F 8-12-99

Environmental Assessment
Selenite Pasture Fence
North-South Division Fence

I. Introduction.

Background

In 1994, the Blue Wing/Seven Troughs Allotments Reevaluation and subsequent Final Multiple Use Decision (FMUD) were issued. This decision implemented a north/south grazing strategy for the permittee, C-Punch Ranch. C-Punch Ranch appealed the Decision. A settlement agreement (Settlement) between BLM and C-Punch Ranch was reached. Part of the Settlement identified three fences that should be constructed within the Blue Wing and Seven Troughs Allotment. These fences would allow for more intensive livestock management and maintain wild horses and burros within their respective Herd Management Areas (HMA's) while keeping them out of non-HMA areas.

With the construction of the Blue Wing/Majuba Boundary Fence in 1998, the entire Antelope Range Herd Area (HA), which includes checkerboard lands, was fenced into the Majuba Allotment.

In the Settlement[1], BLM and C-Punch agreed the following priority fences should be constructed subject to cultural inventories and environmental analysis. The actual routes would be determined through an on-the-ground selection. The final routes may differ from the routes described in the Settlement.

Purpose and Need

Selenite Pasture Fence.

Construct a fence separating the Selenite Range from the Lava Beds, Blue Wing Mountains, and Shawave/Nightengale Mountains. This fence would serve two purposes:

1.) Livestock management and 2.) Maintenance of wild horses within the Lava Beds Herd Management Area (HMA), Blue Wing Mountains HMA, Shawave Mountains HMA, and Nightengale Mountains HMA. The proposed fence would enclose the Selenite Range, a Herd Area.

2.North/South Division Fence.

Construct an east to west fence dividing the Blue Wing/Seven Troughs Allotment approximately in half. The proposed fence would improve the management of livestock in the allotment. The proposed fence would not cross through any major portion of any HMA.

Building these fences would be in conformance with the Sonoma-Gerlach Land Use Plan issued July of 1982, the Blue Wing/Seven Troughs 1994 Final Multiple Use Decision, and the1999 Settlement. The proposed action and alternatives are consistent with Federal, State, and local laws, regulations, and plans to the maximum extent possible.

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[1] Affected Interested Publics were notified of the Settlement Agreement by letter dated August 12, 1999.

II. Proposed Action

Construct approximately 56 miles of fence (see attached map). There would be no blading along the fence route. The fence would be four wires, with the bottom wire smooth. The wire spacing would be 20" for the bottom wire, 35" for the second wire, 39" for the third wire and 42" for the top wire. Line posts would be 16.5' (one rod) apart. Gates would be installed in every minor road/trail, every mile if there were no roads/trails, and adjacent to cattle guards. Off set gates would be built if the proposed fence crosses any existing wild horse and burro trails. All gates would have either wire or mechanical gate closures installed. At any wild horse and burro trails, fabric strips would be installed 50 feet either side of the gates. Cattle guards would be installed on the county/major roads, including the road into the Limbo Cow Camp. All cattle guards would be of sufficient size and load-bearing strength based on expected traffic. The cattle guards would have rebar welded between each rail to prevent livestock and/or wild horses from stepping between the rails and becoming caught.

Steel Pipe would be used to construct corners, stretch panels and gates. In some areas, rock cribs could be used for corners. All line posts will be steel.

BLM would continue to manage wild horses and burros within each of the Herd Management Areas (HMA's) in accordance with the 1994 Final Multiple Use Decision. The Selenite Range, and the new Selenite Pasture, is not within an HMA and BLM would manage for zero wild horses and burros within the Selenite Pasture. The appropriate management level (AML) for all the HMAs would not be adjusted because of the fences.

The BLM and the permittees are cooperating in the construction of the proposed fence. For that portion of the Selenite Pasture Fence beginning in Section 12, T28N, R25E, north to the northern allotment boundary west of Trego, a distance of approximately 22 miles, C-Punch Ranch will fund 100% of the materials and construction. For that portion of the Selenite Pasture Fence west of the above-mentioned Section 12, a distance of approximately 12 miles, BLM will provide materials, and C-Punch Ranch would provide construction. For the North/South Division Fence, a distance of approximately 22 miles, BLM would fund 100% of the materials and construction. C-Punch Ranch will be assigned maintenance responsibility for these fences. The projects would be implemented under a Cooperative Agreement.

III. Alternatives

A. Selenite Pasture Fence

Alternative 1: From Twin Butte Well, north, the fence line would run adjacent to the main north/south road to the Gerlach-Winnemucca road (the High Road). This route would effectively move the Lava Beds HMA boundary to the east, away from private lands and privately owned waters. The road presently roughly marks the route itself, and the fence would follow within 50-100 feet of the road in most places.

Alternative 2: From Twin Butte Well, north, the fence line would skirt the present western boundary of the Lava Beds HMA. There are presently no roads or trails along this boundary to mark the actual route.

For Alternatives 1 and 2, from Twin Butte Well, the fence would run south to near a set of existing livestock corrals in Section 22, T28N, R25E; thence westerly to near Jayhawk Well, thence westerly to the western allotment boundary at Highway 447.

Alternative 3: The proposed fence route would be the same for either alternative until the route got to Jayhawk Well. So as not to cross the Mt. Limbo Wilderness Study Area (WSA) from Jayhawk Well the proposed fence would run south for about three miles until it reached Stonehouse Canyon in Section 35, T28N, R24E. From this location the proposed fence could run either due west and tie into Winnemucca Lake or follow the powerline right-of-way until it was north of Winnemucca Lake and thence westerly to the western allotment boundary at Highway 447. This alternative would be used in conjunction with alternative one or two.

B. North/South Division Fence

Alternative 1: From Section 12, T 28N, R25E, follow the main east-west road through Juniper Pass to a point at the southwest corner of the Seven Troughs HMA. This fence line would run north of the Shawave Mountains HMA, and south of the Blue Wing Mountains HMA.

Alternative 2: From Twin Butte Well, follow the main road to the southeast, to the southwest corner of the Seven Troughs HMA. This fenceline would run generally along the southern boundary of the Lava Beds HMA, north of the Blue Wing Mountains HMA, and along the southwest boundary of the Seven Troughs HMA.

For both alternatives, the fence line would run generally along the southern boundary of the Seven Troughs HMA to the eastern allotment boundary, using existing roads to the extent feasible.

C. No Action

The fences would not be constructed.

IV. Affected Environment

See Attachment 1 for a list of vegetative species found along the proposed fence lines. The Blue Wing/Seven Troughs Allotment is about 1.2 million acres in size. Much of the allotment vegetation

communities are salt desert shrub, sagebrush/grassland, and greasewood/desert shrub. These vegetation communities would be crossed in the construction of the proposed fences. There are no noxious weeds along the proposed route. The soil textures are sandy loams through silt loam.

The predominate wildlife species are songbirds, jack rabbits and reptiles. California bighorn sheep and pronghorn antelope are the dominant big game species found along the proposed fence. The closest known sage grouse lek is located approximately 9 miles from the nearest point of any of the alternative proposed routes.

All proposed fence locations are within a Class IV Visual Resource Management Area. Class IV provides that contrasts may attract attention and be a dominant feature of the landscape in terms of scale; however, the changes should repeat the basic elements (form, line, color, and texture) inherent in the characteristic landscape.

A cultural resource inventory of the proposed fence line will be performed prior to completion of the final EA for this project. The result of this inventory will be included in the final EA. Native American concerns will also be addressed in the final EA.

The FMUD established the following AML ranges for wild horses and burros:

Lava Beds	Seven Troughs	Blue Wing Mtn.	Shawave/Nightengale
111 to 148 horses	117 to 156 horses	27 to 36 horses	102 to 136 horse
12 to 16 burros	35 to 46 burros	21 to 28 burros	0 burros

The Selenite Pasture Fence Alternative 1 would cross portions of the Lava Beds HMA. Under Alternative 1, approximately 11,000 acres of the Lava Beds HMA would be west of the proposed fence. Approximately 287,000 acres of the Lava Beds HMA would be east of the fence. There is no perennial water west of the proposed Alternative 1 location. Antelope Spring, Mud Spring, and Ten Mile Spring lie within the Selenite Range HA, but outside of the HMA, and may have served to water wild horses west of the proposed fence location. However, these are privately held waters.

The North/South Division Fence Alternative 1 would cross tips of the Shawave Mountains HMA. The North/South Division Fence Alternative 2 would cross portions of the Lava Beds and Seven Troughs HMA's. However, the portions of the respective HMA's which would be crossed by any of these alternatives are insignificant, and do not have the likelihood of affecting wild horse and burro distributions within the HMAs.

The following table shows adult wild horse numbers east and west of the proposed Selenite Pasture fence Alternative 1, within the Lava Beds HMA, based upon census flights.

Year	East	West
1974	410	0
1975	367	0
1977	572	0
1980	690	0
1982	337	3
1984	907	2

1987	1032	4
1989	325	0
1992	394	7
1993	454	11
1994	445	0
1995	251	0
1998	422	0

No on the ground field investigation has been conducted for sensitive/protected plants and animal species. However, according to the Nevada Threatened and Endangered Plant Map Book, as updated, and Nevada Natural Heritage's Program data (March 2000), no sensitive plants have been observed in the project area. There could be a potential impact to the Western burrowing owl, a Nevada BLM sensitive species. The owl is a small underground nesting bird of prey, which lives in colonies inside abandoned rodent and small mammal dens. The openings appear as obvious holes in the ground marked by whitewash excrement from the colony.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Species of Concern and/or BLM Sensitive Species that may occur in the area are:

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
western burrowing owl	Athene cunicularia hypugea
northern goshawk	Accipiter gentilis
black tern	Chlidonias niger
least bittern	Ixobrychus exilis hesperis
white-faced ibis	Plegadis chihi
ferruginous hawk	Buteo regalis
Western sage grouse	Centrocercus urophasianus
Lahontan milkvetch	Astagalus porrectus

There are two WSAs within the Blue Wing/Seven Troughs Allotment; Mt. Limbo and Selenite Mountain. The proposed North-South Division fence would either run through the souther portion of the Mt. Limbo WSA (Alternatives 1 and 2) or would approximately follow the boundary for about 5-6 miles. The proposed Selenite Pasture fence would either run along side a portion of the Selenite Mountain WSA (Alternative 1), or would run through a portion of the WSA if the fence follows the present Lava Beds HMA boundary (Alternative 2).

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 farm lands, flood plains, Native American Religious concerns, paleontology, threatened or endangered species, wastes – hazardous or solids, water quality, wetlands/riparian zones, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness,

migratory birds, and noxious weeds.

A complete noxious weed inventory has not been completed in the Blue Wing/Seven Troughs Allotment. There are known noxious weed infestations in the allotment, but if there are any they would be located near water courses, springs, and along roads or trails. There are no known infestations known along the proposed fence routes. The proposed action or alternatives should not further promote the spread of noxious weeds.

A complete migratory bird inventory has not been completed for the allotment. There is a chance that some migratory birds may occur in the allotment. The proposed action should not impact migratory birds.

V. Environmental Consequences

All Alternatives

Construction would cause some short-term impacts to vegetation from crushing, trampling and breaking. The vegetation should recover within 2-3 years after construction. The soils along the fence would withstand the impacts of driving and any animals that might walk along the fence; changes in erosion would be minimal.

For the short-term (3-5years) wild horses and burros could run into the fences until they are conditioned to the fences. However, all alternatives either run on the fringes of, or between, HMA boundaries. Where fences would cross portions of HMA's, the fence locations would be away from wild horse and burros concentration areas. See discussion below.

There should be no impacts to wildlife and domestic sheep movements since the bottom wire would be smooth and 16" off the ground. Wildlife and domestic sheep should easily pass through the fence while keeping cattle and wild horses in the appropriate use areas. There would be some inconvenience for the sheep herders getting through the fence if a gate was not near by.

Environmental consequences to the Cultural Resources and Native American Concerns will be analyzed in the final EA.

Impacts to western burrowing owls should have a low probability of occurring due to the scattered distribution of the species and the likelihood that vehicles would not knowingly drive into the den openings, since they are obvious. If the fences are constructed during the spring, there could be disturbance and/or displacement of the birds. This could possibly lead to the abandonment of the young if the fence were too close to burrows, which would result in a possible negative impact to the young. However, a possible positive impact to the burrowing owl is that the fences would provide an elevated perch to facilitate hunting of prey.

No impacts to sage grouse are expected, as all fence line alternatives are well away from known concentration areas, leks, and brooding areas. The closest known lek to any portion of the fence is approximately nine (9) miles away on top of the Selenite Range.

Visual resources were considered in the analysis of the project and were determined not to be impacted

by the proposed action. Though the area is rated Class IV, which permits the projects to dominate the landscape, the fences are not expected to dominate the visual landscape due to their limited size in comparison to the area, and because they will primarily follow existing roads and contours. Therefore, a VRM worksheet was not completed.

Selenite Pasture Fence Alternative 1

Under this alternative, there should not be much driving along the fence line during construction and or maintenance since the majority of the fence would be constructed adjacent to the roads.

For the short-term (3-5years) wild horses might run into the fences until they are conditioned to the fences. However, based on horse census flights, the vast majority of wild horses were found to the east of the proposed fence location. It would appear the area between the fence and the HMA boundary does not provide substantial habitat for wild horses. There are no perennial water sources for wild horses within this area. It is known that some wild horses and burros are within the Selenite Range HA, and it is possible that until they are removed from the Selenite Range, this alternative may hinder movement back into the Lava Beds HMA. Once the wild horses and burros are removed from the Selenite Range HA, the fence should keep them in the Lava Beds HMA, and BLM should not have to gather wild horses and burros from the Selenite Pasture. BLM will manage that part of the HMA west of the fence for zero wild horses, and will amend the HMA boundary to the road/fence line. From a practical standpoint, this boundary adjustment will have no impact to either the HMA or the AML, since few wild horses have ever used the area west of the road/fenceline. Available information suggests that they were probably not occupying the area in 1971, because the 1974, 1975, and 1980 census flights did not find any horses in the area, and census flights did not record horse use of the area west of the road/proposed fenceline until 1982.

This alternative would not require crossing the Selenite Mountains Wilderness Study Area to skirt the HMA boundary.

Selenite Pasture Fence Alternative 2

Under this alternative, there would be additional driving along the fence line during construction and or maintenance on a portion of the fence. However, impacts would be as described under All Alternatives. Some additional short term crushing of vegetation would occur, since the location would depart the north-south road side to skirt the HMA boundary.

For the short-term (3-5years) wild horses might run into the fences until they are conditioned to the fences. However, based on wild horse census flights, the vast majority of the horses were found to the east of proposed fence location. It would appear the area between the north-south road and the HMA boundary does not provide substantial habitat for the wild horses. There are no perennial water sources for wild horses within this area. It is known that some wild horses are within the Selenite Range HA, outside the Lava Beds HMA. As with Alternative 1, it is possible that until they are removed from the Selenite Range, this alternative may hinder wild horse movement from the Selenite Range HA, back into the Lava Beds HMA. As with Alternative 1, once the wild horses are removed from the Selenite Pasture, the fence should keep them in the HMA, and BLM should not have to gather horses from the Selenite Pasture.

This alternative would require a portion of the fence to cross the Selenite Mountains Wilderness Study Area to avoid the HMA boundary. While such fence would not impair the suitability for the area to be

designated Wilderness, such designation may require the removal of the fence to a different location in the future.

Both alternatives would cross the southern portion of the Mt. Limbo WSA once the proposed fence headed west from Jayhawk Well.

Selenite Pasture Fence Alternative 3

This alternative would require the proposed fence to follow the southern boundary of the Mt. Limbo WSA until the fence was on the west side of the WSA, where it would tie into either Winnemucca Lake or Highway 447. This alternative would be used in conjunction with alternative one or two.

North/South Division Fence Alternative 1

This location would have the least impact to Wild Horse and Burros. The HMA's where burros are managed (Blue Wing Mountains, Lava Beds, And Seven Troughs), would be north of the fence which would allow for the free movement of animals and the maintenance of a healthy burro population. Movement of wild horses is minimal between Shawave/Nightingale Mountains HMA's, and the Blue Wing Mountains/Lava Beds HMA's. There would be few impacts to wild horse movements.

North/South Division Fence Alternative 2

This location would result in a fence between the Blue Wing HMA and the Lava Beds and Seven Troughs HMA's. Movement of burros would be impacted and all movements between the Blue Wing Mountains HMA and the Lava Beds/Seven Troughs HMA's would be eliminated. Movement of wild horses is minimal between the Shawave/Nightingale and the Blue Wing Mountains HMA's and the Lava Beds. There would be few impacts to wild horses.

No Action

The 1994 Blue Wing/Seven Troughs Allotment Re-evaluation identified management actions that were needed to meet short and long term vegetation objectives. These actions are: 1) more intensive livestock management, 2) managing wild horses and burros within the AML range within designated HMAs, and 3) adjustments in livestock numbers.

This alternative would eliminate any potential hazards to wild horses and burros from running into the fence or keep them from moving in and out of HMAs. The WSAs would not be impacted by building fence through them or around them.

No vegetation would be damaged along the proposed routes from the construction of the proposed fences.

Because of the size of the allotment and a lack of topographic features that would keep livestock or wild horses and burros in specified areas, it would be difficult to achieve the goals outlined in the Allotment Re-evaluation or Agreement.

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 or alternatives.

VI. Specialists Coordination/Concurrence/Comments

The specialists who have signed the face sheet of this document have been involved in the development and review of the proposed action.

The following individuals have been provided copies of this environmental assessment for comments during the planning stages of the project:

Attachment #1

Grasses:

Indian Ricegrass
Bottlebrush Squirreltail
Sandberg Bluegrass
Thurber's Needlegrass
Cheatgrass
Basin Wildrye

Forbs:

Globemallow
Lupine
Indian Paintbrush
Phlox
Tansy tumblemustard
Fiddleneck
Halogeton
Biscuitroot
Pepperweed
Milkvetch
Eriogonum

Shrubs:

Horsebrush
Spiny hopsage
Green mormon tea
Shadscale
Winter fat(white sage)
Bailey greasewood
Bud sage
Wyoming big sagebrush
Low sage
Rabbitbrush