

Term Livestock Grazing Permit

Churchill Canyon Allotment

Finding of No Significant Impact

DOI-BLM-NV-C020-2008-0024-EA

June 2011



FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)
Churchill Canyon Allotment
Term Livestock Grazing Permit and Construction of Range Improvements
Final Environmental Assessment (DOI-BLM-NV-C020-2008-0024-EA) June 2011

Background

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposes to issue a new term livestock grazing permit for the Churchill Canyon Grazing Allotment (Allotment) and to construct range improvements within the Allotment. The Allotment is located approximately 20 miles southeast of Carson City, Nevada and is within the jurisdictional boundary of the Sierra Front Field Office. The Allotment encompasses approximately 49,228 acres of BLM-managed land and is located on the eastside of the Pine Nut Mountains in Lyon and Douglas Counties.

The Proposed Action is to issue a new 10-year term livestock grazing permit to the current permit holder that would authorize grazing use by 193 cattle from November 1 through May 20 each year, and result in forage consumption of 1,275 Animal Unit Months (AUMs), annually. The Proposed Action includes a grazing system, new permit terms and conditions, as well as fence construction. Fencing is proposed to reduce livestock drift between grazing allotments as well as provide a location for livestock handling. Management changes are proposed to improve livestock distribution and provide key perennial plant species rest during the spring growing season. Fencing is also proposed to exclude livestock from one ephemeral lake with a known population of William's combleaf.

Land Use Plan Conformance

The Proposed Action described below is in conformance with the CRMP, pages LSG-1 & LSG-2 and is as follows:

- Maintain or improve the condition of the public rangelands to enhance productivity for all rangeland and watershed values.
- Initially, manage livestock use at existing levels (5,394 AUMs – Sheep).
- Provide adequate, high quality forage for livestock by improving rangeland condition.
- Improve overall range administration.
- Maintain a sufficient quality and diversity of habitat and forage for livestock, wildlife, and wild horses through natural regeneration and or vegetation manipulation methods.
- Improve the vegetation resource and range condition by providing for the physiological needs of key plant species.
- Reduce soil erosion and enhance watershed values by increasing ground cover and litter.
- Improve riparian-wetland ecosystems to achieve a healthy proper functioning condition that assures biological diversity, productivity and sustainability.

Finding

I have reviewed the Final Environmental Assessment (EA) (DOI-BLM-NV-C020-2008-0024-EA), dated June 2011. After consideration of the environmental effects as described in the EA, and incorporated herein, I have determined that the Proposed Action identified in the EA will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment and that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

I have determined the Proposed Action is in conformance with the approved Carson City Field Office Consolidated Resource Management Plan, dated May 2001, and is consistent with the plans and policies of neighboring local, county, State, tribal and federal agencies and governments. This finding and conclusion is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the context and intensity of impacts described in the EA.

Context:

Renewing a term livestock grazing permit for a period of 10 years and the construction of four miles of fence does not have international, national, regional or statewide importance. The Allotment is located approximately 20 miles southeast of Carson City, Nevada and encompasses approximately 49,228 acres of BLM-managed land. The discussion of significance criteria that follows applies to the Proposed Action and is within the context of local importance in the area associated with the Allotment. Implementing the Proposed Action would maintain and improve conditions within the Allotment.

Intensity:

1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The EA has considered both beneficial and adverse impacts of the proposed grazing system and the addition of range improvements. On the whole, the Proposed Action would result in improved vegetative condition and wildlife habitat. Improving ecological conditions is an improvement in the quality of the human environment through the management of rangeland resources, and is not considered a significant effect in either the short or long term.

2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

The Proposed Action would have no effect on public health and safety.

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

The BLM reviewed the immediate region for historic properties prior to a federal "undertaking" (issuance of a federal permit). The potential exists for adverse impacts to cultural resources and/or historic properties due to a continuation of livestock grazing with or without modifications to the term livestock grazing permit. Previous cultural resource inventories comprise 2,601 acres, or 5.4 percent of the Allotment area, and have resulted in the identification of 43 sites. To date, in and immediately adjacent to the BLM-managed lands of the Allotment, known cultural resources represent significant past human use of the landscape.

Known site types within the Allotment area include prehistoric camp sites; prehistoric limited activity/procurement sites; rock alignments and hunting blinds; historical stone structures; historical refuse scatters; mining complexes; isolated prospecting locales; ranch sites; transportation and communication sites; woodcutting locales; and charcoal production locales.

Records searches at the BLM Carson City District Office and through the Nevada State Museum revealed that the Allotment contains at least six historic properties. All six historic properties consist of areas of prehistoric material remains. Two of these historic properties have been subject to archaeological data recovery designed to resolve adverse effects from other activities. Grazing, as proposed is not considered to have an impact upon these two resources. Three additional historic properties do not lie in areas which received heavy or severe use in the past. The fifth historic property lies in the vicinity of a spring. A BLM archaeologist conducted a field visit to this particular historic property and concluded that it would not have adverse effects from grazing.

BLM analyses included the potential impacts of implementing Allotment improvements (fencing) in the Proposed Action. Fieldwork at the location of each of these improvements was completed in April through June, 2008 and in May 2011. The specific Allotment improvements include the proposed drift fence extension in the Sario Well pasture, two small holding corrals along the northern pasture boundary and one small enclosure around a known population of William's combleaf, and no historic properties are present at the Allotment improvements. Therefore, the Proposed Action is not known to have significant impact to historic properties and there is no need to alter these four proposed improvements in the Proposed Action to prevent adverse effects to cultural resources.

Eighteen separate riparian areas were assessed on the Churchill Canyon Allotment between June 5 and June 21, 2007. Overall ratings were generally positive. Thirty-eight percent of lentic areas were in proper functioning condition or functional-at-risk in an upward trend. Fifty-six percent were functional-at-risk in an unknown trend, which primarily reflects the rating of 62 acres in the Big Meadow enclosure. Big Meadow had many characteristics of a properly functioning system, but also had some severe localized hoof impacts around springs. In addition, desirable forbs were lacking while undesirable species, such as wild iris were common. Only six percent of lentic areas were in a downward trend or nonfunctional.

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

The effects of livestock grazing and range improvement projects are well known and documented and are not highly controversial. Livestock management techniques are scientifically accepted methods of achieving both domestic livestock grazing and natural resource management goals. These practices are not considered highly controversial.

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

There are no known effects of the Proposed Action identified in the EA which are considered uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. The Proposed Action is comprised of accepted standard practices of livestock grazing and range improvement projects.

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 does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects and does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. Any future grazing systems and range improvements, if they occur would be subject to the same environmental assessment standards and independent decision making.

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

No significant cumulative impacts have been identified in the EA. Other grazing and range improvement projects (both private and public) may be proposed within the grazing Allotment in the future and other land uses are ongoing within the same geographic area. These projects seen together with other land uses would not result in cumulatively significant impacts at the local or watershed scale.

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

No districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register for Historic Places would be affected by the Proposed Action. Nor would the Proposed Action result in the loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.

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

No threatened or endangered species or their critical habitats were identified in the project area.

10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law 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.

for

Linda J. Kelly
Field Manager
Sierra Front Field Office

Date