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United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Winnemucca Field Office
5100 East Winnemucca Boulevard
Winnemucca, Nevada 89445
(775) 623-1500
<http://www.nv.blm.gov/winnemucca>

In Reply Refer To:
(NV-22.14)
4120.3

MAY 22 2001

Dear Interested Public:

Please find enclosed for your review and comment the Draft Environmental Assessment for the Pole Canyon / Rodeo Creek Allotments and Pyramid Lake Indian Reservation Boundary Fence.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Jonathan Sheeler at (775) 623-1500. The comments are due by June 23, 2001.

Sincerely yours,

Colin P. Christensen
Assistant Field Manager
Renewable Resources

Enclosure

ACTIVITY:

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Bureau of Land Management

EA FACE SHEET

OFFICE: Winnemucca F.O. (NV-020) FY & REPORT #: NV-020-01-32

ACTION: Pole Canyon/Rodeo Creek Allotments and Pyramid Lake
Reservation Management Boundary Fence NO. OF PAGES:

LOCATION: Pole Canyon/Rodeo Creek Allotments (see EA for legal)
SERIAL NO:

| <u>TEAM SIGNATURES</u> | <u>TITLE</u> | <u>RESOURCE VALUES ASSIGNED</u> | <u>HOURS</u> |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| <u>Jonathan Sheeler</u> | <u>Rangeland Mgmt Spec</u> | <u>Author/Range</u> | |
| <u>Dona Sedberry</u> | <u>Sup Rangeland Mgmt Spec</u> | <u>Range</u> | |
| <u>T Selley</u> | <u>Wild Horse and Burro Spec</u> | <u>Wild Horses</u> | |
| <u>Les Boni</u> | <u>Archeologist</u> | <u>Cultural</u> | |
| <u>Myra B. [unclear]</u> | <u>Outdoor Rec Planner</u> | <u>Visual Resources/Wilderness</u> | |
| <u>Clarence [unclear]</u> | <u>Wildlife Biologist</u> | <u>Wildlife/T&E</u> | |
| <u>Ju [unclear]</u> | <u>Hydrologist</u> | <u>Water Resources</u> | |
| <u>Michael [unclear]</u> | <u>Soil Scientist</u> | <u>Soils</u> | |
| <u>Mike [unclear]</u> | <u>Weeds Coordinator</u> | <u>Weeds</u> | |

ENVIRONMENTAL
COORDINATOR: [Signature] 7/18/01
(Signature) (Date)

COMPLIANCE
OFFICER: Chuck Neill 7/23/01
(Signature) (Date)

ASSISTANT FIELD MANAGER [Signature] 7/18/01
RENEWABLE RESOURCES (Signature) (Date)

**Environmental Assessment
Pole Canyon/Rodeo Creek Allotments
and
Pyramid Lake Indian Reservation Boundary Fence**

I. Introduction/Overview

Purpose and Need

The proposed action is for the reconstruction/construction of the common boundary fence between the Pole Canyon and Rodeo Creek Allotments, and the Pyramid Lake Indian Reservation. The reconstruction/construction of the boundary fence is a cooperative effort between the Winnemucca Field Office and the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe to repair/replace the original boundary fence constructed by the Tribe in the 1930's. The proposed project is located approximately 35 miles southwest of Gerlach, Nevada. The need is to provide a physical barrier that will reduce and/or eliminate the uncontrolled seasonal movement of wild horses, and the drift of livestock between public and reservation land.

In the Pole Canyon Allotment Final Multiple Use Decision (FMUD) of April 5, 2000, the fence was required before livestock grazing could occur. The fence will allow for the implementation of intensive grazing management practices to improve the condition and productivity of public lands.

This action is in conformance with the Sonoma-Gerlach Resource Area Land Use Plan. Even though it is not specifically provided for, it is clearly consistent with the following LUP decision: RM 1.4.

II. Proposed Action and Alternative

Proposed Action

The proposed action is to reconstruct/construct and remove unsalvageable materials on approximately 23.5 miles of fence across public land and reservation land. The fence would start on the west side of Nevada State Highway 447 at T. 27 N., R. 23 E., section 22, and end at the Union Pacific Railroad track at T. 29 N., R. 20 E., Section 24. The fence would be located on the common boundary except for areas where terrain or other physical factors (rockiness) require modifying the location. The fence would divide the Pole Canyon and Rodeo Creek Allotments from the Pyramid Lake Indian Reservation. Reconstruction would occur on approximately 17 miles of existing fence which coincides with the boundary between the Rodeo Creek Allotment and the Pyramid Lake Indian Reservation. New fence construction would be required on approximately 6.5 miles of the boundary between the

Pole Canyon Allotment and the Pyramid Lake Indian Reservation. (See attached Map) The fence would enable wild horse management actions and resource management objectives to be achieved. The fence would consist of four strands of fence wire, steel posts, wooden or steel pipe panels, and would be built to modified bureau bighorn sheep specifications (20", 35", 39", and 43"; smooth bottom wire, top three wires barbed). The fence contractor would be allowed to knock down brush along the proposed route, but the surface would not be cleared. Access to the construction sight would be by existing roads in the allotment and by cross country travel.

The fence would be scheduled for reconstruction/construction in Fall/Winter 2001. The permittee's (John Torvick and Stan Ceresola) and the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe would be assigned maintenance responsibility for this fence.

No Action Alternative

The fence would not be reconstructed/constructed. The uncontrolled movement of wild horses between the Fox & Lake Range HMA and the reservation would not be reduced and/or eliminated, livestock would continue to drift between public and reservation lands, and livestock grazing would not be authorized in the Pole Canyon Allotment. Resource objectives would not be met.

III. Affected Environment

The proposed fence would be located in a sagebrush-bluegrass-needlegrass vegetation type at higher elevations to greasewood-saltbrush vegetation at lower elevations. Topography is high elevation north-south trending Lake Range and the Fox Range which descends to the valley floor of the Smoke Creek Desert. Washes in the area are intermittent and flow only during spring snowmelt and intense rainstorms. The fence will cross Mullens Canyon and a Type A drainage crossing is proposed.

The proposed fence is on the southern boundary of the Fox & Lake Range Herd Management Area (HMA), which is all within the Rodeo Creek Allotment. The appropriate management level for wild horses in the HMA is 204 head, which are managed in a range from 122 to 204. Following the removal of 455 wild horses in February 2001, the estimated wild horse population in the HMA is 130 head.

Mammals that inhabited the area include mule deer, pronghorn antelope, coyote, badger, and small animals common to the Great Basin. Numerous species of birds inhabit the area, including western meadow larks, horned larks, ravens and several species of sparrows. The area also provides potential habitat for California bighorn sheep and sage grouse, although no leks or nesting activity has been documented. No fisheries exist in the area of fence construction.

The proposed action and the alternatives in the Sonoma-Gerlach Grazing Environmental Impact Statement did not consider migratory birds which were later added as a critical element of

environmental concern. A complete migratory bird inventory has not been completed in these allotments; however, migratory birds have been identified in the proposed project area.

The proposed fence location is on the southern boundary of the Fox Range (NV-020-14) and Pole Creek (NV-020-14A) Wilderness Study Areas (WSA's). Visual Resource Management (VRM) within the WSA's is managed as Class I. The remainder of the proposed fence would be located within a Class IV Area.

A cultural inventory has not been completed for areas where the proposed project was not located on the existing fence location. Prior to the Final E. A. and proposed decision, the inventory will be completed.

Native American concerns were considered through consultation and coordination with Tribal representatives and the Western Nevada Agency of the Bureau of Indian Affairs from the initial proposal for construction of the fence outlined in the Pole Canyon Allotment Evaluation. Consultation and coordination has consisted of meetings (office and on site) with Tribal representatives (Norm Harry - former Tribal Chairman, and Gerry Emm - Environmental Coordinator) and numerous telephone calls, starting in July 1999.

Complete noxious weed inventories have not been completed on the Pole Canyon or Rodeo Creek Allotments. Currently, it is known that noxious weeds are found on the allotments and are for the most part, located near water courses, springs, and along roads or trails. The noxious weed species and locations are being identified as the monitoring process continues. The treatment of noxious weeds has primarily been mechanical, utilizing pulling and chopping by BLM staff and the permittee. There are several noxious weeds found in this general area, with the following being the most common:

Noxious Weeds found in the vicinity:

| <u>Code</u> | <u>Scientific Name</u> | <u>Common Name</u> |
|-------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| ONAC | <u>Onopordum acanthium L.</u> | Scotch thistle |
| CIAR | <u>Cirsium arvense L.</u> | Canada thistle |
| CERE | <u>Centaurea repens</u> | Russian knapweed |
| LELA | <u>Lepidium latifolium L.</u> | perennial pepperweed |

The proposed action should not further promote the spread of noxious weeds.

Threatened species and species of concern that may occur in the area of the Rodeo Creek Allotment.

Threatened Species

Bird

bald eagle

Haliaeetus leucocephalus

Species of Concern

Mammals

Pygmy rabbit

Brachylagus idahoensis

Spotted bat

Euderma maculatum

Small-footed myotis

Myotis ciliolabrum

Long-eared myotis

Myotis evotis

Fringed myotis

Myotis thysanodes

Long-legged myotis

Myotis volans

Pale Townsend's big-eared bat

Plecotus townsendii pallescens

Pacific Townsend's big-eared bat

Plecotus townsendii townsendii

Birds

Northern goshawk

Accipiter gentilis

Western burrowing owl

Athene cunicularia hypugea

Black tern

Chlidonias niger

Least bittern

Lxobrychus exilis hesperis

White-faced ibis

Plegadis chihi

Western Sage Grouse

Centrocercus urophasianus

The fencing project actions addressed in this environmental assessment should not impact the species of concern which are listed above.

No on-the-ground field investigation was conducted for sensitive/protected plants and animal species. However, according to the Nevada Threatened and Endangered Plant Map Book and the Nevada Natural Heritage's program data (March 2000), the western Lahontan springsnail (*Pyrgulopsis longiglans*), a sensitive species, was observed approximately four miles south of the project area in the vicinity of Nugent Spring.

The following critical elements of the human environment are not present and/or not affected by the proposed action or alternatives: air quality, areas of critical environmental concern, prime or unique farmlands, flood plains, threatened or endangered species, wastes-hazardous or solid, water quality, wetland-riparian zones, wild and scenic rivers, palenotology, migratory birds, and environmental justice.

Please consult the Sonoma-Gerlach Grazing EIS for a more complete description of the affected environment.

IV. Environmental Consequences

Implementation of the proposed action would result in better resource management capabilities for wild horses and livestock on the Pole Canyon and Rodeo Creek Allotments. Management of the allotments would be more efficiently controlled through use of the boundary fence.

Reconstruction/construction of the fence would cause short-term damage to vegetation from crushing, trampling, and breaking during construction.

The proposed fence would be built to bighorn sheep specifications, thus, there would be minimal adverse impacts to wildlife. The proposed fence should not impact migratory birds. There would be some disturbance and displacement of wildlife during construction.

The proposed project is located on the boundary of VRM Class I and Class IV Areas. Visual resources were considered in the analysis of the project and were determined not to be impacted by the proposed action. Therefore, a VRM work sheet was not completed.

No impacts to cultural resources are anticipated to occur. If cultural resources are encountered during construction of the new section of the proposed fence, the location could be modified to avoid impacts to cultural resources.

No impacts to Native American concerns are anticipated to occur since Tribal representatives have been involved in the planning of the proposed fence from the initial proposal outlined in the Pole Canyon Allotment Evaluation.

The proposed fence would provide a physical boundary between the Fox and Lake Range HMA and the reservation that would reduce and/or eliminate the uncontrolled movement of wild horses, and allow for implementation of population level management. The movement patterns of a small number of wild horses that inhabit the area adjacent to the proposed fence may be affected by the proposed project. Impacts to wild horses could result from animals becoming entangled in fences when attempting to cross or during removal operations. Horses could be denied access to traditional habitat areas, such as water or forage, during periods of environmental extremes. Such impacts could result in the death of a few wild horses, depending on the circumstances which occur. However, the overall impact of the proposed fence to wild horses in the HMA would be minimal. Wild horses should adjust to the proposed fence in a short period of time.

No Action Alternative

The fence would not be built and the Pole Canyon Allotment would not be grazed by authorized livestock. Wild horses and livestock would continue to drift between the allotments and reservation lands, and resource objectives would not be met.

Cumulative Impact Analysis

All resource values have been evaluated for cumulative impacts. It has been determined that cumulative impacts would be negligible as a result of the proposed action.

V. Consultation and Coordination

A. List of Preparers:

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Jonathan Sheeler | Author-Rangeland Management Specialist |
| Gene Seidlitz | Supervisory Rangeland Management Specialist |
| Tom Seley | Wild Horse and Burro Specialist |
| Mike Bilbo | Visual Resource Management/Wilderness |
| Clarence Covert | Wildlife/T&E Specialist |
| Jeff Johnson | Environmental Coordinator |
| Mike Whalen | Noxious Weed Coordinator |
| Peggy McGuckian | Archaeologist |

B. Persons, Groups, and Agencies Consulted

John and Vella Torvick
Stan Ceresola
Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe
NDOW - Fallon
RCI
WHOA
Nevada Cattlemen's Association
Sierra Club
Nevada Wool Growers Association
ISPMB
Orient Farms
NCPWH
Washoe County Commissioners
Friends of Nevada Wilderness
Nevada Outdoor Recreation Association
The Wilderness Society
John Davis
Roger Scholl
Phil Briggs
Paul Clifford

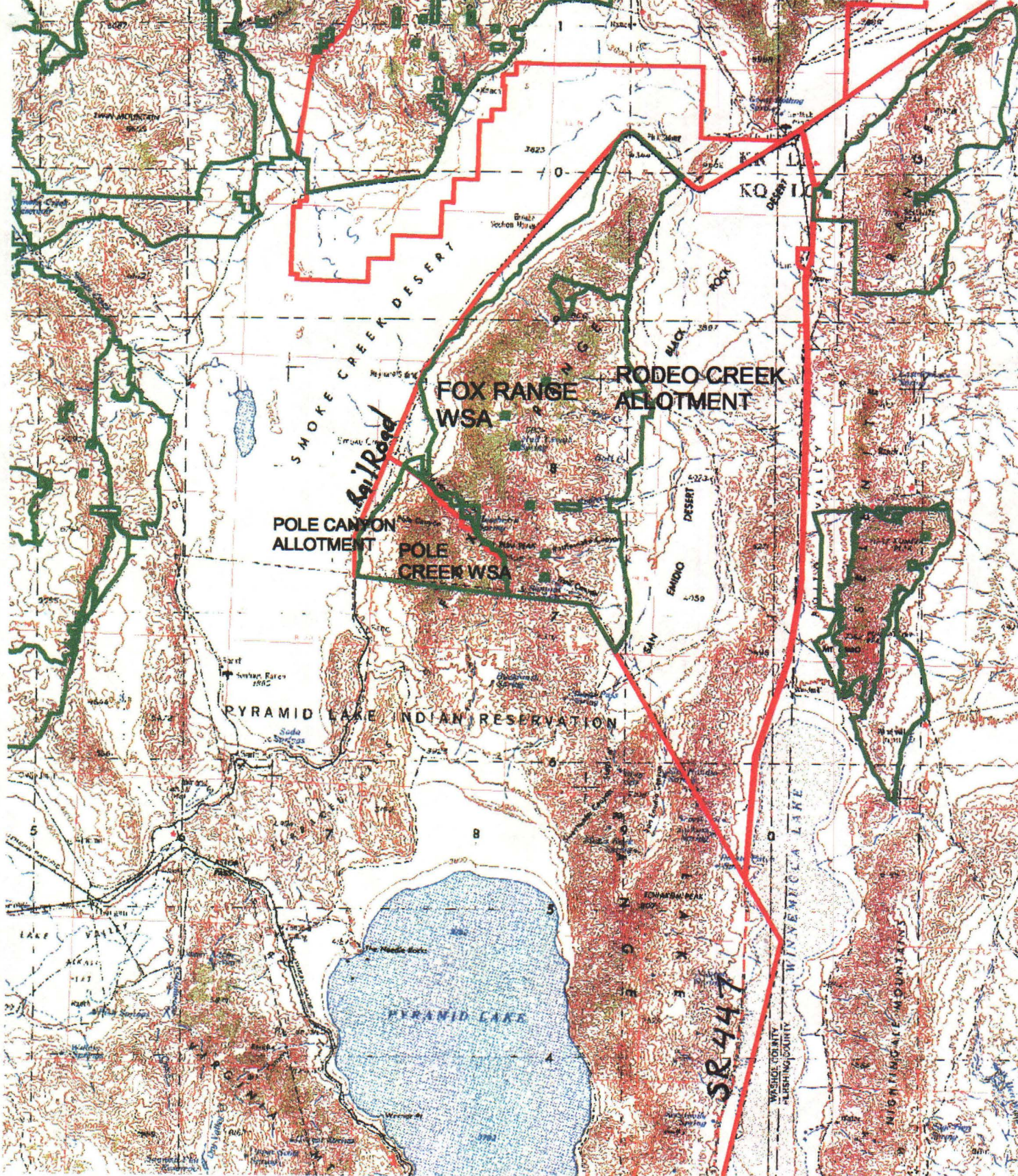
Philip Harris
Nevada Heritage Program
Natural Resources Defense Council
Leah Brashear
Tom Myers
Public Resources Associates

VI. Mitigation Measures

The following mitigating measures would be adhered to during reconstruction/construction of the proposed project along the boundary of the Fox Range (NV-020-14) and Pole Creek (NV-020-14A) WSA's:

1. Vehicular access to the fence would be from reservation lands.
2. Mechanized equipment would not be allowed within the WSA's.
3. All fence materials that are replaced in the existing fence and construction debris associated with the proposed project would be removed from the area and transported to a landfill.
4. Selected portions of the new or reconstructed fences would be flagged or otherwise marked (i.e. snow fence, jute, etc.) for one year after construction to provide a visible sight barrier for the wild horses.

If cultural resources are encountered during construction of the new section of the proposed fence, the Field Office Archeologist will be notified so action(s) can be taken to avoid impacts to cultural resources.



 WSA BOUNDARY
 ALLOTMENT BOUNDARY

3 0 3 6 Miles



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 5100 E. Winnemucca Blvd.
 Winnemucca, NV 89445

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