



# United States Department of the Interior

## BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Carson City Field Office  
5665 Morgan Mill Road  
Carson City, Nevada 89701  
<http://www.nv.blm.gov>



In Reply Refer To:  
4130  
(NV-032)  
CF-2703030

Dear Interested Public:

MAR 16 2006

Enclosed are the 2004 Clifton Flat Allotment Standards and Guidelines Analysis and 2006 Clifton Flat Allotment Environmental Assessment. If you would like to make comments, please do so by April 21, 2006.

If you have any questions, please call Peter Raffetto, Rangeland Management Specialist at (775) 885-6152.

Sincerely

Peter Raffetto  
Rangeland Management Specialist  
Renewable Resources

Enclosures:

- (1) 2004 Clifton Flat Allotment Standards and Guidelines Analysis.
- (2) 2006 Clifton Flat Allotment Environmental Assessment Permit Renewal.

RECEIVED

MAR 16 2006

DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION  
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR  
BUDGET AND PLANNING DIVISION

**Clifton Flat Allotment**  
**2004 Standards & Guidelines Analysis**

This analysis provides background information necessary to renew a Term Grazing Permit, as per guidance provided by the Washington Office. It is necessary to determine if Standards and Guidelines (S & G's) are being met, if substantial progress is being made towards meeting them, or if they are not being met, what changes are necessary in order to meet them. The S & G's for rangeland health that apply to the Carson City Field Office were developed by the Sierra Front - Northern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council and approved by the Secretary of the Interior on February 12th, 1997. The Standards are as follows:

**1. Soils:** Soil processes will be appropriate to soil types, climate and land form as indicated by: (1) Surface litter is appropriate to the potential of the site; (2) Soil crusting formation in shrub interspaces, and soil compaction are minimal or not in evidence, allowing for appropriate infiltration of water; (3) Hydrologic cycle, nutrient cycle and energy flow are adequate for the vegetative communities; (4) Plant communities are diverse and vigorous and there is evidence of recruitment; and (5) Basal and canopy cover (vegetative) is appropriate for site potential.

**2. Riparian/Wetlands:** Riparian/wetland systems are in properly function condition as indicated by: (1) Sinuosity, width/depth ratio and gradient are adequate to dissipate stream flow without excessive erosion or deposition; (2) Riparian vegetation is adequate to dissipate high flow energy and protect banks from excessive erosion; and (3) Plant species diversity is appropriate to riparian-wetland systems.

**3. Water Quality:** Water quality criteria in Nevada and California State Law shall be achieved or maintained as indicated by: (1) Chemical constituents do not exceed the water quality standards; (2) Physical constituents do not exceed the water quality standards; (3) Biological constituents do not exceed the water quality standards; and (4) The water quality of all water bodies, including ground water located on or influenced by BLM lands will meet or exceed the applicable Nevada or California water quality standards. Water quality Standards for surface and ground waters include the designated beneficial uses, numeric criteria, narrative criteria, and anti-degradation requirements as set forth under State law, and as found in Section 303(c) of the Clean Water Act.

**4. Plant and Animal Habitat:** Populations and communities of native plant species and habitats for native animal species are healthy, productive and diverse as indicated by: (1) Good representation of life forms and numbers of species; (2) Good diversity of height, size, and distribution of plants; (3) Number of wood stalks, seed stalks, and seed production adequate for stand maintenance; and (4) Vegetative mosaic, vegetative corridors for wildlife, and minimal habitat fragmentation.

**5. Special Species Habitat:** Habitat conditions meet the life cycle requirements of special status species as indicated by: (1) Habitat areas are large enough to support viable populations of special status species; (2) Special status plant and animal numbers and ages appear to ensure stable populations; (3) Good diversity of height, size, and distribution of plants; (4) Number of wood stalks, seed stalks, and seed production adequate for stand maintenance; and (5) Vegetative mosaic, vegetative corridors for wildlife, and minimal habitat fragmentation.

### **ALLOTMENT INFORMATION**

The Clifton Flat Allotment is located between the lower north slope of the Pine Nut Mountains and the Carson River. It is approximately 15 miles southwest of Silver Springs, Nevada. The allotment is located in Nevada and is administered by the Carson City Field Office (Nevada). The allotment boundary is not fenced except a portion along the Carson River and a portion of the western boundary. This allotment has historically been a cattle allotment during the spring/summer.

Very little grazing by livestock has occurred through 1993. Total active use for the Clifton Flat Allotment is 360 AUMs. In 2002, Richard Huntsberger has leased the allotment from the Hodges Transportation Inc.

The major plant communities are Wyoming Big Sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata wyomingensis*), Bailey greasewood (*Sarcobatus vermiculatus baileyi*), Spiny hopsage (*Grayia spinosa*), shadscale (*Atriplex confertifolia*) with an under story of Indian ricegrass (*Oryzopsis hymenoides*). There are a few small areas of winterfat (*Eurotia lanata*).

The area is not currently contained in a Habitat Management Plan Area. Primary wildlife use is by non-game species. Game species using the area are chukar (*Alectoris chukar*) and mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*). California quail (*Callipepla californica*) can be found along the Carson River. The riparian habitat adjacent to the river adds structural diversity and provides habitat for migratory non-game bird species. Management for these species has resulted in the construction of several guzzlers in the area. Habitat diversity in the area is generally low, but appropriate for the area.

There is winter/spring grazing. The critical growing period for Indian ricegrass (*Oryzopsis hymenoides*) is March 1 through July 15 and winterfat (*Eurotia lanata*) is April 1 to July 15. This is when the plants are most susceptible to damage by grazing.

Livestock grazing is authorized as a cow/calf operation. Grazing preference is 360 AUMs. In the allotment, 72 cattle are permitted from November 1 to March 31, with a public land rating of 100%.

The Allotment is classified as a category "M" (Maintain) based upon the relatively low resource conflicts and its overall good condition.

There are no springs located on public lands. Some limited mining has/does occur. The area encompassed by the Clifton Flat Allotment is very popular with hunters and recreationists, because of its proximity to Reno and Fallon. Off-road racing occurs near the allotment. Access to the public lands is limited in many areas due to lack of roads.

An Allotment Evaluation was completed in 1994. It covered the years of 1977 to 1993. For this period of time the average AUM harvest was 119 AUMs.

Additional monitoring data has been collected and is analyzed on the following pages. *It covers the period of 1994 to the present.*

### **MONITORING DATA**

#### I. Billed and Actual Use

Livestock actual use is recorded from a report provided by the permittee at the end of specific grazing periods. Data are verified by field checks and occasional counts. Actual use data contain dates, numbers, and classes of livestock turned out, moved, or gathered, as well as deaths.

Between 1994 and 2004, livestock use (Table 1) occurred as follows:

**Table 1. Actual Use.**

<u>Year</u>	<u>AUMs Billed</u>	<u>AUR AUMs</u>	<u>TAPU AUMs</u>
1993-94	237	0	360
1994-95	92	92	360
1995-96	357	357	360
1996-97	324	326	360
1997-98	277	151	360
1998-99	0	0	360
1999-00	353	345	360
2000-01	331	345	360
2001-02	217	315	360
2002-03	119	67	360
2003-04	177	177	360
TOTAL	2,484	2,175	3,960
AVERAGE	226	188	360

AUR = Actual Use Records.

TAPU = Total Active Permitted Use.

The total active permitted use for the Richard Huntsberger permit is 360 AUM's. The average actual use for this evaluation period was 188 AUM's or 52.2% of the total active preference 360 AUM's. There is no specific location of the cattle on the allotment.

## II. Special Status Species

Recent information provided by the Nevada Division of Wildlife found within the GIS systems shows sage grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) yearlong and winter habitat areas exist southwest of the allotment.

There are no known T & E animals on the allotment. Loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) Nevada BLM special status species may occur in the area but the BLM has no record of nests in the allotment. Grazing should have no adverse effect on Loggerhead shrike if utilization levels specified in the Technical Recommendations section are maintained.

The following sensitive species are found within and near the Clifton Flat Allotment: (1) Nevada suncup (*Camissonia nevadensis*), (2) Lemmon buckwheat (*Eriogonum lemmonii*), and (3) Churchill Narrows buckwheat (*Eriogonum diatomaceum*).

The habitat areas are large enough to support viable populations of the sensitive species, however there is no monitoring data collected on these species. With the lack of data it is not possible to address the standards and guidelines with any certainty regarding: stable populations, diversity, and distribution of plants, and the reproductive success necessary for stand maintenance. Monitoring of the Churchill Narrows buckwheat is planned for the summer of 2005 and 2006. The base-line data will be useful in accessing the condition of the species at that time and will be used to develop future monitoring protocol.

## III. Wildlife

The area is not currently contained in a Habitat Management Plan area. Primary wildlife use is by non-game species such as coyotes (*Canis latrans*), kangaroo rats (*Dipodomys sp.*), Horned larks (*Eremophila alpestris*), and blacktail jackrabbits (*Lepus californicus*). Main game species in the allotment are chukars (*Alectoris chukar*) and mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*).

#### IV. Precipitation Data

Nevada experienced droughts from 1999 to 2004 which varied in degree dependent on the year. The critical time for precipitation for the key species is during the winter and early spring periods. Moisture storage in the soil is essential for the plants to initiate growth of twigs and foliage. This in turn allows the plants to increase rooting depth and size, increase root reserves, and enhance vigor.

No permanent weather station is located on the Clifton Flat Allotment. To cover the area, Lahontan, Nevada weather data is included with this evaluation. The Lahontan, Nevada weather station is approximately 8 miles northeast from the Clifton Flat Allotment boundary. Depending upon the path, intensity, and duration of storms, the Sierra Nevada Mountains influence precipitation amounts in the allotment. Therefore the data presented provides the reader with an idea of what may have occurred during the years shown. The higher elevations receive larger amounts of precipitation than what is recorded at the station. The mean precipitation is 4.50 inches.

**Table 2. Total Precipitation by year for Lahontan, Nevada.**

Year	Amount in Inches
1992	2.51
1993	5.77
1994	2.62
1995	7.28
1996	5.51
1997	3.36
1998	6.01
1999	3.93
2000	3.51
2001	3.03
2002	1.99
2003	2.95
NOAA AVERAGE	4.50

As evidenced by the total precipitation data, the amount received during the year is low. This appears to be the norm rather than the exception. The total precipitation varied from a low of 1.99 inches in 2002 to a high of 7.28 inches in 1995. Total precipitation was four years above average and eight years below average. Note the last five years were below average.

V. Use Pattern Mapping

**Table 3. Average utilization levels in the Clifton Flat Allotment by year. The information is taken from the utilization maps. Grazing period is from 11/01 to 03/31.**

Year	Percent Utilization Level Classes					Total	Average %
	Slight	Light	Moderate	Heavy	Severe		
1993-1994	No Utilization Data						
1994-1995	No Utilization Data						
1995-1996	98.1	1.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	10.8
1996-1997	99.0	0.3	0.7	0.0	0.0	100.0	10.3
1997-1998	72.0	27.3	0.7	0.0	0.0	100.0	15.7
1998-1999	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	10.0
1999-2000	22.4	64.7	2.2	10.7	0.0	100.0	30.2
2000-2001	47.1	36.6	3.1	13.3	0.0	100.0	26.5
2001-2002	0.0	41.2	22.4	36.5	0.0	100.1	49.1
2002-2003	No Utilization Data						
2003-2004	No Utilization Data						

The seven years of data show a high amount of slight, light and moderate use. Four years of data was not collected because of the work load. The average percent utilization was well below the 55%. The highest average use was 49.1% in 2001-2002. To improve the distribution of livestock, water haul sites should be used on the allotment. The areas near the Carson River had the highest utilization. The use pattern maps would fall between slight and moderate use levels.

VI. Trend (Photo Plot Interpretation)

There was one photo trend plots established in the Clifton Flat Allotment.

PP CF-01:

**Table 4. COMPARING FREQUENCY OF PLANTS FROM THE PHOTO TREND PLOT DATA COLLECTED AT STUDY SITE PP CF-01 OVER TWO POINTS OF TIME (12 YEARS). FRAME SIZE IS 5' X 5'.**

PLANT	05/26/93	05/24/04	TREND
INDIAN RICEGRASS #	3	1	DECREASE
BUDSAGE #	9	7	DECREASE
SHADSCALE	2	3	INCREASE

Table 4 shows there were significant changes between the 1993 and 2004 readings. The key species in the study area were Indian ricegrass (*Oryzopsis hymenoides*) and budsage (*Artemisia spinescens*). The frame size is 5' X 5'.

The plot was established in 1977 and was photographed again in 1979, 1993, 1999, and 2004. Plot PP CF-01 is located in T. 16 N., R. 23 E., and Section 14 SENE. It lies about half a mile from a water haul site. There appears to be some changes in the vegetation. There is a decrease of Indian ricegrass (*Oryzopsis hymenoides*) and budsage (*Artemisia spinescens*). There is an increase of shadscale (*Atriplex confertifolia*) in the area. The shrub component appears about the same. There is no apparent evidence of any soil movement. The trend looks downward. The current drought for that area is the apparent reason for the reductions.

#### VII. Riparian Functionality

There are no springs on the allotment.

#### VIII. Rangeland Health

Rangeland Health write-ups was completed in the vicinity of the CF-01 photo trend plot. This write-up can be found in Appendix II. For the site, two factors (Soil/Site Stability and Hydrologic Function) were rated as slight to none, and the Biotic Integrity was listed as slight for the site. On CF-01 site, it was noted that the vegetative component, particularly Indian ricegrass (*Oryzopsis hymenoides*), could benefit from at least light grazing use. It might even be beneficial to utilize areas, at a lower use level.

#### IX. Water Quality

There are no water sources on the allotment.

#### X. Noxious Weeds

There are no known populations of Noxious Weeds on the allotment.

### INTERPRETATION/CONCLUSIONS

#### Livestock Grazing

The current livestock management practices that are in place are meeting **Standard #1 (Soils), Standard #2 (Riparian/Wetlands), Standard #3, (Water Quality), Standard #4. (Plant and Animal Habitat), and Standard #5. (Special Species Habitat).**



At CF-01 photo plot, the soil component was stable. The vegetative component was diverse and of adequate density to protect the soil surface. There was no readily visible evidence of overland flows, rills, or terracettes.

There are no springs on the allotment. Though no water quality samples were taken from the water troughs, with the water source being brought into the allotment, the likelihood of water quality standards being met are significant.

There is a diverse plant community present. The density of vegetation and the fact that recruitment for all species is occurring is resulting in plant and animal habitat remaining stable and in good condition.

The current plants in the allotment could improve with higher rates of precipitation. In the last five years, the average precipitation was below normal and we are currently in a drought.

### **Wildlife**

Overall, the wildlife habitat looks in good condition for species which utilize the allotment. The big sagebrush component is gradually increasing in many areas of the allotment. There are an adequate number of mature plants to provide a viable seed source for recruitment. Native perennial grass needs to increase in CF-01 photo point area. Many grasses were dead at the CF-01 photo point site and there was probably little seed source left. There is a diverse amount of forbs present.

Signs of small rodent activity were abundant in the CF-01 area. Lizard activity and horned larks were noted in the area.

A series of photographs, taken in the Fort Churchill Allotment, are located in Appendix IV.

### **Recommendations**

Nothing points to any immediate management changes being needed, prior to the start of the next grazing season, to meet or make progress towards meeting the Standards and Guidelines. Future considerations for changes in livestock management have been previously proposed. They are brought forward, with my revisions in bold, for review.

Objectives identified were as follows:

- 1) Limit utilization on desirable shrubs (winterfat (*Eurotia lanata*), and budsage (*Artemisia spinescens*)) **so as not to exceed 45%**.
- 2) Limit utilization on key grasses (Indian ricegrass (*Oryzopsis hymenoides*) and Thurber's needlegrass (*Stipa thurberiana*)) **so as not to exceed 50%**.
- 3) Water hauling in the allotment will be required each year.
- 4) Establish a CF-02 study plot on the allotment.
- 5) Control and eradicate noxious weed infestations.

#### LIST OF REVIEWERS/PARTICIPANTS

Peter Raffetto	Rangeland Management Specialist
Russell Suminski	Lead Rangeland Management Specialist
Claudia Funari	Wildlife Management Biologist
Jim deLaureal	Soil Scientist/Noxious Weeds
Jim Schroeder	Hydrologist/Riparian Coordinator
Peggy Waski	Lead Archaeologist
Dean Tonenna	Plant Ecologist
John Axtell	Wild Horse and Burro Specialist
Terry Knight	Lead Wilderness/Recreation Specialist

Environmental Assessment

Clifton Flat Allotment Permit Renewal

EA-NV-030-06-14

CF-2700019

February 14, 2006

U.S. Department of Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
Carson City Field Office  
5665 Morgan Mill Road  
Carson City, Nevada 89701

## I. INTRODUCTION/PURPOSE AND NEED

### 1. Introduction:

This environmental assessment (EA) analyzes the anticipated impacts resulting from the use of the Clifton Flat Allotment (maps 1 & 2) for grazing purposes. It analyzes the proposed action, modification of the existing utilization levels by adoption of the technical recommendations presented in the Clifton Flat Allotment Standards and Guidelines Analysis (2004), the No Action Alternative, and No Grazing alternative. This EA relies on and incorporates by reference a large portion of the recent Clifton Flat Allotment Standards and Guidelines Analysis (2004) which is attached to the EA for your convenience.

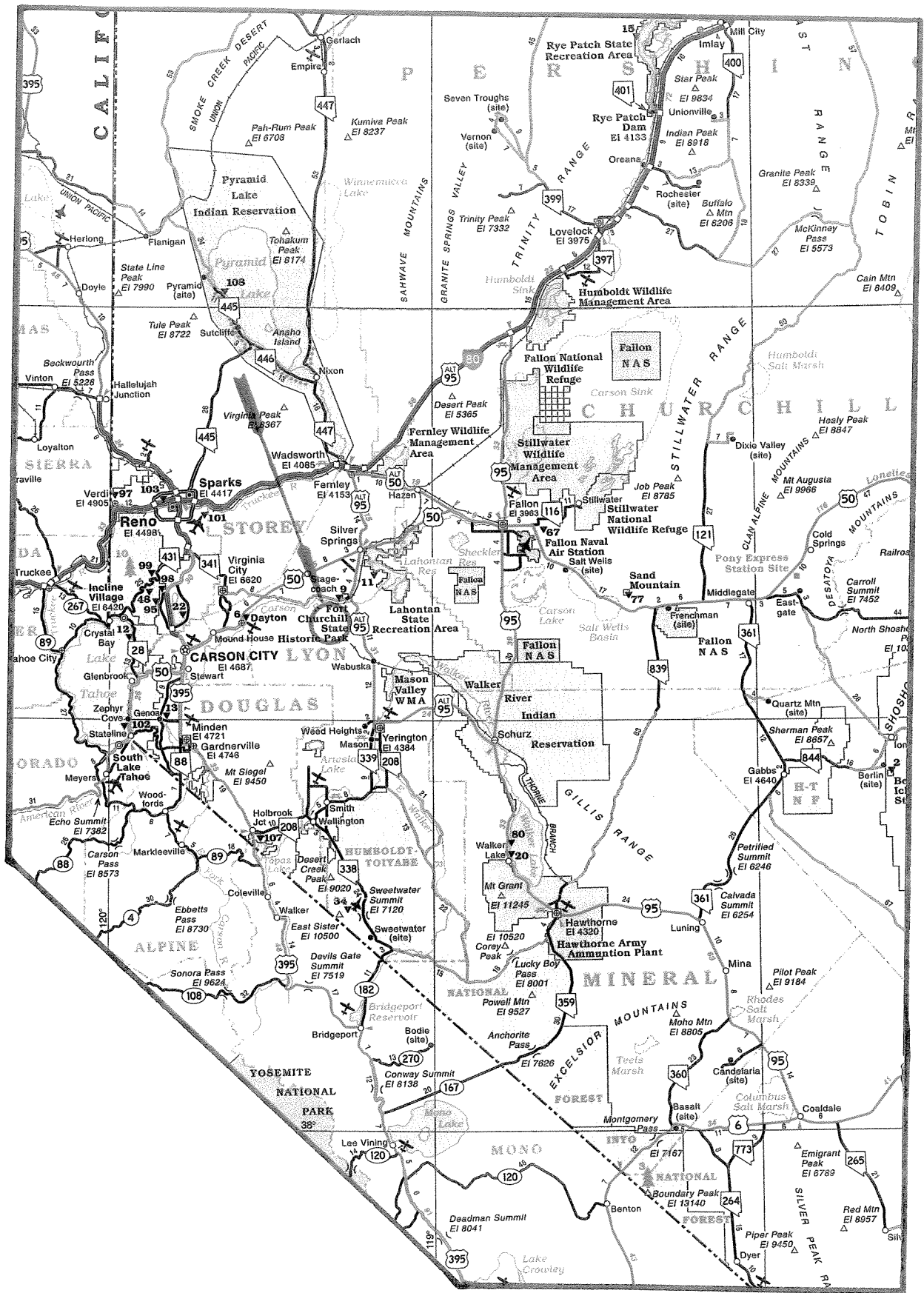
On February 12, 1997, Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt approved the Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health and Grazing Management to be applied to BLM public lands in the State of Nevada. These standards and guidelines were developed in consultation with the Resource Advisory Councils (RAC) for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in Nevada to help ensure that grazing use of these public lands result in productive and sustainable rangelands for the use and enjoyment of future generations.

Standards and Guidelines are being implemented through two processes; (1) determination that the terms and conditions of the grazing permit are consistent with the Standards and Guidelines applicable to the allotment and (2) the allotment evaluation process to determine whether or not the current grazing utilization is expected to achieve the specific resource goals and objectives identified for the Clifton Flat Allotment in the applicable Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Rangeland Program Summary (RPS).

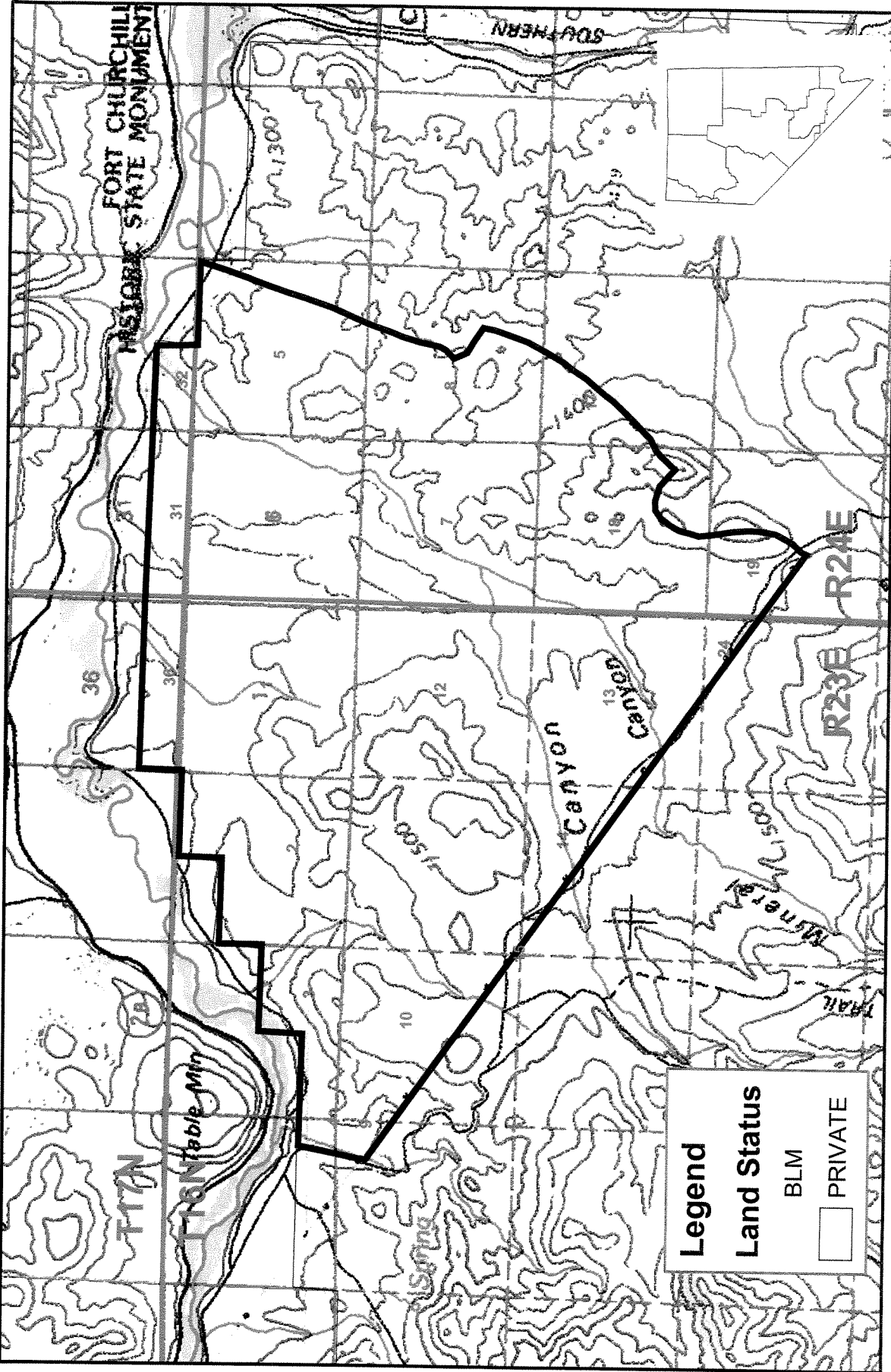
The EA references parts of the 2004 Clifton Flat Allotment Standards and Guidelines Analysis and standards and guidelines developed for the Sierra Front - Northwestern Great Basin Area (the specific area that includes the Clifton Flat Allotment).

### 2. Purpose and Need:

The purpose of the proposed action is two fold; (1) Administer grazing and implement grazing practices on the Clifton Flat Allotment in a manner consistent with the attainment of site specific objectives for the allotment found in the Carson City Field Office Consolidated Resource Management Plan 2001 and (2) Implement grazing practices that would ensure compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health and Grazing Management.



# GENERAL VICINITY



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 Bureau of Land Management  
 Carson City Field Office  
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# Map 2 - Clifton Flat Allotment



The BLM is presently working to fully process grazing permit renewals. This action is a part of this process. The need for the proposed action stems from BLM mandates to conduct grazing activities in an ecologically sound manner. Grazing use of the Clifton Flat Allotment as well as requirements to conduct grazing activities in a manner consistent with the principles of multiple use and sustained yield and in an ecologically sound manner are found in the provisions of the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), Standards and Guidelines for the Rangeland Health and Grazing Management, as well as various other federal laws and regulations.

3. **Land Use Plan Conformance Statement:**

The proposed action and alternatives described below are in conformance with the Carson City Field Office Consolidated Resource Management Plan, pages LSG-2.

- A. Maintain or improve the condition of the public rangelands to enhance productivity for all rangeland and watershed values.
- B. Initially, manage livestock use at existing levels.
- C. Provide adequate, high quality forage for livestock by improving rangeland condition.
- D. Improve overall range administration.

The following Standards and Guidelines Analysis apply to the geographic area of the proposed action and alternatives:

- A. 2004 Clifton Flat Allotment Standards and Guidelines Analysis, October 2004.

II. **PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES**

1. **Proposed Action:**

Issue a 10 year grazing permit to authorize livestock grazing on the Clifton Flat Allotment. The technical recommendations in the 2004 Clifton Flat Allotment Standards and Guidelines Analysis would be implemented to provide proper management of the range resource.

- A. In the Clifton Flat Allotment, 72 cattle would be grazed with a period of use (November 1 to March 31) each year, with a total of 360 AUMs. The BLM Federal Range is 100% of the allotment.
- B. Limit utilization on desirable shrubs (winterfat (EULA) and budsage (ARSP)) so as not to exceed 45% in the upland key areas in the allotment. The utilization levels would be checked and when maximum utilization is

reached, animals would be removed from the area.

- C. Limit utilization on desirable grasses (Indian ricegrass (ORHY) and Thurber's needlegrass (STTH2)) so as not to exceed 45% in the upland key areas in the allotment. The utilization levels would be checked and when maximum utilization is reached, animals would be removed from the area.
- D. Water hauling in the allotment will be required each year.
- E. Improve existing ecological condition and trend.

2. **Alternatives:**

**No Action.**

Maintain current management and status of the Clifton Flat Allotment.

- A. In the Clifton Flat, 72 cattle would be grazed with a period of use (November 1 to March 31) each year, with a total of 360 AUMs. The BLM Federal Range is 100% of the allotment.
- B. Maintain utilization not to exceed 55% on identified key species on the upland key areas.
- C. Maintain existing ecological condition and trend.

**No Grazing:**

- A. Under this alternative, no Term Grazing Permit would be issued, and no grazing would occur on this allotment in the future. There would be no further range improvements constructed on the allotment, and no grazing permittee to maintain current range improvements, including fences and water sources. A permittee would not be present on the allotment to continue proper day-to-day management, so these vital activities would no longer be preformed.

**III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT**

1. **SCOPING AND ISSUE IDENTIFICATION:**

On November 9, 2005 a letter was sent to the interested public to identify those individuals and organizations interested in specific actions on specific Allotments under the jurisdiction of the Carson City Field Office. The purpose of the scoping



letter was to gather information and determine who would be further interested in participating in the evaluation process on the Carson City grazing allotments. The Environmental Assessment for the Clifton Flat Allotment and the Standards and Guidelines Analysis will be sent out for public review. A copy will be sent to the Nevada State Clearinghouse for distribution amongst state agencies. In addition, copies will be sent to the following:

Hodges Transportation Inc.  
Richard Huntsberger  
Western Watersheds Project  
Yerington Paiute Tribe  
Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe

The Internal scoping with the BLM staff occurred from September of 2004 to March 2005, and included the Clifton Flat Allotment Standards and Guidelines Analysis and preparation of this Environmental Assessment.

2. **PROPOSED ACTION:**

A. **General Setting:**

The Clifton Flat Allotment is primarily arid-land fan with rugged mountain foot hills and mountains. Grazing occurs around the peak on sandy, 5-8" rainfall range site. This allotment has historically been a cattle allotment during the winter. The area is mostly salt desert shrub communities.

B. **Critical Elements of the Human Environment:**

The following critical elements are not present or would not be affected by the analyzed alternatives: Air Quality, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Prime or Unique Farmlands, Floodplains, Native American Religious Concerns, Invasive & Noxious Species, Hazardous or Solid Wastes, Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species, Wetlands/Riparian, Water Quality, Wilderness, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and Environmental Justice.

The following Critical Elements described below, although present, would not be affected by the proposed action and alternatives actions.

**Cultural Resources:**

Required Section 106 reviews and a Class I literature search was conducted. It was determined that no cultural resource reconnaissance was

necessary for the Clifton Flat Allotment (CRR3-2253). For further details regarding the assessment of grazing impacts upon cultural resources, refer to the Carson City Field Office Protocols for Rangeland Activities in Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, per Washington Office IM No. 99-021 and protocol agreements between the BLM and the Nevada and/or California State Historic Preservation Offices. Notification letters were sent to the following tribes: (1) Yerington Paiute Tribe and (2) Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe. No comments or concerns were raised.

Requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act will be met prior to construction and/or implementation of any individual range improvement projects proposed for this allotment. All projects with the potential to affect cultural resources are required to have a Class III cultural resource inventory conducted over the project area.

Determinations of cultural resource eligibility and project effect could be made through consultation with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office. Any National Register eligible or listed properties within the project area will either be avoided or mitigated to a “No Adverse Effect” project determination pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Further proposed action would require a review and Native American coordination and determination of consultation or notification.

**Recreation:**

The area encompassed by the Allotment is very popular with hunters and recreationists, because of its proximity to Reno and Fallon. Off-road racing occurs on the allotment. Access to the public lands is limited in many areas because of lack of roads.

C. **Resources Present but not Affected: (other than critical elements)**

The following elements are present but would not be affected by the proposed action, no action and no grazing alternatives: Forestry, Geologic Resources, Lands, Paleontology, Wild Horse & Burros, and Socioeconomic.

D. **Resources Present and Brought Forward for Analysis:**

1. **Livestock:**

360 AUMs are currently authorized on the Clifton Flat Allotment. Grazing occurs around the mountain peak near Bull Canyon on the sandy, 5"-8" rainfall range site. This allotment has historically been a cattle allotment with a winter grazing season.

In the past, most of the utilization monitoring in this allotment has been measured on the key species, Indian ricegrass (*Oryzopsis hymenoides*). Since this is a winter allotment, it is important to consider shrubs in the management of this allotment. More emphasis in monitoring should be on the shrubs such as winterfat and budsage. In the winter, grasses are dormant and little affected by grazing as most of their stored food reserves are in the plant roots. However, twigs of shrubs, and leaves of those that are evergreen, are living tissue. Shrubs are less damaged by grazing during the cold weather period of dormancy than during spring growth, but they are at a disadvantage compared to grasses.

In the winter, livestock graze both shrubs and grasses. If cattle are to subsist during the winter on range forage, a mixture of shrubs and grasses will come closer to meeting the requirements of a balanced ration than either one alone. Shrubs are higher in protein, phosphorus, and carotene (vitamin A) than grasses, whereas grasses are superior only in energy-yielding qualities.

Livestock grazing is authorized as a cow/calf operation. In the allotment, 72 cattle are permitted from November 1 to March 31, with a public land rating of 100%. See pages 2 & 3 of the Clifton Flat Allotment Grazing Use in the 2004 Clifton Flat Allotment Standards and Guideline Analysis.

There is currently no grazing system on the allotment. See page 2 of the Clifton Flat Allotment Grazing Use in the 2004 Clifton Flat Allotment Standards and Guidelines Analysis.

2. **Wildlife:**

Overall, the wildlife habitat is in fair to good condition for the species which utilize the allotment. The big sagebrush component is gradually increasing in many areas of the allotment, and the number of mature shrubs are adequate to provide a viable seed

source for recruitment. The cover and forage provided by the shrubs for wildlife species such as deer, quail, lizards, and birds is adequate for this area.

Unfortunately, in some areas, grass abundance is extremely low. Many grasses were dead at the CF-01 photo point site with few young plants apparent in the population; suggesting that the seed source for these grasses may be low. This may be a result of grazing, but it is more likely due to the previous years' drought. Native perennial grass needs to increase in some areas, particularly in the CF-01 photo point area. The loss of grasses and shrubs negatively impacts wildlife habitat by reducing cover and forage.

Most sites had a diverse amount of annual forbs that were widespread throughout. This may only be a factor of adequate winter and spring precipitation this year, but shows a good seed source exists on site. These forbs are good spring time forage for mule deer and pronghorn antelope, allowing for potential expansion of these animals into the area.

Executive order #13186 titled "Responsibilities of Federal Agencies to Protect Migratory Birds," signed 01/10/01, requires that the BLM evaluate the effects of federal actions on migratory birds. No migratory bird inventory has been completed for the proposed project area. Migratory birds fly over the area and may use the riparian areas on public and private lands, especially the Carson River just north of the allotment. Neo-tropical birds very likely nest in the allotment along with many other species of birds. Common migratory birds which may use the area as habitat include various species of ducks, geese, owls, blackbirds, hawks, finches, doves, and killdeer. In particular there may be white-crowned sparrows (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*), horned larks (*Eremophila alpestris*), common ravens (*Corvus corax*), prairie falcons (*Falco mexicanus*), dark-eyed juncos (*Junco hyemalis*), and chukar (*Chukar Alectoris*)

Other species such as mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), coyote (*Canis latrans*), black-tailed jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus*), mountain cottontail (*Sylvilagus nuttali*), least chipmunk (*Tamias minimus*), white-tailed antelope ground squirrel (*Ammosperophilus leucurus*), deer mice (*Peromyscus maniculatus*), and kangaroo mice (*Dipodomys sp.*) may occur on the allotment.

Signs of small rodent activity were abundant in the CF-01 area. Lizard activity and horned larks (*Eremophila alpestris*) were noted in the area.

### 3. Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species:

The following sensitive species occur within the Clifton Flat Allotment: (1) Churchill Narrows buckwheat (*Eriogonum diatomaceum*).

*Eriogonum diatomaceum* (Churchill Narrows buckwheat) is a low matted perennial herbaceous buckwheat species known to occur in the Churchill Narrows area, in Lyon County, Nevada. The species was first discovered in June 1997 and was subsequently identified and reported as a new species in 2002. The species is known worldwide from only 15 small patches of diatomaceous montmorillonite clay deposits of the Coal Valley Formation at elevations between 4300 and 4600 ft. Six of the occurrences are located within the south eastern portion of the Clifton Flat Allotment.

*Eriogonum diatomaceum* breaks dormancy in late spring and flowers from July until the first hard frost in early October. Seed cast occurs from September to mid November. The majority of living plants are older mature plants comprising roughly 77 % of the population with 5% of the population composed of seedlings. The stage class distribution appears to be typical for long lived perennials within an arid environment.

No noxious weeds were found in any of the monitoring plots. Cheatgrass was noted as a very small component within the habitat. During the fall, noticeable grazing of the herbaceous stems and flower stalks was seen throughout the buckwheat occurrences. This same type of grazing was noted previously by consultant botanists in 1997 and the information was included in a status report prepared for the BLM in 2001 (Reynolds, 2001). There is evidence of cattle within the habitat, but at this time it is not known for certain if the herbivory is due to native wildlife, livestock or occasional wild horse use. Further investigation on herbivory is planned.

*Eriogonum diatomaceum* is negatively impacted by trampling. When trampled by humans or livestock, the fragile herbaceous stems and leaves break off from the woody base. Trampling also negatively impacts the flocculated soils which damages the soil

structure and permeability. Trampling by humans can compact the soil column anywhere from 10 to 15 cm. Trampling by livestock or horses would have an even greater impact to the fragile soils.

Aside from mining and off-highway-vehicle use, which constitutes the greatest threats to *E. diatomaceum*, excessive trampling and herbivory by livestock and wild horses could be of concern.

No other survey was done for any listed threatened, endangered or BLM sensitive status plant species by BLM staff. It is unknown to BLM staff if the allotment has been surveyed by any other entity. Due to the lack of BLM survey data, the data issued by the Nevada Natural Heritage Program (NNHP, 2005) was used to identify known locations of sensitive plants within the allotment. The NNHP information is made available to the Carson City Field Office with the following caveat: "The Nevada Natural Heritage Program provides information on the known and previously reported locations and status of threatened, endangered, candidate, sensitive, and other at-risk species throughout the state, to meet the legitimate needs of land-use-planning, development, conservation, and research activities. These data are constantly updated and added to, and do not constitute and cannot replace on-site surveys, conducted by qualified biologists at appropriate times of year, to detect all species of concern actually present in an area." (Emphasis is NNHP, September, 2005, <http://heritage.nv.gov/reqintro.htm>)

Aside from the *E. diatomaceum*, there are no records in the NNHP database of any other threatened, endangered, candidate, or BLM sensitive plant species within the Allotment.

#### **4. Soils:**

The soils in the Clifton Flat Allotment vary from sandy to silt loams, with varying amounts of intermixed gravel and rocks. These soils are susceptible to wind and water erosion. High intensity, short-duration summer rainstorms have historically caused gully washing and sheet erosion.

For detailed soil descriptions see the Lyon County Soil Survey, published 1984.

**5. Vegetation:**

Key upland species on the Clifton Flat Allotment include two shrubs and two grass species. They are winterfat, budsage, Indian ricegrass, and Thurber's needlegrass. See page 2 of the 2004 Clifton Flat Allotment Standards and Guidelines Analysis.

**6. Visual Resources:**

The allotment is managed under both Class III and Class IV Visual Resource Management designations. In a Class III area, the objective is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape. Management activities (using water haul sites) may attract the attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. In a Class IV area, the objective is to provide for management activities which require major modification of the landscape. Management activities may dominate the view and be the major focus of viewer attention; however, every attempt should be made to minimize the impact of these activities.

**7. Land Use/Access:**

The allotment is entirely public land. Land uses in this area include a major utility right-of-way (CC-06186) and a vehicle testing permit (N-66753) for Hodges Transportation/Nevada Automotive Test Center.

**E. Alternatives:**

The description of the affected environment for the No Action and No Grazing alternatives would be the same as that for the proposed action.

**IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES**

**1. Proposed Action:**

**A. Environmental Impacts:**

**1. Livestock:**

A maximum of 72 cattle would be run on the allotment. Implementation of the Proposed Action would not change the location and number of livestock utilizing the allotment. The allotment would not have a shortened period of time used, the

entire grazing season would be the same as the no action alternative, and with no change in the authorized (360) AUMs.

Better livestock distribution would provide lower utilization levels overall, and over time improve the condition of the vegetation in the areas currently grazed. The level of utilization would be checked during the grazing season and cattle would have to move out of the area when 45% is reached on the shrubs. The desirable shrub vegetation that is grazed would have no more than the maximum proposed utilization level (45%) and would have more rest and should produce larger plants because of better plant reserves. These recommendations should increase the number of winterfat and budsage plants on the allotment.

The maximum allowable utilization level on grasses will change to 45% and be in the lower moderate category. Reduced utilization should produce larger plants because of better plant reserves.

## **2. Wildlife:**

Implementation of the Proposed Action would not affect wildlife utilizing the allotment. Based on the limited utilization change, there will probably not be a large enough change in vegetation parameters to increase or decrease quality of habitat for wildlife. However, if shrub and grass cover increase on the allotment, it would positively affect wildlife utilizing the allotment by adding more cover and forage for wildlife to the area. The larger and more abundant shrub plants would provide greater cover and forage for wildlife in general. Wildlife may utilize the allotment for a longer period of time, due to the greater availability of food and cover.

The proposed action and alternative action will have no impacts for migratory and neo-tropical birds on the allotment. If shrub and grass cover were to increase on the allotment, it would improve the quality of habitat for nesting migratory birds by adding more cover and forage to the area.

## **3. Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species:**

Implementation of the Proposed Action with winter grazing would have no negative impacts on the sensitive plant species as long as excessive numbers of livestock do not congregate or trail within the Churchill Narrows buckwheat habitat. Based on past grazing history within the allotment, it is unlikely that would occur. The



Churchill Narrows buckwheat grows on diatomaceous soils which support few other plant species. Therefore these sites have little vegetative cover. There are no perennial forage species at these sites which would typically draw livestock to an area to feed. In addition, because there is no feed for livestock, the permittee has not used tools such as water or salt supplements to draw livestock into these areas. Under the proposed action, only 72 cattle would be permitted to graze within the allotment. In the past, livestock have been widely dispersed throughout the allotment while foraging and have not congregated near the buckwheat populations. Livestock congregation has been limited to areas where water and salt supplements were provided. During the grazing season, a few cattle may wander through habitat areas for the Churchill Narrows buckwheat, but no impacts are anticipated. Trampling would be minimal, and any incidental herbivory would occur after the buckwheat has completed its reproductive cycle.

**4. Soils:**

Since some of the soils within the Clifton Flat Allotment have moderate to severe water erosion hazard ratings, the Proposed Action would have a slight potential to positively impact this resource due to the reduced utilization levels proposed. Most of these erosive soils however are located on very steep slopes which are not normally utilized by livestock, and so the actual impacts should not differ from the present situation.

Soils around the trails to the water troughs could become compacted and the surface around the troughs could become broken up, resulting in some impacts in the immediate vicinity of these water sources.

**5. Vegetation:**

The utilization level would be reduced from 55% to 45% for grasses and shrubs. There would be no change in the utilization category (Moderate Use Class - 41% to 60%). The general allotment use is from 11/01 to 03/31. These grass plants can sustain this level of use on the current year's growth without damage to the plant. The shrub utilization level would be decreased to increase the potential number of winterfat and budsage plants. The grasses and shrubs enter dormancy after 08/15. The grass utilization levels were recommended in the Nevada Rangeland Monitoring Handbook on page 23 as proper use. Proper

use is the degree of utilization of current year's growth which, if continued, will maintain or improve the long term productivity of the site. This would meet vegetation objectives for the allotment.

This grazing allotment is dependent on using the water haul sites on the allotment. There are no permanent water sources on the allotment. In the past, the permittee's private land along the Carson River was used as the location to water the livestock. Use on the allotment was mainly on the northern end. In the 1990's, a number of water haul sites were established. These water sources helped to spread the livestock distribution over most of the allotment.

**6. Visual Resources:**

The Proposed Action would meet VRM Class III and Class IV objectives. No new surface disturbing projects are being proposed in this EA. If new range improvement projects are proposed in the future, a separate EA would be prepared at that time and would analyze potential impacts to Visual Resources.

**7. Land Use/Access:**

Livestock grazing is compatible with existing land use authorizations. The potential exists for collisions between livestock and vehicles traveling or being tested in the area. Collisions in the past have been rare and impacts are anticipated to be insignificant.

**2. Alternatives (No Action):**

**A. Environmental Impacts :**

**1. Livestock:**

Implementation of the No Action Alternative would not change the number of livestock utilizing the allotment, authorized AUMs or the season of use, or utilization levels from the present situation.

**2. Wildlife:**

Implementation of the no action alternative would keep the current use level. Continuing with these objectives would not serve to protect and restore wildlife habitat. Continuing this current use

level could negatively impact grass restoration within the allotment. These plants would take longer to establish and grow larger. The smaller and less abundant grass plants would continue to provide inadequate forage and cover for wildlife and inadequate habitat for grass-nesting migratory birds.

**3. Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species:**

Implementation of the no action alternative winter grazing would have no negative impacts on the sensitive plant species as long as excessive numbers of livestock do not congregate or trail within the Churchill Narrows buckwheat habitat. Based on past grazing history within the allotment, it is unlikely that excessive numbers of livestock would congregate or trail through these sensitive plant populations. The Churchill Narrows buckwheat grows on diatomaceous soils which support few other plant species; therefore these sites have little vegetative cover. There are no perennial forage species at these sites which would typically draw livestock to an area to feed. In addition, because there is no feed for livestock, the permittee has not used tools such as water or salt supplements to draw livestock into these areas. Under the no action alternative, only 72 cattle would be permitted to graze within the allotment. In the past, livestock have been widely dispersed throughout the allotment while foraging and have not congregated near the buckwheat populations. Livestock congregation has been limited to areas where water and salt supplements were provided. During the duration of the grazing season a few cattle may wander through habitat areas for the Churchill Narrows buckwheat but no impacts are anticipated. Trampling would be minimal and any incidental herbivory would occur after the buckwheat has completed its reproductive cycle.

**4. Soils:**

Since some of the soils within the Clifton Flat Allotment have moderate to severe water erosion hazard ratings, the No Action Alternative would have a slight potential to negatively impact this resource due to the utilization levels proposed. With the higher utilization levels, the cattle may remain longer on specific areas causing more stamping of soils at each site. Most of these erosive soils are located on very steep slopes which are not normally utilized by livestock, so this alternative would result in little change in impacts to the soil resource compared with the proposed action situation.

**5. Vegetation:**

This alternative would not result in faster increase in four-wing saltbush and budsage plants as would the proposed action on pages 14 & 15. The general allotment use is from 11/01 to 03/31. When cattle are turned out in the allotment on 11/01, both the shrubs and grasses are dormant. These grass plants can sustain as much as 50% utilization of the current year's growth without damage to the plant.

The growing period for the key plant species is from 03/01 to 08/15 each year. The grass utilization levels were below the "Degree of Allowable Use" level in the Nevada Rangeland Monitoring Handbook on page 23 as proper use. This alternative meets vegetation objectives established for the allotment, but would not result in any improvement over the current situation.

**6. Visual Resources:**

Effects of this alternative would be the same as the proposed action on page 15. The difference between the Proposed Action such as water hauling on the allotment and the No Action Alternative from a visual resources standpoint is indistinguishable. The same water haul sites would be used on the allotment.

**7. Land Use/Access:**

Livestock grazing is compatible with existing land use authorizations. The potential exists for collisions between livestock vehicles traveling or being tested in the area. Collisions in the past have been rare and impacts are anticipated to be insignificant.

**3. Alternatives (No Grazing):**

**A. Environmental Impacts :**

**1. Livestock:**

Implementation of the No Grazing Alternative would result in no cattle utilizing the allotment, authorized AUMs or season of use.

Implementation of the No Grazing Alternative would result in no maintenance of range improvements. The water development sites would have no water because the permittee would not be hauling water during the grazing season.

Removal of livestock would also mean removal of the permittee. Loss of this presence on the allotment would be detrimental to maintenance of the vegetation found on the allotment. The permittee has alerted the BLM to a number of abuses, by recreationists, on the allotment, and this has prompted action by the BLM to protect various areas. Maintenance and use supervision of range improvements by the permittee also serves to protect the vegetation found on the allotment from uncontrolled use by trespass livestock.

**2. Wildlife:**

Implementation of the No Grazing Alternative would eliminate utilization by livestock. This alternative would probably have the greatest effect on wildlife in the allotment. It would improve both food and cover for wildlife by reducing livestock utilization. With the decrease in cattle utilization, shrubs, grasses, and forbs would increase in abundance, volume, and cover as a result. There would be a greater diversity in age class and structure of vegetation which would increase the quality and quantity of habitat for migratory birds and common wildlife species. Utilization of the allotment by wildlife and migratory birds would, in turn, increase.

Implementation of the No Grazing Alternative would result in no maintenance of range improvements. The water development sites would have no water because the permittee would not be using water during the grazing season. Wildlife and migratory bird use on the allotment may decrease due to lack of water.

**3. Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species:**

Implementation of the No Grazing Alternative would not impact Churchill Narrows buckwheat or its habitat. Past livestock grazing use within this habitat has been incidental to none, therefore implementation of the no grazing alternative is not significantly different from the existing condition. Under the no grazing alternative, livestock would not be present within the allotment therefore any potential trampling of buckwheat by livestock would not occur.

**4. Soils:**

Since some of the soils within the Clifton Flat Allotment have moderate to severe water erosion hazard ratings, the No Grazing

Alternative would have a potential to positively impact this resource due to the lack of grazing and hoof action by livestock. However, most of these erosive soils are located on very steep slopes which are not normally utilized by livestock, and so this alternative should result in very little actual change in impacts to the soil resource compared with the present situation.

**5. Vegetation:**

The No Grazing Alternative proposed would have a number of effects. The vegetation across the allotment would continue to improve. Eventually, the forage species on some areas of the allotment would reach an over mature stage of growth, and the vigor of the plants would suffer. Grass plants may become wolfy with dead crown centers. This alternative would also not allow for the proper use of a renewable resource (range forage) as allowed for by law and regulation concerning management of public lands.

**6. Visual Resources:**

The No Grazing Alternative would be different from the proposed action. The difference between the Proposed Action and the No Grazing Alternative from a visual resources standpoint is no water hauling and placement of existing troughs would occur. The public would not see cattle on the allotment during the grazing season. There would be no distribution of cattle over the allotment which would improve the vegetation cover for a few years.

**7. Land Use/Access:**

Removal of livestock grazing would be compatible with existing land use authorizations. There would be no potential for collisions between livestock and vehicles traveling or being tested in the area.

**4. Mitigation Measures:**

**A. Proposed Action:**

1. Range improvement sites would be maintained in a sanitary condition at all times, waste materials at those sites would be disposed of promptly at an appropriate waste disposal site. Waste means all discarded matter including, but not limited to, trash, garbage, refuse, oil drums, petroleum products, ashes, and equipment.

2. Bird ladders need to be installed at all water haul sites.
3. To reduce impacts on the visual landscape, water storage tanks may be camouflaged and/or partially buried.
4. The Carson City Field Office (CCFO) would send an inspector to all the new project sites to ensure conformance with BLM standards.
5. Possible negative impacts to the Churchill Narrows buckwheat such as trampling and soil compaction can be avoided by locating any water haul sites 1 mile away from the habitat and by not allowing any herding of livestock through the habitat.

**B. No Action:**

The mitigation measures are the same for No Action Alternative as the Proposed Action.

**C. No Grazing Alternative:**

No mitigation is needed.

**5. Cumulative Impacts:**

All resource values have been evaluated for cumulative impacts. It has been determined that cumulative impacts would be negligible as a result of the proposed action or alternatives.

The issuance of a term grazing permit for the Clifton Flat Allotment is a discrete action, and would cause no known cumulative impacts to the environment when considered in combination with any known or anticipated actions on these or adjacent lands in the past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future. Any effects of the moderate grazing levels proposed would be limited to the project area. The grazing levels considered under these alternatives are either no grazing or grazing at moderate levels. Grazing at these levels has not been shown to be injurious to plant or animal species in the area. The effects of grazing at moderate levels, along with associated activities in the management of this allotment such as maintenance or construction of range improvements, would be limited to the immediate area of the allotment. They would not combine with any known, or reasonably foreseen, activities on these or adjacent lands to produce any detrimental cumulative impacts in the area.

**6. Monitoring:**

Range Monitoring would continue for the Clifton Flat Allotment. The types of monitoring could include (1) Photo Points, (2) Utilization, (3) Use Pattern Maps, (4) Rangeland Health Assessments, (5) Actual Use Reports, and (6) Weather Data. Actual monitoring will depend on resource needs, as well as funding and personnel levels.

**V. CONSULTATION & COORDINATION**

**1. List of Preparers:**

1.	Peter A. Raffetto	Rangeland Management Specialist
2.	Russell Suminski	Senior Rangeland Management Specialist
3.	Susan McCabe	Archaeologist
4.	James T. DeLaureal	Soil Scientist
5.	Ken Nelson	Realty Specialist
6.	Terry Knight	Wilderness Specialist
7.	Jim Schroeder	Hydrologist
8.	Claudia Funari	Wildlife Biologist
9.	Katrina Leavitt	Range Ecologist
10.	Desna Young	Environmental Coordinator

**2. Persons, Groups or Agencies Consulted:**

1. Hodges Transportation Inc.
2. Richard Huntsberger
3. Western Watersheds Project
4. Yerington Paiute Tribe
5. Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe
6. Nevada State Clearing House

**VI. APPENDICES OR ATTACHMENTS:**

Attached is the 2004 Clifton Flat Allotment Standards & Guidelines Analysis.