



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Surprise Field Office
P. O. Box 460
Cedarville, CA 96104
www.ca.blm.gov/surprise

March 12, 2009

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

Notice of Proposed Action and Initiation of Public Scoping Grazing Permit Renewal for the Nut Mountain Allotment

Dear Interested Party:

The BLM proposes to reissue the grazing permit for livestock grazing on the Nut Mountain Allotment. The need for the action is to comply with the Surprise Field Office Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Record of Decision of April 2008 that allocates public land within the Nut Mountain Allotment for livestock grazing. Additionally there is a need to ensure that any livestock grazing in the allotment is consistent with the goals and objectives of the RMP and the Northeastern California and Northwestern Nevada, Standards for Rangeland (Land) Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management of July 2000 to be achieved.

Washington Office Instruction Memorandum No. 2003-071, directs BLM to fully process all grazing permits by the end of FY 2009, using the information from the land health standards evaluations as needed to complete environmental impact analysis and documentation. In accordance with that policy, the Surprise Field Office will analyze the environmental impacts of several alternatives, including an alternative to issue a 10 year permit livestock grazing permit to a qualified applicant on the Nut Mountain Allotment. The grazing permit or authorization (including crossing or trailing permits) will include the type and level of use authorized, including the kind and number of livestock, the period of use, and the amount of active use in animal unit months (AUMs), terms and conditions for grazing use.

All grazing permits are issued in accordance with 43 CFR 4100. Grazing permits must be consistent with the provisions of the Taylor Grazing Act, Public Rangelands Improvement Act, and Federal Land Policy and Management Act.

Background Information

The Bureau of Land Management recently completed a Rangeland Health Assessment for the Nut Mountain Allotment. This assessment concluded that the standards for stream health, riparian/wetland areas and biodiversity were not met. In accordance with policy, the Bureau of Land Management must modify grazing use to address this non-attainment of Rangeland Health Standards. The determination for the RHA was issued on March 12, 2009 and is posted on the

Surprise Field Office homepage at http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/surprise/grazing_permit_renewals.html.

Overview of Affected Resources

The Nut Mountain Allotment is located in northwestern Washoe County Nevada at T 41- 43 N, R 19 - 21 E; the allotment is comprised of 63,980 acres of public land and 4,255 acres private land. Elevations range from 5,400 and 7,000 feet; precipitation varies from 8 to 16 inches depending on elevation. Refer to the attached maps.

The Nut Mountain Allotment is categorized as “I” (Improve), meaning it is a high priority allotment with considerable public land, significant resource and grazing management issues that require attention, along with a high potential for range condition improvements.

Grazing Management

The Nut Mountain allotment is currently authorized for up to 815 cattle to utilize 4893 Active AUMs from April 16 to October 15, annually.

The Nut Mountain allotment is comprised of five use areas (see attached map):

1. Cavalry Camp Seeding
2. Hanging Rock
3. Upper Field
4. Massacre Lakes
5. Mountain

The current grazing system is designed to provide each of the five use areas at least one growing seasons rest every other year. April 16 is the normal date for range readiness in the allotment. Presently cattle are turned out on the lower elevation areas and are herded and/or allowed to drift to the mountain as the season progresses.

Table 1. Current Grazing System

Use Area	Number of Cattle	Year 1	Year 2
Cavalry Camp Seeding*	815	Rest	April 16 – June 15
Hanging Rock	815	April 16 – June 15	Rest
Mountain	815	June 16 – August 15	August 16 – October 15
Massacre Lakes	715	August 16 – October 15	June 16 – August 15
Upper Field (used in conjunction with Massacre Lakes pasture)	100	August 16 – October 15	June 16 – August 15

*In mid to late April cattle are trucked to the allotment. Cattle are either turned out directly into the Cavalry Camp Seeding or held in a private field (Coyote Camp) until they are driven (trailed) to the Hanging Rock use area.

Wilderness Areas, Wilderness Study Areas

Approximately 16,550 acres of the Massacre Rim Wilderness Study Area is located in the northern portion of the allotment. The southern end of the allotment includes 3,505 acres of the

East Fork High Rock Canyon Wilderness Area and 11, 915 acres of the Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails NCA.

Cultural Resources

The Nut Mountain allotment contains a number of prehistoric and historic cultural resource sites. A number of these sites are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Wildlife

The allotment contains important wildlife values. The high elevation bitterbrush stands on Nut Mountain support summering deer populations. These deer move south and north to lower elevations during the colder periods. Antelope use the benches at lower elevations. Sage-grouse strutting, nesting and brooding habitat are also found in the allotment. The diverse landscape and vegetative communities provide habitat for a wide variety of non-game animals.

Wild Horses

The Nut Mountain Allotment includes portions of two Herd Management Areas (HMAs). The Bitner HMA is located at the north end of the allotment and north of NV 8A; the Nut Mountain HMA is located at the south end of the allotment south of NV 8A.

Recreation

The allotment also provides opportunities for dispersed recreation. These opportunities include but are not limited to hunting, off highway vehicle (OHV) use and rock hounding.

The Land Health Determination

The rangeland health assessment and determination was completed in 2008 and 2009 for the Nut Mountain Allotment. The following table contains the determination results. Note, if an assessment site does not meet a standard, then the standard was considered not met for the entire allotment.

Table 2. Achievement of Rangeland Health Standards Nut Mountain Allotment

Rangeland Health Standard	Meets Standard	Does Not Meet Standard	Current livestock are a causal factor for not meeting Yes or No	Remarks (locations, etc.)
Upland Soils	✓			Data from five representative Upland Health Assessments rated Soil/Site Stability as stable and Hydrologically functioning. Transect data collected at the upland health assessments support the determination that the allotment has an abundance of total cover to protect the soil from wind and water (raindrop and surface flow) impacts and the Soil Stability ratings are well within the range of variability for the reference sites.

Stream Health		✓	YES	The Standard for Stream Health is met in the two lower reaches and not met in the upper reach of Hanging Rock Creek, the only perennial stream within the allotment. Streambanks are either deeply incised or shallow with little or no vegetation and sediments are not being trapped by vegetation. Livestock and wild horse grazing is a contributing factor to these conditions. The functioning lower reaches have diverse vegetation that is shading the stream, protecting streambanks from high flows and creating undercuts that further shade the stream and provide hiding cover for fish.
Riparian/ Wetland		✓	YES	The Standard for Riparian Wetland Areas is not met. Rock Spring was functioning at risk with an upward trend. The middle and lower reaches of Hanging Rock Creek are properly functioning. The upper reach of Hanging Rock Creek is functional at risk with a downward trend. Miller and Lux Spring and Trough Spring were non-functional. Livestock and wild horse grazing is a contributing factor to these conditions. Riparian areas which were not enclosed by fences within the allotment are showing negative impacts from cattle and wild horse grazing due to heavy use and adjacent water developments.
Water Quality	✓			One water quality station for the allotment is located at the spring source at the head of Hanging Rock Creek. Baseline water quality was established in 2002 and 2003 and is currently meeting the State Numeric and Narrative Standards, Beneficial Use needs and BLM Standards. Neither surface water nor groundwater within the allotment has been listed for exceeding State water quality standards.
Bio- diversity		✓	YES	<p>The Standard for Biodiversity is not met. Riparian areas outside of exclosures observed in 2008 are being negatively impacted by current livestock and/or wild horses. These sites have not improved since the 1980's and are not providing important food, cover, or nesting substrates for wildlife. Livestock and wild horse grazing is a contributing factor to these conditions.</p> <p>Riparian areas make up less than 1% of the allotment but are extremely important for providing diverse wildlife habitat in desert environments. Perennial water at Miller and Lux, Rock Spring, and Trough Spring occur within about 1.25 miles of each other and about 3.5 miles from upper Hanging Rock, all in the Mountain Pasture. These riparian areas are important in terms of providing season-long water and wildlife habitat since stock reservoirs in the general area are not considered reliable.</p> <p>Upland areas of the allotment generally have good cover and diversity of shrubs and forbs but some sites are lacking native bunchgrasses. This condition is a result of historic grazing not current grazing practices. This conclusion is based on data collected from bitterbrush and upland utilization monitoring and documented actual use records in the Hanging Rock Use area and Upper Field and Mountain Pastures.</p>

Request for Input

Please submit any comments that you have regarding this permit renewal to the Surprise Field Office by April 12, 2009. We will use your comments and those received from other interested parties to identify issues and alternatives for consideration in the EA. You will receive a copy of the EA and proposed decision, which are expected to be issued in late spring 2009.

Thank you for participating in this grazing permit renewal process. If you have questions, or if you're not interested in receiving any additional information related to this proposed action, please call Steve Surian or Steve Mathews at (530) 279-6101.

Your comments may be submitted to the address below:

By Mail:
Bureau of Land Management
Surprise Field Office
Attn: Steve Mathews
PO Box 460
Cedarville, CA 96104

By E-mail: smathews@ca.blm.gov

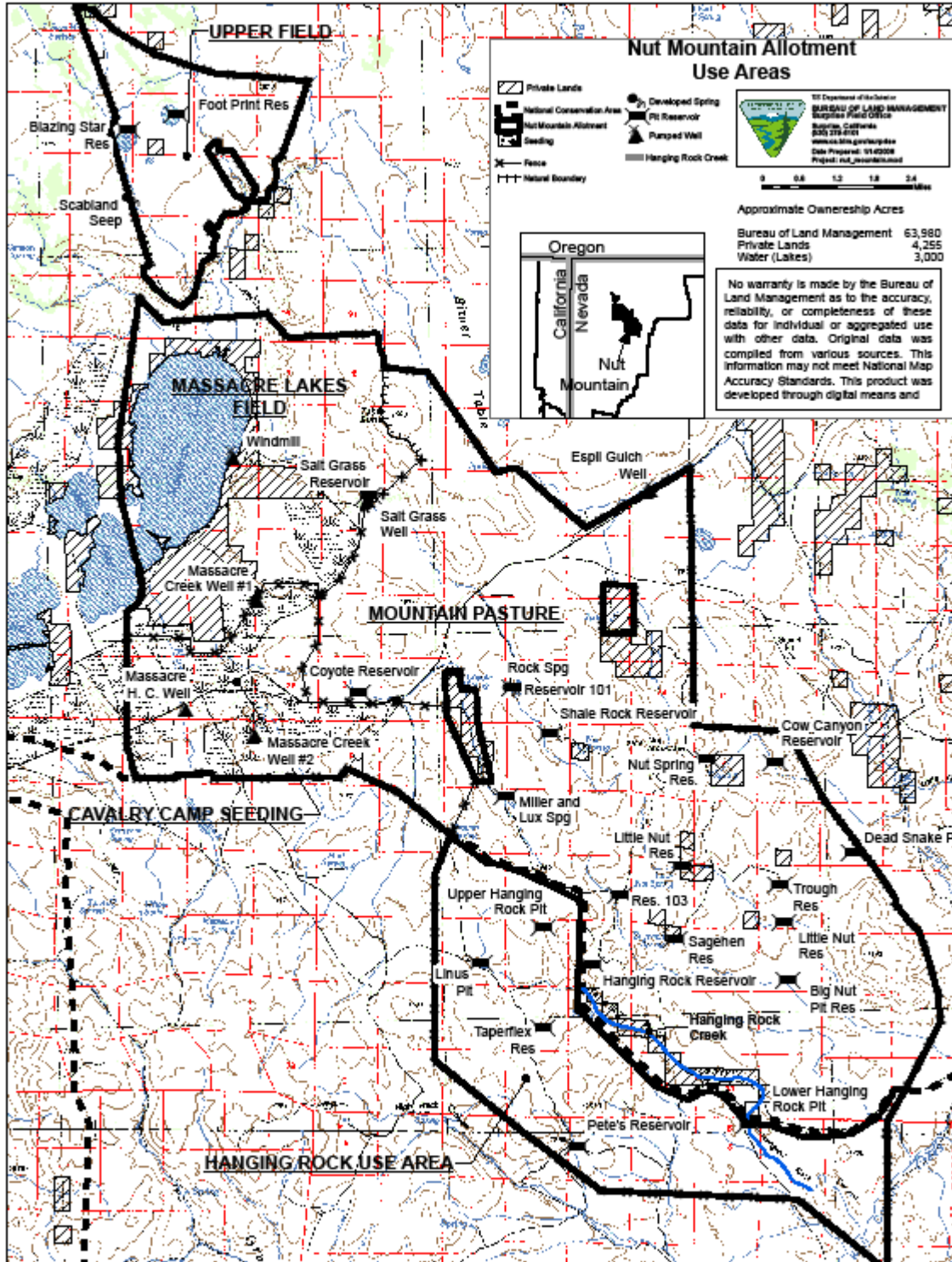
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shane DeForest". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "S" at the beginning.

Shane DeForest,
Surprise Field Manager

Nut Mountain Allotment Maps, attached

Attachment 1
Nut Mountain Allotment Use Areas



Attachment 2
 Nut Mountain Allotment Wilderness/Wilderness Study Areas

