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Bureau of Land Management

Winnemucca District Office

Wild Horse Management

4740

Sonoma-Gerlach Resource Area

Lava Beds

Gathering Plan

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3/81

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Stipulations

1. Archeological clearance will be done on all trap sites prior to their construction: If archeological values are present, trap sites will be moved. Traps will not be placed near any of the identified historic sites. The Nevada Division of Historic Preservation and Archeology will be notified before any action is taken.
2. A Bureau employee will make a careful determination of a boundary line to serve as an outer limit within which attempts will be made to herd horses to a given trap. Topography, distance, and current conditions of the horses are factors that will be considered to set the limits so as to avoid undue stress on the horses while they are being herded.
3. All corral panels will be from 72" to 84" high in order to prevent horses from jumping out of traps.
4. Brutality to horses in any form will not be tolerated. Any employee who mistreats any horse will be dismissed immediately from the roundup operation.
5. The helicopter shall be under the direct supervision of a duly authorized BLM employee. He must be able to communicate with the pilot and be able to direct the use of the helicopter so as to observe the effects on the well being of the animals.
6. Only experienced horseback riders will be used in the gathering operations.
7. All saddle horses will be properly shod and over three years in age. All saddles and tack will be in good repair.
8. Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA) samples will be taken at the holding facilities at Carson City.
9. Only experienced drivers will be used to transport the horses to the holding facilities.
10. The helicopter will have radio communication with the Authorized Officer or his designated representative at all times.
11. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the Nevada Department of Wildlife will be notified before any action is taken.
12. Disturbed ground around each trap site will be rehabilitated in such a manner that is determined feasible by the District Soil-Water-Air Specialist.

13. A qualified Bureau employee will clear all sites prior to construction, to insure that a trap will not significantly impact any Federal or State listed or proposed threatened or endangered plant species. If significant disturbance is anticipated, the trap site will be moved.
14. A veterinarian will be on call at all times during the roundup operation. The veterinarian will never be more than 100 miles from the roundup operation. In an emergency, the veterinarian could be helicoptered in, arriving in one to one and a half hours.
15. Every effort will be made to locate a trap near existing horse trails so that once the animals are started towards the capture area they will be able to pick a natural route and proceed at their own pace.
16. Allowances are made for high temperatures so that horses are not driven long distances in hot conditions.
17. All of the proposed trap sites will conform with the Bureau's Interim Management Policy and Guidelines for Lands under Wilderness Review (issued December 12, 1979).

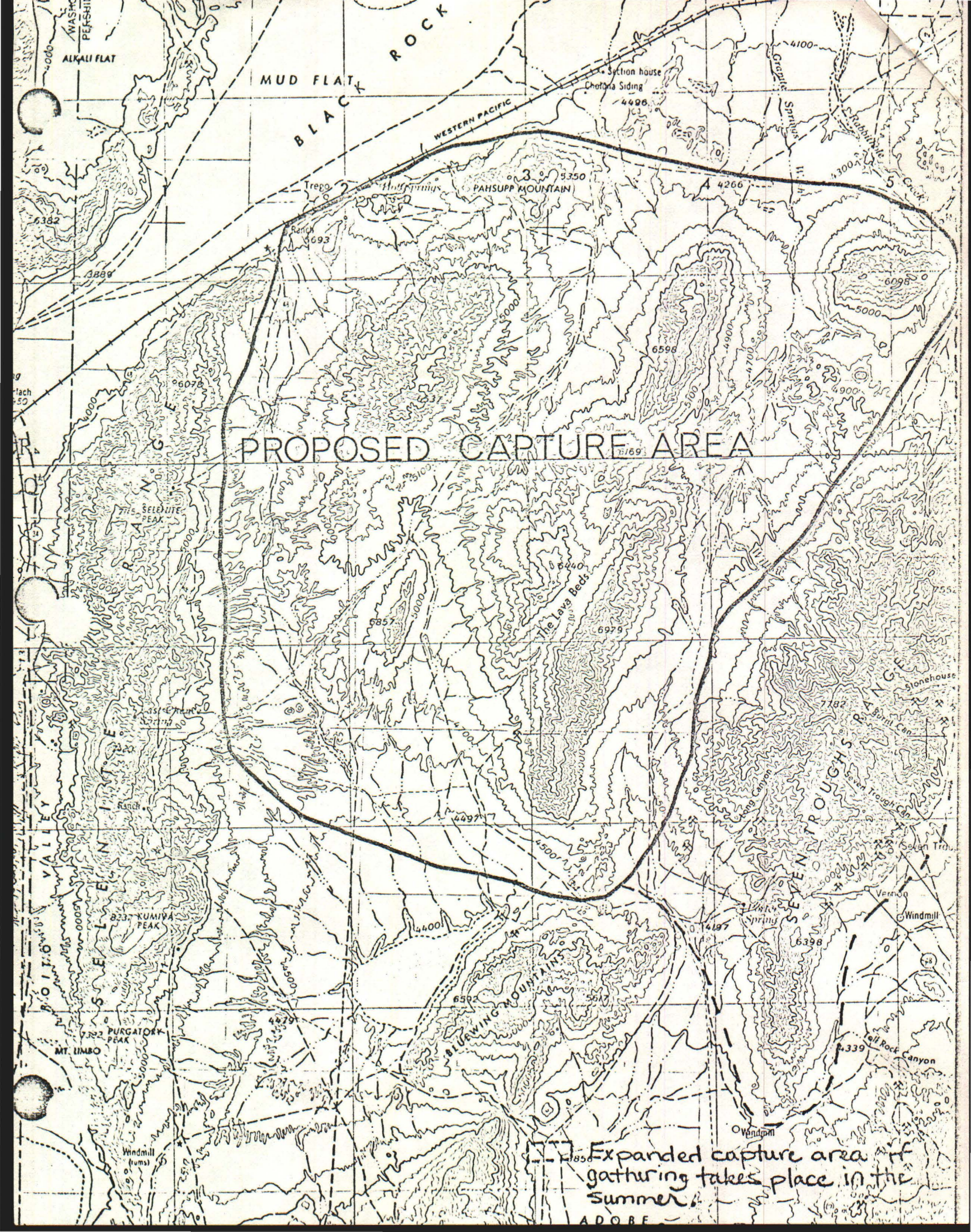
I. Introduction

The intent of this capture plan is to outline the methods and procedures to be used in reducing the wild horse/burro herd in the Lava Beds Herd Use Area (HUA) to an interim management level of 90 horses and 30 burros, which will allow the range condition to improve until such time as a Management Framework Plan (MFP) decision sets the optimum herd size. This will involve the removal of approximately 796 horses and 12 burros.

The actual gathering should take place after foaling season in 1981, depending on available funds and manpower.

Two aerial inventories have been conducted in the Lava Beds during 1980 (February and October). The February 27 inventory placed the total population at 789 wild horses and 38 wild burros. It was estimated that at the end of this year's foaling season the population would be 876 horses and 42 burros (based on an 11%/year net increase). The October 2 inventory placed the population at 613 horses and 44 burros, which is approximately 263 horses short of the expected population. The Seven Troughs HUA, which borders the eastern side of the Lava Beds HUA, was also inventoried this year. This area has not been inventoried since the spring of 1977 and the population in 1980 was estimated to be 318 wild horses. The inventory, conducted in late September 1980 placed the population at 664 horses, 346 over the estimated number. An analysis of the information obtained from the inventories indicated that seasonal migration is occurring between the two HUAs. Therefore, the proposed capture area described in the draft EA will be expanded to include a portion of the Seven Troughs Range to insure that a significant amount of the year-round grazing pressure in the Lava Beds HUA will be reduced. Generally, the wild horse/burro populations were concentrated in the following areas (see Figure 1):

- (a) The majority of the wild horses were located southwest of Pahsupp Mountain.
- (b) Smaller populations of horses were located in the mountainous areas to the east and southeast of Pahsupp Mountain.
- (c) The majority of the wild burros were located in the flats in the extreme southern end of the HUA.



PROPOSED CAPTURE AREA

Expanded capture area of gathering takes place in the summer

A detailed inventory will be conducted prior to the gathering to determine the exact number of animals to be removed.

The BLM is directed to manage wild horses and burros as authorized by Public Law 92-195, Section 3. This management includes maintaining an ecological balance on the public lands. Over the past years the increase in horse/burro numbers have caused a deteriorating range condition and has adversely affected the ecological balance of the area. This gathering plan is an attempt to alleviate the grazing pressure and competition for forage on a seriously overobligated range resource. The range adjudications made in the 1960's allocated all the available forage to livestock and a small percentage to wildlife; wild horses were not considered. Livestock numbers are being reduced to alleviate some of the overobligation. Horse numbers must be reduced to relieve the present demand on the available forage.

Yearly trapping of wild horses/burros to maintain the numbers at the recommended interim management levels is not economically feasible. Consequently, the animals will be trapped below their optimum numbers (to be determined through MFP decision) in the 1981 trapping and allowed to increase beyond the interim management levels.

II. General Area Description

The Lava Beds HUA is located approximately 18 miles east of Gerlach, Nevada, and 44 miles northwest of Lovelock, Nevada.

There are three major land masses within the HUA, Dry Mountain, Rattlesnake Ridge, and the Lava Beds. Each land mass has a north-south orientation and is approximately 12 miles long and 3-4 miles wide. Elevations range from a high of 6,979 feet at an unnamed peak in the Lava Beds proper, to 4,000 feet at the northeast end of the HUA.

The vegetation in the HUA is characterized by big sagebrush, saltbush, bud sage, low sage, greasewood, rabbitbrush, horsebrush, Sandberg bluegrass, cheatgrass, squirreltail, needlegrass, buckwheat, filaree, halogeton, Russian thistle, tumbled mustard, and tansymustard.

Poisonous plants that are known to occur in the Lava Beds HUA are deathcamas, larkspur, locoweed, lupine, halogeton, and horsebrush. These species appear in limited quantities throughout the range.

Land status of the HUA is as follows:

	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Public Lands	231,744	100
Private Lands	<u>5</u>	<u><1</u>
TOTAL	231,749	100

Since 1971 horse roundups have not been authorized in this area. The Winnemucca District did not receive any claims from private individuals for horses in the Lava Beds during the claiming period.

All of the available forage on the public lands in this area was adjudicated in the mid-60's for use in domestic livestock operations and a small percentage for wildlife. No AUMs were adjudicated for wild horses/burros. Because of this situation significant resource damage is occurring in the HUA; perennial grasses are being grazed close to 100 percent yearly, and sagebrush and hopsage plants are being pawed out by horses in search of the protected grasses in these shrub understories. This is causing a significant decrease in the percentage of ground cover and is contributing to increased soil erosion problems, plus increased wildlife and livestock competition for forage.

The area supports a small to moderate-sized population of mule deer, a relatively high density population of chukar, and a low density population of sagehen, mourning doves, and California quail.

III. Justification

With the passage of Public Law 92-195, the "Wild Free-roaming Horse and Burro Act," the wild horse populations have gone unmanaged for the past nine years. As a result, animal numbers have increased at a damaging rate. This has caused serious overuse by both livestock and wild horses in competition for inadequate quantities of forage. The wild horse gathering will alleviate the pressure on a heavily stressed, overpopulated wild horse herd, and serve as a rehabilitative measure to aid in the reestablishment of the vegetative communities.

Preliminary figures from the 1979 range survey compilations indicate that the carrying capacity for the HUA is estimated to be 5,607 Animal Unit Months 1/ (AUMs).

1/ An AUM is the amount of forage necessary to sustain one cow, five sheep, one horse, or four deer for one month.

The 1980 use demand is estimated as follows:

<u>Species</u>	<u>AUM Demand</u>
Cattle/Sheep	600/1,380
Wild Horses/Burros	10,512/ 504
Wildlife	<u>145</u>
TOTAL	13,141

This indicates that the HUA is overobligated by an estimated 7,534 AUMs, or 134%.

Subpart 4120.2-1(a) of Part 43 CFR states that the "authorized officer shall specify the kind and number of livestock, the period(s) of use, the allotment(s) to be used and the amount of use . . . ," and that the " . . . livestock grazing use shall not exceed the livestock grazing capacity and shall be limited or excluded to the extent necessary to achieve the objectives established for the allotment."

Concurrent with the reduction in wild horse/burro numbers, the Winnemucca District Office will temporarily suspend the authorized livestock grazing use in the gathering area by at least 10% or by a negotiated voluntary reduction/exclusion of livestock use within the boundaries of the HUA.

This reduction of authorized livestock use will remain in effect until such time as the key forage species in the HUA have required vigor and that adequate reproduction of the key species is occurring, and/or until such time as the final MFP decisions regarding forage allocation for this HUA have been made.

The HUA is currently receiving excess utilization of the forage resources and this gathering plan will be an interim action pending the determination of optimum wild horse/burro numbers under the MFP decision on grazing use and the hopeful recovery of the range condition.

IV. Capture Plan and Methods

Wild horses will be rounded up through the use of a helicopter. The horses will be directed toward temporary capture corrals by means of a helicopter. Wings (from 1/8 to 1/4 mile) will be constructed leading into the corral. When the horses have been driven to within 1/4 to 1/2 mile of the trap, riders on horseback will then flank the animals and guide them into the trap. Once the horses are in the trap the gate will be closed by hand. Should a horse break back at the trap it will be roped, if possible, by the riders.

It is expected that the number of animals that are driven into the traps will vary from 1 to 35 horses at a time.

The capture corrals will generally be circular (100' in diameter) and constructed of approximately 90 to 100 portable panels (height 6' to 7'). Each trap will have in addition a small holding corral (100' in diameter) adjoining the trap. This corral will also be circular and constructed from portable panels. The trap will be camouflaged with sagebrush or juniper.

A portable loading chute will be used at each trap site to load captured horses onto stock trucks that will transport the animals.

The start of each wing will be constructed from portable panels (6' to 7' high). The remainder of the wing will be constructed from white rope stretched on 6 1/2' steel fence posts. The fence posts will be spaced from 50' to 100' apart, depending upon the terrain.

The helicopter will carry a Bureau employee when necessary and, should the horses become unnecessarily stressed, the BLM employee will instruct the pilot to break off the pursuit so that the animals may rest and recover. All attempts will be made to move and keep bands together.

A Bureau of Land Management employee will make careful determination of boundary lines to serve as an outer limit within which attempts will be made to herd horses to a given trap. Topography, distance, and current condition of the horses are factors that will be considered in setting the limits to avoid undue stress on the horses while they are being herded. Each area will be flown prior to the start of trapping to locate any hazards to the horses while being herded (fences, cliffs, etc.).

More than one trap site will probably be needed in the mountain range. Each site will be located after the habits of the horses in that area are determined. In general, all sites will be located to cause as little damage to the natural resources of the area as possible. Sites will be located close to existing roads when possible, and all sites will be cleared by the District Archeologist.

As the horses are captured in the trap sites they will be loaded onto the stock trucks and shipped to Palomino Valley or to temporary holding corrals in the area.

Those horses that are determined to be privately-owned animals will be handled as stipulated in the cooperative agreement between the BLM and the Nevada State Department of Agriculture, for this specific roundup.

A veterinarian will be on call or contract in Reno at all times during the roundup process, and at a maximum will be 100 miles away from any one trap site.

The area adjacent to each trap site will be thoroughly worked by the helicopter until the authorized officer determines the trap should be moved to another location.

All handling of the horses captured by Bureau employees will conform to the Nevada "Safety Guidelines for Gathering, Transporting, and Handling Wild Horses."

No wild free-roaming horse shall be destroyed except on certificate of a licensed veterinarian that the animal is severely injured or seriously sick and should be destroyed as an act of mercy (pursuant to section 4740.3-1 of the regulations), or except on order of an authorized officer (pursuant to section 4740.3 of the regulations).

Any horses that have been moved to the temporary holding corrals will be shipped, as transportation is available, to the Bureau's Palomino Valley corral facility.

The sole responsibility of the Palomino Valley crew is to capture the wild horses/burros in the safest and most humane manner. The district authorized officer will make the determination as to which horses will be shipped to the Palomino Valley corral facility and which horses will be rereleased for study purposes or humanely destroyed at the trap site.

Any transportation of captured animals will be subject to the following humane procedures as outlined in CFR section 4740.2(b)(1-5) and 4740.2(c):

- (1) All such transportation shall be in compliance with appropriate state and federal laws and regulations applicable to the humane transportation of horses and burros.
- (2) Vehicles shall be in good repair, of adequate rated capacity, and carefully operated so as to insure that captured animals are transported without undue risk of injury.

- (3) Vehicles shall be inspected and approved by an authorized officer prior to use.
- (4) Where necessary and practical, animals shall be sorted as to age, size, temperament, sex, and condition when transporting them so as to minimize, to the extent possible, injury due to fighting and trampling.
- (5) The authorized officer shall consider the condition of the animals, weather conditions, type of vehicles, and distance to be transported when planning for the movement of captured animals.
- (6) The transportation of wild free-roaming horses and burros shall be under humane conditions. Unless otherwise approved by the authorized officer, transportation shall be limited, in sequence, to a maximum of 24 hours followed by a minimum of 5 hours of on-the-ground rest with adequate feed and water.

V. Signatures

Lead responsibility:

Rodger T. Bryan
 Rodger T. Bryan
 Natural Resource Specialist

1/23/81
 Date

Reviewed by:

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 Environmental Coordinator

1/26/81
 Date

Brad Hines
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 Area Manager

Jan 27 1981
 Date

Submitted to State Director by:

Frank C. Shields
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 District Manager

1/29/81
 Date

Approved by:

 Ed Spang
 State Director

 Date