



IN REPLY REFER TO:

United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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AUG - 7 1995

Dear Participant:

Enclosed for your information is the Management Action Selection Report (MASR) for the Railroad Pass Allotment. This report is the final section of the allotment evaluation and completes the monitoring evaluation process.

The MASR addresses the primary concerns received from involved interests, lists the options considered during the evaluation, and identifies the management actions selected. The report also describes the rationale as to why those actions were selected.

The MASR is provided for your information only and will most likely be followed at a later date by a Proposed Multiple-Use Decision. The decision will be issued to actually initiate the chosen actions on-the-ground and will specify the procedures for protest and appeal. A copy of the decision will be provided to those individuals and/or organizations that have participated in the monitoring evaluation process.

Sincerely,

Gene L. Drais, Acting

Gene L. Drais, Manager
Egan Resource Area

1 Enclosure

1. Railroad Pass Allotment MASR

MANAGEMENT ACTION SELECTION REPORT
RAILROAD PASS ALLOTMENT
EGAN RESOURCE AREA

Harold Rother, Pete Paris Jr., Pete and Julian Goicoechea (Permittees)

A. INTRODUCTION

The Railroad Pass Allotment Evaluation was conducted in accordance with the direction set forth in the Washington Office Instruction Memorandum No. 86-706 and is based on monitoring data collected in 1988, 1989, 1991, and 1992.

Comment letters were received from the Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses, Pete Goicoechea (permittee) and the Nevada Division of Wildlife (NDOW). Copies of the comment letters that specifically address this allotment can be found in the Railroad Pass Allotment Evaluation file located in the Ely District Office. All three permittees came into the office to give personal comments as well. All allotment specific comments were considered for incorporation into the management action selection report. From the comments received from permittees and wild horse interest groups, it was evident that there was some concern about how wild horse numbers were calculated and used to set stocking rates in the evaluation. The Bureau of Land Management uses all available sightings, on the ground counts, and annual census to identify the wild horses that use an allotment. Population modeling is not used because it is intended to track population growth and age structure. This type of data would not show movement and actual use information.

There was some concern as to the validity of using initial stocking rates established in the Land Use Plan to proportion AUMs for livestock and wild horses. The numbers established in the Record of Decision (ROD) for livestock and wild horses were management levels that would meet management objectives. It was the Bureau's intention, as well as an ROD decision, from that point on, to make any changes in stocking rates based on monitoring. The Railroad Pass Allotment was unique in the fact that we are required to reduce from preference; however, if we attributed the use to the offending animal, in this case based on 74% actual use by wild horses and 26% actual use by cattle, it would have resulted in reducing the wild horse population below zero which is not an option. We then attempted the adjustment based on a needed 58% reduction overall. This resulted in the livestock operators being reduced 59%, while only making 26% of the actual use, and wild horses being reduced 41%, while making 74% of the actual use. This was not equitable. We then used our existing Land Use Plan proportion for AUMs of 84% for livestock and 16% for wild horses. This results in livestock receiving 84% of available AUMs and wild horses receive 16% of available AUMs. We felt this was the most justifiable since it is equitable to both users.

NDOW had some concern that the following springs were not included in the evaluation: Little Joe Spring, Portuguese Spring and an unnamed spring located in the southern portion of the allotment. Little Joe Spring was not included in the evaluation as a result of a field check on 4/6/93, which found no surface water and no mesic vegetation associated with the spring. Portuguese Spring was not included in the evaluation either because of a lack of mesic vegetation to evaluate in the area. The unnamed spring located at T23N R55E, Sec. 16 will be added to the evaluation. It was monitored on 11/9/94 and found to have a condition rating of good, with potential of excellent if protected.

Other concerns expressed by NDOW were that a reduction in the cattle preference was in reality an increase in AUMs from actual use and that the two pasture deferred grazing system would increase use in the riparian areas. It is established policy that livestock reductions are made from preference and wild horse reductions are made from the most recent census. The BLM maintains that the two pasture rotation system will provide rest to these riparian areas and allow opportunity for regrowth. During the evaluation period, use in the riparian areas was uniformly severe due to almost year round combined wild horse and cattle use.

Pete Goicoechea questioned if sheep would have to follow the two pasture deferred system and NDOW also commented that this would be beneficial due to the fact that early grazing by sheep might negatively impact sage grouse nesting and breeding success due to their impact on the forb component in the sagebrush community.

Early grazing by sheep can have a negative effect on sage grouse nesting and breeding success as a result of heavy use of the forb component; however, monitoring has shown that sheep use on the forb component in the Railroad Pass allotment has been slight/light for each of the evaluation years. Sheep spend approximately one month in the spring in areas where management objectives are not being met. They are appropriately distributed and removed from these areas early enough to allow regrowth. Overall, sheep use impacts are quite minimal in these areas. Also, no one particular forb is found in great enough abundance to be considered a key species. Based on the above, sheep will not be required to follow the two pasture deferred grazing system.

Pete Goicoechea also wanted to know what criteria was used to determine that 69 cows have more impact than 4,000 sheep and what portion of Paris Livestock demand was being satisfied by the Corta Seeding.

The Bureau of Land Management uses a combination of use pattern mapping, key area utilization transects (key forage plant method), quadrat frequency, and ecological status inventory (condition) to monitor existing range conditions on grazing allotments. Use pattern mapping gives an indication of whether utilization objectives are being met on the allotment and delineates actually how the allotment is being used by the various classes of grazing animals. Key area utilization transects are used at existing key areas within the allotment to determine what use class those areas fall within (slight, light, moderate, heavy or severe). Quadrat frequency is used to determine community structure at the key areas and how those

change over time. Ecological status inventory is used to determine what ecological condition the allotment is in. Utilization mapping, key forage plant method, and condition were all done on the Railroad Pass Allotment to determine impacts.

In regard to the 4,000 sheep mentioned above, they are on the allotment for a very short period of time (2 days in the spring and 3-4 days in the fall. There is one band of sheep (1,000 animals) which lamb on the allotment for 1.5 months to 2 months. Of those 1.5 to 2 months the sheep are well distributed, and only in areas where objectives are not being met, for approximately one month; then they are moved to higher elevations in the Diamond Mountains where there is no significant overlap of use with cattle and wild horses. The sheep also use an average of 350 AUMs in the Corta Seeding, located within the Railroad Pass Allotment, in which they have exclusive grazing privileges. Therefore, sheep use in the native areas within the allotment is well below the allocated 691 AUMs; in reality it would be around 341 AUMs of use.

Licensed cattle use on the allotment consists of 200 head for approximately two weeks in the spring (4/1 - 4/15) and 70 head from 6/1 to 9/30 (4.5 months) for Pete Goicoechea and 300 head from 4/15 to 10/15 (6 months) for Harold Rother. As for the sheep use during the "critical" spring months of April and May, utilization transects have been completed directly following sheep use; in all cases use was slight to light. Sheep were also off by May 22 which would allow opportunity for regrowth, where cattle and wild horse use is continuous during the growing period. Pete Paris' actual use in the Corta Seeding averaged 350 AUMs during the evaluation years. For the purposes of the evaluation, utilization was not calculated for the Corta Seeding because it was an exclusive sheep use area; however, those AUMs were calculated for total use within the Railroad Pass Allotment. Therefore, in reality, even though Pete Paris licensed full preference of 691, only 341 AUMs were used in the native areas where there is combined sheep, cattle and wild horse use. As a result of production information collected in the Corta Seeding in June 1994, the Corta Seeding will be adjudicated separately as follows:

$$\text{AUMs} = \frac{1,000 \text{ acres} \times \text{production/acre (800 lbs)} \times 90\% \text{ AGCR} \times 60\%}{800 \text{ lbs forage/AUM}} = 540 \text{ AUMs}$$

Another concern expressed by Pete Goicoechea was the amount of larkspur present in the spring on the south part of the allotment. He was concerned that because of the larkspur the two pasture deferred system would not be feasible.

The extent of the poison problem in the spring was not known at the time of the evaluation; however, because of the poor condition of the allotment and the fact that rest would be advantageous to restoring vigor and promote seedling establishment, the BLM maintains that the rotation system should be implemented. Options that could be used to alleviate the problem would be establishing later on dates or non-use for cattle in the south end in the spring in years when larkspur is a problem.

B. ANALYSIS OF MONITORING DATA

Based on the identified issues of the evaluation, seven of the thirteen land use plan objectives are not being met with current management practices. Therefore, additional management actions and/or adjustments in use are necessary. The current problem on the allotment is overutilization of native perennial grasses by wild horses and cattle.

C. SUMMARY OF MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

Several options can reasonably be considered based on BLM monitoring data and input from permittees.

OPTION 1

1. Reduce active preference for cattle to the following:

Harold Rother

From: 1,800 AUMs

To: 1,064 AUMs

Pete and Julian Goicoechea

From: 511 AUMs

To: 300 AUMs

2. Establish an Appropriate Management Level (AML) for wild horses within the Diamond Hills South Herd Management Area at 260 AUMs or 22 wild horses yearlong \pm 15%, which establishes a wild horse management range of 19 to 25 wild horses year round.

3. Establish a two pasture deferred rotation grazing system for cattle, following the original dates outlined in the evaluation. Late and early use will be rotated between the two pastures on a yearly basis. Monitor spring use to determine if larkspur is a problem based on moisture, etc. Cattle will not use the south unit early in those years.

4. Retain the Paris Livestock (Pete Paris) sheep preference of 691 AUMs and adjudicate the Corta Seeding for 540 additional sheep AUMs. The period of use for sheep grazing will be 4/15- 6/15 and 11/1 - 11/15. Sheep may use the native portion of the allotment or the Corta

Seeding during this period; however, the Corta Seeding will be licensed separately. There will be no sheep use on the burns in the fall.

OPTION 2

Option 2 is the same as Option 1, except for number 3.

3. Establish a two pasture deferred rotation grazing system for cattle, extending the date on the early unit outlined in the evaluation from 5/15 - 6/15 to 6/15 - 7/15. Use on the late unit will be extended from 8/15 - 10/15 to 9/15 - 11/15. Late and early use will be rotated between the two pastures on a yearly basis. The later on date should help alleviate problems with larkspur.

D. SELECTED MANAGEMENT OPTION

The selected management option, which is number 2, is outlined as follows:

1. Reduce active preference for cattle to the following:

Harold Rother

From: 1,800 AUMs

To: 1,064 AUMs

Pete and Julian Goicoechea

From: 511 AUMs

To: 300 AUMs

2. Establish an Appropriate Management Level (AML) for wild horses within the Diamond Hills South Herd Management Area at 260 AUMs or 22 wild horses yearlong \pm 15%, establishing a wild horse management range of 19 to 25 wild horses year round.

3. Establish a two pasture deferred rotation grazing system for cattle, extending the date on the early unit outlined in the evaluation from 5/15 - 6/15 to 6/15 - 7/15. Use on the late unit will be extended from 8/15 - 10/15 to 9/15 - 11/15. Late and early use will be rotated

between the two pastures on a yearly basis. The later on date should help alleviate problems with larkspur.

4. Retain the Paris Livestock (Pete Paris) sheep preference of 691 AUMs and adjudicate the Corta Seeding for 540 additional sheep AUMs. The period of use for sheep grazing will be 4/15 - 6/15 and 11/1 - 11/15. Sheep may use the native portion of the allotment or the Corta Seeding during this period; however, the Corta Seeding will be licensed separately. There will be no sheep use in the burns in the fall.

E. GRAZING ADJUSTMENTS

Changes in cattle grazing will be phased in over five years, in roughly equal increments as follows, with AUMs removed from active use to be held in suspension:

1. Harold Rother

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Suspended</u>	<u>Preference</u>
From:	1,800	0	1,800
To :	1,800	736	1,064

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Suspended</u>	<u>Active Preference</u>
Year <u>One</u>	1,800	246	1,554
Year <u>Three</u>	1,800	491	1,309
Year <u>Five</u>	1,800	736	1,064

2. Pete and Julian Goicoechea

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Suspended</u>	<u>Active Preference</u>
From:	511	0	511
To:	511	211	300

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Suspended</u>	<u>Active Preference</u>
<u>Year One</u>	511	71	440
<u>Year Three</u>	511	141	370
<u>Year Five</u>	511	211	300

(Sheep Use) Pete Paris

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Suspended</u>	<u>Active Preference</u>
Native	691	0	691
Corta Seeding	540	0	540*

* The 540 AUMs identified above will be licensed exclusively within the seeding.

Rationale: the desired stocking level on the Corta seeding is based on production information, with 60% as the desired utilization for spring/summer sheep use. This data indicates that the Corta Seeding should be adjudicated for 540 AUMs. The desired stocking level on the native portion of the allotment is based on 50% desired utilization, with spring/summer/fall sheep and cattle use. This calculation results from actual use and measured utilization data and indicates that a reduction to 2,315 AUMs is necessary to meet the desired utilization level. Adjustments in stocking levels and grazing treatments are being made to establish proper carrying capacities, based on sustained yield and to improve the vigor and production of key forage plants for both the native range and the seeding.

F. FUTURE MONITORING AND GRAZING ADJUSTMENTS

The Egan Resource Area will continue to monitor all existing studies and establish additional studies as identified in Section VII of the Allotment Evaluation. This monitoring data will continue to be collected in the future to provide necessary information for subsequent reevaluations in the third and fifth years following the decision. These reevaluations are necessary to determine if the allotment objectives are being met under the new grazing management strategies. In addition, these subsequent evaluations will determine if continued or additional adjustments are needed to meet allotment objectives.