting or use of mineral supplements is not allowed within ¼ mile of permanent water sources.

13. When sheep are grazing on the allotment, signs will be posted stating “Guard Dogs” in area.

14. Motorized use will be kept on designated routes except for emergencies, including retrieval of sick, down, or dead animals.

15. Manage domestic sheep grazing on a case-by-case basis following a risk assessment to determine degree of risk of interaction between domestic and bighorn sheep and the probability of infection of bighorn sheep with domestic sheep diseases.

16. Manage domestic sheep with the following restrictions:

- Only healthy domestic sheep may be turned out onto BLM.
- All domestic ewes must be bred before turn out onto BLM.
- No lambing of domestic sheep will occur on BLM.
- Sweep allotments within 24 hours of moving off to capture any strays.
- Use marker sheep within bands at least 1 per 100 head.
- Report any sightings of bighorn sheep to BLM within 24 hours of sighting.
- Remove sick, physically disabled or dead domestic sheep from the band or BLM lands within 24 hours of discovery and report cause of death to BLM within 24 hours.
- Use only highly gregarious breeds of domestic sheep.
- Mandatory use of at least two guard dogs per domestic sheep band to deter comingling.
- Maintain a domestic sheep band of no greater than 2,000 head based on manageability by herder.

Use adaptive management to adjust domestic sheep grazing based on current science and updated risk assessments.

No Action Alternative: The No Action alternative would ⁴transfer the livestock grazing permit without the proposed changes to class of livestock, AUMs, seasons of use, or utilization levels.

Current Permit:

ALLOTMENT	PASTURE	LIVESTOCK		GRAZING PERIOD			TYPE USE	AUMS
		NUMBER	KIND	BEGIN	END	%PL		
05507 Pipeline		130	Cattle	5/15	6/30	100	Active	201
		132		10/10	01/09	100	Active	399
05512 Franklin Mesa		45	Cattle	5/15	6/30	100	Active	70
		80		10/10	01/10	100	Active	245
05513 Dry Creek Basin		100	Cattle	5/15	6/30	100	Active	155
		76		10/10	1/9	100	Active	230
05515 South Piney		47	Cattle	5/15	6/30	100	Active	73
		37		10/10	1/08	100	Active	111

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW: The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5-3, BLM 1617.3):

Name of Plan: Uncompahgre Basin Resource Management Plan

Date Approved: September 1988: amended 2009 to include the Dry Creek Travel Management Plan amendment.

Decision Number/Page: Livestock Grazing, page 11

Decision Language: Suitable public lands would be available for livestock grazing use.

Standards for Public Land Health: In January 1997, Colorado Bureau of Land Management (BLM) approved the Standards for Public Land Health. Standards describe conditions needed to sustain public land health and relate to all uses of the public lands. A finding for each standard will be made in the environmental analysis (next section).

Standard	Definition/Statement
#1 Upland Soils	Upland soils exhibit infiltration and permeability rates that are appropriate to soil type, climate, land form, and geologic processes. Adequate soil infiltration and permeability allows for the accumulation of soil moisture necessary for optimal plant growth and vigor, and minimizes surface runoff.

⁴ Transfers of grazing preference when class of livestock and the Terms and Conditions remain the same can be accomplished with a Categorical Exclusion (CX) (BLM NEPA HandbookH-1790-1, Appendix 4). The No Action Alternative assumes a CX would be completed, and grazing preference would remain as it now exists.

Standard	Definition/Statement
#2 Riparian Systems	Riparian systems associated with both running and standing water, function properly and have the ability to recover from major surface disturbances such as fire, severe grazing, or 100-year floods. Riparian vegetation captures sediment, and provides forage, habitat and bio-diversity. Water quality is improved or maintained. Stable soils store and release water slowly.
#3 Plant and Animal Communities	Healthy, productive plant and animal communities of native and other desirable species are maintained at viable population levels commensurate with the species and habitat's potential. Plants and animals at both the community and population level are productive, resilient, diverse, vigorous, and able to reproduce and sustain natural fluctuations, and ecological processes.
#4 Threatened and Endangered Species	Special status, threatened and endangered species (federal and state), and other plants and animals officially designated by the BLM, and their habitats are maintained or enhanced by sustaining healthy, native plant and animal communities.
#5 Water Quality	The water quality of all water bodies, including ground water where applicable, located on or influenced by BLM lands will achieve or exceed the Water Quality Standards established by the State of Colorado. Water Quality Standards for surface and ground waters include the designated beneficial uses, numeric criteria, narrative criteria, and anti-degradation requirements set forth under State law as found in (5 CCR 1002-8), as required by Section 303(c) of the Clean Water Act.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT and ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This chapter provides a description of the human and environmental resources that could be affected by the Proposed Action, including elements specified by statute, regulation, executive order, or the Standards for Public Land Health, and presents comparative analyses of the direct, indirect and cumulative effects on the affected environment stemming from the implementation of the Proposed Action.

Cumulative impacts of the proposed action are shown in the analysis of each element. Past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions known to the BLM that may occur within the affected area are shown at the end of this section.

Potential effects to the following resources/concerns were evaluated to determine if detailed analysis is necessary. Consideration of some elements is to ensure compliance with laws, statutes or Executive Orders that impose certain requirements upon all Federal actions. Other items are relevant to the management of public lands in general, and to the BLM UFO in particular.

Any element not affected by the proposed action will not be analyzed; the reasons for no impact will be stated.

Element	Not Applicable or Not Present	Present, But No Impact	Applicable & Present; Brought Forward for Analysis
Air Quality		X	
ACEC	X		
Wilderness	X		
Lands with Wilderness Characteristics			X

Wild and Scenic Rivers	X		
Cultural			X
Native American Religious Concerns		X	
Farmlands, Prime/Unique	X		
Soils			X
Vegetation			X
Invasive, Non-native Species			X
Threatened and Endangered Species			X
Migratory Birds			X
Wildlife, Terrestrial			X
Wildlife, Aquatic		X	
Wetlands & Riparian Zones			X
Floodplains			X
Water Quality, Surface and Ground			X
Wastes, Hazardous or Solid			X
Environmental Justice			X
Range Management			X
Recreation			X
Socio-Economics			X

AREAS OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN, WILDERNESS (and WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS), WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS; PRIME AND UNIQUE FARMLANDS; AQUATIC WILDLIFE

There are not any Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC); Wilderness or Wilderness Study Areas; designated, suitable or eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers; prime or unique farmlands within or adjacent to the affected allotments. Habitat for aquatic wildlife is extremely limited within this area. There would not be an impact to these elements.

AIR QUALITY

Affected Environment: The nearest Class 1 Air shed (Black Canyon of the Gunnison Wilderness) is more than 11 miles from the project area and would not be impacted. The nearest community is Montrose. Air quality in this area complies with federal air quality standards according to the most recent Colorado Air Quality Control Commission’s Report to the Public (CDPHE 2012).

Environmental Consequences:

Proposed Action – Impact would be similar to the No Action alternative. Grazing in a rangeland setting does not involve livestock confinement over long periods of time. Gaseous

emissions and fugitive dust may be produced at locations where livestock may congregate, such as watering locations; however, concentrations of fugitive dust and/or gaseous emissions are expected to quickly dissipate by wind and topographic features. For these reasons, livestock grazing on these allotments is not expected to exceed air quality standards. Air quality would not be noticeably affected.

No Action Alternative – There would not be a change to current livestock management. Impacts would be similar to the proposed action.

Cumulative Impacts – Impacts to air quality associated with the proposed action would generally add incrementally for short periods of time with no measurable cumulative impacts beyond localized area. Dust or emissions would not measurably add cumulatively to dust or emissions from other sources.

LANDS WITH WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

Affected Environment: Each BLM office maintains an inventory of lands they manage that possess wilderness characteristics. Lands with wilderness characteristics in the Dry Creek Basin area are shown in figure 2. Requirements can be found in the inventory (link is below).

In 2010/2011 the UFO updated its inventory of lands with wilderness characteristics, and found that much of Dry Creek Basin possesses wilderness characteristics. See Uncompahgre Planning Area Wilderness Characteristics Inventory: 2011 Update - http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/fo/ufo/uncompahgre_rmp/lwc_inventory.html.

Environmental Consequences:

Proposed Action – If the class of livestock is changed from cattle to sheep (with at least two guard dogs per band), some people (especially those with children or dogs) could opt to avoid active grazing areas due to safety concerns. For those people, opportunities for unconfined recreation would be temporarily lost. Since outstanding opportunities for solitude *or* a primitive and unconfined type of recreation must exist for wilderness characteristics to be present, eliminating only opportunities for unconfined recreation would not preclude the presence of wilderness characteristics.

No Action Alternative – Since Dry Creek Basin has retained its wilderness characteristics under the current grazing management regime, it is very likely there would be no negative effects from continuing current management.

Cumulative Impacts – The proposed action would result in a slight reduction in opportunities for unconfined recreation due to the presence of guard dogs, and there is limited OHV use in the area that would reduce opportunities for solitude. At times when guard dogs and OHVs were in the same general area, they would cumulatively eliminate outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation in that location for the duration of time when both are present. Wilderness characteristics would continue to exist in other parts of the unit. It is anticipated that OHV use and guard dog use on the same piece of land at the same time would be

short in duration, and therefore would have negligible sustained effect on wilderness characteristics. The No Action Alternative would not change impacts.

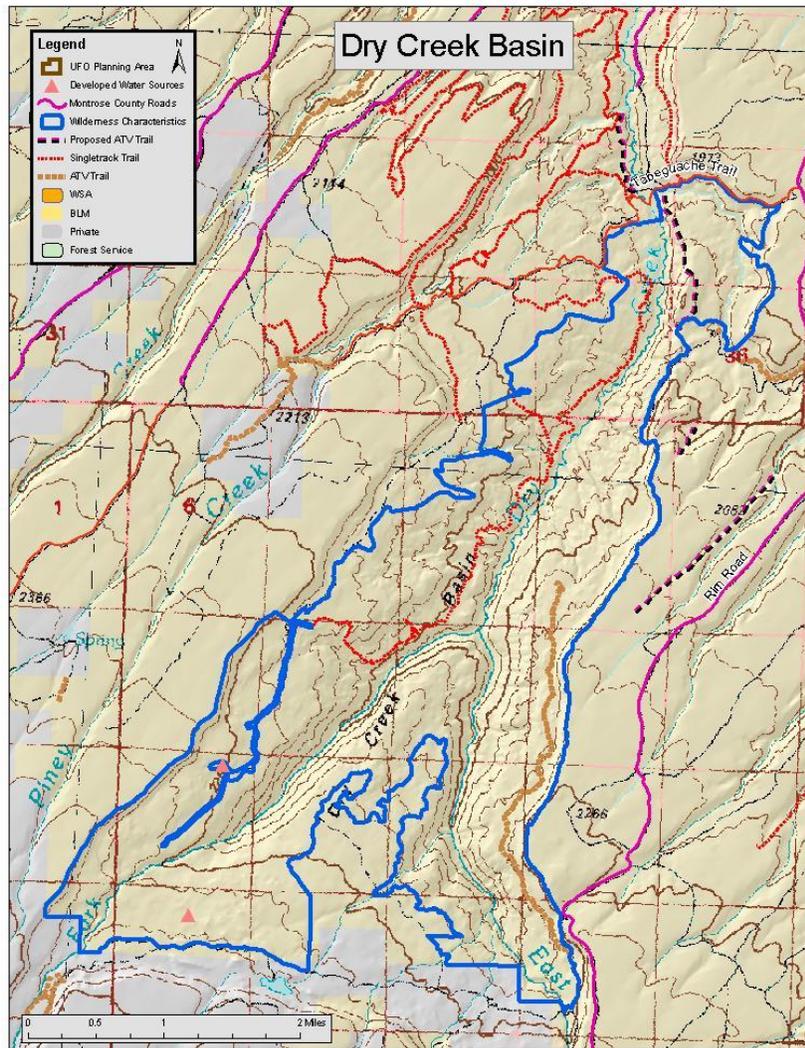


Figure 2

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Affected Environment: During Section 106 review of this allotment, a cultural resource assessment was completed following the procedures outlined in IM-WO-99-039. Copies of the existing cultural resource assessment are available in the Uncompahgre Field Office archaeology files. Subsequent cultural resource inventories may be conducted in areas where livestock concentrations coincide with high potential for discovering vulnerable historic properties. Based on available data, a low to moderate potential exists for historic properties in this allotment.

Environmental Consequences:

Common to both alternatives: There are no known historic properties considered to be

potentially ‘at risk’ from damage due to a change in livestock use in this grazing allotment.

Direct impacts that could occur where livestock concentrate include trampling, chiseling and churning of site soils, cultural features and artifacts, artifact breakage and impacts from standing, leaning and rubbing against above ground features and rock art.

Proposed Action – Converting livestock use to sheep would not result in new effects to historic properties.

No Action Alternative – Retaining the existing authorization would not result in new effects to historic properties.

Cumulative Impacts – none

NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS CONCERNS

No Native American Religious Concerns are known in the area, and none have been noted by Tribal authorities. Should recommended inventories or future consultations with Tribal authorities reveal the existence of such sensitive properties, appropriate mitigation and/or protection measures may be undertaken.

SOILS (includes a finding on Standard 1)

Affected Environment: The soils within the four allotments are largely a product of the local geologic parent material, climatic conditions, and the topographic position on the landscape. Sedimentary sandstone and shale formations occupy much of the surface geology of the area. The inter-bedded sandstone and shale units of the Dakota and Morrison formations, which dominate the surface over much of the area, weather to produce sandy and fine sandy loam textured soils.

Deeper soils with little rock content are mostly found on the interior portions of mesa tops and alluvial valleys. The shallower rocky soils are found along mesa rims and canyon side slopes. The soils in the lower and more arid portions of the area are mostly classified in the soil orders Aridisols (soils of dry climate regimes) and Entisols (very limited soil development), and have little organic matter throughout their vertical profile. At the higher elevations, soils are commonly in the soil orders Alfisols (high level of subsoil development) and Mollisols (soils having darkened, organic matter enriched surfaces).

The Ridgway Area Soil Survey, completed by the United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, contains detailed soils information for the allotted area and is shown in the table below.

The 2004 Land Health Assessment (LHA) classified 557 acres as “not meeting” land health standards for upland soils and 15,400 acres as “meeting with problems”. The reasons found for

the problems were: soil pedestals, low litter cover, high level of bare soil, low plant basal area, gullies, runoff drainages. The causes for the problems cited were old vegetation treatments, recreational impacts, wildlife, roads, drought, and historic grazing. More recent grazing could also have contributed to these impacts.

In an effort to mitigate overall grazing impacts and grazing impacts found in allotments that were “not meeting” and “meeting with problems”, new Terms and Conditions were implemented associated with the Roubideau land health assessment and the grazing permits issued in 2005 to help address problems where bare soil, gullies and low basal conditions exist.

Soil Unit Name	Geomorphic Description	Taxonomic Order	Texture	Runoff Potential	Soil Erodibility (Kw) Higher=More Erodable (0.2-.69)	Acres
Arabrab-Evpark-Parkelei complex	cliffs, ledges				0	9053
Rock outcrop, Ustic Torriorthents	escarpments on cuestas, escarpments on mesas	Entisols		High	0	3474
Barboncito-Rock outcrop complex	dipslopes on cuestas, mesas	Aridisols	loamy	High	0.32	3203
Mags-Lazear-Rock outcrop complex	mesas, structural benches	Aridisols	fine	High	0.28	3171
Barboncito-Gapmesa complex	dipslopes on cuestas	Aridisols	fine-loamy	High	0.32	2238
Walknolls-Rock outcrop complex	cliffs, ledges			Very high	0.1	1924
Blancot-Gapmesa complex	valley sides on cuesta valleys, mesas, structural benches	Aridisols	fine-loamy	Medium	0.28	1121
Lazear-Blancot-Rock outcrop complex	valley sides on cuesta valleys, mesas, structural benches	Aridisols	fine-loamy	Medium	0.28	863
Aridic Ustifluvents	flood plains on cuesta valleys				0.28	594
Moento-Beje-Rock outcrop complex	dipslopes on cuestas, hills on mesas	Mollisols	loamy	Very high	0	533
Twentyfive-Gapmesa-Rock outcrop	ledges			Very high	0.32	187

Environmental Consequences:

General – Grazing can directly impact soil conditions by reducing vegetative cover and biological soil crust. These two factors are critical in maintaining soil health and moisture content. If overgrazed, the activity can remove the organic matter that is normally weathered by biological and chemical processes providing nutrients for continued plant growth. Disturbance of soil crust reduces nutrient cycling, water infiltration rates (Belnap and Gardner 1993), and moisture retention in the soil.

Overgrazing can also reduce the native perennial vegetation. In overgrazed areas where perennial vegetation and soil crust is degraded, annual weeds such as cheatgrass can become dominant. Annual vegetation provides soil stabilization for a short period of time compared to perennials and prevents soil crust establishment by forming a dense monoculture of tightly spaced plants (Rosentreter 1994; Kaltenecker 1997).

Proposed Action – The proposed action reduces grazing use by 15% in two allotments, incorporates a rest-rotation program, changes season of use in some areas, reduces AUMs and continues existing terms and conditions implemented in 2005 associated with land health, all of which would further promote proper grazing management. Overgrazing is not anticipated, and the overall impacts from grazing are expected to continue to improve with management changes to the allotments.

No Action Alternative – The No Action Alternative would continue current management, and could have improved or neutral impacts for the few areas documented to have soil quality problems related to current grazing practices as the revised terms and conditions continue to be implemented.

Cumulative Impacts – Continued surface disturbance associated with grazing could be additive to other impacts from activities on private and federal lands in the watershed. Other activities causing impacts to soils on BLM and Forest Service lands in the watershed include rights of ways and recreation and travel infrastructure. The types of impacts expected from other actions in the watershed would be similar to those described for the proposed action. The cumulative effect of all the impacts in the watershed could contribute to decreased soil health.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for upland soils: Overall, most acres meet Standard 1. The majority of problems or concerns across the unit appear related to low plant basal coverage, lack of vegetation diversity, and bare soils. The Proposed Action would gradually improve problems associated with bare soil and low plant basal as improved grazing practices are implemented. Other causes of bare soil and low plant basal such as wildlife and recreation use will not be affected by the Terms and Conditions and deferred rest-rotation grazing strategies.

VEGETATION (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: Vegetation on the Pipeline allotment is a mix of pinyon-juniper/sagebrush, sagebrush/grass, and sagebrush/mountain shrub communities. The Franklin Mesa allotment supports mostly sagebrush/grass communities, with some saltbush/grass and small amounts of pinyon-juniper vegetation. The Dry Creek Basin allotment includes a mix of saltbush/grass, sagebrush/grass, and pinyon-juniper/sagebrush. The South Piney allotment has a mix of pinyon-juniper/Gambel oak, pinyon-juniper/sagebrush, grass, sagebrush/grass and pinyon-juniper communities. A map and complete description of vegetation types found throughout these allotments can be found in the Roubideau Land Health Assessment (BLM 2005).

The Land Health Assessment for Standard 3 -- Plant and Animal Communities shows that the majority of the Pipeline allotment does not meet or has problems meeting Standard 3. While vegetation problems vary and are not present in all parts of the allotment, problems include low cool and warm season perennial grass cover, low perennial forb cover, poor shrub vigor, apparent pinyon-juniper invasion, and the presence of exotic, invasive species. Several factors are thought to contribute to these problems, with road management and recreation use a major

contributor, along with poorly implemented and managed past vegetation treatments, wildlife use, and the seral stage of the vegetation. Vegetation trend in this allotment is unclear.

There are also concerns with vegetation health in the Franklin Mesa allotment, where the majority of acreage does not meet Standard 3. Vegetation problems include low perennial cool and warm season grass cover across almost all of the allotment, low perennial forb cover, widespread problems with shrub vigor, and low plant diversity. This allotment seemed particularly affected by the drought of the early 2000s. In addition, road management, general recreation use and OHV use, historic livestock grazing, and historic heavy use by wildlife appear to be the primary cause of poor conditions. There are presently two long term trend studies that monitor vegetation trend in this allotment. Trend studies indicate stable conditions in the allotment.

Vegetation in the South Piney allotment is in better condition, with the majority of this allotment meeting Standard 3 with problems, while other portions fully meet Standard 3, and only limited areas not meeting the Standard. Parts of the allotment have low perennial cool and warm season grass cover, low perennial forb cover, and problems with shrub vigor. Seral stage of the vegetation, poorly managed or implemented past vegetation treatments, and wildlife use are thought to be the primary causes of the vegetation problems. Trend studies in the allotment indicate a generally stable trend.

The Dry Creek Basin allotment is also in better condition with the majority of the allotment meeting Standard 3 with problems, other portions which fully meet Standard 3, and only limited areas not meeting the Standard. The notable problems with vegetation include areas with low perennial warm and cool season grass cover, low perennial forb cover, low shrub vigor and hedging, as well as sites with low plant diversity. Causes appear to include OHV use, road management, the seral stage of the vegetation, historic livestock grazing, historic heavy wildlife use, and past reservoir construction. Trend data indicates generally stable conditions.

Since the Roubideau Land Health Assessment was completed, measures to improve livestock grazing management have been taken in the form of new grazing permit terms and conditions. Other large-scale management activities which have been implemented to address land health problems include converting the region from an open travel designation to one where motorized and mechanized vehicles are limited to designated routes, and a vegetation management strategy to treat and restore a more natural vegetation mosaic across the landscape.

Environmental Consequences:

Proposed Action – Impacts from the proposed action are expected to be neutral to vegetation and not result in overall declining vegetation conditions. Because permit terms and conditions associated with land health are being extended to the new permit, the same grazing Best Management Practices would be in place, regardless of whether sheep or cattle graze the allotment. These include the following measures to address vegetation problems: 1) Limiting dormant season utilization to an average of 50% use on the palatable upland species (including shrubs), 2) Limiting duration of use during active growing periods to no more than 14 days in the growing season on any given “grazing area” within the allotment to avoid grazing of regrowth, 3) Limiting spring and fall use during the same year to special circumstances, 4) Deferring

grazing on vegetation treatments or burns to provide for the establishment of healthy native vegetation, 5) Looking for opportunities to provide season long rest for all areas of the allotment once every five years to build up fuels and encourage natural fires, 6) Periodic authorization of grazing outside the time period specified in the grazing permit to vary the time of grazing impacts to plants and provide benefit to vegetation community. Additional conditions that regulate sheep bedding are included to reduce impacts of heavy concentrations of livestock on vegetation. Detailed explanations of how these measures reduce impacts to vegetation, including the vegetation problems listed above are included in EA# CO-150-2005-011 Roubideau LHA Grazing Permit Renewal.

While sheep place greater browsing pressure on shrubs than cattle do, the proposed rest-rotational grazing system that is informed by regular monitoring should mitigate this pressure. The grazing system includes periodic year-long rest and provides for alternating grazing seasons over the years. Over a multi-year period, the rest or seasonal deferment would provide years where shrubs would be able to recover carbohydrate reserves from winters of heavy browse use, complete seed production, and provide for establishment and recruitment. Existing problems with perennial grasses and forbs would be reduced by increased management during the critical spring growing season in addition to the overall reduction of 15% in AUMs from Franklin Mesa and the lower portion of Dry Creek. Elsewhere, the rotational grazing system would provide the same benefits for herbaceous species as it does for shrubs as described above.

No Action Alternative – No changes to vegetation would be expected under this alternative.

Cumulative Impacts – The alternatives, when combined with past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions, would have negligible to minor beneficial impacts to vegetation at the watershed level. Carefully managed sheep grazing would be compatible with allowing vegetation to improve from other measures such as improved route and recreation management. Because a moderately large area of land is being influenced (approximately 24,000 acres), any change could be detectable at the larger watershed level. Vegetation at the watershed scale is experiencing a variety of impacts on federal lands such as those associated with wildfire, vegetation treatments, livestock grazing, wildlife use, rights of ways, recreation, adjacent private inholdings, and travel infrastructure. Impacts to vegetation resulting from activities on private property in the watershed include cultivation, irrigation, livestock production, residential and commercial land development, and mining. The scale and scope of these other impacts reduces the degree to which vegetation changes resulting from these alternatives would affect overall vegetation health in the watershed.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Wildlife, Aquatic; Wildlife, Terrestrial; and Invasive, Non-native Species): Under both the Proposed Action and the No Action alternatives, there should be no short term change to land health status. Over the long term, vegetation health may improve under both alternatives, since they would help sustain improvements that arise from other management actions.

INVASIVE, NON-NATIVE SPECIES (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: The allotments range in elevation from 8000ft at the high end to approximately 6000ft at the lower end. Noxious weeds are primarily associated with developments in the area and all allotments are transected by constructed roads, pipelines, energy towers, recreation trails and facilities, and livestock management facilities which are all common vectors for the spread of weeds.

The most common noxious weed in the area is Russian knapweed (*Acroptilon repens*). This weed is frequently found along roadways, pipelines, recreation trails/facilities and livestock water facilities. It is easily spread down roads, pipelines, and maintained trails. In reservoirs it is normally confined to the footprint of the basin; however, there have been incidents where it has moved into the adjacent rangeland or down-drainage. Other common noxious weeds in the area include whitetop (*Cadaria draba*), burdock (*Arctium minus*), and common cocklebur (*Xanthium strumarium*). There is oxeye daisy (*Chrysanthemum leucanthemum*) around the Olathe reservoirs.

Environmental Consequences:

Proposed Action – Grazing has been occurring on the allotment and is authorized to continue under the current permit. The proposed action to add sheep to the class of livestock on the permit would not have additional adverse impacts on noxious weed spread or establishment of new weed infestations beyond what uses are already occurring. Livestock facilities and other developed sites are monitored for noxious weeds to reduce weed establishment and spread to other areas. Weed spread would also be curtailed through Best Management Practices and range management strategies such as rest rotations, deferred rotations, proper seasons of use, and utilization levels. All these practices support healthy landscapes which tend to be more resilient to disturbance and weed invasion.

No Action Alternative – Cattle grazing would continue. Impacts would be similar to the proposed action.

Cumulative Impacts – The alternatives, when combined with past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions, would have negligible impacts to the introduction and establishment of noxious weeds at the watershed level.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Wildlife, Aquatic; Wildlife, Terrestrial; and Vegetation): There should not be a short term change to land health status. Over the long term, vegetation health may improve under both alternatives, resulting in fewer opportunities for weeds to establish.

THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND SENSITIVE SPECIES (includes a finding on Standard 4)

Affected Environment: The Uncompahgre Field Office refers to the most current Colorado county list provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to analyze the effects of a proposed action on threatened, endangered and candidate species and designated critical habitat

for these species. In accordance with *BLM Manual 6840*, the goal of management is to prevent a trend toward federal listing or loss of viability for sensitive species.

A review was completed and the project file has a list of potentially occurring federal status species within the UFO and provides assessments for their occurrence within the project area. No threatened, endangered, or federally protected species or habitats occur in the proposed action area.

A review was completed and the project file has a list that identifies species of special management concern that are known or have potential to occur within the UFO along with occurrence assessments for the area. Several sensitive species are known or have the potential to occur in the project area. Those that have potential habitat and are expected in the area include desert bighorn sheep, spotted bat, Townsend's big-eared bat, fringed myotis, bald eagle, American peregrine falcon, northern goshawk, ferruginous hawk, and Brewer's sparrow.

The allotments are approximately four miles from overall bighorn sheep range on the USFS, six miles from range on BLM, and seven miles from bighorn production area as mapped by CPW. Portions of the Dry Creek area could potentially provide suitable habitat for desert bighorn sheep in the future. It is well documented that bighorn sheep can be infected with various domestic sheep diseases which reduce bighorn sheep vitality and may result in death (Besser et al. 2012; Coggins, 1988; Foreyt, 1994; Jessup 1985; Lawrence et al. 2010). Based on information from Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) (WSWG 2012) and input from Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) biologists, the Uncompahgre Field Office completed a probability of interaction model at the landscape scale to assess bighorn and domestic sheep interactions. This model indicates that the allotments in this proposal are currently within the "Some Probability of Interaction" areas.

Environmental Consequences:

Proposed Action –The proposed action would have no effect to any threatened, endangered, or federally protected species or habitats that occur in the proposed action area. See the Vegetation section for potential impacts to habitat.

The project area does not contain identified habitat for any listed or BLM sensitive plant species. The likelihood of direct mortality of BLM sensitive animals is low because of the small areas of site disturbance and the high level of mobility of most animal species. Potential impacts of this disturbance to animals may include movement to less optimal habitat, increased energy expenditure, or greater exposure to predation, which may in turn cause increased mortality or reduced reproduction; however, the disturbance events would be of short duration and mostly localized, and as a consequence, disturbance to special status animals is not likely to cause measurable impacts to species.

While the addition of another class of livestock (domestic sheep) to the allotments would have no adverse impacts on most of the sensitive species, it could affect individual desert bighorn sheep, but is not likely to result in a trend toward federal listing. Terms and conditions #16 was developed from WAFWA Guidelines and input from CPW. With the proposed season of use for domestic sheep not within desert bighorn sheep breeding season (August 1-September 30), and

the terms and conditions # 16 for bighorn sheep, the addition of domestic sheep would not increase the “probability of interaction” between domestic and wild sheep and should not cause a trend toward federal listing or loss of viability for desert bighorn sheep.

No Action Alternative – The current conditions and trends would continue. Impacts would be similar to the proposed action, with the exception of potential impacts to bighorn sheep.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Threatened & Endangered species: There would be no impact on federally listed threatened or endangered species or their habitats. The action may affect individuals of some species, but not likely to result in a trend toward federal listing (see 6840 TES Wildlife and Plants Report).

Cumulative Impacts – The alternatives, when combined with past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions, would have negligible to minor beneficial impacts to vegetation and TES species habitat at the watershed level (see the Vegetation section.) Impacts to vegetation and TES species habitat resulting from activities on private property in the watershed include cultivation, irrigation, livestock production, residential and commercial land development, and mining.

MIGRATORY BIRDS

Affected Environment: Plant communities within the analysis area provide habitats for a variety of migratory bird species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service list of Birds of Conservation Concern was used as to complete this analysis (USFWS 2008, Table 14, p.32, BCR 16 [Southern Rockies/Colorado Plateau]).

A review was completed and the project file identifies the species from this list which are known or have potential to occur in the UFO and which are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), and assesses their potential for occurring in the project area.

Environmental Consequences:

Proposed Action – Refer to the Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species Section for a discussion of general impacts to species and habitats. Direct impacts through mortality or disturbance of nesting birds would be avoided by the requirement that activities associated with range management be conducted outside of the nesting season, or if during the nesting season, that nest searches would be conducted and areas around active nests avoided. (Surface-disturbing range projects would need to be analyzed in a separate document). As a consequence, the proposed action may impact individuals, but is unlikely to have a measurable impact on species distribution, abundance, or population viability on a landscape scale. The determination is based on terms and conditions of the proposed action, including measures for nest protection. The addition of another class of livestock (sheep) to the allotment would have no adverse impacts on migratory birds.

No Action Alternative – The current conditions and trends would continue. Impacts

would be similar to the proposed action.

Cumulative Impacts – The alternatives, when combined with past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions, would have negligible impacts to migratory bird species habitat at the watershed level. Impacts to vegetation and migratory bird species habitat resulting from activities on private property in the watershed include cultivation, irrigation, livestock production, residential and commercial land development, and mining.

WILDLIFE, TERRESTRIAL (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: The project area supports a variety of terrestrial wildlife species including reptiles, small mammals, carnivores, birds, and big game. Example species include garter snake, cottontail rabbit, least chipmunk, coyote, bobcat, black bear, mountain lion, elk, mule deer, red-tailed hawk, and a large number of songbird species. Terrestrial wildlife species of concern are addressed in the Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species Section. Colorado Parks and Wildlife has mapped portions of the project area as mule deer winter range, severe winter and winter concentration areas, and elk winter range and severe winter areas.

Environmental Consequences:

Proposed Action – Refer to the Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species and Migratory Bird Sections for a discussion of general impacts to species and habitats. Any direct mortality of small animals from surface disturbing activities or vehicle travel associated with range management activities would be very infrequent and have negligible impacts to species. Impacts to wintering big game would not occur due to this action (surface-disturbing range projects would need to be analyzed in a separate document). Travel restrictions and seasonal restrictions implemented in the Dry Creek Travel Management Plan (CO-150-2008-0033) would also provide for protections from disturbance during crucial winter months (Dec 1 – April 15). For these reasons, the proposed action may impact individual animals, but would not result in measurable impacts to species distribution, abundance, or population viability for any terrestrial wildlife species. The addition of another class of livestock (sheep) to the allotment would have no adverse impacts on wildlife species habitat.

No Action Alternative – The current conditions and trends would continue. Impacts would be similar to the proposed action.

Cumulative Impacts – The alternatives, when combined with past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions, will have negligible to minor beneficial impacts to vegetation and terrestrial wildlife species habitat at the watershed level (see the Vegetation section). Impacts to vegetation and terrestrial wildlife species habitat resulting from activities on private property in the watershed include cultivation, irrigation, livestock production, residential and commercial land development, and mining.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Vegetation; Invasive, Non-native Species; and Wildlife, Aquatic): The proposed action would be unlikely to influence the current status for terrestrial wildlife and habitat. Therefore,

the proposed action would meet the criteria for this Land Health Standard.

WETLANDS & RIPARIAN ZONES (includes a finding on Standard 2)

Affected Environment: Within the Pipeline or Franklin Mesa allotments, there are no perennial or intermittent streams with the potential to support a riparian zone, and there are no inventoried wetlands. South Piney allotment has 3.6 miles of the East Fork of Dry Creek, 4.1 miles of the West Fork of Dry Creek, and 0.06 miles of Dry Creek. Dry Creek Basin allotment has over 6.4 miles of Dry Creek which pass through the allotment. These streams are mainly located in canyon bottoms and dominated by woody vegetation. Both of these features help protect them from impacts of livestock use, and accordingly, they were found to be in Proper Functioning Condition, and rated as fully meeting Standard 2 during the 2004 Roubideau Land Health Assessment. There are no inventoried wetlands in either of these allotments.

Riparian vegetation along the streams includes Rio Grande cottonwood trees (*Populus deltoides ssp. Wislizenii*) at lower elevations and narrowleaf cottonwood (*Populus angustifolia*) at higher elevations with occasional hybrids between these two occurring in small stands. Sandbar willow (*Salix exigua*), strapleaf willow (*Salix ligulifolia*), thinleaf alder (*Alnus tenuifolia*), and water birch (*Betula occidentalis*) are the other main woody riparian species near the water's edge. On higher terraces, skunkbush sumac (*Rhus aromatica*), silver buffaloberry (*Shepherdia argentea*), red osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*), Woods' rose (*Rosa woodsii*), spearleaf rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus linifolius*) and clematis (*Clematis ligusticifolia*) are the most common species. Common reed grass (*Phragmites australis*) is present in some areas.

Environmental Consequences:

Proposed Action – There would not be riparian impacts in Pipeline or Franklin Mesa allotments. No changes to riparian condition are anticipated in South Piney and Dry Creek Basin allotments, since the protective permit terms on the existing permit will be extended onto the new permit. The permit terms include limitations on seasonal utilization of native woody riparian species (to 30% use) and seasonal herbaceous forage utilization to 50%. Light use levels would permit the native woody species to sustain and/or increase their cover, better compete against salt cedar and Russian olive, and contribute more to stream and wetland functionality. Limited seasonal herbaceous forage use would ensure that adequate stubble remains along streambanks to trap sediment and protect the floodplain from erosion. Furthermore, these utilization limits should discourage long term use of the riparian zone by livestock and thereby limit bank trampling and erosion. The fact that the streams are currently in good condition provides additional evidence that past sheep grazing and current cattle grazing practices have not caused notable degradation, and these conditions are expected to continue under the new permit.

No Action Alternative – There will be no changes to riparian or wetland condition under this alternative.

Cumulative Impacts – The alternatives, when combined with past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions would have negligible impacts to riparian zones or wetlands at the watershed level. Grazing practices are and would be compatible with maintaining the current healthy riparian conditions. Riparian areas at the larger, watershed scale are experiencing more

substantive impacts on federal and private lands. On federal lands, these include water depletion, flow alterations, livestock grazing and wildlife use, rights of ways, recreation and travel infrastructure. Additional impacts arise from activities on private property in the region, and include cultivation, irrigation, mining, livestock production, residential and commercial land development, and road construction and maintenance.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for riparian systems: Under the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternatives, the streams in these allotments currently meet Standard 2 and are expected to continue in this status.

FLOODPLAINS

Affected Environment: The allotments contain portions of Dry Creek. Dry Creek is a mapped FEMA floodplain and contains broad floodplains in portions of Dry Creek Canyon on BLM lands and sites of relatively narrow floodplains through more confined areas higher in the basin.

Environmental Consequences:

Proposed Action – Terms and Conditions would likely reduce livestock impacts and help improve or maintain the beneficial and natural functions of floodplains as required by Executive Order 11988 (Bureau of Land Management, 1979). Measures include 1) salt block placement at least 1/4 mile from live water, which would help to minimize concentrated livestock use along stream systems, 2) requiring actual use records on selected allotments and performing use supervision checks allows the BLM to more accurately assess impacts to riparian and stream channel conditions and make needed adjustments to the grazing operation in a timely fashion, and 3) limiting forage utilization to 35% in riparian areas would help minimize direct impacts to riparian vegetation, the soil surface, and channel banks, which are key components to properly functioning floodplains.

No Action Alternative – There will be no changes to riparian condition under this alternative. It would be expected that grazing practices without rest-rotation could degrade physical conditions along floodplains, possibly increasing the magnitude of flooding downstream.

Cumulative Impacts – Surface disturbance associated with grazing would add to impacts from activities on private and federal lands in the watershed. Other activities causing impacts to floodplains on BLM and Forest Service lands in the watershed include rights of ways and recreation and travel infrastructure. The types of impacts expected from other actions in the watershed would be similar to those described for the proposed action. The cumulative effect of all the impacts in the watershed could contribute to decreased capacity of floodplains to dissipate flooding events.

WATER QUALITY, SURFACE AND GROUND (includes a finding on Standard 5)

Affected Environment: The allotments lie within the Dry Creek Basin, a major tributary to the Uncompahgre River. The table below lists the water quality classifications for the described surface waters:

<i>4th Level Watershed</i>	<i>Stream Segment</i>	<i>Stream Classification¹⁻⁵</i>
14030003 Uncompahgre River	Mainstem of East Fork Dry Creek, Pryor Creek and West Fork Dry Creek from their sources to their confluence; mainstem of Spring Creek, West Fork Spring Creek and Middle Spring Creek from the source to Popular Road at the mouth of Spring Canyon, and mainstem of Mexican Gulch from the source to the Section line dividing Section 19 and 30, T49N, R9W.	Aq Life Cold 1 Recreation E Agriculture

- 1- Waters are designated either warm or cold based on water temperature regime. Class 1 water's are capable of sustaining a wide variety of cold or warm water biota, while class 2 waters are not.
- 2- Recreation Class E - Existing Primary Contact Use. These surface waters are used for primary contact recreation or have been used for such activities since November 28, 1975.
- 3-Recreation Class P - Potential Primary Contact Use. These surface waters have the potential to be used for primary contact recreation.
- 4-Recreation Class N - Not Primary Contact Use
- 5- Waters that are suitable for irrigating crops usually grown in Colorado.
- 6- Waters that are suitable or intended to become suitable for potable water supplies.

The table below shows the surface waters in the area that are on Colorado's impaired waters, 303(d) or Monitoring and Evaluation list (CDPHE, Water Quality Control Commission, 5 CCR 1002-93).

Segment Description	Portion	Colorado's Monitoring & Evaluation Parameter(s)	Clean Water Act Section 303(d) Impairment	303(d) Priority
Tributaries to Uncompahgre River, South Canal to Gunnison River	all		Se	H

In addition to the state's water quality classifications and numeric standards, all surface waters of the State are subject to the Basic Standards (Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Water Quality Control Commission, Regulation NO. 31), which in part reads: state surface waters shall be free from substances attributable to human-caused point or nonpoint source discharge in amounts, concentrations or combinations that:

1. Can settle to form bottom deposits detrimental to the beneficial uses. Depositions are stream bottom buildup of materials which include but are not limited to anaerobic sludges, mine slurry or tailings, silt, or mud; or
2. Form floating debris, scum, or other surface materials sufficient to harm existing beneficial uses; or

3. Produce color, odor, or other conditions in such a degree as to create a nuisance or harm existing beneficial uses or impart any undesirable taste to significant edible aquatic species or to the water; or
4. Are harmful to the beneficial uses or toxic to humans, animals, plants or aquatic life; or
5. Produce a predominance of undesirable aquatic life; or
6. Cause a film on the surface or produce a deposit on shorelines.

Water quality and macroinvertebrate sampling conducted in 2003 associated with the land health assessment did not reveal any water quality exceedences. A complete organic, inorganic and metals suite was analyzed at two sites, and E. Coli bacteria was analyzed at one site. All of the samples returned results below the state water quality standards.

Macroinvertebrates were collected at two locations. The results were compared to reference sites established by the state of Colorado as well as prior monitoring. This data as well as the water quality data and stream morphology characteristics were used to determine the status and trend for Land Health Standard 5- water quality and found to “meet” standards.

Standard water quality parameters were collected to make an assessment of the water quality in the area. The biggest water quality concern related to grazing is accelerated sediment yield from upland soil and stream channel erosion. Much of the sediment eroded from the uplands is transported during intense monsoonal rainfall events in the summer months. These rainfall events are usually short duration, typically lasting from one to three hours. The resultant runoff in the allotments receiving streams is also short duration, making quantitative water quality assessments difficult. Thus, to assess a stream’s potential for suspended sediment loading from the allotments, soil surface conditions are used in place of water quality analyses. These indicators used for the assessment include the amount of bare soil surface, plant basal coverage, amount of plant litter on the soil surface. Low amounts of plant litter and plant basal cover, and high amounts of bare soil surface (soil surface with no plant, rock, or litter cover) are indicative of soils susceptible to high rates of erosion.

Environmental Consequences:

Proposed Action – The Proposed Action should continue to reduce the potential to mobilize sediment by implementation of the permit terms and conditions from 2004 and as outlined in the proposed action. The terms and conditions along with rest-rotation should help address the potential for mobilizing sediment from uplands by increasing ground cover and preventing nutrients and biological pathogens generated by livestock from reaching the stream.

No Action Alternative – Current livestock grazing would continue. Grazing practices such as rest-rotation would not be implemented under the no-action alternative. This could result in increases in bare soil and accelerated rates of erosion in those areas impacted by grazing, which could degrade water quality by increasing biological pathogens, nutrients and sedimentation.

Cumulative Impacts – Surface disturbance associated with grazing could add to impacts from activities on private and federal lands in the watershed. Other activities causing impacts to water quality on BLM and Forest Service lands in the watershed include: rights of ways and recreation

and travel infrastructure. The types of impacts expected from other actions in the watershed would be similar to those described for the proposed action. The cumulative effect of all the impacts in the watershed could contribute to decreased water quality by increasing suspended sediment.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for water quality: Overall, all acreage meets Standard 5. The majority of problems or concerns across the unit appear related to bare soil and low plant basal coverage. The Proposed Action would gradually improve problems associated with bare soil and low plant basal as improved grazing practices are implemented and reduce the potential to mobilize sediment and nutrients. Other causes of bare soil and low plant basal such as wildlife and recreation would not be affected by the changes in Terms and Conditions.

WASTES, HAZARDOUS OR SOLID

Affected Environment: Hazardous and solid wastes are not a part of the natural environment.

Environmental Consequences:

Proposed Action – There should be little or no direct or indirect impacts from the proposed action. Potential sources of hazardous wastes would be from the use of herbicides/pesticides, and fuels and lubricants used for equipment. Standard lease terms require adherence to applicable state and federal laws, which would include the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) and the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA). Improper disposal of solid wastes is prohibited by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). Illegal disposal of hazardous or solid wastes has generally not been an issue with grazing permits, at least in the more recent past. The rare, isolated instance of spilled or abandoned wastes would be handled in accordance with the Uncompahgre Field Office Oil and Hazardous Materials Incident Contingency Plan.

No Action Alternative – The impacts would be the same as for the Proposed Action.

Cumulative Impacts – None.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Affected Environment: While analyzing a federal action, BLM identifies and addresses, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects of program, policies, or activities on minority or low income populations. Environmental Justice involves fair treatment, which means that no group of people, including a racial, ethnic, or socio-economic group, should bear a disproportionate share of negative environmental consequences resulting from a federal action.

Environmental Consequences:

Proposed Action – The proposed action was developed and based on a request by a livestock operator to change the class of livestock he grazed on public lands. The proposed action would not impact populations and would not have disproportionate or adverse human health or environmental effect on minority or low-income populations.

No Action Alternative – There would not be a disproportionate or adverse human health or environmental effect on minority or low-income populations.

Cumulative Impacts – None.

RANGELAND MANAGEMENT

Affected Environment: The allotments are located within 7-15 miles of Montrose, CO, and are an important part of the grazing base across the Uncompahgre Plateau. The allotments are a collective 23,903 acres with an associated 1,267AUMs of public land grazing.

Environmental Consequences:

Proposed Action – The proposed action would add sheep to the class of livestock allowing the permittee greater flexibility within his ranch operations, and would allow for changes in range management for improved land health. With modifications made on the allotment and on the permit, such as grazing strategy, AUM reduction, and season of use differences, the proposed action should improve overall management in the area.

No Action – The no action would allow for the permit to be transferred without modifications. This action does not address the needs of the permittee, address conflict resolution, or make modifications to the permit for the maintenance and enhancement of land health.

Cumulative Impacts – The alternatives, when combined with past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions, would have beneficial impacts to rangeland management.

RECREATION

Affected Environment: All four allotments are located within high recreational use areas. The Tabeguache Trail, a very popular mountain bike trail year round, runs through Dry Creek Basin and Franklin Mesa allotments. On all four allotments, dispersed recreation uses such as running, hiking, horseback riding, camping, mountain biking, rock crawling, ATV and motorcycle riding, and small game hunting are very common year-round. Big game hunting is also a very popular recreational use. Currently there are approximately thirteen big game and lion hunting permits for Game Management Unit 62 (the allotments in this proposal make-up only a small portion of unit 62). Previously there have also been permits issued for mountain biking and jeep touring events.

Environmental Consequences:

Proposed Action – The proposed action could have the potential to displace recreational use during the month of May due to possible conflicts with sheep dogs and recreational users (especially users with dogs). Recreational use is much less frequent during the other times sheep would be on the allotments (12/15 – 3/10). Potential conflicts could also occur with mountain lion hunting due to the nature of the hunt requiring unleashed dogs to track mountain lions. If there are conflicts with recreational users these could be mitigated to an acceptable level by having the sheep guard dogs tied up during daylight hours.

No Action Alternative – Cattle grazing would continue. There have not been identified conflict between cattle grazing and recreation use, other than gates between pastures or allotments occasionally left open.

Cumulative Impacts – The Proposed Action and alternatives, when combined with past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions would have negligible impacts to recreation. Impacts to recreation associated with this proposed action would generally have no measurable cumulative impacts beyond the localized area.

SOCIO ECONOMICS

Affected Environment: Ranching is an important part of history, culture, and economy in Montrose County. Ranchers face such challenges as fluctuating livestock prices, increasing equipment and operating costs, fluctuating water availability, and changing federal regulations. Replacing public land grazing with private land pasture would be an expensive endeavor for the permittee. In 2008, the average fee per AUM on private lands in Colorado was \$14.50 (USDA, National Agricultural Statistical Service 2010) compared to the current federal rate of \$1.35 per AUM.

Environmental Consequences:

Proposed Action – The proposed action would allow the permittee to graze sheep, which is his primary interest. The permittee would not need to find private pastures for his sheep, which would not be economically feasible. If cattle were grazed, there would not be a change from the current situation.

No Action Alternative – Under this alternative, in order to graze sheep, the permittee would have to sell the allotments and find private pasture at a more expensive rate. There would not be a change from the current situation if the permittee grazed cattle.

Cumulative Impacts – The Proposed Action would not have noticeable cumulative effects over the broader regions, as livestock would continue to be grazed. The No Action could have negative socioeconomic impacts over the broader region if the permittee were forced to sell sheep because he is not able to graze on the allotments.

PERSONS / AGENCIES CONSULTED
Colorado Parks and Wildlife

INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW: The following BLM personnel have contributed to and have reviewed this environmental assessment.

Name	Title	Area of Responsibility
K. Homstad	Fire, Fuels Specialist	Air Quality, Forest Management, Fuels,
E.Franz	Recreation Specialist	Wilderness/WSA, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Lands with Wilderness Charateristics,
G. Hadden	Archeologist	Cultural, Native American Religious Concerns,
J. Sondergard	Hydrologist	Farmalnds, Prime/Unique, Soils, Floodplains, Water Quality, Surface and Ground.
A. Clements	Ecologist	Vegetation, Riparian, Wetlands
L. Rogers	Rangeland Management Specialits	Invasive Non-native species, Range Management
M. Siders	Wildlife Biologist	Threatened and Endangered Species, Migratory Birds, Wildlife Terrestrial, Wildlife Aquatic
A. Kraus	Hazardous Waste Specialist	Wastes, Hazardous or Solid
B. Krickbaum	NEPA Specialist/Planner	NEPA Compliance/review, Environmental Justice
L. Reed	Reality Specialist	Access, Reality Authorizations
J. Jackson	Recreation Specialist	Transportation, Recreation, Visual Resources

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