



United States Department of the Interior

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In Reply Refer To:
4120 (NV-062)

PUBLIC CONSULTATION TEMPORARY NON-RENEWABLE GRAZING PERMIT FOR THE GRASS VALLEY ALLOTMENT

Dear Interested Public:

On August 24, 2007, Tom and Volina Connolly of the Flying T Ranch submitted an application for Temporary Non-Renewable (TNR) use for the Grass Valley Allotment. Mr. and Mrs. Connolly applied for TNR in the Native Valley Floor use area. In accordance with the Grazing Regulations, "... the authorized officer shall consult, cooperate and coordinate with affected permittees or lessees, the State having lands or responsible for managing resources within the area, and the interested public prior to issuance of nonrenewable grazing permits and leases" (43 CFR 4130.6-2).

BACKGROUND

The Grass Valley Allotment was designated as an "I" or improve category allotment in the Shoshone Eureka Rangeland Program Summary (RPS). The allotment is approximately 20 miles north east from the town of Austin, Nevada (see attached map). The allotment is comprised of approximately 288,593 acres and currently includes five permittees, Tom and Volina Connolly, Ken Buckingham, Gund Ranch/University of Nevada Reno c/o Ken Conley, Tommie G. Lancaster and Dry Creek Ranch c/o Peter J. Damele. In 2002, a Final Multiple Use Decision (FMUD) was issued which designated use areas for each permittee. Mr. and Mrs. Connolly's use areas occur in the northern portion of the Grass Valley Allotment and include the Native Mountain Area, Native Valley Floor, Horse Ranch Seeding, South Keystone Seeding, North Keystone Seeding and Upper and Lower McClusky. Ken Buckingham is the only permittee that runs in common with Mr. and Mrs. Connolly in the Grass Valley Allotment. Mr. Buckingham's permit for the allotment is 1,032 drift animal unit months (AUMs). Mr. and Mrs. Connolly's permit is for 3,517 cattle AUMs.

The elevation of the Grass Valley Allotment ranges from 5,500 to 10,000 feet. The primary resource issues associated with this allotment include management of upland native vegetation, wildlife habitat, riparian areas, wild horses and livestock management. The major vegetation types within the allotment are salt desert shrub, sagebrush/bunchgrass, and pinyon/juniper woodland. No listed species exists within the allotment, but mule deer, antelope, sage grouse and a variety of non-game species are found throughout the allotment. There are eight major perennial streams in the allotment, two of which are within Mr. and Mrs. Connolly's Native Mountain Area (Pat Canyon and McClusky Creeks). Quaking Aspen are also found in these and other riparian areas. There are no perennial streams within the Native Valley Floor use area. The Rocky Hills Herd Management Area (HMA) occurs within the Grass Valley and JD Allotments.

In 1999 the Trail Canyon Fire burned in the Grass Valley, Underwood and JD Allotments. The fire consumed most of Mr. and Mrs. Connolly's use areas (Upper McClusky, Lower McClusky, Native Mountain Area and Native Valley Floor), in which the area was closed from March 1, 2000 and opened on March 1, 2002 when objectives were met. During the closure, the burned area was aerial reseeded with crested wheatgrass and forage kochia than chain drug with dozers. The use areas seeded were Upper McClusky, Lower McClusky and Native Valley Floor.

An evaluation of the allotment was completed in February 2002, followed by the FMUD issued on June 21, 2002 where a formal grazing management plan was established. Since the FMUD, the management plan has been implemented and monitoring data has indicated that current utilization rates are being met and additional forage is available this year on a temporary basis within the Native Valley Floor use area.

The RPS objectives for the Grass Valley Allotment states that in the long-term, improve 45,964 acres to good condition, and 2,546 acre to excellent condition. The RPS also states that utilization is not to exceed 50% on key species. According to the 2002 Grass Valley FMUD, the utilization rates for seedings are 50% if used in the spring and summer and 60% if used in the fall and winter.

APPLICATION

The following is a summary of Tom and Volina Connolly's 10-year permit, authorized use for the 2007 grazing season in the Grass Valley Allotment and the application for TNR:

1. 10-year Permit:

Allotment	Livestock #/Kind	Period of Use	AUMs
Grass Valley	349 Cattle	4/1 – 1/31	3,511
	6 Cattle	4/1 – 4/30	6
Bauman Buckhorn Unit	73 Cattle	3/1 – 10/31	588
	7 Cattle	4/1 – 4/30	7
Grass Valley Total			3,517
Bauman Buckhorn Unit Total			695
Total Active Use			4,212

2. 2007 authorized use:

Allotment	Use area	Livestock #/Kind	Period of Use	% Public Land	AUMs
Grass Valley	Horse Ranch Seeding	85 Cattle	4/1 – 5/1	100	87
	N. Keystone Seeding	26 Cattle	10/2 – 1/31	100	104
	Upper McClusky	75 Cattle	5/2 – 6/1	100	87
	Lower McClusky	26 Cattle	5/1 – 6/1	80	22
	Native Mountain Area	386 Cattle	6/2 – 8/9	100	876
	Native Valley Floor	428 Cattle	8/10 – 10/1	100	746
	Native Valley Floor	402 Cattle	10/2 – 12/31	100	1,203
	Native Valley Floor	400 Cattle	1/1 – 1/29	100	381
Total					3,506

3. Application for TNR:

Allotment	Use area	Livestock #/Kind	Period of Use	% Public Land	AUMs
Grass Valley	Native Valley Floor	400 Cattle	1/30/08-2/28/08	100	395

At the end of their grazing schedule Mr. and Mrs. Connolly will have used 3,506 AUMs on the Grass Valley Allotment and will have 11 AUMs remaining. If the application for TNR use is authorized, TNR will not begin until 1/30/08.

MONITORING INFORMATION

Between October 10, 2007 and October 25, 2007 Jason Theodozio, Rangeland Management Specialists, met with Mr. and Mrs. Connolly to conduct utilization studies in their use area of the Grass Valley Allotment (see attached maps). To date, six use areas have been utilized; Horse Ranch Seeding, Lower and Upper McClusky, Native Mountain and Valley Floor and North Keystone Seeding. Monitoring data collected within these use areas showed slight to moderate utilization. TNR permits are not considered unless all of the allotment specific objectives are being achieved. The following is a summary of the field observations recorded during monitoring studies. Photos of the sites are found in the Appendix.

Upper McClusky (pages 1 and 2 of Appendix)

Upper McClusky use area is south-east of the Flying T Ranch, through McClusky Canyon and borders the Three Bars Allotment at the top of McClusky Pass within the Simpson Park Mountain Range. This use area was burned in the 1999 Trail Canyon Fire and was reseeded with kochia and crested wheatgrass. Kochia is the dominate shrub followed by scattered rabbitbrush and a diverse age class of Wyoming big sagebrush. Cheatgrass is found throughout the use area due to the fire, but did not dominate the site and several key and introduced perennial grass species exist as well, such as crested wheatgrass, bluebunch wheatgrass, needleandthread, bottlebrush squirreltail, Sandberg's bluegrass and basin wildrye. Where utilization was

conducted, bluebunch wheatgrass and bottlebrush squirreltail are the key species, and all the above named species were observed. The utilization for both key species is slight with 2.5%. The only forbs observed at this time were arrowhead balsamroot and small phlox. The bare areas where grass was not growing are covered by small rock and gravel.

McClusky Creek is within this use area and is recovering from a flood event that occurred in 2004. Between the Flying T Ranch up stream to the bottom of McClusky Pass the creek is reestablishing stream banks and sinuosity in the lowered channel with a variety of riparian species, such as: sedges, rushes, willows, wild rose, and aspen. Up stream from the bottom of McClusky Pass to Granite Spring the creek was not harmed during the flood event. Sinuosity increases here as does large rocks and small boulder in the channel to help dissipate energy. The same riparian species, minus the aspen, occur on this stretch. However, there are places where upland species are encroaching due to the lack of water in the creek. Photos of McClusky Creek are found on pages 13 through 25 of the Appendix.

Black Spring is a large riparian area that is split between the Grass Valley and JD Allotments. The spring is in excellent condition with no erosion, little hummocking and is completely covered by sedges and rushes and is surrounded by willows and wild rose. There is currently an 8x8 exclosure within the spring and a permanent exclosure around the spring will be constructed in the near future. Photos show that utilization and stubble height rates are being met on Black Spring. Photos of Black Spring are found on pages 25 through 28 of the Appendix.

Lower McClusky (page 3 of Appendix)

This use area also consists of a portion of the allotment that was burned in the 1999 Trail Canyon Fire. Lower McClusky was reseeded with kochia and crested wheatgrass that dominates the use area. Adjacent unburned sites consist of Wyoming big sagebrush/Indian ricegrass sites and pinyon/juniper with a variety of native grass species, such as Thurber's needlegrass, Indian ricegrass, bottlebrush squirreltail and Sandberg's bluegrass. These species are also scattered throughout the site. All grass species show good vigor and passed years growth, even on grazed plants. The soil is fine and loose with gravel scattered in the bare areas along with fine litter from the crested wheatgrass. The utilization on the crested wheatgrass is slight with 3.88% use. Cheatgrass was not observed in site, but is present near roads.

South Keystone Seeding (page 4 of Appendix)

The South Keystone Seeding is a crested wheatgrass seeding, south of McClusky Creek, that was established before the Trail Canyon Fire. The site consists of fine, loose soil with gravel and fine litter scattered throughout. Bottlebrush squirreltail and Sandberg's bluegrass are found scattered in the use area. Cheatgrass also exist near the road, in drainages and in scattered patches, but on a limited basis. Wyoming big sagebrush is the only shrub present and has diverse age class, seedlings to mature plants. This use area has not and will not be utilized by livestock this year. Utilization on crested wheatgrass is slight with 3.05%.

North Keystone Seeding (page 5 of Appendix)

North Keystone Seeding is located north of McClusky Creek west of Grass Valley Road. The soil in this use area is more compacted and has dark cyanobacteria crust with a thick vesicular layer underneath. This is a healthy crested wheatgrass seeding that is co-dominated with Wyoming big sagebrush. Smaller crested wheatgrass plants show pedaling, but no other signs of erosion were observed. Bottlebrush squirreltail and cheatgrass are present, but neither are found in large concentrations. There was slight utilization on crested wheatgrass with 7.83% use.

Horse Ranch Seeding (page 6 of Appendix)

This seeding has the least production of crested wheatgrass compared to the other seedings. The dominant species is Wyoming big sagebrush. This use area is used mostly as a holding use area during weaning, brandings and gathers. Sandberg's bluegrass and cheatgrass are found in the use area. The majority of the smaller bunch grasses are pedestaled. The bare areas consist of fine compacted soil with scattered gravel and a cyanobacteria layer. This use area has the highest utilization rate of all the use areas with 42.85%.

Native Mountain Area (page 7 of Appendix)

This is an area that was burned in the Trail Canyon Fire, but was not reseeded due to the elevation. The dominant species is cheatgrass, which provides most of the cover. Vigorous, robust perennials also occur all over this use area. The dominant perennial is bluebunch wheatgrass followed by Indian ricegrass, bottlebrush squirreltail, needleandthread, Thurber's needlegrass and basin wildrye. Unburned patches consist of low sagebrush/black sagebrush sites. Utilization is as follows: bluebunch wheatgrass 3.02%, Indian ricegrass 5.98%, bottlebrush squirreltail 19.23% and needleandthread 8.63%.

Native Valley Floor (pages 8 through 12 of Appendix)

Mr. and Mrs. Connolly are applying for TNR within this use area. Part of this use area was reseeded with kochia and crested wheatgrass after the 1999 Trail Canyon Fire. There is also a large portion of this use area that is native range. Three sites were monitored for utilization, two in the seeded area where most of the TNR will occur, and one in the native portion.

Site #1 (pages 8 and 9) is located 0.5 miles north of a watering site. The soil here is fine and loose, and the only cover is from fine litter from wolfy crested wheatgrass plants that is accumulating past year's growth. Bottlebrush squirreltail is also found all through the site, along with scattered Indian ricegrass, Sandberg's bluegrass and cheatgrass. Wyoming bit sagebrush is scattered in patches and a diverse age class of individual plants are present throughout this portion of the use area. Utilization studies indicate utilization on crested wheatgrass is 2.5% and bottlebrush squirreltail is 10.05%.

Site #2 (pages 9, 10 and 11) is also located in the seeded portion of this use area, 0.6 miles south of the Bauman Well. This site is in the foothills and consists of a fine textured soil with cover from gravel and small rock. Beneath the surface is thin vesicular layer. Native perennial species also exist here, such as: bottlebrush squirreltail, Sandberg's bluegrass and Indian ricegrass. Cheatgrass is not present at this site. Utilization on key specie are 2.5% for crested wheatgrass and 13.2% for bottlebrush squirreltail.

Site #3 (pages 11 and 12) is in the native range portion of the use area. This is a Wyoming big sagebrush/Indian ricegrass-Thurber's needlegrass site. The soils here are fine with gravel scattered throughout. There is a dark cynobacteria layer on top with a thick, crumbly vesicular layer beneath it. Course woody debris from the sagebrush is found throughout the use area, accumulating beneath the canopy. Indian ricegrass and bottlebrush squirreltail are frequently found outside the shrub canopy while Thurber's needlegrass is mainly found under the shrub canopy. There is shadscale/Indian ricegrass patches scattered throughout this portion of the use area. Utilization on Indian ricegrass was 21.55% and 20.45% utilization on bottlebrush squirreltail.

RATIONALE

Available forage for TNR use is determined by collecting utilization data on key species and comparing that use to the utilization levels. Other indicators such as plant vigor, phenology, annual precipitation, ecological status and field observations also contribute to making a determination whether or not TNR should be authorized.

Analysis of the monitoring data indicates that utilization levels have not been exceeded and field observations indicate that forage is available for TNR. Monitoring conducted this year indicates additional forage is available and use areas that have been grazed received slight to moderate use.

Although utilization levels identified in the Shoshone-Eureka RPS for the Grass Valley Allotment are not to exceed 50% on key species, the BMFO proposes to establish the allowable utilization level to 30% for this proposed authorization, as a result of the below normal annual precipitation, in the area subject to this TNR application. In addition, removal of livestock from the allotment would be required once utilization levels are achieved in order to protect resource values under drought stress and to ensure sufficient residual biomass remains. However, a refund would be approved in the event livestock have to be removed.

Terms and conditions will ensure that this authorization will result in the attainment of allotment specific objectives and will conform to the Northeastern Great Basin Resource Advisory Counsel's Standard and Guidelines for livestock grazing.

Utilization studies were completed throughout the month of October of 2007 within the Grass Valley Allotment. Results from these studies indicated that additional AUMs are available on a temporary basis (refer to table below). Utilization rates from the Grass Valley Allotment are not to exceed 50% on key species. Of the use areas that were utilized prior to the TNR application, the greatest use was 42.85% on crested wheatgrass within the Horse Ranch Seeding.

Use area	Key Species	RPS/FMUD Utilization	Utilization%
Upper McClusky	bluebunch wheatgrass	50%	2.5%
	bottlebrush squirreltail	50%	2.5%
Lower McClusky	crested wheatgrass	50%	3.88%
South Keystone Seeding	crested wheatgrass	50%	3.03%
North Keystone Seeding	crested wheatgrass	50%	7.83%
Horse Ranch Seeding	crested wheatgrass	50%	42.85%
Native Mountain Area	bluebunch wheatgrass	50%	3.02%
	Indian ricegrass	50%	5.98%
	bottlebrush squirreltail	50%	19.23%
	needleandthread	50%	8.63%
Native Valley Floor	Site #1 – crested wheatgrass	50%	2.5%
	bottlebrush squirreltail	50%	10.05%
	Site #2 - crested wheatgrass	50%	2.5%
	bottlebrush squirreltail	50%	13.2%
	Site #3 – Indian ricegrass	50%	21.55%
	bottlebrush squirreltail	50%	20.45%

Mr. and Mrs. Connolly are applying for 658 AUMs of TNR in the Native Valley Floor use area that consist of both seeded and native range. Due to the use by wild horses in the Rocky Hills HMA there are no fences between seeded and native range so, utilization rates for TNR will be based on, but will not be limited to, Site #3 of the Native Valley Floor use area. This will allow the BMFO to manage for proper utilization rates in the native range. In addition to the utilization level, the following terms and conditions will apply if TNR is authorized:

Terms and Conditions

- 1) This authorization is temporary in nature for the 2007 grazing season and does not constitute a permanent increase in the permitted use.
- 2) Livestock numbers may vary provided authorized use is not exceeded and that there is prior approval from the authorized officer.
- 3) Utilization will not exceed 30% on key species. If monitoring data shows that utilization levels have been achieved, the permittee will have 3 days to remove the livestock from the entire allotment.
- 4) Monitoring for microbotic crusts will occur throughout the use area, where TNR is authorized on a monthly basis.
- 5) The permittee will try to avoid native range and will concentrate use on the seeded portion of the use area by means of herding, supplements or water.

CONCLUSION

Monitoring data collected has resulted in the attainment of allotment specific utilization rates and that additional forage is available on a temporary basis. It is anticipated that approval of Mr. and Mrs. Connolly's application for TNR would result in the attainment of allotment specific utilization rates as currently described in the RPS.

Upon the approval of this authorization, the BMFO would continue to monitor the allotment on a monthly basis throughout the remainder of the grazing year. If monitoring data indicates that utilization levels are met in the use area, the permittee would have 3 days to remove all livestock from the allotment.

Before a TNR can be approved, the BMFO is required to consult, cooperate and coordinate with interested public and comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). An Environmental Assessment (EA) will be completed for the issuance of TNR. The EA will analyze the environmental impacts of the proposed action to authorize Mr. and Mrs. Connolly's TNR application. This letter serves as the opportunity for the permittee, state and local governments and the interested public to provide comments to the TNR application and possible approval. Please submit any comments to the above address within 15 days of the date posted on this letter. This comment period will provide the BMFO with an opportunity to conduct public scoping prior to the development of the EA. At the conclusion of the comment period, we will consider any comments or alternatives that are received to prepare the EA. The EA will then be sent out for review and comment with a proposed decision. If you have any question concerns, please contact Jason Theodozio, Rangeland Management Specialist at (775) 635- 4188.

Sincerely,

Douglas W. Furtado
Assistant Field Manager
Renewable Resources

Enclosure(s)

CC: GRASS VALLEY TNR

KENNETH BUCKINGHAM
TOM AND VOLINA CONNOLLY
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TOMMIE G LANCASTER
CINDY MACDONALD
CHARLES W. PARSONS
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NATIONAL MUSTANG ASSOCIATION
NATURAL RESOURCES ADVISORY COMMISSION - JIM BAUMANN, CHAIRMAN
NEVADA CATTLEMENS ASSOCIATION - MEGHAN WERELEY
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RESOURCE CONCEPTS, INC - REX CLEARY
STONE CABIN RANCH LTD - ROY CLIFFORD
U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
UNIVERSITY NEVADA RENO - KEN CONLEY
USDA FOREST SERVICE AUSTIN DISTRICT - AUSTIN DISTRICT
WESTERN WATERSHEDS PROJECT - KATIE FITE, BIODIVERSITY DIRECTOR
WILD HORSES ORGANIZED ASSISTANCE - DAWN LAPPIN

**UPPER McCLUSKY
East**



North



West



South



LOWER McCLUSKY
East



South



SOUTH KEYSTONE SEEDING
East



South



NORTH KEYSTONE SEEDING
East



North



HORSE RANCH SEEDING
East



North



NATIVE MOUNTAIN AREA
South



West



**NATIVE VALLEY BOTTOM
SITE #1
North**



East



South



**SITE#2
North**



East



South



West



SITE #3

East



South



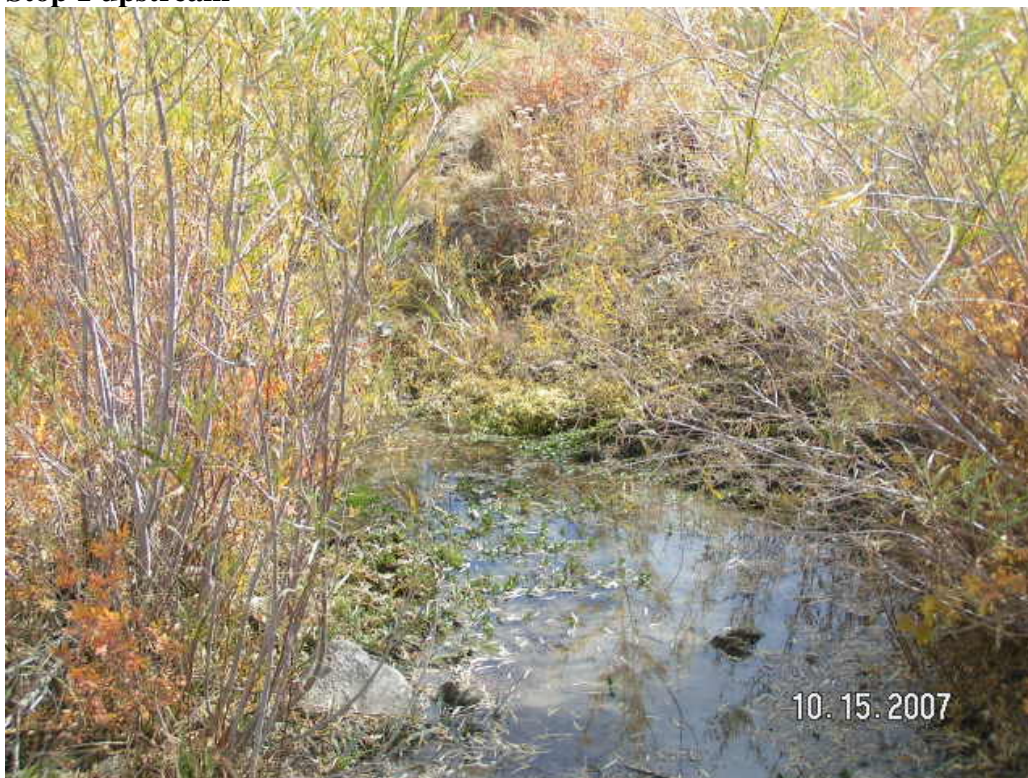
West



McCLUSKY CREEK
Stop 1 downstream



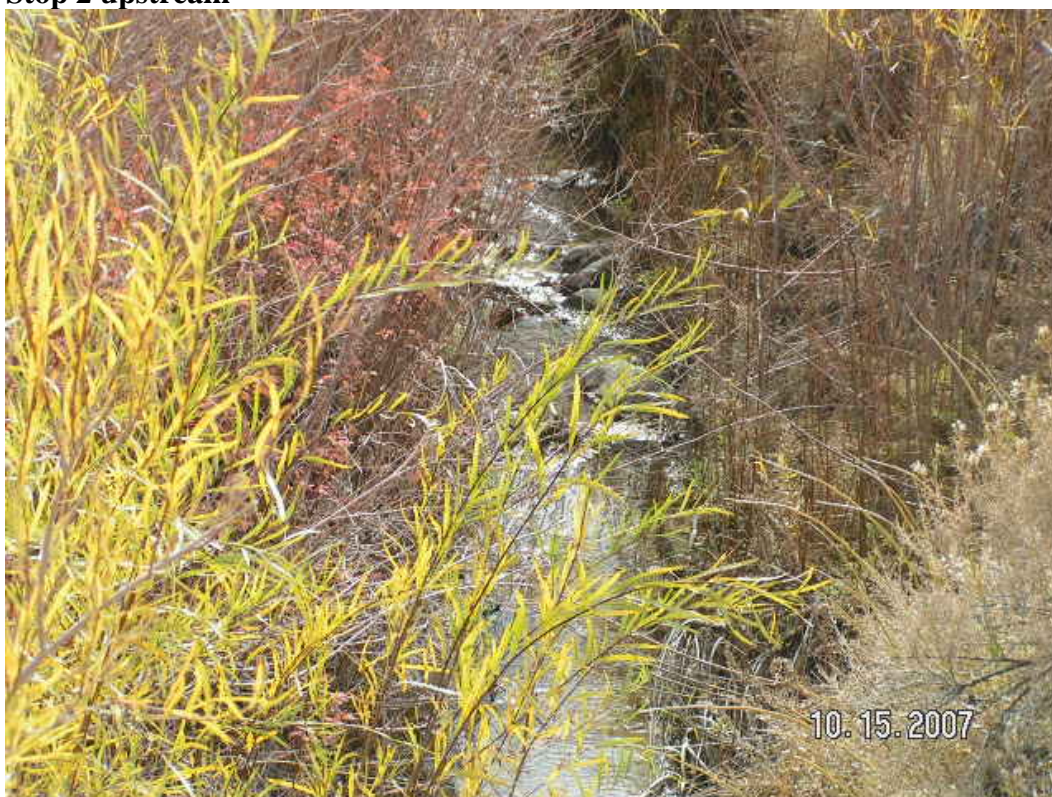
Stop 1 upstream



Stop 2 downstream



Stop 2 upstream



Stop 3 downstream



Stop 3 upstream



Stop 4 downstream



Stop 4 upstream



Stop 5 upstream



Stop 5 downstream



Stop 6 downstream



Stop 6 upstream



Stop 7 upstream



Stop 7 downstream



Stop 8



Stop 9 downstream



Stop 9 upstream



Stop 10 Exclosure on McClusky Creek



Stop 10 Inside and outside of excloser



Stop 10 Near exclosure



Stop 10 Closeup of above picture



Stop 11 downstream



Stop11 upstream



Stop 12 downstream



Stop 12 upstream



BLACK SPRING
Looking down from the top of the spring



Close up of exclosure from top of spring



Looking up from near the top of the spring



Exclosure

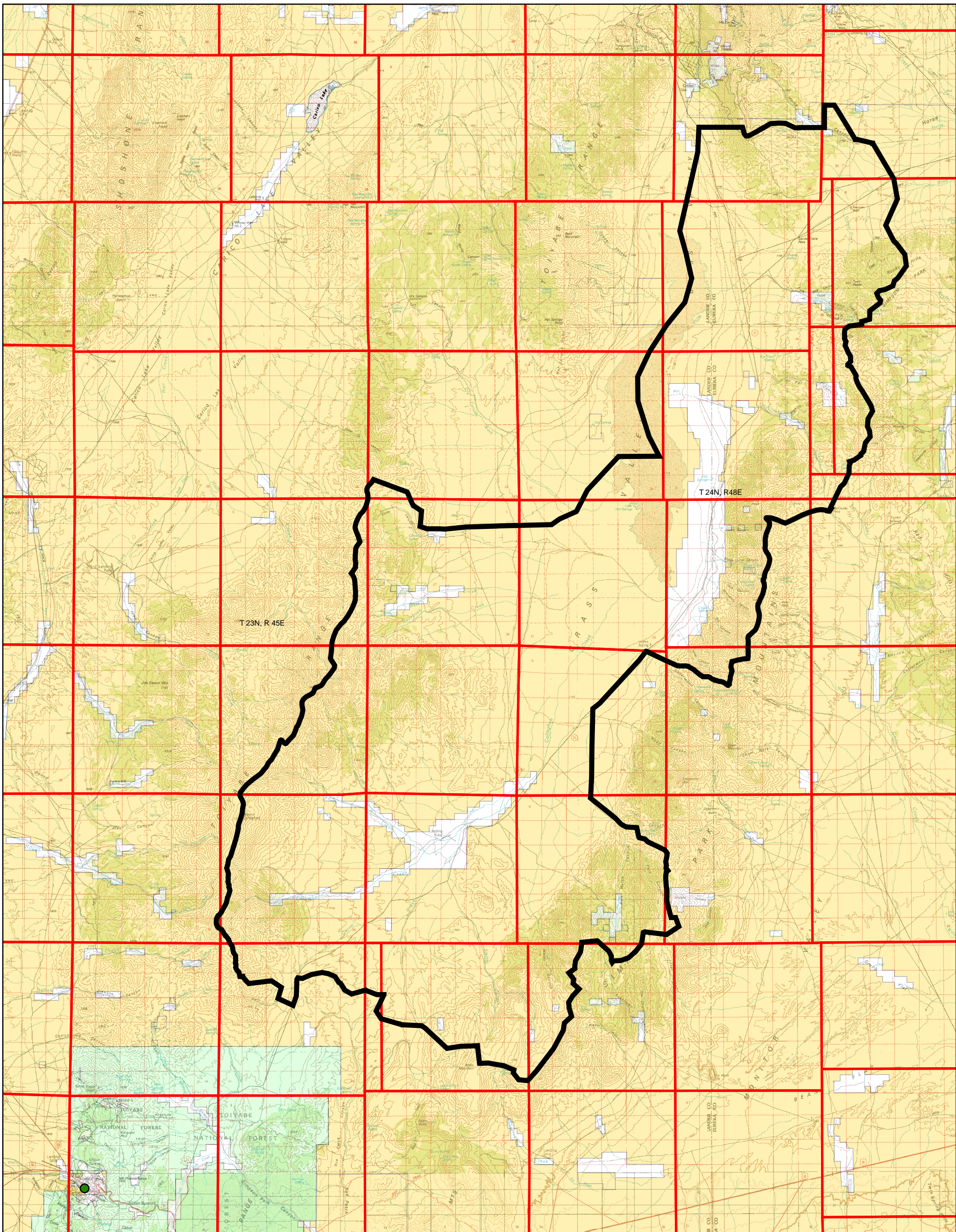


Looking up from the bottom of spring




Close up of exclosure from bottom of spring






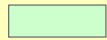
Legend


ALLOT_NAME  GRASS VALLEY  Township and Range


Ownership

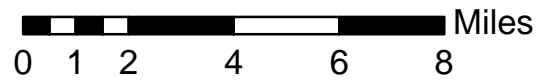
NAME

 Bureau of Land Management

 Forest Service

 Private

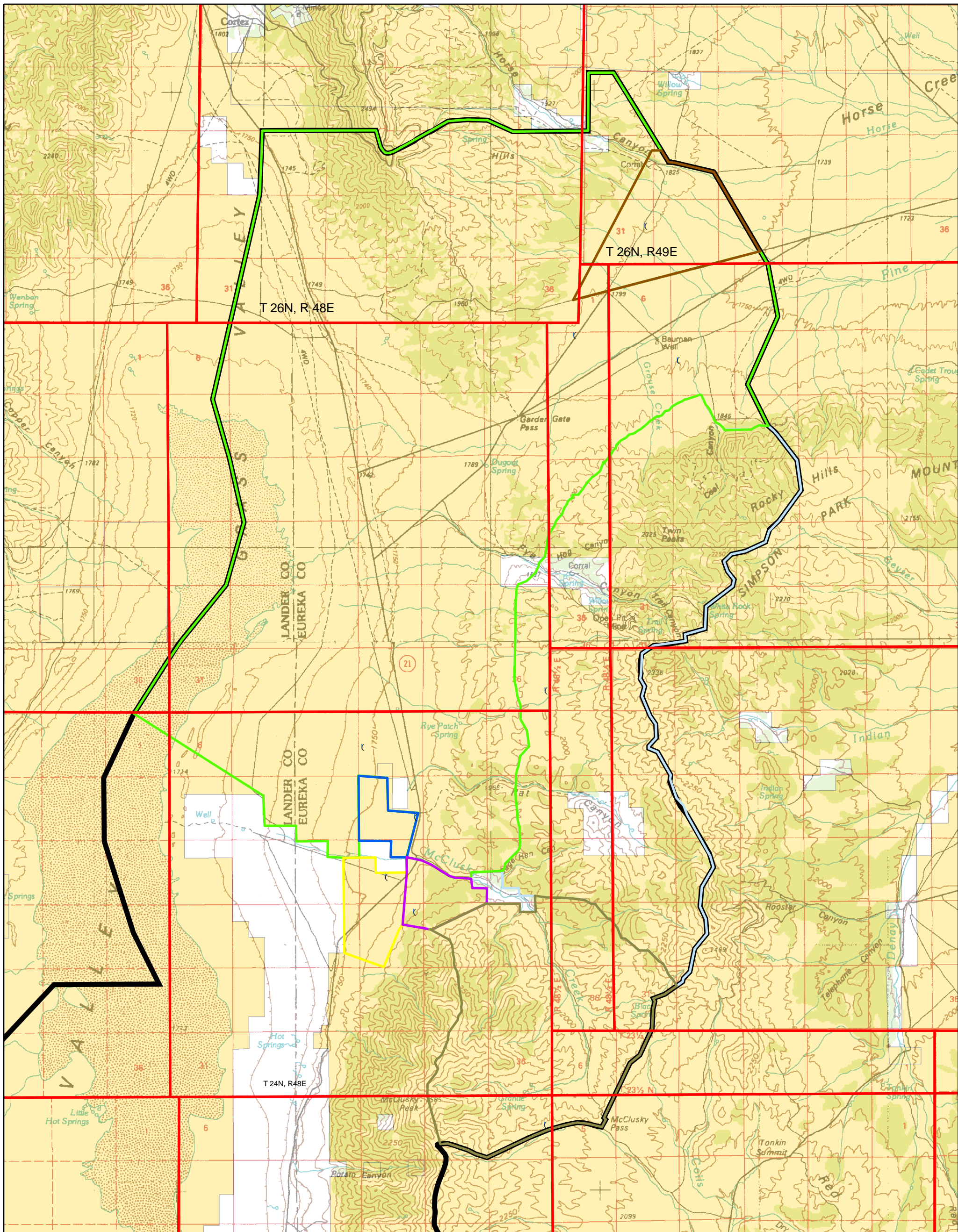
 Austin, NV



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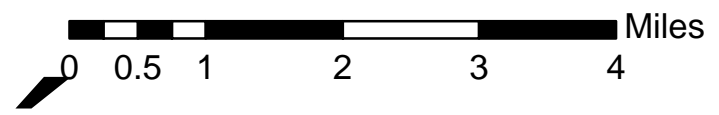
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 Battle Mountain, NV 89820

Data is published in the
 North American Datum 1983
 (NAD83) UTM, Zone 11, Meters
 10/30/2007 - Theodozio



Legend

- | | | |
|------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Utilization sites | ALLOT_NAME | Ownership NAME |
| Township and Range | GRASS VALLEY | Bureau of Land Management |
| pastureboundary | | Forest Service |
| pasturenam | | Private |
| Horse Ranch Seeding | | |
| Lower McClusky | | |
| Native Mountain Area | | |
| Native Valley Floor | | |
| North Keystone Seeding | | |
| South Keystone Seeding | | |
| Upper McClusky | | |



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