

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
FOR THE
BATTLE MOUNTAIN DISTRICT DROUGHT MANAGEMENT
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
DOI-BLM-NV-B000-2012-0005-EA

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
BATTLE MOUNTAIN DISTRICT OFFICE

Environmental Assessment (EA) DOI-BLM-NV-B000-2012-0005-EA, dated March 07, 2012, has been reviewed through an interdisciplinary team process, and it has been sent to the Nevada State Clearinghouse and the public for a 30-day comment period. The EA was sent to 175 individuals, organizations, companies, agencies and tribes.

After consideration of the environmental effects of the Proposed Action described in the EA and supporting documentation, it has been determined that the Proposed Action is not a major Federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity as described in 40 CFR 1508.27. Therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required, per section 102(2) (c) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

LAND USE CONFORMANCE

The Proposed Action and Alternatives described below are in conformance with the following plans:

- Shoshone-Eureka Resource Management Plan (RMP) Record of Decision (ROD), 1986;
- Shoshone-Eureka RMP Amendment ROD, 1987;
- Shoshone-Eureka Rangeland Program Summary, 1988;
- Sonoma-Gerlach Management Framework Plan III, 1982;
- Sonoma-Gerlach Rangeland Program Summary, 1992;
- Northeastern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council (RAC) Standards and Guidelines;
- Sierra Front-Northwestern Great Basin RAC Standards and Guidelines, 1997, as amended;
- Tonopah Resource Management Plan, 1997 and,
- Mojave-Southern Great Basin (RAC) Standards and Guidelines, 2006 as amended.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I have reviewed EA DOI-BLM-NV-B000-2012-0005-EA, dated June 14, 2012. After consideration of the environmental effects, as described in the EA and incorporated herein, I have determined that the Proposed Action, with the project design specifications including adopted environmental protection measures and required mitigation measures identified in the EA, will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required to be prepared.

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

CONTEXT

According to the US Drought Monitor, as of June 12, 2012, approximately 75% of the state of Nevada is experiencing severe drought conditions. Field monitoring indicates that many areas within the Battle Mountain District (BMD) are experiencing drought impacts including substantial reductions in forage production and reduced spring and stream flows. It is likely that a continuation of these conditions will impair forage and water resources on many more areas within the BMD. The Proposed Action analyzed in the EA is needed to ensure that livestock and wild horse and burro management during drought does not adversely impact the range.

The Proposed Action allows for the rapid response to drought in order to alleviate the impacts of authorized uses and activities on natural resources that are at risk of being adversely affected by drought. The effects of drought are often times far reaching, impacting the environment and economy of an area. This EA focuses primarily on the environmental impacts of drought. Specific impacts depend on drought severity but often include:

- Increased number and severity of fires
- Lack of forage and drinking water
- Decreased vigor and production of plants
- Damage to plant species
- Increased wind and water erosion of soils
- Reduction and degradation of fish and wildlife habitat
- Increased death loss of wildlife, wild horses and burros and livestock

The Proposed Action includes a range of drought response actions that would be used to mitigate the effects of drought and to address emergency situations for livestock grazing management, wild horse and burro management, wildlife needs, riparian resource concerns and a variety of other resources. These drought response actions include partial or complete closures of allotments; reductions in livestock animal unit months; reductions in livestock grazing duration; changes in livestock season of use; changes in livestock management practices; targeted grazing of monotypic annual plant communities; temporary changes in kind or class of livestock; wild horse and burro removals; temporary water hauls; temporary above ground pipelines; and temporary

fencing. The Proposed Action and Alternatives analyzed in the EA will prepare the BLM to quickly respond to drought conditions, to ensure the long-term health and sustainability of public lands within the Battle Mountain District (BMD).

INTENSITY

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The EA considered impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse through the analysis of direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of the Proposed Action. These impacts are described in detail in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 of the EA.

Implementation of the Proposed Action would help ensure the long-term health and sustainability of public lands managed by the BMD by mitigating the effects of drought on rangeland resources.

Beneficial impacts associated with the implementation of the Proposed Action include minimized potential for soil loss through erosion; reduced particulate matter in the air; reduced potential for degradation of wildlife habitat; increased resistance of rangelands to weed and non-native species invasion; maintenance of riparian and wetland vegetation; reduced potential for water contamination; long-term sustainability of livestock grazing on public lands; improved opportunities for dispersed recreation; protection of native vegetation; and sustained health of wild horses and burros.

Adverse impacts associated with the implementation of Proposed Action include short-term increases in air particulate matter and vehicle emissions; increased utilization of forage around temporary water sources; increased potential for the spread of weeds during horse and burro gathers; temporary financial impacts to grazing permittees; temporary reductions in recreational access to riparian and wetland areas; soil compaction around trap sites; potential stress, injury or mortality to wild horses and burros resulting from gather activities; change to population dynamics, age structure, sex ratios and genetic diversity. Adverse impacts would be avoided or minimized through application of standard operating procedures and other measures identified in the EA.

None of the environmental impacts discussed in detail in Chapters 3 and 4 of the EA are considered significant.

2. The degree to which the Proposed Action affects public health and safety.

If drought conditions warrant the removal of wild horses or burros, the Wild Horse and Burro Standard Operating Procedures (Appendix A of Attachment 2) would be used to conduct gather activities and are designed to protect human health and safety.

Implementation of the Proposed Action would have minimal affects to public health or safety.

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

Seven sites within the BMD are listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP); 1,322 sites have been determined eligible for inclusion; and 2,767 sites have not been evaluated. Where possible, those historic properties determined eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places and those that are unevaluated, would be avoided. Where this is not possible, such sites will be treated with an approved Historic Properties Treatment Plan. Implementation of the Proposed Action would act to reduce the severity of potential impacts to cultural resources generated by livestock and wild horses and burros.

The BMD administers 15 Wilderness Study Areas and two Instant Study Areas (ISA) Portions of 4 WSAs over-lapping the BMD boundary are administered by other BLM-Nevada Districts through Inter-District agreements. Implementation of the Proposed Action would protect rangeland and riparian areas within these areas.

Implementation of the Proposed Action would help maintain riparian and wetland vegetation; thereby, sustaining the health of these areas. There are no park lands, prime farmlands, or wild and scenic rivers within the BMD.

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

Some members of the public feel that no wild horses or burros should be removed from any public lands and advocate removal of livestock or letting “nature take its course”. Conversely, other members of the public feel that wild horses and burros should be removed from public lands before any livestock are removed. The effects of wild horse or burro gathers and appropriate livestock management during drought on the quality of the human environment are well documented through scientific research and years of management experience.

Implementation of the Proposed Action is not highly controversial.

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

Implementation of the Proposed Action has no known effects on the human environment which are considered highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. This is demonstrated through the effects analysis in the EA.

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

The Proposed Action will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision about a future consideration. Completion of this EA and

approval of the Proposed Action does not establish a precedent for other assessments. Any future projects within the BMD would be analyzed on their own merits and carried out, or not, independently of the actions currently selected.

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

Past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions have been considered in the cumulative impacts analysis in the EA (Chapter 4). The cumulative impacts analysis examined all of the other known actions and determined that the Proposed Action would not have significant cumulative impacts or incrementally contribute to significant cumulative impacts. In addition, for any actions that might be proposed in the future, further environmental analysis, including assessment of cumulative impacts, would be required prior to authorizing surface disturbing activities.

8. *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.*

The Proposed Action and Alternatives would not affect significant scientific, cultural or historical resources. A cultural resource inventory would be completed prior to implementing drought response actions that make up the Proposed Action. Temporary range improvement and gather sites and holding facilities would be inventoried to determine the presence of sites that are unclassified, eligible or potentially eligible for the NRHP. Archaeological site clearances and avoidance measures would ensure that loss or destruction of known significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources does not occur.

9. *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.*

Threatened and endangered (T&E) plant species located on the BMD include Monte Neva paintbrush (*Castillejasalsuginosa*) and Williams' combleaf (*Polyctenium williamsiae*).

Potential impacts to T&E plant species would be reduced to insignificance by implementing mitigation measures, such as pre-construction clearance surveys, buffering and avoiding identified plants, seed collection, reseeding, propagation and out-planting.

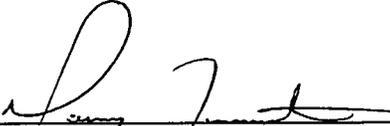
T&E, proposed and candidate wildlife species of the BMD include yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*); southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*); greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*); lahontan cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus henshawi*); Railroad Valley springfish (*Crenichthys nevadae*); desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*); and the Columbia spotted frog (*Rana luteiventris*).

Potential beneficial impacts to these wildlife species resulting from the implementation of the Proposed Action include temporary water sources for use by wildlife; reduced impacts on wildlife habitat; reduced competition for forage and water between wildlife and livestock and wild horses and burros; and protection of water quality and fish habitat.

Potential adverse impacts to these wildlife species resulting from the implementation of the Proposed Action include increased utilization of forage surround temporary water developments; temporary dispersal of wildlife species during gather activities; and potential avian fence-impact mortality. Potential impacts to avian T&E, proposed and candidate species would be reduced to insignificance by implementing mitigation measures such as installing bird deterrent devices on fences. Temporary increases in forage utilization and scattering of wildlife is not considered significant.

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

The Proposed Action will not violate or threaten to violate any federal, state, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.



Douglas W. Furtado
District Manager
Battle Mountain District Office

6/22/12
Date