



United States Department of the Interior



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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT Evans Flat Water Project Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-NV-N020-2011-0029-EA

Based on the revised April 2012 Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Evans Flat Water Project (DOI- BLM-NV-N020-2011-0029-EA), I have determined that the actions to be implemented, as described and analyzed in the EA, will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required prior to my issuance of a decision to implement the selected actions.

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

Context:

The selected actions provide for installing a water collection box and collection pipe, pipelines, storage tanks, and troughs within the Evans Flat Pasture of the Pine Mountain Allotment. The water system is intended to provide livestock easier access to water, while better utilizing the Evans Flat bench. The anticipated results will be to alleviate livestock use in the Trout Creek riparian area in the southern part of the pasture, as well as, promote livestock away from the uplands; thus, reducing use on bitterbrush which is an important forage shrub for mule deer. The development of more stock-water away from the Trout Creek area will not only improve livestock distribution but will offer additional flexibility in designing grazing management plans for the area in the future. The area is located about 16 miles south of Carlin, Nevada.

Intensity:

1) *Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.*

The analysis identifies both beneficial and adverse impacts including impacts to uplands, riparian zones, livestock grazing, wildlife, and wildlife habitats of concern that may arise through implementation of the selected actions. Measures are incorporated to avoid or reduce adverse impacts.

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

There should be little to no effect on public health or safety from implementation of the selected actions.

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 selected actions incorporate procedures for the protection of historic and cultural resources in the project area. No park lands, special recreation management areas, prime or unique farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas exist in the affected area.

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

The effects of the selected actions are well known and not highly controversial.

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

The selected actions would have effects that are predictable and well known. The selected actions are subject to applicable procedures to prevent undue environmental harm and risk.

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.*

This action does not make any commitments for BLM approval for any future actions. Future project proposals would continue to be subject to further consideration in accordance with BLM grazing and NEPA regulations and policies.

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

All resources are evaluated for cumulative impacts in the EA, and no significant impacts are identified. As a standard procedure, cumulative impacts would continue to be subject to further review as projects are proposed, and on a site-specific basis.

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 historic resources.*

The selected actions incorporate standard operating procedures to identify and protect significant cultural resources from adverse effects.

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 ESA of 1973.*

No listed species are known to occur within the project area, and no critical habitats for any species have been designated in the area. As discussed for “special status species” in the EA, the Pine Mountain Allotment does provide habitat for one candidate species of concern, which is the sage grouse.

The Environmental Assessment (EA) is in conformance with considerations shown in the December 2011 BLM Instruction Memorandum No. 2012-043 regarding the “Greater Sage-Grouse Interim Management and Procedures.”

The Evan's Flat area is within the South Fork Sage-Grouse Population Management Unit (PMU) in Northeasters Nevada considered under the 2001 Governor's Nevada Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy and 2004 Elko County Sagebrush Ecosystem Conservation Strategy by the Northeastern Nevada Stewardship Group Inc. (NNSG). Despite the Evan's Flat bench being located within this PMU, the area does not provide for optimum sage grouse habitat due to lack of sagebrush, resulting from the 1999 Sadler Fire. Because of the condition after the burn, the area has very low potential for fall/winter habitat, lekking, or nesting of sage grouse. There are however, known leks approximately 6 miles from the project site; which leaves opportunity for sage grouse movement into the area from other areas relatively far away as individual or groups of grouse seek seasonal use areas.

The limited riparian areas in upper Lee Canyon provide water sources for sage grouse to drink, and succulent forbs and insects for food. The riparian vegetation is almost all woody shrubs and trees which are not food sources for sage grouse, but there would be some sagebrush, forbs, and insects in the adjacent uplands that would provide food sources.

Prior to the 1999 Sadler Fire, the Evans Flat upland bench area would have provided potential sage grouse habitat including lekking, nesting and early (upland) brood-rearing and fall/winter habitat. The Evans Flat area was searched by helicopter for undocumented leks in 2004 and 2009 and no leks were located. As of 2011, the only intact sagebrush grasslands are located on the northern fringe areas of Evans Flat and seasonal use either does not occur or is limited to areas in close proximity to areas with sagebrush cover. The fire burned the sagebrush thus habitat will continue to be very limited on the bench until sagebrush becomes re-established with a high percentage of the area with approximately 8-15% shrub foliar cover. Sagebrush/other shrub foliar cover is currently less than 1% on the bench.

In addition, as discussed within the EA, the NEPA analysis covered and assessed impacts that may occur due to this proposed project, as well as mitigation to ensure sage grouse protection; including, habitat fragmentation, the installation of bird ladders, and integration of water-flow control mechanisms to reduce the potential for a West Nile virus occurrence arising from this proposed project.

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

The selected actions have been developed and reviewed in coordination with applicable agencies to ensure its consistency with plans and requirements of other Federal, State and local agencies.

_____/s/ Gerald Dixon_____
Gerald Dixon
Manager
Tuscarora Field Office

_____/4/10/2012_____
Date