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ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT OF MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVES

MONTGOMERY PASS WILD HORSE TERRITORY

DECISION NOTICE

I have adopted Alternative B which calls for reducing wild horse numbers. Under this alternative the target level for the Montgomery Pass Wild Horse Territory will be seventy five (75) head. Obligated domestic livestock grazing will be maintained.

A. Summary of Impact.

The current wild horse population, which exceeds 150 head, will be reduced to 75 horses. Long-range management will be within a 60 to 90 head range.

B. Reasons for choosing the alternative.

1. It provides for multiple resource management and wild horse management as directed by Public Law 92-195.

2. Maintenance of fewer wild horse numbers provides a viable management alternative for natural improvement of rangeland resources.

3. The forage on range grazed exclusively by wild horses will be brought into line with forage availability.

4. It provides the best management opportunity to avoid grazing conflicts between wild horses and cattle on winter range.

5. Wildlife, especially mule deer and sage grouse, will be directly benefitted by improved habitats.

ANALYSIS OF OTHER ALTERNATIVES

A. Take No Action. The resource conditions would continue to deteriorate, affecting all range users. It does not meet intents of the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act or multiple resource management.

C. Significantly Reduce Livestock Use. Livestock use was reduced in 1973 by discontinuing permitted grazing on the Pizona Allotment. The yearlong horse use within the territory which exceeds the capacity of the Pizona range would continue. An additional reduction of 500 - 900 livestock AM's on other areas would not provide any major benefit, although the action might be beneficial to

winter grazing areas, but as indicated would fail to correct conditions on range sites where improvement is most needed. Further reductions would reduce the economic stability of the local livestock industry.

D. Reduce Livestock Use and Horse Numbers. Further reductions (above those imposed in 1973) in livestock grazing would be severely detrimental to the stability of the local ranching community. Range used exclusively by wild horses would continue to be adversely impacted.

E. Maintain (Livestock/Horse) Present Levels. Over use on key ranges and habitats would continue. Rates low for wildlife.

F. Reduce Wildlife Numbers & Reduce Livestock Use and Horse Numbers. Manipulation of wildlife populations is not a good practice. It rates low as a method to stimulate improvement of rangeland resources. Also rates as "D" above.

MITIGATION AND MONITORING MEASURES

A. A Monitoring Plan for the Montgomery Pass Wild Horse Range will be written and put into action.

B. The environmental assessment relates to obligated livestock grazing which was discontinued due to increased wild horse numbers and their subsequent forage requirements. These ranges will remain open to livestock grazing, but livestock grazing will continue to be deferred until a livestock grazing program is established in an approved allotment management plan.

C. Appropriate management levels for wild horses & livestock on the Carson City District BLM portion of the range will be established by the Walker Resource Management Plan.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

A. I have determined that this action will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not needed.

Factors in this determination are:

1. There will be no basic change to types of existing land uses of the area.

2. No economic changes will be experienced by local communities.

3. The action follows administrative guidelines for the public lands involved.

4. No adverse conditions have been identified through the public involvement process.

This decision is subject to administrative review as outlined in 36 CFR 211.18. A Notice of Appeal must be filed within 45 days after the date of this signed decision notice.

Eugene E. Murphy

EUGENE E. MURPHY
Forest Supervisor
Inyo National Forest

Feb 6 1985
Date

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(2260)

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT OF MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVES

MONTGOMERY PASS WILD HORSE TERRITORY

The Environmental Assessment Documents
The Analysis For Establishing The Management
Level For Wild Horses In Association With
Other Herbivores and Wildlife Needs.

COOPERATING AGENCIES

INYO NATIONAL FOREST
USDA FOREST SERVICE
BISHOP, CA

TOIYABE NATIONAL FOREST
USDA FOREST SERVICE
RENO, NV

BAKERSFIELD DISTRICT
USDI BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
BAKERSFIELD, CA

CARSON CITY DISTRICT
USDI BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
CARSON CITY, NV

RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL:

EUGENE E. MURPHY
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I. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

A. The Montgomery Pass Wild Horse Territory is an expanse of 207,921 acres in California and Nevada. It is located east of Mono Lake in the south portion of the Excelsior Mountains. It is approximately thirty seven miles north of Bishop, California. Management direction is The Wild Horse Act (P. L. 92-195).

B. The territory is a combination of public lands, and is administered by two agencies. National Forest System Lands are administered by the Bridgeport Ranger District, Toiyabe National Forest and the Mono Lake Ranger District, Inyo National Forest. The Public Domain Lands are administered by the Nevada State Office, Bureau of Land Management, Carson City District and California State Office, Bureau of Land Management, Bakersfield District.

C. A Memorandum of Understanding dated February 13, 1984, executed by the two agencies has designated Inyo National Forest as lead agency in formulating wild horse management goals and objectives.

D. Wild and free-roaming horses are managed under principles of multiple use, sustained yields and environmental quality, to protect them from unauthorized actions, to manage their habitats in a manner to achieve and maintain an ecological balance and a population of sound and healthy individuals. This document will analyse the management level for wild horses in association with other herbivores and wildlife needs.

E. Forage on portions of the wild horse range is being heavy to severely utilized. A 1978 range analysis survey conducted on key wild horse range established most areas to be in poor condition with a downward trend. The major key area is the Pizona, McBride, Sagehen, and Truman Springs range, which has been grazed exclusively by wild horses since 1973.

II. MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVES

A. TAKE NO ACTION. Allow natural increases in the horse population to continue unchecked. Maintain obligated [1] livestock use - 2,000 animal months.

B. REDUCE HORSE NUMBERS. Control the number of horses below present populations as per key range survey data - 900 animal months.[4] Maintain obligated livestock use - 2,000 animal months.

C. SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE LIVESTOCK USE. Allow less livestock on the public lands, shorten the grazing season, or both, to achieve a reduction of 900 animal months from present use 5/. Maintain horse populations at present levels[2] - 1,800 animal months.

D. REDUCE LIVESTOCK USE AND HORSE NUMBERS. Reduce the animal classes (domestic livestock - wild horses) 900 animal months in proportion to their present use, to arrive at prescribed management levels.[3]

E. MAINTAIN LIVESTOCK USE AND HORSE NUMBERS AT THE PRESENT LEVELS.

F. REDUCE WILDLIFE NUMBERS, LIVESTOCK USE AND HORSE NUMBERS. Reduce deer numbers, but allow establishment of antelope, but only a minimal population through controlled hunting. Reduce rodent and rabbit populations by poisoning. No predator control. Reduce wild horse populations and livestock use to prescribed levels.3/

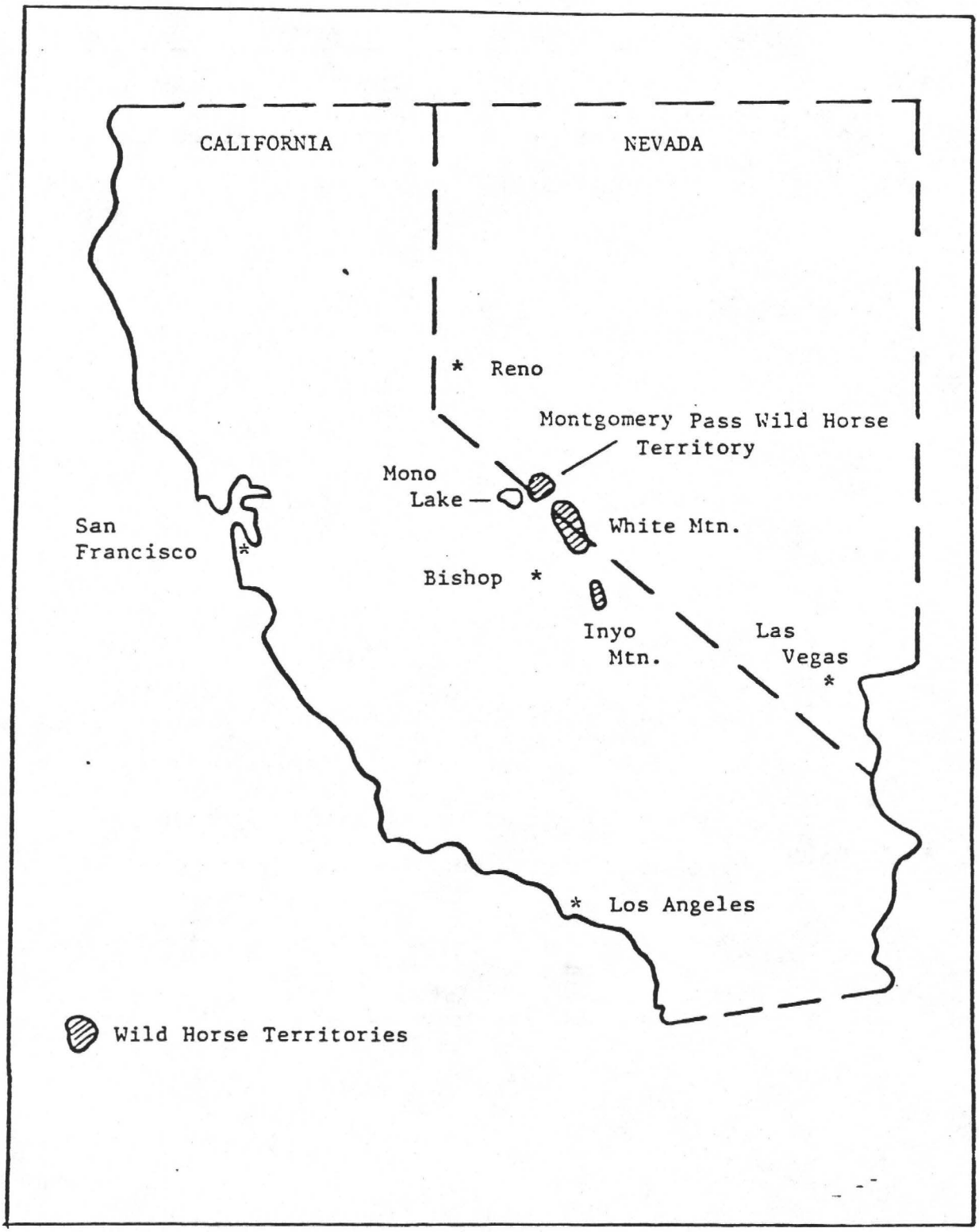
1/ Obligated Livestock Use - Numbers (animal months) currently under grazing permit and animal months of livestock grazing discontinued due to forage competition with wild horses - 2,000 animal months.

2/ Present wild horse numbers 150 head or 1,800 animal months.

3/ Prescribed levels of animal months - livestock 953 animal months and wild horses 1,287 animal months.

4/ Range survey data of range used exclusively by wild horses - 900 wild horse animal months.

5/ Estimated actual livestock (present use) grazing within the wild horse territory, last three year average - 1340 animal months. See page 10.
7


CALIFORNIA
NEVADA
* Reno
Montgomery Pass Wild Horse Territory
Mono Lake
White Mtn.
San Francisco
Bishop *
Inyo Mtn.
Las Vegas *
* Los Angeles
Wild Horse Territories

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. LIVING AND NON-LIVING COMPONENTS

1. VEGETATION

The vegetation types found on the rolling uplands at the higher elevations are pinyon, pinyon - juniper and high desert shrub. Low sagebrush and bitterbrush are prominent plants throughout and big sagebrush along with rabbitbrush are in draws where soils are well developed and also adjacent to riparian zones. The desert shrub community with hopsage, saltbrush and ephreda are more pronounced on the lower fringe areas. On key summer wild horse ranges in the central part of the territory preferred perennial grasses now vary from nonexistant to widely scattered understory plants (Range Survey 1978). Preferred browse plants have been significantly reduced on some key habitats.

There are several small meadows and riparian zones which form a small portion of the key summer range. They are also key components of wildlife habitat. Key forage species here are: Carex, Saltgrass, red-top and Sandberg's bluegrass.

The clearing of pinyon pine vegetation in the early 1960's broadened the grazing resources and wildlife habitats.

2. ANIMALS

Grazing and browsing use by wild horses and deer, along with domestic livestock grazing (mainly cattle) has been a long time use of the range-land resource. Wild horses are on the range year round with movements influenced by weather, water sources and available forage. Livestock grazing is administered by permit within range allotments during specific seasons. Past grazing within the central portion of the territory was during the summer season. Winter use occurs on ranges to the north and east. Rabbits and rodents also contribute to the forage utilization. The degree of forage and plant seed utilization occurs in cyclic patterns. The lack of perennial forbs on meadows and upland sites keeps sage grouse numbers at extremely low levels. There are signs of competition for forage between livestock and wild horses on some range sites. The effects of severe forage utilization are most pronounced on meadows and riparian zones and on adjoining key range sites. Livestock grazing on the Pizona allotment was discontinued in 1973 due to forage utilization by wild horses.

To the north and east is the McBride Flat allotment which has not been stocked with livestock for a similar period of time. This management decision is based on lack of available forage due to heavy and severe grazing by wild horses. The extreme

eastern range has very little natural water which helps retain it for winter grazing by both horses and livestock.

The Sounding Rock and Jacks Spring range on the Toiyabe National Forest is closed to livestock grazing. During late winter and early spring wild horses have been observed on this range. At this time they also use the east portion of the Adobe Hills allotment. This Inyo National Forest range receives very little or no livestock grazing.

Several small wild horse bands summer in the hills above Adobe Valley and Benton Valley, generally moving down in the evenings to water. One band generally occupies the Queen Valley range.

Management of ungulate populations is essential to maintain a desirable environment. If the 1983 antelope reintroduction into Adobe Valley is successful they may extend their range into the wild horse territory.

In addition to normal carnivores the area has golden eagles and mountain lions. Predation by lion on young offspring of grazing animals is a natural happening, but degree of occurrence is not known.

Mule deer use is primarily by migratory herds. The condition of forage plants on winter ranges may be inhibiting the productivity of the deer herds.

No classified plant or animal species is known to occur within the area.

3. FOOD RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

Rabbits and rodents utilize herbaceous plants, but the degree of impact to the grazing resource is related with the population cycles associated with these animals.

Predatory mammals and birds such as mountain lions, coyotes, bobcats, badgers, skunks, golden eagles, hawks and owls, prey upon the rodent populations. However, predators have less influence upon rodent populations than rodent populations have upon predators. When rodent populations are low, the predators attack non-rodent animals, including fawns, colts and calves, more frequently.

Deterioration of vegetation also means an increase of rodent population, plus an increase in predatory mammals until the range condition becomes so poor that even the rodent population will decline.

The water sites are mainly springs and playas, (spring and early summer ponds). They are not uniformily located throughout the area, and some marginal sites go dry in early summer

requiring animals to travel great distances. Wells and pipelines are essential components of some livestock grazing programs and may occasionally be used by wild horses.

Concentrations of grazing animals around springs and playas and on small meadows around water sources and drainage courses are an adverse effect upon sage grouse habitat.

Bitterbrush, mountain mahogany, and other browse plants of the summer range are moderately grazed. The north and eastern range areas provide winter grazing for cattle. The winter snows drive wild horses and wildlife to the east and onto other lower elevation sites found on fringe areas of the territory.

Coyotes are found in all vegetation types, but concentrated in certain areas during certain seasons. In the summer coyotes are more widely distributed.

Bobcats utilize the riparian habitats plus rimrock and rock outcrops in sagebrush, juniper and brush types. They are dependent on the small mammals and birds, and carrion.

General characteristics of small game include a short life span, high reproductive rates and rapid population turnover rates. Normally, the larger the animal, the longer the life span but the lower the reproductive rate. Short-term population levels are governed by annual weather conditions and intrinsic factors. Long term populations are affected by habitat conditions and long range weather patterns. Dove, chukar, and rabbits are adapted to lower successional stages than sage grouse and quail.

Sage grouse are associated with the low and big sagebrush types. Meadow areas, breeding complexes and winter concentration areas are essential in the sage grouse life cycle. The wet meadows provide insects and forbs to young broods in June, and are utilized throughout the summer and early fall.

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL

Archaeological features in the area include: numerous rock chipping sites, found principally near springs, wet meadows and pinyon forests; campsites, usually found along travel routes and stream courses; rock hunting blinds; pictographs and petroglyphs on rock faces; rock rings amidst pinyon trees; and several wikiup remains. Herbivore grazing on rangelands does not hinder these cultural resource items.

5. RECREATIONAL

The primary recreational activities within the area include deer hunting, rockhounding and camping associated with these and other outdoor activities. General sightseeing would be in

connection with educational, geological, archaeological, historical and wild horse features. The level of use is restricted by remote characteristics and rough roads. The RARE II process may have attracted some use to the area, as the 1979 review proposed that a portion of the area be allocated to wilderness.

B. CHANGE AGENTS

The principal agents of change can be classified into two categories, natural and those that are the result of man's activities.

The more important natural agents of change are fires resulting from lightning strikes, deer population changes, rodent population changes, insect population changes, plant diseases and weather. The efficient, early detection and suppression of fires has greatly reduced the degree of change brought by this natural element. Fires had the effect of greatly reducing ground cover on the burned-over area and leaving such areas at least temporarily susceptible to accelerated erosion. The greatest accumulation of fuel for fire generally exists on big sagebrush and pinyon vegetative types with an understory of herbaceous plants and litter. The annual understory grasses mature and produce dry fuel with a low ignition temperature, and sagebrush contains oils and resins that make this plant burn readily. An increase in perennial understory grasses through grazing management systems should reduce the incidence of fire and reduce soil erosion hazard following fire, since perennial grasses mature later in the summer, have extensive fibrous root systems, and are not usually killed by fire.

Migratory deer use during the winter season occurs on several key ranges. The population concentrations under present conditions are having some effects upon other elements of the ecosystem. Wild horse and cattle use on a key winter deer range with southerly exposure is contributing to unsatisfactory conditions. Horse use is mainly on the upper area, while cattle use occurs on the lower slopes and valley floor.

Rodent populations fluctuate greatly over a few years. Rabbit populations do increase but the degree of competition with large herbivores for forage has not been established. Small rodent populations occasionally increase to the point of partially depleting native grass stands, but do not become significant problems.

The incidence and effect of plant diseases are not well known, but are probably not very significant in their effect upon forage production or other factors of the environment.

Weather affects forage production and plant composition where annual grasses and forbs are the predominant understory plant species. Weather also has a direct effect upon animal and insect populations, and thus an indirect effect upon flora. Summer storms

of high intensity (thunder showers) may produce rapid surface runoff with resulting damage to the soil resource.

It is generally concluded that grazing use by the early settlers had an adverse effect upon the vegetative elements of the environment because of excessive stocking rates, poor distribution of animals over the area and improper seasons of use. Current livestock grazing management is based on maintaining sustained forage yields. The increased number of wild horses on the range has over utilized forage plants and made adverse impacts to water resources and wildlife habitats.

Fires have made impacts on forage resources and wildlife on limited areas. In some instances, the effect of uncontrolled wild fire has been adverse upon forage production and other range resources.

Hunting, off-road vehicle use and other recreational uses have not had a significant impact upon forage production or livestock and wild horse use on the range. Vehicle use has adversely impacted wet sites and camping at key habitats may occasionally disrupt wildlife use.

Water development for livestock use has generally had a beneficial impact upon other uses of the land. In some instances these developments have expanded wild horse grazing use.

The clearing, piling and burning of pinyon pine vegetation in the early 1960's for fire research data increased forage productivity and availability.

A high voltage power transmission corridor (line and road) bisects the west portion of the range. The public lands are open to mineral prospecting. These land uses have not created any adverse impacts to rangeland programs.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

ALTERNATIVE A

A. Take no action. Allow natural increase in the horse population to continue unchecked. Maintain obligated livestock use.

The environment in which the wild horses are presently found would be adversely impacted to the extreme. Unchecked the wild horse population would reach a level where their needs would exceed the inherent ability of the land resources. A sudden population reduction could be experienced, being triggered by drought conditions, extreme winter weather in the form of deep snow, or epidemics in the weakened herd. Due to the adverse conditions, wild horses most likely would move outside the Territory Boundary. Maintaining present permitted livestock would be difficult due to lack of available forage. The adverse impacts to vegetation and soil on key range areas would spread outward onto adjoining secondary range types.

The continued grazing impacts would ultimately be cause for disappearance or a greatly reduced precentage of preferred range plants.

As desirable forage plants are reduced in number by overgrazing the forage production will decrease to a point where all classes of herbivores have much less forage than needed. The most aggressive animals (wild horses) would probably utilize most of the forage and the least aggressive (deer) will suffer for lack of forage and water. The situation would not be favorable for establishment of a antelope herd. Death losses will be high for both old and young animals among all herbivores.

As plant cover was removed soil erosion would become more wide spread and evident. The lowered water table levels would intensify the xeric condition upon the landscape.

The impacts on the ecological processes would be extremely adverse. The current vegetation of mixed sagebrush and scattered perennial grasses would change to an understory of annual grasses. Shrub type range with interspersions of preferred browse plants would become more single species dominant with lesser value for foraging. The increasing numbers of wild horses would further degrade the existing habitats, which would affect many life forms. The loss of winter forage for migratory deer herds would bring low deer fawn production and a decline in deer numbers.

The playas and the shore bird habitat would be adversely affected by over-utilizaiton. Maximizing horse numbers and maintaining livestock use at the present level would present further impacts to the sage grouse population and wet meadow habitats.

A greater abundance of animals would be available as prey for the mountain lion. Prey would be young colts and other animals undergoing stress from the declining habitats. Other predator and scavenger type of wildlife would flourish during this period. Doves, many rodents and rabbits are adapted to an annual or lower successional stage so they would be enhanced by the environmental change.

Landscape characteristics would be adversely affected. Condition of the resource would be in an exhausted state as viewed by human eyes and, although abundant in number, many of the wild horses would be thin and of little substance, which is in contrast to the vision of the western mustangs.

The impact on the social welfare of the local communities would be adverse. The communities are not completely dependent on the livestock industry for economic livelihood, but those individuals with operations dependent upon public land grazing would suffer substantial financial loss. Some loss to the recreation economic base would occur through the loss of hunting.

ALTERNATIVE B

B. Reduce horse numbers. Reduce to a target level of 75 head. Long-range goal will be to manage the herd within a 60 to 90 head range by periodic capture and placement in homes through the adoption program or by disposal through other approved systems. Maintain obligated livestock use.

The environment wild horses are presently found in would be improved. Improvement by natural process on dry sites would be slow, but more rapid on meadows and riparian areas.

The ranges grazed exclusively by wild horses (no livestock) would respond dramatically. Wild horse grazing and associated impacts of uncontrolled use upon the resource which is greatest on these ranges would be reduced. In addition to reduced forage demand there would be less yearlong use which would allow improved plant health. There would be less trampling of wet soils and the close cropping and pawing habits associated with horses would be lessened. The degree of improvement and response time would be greatly determined by the time period required to reach the management level of 75 horses. Ultimately the health and vigor of all herbivores would reflect the condition of the forage plants.

Plant vigor and cover, especially of perennial plants, would increase as plant utilization and season of use would be more controlled with fewer horse numbers. Increased plant vigor & cover would improve watershed conditions.

There would be a beneficial impact on wildlife, mainly on range grazed exclusively by wild horses. Key resources such as springs, playas, meadows and riparian areas would receive significantly less grazing pressure. Cover and nesting habitats would be improved.

Current levels of livestock grazing will be managed under the principle of sustained forage yields, in association with horse grazing.

ALTERNATIVE C

C. SIGNIFIANTLY REDUCE LIVESTOCK USE

Reduce livestock grazing by 900 animal months. Do by permitting less livestock on the public lands, shortening the grazing season, or both. Maintain wild horse populations at present levels.

Reducing livestock use by 900 animal months & maintaining wild horse populations at present levels will not provide any benefit to the Pizona key range as livestock grazing was discontinued in 1973. Management priority on this range to bring grazing use into line with available forage and potential productivity of the range will not be achieved. Reducing livestock use on the Willow Creek key range of the Marietta allotment would provide some benefit, but only to that portion of the key wild horse range. Reducing live-

stock use on the east portion of the wild horse territory would provide some benefit to the winter range, but the benefit will also be achieved under Altenative B. Achieving livestock adjustments on allotments partially within the wild horse territory would be difficult due to lack of barriers for control.

Overall, less livestock grazing would be beneficial from the standpoint of maintaining plant vigor and providing for increased reproduction of desirable forage plants on some sites. Increased ground cover would occur from litter accumulation and plant growth, resulting in less movement of soil particles.

The shortening of grazing seasons would have little affect on improved plant growth as current grazing seasons are adequate. The chance for reducing effects from livestock trampling would occur, but it is basically not a problem under current livestock management programs.

Utilization of browse forage is best achieved in late fall or winter periods when herbaceous plants are dormant and/or covered with snow. Reduced livestock grazing or change in season of use on the Benton Valley range could reduce utilization of browse plants on key winter deer range with ultimate improvement to some sites. Reducing livestock use while maintaining the wild horse population at present levels would provide a low to moderate beneficial impact on specific wildlife sites outside the key wild horse range area. A reduction of present livestock use during spring or early summer on meadows would be of definite value to sage grouse. The lower the number of livestock allowed to graze on the range the greater would be the overall beneficial impact on most wildlife species by reducing competition for food and space.

Reduction of livestock would have an economic impact on the local livestock industry and the action could be considered an adverse trend for the industry in relation to grazing upon public lands. A reduction would be significant to an individual permittee, but the degree of significance would vary depending on the individuals economic and financial situation at this date and time.

Maintaining wild horse populations at the present level (150 head) would have an adverse effect on range condition, (vegetation and soil). The present wild horse population would impede improvement of the range resource where improvement is desired, regardless of reduced livestock numbers. The impacts of horse use (feeding and trampling) upon the environment is greater than cattle due to uncontrolled movements and seasons of use.

ALTERNATIVE D

D. REDUCE BOTH LIVESTOCK USE AND WILD HORSE NUMBERS.

Reduce the animal classes (domestic livestock - wild horses) 900 animal months in proportion to their present use, to arrive at

prescribed levels - livestock 953 - wild horses 1,287 animal months.

The livestock and wild horse use would be reduced by 900 animal months. Livestock reduction would be 43% (387 A.M.) while wild horse reduction would be 57% (513 A.M.) to achieve reduced animal months of use as indicated above. This level of wild horse reduction would not achieve the necessary management level which is indicative of the 1978 range survey.

While less livestock may provide some range benefits, the change would not occur where needed.

This management would enhance soil stabilization and reduce the degradation of water quality, therefore, all species, both plant and animal, that thrive under healthy habitat conditions would benefit, but not to the degree of alternative B. Most wildlife populations would reflect the improved environment with healthier animals and a small increase of numbers.

Reductions in classes, (cattle & horses) in proportion to current use would obviously enhance wildlife & ecosystem stability, but to a minor degree.

A variety of animal life in a given environment is generally considered a healthy environment. Some use by all classes rather than dominant use by one class would be most beneficial for all components making up the environment, including wildlife.

Maintaining animal numbers at prescribed levels in balance with available vegetation and water conditions would not be fully achieved.

The economic impact would be adverse upon those grazing permittees directly affected by needed adjustments in their ranch management programs. Achieving livestock adjustments on allotments partially within the wildhorse territory would be difficult due to lack of barriers for control.

ALTERNATIVE E

E. MAINTAIN LIVESTOCK USE AND WILDHORSE NUMBERS AT THE PRESENT LEVELS.

Maintaining the animals at the present levels would mainly continue the adverse impacts taking place on range used exclusively by wild horses. It would result in a continued decline in the vigor and reproduction of desirable forage plants. Some winter range with dual grazing use could under go further deterioration. Cropping plants at ground level and pawing by wild horses will continue to impact local sites.

The movement of wild horses to outer perimeters may eventually create an imbalance to the available seasonal (summer and winter) needs. Conditions of below normal precipitation and hot weather

may reduce available watering sites, concentrating larger numbers of animals on smaller range areas.

Soil erosion and pollution of local water sites will continue with a predictable ultimate result of deteriorated plant sites, in which fewer species will be able to exist, and in fewer numbers.

Continued use by livestock and wild horses at the present levels, will foster a continued decline in local habitats essential to good reproduction and survival rates of mule deer. Many other wildlife populations will suffer declines due to habitat deterioration.

The economic stability of permittee livestock operations would not be effected as viewed on a short-term basis, but it would only be a matter of time before conditions would come about, which would further reduce livestock grazing. The economical aspects of livestock grazing and management on the public lands at the same numbers and season of use as at present would be jeporadized. The economic contribution of wildlife and esthetic related values would continue to decline.

ALTERNATIVE F

F. REDUCE WILDLIFE NUMBERS, LIVESTOCK USE AND HORSE NUMBERS.

Reduce migratory deer populations by controlled hunting. Antelope populations would be allowed to become established but would be maintained at minimum levels. The rodent and rabbit populations would be reduced by poisoning. No predator control. Maintain wild horse populations and livestock use at prescribed levels.

Reduction of wildlife numbers even at the highest possible foreseeable magnitude would have only very short-term benefits, if any, in reducing overgrazing of the range. Deer can traverse very rough terrain, so they are not completely dependent on ranges used by wild horses or livestock. Some of their forage needs are obtained from the rough steep sites, but their winter needs are dependent upon access and the conditions of browse plants found on key ranges. Reducing big game numbers would have little effect upon the total range forage condition, and therefore, little effect on livestock and wild horse populations.

Watershed conditions would also be enhanced very little throughout the entire area by reducing big game populations.

Specific sites could be improved on a limited basis with an intensive poisoning program for rodents and rabbits, or by intensive big game hunting. The reduction of major wildlife populations such as deer, rodents, and rabbits in competition for available forage with livestock and wild horses would have a moderate impact on most other wildlife species. As each species has through time, become adapted to a certain way of life, that is, filling a specific ecologic niche, reduction or removal of a particular species would not greatly affect adversely those species at approximately the

same level of the food web. Direct adverse effects would be noted on those species that are in some way dependent on the species to be reduced. For example, some predator-prey relationships would be out of balance. Overall the ecologic balance would be disrupted to the benefit of some, adversely for others. Ideally, controlled hunts in areas deemed critical for proper resource management would be conducted. Anterless hunts would not only reduce interspecific competition but would result in a healthier herd. Poisoning rodents and rabbits would have only short term effects because of their rapid reproductive rates and perhaps more importantly the fact that ingression into the poisoned area by animals outside occurs quite rapidly thereby negating any beneficial impact in a short period of time.

Also no rodent or rabbit poison is specific so many non-target species would also be effected.

Direct control measures would have to be conducted by the State Fish and Game Department or U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service as the U.S. Forest Service does not have this authority.

The landscape character cannot be expected to be influenced significantly to the point of change in a vegetative type by reducing a wildlife species. The "browse line" or "clubbing" effect could be influenced somewhat in specific areas but this would alter a relatively small part of the environment.

The social welfare of local communities would be moderately impacted as fewer animals (wildlife) would be available for hunting, photography, and general observation.

The effects of maintaining wild horse numbers and livestock use at prescribed levels would be as described in Alternative D.

V. SUMMARY

MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVE B:

Reduce Wild Horse Numbers is the preferred alternative. The initial population level will be established at 75 animals with long-range management goals within the 60 to 90 head level. Alternative B will provide for management of the range resources to assure a healthy viable horse population in conjunction with livestock grazing and wildlife needs and for natural improvement to ranges now grazed exclusively by wild horses.

The wild horse use basically occurs on summer and winter ranges. There are no controls on movements so trampling and compaction of soils takes place. Early spring use is retarding new plant growth. Livestock management programs are directed to defer grazing and permit vegetation to grow and establish adequate food reserves for reproduction during the growth cycles. If wild horse grazing is not reduced, the damage to forage plants will become more pronounced with no opportunity for recovery. The close nipping of plants and pawing to expose roots is

adversely impacting range conditions. Alternative B provides for less impact to range resources from uncontrolled movement of horses.

When forage is not abundant animal populations become less thrifty and they become more prone to physical and biological functions of the environment. This process of natural control could develop unless uncontrolled grazing is significantly reduced. This "boom-bust" population cycle is not desirable due to the extreme adverse effect on the vegetation, soils & water resources. Alternative B reduces the opportunity for extreme population swings.

VI. LIST OF PREPARERS

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APPENDIX

Review of Livestock Forage Uses and Wild Horse Demands within the Territory

Land Status - Acreage

Map of Range Allotments

Land Status - Agency Administration

REVIEW OF LIVESTOCK FORAGE USES
AND
WILD HORSE DEMANDS WITHIN THE TERRITORY

Range Allotment	ANIMAL MONTHS Livestock Obligated Use	Livestock Present Use	Season	Wild Horse Demands Projected 150 Head (in AMs)
Adobe Hills Area **	0	0	12/1 - 3/31	134
Adobe Lake xx	58	58	6/1 - 10/31	15
Adobe Valley xx	540	540	6/15 - 11/15	119
Basalt	72	72	10/1 - 3/31	30
Benton Valley xx	120	120	10/1 - 2/28	50
Granite Mountain	28	28	7/1 - 10/15	5
Huntoon	200	200	12/16 - 4/15	20
Huntoon Valley	142	142	11/1 - 4/15	20
Marietta *	180	180	12/1 - 4/15	128
McBride Flat *	488	0	6/1 - 9/30	520
Pizona	168	0	6/1 - 9/30	479
Jack Spring Range	0	0	Closed	280
Total	1996	1340		1800

** Private land capacity not reported. Unfenced, but with little or no use if wildhorse numbers are reduced and controlled.

xx Private land capacity not reported. Basically no horse use due to fencing.

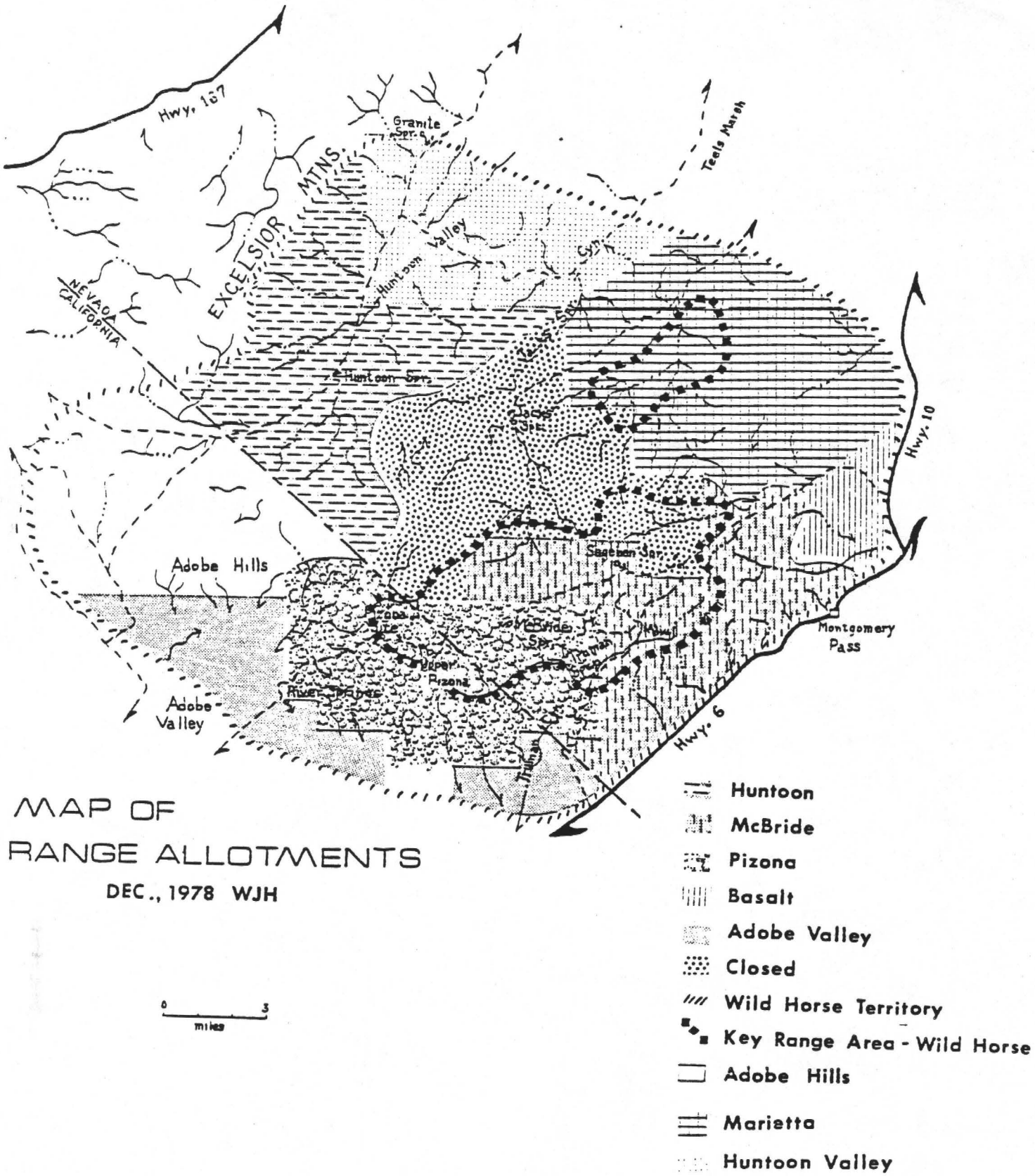
* No recent livestock grazing due to increased use by wild horses.

LAND STATUS

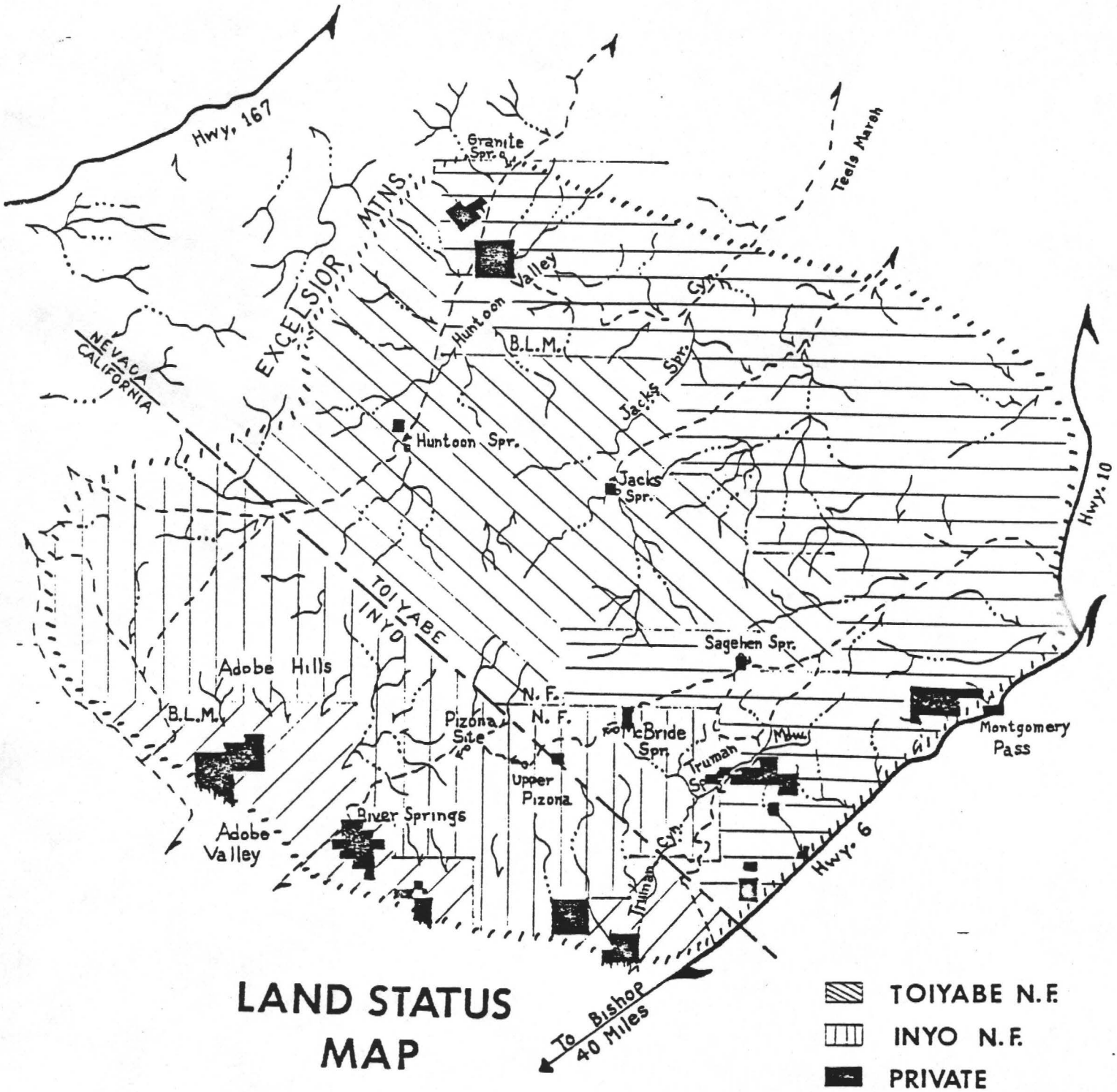
	NATIONAL FOREST		PRIVATE	
	Acres	Percent	Acres	Percent
Bridgeport District	60,782	53.98	80	0.07
Mono Lake District	51,579	45.80	160	0.15
TOTAL	112,361	99.78	240	0.22

	PUBLIC DOMAIN		PRIVATE	
	Acres	Percent	Acres	Percent
BLM Carson City District	78,820	80.5	2,500	2.5
BLM Bakersfield District	14,000	14.3	2,500	2.5
TOTAL	92,820	94.8	5,000	5.2

GOVERNMENT		PRIVATE		TOTAL	
Acres	Percent	Acres	Percent	Acres	Percent
205,181	98.68	2,740	1.32	207,921	100

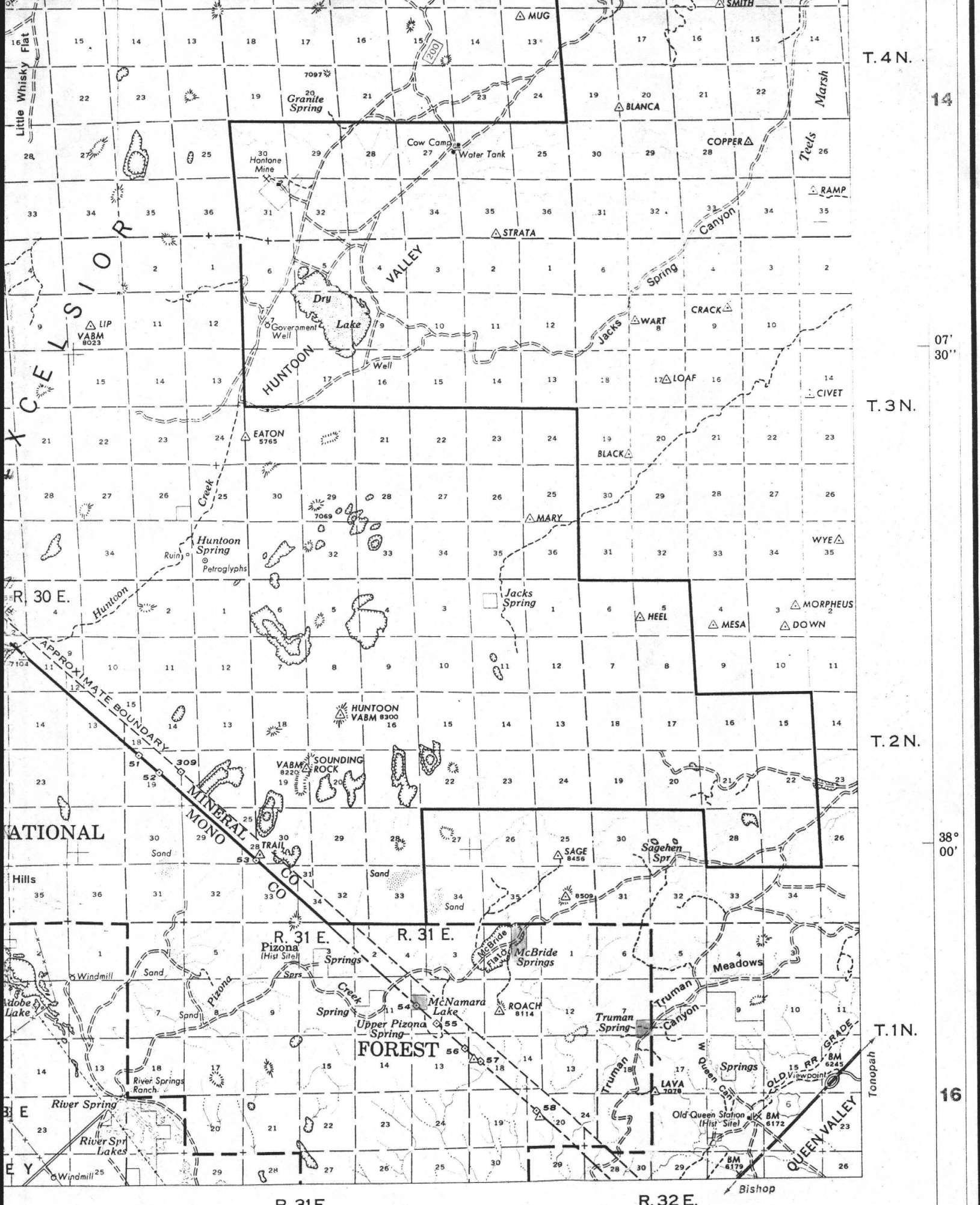


MAP OF
RANGE ALLOTMENTS
DEC., 1978 WJH

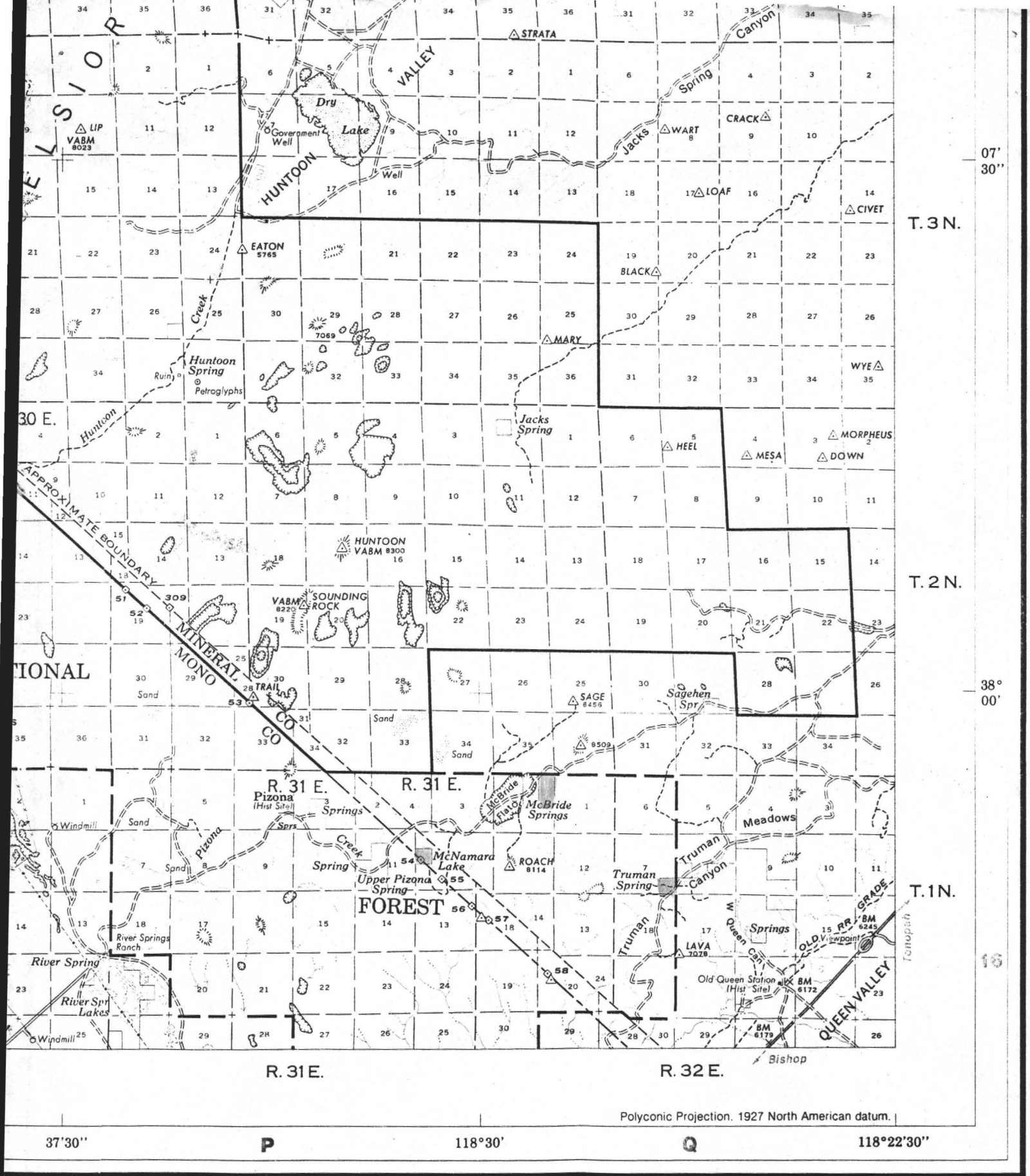


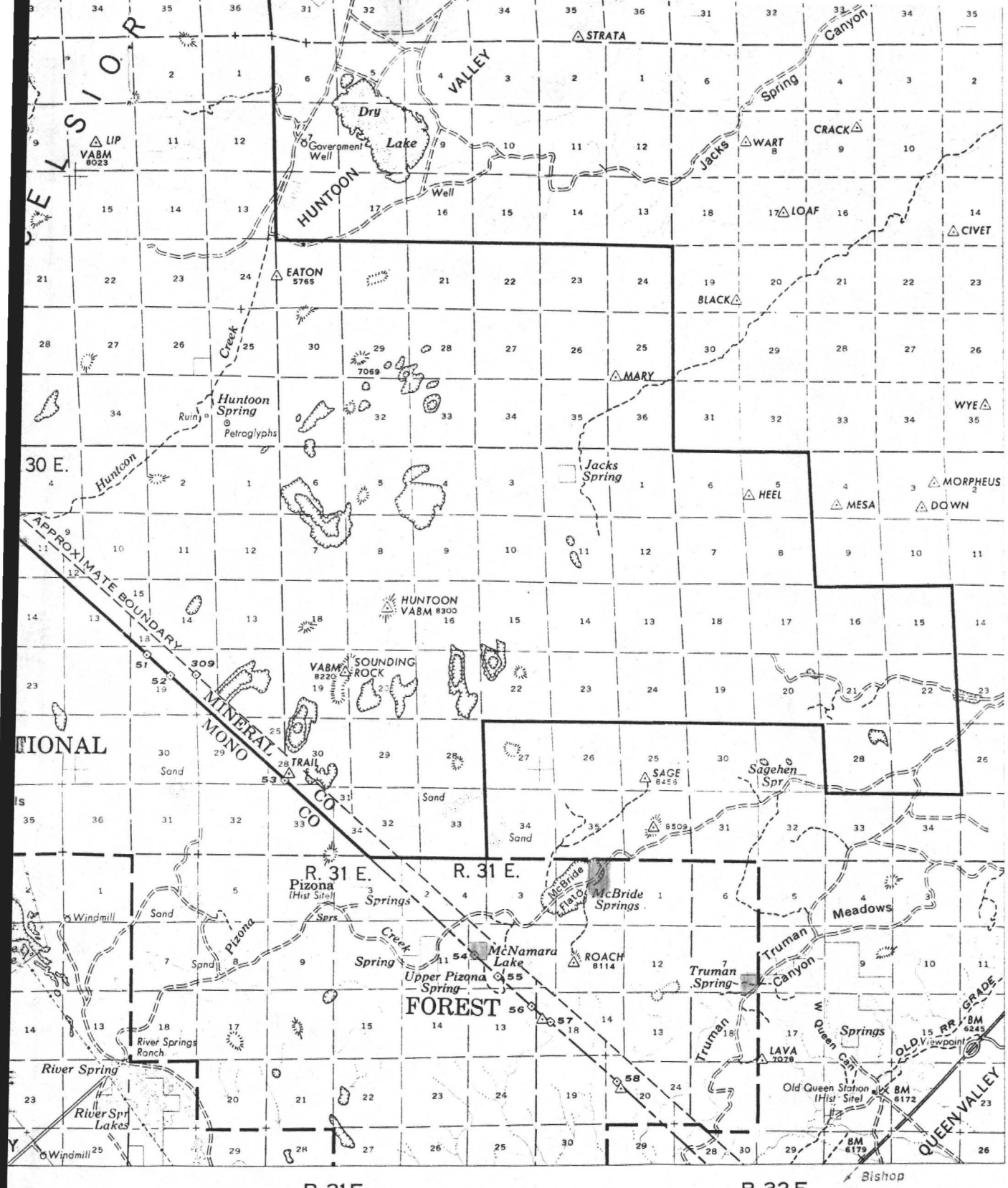
LAND STATUS MAP

DEC. 1978
WJH



Polyconic Projection. 1927 North American datum.


STRATA
VALLEY
Dry
Lake
Government Well
Well
HUNTOON
Jacks Spring Canyon
LIP VABM 8023
WART
CRACK
LOAF
CIVET
EATON 5765
BLACK
MARY
WYE
Creek
Huntoon Spring
Ruin
Petroglyphs
Huntoon
Jacks Spring
HEEL
MESA
DOWN
MORPHEUS
APPROXIMATE BOUNDARY
MINERAL CO
MONO CO
HUNTOON VABM 8300
VABM 8220
SOUNDING ROCK
TRAIL
SAGE 8456
Sagehen Spr
8509
Sand
R. 31 E.
R. 31 E.
Pizona (Hist Site)
Springs
Spr
Windmill
Pizona Creek
McBride Flat
McBride Springs
Meadows
McNamara Lake
ROACH 8114
Truman Spring
Truman Canyon
Upper Pizona Spring
FOREST
Springs
W Queen Can
River Springs Ranch
River Spring
River Spr Lakes
LAVA 7078
OLD RR GRADE
Viewpoint
BM 6245
Old Queen Station (Hist Site)
BM 6172
BM 6179
QUEEN VALLEY
Tonopah
Bishop
R. 31 E.
R. 32 E.
T. 3 N.
T. 2 N.
T. 1 N.
07' 30"
38° 00'
Polyconic Projection. 1927 North American datum.
37'30"
P
118°30'
Q
118°22'30"



Polyconic Projection. 1927 North American datum.

37'30" P 118°30' Q 118°22'30"

MONTGOMERY PASS WILD HORSE TERRITORY CRM

PRELIMINARY LIST OF "ISSUES"

Issues" important to the management of wild horses in the Montgomery Pass Wild orse Territory are:

1. What maximum wild horse population is the existing range resource capable of supporting?

2. How does the 1971 estimates of herd size and territory constrain what herd size and territory that can be considered for management?

3. To what extent is recreation/education/research activities compatible with protection and management of wild horses?

4. How will existing or deferred livestock grazing be affected?

5. Considering most available water is located on private land, how can water be secured for wild horse use?

6. What role does the mountain lion play in the ecology of the MPWHT? Is the predator-prey relationship significantly regulating the wild horse population? Is this natural control capable of fully regulating the horse population?

7. What affect would any management activities have on the cultural/historical resources or aboriginal uses of this unique area?

8. How would wildlife be affected by management of the MPWHT?

9. What is an acceptable level of competition between wild horses and livestock and wildlife?

10. How will vehicle use limitation within the MPWHT affect management options?

11. What constraints will pending Wilderness decisions have on management?

12. What types of habitat improvement would be appropriate? What areas offer potential for habitat improvement?

13. How will the wild horse population be controlled?

14. What variables of the wild horse population are important in management of MPWHT?

15. What guidelines exist for managing the MPWHT (laws, regulations, and policies)?

MONTGOMERY PASS WILD HORSE TERRITORY

PROPOSED MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

A. HABITAT OBJECTIVES:

1. Maintain sound rangeland ecological conditions, improve where appropriate.

2. Provide water for wild horses where possible to yield a better distribution of animals utilizing the habitat.

3. Ensure water availability at existing sources for wild horses, particularly water sources on private land.

4. Consider habitat improvement that improves conditions for wild horses, but does not increase management population numbers.

5. Maintain the free-roaming behavior and movement of wild horses.

6. Manage for a balance between educational-recreational-research use and objective 5. (Combination of Wild Horse Committee's stated objective and underlying wild horse protection policy direction)

B. WILD HORSE OBJECTIVES:

1. Maintain a healthy herd of animals consistent with the determined carrying capacity of the range.

2. Establish forage use levels for wild horse population through monitoring of the habitat.

3. Determine distribution and movement patterns for the wild horses.

4. Maintain demographic characteristics of the wild horse population (sex ratio, age structure, young/adult ratio, and actual use) to determine natality, mortality, and rate of increase.

5. Permit the continuing evolution of existing predator-prey relationships involving wild horses and mountain lion. (Wild Horse Subcommittee Report and Recommendations)