



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
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<http://www.nv.blm.gov/battlemountain>
or bmfoweb@nv.blm.gov



In Reply Refer To:
(NV060) 4110

DEC 17 2007

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DEC 19 2007

PUBLIC CONSULTATION
FOR DROUGHT MANAGEMENT WITHIN THE
FISH CREEK RANCH AND SEVEN MILE ALLOTMENTS

DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION
BUDGET AND PLANNING DIVISION

Dear Interested Public:

Monitoring data collected in 2007 indicates that the current drought is affecting vegetative resources within the Fish Creek Ranch and Seven Mile Allotments in the Battle Mountain Field Office (BMFO). In these allotments the BMFO proposes to adjust livestock grazing for the remainder of the 2007-08 grazing year. The purpose of this letter is to consult, cooperate, and coordinate (CCC) with the interested public and effected permittees regarding the proposed temporary changes in grazing use.

The Fish Creek Ranch Allotment was divided into use areas through the 2004 Final Multiple Use Decision. The proposed modification in grazing use would affect the Antelope Valley and the Fish Creek Valley North and South Use Areas (see attached maps). Vince Ferreira grazes within the Antelope Valley Use Area which is approximately 154,771 acres in size and is permitted for 506 cattle from November 1st through March 31st for 2,513 AUMs. The use area consists of winterfat communities in the valley bottom and salt desert shrub and Wyoming big sagebrush communities in the foothills.

Winter Grazing Lands LLC grazes within the Fish Creek Valley North and South Use Areas. North Fish Creek Valley Use Area is approximately 40,259 acres in size and is permitted for 600 cattle from April 1st through May 15th for 888 AUMs. The South Fish Creek Valley Use Area is approximately 44,591 acres in size and is permitted for 600 cattle from March 1st through March 31st for 612 AUMs. Both use areas consists of winterfat, halogeton and Wyoming big sagebrush communities and the North Fish Creek Use Area includes some Pinyon/juniper communities.

Tom and Ellen Gardner are the permittees for the Seven Mile Allotment which is approximately 90,486 acres in size. They are permitted 354 cattle and 1,333 sheep from June 1st through February 28th for a total of 5,573 AUMs. The allotment is dominated by Pinyon/Juniper woodland communities with only small portions dominated by winterfat and Wyoming big sagebrush communities.

Monitoring data along with Western Region Climatological Center's (www.wrcc.dri.edu) precipitation data and the Drought Monitor Index (www.droughtmonitor) indicates that winterfat communities within portions of the Fish Creek Ranch and Seven Mile Allotments are experiencing reduced vigor due to an extended period of drought. Drought conditions have affected vegetative production and increased the susceptibility of damage to plants from grazing. Field observations within the Fish Creek Ranch and Seven Mile Allotments indicate that production of winterfat is less than normal, producing only a few inches of leader growth this year. Grazing the winterfat would likely result in the utilization of second and third-year wood which would increase plant stress and possibly cause mortality.

Therefore, I propose the following:

1. Close the winterfat communities within the Antelope Valley Use Area of the Fish Creek Ranch Allotment with the following terms and conditions:
 - a. Place 742 AUMs into temporary suspension until drought conditions improve and monitoring data indicates that the vegetation has recovered.
 - b. Pumping of wells, water hauling or placing minerals within and adjacent to winterfat communities will not be allowed.
 - c. Water hauling and minerals are encouraged and would be approved after appropriate documentation is completed.
 - d. If livestock cannot be kept out of the winterfat communities, removal of livestock from the entire allotment would be required.
2. Close the winterfat communities within the North and South Fish Creek Valley Use Areas of the Fish Creek Ranch Allotment with the following terms and conditions.
 - a. Pumping of wells, water hauling or placing minerals within and adjacent to winterfat communities will not be allowed.
 - b. Water hauling and minerals are encouraged and would be approved after appropriate documentation is completed.
 - c. If livestock cannot be kept out of the winterfat communities, removal of livestock from the use area or entire allotment would be required.
3. Close the winterfat communities within the Seven Mile Allotment with the following terms and conditions:
 - a. Pumping of wells, water hauling or placing minerals within and adjacent to winterfat communities will not be allowed.

- b. Water hauling and minerals are encouraged and would be approved after appropriate documentation is completed.
- c. If livestock cannot be kept out of the winterfat communities, removal of livestock from the entire allotment would be required.

RATIONALE

The U.S. Drought Monitor indicates that the entire state of Nevada is experiencing severe drought conditions and data from the Western Regional Climatological Center indicates that the Fish Creek Ranch and Seven Mile Allotments are experiencing below normal precipitation rates that have resulted in severe drought conditions. According to the Society for Rangeland Management, drought conditions exist when precipitation is 75 percent or less than normal.

The closest weather station which has similar weather patterns and moisture regimes is the Smokey Valley Cooperative weather station. Total precipitation for the 2007 calendar year was 1.72 inches; however, data was missing for the months of August through December. To determine precipitation levels for those months the average monthly precipitation calculated over the life of the weather station was utilized. After adding the average precipitation levels for the missing data the total calendar year precipitation was 4.29 inches. This level of precipitation is less than 75 percent of normal (6.58 inches) which is the average precipitation over the life of the weather station. The calculated precipitation for the 2007 calendar year is approximately 65 percent of normal; however, this total includes averages for the months where data has not been collected. Because the area is experiencing drought, it is expected that actual precipitation levels for these months would be less than the average for each month calculated over the lifetime of the station.

Historic livestock grazing and wild horse use resulted in degraded range condition within the Fish Creek Ranch Allotment. In 1994 a final multiple use decision (FMUD) was issued closing the allotment to livestock and established the Appropriate Management Level (AML) for wild horses. However, wild horses were allowed to remain and increase in number. In 2003, an evaluation was completed to develop a grazing management system to coincide with wild horse use. After the evaluation, it was determined that livestock grazing could resume within the Fish Creek Ranch Allotment. Because the allotment had been closed, there was not enough data to calculate a carrying capacity. Therefore, with some slight modifications, it was determined that grazing could resume at the carrying capacity which was established in the 1994 FMUD.

Data collected for the 2003 evaluation indicated the allotment was showing progress, but was still in less than desirable condition. Field observation within the Antelope Valley Use Area showed the average height of winterfat plants were approximately 6-8 inches with a few communities showing 3 inches or less. With less above ground biomass due to drought, grazing these plants would result in the utilization of second and third year wood increasing stress and the likelihood of mortality. Closing the winterfat communities and temporarily suspending AUMs would reduce the amount of stress and allow the plants to recover much quicker when drought conditions dissipate.

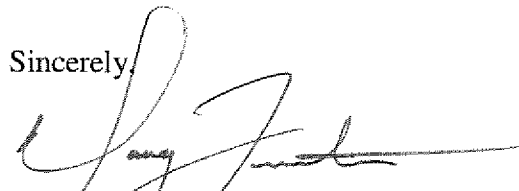
Monitoring data collected over the past three years within the Fish Creek Valley Use Areas indicate the majority of winterfat communities were grazed slight to light. Winterfat communities which received higher utilization are located near water and could be controlled by restricting the use of wells and water hauling. To further facilitate the winterfat closures, water hauling would be authorized away from the communities after the appropriate documentation has been completed. Fish Creek Valley does not have an abundance of winterfat when compared to Antelope Valley and these communities are scattered throughout the valley.

On September 18, 2007, Winter Grazing Lands LLC requested a change in season of use for the 2007 grazing season. The change in season of use eliminated grazing during the growing season and resulted in the following authorization: South Fish Creek Use Area 350 cattle from November 1st through December 23rd for 610 AUMs and North Fish Creek Use Area 350 cattle from December 24th through March 31st. Because there is not an abundance of winterfat within the Fish Creek Valley Use Areas and field observations indicated that grass species were not as affected by the drought, there is no need to reduce AUMs. The data collected over the past three years indicates that there are areas which livestock use lightly or not at all because of distance from water. In order to adjust grazing patters where winterfat is the limiting factor, the permittee would be able to haul water to these areas once the proper documentation and authorization has been completed.

Field observations within the Seven Mile Allotment also indicate that winterfat communities produced little growth. Due to drought and the condition of the winterfat, Mr. Gardner, on his own accord, reduced both his cattle and sheep numbers by half and plans to remove his sheep by the end of December. Along with Mr. Gardner's reduction, closing the winterfat communities within the allotment will further reduce the amount of stress, harmful grazing and allow for a quicker recovery when drought conditions dissipate.

This proposal is in accordance with 43 CFR 4110.3-3(b) which requires the authorized officer to close allotments or portions of allotments to grazing by any kind of livestock or modify authorized grazing use when it has been determined that soil, vegetation, or other resources on the public lands require immediate protection because of conditions such as drought. This letter provides you the opportunity to review and provide comments to the proposed grazing use modification due to drought conditions within the Fish Creek Ranch and Seven Mile Allotments. Please submit any comments to the address above within fifteen (15) days of the date on this letter. If you have any questions, contact Jason Spence, Rangeland Management Specialist, of my staff at (775) 635-4194.

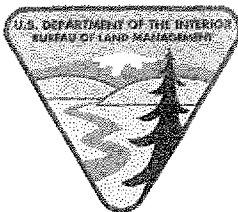
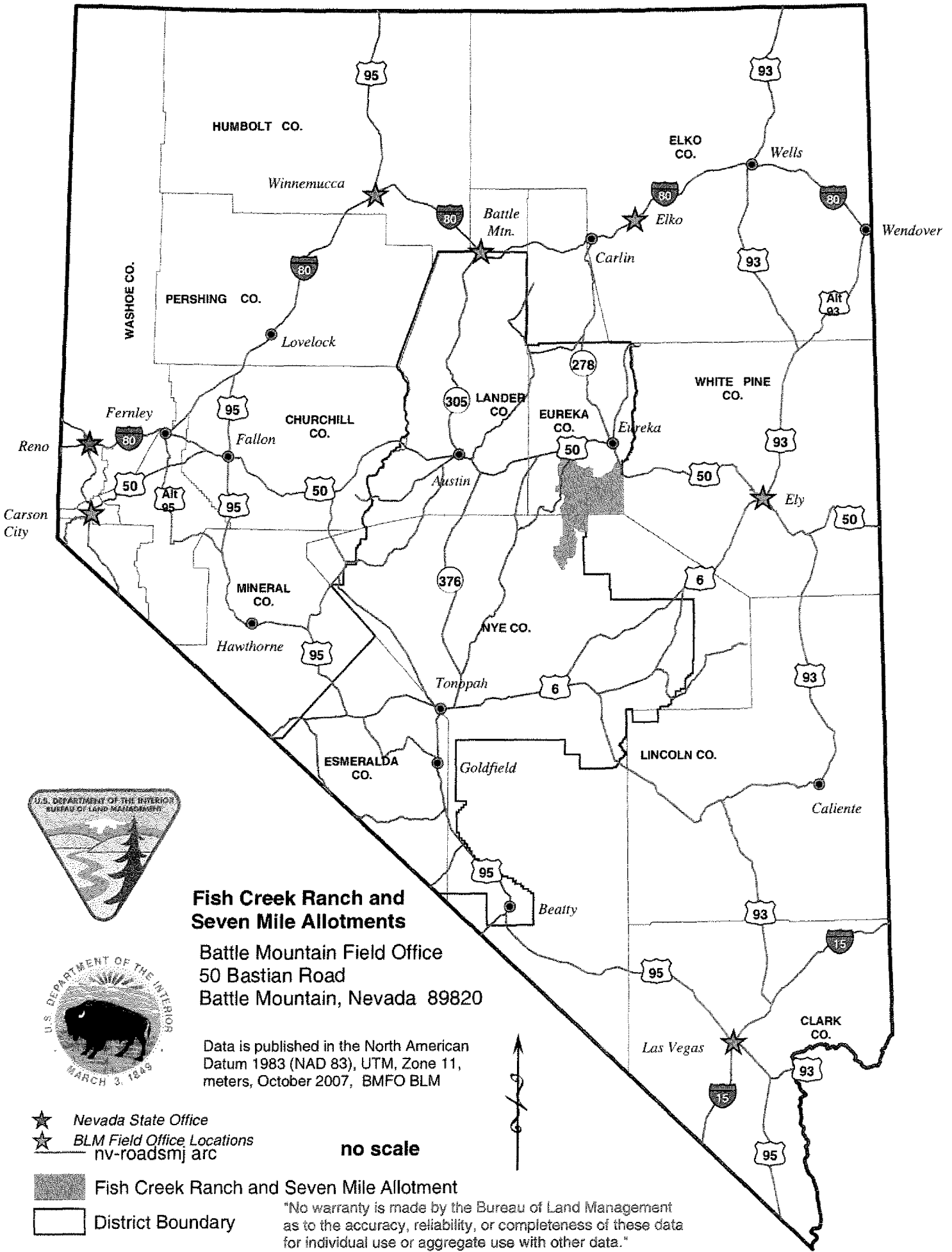
Sincerely,



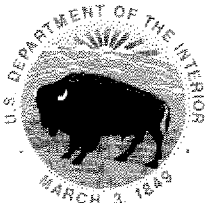
DOUGLAS W. FURTADO
Assistant Field Manager
Renewable Resources

cc:

Animal Welfare Institute
Eureka County Commissioners
Eureka Livestock
Filippini Ranching Company
William J. Gandolfo
Lander County Commissioners
National Mustang Association
Natural Resources Advisory Commission
Nevada Cattlemens Association
Nevada Commission for Preservation of Wild Horses
Nevada Department of Wildlife, Mike Podborny
Nevada Department of Wildlife, Dave Pulliam
Nevada Department of Wildlife Eastern Region
Nevada Department of Wildlife Southern Region
Nevada State Clearing House
Nye County Commissioners
O'Toole Ranches
Stone Cabin Ranch LTD
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
USDA Forest Service, Austin District
Western Watersheds Project
Wild Horses Organized Assistance
Winter Grazing Lands LLC
Carl Slagowski
Chad and Rosie Bliss
Charles W. Parsons
Cindy MacDonald
James Ithurrealde
Joe B. Fallini, Jr.
Norman K. Sharp
Pam Scutt
Pete Tomera
Thomas Gardner
Vince Ferreira



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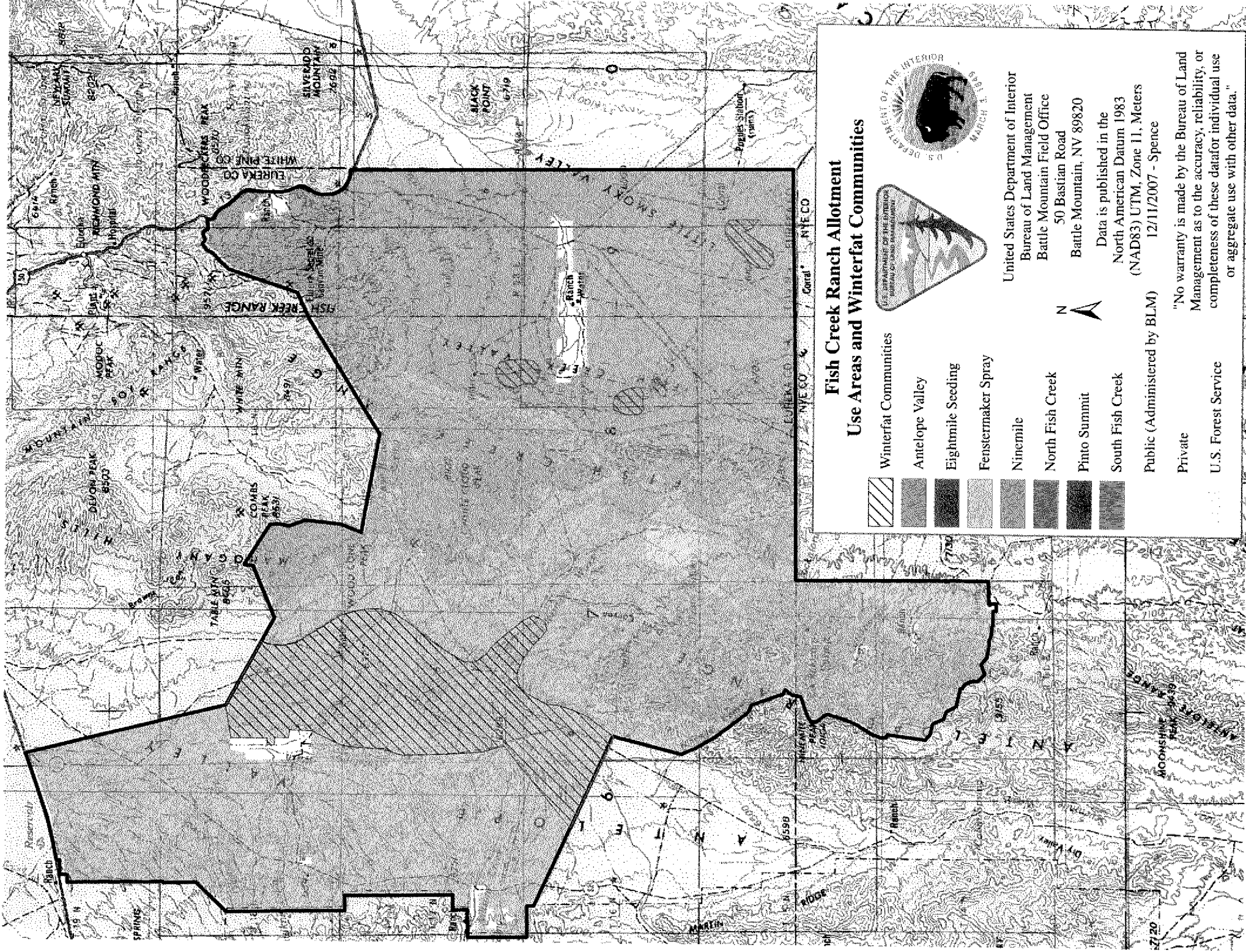
Data is published in the North American Datum 1983 (NAD 83), UTM, Zone 11, meters, October 2007, BMFO BLM

- ★ Nevada State Office
- ★ BLM Field Office Locations
- nv-roads/mj arc

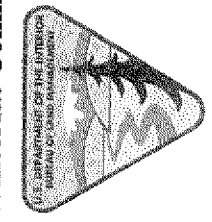
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







- Fish Creek Ranch and Seven Mile Allotment
- District Boundary

"No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregate use with other data."



Fish Creek Ranch Allotment Use Areas and Winterfat Communities



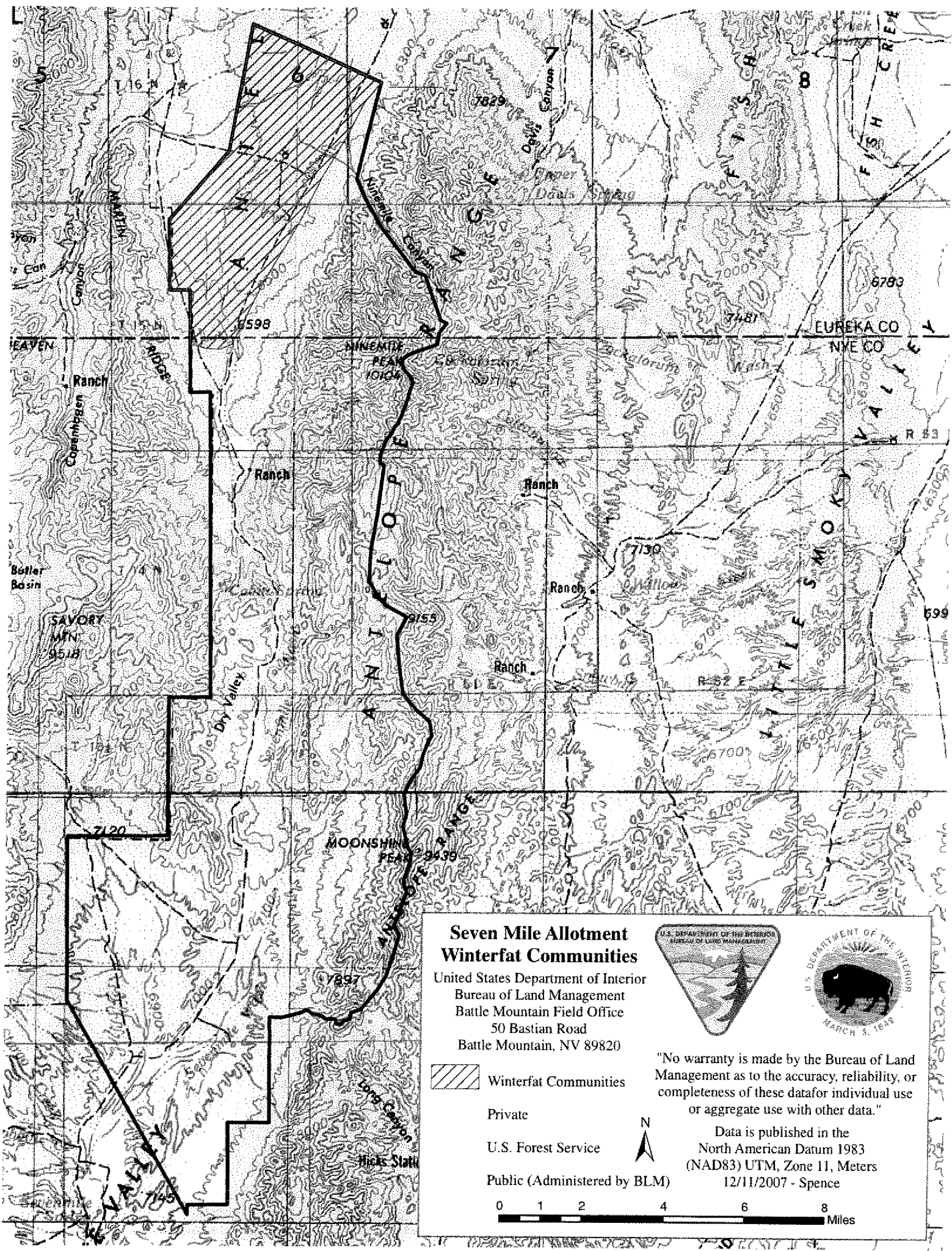
-  Winterfat Communities
-  Antelope Valley
-  Eightmile Seeding
-  Fenstermaker Spray
-  Ninemile
-  North Fish Creek
-  Pinto Summit
-  South Fish Creek

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Data is published in the
 North American Datum 1983
 (NAD83) UTM, Zone 11, Meters
 12/11/2007 - Spence

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Seven Mile Allotment Winterfat Communities

United States Department of Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Battle Mountain Field Office
50 Bastian Road
Battle Mountain, NV 89820



 Winterfat Communities

 Private

U.S. Forest Service

Public (Administered by BLM)



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