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:
4700
(NV-032)

EMS Transmission 05/14/07
Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed are copies of the Mountain Well/LaPlata and Flanigan Allotment Term Grazing Permit Environmental Assessments (EA-NV-030-07-017&8). Please review the enclosed document and provide written comments before June 18, 2007.

Signed by:
Elayn M. Briggs
Assistant Manager, Renewable Resources

Authenticated by:
James M. Gianola
Wild Horse and Burro Specialist

Enclosures: Environmental Assessment #'s EA-NV-030-07-17&18.

FLANIGAN LIVESTOCK GRAZING ALLOTMENT
PERMIT RENEWAL
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
EA # NV-030-07-018

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

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I. INTRODUCTION/PURPOSE AND NEED

A. Introduction

The Flanigan Allotment is located within the jurisdictional boundary of the Carson City Field Office (CCFO) of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The grazing allotment is located in Washoe County, Nevada approximately 50 miles north of Reno, NV and runs along the northern end of the Virginia Mountains. The allotment boundaries are formed by the Pyramid Lake Indian Reservation to the east, Tule and Vinegar Peaks and Sugarloaf Mountain to the south and Fort Sage Mountains to the west. As with most of the allotment boundary the northern end is also fenced. Other than an east west drift fence that separates the summer and winter pastures and several protected areas there is no internal fencing on the allotment.

A majority of the allotment is comprised of rough mountainous terrain throughout all but a portion of the winter pasture, which is a flat long lying valley at the north end. Elevations within the allotment range from 3900 feet to more than 8000 feet above sea level.

Along with the Carson City administered permit, Jimmy Lee, the current permittee, has several permits to the north and west located in the Susanville District. These permits are used in the winter and spring in conjunction with the Flanigan allotment. His private lands and these additional permits give Mr. Lee considerable flexibility in his operation.

This environmental assessment (EA) analyzes the potential environmental impacts associated with each of the livestock management alternatives currently being considered for the Flanigan Allotment. Management options presently under consideration include; (1) authorizing cattle grazing and continuing with current management; and (2) not authorizing livestock grazing within the allotment at this time.

B. Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Proposed Action is; (1) Administer grazing in a manner consistent with the attainment of site specific objectives found in the Consolidated Resource Management Plan, 2001, and (2) Implement grazing practices that will ensure compliance with the approved Standard & Guideline's (S&Gs)for the CCFO.

The need for the proposed action stems from Bureau of Land Management (BLM) mandates to conduct grazing activities in an ecologically sound manner. Grazing use of this Allotment and guidelines for making such use are found in the provisions of the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 (as amended), the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978, and the approved S&Gs of 1997, as well as various other federal laws and regulations.

C. Land Use Plan Conformance Statement

The proposed action and alternatives described in this document are in conformance with the CCFO CRMP desired outcomes. For livestock grazing, these are found on page LSG-1 and are as follows:

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

The following activity plan(s) apply to the geographic area of the proposed action and alternatives: Flanigan Herd Management Area Plan/Capture Plan/EA (October 1990) and the Dogskin/Virginia Herd Management Plan (Completed 1997).

Additional Guidance: Standards and Guidelines for Nevada's Sierra Front-Northwestern Great Basin Area (2003); Riparian – Wetland Initiative (1991).

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND OTHER ALTERNATIVES

A. Proposed Action / No Action

The following Proposed Action / No Action Alternative is designed to meet and/or make progress towards meeting the Standards and Guidelines required by BLM.

1. Continue to authorize livestock grazing (cattle – 5015 AUMs) from 12/01 to 09/30.

2. The basic schedule would remain the same and is as follows:

Allotment	Pasture	Livestock Number/Kind	Begin Date	End Date	Type Use	%PL	AUMs
Flanigan	Juniper	322 Cattle	12/01	04/15	A	90	1295
Flanigan	Honey Lake	749 Cattle	04/16	06/15	A	90	1351
Flanigan	Cold Spring	749 Cattle	06/16	09/30	A	90	2371

a. Honey Lake Pasture (1)

Turnout date of April 15th or boot stage of Indian ricegrass. All cattle would be removed from the area identified as wandering skipper habitat no later than 06/01 of each year. These cattle would be moved to other portions of the Honey Lake **(**to the winterfat area) or Cold Springs pasture depending on conditions.

b. Cold Springs Pasture (2)

Turnout date of June 15th (or earlier depending on conditions), or boot stage of key species, bluebunch wheatgrass. Graze until approximately 9/30 at which time all cattle would return to the base ranch for the months of October and November. Cattle would be turned out at different locations based on the prior years use levels, i.e., if the west end was used heavily then next years turnout would occur on the east side of the pasture.

c. Juniper Basin Pasture (3)

Approximately 250 head of cattle would graze this pasture from 12/01 thru 4/15.

No new terms and conditions would be added to the Permit.

B. No Grazing Alternative

Under this alternative, the BLM would not renew the ten (10) year grazing permit thereby ending domestic livestock grazing on this allotment.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. Scoping and Issue Identification

On 11/09/06 the annual scoping letter was sent to all of the interested publics to identify those individuals and organizations interested in specific actions on specific Allotments under the jurisdiction of the CCFO.

As a matter of policy the BLM supplies the Nevada State Clearinghouse with an electronic copy of all documents relating to grazing on public lands. The Clearinghouse then distributes the document to the appropriate agencies within the State. In addition, copies were sent to all entities that expressed interest in this particular allotment and are as follows:

Jimmy Lee c/o Fish Springs Ranch
V&B LLC
Western Watersheds Project
Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe
RCI

B. Proposed Action / No Action

1. General Setting

The Flanigan grazing allotment is located in Washoe County, Nevada approximately 50 miles north of Reno, NV and runs along the northern end of the Virginia Mountains. The allotment boundaries are formed by the Pyramid Lake Indian Reservation to the east, Tule and Vinegar Peaks and Sugarloaf Mountain to the south and Fort Sage Mountains to the west. As with most of the allotment boundary the northern end is fenced. Other than an east west drift fence that separates the summer and winter pastures and several protected areas, there is no internal fencing on the allotment.

The acreage breakdown is as follows:

BLM	56639 Acres
Permittee	6479 Acres
Other Private	33744 Acres
Total	96592 Acres

Most of the private lands within the allotment are owned by individuals other than the permittee. Most of these lands are unfenced and as result are available for use by the permittee. For a map of the Allotment refer to Appendix 1.

Along with the Carson City administered permit, Jimmy Lee, the current permittee, has several permits to the north and west located in the Susanville District. These permits are used in the winter and spring in conjunction with the Flanigan allotment. His private lands and these additional permits give Mr. Lee considerable flexibility in his operation.

A majority of the allotment is comprised of rough mountainous terrain throughout all but a portion of the winter pasture, which is a flat long lying valley at the north end of the allotment. Elevations range from 3900 feet to more than 8000 feet above sea level. Vegetation types range from Juniper dominated sites with sagebrush/grassland understory to a typical salt desert shrub community in the low lying valley.

The low lying valley area consists of plants common to salt desert shrubs which includes, Indian ricegrass, white sage, budsage, Bailey's greasewood and shadscale.

As result of fire, a majority of the upper elevations (85%) have been altered to grass dominated sites with bluebunch wheatgrass being the major component. Other perennial grasses include; Idaho fescue, bottlebrush squirreltail, Sandberg's bluegrass, smooth brome and other less dominant species comprising a bulk of the vegetative community. The remaining shrubs; big sagebrush, snowberry, bitterbrush, rabbitbrush and others are still present but in sub-dominant to trace amounts. Crucial forbs are still present with little change in frequency.

The remaining unburned area in the upper elevation is dominated by Wyoming big sagebrush, antelope bitterbrush, low sagebrush and juniper woodlands. Aspen groves are also present and occur exclusively within the burned areas. Major grass species are bluebunch wheatgrass, Idaho fescue, Thurber's needlegrass, bottlebrush squirreltail and several species of bluegrass.

A current allotment management plan is in place which defers domestic grazing in both the spring and summer pastures.

2. Critical Elements of the Human Environment

The following critical elements were evaluated and found not to be present or would not be affected by the Proposed Action or Alternatives.

Air Quality
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
Environmental Justice
Prime or Unique Farmlands
Floodplains
Hazardous Materials
Paleontology
Wild and Scenic Rivers
Wilderness

3. Resources Present But Not Affected (other than critical elements)

Bureau specialists have further determined that the following resources, although present in the project area, are not affected by the proposed action: forestry, geologic resources, lands, visual resources, recreation, Socio-economics, water quality, water

rights and forestry.

Cultural Resources

Both Cultural Resources and Native American Religious Concerns also are present but would not be affected by the alternatives. The analyses conducted to reach these decisions are discussed.

Following BLM regulations (43 CFR Part 8100) and other federal laws including the National Historic Preservation Act (16 USC § 470f) and its implementing regulations (36 CFR Part 800), as amended, BLM reviewed the immediate region for historic properties prior to a federal undertaking (issuance of a federal permit). By definition, an historic property is a "prehistoric or historic district, site, building, structure, or object included in, or eligible for inclusion in, the National Register of Historic Places" and includes "artifacts, records, and remains that are related to and located within such properties" (36 CFR 800.16(l)(1)).

Based on research of files at the Carson City Field Office and the Nevada State Museum, known historic properties represent significant past human use of the landscape in and immediately adjacent to the BLM-managed lands of the Flanigan Allotment. These include prehistoric-period lithic scatters, stone alignments, and camp sites of an extensive period of time ranging from the Paleoarchaic (over 8500 years ago) through the nineteenth-century. Also present are historic-period debris scatters; stone structures and buildings; roads and railroad lines associated with mining, military deployment, limited settlement, and transportation. The area has and continues to be a place of ranching, and some abandoned ranching features and sites remain (Pendleton et al. 1982; Young 2006).

Based on review of the reports on areas previously inventoried in or near the allotment, a visit to the allotment by a BLM archaeologist, livestock grazing is not a significant impact to historic properties. Based on review of range use data, use of the allotment landscape is slight to moderate, with some heavier use at the springs on Cottonwood Creek and in Juniper Basin. Two projects investigated the springs on Cottonwood Creek, with no resources observed at Cold Spring and a fence in the lower part of the creek authorized in 2005 to address livestock concentrations (Hutchins 2005; Kinerson 1996). Field reconnaissance in 2007 revealed no cultural resources at risk near Juniper Basin. Based on this review and review of these locations for cultural resources, grazing is not likely to be a significant impact to currently unknown cultural resources. Therefore, relative to cultural resources, there exists no need to alter the proposed term grazing allotment permit proposed action for the Flanigan allotment in order to prevent unnecessary or undue degradation.

Additional allotment improvements may be part of the issuance of this grazing permit, but all proposed project improvements have the potential to adversely affect cultural resources. Per 36 CFR Part 800 and 43 CFR Part 8100 (BLM), as amended, BLM is required to identify and evaluate cultural resource within the area of potential effect from an undertaking such as a waterline, fence, creation of new water haul locations, or other area that concentrates livestock. Any historic properties within a proposed improvement project area will be avoided by proposed improvements. If these cannot be accomplished, specific project undertakings will be cancelled, or the allotment use will be modified to result in no adverse effect to the historic property(ies) pursuant to 36 CFR

Part 800, and in consultation with the local tribal entity and the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office.

Native American Religious Concerns

The Native American tribes that have cultural affiliation with the area within the allotment are the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California, the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe, the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony, and the Susanville Indian Rancheria Tribe. Per 36 CFR Part 800 and 43 CFR Part 8100 (BLM), as amended, a consultation letter with a general summary of the proposed lease renewal program, and map of the allotment location were sent to the tribe on June 26, 2006 concerning the Flanigan grazing permit renewal. During various face to face meetings and phone calls since that date, the Tribes have shared information concerning grazing activities within their aboriginal territory. The Tribes have each stated that any impacts to cultural resources should be avoided, however to date there are no Native American Religious concerns relative to this grazing permit renewal.

Any proposed improvements may potentially have an effect on tribal concerns. Per 36 CFR Part 800 and 43 CFR Part 8100 (BLM), as amended, BLM would review known tribal concerns and conduct Native American coordination and consultation, as necessary.

4. Resources Present and Brought Forward for Analysis

Proposed Action / No Action

1. Livestock Grazing

Livestock grazing is authorized in accordance with the Flanigan Allotment Management Plan (AMP) finalized in January of 1988. The AMP implemented a three pasture deferred rotation system. Grazing preference for cattle will remain at 5015 AUMs. Of the total, the permittee has chosen not to use 1200 AUMs yearlong and would continue to do so in the near future. The allotment is classified as category "I" based on the numerous resource values present. The authorized period of use is 12/01 through 09/30 with no cattle on the allotment for the months of October and November.

2. Wild Horses

There are two Herd Management Areas (HMAs) located either entirely or partially within the Flanigan allotment boundary. They are the Flanigan and Ft. Sage HMAs.

Flanigan HMA

Date	Number in Allotment	Notes
1972	96	First Census 08/71
1985	320	census
1987	399	census
1989	507	census
1991	550	402 gathered 10/91
1991	122	after gather

1992	192	census
1993	213	188 gathered 08/93
1993	77	after gather
1995	83	census
1998	157	includes 43 on Ft. Sage
1999	64	census
2002	39	census
2005*	108	census

This census included 43 head returned after opening the area to grazing.

Fort Sage HMA

Date	Number in Allotment	Notes
1991	26	census
1992	25	census
1995	20	census
1996	23	estimate based on 17% increase

The horse numbers listed above are the number of wild horses allotment wide. The Flanigan HMA is located entirely within the allotment and wild horses have unrestricted access to the entire allotment with a good part of their use centered in areas outside of the HMA. The Fort Sage HMA is located adjacent to the allotment and these horses also have free access to the allotment. These horses move to and from the Flanigan allotment but have not established themselves on the allotment and spend a minimal amount of time there.

3. Soils

The soils within the Flanigan Grazing Allotment vary considerably in physical, chemical, and biological characteristics. Parent material, surface and subsurface textures and rock fragments, elevation, aspect, and slope determine the inherent productivity. Erosion and runoff potential, while affected greatly by these factors, are also dependant upon the basal and canopy cover of vegetation on site. Roads, livestock and horse use, mining and other overland activities, and general motorized vehicle use have impacted soils in certain areas. Generally the soils in this allotment are classified as either Aridisols or Mollisols, with much of the area in the seven to ten inch precipitation zone. Soil reactions range from near neutral to moderately alkaline. Detailed descriptions of the soils within the allotment can be found within the Washoe County Soil Survey-South Part, issued in 1983, and the Washoe County Soil Survey-Central Part, issued in 1997, both by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture-Soil Conservation Service.

4. Wildlife

This allotment was severely affected by wildfires in 1999 and 2001. Approximately 85% of the upland summer country was affected. All of the shrub-bearing uplands burned as well as some riparian areas. Although burned site recovery is very good, many areas are in an early seral stage which means grasses rather than shrubs dominate the sites. Because of this, general wildlife diversity is limited to those species that can tolerate or

need grasslands. The allotment area has some general wildlife diversity potential now due to elevation changes within it, the variety of habitat types and topographical features present (Suminski 2007). As the burned areas recover, wildlife diversity will increase.

A few resident mule deer use this allotment, but no key areas are located within the boundaries except possible fawning areas associated with springs (Suminski 2007). Because most springs burned, fawning areas associated with these would not be in ideal condition. However, with upward riparian vegetation trend at the springs, fawning areas should improve even under grazing.

Historically, antelope were present in all valleys of Nevada (BLM 1988). Antelope are common on the allotment and appear to be increasing in number. Juniper Basin is a key yearlong area for pronghorn.

The allotment provides yearlong habitat for California bighorn sheep, although the population is fairly low (Axtell 2007). Bighorn sheep are located south of the allotment but are frequently seen in the upper elevations of the Flanigan summer pasture. Because the general allotment is in functional condition, bighorn habitat is probably in acceptable condition.

The allotment provides nesting, summer and winter habitat for sage grouse. One of the only two known leks for the Pah Rah/ Virginia sage grouse population is located several miles to the south of the Flanigan Allotment (Axtell 2007). Sage grouse from the Winnemucca Ranch area, adjacent to the allotment have used the East Cottonwood Creek prior to the burn. Because of the extensive damage to the Creek from the burn, the amount of useable habitat remaining and occupied is unknown. In general, the shrub component for nesting is not present although herbaceous cover is present (Axtell 2007). This should change as the burned areas recover.

Mountain quail can be found in this allotment. California quail are present in this allotment. A few mourning doves can be found in the allotment. The exotic species, chukar partridge can be found in the allotment.

5. Vegetation

Vegetation types range from Juniper dominated sites with sagebrush/grassland understory to a typical salt desert shrub community in the low lying valley.

The low lying valley area consists of plants common to salt desert shrubs which includes, Indian ricegrass, white sage, budsage, Bailey's greasewood and shadscale.

As result of fire a vast majority of the upper elevations have been modified to grass dominated sites with bluebunch wheatgrass being the major component and other perennial grasses including; Idaho fescue, bottlebrush squirreltail, Sandberg's bluegrass and other less dominant species comprising a bulk of the vegetative community.

The remaining shrubs, big sagebrush, snowberry, bitterbrush, rabbitbrush and others are still present but in sub-dominant to trace amounts. Crucial forbs are still present with little change in frequency. Several aspen patches in various locations within the burn area are doing well under current management and existing fencing.

The remaining unburned area in the upper elevation is dominated by Wyoming big sagebrush, antelope bitterbrush, low sagebrush and juniper woodlands. Major grass species are bluebunch wheatgrass, Idaho fescue, Thurber's needlegrass, bottlebrush squirreltail and several species of bluegrass.

6. Special Status Species

Federally Listed Species

Carson wandering skipper (federal endangered) has been located on this allotment as well as potential habitat for this species (Stanford 2004). Bald eagles (federal threatened) are expected to use the allotment as a fly-over area and possibly as a foraging area for carrion.

The Nevada Natural Heritage Program (NNHP) database has no record of any plant species proposed for federal listing, plant species listed as endangered or plant species listed as threatened.

BLM Sensitive Species

BLM Manual 6840 defines sensitive species as "…those species not already included as BLM Special Status Species under (1) Federal listed, proposed or candidate species; or (2) State of Nevada listed species. Native species may be listed as "sensitive" if it: (1) could become endangered or extirpated from a state or significant portion of its range; (2) is under review by the FWS/NMFS; or (3) whose numbers or habitat capability are declining so rapidly that Federal listing may become necessary, or (4) has typically small and widely dispersed populations; (5) inhabits ecological refugia, specialized or unique habitats; (6) is state-listed, but is better conserved through application of the BLM sensitive species status." It is BLM policy to provide sensitive species with the same level of protection that is given federal candidate species. The major objective of this protection is to preclude the need for federal listing (USDI-BLM 2003).

Nevada BLM sensitive species expected, or found in or near the allotment are shown in Appendix II (BLM 2003). The NNHP database has no record of any BLM sensitive species (Tonenna 2007).

Neo-Tropical Migratory Birds

On January 11, 2001, President Clinton signed Executive Order 13186 (Land Bird Strategic Allotment) placing emphasis on conservation and management of migratory birds. The species are not protected under the Endangered Species Act, but most are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. No BLM policies have been developed to provide guidance on how to incorporate migratory birds into NEPA analysis. However, advice based on past USFWS MOU's, list items the USFWS believes are fundamental for the analysis of impacts to and planning for these birds. These items are (1) effects to highest priority birds listed by Partners in Flight; (2) effects to important bird areas (IBA's); (3) effects to important over wintering areas.

Avifaunal Biomes that are found on the allotment are described by Partners in Flight (PIF) [Beidleman 2000], PIF-Nevada (Neel 1999) and Nevada Wildlife Action Plan (Nevada Wildlife Action Plan Team 2006). The Intermountain West is the center of

distribution for many western birds. Over half of the biome's Species of Continental Importance have 75% or more of their population here. Many breeding species from this biome migrate to winter in central and western Mexico or in the Southwestern biome (Beidleman 2000). There are no Important Bird Areas (IBA) associated with this allotment. The species of concern listed by PIF that could occur in the allotment are shown in Appendix III.

7. Wetlands/Riparian

Numerous spring sources are located on both private and public lands. Of the total number eight are located on public lands. In addition, there is one perennial stream in West Cottonwood Canyon and another stream that runs intermittently in East Cottonwood Canyon.

Ten separate riparian areas were assessed on the Flanigan allotment between May 16 and August 16, 2006. Table 1 provides basic data for each location, and Table 2 summarizes the condition ratings for all assessed sites.

All stream miles and almost two thirds of spring areas were in a proper functioning condition. The remaining springs were rated as functional-at-risk in an upward trend, except for Anderson Spring. This one-acre lentic area receives use by livestock, but is primarily impacted by wild horses, which are present all year. Repair of a damaged fence exclosure at Anderson Spring is planned.

Table 1. 2006 Riparian Assessment Data for the Flanigan Allotment

Name	Date Assessed	UTM Northing	UTM Easting	Rating[1]	Acres[2]	Miles	Management Recommendations
E. Cottonwood Canyon	5/18/2006	4442128 (lower end)	259775 (lower end)	PFC	7	2	
W. Cottonwood Canyon	5/16/2006	4442307 (lower end)	258587 (lower end)	PFC	10	5	
Sheep Spring	5/16/2006	4438605	250123	PFC	0.1		Repair fence; treat hoary cress
Mud Spring	5/16/2006	4436990	248860	FAR-UP	1		Repair Exclosure
Adobe Spring	7/25/2006	4445977	263848	PFC	1		Repair Exclosure
Juniper Spring	7/24/2006	4437588	259133	FAR-UP	10		Repair Exclosure
Anderson Spring	8/16/2006	4437198	253271	FAR-DN	1		Repair Exclosure
Rock Spring	8/16/20	4438549	254470	FAR-UP	1		Repair

	06						Exclosure
Salt Cabin Spg.	5/20/2006	4438914	261563	PFC	1		Repair Exclosure
Telephone Pole Spring	8/16/2006	4443744	260449	PFC	1		Repair Exclosure

Table 2. Summary of 2006 Riparian Assessments on the Flanigan Allotment

Rating	Acres	Percent of Total	Miles	Percent of Total
PFC	20	62.5	7	100.0
FAR-UP	12	36.4	--	--
FAR-?	--	--	--	--
FAR-DN	1	3.0	--	--
NF	--	--	--	--
Total	33	100.0	7	100.0

[1] Rating key: PFC = Proper Functioning Condition
FAR-UP = Functional-At-Risk with an Upward Trend
FAR-? = Functional-At-Risk with an Unknown Trend
FAR-DN = Functional-At-Risk with an Downward Trend
NF = Nonfunctional

[1] Acreages were estimated in the field or from digital orthophoto quarter quads, except for Sheep Spring, which was GPSed .

8. Weeds

Two small noxious weed infestations have been located within the allotment. One is a perennial pepperweed patch in West Cottonwood Canyon, and a small area of hoary cress at Sheep Spring. There is also some bull thistle at Sheep Spring.

C. No Grazing Alternative

The description of the affected environment for this alternative would be the same as that for the No Action.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This chapter describes the potential direct, indirect, residual and cumulative impacts that may result from the proposed action or alternatives. It also includes potential mitigation measures and monitoring needs associated with the specific resources.

A. Proposed Action / No Action

1. Livestock Grazing

The total number of AUMs, 5015 and management would remain the same under the Proposed Action/No Action Alternative. Grazing preference for cattle will remain at 5015 AUMs. Of the total, the permittee has chosen not to use 1200 AUMs yearlong and would continue to do so in the near future.

As evidenced by the findings of the recent S&G Assessment, maintaining the current grazing practices would ensure that continued progress would be made toward not only the identified S&Gs but the objectives in various planning documents including the AMP.

The deferred grazing system would continue to prevent the overuse of any one given area resulting in a healthy vegetative resource and stable soils. Livestock concentration would be minimized under the Proposed Action/No Action Alternative thus preventing the degradation of specific areas.

Overall, use levels on uplands have been well below the levels identified in the AMP and those set forth in the Nevada Rangeland Monitoring Handbook resulting in good to excellent range conditions. The allotment has improved considerably since the AMP was finalized in 1988 and would continue to do so under present management practices.

2. Wild Horses

The current grazing practices would result in less competition between domestic livestock and wild horses thus benefiting horses. Without extensive fencing wild horses would continue to have unrestricted access to all areas both within and outside the HMA. Physical condition of the horses would remain high with a corresponding increase in the overall recruitment rate. Only the predation by mountain lions has reduced the survival rates and overall recruitment of foals.

The present AML would remain in place only changing if monitoring information concludes a change is necessary, which at this time it does not. Maintaining the current AML is critical to the continued improvement of the vegetative resource.

3. Soils

The implementation of this alternative would have little effect on the soil resource, since at present the allotment is meeting the soil standards. Otherwise there would continue to be minor compaction around various water sources and the trails leading to them.

4. Wildlife

Because the soil and vegetative communities are stable and functional, normal vegetation seral progression would be allowed to occur over the years to where wildlife habitats would approach pre-burn conditions.

Springs were rated as functional, some having an upward trend. Although many of the riparian areas and water sources were burned over, these are also recovering under current grazing management and protective fencing. It is expected that in the future, these sites would support wildlife diversity approaching pre-burn conditions even with livestock grazing continuing.

Livestock grazing would occur in a 10 month, rotational system. Deer would use pastures not being used by livestock. Although most of the uplands and many springs used by mule deer were burned over, these are recovering under current grazing management. It is expected that in the future, these sites would support shrub vegetation that could support greater resident and seasonal mule deer use. Livestock grazing isn't affecting mule deer use of this allotment.

Bighorn sheep do not do as well when they share ranges with cattle (Krausman et al 1995). Extended use by livestock is less than ideal for bighorn. However, use of a rotation system provides the best possible situation. Proposed utilization levels would help retain forage for bighorn.

Pronghorn thrive on the early seral vegetative conditions created by the wildfire. Numbers appear to be increasing under the current level of livestock grazing. Competition can be severe in spring and summer on kidding grounds but is not an issue at the present with increasing populations.

The shrub component in this allotment is lacking or poor due to the large burned areas. In general however, sage grouse winter habitats are not adversely impacted from moderate cattle grazing as the winter sage grouse diet consists mainly of sage brush leaves. Sage grouse numbers and habitats, particularly ones located outside the allotment, are being affected by conditions out of the control of the allotment or the grazing system permitted on it. Although the East Cottonwood Creek use area was burned over, the area is recovering under current livestock grazing. Sage grouse may or may not be able to use this area in the future, but current livestock grazing won't affect these birds.

5. Vegetation

The landscape of the upper elevations changed drastically following the fires of 1999 and 2001 resulting in a native grass dominated landscape. All native grasses would increase with all plants remaining healthy and vigorous. Production would be at or near the limit of the potential for the site. Reproduction would also be at the upper end of the grass community's potential.

Native shrubs in the burned areas, although subdominant to trace, would continue to reproduce and eventually, over an extended time period, again dominate the site. Vigor and health would remain high. The same can be said for the shrub community in the unburned areas. Aspen patches would continue to improve under current management and fencing.

Livestock grazing is not affecting upland game bird species.

6. Special Status Species

Federally Listed Species

A biological evaluation and assessment prepared for the Carson wandering skipper and bald eagle. A determination of "May Affect, Not Likely To Adversely Affect" from re-issuing this grazing permit was made for the Carson Wandering Skipper. The US Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with this determination on April 5, 2007. A determination of "No Effect" to the bald eagle from re-issuing this grazing permit was made (Suminski 2007).

BLM Sensitive Species

Livestock grazing allows some species to respond positively, some to respond

negatively and some to have a mixed response (Finch et al 1993). This means only that some species may use a grazed area more, some may use it less. It doesn't necessarily preclude the presence of a species (Fagerstone and Ramey 1995). Livestock grazing in this allotment is not seriously affecting BLM sensitive species because this allotment is in acceptable functioning condition overall for soils and vegetation, and utilization levels are generally moderate.

Neo-Tropical Migratory Birds

Livestock grazing allows some species to respond positively, some to respond negatively and some to have a mixed response (Finch et al 1993). This means only that some species may use a grazed area more, some may use it less. It doesn't necessarily preclude the presence of a species. Livestock grazing was not listed as a threat to loggerhead shrike (www.natureserve.com). Although overgrazing can be an issue for Brewer's sparrow and sage thrasher (www.natureserve.com, Finch et al 1993) this is not an issue in this allotment since strong stands of grasses are present. Some of the migratory bird species that should be found on the allotment would not be present or would be present in small numbers due to the wildfire damage to the shrub and mature riparian vegetation resource. These areas are presently dominated by native vegetation that will eventually support greater numbers and more diverse species. The burn recovery is occurring and being maintained under the current grazing levels.

7. Wetlands/Riparian

In general, the riparian areas on the Flanigan allotment are being maintained or improving under current management. Most are in a proper functioning condition or in an upward trend. Because the Proposed Action/No Action is to continue current management, and repair of riparian exclosures is planned, continued improvement of the riparian areas would be expected.

Anderson Spring is the only riparian area to show a downward trend since the 1996 assessment. Improvement here would also be expected after repair of an existing fence.

All of the riparian areas would either remain fully functional or improve to that condition with repair of existing exclosures.

8. Weeds

The implementation of this alternative could have a slight negative effect to the native vegetation resource since the potential of new noxious weed infestations due to disturbances around riparian areas and trails would remain the same. Noxious weed infestations would continue to be sprayed with the appropriate herbicides and monitored.

B. No Grazing Alternative

1. Livestock Grazing

The livestock operation is used in combination with other BLM Allotments. Few, if any, permits are available on public lands. If lost, it is highly unlikely that the operator would be able to find a Permit to replace his current authorization. Private land grazing is very

rare if not non-existent with leasing costs significantly higher than for public lands grazing. This would significantly increase the cost of running the livestock operation.

This alternative would also not allow for the managed use of a renewable resource (range forage) allowed for in the CCFO CRMP, dated May 11, 2001.

With no permittee being authorized to graze cattle the amount of time spent by Bureau personnel visiting the Allotment would be substantially reduced. The potential for unauthorized use by adjoining permittees and other grazers would increase.

All water sources currently used by domestic livestock, wildlife and wild horses would fall into disrepair with the quantity and quality available for all species would decrease drastically.

2. Wild Horses

Elimination of domestic livestock grazing would have a positive impact on wild horses. No competition for forage and water would occur thereby benefiting the horses present. Wild horse use would still be limited to the HMA.

3. Soils

The implementation of this alternative would have a slight positive impact to the soils resource and would result in less erosion and trampling in the vicinity of a number of riparian areas. Also basal cover from grasses and forbs would probably increase.

4. Wildlife

Any forage or spatial competition between general wildlife, game species and livestock would be eliminated which could be more important in drought years.

5. Vegetation

The vegetations health and vigor would not improve as rapidly and would become stagnant and would decrease in quantity and quality. The amount of forage produced from these plants would be totally available to wildlife and wild horses. In the absence of domestic livestock the current AML would be increased to reflect the additional AUMs not utilized by domestic livestock. Over time, the wild horses would end up utilizing a much greater proportion of the vegetation being produced. Total vegetative production and increased diversity of plant life would not occur.

With more above ground vegetation remaining and more litter being made available, the health of the community would continue to improve. In the absence of domestic livestock, a build up of fuels would result. Over a period of years, the potential for a more intense fire would result. Fire would be carried over a much larger area, expanding outside the boundaries of this Allotment and into adjoining allotments.

6. Special Status Species

Federally Listed Species

There would be no impacts to federally listed species or habitats (Suminski 2007, Tonenna 2007).

BLM Sensitive Species

The response of BLM sensitive species would be reverse of the grazing alternatives as those species which responded positively to grazing might not be as abundant while those that respond with no grazing might increase.

Neo-tropical Migratory Birds

The response of Neotropical migratory birds would be reverse of the grazing alternatives as those species which responded positively to grazing might not be as abundant while those that respond with no grazing might increase.

7. Wetlands/Riparian

The allotment riparian areas could benefit from the elimination of grazing pressure by domestic livestock. Grazing impacts, however, are largely due to wild horses that use parts of the allotment during the entire year. Juniper Basin in particular would benefit if the horse population were maintained at the appropriate management level.

Conditions would improve as a result of less grazing pressure but would still be subject to grazing by wild horses and the effects of drought.

8. Weeds

The implementation of this alternative would have a slight positive impact to the soils resource and would result in less erosion and trampling in the vicinity of a number of riparian areas. Also basal cover from grasses and forbs would probably increase.

Mitigation Measures

Maintenance or reconstruction of the identified exclosures would be completed.

Cumulative Impacts

All resources 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 Flanigan 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 foreseeable future. The effects of grazing at identified 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 adjacent lands to produce any detrimental cumulative impacts in the area.

Monitoring

All monitoring would be done in accordance with the parameters set forth in the Flanigan

AMP dated 1/18/88.

Aspen patches would be monitored using existing accepted techniques and guidelines.

V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

List of Preparers

James M. Gianola	Wild Horse and Burro Specialist
Russell Suminski	Supervisory Rangeland Management Specialist
Dean Tonenna	Plant Ecologist
Rita Suminski	Supervisory Wildlife Biologist
John Axtell	Natural Resource Specialist – Sage Grouse
Jim Carter	Archaeologist
James deLaureal	Soil Scientist/Noxious Weeds
Jim Schroeder	Hydrologist
Terry Knight	Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner
Terri Kuntsen	Planning and Environmental coordinator

Persons, Groups and/or Agencies Consulted

Nevada State Clearinghouse
Jimmy Lee c/o Fish Springs
V&B LLC
Western Watershed Project
Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

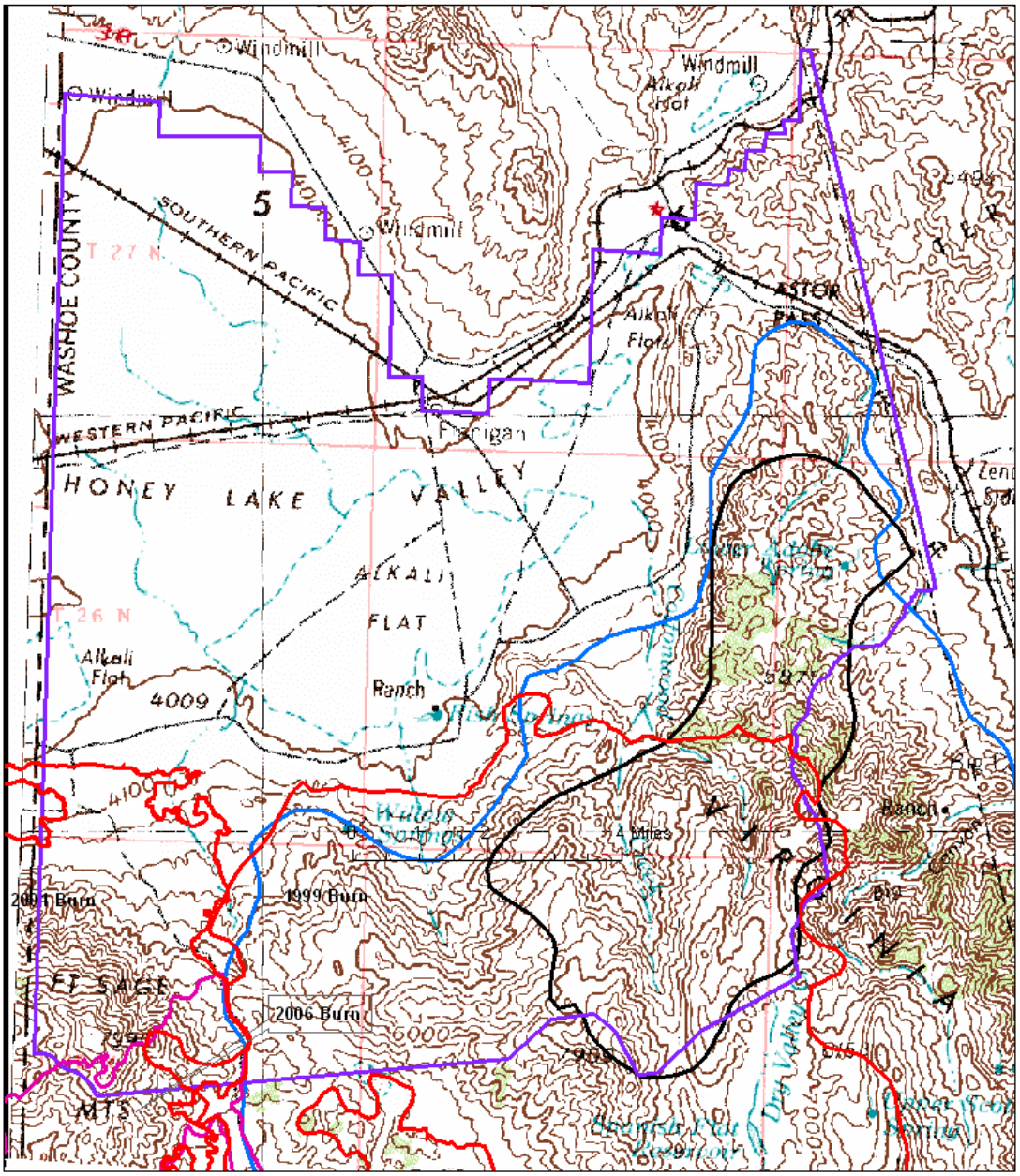
VI. APPENDICES AND/OR ATTACHMENTS

Appendix I – General Location Map for the Flanigan Allotment

Appendix II – BLM sensitive species that are expected or are found on Flanigan Allotment.

Appendix III -- The species of concern listed by PIF that could occur in the Flanigan Allotment.

Appendix I


Windmill
Windmill
Windmill
Windmill
Alkali Flat
SOUTHERN PACIFIC
WESTERN PACIFIC
WASHOE COUNTY
HONEY LAKE VALLEY
ALKALI FLAT
Alkali Flat
Flanigan
Ranch
Ranch
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5000
4 Miles
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1999 Burn
2006 Burn
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Flanigan Allotment
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Legend
Flanigan HMA
Flanigan Allotment
Sage Grouse PMU
1999 Burn
2001 Burn
2006 Burn

APPENDIX II

BLM Sensitive Species associated with Flanigan Allotment

Animal

Golden Eagle – *Aquila chrysaetos*
Ferruginous Hawk - *Buteo regalis*
Burrowing owl - *Athene cunicularia*
Long-billed Curlew – *Numenius americanus*
Prairie Falcon – *Falco columbarius*
Cooper's Hawk – *Accipiter cooperii*
Short-eared owl – *Asio flammeus*
Mountain Quail – *Oreortyx pictus*
Swainson's Hawk- *Buteo swainsoni*
Western Snowy Plover- *Charadrius alexandrinus*
Loggerhead shrike- *Lanius ludovicianus*
Vesper Sparrow – *Pooecetes gamineus*
Pallid bat – *Antrozous pallidus*
Townsend's big-eared bat - *Corynorhinus townsendii*
Western Pipistrelle Bat – *Pipistrellus hesperus*
Brazilian free-tailed bat - *Tadarida braziliensis*
Fringed myotis – *Myotis thysanodes*
Long-legged myotis – *Myotis volans*
California myotis – *Myotis californicus*
Pygmy rabbit – *Brachylagus idahoensis*

Source: www.natureserve.com, www.heritage.nv.gov, CCFO Habitat Management Plans, misc. observ

APPENDIX III

Neo-tropical Migratory Birds, Species of Continental Importance on Flanigan Allotment

Salt Desert Scrub

(Beidleman 2000) **–** This biome experiences harsh climactic variation and is often dominated by salt-tolerant shrubs. Species of concern associated with this habitat type in the project area are,

Loggerhead Shrike – *Lanius ludovicianus* (Neel 1999, Nevada Wildlife Action Plan 2006)
Burrowing Owl – *Athene cunicularia* (Neel 1999)

Issues related to this habitat type include physical destruction of salt desert shrubs, habitat conversion and use of rangeland pesticides (Neel 1999). Off-road vehicle activity and non-native species invasion has also been identified as an issue (Nevada Wildlife Action Plan 2006).

Western Shrublands

(Beidleman 2000) – Shrubsteppe was identified as the highest priority habitat for conservation for breeding birds. This habitat type supports the largest nesting-bird species list of any upland vegetation type in the West (Beidleman 2000). Species of concern associated with this habitat type in the plan area,

Shrub-Steppe
Sage grouse – *Centrocercus urophasianus* (Beidleman 2000)
Brewer's sparrow – *Spizella breweri* (Beidleman 2000)
Sage Sparrow – *Amphispiza belli* (Neel 1999, Beidleman 2000, Nevada Wildlife Action Plan 2006)
Sage Thrasher – *Oreoscoptes montanus* (Neel 1999, Beidleman 2000, Nevada Wildlife Action Plan 2006)

Issues related to this habitat type include fragmentation from man-caused activities. Threats to this habitat type include overgrazing of grasses and forbs that alter community structure, invasion of non-native grasses and fire suppression / crown-killing wildfire (Beidleman 2000). Loss of shrub understory, increasing human infrastructure which fragments and degrades habitat, and increases soil erosion was also identified (Nevada Wildlife Action Plan 2006).

Riparian

This habitat type supports the highest bird diversity of any western habitat type but is one of the rarest. Species of concern associated with this habitat type in the plan area,

Calliope hummingbird – *Stellula calliope*- (Beidleman 2000)

Issues related to this habitat type include de-watering and alteration of water flows / channels, road construction, nonnative species, logging, recreation and overgrazing (Beidleman 2000). Groundwater withdrawal and shallow aquifer pollution were

mentioned as specific Nevada issues (Nevada Wildlife Action Plan 2006).

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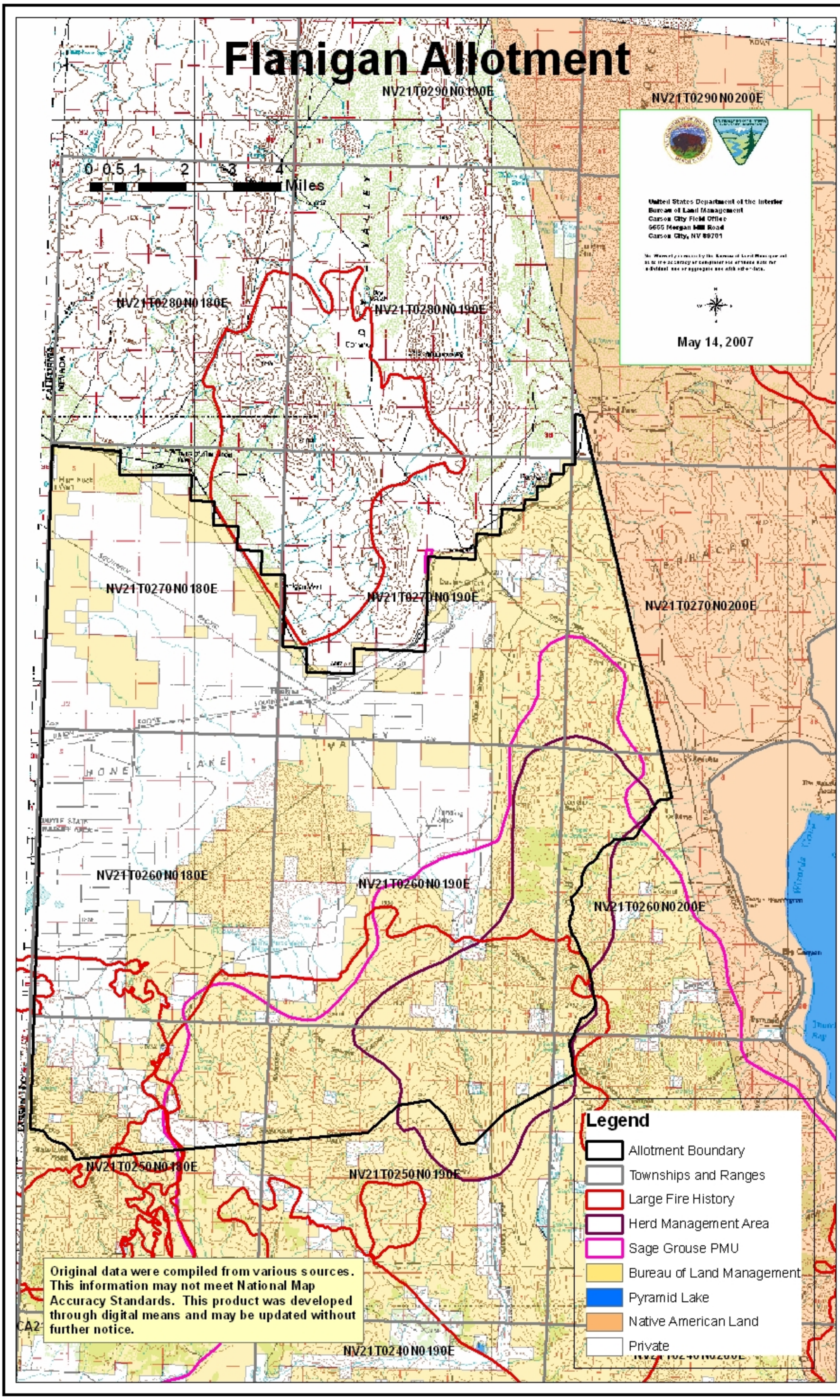
Flanigan Allotment



MTN. WELL/LAPLATA ALLTOMENT TERM GRAZING PERMIT
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
EA# NV-030-07-017

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

I. INTRODUCTION/PURPOSE AND NEED

A. Introduction

The Mountain Well/LaPlata Allotment is located within the jurisdictional boundary of the Carson City Field Office (CCFO) of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The grazing allotment is located in Churchill County, Nevada approximately 20 miles south and east of Fallon, NV and is located at the central and southern end of the Stillwater Range. The allotment boundaries are fenced with adjoining allotments on three sides and the Stillwater Wildlife Refuge forming the west boundary. Other than the allotment boundary fences and several protected areas there is no internal fencing on the allotment.

A majority of the allotment is comprised of rough mountainous terrain throughout all but a portion of the winter pasture, which is a flat long lying valley on the west side. Elevations within the allotment range from 4000 feet to more than 8000 feet above sea level.

Bruce K. and Jamie Kent Family Trust, the current permittee control all of the grazing privileges to the extent of 8004 AUMs.

The area encompassing the allotment has been in an extended drought for the last 10 years with only 2 of the 10 years experiencing either normal or above normal precipitation. The permittee has **voluntarily** taken considerable non-use, even in the above normal years, to help offset the impacts of the lack of adequate moisture. He has also voluntarily modified his use patterns to provide additional protection to areas that experienced more use than normal either the previous year or during the current year.

This environmental assessment (EA) analyzes the potential environmental impacts associated with each of the livestock management alternatives currently being considered for the Mountain Well/La Plata Allotment. Management options presently under consideration include; (1) authorizing cattle grazing and continuing with current management; and (2) not authorizing livestock grazing within the allotment at this time, (3) modifying the current grazing use.

B. Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Proposed Action is; (1) Administer grazing in a manner consistent with the attainment of site specific objectives found in the Consolidated Resource Management Plan, 2001, and (2) Implement grazing practices that will ensure compliance with the approved Standard & Guideline's (S&Gs)for the CCFO.

The need for the proposed action stems from Bureau of Land Management (BLM) mandates to conduct grazing activities in an ecologically sound manner. Grazing use of this Allotment and guidelines for making such use are found in the provisions of the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 (as amended), the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978, and the approved S&Gs of 1997, as well as various other federal laws and regulations.

C. Land Use Plan Conformance Statement

The proposed action and alternatives described in this document are in conformance with the CCFO CRMP desired outcomes. For livestock grazing, these are found on page LSG-1 and are as follows:

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

The following activity plan(s) apply to the geographic area of the proposed action and alternatives: South Stillwater Herd Management Area Plan/Capture Plan/EA (Completed 1995) and the Stillwater Herd Management Plan (Completed 1995).

Additional Guidance: Standards and Guidelines for Nevada's Sierra Front-Northwestern Great Basin Area (2003); Riparian – Wetland Initiative (1991).

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERANTIVES

A. Proposed Action

The following Proposed Action is designed to meet and/or make progress towards meeting the Standards and Guidelines required by BLM.

1. Authorize livestock grazing (cattle – 8004 AUMs) from 03/01 to 02/28 of which 4000 AUMs of the Active preference will be held in Suspended-Non-Use for 5 years.

2. The basic schedule would now be:

Allotment	Livestock Number/Kind	Begin Date	End Date	Type Use	%PL	AUMs
Mtn. Well/LaPlata	333 Cattle	03/01	02/28	A	100	4004
Mtn. Well/LaPlata	333 Cattle	03/01	02/28	SNU	100	4000

This would allow the allotment to further recover from the effects of the present drought.

3. All riparian areas identified as non functional or functional at risk with a downward trend would be fenced.

4. All riparian areas identified as having noxious or invasive weeds would be sprayed to eliminate these species.

5. East Lee Canyon, Eleven Mile Canyon, La Plata Canyon and the area south and west of Mill Canyon will be monitored during the grazing period. When use levels approach 55% all cattle would be removed from those areas.

6. Cattle would be concentrated on the burn during the spring period of use to help alleviate the presence and spread of cheatgrass.

Livestock grazing would still be authorized in accordance with the Mountain Well La/Plata AMP Allotment Management Plan (AMP) finalized in December of 1970.

The general objective of the plan is to protect, manage and regulate the use of the multiple resources in a combination that will meet the needs of the various resource users without impairment of the productivity of the rangeland watershed. The key species was identified as Indian ricegrass. Grazing is done under a deferred system. Livestock are in the Allotment from early November through September of the following year. They are taken to the base property in late summer and fall for better forage and for sorting. This allows them to be off the public lands during most of the hunting season. The livestock operator relies on water control, natural barriers, gap fencing and herding to accomplish management control. Short sections of drift fence are placed in critical areas to aid in control. The area is divided into five pastures or use areas and is used as follows:

Pasture 1 – Winter Use Area 11/10 to 04/15

Cattle move out of pasture 1 onto the spring range. The move varies according to weather conditions and growth stages. It is made when new growth of perennial grass plants is two to three inches high. This normally occurs sometime between 04/10 and 04/15 each year.

Pasture 2 & 3 – Spring Use Area 04/16 to 06/10

Cattle move from pasture 1 and are distributed in pastures 2 and 3. Every effort is made to avoid concentrations of animals in these units since use is made during the early development stage of plant growth. The spring range area was suspected to be in declining trend at the time of the AMP development. A comparison of available forage and planned use showed that the demand in the spring range area is approximately one-half of the available AUMs of forage. The alternate plan calls for pasture 2 to be divided creating three spring units. Two units are used each spring giving the third unit total rest. This rotation provides total rest for each unit one of every three years.

Pasture 4 & 5 – Summer and Fall Area 06/1 to 09/30

Pasture 4 is used by the cow and calf herd. The cow and calf herd enter the summer range in pasture 4 approximately June 11 or when seeds of the major forage plants are maturing on the lower elevations of the pastures. This is normally somewhere between June 1 and June 15. The herd is divided with one-half entering the summer range via West Lee Canyon and one-half entering via Sheep Canyon and Eleven Mile Canyon. This allows even distribution and avoids heavy concentrations of livestock. If it is necessary to go to the alternate plan for spring use, the cow and calf herd remains in pasture 4 until returned to the base property in the fall.

Pasture 5 is steep, rugged country. The replacement heifer herd is taken to the lower elevations of the pasture in Coyote Canyon between 04/21 and 05/10 each year. The opening date is dictated by moisture and forage conditions. This herd is gradually moved from canyon to canyon in a northerly direction to higher elevation ranges as the season progresses. The movement of grazing ends in Freeman and Box Canyons. The livestock are then returned to the base property to be included in the cow herd.

Based on the evaluation a period of prolonged drought is the likely cause of the downward trend in the identified areas of the allotment.

B. No Action

Continue to authorize the entire grazing preference of 8004 AUMs with no changes.

C. No Grazing Alternative

Under this alternative, the BLM would not renew the ten (10) year grazing permit thereby ending domestic livestock grazing on this allotment.

III AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. Scoping and Issue Identification

On 11/09/06 the annual scoping letter was sent to all of the interested publics to identify those individuals and organizations interested in specific actions on specific Allotments under the jurisdiction of the CCFO.

As a matter of policy the BLM supplies the Nevada State Clearinghouse with an electronic copy of all documents relating to grazing on public lands. The Clearinghouse then distributed the document to the appropriate agencies within the State. In addition, copies were sent to all entities that expressed interest in this particular allotment and are as follows:

Bruce K. and Jamie Kent Family Trust
RCI
Western Watersheds Project
Stillwater Indian Reservation

B. Proposed Action

1. General Setting

The Mountain Well /La Plata Allotment, (03039), is located in the central and southern portion of the Stillwater Mountain Range, approximately 20 miles east of Fallon, Nevada. At one time Mountain Well and La Plata were two separate Allotments but are now managed as one. The Allotment extends from high peaks, through the foothills and out into alkali flats near the farming areas of Fallon. It is bounded on the east by the Dixie Valley and Frenchman Flat Allotments, on the north by the White Cloud Allotment, and on the west by the Stillwater Wildlife Refuge. The majority of the La Plata Allotment is fenced separately from the Mountain Well Allotment. The elevation ranges from 4000 feet in the south and west areas to 8790 feet at Jobs Peak in the northeastern part of the Allotment.

The west side of the Allotment drains into the Carson Sink and the east side drains into the Humboldt Marsh after passing through Dixie Valley. The soils are extremely variable. They are of volcanic, sedimentary, and alluvial origin freely mixed.

It is classified as Category “M” (Maintain) which means the “Present range condition is satisfactory or improving.” Two key areas have been established. There are a total of 137,683 public land acres with a public land rating of 100%. Of this amount of acreage, 2330 acres are considered unusable by livestock. The normal operation is 667 cattle run year-round for a total of 8004 AUMs.

For a map of the Allotment refer to Appendix 1.

2. Critical Elements of the Human Environment

The following critical elements were evaluated and found not to be present or would not be affected by the Proposed Action or Alternatives.

Air Quality
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
Environmental Justice
Prime or Unique Farmlands
Floodplains
Hazardous Materials
Migratory Birds
Paleontology
Threatened or Endangered Species (Plant or Animal)
Wild and Scenic Rivers
Wilderness

Cultural Resources

Both Cultural Resources and Native American Religious Concerns also are present but would not be affected by the alternatives. The analyses conducted to reach these decisions are discussed.

Following BLM regulations (43 CFR Part 8100) and other federal laws including the National Historic Preservation Act (16 USC § 470f) and its implementing regulations (36 CFR Part 800), as amended, BLM reviewed the immediate region for historic properties prior to a federal undertaking (issuance of a federal permit). By definition, an historic property is a “prehistoric or historic district, site, building, structure, or object included in, or eligible for inclusion in, the National Register of Historic Places” and includes “artifacts, records, and remains that are related to and located within such properties” (36 CFR 800.16(l)(1)).

Based on research of files at the Carson City Field Office and the Nevada State Museum, known historic properties represent significant past human use of the landscape in and immediately adjacent to the BLM-managed lands of the Mountain Well/La Plata Allotment. These include prehistoric-period lithic scatters, stone alignments, rockshelters, rock art (petroglyphs and pictographs), and camp sites of an extensive period of time ranging from the Paleoarchaic (over 8500 years ago) through the nineteenth-century. Also present are historic-period debris scatters; stone structures and buildings; roads associated with mining; mill sites; well sites; and limited settlement and transportation sites. Historic sites include the mining town site of La Plata, the Crehore Mine, and the Mountain Wells site, a station of the Overland Mail Route. Further details on local site types and the potential for effect to historic properties from

livestock activities associated with the issuance of a grazing permit are available in a technical report prepared for this permit renewal (CRR 3-2393, Lane 2007) and the published Carson City District Cultural Resources overview report (Pendleton et al. 1982).

Based on review of the reports on areas previously inventoried in or near the allotment, a visit to the allotment by a BLM archaeologist, and a Class III inventory at a location with a high potential for cultural resources (springs in lower West Lee Canyon and one of its south-trending drainage tributaries), livestock grazing is not a significant impact to historic properties (Lane 2007). Based on review of range use data, use of the allotment landscape is slight to heavy, and continued grazing is not likely to be a significant impact to currently unknown cultural resources. Therefore, relative to cultural resources, there exists no need to alter the proposed term grazing allotment permit proposed action for the Mountain Well/La Plata allotment in order to prevent unnecessary or undue degradation.

Additional allotment improvements may be part of the issuance of this grazing permit, but all proposed project improvements have the potential to adversely affect cultural resources. Per 36 CFR Part 800 and 43 CFR Part 8100 (BLM), as amended, BLM is required to identify and evaluate cultural resource within the area of potential effect from an undertaking such as a waterline, fence, creation of new water haul locations, or other area that concentrates livestock. Any historic properties within a proposed improvement project area will be avoided by proposed improvements. If these cannot be accomplished, specific project undertakings will be cancelled, or the allotment use will be modified to result in no adverse effect to the historic property(ies) pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800, and in consultation with the local tribal entity and the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office.

Native American Religious Concerns

The Native American tribe that has cultural affiliation with the area within the allotment is the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe. Per 36 CFR Part 800 and 43 CFR Part 8100 (BLM), as amended, a consultation letter with a general summary of the proposed permit renewal program, and map of the allotment location were sent to the tribe on June 26, 2006 concerning the Mountain Well/La Plata grazing permit renewal. The Tribe responded with concerns for potential inadvertent discoveries due to grazing impacts within their aboriginal territory. The Tribe has stated previously that any impacts to cultural resources should be avoided. Cultural resource personnel have assessed areas of cattle congregation and determined that there were no impacts to historic properties. A face to face meeting was conducted with tribal cultural resource personnel resulting in no Native American Religious concerns for this grazing permit renewal.

Any proposed improvements may potentially have an effect on tribal concerns. Per 36 CFR Part 800 and 43 CFR Part 8100 (BLM), as amended, BLM would review known tribal concerns and conduct Native American coordination and consultation in the case of any future proposed projects.

3. Resources Present But Not Affected (other than critical elements)

Bureau specialists have further determined that the following resources, although present in the project area, are not affected by the proposed action: forestry, geologic

resources, lands, visual resources, recreation, Socio-economics and water rights.

4. Resources Present and Brought Forward for Analysis

Proposed Action

1. Livestock Grazing

Livestock grazing is authorized in accordance with the Mountain Well/LaPlata Allotment Management Plan (AMP) finalized in December of 1970. The AMP implemented a five pasture deferred rotation system. Grazing preference for cattle presently is 8004 AUMs. The allotment is classified as category "M" based on the lack of management issues present. The authorized period of use is 03/01 through 02/28.

2. Wild Horses

The Allotment contains the South Stillwater Herd Management Area (HMA). The appropriate management level (AML) has been established at 16 head or 192 AUMs. No range of numbers was established. Census data collected over the last 20 years have shown that the population is stable and has remained between 14 and 16 head. This is due to the relatively dense population of mountain lions in the Stillwater Mountain Range.

3. Vegetation

Vegetation types range from Pinyon/Juniper dominated sites with sagebrush/grassland understory to a typical salt desert shrub community in the low lying valley.

The low lying valley area consists of plants common to salt desert shrubs which includes, Indian ricegrass, white sage, budsage, Bailey's greasewood and shadscale.

The upper elevation is dominated by Wyoming big sagebrush, antelope bitterbrush, low sagebrush and juniper woodlands. Major grass species are Idaho fescue, Thurber's needlegrass, bottlebrush squirreltail and several species of bluegrass.

4. Wildlife

The rangeland health assessment indicates this allotment is somewhat mixed in functional condition for soils and vegetation. The salt desert, shrub and woodland habitat used by general wildlife species would be in fair condition and would support diverse, reasonably healthy populations in general. Drought has affected the vegetation communities for the past several years. The west side of this allotment has experienced major wildfire in the past few years. The desert shrub and sagebrush communities in the burn were converted from perennial vegetation systems to annual in the burn areas. The attendant wildlife communities associated with the perennial vegetation were also converted to species needing early seral vegetation. General wildlife species use riparian, wet meadow areas and springs. Several riparian areas that were assessed were found to be functionally at risk. Several terrestrial wildlife habitats occur within the allotment area (Suminski 2007).
This allotment is within the BLM designated Stillwater Habitat Management Plan Area. (BLM 1995).

Mule deer use this allotment (Axtell 2007). The Table Mountain area of the allotment has been identified as key mule deer winter range (BLM 1995; Axtell 2007). The eastern half and a large portion of the southern end is key mule deer summer range. Because the upland areas of the allotment were found to be in functional condition for soils and vegetation, key summer and winter deer areas are probably in acceptable condition in general. Fawning occurs on the summer range (BLM 1995; Axtell 2007). Some springs associated with these areas are in poor or non-functional condition which would make fawn survival less than ideal (Suminski 2007).

Bighorn sheep use this allotment (Axtell 2007). The northeast corner of the allotment (Little Box, Big Box and Freeman Canyons) has been identified as key bighorn sheep habitat. In addition, Mississippi, Bell Mare, Cottonwood and Hare Canyons have had sheep releases in the past. Because the upland areas of the allotment were found to be in functional condition for soils and vegetation, key summer and winter bighorn areas are probably in acceptable condition in general. The south and southeast areas of the allotment contain travel corridors accessing the Chalk Peak area, which has been identified as a key bighorn lambing area. Areas around the Big Kassock Range and Fairview Peak are accessed by the same travel corridor that originates on this allotment (BLM 1995). Some springs needed by bighorn, especially during lamb rearing are in poor or non-functional condition which may be affecting lamb survival.

Historically, antelope were present in all valleys of Nevada (BLM 1988). Pronghorn occur in this allotment (BLM 1995). Kidding areas can be found on low elevation alluvial fans with a south-southeast aspect where bud sagebrush is abundant and green foliose lichen is present. The southeastern portion of the allotment may contain this type of habitat. Because the general condition of the allotment was rated as functional, general pronghorn habitat would probably be in acceptable condition. The condition of any kidding ground is unknown.

The majority of this grazing allotment lies within the Stillwater Sage Grouse Population Management Unit (PMU). Historically sage grouse were abundant in this PMU (Axtell 2007). Until relatively recently, the 1960's, sage grouse were somewhat abundant in the Stillwater Range (Axtell 2006). The population of sage grouse within this PMU is very low, possibly extirpated. The decline is not well understood though poaching of grouse on the only known remaining lek apparently lead to the near extirpation of sage grouse from that mountain range. Large areas of seemingly suitable habitat still remain in much of the PMU though substantially reduced from historical levels through encroachment of pinyon pine (Axtell 2007). Nevada Department of Wildlife listed the Stillwater Range population at 25 during a 2002 inventory of sage grouse management units. Although grouse occur in mountains to the east, this species doesn't colonize readily (Axtell 2006). Current management is not meeting sage grouse management guidelines (Nevada Conservation Sage Grouse Strategy 2001) as riparian areas that would be used for brooding were generally rated functional-at risk. Although noxious weed invasion was the cause of much of the problem, livestock use on high meadow areas was identified as a concern. There is also recreational use of the high meadows that is a concern (OHV use that damages springheads and riparian / wet meadow vegetation are an issue).

Mountain and California quail are present in this allotment. Mourning dove can be found in the allotment (BLM 1995). The non-native chukar partridge can be found extensively

throughout the allotment.

5. Soils

The soils within the Mountain Well/La Plata Grazing Allotment vary considerably in physical, chemical, and biological characteristics. Parent material, surface and subsurface textures and rock fragments, elevation, aspect, and slope determine the inherent productivity. Erosion and runoff potential, while affected greatly by these factors, are also dependant upon the basal and canopy cover of vegetation on site. Also, roads, livestock and horse use, mining and other overland activities, and general motorized vehicle use have impacted soils in certain areas. Generally the soils in this allotment are classified as either aridic or mesic, with much of the area in the four to ten inch precipitation zone. Soil reactions are mostly slightly to moderately alkaline. There are a few sodic and dune areas in the extreme western portion of the allotment, but most soils are shallow to moderately deep and are located in mountainous areas. Detailed descriptions of the soils within the allotment can be found within the Churchill County Soil Survey, issued in 2001 by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture-Natural Resources Conservation Service.

6. Special Status Species

Federally Listed Species

In October, 2006, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's electronic listing of federally listed threatened, endangered, proposed for listing and candidate (TEPC) species was reviewed to determine which species might be associated with this grazing allotment (www.fws.gov/nevada/protected_species/index.html 2006). Only the bald eagle, a federally listed threatened species could be found within the allotment boundaries.

Bald eagles may fly over the western portion of the allotment. Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge, managed primarily for waterfowl, lies to the west of the allotment. The allotment may be used for foraging by bald eagles. This bird uses fish but will also utilize carrion, which would provide occasional use by this eagle in the allotment (Suminski 2007).

The Nevada Natural Heritage Program (NNHP) database has no record of any plant species proposed for federal listing, plant species listed as endangered or plant species listed as threatened (Tonenna 2007).

BLM Sensitive Species

BLM Manual 6840 defines sensitive species as "…those species not already included as BLM Special Status Species under (1) Federal listed, proposed or candidate species; or (2) State of Nevada listed species. Native species may be listed as "sensitive" if it: (1) could become endangered or extirpated from a state or significant portion of its range; (2) is under review by the FWS/NMFS; or (3) whose numbers or habitat capability are declining so rapidly that Federal listing may become necessary, or (4) has typically small and widely dispersed populations; (5) inhabits ecological refugia, specialized or unique habitats; (6) is state-listed, but is better conserved through application of the BLM sensitive species status." It is BLM policy to provide sensitive species with the same level of protection that is given federal candidate species. The major objective of this protection is to preclude the need for federal listing (BLM 2003).

Sage grouse were addressed in the proceeding narrative as an upland game species. These are also a BLM sensitive species. Although sage grouse are considered nearly extirpated on the allotment, BLM policy for sensitive species directs the agency to manage habitat as if it were occupied, in hopes that the species might be re-established in the future (Axtell 2006).

The NNHP database has no record of any BLM sensitive species (Tonenna 2007). Nevada BLM sensitive species expected, or found in or near the allotment are shown in Appendix A (BLM 2003).

Neo-Tropical Migratory Birds

On January 11, 2001, President Clinton signed Executive Order 13186 (Land Bird Strategic Allotment) placing emphasis on conservation and management of migratory birds. The species are not protected under the Endangered Species Act, but most are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. No BLM policies have been developed to provide guidance on how to incorporate migratory birds into NEPA analysis. However, advice based on past USFWS MOU's, list items the USFWS believes are fundamental for the analysis of impacts to and planning for these birds. These items are (1) effects to highest priority birds listed by Partners in Flight; (2) effects to important bird areas (IBA's); (3) effects to important over wintering areas.

Avifaunal Biomes that are found on the allotment are described by Partners in Flight (PIF) [Beidleman 2000], PIF-Nevada (Neel 1999) and Nevada Wildlife Action Plan (Nevada Wildlife Action Plan Team 2006). The Intermountain West is the center of distribution for many western birds. Over half of the biome's Species of Continental Importance have 75% or more of their population here. Many breeding species from this biome migrate to winter in central and western Mexico or in the Southwestern biome (Beidleman 2000). There are no Important Bird Areas (IBA) associated with this allotment. Some of the migratory bird species associated with the wildfire areas may be heavily weighted to early seral species, this isn't affecting overall populations.
The species of concern listed by PIF that could occur in the allotment are shown in Appendix B.

7. Wetlands/Riparian

Sixteen separate riparian areas were assessed on the Mountain Well-La Plata allotment between May 3 and August 16, 2006. Table 1 provides basic data for each location, and Table 2 summarizes the condition ratings for all assessed sites.

Table 1. 2006 Riparian Assessment Data for the Mountain Well-La Plata Allotment

Name	Date Assessed	UTM Northing	UTM Easting	Rating[1]	Acres[2]	Miles	Management Recommendations
No Name Spring	5/3/2006	4376668	387646	FAR-DN	<0.1		thin trees
Pond Spring	5/3/2006	4371849	386041	FAR-DN	<0.1		thin trees
Hike Spring	5/3/2006	4371441	388059	PFC	<0.1		none
La Plata Spring	5/3/2006	4367668	386876	FAR-DN	<0.1		Treat saltcedar
Mulholland Spg	5/3/2006	4369051	385590	FAR-DN	<0.1		Treat saltcedar
Black Knob Spg	5/3/2006	4366984	389454	FAR-?	<0.1		Treat saltcedar
Buckbrush Spg	5/3/2006	4368460	389173	FAR-?	0.4		none
Burnt Cabin Spg	5/3/2006	4369294	389237	FAR-DN	<0.1		Fence source WH&B funds
Cabin Spring	5/4/2006	4375697	387672	FAR-UP	<0.1		repair fence
Huckleberry Spg	5/4/2006	4375764	388492	FAR-UP	0.4		none
Fenced Spring	5/4/2006	4376354	388081	FAR-DN	0.4		Repair fence
Red Trough Spg	5/4/2006	4376921	387517	NF	0.1		Fence source
Freeman Spring	7/26/2006	4382846	397996	PFC	<1		none
Coyote Spring	7/26/2006	4378734	395501	FAR-?	<1		Treat hoary cress
Ripley Spring	7/27/2006	4369295	382162	NF	<1		Treat saltcedar; build exclosure
W. Lee Canyon Complex	8/16/2006	4383313 (lower end)	386385 (lower end)	FAR-DN		2	Treat saltcedar

[1] Rating key: PFC = Proper Functioning Condition
FAR-UP = Functional-At-Risk with an Upward Trend
FAR-? = Functional-At-Risk with an Unknown Trend
FAR-DN = Functional-At-Risk with an Downward Trend
NF = Nonfunctional

[1] Acreages were estimated in the field or from digital orthophoto quarter quads, except for Sheep Spring, which was GPSed .

Table 2. Summary of 2006 Riparian Data on the Mountain Well-La Plata Allotment

Rating	Acres	Percent of Total	Miles	Percent of Total
PFC	0.8	19	--	--
FAR-UP	0.5	12	--	--
FAR-?	1.2	29	--	--
FAR-DN	0.8	19	2	100
NF	0.9	21	--	--
Total	4.2	100	2	100

Riparian conditions varied considerably across the allotment, with rating categories ranging from proper functioning condition to nonfunctioning. For most riparian areas, a

nonfunctional rating or downward trend was partly due to livestock impacts. Wild horse impacts were also common. Encroaching saltcedar or pinyon and juniper pushed some areas into the functional-at-risk category, and an isolated population of hoary cress was found at Coyote Spring.

8. Weeds

There are a number of infestations of hoary cress that have been located within the allotment, and salt cedar is common in drainage ways and riparian areas. Many of the areas have already been treated with herbicide, however, a good number are inaccessible.

B. No Action

The description of the Affected Environment for this alternative would be the same as that for the Proposed Action.

C. No Grazing Alternative

The description of the Affected Environment for this alternative would be the same as that for the Proposed Action.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This chapter describes the potential direct, indirect, residual and cumulative impacts that may result from the Proposed Action or Alternatives. It also includes potential mitigation measures and monitoring needs associated with the specific resources.

A. Proposed Action Environmental Impacts

1. Livestock

The total number of AUMs, 8004, would be significantly reduced for 5 years with management being altered to address the problems in the West Lee Canyon and adjacent areas. Grazing preference for cattle would be authorized at no more than 50% of the current preference or 4000 AUMs thus further compensating for the current drought.

As evidenced by the findings of the recent S&G Assessment the current grazing levels are well below the levels identified as acceptable in the Nevada Rangeland Monitoring Handbook (NRMH) and other applicable literature. Implementing the Proposed Action would ensure that progress would be made toward not only the identified S&Gs but the objectives in various planning documents including the AMP.

The rotational grazing system with the additional changes would prevent the overuse of any one given area resulting in a healthy vegetative resource and stable soils. Livestock concentration would be minimized under the Proposed Action thus preventing the degradation of specific areas.

Overall, use levels on uplands have been well below the levels identified in the AMP and those set forth in the NRMH resulting in very low impact by cattle grazing to the health of

the vegetative resource. By extending the reduction in actual use the impacts of the lengthy drought would be mitigated. The allotment would improve and would continue to do so under the proposed management practices.

2. Wild Horses

The Proposed Action would result in less competition between domestic livestock and wild horses thus benefiting horses. Without extensive fencing wild horses would continue to have unrestricted access to all areas both within and outside the HMA. Physical condition of the horses would remain high with a corresponding increase in the overall recruitment rate. Only predation by mountain lions have reduced the survival rates and overall recruitment of foals.

The present AML would remain in place only changing if monitoring information concludes a change is necessary, which at this time it does not. Maintaining the current AML is critical to the continued improvement of the vegetative resource.

3. Vegetation

The landscape of the western portion of the allotment changed drastically following the wildfire of 1999 resulting in a cheatgrass dominated landscape. Increased use by livestock of this area would rest other unburned areas and would prevent the expansion of the cheatgrass dominated site. All native grasses would, in all likelihood, increase with all plants remaining healthy and vigorous. Production would increase but would be affected by the availability of useable moisture. In years of below average moisture levels the plants would benefit by the reduced use of domestic livestock ensuring their continued presence and improvement. Based on the lower use levels reproduction would also increase.

Only the upland areas of West Lee Canyon and associated areas experienced use levels in excess of those called for in the NRMH. The provision to remove livestock when use levels approach 55% would assure the improvement of this area. All other areas were within or considerably below the thresholds set forth in this document indicating that livestock use has had at most a minor impact on the uplands allotment wide. Implementation of the Proposed Action would continue this trend.

Native shrubs in the burned areas, although subdominant to trace, would continue to reproduce and eventually, over an extended time period, again dominate the site. Vigor and health would remain high. The same can be said for the shrub community in the unburned areas.

4. Wildlife

Because the upland soil and vegetative communities are in generally stable and functional condition in the unburned areas, livestock grazing would be having only minimal effect on general wildlife populations. The existing and / or proposed rotation systems are better than non-rotational grazing for general wildlife populations. Concentrating livestock on the burns to eat cheatgrass as proposed, would probably cause general wildlife species to remain in a state where populations were weighted to early seral related species. The proposed repair of spring enclosures, salt cedar removal and construction of an enclosure at Ripley Spring would benefit general wildlife

species using this allotment.

The forb/shrub diets of mule deer and the grass dominated diet of cattle overlap about 19%. However, cattle switch from a grass dominated diet to a more forb/shrub dominated diet in areas previously grazed; dietary overlap can double and competition increases, especially in late summer (Findholt et al 2004). This increase in dietary overlap may occur in some areas of this allotment since summer pasture is grazed season long each year (Suminski 2007).

In late summer, cattle may use bitterbrush because it is the only high protein forage available. The ripe seeds are especially relished. Because of moderate to low levels of livestock use on this allotment that are allowing functioning rangeland conditions, this problem wouldn't occur in most years. During drought, elevated use of browse such as bitterbrush could be a concern (Suminski 2007).

Lactating does will expand their home range under moderate and heavy cattle grazing. This is at the expense of meeting needs of developing fawns (Loft et al 1991). Mule deer hide fawns and when over-utilization of riparian areas occurs, fawns become vulnerable to higher levels of predation and metabolic changes. This reduces fawn survival (NDOW 2004). Because several riparian areas were found to be in an at-risk functioning condition, mule deer recruitment may not be as ideal as it could be in this area (Suminski 2007). Fencing of these areas would alleviate this problem.

Livestock grazing may preclude ideal mule deer habitat conditions in this allotment. Although grazing pastures are used, these are in the same locations and used at the same times mule deer are present. In drought years, livestock grazing may impact deer habitat more than in wetter years. However, because grazing levels don't exceed moderate overall, livestock grazing wouldn't have a serious effect on mule deer (Suminski 2007).

Bighorn sheep do not do as well when they share ranges with cattle (Krausman et al 1995). The replacement heifer herd is on key bighorn range during late spring and summer, when bighorn are present. Young heifers will use a rougher area more than some other cattle so there would be some spatial and forage competition. Since desert bighorn diets are shrub heavy and heifer diets are herbaceous based (Krausman 1995), forage competition wouldn't overlap greatly. The regular cow herd uses the migration corridor area in late winter and spring when bighorn are moving to lambing areas. This is the only time of year when desert bighorn diets are herbaceous dominant. Forage competition would be great at this place and time even though moderated by natural spatial separation. Moderate or less use levels by livestock would allow competition to be as little as possible.

Livestock grazing at the moderate level can cause some rangelands to be in a sub-climax vegetative condition which is ideal for pronghorn (Yoakum et al 1993.) Forage competition in fall and winter between cattle and pronghorn on rangeland that is in fair to good condition is slight because pronghorn use forbs and shrubs, and cattle use grasses primarily (Yoakum et al 1995; Authenrieth et al 2006).

Serious spatial and forage competition can occur in spring and summer between cattle and pronghorn in the Great Basin. Pregnant pronghorn does avoid cattle in the fawning season which force the does to use less desirable fawning sites. Areas grazed by cattle

in spring had less forbs and grasses needed by lactating does and resulted in reduced fawn production in the Great Basin (Yoakum 1995). No key pronghorn areas have been identified, but fawning areas are expected in pastures 1 and 3. Due to moderate grazing levels and generally good functioning condition on the allotment, and a proposed rotation in pasture 3 which is used in the spring, any impacts to pronghorn habitat from livestock grazing would be greatly reduced.
Moderate grazing levels on upland areas as have been practiced in recent years, and that are proposed for this action would not have an effect on upland game bird species (Guthery 1995). The non-functional condition of some riparian areas and springs would have a very damaging effect on sage grouse brood rearing success and are impacting on general sage grouse summer areas (Neel 2001). The non-functional condition of some riparian areas and springs would have an effect on game bird occurrence and possibly some reproductive success. Fencing of these areas would alleviate this problem.

The proposed repair of spring enclosures, salt cedar removal and construction of an enclosure at Ripley Spring would benefit game species using this allotment. Any proposed or existing rotation system of grazing would benefit game species.

5. Soils

The implementation of this alternative would probably have little effect on the overall soils resource within the allotment since the soils standards are already being met. However, since there are a number of riparian areas being negatively impacted by livestock grazing, protecting these areas would provide a positive benefit.

6. Special Status Species

Federally Listed Species

Livestock grazing wouldn't affect bald eagles flying over the allotment since the only use made would be scavenging. A biological evaluation and assessment (Suminski 2007) prepared for this species resulted in a determination of "No Effect" to the bald eagle from re-issuing this grazing permit.

BLM Sensitive Species

Potential effects of livestock grazing on desert bighorn sheep and sage grouse have been discussed. Livestock grazing allows some species to respond positively, some to respond negatively and some to have a mixed response (Finch et al 1993). This means only that some species may use a grazed area more, some may use it less. It doesn't necessarily preclude the presence of a species (Fagerstone and Ramey 1995).

Because the upland soil and vegetative communities are in generally stable and functional condition in the unburned areas, livestock grazing would be having only minimal effect on sensitive wildlife species. Moderate levels of grazing would maintain a vegetation base adequate for maintaining the prey base of sensitive species needing this type of food. The existing and / or proposed rotation systems are better than non-rotational grazing for wildlife populations. The proposed repair of spring enclosures, salt cedar removal and construction of an enclosure at Ripley Spring would benefit sensitive wildlife species using this allotment. Bat species using riparian vegetation and springs

for foraging would be especially benefited.

Neo-Tropical Migratory Birds

Livestock grazing allows some species to respond positively, some to respond negatively and some to have a mixed response (Finch et al 1993). This means only that some species may use a grazed area more, some may use it less. It doesn't necessarily preclude the presence of a species. Burrowing owls prefer a slightly lower seral condition than some birds to be able to see well. Livestock grazing was not listed as a threat to loggerhead shrike (www.natureserve.com). Overgrazing can be an issue for Brewer's sparrow and sage thrasher (www.natureserve.com, Finch et al 1993). But according to the range assessment, this isn't occurring; moderate levels of grazing are being met. Green-tailed towhee, Brewer's sparrow, migrating western hummingbirds and other bird species associated with the western shrub land biome are sensitive to high intensity grazing that would degrade or convert the sagebrush habitat type, or allow invasion by non-native species such as cheatgrass (Beidleman 2000, www.natureserve.com). Because the rangeland health assessment showed the soils and vegetation to be in functional condition, grazing in this allotment would not be a threat to these species. Additionally, insect and vegetation food sources needed by these species would be intact.

The proposed repair of spring enclosures, salt cedar removal and construction of an enclosure at Ripley Spring would benefit Neotropical migratory birds using this allotment.

7. Wetlands/Riparian

Overall improvement in riparian conditions would be expected under the proposed action. Reducing active use to one half of the permitted level would reduce grazing pressures on riparian areas. The compacted soils and heavily utilized riparian vegetation observed during the 2006 assessments would recover.

Fencing the most severely impacted riparian areas would afford protection from livestock and wild horse impacts. Finally, treating noxious weeds would eliminate one of the key risk factors to allotment riparian areas.

8. Weeds

The implementation of this alternative would provide protection to some riparian areas that are in a downward trend, which would have a small positive effect as regards noxious weed susceptibility. Uplands with small, scattered hoary cress infestations would probably see no net positive or negative effect.

B. No Action Alternative Environmental Impacts

1. Livestock

Authorizing the total number of AUMs, 8004, would result in use levels rising allotment wide during drought years to at or above the accepted level of 55%. Overall, with the continued drought, the allotment would not progress as rapidly toward meeting the applicable S&G goals for the allotment. Use in the West Lee Canyon would probably increase resulting in a downward trend in the overall condition of the immediate area.

With the exception of the West Lee area the rotational grazing system would prevent the overuse of any one given area resulting in a healthy vegetative resource and stable soils. Livestock concentration would still be minimized under this action thus preventing the degradation of specific areas. Depending on moisture the allotment would make progress toward achieving the applicable goals set forth in various documents.

2. Wild horses

Since the overlap between wild horses and domestic livestock is minimal and the horse population is so low this alternative would have very little if any effect on the horses.

3. Vegetation

The landscape of the western portion of the allotment changed drastically following the wildfire of 1999 resulting in a cheatgrass dominated landscape. Failure to increase livestock use in this area would result in the spread of cheatgrass and reduction in overall productivity of the area. Without this increased use other areas would not be rested as extensively. All native grasses would, in all likelihood, still increase with all plants remaining healthy and vigorous. Production and reproduction would increase but would be affected by the availability of useable moisture. In years of below average moisture levels the plants would not benefit by authorizing of the entire permitted use.

The upland areas of West Lee Canyon and associated areas would continue to experience use levels in excess of those called for in the NRMH. The provision to remove livestock would not be implemented when use levels approach 55%. All other areas would remain within or below the thresholds set forth in the NRMH indicating that livestock use has had a minor impact on the uplands allotment wide.

Native shrubs in the burned areas, although subdominant to trace, would continue to reproduce and eventually, over an extended time period, again dominate the site. Vigor and health would remain high. The same can be said for the shrub community in the unburned areas.

4. Wildlife

This alternative would be the same as the proposed action with one exception. Without AUM's put into suspended non-use, the permittee could stock up at any time to some level between what is currently being grazed and the fully permitted number. General wildlife and game species habitat condition would be inversely proportional to the amount of increased grazing, i.e. the greater the number of livestock, the less ideal habitats would be for wildlife. There could be a threshold under this alternative to where some wildlife and game species habitats would be disrupted to the extent that these animals couldn't reproduce, migrate, re-establish or increase to carrying capacity, especially in drought conditions.

5. Soils

The implementation of this alternative would have little effect on the overall soil resource since at present the grazing system is meeting the soils standards. There are a number of springs however that are in downward trends, due in part to livestock use.

6. Special Status Species

Federally Listed Species

There would be no impacts to federally listed species or habitats even if livestock were stocked to the limit of the permit (Suminski 2007, Tonenna 2007). Bald eagles would still use carrion found on the allotment, but would depend on the Refuge for the main source of their habitat.

BLM Sensitive Species

This alternative would be the same as the proposed action with one exception. Without AUM's put into suspended non-use, the permittee could stock up at any time to some level between what is currently being grazed and the fully permitted number. Sensitive species habitat condition would be inversely proportional to the amount of increased grazing, i.e. the greater the number of livestock, the less ideal habitats would be for wildlife. There could be a threshold under this alternative to where some sensitive species habitats would be disrupted to the extent that these animals couldn't reproduce, migrate, re-establish or increase to carrying capacity, especially in drought conditions.

Neo-Tropical Migratory Birds

This alternative would be the same as the proposed action with one exception. Without AUM's put into suspended non-use, the permittee could stock up at any time to some level between what is currently being grazed and the fully permitted number. Neotropical migratory bird habitat condition would be inversely proportional to the amount of increased grazing, i.e. the greater the number of livestock, the less ideal habitats would be for wildlife. There could be a threshold under this alternative to where some Neotropical habitat would be disrupted to the extent that these animals couldn't reproduce, migrate, re-establish or increase to carrying capacity, especially in drought conditions.

7. Wetlands/Riparian

In general, riparian conditions on the allotment would decline further if current management is continued. Of 16 areas assessed in 2006, nine were nonfunctioning or functioning-at-risk with a downward trend under current management. Some of the other sites could also begin to see a decline in condition if the entire permitted use level is implemented.

8. Weeds

The implementation of this alternative could have a somewhat negative effect on noxious infestations within the riparian areas of the allotment, since overgrazing of riparian areas can make them somewhat susceptible to salt cedar and hoary cress recruitment and establishment. However, since both of these species can also infest riparian areas in pristine condition, this alternative would probably not affect areas inaccessible to livestock.

C. No Grazing Alternative Environmental Impacts

1. Livestock

The livestock operation is used in combination with private land holdings. Few, if any, permits are available on public lands. If lost, it is highly unlikely that the operator would be able to find a Permit to replace his current authorization. Private land grazing is very rare if not non-existent with leasing costs significantly higher than for public lands grazing. This would significantly increase the cost of running the livestock operation.

This alternative would also not allow for the managed use of a renewable resource (range forage) allowed for in the CCFO CRMP, dated May 11, 2001.

With no permittee being authorized to graze cattle the amount of time spent by Bureau personnel visiting the Allotment would be substantially reduced. The potential for unauthorized use by adjoining permittees and other grazers would increase.

All water sources, which are numerous, currently used by domestic livestock, wildlife and wild horses would fall into disrepair with the quantity and quality available for all species would decrease drastically.

2. Wild Horses

Elimination of domestic livestock grazing would have a positive impact on wild horses. No competition for forage and water would occur thereby benefiting the horses present. Wild horse use would still be limited to the HMA.

3. Vegetation

The amount of forage produced from these plants would be totally available to wildlife and wild horses. In the absence of domestic livestock the current AML would be increased to reflect the additional AUMs not utilized by domestic livestock. Over time, the wild horses would end up utilizing a much greater proportion of the vegetation being produced. Total vegetative production and increased diversity of plant life would not occur.

With more above ground vegetation remaining and more litter being made available, the health of the community would continue to improve. In the absence of domestic livestock, a build up of fuels would result. Over a period of years, the potential for a more intense fire would result. Fire would be carried over a much larger area, expanding outside the boundaries of this Allotment and into adjoining allotments.

4. Wildlife

Any forage or spatial competition between general wildlife, game species and livestock would be eliminated which could be more important in drought years.

5. Soils

The implementation of this alternative could have a small positive effect on the soil resource within the allotment due to the elimination of vegetative utilization by livestock,

especially in riparian areas.

6. Special Status Species

Federally Listed Species

There would be no effect to federally listed species under this alternative.

BLM Sensitive Species

This alternative would lead to increased residual grass cover which would enhance sage grouse nesting habitat. Sage grouse nesting success is positively correlated to increased heights of residual grass cover (Axtell 2007). The response of general BLM sensitive species would be reverse of the grazing alternatives as those species which responded positively to grazing might not be as abundant while those that respond with no grazing might increase. The proposed spring rehabilitation and fencing would not be done in conjunction with the grazing program. This would allow an impact to sensitive species from non-grazing sources to continue.

Neo-Tropical Migratory Birds

The response of Neotropical migratory bird species would be reverse of the grazing alternatives as those species which responded positively to grazing might not be as abundant while those that respond with no grazing might increase. The proposed spring rehabilitation and fencing would not be done in conjunction with the grazing program. This would allow an impact to Neotropical species from non-grazing sources to continue.

7. Wetlands/Riparian

Riparian areas would benefit if domestic livestock no longer grazed the allotment. Much of the compacted soil and heavily utilized riparian vegetation observed during the 2006 assessments would have a chance to recover. The no-grazing alternative would not eliminate grazing impacts, however, since much of the damage seen in 2006 was from wild horses that will continue to use the allotment. No riparian exclosures would be built under this proposal

8. Weeds

The impacts due to the implementation of this alternative could have a small positive effect on the ecological condition/functionality of riparian areas within the allotment as regards salt cedar and hoary cress infestations. Even though many noxious weeds can invade areas in good ecological condition, a reduction in riparian and other areas disturbed by livestock can lessen the potential for infestation.

Mitigation Measures

Maintenance or reconstruction of the identified exclosures would be completed. East Lee Canyon, Eleven Mile Canyon, La Plata Canyon and the area south and west of Mill Canyon will be monitored during the grazing period. When use levels approach 55% all cattle would be removed from those areas.

Cumulative Impacts

All resources 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 Mountain Well/LaPlata 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 foreseeable future. The effects of grazing at identified 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 adjacent lands to produce any detrimental cumulative impacts in the area.

Monitoring

All monitoring would be done in accordance the parameters set forth in the Mountain Well LaPlata AMP dated 01/13/70, the FMUD, RPS and other associated documents and the Nevada Monitoring Handbook and other applicable handbooks and manuals.

IV. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

List of Preparers

James M. Gianola	Wild Horse and Burro Specialist
Russell Suminski	Supervisory Rangeland Management Specialist
Dean Tonenna	Plant Ecologist
Rita Suminski	Supervisory Wildlife Biologist
John Axtell	Natural Resource Specialist – Sage Grouse
Jim Carter	Archaeologist
James deLaureal	Soil Scientist/Noxious Weeds
Jim Schroeder	Hydrologist
Terry Knight	Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner
Terri Kuntsen	Planning and Environmental coordinator

Persons, Groups and/or Agencies Consulted

Nevada State Clearinghouse
Bruce K. and Jamie Kent Living Trust
V&B LLC
Western Watershed Project
Fallon Tribe

V. APPENDICES AND/OR ATTACHMENTS

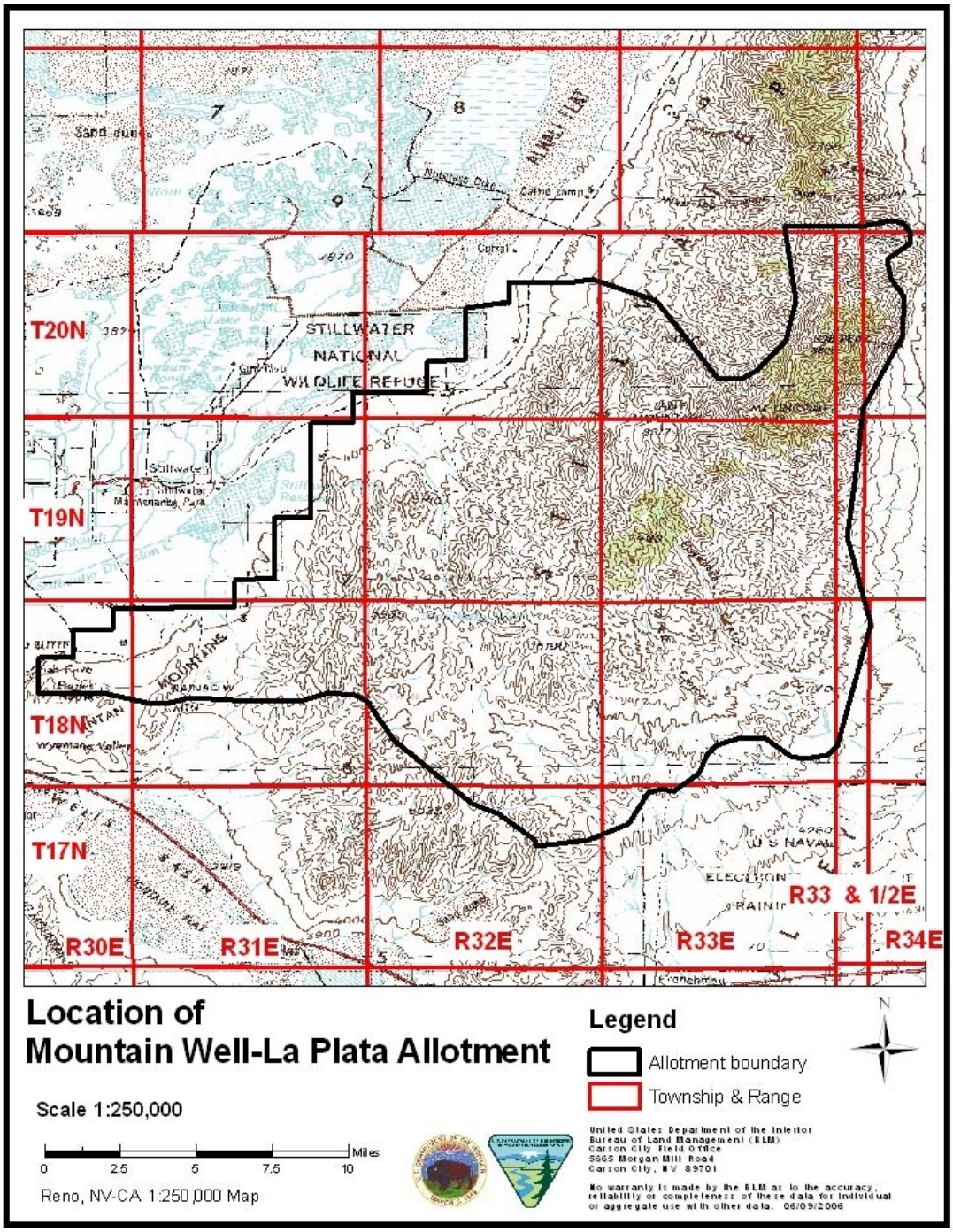
Appendix I – General Location Map for the Mountain Well/LaPlata Allotment Allotment

Appendix II – BLM sensitive species that are expected or are found on the Mountain Well La/Plata Allotment.

Appendix III -- Neotropical Birds

Appendix IV -- References

Appendix #1


T20N
T19N
T18N
T17N
R30E
R31E
R32E
R33E
R33 & 1/2E
R34E
STILLWATER
NATIONAL
Location of
Mountain Well-La Plata Allotment
Legend
Allotment boundary
Township & Range
Scale 1:250,000
Miles
0
2.5
5
7.5
10
Reno, NV-CA 1:250,000 Map
United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Carson City Field Office
5665 Morgan Mill Road
Carson City, NV 89701
No warranty is made by the BLM as to the accuracy, reliability or completeness of these data for individual or aggregate use with other data. 06/09/2006

Appendix #2

BLM Sensitive Species Associated with Mountain Well La/Plata Allotment

Animal

Golden Eagle – *Aquila chrysaetos*
Ferruginous Hawk - *Buteo regalis*
Northern Goshawk - *Accipiter gentilis*
Burrowing owl - *Athene cunicularia*
Long-billed Curlew – *Numenius americanus*
Juniper Titmouse - *Baeolophus griseus*
Pinyon Jay - *Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*
Greater sage-grouse- *Centrocercus urophasianus*
Mountain quail - *Oreortyx pictus*
Cooper's Hawk – *Accipiter cooperii*
Sharp-shinned Hawk- *Accipiter striatus*
Prairie Falcon – *Falco mexicanus*
Peregrine Falcon- *Falco peregrinus*
Swainson's Hawk- *Buteo swainsoni*
Western Snowy Plover- *Charadrius alexandrinus*
Loggerhead shrike- *Lanius ludovicianus*
Gray vireo- *Vireo vicinior*
Desert bighorn sheep- *Ovis canadensis nelsoni*
Pallid bat – *Antrozous pallidus*
Spotted bat – *Euderma maculatum*
Long-eared myotis – *Myotis evotis*
Fringed myotis – *Myotis thysanodes*
Yuma myotis – *Myotis yumanensis*
Silver-haired bat - *Lasionycteris noctivagans*
California myotis - *Myotis californicus*
Small-footed myotis -*Myotis ciliolabrum*
Long-earred myotis -*Myotis evotis*
Little brown myotis - *Myotis lucifugus*
Long-legged myotis - *Myotis volans*
Townsend's big-eared bat - *Corynorhinus townsendii*
Hoary bat - *Lasiurus cinereus*
Western pipistrelle bat - *Pipistrellus hesperus*
Brazilian free-tailed bat - *Tadarida braziliensis*

Source: www.natureserve.com, www.heritage.nv.gov, CCFO Habitat Management Plans, misc. observ

Appendix #3

Neo-tropical Migratory Birds, Species of Continental Importance on Mountain Well-La Plata Allotment

Salt Desert Scrub

This biome experiences harsh climactic variation and is often dominated by salt-tolerant shrubs. Species of concern associated with this habitat type in the land sale area are,

Loggerhead Shrike – *Lanius ludovicianus* (Neel 1999)
Burrowing Owl – *Athene cunicularia* (Neel 1999)

Issues related to this habitat type include physical destruction of salt desert shrubs, habitat conversion and use of rangeland pesticides (Neel 1999).

Western Shrublands

(Beidleman 2000) – Shrubsteppe was identified as the highest priority habitat for conservation for breeding birds. This habitat type supports the largest nesting-bird species list of any upland vegetation type in the West (Beidleman 2000). Species of concern associated with this habitat type in the plan area,

<u>Shrub-Steppe</u>
Sage grouse – *Centrocercus urophasianus* (Beidleman 2000)
Brewer's sparrow – *Spizella breweri* (Beidleman 2000)
Sage Sparrow – *Amphispiza belli* (Neel 1999, Beidleman 2000, Nevada Wildlife Action Plan 2006)
Sage Thrasher – *Oreoscoptes montanus* (Neel 1999, Beidleman 2000, Nevada Wildlife Action Plan 2006)

Issues related to this habitat type include fragmentation from man-caused activities. Threats to this habitat type include overgrazing of grasses and forbs that alter community structure, invasion of non-native grasses and fire suppression / crown-killing wildfire (Beidleman 2000). Loss of shrub understory, increasing human infrastructure which fragments and degrades habitat, and increases soil erosion was also identified (Nevada Wildlife Action Plan 2006).

Woodland

Pinyon-juniper woodlands are characteristic of this habitat type Species of concern associated with this habitat type in the plan area,

Gray Flycatcher – *Empidonax wrightii* (Beidleman 2000)
Gray Vireo - *Vireo vicinior* (Beidleman 2000)
Juniper Titmouse – *Baeolophus ridgwayi* (Beidleman 2000)
Mountain Bluebird – *Sialia currucoides* – cavity nester (Neel 1999)
Pinyon Jay – *Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus* (Neel 1999)
Western Bluebird- *Sialia mexicana* – snags / hollow tree (Neel 1999)
Issues related to this habitat type include fragmentation from man-caused activities

(Beidleman 2000).

Riparian

This habitat type supports the highest bird diversity of any western habitat type but is one of the rarest. Species of concern associated with this habitat type in the plan area,

Calliope hummingbird – *Stellula calliope*- (Beidleman 2000)

Issues related to this habitat type include de-watering and alteration of water flows / channels, road construction, nonnative species, logging, recreation and overgrazing (Beidleman 2000). Groundwater withdrawal and shallow aquifer pollution were mentioned as specific Nevada issues (Nevada Wildlife Action Plan 2006).

Appendix #4

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