

DECISION RECORD

Reference: Environmental Assessment (EA) for Grazing Authorization, #NM-060-00-092

Decision: It is my decision to authorize the issuance of a ten year grazing permit to Marie Haumont for the Bureau of Land Management grazing allotment #64046. The permit will authorize 150 Animal Units (AU's) yearlong at 59 percent federal range for 1062 Animal Unit Months (AUM's). Cattle will be the authorized class of livestock.

Any additional mitigation measures identified in the environmental impacts sections of the referenced environmental assessment have been formulated into stipulations, terms and conditions.

If you wish to protest this proposed decision in accordance with 43 CFR 4160.2, you are allowed 15 days to do so in person or in writing to the authorized officer, after the receipt of this decision. Please be specific in your points of protest. In the absence of a protest, this proposed decision will become the final decision of the authorized officer without further notice, in accordance with 43 CFR 4160.3. A period of 30 days following receipt of the final decision, or 30 days after the date the proposed decision becomes final, is provided for filing an appeal and petition for the stay of the decision, for the purpose of a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge (43 CFR 4.470). The appeal shall be filed with the office of the Field Office Manager, 2909 West Second, Roswell, NM, 88201, and must state clearly and concisely your specific points.

signed by T. R. Kreager,
Assistant Field Manager-Resources

2/26/01
Date

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
for
GRAZING AUTHORIZATION**

ALLOTMENT 64046, SECTION 3

Operators: Orval and Marie Haumont

EA-NM-060-00-092

April, 2000

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Roswell Field Office
Roswell, New Mexico**

I. Introduction

When authorizing livestock grazing on public range, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has historically relied on a land use plan and environmental impact statement to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). A recent decision by the Interior Board of Land Appeals, however, affirmed that the BLM must conduct a site-specific NEPA analysis before issuing a permit or lease to authorize livestock grazing. This environmental assessment fulfills the NEPA requirement by providing the necessary site-specific analysis of the effects of issuing a new grazing permit/lease on allotment #64046.

The scope of this document is limited to the effects of issuing a 10 year grazing permit, other future actions such as range improvement projects will be addressed in a project specific environmental assessment. There are no current plans for additional management actions on this allotment.

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The purpose of issuing a new grazing permit would be to authorize livestock grazing on public lands on allotment #64046. The permit would specify the types and levels of use authorized, and the terms and conditions of the authorization pursuant to 43 CFR §§4130.3, 4130.3-1, 4130.3-2 and 4180.1.

B. Conformance with Land Use Planning

The Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (October 1997) has been reviewed to determine if the proposed action conforms with the land use plan's Record of Decision. The proposed action is consistent with the RMP/EIS.

C. Relationships to Statutes, Regulations, or Other Plans

The proposed action is consistent with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1700 et seq.); the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 (43 U.S.C. 315 et seq.), as amended; the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.), as amended; the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. 1535 et seq.) as amended; the Federal Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 (43 U.S.C. 1901 et seq.); Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management and Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands.

Proposed Action and Alternatives

A. Proposed Action:

The proposed action is to authorize the Orval and Marie Haumont a grazing permit for the Cottonwood Ranch, BLM grazing allotment #64046. The permit would authorize 135 Animal Units (AU's) yearlong at 59 percent federal range for 956 Animal Unit Months (AUM's). Cattle are the class of livestock proposed for authorization.

B. No Permit Authorization Alternative:

This alternative would not issue a new grazing permit. There would be no livestock grazing authorized on public land within allotment #64046

C. Authorize Grazing at an Increased Level:

This alternative would increase the number of authorized livestock to 160 Animal Units (AU's) yearlong at 59 percent federal range for 1,133 Animal Unit Months (AUM's). 150 AU's for 1,062 AUM's would be placed under active use, 10 AU's for 71 AUM's would be placed under temporary non-renewable use. Rangeland monitoring will be used to validate the temporary non-renewable use. If the monitoring shows declining range conditions or trends, then the number of livestock (temporary non-renewable use) will be adjusted down; If the monitoring data shows stable or improving conditions or trends, then converting the temporary non-renewable use into active use will be considered.

III. Affected Environment

A. General Setting

Allotment #64046 is located in Chaves county, approximately 35 miles north of Roswell, New Mexico. The allotment consists of 5,611 acres of public land, and 4,662 acres of private land. There is also approximately 151 acres of private land within the boundaries of the allotment that are owned by an individual other than the allottee.

This allotment lies within the boundaries of the Roswell Grazing District established subsequent to the Taylor Grazing Act (TGA). Grazing authorization on Public Lands inside the Grazing District boundary is

governed by section 3 of the TGA. Livestock numbers for the ranch are controlled under this section 3 permit, the permittee is billed for the amount of forage available for livestock on federal land. Vegetation monitoring studies are used to determine the allowable number of livestock on the ranch.

The landscape is upland terraces west of the Pecos River and dissected by numerous small draws and one major drainage. The major drainage within this allotment is the Five Mile Draw. This general area has developed gas fields in operation. Roads, pipelines and facilities associated with the gas field are prominent in the area. More detailed information of the area is discussed under the affected resources section.

The following resources or values are not present or would not be affected: Prime/Unique Farmland, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Minority/Low Income Populations, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Hazardous/Solid Wastes, Wetlands/Riparian Zones. Native American Religious Concerns. Cultural inventory surveys would continue to be required for public actions involving surface disturbing activities.

B. Affected Resources

1. Soils: In general, the soils in the area are Hollomex-Reeves-Miller series. The soils are deep, well drained, and found on nearly level to undulating areas. The soils are derived predominately from limestone. For in depth soil information, please refer to the Soil Survey of Chaves County New Mexico, Northern Part, published by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). A copy of this publication may be reviewed at the BLM Roswell Field Office or at a local NRCS office.

2. Vegetation: This allotment is within the grassland vegetative community as identified in the Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS). Vegetative communities managed by the Roswell Field Office are identified and explained in the RMP/EIS. Appendix 11 of the draft RMP/EIS describes the Desired Plant Community (DPC) concept and identifies the components of each community. The distinguishing feature for the grassland community is that grass species typically comprises 75% or more of the potential plant community. The community also includes shrub, half-shrub, and forb species. The percentages of grasses, forbs, and shrubs actually found at a particular location will vary with recent weather factors, past resource uses and the potential of the site.

Three rangeland monitoring studies have been in place on this allotment since 1983. One monitoring site is located on a Loamy SD-3 ecological (range) site and two monitoring sites are located in a Sandy SD-3 ecological (range)

site. Monitoring was conducted in 1983, 1987, 1992, 2000. The following table summarizes monitoring data for the Cottonwood allotment:

Pasture Name	Condition Score by year of study				Grass Species Production (lbs./acre) by year of study			
	1983	1987	1992	2000	1983	1987	1992	2000
Pollard	58.7	69.8	65.5	70.3	119	618	380	710
Badger	50.7	54	60.4	74	79	235	333	608
Indian	54.3	35.9	44	63.4	136	366	333	494

The Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (RMP) of October 1997 designated desired plant communities for each vegetative community. The community found on this allotment is the grassland community. The following table summarizes the current existing situation.

Monitoring Data Summary, Allotment Averages from 1983 to 2000							
Loamy SD-3 and Sandy SD-3 Ecological Sites (three study locations)							
	Grasses	forbs*	shrubs	trees	litter	bare ground	rock
Percent composition of vegetative cover	78.12	1.69	20.01	0.16	N/A	N/A	N/A
Percent ground cover	21.68		7.38		18.4	48.1	4.42

*Forb percentages are not accurately reflected due to collection techniques. On pace point monitoring, only perennial species are recorded.

Monitoring data indicates that the vegetative conditions on allotment #64046 achieve the multiple resource objectives established in the Roswell RMP. Livestock stocking levels are within the allowable vegetation utilization range. Vegetation conditions have improved as evidenced by the monitoring data. Monitoring data and analysis are available for review at the Roswell Field Office.

3. Wildlife: Game species occurring within the area include mule deer, antelope, mourning dove, and scaled quail. Raptors that utilize the area on a more seasonal basis include the Swainson's, red-tailed, and ferruginous hawks, American kestrel, and great-horned owl. Numerous passerine birds utilize the grassland areas due to the variety of grasses, forbs, and shrubs. The most common include the western meadowlark, mockingbird, horned lark, killdeer, loggerhead shrike, and vesper sparrow.

The warm prairie environment supports a large number of reptile species compared to higher elevations. The more common reptiles include the short-horned lizard, lesser earless lizard, eastern fence lizard, coachwhip, bullsnake, prairie rattlesnake, and western rattlesnake.

A general description of wildlife occupying or potentially utilizing the proposed action area is located in the Affected Environment Section (p. 3-62 to 3-71) of the Draft Roswell RMP/EIS (9/1994).

4. Threatened and Endangered Species: There are no known threatened or endangered species of plant or animals on Allotment 64046. A list of federal threatened, endangered and candidate species reviewed for this EA can be found in Appendix 11 of the Roswell Approved RMP (AP11-2). There are no designated critical habitat areas within this allotment. The swift fox is a Federal Candidate species that may occupy or utilize the area; refer to the Biological Opinion (AP11-38) in the Roswell RMP for a detailed description of the range, habitats and potential threats.

A species of bird, the mountain plover, has been recently proposed for listing as an Endangered Species. It is associated with shortgrass and shrub-steep landscapes throughout its breeding and wintering range. Historically, on the breeding range, it occurred on nearly denuded prairie dog towns and in areas of major bison concentration. The mountain plover are considered to be strongly associated with sites of heaviest grazing pressure, to the point of excessive surface disturbance. Short vegetation, bare ground, and a flat topography are now recognized as habitat-defining characteristics at both breeding and wintering locales.

5. Livestock Management: The allotment is operated as a cow/calf ranch. The Cottonwood Ranch consists of six pastures and one trap, which aid in livestock movement and restraint. Water wells, a pipeline system and earthen reservoirs provide livestock water throughout the allotment. Planned rotation of livestock through the pastures is used to promote proper grazing and vegetation conservation.

This allotment has undergone mesquite reduction treatments by both the BLM and by the operator. The treatments have been very successful and the operator continues to work toward reducing mesquite and promoting preferred vegetation species.

6. Visual Resources: The allotment is located within a Class IV Visual Resource Management area. This means that contrasts may attract attention and be a dominant feature in the landscape in terms of scale. However, the changes should repeat the basic elements of the landscape.

7. Water Quality: No perennial surface water is found on the Public Land on this allotment.

8. Air Quality: Air quality in the region is generally good. The allotment is in a Class II area for the Prevention of Significant Deterioration of air quality as defined in the public Clean Air Act. Class II areas allow a moderate amount of air quality degradation.

9. Recreation: Since this allotment has no facility based recreational activities, only dispersed recreational opportunities occur on these lands. Recreational activities that may occur include hunting, caving, sightseeing, Off Highway Vehicle Use, primitive camping, horseback riding and hiking.

Portions of the Public land within this allotment are accessible via county maintained road. Off Highway Vehicle designation for public lands within this allotment are classified as "Limited" to existing roads and trails.

Due to the fact that public land boundaries are not marked adequately or identified by signs and/or fences, the general public may be reluctant to use these public lands in fear of being in trespass on private land.

10. Cave/Karst: This allotment is located within a designated area of high karst and cave potential. A complete significant cave or karst inventory has not been completed for the public lands located in this grazing allotment. No significant caves or karst features are known to exist within this allotment.

11. Floodplains: Within this allotment, one floodplain exists that is recorded on Federal Emergency Management Agency maps. The identified floodplain is the Fivemile Draw. Any future permanent structures or improvements will be analyzed on a site specific basis prior to approval within the floodplain.

IV. Environmental Impacts

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action

1. Soils: Proper utilization levels and grazing distribution patterns are expected to retain sufficient vegetative cover on the allotment, this will maintain the stability of the soils. Soil compaction and excessive vegetative use will occur at small, localized areas such as bedding areas, watering locations, and along trails. Positive affects from the proposed action may include acceleration of nutrient cycling, and chipping of the soil crust by hoof action may stimulate seedling growth and water infiltration.

2. Vegetation: Vegetation will continue to be grazed and trampled by domestic livestock as well as other herbivores. The area has been grazed by livestock since the early part of the 1900's, if not longer. The area evolved with large ungulate animal species and native vegetation is accustomed to herbivory. Ecological condition and trend is expected to remain stable and/or improve over the long term with the proposed authorized number of livestock and existing pasture management. Rangeland monitoring data indicates that there is additional forage available for livestock above the currently permitted numbers. The vegetation within the allotment meets or exceeds the the multiple resource use objectives set forth in the Roswell RMP.

3. Wildlife: Domestic livestock will continue to utilize vegetative resources needed by a variety of wildlife species for life history functions within this allotment. The magnitude of livestock grazing impacts on wildlife is dependent upon the species of wildlife being considered, and it's habitat needs. In general, livestock stocking rate adjustments have been made in the past to minimize the direct competition for those vegetative resources needed by a variety of wildlife species. Cover habitat for wildlife will remain the same as the existing situation. Maintenance and operation of existing waterings will continue to provide dependable water sources for wildlife, as well as livestock.

4. Threatened and Endangered Species: Surveys have been conducted in New Mexico for the mountain plover by Lawry Sager in 1995, for the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (Sager, 1996). No breeding populations were found south of the 34° North Latitude which generally follows the Chaves/DeBaca County line on the north end of the Roswell Field Office area. However, no birds were reported in either DeBaca or Chaves Counties; only one observation was reported in Lincoln County (near Lon). In addition, mountain plover surveys were conducted in 1998 at BLM selected sites by New Mexico Natural Heritage Program (DeLay & Johnson, 1998). No mountain plovers were observed at the sites. As mountain plovers prefer short vegetation and actually seek out grazed pastures, the cumulative impacts from grazing are not anticipated to adversely affect the bird. Grazing

practices which maintain or improve ground cover to the greatest extent possible could decrease mountain plover habitat. The preferred alternative will continue to emphasize proper watershed management, but is unlikely to adversely affect this species or its habitat in the mixed desert shrub area. Since no known wintering locales or breeding sites have been found and no known prairie dog towns are located within this allotment, proper grazing management is not likely to jeopardize, destroy or adversely modify the habitat.

5 Livestock Management: No adverse impacts are anticipated under the proposed action.

6. Visual Resources: The continued grazing of livestock would not affect the form or color of the landscape. The primary appearance of the vegetation within the allotment will remain the same.

7. Water Quality: Direct impacts to surface water quality would be minor, short-term impacts during stormflow. Indirect impacts to water-quality related resources, such as fisheries, would not occur. The proposed action would not have a significant effect on ground water. Livestock would be dispersed over the allotment, and the soil would filter potential contaminants.

8. Air Quality: Dust levels under the proposed action would be slightly higher than under the no grazing alternative due to allotment management activities. The levels would be within the limits allowed in a Class II area for the Prevention of Significant Deterioration of air quality.

9. Recreation: Grazing should have little or no impact on the dispersed recreational opportunities within this allotment. Public lands are accessible via county maintained roads. The evidence or presence of livestock can negatively affect visitors who desire solitude, unspoiled landscape views, or to hike without seeing signs of livestock. However, grazing can benefit some forms or recreation, such as hunting, by creating new water sources for game animals.

10. Caves/Karst: No known significant cave or karst features are known to exist on this allotment. There is a high potential that caves do exist in the area. If a significant cave is found, protection measures would be placed into effect.

11. Floodplains: No impacts to the floodplains are known, by keeping structures out of floodplains, impacts should not occur.

B. Impacts of the No Livestock Grazing Alternative.

1. Soils: Soil compaction would be reduced on the allotment around old trails and bedding grounds, there would be a small reduction in soil loss on the allotment.
2. Vegetation: It is expected that the number of plant species found within the allotment will remain the same, however, there would be small changes in the relative percentages of these species. Vegetation will continue to be utilized by wildlife. There would be an increase in the amount of standing vegetation.
3. Wildlife: Wildlife would have no competition with livestock for forage and cover.
4. Threatened and Endangered Species: There would be no change in the mountain plover habitat if the no grazing alternative was selected.
5. Livestock management: The forage from public land would be unavailable for use by the lessee. This would have a significant adverse economic impact to the livestock operation. If the No Grazing alternative is selected, the owner of the livestock would be responsible for ensuring that livestock do not enter Public Land [43 CFR 4140.1(b)(1)]. The intermingled land status on the allotment makes it economically unfeasible to fence out the public land and use only the private land. The remaining private and state land could not support the number of livestock currently authorized and the lower number of livestock would not provide the level of potential income the operator is accustomed to.
6. Visual Resources: There would be no change in the visual resources.
7. Water Quality: There could be a slight improvement in water quality due to the minor reductions in sediment loading during stormflow.
8. Air Quality: There would be a slightly less dust under this under this alternative versus the proposed alternative, but this would be negligible when considering all sources of dust.
9. Recreation: Impacts would be very minor under the alternative. No positive impacts from livestock watering locations would occur.
10. Caves/Karst: Impacts would be the same as the proposed action if no significant caves are found.
11. Floodplains: Impacts would be the same as the proposed action.

C. Impacts of the Authorize Grazing at an Increased Level Alternative:

1. Soils: There may be a slight increase in soil compaction in areas such as water locations and trails due to the increased number of animals. This impact is negligible however and will probably be undetectable.
2. Vegetation: There will be slightly increased forage utilization levels under this alternative. The utilization of forage will not exceed 45 percent as outlined in the Roswell RMP. Monitoring studies verify that sufficient forage is available within this allotment to allow the increase in livestock use. Vegetative composition and abundance are expected to remain the same as under the proposed action. All other impacts will be the same as under the proposed action.
3. Wildlife: The impacts under this alternative will be basically the same as under the proposed action. The increased number of livestock should not cause a conflict with wildlife since utilization levels of the vegetation would still be within the parameters of the Roswell RMP.
4. Threatened and Endangered Species: All impacts would be the same as under the proposed action.
5. Livestock Management: A benefit to the allotment operator would be realized under this alternative. The additional livestock would provide the means for more income to the operator.
6. Visual Resources: All impacts would be the same as under the proposed action.
7. Water Quality: Impacts would be the same as the proposed action.
8. Air Quality: Impacts would be the same as the proposed action.
9. Recreation: Impacts would be the same as the proposed action.
10. Caves/Karst: Impacts would be the same as the proposed action.
11. Floodplains: Impacts would be the same as the proposed action.

V. Cumulative Impacts

All of the allotments that have permits/leases with the BLM will have to go through scoping and analysis under NEPA. Allotment #64046 is surrounded

by allotments that will be undergoing this process. If the proposed action is selected, there would be no change in the cumulative impacts since it does not vary from the current situation.

If the no livestock grazing alternative is selected, there would be little change in the cumulative impact as long as the surrounding allotments continue to be stocked at their current level. If the permitted numbers are reduced on the surrounding ranches as well, the economics of the surrounding communities and/or minority/low income populations would be negatively impacted.

The No Grazing alternative was considered, but not chosen in the Rangeland Reform Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Record of Decision (ROD) (p. 28). The elimination of grazing in the Roswell Field Office Area was also considered but eliminated by the Roswell RMP/ROD (pp. ROD-2).

If the increase livestock numbers alternative is selected, there would be little change in the cumulative impacts. The number of livestock under this alternative are within an acceptable utilization range and no detriment to the environment would be expected. Livestock grazing at the level prescribed under this alternative would be a sustainable use of the vegetative resources.

VI. Residual Impacts

Vegetative monitoring studies have shown that grazing, at the current permitted numbers of animals, is sustainable. If the mitigation measures are enacted, then there would be no residual impacts to the proposed action.

VII. Mitigating Measures

Vegetation monitoring studies will continue to be conducted and the permitted numbers of livestock will be adjusted if necessary. If new information surfaces that livestock grazing is negatively impacting other resources, action will be taken at that time to mitigate those impacts.

VIII. Fundamentals of Rangeland Health

The fundamentals of rangeland health are identified in 43 CFR §§4180.1 and pertain to watershed function, ecological process, water quality, and habitat for threatened and endangered (T&E) species and other special status species. Based on the available data and professional judgement, the evaluation by this environmental assessment indicates that the conditions identified in the fundamentals of rangeland health exist on this allotment.

IX. BLM Team Members

Jim Schroeder, John Spain, Tim Kreager, Irene Gonzales-Salas, Jerry Dutchover, Rand French, Pat Flanary, Paul Happel, Howard Parman, Chuck Schmidt.

