

Decision Record

Environmental Assessment (EA) for Grazing Authorization, DOI-BLM-NM-P010-2011-048-EA

Decision: It is my decision to authorize and implement Alternative A as described in **DOI-BLM-NM-P010-2011-048-EA**. The proposed action in Alternative A will authorize a grazing permit for 95 Animal Units at 100% Federal Range for 1,140 Animal Unit Months (AUM's) active use and 62 Animal Units at 77% for 573 Animal Unit Month on allotment 65003. The mitigation measures identified in the attached EA have been formulated into terms and conditions that will be attached to the grazing permit. This decision incorporates, by reference, those conditions identified in the attached Environmental Assessment. A summary table follows:

Allotment Number	Allotment Name	Pasture	Grazing Period	% Public Land	Animal Units Authorized	Animal Unit Months Authorized	Livestock	Use
65003	SEA-Bojax	Rest of Pastures	3/01-2/28	100%	94	1128	Cattle	Active
65003	SEA-Bojax	Rest of Pastures	3/01-02/28	100%	1	12	Horse	Active
65003	SEA-Bojax	East Pasture	3/01-2/28	77%	62	573	Cattle	Active

Rationale: Based on the rangeland health assessment (RHA) and previous monitoring, resource conditions on this allotment are sufficient and sustainable to support the level of use outlined in the ten-year grazing permit.

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.

The protest shall be filed with the Field Manager, Bureau of Land Management, 2909 West 2nd, Roswell, NM 88201. This protest should specify, clearly and concisely, why you think the proposed action under Alternative A is in error.

In the absence of a protest within the time allowed, the above decision shall constitute my final decision. Should this notice become the final decision, you are allowed an additional 30 days within which to file an appeal for the purpose of a hearing before the Interior Board of Land Appeals, and to petition for stay of the decision pending final determination on the appeal (43 CFR 4.21 and 4.410). If a petition for stay is not requested and granted, the decision will be put into

effect following the 30-day appeal period. The appeal and petition for stay should be filed with the Field Manager at the above address. The appeal should specify, clearly and concisely, why you think the decision is in error. The petition for stay should specify how you will be harmed if the stay is not granted.

/s/ Jerry Dutchover
Jerry Dutchover
Assistant Field Manager, Resources

02/05/2013
Date

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT/RATIONALE

DOI-BLM-NM-P010-2011-048-EA

Finding of No Significant Impact: I have reviewed this environmental assessment including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant environmental impacts. I have determined the proposed action under Alternative A will not have significant impacts on the human environment and that preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

Rationale for Recommendations: The proposed action under Alternative A would not result in any undue or unnecessary environmental degradation. The proposed action under Alternative A will be in compliance with the Roswell Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision (October, 1997).

/s/ Jerry Dutchover
Assistant Field Manager, Resources

02/05/2013
Date

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

GRAZING AUTHORIZATION

For

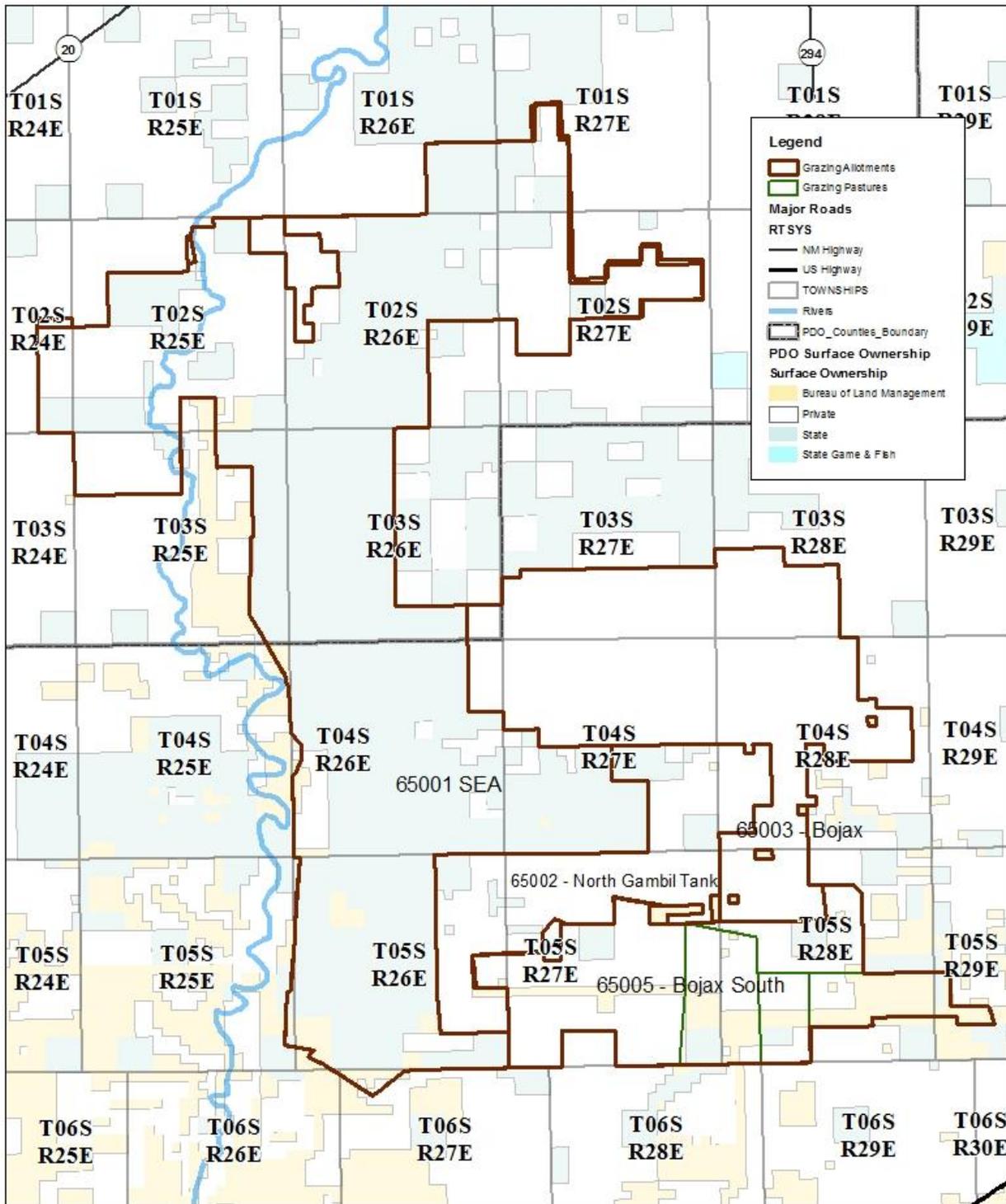
ALLOTMENT 65003
SEA-Bojax

DOI-BLM-NM-P010-2011-048 EA

November, 2012

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

Allotments 65001 - 65003 - 65005

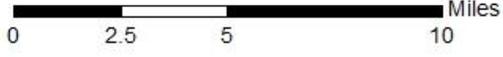


Legend

- Grazing Allotments
- Grazing Pastures
- Major Roads**
- RTSYS
- NM Highway
- US Highway
- TOWNSHIPS
- Rivers
- PDO_County_Boundary
- PDO Surface Ownership**
- Bureau of Land Management
- Private
- State
- State Game & Fish



The boundary is provided by the Bureau of Land Management in the absence of a survey. An exception of this data for individual allotments will only be made if the original data is available. Data is not intended to be used for legal purposes.



I. BACKGROUND

Purpose and Need

The purpose of issuing a new grazing lease would be to authorize livestock grazing on public range on the SEA, Bojax and the Bojax South allotments, 65001, 5003 and 65005. When authorizing livestock grazing on public range, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) must conduct a site-specific NEPA analysis before issuing a 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 lease on these allotments. The lease would be needed to 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.

The scope of this environmental assessment is limited to the effects of issuing a new grazing lease on these allotments. Over time, the need could arise for subsequent management activities which relate to grazing authorization. These activities could include vegetation treatments (e.g., prescribed fires, herbicide projects), range improvement projects (e.g., fences, water developments), and others. Future rangeland management actions related to livestock grazing would be addressed in project-specific NEPA documents as they are proposed.

Though this environmental assessment specifically addresses the impacts of issuing a grazing lease on these allotments, it does so within the context of overall BLM management goals. Allotment management activities would have to be coordinated with projects intended to achieve those other goals. For example, a vegetation treatment designed to enhance watershed condition or wildlife habitat may require rest from livestock grazing for one or more growing seasons. Requirements of this type would be written into the lease as terms and conditions.

Conformance with Land Use Planning

The proposed action conforms to the 1997 Roswell Approved Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Record of Decision; the 2000 New Mexico Standards for Public Land Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management and Record of Decision and the 2008 Special Status Species Resource Management Plan Amendment as required by 43 CFR 1610.5-3.

Relationships to Statutes, Regulations, or Other Plans

The proposal to renew the livestock grazing lease on these allotments is in conformance with the 1994 Environmental Impact Statement for Rangeland Reform; the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) (43 U.S.C. 1700 et seq.); the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 (TGA) (43 U.S.C. 315 et seq.); the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 (PRIA) (43 U.S.C. 1901 et seq.).

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Proposed Action - Current Livestock Management

The proposed action is to issue a term lease to graze cattle and horses on each of these allotments. Current permitted use is based on long term monitoring and rangeland conditions. Additionally a rangeland health assessment has been completed and the allotments met the Standards for Public Land Health. See Table 1 below for details of these allotments.

Table 1. Animal Units/Animal Unit Months								
Allotment Number	Allotment Name	Acres of Public Land	Pasture	Percent Public Land	Animal Units Authorized	Animal Unit Months Authorized	Permitted Animal Units	Permitted Animal Unit Months
65001	SEA	3021		100	39	468	39	468
65001	SEA			100	16	192	16	192
65003	Bojax	200		100	3	40	3	40
65005	Bojax South	6192	Rest of Pastures	100	53	636	53	636
65005	Bojax South		East Pasture	77	62	573	62	573
Totals		9413			173	1909	173	1909

Currently 157 Animal Units (AUs)/1717 Animal Units Months are actively authorized on the three allotments and 16 AUs/192 AUMs are Suspended on allotment 65001. Suspended Use is defined as the temporary withholding from active use, through a decision issued by the authorized officer, of part or all of the permitted use in a grazing permit or lease. This current level of Suspended Use is a result of a Decision issued in December 1990. Initially, 55 AUs/660 AUMs were authorized on the SEA ranch. In 1980, 26 AUs/312 were placed in Suspension. Over time, based on monitoring studies, 10 AUs/120 AUMs have been activated, leaving 16 AUs/192 AUMs in Suspended Use.

There would be no changes from current livestock management as conducted by the permittee, or to existing range improvements already in place. Future projects or activities identified by the permittee or the BLM can still be considered for implementation. Rangeland monitoring would continue on the allotment and changes to livestock management would be made as necessary. If new information surfaces that livestock grazing is negatively impacting other resources, action will be taken to mitigate those impacts.

Alternative A or Preferred Alternative: Removal of the Suspended Use

This Alternative is to combine the three allotments into one management unit and to issue a term lease to graze cattle and horses on this allotment, only permitting the Active Use and removing the Suspended Use from the lease. Current authorized active use is based on long term monitoring and rangeland conditions. Additionally a rangeland health assessment has been completed and the allotment met the Standards for Public Land Health. See Table 2 below for details of this proposed allotment.

Table 2. Animal Units/Animal Unit Months

Allotment Number	Allotment Name	Acres of Public Land	Pasture	Percent Public Land	Animal Units Authorized	Animal Unit Months Authorized	Permitted Animal Units	Permitted Animal Unit Months
65003	SEA-Bojax	9143	Rest of Pastures	100	95	1140	95	1140
			East Pasture	77	62	573	62	573
Totals		9143			157	1713	157	1713

No Grazing Alternative

Under this alternative a new grazing lease would not be issued for these allotments. No grazing would be authorized on federal land on these allotments under this alternative. Under this alternative and based on the land status pattern within the allotment, new fences would be required to exclude grazing on the federal land.

Alternatives Considered But Not Analyzed

Grazing with reduced numbers – BLM considered authorizing grazing with reduced numbers on these allotments. Grazing with reduced numbers would produce impacts similar to the proposed action. Additionally, these allotments meets the Standard for Public Land Health and monitoring studies do not indicate changes are necessary. Therefore, BLM will not analyze this alternative.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

General Setting

These allotments are located in Chaves and DeBaca County, approximately 40 miles northeast of Roswell, NM. Shinnery oak/dune (SOD, Grasslands (GR) and Mixed Desert Shrub (MDS) are the major plant communities occurring within allotments #65001, 65003 and 65005. Annual precipitation for this region averages 12 -13 inches. These communities are in the Southern Desertic Basins, Plains and Mountain and the Canadian-Pecos Plains major land resource system between elevations of 3,312 and 4,434 feet. The Shinnery Oak Dune, the Mixed Desert Shrub and the Grassland vegetative communities are 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

Affected Resources

The following resources or values are not present or would not be affected by the authorization of livestock grazing on these allotments: Prime or Unique Farmland, Minority/Low Income Populations, Hazardous or Solid Wastes, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and Wilderness. Controlled livestock grazing effect on cultural resources is limited within the allotment due to the type of cultural resources present. . Riparian areas are found along the Pecos River, none of which are located on public lands within the allotment and not considered under the grazing permit for the allotment.

Vegetation

Affected Environment

The allotments are comprised of predominately three vegetation community types arranged in a mosaic over the allotment. Shinnery Oak Dune, Grassland and Mixed Desert Shrub communities dominate. General objectives or guidelines for each vegetation community are described in the Roswell Approved RMP and Record of Decision (BLM 1997) and the Roswell Draft RMP/EIS (BLM 1994). The primary features in the SOD community are topography influenced by aeolian and alluvial sedimentation on upland plains forming hummocks, dunes, sand ridges and swales and presence of shinnery oak (*Quercus havardii*). This is a unique community type found primarily below the Llano Estacado or Staked Plains, in an area known as Mescalero Sands. Topography is gently sloping and undulating sandy plains, with moderate to very steep hummocky dunes of up to ten feet and more in height scattered throughout. Some dunes are stabilized with vegetation, while a number of them are unstable and shifting. Dune blowouts with shinnery oak and bluestem (*Andropogon* spp.) either isolated or in dune complexes are common in this community.

A distinguishing feature for the Grassland community is that grass species typically comprises 75% or more of the potential plant community. This 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. The Grassland community is found predominately on the western edge of the allotment.

Grasslands are intermixed with all community types. In general, sand dropseed, three-awn, black grama, bush muhly and fluffgrass are common in the sandy uplands. Alkali sacaton is the dominant species in the bottomlands where it is interspersed with saltcedar. Tobosa is found in both sandy uplands and bottomlands. Grassland sites also have a mesquite or broom snakeweed shrub component. Blue grama is primarily found on loamy soils and black grama on more gravelly soils. Grassland communities on the uplands and shallow breaks support a large percentage of shrub species. Mesquite, broom snakeweed, fourwing saltbush, and yucca are common shrub species. The primary grasses are sand dropseed and bush muhly, bush muhly, vine mesquite and black grama.

The Mixed Desert Shrub community is primarily made up of desert grasses, shrubs and cacti. The predominant shrub species include creosote, mesquite, tarbush, saltbush, little leaf sumac, and sage. Common cacti encountered are claret cup, cholla, prickly pear, and eagle claw. Forbs include plantain, globe mallow, and buckwheat. Grasses include fluffgrass, sideoats grama, black grama, dropseed, and galleta.

The Rangeland Health assessment indicates a problem with invasive plants, most notably mesquite. Mesquite dominates the deep sand ecological sites and affects both the plant community and hydrologic functions of these sites.

Rangeland monitoring studies have been established in seven key areas within the allotments. The studies are located within the following ecological sites: Sandy Plain CP-2, Gravelly CP-2 and Sandy Loam CP-2. These permanent study locations are used to track vegetation changes and to determine proper stocking rates. The vegetative studies were initially placed as early as in the late 1970's and monitoring data has been collected periodically over the last 30 years.

The description for these ecological sites was developed by the Soil Conservation Service (now referred to as the National Resource Conservation Service) in their ecological site guides. Ecological site descriptions are available for review at the Roswell BLM office, any Natural Resources Conservation Service office or accessed at www.nm.nrcs.usda.gov. From 1978 to 1999 agencies were using the traditional range condition methodology to depict range condition. This compared collected rangeland

monitoring information with the potential vegetation community in terms of species composition by weight. The rating is based on a scaled of 0 to 100 with 100 being the actual representative site.

In 1999 the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) revised the methodology for comparing the existing vegetation community with the potential vegetation community and to aid in the determination of ecological condition. This methodology is called the Similarity Index (SI). The SI compares existing vegetation data (collected from rangeland monitoring) with the potential vegetation community described in the NRCS ecological site guide for that site. The index is based on a scaled of 0 to 100 with 100 being the actual representative site. For example, the normal year production is about 1700 pounds per acre in the Sandy Hills CP-2 ecological (range) site. The index takes into account vegetation species present and the relative amount of production for each species when compared to the potential for the range site. The percent bare ground and rock found on the allotment fall within the parameters established by the RMP/EIS for this vegetative community.

Noxious and Invasive Weeds: Noxious weeds affect both crops and native plant species in the same way, by out-competing for light, water and soil nutrients. Losses are attributed to decreased quality and quantity of agricultural products due to high levels of competition from noxious weeds and infestations. Noxious weeds can negatively affect livestock productivity by making forage unpalatable to livestock thus decreasing livestock productivity and potentially increasing producer's feed costs. Potential noxious weed species include African rue, non-native thistles (*Cirsium* spp.), leafy spurge, and goldenrod. There are known populations of African rue on surrounding allotments therefore monitoring for noxious weeds on the allotment is necessary.

Environmental Impacts

Under the proposed action and under Alternative A the vegetation in the Shinnery Oak Dune, the Mixed Desert Shrub and Grassland communities 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. Ecological condition and trend is expected to remain stable and/or improve over the long term at the permitted active number of livestock.

Upland sites would reflect a static ecological condition trend at the existing permit level. In the long term, upland vegetation would continue to improve in all pastures from the implementation of a rest-rotation system. Range monitoring data indicate that the vegetation is sustainable to meet multiple resource requirements and forage at the active use level permitted use level under the Proposed Action and under Alternative A. Data indicate that livestock grazing is compatible with vegetation cover and composition objectives. In addition to the upward trend in ecological condition, monitoring data show the vegetative resources have been improved and sustained since monitoring began in 1981. Monitoring data does not indicate that vegetative resources would support re-activation of the suspended use at this time.

Under the No-Grazing Alternative, no impacts to vegetation resources would occur on public lands from authorized livestock grazing. Vegetation cover would increase over the long term in some areas. Grasslands in the uplands would increase in cover and composition, but composition would be tempered by mesquite somewhat dominating the shrub component.

Soils

Affected Environment

The Soil Survey of Chaves County, Northern Part, New Mexico (USDA Soil Conservation Service 1983) and the Soil Survey of DeBaca County, New Mexico (USDA Soil Conservation Service 1986) were used to describe and analyze impacts to soils on these allotments. The soil units covering the most area are described below, more in depth information can be found in the soil survey. The primary soil units on these public lands are: Latom-Rock outcrop-Philder complex, moderately undulating (LRD), the Ratliff-Redona association, gently undulating (RBA), Roswell-Jalmar fine sandy, hilly (RPD), Stromal-Faskin Malstrom fine sand, undulating (SOA) and the Faskin fine sands (FaA).

The Latom-Rock outcrop-Philder complex, moderately undulating is found on terraces along the Pecos River with slopes of 3 to 30 percent. The Latom soil is a fine sandy loam and is found on high terraces, terrace fronts and escarpments along with the Rock outcrops. The Philder soils which is a gravelly fine sandy loam, is found on the high terraces. The Latom soil is shallow and well drained, forming in residuum derived dominantly from sandstone. Permeability is moderate. Available water capacity is very low. Effective rooting depth is 4 to 20 inches. Runoff is rapid and the hazard of water erosion is high as is the hazard of soil blowing. The rock outcrop is exposures of unweathered sandstone and supports little if any vegetation. Surface runoff is rapid. The Philder soil is also shallow and well drained but is formed in calcareous alluvium. Permeability is moderate and the available water capacity is also very low. Effective rooting depth is 4 to 9 inches. Runoff is rapid, and the hazard of water erosion and the hazard of soil blowing is high. (Soil Survey of Chaves County, Northern Part, New Mexico, p. 44)

The Ratliff-Redona association is also found on high terraces with slopes of 0 to 2 percent. Both of these soils are fine sandy loams; the Ratliff is on alluvial side slopes and low ridges and the Redona soil is found in depressional areas. Both soils are deep and well drained, forming in calcareous alluvium. Permeability is moderate, available water capacity is high to very high. Effective rooting depth is 60 inches or more. Runoff is slow and the hazard of water erosion is slight. The hazard of soil blowing is high. (Soil Survey of Chaves County, Northern Part, New Mexico, p. 52)

The Redona-Canez association, gently undulating soil unit is found on high terraces with 0 to 2 percent slopes. Both soils are fine sandy loams. In this unit the Redona soil is found on the low ridges and the Canez soil is in depressional areas. The Canez soil is deep and well drained, forming in alluvium. Permeability is moderate, available water capacity is high. Effective rooting depth is 60 inches or more. Runoff is medium and the hazard of water erosion is moderate. The hazard of soil blowing is high. (Soil Survey of Chaves County, Northern Part, New Mexico, p. 57)

The Roswell-Jalmar fine sands, hilly unit is also found on high terraces with slopes of 0 to 25 percent. Both of these soils are fine sands. The Roswell soil is found on hummocky sand dunes and the Jalmar soil is in depressional areas and in interdunal areas. The Roswell soil is deep and excessively drained, forming in eolian deposits. Permeability is rapid, available water capacity is low. Effective rooting depth is 60 inches or more. Runoff is slow and the hazard of water erosion is slight. The hazard of soil blowing is very high. The Jalmar soil is also deep and well drained, forming in alluvial and eolian deposits. Effective rooting depth is 60 inches or more. Runoff is slow and the hazard of water erosion is slight. The hazard of soil blowing is very high. (Soil Survey of Chaves County, Northern Part, New Mexico, p. 61)

Stromal-Faskin-Malstrom fine sands, gently undulating is also located on high terraces with slopes of 0 to 2 percent. Each of these soils is a fine sand. They are each deep and well drained, each forming in calcareous alluvial and eolian deposits. Permeability is moderate to moderately rapid, available water capacity is moderate to high. Effective rooting depth is 60 inches or more in this unit. Runoff is slow to medium and the hazard of water erosion is slight to moderate. The hazard of soil blowing is very high. (Soil Survey of Chaves County, Northern Part, New Mexico, p. 66)

The Faskin fine sands is a deep and well-drained soil, forming in alluvial and eolian deposits. Permeability of the soil unit is moderate with high available water capacity. Effective rooting depth is 60 inches or more. Runoff is medium and the hazard of water erosion is moderate. The hazard of soil blowing is very high. (Soil Survey of Chaves County, Northern Part, New Mexico, p. 29)

Environmental Impacts

Under the Proposed Action and Alternative A, livestock would remove some of the cover of standing vegetation and litter, and compact the soil by trampling. If livestock management were inadequate, these effects could be severe enough to reduce infiltration rates and increase runoff, leading to greater water erosion and soil losses (Moore et al. 1979, Stoddart et al. 1975). Producing forage and protecting the soil from further erosion would then be more difficult. The greatest impacts of removing vegetation and trampling would be expected in areas of concentrated livestock use, such as trails, waters, feeders, and shade.

Under the Proposed Action and Alternative A rangeland monitoring would help ensure that adequate vegetation cover is maintained to protect the soil from erosion. Low/moderate forage quality plants provide protection to the soils resource. Cumulative long term monitoring data reflect the soils are being adequately protected.

Under No-Grazing Alternative, any adverse impact from livestock grazing would be eliminated. However, it is possible that removing grazing animals from an area where they were a natural part of the landscape could result in poor use of precipitation and inefficient mineral cycling (Savory 1988). Bare soil could be sealed by raindrop impact, and vegetation could become decadent, inhibiting new growth. Therefore, the results of no grazing could be similar to those of overgrazing in some respects.

Mitigation

Rangeland monitoring would help ensure that adequate vegetation cover is maintained to protect the soil from erosion.

Floodplains

Affected Environment

Portions of the proposed allotment are located in the 100-year floodplain. For administrative purposes, the 100-year floodplain serves as the basis for floodplain management on public lands. It is based on Flood Insurance Rate Maps prepared by the Federal Emergency Management Agency which describes a Zone A as the "Area of the 100-year flood". Current development on the floodplain consists of two-track roads and several miles of boundary fences located in the area.

Environmental Consequences

Surface disturbance from the proposed project can result in impairment of the floodplain values from removal of vegetation, removal of wildlife habitat, impairment of water quality, decreased flood water retention and decreased groundwater recharge.

Under the Proposed Action rangeland monitoring would help ensure that adequate vegetation cover is maintained to protect the floodplain values. Low/moderate forage quality plants provide protection to the floodplain values. Cumulative long-term monitoring data reflect the floodplain values are being adequately protected.

Mitigation

The disturbed area should naturally re-vegetate within two growing seasons or less with adequate precipitation, resulting in cessation of project related erosion or runoff and impacts to floodplain values.

Watershed – Hydrology

Affected Environment

The watershed and hydrology in the area is affected by land and water use practices. The degree to which hydrologic processes are affected by land and water use depends on the location, extent, timing and the type of activity. Factors that currently cause short-lived alterations to the hydrologic regime in the area include livestock grazing management, recreational use activities, groundwater pumping and also oil and gas developments such as well pads, permanent roads, temporary roads, pipelines, and powerlines.

Environmental Impacts

Livestock grazing management and range improvement projects can result in long term and short term alterations to the hydrologic regime. Peak flow and low flow of perennial streams, ephemeral, and intermittent rivers and streams would be directly affected by an increase in impervious surfaces resulting from the livestock grazing management and range improvement projects. The potential hydrologic effects to peak flow is reduced infiltration where surface flows can move more quickly to perennial or ephemeral rivers and streams, causing peak flow to occur earlier and to be larger. Increased magnitude and volume of peak flow can cause bank erosion, channel widening, downward incision, and disconnection from the floodplain. The potential hydrologic effects to low flow is reduced surface storage and groundwater recharge, resulting in reduced baseflow to perennial, ephemeral, and intermittent rivers and streams. The direct impact would be that hydrologic processes may be altered where the perennial, ephemeral, and intermittent river and stream system responds by changing physical parameters, such as channel configuration. These changes may in turn impact chemical parameters and ultimately the aquatic ecosystem.

Long-term direct and indirect impacts to the watershed and hydrology would continue for the life of the livestock grazing management and range improvement projects and would decrease once reclamation of the range improvement projects has taken place. Short term direct and indirect impacts to the watershed and hydrology from access roads that are not surfaced with material would occur and would likely decrease in time due to reclamation efforts.

Under the Proposed Action and Alternative A rangeland monitoring would help ensure that adequate vegetation cover is maintained to protect the hydrologic regime. Low/moderate forage quality plants provide protection to the soils resource and hydrologic regime. Cumulative long-term monitoring data reflect the hydrologic regime is being adequately protected.

Under the No Grazing Alternative, any adverse impact from livestock grazing management and range improvement projects would be eliminated. However, it is possible that removing grazing animals from an area where they were a natural part of the landscape could result in poor use of precipitation and inefficient mineral cycling (Savory 1988). Bare soil could be sealed by raindrop impact, and vegetation could become decadent, inhibiting new growth. Therefore, the results of no grazing could be similar to those of overgrazing in some respects.

Mitigation

Rangeland monitoring would help ensure that adequate vegetation cover is maintained to protect the soil from erosion.

Water Quality

Affected Environment - Ground Water

Fresh water sources are in the Quaternary Shallow Alluvium Aquifer. Depth to water in nearby wells in the shallow aquifer ranges from 30 to 150 feet (Water Table Contour Map of Part of East Chaves County, Geohydrology and Associates 1978).

Environmental Impacts – Ground Water

The proposed action and Alternative A would not have a significant effect on ground water. Livestock would be dispersed over the allotments or over the management unit if placed into one allotment, and the soil would filter potential contaminants.

Affected Environment – Surface Water

No perennial surface water is found on the Public Land on these allotments.

Environmental Impacts – Surface Water

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.

Mitigation

Rangeland monitoring would help ensure that adequate vegetation cover is maintained to protect the soil from erosion.

Wildlife

Affected Environment

The allotments provide a variety of habitat types for terrestrial wildlife species. The diversity and abundance of wildlife species in the area is due to the presence of a mixture of grassland habitat and mixed desert shrub vegetation.

Avian species potentially occurring within this allotment based on the presence of suitable habitat include the lesser prairie-chicken, bobwhite quail, scaled quail, mourning dove, white-winged dove, road runner, western king bird, scissor-tailed flycatcher, ash-throated flycatcher, pyrrhuloxia, Scott's oriole, Bullock's oriole, Chihuahuan raven, turkey vulture, Harris' hawk, northern harrier, prairie falcon, Swainson's hawk, Ferruginous hawk, red-tailed hawk, golden eagle, merlin, American kestrel, barn owl, great horned owl, burrowing owl, lesser night hawk, various hummingbirds, horned larks, lark bunting, logger-headed shrike, cactus wren, western tanager, curve-billed thrasher, mocking bird, various warblers and sparrows.

Mammals known to occur throughout the allotment include various bats, mule deer, pronghorn antelope, javelina, desert cottontail, black-tailed jackrabbit, spotted ground squirrel, pocket gopher, porcupine, coyote, gray fox, bobcat, raccoon, striped and spotted skunk, wood rat and various other small rodents. Resident bats in the area tend to be Townsend's Western Big-eared (*Corynorhinus townsendii*), Cave Bat (*Myotis velifer*), Small-footed Bat (*Myotis celiolabrum*) and Mexican Freetail (*Tadarida brasiliensis*). None of these bat species are threatened or endangered. This is not a complete list, as there are other mammal species that are highly likely to occur on this allotment.

Herpetofauna (reptiles and amphibians) potentially associated with the allotment include the Couch's spadefoot toad, green toad, Red-spotted toad, plains leopard frog, collared lizard, Texas horned lizard, EA DOI-BLM-NM-P010-2011-048

short-horned lizard, roundtail horned lizard, prairie lizard, Texas spotted whiptail, six-lined racerunner, western whiptail, little striped whiptail, great plains skink, leopard lizard, lesser earless lizard, Dunes sagebrush lizard, side-blotched lizard, many lined skink, New Mexico milk snake, ringneck snake, Texas blind snake, glossy snake, longnose snake, plains black-headed snake, checkered garter snake, coachwhip, striped whipsnake, gopher snake, western hognose snake, common kingsnake, blackneck garter snake, western garter snake, western rattlesnake, massasauga and the western diamondback rattlesnake.

Migratory Birds: Executive order #13186 titled "Responsibilities of Federal Agencies to Protect Migratory Birds"; signed 1/10/01 requires that the BLM evaluate the effects of federal actions on migratory birds. No migratory bird inventory has been completed for the proposed project area. Common migratory birds which may use the area as habitat include various species of song birds, owls, ravens, hawks, finches, doves, thrashers, and meadow larks.

Environmental Impacts

Under the Proposed Action and Alternative A, livestock grazing management and range improvement projects designed with consideration for wildlife would generally enhance the quality of wildlife habitat. Vegetation condition, forage production, and habitat diversity would improve, and wildlife species distribution and abundance would increase. The construction of livestock waters in previously unwatered areas would promote increased wildlife distribution and abundance, but may potentially increase grazing pressure in those same areas. Short-term impacts of range improvement projects would be the temporary displacement of wildlife species during construction activities.

Under No-Grazing Alternative, there would no longer be direct competition between livestock and wildlife for forage, browse and cover. Wildlife habitat would moderately improve. The limitation for improvement would continue to be the existing invading species component (e.g., mesquite, snakeweed) affecting plant composition. Since livestock grazing would not be permitted, range improvement projects that benefit wildlife, such as water developments, would be abandoned. New range improvement projects that would also benefit wildlife habitat, such as brush control, may not be implemented because these projects are primarily driven and funded through range improvement efforts.

Special Status Species, Including Threatened and Endangered Species

Federally Listed Threatened/Endangered Species:

There are no species listed as endangered, threatened, or proposed for protection under the Endangered Species Act known on this allotment. Designated critical habitat for a listed species also does not occur on this allotment.

Other Special Status Species

The species listed below are also potentially associated with this allotment and are considered sensitive due to their state of NM status and BLM sensitive status. (BS refers to BLM Sensitive species, FC refers to Federal Candidates for listing for protection under the Endangered Species Act, and SE refers to State Endangered species.)

	<u>Status</u>	<u>Riparian/Aquatic</u>	<u>Uplands</u>
Loggerhead shrike <i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	BS		x
Lesser prairie-chicken <i>Tympanuchus pallidicinctus</i>	FC		x
Dunes sagebrush lizard	BS,SE		x

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Sceloporus arenicolus

SE--State Endangered, BS--BLM Sensitive, FC--Federal Candidate

Loggerhead Shrike

The shrike occurs throughout the sand shinnery oak community of Chaves, Eddy and Lea County. The shrike is usually seen in relatively xeric habitats dominated by shrubs and desert grasses. Some of the important shrubs are honey mesquite and fourwing saltbush, and some of the grasses include tobosa, grama spp., sand dropseed, and three-awn. Trees are generally uncommon but a few large honey mesquite, soapberry, or hackberry trees are occasionally present.

Lesser prairie-chicken

The lesser prairie-chicken (LPC) is a species of prairie grouse endemic to the southern high plains of the United States, commonly recognized for its feathered feet, stout build, ground-dwelling habit, and elaborate breeding behavior.

The historic range of the LPC encompassed habitats with sandy soils supporting shinnery oak (*Quercus harvardii*)-bluestem (*Andropogon* sp.) and sand sage (*Artemisia filifolia*)-bluestem communities in the high plains of southeastern Colorado, southwestern Kansas, western Oklahoma, west Texas, the Texas panhandle, and eastern New Mexico. In New Mexico, (Ligon 1961) reported the historic range as being the sandhill-bluestem plains, an approximately 120 km (75 mi) wide swath from the northeast border with Colorado to the southeast border with Texas and in northern De Baca County to 48 km (30 mi) west of Ft. Sumner.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the former range of the LPC in New Mexico was described as all of the sandhill rangeland of eastern New Mexico as far west as De Baca County. (Ligon 1927) mapped the breeding range as encompassing portions of seven counties, a small subset of what he described as former range. In the 1950s and 1960s, occupied range was more extensive, indicating reoccupation of some areas. Presently, the NMDGF reports that LPCs are known from portions of seven counties and the occupied range of the LPC in New Mexico is estimated to encompass approximately 5,698 km² (2,200 mi²) (Davis 2006) compared with its historic range of 22,390 km² (8,645 mi²). Private and State land supports approximately 40 percent of the LPC population in New Mexico, with the remaining occurring on lands managed by BLM (Davis 2006). In the 1950s, the LPC population was estimated at 40,000 to 50,000 individuals, but by 1972 the population had declined to an estimated 6,000 to 10,000 individuals. NMDGF currently estimates the LPC statewide population to be about 9,443 individuals (Beauprez 2008).

In New Mexico, the most recent LPC population decline began in 1989. LPC counts on leks dropped dramatically in the BLM Caprock Wildlife Habitat Management Area and in west-central Lea County (Smith et al. 1998). Estimated hunter harvest also declined sharply (Cowley 1995), resulting in closure of hunting seasons in New Mexico in 1996. Although the decline may have been precipitated by drought conditions and reduced nest success, it is also likely that population recovery during the drought was hampered by habitat fragmentation and low recruitment. Since 2005, weather conditions have improved resulting in population increases, and Federal and State agencies have focused staff time and funding to address habitat concerns. From 1998-2008 LPC populations within the core area of southern Roosevelt, northern Lea, and eastern Chaves counties have increased (Beauprez 2008). The LPC population south of U.S. Highway 380 in southeastern Chaves County has shown a significant decline over the same ten-year period, even though 5 leks were detected in 2008, the largest number of leks detected since 1998 (Beauprez 2008). In 1995, conservation interests petitioned the USFWS to list the LPC as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. In 1998, the FWS ruled that such a listing was warranted, but precluded by the need to devote limited agency resources to other higher priority species. The species is currently considered a candidate species for listing. The 2008 Candidate Notice of Review elevated the species to a Listing Priority Number of 2, the highest priority ranking as a candidate species. On December

11, 2012, The FWS published a rule proposing to list the lesser prairie-chicken as a threatened or endangered species under the Endangered Species Act.

Dunes sagebrush lizard

The dunes sagebrush lizard (*Sceloporus arenicolus*, DSL) is listed by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish as endangered. The DSL only occurs in the southeastern corner of New Mexico and the western region of Texas. DSL only occur in sand dune complexes associated with shinnery oak (Degenhardt et al. 1996). Shinnery oak is the dominate plant species that surrounds the top edge of the active sand dune, with a small composition of grasses inside the blowout area.

Conservation interests petitioned the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to list the DSL as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. On June 13, 2012 the FWS withdrew their proposed rule that the species be listed under the Endangered Species Act. It was their conclusion that the threats to the species as identified in the proposed rule no longer are as significant as believed at the time of the proposed rule. The FWS based this conclusion on their analysis of current and future threats and conservation efforts. The FWS found the best scientific and commercial data available indicated that the threats to the species and its habitat have been reduced to the point that the species does not meet the statutory definition of an endangered or threatened species. (*Federal Register*, Vol. 77, No. 118, Tuesday, June 19, 2012, Proposed Rules)

Impacts

Lesser prairie-chicken

Grazing is one of the dominant land uses on public and private lands throughout the range of LPCs. The evolutionary history of the mixed-grass prairie resulted in endemic bird species adapted to a mosaic of lightly to heavily grazed areas (Bragg and Steuter 1996; Knopf and Samson 1997). In some areas within LPC range where heavy grazing has removed tallgrass and midgrass cover, insufficient amount of lightly grazed habitat is available to support successful nesting (Jackson and DeArment 1963; Davis et al. 1979; Crawford 1980; Taylor and Guthery 1980; Davies 1992). Uniform or widespread livestock grazing of rangeland, to a degree that leaves less than adequate residual cover remaining in the spring, is considered detrimental to LPC populations because grass height is reduced below that necessary for secure nesting cover and desirable food plants are markedly reduced (Bent 1932; Davis et al. 1979; Crawford 1980; Bidwell and Peoples 1991; Riley et al. 1992; Giesen 1994). Residual cover at and around nests is thought to increase nest success because the nest is better concealed from predators (Davis et al. 1979; Wisdom 1980; Riley et al. 1992; Giesen 1994b).

The impacts of grazing on LPC habitat can vary widely, depending on climatic conditions, the state or health of range vegetation, and the type of grazing regime utilized. Drought tends to magnify grazing impacts, as both processes reduce plant cover (Giesen 2000). When forage is reduced by drought, what remains tends to be grazed more heavily unless animal numbers are reduced. As a result, some grazed areas may supply adequate habitat during periods of normal rainfall, but may be unable to support LPCs during periods of drought (Merchant 1982). Intensive and/or persistent grazing may reduce or eliminate residual tallgrass cover needed for nesting (Davis et al. 1979; Riley et al. 1992). Heavy grazing that repeatedly interrupts plant succession over a broad area may result in the conversion of tallgrass prairie to shortgrass or forb-dominated habitat (Hoffman 1963; Jackson and DeArment 1963; Litton et al. 1994) or shrub-dominated landscapes.

Suitable habitat for LPCs has been lost due to conversion to agriculture and modified through grazing practices and other factors, such that remaining suitable habitat is increasingly fragmented and isolated (Crawford 1980; Braun et al. 1994). Fragmentation may threaten local LPC populations through several mechanisms: habitat juxtaposition and remaining patches of rangeland may be smaller than necessary to EA DOI-BLM-NM-P010-2011-048

support populations (Samson 1980); necessary habitat heterogeneity may be lost; habitat between patches may accommodate high densities of predators; and ability to move and/or disperse among suitable patches of habitat may decrease (Wilcove et al. 1986; Knopf 1996).

Wire fencing is common throughout LPC range as a means of confining livestock to ranches and pastures, or excluding them from areas not intended for grazing such as CRP, agricultural fields, and public roads. Like most grassland wildlife, LPC evolved in open habitats free of vertical features or flight barriers. Fences, power lines, or other wire structures are an unnatural threat to prairie grouse that, until recently, were seldom perceived as significant at the population level (Wolfe et al. 2007).

Lesser prairie-chicken was a focal species in the 2008 Pecos District Special Status Species Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment. Through the planning process, the USFWS supported BLM's determination of "may affect, not likely to affect" for LPC. The management prescriptions of the plan include vegetation management and livestock management (grazing) as addressed on pages 15-23 of the Amendment and further in Appendix 2

Dunes sagebrush lizard

There are no known direct impacts to DSL from livestock grazing. However, domestic livestock and wildlife grazing practices that reduce the ability of the land to sustain long term plant and animal production (Smith et al. 1996) may lead to the loss of grassland cover, mortality of plant species, and increased erosion. Further, improper grazing practices and increased conversion of rangelands to agricultural production may lead to habitat fragmentation and loss by promoting conditions favorable for shrub encroachment and by increasing infrastructure development, such as roads, drinkers, windmills, water pipelines, and fences (Dinerstein et al. 2000). These land management activities are compounded by extended drought periods and altered hydrologic functions.

Dunes sagebrush lizard was a focal species in the 2008 Pecos District Special Status Species Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment. Through the planning process, the USFWS supported BLM's determination of "may affect, not likely to affect" for DSL. The management prescriptions of the plan include vegetation management and livestock management (grazing) as addressed on pages 15-23 of the Amendment and further in Appendix 2.

Air Quality

Affected Environment

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has the primary responsibility for regulating air quality, including seven nationally regulated ambient air pollutants. Regulation of air quality is also delegated to some states. Air quality is determined by atmospheric pollutants and chemistry, dispersion meteorology and terrain, and also includes applications of noise, smoke management, and visibility.

The area around the allotment is considered a Class II air quality area. A Class II area allows moderate amounts of air quality degradation. The primary sources of air pollution are dust from blowing wind on disturbed or exposed soil and exhaust emissions from motorized equipment. Air quality in the area is generally good and is not located in any of the areas designated by the Environmental Protection Agency as "non-attainment areas" for any listed pollutants regulated by the Clean Air Act.

The allotments are in a Class II area for the Prevention of Significant Deterioration of air quality as defined by the federal Clean Air Act. Class II areas allow a moderate amount of air quality degradation.

Air quality in the region is generally good, with winds averaging 10-16 miles per hour depending on the season. Peak velocities reach more than 50 miles per hour in the spring. These conditions rapidly disperse air pollutants in the region.

Environmental Impacts

Air quality would temporarily be directly impacted with pollution from enteric fermentation (ruminant livestock), chemical odors, and dust. Dust levels resulting from allotment management activities would be slightly higher under the Proposed Action, Alternative A or No Action alternative, than the No Grazing Alternative. The cumulative impact on air quality from the allotment would be negligible compared to all pollution sources in the region.

The federal Clean Air Act requires that air pollutant emissions be controlled from all significant sources in areas that do not meet the National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS). The New Mexico Air Quality Bureau (NMAQB) is responsible for enforcing the state and national ambient air quality standards in New Mexico. Any emission source must comply with the NMAQB regulations (USDI, BLM 2003b). At the present time, the counties that lie within the jurisdictional boundaries of the Roswell Field Office are classified as in attainment of all state and national ambient air quality standards as defined in the Clean Air Act of 1972, as amended (USDI, BLM 2003b).

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), on October 17, 2006, issued a final ruling on the lowering of the NAAQS for particulate matter ranging from 2.5 micron or smaller particle size. This ruling became effective on December 18, 2006, stating that the 24-hour standard for PM_{2.5}, was lowered to 35 ug/m³ from the previous standard of 65 ug/m³. This revised PM_{2.5} daily NAAQS was promulgated to better protect the public from short-term particle exposure. The significant threshold of 35 ug/m³ daily PM_{2.5} NAAQS is not expected to be exceeded under the proposed action or under Alternative A.

Mitigation

Rangeland monitoring would help ensure that adequate vegetation cover is maintained to protect the soil from erosion.

Climate

Affected Environment

Climate is the composite of generally prevailing weather conditions of a particular region throughout the year, averaged over a series of years.

Greenhouse gases (GHGs), including carbon dioxide (CO₂) and methane (CH₄), and the potential effects of GHG emissions on climate are not regulated by the EPA under the Clean Air Act. However, climate has the potential to influence renewable and non-renewable resource management. The EPA's Inventory of US Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks found that in 2006, total US GHG emissions were over 6 billion metric tons and that total US GHG emissions have increased by 14.1% from 1990 to 2006. The report also noted that GHG emissions fell by 1.5% from 2005 to 2006. This decrease was, in part, attributed to the increased use of natural gas and other alternatives to burning coal in electric power generation. The levels of these GHGs are expected to continue increasing. The rate of increase is expected to slow as greater awareness of the potential environmental and economic costs associated with increased levels of GHGs result in behavioral and industrial adaptations.

Global mean surface temperatures have increased nearly 1.0°C (1.8°F) from 1890 to 2006 (Goddard Institute for Space Studies, 2007). However, observations and predictive models indicate that average temperature changes are likely to be greater in the Northern Hemisphere. Without additional meteorological monitoring systems, it is difficult to determine the spatial and temporal variability and

change of climatic conditions, but increasing concentrations of GHGs are likely to accelerate the rate of climate change.

In 2001, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicted that by the year 2100, global average surface temperatures would increase 1.4 to 5.8°C (2.5 to 10.4°F) above 1990 levels. The National Academy of Sciences (2006) supports these predictions, but has acknowledged that there are uncertainties regarding how climate change may affect different regions. Computer model predictions indicate that increases in temperature will not be equally distributed, but are likely to be accentuated at higher latitudes. Warming during the winter months is expected to be greater than during the summer, and increases in daily minimum temperatures is more likely than increases in daily maximum temperatures.

A 2007 US Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report on Climate Change found that, "federal land and water resources are vulnerable to a wide range of effects from climate change, some of which are already occurring. These effects include, among others: 1) physical effects such as droughts, floods, glacial melting, and sea level rise; 2) biological effects, such as increases in insect and disease infestations, shifts in species distribution, and changes in the timing of natural events; and 3) economic and social effects, such as adverse impacts on tourism, infrastructure, fishing, and other resource uses." It is not, however, possible to predict with any certainty regional or site specific effects on climate relative to the proposed lease parcels and subsequent actions.

In New Mexico, a recent study indicated that the mean annual temperatures have exceeded the global averages by nearly 50% since the 1970's (Enquist and Gori). Similar to trends in national data, increases in mean winter temperatures in the southwest have contributed to this rise. When compared to baseline information, periods between 1991 and 2005 show temperature increases in over 95% of the geographical area of New Mexico. Warming is greatest in the northwestern, central, and southwestern parts of the state.

Environmental Impacts

Climate change analyses are comprised of several factors, including greenhouse gases (GHGs), land use management practices, the albino effect, etc. The tools necessary to quantify climatic impacts from the Proposed or No Action Alternatives are presently unavailable. As a consequence, impact assessment of specific effects of anthropogenic activities cannot be determined. Additionally, specific levels of significance have not yet been established. Therefore, climate change analysis for the purpose of this document is limited to accounting and disclosing of factors that may contribute to climate change. Qualitative and/or quantitative evaluation of potential contributing factors within the planning area is included where appropriate and practicable.

Livestock Management

Affected Environment

In the past, these allotments have been permitted to be grazed yearlong by cattle, with only enough horses required to work stock. The leases authorized a total of 157 Aus yearlong/1717 Animal unit months Active use and 16 AUs/192 AUMs in Suspended Use. Grazing is by a cow/calf operation. Stock are generally on the allotments from March 1 to February 28 and are rotated through the many pastures.

In 1980, the grazing lease authorized 55 AUs/660 AUMs on allotment 65001 - SEA. A Decision was issued, placing 26 AUs/312 AUMs in Suspension. Rangeland monitoring continued on the allotment and in 1990, 10 AUs/120 AUMs were moved from Suspension to Active use. An Environmental Assessment (NM-060-2000-145) was completed for this allotment in 2001. The Decision issued at the time maintained the 39 AUs/468 AUMs active and 16 AU/s192 AUMs in Suspended Use at 100% pl. The allotment at this time contained 3,021 acres of public land.

In May 2006, an Environmental Assessment (NM-510-2006-045) was completed for allotment 65003 – Bojax. The Decision issued for the assessment offered the long term lease on the 200 acres of public land within this allotment for 3 AUs/36 AUMs at 100 % pl.

Also in May 2006, an Environmental Assessment (EA) (NM-510-2005-0056) was completed for allotment 65005 – Bojax South. This allotment contains the predominant amount of public land of the three. There are 6,192 acres of public land within the Bojax South allotment. The Decision for the Environmental Assessment determined the lease to be 62 AU/573 AUMs at 77% pl for the East Pasture and 53 AUs/627 AUMS at 100% pl for the remaining pastures. This was due to the fact that most of the public land (2,996 acres) within this allotment was concentrated in the southeast (East) pasture of the allotment and is considered to be within the Lesser Prairie Chicken Core area. The management outlined in this EA will continue for the East Pasture.

The allotments contain about 184,302 total acres (see Location Map). Landownership consists of approximately 87,959 acres of private land, 9,413 acres of federal land, and 86,930 acres of state land. Current range improvement projects for the management of livestock include earthen tanks, wells, and drinking troughs with associated pipelines, pasture and boundary fences and corrals.

Environmental Impacts

Under the Proposed Action and Alternative A, livestock would continue to graze public lands within the allotments. Existing pasture configurations and water developments would remain the same. Livestock management would still follow the multiple-herd rotation system.

Under No-Grazing Alternative, there would be no livestock grazing authorized on public lands. The public lands would have to be fenced apart from the private lands or livestock would be considered in trespass if found grazing on public land (43 CFR 4140.1(b)(1)). Exclusion of livestock from the public land would approximately cost \$783,000.00 (based on 65.25 miles at \$12,000/mile). This expense would be borne by the private landowner. Range improvements on public land would not be maintained and the BLM would have to compensate the permittee if any of the improvements were cost shared at the time of their authorization.

Under No-Grazing Alternative, the overall livestock operation could be reduced by 142 AUs (those attached to the public lands). This would have an adverse economic impact on the permittee and to the counties.

Cumulative impacts of the grazing and no grazing alternatives were analyzed in Rangeland Reform '94 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (BLM and USDA Forest Service 1994) and in the Roswell Resource Area Draft RMP/EIS (BLM 1994). The no livestock grazing alternative was not selected in either document.

Visual Resources Management

Affected Environment

The setting presents a winter gray color pattern and in warm months, with foliage, a gray to gray-green color pattern. The allotments are in a Class IV area for visual resources management. The proposed EA DOI-BLM-NM-P010-2011-048

actions are located within a designated VRM Class IV area. The objective of Class IV is to: "Provide for management activities which require major modification of the existing landscape character...Every attempt, however, should be made to reduce or eliminate activity impacts through careful location, minimal disturbance, and repeating the basic landscape elements."

Environmental Impacts

The basic landscape elements of form, line color and texture would not change within the allotments under any management alternative. Potential impacts to visual resources would be analyzed and mitigated as allotment management activities are proposed in the future. Range facilities such as windmills and fences tend to be a translucent grey in color and blend favorably with grey and grey-green settings, To further blend favorably with the setting tanks would be low profile, not exceeding 8 feet high, and painted a flat grey or grey-green color. Other translucent colors, such as juniper green and brown can be used, as long as they blend with the setting.

Recreation

Affected Environment

The area around the proposed action site is primarily used by recreational visitors engaged in hunting, off-highway vehicle use and other recreational activities. Non-recreation visitors include oil and gas industrial workers and ranchers. The area provides habitat for numerous game species including desert mule deer, pronghorn, mourning dove and scaled quail. Predator and feral pig hunting may occur on the allotments, as well as trapping for predators or furbearers. General sightseeing, wildlife viewing and photography are non-consumptive recreational activities that may occur. Rock collectors find various minerals unique to the area, such as Pecos diamonds.

Environmental Impacts

Game and non-game wildlife species could realize long-term benefits through the improvement of habitat. It is expected that hunter success and wildlife viewing opportunities would be enhanced. Under No-Grazing Alternative, no conflicts between ranching activities and recreational use would occur on public lands. Success of hunts and non-consumptive opportunities would remain the same or slightly improve. Vandalism could still occur to range improvements. Conflicts with OHV use would continue.

Cave and Karst

Affected Environment

These allotments are located within a designated area of *High Karst* or *Cave Potential*. Karst features such as sinkholes have been documented in this area. Karst features are derived from dissolved limestone and gypsum from which caves and sinkholes can form, under the definition of caves in the Federal Cave Resource Protection Act of 1988.

Pursuant to Federal Register Notices, Vol. 76, No. 16, page 4373, January 23, 2011, all known Roswell Field Office hibernacula are temporarily closed to public entry from January 25, 2011 to no later than January 25, 2013 to monitor for the presence of White Nose Syndrome and prevent its spread if it arrives. White Nose Syndrome) was first documented on hibernating bats in New York and by 2009 it had moved over 450 miles across eight states and had killed well over 1 million bats. By spring of 2010, White Nose Syndrome (WNS) had been found in Oklahoma on cave myotis (*Myotis velifer incautus*), the first evidence of it infecting a western bat species. Any proposed entry whatsoever of these caves must be formally proposed to BLM.

Environmental Impacts

While the proposed action is located in a *High Potential Karst Area*, a complete inventory of significant cave or karst features has not been completed for public land located in this grazing allotment. However, no surface cave/karst features were observed in the immediate vicinity of the proposed action. Livestock grazing could be affected by the presence of karst features if livestock became entrapped in deep sinkholes, which has occurred with sheep grazing on karst land north of Roswell. This could be prevented by creating exclosures around identified karst features that pose a hazard to livestock.

*A separate Environmental Analysis would be prepared to construct an exclosure fence.

*In the event that range improvement projects are proposed, the presence of karst features would be further analyzed in related environmental assessments.

*If at a later date, more significant caves or karst features are found on public land within the allotment, that cave or feature may be fenced to exclude livestock grazing and Off Highway Vehicle Use.

*Any cave or karst feature, such as a deep sinkhole, discovered by the co-operator/contractor or any person working on the co-operator's/contractor behalf, on BLM-managed public land shall be immediately reported to the authorized officer. An evaluation of the discovery will be made by the authorized officer to determine appropriate action(s). Any decision as to the further mitigation measures will be made by the Authorized Officer after consulting with the co-operator/contractor.

Cultural Resources

Affected Environment

The project falls within the Southeastern New Mexico Archaeological Region. This region contains the following cultural/temporal periods: Paleoindian (ca. 12,000-8,000 B.C.), Archaic (ca. 8000 B.C. –A.D. 950), Ceramic (ca. A.D. 600-1540) Protohistoric and Spanish Colonial (ca. A.D. 1400-1821), and Mexican and American Historical (ca. A.D. 1822 to early 20th century). Sites representing any or all of these periods are known to occur within the region. A more complete discussion can be found in *Living on the Land: 11,000 Years of Human Adaptation in Southeastern New Mexico An Overview of Cultural Resources in the Roswell District*, Bureau of Land Management published in 1989 by the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management.

Environmental Impacts

Concerning cultural resources, grazing has the potential for impacts. The Roswell Field Office reviews the local office and New Mexico Cultural Resource Information System databases for every grazing permit or leasing action at both the Environmental Assessment level and the Documentation of NEPA Adequacy level. In situations where sensitive sites lie within an allotment, site specific visits may be conducted to assess the presence of effects. Seven surveys and 18 sites have been reported in this allotment. Currently, there is no evidence that grazing activities at this intensity have adversely impacted any cultural resources; however, unforeseen impacts may occur.

Mitigation

Any future range improvement involving earth disturbing activities will require a cultural resource inventory prior to approval.

Native American Religious Concerns

Affected Environment

To date, the areas to be affected by the current project have not been identified by interested tribes as being of tribal concern.

Environmental Impacts

A review of existing information indicates the proposed action is outside any known Traditional Cultural Property.

Paleontology

Affected Environment

Surface disturbances have the potential to affect paleontological resources in the areas known to contain or have the potential to contain paleontological resources, primarily the areas identified through the Potential Fossil Yield Classification (PFYC) system.

Environmental Impacts

The proposed action is not located within an area with a high PFYC. Impacts to paleontological resources are not anticipated.

IV. CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

A cumulative impact is defined in 40 CFR 1508.7 as:

“the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-Federal) or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time.”

The incremental impact of issuing a grazing permit on these resources must be analyzed in the context of impacts from other actions. Other BLM actions that could have impacts on the identified resources include: livestock authorization on other allotments in this area; oil and gas activities on the uplands; rights-of way crossing the area; and recreation use, particularly off-highway vehicles. All authorized activities which occur on BLM land can also take place on state and private land.

Many of the actions which could contribute to cumulative impacts have occurred over many years. Impacts from open-range livestock grazing in the last century are still being addressed today. Oil and gas activities began in the early part of the 20th century. These activities are still occurring today, and are expected to continue into the foreseeable future to some degree.

If the No-Grazing Alternative were chosen, some adverse cumulative impacts would be eliminated, but others would occur. Grazing would no longer be available as a vegetation management tool, and BLM lands within the allotment would be less intensively managed.

Wildlife: Wildlife, as well as domestic livestock, will continue to utilize the available forage and browse. The amount of cover available for the various wildlife species present on the allotment will fluctuate, based
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on livestock use levels and amount of precipitation. Maintenance and operation of existing waterings will continue to provide a dependable water source for wildlife, as well as livestock.

Livestock grazing may have an impact on the various habitat components of some wildlife species. Livestock select the herbaceous component, which provides a source of food for various neotropical migrants and upland game birds, first before other vegetative types such as browse or forbs. Subsequently, impacts to the ground nesting birds and to the various food types utilized by avian species (seeds, green vegetative material, etc.) can range from beneficial to detrimental depending on specific livestock management scheme including season of use, pasture rotation system, annual precipitation and number of livestock.

Specifically, in the SEA, the Bojax and the Bojax South allotment, cattle are rotated between pastures, adequate growing season rest is given to pastures before cattle return to them, voluntary nonuse is taken during drought periods, and utilization levels are within the acceptable range so the impacts from livestock grazing to wildlife is minimized.

Special Status Species

Lesser Prairie-chicken: Residual (growth from the previous year) cover in the form of sand bluestem, little bluestem, dropseeds (*Sporobolus* spp.), and other native warm-season grasses are the preferred nesting substrate for lesser prairie-chicken (LPC), and these grasses typically occur under light to moderate grazing intensities (Riley et al. 1992). When birds are forced to nest in isolated small pockets of suitable cover, or in areas of less than suitable cover, nesting success is greatly reduced. In these areas, nest failure due to predation is increased.

Livestock grazing may reduce nesting success when it results in less residual grass height and density, or less litter and more bare ground (Riley 1978, Wisdom 1980). Range management practices that do not leave adequate residual cover contribute to the decline of nesting habitat. Intensive grazing that does not include sufficient rest at the end of the growing season can eliminate some residual cover necessary for nesting the following spring. Severe climatic events such as drought often magnify the effect of livestock grazing throughout the LPC range.

Lesser prairie-chicken was a focal species in the 2008 Pecos District Special Status Species Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment. Through the planning process, the USFWS supported BLM's determination of "may affect, not likely to affect" for LPC. The management prescriptions of the plan include vegetation management and livestock management (grazing) as addressed on pages 15-23 of the Amendment and further in Appendix 2.

Dunes sagebrush lizard: There are extensive public land shinnery oak habitats that have been altered by grazing, spraying of the herbicide tebuthiuron and oil and gas development and exploration. There are oil and gas facilities located throughout the allotment. As the lizard occupies the blowout dunal features exclusively, livestock grazing itself should not affect the lizard and there has been no documentation of direct effects on lizards due to grazing.

At this time portions of the Sea, the Bojax and the Bojax South allotments fall outside the current Dunes sagebrush lizard distribution map however does contain habitat that is conducive for the Dunes sagebrush lizard.

Loggerhead Shrike: Declines in range wide populations are attributed to the consumption of contaminated prey (large insects and small mammals), the loss of nesting sites such as hedgerows and thorn trees, and the loss of pastureland feeding habitat. Specifically, impacts to the shrike in the RFO can be attributed primarily to drought conditions affecting prey species, and loss of nesting habitat. Loggerhead shrikes nest in shrubs, so a decrease in shrub density would lead to a decrease in nesting structure available for the shrike. Shrub communities within the SEA, the Bojax and the Bojax -South
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allotment are abundant so nesting habitat for the shrike is not impacted in this allotment. Concurrently, since cattle are primarily herbaceous grazers, the grazing of livestock within the allotment would not impact the nesting habitat for the loggerhead shrike.

V. MITIGATION MEASURES

Vegetation monitoring studies will continue if a new grazing permit were issued under the Proposed Action or under Alternative A. Changes to livestock management would be made if monitoring data showed adverse impacts to the vegetation.

If new information surfaces that livestock grazing is negatively impacting other resources, action will be taken at that time to mitigate those impacts.

VI. RESIDUAL IMPACTS

Residual impacts are direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts that would remain after applying the mitigation measures. Residual impacts following authorization of livestock grazing would be insignificant if the mitigation measures are properly applied.

VII. SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS, and Public Health and Safety

Neither the Proposed Action, nor the Preferred Alternative A as outlined in this document are anticipated to alter the socio-economic conditions for either the permittees or Chaves County. Should the No Livestock Grazing Alternative be adopted, economic impacts would occur. Chaves County would lose tax revenues on approximately 142 head of cattle annually.

Under the No Livestock Grazing Alternative, it would be the responsibility of the permittees to prevent livestock from grazing on the public lands. To accomplish this, the permittees would most likely have to construct fences to exclude the public land. New fence would be needed at a cost of approximately \$12,000/mile. BLM would also have to provide compensation to the permittees for their interest in authorized range improvements due to the exclusion of livestock grazing. These costs could be reduced or mitigated by land exchanges with either the state or the permittees to block up the public land.

Public Health and Safety

Usual agricultural practices will be followed. No impacts to public health and safety are anticipated.

IX. BLM TEAM MEMBERS

Helen Miller - Rangeland Management Specialist
Kyle Arnold - Rangeland Management Specialist
Mike McGee - Hydrologist
Jeremy Iliff – Archaeologist
Glen Garnand – Environmental Coordinator
Chris Brown – Outdoor Recreation Planner
Randy Howard – Wildlife Biologist
Mike Bilbo – Cave Specialist & Assistant Outdoor Recreation Planner
Vanessa Bussell-Realty Specialist

X. PERSONS AND AGENCIES CONSULTED

Chaves County Public Land Use Advisory Committee
New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
New Mexico Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department
- Forestry and Resource Conservation Division
New Mexico Environment Department - Surface Water Quality Bureau
New Mexico State Land Office
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Ecological Services
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Fishery Resources Office

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Bureau of Land Management, Roswell Field Office

Environmental Assessment Checklist, DOI-BLM-NM-P010-2011-048 EA

Resources	Not Present on Site	No Impacts	May Be Impacts	Mitigation Included	BLM Reviewer	Date
Air Quality			X	X	<i>/s/ Michael McGee Hydrologist</i> <i>SWA Spec/Hydro.</i>	11/27/2012
Soils			X	X		
Watershed Hydrology			X	X		
Floodplains			X	X		
Water Quality - Surface			X	X		
Water Quality - Ground			X	X	<i>/s/ Michael McGee Geologist/Hydrologist</i>	11/27/2012
Cultural Resources			X	X	<i>/s/ Jeremy Iliff Archaeologist</i>	1/7/2013
Native American Religious Concerns		X				
Paleontology		X			<i>/s/ Al Collar Geologist</i>	1/25/2013
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern			X		<i>/s/Glen Garnand Plan & Env. Coord.</i>	2/1/2013
Farmlands, Prime or Unique	X				<i>/s/Tate Salas Realty Specialist</i>	12/17/2012
Rights-of-Way		X				
Invasive, Non-native Species			X	X	<i>/s/ Emily Peterson Range Mgmt. Spec.</i>	1/29/2013
Vegetation			X	X		
Livestock Grazing			X	X		
Wastes, Hazardous or Solid	X				<i>/s/ Al Collar geologist</i>	1/3/2013
Threatened or Endangered Species	X				<i>Biologist</i> <i>/s/ Randy Howard</i>	12/17/2012
Special Status Species			X	X		
Wildlife			X	X		
Wetlands/Riparian Zones			X			
Wild and Scenic Rivers	X				<i>/s/ Christopher J Brown</i> <i>Outdoor Recreation Planner</i>	
Wilderness	X					
Recreation		X				
Visual Resources		X			<i>/s/ Michael J. Bilbo Cave & VRM Specialist</i>	1/23/2013
Cave/Karst			X	X		
Environmental Justice	X				<i>/s/ Beth Skaggs</i>	5 Dec 2012
Public Health and Safety	X					
Solid Mineral Resources		X			<i>/s/ Al Collar geologist</i>	1/3/2013
Fluid Mineral Resources		X			<i>/s/ John S. Simitz Geologist</i>	Dec. 10, 2012