



Buffalo Hills Allot.
United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Winnemucca Field Office

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In Reply Refer To:
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Buffalo Hills Allot.

JUN 14 2000

Dear Interested Public:

Enclosed is a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the relocation of the Granite Mountain Drift Fence and subsequent temporary enclosure. The Granite Mountain Drift Fence, also known as the Cottonwood Drift Fence, is located along the south fork of Wagon Tire Creek in the Granite Mountains near Gerlach, Nevada.

This Environmental Assessment was previously sent out, along with the proposed decision, on January 21, 1999. Due to unforeseen circumstances this document did not become final and due to the length of time between decisions, it has been decided to start this project over at the draft stage. Because many of you, on this projects mailing list, have previously viewed this document and there are virtually no changes to it from the previous, we are asking for a short review turn around time. If you have any comments please respond by June 29, 2000.

If you have any questions, please contact Shane Findlay at (775)623-1500.

Sincerely yours,

Colin P. Christensen

FOR
Colin P. Christensen
Assistant Field Manager
Renewable Resources

Enclosure

DRAFT
Environmental Assessment
Granite Mountain Drift Fence-Relocation

I. Introduction/Overview

Purpose and Need

The Buffalo Hills Allotment is located immediately north of Gerlach, Nevada. It consists of four pastures and is managed under a rest rotation grazing system. The main fork of Wagon Tire Creek is located in the Dolly Varden pasture with the south fork meandering between the Granite and Dolly Varden pastures. During 1993 and 1994 a section of the south fork of Wagon Tire Creek was used quite heavily by horses and livestock. Utilization limits had been exceeded both years even before livestock entered the pasture. The permittees have herded their livestock continually and removed them from this portion of the pasture in order to keep use levels down. Due to the high horse numbers this has not been very effective or efficient.

The proposed action is to relocate a portion of the Granite Mountain Drift fence so that this fork of Wagon Tire Creek would be protected from both wild horses and livestock. Though the action is not specifically addressed in the Sonoma-Gerlach MFP, it is consistent with the objectives of the MFP and with Federal, State, and Local laws, regulations, and policy.

II. Proposed Action and Alternatives

A. Proposed Action

The proposed action is to construct 1½ miles of fence along the south fork of Wagon Tire Creek. The action would take place in T. 35N. R. 22E. Sections 34 & 35 (See attached map). The original fence would be left in place to form an enclosure and facilitate a more expeditious recovery of the riparian area. When recovery is completed the original fence may be removed to allow animals to water. If the enclosure is kept in place the permittees would be allowed to push livestock through it when gathering. The fence would be a four strand barbed wire fence built to antelope standards. The new fence would tie in with the existing fence about 1 mile southeast of Heward Reservoir and continue westerly until it met back up with the existing fence. Access to the site would be by existing roads, no new road construction would be needed.

This project would be implemented under a cooperative agreement. The Bureau would provide materials, construct the fence and remove the original fence when needed. The permittees would have seasonal maintenance on this project.

B. No Action Alternative

Under the no action alternative the fence would not be constructed. The riparian vegetation and stream would continue to be impacted by wild horses and livestock.

III. Affected Environment/Environmental Consequences

Proposed Action

A. Vegetation

Reconstruction of the fence would occur in a variety of vegetation types, ranging from low sagebrush (*Artemisia arbuscula*) to snowberry (*Symphoricarpos spp.*). The dominant vegetation would be low sage and Sandberg bluegrass (*Poa secunda*), bluebunch wheatgrass (*Agropyron spicatum*), and rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus spp.*). The fence would not be constructed in the riparian area, so disturbance to riparian vegetation would be minimal. Vegetation within the newly created enclosure would be protected from large ungulate herbivory until fully recovered and thus would be more vigorous. Riparian vegetation is characterized by willows (*Salix spp.*), rushes (*Juncus spp.*), and sedges (*Carex spp.*).

B. Water Resources

It is anticipated that there would be no adverse impacts to water quality. As a result of the enclosure water quality would be higher.

C. Wildlife

Several species of wildlife occur in habitat surrounding the proposed project. Mule deer, pronghorn antelope, chukar, sage grouse, quail, and several nongame species inhabit the area. Since the proposed fence would be built to antelope specifications, there should be a positive impact to wildlife from the improved condition of the riparian area. Wagon Tire Creek, at present, does not contain any fish populations.

D. Wild Horses

Wild horses could potentially be affected through implementation of these proposed actions. Horses would not be able to access water in this section of the creek if the fence were built. The next nearest water source would be Heward Reservoir on years of good precipitation and the main fork of Wagon Tire Creek in years with below normal precipitation. Heward Reservoir is about 100 yards above the stream and the main fork is about 1½ miles from the proposed project, so water would be available in the vicinity.

E. Cultural Resources

A class III cultural resource inventory, CR2-2751(N), of the proposed fence line was conducted in October 1997. The results of the inventory were negative. The report is on file in the Winnemucca Field Office, in the cultural files. No Native American consultation was undertaken because very little surface disturbance would occur, no archeological sites were recorded, and there are no ethnographic record of ceremonial or sacred sites in the area. No National Register properties would be impacted by the proposed project.

F. Threatened and Endangered Species

No on the ground search for sensitive plants was conducted, but the Nevada Threatened and Endangered Plant Map Book (Nevada State Museum, 1988) located in the Winnemucca Office shows that no sensitive plants are known to occur in the immediate vicinity of either proposed activity. No threatened or endangered wildlife species would be impacted through implementation of this proposed action.

G. Visual Resource Management

This project would be located in a Class II visual resource management area. The management objective for this class is to retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change should be low. Management activities may be seen, but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Any changes must repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape. The proposed fence would meet Class II VRM objectives. A Visual Contrast Rating Worksheet was completed on November 30, 1995. See Attachment 1.

H. Cumulative Impacts

All resource values have been evaluated for cumulative impacts. There would be no direct cumulative impacts to resource values as a result of the proposed action, however an indirect impact could occur on the main fork of Wagon Tire Creek. If wild horse and livestock use in the proposed fence area shifts to the main fork of Wagon Tire Creek utilization limits may continue to be exceeded in this area.

I. Other Critical Elements of the Human Environment

Implementation of the proposed projects would not have any impact on flood plains, wetlands, air quality, areas of critical environmental concern, hazardous materials, paleontological resources, wild and scenic rivers, prime or unique farmlands, wilderness, noxious weeds or Native American Religious concerns.

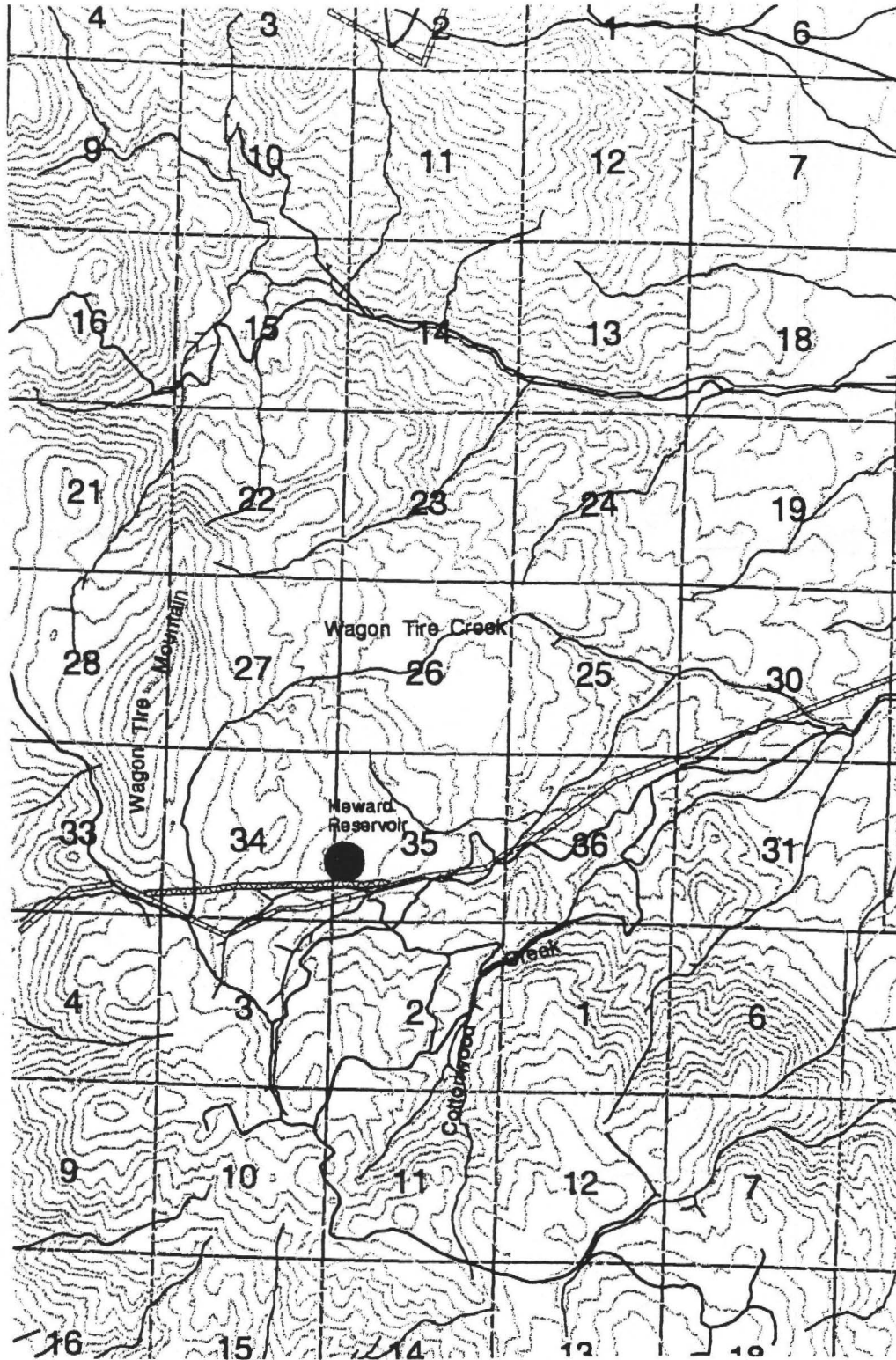
IV. Consultation, Coordination, Cooperation

The specialists who have signed the face sheet of this document have reviewed and concur with the technical aspects of this environmental assessment, as concerns their respective specialties. The permittees and affected interests have been consulted, see CC on cover letter.

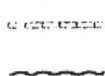
R. 22E.



T. 35N.



1:62500



Existing Fence

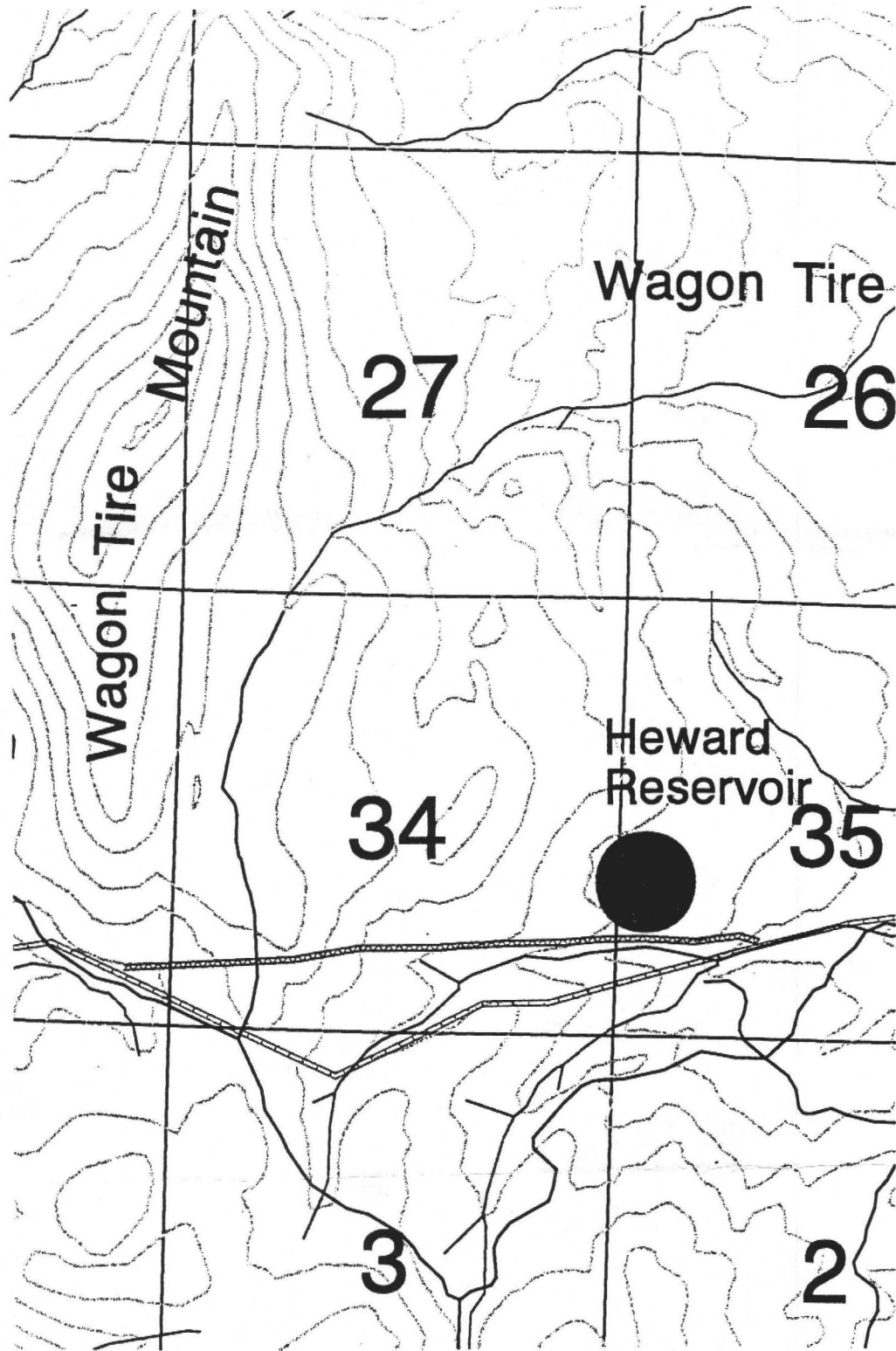
Proposed Fence

Proposed Wagon Tire Fencing

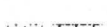

R. 22E.



T. 35N.



1:24000

-  Existing Fence
-  Proposed Fence

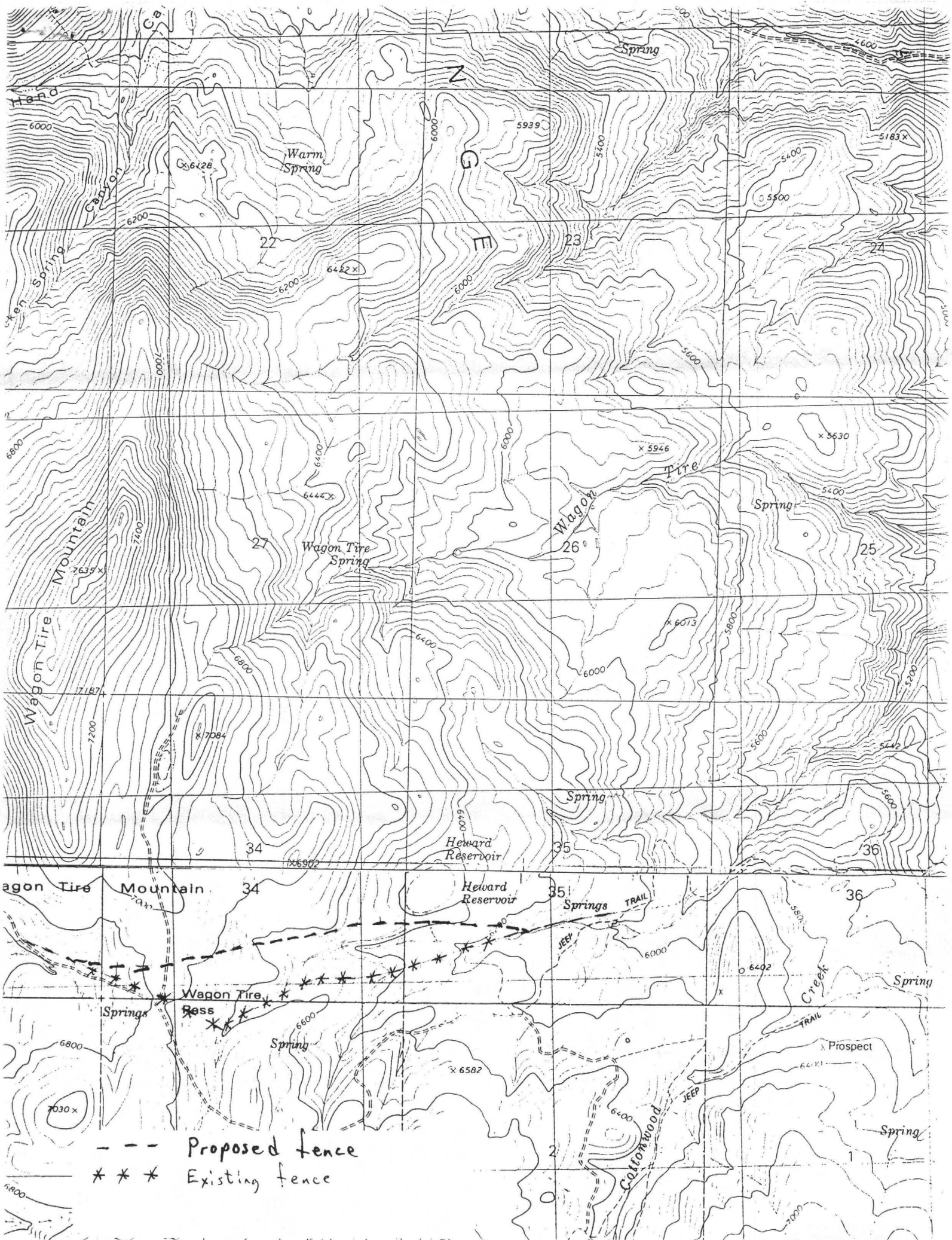
Proposed Wagon Tire Fencing

SECTION D. (Continued)

Comments from item 2.

THE RANGE FENCE (proposed) meets the CLASS II VRM objectives as it does not dominate the landscape. The level of change is low. The fence will not attract the attention of the casual observer.

Additional Mitigating Measures (See item 3)



- - - Proposed fence
 * * * Existing fence