



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Surprise Field Office
PO Box 460
Cedarville, CA 96104
www.ca.blm.gov/surprise



In Reply Refer To:
4160 (CA-370) P

October 21, 2004

CERTIFIED MAIL: 7160 3901 9842 8266 9142
Return Receipt Requested

Dawn Lappin
Wild Horse Organized Assistance
PO Box 555
Reno, NV 89504

NOTICE OF PROPOSED DECISION

Dear Dawn:

INTRODUCTION

Sand Creek Allotment is located approximately six (6) miles north and east of Cedarville, California, and immediately north of 49 Mountain in Nevada. The Allotment lies in Modoc County, California and Washoe County, Nevada (See Map).

The Sand Creek Allotment encompasses 66,715 acres of public lands and 9,780 acres of private lands. The allotment is further divided into three descriptive areas: Desert Shrub Lowlands 17,053 acres public, 6,620 private, Intermediate Range 32,305 acres public, 920 acres private, and Carter Reservoir Uplands 12,631 acres public, and 2,240 acres private.

The Sand Creek Allotment has been categorized as an "T", or improved level management allotment. A total of 3,647 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) are currently authorized to be harvested from the allotment annually under seven grazing permits.

BACKGROUND

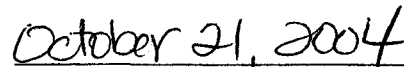
The Technical Review Team recommended, in 1984, that the Sand Creek/Sand Creek Allotment be divided into the Sand Creek Allotment and the Bull Creek Allotment, to meet the objectives of two different management systems. This action was accomplished.


The Sand Creek Allotment failed to meet Rangeland Health Standards for Stream Channel Health and Riparian Area Health on Sand Creek, and Biodiversity standards in uplands areas in 1999. The Sand Creek Allotment is not meeting three of the four rangeland health standards; however, progress is being made towards meeting these standards. Range Soils Standard was met.

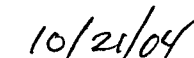
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

I have determined that the Proposed Action with the mitigation measures described, in EA CA-370-03-29 will not have any significant impacts on the human environment and that an EIS is not required. I have determined that the Proposed Action is in conformance with the approved Land Use Plan. It is my Decision to implement the action with the mitigation measures identified herein.


Environmental Coordinator


Date


for Owen Billingsley, Surprise Field Manager


Date

Proposed Action

It is my decision to implement the Proposed Action as described in the attached Environmental Assessment (CA 370-03-29).

The Proposed Action is to reissue the seven grazing permits on the Sand Creek Allotment for ten years. The Sand Creek Allotment Management Plan (AMP) will be updated to include the new Lake Burn Seeding Pasture. Livestock use authorization would continue in compliance with Sand Creek AMP in the remaining pastures and use areas:

This Proposed Action was developed after a review of resource issues and conditions found on the Sand Creek Allotment. Monitoring requirements, mitigation measures, and permit terms and conditions developed in the resolution of issues are incorporated into this alternative to minimize potential impacts to resources while continuing to provide forage for livestock grazing.

Rationale

The Proposed Action is needed to meet riparian objectives, the needs of the beneficial uses for water quality, and to make progress towards meeting the Stream Health, Riparian/Wetland, Water Quality, and Biodiversity (riparian) Standards, while maintaining a viable ranching operation. The proposed action is needed to authorize grazing in accordance with 43 CFR 4100 and to be consistent with the provisions of the Taylor Grazing Act, Public Rangelands Improvement Act, and Federal Land Policy and Management Act.

The Proposed Action utilizes the current Allotment Management Plan until the necessary projects can be completed to allow modification of the AMP. At that time the modified system may be initiated using livestock numbers, adapted from the operators' grazing plan, and modifies the grazing season. The Proposed Action does not change the authorized AUMs. Cheatgrass would be grazed prior to seed ripe in the west slope pastures during the spring. This is the best opportunity to gain control of cheatgrass, and allow the native plant community to thrive. Herding, salt and mineral placement coupled with a deferred rotational grazing plan, allows livestock to be maintained in grazing units without the impact and expense of extensive fence construction.

The normal season of use, as called for in the grazing plan is April 1 to Sept 30. The operator will be allowed +/- two weeks flexibility based on forage conditions. The grazing period is 182 days on public ground. Further, this alternative reduces impacts from livestock grazing, and will help improve rangeland health assessments in the future.

Riparian Objectives for Sand Creek: 1) Proper Functioning Condition, (PFC), 2) Re-establish woody riparian vegetation (primarily willow), and 3) Retain a minimum of 6 inches of riparian vegetation by the end of the growing season.

Terms and Conditions

- 1) All grazing on the allotment will be in accordance with the Allotment Management Plan.
- 2) Billings will be based on actual use reports to be submitted within 15 days following your last authorized takeoff date.
- 3) Any deviation in season of use, livestock numbers, or pasture rotation must receive prior approval from the authorized officer.
- 4) The terms and conditions of your permit may be modified if additional information indicates that revision is necessary to conform to 43 CFR 4180 (Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines).
- 5) Salt will be placed no closer than ¼ mile from any water source.
- 6) Livestock grazing is not permitted within meadow rehabilitation exclosures or spring source exclosures unless such use promotes meeting the objectives for the exclosure, and is prescribed in the annual operating plan.
- 7) All range improvements, including fences, must be maintained prior to turn out.
- 8) Utilization of key forage species will not exceed 50%.
- 9) Utilization of bitter brush will not exceed 50%
- 10) All Standard Terms and Condition apply.

Monitoring

Conduct Ecological Site Inventory during the summer of 2005. Analyze the trend in ecological condition.

Establish permanent upland utilization monitoring sites, including utilization cages (at least one in each of the pastures/use areas).

Actual use reports turned in and analyzed annually.

Establish permanent riparian utilization monitoring sites, including utilization cages.

Periodically count livestock during turnout and pasture moves.

AUTHORITY

The authority for this decision includes but is not limited to:

43CFR 4130.2 (a): "Grazing permits or leases shall be issued to qualified applicants to authorize use on the public lands and other lands under the administration of the Bureau of Land Management that are designated as available for livestock grazing through land use plans. Permits or leases shall specify the types and levels of use authorized, including livestock grazing, suspended use and conservation use. These grazing permits and leases shall also specify terms and conditions pursuant to 4130.3, 4130.3-1 and 4130.3-2."

43 CFR 4130.3: "Livestock grazing permits and leases contain terms and conditions determined by the authorized officer to be appropriate to achieve management and resource condition objectives for the public lands and other lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management, and to ensure conformance with the provisions of subpart 4180 of this part."

RIGHT OF PROTEST AND/OR APPEAL

Any applicant, permittee, lessee or other affected interest may protest a proposed decision under Sec. 43 CFR 4160.1, in person or in writing to [Owen Billingsley, Field Office Manager, Surprise Field Office PO Box 640 Cedarville CA 96104] within 15 days after receipt of such decision. The protest, if filed, should clearly and concisely state the reason(s) as to why the proposed decision is in error.

In the absence of a protest, the proposed decision will become the final decision of the authorized officer without further notice unless otherwise provided in the proposed decision.

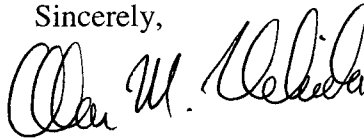
Any applicant, permittee, lessee or other person whose interest is adversely affected by the final decision may file an appeal in accordance with 43 CFR 4.470 and 43 CFR 4160.1-4. The appeal may be accompanied by a petition for stay of the decision in accordance with 43 CFR 4.21, pending final determination on appeal. The appeal and petition for stay must be filed in the office of the authorized officer, as noted above, within 30 days following receipt of the final decision, or within 30 days after the date the proposed decision becomes final.

The appeal shall state the reasons, clearly and concisely, why the appellant thinks the final decision is in error and otherwise comply with the provisions of 43 CFR 4.470 which is available from the BLM office for your use in a BLM office.

In accordance with 43 CFR 4.21(b) (1), a petition for stay, if filed, must show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

- (1) The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied.*
- (2) The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits.*
- (3) The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted, and*
- (4) Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.*

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Owen M. Billingsley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "O".

 Owen Billingsley
Surprise Field Manager

Sand Creek Allotment
LIVESTOCK GRAZING AUTHORIZATION
Environmental Assessment #CA-370-03-29

Surprise BLM Field Office
Date prepared September 30 2004

Proposed Action Title/Type: **Sand Creek Grazing Permit Renewal EA**
Location of Proposed Action: **Townships 42, 43, 44N, Range 17, 18E.**

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Sand Creek Allotment is located approximately four (4) miles north and east of Cedarville, California, and immediately north of 49 Mountain in Nevada. The Allotment lies in Modoc County, California and Washoe County, Nevada (See Map). The elevation range is between 4,600 and 7,000 feet. Vegetation communities are a mix of juniper uplands, sagebrush/grass, desert shrub, and alkali dry lakes, with widely scattered aspen colonies.

The Sand Creek Allotment is located in the Great Basin. The area receives 8 to 14 inches of annual precipitation, with the majority of the precipitation events occurring during the winter and early spring. Isolated, localized thunderstorm events occur during the summer. The normal growing season for herbaceous upland species begins in late March and ends in late June when plant growth becomes limited by available soil moisture. Some herbaceous re-growth may occur in late September through mid October, depending on seasonal rainfall.

The Sand Creek Allotment encompasses 66,715 acres of public lands and 9,780 acres of private lands. The allotment is further divided into three descriptive areas: Desert Shrub Lowlands 17,053 acres public, 6,620 private, Intermediate Range 32,305 acres public, 920 acres private, and Carter Reservoir Uplands 12,631 acres public, and 2,240 acres private.

The Sand Creek Allotment has been categorized as an "I", or improved level management allotment. A total of 3,647 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) are currently authorized to be harvested from the allotment annually under seven grazing permits.

Sand Creek Technical Review Team Report recommendations, 1982.

- Split Bull Creek Sand Creek Allotment in to two allotments; Bull Creek Allotment and Sand Creek Allotment.
- Develop livestock water on the Sand Creek Allotment
- Build fence for pastures and develop a rest rotation grazing system
- Improve forage production on 50% of the allotment to support licensed AUMs
- Monitor bitterbrush for grazing affects
- Develop a Habitat Management Plan
- Manage to reach 50 to 75% of site potential on native vegetative sites. Provide at least one growing season rest every two years on native range.

A Rangeland Health Assessment was conducted on the Sand Creek Allotment in 1999. The results of this assessment are as follows:

Rangeland Health Standard	Meets Standard	Does Not Meet Standard	Impacts from Livestock Yes or No	Remarks
Soils Health	Met		Yes	Slight upward trend
Stream Health		Not met, but progressing toward	Yes	Slight upward trend
Riparian and Wetland Health		Not met, but progressing toward	Yes	Slight upward trend
Biodiversity Standard		Not met, but progressing toward	Yes	Slight upward trend

Relationship to Statues, Regulations, and Plans

Endangered Species

Several of the Surprise Field Office allotments are within the range of federally listed threatened or endangered species. Pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, formal consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is required on all allotments for which livestock grazing may adversely affect listed species. The stipulations of any grazing permit may need to be modified to conform to the terms and conditions specified in a FWS (U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service) biological opinion. In addition, the terms and conditions of any grazing permit may also need to be modified through subsequent land use plan amendments or revisions to conform to decisions made to achieve recovery plan objectives. A number of such plan amendments are currently being prepared in the RMP (Regional Management Plan) and are expected to be completed in fiscal year 2005.

Several of the Surprise Field Office allotments also provide habitat for State listed fish, wildlife, and plant species. According to the MOU between BLM and CDFG we agree: "to notify the Department of all projects involving impacts to, or manipulation of, State-listed rare (threatened) and endangered fish, wildlife and plants and to obtain State recommendations of the project-specific management of such populations."

Livestock grazing on public lands generally conforms to federal and state air quality standards. Where livestock grazing occurs within an area classified as a federal non-attainment/maintenance area, BLM will make a determination whether the action is in conformance with the applicable State Implementation Plan (SIP) requirement.

Issues Considered but Dropped From Further Analysis

Permittee's request for restoration of suspended AUMs

After reviewing all available data on utilization, monitoring and Rangeland Health Assessments, there is nothing to support re-authorizing suspended AUMs on the Sand Creek Allotment. The 49 Seeding shows evidence of repeated over utilization. This is demonstrated by the presence of areas grazed nearly to dirt with wolfy decadent crested wheatgrass plants scattered across the seeding. The Intermediate Pasture is dominated by sagebrush fields with very little grass under story. The upland areas are suffering from juniper encroachment, coupled with reduced herbaceous understory. The last two observations are a direct result of the lack of active wildfire in these ecosystems combined with grazing. The allotment has failed to achieve the management objective of reaching 50 to 75% of site potential on native vegetative sites, or providing at least one growing season rest every two years on native range. The rest rotation system has never been developed where the desert shrub pasture and the intermediate pasture would receive alternate years rest.

The Rangeland Health assessment indicates improvements in uplands, riparian areas, stream channel health and biodiversity, (functioning at risk with an upward trend) but more progress needs to be made in management and the allotment's condition before these suspended AUMs may be restored. An Ecological Site Inventory (ESI) is scheduled for the 2005 grazing year to refine this determination.

CHAPTER 2: PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action is to reissue the seven grazing permits on the Sand Creek Allotment for ten years. The Sand Creek Allotment Management Plan (AMP) will be updated to include the new Lake Burn Seeding Pasture. Livestock use authorization would continue in compliance with Sand Creek AMP in the remaining pastures and use areas, as follows:

This Proposed Action was developed after a review of resource issues and conditions found on the Sand Creek Allotment. Monitoring requirements, mitigation measures, and permit terms and conditions developed in the resolution of issues are incorporated into this alternative to minimize potential impacts to resources while continuing to provide forage for livestock grazing.

Rangeland Use Areas into two pastures. Additional livestock water sources may be needed in one or both of the two new pastures. Once the fence and any necessary water developments are complete, the Final System would be implemented, as follows:

Final System

Pasture/Use Area	Year 1	Year 2
Lake Burn Seeding	4/1 to 5/14	Rest
Desert Shrub	Rest	4/1 to 5/14
Intermediate Rangeland	5/15 to 7/14	Rest
49 Seeding	Rest	5/15 to 7/14
Carter Reservoir	7/15 to 9/30	7/15 to 9/30

Entry and exit from each pasture includes a flexibility of +/- 15 days, depending upon weather, water, and forage conditions. Herding, fencing, mineral supplement sites, natural barriers, and water would be used as management tools to maintain livestock in the desired grazing areas. Periodic winter and/or early spring use may be prescribed for the Lake Burn Seeding if such use would enhance recovery of the natural and seeded vegetation in the pasture. If livestock water is not available in a pasture scheduled for use, then the annual grazing plan would be adjusted. However, all pastures would receive at least one year of rest or deferment (use after seed set on grasses, around July 15) out of three.

Riparian Objectives for Sand Creek: 1) Proper Functioning Condition, (PFC), 2) Re-establish woody riparian vegetation (primarily willow), and 3) Retain a minimum of 6 inches of riparian vegetation by the end of the growing season.

Terms and Conditions

- 1) All grazing on the allotment will be in accordance with the Allotment Management Plan.
- 2) Billings will be based on actual use reports to be submitted within 15 days following your last authorized takeoff date.
- 3) Any deviation in season of use, livestock numbers, or pasture rotation must receive prior approval from the authorized officer.
- 4) The terms and conditions of your permit may be modified if additional information indicates that revision is necessary to conform to 43 CFR 4180 (Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines).
- 5) Salt will be placed no closer than ¼ mile from any water source.
- 6) Livestock grazing is not permitted within meadow rehabilitation enclosures or spring source enclosures unless such use promotes meeting the objectives for the enclosure, and is prescribed in the annual operating plan.

Range Improvements

EXISTING PROJECTS

Project Name/No.	Location Township, Range, Section	Comments and General Condition	Mitigation Description
49 Seeding	T42N, R18E	Poor due to several years of drought	Rainfall would improve the seeding
Lake Fire Seeding	T43N, R17E	Fair Larkspur abundant	Explore cheatgrass control Time use to prevent poisoning
Peters Gulch CCC Spring	T43N, R18E, Sec18	Spring box needs repair	Spring box collection system and plumbing need overhaul.
Allotment Boundary Fence	T42/43/44 N, R17E, Section 18 & 19	Poor	Boundary fences are shared between allotments. Improve communication/cooperation with neighboring permittees.
Sand Creek Exclosures #1, #2, & #3	T42N, R17E, Section 9 & 10	Fair	BLM & permittees need to increase frequency of monitoring to eliminate livestock use in exclosures.
Jackass Well	T42N, R17E, Section 16 NESE	Good	Continue regular maintenance
Lake Burn water system	T42N, R17E, Section 16	Permittee development Incomplete	Permittees need to budget dollars and work schedules to finish this project.
Iris Reservoir	T43N, R18E, Section 22	Inoperative	Realign channel drainage & seal with bentonite
Truck Pit Reservoir	T43N, R18E Section 33 NWSW	Inoperative	Poor positioning - abandon
Armpit Reservoir	T43N, R18E, Section 32 SENW	Good	Continue regular maintenance
Peter's Gulch Reservoir	T43N, R18E, Section 31 NESE	Good	Continue regular maintenance
Doubtful Reservoir	T43N, R18E, Section 29 SWNW	Good	Continue regular maintenance
49 Holding Field	T42N, R18E, Section 18	Good	Continue regular maintenance
Sand Creek Holding Field	T2N, R17E, Section 19	Good	Continue regular maintenance
49 Field water system	T42N, R18E, Section 19	Good	Continue regular maintenance
Upper American Flat Reservoir	T44N, R19E, Section 27 NENE	Good	Continue regular maintenance

- 5) Review and adjust AUMs IAW finding of Environmental Status Inventory.
- 6) Create pasture fences and water sources to improve grazing distribution.
- 7) Maintain Feral horse population at appropriate management levels
- 8) Use salt and mineral supplements as a tool to redistribute grazing pressure.

- 9) Allotment overall grazing levels set at moderate, IAW Technical Review Team.
- 10) Permittees have five (5) days to remove all livestock once grazing levels are met, and to complete pasture moves. IAW Allotment Management Plan.
- 11) Sand Creek Allotment fence shall be inspected and found to be serviceable prior to turnout.
- 12) Adjust grazing season as necessary (early spring and winter use) and use multiple species as necessary to control the cheatgrass in the Lake Burn Seeding.
- 13) Monitor utilization and Rangeland Health Standards and Guides to ensure the grazing plan is improving range conditions; as described in the Allotment Management Plan, and recommended by the Technical Review Team.
- 14) Rest seeding pastures (Lake Burn and 49) for two years when utilization exceeds 50%.
- 15) All tanks designated for livestock water use shall have a certificate of cleaning from a State Licensed cleaning contractor prior to being moved to public ground.

No Grazing Alternative

This alternative would cancel the permit on the Sand Creek Allotment. As a result, grazing would not be authorized on this allotment. If this is to be a permanent cancellation, BLM would initiate a process in accordance with the 4100 regulations to permanently eliminate grazing on the allotment.

Vegetation			X
Threatened and Endangered Species			X
Wilderness Studies Areas	x		

AIR QUALITY (CRITICAL ELEMENT)

A. Affected Environment

The Sand Creek Allotment is located in the northeastern corner of Modoc County, California and the northwestern corner of Washoe County, Nevada. Modoc County is part of the Northeast Plateau Air Basin (NPAB), which includes Siskiyou, Modoc, and Lassen Counties. The Modoc County Air Pollution Control District (MCAPCD) has jurisdiction over air quality issues throughout Modoc County and administers air quality regulations developed at the federal, state, and local levels. The Washoe County District Health Department, Air Quality Management Division, Washoe County, has jurisdiction over air quality issues throughout Washoe County and administers air quality regulations developed at the federal, state, and local levels.

Air quality throughout the Sand Creek Allotment is good much of the time. The area has not been classified as a federal non-attainment/maintenance area by the EPA therefore Federal actions is not subject to conformity determinations under 40 CFR 93. Particulate matter (e.g. dust) associated with surface disturbance by livestock is the only potential air quality issue associated with public land livestock grazing.

B. Environmental Consequences

1. Impacts of Proposed Action

Soil disturbance from the trampling action of 106 to 812 cows/calf pairs when soil moisture levels are low would result in increased fugitive dust emissions (PM₁₀) in the allotment. In addition, vehicles used in association with livestock operations on the access roads would also generate small additional amounts of PM₁₀ emissions and various precursor emissions for ozone.

However, the overall effect on air quality would be slight due to the generally wide distribution of livestock movement patterns in the 66,715 acre Sand Creek Allotment.

2. No Grazing

Under the No Grazing alternative there would be no effect to air quality as no livestock would be permitted to use the Sand Creek Allotment.

Impacts of Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action the five previously recorded sites would continue to receive negative impacts from cattle grazing. The impacts that these sites would continue to receive are resulting from trampling, wallowing, and trailing.

Recommended Mitigation

Under this Proposed Action it is mandated that sites receiving damage due to cattle activities be recorded and evaluated for their NRHP eligibility. Impacts occurring to NRHP eligible sites will be eliminated or mitigated pursuant to consultation with the local Native American tribes and the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office.

Impacts of No Action Alternative

Under this No Action Alternative, sites within the Sand Creek Allotment would continue to experience damage from cattle activities.

Recommended Mitigation

Same as under the Proposed Action

No Grazing Alternative

No impacts to cultural resources from cattle grazing would occur under this alternative.

Cumulative Impacts

In general, archaeological sites located on public lands receive a number of impacts from multiple use, among them are: cattle grazing; travel routes that cross through archaeological sites; vandalism and looting of archaeological sites; illegal surface collection of archaeological sites; establishing camping areas within archaeological sites; wild horse grazing; natural processes such as erosion and fire.

Cumulatively, these affects are depleting and damaging the non-renewable cultural resources on public lands managed by the Surprise Field Office. The majority of archaeological sites within the Surprise Field Office area have been impacted to some degree as a result of multiple use.

Consultation

Nevada State Historic Preservation Office
Fort Bidwell Indian Community Council
Cedarville Rancheria

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE (CRITICAL ELEMENT)

A. Affected Environment

There are no Environmental Justice Critical Elements that fall within or adjacent to the Sand Creek Allotment. There will be not impacts to this Critical Element by this proposed action.

values. Once exotic weeds become established it is extremely difficult to eradicate them and bring back the native communities that have been displaced.

At the current time, noxious weeds are not known to occur on public lands within the allotment; therefore the proposed action will have no impact on noxious weeds.

NATIVE AMERICAN CONCERNS (CRITICAL ELEMENT)

A. Affected Environment

The Fort Bidwell Indian Community Council and the Cedarville Rancheria are the nearest tribes within the Surprise Field Office area. Neither of the tribes have a treaty in place, nor do they have any specific resource rights that the Surprise Field Office holds in trust. However, the cultural resources located within the Sand Creek Allotment have significant cultural meaning and value to the local tribes.

B. Environmental Consequences

1. Impacts of Proposed Action

Local Native American tribes are greatly concerned with impacts that will continue to occur to cultural resources under the Proposed Action.

2. Impacts of Current Management if different than proposed action

Same as above

3. No Grazing

Impacts to cultural resources would cease under this alternative.

4. Cumulative Impacts

Identify any cumulative impacts from past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future public or private actions including any actions on non federal lands. Note any differences among the alternatives.

C. Consultation

The Fort Bidwell Indian Community Council and the Cedarville Rancheria were consulted with on the proposed action. Concerns have been addressed from the Fort Bidwell Indian Community regarding prehistoric Native American sites that are being damaged by cattle grazing. The Surprise Field Office is currently in consultation with the Fort Bidwell community regarding these issues.

RECREATION

public land grazing fees, and costs associated with herding and moving cattle to and from the allotment. The net increased cost to the permittee is unknown, but could be substantial.

With the no grazing action there is the potential for economic loss of 3,647 AUMs at a fair market value of \$24.40 per AUM. The elimination of AUMs is temporary until a longer-term solution could be worked out. Both the community and the operators concern is the removal of AUMs would eliminate the value of the permit.

The no grazing action would prevent the permittees from using unfenced private lands within Sand Creek Allotment. There are approximately 9780 acres of private land with the Sand Creek permit. This would be a loss of an estimated 970 private AUMs. There would be a slight negative impact to the local socio/economic conditions. Depending upon the actual costs discussed above, the amount of this impact could range from negligible to very minor.

4. Cumulative Impacts

Seven Permittees use Sand Creek Allotment for summer turnouts for 816 cattle (pairs), 3647 AUMs.

This is less than 4% of the Surprise Field Office Livestock AUMs.

The degree of dependence the permittees have for the forage provided by this allotment is unknown. On average, operators with a Federal-grazing permit depend on five months forage (May-September), which is equivalent to 42% of the herds annual forage requirement. If Federal grazing is reduced or eliminated, the direct loss to the permittee is a 20 to 42% reduction in their cowherd. The total cumulative loss is estimate at 58%, associate with adjusting the overall ranching operation. What this means for the permittee, is for every federal AUM reduced, they lose 1.38 AUMs in production.

E. References

\$88,986.80 would be removed from the local economy annually by canceling the Sand Creek grazing permit. This figure is based on a value of \$24.40/AUM.

Data in this section was provided by the California Cattlemen's and Nevada Cattlemen's Associations

SOILS

A. Affected Environment

Numerous soil associations are found on the Sand Creek Allotment. Ecological site potential varies with soil type. The soil classification for the allotment is contained in the Surprise Valley/Home Camp Area and Washoe County, Nevada, North Part Order III soil surveys.

Soils in the allotment range from fine sandy loam, very deep, well drained soils in the lower elevation to very cobbly loam, shallow, well drained soils in the uplands. Erosion potential of

compacted as livestock trailed along the stream making the soils susceptible to erosion. Sand Creek now has 4 exclosures and is being managed as a stream/wetland/riparian area. It is assumed that if the Stream Health and Riparian/Wetland standards are being met or progressing toward (upward trend), than the Water Quality standards are also being met. Beneficial uses for the allotment include watering of livestock, aquatic life and propagation of wildlife.

Impacts of Proposed Action

There are no identified water quality problems on the allotment since Sand Creek Exclosures were constructed in 1987 to control heavy livestock use during the hot season. None are anticipated from the Proposed Action.

No Grazing

There would be no impacts to the water quality from livestock grazing as no livestock would be authorized to use the Bull Creek Allotment.

.B. References - Surprise Field Office, NRCS, USGS, and EPA Watershed documents and records search

WETLANDS/RIPARIAN ZONES (CRITICAL ELEMENT)

A. Affected Environment

Wetlands/Riparian areas for the allotment is primarily focused on Sand Creek, a small perennial/intermittent spring fed stream which flows approximately 16 miles across private and public lands to the south and southwest into Middle Alkali Lake a closed basin. A history of heavy grazing by livestock during the hot season has led to the degradation of the riparian corridor. Severe erosion as well as losses of sod, willows, aspen and roses greatly impacted the riparian corridor. Sand Creek has since improved with the construction of the 4 exclosures, but annual unauthorized use by livestock within the exclosures have led to some riparian/wetland resource objectives currently not being met.

Vegetation along Sand Creek is mostly herbaceous, including sedges, rushes, grasses, and forbs. Sand Creek has a few woody riparian communities present, including willow, rose, and aspen, and there is good potential to increase the amount of woody riparian vegetation. In addition to Sand Creek, there are a few seeps and springs scattered throughout the allotment. Most of the seeps and springs support herbaceous vegetation communities.

The 1998 Rangeland Health Assessment determined that the Stream Health Standard and the Riparian/Wetland Standard are not being met but are progressing towards meeting standards. Before the construction of the Sand Creek Exclosures, stream banks were trampled and compacted as livestock trailed along the stream making the soils susceptible to erosion. Sand Creek now has 4 exclosures and is currently being managed as a stream/wetland/riparian area.

A. Affected Environment

There are no known occurrences of federally listed wildlife species within the Sand Creek Allotment; however, there may be potential habitat for the federally endangered Carson Wandering skipper (*Pseudocopaodes eunus obscurus*) near Middle Alkali Lake in the western portion of the allotment. This species is found associated with saltgrass (*Distichlis spicata*) and either alkaline tolerant or intolerant nectar source plants.

Several BLM sensitive species are either known or very likely to occur. These species are; Burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*), Greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), Northern sagebrush lizard (*Sceloporus graciosus graciosus*), Juniper titmouse (*Baeolophus ridgwayi*), and Golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*). Potential California bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis californiana*) habitat occurs adjacent to the 49 seeding; however, there are no known sightings of this California State Threatened species in the allotment. Of these species, Golden eagle are known to nest within the allotment and the Greater sage-grouse likely nest within the allotment due to the proximity of an active strutting ground (lek) outside of the allotment and the scattered presence of brood-rearing habitat (wet meadows) throughout the allotment. Both the Juniper titmouse and the Northern sagebrush lizard are associated with riparian and juniper habitats and the Northern sagebrush lizard is a known sagebrush obligate species. Burrowing owls are known to occur on a limited basis in the lowlands pasture. This species is generally found in sagebrush and grassland habitats and makes use of abandoned rodent burrows for nesting and hiding cover.

Important big game species found in the allotment include mule deer and pronghorn antelope. Mule deer use the entire allotment throughout the year being found at the higher elevations in the summer and lower elevations the rest of the year. Pronghorn use the north central areas of the allotment yearlong and probably used the area of the Lake Fire seeding as kidding grounds prior to the Lake Fire. Some mourning dove, California quail and chukar are found along the riparian zones and steep slopes of Sand Creek and its wetted drainages.

B. Environmental Consequences

1. Impacts of Proposed Action

Riparian habitat will continue to benefit from having riparian exclosures in place with limited livestock use on them. Greater sage-grouse will benefit from the increased production of insects and forbs in wet meadows, there will also be benefits to other insect eating wildlife including songbirds, frogs, and bats. The switch away from fall and winter grazing of upland shrub habitats like bitterbrush will help in providing better quality and availability of these foods for big game during the fall and winter seasons. Continuation of early spring use by livestock at the lower elevations will limit forb availability and production for all wildlife species however. Early grazing of the Lake Fire seeding is expected to help reduce the density of cheatgrass in the seeding and therefore may provide for increased forbs in later years. Any increase in forbs is

Black Grease wood, (*Sarcobatus vermiculatus*), salt grass, (*Distichlis spicata*), Great Basin Wildrye, (*Elymus cinereus*), Bottlebrush squirrel tail, (*Sitanion hystrix*), button brush, spiny hopsage, (*Grayia spinosa*), shadscale (*Atriplex confertifolia*), rabbit brush (*Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus* and *nauseosus*), and cheatgrass (*Brome tectorum*). The mid slopes are sage brush grass steps that include mountain big sage, (*Artemisia tridentata*) low sage, (*Artemisia spp.*), early sage, (*Artemisia spp.*), and rabbit brush. Key grass species are Blue bunch wheat grass, (*Agropyron spicatum*), Idaho fescue, (*Festuca idahoensis*), and Western wheat grass, (*Agropyron smithii*), Great Basin Wildrye, (*Elymus cinereus*), Needle grass (*Achnatherum Columbiana* and *californicum*), Kentucky blue grass, (*Poa pratensis*), Sandberg's blue grass, (*Poa secunda*), and Nevada blue grass, (*Poa spp.*), bottlebrush squirreltail, (*Sitanion hystrix*). The upper slopes include juniper (*Juniperus occidentalis*), and a small bitter brush population in addition to plant already listed above.

1. Impacts of Proposed Action

The area shows a shift from Blue bunch wheatgrass, Idaho fescue mix to a near monoculture dominated by Sandberg's blue grass. The shift in grass populations is a direct result of prolonged over grazing. The percentage of shrubs (sage brush and rabbit brush) and juniper have increased. Greater than 50% of the over story is dominated by these shrub and tree species. This is a direct result of a very aggressive fire suppression program.

Remnant populations of most of the desired native plants are present in the steeper and rockier areas of the allotment. These relic areas comprise about 15% to 20% of the allotment's area.

The Sand Creek Allotment Rangeland Health Assessment was conducted in 1999. The allotment's upland areas received a grade of functioning at risk. The trend is a slight upward trend.

Under the current grazing management the Sand Creek Allotments grass populations will continue to shift towards a Sandberg's blue grass dominate monoculture.

Livestock use runs in the moderate range of 40% to 60% over all. This information is based on grazing utilization records, monitoring, and field surveys.

This change in the grazing permit would allow early spring or winter use on the Lake Burn Seeding where cheatgrass control has become an issue. Winter and early spring use increases grazing pressure on the cheat grass currently established in the Lake Fire Burn area. Early grazing effort failed in 2003 season due to a heavy infestation of Larkspur that occurred after site disturbance. The Cheatgrass infestation may be controlled by winter use.

Threatened or Endangered Species

No federally listed species occur on the allotment.

Environmental Assessment CA 370 04 029


Prepared by Ken Lucas Rangeland Management Specialist


Reviewed by Tara De Valois Rangeland Management Specialist/Environmental Coordinator


Allen Uchida Hydrology/Riparian/Soils/ Water Quality


Elias Flores Wildlife and Penny Van Ornum Archeology


Sand Creek Seedings and Fences


 SAND CREEK ALLOTMENT

 rimpsra region seeding

 Exterior Fence


 Interior Fence


 Exterior Natural Boundary


 Interior Natural Boundary


Water Source Inventory - Point


type.TYPE


 Developed Spring


 Pumped Well


 Cased Well (Not Equipment)

 Catchments

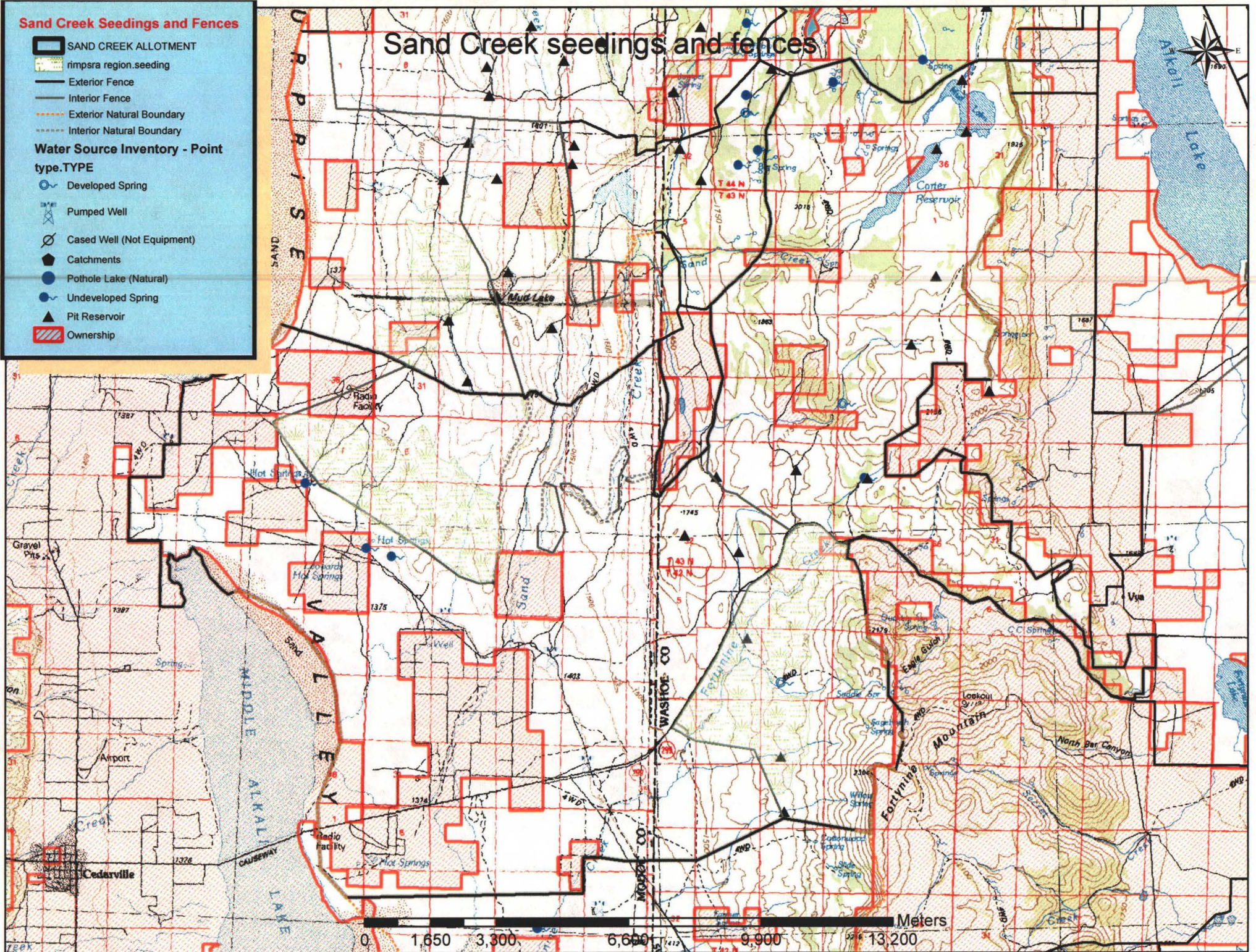
 Pothole Lake (Natural)

 Undeveloped Spring

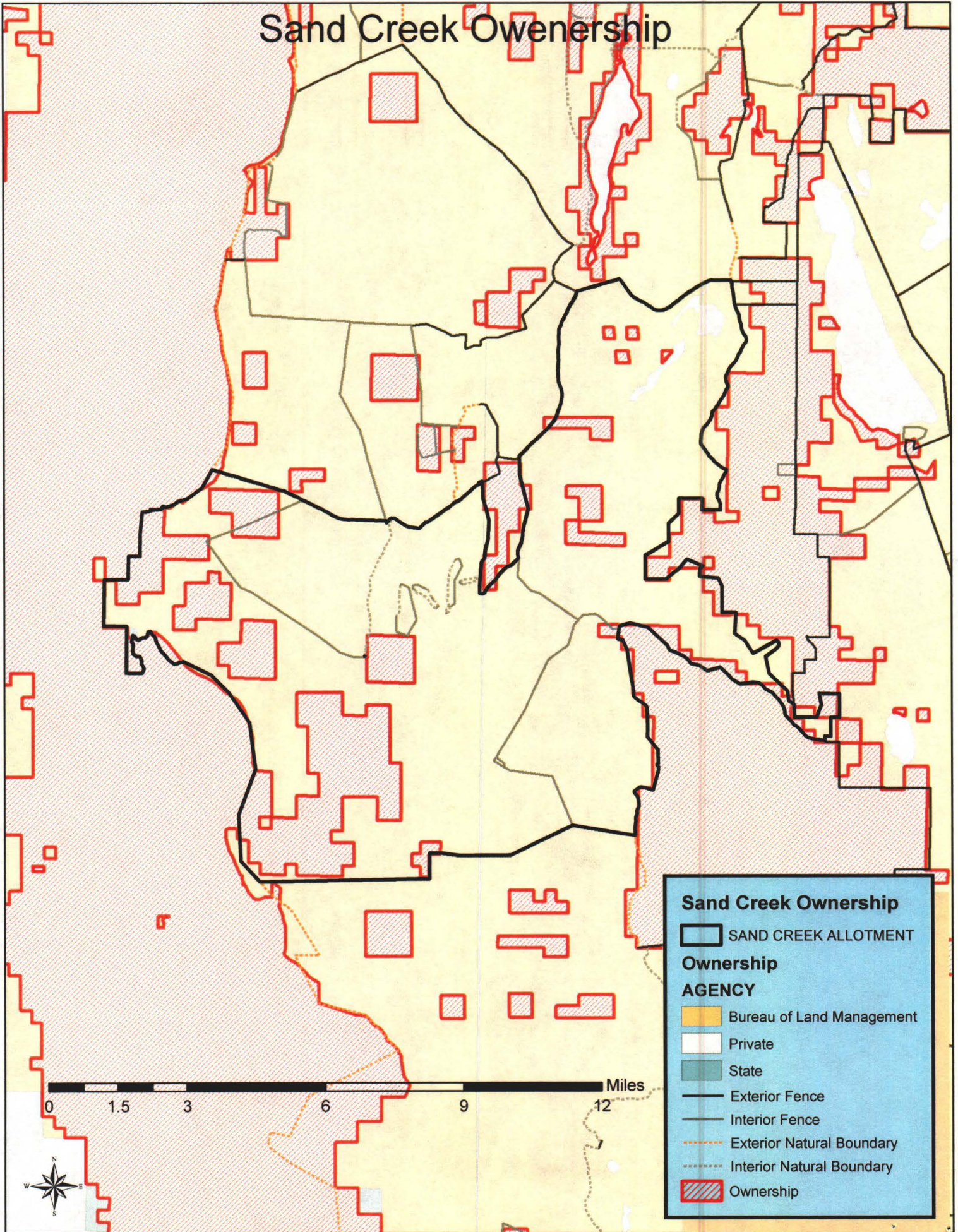
 Pit Reservoir

 Ownership

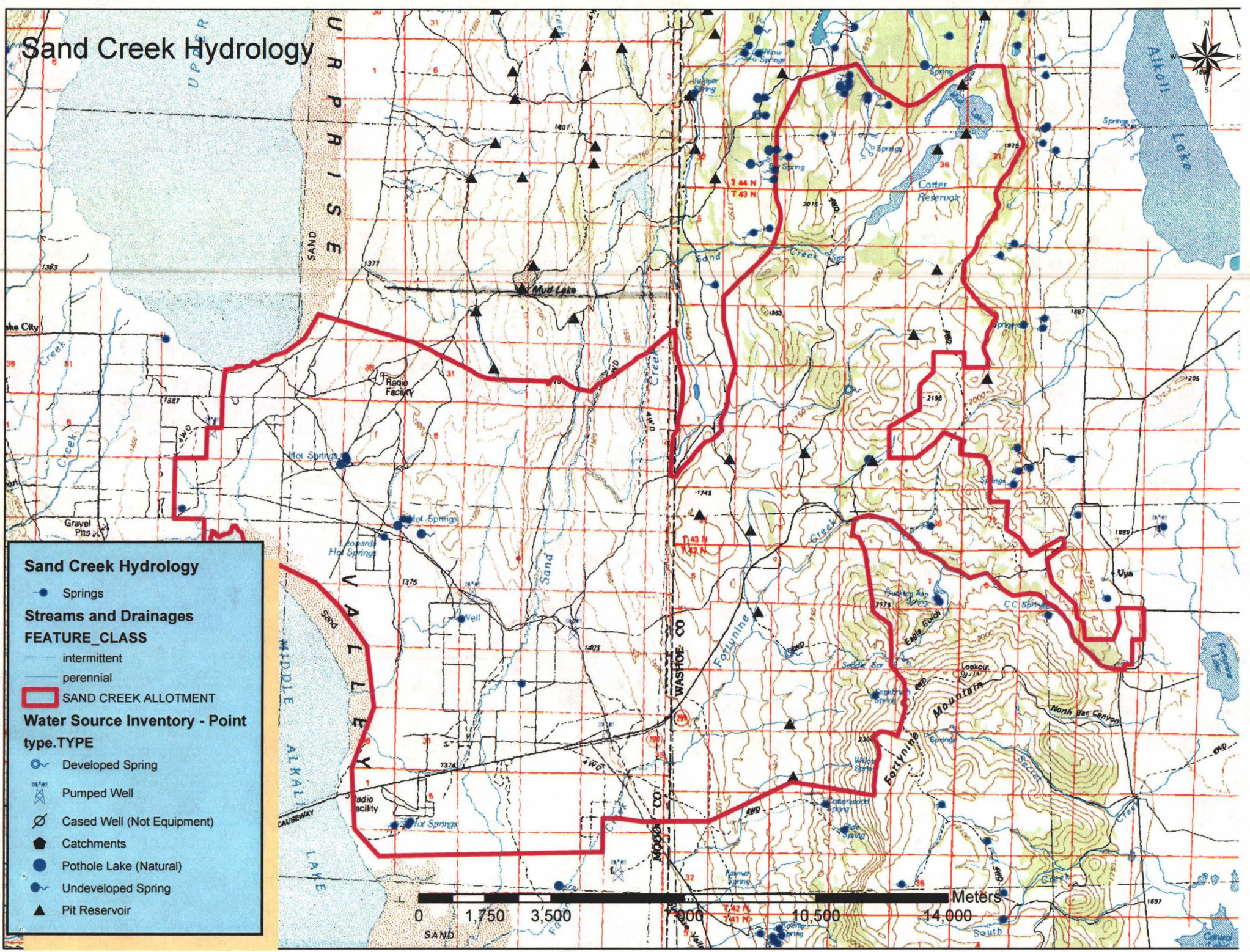
Sand Creek seedings and fences



Sand Creek Ownership



Sand Creek Hydrology



Sand Creek Hydrology

- Springs

Streams and Drainages

FEATURE_CLASS

- intermittent
- perennial
- SAND CREEK ALLOTMENT

Water Source Inventory - Point

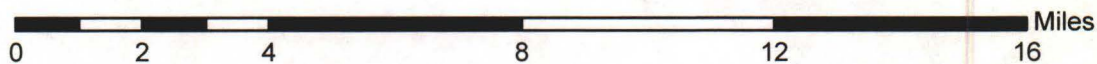
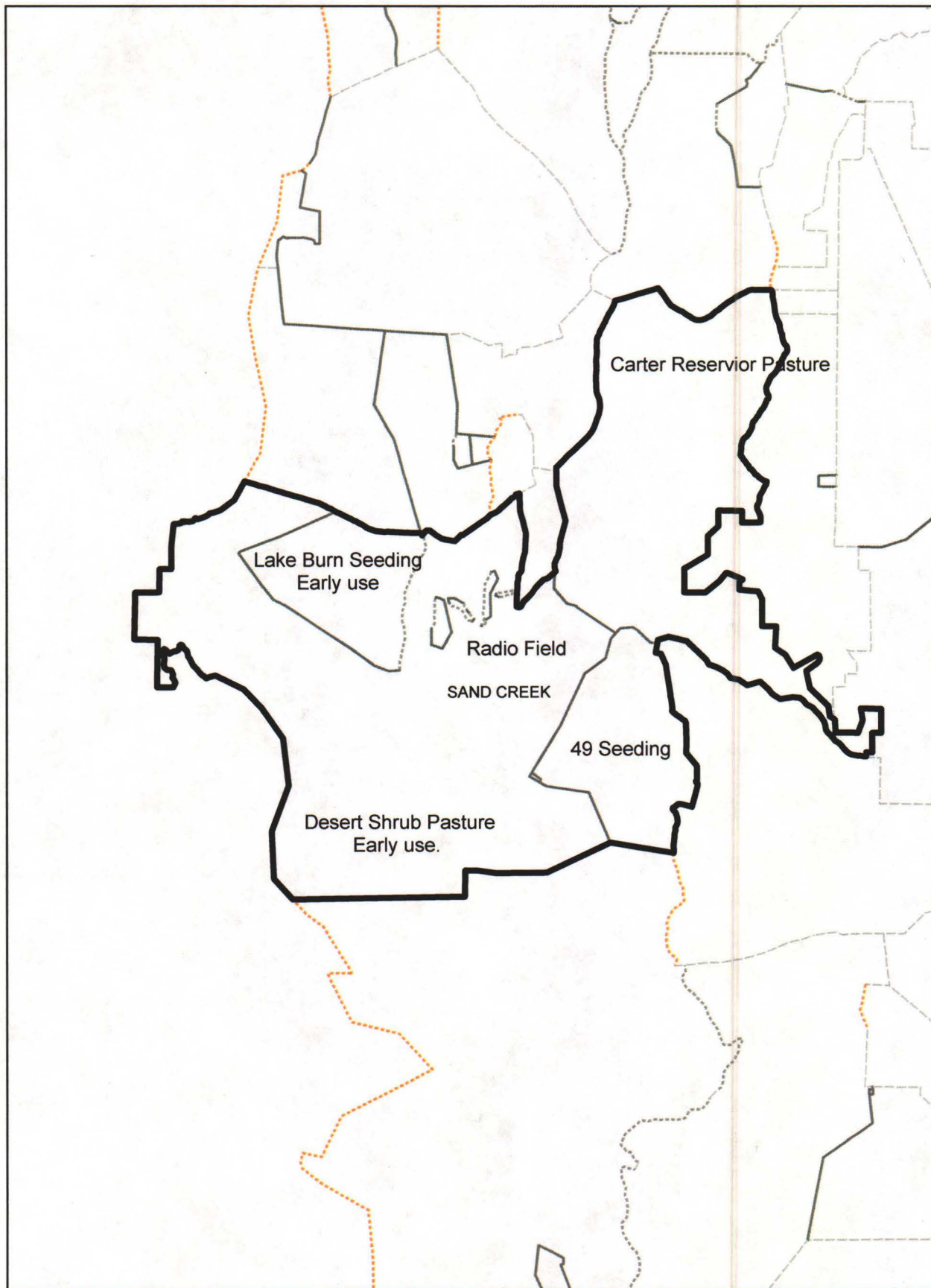
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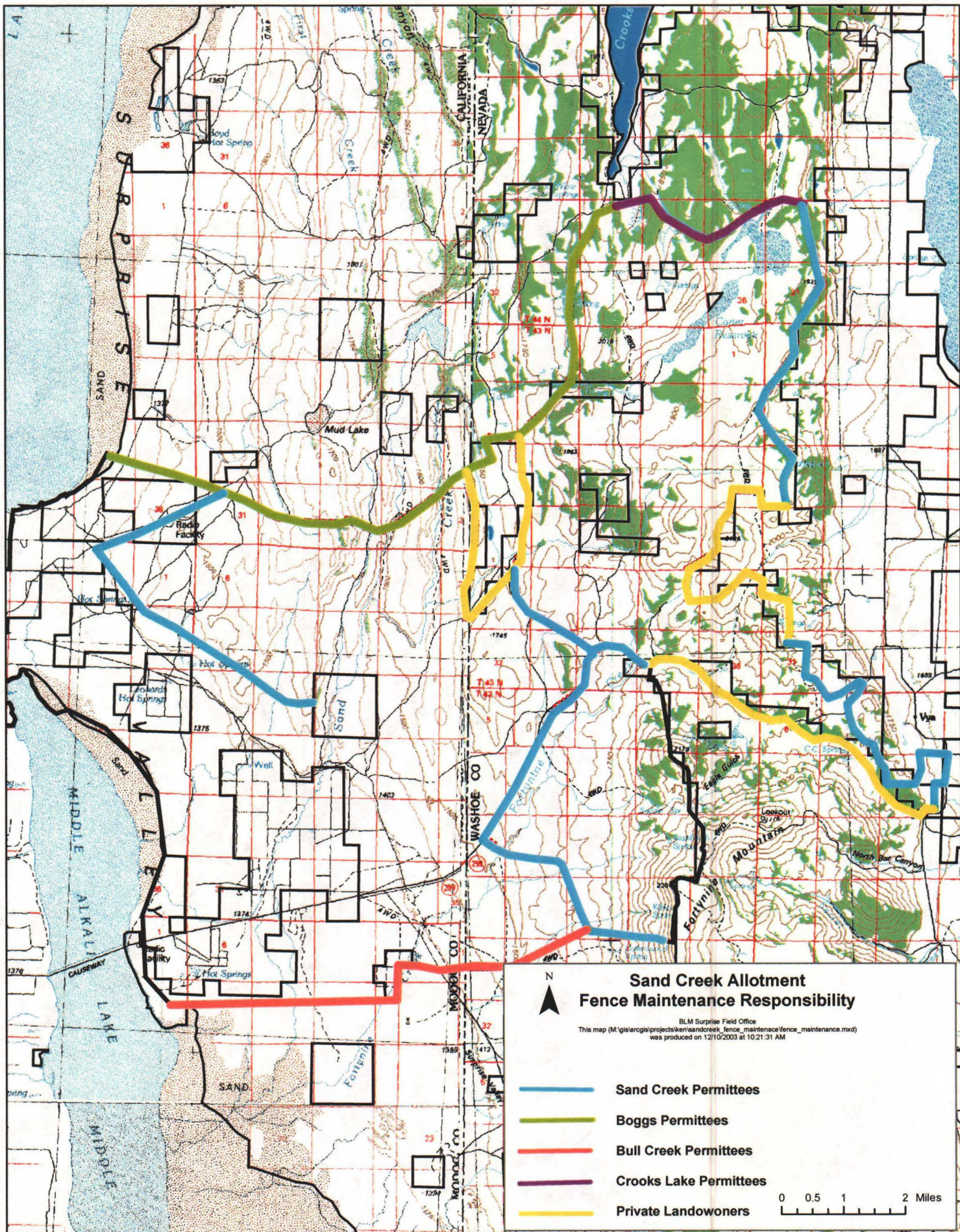
- Developed Spring
- ⊗ Pumped Well
- ⊗ Cased Well (Not Equipment)
- ▲ Catchments
- Pothole Lake (Natural)
- Undeveloped Spring
- ▲ Pit Reservoir










Pasture map Sand Creek





**Sand Creek Allotment
Fence Maintenance Responsibility**

BLM Surprise Field Office
This map (M:\gis\arcgis\projects\ken\sandcreek_fence_maintenance\map_maintenance.mxd)
was produced on 12/10/2003 at 10:21:31 AM

-  Sand Creek Permittees
-  Boggs Permittees
-  Bull Creek Permittees
-  Crooks Lake Permittees
-  Private Landowners

