

BLM-Carson City District *District Manager's* *Report*

March 23 & 24, 2016
SFNWGB RAC Meeting
Reno, Nevada
Presented by: Ralph Thomas

Current:

1. The Draft RMP/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) public comments have been reviewed and incorporated as appropriate into Proposed RMP/Final EIS. The Proposed RMP/Final EIS is expected to be released to the public spring 2016.
2. Drought monitoring continues within both field offices;
3. No wild horse gathers are scheduled at this time within the Carson City District;
4. BLM is working on multiple land conveyances in response to lands bills including Storey County and City of Fernley;

Landscape Projects:

1. The Desatoya Landscape Restoration Project implementation continues successfully in its fourth year. Partners include UNR, NRCS, NDOW, USGS, USDA-ARS, BOR, GBBO, and Smith Creek Ranch.
2. The Pine Nut Land Health Project, located in the Pine Nut Mountains, Douglas, Lyon and Carson City Counties, Nevada was implemented fall 2014 and is ongoing.
3. Add something on the Virginia Mountains Landscape Project
4. Should we add something on the Alpine Forest Restoration Project?

Carson City District Resource Management Plan Revision

The Draft Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement 180-day public review and comment period ended on May 27, 2015. More than 30,000 comments were received. Carson City BLM has developed the Proposed RMP and Final EIS which is scheduled for release spring 2016.

More than 150 public presentations on the RMP were made across the District to counties, cities, tribes, etc. Finalized associated reports have been posted to the RMP website at http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/fo/carson_city_field.html and are available for public review.

- **Bi-State Sage-Grouse**

Efforts continue with the USFS Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest on the Bi-State Sage-Grouse planning effort. A Final EIS was released February 2015. The BLM published a Federal Register Notice of Significant Change in November 2015. The comment period on the proposed changes closed on January 29, 2016. Separate Records of Decisions (one for USFS and one for BLM) will be released spring 2016.

Carson City Interagency Division of Fire and Aviation



RECENT WEATHER / DROUGHT:

Average temperatures during December were 2-4 degrees above normal over Western Nevada. Precipitation during December was average over the Sierra Front, but well below normal as you moved towards the central part of Nevada. However, precipitation since October 1, 2015, the start of the water year shows the majority of the District at 200% of normal. The snow pack is above normal for this time of year as well at around 140% compared to 60% of normal at this time last year.

Due to the extremely low snow pack we have had over the last few years extreme to exceptional drought continues over the western half of NV and the Sierra's. However

with the moisture we have received and moisture that is forecasted the drought is expected to remain, but improve between now and April.

WEATHER OUTLOOK / FUELS DISCUSSION / FIRE SEASON TIMING / FIRE POTENTIAL DISCUSSION:

The extended weather outlook points towards above average temperatures through February. Precipitation is expected to be above average from February through April due to El Nino gradually weakening through the spring causing the precipitation increases through the winter/spring across the Great Basin.

Entering the middle of winter, minimal fire activity is expected. We will continue evaluating precipitation anomalies through the rest of the winter and spring for their effect on fuel moisture and fuel growth toward the upcoming 2016 Fire Season.

Fuels Management

The fuels management program continues to focus its efforts on reducing the potential for negative impacts of wildfire to communities and improving the health of sagebrush plant communities that provide important habitat for sage-grouse and other species.

In 2016, the Carson City fuels management program will treat 6,312 acres in Alpine, Douglas, Churchill, Lyon, Lander and Washoe Counties.

Planned Treatment By Method:

Mechanical – 6,237 Acres

Prescribed Fire – 75 Acres

To date in 2016, over 2,300 acres of mechanical treatment have been completed on the Pine Nut Land Health, Desatoya Mountains Restoration and the Alpine Forest Restoration Projects.

The fuels management program continues to support the District's non-fuels vegetation treatment efforts through planning, treatment design and treatment implementation administration.

Fire Mitigation and Education/Trespass and Investigation

To date, over 40 fire prevention programs were presented at elementary schools and public events.



To date, ten origin and cause determination investigations have been completed for human caused fires on the District recommending that two trespass cases go forward for cost recovery. An additional seven were completed for fires on BIA land.

Fire Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation (ESR)

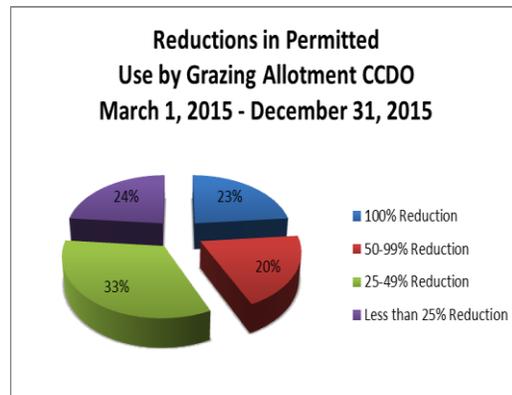
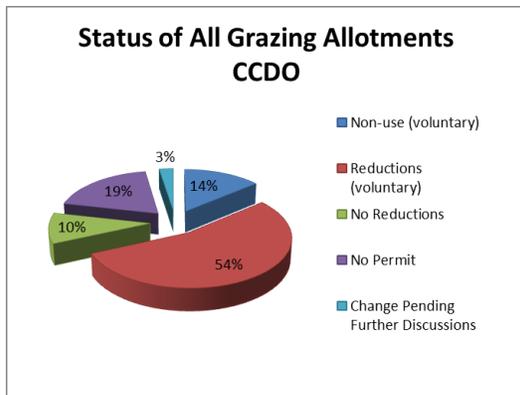
The Cold Springs Fire in the Desatoya Mountains was approved and has been seeded thanks to collaboration with NDOW. Funding was not delivered on time to allow for proposed chaining operations to enhance success in some areas, but the entire fire was seeded.

Monitoring activities were completed on the Bison, Red Rock, Como, Preacher, Gilbert, Spring, TRE, Finch, and Washoe Fires. Once these data are summarized and available, we will be compiling a monitoring summary report for circulation.

The Carson City District has begun the process of updating the Normal Year Fire Rehabilitation plan to keep up with management direction regarding Sage-Grouse. It is intended that this EA will be completed prior to fire season.

Carson City District (CCDO)

Drought Monitoring



All reductions in livestock use have been voluntary. Drought monitoring efforts began in FY12 and are ongoing. Drought monitoring will continue until the drought monitor indicates drought conditions have ceased within the district.

Interdisciplinary teams conducted drought/allotment monitoring during FY15 & FY16 in order to determine livestock numbers and grazing levels for the spring-winter 2016 grazing seasons. Monitoring is being completed by an ID Team. The core ID Team is

comprised of BLM personnel, and the extended team is comprised of several permit holders who are joining the team for short periods to inspect their allotments. All permittees are notified of the date(s) of their allotment's monitoring visit and are invited to join the ID Team.

Stillwater Field Office

Livestock grazing authorizations for the March 1, 2015 to December 31, 2015 time period were:

- 5 permits were/are in voluntary non-use;
- 2 permits Animal Unit Months (AUMs) reduced by 50 % - 99 %;
- 9 permits AUMs reduced by 25 - 49%;
- 7 permits AUMs reduced by less than 25%;
- 9 permits AUMs not reduced;
- 0 permits are pending further discussion;
- 1 permit is in non-use for reasons other than drought.

Sierra Front Field Office

Livestock grazing authorizations for the March 1, 2015 – December 31, 2015 time period were:

- 7 permits are in voluntary non-use;
- 8 permits Animal Unit Months (AUMs) reduced by 50 %- 99 %;
- 8 permits AUMs reduced by 25 - 49 %;
- 5 permits AUMs reduced by less than 25 %;
- 4 permits AUMs not reduced;
- 2 permits are pending further discussion (grazing season of use has not occurred yet)
- 1 permit AUMs reduced for reasons other than drought.
- 7 permits are in non-use for reasons other than drought.

Sierra Front Field Office (SFFO)

Prison Saddle Trained Adoptions

The saddle trained adoptions are held four times a year (May, August, October, and February). The last one was in October, at the Northern Nevada Correctional Center, in Carson City. Eleven horses were offered and adopted through a competitive bid process. The high bid was \$15,000 and the average bid for the 11 horses was \$3,445.00. The next adoption will also be held at the Northern Nevada Correctional Center on February 20, where 17 saddle trained horses will be offered.



Divit, trained by Mike Farley was adopted for \$15,000.



Yeti, trained by Ken Parker, was adopted for \$4,500.

Pine Nut Horse Gather

The SFFO has prepared an evaluation for this HMA, and is concurrently working on a Herd Management Area Plan and Capture Plan with both documents anticipated to be finalized by this summer.

The proposed gather would remove between approximately 200 excess wild horses from both inside and outside of the HMA, which would adjust the wild horse population closer to the lower AML. Additional wild horses would be temporarily gathered so mares could be vaccinated with PZP contraceptive and released back into the HMA.

USA Parkway Right-of-Way

Over the past several years, the BLM has been working closely with Nevada Department of Transportation (NDOT) and Federal Highways Association to review environmental documentation for the USA Parkway. The USA Parkway will connect I-80 near the Tahoe Reno Industrial Center to U.S. 50 near Silver Springs and is anticipated to support regional economic development. In October 2015, the BLM received the ROW application from NDOT for the final proposed alignment. The ROW grant was issued to NDOT by the BLM in January 2016.

SNPLMA Land Acquisition in the Pine Nut Mountains

The BLM, with support of several partners, has proposed to acquire approximately 14, 522 acres of vacant land located in the Pine Nut Mountains. This proposal was submitted for SNPLMA Round 15 funding and was approved in December 2015. The acquisition would consolidate federal ownership and management for the protection of Bi-State Sage-grouse habitat, cultural resources, riparian areas, and general wildlife habitat. It would also improve public access. The next step now that the project is approved is for resource specialists to complete analysis to validate and finalize the parcels for acquisition.

Lands Bills

The SFFO is currently working on two land conveyances that were authorized under the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015 (Act).

- ❖ Conveyance to the City of Fernley, Nevada; this Section requires the BLM to convey to the City of Fernley approximately 6,700 acres within 180 days of the request from the City; the lands may be resold by the City or the City may retain lands for Recreation & Public Purposes Act uses. The SFFO is in the process of finalizing an MOU with the City of Fernley to outline the roles and responsibilities for completing the land conveyances. The BLM anticipates the first of several requests for parcels to be conveyed will be made by the City shortly after finalization of the MOU.
- ❖ Conveyance of Federal Land, Storey County, Nevada; this Section requires the BLM to convey approximately 1,700 acres to Storey County through the “quitclaim” process (which is an exercise that ‘disclaims’ the BLM interest in the lands). Most of the lands involved in this conveyance are already occupied (there are many acres of

‘disputed’ ownership in Storey County). The BLM is working closing with Storey County officials to develop a proposed path forward and timeline for the conveyance.

Fish Springs Wild Horse PZP Project

Approximately 40 wild horses reside in the Fish Springs area. The Fish Springs area is in the urban interface, approximately 10 miles south of the Pine Nut Herd Management Area (HMA). Some residents in the area are supportive of the horses staying in the area and keep water troughs filled for the wild horses, while others (mostly anonymously) have made complaints to the BLM about property damage caused by the horses.

In 2013, the BLM held three public workshops to address issues of wild horses being habituated to water and food sources around private residences. Also, concerns about horse-vehicle collisions, and the issue that the horses are residing in an area not designated for their management.

Given the BLM’s current and likely long-term constraints on removal of large numbers of wild horses, except in limited emergency and public safety situations, the BLM has sought an alternative solution from the public and wild horse advocacy groups to address the population growth rate.

During fall 2013, the BLM met with representatives from the “Return to Freedom American Wild Horse Preservation Campaign” concerning solution oriented alternatives to a removal/gather effort.

In January 2014, the “Return to Freedom American Wild Horse Preservation Campaign” presented the BLM with a proposal to treat the wild horses within the Fish Springs area with porcine zona pellucide (PZP).

To date, 23 female horses have received a primer dose and nine have received a booster. To prevent conception a mare needs both a primer and a booster inoculation.



Wild Horses at Fish Springs



Mare and Foal at Fish Springs

Virginia Mountains Vegetation Treatments Project

The SFFO is planning for the Virginia Mountains Vegetation Treatments Project and proposes to conduct vegetation treatments on approximately 22,000 acres over a 10-year period in the Virginia Mountains, northeast of Reno, Nevada. This project is using a landscape approach to identify and prioritize vegetation treatments to increase the resistance and resilience of plant communities to disturbance. Vegetation management is needed to restore the balance of perennial grasses, shrubs, and trees in the Virginia Mountains area to:

- Reduce the potential of large-scale high severity wildland fire;
- Provide for public and firefighter safety and protection of property and infrastructure;
- Maintain sagebrush habitat, riparian plant communities, wet meadows, and springs;
- Protect and enhance juniper woodland habitat; and
- Provide woodland products to the public, tribes, and commercial entities.

A large focus of this project will be to improve and protect greater sage-grouse habitat. This area was identified in the FIAT process and treatments will address threats to sage-grouse from invasive annual grasses, wildfires, and conifer expansion. Treatments will occur in areas known to be used by sage-grouse based on current telemetry data.

Pine Nut Land Health Project

The Sierra Front Field Office (SFFO) signed a Decision Record and Finding of No Significant Impact on the Pine Nut Land Health Project Environmental Assessment (EA) on April 29, 2014. The Pine Nut Land Health Project will treat approximately 24,564 acres and would be implemented over a 10 to 15 year period. Implementation is already beginning on the project with most of the initial work planned for this fall. The project objectives are:

- Restore and maintain sagebrush habitats, with special emphasis on improving habitat for the Bi-State sage grouse.
- Restore and maintain riparian plant communities and wet meadows/springs.
- Protect and enhance historic pinyon-juniper woodland habitat.
- Reduce the potential of large-scale high severity wildland fire.
- Provide for public and firefighter safety and protection of property and infrastructure.
- Provide woodland products to the public, tribes, and commercial entities.

A large focus of the project is the complete removal of pinyon-juniper trees in sage-brush areas in order to maintain and/or create additional sage-grouse habitat and movement corridors. This may occur on up to 15,000 acres in areas where sage-grouse have been identified as present by recent telemetry studies. The other prescription proposed for medium and high density woodland stands (9,500 acres) is selective thinning to achieve fuel hazard reduction, riparian stand health and hydrologic function, woodland stand health and diversity, and forest product removal as a byproduct of treatments.

Completed treatments

Unit Name	Treatment Type	Date Completed	Acres
Mill Canyon 1	Sage-grouse	Dec 2014	2210
Illinois EQIP	Sage-grouse	Dec 2014	177
Lyon EQIP	Sage-grouse	Dec 2014	969
Crest EQIP	Sage-grouse	Sep 2015	770
Sunrise Roadside 1	Woodland Thinning	Nov 2014	69
Ruhenstroth Well/Como	Woodland Thinning	Nov 2015	30
Ruhenstroth	FHR Thinning	Nov 2015	189
Sunrise 1	FHR Thin/Sage-grouse	Dec 2015	660
Illinois 1	Pile Burning	Nov 2015	78

Planned treatments (/FY16)

Sage-grouse hand removal treatments will continue in 2016 on the remaining 2,412 acres of the Mill Canyon unit and 583 acres of the Bald Mountain unit. Approximately 447 acres of the Mt. Siegel unit will be treated in the fall of 2016. Small trees will be removed from the previously treated Mill Canyon unit (completed in 2010) in the fall of 2016. The Slater unit was funded in FY15 but will not be treated until the fall of 2017 due to capacity to treat delayed and planned units. Fuel hazard reduction-depending upon funding, approximately 537 acres of the Mineral/Illinois unit will be treated in the fall of 2016.

Riparian restoration-the contract was awarded for 415 acres of treatments in the El Dorado and Hackett Canyon units and work will begin this summer/fall. Treatments are ongoing in the Pipeline Canyon unit but it is expected that the 106 acres will be completed in the next month, weather dependent.

Woodland health thinning- The Great Basin Institute completed 90% of the 80 acre Sunrise Pass Stewardship unit and work will resume on this unit in May of 2016.

Roadside thinning in the Sunrise Pass, Ruhenstroth Well, and Como areas will resume in the fall of 2016.

Monitoring-since 2011, USGS has been actively collaring sage-grouse to track their movement in the Pine Nut Mountain Range. This will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of sage-grouse habitat enhancement treatments. Other monitoring includes vegetation response and migratory bird nesting and foraging use.

Stillwater Field Office (SFO)

Geothermal

There are two geothermal utilization projects under review/development in the Stillwater Field Office:

- 1) Ormat Tungsten Mountain Project in Edwards Creek Valley
- 2) Ormat Dixie Hope/Meadows Project in Dixie Valley

The public comment period for the Tungsten Mountain Geothermal Development Project EA has closed and the comments are currently being addressed. For the Dixie Hope/Meadows Project we are anticipating the arrival of the internal draft EA for Inter-disciplinary team review sometime in the next month.

Desatoya Land Health Project

The Desatoya Landscape Restoration Project continues successfully into its fourth year. Two service contracts were awarded in the fall of 2015 to both protect and improve the sage brush steppe ecosystem in the Desatoya Mountains. Both contracts are on hold due to the winter conditions in the treatment areas; work will resume in the spring as conditions allow. Approximately 150 acres of pinyon-juniper removal was done in 2015 in the Porter Canyon watershed, as part of a research study by University of Nevada Reno (UNR) & Agriculture Research Service (ARS), to study the effects of tree removal on hydrology, soils, microclimate, and vegetation within the watershed. Approximately 285 acres of pinyon-juniper removal is planned in 2016 along Smith Creek to improve riparian vegetation health and hydrologic functioning. Finally, the cultural survey conducted by ASM contractors for Dalton Canyon area is currently in review; completion of the report will be in the spring when the site is accessible.

Permittee Outreach

The Stillwater and Sierra Front Field Offices continues to hold Bi-annual Permittee Outreach meetings. Drought related issues pertaining to livestock grazing management, wild horse and burro management, and fire management were the major topics of discussion. The attendance and response from the permittees with these regular meetings is positive and stronger relationships between the agency and permittees are developing through these face-to-face meetings.

Grazing Management

The agreement between The Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is still being developed in order to allow BLM to take over the

administrative management of 152,000 acres of grazing pastures within Churchill that are identified to be relinquished back to BLM. Current management of the grazing pastures continues to be administered by BOR and will continue until the agreement is finalized. A date has not been determined at this point.

Recreation

Visitor use at Sand Mountain Recreation Area increased steadily throughout 2015, possibly coinciding with the economic improvement and drop in fuel prices. Pass sales data are currently being reviewed, but approximately 900 annual passes were sold along with 2,300 weekly passes. During the Halloween weekend, the busiest period of the year, 870 trailers (motor homes, 5th wheelers, toy haulers) were counted at the site with an estimated 4,500 people showing up over the week long period.



Upcoming OHV Events

The Best in the Desert Vegas to Reno Race is scheduled for the 19th and 20th of August. For 2016, the promoter will be celebrating the 20th anniversary of the event by expanding to a two day, 650 mile course starting in Alamo and ending in Tonopah on the first day, then racing from Tonopah to Dayton on the second day. The course will remain the same in the Carson City District and this year will pass near the town of Hawthorne in Mineral County.

Sportsman's Beach

Staff from Stillwater Field Office, Carson City District support services and the Engineering Division at the BLM Nevada State Office has been working with representatives from the Federal Lands Transportation Program and the Federal Highways Administration to construct a new low-water boat ramp for Walker Lake at Sportsman's Beach. The boat ramp design is in progress and construction is scheduled to begin late spring or early summer of 2016.



New ramp proposed to the right of campers in deeper water. Existing ramp to be used during periods of higher lake levels.

Hidden Cave Tours

The Stillwater Field Office provides tours of Hidden Cave near Fallon Nevada in partnership with the Churchill County Museum. In 2015, the Churchill County Museum provided 33 specially arranged tours to 213 adults and 423 youth. The BLM staff provided 34 regularly scheduled tours to 509 adults and 175 youth on the second and fourth Saturday of each month, excluding holiday weekends. Total volunteer hours for the Museum, including cave tours, showing the Hidden Cave Video and answering public questions came to 511 hours of volunteer time worth \$12,911 dollars. The cost for the BLM to provide the public outreach at Hidden Cave is estimated to be \$11,220.

Staff will be replacing the interpretive panels at the Hidden Cave parking lot as soon as they are received from the printers, and will be working with the BLM sign shop this spring to replace the faded and cracked interpretive panels at the Grimes Point parking lot.



Photo: Tour group at Picnic Cave on the Hidden Cave Trail System

Fire Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation (ESR)

The BLM ES&R crew completed seeding of the Cold Springs Fire burn area in the third week of January, 2016. The fire, which started on August 14, 2015 from a lighting strike, burned an estimated 4,013 acres east of East Gate. Roughly 2,679 acres were located within the Desatoya Wilderness Study Area (WSA). Emergency dozer lines were established within the WSA to actively fight the fire since the area is also within the Greater Sage Grouse habitat. Upon fire containment, the dozer lines were restored using equipment and hand crews. Aerial seeding within the WSA consisted of native grasses and shrubs.