# REICKEN'S CORNER ALLOTMENT MANAGEMENT PLAN

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT OR-07-026-042

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION: PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

### A. Introduction: Purpose and Need

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is proposing a new Reicken's Corner Allotment Management Plan (AMP). The changes to the 1991 AMP are: 1) provide for deferred grazing on the seeding pastures, 2) issue a nonrenewable grazing permit on an annual basis when forage is temporarily available, and 3) rerouting a pasture boundary fence at permittee's request.

Reicken's Corner Allotment is located in the Andrews Management Unit (AMU) in the northern portion of Catlow Valley which is in the southern portion of Harney County, Oregon (Map A). This allotment contains 9,363 public land acres and 517 private land acres. These are divided into three pastures - Gene Miller Seeding, Sand Hollow Seeding, and Reicken's Corner. The term permit is currently authorized for 688 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) from April 1 to October 31). All authorized livestock grazing is by cattle. Other forage allocations include 3 AUMs for mule deer and 4 AUMs for pronghorn. Reicken's Corner Allotment is a Management Category "M" (maintenance) allotment. The "maintenance" category identifies allotments with low or no management and resource concerns. These allotments receive lower priority for monitoring, and are targeted for effectiveness and performance monitoring, unless monitoring data indicate need for a change to management strategy.

#### Background

1. Authorized Grazing on Public Lands

The Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 (43 U.S.C 315) provides the basic legislative authority for livestock grazing on public lands, with provisions for protection of the lands from degradation and for orderly use and improvement of public rangelands. The Act established a system for the allotment of grazing privileges to livestock operators based on grazing capacity and use priority, and for the delineation of allotment boundaries. It also established standards for rangeland improvements and implemented grazing fees.

Approximately 142 million acres of land in the western United States were placed under the jurisdiction of the Grazing Service, which became the BLM in 1946.

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (43 U.S.C. 1701, 1976) and the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 (43 U.S.C. 1901) mandate the management of public land for multiple use and sustained yield. Specifically, the regulations implementing these acts call for rangeland management strategies that provide forage for economic use as well as for the maintenance or restoration of watershed function, nutrient cycling, water quality, and habitat quality for Special Status Species and native plants and animals. These management strategies have been supported and implemented by the development of national policies and the Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Management (S&Gs, 1997).

2. Reicken's Corner Objectives and Rangeland Health Standards

The BLM completed the Reicken's Corner Allotment Evaluation in 2006. The evaluation took place from 1995 to 2004. Effects from grazing management actions were analyzed through an Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) evaluation process. The following are determinations from the evaluation on objectives met or not met:

Objectives (from the 1991 AMP)

a. Maintain and/or improve the condition of upland range within the allotment over a 10-year period.

**Met:** for Reicken's Corner Pasture

**Partially met:** for Sand Hollow, Gene Miller Seeding Pastures

This reason for partially met is due to repeated grazing during the growing season along with drought conditions during the last 4 out of 5 years, which has led to a slight decline in the amount and vigor of crested wheatgrass species. The IDT concluded that the trend was in a slight decline for the seeding pastures.

b. Provide a total of 7 AUMs of competitive forage for wildlife (forage allocations in the allotment are 3 AUMs for deer and 4 AUMs for antelope).

**Met:** for Reicken's Corner Allotment

The following is from the evaluation on whether the Rangeland Health Standards were achieved or not achieved:

Standard 1 Watershed Function – Uplands

Upland soils exhibit infiltration and permeability rates, moisture storage and stability that are appropriate to soil, climate, and landform.

Standard was achieved.

Standard 2 Watershed Function – Riparian/Wetland Areas

Riparian-wetland areas are in properly functioning physical condition appropriate to soil, climate, and landform.

Standard is not present.

Standard 3 Ecological Processes

Healthy, productive and diverse plant and animal populations and communities appropriate to soil, climate, and landform are supported by ecological processes of nutrient cycling, energy flow, and hydrologic cycle.

Standard was achieved.

Standard 4 Water Quality

Surface water and groundwater quality, influenced by agency actions, complies with State water quality standards.

Standard is not present.

Standard 5 Native, Threatened and Endangered (T&E), and Locally Important Species

Habitat support healthy, productive and diverse populations and communities of native plants and animals (including Special Status Species and species of local importance) appropriate to soil, climate, and landform.

Standard was achieved.

B. Purpose of and Need for Action

The allotment objective "Maintain and/or improve the condition of upland range within the allotment over a 10-year period" was partially met in the seeding pastures. The BLM IDT determined that there is a slight downward trend in the seeding pastures. BLM's monitoring has shown a decrease in vigor and number of crested wheatgrass plants.

The objectives of the new AMP are to: 1) achieve an upward trend in the two seeding pastures by increasing the production of crested wheatgrass those pastures (Gene Miller and Sand Hollow Seedings), 2) manage public land to provide social and economic benefits to local residents by issuing a nonrenewable grazing permit on an annual basis when forage is temporarily available, and 3) the request from the permittee to reroute a pasture boundary fence. The permittee feels that the northwest corner of Gene Miller Pasture would be better utilized if livestock could access water from Sand Hollow well.

Grazing management would be in accordance with the following objectives from the Andrews Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Reicken's Corner Allotment objectives, and standards for rangeland health:

The purpose of the proposal is to meet the allotment objectives and achieve rangeland health standards for Reicken's Corner Allotment in a manner consistent with AMU RMP management direction particularly for Social and Economic Values, Vegetation, and Grazing Management, including:

1. Resource Use - Provide for sustainable livestock grazing that meets allotment management (natural resource) objectives and the S&Gs (Social and Economic Values, RMP p. 45).

2. Resource Enhancement – Maintain, restore or improve the integrity of desirable vegetation communities including perennial, native, and desirable introduced plant species. Provide for their continued existence and normal function in nutrient, water, and energy cycles (Vegetation, RMP p. 30).

3. Resource Use - Implement administrative solutions and rangeland projects to provide proper management for livestock grazing while meeting resource objectives and requirements for S&Gs (Grazing Management, RMP pp. 54-56).

Specifically, the proposed AMP should meet the following objectives for the Reicken's Corner Allotment and rangeland health standards:

Reicken’s Corner Allotment Objectives

1. Increase the density of cover of crested wheatgrass grass within Sand Hollow and Gene Miller Seeding Pastures within the next 5 years.

2. Maintain the relative percent composition of native perennial plant species by frequency of occurrence for needleandthread grass and Thurber's needlegrass within the Reicken's Corner Pasture for the next 5 years.

3. Maintain current stands of big sagebrush in native vegetation and increase the occurrence of big sagebrush in the burned portion of the Reicken's Corner Pasture. Retain 40 percent of existing sagebrush population within crested wheatgrass seedings.

Rangeland Health Standards

Standard 1 Watershed Function – Uplands
Standard 3 Ecological Processes
Standard 5 Native, T&E, and Locally Important Species

*Note: Standard 2 Watershed Function – Riparian/Wetland Areas and Standard 4 Water Quality are not present

Not implementing the proposed AMP would result in a continuing decline in trend in the seeding pastures. Decline in trend could lead to the allotment objectives not being met and the rangeland health standards not being achieved.

C. Relationship to other Policies and Plans

This Environmental Assessment (EA) is tiered to the AMU/Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area (CMPA) Proposed RMP/Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and relevant information contained therein is incorporated by reference. The proposed action has been designed to conform to the following documents, which direct and provide the legal framework for management of BLM-administered lands within the Burns District:

- Taylor Grazing Act (43 U.S.C 315 - 1934)
- National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S.C. 4321-4347)1970
- Federal Land Policy and Management Act (43 U.S.C. 1701, 1976)
- Public Rangelands Improvement Act (43 U.S.C. 1901. 1978)
- Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management for Public Lands Administered by the Bureau of Land Management in the States of Oregon and Washington (1997)
- Greater Sage-Grouse and Sagebrush-Steppe Ecosystems Management Guidelines (Interagency - 2000)
- Bureau of Land Management National Sage-Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy (2004)
- Local Integrated Noxious Weed Control Plan (2004)
- Andrews Management Unit Resource Management Plan/Record of Decision (July 15, 2005)

D. Decision Framework

The Andrews Resource Area Field Manager is the responsible official who will decide which alternative analyzed in this document best meets the objectives for action based on the interdisciplinary analysis presented in the EA and the following decision factors.

1. Does the alternative achieve RMP management direction for Social and Economic, Vegetation and Grazing Management.

2. Is the alternative likely to achieve Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Management for Oregon and Washington in accordance with 43 CFR 4180.2(b).

3. Does the alternative have an unreasonable management cost to the livestock grazing permit holder.

4. When considering grazing use, does the alternative provide for sustainable livestock grazing in areas allocated for livestock grazing in RMPs where such use results in achievement of rangeland health S&Gs.

E. Issues Considered but not Analyzed Further

An intensive inventory evaluating the presence or absence of wilderness characteristics on the BLM-administered lands in Reicken's Corner Allotment was documented in November of 1980. The final intensive inventory decision (Wilderness Inventory - Oregon and Washington, Final Intensive Inventory Decisions, November 1980) found that wilderness characteristics were not present on these lands. In November of 2002 additional inventory was completed by an IDT that reviewed current conditions and looked for changes that had occurred since the original inventory was completed. No changes to conditions were identified that would modify the findings of the 1980 inventory; therefore, wilderness characteristics have been determined not to be present. This finding was further documented in the Andrews RMP (July 2005), and this issue will not be analyzed further in this EA.

## CHAPTER II: ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

### Actions Common to all Alternatives

All range improvements projects within the Reicken's Corner Allotment would be required to be maintained by the permittee.

A. No Action Alternative (continuation of current management)

A new AMP would not be implemented. This alternative would continue the current growing season use on the two seeding pastures. The pasture fence would not be rerouted to provide increased water availability for livestock. Use would occur from April 1 to August 31. Permitted use would remain at 688 AUMs of active preference.

Grazing management would continue in accordance with the 1991 Reicken's Corner AMP.

B. Proposed Action Alternative

The proposed action is to implement a new Reicken's Corner AMP which would incorporate the following changes: 1) provide for deferred grazing on the seeding pastures, 2) issue a nonrenewable grazing permit on an annual basis when forage is temporarily available, and 3) rerouting a pasture boundary fence at the permittee's request.

**The Proposed Reicken's Corner Allotment Management Plan**

The AMP consists of allotment objectives, rangeland health standards, stocking capacity, grazing system with flexibility description, a list of proposed range improvements and maintenance responsibility of range improvements.

Objectives

Objective 1. Increase the amount of crested wheatgrass grass plants within the Sand Hollow and Gene Miller Seeding Pastures within the next 5 years.

Meeting this objective achieves the following standards: Watershed Function – Uplands, Ecological Processes, and Native, T&E, and Locally Important Species.

Meeting this objective addresses the following resource concerns: Range condition, wildlife habitat, noxious weeds and forage allocations for:

livestock - 688 AUMs
wildlife - 3 AUMs (deer)
- 4 AUMs (antelope)

The following Management Actions would meet the above objective: Implement the proposed grazing system for the allotment that provides deferment for the seeding. The BLM would monitor the area for noxious weed introductions and would treat any noxious weed infestations that are found using the most appropriate methods as funds become available. Allow mosaic brushbeating of sagebrush, no more than 60 percent, in crested wheatgrass seedings to reduce canopy cover of sagebrush and improve vigor of seeded species. Experiment with methods to reduce the amount of gray rabbitbrush in crested wheatgrass seedings.

Monitoring of this objective: This objective would be measured, at the trend sites, by Pace 180°, analysis of photo trend, observed apparent trend, and supporting field observations. After 5 years the BLM would evaluate the monitoring data to determine at what level of Temporary Non-Renewable (TNR) AUMs is available on a sustainable yield basis.

Objective 2. Maintain the percent composition of native perennial plant species by frequency of occurrence for needleandthread grass and Thurber's needlegrass within Reicken's Corner Pasture within the next 10 years.

Meeting this objective achieves the following standards: Watershed Function – Uplands, Ecological Processes, and Native, T&E, and Locally Important Species.

Meeting this objective addresses the following resource concerns: Range Condition and Wildlife Habitat, Noxious Weeds and forage allocations for:

livestock - 688 AUMs
wildlife - 3 AUMs (deer)
- 4 AUMs (antelope)

The following Management Actions would meet the above objective: Implement the recommended grazing system for the allotment that provides deferment 2 out of 4 years the first grazing cycle and 3 out of 4 years the second grazing cycle for Reicken's Corner Pasture (Tables 2 and 3). The BLM would be monitoring the area for noxious weed introductions and would treat any noxious weed infestations that are found using the most appropriate methods.

Monitoring of this objective: This objective would be measured, at the trend site, by rereading Pace 180° trend plot with analysis of photo trend, observed apparent trend, and supporting field observations within the next 10 years.

Objective 3. Maintain current stands of big sagebrush in native vegetation and increase the occurrence of big sagebrush in the burned portion of the Reicken's Corner Pasture to be measured every 10 years.

Meeting this objective achieves the following standards: Watershed Function – Uplands, Ecological Processes, and Native, T&E, and Locally Important Species

Meeting this objective addresses the following resource concerns: Wildlife and Special Status Species Habitat and Range Condition

The following Management Actions would meet the above objective: Implement proposed grazing system that provides deferment in the allotment. If sagebrush is not returning naturally to the burned areas, seedlings may be planted or seed may be drilled into the sites to facilitate establishment.

Monitoring of this objective: This objective would be measured by establishing a Pace 180° trend plot with analysis of photo trend, observed apparent trend, and supporting field observations every 10 years.

Rangeland Health Standards

Standard 1 Watershed Function – Uplands
Standard 3 Ecological Processes
Standard 5 Native, T&E, and Locally Important Species

*Note: Standard 2 Watershed Function – Riparian/Wetland Areas and Standard 4 Water Quality are not present

Stocking Capacity

The permitted use would remain at 688 AUMs, with 60 Exchange-of-Use AUMs for 748 total active use AUMs. The permittee would be able to apply for up to 452 TNR AUMs for a total 1,200 AUMs (Table 1). Approval would depend on managing livestock grazing within the AMP along with seasonal growing conditions and maintaining less than 60 percent utilization within seeding pastures and 50 percent in the native pasture. At the end of the 2011 grazing season monitoring data would be analyzed to determine if there would be an increase in permitted AUMs.

Table 1

| Pasture | Active AUMs | Exchange-of-Use (Private Lands) | TNR AUMs | Total AUMs |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sand Hollow Seeding | 169 | 0 | 128 | 297 |
| Gene Miller Seeding | 169 | 16 | 216 | 401 |
| Reicken's Corner Pasture | 350 | 44 | 108 | 502 |
| TOTALS | 688 | 60 | 452 | 1,200* |

Grazing System

Tables 2 and 3 show the grazing rotation between pastures and dates. The grazing system is designed for a 250 head of livestock grazing system (Map B).

Table 2

| Pasture | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sand Hollow | 07/15 – 08/19 | 04/15 – 05/20 | 09/14 – 10/20 | 09/02 – 10/07 |
| Gene Miller | 08/20 – 10/07 | 09/14 – 10/31 | 04/15 – 06/02 | 07/15 – 09/01 |
| Reicken's Corner Pasture | 04/15 – 06/14 | 07/15 – 09/13 | 07/15 – 09/13 | 04/15 – 06/14 |
| *Note: When livestock are not scheduled to be on public lands they would be on adjacent private lands. | | | | |

Table 3

| Pasture | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sand Hollow | 04/15 – 05/21 | 06/03 – 07/09 | 09/02 – 10/07 | 04/15 – 05/21 |
| Gene Miller | 09/14 – 10/31 | 04/15 – 06/02 | 07/15 – 09/01 | 05/22 – 07/09 |
| Reicken's Corner Pasture | 07/15 – 09/13 | 07/09 – 09/08 | 04/15 – 06/14 | 07/10 – 09/08 |
| *Note: When livestock are not scheduled to be on public lands they would be on adjacent private lands. | | | | |

At the end of the 8 years the permittee would repeat Years 5 through 8.

Prior to the start of each grazing year, the permittee would submit an annual grazing application, which includes planned stocking rates by pasture. This application would be reviewed and any use authorized would be in conformance with the Reicken's Corner AMP.

The permittee is required to implement appropriate actions (e.g., riding, herding, and salting) to ensure multiple-use objectives and rangeland health standards are being met.

Flexibility

Depending on weather, plant phenology, and other factors that determine range readiness the permittee would be allowed to turn out as early as April 1 with approval from the Andrews Resource Area Field Manager.

The permittee would be allowed a 5-day flexibility period from the outlined move dates (i.e., 5 days prior to turning out livestock and/or 5 days after scheduled date to remove livestock) without prior approval from the Andrews Resource Area Field Manager.

Proposed Range Improvement Projects

1. Readjustment of Pasture Boundary Fence

   The proposed fence would be approximately one-half mile long (Map C). The permittee would construct the rerouted fence reusing existing fence material that he would pull. The rerouting of the fence between Gene Miller Seeding and Sand Hollow Seeding Pastures would allow cattle to access Sand Hollow well from Gene Miller Seeding Pasture. At this time livestock only have access to the well from Sand Hollow Seeding Pasture.

Fence - Project Design Features

1. The fence would be constructed to BLM specifications for a 4-strand barbed wire fence, including 22-foot line post spacing. Wire spacing would be 16 inches, 22 inches, 32 inches, and 42 inches up from the ground, with a smooth bottom wire. The livestock permittee would be responsible for fence maintenance as defined in a cooperative agreement to be developed.

2. No blading, grading, or scalping of the fence line would be allowed.

3. Prior to final inspection all construction trash and excess debris would be removed from the public lands and disposed of at a site approved by the BLM Contracting Officer.

4. Fence construction activities would occur after the ground is dry and before weeds have set seed. Seed set generally occurs from approximately June 1 through July 1.

5. Vehicles and equipment would be cleaned prior to entry to the site for fence work.

6. A two-track trail adjacent to the fence would remain available for maintenance access.

Maintenance of Range Improvement Projects

All range improvements projects within Reicken's Corner Allotment would be required to be maintained by the permittee.

C. Removal of Livestock Alternative

Complete removal of livestock from the allotment would allow for growing season rest that native plants require; however, it would not maintain the economic viability of the permittee's operation, and would not be in conformance with the AMU RMP/ROD which allows for sustainable livestock grazing in Reicken' Corner Allotment as long as rangeland health standards are met. The proposed changes would alleviate the problem without complete livestock removal.

## CHAPTER III: DESCRIPTION OF THE AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The IDT reviewed the elements of the human environment, required by law, regulation, Executive Order and policy, to determine if they would be affected by the proposed action. Table 4 (Critical Elements of the Human Environment) and Table 5 (Noncritical Elements of the Human Environment) summarize the results of that review. Affected elements are in bold.

Table 4 - Critical Elements of the Human Environment

| Critical elements of the human environment Element | | Status | Project contributes to cumulative effects? | If Not Affected, why? If Affected, Reference Applicable EA Section |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Air Quality (Clean Air Act) | | Not Affected | No | There would be no change in air quality as a result of the proposed action. |
| American Indian Traditional Practices | | Not Affected | No | No known effects. |
| Areas of Critical Environmental Concern | | Not Present | No | |
| **Cultural Resources** | | **Affected** | **Yes** | **See Chapter III, Section A2.** |
| Environmental Justice (Executive Order 12898) | | Not Affected | No | The proposed action is not anticipated to have disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority populations and low-income populations. |
| Flood Plains (Executive Order 13112) | | Not Present | No | The proposed action does not involve occupancy and modification of flood plains, and would not increase the risk of flood loss. |
| Hazardous or Solid Waste | | Not Present | No | |
| **Noxious Weeds** | | **Affected** | **Yes** | **See Chapter III, Section A4.** |
| **Paleontological Resources** | | **Affected** | **Yes** | **See Chapter III, Section A3.** |
| Prime or Unique Farmlands | | Not Present | No | |
| **Migratory Bird Treaty Act (Executive Order 13186)** | | **Affected** | **Yes** | **See Chapter 4, Section A5.** |
| T&E and Special Status Species or Habitat | Fish | Not Present | No | |
| | **Wildlife** | **Affected** | **Yes** | **See Chapter III, Section A1.** |
| | Plants | Not Present | | No Federal T&E or Special Status plant species are known or suspected to occur in the project area. |
| Water Quality (Surface and Ground)/Water Resources (303d listed streams, DEQ 3219 assessment, downstream beneficial uses) | | Not Present | No | |
| Wetlands/Riparian Zones (Executive Order 11990) | | Not Present | No | |
| Wild and Scenic Rivers | | Not Present | No | |
| Wilderness | | Not Present | No | |
| Wilderness Study Area | | Not Present | No | |

Table 5 – Noncritical Elements of the Human Environment

| Noncritical elements of the human environment | Status Status (Affected/ Not Affected/ Not Present | Project contributes to cumulative effects? | If Not Affected, why? If Affected, Reference Applicable EA Section |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Grazing Management** | **Affected** | **No** | **See Chapter III, Section B1.** |
| Recreation | Not Affected | No | No changes to authorized access routes. No changes to the type of recreation opportunities provided or the recreation setting are expected. |
| **Social and Economic Values** | **Affected** | **No** | **See Chapter III, Section B2.** |
| Soils | Not Affected | No | See Chapter III, Section B3 |
| **Vegetation** | **Affected** | **No** | **See Chapter III, Section B4.** |
| **Visual Resources** | **Affected** | **No** | **See Chapter III, Section B5.** |
| Wilderness Characteristics | Not Present | No | |
| **Wildlife/Locally Important Species and Habitat** | **Affected** | **No** | **See Chapter III, Section B6.** |

A. Critical Elements

The following critical elements are known to be present and may be affected by the proposed action.

1. Special Status Species – Fauna

Current discussion and analysis of potential effects to Special Status Species - Fauna are tiered to the AMU/Steens Mountain CMPA Proposed RMP/FEIS (August 2004) (Sections 3.7.2 and 4.7.2).

Affected Environment

Special Status animal species found in the allotment include greater sage-grouse, loggerhead shrike, black-throated sparrow, white-tailed antelope squirrel, and several species of bats. Although sage-grouse have not been documented in the allotment, most of the allotment is shown as occupied habitat with season of use uncertain. The nearest lek and seasonlong habitat is in Lavoy Tables Allotment to the east. The habitat continues into Reicken's Corner Allotment with the same vegetation type as in Lavoy Tables Allotment.

Environmental Consequence for Special Status Species – Fauna

No Action Alternative - The grazing system would remain the same with seeded pastures and habitat quality for Special Status Species continuing to decline while habitat in the native pasture would maintain or improve.

Proposed Action Alternative - The proposed grazing system should improve habitat for Special Status Species in the seeded pastures while maintaining or improving habitat in the native pastures as well.

2. Cultural Heritage

Current discussion and analysis of potential effects to cultural heritage are tiered to the AMU/Steens Mountain CMPA Proposed RMP/FEIS (August 2004) (Sections 3.9 and 4.9).

Affected Environment

Nineteen percent (1,086 acres) of Reicken's Corner Allotment has been inventoried for cultural resources. The inventory was completed for a fire rehabilitation and underground telephone cable project. Four cultural sites, all related to early 20th century dry-land farming in Catlow Valley, have been recorded in the allotment. One site is a poorly preserved remnant of historic homestead; one site is an old road; one site is a pre-1920 trash scatter at the end of the historic road and the other is a water impoundment structure (dam and canal). It is likely that other early 20th century sites similar to these are in the allotment; however, the potential for important cultural sites is low in this allotment. See Table 1 for impacting agents at each site.

| Site Number | Impacts |
|---|---|
| 2339si | Weathering, vandalism |
| 2400si | Erosion, livestock trampling |
| 2401si | Erosion, livestock trampling |
| 2402si | Erosion and weathering |

Environmental Consequences for Cultural Heritage

No Action Alternative - It is not conclusively known if the abovementioned sites were affected by livestock trampling during the last allotment evaluation period. However, that they showed evidence of trampling when recorded in 1999 suggests trampling was recent. These properties and other unrecorded properties within the allotment would not be affected to a greater degree than in the past under the no action alternative.

Proposed Action Alternative – Selection of the proposed action would not affect cultural properties differently than the no action alternative because the two alternatives are not appreciably different. The only difference between the two that could affect cultural properties is the proposed boundary fence adjustment. This proposed one-half mile fence could create new livestock congregation areas. If cultural properties exist in these new congregation areas the cultural properties could be affected by livestock trampling to a greater degree than prior to fence construction.

Cultural properties can be affected by livestock trampling, loss of ground cover and potential sediment erosion annually. Livestock tend to congregate in the same locations year after year and only change when range improvements such as fencing and spring developments change the routes that livestock use in their movements within an allotment. Gradual accumulation of effects on cultural sites occurs over time with surface and sub-surface artifacts being broken and moved horizontally and vertically. As the disturbance increases in depth, the integrity of the site is reduced proportionately.

3. Paleontology

Current discussion and analysis of potential effects to paleontology are tiered to the AMU/Steens Mountain CMPA Proposed RMP/FEIS (August 2004) (Sections 3.8 and 4.8).

Affected Environment

The allotment contains one important paleontological locality. It appears to date to about 5 million years ago and contains fossilized bones of cats, peccaries, and camels. The primary impact to the locality is erosion, which enabled BLM staff to find it. Other, similar paleontological localities may occur within the allotment.

Environmental Consequences for Paleontology

No Action Alternative - It is not conclusively known if the abovementioned paleontological locality was affected by livestock trampling during the last allotment evaluation period. Sheet wash and gulley erosion are the predominant effects within this locality. This locality and other unrecorded localities within the allotment would not be affected to a greater degree than in the past under the no action alternative.

Proposed Action Alternative – Effects on cultural resources discussed above also apply to paleontological resources.

4. Noxious Weeds

Current discussion and analysis of potential effects to noxious weeds are tiered to the AMU/Steens Mountain CMPA Proposed RMP/FEIS (August 2004) (Sections 3.5.5 and 4.5.5).

Affected Environment

There are five known noxious weed sites in Reicken's Corner Allotment totaling .15-acre. Actual infestation sizes have not been revised/updated since 1999. There are four different species of noxious weeds broken out as follows: One perennial pepperweed site (.022-acre), one whitetop site (.004-acre), two Canada thistle sites (.046-acre), and one Scotch thistle site (.08-acre). All known weed sites occur in Reicken's Corner #3 Pasture, along the County road. Some systematic weed inventory has been conducted in this allotment but is not complete. A more thorough inventory, especially along secondary roadways and near water sources should be conducted soon.

Control treatments along the County road are, and will continue to be, ongoing on an annual basis. They include primarily manual and chemical treatments. Annual monitoring is essential to keep newly established weeds from spreading.

Quite a bit of hunting and other recreational activities occur in the area. With the mobility of recreationists the potential for new weed introductions, as well as the spread of existing infestations in this area, is increasing.

Environmental Consequences for Noxious Weeds

No Action Alternative - Noxious weed introductions would continue, especially due to the proximity of this allotment to the County road. This alternative leaves the allotment more vulnerable to noxious weed introduction and spread.

Proposed Action Alternative - Managing Reicken's Corner Allotment for improving the trend in the seeding pastures and maintaining range condition in the native pasture should provide conditions that would create resistance to noxious weed introduction and spread.

If noxious weeds are found, they would be treated using the most appropriate methods.

5. Migratory Birds

Current discussion and analysis of potential effects to migratory birds are tiered to the AMU/Steens Mountain CMPA Proposed RMP/FEIS (August 2004) (Sections 3.6.2 and 4.6.2).

Affected Environment

Data from a Breeding Bird Survey route through Reicken's Corner Allotment indicate that approximately 40 species of neotropical, migratory birds use the area. These include sage thrasher, sage sparrow, Brewer's sparrow, white-crowned sparrow, black-throated sparrow, western meadowlark, horned lark, and loggerhead shrike.

Because of the 1999 fire in Reicken's Corner Pasture, burned areas will mainly support grassland species until sagebrush returns. This pasture has areas around the burn that have sufficient sagebrush for sagebrush obligate species. The seeding pastures also have good stands of sagebrush for sagebrush obligate species as well as some open grasslands.

Environmental Consequences for Migratory Birds

No Action Alternative – This grazing system should maintain or improve migratory bird habitat in the native pasture but the seeded pasture would continue to decline in health due to continued growing season grazing. Although structural diversity would be maintained the understory vegetation would decline in condition which could affect migratory bird use of the area.

Proposed Action Alternative – The proposed grazing system would result in improvement of the condition of the seeded pastures as well as maintaining or improving the native vegetation pasture. This would result in an improvement of habitat for migratory birds in the seedings as well as maintain or improve habitat in the native pasture.

B. Noncritical Elements

The following noncritical elements are known to be present and may be affected by the proposed action.

1. Grazing Management

Current discussion and analysis of potential effects to grazing management are tiered to the AMU/Steens Mountain CMPA Proposed RMP/FEIS (August 2004) (Sections 3.15 and 4.15).

Affected Environment

The 2006 Reicken's Corner Allotment Evaluation proposed to maintain the permittee's permitted active use at 688 AUMs, with 60 Exchange-of-Use AUMs for a total of 748 AUMs. The permittee would be able to apply for TNR use up to 452 AUMs for a total of 1,200 AUMs. Approval would depend on a change in the grazing system along with seasonal growing conditions and maintaining target utilization within seeding pastures at 60 percent and 50 percent in the Reicken's Corner Pasture.

The existing range improvements, that help support livestock grazing, in the allotment are one stock pond, one well, two wells on private land, approximately 2 miles of pasture fence and 27 miles of allotment boundary fence.

Environmental Consequences for Grazing Management

No Action Alternative - Under the no action alternative livestock would continue with the current grazing system. Continuing grazing during the critical growing season every year within the seeding pastures could lead to the decline of the range condition of the forage production during drought cycles. This decline in trend could lead to not meeting the allotment objectives and not achieving the rangeland health standards.

Proposed Action Alternative - This alternative would allow for periodic deferment during the critical growth periods for herbaceous rangeland vegetation by using a graze/defer treatment improving the seeding pastures and maintaining the good range condition on the native pasture. Doing this would ensure meeting the allotment objectives and achieving the rangeland health standards.

The rationale for the TNR use is during this evaluation period the average actual use for the allotment has been 1,495 AUMs. There has been only one year that utilization was exceeded.

2. Social and Economic Values

Current discussion and analysis of potential effects to social and economic values are tiered to the AMU/Steens Mountain CMPA Proposed RMP/FEIS (August 2004) (Sections 3.12 and 4.12).

Affected Environment

Harney County, located in the Boise trade center, is an area of low economic and social resiliency. This determination is based on the County's dependence on public land timber and forage and the fact that 21 percent of the County budget is derived from Federal land payments. Harney County was found to have a medium to high agricultural employment specialization. The BLM and other public land management agencies often make commodities available for use by the private sector. The BLM makes rangelands available to private ranching concerns on a renewable permit basis. Agricultural activities in Harney County are not considered highly labor-intensive and are limited primarily to production of hay, forage, and livestock. The highest individual agricultural sales revenue in Harney County is derived from cattle ranching, which is inextricably linked to the commodity value of public rangelands (AMU Draft RMP/EIS pp, 3-37).

Environmental Consequences for Social and Economic Values

No Action Alternative - The Federal government would continue to collect grazing permit fees from the permittee at the going annual rate. This commodity use on public lands would continue to generate revenues for the Federal government and private economy activity in the local, regional, national, and in some cases, international economies.

At the same time, public lands in and around the project area would also continue to contribute environmental amenities such as open space, scenic quality, and recreational opportunities (including hunting, bird watching, sightseeing, hiking, and off-highway vehicle use) as part of the larger Catlow Valley Basin. These amenities enhance local communities and tourism, though the specific contribution of the project area is not known.

Proposed Action - The permittee would incur some small costs for reconstructing and maintaining the fence. Collection of grazing permit fees would not differ from the no action alternative. The area's intrinsic value as part of a larger recreational use area would be maintained. Maintaining the economic viability of the grazing operation would continue the contribution to the local economy.

3. Soils

Current discussion and analysis of potential effects to soils are tiered to the AMU/Steens Mountain CMPA Proposed RMP/FEIS (August 2004) (Sections 3.4 and 4.4).

Affected Environment

The soil series for most of the allotment is the Enko-Catlow complex, which is loam or sandy loam in texture and ranges from 1 to 7 percent slope. Smaller portions of the allotment are within the Lawen complex (deep, fine, sandy loam on 2 to 5 percent slope) and the Raz-Brace-Anawalt complex (deep loam on 2 to 20 percent slopes).

Environmental Consequences for Soils

No Action Alternative - There would be no effect to soils over most of the allotment; however, those sites that are at risk for not meeting standards for rangeland health may be susceptible to erosion under extreme conditions.

Proposed Action Alternative - There would be no effect to soils under the proposed grazing system and with the proposed fence realignment.

4. Vegetation

Current discussion and analysis of potential effects to vegetation are tiered to the AMU/Steens Mountain CMPA Proposed RMP/FEIS (August 2004) (Sections 3.5 and 4.5).

Affected Environment

The dominant vegetation consists of Wyoming sagebrush and crested wheatgrass in two seeding pastures with understory of various forbs.

The vegetative community type of this allotment is Wyoming big sagebrush/Thurber's needlegrass, needleandthread, and Indian rice grass. Species composition is diverse with native perennial grasses, annual and perennial forbs, and native shrub species. Reicken's Corner Pasture has maintained an upward trend. The two seeding pasture trend was determined to be in a slight decline, due to repeated grazing during the growing season along with drought conditions during the last 4 out of 5 years.

Environmental Consequences for Vegetation

No Action Alternative - Under the no action alternative livestock would continue to graze annually on the seeding pastures during the active growth period which includes critical growth periods for herbaceous rangeland vegetation. Continuous growing season use would eventually reduce the vigor of certain species and may also cause a decrease in desirable species that make up the current diverse good condition plant community. If these species are decreased, then less desirable species and/or noxious weeds may invade resulting in poor condition rangelands.

Proposed Action Alternative - This action that conforms to guidelines for grazing management has taken into consideration the health and life cycle requirements of rangeland vegetation.

This alternative would allow for periodic rest during critical growth periods in all pastures. Typical results from this type of system are increased vigor, reproduction, and productivity of perennial forage species. This would maintain the current stable trend in the Reicken's Corner Pasture and cause an upward trend in the two seeding pastures.

5. Visual Resources

Current discussion and analysis of potential effects to visual resources are tiered to the AMU/Steens Mountain CMPA Proposed RMP/FEIS (August 2004) (Sections 3.11 and 4.11).

Affected Environment

The general landscape is a mix of relatively flat with some rolling hills to the west and east with elevations range from 4,600 feet to 4,840 feet. Colors in the two crested wheatgrass appear green in the spring and early summer and light brown in the summer. Colors in the native pasture appear grey-green in the spring and early summer and grey and light brown in the summer. Other humanmade features include two-track roads, water developments, existing pasture fences and Harney County Road.

The allotment falls within Visual Resource Management Class III and IV lands having management objectives which provide for moderate to high changes to the visual characteristics of the landscape. Most Class III lands are located in the southeast and western portion of the allotment.

Environmental Consequences for Visual Resources

No Action Alternative – The fence would not be rerouted and grazing management would continue currently authorized therefore the Class III and Class IV management objectives would be met.

Proposed Action Alternative - The proposed brush beating and one-half mile of new fence would be observable, but would not dominate the view of the casual observer and would comply with Class III and IV management objectives.

6. Wildlife

Current discussion and analysis of potential effects to wildlife are tiered to the AMU/Steens Mountain CMPA Proposed RMP/FEIS (August 2004) (Sections 3.6.2 and 4.6.2).

Affected Environment

Reicken's Corner Allotment supports a diversity of wildlife that includes mule deer, pronghorn antelope, coyote, badger, black-tailed jackrabbit, cottontail, kangaroo rat, pocket gophers, bats and other small mammals, golden eagle, prairie falcon, American kestrel, red-tailed hawk, Arctic rough-legged hawk, Northern harrier, turkey vulture, long-eared owl, other raptors, ravens, magpies, reptiles and amphibians.

Environmental Consequences for Wildlife

No Action Alternative - This alternative, as discussed above, could compromise the vigor and diversity of seeding pastures since the seeding pastures are grazed during the same time each year and in a critical growing season. In turn, the decline in the health of the vegetation would negatively impact wildlife and their habitat needs.

Proposed Action Alternative - The results of this action would be maintained or increased vigor and productivity of seeding pastures. This also results in maintained or improved habitat for most wildlife species.

Discussion of Cumulative Effects

As the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), in guidance issued on June 24, 2005, points out, the "environmental analysis required under NEPA is forward-looking," and review of past actions is required only "to the extent that this review informs agency decision-making regarding the proposed action." Use of information on the effects on past action may be useful in two ways according to the CEQ guidance. One is for consideration of the proposed action's cumulative effects, and secondly as a basis for identifying the proposed action's direct and indirect effects.

The CEQ stated in this guidance that "[g]enerally, agencies can conduct an adequate cumulative effects analysis by focusing on the current aggregate effects of past actions without delving into the historical details of individual past actions." This is because a description of the current state of the environment inherently includes the effects of past actions. The CEQ guidance specifies that the "CEQ regulations do not require the consideration of the individual effects of all past actions to determine the present effects of past actions." Our information on the current environmental condition is more comprehensive and more accurate for establishing a useful starting point for a cumulative effects analysis, than attempting to establish such a starting point by adding up the described effects of individual past actions to some environmental baseline condition in the past that, unlike current conditions, can no longer be verified by direct examination.

The second area in which the CEQ guidance states that information on past actions may be useful is in "illuminating or predicting the direct and indirect effects of a proposed action." The usefulness of such information is limited by the fact that it is anecdotal only, and extrapolation of data from such singular experiences is not generally accepted as a reliable predictor of effects.

In this case, the basis for predicting effects of the proposed action and its alternatives is based on published empirical research and/or the general accumulated experience of the resource professionals in the agency with similar actions.

## CHAPTER IV: PERSONS, GROUPS, AND AGENCIES CONSULTED

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Reicken's Corner Allotment Permittee

## CHAPTER V: PARTICIPATING STAFF

Bill Andersen, District Rangeland Management Specialist
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