

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Uncompahgre Field Office
2465 S. Townsend Ave.
Montrose, CO 81401**

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

DOI-BLM-CO-S050-2014-0037 EA

Project Name: North Delta Grazing Permit Renewals

Location: Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Public Lands North of Delta, Colorado

Applicant: Grazing Term Permit Holders

Background

The BLM Uncompahgre Field Office has completed preliminary Environment Assessment (EA), # DOI-BLM-CO-S050-2014-0037 which analyzes the effect of renewing ten grazing permits on nine allotments in the North Delta Land Health Assessment Area, located North of Delta, Colorado.

BLM provided a public scoping and comment period from November 17 through December 5, 2014. The scoping period was extended until March 6, 2015. BLM received four comment letters containing several comments, which were addressed in the EA.

BLM provided a 30-day comment period from August 25 through September 24, 2015. BLM received 14 comment letters with a multitude of comments, which were addressed in the EA in Appendix C.

Finding of No Significant Impact

I have reviewed the Final Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-CO-S050-0037, dated June, 2016. After consideration of the environmental effects as described in the EA, and incorporated herein, I have determined the Modified Grazing Alternative (BLM's Preferred Alternative) identified in the EA will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment and that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required. The Modified Grazing Alternative (BLM's Preferred Alternative) includes Design Features, Terms and Conditions of the permit, Best Management Practices, and Conservation Measures as part of the Modified Grazing Alternative (BLM's Preferred Alternative) to minimize the impacts of livestock grazing on other resources values.

I have determined the Modified Grazing Alternative (BLM's Preferred Alternative) is in conformance with the approved Uncompahgre Basin Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision (1989) pgs. 36-37. This finding and conclusion 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 intensity of impacts described in the EA.

Rationale

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

Context

Renewing term livestock grazing permits in the North Delta Land Health Unit does not have national, regional, or statewide importance in terms of permit modifications. The allotments are located north of Delta, Colorado, and encompass approximately 61,449 acres of BLM-managed lands. The discussion of significance criteria that follows, applies to the Modified Grazing Alternative (BLM's Preferred Alternative) and is within the context of local importance in the area associated with the allotments. Implementing the Modified Grazing Alternative (BLM's Preferred Alternative) would maintain and improve land health conditions within the associated grazing allotments.

Intensity

1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The EA has considered both beneficial and adverse impacts of the proposed re-issuance of term grazing permits. Collectively, the Modified Grazing Alternative (BLM's Preferred Alternative) would result in improved vegetative condition and wildlife habitat over time, while authorizing public land grazing and sustaining the local and regional economy through continued personal income to the operator, employees, and regional businesses.

Improving ecological conditions is an improvement in the quality of the human environment through the management and improvement of rangeland resources. The stewardship role of the livestock operator not only mandates proper livestock and forage management but also provides communication with the BLM as to other activities or events that could cause degradation to public lands. Long term effects would be limited in scope.

2) The degree to which the Modified Grazing Alternative (BLM's Preferred Alternative) affects public health and safety.

There would be no effects to public health and safety.

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

There are no park lands, or prime farmlands within the allotments.

Cultural resources adopt the 1998 BLM/Colorado State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO) Protocol agreement which requires the BLM to identify all historic properties and sacred sites on all lands within Colorado that are within the Area of Potential Effect (APE) of a BLM undertaking (1998 Protocol VII (A) p. 4), which is defined as the geographic area(s) within which an undertaking may cause changes in the character or use of historic properties (36 CFR 800.2). During Section 106 review, a cultural resource assessment was completed for this allotment in November and December 2014, following the procedures outlined in BLM instruction memoranda (IM-WO-99-039, IM-CO-99-007 and IM-CO-99-019).

A segment of the Gunnison River adjacent to the North Delta Land Health Unit has been determined to be “eligible” for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System (NWSRS). The segment has a tentative classification of “recreational.” This means there are few constraints on the level of development and modification of the lands adjacent to the segment within a quarter mile of either side of the area. The Modified Grazing Alternative (BLM’s Preferred Alternative) would not result in discernable impacts to water quality or impact the outstanding remarkable value of this section of river.

Three of the allotments in the North Delta Land Health Unit contain a portion of the Adobe Badland Outstanding Natural Area (ONA), and Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). Key values for the ONA/ACEC include unique scenic qualities, threatened and endangered species habitat, and erosive soils. Of the grazing allotments containing acres within the ONA/ACEC the majority of the allotment acres are either meeting with downward trends or not meeting land health standards. These determinations are due to several factors including historic and current grazing management, historic and current recreation, and exotic invasive species. Changes implemented in the Modified Grazing Alternative (BLM’s Preferred Alternative) of the EA and proposed changes to the terms and conditions will move the area towards meeting land health standards and support the ONA/ACEC key values for unique scenic qualities, threatened and endangered habitat, and erosive soils.

The Adobe Badlands Wilderness Study Area (WSA) was determined to possess wilderness characteristics, including adequate size, naturalness, outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation, and supplemental values. Grazing would be allowed to continue as a “grandfathered use.” The Adobe Badlands WSA unit was found to possess wilderness characteristics while under current grazing management. Under the Modified Grazing Alternative (BLM’s Preferred Alternative) there would likely be incremental improvements to land health, and no discernable effect on wilderness characteristics.

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

Public input regarding the Modified Grazing Alternative (BLM’s Preferred Alternative) and other alternatives was solicited during the planning process. The BLM Uncompahgre Field Office sent out a Notice of Public Scoping on May 9, 2014 to determine the level of public

interest, concern, and resource conditions of the grazing permits that were up for renewal. A Notice of Public Scoping was posted on the BLM Colorado website, asking for public input on permit/lease renewals. Individual letters were sent to interested publics and affected permittees/lessees informing them about the proposed action. The BLM requested information for consideration during the renewal process. The BLM addressed issues brought forward that were in the scope of the Modified Grazing Alternative (BLM's Preferred Alternative) and other alternatives in the EA.

A 30-day public comment period on the preliminary Environmental Assessment (EA) was sent out on August 24, 2015 to interested publics and affected permittees/leesees. The BLM responded to 100 comments, included in Appendix C in the EA.

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

There are no unique or unknown risks associated with the implementation of the Modified Grazing Alternative (BLM's Preferred Alternative). The action relied on applicable scientific findings, monitoring, rangeland health assessments, published studies, professional contacts, stated Terms and Conditions of the permit, and project design criteria to address and/or preclude impacts.

6) The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The Modified Grazing Alternative (BLM's Preferred Alternative) neither establishes a precedent for future BLM actions with significant effects, nor represents a decision in principle about a future consideration. The specific actions involved in the Modified Grazing Alternative (BLM's Preferred Alternative) have all been done before, separately and collectively, in the course of management of public lands over the past 50 years. Adjustments in the Modified Grazing Alternative (BLM's Preferred Alternative) were to stabilize the grazing base and sustain rangeland health and productivity on public lands. Future considerations for range management actions are on a case by case basis and based on the best available science, current data, and current grazing management practices.

7) Consideration of the action in relation to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

The impact of the Modified Grazing Alternative (BLM's Preferred Alternative) has been analyzed and considered, separately and cumulatively in the document. The specific action of reducing 10 year average actual use Animal Unit Months (AUMs) in the Modified Grazing Alternative (BLM's Preferred Alternative) will have economic impacts to individual permittees. Cumulatively, grazing operations in the regional area, while impacted in the short term in Delta County, will in the long term remain sustainable, and rangeland health and productivity will be protected and enhanced for future use.

The cumulative effect of implementing the Modified Grazing Alternative (BLM's Preferred Alternative), is either not significant or addressed in the design features and/or Terms and Conditions of the Modified Grazing Alternative (BLM's Preferred Alternative).

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.*

There would be no loss or destruction to these resources. A cultural resources study was initiated prior to considering the action under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Any adverse effects to historic properties are mitigated in consultation with the Colorado Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation.

9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat.*

There has been documented physical damage to individual populations of Colorado hookless cactus (*Sclerocactus glaucus*) from concentrated livestock uses. These direct measurable effects have been observed primarily during salting, watering, trailing and bedding. The Uncompahgre Field Office has been revisiting historic occurrences for the Colorado hookless cactus, and found in most cases that populations that are not within close proximity to livestock concentration areas, remain on the landscape. In addition, Terms and Conditions established for threatened or endangered plants are expected to mitigate and minimize the effects associated with livestock concentrations.

It is difficult to identify a clear trend in cactus health relative to current livestock grazing impacts verses other environmental stressors such as precipitation and herbivory. For all allotments analyzed, the application of the design features will minimize and mitigate direct impacts to cactus populations from permitted livestock grazing. Managing for improved land health will further secure existing populations possibly resulting in increased cactus densities. This is an identified U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) goal for delisting the species from Endangered Species Act protections.

The Uncompahgre Field Office consulted with the USFWS concerning the programmatic nature of BLM authorized grazing for the Colorado hookless cactus, clay-loving wild buckwheat (*Eriogonum pelinophilum*), and the DeBeque Phacelia (*Phacelia submutica*) as required by Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, and prepared a Biological Assessmentⁱ to evaluate likely impacts to federally listed or proposed threatened or endangered species. The USFWS issued a Biological Opinion on November 15, 2012 regarding BLM authorized grazing and its impacts on federally protected plants, including the proposed Terms and Conditions (conservation measures).ⁱⁱ The USFWS Biological Opinion states that the Modified Grazing Alternative (BLM's Preferred Alternative) is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the Colorado hookless cactus.

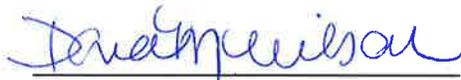
10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

None of the alternatives violate federal, state, or local environmental protection laws.

Determination

This Finding of No Significant Impact is based on the information contained in the EA and my consideration of criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27). It is my determination that: 1) the implementation of the Modified Grazing Alternative (BLM's Preferred Alternative) will not have significant environmental impacts; 2) the Modified Grazing Alternative (BLM's Preferred Alternative) is in conformance with the Uncompahgre Basin Resource Management Plan, 1989; and 3) the Modified Grazing Alternative (BLM's Preferred Alternative) does not constitute a major federal action having significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not necessary.

Authorized Official:



Dana Wilson
Acting Field Manager
Uncompahgre Field Office

06/30/16
Date

ⁱ Programmatic Biological Assessment Effects to Listed Plant Species from the Bureau of Land Management Livestock Grazing Program: Colorado hookless cactus (*Sclerocactus glaucus*) Clay-loving wild buckwheat (*Eriogonum pelinophilum*) Debeque phacelia (*Phacelia submutica*). May 8, 2012. 117 pp.

ⁱⁱ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). 2012. Biological Opinion for Livestock Grazing Program Effects on Three Listed Plants in the Bureau of Land Management Grand Junction, Colorado River Valley, and Uncompahgre Field Office November 15, 2012. 66 pp.