

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
FOR
SAVAL RANCHING COMPANY PERMIT RENEWAL
--BUFFALO VALLEY/SOUTH BUFFALO ALLOTMENTS--
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
NV062-EA07-080**

RECEIVED

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DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
BUDGET AND PLANNING DIVISION

Environmental Assessment (EA) NV062-EA07-080, dated August 2007 has been reviewed through the interdisciplinary team process. After consideration of the environmental effects described in the EA and supporting documentation, it has been determined that the Proposed Action identified in the EA is not a major Federal Action and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity as described in 40 CFR 1508.27. Therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required as per Section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act.

It has been determined that the Proposed Action is in conformance with the approved Shoshone-Eureka Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Sonoma-Gerlach Management Framework Plan (MFP) III. It is consistent with the plans and policies of neighboring local, county, state, tribal and federal agencies and governments. This finding and conclusion is based in the consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the context and the intensity of impacts described in the EA.

Context:

The Buffalo Valley and South Buffalo Allotments are located approximately 20 miles south of Battle Mountain, NV in Lander and Pershing Counties (for map, see Appendix 1). The allotments occur within Buffalo Valley (approximately 4,600 ft) and Jersey Valley (approximately 3,775 ft) in the lower elevations. The upper elevations consist of the Tobin Range (approximately 8,745 ft) to the west and the Fish Creek Mountain Range (7,530 ft) to the east. There are approximately 370,977 acres of public land and 14,660 acres of private land between the two allotments. Livestock management for the two allotments is administered by the Battle Mountain Field Office (BMFO). The Winnemucca District is responsible for the management of the Tobin Range and North Stillwater Herd Management Areas (HMAs) and has lead responsibilities for wilderness management and recreation in the Augusta Mountain Wilderness Study Area (WSA).

Intensity:

1) *Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.*

The Saval Ranching Company Permit Renewal—Buffalo Valley & South Buffalo Allotments—Environmental Assessment analyzed both the beneficial and adverse impacts of the Proposed Action. Possible adverse impacts identified through the EA include cultural resources and microbiotic crusts. However, these impacts are not significant. Designating use areas and implementing appropriate seasons of use and terms and conditions are beneficial for rangeland health and wildlife habitats, while ensuring that

progress will be made towards management objectives set forth by the 1986 Shoshone-Eureka RMP and the 1982 Sonoma-Gerlach MFP III. The Proposed Action will also be in conformance with the Northeastern Great Basin and Sierra-Front Northwestern Resource Advisory Council's (RAC) Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health as amended, implemented in 1997. Adverse impacts may occur to cultural resources, however, impacts from past grazing management practices have not been evaluated in great detail. The assessment concluded that although impacts to cultural resources may be adverse, the Proposed Action would result in improved rangeland health, which would contribute to the preservation of cultural resources. Impacts to resources analyzed within the EA were not significant.

2) *The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.*

The Proposed Action will not result in potentially substantial or adverse impacts to public health and safety.

3) *Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historical or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.*

There are no park lands, areas designated to be prime farmlands, or wild and scenic rivers within the geographic area of the Buffalo Valley and South Buffalo Allotments. The EA did not identify any significant impacts to historical or cultural resources, unique species or their habitats, wetlands or riparian areas or ecologically critical areas. The Proposed Action will improve vegetative communities, riparian zones, and wildlife habitat associated with these areas, particularly for sage grouse.

4) *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.*

Permittee and interested public input was requested throughout the permit renewal process prior to and during the issuance of the 2007 monitoring report. Additional public input was included during the development of a proposed grazing management system initially proposed to address issues brought forward through the monitoring report. The permittee and interested public were provided a comment period during review of the EA. The effects on the quality of the human environment due to the Proposed Action are not highly controversial for the affected allotments.

The only comments received were those from Resource Concepts, Inc. in behalf of the Joe Saval Ranching Company, LLC. As indicated by the limited comments received, the proposed action is not highly controversial within the allotments. All comments received within a timely manner were addressed in the EA if deemed appropriate.

5) *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.*

There are no known effects of the Proposed Action identified in the EA which are considered uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. The effects analysis demonstrates the effects are not uncertain and do not involve unique or unknown risks (EA pgs 10-41).

6) *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*

The Proposed Action will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. Management and resource issues may be similar in nature; however, all future actions regarding permit renewals will be assessed on an individual and site-specific basis.

7) *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*

Past and present activities within the Buffalo Valley/South Buffalo allotments include livestock grazing, mining, geothermal exploration, wild horse distribution flights, wildfire suppression activities, wildfire emergency stabilization and rehabilitation activities, construction of range improvement projects such as watering facilities and boundary fences, and various recreation activities, namely hunting. No significant cumulative impacts were identified as a result of the Proposed Action when coupled with the impacts of other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions (EA pgs. 34-40).

8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the NRHP or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

The action complies with the National Historic Preservation Act. Implementation of the Proposed Action will have no significant adverse affects to districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The proposed use areas and seasons of use will promote improvements to upland vegetative communities, riparian zones, and condition of soils within these areas. Changes in seasons of use, particularly within riparian areas, and the implementation of utilization terms and conditions lessen impacts to soils and reduce erosion, therefore reducing potential adverse impacts to significant cultural or historical resources (EA pgs 10-12).

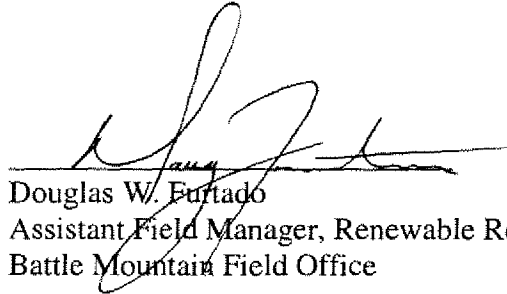
9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the ESA of 1973.*

The BLM is required by the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, to ensure that no action on the public lands jeopardizes a threatened, endangered, or proposed species. There are no federally listed endangered or threatened species within the Buffalo Valley and South Buffalo Allotments. Special status species known to be associated with habitat typical of the Buffalo Valley and South Buffalo Allotments are listed in the EA (pgs 14-15 and 27). The Proposed Action will lead to the improvement of upland and riparian areas,

which will lead to improvements in wildlife habitat, particularly for sage grouse. Sage grouse, along with other more noted special status species, have been analyzed in the EA (pgs. 15-16).

10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

The Proposed Action will not violate or threaten to violate any Federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment (EA pgs 1-2).



Douglas W. Eufado
Assistant Field Manager, Renewable Resources
Battle Mountain Field Office

9/7/07
Date