



# United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
SURPRISE RESOURCE AREA  
P.O. BOX 460  
CEDARVILLE, CALIFORNIA 96104-0460



IN REPLY REFER TO:

1792 (CA-028)  
CA-028-91-18

## DECISION RECORD

### East High Rock/Wall Canyon Herd Management Areas Maintenance of Wild Horses at Planned Management Levels

#### I. WILD HORSE REMOVAL

The proposed or recommended action in the EA is Alternative 1. This action would result in:

- The capture of approximately 30 head of horses in the Wall Canyon Herd Management Area (HMA).
- The release of approximately 11 horses in the Wall Canyon HMA with the removal of 19 horses from the range.
- The capture of approximately 60 head of horses in the High Rock HMA east of High Rock Canyon.
- The release of approximately 29 head of selected horses back into the eastern part of the High Rock HMA, with the removal of 31 head from the range.

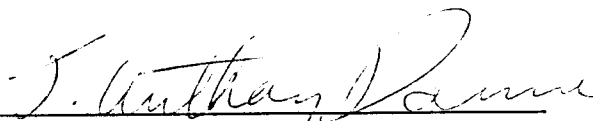
#### II. ALTERNATIVE 2

No Action

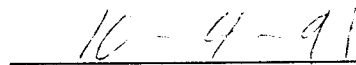
#### III. DECISION AND RATIONALE

Alternative 1 is selected as the Preferred Alternative. This will result in the removal of horses which are in excess of maximum herd numbers from the two Herd Management areas. This removal will bring herds down to their minimum herd management numbers. This is in compliance with the Susanville District's objectives and policy for managing wild horses.

This Decision is in the public interest, there will be no significant adverse impacts and an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.



J. Anthony Darina  
Surprise Resource Area Manager



Date



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## ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

### East High Rock/Wall Canyon Wild Horse Herd Management Areas Maintenance of Wild Horses at Planned Management Levels CA-028-91-18

#### I. INTRODUCTION

##### A. Purpose/Need

The purpose of this Environmental Assessment is to analyze the impacts of maintaining wild horses at planned management levels in the eastern portion of the High Rock and the Wall Canyon Herd Management Areas (HMAs). The action is needed to:

1. bring the herds to minimum management levels as identified in the Land Use Plan so as to maintain the vitality of HMA areas,
2. keep the herd numbers within the carrying capacity of the range and prevent the deterioration and downward trend of the special habitat areas found within the HMAs,
3. protect the natural ecological balance of wildlife species.

Provision for removal of horses from the range are contained in Section 3 of Public Law 92-195, of 1971 the Wild, Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act; Section 14 of the Public Law 95-514, the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 and in Section 4740.1 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

##### B. Location

The proposed areas for horse removal are in the Surprise Resource Area (see Map 1).

1. **Wall Canyon Herd Management Area (see Map 2)**

This HMA is located approximately 46 miles east of Cedarville, CA. The HMA boundary and the Wall Canyon Allotment boundary are the same.

2. **High Rock Herd Management Area, Eastern Portion (see Map 3)**

This HMA is located approximately 40 miles southeast of Cedarville, CA. The western portion of the High Rock HMA is south and west of High Rock Canyon and north of Little High Rock Canyon. The eastern portion of the HMA is north and east of High Rock Canyon and west of the Susanville/Winnemucca District Boundary. This Area also borders the Wall Canyon HMA on the north. This HMA is located in the south-eastern half of the Massacre Mountain Allotment.

### **C. Background Information**

The Cowhead/Massacre Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was completed in 1980. Land Use decisions were formed from the EIS and documented in the Cowhead/Massacre Management Framework Plan (MFP) in 1981. The numbers for each HMA were established so that horse numbers could be managed in a manner to achieve ecological balance with other uses. Herd numbers are within the carrying capacity of the range and are also at a level that is not detrimental to the special habitat requirements of other resource values within the two HMAs.

1. **High Rock (East of Canyon) (CA-264)**

The planned minimum management level for the High Rock Herd is 70 horses, and the maximum planned management level is 100 horses. This is further broken down to the "East of the Canyon" home range (with a minimum of 40 horses and a maximum of 60 horses) and the "Little High Rock" home range (with a minimum of 30 horses and a maximum of 40 horses).

The population "East of the Canyon" was reduced to 40 horses in the fall of 1988. The population in "Little High Rock" was reduced to 32 head in November of 1990.

The "East of Canyon" home range was placed under structured management in the fall of 1988 and the "Little High Rock" home range was placed under structured management in the fall of 1990.

The estimated population of the "East of Canyon" home range as of October 1, 1991 is estimated to be 71 animals.

2. **Wall Canyon (CA-265)**

The Wall Canyon Herd has a minimum planned management level of 15 horses and a maximum planned management level of 25 horses.

This area was last gathered during the fall of 1988 leaving a population of 19 animals. This HMA was placed under structured management at that time. It is estimated that there will be approximately 34 head in the HMA on October 1, 1991.

The Susanville District policy adopted after consultation with interested parties, June 15, 1989, states that the District's objectives and policies are:

1. **Objectives**

- a. Maintain the numbers of all herds within the population ranges established in the Land Use Plans.
- b. Perpetuate healthy, viable wild horse populations for future generations.
- c. Strive to achieve 100 percent adoptability of excess animals that are removed in order to stop contributing animals to the unfortunate and costly pool of unadoptable animals gathered from public lands.
- d. Achieve a strong and effective California Adoption Program for excess animals removed from California herds.
- e. Maintain the habitat within the Herd Management Areas in the Susanville District.

2. **Policies**

- a. District Land Use Plans will allocate sufficient forage to properly maintain the planned population levels established for each HMA.
- b. Animals will be gathered in a safe and minimal stress manner.

- c. Animals will be handled, transported, fed and processed in a manner so they will be protected against injury and disease and receive proper nutrition to keep them in top condition while in BLM holding facilities.
- d. Because horses older than four years of age are more difficult to adopt, the Susanville District, to the extent practical, will work toward placing all excess progeny of the Susanville herds into the regular adoption program at four years of age and younger.
- e. The base herd horses for each Herd Management area will consist of horses that are selected on the basis of their apparent ability to propagate adoptable progeny. The base herd is the breeding herd selected and left on the range to achieve the herd objectives.
- f. Once selected for the base herd, horses will remain in the base herd until they die. When they die they will be replaced by younger horses (four years of age and younger) selected from the herd or by horses selected from other Herd Management areas.
- g. When selecting base herd horses, consideration will be given to maintaining herd integrity (residual animal characteristics).

Approximately 80% of the horses that can be safely and practically gathered from the Wall Canyon and High Rock HMAs will be gathered. Those horses selected as a base herd in 1988 will be returned to their respective HMAs along with selected offspring in order to maintain the minimum herd number.

The public land uses of the area are mainly for recreation, livestock grazing, wild horse and wildlife habitat.

**D. Policy, Planning Documents**

Public Law 92-195, the Wild Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971, Section 3

Public Law 95-514, the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978, Section 14

Code of Federal Regulations 4740.1

Tuledad/Home Camp Management Framework Plan, 1979

Cowhead/Massacre Management Framework Plan, 1981

Susanville District Policy Statement, June 15, 1989

Federal Register Notification, July 30, 1991, page 36063

## II. DESCRIPTIONS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

### A. Proposed Action

The Proposed Action is to gather horses in the High Rock (East) HMA and Wall Canyon HMA Herds. Approximately 90 horses will be gathered from these herds. Those horses selected in 1988, as base herd horses, will be returned to their respective HMAs along with additional young horses in order to meet the minimum herd number. The minimum herd number is 70 head of High Rock (East) and 15 head for Wall Canyon. A high degree of integrity will be maintained in the selection of young animals that will be added to the base herd. Integrity refers to those characteristics that all individuals in a herd have in common and are unique to that herd. The exception will be when inbreeding problems occur. Horses from unrelated herds will be introduced to help correct those problems.

Horses will be gathered in the fall of 1991, in the month of October. Most of the horses located in these HMAs are also located in the East Fork High Rock WSA (914). Gathering will be by helicopter. The gathering period will be from three to five days. The horses will be herded by helicopter approximately 5-10 miles to the trap site. The trap site is located in the East Fork High Rock Canyon WSA. There will be some soil disturbance within the trap due to trampling by horses. The trap will be setup and removed by vehicle using the existing way into the site. There will be overland travel at the trap site to setup, disassemble the trap and turn vehicles around. All removal of horses by vehicle from the trap will be done on the existing way. All vehicle traffic will be kept to a minimum on existing ways. After the gather and trap removal, the site will be rehabilitated within one day based on specified mitigation.

Gathering will be under direct supervision of a duly authorized employee of the Department of Interior. Humane procedures prescribed by the Secretary of Interior, in accordance with Section 404 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 will be used.

All gathering, handling, sorting and hauling will be by employees of the Susanville District. These personnel use maximum care in these operations.

Gathering in the Susanville District is done between October 1 and winter shutdown. At this time, nearly all of the foals are six months of age or older. At this age the foals can be gathered and handled with less stress than occurs when younger foals are gathered.

## B. Description of the Environment

### 1. Vegetation

The Wall Canyon and High Rock HMAs are located in shrub/grass plant community. The dominant shrub is sagebrush and low sagebrush with an understory of bunch grasses which include squirreltail, Stipa, bluebunch wheatgrass and Great Basin wildrye.

The overall condition of these areas range from early serial to late serial ecological condition. Trend in condition is improving in most areas of the HMAs due to improved livestock management and the maintenance of wild horses at planned management levels. The vigor of existing grass plants still needs improvement. Most riparian areas have a static to slightly upward trend, additional improvement is needed.

### 2. Wildlife

The Wall Canyon and "East of High Rock" horse herd areas provide habitat for a large number of wildlife species commonly found within the region. The most common species are pronghorn antelope, sage grouse, black-tailed jackrabbit, Brewer's sparrow and deer mouse. One habitat of special concern to wildlife are the widely scattered riparian zones that occupy less than one percent of the total area. Over half of all wildlife species in the area are dependant upon the riparian communities during some portion of the year. Many of the less common wildlife including voles, killdeer and amphibians would not occur in the area without riparian zones.

### 3. Threatened and Endangered Species

No federally threatened or endangered plants or animals are known to occur. Several sensitive plants occur in the Wall Canyon and High Rock HMAs. These plants are Ivesia rhypara, BLM sensitive, Trifolium andersonnii ssp. beatleyae, CNPS-List 5, Cryptantha schoolcraftii, no listing yet.



#### 4. **Wild Horses**

It estimated that there are at least 105 horses in the two HMAs.

Wild horses in Wall Canyon HMA tend to make the majority of their use on the eastern half of the HMA. This is due in part to the Cottonwood drainage which acts as a natural barrier. In addition, areas which tend to suit horses better vegetatively are found on the eastern half of the HMA.

Most of the horse use is made on the low sage tablelands and ridge tops. This use is made during both summer and winter. The identification of summer and winter range has not been done in this area. Presently there seems to be a significant amount of overlap between the two.

The High Rock Herd has a summer range of approximately 115,000 acres and a winter range of 60,000 acres.

Horses in both herd areas show more of a light horse characteristics with smaller sizes and lighter bone than some of the other herds in the Resource Area. The color of these horses varies, but paint and dun colors are dominant.

#### 5. **Wilderness**

One Wilderness Study Area (WSA), East Fork High Rock Canyon WSA 914, is located within the proposed gather areas. Interim Management Plan guidelines allow temporary facilities for the management of wild horses and burros to be installed as long as they satisfy the non-impairment criteria which states the use is temporary and does not create surface disturbance.

#### 6. **Cultural Resources**

The area has scattered cultural resources such a lithic scatters of obsidian chips. Cultural field inventories will be completed on each new capture site. The proposed capture site has been used several times in the past.

#### 7. **Livestock**

There is no management plan for the Massacre Mountain Allotment. This Allotment has had non-use from cattle for the last several years. There is sheep grazing during the lambing season, April 1 to June 30 in the

general area. Sheep move back in the area from October 8 to December 7. The sheep permit has also been in non-use for the last three years.

The Wall Canyon Allotment has an approved Allotment Management Plan which is a coordinated plan with the Sheldon Wildlife Refuge. Approximately 1,817 cattle graze this Allotment on an alternating season of use. The season alternates from May 1 to June 24 and August 25 to October 15 every other year.

### III. ANALYSIS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

#### A. Proposed Action

##### 1. Vegetation

There are two impacts related to vegetation. One deals with the health of the vegetation and the other has to do with forage competition between horses and wildlife.

Periodic rest during the growing season is essential for an improvement in vigor of perennial grass plants. Currently, livestock management is giving these areas periodic growing season rest. Horses and wildlife, to an extent, tend to use the areas on year long basis, concentrating in preferred and traditional areas. Vegetation in these areas are then used throughout the growing season every year. Season long grazing does not benefit plants but they may be maintained if utilization does not exceed 40-60 percent. Since periodic deferment by horses is not feasible, utilization standards must be adhered to. Utilization levels have been exceeded in some areas of the proposed gather area, particularly in riparian and meadow areas near water. Maintaining the number of horses at planned management levels will help achieve utilization parameters and will benefit riparian and meadow vegetation.

##### 2. Soils

Soils impacts are directly related to the health of the vegetation. The maintenance of horses at planned management levels will benefit the vegetation and use levels allowing litter to establish. Perennial seedlings then can establish, which will help prevent soil erosion and absorb water to benefit the growing medium.

3. **Wildlife**

The maintenance of horses at planned management levels will benefit wildlife. Horses, livestock and wildlife congregate in riparian areas, particularly during the summer months. Livestock reductions and management actions have significantly reduced adverse impacts on riparian zones. Horse impacts can be substantial to riparian sites if numbers are allowed to exceed the carrying capacity of the riparian areas. Maintaining planned populations of horses will assure that horses do not have significant adverse impacts on key wildlife habitats.

4. **Threatened and Endangered Species**

The four sensitive plants found in the two horse herd areas do not appear to be affected by the current horse numbers.

5. **Wild Horses**

Maintaining horses at planned management levels will benefit livestock, wildlife, vegetation, and the wild horses themselves by keeping the total herbivore use in balance with the carrying capacity of the ecosystem. Maintenance of the habitat in acceptable condition will be facilitated.

The horses that were selected in 1988 and returned to the HMAs will again be released after the capture. Returning these horses is a more humane treatment as opposed to other disposition options such as holding facilities or sanctuaries. The selected horses are a mixed age group with many being over four years of age. Typically, these older animals are not adopted and do not adapt well to domestication. They usually end up in feeding centers or sanctuaries. Young horses, four years and younger, generally adapt well to domestication and are readily adopted by the public. By returning older, selected horses to their home range, they can live out their natural life in the wild.

The selection process can reduce the occurrence of genetic weakness or deformities by removing inferior horses from a population during each gather. Desirable traits in a herd can also be enhanced by the selection process. During the selection process in 1988, the integrity of the herd was maintained by selecting those individuals having characteristics that represent the entire herd.

6. **Wilderness**

a. **Description of Proposed Action**

Some gathering will occur within the East Fork High Rock Canyon WSA 914. Gathering animals will have a short term affect on solitude of the WSAs due to the noise of the helicopter and the presence of wranglers and a semi-truck to transport the gathered animals back to the corrals.

Gathering will occur on or adjacent to roads or ways. Temporary traps will be constructed from portable panels. Wings will be constructed by suspending jute from fence posts driven into the ground. Traps and wings are generally set up on either side of a road or just off the road. No surface disturbance takes place where the panels are setup. Temporary surface disturbance due to trampling will take place inside the enclosures in which the animals will be gathered. After gathering, all panels will be removed and there will be only short term evidence of horses being concentrated within the area of activity. Temporary facilities for the management of wild horses and burros may be installed as long as they satisfy the non-impairment criteria which states that the use is temporary and does not create surface disturbance or involves permanent placement of structures.

The maintenance of animals at planned management levels will help maintain the naturalness of the WSA by preventing degradation of the vegetation and riparian areas. Maintenance of planned management levels will maintain a viable horse herd that will provide opportunities to view wild horses and burros as part of a wilderness experience.

b. **Consistency With BLM's Interim Management Policy**

(1) Is the proposal temporary? Yes

The Proposed Action would take approximately two to three days in the WSA.

(2) Does the activity require reclamation? No

The analysis indicates minor impacts to solitude. Solitude will be affected for two or three days due to the noise of

the helicopter and the presence of wranglers and a semi-truck to transport the gathered horses.

Travel routes will be kept to a minimum of trips and distance from the existing ways. The wild horse gather requires minor reclamation which can be accomplished the same day as the completion of the activity. Reclamation will be done on all cross country travel routes, turn around areas at the trap site and the trap site itself. Reclamation will include removing crushed vegetation, removing tire tracks, and replacing displaced soil and rock.

- (3) Does the Proposed Action significantly constrain the Secretary of Interior's recommendation on the Little High Rock WSA and Buffalo Hills WSA with respect to the area's suitability or non-suitability for preservation as wilderness? No

The scope of the Proposed Action and the extremely limited disturbance should not measurably affect the Secretary's recommendation.

## **7. Livestock**

The maintenance of horses at planned management levels would benefit livestock and reduce competition for available forage and water. Most livestock will be off the allotments when horse gathering occurs.

## **B. No Action**

### **1. Vegetation**

Horse populations would continue to build above maximum management levels increasing pressure on the vegetation. Vegetation is used as forage and habitat not only by the horses themselves but by other wildlife species. Vegetation would be over utilized in the critical deer and antelope ranges and other concentration areas, eventually eliminating the perennial grass plants. The current upward trend would be reversed. Competition for forage particularly during the growing season will continue and the heavy use areas will expand. This would all be in non-conformance of the Land Use Plan (LUP).

2. **Soils**

With overuse of vegetation, lack of litter becomes evident. In addition, perennial plants begin to die and are replaced by annuals which do not hold the soil as well as perennial. Rainfall impact and runoff carry off soil and reduce the productivity of the soil and its capability to grow vegetation.

3. **Wildlife**

Wildlife would be adversely affected by not maintaining the horses at planned management levels. Competition for forage would continue and would worsen as perennial plants are replaced by undesirable vegetation such as medusahead, thistle, and annuals. Riparian sites would receive significant adverse impacts.

4. **Threatened and Endangered Species**

It is not anticipated that increased horse population would adversely affect any of the sensitive plants found in the two horse areas.

5. **Wild Horses**

Failure to maintain the herd at planned management levels would lead to an eventual imbalance between herbivorous use and habitat grazing capacity. Both the condition of the habitat and of the dependent animal populations would be expected to decline. The rate of decline would accelerate with time as the population increased and carrying capacity deteriorates. In the case of horses, annual production would drop off, mares would abort due to lack of nutrition and fewer colts will reach maturity.

6. **Wilderness**

Solitude would not be affected by gathering horses, except in the very short term. However, naturalness would be affected by the degradation of the vegetation, soils and riparian areas due to more horses than the habitat can sustain.

7. **Livestock**

Competition for forage would increase as the number of animals increase adversely affecting horses and livestock.

**C. Mitigation Measures**

The Proposed Action requires no additional mitigation.

**D. Unavoidable Adverse Impacts**

**1. Adverse Impacts to Horses and Burros**

In spite of using great care in gathering, hauling and sorting wild horses and burros, some level of stress is always created for the animals. There is always a chance of injury and on rare occasions, an animal dies. These adverse impacts cannot be totally mitigated.

**2. Adverse Impacts to Wildlife**

Some disturbance will be created for wildlife as the helicopter moves wild horses and burros through the area. This adverse impact can not be mitigated. However, this disturbance is minor and occurs only at widely spaced intervals (every three to four years).

**III. PUBLIC REVIEW**

Nevada Division of Wildlife

Interest groups expressing concern of actions in WSAs (mailing list)

**IV. LIST OF BLM CONTRIBUTORS**

Tracey Irons - Resource Area Range Conservationist

Bill Phillips - District Range Conservationist

Roger Farschon - Resource Area Wildlife Biologist

Gary Schoolcraft - District Botanist

Rick Ekwortzel - District Wild Horse Wrangler

Rob Jeffers - District Wild Horse Specialist

Hugh Bunten - Resource Area Archaeologist



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IN REPLY REFER TO:

8500 (CA-028)

September 11, 1991

92300047

## NOTICE OF PROPOSED ACTION Wild Horses in WSA'S

State: Nevada  
County: Washoe  
District: Susanville, CA  
Area: Surprise Resource Area, Cedarville, CA

WSA:	<u>Number</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Acreage</u>
	CA-020-914	East Fork High Rock Canyon	33,985

Date of 30 days notification period ends: October 15, 1991

### 1. Description of Action

In the fall of 1991, in the month of October, 90 wild horses will be gathered in the above WSA. Of those horses gathered, 50 horses will be removed and 40 will be returned to the range as specified in the High Rock and Wall Canyon Herd Management Area Plans.

### 2. Location of Action

See map.

### 3. Description of Activity

Approximately 90 horses will be gathered in the High Rock (East and Wall Canyon area) Herd Management areas this fall in the month of October. The horses are located in the above WSA. Gathering will be by helicopter. The gathering period will be from three to five days. The horses will be herded by helicopter approximately 5-10 miles to the trap site. One trap site is located in the East Fork High Rock Canyon WSA 914. There will be some soil disturbance within the trap due to trampling by horses. The trap will be setup and removed by vehicle using the existing way into the site. There will be minimal overland travel to setup and disassemble the trap. All removal of horses by vehicle from the trap will be done on the existing way. All vehicle traffic will be kept to a minimum on existing ways.



After the gather and trap removal the site will be rehabilitated based on specified mitigation. This activity will not adversely affect the evaluation of the above WSA. The East High Rock Wild Horse Gather EA (CA-028-91-18) is available upon request.

4. Chronology of Events

Cowhead/Massacre EIS, 1980

Cowhead/Massacre MFP, 1981

High Rock Herd Management Area Plan, 1985

High Rock Herd Management Area Plan, revised 1989

Proposed Helicopter Gathering Wild Horse and Burro Plan for FY'92, June 1990

Notification of Proposed Helicopter Gather of Wild Horses and Burros for FY'91, Federal Register. Vol. 55, N. 120. Thursday, June 21, 1990

East High Rock Wild Horse Gather EA, September 1991

East High Rock Horse Gather, October 1991

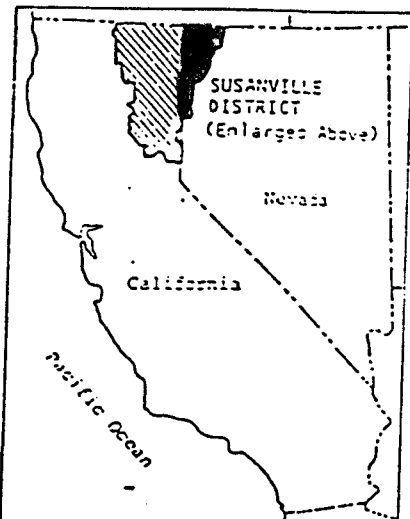
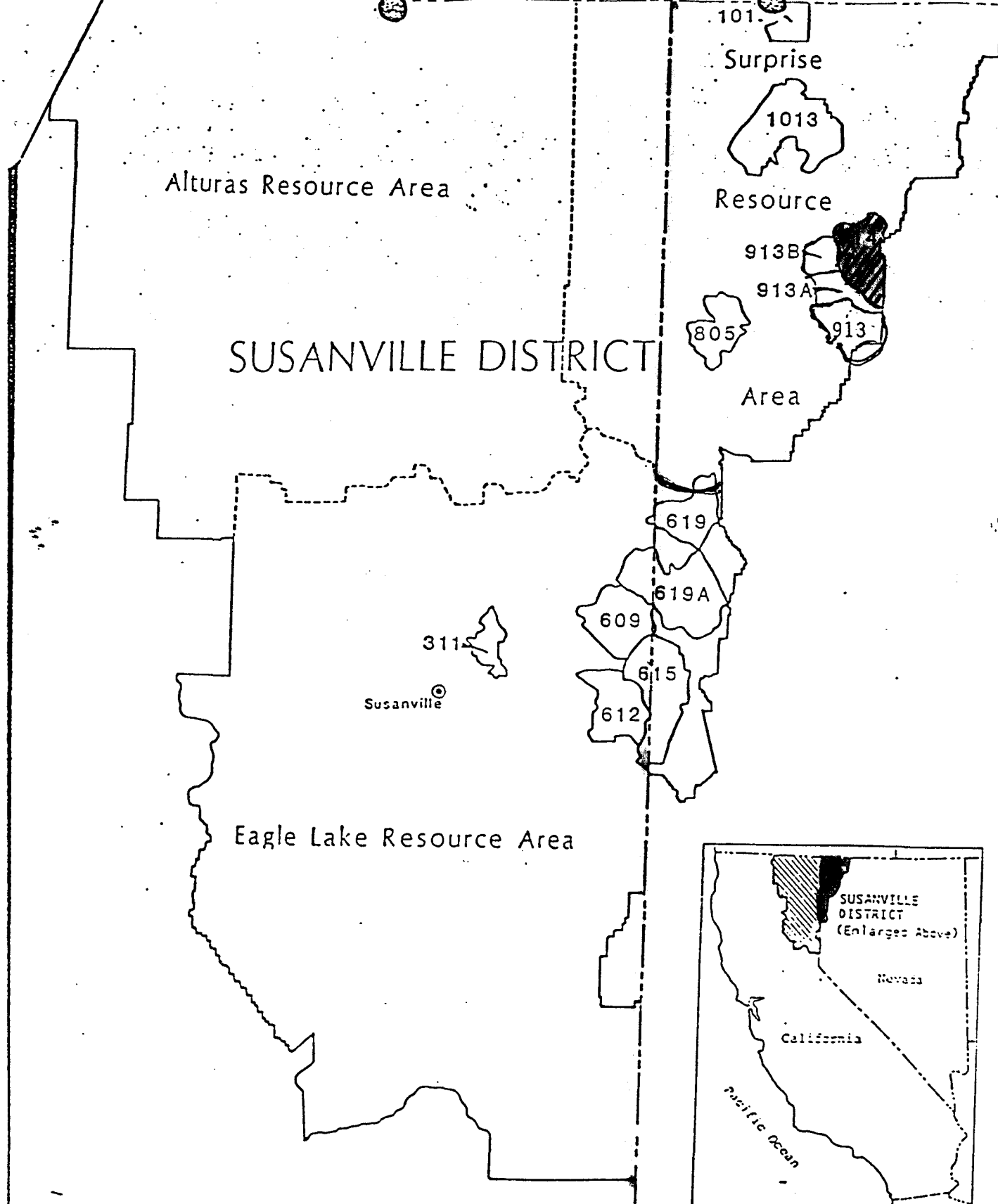
5. Contact for Further Information

J. Anthony Danna  
Surprise Resource Area Manager

or




Richard Westman  
Supervisory Range Conservationist

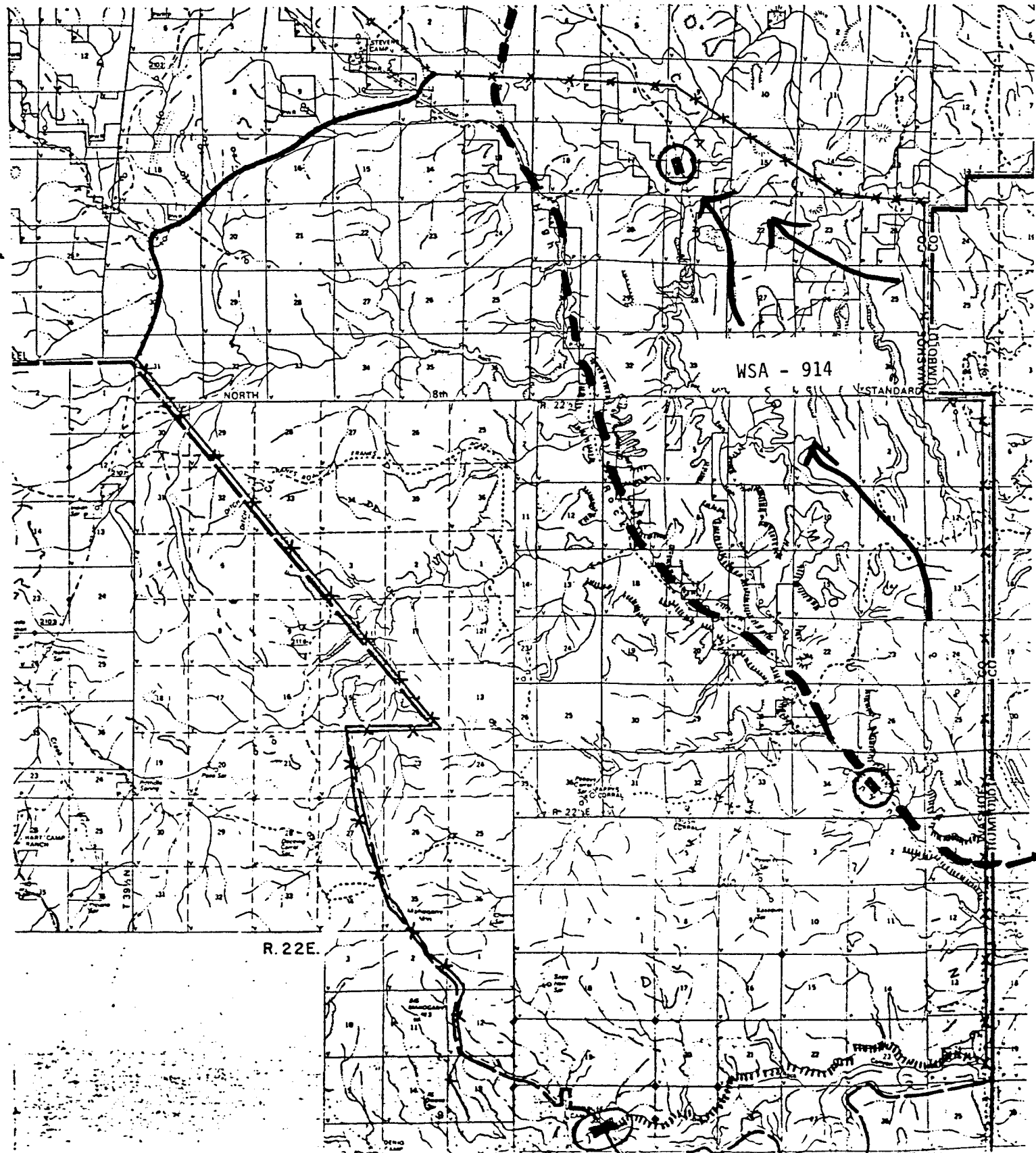
Surprise Resource Area  
Bureau of Land Management  
Cedarville, California 96014  
(916) 279-6101



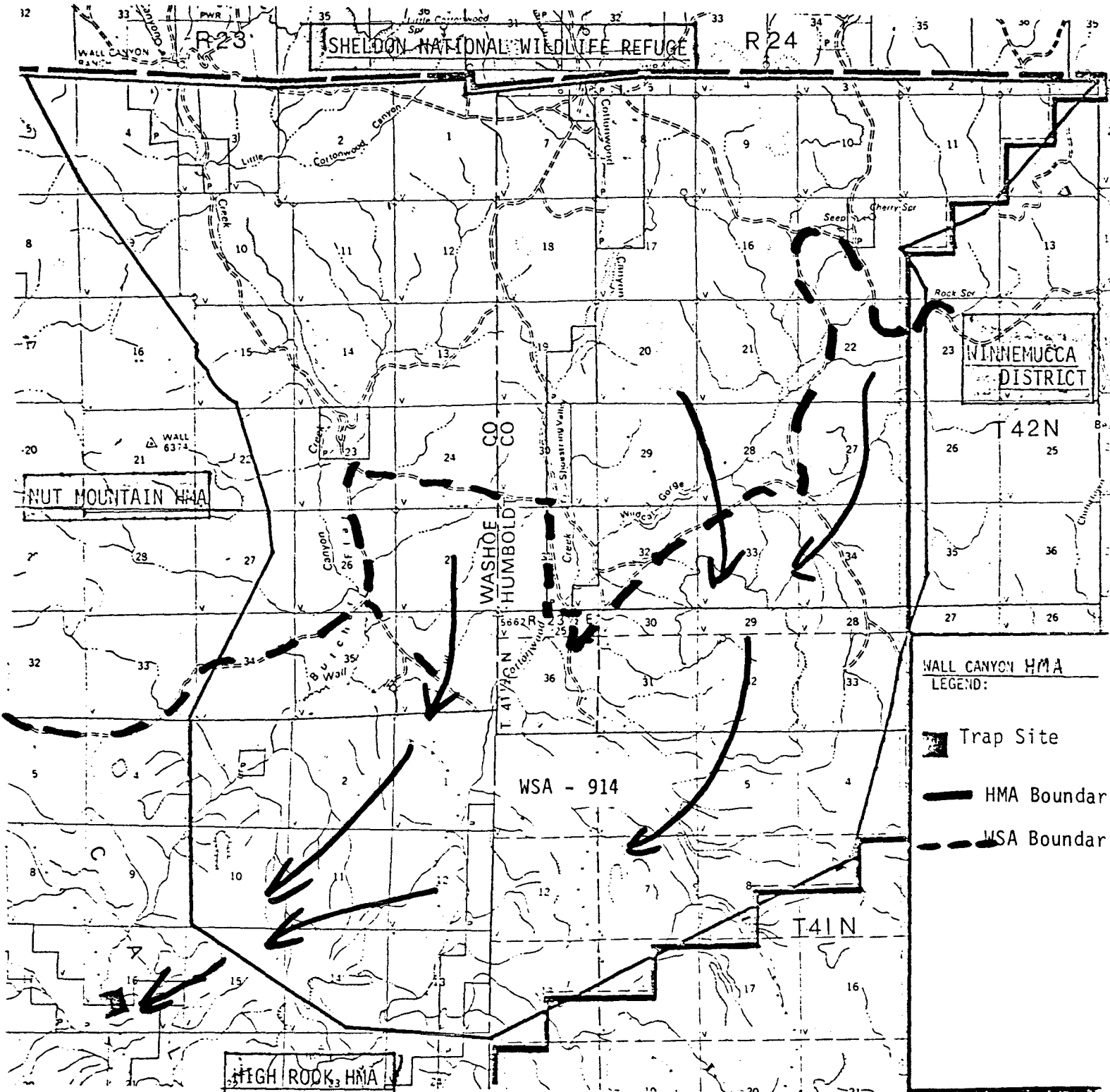
HIGH ROCK  
HERD MANAGEMENT AREA

Legend: 1/2 inch = 1 mile

-  Trap Site Location
-  HMA Boundary
-  WSA Boundary



# WALL CANYON HERD MANAGEMENT AREA



**WALL CANYON HMA**  
**LEGEND:**

- Trap Site
- HMA Boundar
- WSA Boundar

MAP 5