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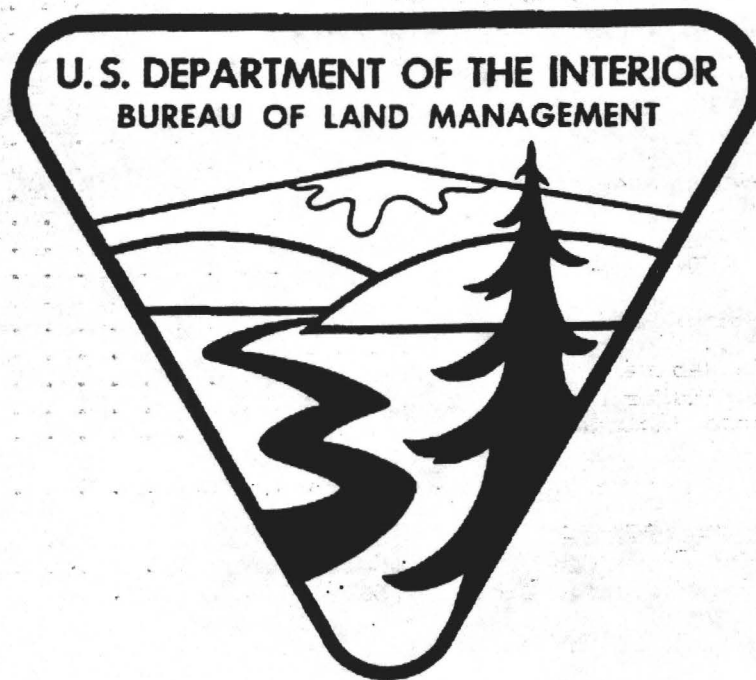
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UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
CARSON CITY DISTRICT OFFICE  
1535 HOT SPRINGS ROAD, SUITE 300  
CARSON CITY, NEVEADA 89706

# MILL CANYON ALLOTMENT EVALUATION

January, 1995



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I. INTRODUCTION

In June, 1992, the Bureau of Land Management issued its *Strategic Plan for Management of Wild Horses and Burros on Public Lands*. One of the objectives is to establish initial Appropriate Management Levels (AMLs) for all herd areas by 1995. In order to establish an AML for wild horses in the Pine Nut Herd Management Area (HMA), it is necessary to evaluate resource management within all the allotments included within the Herd Management Area. One of these is Mill Canyon Allotment.

Specifically, the purpose of this allotment evaluation is to determine if current grazing practices are consistent with attainment of Land Use Plan (LUP) and allotment specific objectives. If current grazing practices are not consistent with attainment of these objectives, appropriate changes in management will be identified and implemented. The allotment is classified as category C. The evaluation period is from 1982 to 1993.

Mill Canyon allotment was placed in the "C"<sup>1</sup> category because ninety-one percent of the area is categorized as having low production potential. Also, seventy-one percent of the acreage is in an early seral stage<sup>2</sup>, seventeen percent is classified as unsuitable, with only twelve percent classified in a mid seral stage. This is a sheep allotment controlled by the Borda Land and Sheep Company.

II. INITIAL STOCKING LEVEL

A. Livestock Use

1. Preference (AUMs)

ALLOTMENT NUMBER	ALLOTMENT NAME	SEASON OF USE	% PUBLIC LAND	AUMS
03563	MILL CANYON	1/1 TO 1/31 4/1 TO 5/31	100	2049

2. Other Information

A total of 2049 AUMs were adjudicated, April 9, 1962, to the Borda Brothers. The Borda Brothers control the grazing permits in two other allotments besides Mill Canyon.

The allotment is located approximately ten miles northwest of Wabuska, Nevada and approximately five miles southwest of Fort Churchill. It forms a portion of the northeasternmost boundary of the Walker Resource Area. It is bounded on the

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<sup>1</sup> "Custodial" - manage in a custodial capacity, while protecting existing resource values.

<sup>2</sup> Ecological status is use-dependent and defined as the present state of the vegetation and soil protection of an ecological site in relation to the potential natural community for that site. Potential natural community is a biotic community that would become established if all successional sequences were completed without interference by man under present environmental conditions. Four seral stage classes are identified with corresponding numerical ratings. These are 0 -25 (early seral), 26-50 (mid seral), 51-75 (late seral), and 76-100 (potential natural community).

west by Rawe Peak and Clifton allotments and on the south by Churchill Canyon allotment. (Refer to Map No. 1, Appendix A).

Documented improvements within the allotment are:

<u>JOB NUMBER</u>	<u>NAME</u>	<u>COMPLETION DATE</u>
0035	Churchill Spring Drift Fence	1943
4269	Bull Canyon Guzzler	1971
4367	Bull Canyon Guzzler No. 2	1974
4438	Mill Canyon Guzzler No. 2	1975
4483	Mill Canyon Guzzler No. 3	1976
4484	Mill Canyon Guzzler No. 4	1976
6058	Mill Canyon Guzzler No. 1	1971
6073	Bull Canyon Guzzler No. 3	1971
6177	OSA Guzzler No. 1	1984
6178	OSA Guzzler No. 2	1984
6325	Mill Canyon Stock Trail	1985

Locations are shown on Map No. 2, Appendix A.

Public land in the allotment totals 19,064 acres.

**B. Wild Horse Use**

**1. Management Level**

The LUP identified 303 AUMs as the existing demand for wild horses in the allotment. The AML for the Pine Nut HMA will be based on stocking levels for wild horses determined for all the allotments within the HMA. The stocking level for Mill Canyon Allotment will be determined through the analysis of monitoring data contained within this evaluation.

**2. Herd Management Area within the Allotment**

The allotment contains ten percent of the Pine Nut HMA acreage. The western half of the allotment constitutes the majority of the HMA (Refer to Map No. 3, Appendix A).

**C. Wildlife Use**

**1. Mule Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*).**

**a. Existing Demand**

Existing demand for mule deer identified in the LUP is 61 AUMs.

**b. Key and Crucial Areas**

There are no identified key or crucial mule deer areas in the allotment. The majority of the allotment contains winter mule deer range.

**2. Wildlife - General**

Located in the northwestern section of the allotment is a sage grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) use area. (Refer to Map No. 4, Appendix A).

Upland and non-game wildlife occur throughout the allotment. Common furbearing species are coyote (*Canis latrans*), bobcat (*Felis rufus*), badger (*Taxidea taxus*), mountain lion (*Felis concolor*), and kit fox (*Vulpes macrotis*).

Upland game species include mountain cottontail (*Sylvilagus nuttallii*), desert cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*), mourning dove (*Zenaidura macroura*), California quail (*Lophortyx californicus*), and chukar (*Alectoris chukar*).

Raptors inhabiting the allotment include the prairie falcon (*Falco mexicanus*), red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*), golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), and American kestrel (*Falco sparverius*).

Also present are a host of small mammals, birds, and reptiles.

### III. ALLOTMENT PROFILE

#### A. Description

##### 1. Topography

The area is best characterized as a mountainous plateau. Elevations range from approximately 4720 feet to 6640 feet. Two major canyons, Mill and Bull dissect the area with the latter forming the majority of the northwestern allotment boundary.

##### 2. Soils/Range Sites

The soils in this allotment are typical of the Western Great Basin and exhibit wide ranges in depth, drainage class, percent surficial and subsurface rock fragments, pH, and other diagnostic soil properties. For a more detailed description, refer to the Reno Grazing Environmental Impact Statement (1982), Appendix E, Section 1, pages 5-25 to 5-39.

Accelerated erosion within the allotment is mostly confined to small areas adjacent to seeps/springs, shallow/lithic soils and steep slopes. A complete description of range sites can be found in the Lyon County Soil Survey compiled by the Soil Conservation Service. Field work for the soil survey was done between 1968 and 1979.

Statements in the document are based on information from 1980. The primary soils and range sites in Mill Canyon are:

<u>SMU<sup>3</sup></u>	<u>SOIL DESCRIPTION</u>	<u>RANGE SITE</u>
202	Cleaver gravelly sandy loam, 2-4% slopes	27-18 (Gravelly Loam 4-8 precipitation zone)
204	Cleaver stony sandy loam, 4-15% slopes	27-18 (Gravelly Loam 4-8 precipitation zone)
209	Cleaver association	27-18 (Gravelly Loam 4-8 precipitation zone)
292	Fallon fine sandy loam	27-18 (Gravelly Loam 4-8 precipitation zone)
293	Fallon fine sandy loam, frequently flooded	27-18 (Gravelly Loam 4-8 precipitation zone)
295	Fallon sandy loam, ponded	27-1 (Wetland, 4-8 precipitation zone)
311	Fulstone cobbly loam, 2-8% slopes	26-25 (Claypan 8-10 precipitation zone)
312	Fulstone cobbly loam, 8-15% slopes	26-25 (Claypan 8-10 precipitation zone)
371	Hylloc-Ister association	26-05 (Loamy 12-14 precipitation zone) Woodland Site
372	Hylloc-Ister-Rock Outcrop association	26-05 (Loamy 12-14 precipitation zone) Woodland Site
411	Lapon extremely stony loam, 15-30% slope	27-20 (Shallow Claypan 8-10 precip. zone)
412	Lapon-Rubble-Rock outcrop association	27-20 (Shallow Claypan 8-10 precip. zone)
441	Lunder very cobbly loam, 2-15% slopes	26-23 (Claypan 10-12 precipitation zone)
651	Theon very gravelly sandy loam, 8-3-% slopes	27-19 (Stoney Slope 4-8 precipitation zone)
653	Theon-Lapon-Olac association	27-19 (Stoney Slope 4-8 precipitation zone) 27-20 (Shallow Claypan 8-10 precip. zone) 26-25 (Claypan 8-10 precipitation zone)
702	Veta very gravelly sandy loam, flooded	26-34 (Wash 8-10 precipitation zone)
711	Vylach-Weena association	27-26 (Eroded Slope 4-8 precipitation zone)
751	Malpais gravelly loamy sand, 2-8% slopes	27-18 (Gravelly Loam 4-8 precipitation zone)
754	Malpais complex, 2-15% slopes	27-18 (Gravelly Loam 4-8 precipitation zone)
831	Ister-Hylloc-Lunder association	26-05 (Loamy 12-14 precipitation zone) 26-23 (Claypan 10-12 precipitation zone) Woodland Site

### 3. Water Resources

Water is a limiting factor in the allotment.

On the western border of the allotment, Greg's Cabin Spring provides water for a meadow area. This water source services a fractional part of the allotment. A portion of the meadow has been fenced for protection from grazing. Within the enclosure, the area is considered to be in proper functioning condition<sup>4</sup>. The wet area and spring located outside of the enclosure has been classified as functional at risk due to excessive use by wild horses.

<sup>3</sup> Soil Mapping Unit - this refers to areas of similar characteristics delineated in the soil survey.

<sup>4</sup> Proper Functioning Condition, as defined in Technical Reference 1737-9 (1993), Riparian Area Management, *Process for Assessing Proper Functioning Condition*, is when adequate vegetation, landform, or large woody debris is present to dissipate stream energy associated with high waterflows, thereby reducing erosion and improving water quality; filter sediment, capture bedload, and aid floodplain development; improve flood-water retention and ground-water recharge; develop ponding and channel characteristics to provide the habitat and the water depth, duration, and temperature necessary for fish production, waterfowl breeding, and other uses; and support greater biodiversity. The functioning condition of riparian-wetland areas is a result of interaction among geology, soil, water, and vegetation.

Located directly north of Greg's Cabin Spring is an area known as Pony Meadows. A spring provides water to this meadow and was developed in conjunction with a mining operation. Wild horses are utilizing the area. Riparian functionality was not assessed. Due to the proximity to Greg's Cabin and the conditions that are present, it is safe to say that this area would be classified as functional at risk.

Several other springs are shown on topographic maps. Information is not available as to their current status (i.e. flow/condition) due to limited accessibility. A low-lying area which is located on private land, in Township 15 North, Range 23 East, Section 4, collects snow melt and overland flow from thunderstorms. In normal years it provides water throughout most of the summer months. There are four sage grouse leks in this area.

#### 4. Vegetation

The allotment is dominated by low sagebrush (*Artemisia arbuscula*). This vegetation type is typically located on the lower hill and plateau country. Greasewood (*Sarcobatus vermiculatus baileyi*)/shadscale (*Atriplex confertifolia*) areas are located primarily on the lower reaches of fans adjacent to Bull and Churchill canyons. Pinyon (*Pinus monophylla*)/big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata sp.*) is located in the western part of the allotment at higher elevations.

#### 5. Key Species

##### a. Uplands

No key areas have been established that identify specific key species. Important to wild horses are grasses. Browse species including bitterbrush, which is found among the pinyon/big sagebrush vegetative type, are important for mule deer and sheep. They utilize similar forage. Cheatgrass is important for chukar. Meadow vegetation is important for sage grouse because of the production of insects and succulent forage, particularly dandelion (*Taraxacum sp.*).

##### b. Riparian

Vegetation located in and around water sources is composed of willow (*Salix sp.*), rushes (*Juncus sp.*), wild rose (*Rosa sp.*) and sedges (*Carex sp.*). Watercress (*Nasturtium officinale*) is also present in the shady areas where pooling and/or overland flow occurs.

#### 6. Threatened and Endangered Species

##### a. Vegetation

There are no threatened, endangered, or candidate plant species known to inhabit the allotment.

b. Wildlife

Category 2<sup>5</sup>, Candidate species, as defined by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, that may occur in the allotment are the pygmy rabbit (*Brachylagus idahoensis*) and the spotted bat (*Euderma maculatum*). While they are not listed as threatened or endangered, in order to avoid further jeopardizing their existence, the Bureau treats candidate species the same as threatened or endangered. No other threatened, endangered, or sensitive animals are known to inhabit the allotment.

The spotted bat spends daylight hours and reproduces in caves, cliffs and talus slopes. It generally feeds on flying insects in the vicinity of juniper grasslands and tall sagebrush. The pygmy rabbit reproduces and feeds in sagebrush/grasslands and riparian habitats. Since these habitats occur throughout the Pine Nut Range, there is a possibility that both species occur in the allotment.

B. Allotment Specific Objectives

Objectives taken from the LUP are as follows:

1. Short Term

- a. Provide for 2049 AUMs of livestock use.
- b. Prevent deterioration of condition.
- c. Maintain habitat for present mule deer use.
- d. Horses remaining after capture will be maintained for viable herd compatible with other resources.

2. Long Term

- a. With the exception of wild horses, maintain existing situation through custodial management.
- b. Manage wildlife habitat to fair or good condition for a long term goal of providing forage for reasonable numbers of big game.
- c. Protect and improve riparian areas to a good or better condition class.
- d. Develop and implement the Pine Nut Herd Management Area Plan (HMAP) for wild horses.
- e. If monitoring programs indicate there are significant resource problems developing, the allotment could be added to Category I (Classification for Intensive Management).

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<sup>5</sup> Category 2: Taxa for which existing information indicates that the listing may be warranted, but for which substantial biological information to support a proposed rule is lacking.



- f. Continue rangeland and watershed monitoring to determine if management objectives are being met and what future adjustments in grazing use are necessary.

IV. MANAGEMENT EVALUATION

A. Actual Use

1. Livestock

YEAR	ACTUAL USE (AUMS)	LICENSED USE (AUMS)
1993		NON USE
1992		NON USE
1991		NON USE
1990		321
1989		NON USE
1988		NON USE
1987	300	
1986	NON USE	
1985	NON USE	
1984	307	
1983	153	
1982	240	

Scarcity of roads, decline in the condition of existing roads, and lack of water severely limited use in Mill Canyon during the evaluation period.

2. Wild Horses

Aerial census data was collected in 1986, 1989, 1990, 1992, and 1993 for wild horses in the Pine Nut HMA. The most current information (1993) showed 95 wild horses (1140 AUMs) within the HMA boundary in Mill Canyon allotment. Horses were also counted on the boundary and outside of the HMA. With the exception of a small area in the southwestern portion of the allotment, which received no use, the area contained within the HMA received heavy use in 1993 by wild horses.

3. Wildlife

The allotment is contained within Nevada Division of Wildlife Management Unit 291, Pinenut Range, Carson City, Douglas and Lyon Counties. Mule deer population estimates for this unit provided by the Nevada Division of Wildlife are as follows:

1993	932 head
1992	1311 head
1990	942 head

Allotment specific information provided by the Nevada Division of Wildlife is as follows:

	<u>NUMBER</u>	<u>(AUMs)</u>	<u>%BLM</u>	<u>BLM AUMs</u>
*Migrants	45	22.5	98.9	22.3
*Winter Residents	30	45.0		<u>44.5</u>
			(Total)	66.8

LUP identified 61 AUMs Existing Demand

\* Based on NDOW 1991 population estimates, and predicted distribution.

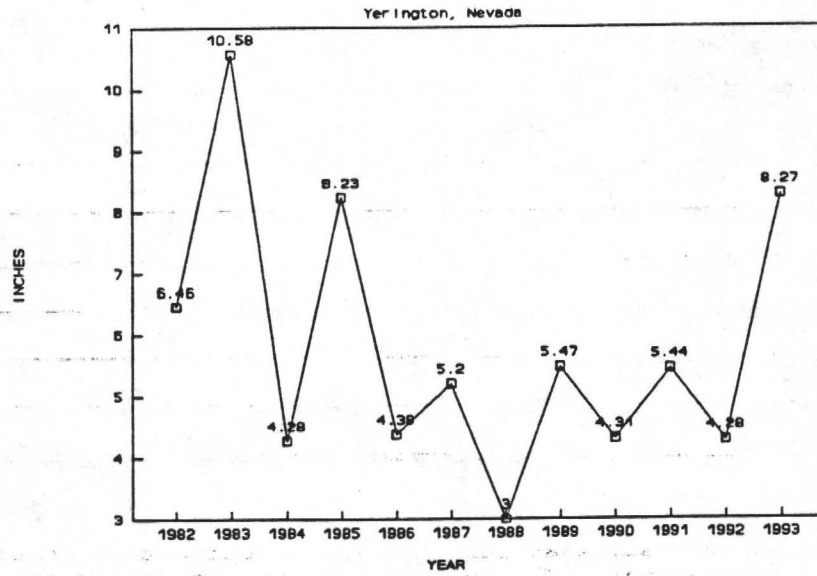
Sage Grouse surveys, conducted in April 1993, showed that a total of 65 birds were counted on 6 leks, all within the Mill Canyon allotment.

B. Precipitation

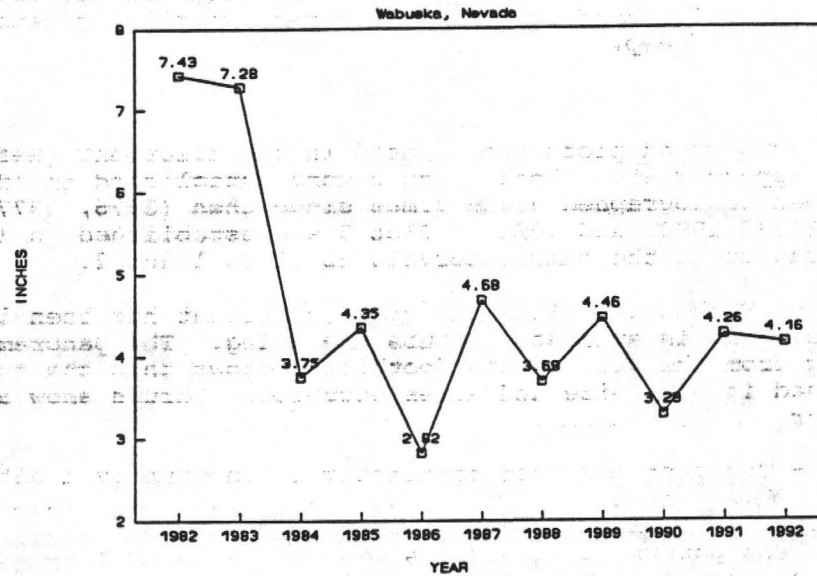
Yerington and Wabuska, Nevada are the closest available weather stations to the allotment. The mean annual precipitation is 5.38 and 4.55 inches respectively. Depending upon the path, intensity, and duration of storms, the Pine Nut Mountains and the Sierra Nevada can influence precipitation amounts. Therefore the data presented provides the reader with an idea of what may have occurred over the evaluation period. The higher elevations of the allotment generally receive larger amounts of precipitation than what is recorded at the stations.

Data presented in Yerington for 1988, 1990, and 1991 is incomplete, as is the 1991 data for Wabuska. One or more months of data must be absent for the information to be considered incomplete. In the case of these two stations, one month of data was missing for each year.

### ANNUAL PRECIPITATION



### ANNUAL PRECIPITATION



C. Use Pattern Mapping

Use pattern mapping data was gathered in 1993 (Refer to Map No. 5, Appendix A). Data collected was specific to wild horses. Results are as follows:

UTILIZATION CLASS	ACRES IN HMA BY CLASS	ACRES OUTSIDE HMA BY CLASS
SLIGHT	0	0
LIGHT	69	262
MODERATE	0	786
HEAVY	7090	2736
SEVERE	181	41
TOTAL	7340	3825

Significant use is being made outside the HMA boundary by wild horses. The low-lying Private Land in T 15 N, R 23 E, Section 4 appears to be a somewhat reliable water source throughout a large portion of the year. The location allows the horses to range long distances in all directions, making a complete search for forage. This would explain the amount of heavy use being made in Rawe Peak allotment, which lies west of this water source.

Sheep use has been negligible. Of the twelve years of data presented, four years had sheep use. Average use was 250 AUMs or 12.20% of active preference. No use pattern mapping data was recorded for sheep.

D. Trend

Three photo trend plots are located in the allotment (Refer to Map No. 6, Appendix A). Plots 1 and 2 were established in 1975 and have been photographed seven times since then (1976, 1977, 1979, 1980, 1987, 1990, and 1993). Plot 3 was established in 1976 and photographed at the same intervals as plots 1 and 2.

Plot 1 - Within the plot, the grass component has been lost. Soil movement is evident. Shrubs are dying. The panoramic view, looking from the plot to the foothills, shows that the trees increased in both size and acres occupied. Shrubs show a decline in vigor.

Plot 2 - The plot has been completely taken over by a bitterbrush plant. The plant is in high vigor. A pinyon tree, adjacent to the plot, is beginning to grow above and over the bitterbrush plant. The panoramic view shows the shrubs haven't declined in vigor as dramatically as those at Plot 1 but still give the appearance of a reduction in size.

Plot 3 - Within the plot, both grasses and shrubs have declined in vigor. Soil movement is evident. The panoramic view reflects a downward trend in the plant community.

E. Range Survey Data

An ocular reconnaissance survey was conducted between 1956 and

1961 in the Como Planning Unit by the Bureau. This resulted in the establishment of the current active preference mentioned at the beginning of this document (II. A. 1.).

**F. Ecological Condition**

Information provided in the LUP showed the allotment as having 2,325 acres in mid seral, 13,456 acres in early seral, and 3,283 acres as unsuitable. Trend was downward.

**G. Wildlife Habitat**

The allotment contains mule deer winter range. There is no key mule deer range. The central portion of the allotment has been classified as a sage grouse use area.

**H. Riparian/Fisheries Habitat**

Refer to Section III. 3. for a discussion of riparian areas in the allotment. No fisheries habitat exists within the allotment.

**I. Wild Horse Habitat**

The western portion of the allotment is contained within the Pine Nut HMA. Wild horse use is prevalent over this entire area. Use is also occurring outside of the HMA. As resource conditions decline, particularly the frequency of grass species, use can be expected to spread further eastward outside of the HMA.

**V. CONCLUSIONS**

**A. Short Term**

**1. Provide for 2049 AUMs of livestock use.**

Livestock use has been negligible during the evaluation period. Lack of naturally occurring water sources, minimal snowpack during the authorized season of use, and limited access for water hauling are responsible for this restricted use. Low sagebrush, the primary forage species for sheep in the allotment, is the dominant vegetation type. There is adequate forage available for the sheep.

To date the objective has not been met. With a modification in the season of use and the development of alternate water sources, the objective can be achieved.

**2. Prevent deterioration of condition.**

There appears to be a decline in ecological condition. This is supported by interpretation of photo trend plots which show a loss of plants and/or a decline in vigor. All of the plots are located within wild horse use areas.

For the purpose of evaluating this objective, browse species and grasses will be discussed in association with sheep, mule deer and wild horses.

Sheep are a herded animal. Their use can be tightly controlled. Areas of use can be shifted on a yearly basis, ensuring that no one area is grazed at the same time in consecutive years. The amount of time that the animals stay

in contact with the plants during the active growing period can also be controlled. These actions meet the physiological needs of the plants and ensures a sustainable, healthy forage base for both sheep and mule deer.

Wild horses, on the other hand, have been utilizing the same areas, the same plants, at the same time, year after year. Plants are being bitten (eaten) more than once during the growing season. The cumulative effect of this type of grazing is loss of vigor and ultimately, death. The physiological needs of the plants are not being met.

This objective has not been met.

**3. Maintain habitat for present mule deer use.**

Although ecological condition appears to be downward based on soil movement and the loss of vegetation, it also appears that the habitat for mule deer remains adequate. The LUP stated an objective of maintaining the existing 61 AUMs of use by mule deer. The most current information (1991) provided by NDOW projected that 66.8 AUMs of mule deer use was occurring.

Based upon this information, the objective is being met.

**4. Horses remaining after capture will be maintained for viable herd compatible with other resources.**

Significant numbers of wild horses were removed from the HMA in 1984, 1985, and 1986. The population has increased to such a degree that the resultant resource conditions associated with this number of horses is not compatible with other resources.

Uncontrolled year round use, by any grazing animal, will lead to deterioration in the conditions of rangelands, in this case, deer winter range. Plants, generally, do not have the opportunity to replenish root reserves and recover vigor. Reproduction potential is extremely limited. The result, as evidenced by numerous examples throughout the west, is a decline or total loss of preferred vegetation and soil movement. This is supported by photo plot interpretation.

Wild horse use pattern mapping data, collected in 1993, is indicative of a similar scenario that has existed during the evaluation period. Sandberg bluegrass (*Poa secunda*) is the major forage species available to the wild horses. This plant does not produce abundant forage but is being utilized heavily. Low sage flower tops are also being used but not to any great extent. Away from the HMA (eastward), squirreltail becomes a more frequent component, with Thurbers needlegrass (*Stipa thurberana*) also showing up in the plant community. Professional observations indicate that the existing wild horse numbers are adversely impacting the vegetation. The area is in an early seral stage. The wild horses are in poor condition.

The objective is not being met.

B. Long Term

1. With the exception of wild horses, maintain existing situation through custodial management.

Ecological status, based on professional judgement, remains in an early seral stage. Livestock use, when occurring during the evaluation period, has been insignificant. Wildlife use has remained constant and at a low level.

The objective has been met.

2. Manage wildlife habitat to fair or good condition for a long term goal of providing forage for reasonable numbers of big game.

A habitat condition rating for mule deer winter range has not been established, primarily due to the allotments custodial categorization. The objective of maintaining the existing demand (61 AUMs) identified in the LUP was a target level. This figure was to be used for future analysis/evaluations. The 1991 data provided by NDOW showed 66.8 AUMs of use by mule deer which slightly exceeds the target level.

It would appear that habitat condition is not presently a limiting factor. The scarcity of water may be a limiting factor, even in winter.

Given the existing situation of year-round use by wild horses, heavy use levels, especially during the critical growth period, and the changing plant community, it is apparent that in the long term, habitat condition will become a limiting factor. As the grasses disappear, browse will be favored. Finally, the browse species will begin to disappear.

The objective is being met but it may be only in the short term.

3. Protect and improve riparian areas to a good or better condition class.

For the purpose of evaluating this objective, a parallel must be established between terminology used in the past and the newer terms associated with riparian areas. Good condition can be equated to a properly functioning riparian area. Functional -at risk<sup>6</sup> areas are in a functioning condition but an existing soil, water, or vegetation attribute makes them susceptible to degradation. This can be equated with the fair condition class. Poor condition riparian areas can be considered as non-functional.

The meadow area serviced by Greg's Cabin Spring has been partially fenced. The spring source and remaining meadow area are unfenced and classified as functional at risk. Riparian vegetation and the insect population associated with the vegetation remains important to the sage grouse.

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<sup>6</sup> Defined in Technical Reference 1737-9 (1993), RIPARIAN AREA MANAGEMENT, Process for Assessing Proper Functioning Condition, USDI.

A portion of Pony Meadows is classified as properly functioning. The balance of the area is functional -at risk and is being adversely affected by wild horses. The water was developed for use in conjunction with mining operations. The current status of the water rights precludes the Bureau from taking any action to protect the area.

The other springs identified on the topographic maps have not been evaluated as to water availability and condition due to limited access. Since they are located within the Herd Management Area, it can be surmised that they are either functional - at risk or non-functional.

For the most part, this portion of the objective has not been met.

4. Develop and implement the Pine Nut Herd Management Area Plan (HMAP) for wild horses.

Issuance of this document for public review/input initiates a process that will ultimately result in the development of the Pine Nut HMAP.

Steps are being taken to meet this objective.

5. If monitoring programs indicate there are significant resource problems developing, the allotment could be reclassified to Category I.

Use levels, by existing numbers of wild horses, both inside and outside of the HMA, are of concern. Reclassifying the categorization to an "I", however, won't provide any additional alternatives or accelerate changes beyond what the existing process allows.

Steps are being taken to meet this objective.

6. Continue rangeland and watershed monitoring to determine if management objectives are being met and what future adjustments in grazing use are necessary.

Monitoring intensity, due to Custodial classification, has been limited. Aerial census of wild horses, actual use for livestock, use pattern mapping, and continuation of photographing the trend plots have all been completed during the evaluation period. Riparian functionality has also been evaluated.

The results of this monitoring data has indicated that adjustments in management are needed.

The objective has been met.

## VI. TECHNICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. Wild Horse/Potential Stocking Level

The factor most affecting the allotments ecological condition is year-round use by the existing population of wild horses. In order to maintain and protect resources and provide a viable habitat for all grazing/browsing animals, it is necessary to determine the potential stocking level for wild horses. The



calculations, contained in Appendix II, reflect the potential stocking level for Mill Canyon allotment. The potential stocking level determined for this allotment is 296 AUMs.

The area being utilized by wild horses is lacking in abundance and diversity of grass species. This is forcing wild horses to range out further for preferred forage. It is also resulting in the use of browse species by wild horses, although currently this use is limited. Sheep and mule deer prefer browse species. When green grasses and forbs are present in the spring, all grazing/browsing animals present select these forage types. There is potential for dietary overlap and competition for the forage but on a very limited basis.

If the grazing permit were to be transferred, it would most likely be converted to a cattle operation. The reason being, wool subsidies are being eliminated, thereby reducing the profitability in the sheep industry. Churchill Canyon recently changed hands and the allotment was converted from sheep to cattle. Cattle and wild horses are direct competitors for forage. For this reason, the calculations for the potential stocking level were split evenly between wild horses and livestock.

#### B. Livestock/Potential Stocking Level

The allotment has had very limited use from sheep during the evaluation period. This has primarily been due to a lack of permanent waters and the continuing drought that the region has been experiencing. The existing season of use (1/1 to 1/31 and 4/1 to 5/31) limits the amount of time that snow, when present, can be used to more fully utilize the allotment. Due to the limited dietary overlap between sheep and wild horses and minimal use of browse species by wild horses, maintaining the active preference for sheep is practical. It is therefore recommended that the active preference of 2049 sheep AUMs be retained for the Mill Canyon Allotment.

In lieu of the late spring grazing (4/1 to 5/31), it would be more beneficial to the resource to authorize grazing from 11/1 to 3/31. This would allow grazing during the plants dormant period, with the exception of possible early growth that can occur in the month of March.

It also provides a greater opportunity to take advantage of snow when it is available. Use can potentially be spread out over a greater portion of the allotment, thereby reducing the possibility of utilizing an area during the same period of time, year after year. This five month period provides the permittee with flexibility.

It is therefore recommended that the season of use for sheep within the allotment be adjusted from 1/1 - 1/31 and 4/1 - 5/31 to 11/1 - 3/31.

In the event that the permit is transferred and a conversion from sheep to cattle is requested, it is necessary to establish a potential stocking level for cattle. The AUM figure for the area outside of the HMA is based upon information gathered during the Ocular Reconnaissance Survey's from 1956 to 1961 in the Como Unit by the Bureau of Land Management.

The acreage contained within the HMA that would receive dual use

totals approximately 7340 acres. The potential stocking level for wild horses in this allotment has been established at 296 AUMs. This is based upon a use level of 27.5%, which is one-half of the desired 55% AUL. Therefore, the potential stocking level for cattle within the HMA will be 296 AUMs. The potential stocking level outside of the HMA, based upon the range survey, totals 480 AUMs. This results in a total potential stocking level of 776 AUMs for cattle.

It is therefore recommended that in the event the allotment is converted from sheep to cattle use, the active preference for cattle shall be 776 AUMs. It is further recommended that the season of use will run from 11/1 to 3/31.

In either case, whether sheep or cattle are utilizing the allotment, the private land that encompasses the low-lying area is of concern because of its proximity to sage grouse leks and being within the HMA. It provides water and produces riparian forage around the shoreline. The riparian vegetation and associated insect populations are important to the sage grouse. The most critical period is in the spring. For this reason, a general grazing pattern needs to be implemented for the allotment that will allow for protection of the riparian zone and also reduce competition for the forage.

It is therefore recommended that the HMA portion of the allotment, as identified on Map No. 3, Appendix A, be available for use anytime between 11/1 to 2/28. After 2/28, all use will be shifted outside of this area.

C. Water Rights

Water rights at Pony Meadows were adjudicated for the purposes of mining and milling. It appears that the mining operation is no longer active.

It is recommended that the Bureau pursue obtaining water rights for the beneficial use of wild horses.

This will provide the opportunity to fully protect the water source and associated riparian area.

D. Modification of Objective(s)

With the emphasis on riparian management and new definitions associated with assessing riparian areas, it is recommended that the following objective be changed.

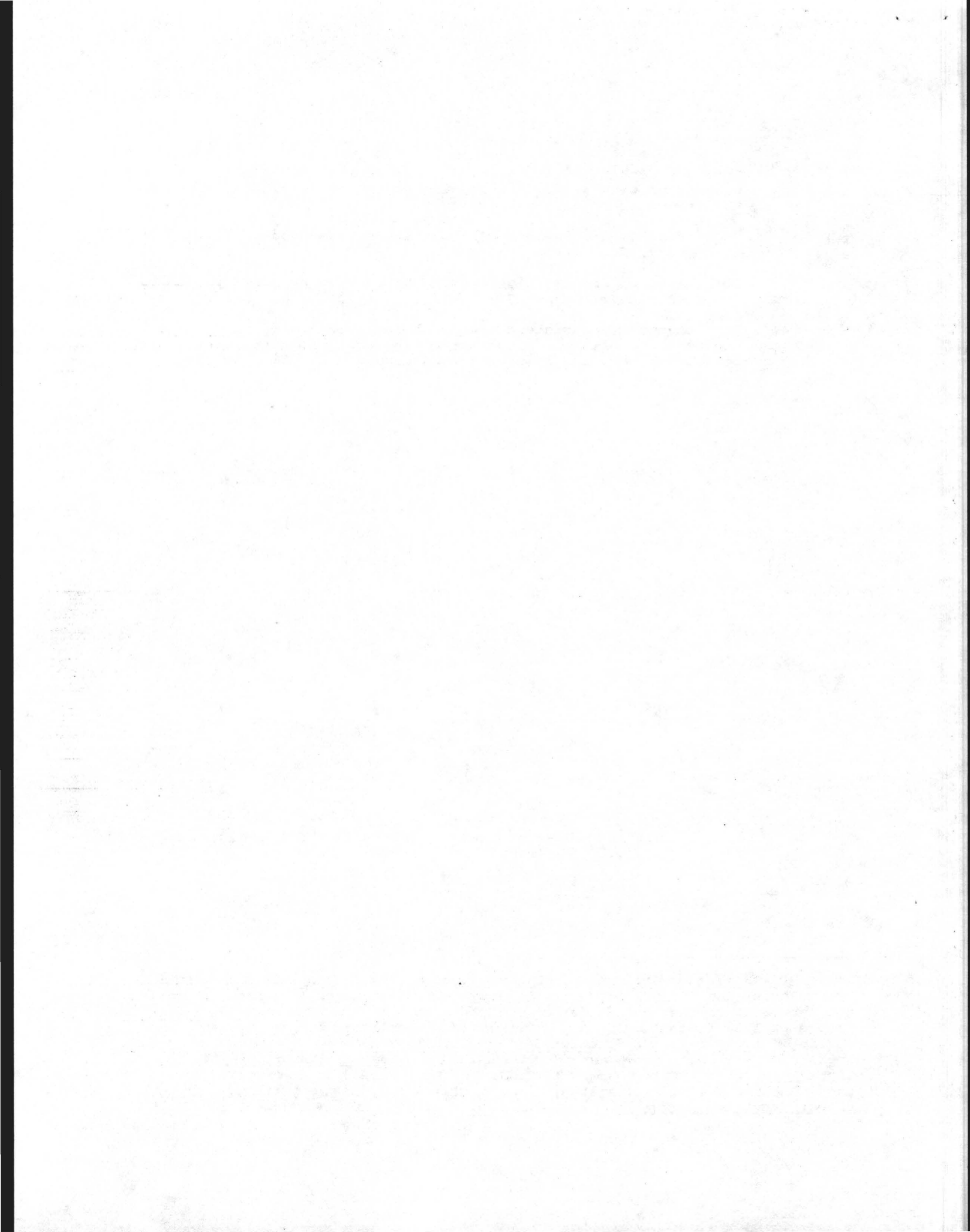
**FROM: Protect and improve riparian areas to a good or better condition class.**

**TO: Protect and improve riparian areas to a proper functioning condition.**

This change is consistent with with the Bureau-wide mandate to "restore and maintain riparian-wetland areas so that seventy-five percent or more are in proper functioning condition by 1997<sup>7</sup>.

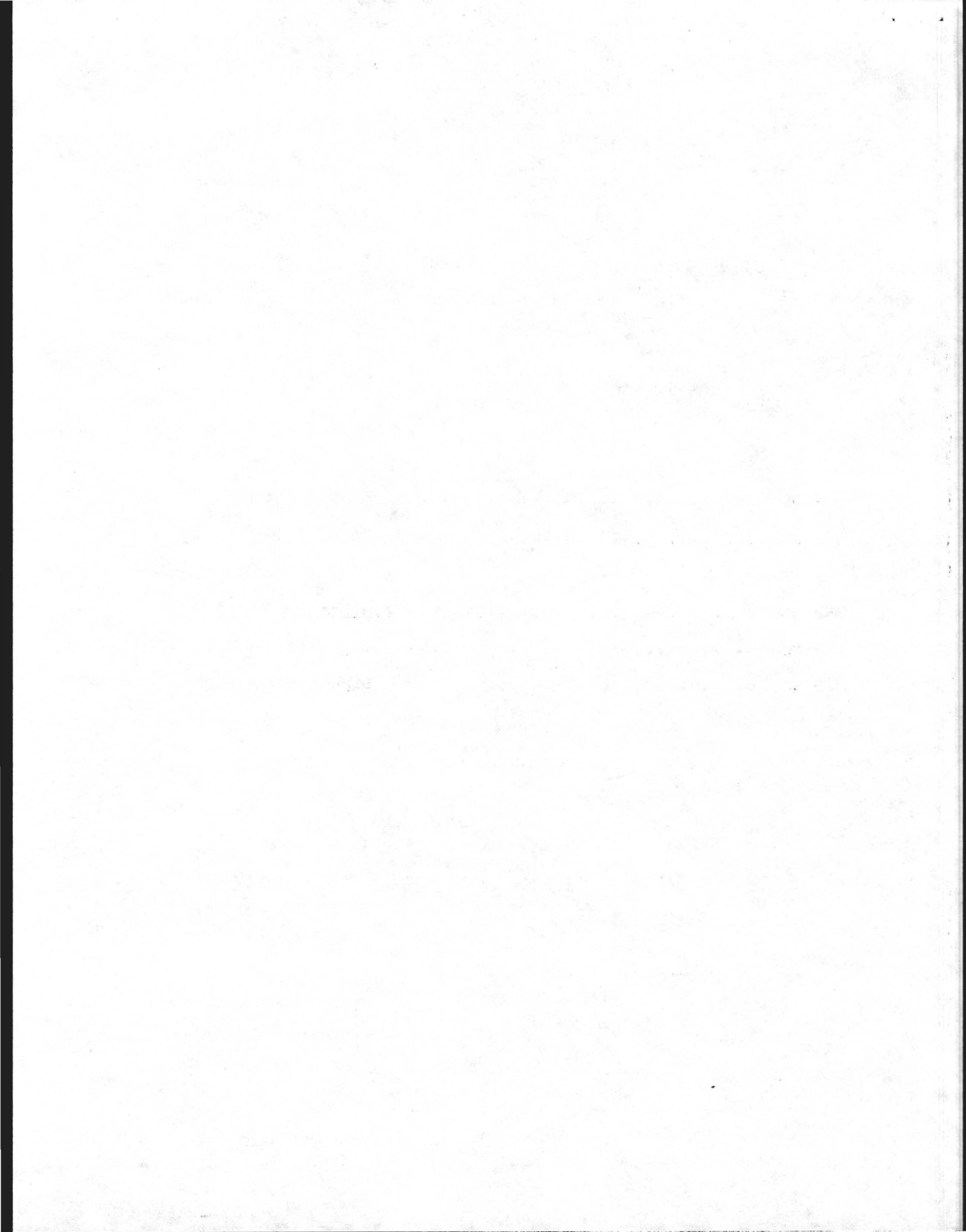
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<sup>7</sup> BLM, Riparian-Wetland Initiative for the 1990's, page 16 (Goal Number 1 - Restoration and Maintenance). It is important to remember that seral stage does not determine whether a riparian area is healthy and functioning. BLM Technical Reference 1737-5 states that relating riparian health to ecological site status "...is a dangerous and functionally impossible view of how riparian systems operate." This same idea was recognized in the Riparian-Wetland Initiative for the 1990's, which states (emphasis added): "The overall objective is to achieve and advanced ecological status, except where resource objectives, including proper functioning condition, would require and earlier successional stage."



APPENDIX I

MAP NO. 1.....LAND STATUS  
MAP NO. 2.....RANGE IMPROVEMENTS  
MAP NO. 3.....HERD MANAGEMENT AREA  
MAP NO. 4.....WILDLIFE HABITAT  
MAP NO. 5.....USE PATTERN MAPPING  
MAP NO. 6.....PHOTO TREND PLOTS



18 T 16 N 17

MAP NO. 1

NORTH

CLIFTON

Bull Canyon  
Mineral Canyon

RAWE PEAK

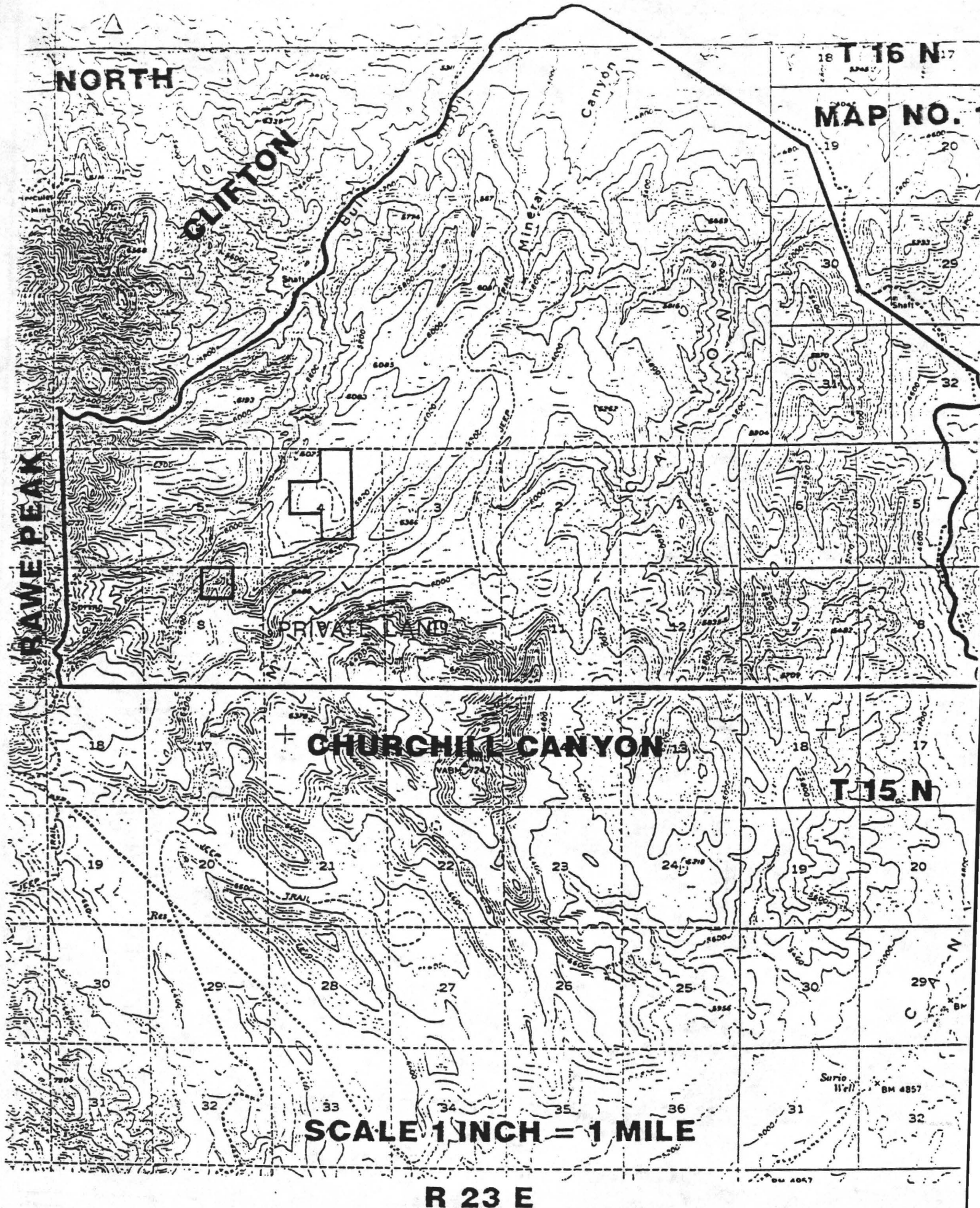
PRIVATE LAND

CHURCHILL CANYON

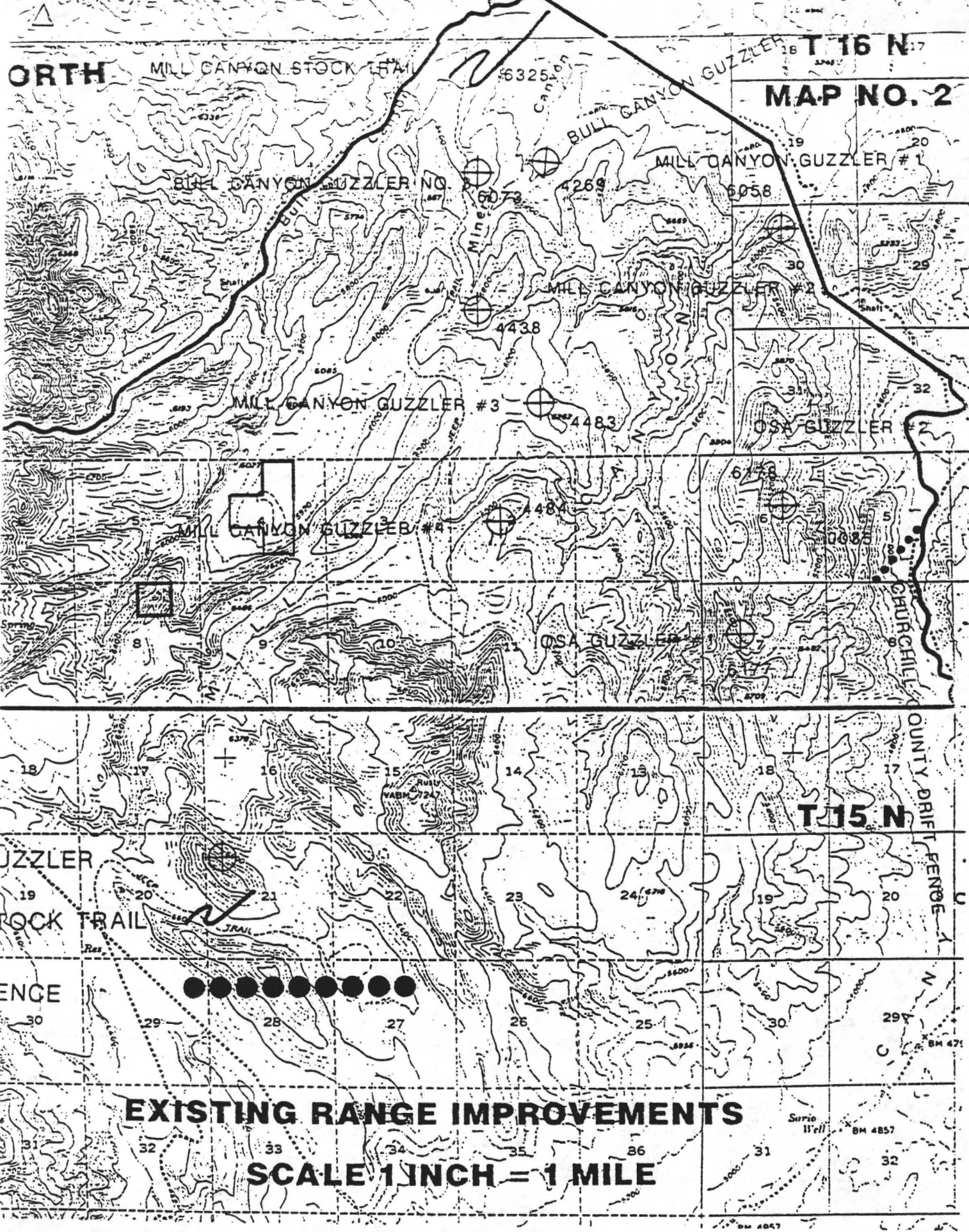
T 15 N

SCALE 1 INCH = 1 MILE

R 23 E



# MILL CANYON ALLOTMENT



MAP NO. 2

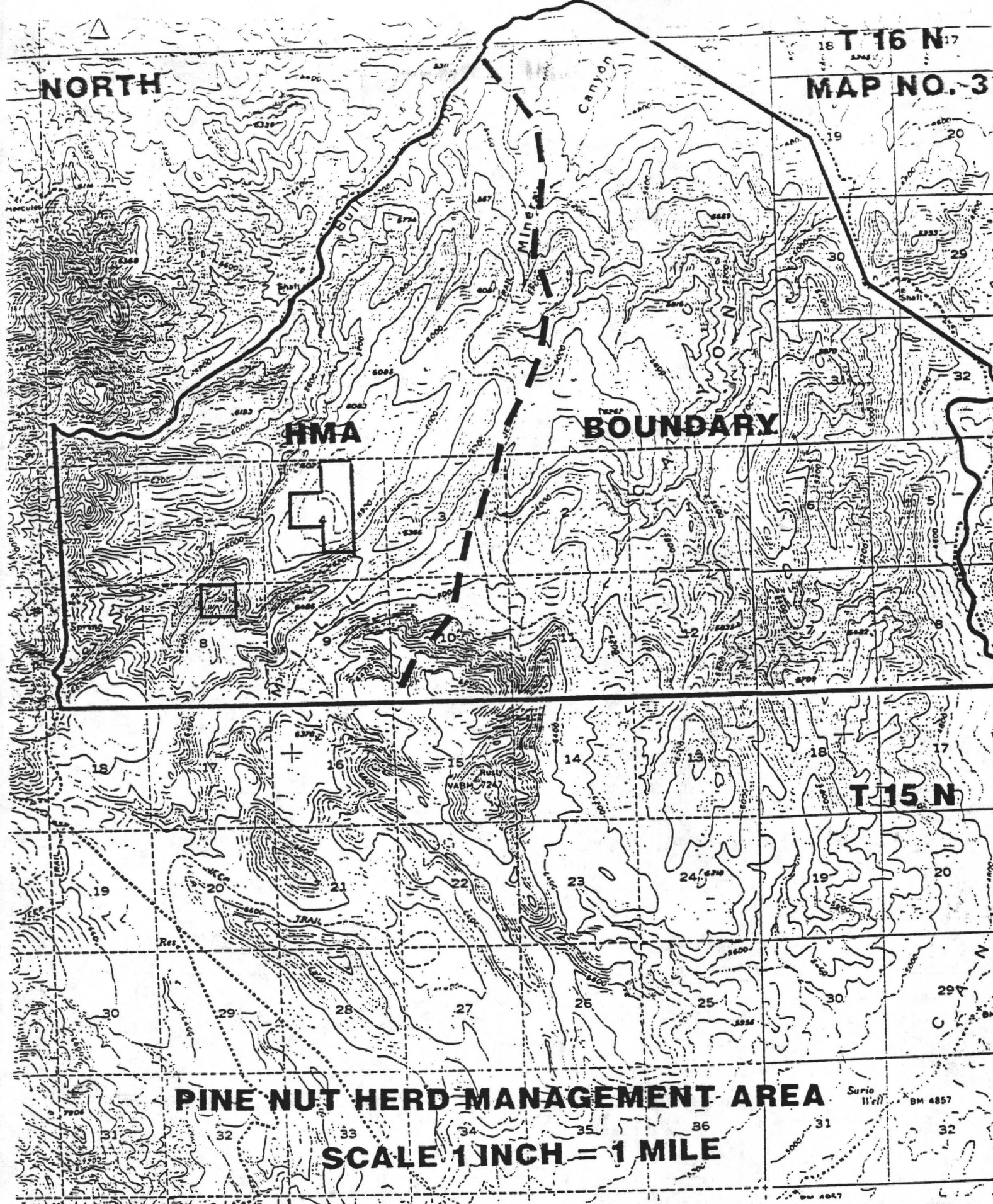
T. 15 N

EXISTING RANGE IMPROVEMENTS

SCALE 1 INCH = 1 MILE

R 23 E





**NORTH**

**T 16 N**

**MAP NO. 3**

**HMA BOUNDARY**

**T 15 N**

**PINE NUT HERD MANAGEMENT AREA**

**SCALE 1 INCH = 1 MILE**

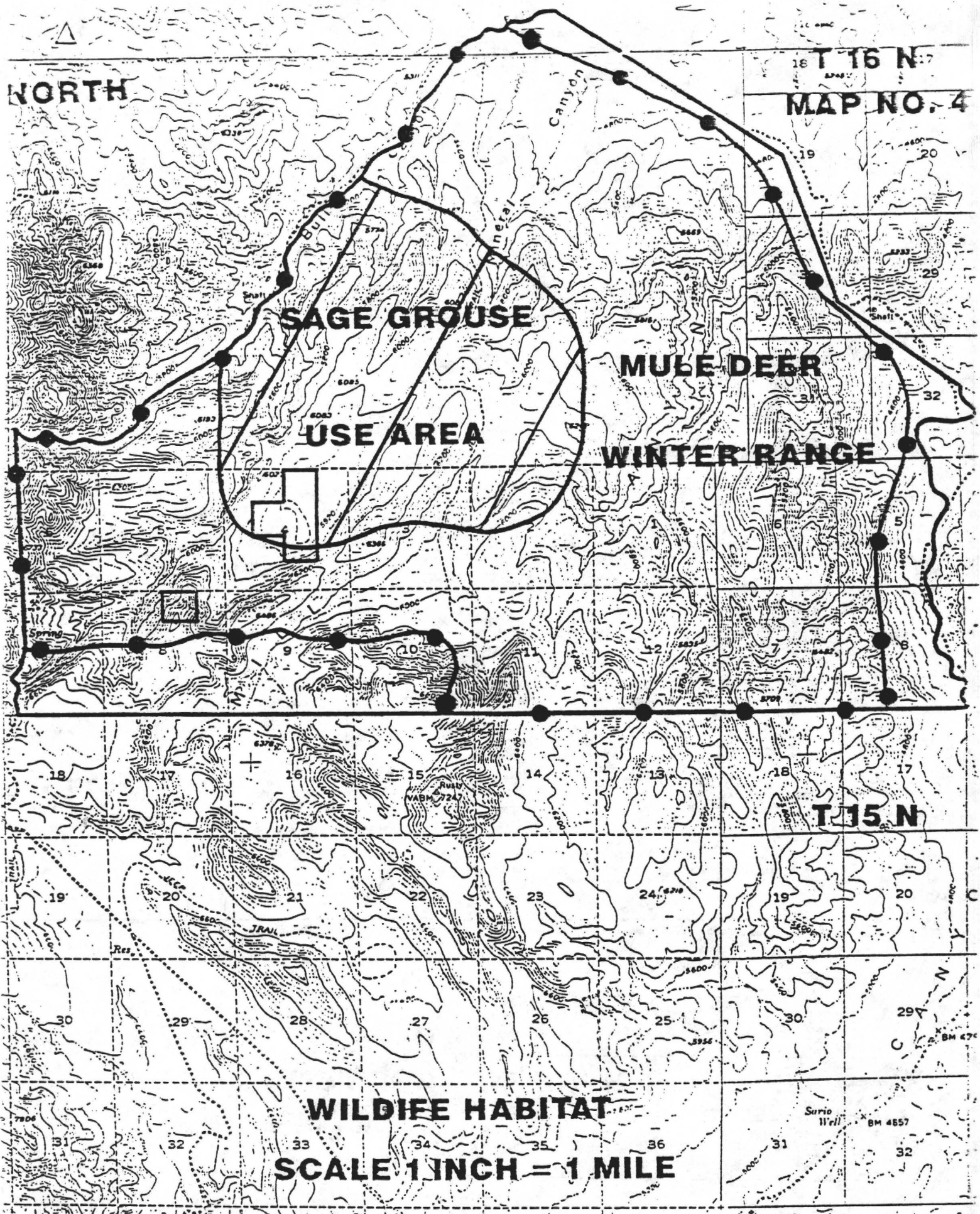
**R 23 E**

NORTH

T 16 N  
MAP NO. 4

SAGE GROUSE  
USE AREA

MULE DEER  
WINTER RANGE

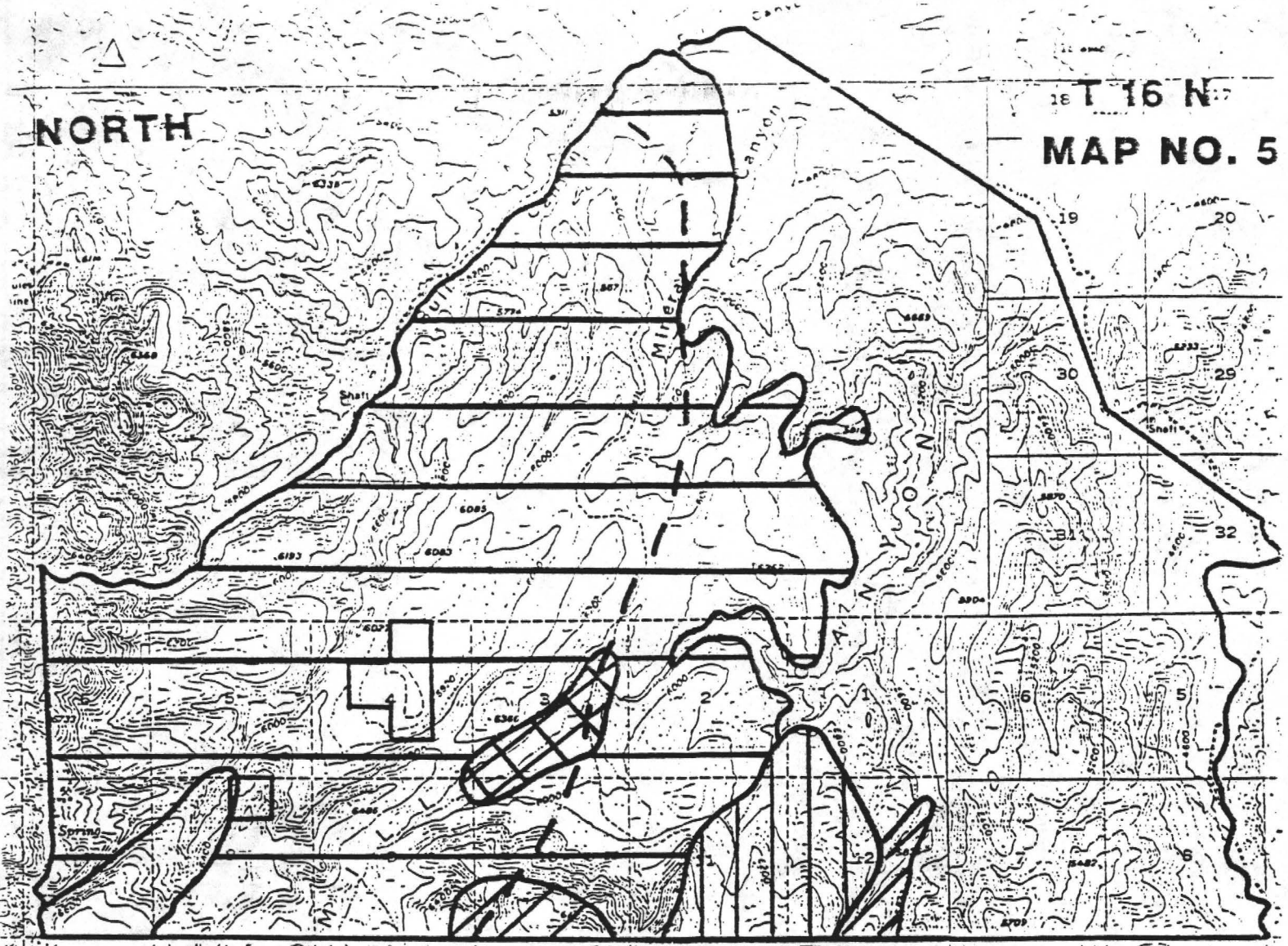


WILDLIFE HABITAT  
SCALE 1 INCH = 1 MILE

R 23 E

NORTH

18 T 16 N  
MAP NO. 5



SEVERE



HEAVY



MODERATE



LIGHT



SLIGHT



NON USE



T 15 N

1993

WILD HORSE

USE PATTERN MAPPING

SCALE 1 INCH = 1 MILE

R 23 E

**NORTH**

18 T 16 N:7  
**MAP NO. 6**

**PLOT NO. 3**

**PLOT NO. 1**

**PLOT NO. 2**

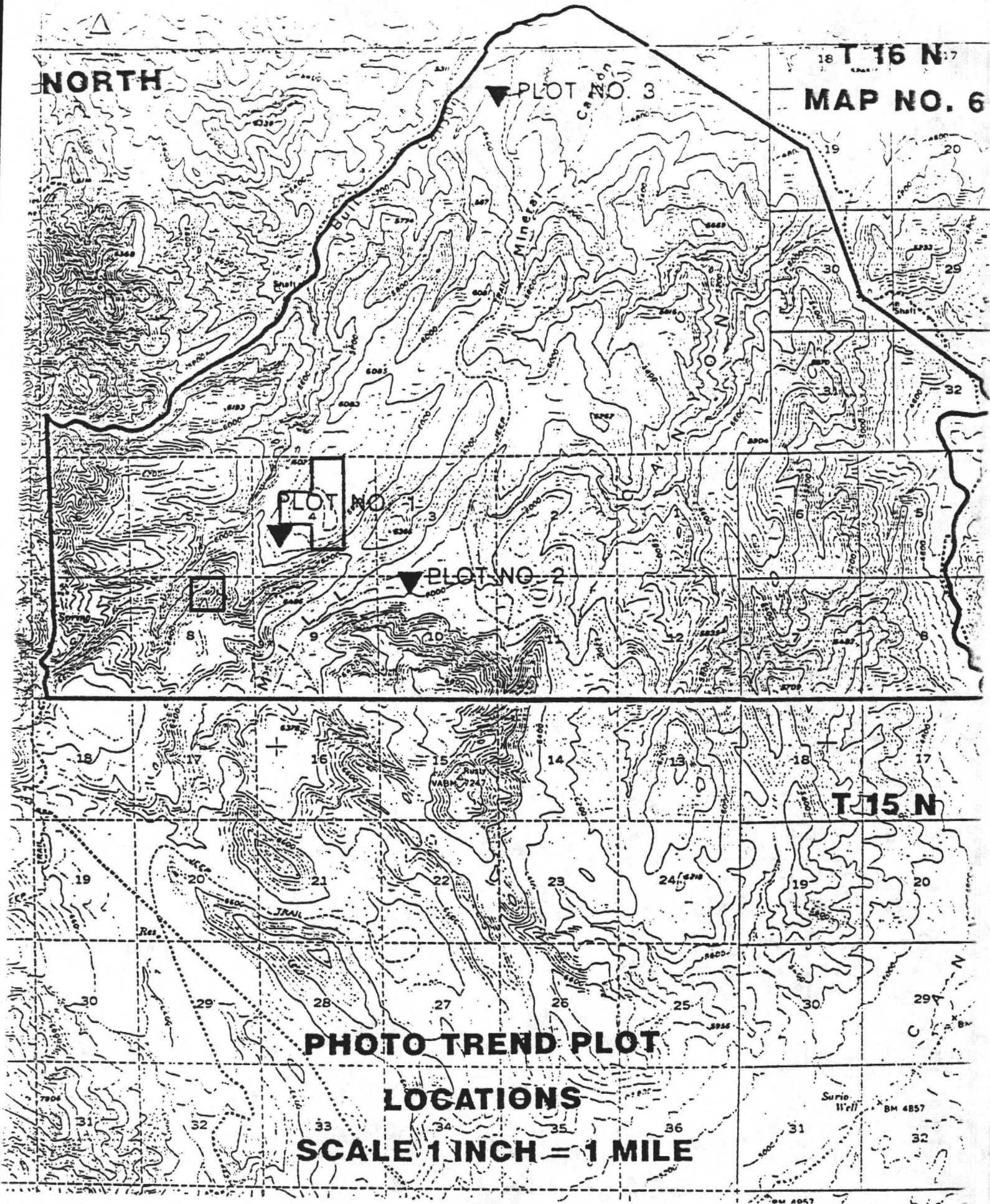
**T 15 N**

**PHOTO TREND PLOT**

**LOCATIONS**

**SCALE 1 INCH = 1 MILE**

**R 23 E**



**APPENDIX II**

**POTENTIAL STOCKING LEVEL CALCULATIONS**

## APPENDIX IIA

### UTILIZATION BY ALLOTMENT FOR RAWE PEAK/CHURCHILL CANYON/MILL CANYON HORSE BANDS

Utilization Class	Churchill Canyon Acres in HMA by class	Churchill Canyon Acres outside HMA by class	Mill Canyon Acres in HMA by class	Mill Canyon Acres outside HMA by class	Rawe Peak Acres in HMA by class
Slight	0	0	0	0	73
Light	54	2681	69	262	102
Moderate	400	3377	0	786	296
Heavy	3384	76	7090	2736	873
<u>Severe</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>181</u>	<u>41</u>	<u>0</u>
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>3838</b>	<b>6134</b>	<b>7340</b>	<b>3825</b>	<b>1344</b>

### UTILIZATION SUMMARY FOR RAWE PEAK/CHURCHILL CANYON/MILL CANYON HORSE BANDS

Utilization Class	(x1) Acres in HMA by class	(x2) Acres outside HMA by class	(y) Class Midpoint	x1 * y Within HMA Acres X Utilization	x2 * y Outside HMA Acres X Utilization
Slight	73	0	10	730	0
Light	225	2943	30	6750	88290
Moderate	696	4163	50	34800	208150
Heavy	11347	2812	70	794290	196840
<u>Severe</u>	<u>181</u>	<u>41</u>	<u>90</u>	<u>16290</u>	<u>3690</u>
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>12522</b>	<b>9959</b>		<b>852860</b>	<b>496970</b>
<b>Desired Utilization</b>	<b>12522</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>27.5</b>	<b>344355</b>	<b>0</b>

Present Horse Numbers	"PRESENT MULTIPLE" Present sums of Acres X Utilization (1)	"DESIRED MULTIPLE" Desired sums of Acres X Utilization (2)	Number of horses needed to achieve desired utilization (3)
164	1349830	344355	42 (504 AUMs)

- (1) Includes the sum of both inside (852,860) and outside (496,970) the HMA.
- (2) The sum 27.5% desired utilization multiplied by the number of acres of HMA being grazed by these bands of horses.
- (3) Solving for "x" in the ratio equation:
- $$\frac{1,349,830}{164 \text{ horses}} = \frac{344,355}{x \text{ (number of horses to achieve desired utilization levels)}}$$

### AUMs PROVIDED FOR THE DESIRED NUMBER OF HORSES (42) BY ALLOTMENT:

Mill Canyon	Churchill Canyon	Rawe Peak
296	154	54

## APPENDIX IIB

### CALCULATION OF HORSE POPULATION LEVEL (AML) AT THE DESIRED FORAGE UTILIZATION LEVELS

	HORSE GROUP				
	Buckeye / Sand Canyon	Eldorado / Hackett Canyon	Clifton	Churchill Canyon/ Mill Canyon/ Rawe Peak	Sunrise
PRESENT POPULATION (Number of horses):	49	43	68	164	35
PRESENT FORAGE PRODUCTION (AUMs)	588	516	816	1968	420
PRESENT AVERAGE UTILIZATION:	27.8%	38.5%	49.8% *	68.1% *	72.5%
"PRESENT MULTIPLE" (from APPENDIX IIA)	423260	345010	669600	1349830	187620
DESIRED UTILIZATION:	27.5%	27.5%	27.5%	27.5%	27.5%
ACRES GRAZED WITHIN HMA:	15252	8957	12770	12522	2588
CALCULATION OF "DESIRED MULTIPLE" (Acres grazed within HMA, multiplied by the 27.5% Desired Utilization)	419430	246318	351175	344355	71170
CALCULATION OF AUMS POTENTIALLY PRODUCED AT "DESIRED MULTIPLE" **	583	368	428	502	159
NUMBER OF HORSES SUPPORTED BY FORAGE AT DESIRED UTILIZATION	49	31	36	42	13
<b>ALLOWABLE MANAGEMENT LEVEL (AML) AT THE DESIRED UTILIZATION LEVEL</b>				<b>2040 AUMs</b>	
(Sum of forage in AUMs for each horse group at desired level, divided by 12 months):				<b>170 horses</b>	

\* INSIDE THE HMA. THERE IS ADDITIONAL UTILIZATION OUTSIDE THE HMA FOR THESE HORSE GROUPS.

\*\* SOLVING FOR "ALLOWABLE USE" IN THE EQUATION:  $\frac{\text{PRESENT PRODUCTION}}{\text{"PRESENT MULTIPLE"}}$   $\frac{\text{"ALLOWABLE USE"}}{\text{"DESIRED MULTIPLE"}}$

MILL CANYON ALLOTMENT EVALUATION  
ERRATA AND ATTACHMENTS

Insert the attached Sections VII and VIII after page 17. In the Table of Contents, insert the following under Section VI:

VII. CONSULTATIONS ..... 18  
VIII. MANAGEMENT ACTIONS SELECTED ..... 21



## VII. Consultation

On July 19, 1993, a letter was sent to persons and organization that have shown interest in resource management in the Walker Resource Area. The purpose of the letter was to gather additional information and to determine who would be interested in participating in the evaluation process on nine allotments in the northern Pine Nut Mountain Range. Mill Canyon was among these allotments.

Sections I (Introduction) through VI (Technical Recommendations) of this evaluation were sent out for public review on January 13, 1995. Fifteen copies were sent to the Nevada State Clearinghouse for distribution among state agencies. In addition, the following were sent copies of this evaluation.

Borda Brothers  
Nevada Wildlife Federation  
Natural Resources Defense Council  
Carson City District Grazing  
Advisory Board  
Resource Concepts Inc.  
Rutgers University, S.I. Newhouse  
Center of Law and Justice  
Wild Horse Organized Assistance  
The Honorable Harry M. Reid  
The Honorable Richard Bryan  
Paul Clifford  
Rebecca Kunow  
Humane Society of Southern Nevada  
Kathey McCovey  
Nevada Commission for the  
Preservation of Wild Horses

Nevada Division of Wildlife  
The Wildlife Society  
Sierra Club, Toiyabe Chapter  
Nevada Cattlemen's Association  
Nevada Woolgrowers Association  
Washoe Tribe  
Bureau of Indian Affairs,  
Western Nevada Agency  
The Honorable Barbara Vucanovich  
Steven Fulstone  
American Horse Protection Association  
Craig C. Downer  
American Mustang and Burro Association  
L.I.F.E. Foundation  
Nevada Humane Society  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service,  
Reno Field Office

Comments concerning Mill Canyon were received from the Nevada Division of Wildlife (NDOW), The Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses (Commission), Wild Horse Organized Assistance (WFOA), and Craig Downer. Most of the comments showed a general opposition to livestock grazing. The BLM, however, is mandated to support a multiple-use concept while managing for a healthy ecosystem. It is therefore important to seek management goals that are fair to the majority of interests while maintaining or improving the health of the range.

There also appeared to be some confusion related to the potential stocking level calculated in Appendix II. The potential stocking level represents the amount of forage *available* to wild horses and livestock. "Potential stocking level" should not be confused with uneven distribution, which in turn should not be confused with resource damage. The use mapping data showed that there was an uneven distribution of wild horse use. The trend data indicated that the areas of heavy and severe utilization may have resulted in resource deterioration over portions of the allotment. Therefore, it was proposed that the stocking level for wild horses should be maintained at half the calculated potential stocking level, and the season of use, whether by sheep or cattle, should be during the fall and/or winter when the plants are dormant.

The fact that animal impacts are occurring on the range does not automatically equate to resource deterioration. Craig Downer made the following observation relating to large ungulates and their environments: "Little is said about the positive affects which these animals [wild horses] have upon the desert ecosystem, nor about the impact which their low population levels can have upon their own long-term survival." Such positive effects result from properly timed impacts. If timing and duration cannot be controlled, either through natural relationships or through intense management, then it becomes necessary to adjust use levels.

Other comments that relate to the health of the public land within the Mill Canyon Allotment or address the evaluation of this health are discussed below.

**Comment:** *In order for sheep to be converted to cattle on this allotment, we suggest the District conduct a suitability study with available monitoring data. The only rationale given on page 15 is that "wool subsidies are being eliminated." This rationale is not based upon the allotment's resources or its suitability for cattle. (NDOW)*

*If this evaluation is to justify a livestock conversion, then suitability and a "grazing pattern that will allow for protection of riparian and also reduce competition for forage" must be presented. (NDOW)*

*We suggest the allotment be evaluated for cattle suitability and a carrying capacity be determined only for wild horses. (Commission)*

**Response:** The range survey (forage inventory) rated the allotment for both sheep and cattle use, therefore the allotment has already been determined to be suitable for use by cattle. The potential stocking level calculation (Appendix II) established an AUM figure for the HMA portion of the allotment and refined the AUM availability for cattle within what could be a dual use area for cattle and horses. This was based on monitoring data (utilization levels, use pattern mapping, wild horse census).

The season of use for cattle recommended in the range survey (forage inventory) was primarily the spring. However, the season of use in the evaluation recommended that the allotment be used, whether by sheep or cattle, during the fall/winter when the plants are dormant. Forage is most desirable and most susceptible to harmful grazing (refer to General Response section for explanation) during the spring. By adjusting the season of use for livestock, this potential danger has been averted. Livestock use, if managed intensively, could take place during the spring and harmful grazing could be minimized, but in the presence of horses continually occupying the area, could not be averted.

In addition, to protect the riparian areas, which are located more or less exclusively in the western portion of the allotment, after 2/28 (before the onset of plant growth), livestock must be removed outside the HMA.

**Comment:** *Are population estimates made using census data? Do census observe all horses? Does one adult/foal equal one cow/calf AUM?*

**Response:** Population estimates presented within this evaluation are based on aerial census data. At the time of aerial censuses, wild horses counted as "foals" are usually old enough, or soon will be old enough to be consuming substantial amounts of forage. Therefore, foals are counted as an animal unit. In calculating AUMs for use in analysis, a calf may also be counted as an animal unit if it develops to a stage where it will be consuming substantial amounts of forage.

**Comment:** *Are you sure there are no threatened, endangered, or candidate plant or animal species in the allotment. I believe the Peregrine Falcon has been spotted in former years in cliffs (Craig Downer).*

**Response:** We are not aware of any such sightings. If you can provide information confirming their existence in the allotment, it will be appreciated.

### **VIII. Management Action Selected**

Due to the necessity of implementing the wild horse decisions on a herd management area basis, only one Proposed Multiple Use Decision will be issued for all nine allotments in the Pine Nut Herd Management Area.

The active preference for sheep will be maintained at 2049 AUMs.

If a conversion is made from sheep to cattle, the active preference for cattle initially will not exceed 776 AUMs. This preference will remain in effect for 5 years following such conversion, after which time a final active preference will be established based on additional monitoring data.

The authorized season of use will be changed from 11/1 -1/31 and 4/1 -5/31 to 11/1 - 3/31.

Livestock use within the HMA portion of the allotment will be made between 11/1 and 2/28. After 2/28, all livestock use will be shifted outside of the HMA.

The potential stocking level for wild horses in the portion of the HMA located within the allotment is 296 AUMs.

It was decided by the Carson City District staff that, because of the potential economic, aesthetic, cultural and recreational values associated with pinyon-juniper woodlands, the longer term management of the woodlands in the Pine Nut Mountains should be addressed in the upcoming land use plan amendment. At the time of this writing, an amendment team had been formed and letters had been sent out to the public soliciting comments.

**MILL CANYON ALLOTMENT**  
**LIVESTOCK GRAZING MANAGEMENT DECISION**

Decisions relating to the grazing of livestock on public lands in the Mill Canyon Allotment are as follows:

- A. In accordance with §4130.6-1(a), the active preference for sheep will be maintained at 2049 AUMs. *1/5 = 410 AUMs cows*
- B. In accordance with §4110.3 and §4130.6-1(a), if cattle are grazed rather than sheep, the active preference for cattle initially will not exceed 776 AUMs. This preference will remain in effect for 5 years following such conversion, after which time a final active preference will be established based on additional monitoring data.
- C. In accordance with §4130.6-1(a), the authorized season of use will be changed from 11/1 -1/31 and 4/1 -5/31 to 11/1 - 3/31.
- D. In accordance with §4130.6-2, livestock use within the HMA portion of the allotment will be made between 11/1 and 2/28. After 2/28, all livestock use will be shifted outside of the HMA.

**RATIONALE**

Sheep and horses have a limited dietary overlap. Sheep prefer browse species while horses prefer grasses. The exception to this is during spring green-up, when sheep will also use the grasses. A large portion of the allotment is comprised of low sagebrush. By changing the grazing season of use for sheep from spring to fall/winter, the competition for grasses is eliminated and heavy shrub browsing by sheep will favor the grasses used by horses. Grazing occurs during plant dormancy when they are least vulnerable. Due to these factors, maintaining the active preference for sheep is practical.

Based on information provided in the evaluation it was determined that adequate forage is present to initially support 776 AUMs of cattle use in the event that a conversion is requested. Five years of studies will provide adequate information to determine a final active preference for cattle.

A sage grouse use area is located within the HMA. By removing livestock prior to the initiation of growth (i.e., green shoots of grass, forb production), the competition for this forage between livestock and wild horses will be eliminated. The vegetation along with the associated insect population are important to the sage grouse.

**RAWE PEAK ALLOTMENT**  
**LIVESTOCK GRAZING MANAGEMENT DECISION**

Decisions relating to the grazing of livestock on public lands in the Rawe Peak Allotment are as follows:

- A. In accordance with §4110.3-2(b) and §4130.6-1(a), the active preference for cattle will be adjusted from 552 AUMs to 54 AUMs. In accordance with §4110.3-3(a) &(b), this reduction in active preference will be phased in over a five year period, beginning with the



COMMISSION FOR THE  
PRESERVATION OF WILD HORSES

255 W. Moana Lane

Suite 207A

Reno, Nevada 89509

February 10, 1995  
(702) 688-2626

Mr. John Singlaub  
District Manager  
Carson City District  
Bureau of Land Management  
1535 Hot Springs Road  
Carson City, Nevada 89706-0638

Subject: Mill Canyon Allotment Evaluation

Dear Mr. Singlaub:

The Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses appreciates your consultation concerning the Pine Nut Wild Horse Herd. The Mill Canyon Allotment is alike many of the allotments of the Pine Nut Range with constant wild horse use and infrequent domestic sheep use. While it may be easily established the appropriate management level for wild horses, it is difficult to determine the type and amount of livestock use in the future.

Page 7, Wild Horses

Are population estimates made using census data? Do census observe all horses? Does one adult/foal equal one cow/calf AUM?

Page 10, Use Pattern Mapping

We recommend that all available data be use to determine the appropriate management level for this allotment. Monitoring was intended to replace the one time inventory that established stocking rates in the 1970's.

Appendix IIB

We cannot find the procedure used in this evaluation in the Technical Mannual 4400-7. We cannot agree that a carrying capacity based solely on wild horse use can be allocated to livestock since the allotment is a winter use area of sheep and not cattle.

2/10/95

Mr. John Singlaub  
February 10, 1995  
Page 2

We suggest the allotment be evaluated for cattle suitability and a carrying capacity be determined only for wild horses. In the interest of the resource, we recommend that computations not include weight averaging utilization data.

Data presented in this document suggest that wild horses are not having any adverse impacts to public land. We do not agree with the procedures, assumptions and data that determined the appropriate management level in the Buckeye and Sand Canyon Allotment Evaluation. However, we do support the retirement of the grazing permit to avoid any potential conflict or over allocation of the available forage on this allotment.

Sincerely,



Catherine Barcomb  
Director

February 10, 1995

Mr. John Singlaub  
District Manager  
Carson City District  
Bureau of Land Management  
1535 Hot Springs Road  
Carson City, Nevada 89706-0638

Subject: Mill Canyon Allotment Evaluation

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Appendix IIB

We cannot find the procedure used in this evaluation in the Technical Mannual 4400-7. We cannot agree that a carrying capacity based solely on wild horse use can be allocated to livestock since the allotment is a winter use area of sheep and not cattle.



Mr. John Singlaub  
February 10, 1995  
Page 2

We suggest the allotment be evaluated for cattle suitability and a carrying capacity be determined only for wild horses. In the interest of the resource, we strongly recommend that computations not include weight averaging utilization data.

Data presented in this document suggest that wild horses are not having any adverse impacts to public land. We do not agree with the procedures, assumptions and data that determined the appropriate management level in the Buckeye and Sand Canyon Allotment Evaluation. However, we do support the retirement of the grazing permit to avoid any potential conflict or over allocation of the available forage on this allotment.

Sincerely,

DAWN LAPPIN  
Director