



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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In Reply Refer To:
80230 (ID230)
CERTIFIED-RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED

October 8, 2008

Lava Lake Land & Livestock LLC
C/o Mike Stevens
P.O. Box 2249
Hailey, ID 83333

**Proposed Decision for the Water Gulch Allotment
Livestock Grazing Permit Renewal
Environmental Assessment No. ID-230-2007-EA-3560**

Dear Mike Stevens:

Introduction

The Water Gulch Allotment had field assessments conducted for meeting Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health in the summer of 2005. The Allotment Assessment was sent to the permit holder, State Agencies having responsibility for managing land or resources, and the interested public on April 18, 2006 requesting comments and any additional information. No public comments were received for Water Gulch Allotment in regard to the Rangeland Health Assessment.

The Shoshone Field Manager made a formal determination that Standard 1 (Watersheds) is being met. Standard 4 (Native Plant Communities) and Standard 8 (Threatened and Endangered Plants and Animals) are not being met but current livestock grazing is not a factor in the failure of these two standards. Standard 2 (Riparian Areas and Wetlands), Standard 3 (Stream Channel/Floodplain), Standard 5 (Seedings), Standard 6 (Exotic Plant Communities, Other than Seedings), and Standard 7 (Water Quality) were determined not to apply to the Water Gulch Allotment. Livestock management practices do conform to Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management.

An Environmental Assessment (ID-230-2007-EA-3560) was prepared describing a proposed action and two alternatives to modify grazing management practices in the allotment. On July 17, 2008, the BLM Shoshone Field Office sent a pre-decisional draft of this EA and posted it on the internet at <http://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/info/nepa.html>. This EA analyzed the environmental effects and documented the findings of a proposal for a grazing permit renewal in the Water Gulch Allotment. Included were the draft Determination of whether or not the allotment was meeting the Standards for Rangeland Health.

One comment for the Pre-Decisional EA was received by Mike Stevens who is the representative for Lava Lake Land & Livestock on September 23, 2008 via telephone. He stated that it should be stressed that the reasons why sage-grouse were not present in the Water Gulch Allotment were due to steepness of slope and lack of overall habitat. There was also a typo found in the Pre-Decisional EA in regards to number of sheep permitted. That typo has since been fixed.

Plan Conformance and Consistency

The proposed action and alternatives have been reviewed and found to be in conformance with the 1981 Sun Valley Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Land Use Plan and the associated decision.

DRAFT Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

I have reviewed the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of the proposed activities documented in the Water Gulch Allotment Grazing Permit Renewal Environmental Assessment No. ID-230-2007-EA-3560. I have also reviewed the project record for this analysis and the effects of the proposed action and alternatives as disclosed in the Alternatives and Environmental Impacts sections of the EA. Based upon a review of the EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that the project 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 defined in 40 CFR 1508.27 and do not exceed those effects described in the 1981 Sun Valley Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not needed. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described:

(a) Context. This requirement means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human, national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. For instance, in the case of a site-specific action, significance would usually depend upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Both short- and long-term effects are relevant (40 CFR 1508.27):

The disclosure of effects in the EA found the actions limited in context. The planning area is limited in size and the activities limited in potential. Effects are local in nature and are not likely to significantly affect regional or national resources.

(b) Intensity. This requirement refers to the severity of impact. Responsible officials must bear in mind that more than one agency may make decisions about partial aspects of a major action. The following are considered in evaluating intensity (40 CFR 1508.27).

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

Impacts associated with the livestock grazing permit renewal are discussed in section 4.2.1 in the Environmental Impacts section of the EA beginning on page 15.

The proposed action is anticipated to have beneficial impacts to the local economy and local ranchers as well as to range conditions which will improve conditions and aid this allotment in continuing to meet Standards for Rangeland Health in the future.

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

The proposed activities will not significantly affect public health or safety. The purpose of the proposed action is to allow for livestock grazing while improving conditions to continue to meet Standards for Rangeland Health in the allotment. Similar actions have not significantly affected public health or safety.

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

There are no unique historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farm lands, wild and scenic rivers, wetlands, Wilderness Study Areas, or Areas of Critical Environmental Concern within the allotment.

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

None of the impacts are expected to be highly controversial, since the impacts are predominantly beneficial.

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

The possible effects on the human environment are not highly uncertain nor do they involve unique or uncertain risks. The technical analyses conducted for determinations of the impacts to the resources are supportable with use of accepted techniques, reliable data, and professional judgment. Potential impacts, as discussed in section 4.2.1, are within acceptable limits and they should not deter the Water Gulch Allotment from achieving Rangeland Health Standards in the future. Therefore, I conclude that there are no highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks.

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.

Neither the Proposed Action, nor any of the alternatives sets precedent or represent a decision in principle about a future management consideration.

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

The EA analyzes all connected and cumulative actions within the scope of the analysis. The cumulative effects of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions are considered and disclosed in the EA, Environmental Impacts section. The cumulative effects are not significant.

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

The proposed action will not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. It also will not cause loss or destruction of significant, cultural, or historical resources (refer to Appendix B, pg 29).

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 Endangered Species Act of 1973.*

Plants: The allotment is within the known range for one BLM Sensitive plant, bug-leg goldenweed. No populations have been documented within the allotment and potential habitat is limited (refer to Appendix B, page 30).

Animals: The presence of gray wolf in the general project area would most likely occur during the winter. Past sightings of gray wolves in the general area are thought to be solitary individuals making a rare incursion into the area. The successful translocation of wolves in central Idaho coupled with recent sightings of gray wolves in the winter of 2006/2007 in the Wood River Valley area makes it likely that wolves would begin to make incidental use of public lands in the Water Gulch Allotment. In March of 2008, the gray wolf was removed from protection by the Endangered Species Act. However, in July of 2008, this delisting was retracted and the gray wolf is now protected by the Endangered Species Act again.

The proposed livestock grazing treatments are not expected to alter habitat suitability for the Federally listed gray wolf which may occur in the Water Gulch Allotment (refer to Appendix B, page 29). The suspected low, incidental use level of the project area by the gray wolf is expected to result in “No Effect” to its continued existence.

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

The actions in this Environmental Assessment do not threaten a violation of Federal, State, or local law or any requirements imposed for the protection of the environment (refer to Appendix B, page 29-31).

Based upon the review of the context and intensity factors and the environmental analyses conducted, I have determined that the actions analyzed for the Water Gulch Allotment Grazing Permit Renewal Environmental Assessment No. ID-30-2007-EA-33560 is not a major federal action and that its implementation will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Accordingly, I have determined that an Environmental Impact Statement need not be prepared for this project.

Proposed Decision

This decision represents my selection of Alternative A—the Proposed Action in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and issuance of a grazing decision as outlined in 43 CFR 4160.1. This final decision is hereby incorporated into your grazing permit for the Water Gulch Allotment.

The new permit will authorize the use of 128 AUMs of active preference with 150 suspended AUMs. This action refers to renewing the grazing permit with the inclusion of utilization limits for the native grasses as well as a change to the number of sheep that could be present in the allotment during the grazing period. The Water Gulch Allotment grazing permit would be issued for a term of ten years and would authorize livestock use as specified in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Proposed Authorized Use in the Water Gulch Allotment

Allotment		Livestock		Grazing Begins	Grazing Ends	% PL	Active AUMs	Suspended AUMs	Total AUMs
Number	Name	Number	Kind						
80223	Water Gulch	2,000	S	05/15	11/10	100	128	150	278

The proposed grazing permit allows some flexibility in the livestock numbers in order for a typical band of sheep to be authorized under the new grazing regulations which states that the number of livestock is a term and condition of the grazing permit. Flexibility in the sheep numbers could be authorized as long as grazing does not occur outside of the season of use, utilization levels do not exceed 40% of the current annual growth and the active preference of 128 AUMs is not exceeded. Any livestock use outside of the Terms and Conditions of the permit that has not been approved by the Authorized Officer will be in violation of the Lava Lake Land & Livestock LLC grazing permit and a trespass may be warranted.

Grazing Management Annual Indicators under the Proposed Action

The grazing permit may be modified before the term expires should information collected at any time subsequent to the renewal indicate changes in management are needed to ensure continued compliance in meeting Rangeland Health Standards and conforming to Guidelines as identified in Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management. Any minor modification of the terms and conditions may occur when the need arises and when it is not environmentally critical and is administratively expedient.

Utilization of native grasses would be limited to 40% of current growth in key areas, i.e., up to one-half mile from water features such as Mulligan Gulch. Key areas would be mutually agreed upon with the permittee. Utilization would be conducted based on the Height-Weight methodology described in Interagency Technical Reference 1734-3.

Rationale

An Environmental Assessment (ID-230-2007-EA-3560) for the Water Gulch Allotment Livestock Grazing Permit Renewal was prepared describing a proposed action and two alternatives to modify grazing management in the allotment. The decision modifies the existing grazing permit in the Water Gulch Allotment.

Due Process

Any applicant, permittee, lessee or other interested public may protest a proposed decision under Sec. 43 CFR 4160.1 and 4160.2, in person or in writing to Lori A. Armstrong, Shoshone Field Office Manager, Twin Falls District, 400 West F Street, Shoshone, ID 83352 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 accordance with 43 CFR 4160.3 (a), 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.

In accordance with 43 CFR 4160.3 (b) upon a timely filing of a protest, after a review of protests received and other information pertinent to the case, the authorized officer shall issue a final 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 through 4.480. The appeal must be filed within 30 days following receipt of the final decision, or within 30 days after the date the proposed decision becomes final as provided in 43CFR 4160.3(a). The appeal may be accompanied by a petition for a stay of the decision in accordance with 43 CFR 4.471 and 4.479, pending final determination on appeal. The appeal and petition for a stay must be filed in the office of the authorized officer, as noted above. The person/party must also serve a copy of the appeal by certified mail to the Office of the Solicitor, 960 Broadway Avenue, Suite 400, Boise, ID 83706 and any persons named [43 CFR 4.421(h)] in the *Copies sent to*: section of this decision.

The appeal shall state the reasons, clearly and concisely, why the appellant thinks the final decision is in error and otherwise complies with the provisions of 43 CFR 4.470.

Should you wish to file a petition for a stay, see 43 CFR 4.471 (a) and (b). In accordance with 43 CFR 4.471(c), a petition for a stay 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.

If you have any questions, please contact either Joanna Tjaden, Rangeland Management Specialist, at 732-7292, or me at 732-7227.

Sincerely,

/s/ Lori Armstrong

Lori A. Armstrong
Field Manager

Enclosures:

Environmental Assessment ID-230-2007-EA-3560
Water Gulch Allotment Determination

Copies sent to:

Lava Lake Land & Livestock LLC
Blaine County Commissioners
Committee for the High Desert
ICL Public Lands Office
Idaho Department of Fish and Game
Idaho State Department of Agriculture
Idaho Department of Lands
Idaho Wildlife Federation
Shoshone-Bannock Tribes
The Wilderness Society
Western Watersheds Project
David Skinner
Western Land Exchange Project
Paul McClain
Mel Quale
Dennis Crane
Chris J. Christiansen
US Forest Service, Ketchum Ranger District, Sawtooth National Forest, c/o
Mike O'Farrell

United States Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management

Proposed Environmental Assessment # ID-230-2007-EA-3560

For the Water Gulch (#80223)

GRAZING PERMIT RENEWAL

October 8, 2008

Location: Twin Falls District, Shoshone Field Office, 400 West F Street, Shoshone, ID 83352

Table of Contents

1.0 PURPOSE & NEED	4
1.1. Introduction:	4
1.2 Background:	4
1.3 Need for the Proposed Action	5
1.4 Purpose(s) of the Proposed Action	5
1.5 Conformance with BLM Land Use Plan(s)	6
1.6 Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, or other Plans.....	6
1.7 Identification of Issues.....	6
1.7.1 Soils.....	6
1.7.2 Vegetation, including Invasive, Non-native Species.	6
1.7.3 Wildlife, including Threatened and BLM Sensitive Species.....	6
1.7.4 Livestock Grazing & Rangeland Health Standards.....	7
1.8 Summary.....	7
2.0 DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING PROPOSED ACTION	7
2.1 Introduction.....	7
2.2 Alternative A – Proposed Action	7
2.3 Alternative B – No Action	8
2.4 Alternative C - No Grazing Alternative.....	8
3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT	9
3.1 Introduction.....	9
3.2 General Setting.....	9
3.3 Critical Elements of the Human Environment and Other Resources/Issues Brought Forward for Analysis	9
3.3.1 Resource 1: Soils.....	9
3.3.2 Resource 2: Vegetation, including Invasive, Non-native Species.	10
3.3.3 Resource 3: Wildlife, including Threatened and BLM Sensitive Species.....	12
3.3.4 Resource 4: Livestock Grazing & Rangeland Health Standards.....	14
4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS	15
4.1 Introduction.....	15
4.2 Direct/Indirect Impacts	15
4.2.1 Alternative A – Proposed Action	15
4.2.1.1 Resource 1: Soils.....	15
4.2.1.2 Resource 2: Vegetation, including Invasive, Non-native Species.....	15
4.2.1.3 Resource 3: Wildlife, including Threatened and BLM Sensitive Species.	16
4.2.1.4. Resource 4: Livestock Grazing & Rangeland Health Standard.....	16
4.2.2 Alternative B – No Action.....	17
4.2.2.1 Resource 1: Soils.....	17

4.2.2.2 Resource 2: Vegetation, including Invasive, Non-native Species.....	17
4.2.2.3 Resource 3: Wildlife, including Threatened and BLM Sensitive Species.....	18
4.2.2.4 Resource 4: Livestock Grazing, including Rangeland Health.....	19
4.3 Cumulative Impacts Analysis.....	19
4.3.1 Past and Present Actions.....	19
4.3.2 Reasonably Foreseeable Action Scenario (RFAS).....	20
4.3.3 Cumulative Impacts Summary.....	20
5.0 CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION.....	21
5.1 Introduction.....	21
5.2 Persons, Groups, and Agencies Consulted.....	21
5.3 Summary of Public Participation.....	21
5.4 List of Preparers.....	22
6.0 REFERENCES.....	22
6.1 References Cited.....	22
6.2 Attachments.....	22
Attachment 1.....	23
Attachment 2.....	24
7.0 APPENDIXES.....	27
Appendix A.....	27
Appendix B.....	29

1.0 PURPOSE & NEED

1.1. Introduction:

This Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared to disclose and analyze the environmental consequences of renewing the term grazing permit on the Water Gulch Allotment as proposed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). This EA is a site-specific analysis of expected impacts that are expected with the implementation of a Proposed Action and alternatives. The EA assists the BLM in project planning and ensuring determination as to whether any “significant” impacts could result from the analyzed actions. “Significance” is defined by NEPA and is found in regulation 40 CFR 1508.27. An EA provides evidence for determining whether to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or a “Finding of No Significant Impact” (FONSI). If the decision maker determines that this project has “significant” impacts following the analysis in the EA, then an EIS would be prepared for the project. If not, a Decision Record (DR) may be signed for the EA approving the selected alternative, whether the Proposed Action or another alternative. A Decision Record, including a FONSI statement, documents the reasons why implementation of the selected alternative would not result in “significant” environmental impacts (effects) beyond those already addressed in the 1981 Sun Valley Management EIS.

1.2 Background:

The action being analyzed is a renewal of the livestock grazing permit in the Water Gulch Allotment in accordance with the Fundamentals of Rangeland Health (43 CFR Subpart 4180). Through this environmental analysis, a final decision will be rendered which will supersede the existing grazing use permit for the Water Gulch Allotment and result in a specific season of use, number and kind of livestock, AUMs, and management plan.

Under the 43 Code of Federal Regulations (43 CFR), Subpart 4180 – Fundamentals of Rangeland Health and Standards and Guidelines for Grazing Administration, the BLM is required to assess resource conditions on the allotment in conjunction with Technical Reference 1734-6 *Interpreting Indicators of Rangeland Health* (2000) and the final *Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management* (1997). Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines are used as management goals by the BLM for the betterment of the environment, protection of cultural resources, and sustained productivity of the range. They were developed with the intent of providing for the multiple use of the public lands. The regulations direct that existing grazing management be modified through the term permit to ensure that rangeland health standards are achieved. Ultimately, the intent of the fundamentals of rangeland health and the Idaho standards is to ensure that the resources within the allotment are meeting the Standards for Rangeland Health or are making significant progress toward meeting the Standards.

Guidelines direct the selection of grazing management practices on the allotment and are outlined in the *Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management* (refer to Appendix A for a list of the Guidelines). These Guidelines, or grazing management practices, are intended to be implemented on the allotment through the term permit to promote significant progress toward, or the attainment and maintenance of the Rangeland Health Standards.

1.3 Need for the Proposed Action:

The current term grazing permit for the Water Gulch Allotment does not incorporate Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management. The underlying need for the Proposed Action is to incorporate Idaho Rangeland Health Standards into the management of the allotment. Another need is to ensure that resources which currently meet the standard continue to maintain rangeland health standards.

Included in this proposal is an increase in livestock numbers from 108 to 2,000 in order to allow for a typical band of sheep to be authorized under the grazing regulations which state that the number of livestock is a term and condition of the grazing permit. Therefore, there is a need to determine what grazing authorization would be made and what management practices in the allotment would be established that would result in the existing resource conditions continuing to meet Fundamentals of Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines.

1.4 Purpose(s) of the Proposed Action:

A Rangeland health evaluation was conducted in the Water Gulch Allotment in August of 2005. The assessment was documented in a subsequent assessment in April of 2006. The Standards for Rangeland Health and the finding of the field evaluation, as applied in the State of Idaho, are considered in the EA, and the current permits would be renewed by incorporating the Fundamentals of Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines, or grazing management practices, into the management of the allotment.

Based on the mandates of several authorities¹, the purpose of the action is to continue authorizing livestock grazing use in the Water Gulch Allotment, consistent with the laws and regulations governing the activity. An environmental assessment is necessary to determine the manner and degree to which issuing grazing permits would, based on existing information, continue to provide a reasonable balance between competing resource values and meeting the requirements for the Fundamentals of Rangeland Health and the Standards and Guidelines for Grazing Administration required by Code 43 of Federal Regulations, Subpart 4180.

Through these authorities and the 43 Code of Federal Regulations Part 4100, the BLM manages allotment resources and issues grazing permits and leases, hereinafter referred to as permits, for a term not to exceed 10 years.

¹ the Taylor Grazing Act of June 28, 1934 as amended (43 U.S.C.315, 315a through 315r); (b) the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.) as amended by the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 (43 U.S.C. 1901 et seq.); (c) Executive orders transfer land acquired under the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act of July 22, 1937, as amended (7 U.S.C 1012), to the Secretary and authorize administration under the Taylor Grazing Act; (d) The Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 (43 U.S.C. 1901 et seq.); and (e) Public land orders, Executive orders, and agreements authorize the Secretary to administer livestock grazing on specified lands under the Taylor Grazing Act or other authority as specified. [43 FR 29067, July 5, 1978, as amended at 49 FR 6449, February 21, 1984; 49 FR 12704, March 30, 1984; 50 FR 45827, November 4, 1985; 61 FR 4227, February 5, 1996]

1.5 Conformance with BLM Land Use Plan(s):

Livestock grazing use within this allotment was analyzed in the 1981 Sun Valley EIS. In that EIS, an increase in permitted use and a change to the season of use were proposed for the Water Gulch Allotment. The active AUMs went from 112 sheep AUMs to 108 sheep AUMs and the starting date for grazing was deferred from May 1st to May 15th. The action of re-issuing a term grazing permit for this allotment would not result in a change in the scope of the resource uses or a change in the terms, conditions, and decisions made. Establishing management practices and the appropriate grazing authorization through the incorporation of the Fundamentals of Rangeland Health and Guidelines would continue to allow allotment management to comply with the long-range direction outlined in the EIS. The Proposed Action described in this document is in conformance with the 1981 Sun Valley EIS and decision.

1.6 Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, or other Plans:

The aforementioned authorities (referenced in footnote 3) mandate or allow the BLM to authorize livestock grazing on public lands as part of the multiple-use management of natural resources.

1.7 Identification of Issues:

Issues raised during the analysis have been identified during public scoping with interested publics and the permittees. Rangeland Health Assessments for the Water Gulch Allotment dated April 18, 2006 were mailed to interested publics and the permittee; no comments were received. Issues have also been raised through internal (BLM) review and interdisciplinary processes including meetings, personal communication, and an analysis record checklist. Appendix B contains the analysis record checklist of all resources considered. The following section is a list of issues relevant to this analysis.

1.7.1 Soils.

- The soils in the Water Gulch Allotment are mostly deep to very deep and have varying amounts of course fragments and gravel. The soils on this site are derived from volcanic, metasedimentary, or granitic materials. The Water Gulch Allotment is currently meeting the rangeland health standard for watersheds; however, there is some concern about the degree of mechanical impacts from livestock use and recreational use to the soil/watershed resource.

1.7.2 Vegetation, including Invasive, Non-native Species.

- The Shoshone Field Office has recorded five wildfires that have occurred on public lands in the Water Gulch Allotment. Many of these fires have overlapped previously burned areas and compromised the native plant communities within the allotment.
- Cheatgrass, a non-native, invasive species, occurs on the south facing slopes in the allotment. There is some concern about the spread of this plant in neighboring allotments from livestock use.

1.7.3 Wildlife, including Threatened and BLM Sensitive Species.

- There may be potential issues with the increase in sheep numbers for big game species even though the numbers that are proposed are basically a continuation of the current situation.
- The variation in habitat conditions and habitat structural components that currently exist on the allotment likely provides minimal suitable habitat for BLM threatened, endangered, and sensitive

animal species. The proposed livestock grazing treatments are not expected to alter habitat suitability for the Federally listed gray wolf which may occur in the Water Gulch Allotment. The allotment provides relatively small areas of marginal late brood-rearing habitat for sage grouse.

1.7.4 Livestock Grazing & Rangeland Health Standards..

- The action being analyzed in this EA is a renewal of the livestock grazing permit in the Water Gulch Allotment in accordance with the Fundamentals of Rangeland Health. Currently, the Water Gulch Allotment is not meeting all applicable standards but current livestock grazing is not a factor in the failure of the standards.

1.8 Summary:

The chapter has presented the purpose and need of the proposed project, as well as the relevant issues, i.e., those elements of the human environment that could be affected by the implementation of the proposed project. In order to meet the purpose and need of the proposed project in a way that resolves the issues, the BLM has developed a range of action alternatives. These alternatives, as well as a no action alternative, are presented in Chapter 2. The environmental impacts or consequences resulting from the implementation of each alternative are then analyzed in Chapter 4 for each of the identified issues.

2.0 DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING PROPOSED ACTION

2.1 Introduction:

The Proposed Action was developed based upon issues identified through internal scoping as well as public scoping and involvement. The Proposed Action was designed to address one or more of the identified issues as well as provide the opportunity for specific comparisons on which the decision maker can base a decision.

2.2 Alternative A – Proposed Action:

This is the preferred alternative.

Issue the grazing permit for ten-year term which authorizes livestock use in the Water Gulch Allotment and incorporates the Fundamentals of Rangeland Health and Standards and Guidelines for Grazing Administration (43 CFR 4180). This alternative describes the on-the-ground management action that the BLM proposes to implement and represents the proposed Management Guidelines. This alternative refers to renewing the grazing permit with the inclusion of utilization limits for the native grasses as well as a change to the number of sheep that could be present in the allotment during the grazing period. The Water Gulch Allotment grazing permit would be issued for a term of ten years and would authorize livestock use as specified in Table 1.

The proposed grazing permit allows some flexibility in the livestock numbers in order for a typical band of sheep to be authorized under the new grazing regulations which states that the number of livestock is a term and condition of the grazing permit. Flexibility in the sheep numbers could be authorized as long as grazing does not occur outside of the season of use, utilization levels do not exceed 40% of the current annual growth and the active preference of 128 AUMs is not exceeded. Any livestock use outside of the Terms and Conditions of the permit that has not been approved by the Authorized Officer will be in violation of the Lava Lake Land & Livestock LLC grazing permit and a trespass may be warranted.

Under the Proposed Action, the Management Guidelines would include:

- Utilization of native grasses would be limited to 40% of current growth in key areas, i.e., up to one half mile from water features, including perennial/intermittent streams, springs, ponds, canals, or troughs. Utilization would be conducted based on the Height-Weight methodology described in Interagency Technical Reference 1743-3, *Utilization Studies and Residual Measurements*.

Allotment Improvements under the Proposed Action.

No range improvements are proposed under this alternative.

Table 1: Proposed Grazing Permit

Current Permittee	Livestock #	Days	Grazing Begin End	%PL	Active AUMs	Suspended AUMs	Total AUMs
Lava Lake Land & Livestock LLC	2,000 Sheep	9	5/15 to 11/10	100%	128	150	278

2.3 Alternative B – No Action:

Under this alternative, there would be no change from current management; the terms and conditions of the permit, the number of livestock, as well as no addition of the utilization limits. The grazing permit in Water Gulch Allotment would be renewed for the same livestock number, kind, and grazing season as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Current Grazing Permit Authorization

Current Permittee	Livestock #	Days	Grazing Begin End	%PL	Active AUMs	Suspended AUMs	Total AUMs
Lava Lake Land & Livestock LLC	108 Sheep	179	5/15 to 11/10	100%	128	150	278

Allotment Improvements under Alternative B.

No range improvements are proposed under this alternative.

2.4 Alternative C - No Grazing Alternative *Close the Allotment to grazing.* Under this alternative, the BLM Shoshone Field Manager would not reissue a grazing permit and thus discontinue livestock grazing in the Water Gulch Allotment. These lands are still allotted and made available for livestock grazing in the Land Use Plan and therefore the No Grazing Alternative was eliminated from further consideration.

3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

3.1 Introduction:

This chapter presents the affected existing environment (i.e., the physical, biological, social and economic values and resources) of the impact area as identified in the Interdisciplinary Team Analysis Record Checklist found in Appendix B and presented in Chapter 1 of this environmental assessment. This chapter provides the baseline for comparison of impacts/consequences described in Chapter 4.

3.2 General Setting:

The Water Gulch Allotment is located in Blaine County; two miles east of Hailey, Idaho (refer to Map 1). Elevations in this allotment range from 5,400 to 8,158 feet. To the north of the allotment is Quigley Allotment, to the east is the Slaughterhouse Allotment, and to the west and south is private land. Within the allotment there are 203 acres of State Land. Sheep graze in this allotment during the late spring and early fall months.

3.3 Critical Elements of the Human Environment and Other Resources/Issues Brought Forward for Analysis:

Critical elements of the human environment are subject to requirements specified in treaty, statute, regulation, or executive order and must be considered in all environmental assessments. Other important elements of the human environment are not necessarily critical elements, but are nonetheless important to consider in assessing impacts of the proposal. Elements which are present in the allotment and are likely to be affected are discussed in this section.

Critical and important elements that are marked as “NP” or “NI” in Appendix B were considered during the environmental analysis process but were identified as such because they are not present within the allotment being analyzed or are present, but not affected to a degree that a detailed analysis is required. Critical and important elements marked as “PI” are analyzed in further detail in the Environmental Effects Section of this document.

3.3.1 Resource 1: Soils.

Since the 1950s, five wildfires have occurred in the Water Gulch Allotment. Prior to the late 1980s, the fires were less than 80 acres. Please refer to the table below for the complete wildfire history. A total of 75% of the allotment has been affected by fire since 1958 (refer to Table 3). The latest fire occurred in 2002 and was called the Cherry Creek Fire. This fire alone burnt about 60% of the allotment which resulted in a three year allotment closure for vegetation recovery. This fire is the main reason why there is a lack of sagebrush throughout the allotment. It should be noted that other fires may have occurred in this allotment prior to the 1950s that were not reported or documented.

Table 3: Fire History

Wildfire Name	Year	Acres
No Name #1	1958	80
No Name #2	1961	3
Slaughter #2	1982	40
Friedman Fire	1987	400
Cherry Creek Fire	2002	460

The field assessment consisted of evaluating the key ecological site(s) found within the Water Gulch Allotment. An allotment summary of the data obtained from the field assessment for applicable rangeland health standards has been included in this document. There are two ecological sites in the Water Gulch Allotment; a North slope loamy 16-20” Mountain Big Sagebrush/Idaho Fescue, and a South Slope Stony 12-16” Mountain Big Sagebrush/ Bluebunch Wheatgrass. The North Slope Loamy 16-20” Mountain Big Sagebrush/Idaho Fescue ecological site is associated with mountain sides on north, east and northwest exposures and slopes range from 20-60 percent. The average annual precipitation ranges from 16-20” and most of the precipitation comes during the plant dormant period of October through April in the form of snow. The average frost free period is only 45-60 days. The soils on this site are dark colored, gravelly loams, gravelly silt loams and clay loams over 40 inches deep and are derived from volcanic, metasedimentary, or granitic materials. The infiltration and internal water movement is good throughout the allotment. Available water capacity is moderate and the erosion hazard is moderate when the vegetation is scarce or removed.

The South Slope Stony 12-16” mountain big sagebrush/bluebunch wheatgrass range site usually occurs on steep mountain sides on south, south-east, or west aspects. Slopes are generally 20-60 percent and the soils are gravelly, very gravelly, or cobbly loams, and gravelly coarse sandy loams. Approximately one-third of the precipitation comes during the plant dormant period of October to April primarily as snow. The water intake is moderate to rapid with well to excessive drainage while the available water capacity is low to medium. Erosion hazard is moderate to high when vegetation is scarce or removed.

3.3.2 Resource 2: Vegetation, including Invasive, Non-native Species.

There are two ecological sites that comprise the majority of Water Gulch Allotment which are the North Slope Loamy 16-20” Mountain big sagebrush/Idaho fescue site and the South Slope Stony 12-16” Mountain big sagebrush/Bluebunch wheatgrass site. The North Slope Loamy 16-20” Mountain big sagebrush/Idaho fescue ecological site is located mostly on the hills and slopes where most of the sheep use occurs, while the South Slope Stony 12-16” Mountain big sagebrush/Bluebunch wheatgrass ecological site usually occurs on steep mountain sides on south, south-east, or west aspects.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service’s (NRCS) ecological site descriptions use dry weight (production) for a measure of community composition. The Bureau of Land Management typically uses the line point intercept method for percent composition by cover. While each of these methods has its own values and weaknesses they are not directly comparable. The climate of both the above sites is characterized by cool summers and cold winters, with snow cover most of the winter. Most of the precipitation occurs during the fall and winter months and the optimum plant growth period is from June through mid-August. The NRCS site guide description for the North Slope Loamy 16-20” states that visually the dominant vegetation of the site is Idaho fescue, bluebunch wheatgrass and mountain big

sagebrush. The potential natural plant community for grasses on the site includes Idaho fescue and bluebunch wheatgrass with lesser amounts of prairie junegrass, Nevada bluegrass, Thurber's needlegrass, and Colombia needlegrass. Forbs in the potential natural plant community include arrowleaf balsamroot, lupine, mustard, tapertip hawksbeard and geranium with lesser amounts of helianthella, Hoods phlox, white stoneseed, onion, and yarrow. Shrubs in the potential natural plant community include mountain big sagebrush with lesser amounts of grey rabbitbrush, green rabbitbrush, snowberry, Woods rose, currant, chokecherry and mockorange.

The NRCS site guide description for the South Slope Stony 12-16" states that visually the dominant vegetation of the site is mountain big sagebrush and bluebunch wheatgrass. The potential natural plant community for grasses on the site includes bluebunch wheatgrass, Indian ricegrass, and Colombia needlegrass with lesser amounts of Sandberg bluegrass, bottlebrush squirreltail, Nevada bluegrass, sedge and basin wildrye. Forbs in the potential natural plant community include tapertip hawksbeard, arrowleaf balsamroot and lupine with lesser amounts of milkvetch, Hooker balsamroot, Indian paintbrush, geranium, helianthella, buckwheat, phlox and foothill deathcamas. Shrubs in the potential natural plant community include mountain big sagebrush and antelope bitterbrush with lesser amounts of currant, gray rabbitbrush, green rabbitbrush, chokecherry, mountain snowberry and gray horsebrush.

Vegetation present in the allotment during the assessments consisted of species that were listed on the NRCS site guide description for the Water Gulch Allotment. There are two limiting factors for the overall native plant community rating for the Water Gulch Allotment. The first main reason is the lack of mountain big sagebrush due to the wildfire in 2002 and the second is the high cover of cheatgrass on the second site located on the southern slope. There is also a lack of diversity and abundance of forbs on these two sites as well but this may be due to the survey being done in August. The field assessment documents that the Water Gulch Allotment is not meeting the rangeland health standard for native plant communities but that current livestock grazing practices are in accordance to the mandate.

Site 1. North Slope Loamy 16-20" Mountain Big Sagebrush/Idaho Fescue:

Cover data indicate that bluebunch wheatgrass, Idaho fescue, Nebraska bluegrass, and basin wildrye are the dominant plant species. The shrub component on this site is missing but this may be due to the recent wildfire. Perennial grasses native to the site are present but the forb abundance is lower than what would be expected for the site. Many of the forbs were present on the site but were not abundant enough to be accounted for in the transect. This may have been due to the survey being done in August. Some of these forbs included cinquefoil, lupine, longleaf phlox, geranium, Indian paintbrush, goatsbeard, arrowleaf balsamroot, and lambs quarter.

Site 2 South Slope Stony 12-16" Mountain Big Sagebrush/Bluebunch Wheatgrass:

This site is a south facing slope and is currently 56% cheatgrass. Cover data indicates that lupine, bluebunch wheatgrass, and cheatgrass are the dominant plant species. The shrub component on this site is missing but this may be due to the recent wildfire. This transect also did not have an abundant or diverse forb community. Many forbs are missing from the site and this could be due to the dense cheatgrass populations. Some of the forbs that were not in the transect but present on the site included goatsbeard, beardtongue buckwheat and arrowleaf balsamroot.

TABLE 4: Species Composition found in 2005

Cover Type	% Cover	
	Site 1	Site 2
ANNUAL GRASSES		
<i>Cheatgrass</i>	-	37
PERENNIAL GRASSES		
<i>Bluebunch wheatgrass</i>	15	12
<i>Nebraska bluegrass</i>	17	-
<i>Idaho fescue</i>	12	-
<i>Prairie Junegrass</i>	4	-
<i>Basin Wildrye</i>	10	-
ANNUAL FORBS		
<i>Mustard</i>	5	2
<i>Knotweed</i>	1	-
<i>Willow herb</i>	-	1
<i>Unknown Annual Forb</i>	1	7
PERENNIAL FORBS		
<i>Phacelia</i>	5	-
<i>Yarrow</i>	1	-
<i>Silene</i>	1	-
<i>Buckwheat</i>	1	-
<i>Penstemon</i>	3	-
<i>Horsemint</i>	5	-
<i>Lupine</i>		5
SHRUBS		
<i>Rabbitbrush</i>	4	-
<i>Chokecherry</i>	1	-

Invasive, Non-Native Species

During the field assessment, populations of Canada thistle and spotted knapweed were identified within the allotment boundary. These two species of noxious weeds are prevalent in the Wood River Valley. Most of the weeds are concentrated in the drainage bottoms or on the boundaries against private lands. Many attempts have been made in the past to eradicate them through chemical and biological means with little success. This area has been and will continue to be closely monitored for potential expansion into neighboring areas.

3.3.3 Resource 3: Wildlife, including Threatened and BLM Sensitive Species.

Big game wildlife species that use public land in the Water Gulch Allotment include mule deer and elk. The 1981 Sun Valley EIS made formal forage allocations for deer in the Water Gulch Allotment. The Sun Valley EIS allocated 16 deer months of forage during the summer (May 1 to October 30) use period. The combined effects of residential and business development, wildfires, changes in land use, weed infestations and various forms of new and more extensive recreational uses of the lands in the Big Wood River Valley that have occurred since the Sun Valley EIS was completed in 1981 have resulted in a change in big game use patterns and increased the importance of many of the large blocks of public land for mule deer and elk. Mule deer and elk use now occurs year-round on the allotment with greater level of use occurring in the late fall, winter, and early spring. Some of the public land in the allotment is currently considered crucial elk and mule deer winter range. The recent wildfire on the allotment has reduced the cover condition and forage values of the habitat for wintering mule deer.

BLM Threatened, Endangered or Sensitive Species

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Biannual Resource Area Species List 2008-SL-0519 lists federally listed Threatened or Endangered Species known or suspected to occur in the resource area. The only listed plant or animal species which potentially may occur in the allotment is the gray wolf (*Canis lupus*). The BLM lists some additional animals and plants as BLM Sensitive Species in Idaho. The BLM Sensitive Species associated with this allotment are discussed below.

A sighting of a gray wolf was made east of Bellevue, Idaho during the winter of 2003. The wolf sighting occurred about three air-miles south of the Water Gulch Allotment. The recent and continuing expansion of gray wolves in the Big Wood River watershed and adjacent areas has increased the likelihood that gray wolves may make use of lands in the Water Gulch Allotment on an incidental but year-round basis.

BLM Sensitive animals that are expected to currently use habitat on public land in the allotment during all or a portion of the year are: bald eagle, prairie falcon; grasshopper sparrow, and wolverine. Bald eagles may make incidental use within the allotment boundary while wintering on the Big Wood River. Bald eagles would be expected to make rare, incidental use of public land in this allotment. Prairie falcons use the allotment during the spring, summer and early fall seasons while searching for prey. Grasshopper sparrows may use habitat conditions on the allotment during the spring and summer season for nesting and brood rearing. Wolverines have large home ranges and may make incidental use of the allotment during any season of the year while searching for prey.

The BLM Sensitive wildlife species that make use of sagebrush and native bunchgrass habitat on the Water Gulch Allotment prior to the recent wildfire include: greater sage-grouse, loggerhead shrike, Brewer's sparrow, sage sparrow, fringed myotis (a species of bat) and Townsend's big-eared bat. All six of these Sensitive species benefit from the habitat conditions created by the presence of mature sagebrush in the plant community.

Sage-grouse require large blocks of mature big sagebrush for nesting, brood rearing and winter habitat. Records at the Shoshone Field Office show there are no known active or historic sage-grouse leks within five air miles of the Water Gulch Allotment. Sage-grouse may make some incidental use of habitat found in the allotment on relatively flat benches and on the bottom of the toe slopes. The Water Gulch Allotment is not designated as sage-grouse habitat, primarily due to the steep slopes of that geographical area. Data from the recent sage-grouse habitat assessment surveys indicate the present vegetation community on the allotment does not provide suitable sage-grouse nesting or winter habitat and marginal late brood-rearing habitat.

The sage sparrow, Brewer's sparrow and loggerhead shrike use mature big sagebrush and to a much less extent other mature native shrub species for nesting, song perches and roosting. Loggerhead shrikes nest in scattered shrubs or small trees generally located within or adjacent to open areas. Shrikes prefer low herbaceous vegetation conditions for foraging activities. Brewer's sparrow prefer vigorous big sagebrush habitat with scattered patches of mature shrubs with a short, open herbaceous community in the understory (Paige et al. 1999). A study by Knick and Rotenberry (1995) found sage sparrow preferred sites with high sagebrush cover, large patch size and little fragmentation. The two bat species, fringed myotis and Townsend's big-eared bat, would use the more ecologically diverse native shrub steppe plant communities for foraging activities.

3.3.4 Resource 4: Livestock Grazing & Rangeland Health Standards.

The Water Gulch Allotment is 833 acres and made up of very steep slopes. The sheep permittee in the past typically turned out a band of sheep (approximately 2,000 head) for a shorter period of time in the allotment. Many times the permittee would graze the allotment in early spring and again in early fall.

Oneida Farms Incorporated held the grazing permit in this allotment from 1975 to 2001. The grazing permit was then transferred to Lava Lake Land & Livestock LLC in 2002. They have yet to use the allotment due to the occurrence of a recent wildfire. The grazing permit allows for 108 head of sheep to graze from 5/15 to 11/10. Typically, the permittees have used the Water Gulch Allotment as a trailing route through other lands and tends to request an application for a larger amount of sheep for shorter time through the allotment in the spring or fall.

Actual use data has been collected annually in the Water Gulch Allotment since 1975. The average actual use between 1975 and 2001 is 147 AUMs or 66% of the active preference of 223 AUMs. The average actual use between 2002 and 2005 has been 0 AUMs or 0% of the active preference of 223 AUMs due to this allotment being closed to grazing for recovery after a wildfire. The original actual use forms can be found in the Water Gulch Allotment Studies File at the Shoshone BLM Office but they have also been summarized in Appendix C.

A Rangeland Health field evaluation was conducted in the Water Gulch Allotment in August of 2005. Findings of the field evaluations were documented in the Rangeland Health Assessment which was sent out for public review and comment on April 18, 2006. No public comments were received for Water Gulch Allotment in regard to the Rangeland Health Assessment.

Table 5. Summary of Rangeland Health Assessment Determination

<i>Standard</i>	<i>Water Gulch Allotment Results</i>
Standard 1 - Watersheds	Meeting
Standard 2 - Riparian Areas and wetlands	Does not Apply
Standard 3 - Stream Channel/Floodplain	Does not Apply
Standard 4 - Native Plant Communities	Not Meeting, current livestock grazing not considered a factor
Standard 5 - Seedings	Does not Apply
Standard 6 - Exotic Plant Communities	Does not Apply
Standard 7 - Water Quality	Does not Apply
Standard 8 - Threatened and Endangered Plants and Animals	Not Meeting, current livestock grazing not considered a factor

4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the environmental impacts that may occur if the Proposed Action were implemented in the Water Gulch Allotment. This section will mirror the issues identified in the Interdisciplinary Team Analysis Record Checklist found in Appendix B and presented in Chapter 1 of this assessment. Because all known mitigating measures have been included in the Descriptions and the Alternatives, the environmental consequences described below are unavoidable.

4.2 Direct/Indirect Impacts:

4.2.1 Alternative A – Proposed Action

4.2.1.1 Resource 1: Soils.

No direct measurements have been conducted to determine if a change in soil loss has occurred following the 1981 Sun Valley MFP. Continued livestock grazing in this allotment and the increase in livestock numbers should not affect soil resources on public lands due to the increase being a continuation of the current situation. A typical band of sheep is 1,200 to 2,000 sheep and the allotment has never been grazed with shorter numbers for a longer duration. BLM has not observed nor received any reports of noticeable soil erosion in the Water Gulch Allotment. The slopes in the Water Gulch Allotment have the potential to be erodible due to the gravel component but under the current grazing management the slopes are stable and well vegetated throughout. Under the present management, the watershed condition in this allotment is adequate for maintaining soil stability and hydrologic cycling.

Litter is important in reducing compaction, erosion and increasing nutrient cycling of minerals and plant nutrients. Removal of vegetation reduces the amount of litter and nutrient cycling in the soil. However, the amount of vegetation removal has the potential to decrease under the Proposed Action due to the utilization being limited to 40% or less in the Water Gulch Allotment.

4.2.1.2 Resource 2: Vegetation, including Invasive, Non-native Species..

High utilization levels and early season grazing do have the potential to alter the composition of the vegetative community, especially if high use levels occur in several subsequent years. These high use levels have not occurred though since the late 1980s and high utilization is not anticipated in the future due to the inclusion of the utilization limits in the proposed action.

Under the Proposed Action, the overstory vegetation would continue to be dominated by mountain big sagebrush in the unburned areas and the understory vegetation would continue to be dominated by native perennial grasses and forbs on the north facing slopes and cheatgrass on the south facing slopes with sagebrush increasing slowly over time. It may take up to 20 years for sagebrush to re-establish naturally on these south facing slopes. The populations of perennial grasses and forbs have the potential to increase over time due to the inclusion of the utilization limits and dormant season use in late fall.

During the field assessment, populations of diffuse knapweed were identified within the allotment boundary. This noxious weed species is prevalent in the Wood River Valley. Many attempts have been made in the past to eradicate them through chemical and biological means with some success. The suite of biocontrol agents the BLM currently has for knapweed would be expected to effectively suppress the presence of knapweed in the Water Gulch Allotment. There is the potential for weed seeds to be trapped in the wool of sheep and transported to other areas. This area has been and will continue to be closely monitored for potential expansion into neighboring areas.

4.2.1.3 Resource 3: Wildlife, including Threatened and BLM Sensitive Species.

Allowing the increase in livestock numbers on the grazing permit may increase competition for forage between the sheep and big game species primarily during the spring use period. The sheep would be present after the mule deer and elk have left the area instead of being there during peak big game use periods on the allotment. The inclusion of the utilization limits could also have an impact to the wintering range for the big game species by not allowing utilization to exceed 40% on native grasses.

The livestock grazing treatment in the Water Gulch Allotment is not expected to alter the current level of use of the allotment by gray wolves. The suspected very low, incidental use level of the project area by the gray wolf is expected to result in “No Effect” to the continued existence of the gray wolf.

Sheep grazing use of the native forbs and to a lesser extent the native grasses in the allotment throughout the growing season would alter vegetation composition and structure on the allotment, causing changes in habitat suitability for some of the sensitive wildlife species. The Water Gulch Allotment is not designated as sage-grouse habitat, primarily due to the steep slopes of that geographical area. The very limited amount of sage-grouse late brood-rearing use that may occur in the allotment would experience a small discountable beneficial impact resulting from reduced grazing use of the herbaceous plant community.

The plant community structure resulting from the planned grazing treatment would provide habitat conditions that would generally be beneficial for grasshopper sparrows during nesting, brood rearing and foraging activities. The suitability of the area for foraging by loggerhead shrike would be slightly improved by the anticipated level of grazing use.

The expected decrease in the level of establishment and spread of big sagebrush on the allotment would result in the creation of poor or unsuitable habitat conditions for the prey base of the bald eagle, prairie falcon, fringed myotis and Townsend’s big-eared bat on the allotment. The inclusion of the utilization limits could have an impact to the nesting habitat and cover though since there may be increased forage left after the grazing season. Any use of the allotment by wolverine would be unaffected by this proposal.

4.2.1.4. Resource 4: Livestock Grazing & Rangeland Health Standard.

The rangelands where the Water Gulch Allotment is located have been dominated by sheep use for decades due to the steep slopes. The actual use throughout the decades has been light moderate and the allotment has been frequently rested from livestock use by the permittee recently. The allotment should continue to be used infrequently due to the placement of this allotment and the historical sheep trailing that occurs today.

The Water Gulch Allotment is currently not meeting Standard 4 (Native Plant Communities) or Standard 8 (Threatened and Endangered Plants and Animals) but current livestock grazing is not a factor in the failure of these two standards. Reoccurring wildfires are considered to be the reason for the failure of these standards but the incorporation of the utilization limits may assist this allotment to make progress towards meeting this Standard in the future.

Litter is important in reducing compaction, erosion and increasing nutrient cycling of minerals and plant nutrients. Removal of vegetation reduces the amount of litter and nutrient cycling in the soil. However, this amount of vegetation removal has the potential to decrease with less than 40% utilization in the Water Gulch Allotment.

4.2.2 Alternative B – No Action

4.2.2.1 Resource 1: Soils.

No direct measurements have been conducted to determine if a change in soil loss has occurred following the 1981 Sun Valley MFP. Continued livestock grazing in this allotment would affect soil resources on public lands, but the BLM has not observed nor received any reports of noticeable soil erosion in the Water Gulch Allotment. Unacceptable levels of soil erosion due to livestock grazing as a result of the No Action Alternative are not expected. Under the present management, the watershed condition in these allotments is adequate for maintaining soil stability and hydrologic cycling.

Under the No Action Alternative, there would not be an inclusion of the utilization limits. This has the potential to allow for heavy utilization to occur. The No Action Alternative also will not incorporate an increase in livestock numbers which means that a typical band of sheep could not graze there at one time but fewer numbers over a longer time would be accepted.

4.2.2.2 Resource 2: Vegetation, including Invasive, Non-native Species.

The rangelands where the Water Gulch Allotment is located have been dominated by sheep use for decades due to the steep slopes. Even with the historical sheep use throughout this allotment, the native plant communities on the north facing slopes are intact. The south facing slopes have had frequent reoccurring fires for decades which has compromised the native vegetation and allowed the encroachment of cheatgrass. This situation does not have the potential to change under the No Action Alternative. The livestock grazing actual use throughout the decades was heavy in the 1970s and 1980s but recently, the allotment has been used infrequently and light use has been more common. The Water Gulch Allotment has been rested from livestock use by the permittee due to fire closures but has been used during the fall of 2007. The allotment should continue to be used infrequently due to the outlying location of the allotment in relation to the permittees other grazing allotments and the different location and trail patterns.

Under the no action alternative, the permit would only allow 108 sheep to graze in the Water Gulch Allotment from 5/15 to 11/10. The permittee would not be allowed to graze a full band of sheep for less time under this alternative and if unforeseeable circumstances occur and the permittee in the Water Gulch Allotment does increase use and subsequently increase utilization levels, under this alternative, the permittee will not be held accountable to over utilization due to there not being any utilization limits in place. High utilization levels and early season grazing do have the potential to alter the composition of the vegetative community, especially if high use levels occur in several subsequent years.

The increase in livestock numbers that was included in the Proposed Action would also not be included under this alternative. The permittee would not be allowed to graze more numbers of sheep for a shorter length of time and could potentially, in turn, be a detriment to the native plant communities by livestock being present during the active growing season and during seedset.

Under the No Action, the overstory vegetation would continue to be dominated by current populations of mountain big sagebrush and the understory vegetation would continue to be dominated by native perennial grasses on the north facing slopes and cheatgrass on the south facing slopes if the utilization levels do not increase. The presence of spotted knapweed and Canada thistle would still occur but there is not potential for these known populations to increase with the proactive weed treatments in the Shoshone Field Office.

4.2.2.3 Resource 3: Wildlife, including Threatened and BLM Sensitive Species.

The fewer number of livestock on the allotment during the spring use period would result in less direct competition for forage between sheep and big game species under the No Action Alternative than under the Proposed Action. Competition for forage between sheep and big game during the summer and fall would remain unchanged.

The proposed livestock grazing is not expected to alter habitat suitability for the federally listed gray wolf which may utilize the Water Gulch Allotment. The suspected very low, incidental use level of the project area would result in “No Effect” to the continued existence of the gray wolf.

The existing grazing treatment would result in the continual grazing use of the native forbs and grasses in the allotment from the mid-boot stage of development of key forage grasses through summer dormancy and fall green-up. This season-long grazing prescription would change the composition and structure of the vegetation on the allotment altering the habitat conditions for a number of Sensitive animal species that would occur on the Water Gulch allotment. Due to the steep slopes of that geographical area, the limited amount of greater sage-grouse late brood-rearing use that may occur in the allotment would experience an adverse impact from a reduction in the composition and abundance of forbs species used by sage-grouse.

The annual seasonal grazing treatment would provide habitat conditions that would not be as suitable for grasshopper sparrow nesting, brood rearing and foraging activities as those expected to result from the Proposed Action. The repeated grazing use of portions of the allotment throughout the growing season on an annual continual basis would accelerate the rate of establishment and spread of big sagebrush on the allotment producing more suitable habitat conditions for sage-grouse, sage sparrow and Brewer’s sparrow nesting, brood-rearing and foraging activities. The likely rate of establishment and spread of big sagebrush under this alternative is not anticipated to provide suitable habitat for sage sparrow. The expected increase in the rate of establishment of big sagebrush on the allotment would improve the structural and species diversity of the vegetation community creating suitable habitat conditions for the prey base of bald eagle, prairie falcon, loggerhead shrike, fringed myotis and Townsend’s big-eared bat. Any use of the allotment by wolverine would be unaffected by this proposal.

4.2.2.4 Resource 4: Livestock Grazing, including Rangeland Health.

The rangelands where the Water Gulch Allotment is located have been utilized by sheep use for decades due to the very steep slopes. Even with the historical sheep use throughout this allotment, the native plant communities on the north facing slopes are intact. The south facing slopes have had reoccurring wildfires throughout the years and are now dominated by cheatgrass. The actual use throughout the decades has been moderate to heavy and the allotment has not been rested from livestock use until just recently with the closure due to the Cherry Creek Fire.

The Water Gulch Allotment is currently not meeting the rangeland health standard for native plant communities due to the lack of mountain big sagebrush from wildfires and the high cover of cheatgrass on the south facing slopes. Litter is important in reducing compaction, erosion and increasing nutrient cycling of minerals and plant nutrients. Removal of vegetation reduces the amount of litter and nutrient cycling in the soil.

4.3 Cumulative Impacts Analysis:

“Cumulative impacts” are those impacts resulting from the incremental impact of an action when added to other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable actions regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions. The geographic scope of the proposed grazing permit renewal will be limited to just those 883 federal acres within the Water Gulch Allotment.

4.3.1 Past and Present Actions

Livestock grazing has occurred in the area now known as the Water Gulch Allotment since the late 1800s. This area was first managed by the General Land Office (GLO) and designated as arid, broken, mountainous, or grazing in character (USDI- BLM 1988). Many western ranchers depended on this remaining public domain to help support their livestock. The local ranchers grazed these lands in conjunction with their private ranch lands and it was on a first-come, first-serve basis. All of these lands had unregulated grazing until the implementation of the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934. In 1946, the Department of the Interior formed the Bureau of Land Management and grazing on public lands was formalized and divided into grazing allotments.

The Water Gulch Allotment borders Quigley Allotment, Slaughterhouse Allotment to the east and privately owned lands to the west and south. Because of the general lack of water (both distribution and time available) over what is known now as the Water Gulch Allotment, this area was likely used less intensively than other areas.

Even though the Water Gulch Allotment is in close proximity to other BLM allotments in the area, it has typically only been used as a trailing route by the permittee. There are historical sheep trail routes located south of this allotment in Slaughterhouse Canyon as well as north in Quigley Gulch. There is the potential for noxious weeds to have been spread by sheep along these trails within the Water Gulch Allotment as well as on neighboring trails.

Most of the parcels of land in the Wood River Valley have populations of spotted knapweed and Canada thistle so it is possible the weeds were spread through many means such as through vehicles, recreation, livestock trailing, construction and development, wind, and mining. Many attempts have been made in the past to eradicate them through chemical and biological means with some success. This area is being monitored by the Shoshone Field Office and weed management has occurred in the Water Gulch Allotment and will continue to occur. Even though there have been large scale wildfires in this allotment, no vegetation treatments have occurred due to the steep slopes and it being inaccessible by vehicles.

4.3.2 Reasonably Foreseeable Action Scenario (RFAS)

There are currently no range improvement projects planned within the Water Gulch Allotment or within the neighboring allotments. The Shoshone Field Office currently has a proposal for a land exchange between the Lake Allotment to the north and the Water Gulch Allotment. The proposal would increase the federal acres in the Water Gulch Allotment with the addition of 672 acres known as Cow Catcher's Ridge along the southern boundary.

Trailing the sheep in and out of the allotment may become an issue in the future due to the development that is occurring in the Wood River Valley. The trailing routes that encompass State Lands and private lands in and around the Water Gulch Allotment may, in the future, be unfeasible and this allotment may be used less due to inaccessibility. In approximately ten years, this allotment will again be reviewed and analyzed under existing regulations for consideration of permit renewal.

The Shoshone Field Office will begin the process for an updated Land Use Plan in the next couple of years. At that time, changes to some grazing permits may be made. No future changes in the Water Gulch Allotment are anticipated outside of the extension to the grazing season to allow for early winter use.

When considered with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, there are no known incremental effects as a result of the Proposed Action.

4.3.3 Cumulative Impacts Summary:

No significant individual, incremental or cumulative impacts are anticipated as a result of the Proposed Action which includes the additions of the utilization limits as well as an increase to allow one band of sheep in the Water Gulch Allotment.

5.0 CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION:

5.1 Introduction:

The issue identification section of Chapter 1 identifies those issues analyzed in detail in Chapter 4. Appendix B provides the rationale for issues that were considered but not analyzed further. The issues were identified through the public and agency involvement process described in sections 5.2 and 5.3 below.

5.2 Persons, Groups, and Agencies Consulted:

TABLE 6: LIST OF ALL PERSONS, AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS CONSULTED FOR PURPOSES OF THIS EA

Name	Purpose & Authorities for Consultation or Coordination	Findings & Conclusions
Lava Lake Land & Livestock LLC	Permittee	No comments from Field Assessment. Comments received from Pre-Decisional EA.
Blaine County Commissioners	Interested Public	No comments from Field Assessment.
Committee for the High Desert	Interested Public	No comments from Field Assessment.
ICL Public Lands Office	Interested Public	No comments from Field Assessment.
Idaho Department of Lands	Government Agency	No comments from Field Assessment.
Idaho Department of Fish & Game	Government Agency	No comments from Field Assessment.
Idaho Department of Agriculture	Government Agency	No comments from Field Assessment.
Idaho Wildlife Federation	Interested Public	No comments from Field Assessment.
Shoshone-Bannock Tribes	Tribal Government	No comments from Field Assessment.
The Wilderness Society	Interested Public	No comments from Field Assessment.
Western Watersheds Project	Interested Public	No comments from Field Assessment.
David Skinner	Interested Public	No comments from Field Assessment.
Western Land Exchange	Interested Public	No comments from Field Assessment.
Paul McClain	Interested Public	No comments from Field Assessment.
Mel Quale	Interested Public	No comments from Field Assessment.
Dennis Crane	Interested Public	No comments from Field Assessment.
Chris J. Christiansen	Interested Public	No comments from Field Assessment.

5.3 Summary of Public Participation:

During preparation of the EA, the Public was notified of the proposed action through a Pre-Decisional EA mailed out on July 17, 2008 and a comment period was offered until August 22, 2008. One comment for the Pre-Decisional EA was received by Mike Stevens who is the representative for Lava Lake Land & Livestock on September 23, 2008 via telephone. He stated that it should be stressed that the reasons why sage-grouse were not present in the Water Gulch Allotment were due to steepness of slope and lack of overall habitat. There was also a typo found in the Pre-Decisional EA in regards to number of sheep permitted. That typo has since been fixed.

5.4 List of Preparers

Table 7. List of BLM –Shoshone Field Office Reviewers

Name	Title	Date Reviewed
Joanna Tjaden	Rangeland Management Specialist	9/24/07
Gary Wright	Wildlife Biologist	1/18/08
Julie Hilty	Botanist	10/16/07

6.0 REFERENCES

6.1 References Cited:

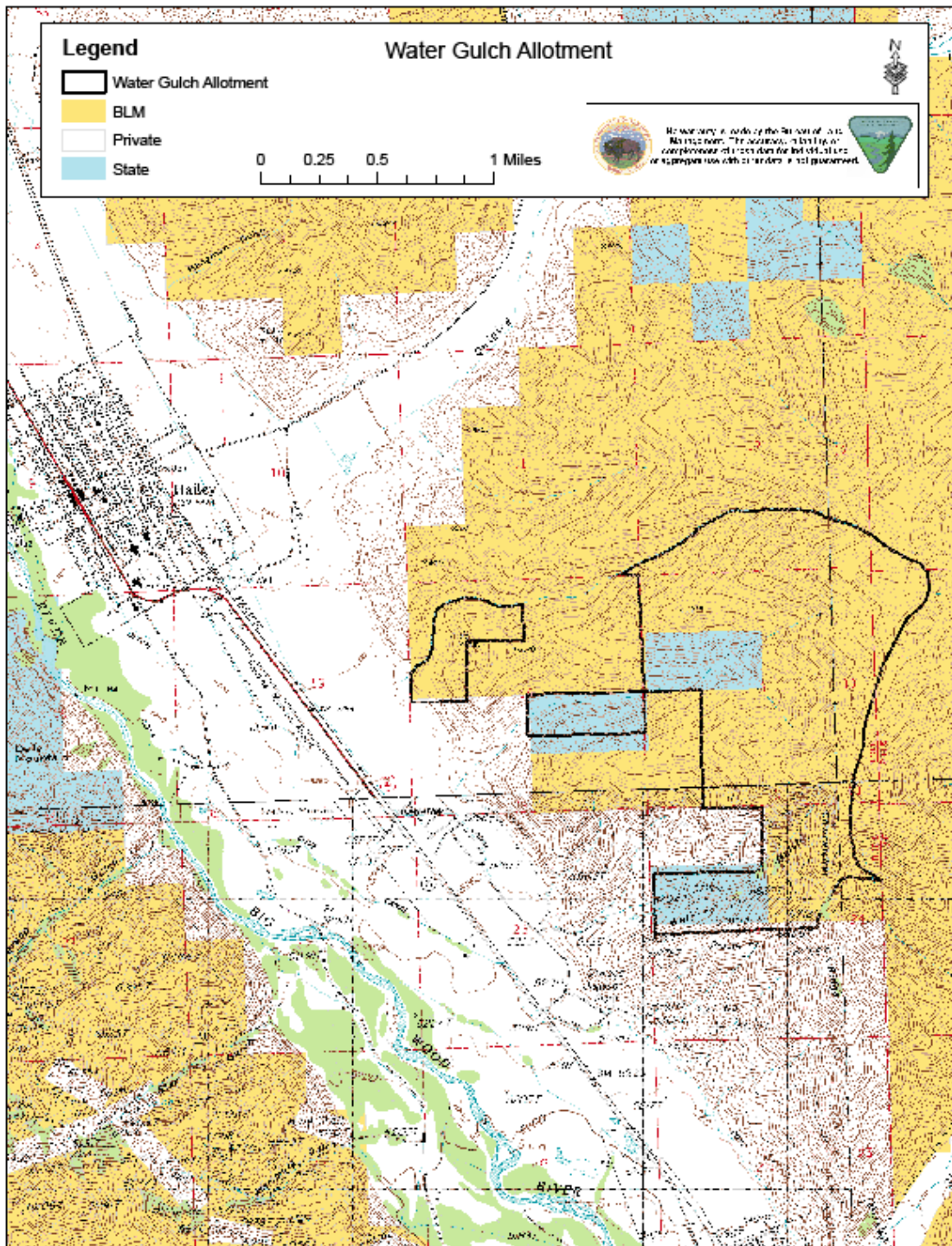
U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management. 1981. Final Sun Valley Environmental Impact Statement. Document on file at the BLM, Shoshone Field Office, Shoshone, Idaho.

U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management. 1988. Opportunity and Challenge: The Story of the BLM. US Government Printing Office, Washington D.C.

6.2 Attachments:

Map 1 – Allotment Boundary

Water Gulch Allotment Draft Determination



Attachment 2
WATER GULCH ALLOTMENT DETERMINATION
Achieving Standards for Rangeland Health
and
Conforming with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management

Field Office: Shoshone		Watershed Name/Number: Big Wood 1704021902	
Allotment Name/Number: Water Gulch/80230			
Public Land (acres)		Streams on Public Land (miles): 0 Miles	
Upland: 833	Riparian: 0		
Date(s) of Field Assessment: August 5, 2005		Name of Permittee(s): Lava Lake Land & Livestock	
Assessment Participants (Name & Discipline or Interest): Joanna Forliano, Rangeland Management Specialist Gary Wright, Wildlife Management Biologist			

Standard 1 (Watersheds)

Check those that apply: *[One or more boxes must be checked.]* Standard doesn't apply

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Meeting the Standard.	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Meeting the Standard, Livestock Grazing Management Practices are Significant Factors.
<input type="checkbox"/> Not Meeting the Standard, but making significant progress to meeting the Standard.	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Meeting the Standard, Livestock Grazing Management Practices are not Significant Factors.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Conforms with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management.	<input type="checkbox"/> Does not conform with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management Guideline No(s).

Rationale/Information Sources: Twelve indicators were evaluated at two sites on the North Slope Loamy 16-20' Mountain big sagebrush/Idaho fescue site and the South Slope Stony 12-16" Mountain Big Sagebrush/Bluebunch Wheatgrass. It should be noted that the Cherry Creek Wildfire burned this portion of the allotment in 2002 and due to this fire, there is a lack of sagebrush on the site as well as large populations of cheatgrass on the southern slopes.

The overall rating for Standard 1 is slight to moderate. Twenty-one indicators (87%) were marked none to slight and three indicators (13%) were marked slight to moderate. This site's plant community composition was missing the sagebrush community due to the 2002 wildfire and site WG-2 had large populations of cheatgrass. The Water Gulch Allotment is comprised of very steep slopes and some water flow patterns are expected on the sites but the presence of cheatgrass may increase the water flow patterns in the future due to the root system of cheatgrass not being as advanced as a native perennial.

Standard 2 (Riparian Areas and Wetlands) & Standard 3 (Stream Channel/Floodplain)

Check those that apply:[*One or more boxes must be checked.*] **X** *Standard doesn't apply*

Standard 4 (Native Plant Communities)

Check those that apply:[*One or more boxes must be checked.*] Standard doesn't apply

<input type="checkbox"/> Meeting the Standard.	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Meeting the Standard, Livestock Grazing Management Practices are Significant Factors.
<input type="checkbox"/> Not Meeting the Standard, but making significant progress to meeting the Standard.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Meeting the Standard, Livestock Grazing Management Practices are not Significant Factors.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Conforms with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management.	<input type="checkbox"/> Does not conform with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management Guideline No(s).

Rationale/Information Sources: Eleven indicators were evaluated at two sites on the both the North Slope Loamy 16-20' Mountain big sagebrush/Idaho fescue site and the South Slope Stony 12-16" Mountain Big Sagebrush /Bluebunch Wheatgrass. It should be noted that the Cherry Creek Wildfire burned this portion of the allotment in 2002 and due to this fire, there is a lack of sagebrush on the site. Perennial grasses and forbs native to the site are present but the abundance of the forbs is lower than what would be expected for the site. Some of the forbs that were not in the transect but present on the site included potentilla, lomatium, longleaf phlox, geranium, Indian paintbrush, monkey flower, goatsbeard, and arrowleaf balsamroot, antennaria, western yarrow, peoni, hydrophyllum and gilia.

The overall rating for Standard 4 is Moderate. There are two limiting factors for the overall native plant community rating for the Water Gulch Allotment. The first main reason is the lack of mountain big sagebrush due to the wildfire in 2002 and the second is the high cover of cheatgrass on the second site located on the southern slope. There is also a lack of diversity and abundance of forbs on these two sites as well but this may be due to the survey being done in August. Twelve indicators (67%) were marked none to slight, one indicator (5%) was marked slight to moderate, three indicators (17%) were marked moderate, and two indicators (11%) were marked moderate to extreme.

Standard 5 (Seedings)

Check those that apply:[*One or more boxes must be checked.*] **X** *Standard doesn't apply*

Standard 6 (Exotic Plant Communities, Other than Seedings)

Check those that apply:[*One or more boxes must be checked.*] **X** *Standard doesn't apply*

Standard 7 (Water Quality)

Check those that apply:[*One or more boxes must be checked.*] **X** *Standard doesn't apply*

Standard 8 (Threatened and Endangered Plants and Animals)

Check those that apply:[*One or more boxes must be checked.*] Standard doesn't apply

<input type="checkbox"/> Meeting the Standard.	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Meeting the Standard, Livestock Grazing Management Practices are Significant Factors.
<input type="checkbox"/> Not Meeting the Standard, but making significant progress to meeting the Standard.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Meeting the Standard, Livestock Grazing Management Practices are not Significant Factors.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Conforms with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management.	<input type="checkbox"/> Does not conform with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management Guideline No(s).

Rationale/Information Sources: The variation in habitat conditions and habitat structural components that currently exist on the allotment likely provides minimal suitable habitat conditions for each of the sensitive plant or animal species described above. The allotment provides relatively small and discrete areas of marginal late brood-rearing habitat for the sage grouse. Due to the steep slopes of that geographical areas well as the lack of sagebrush throughout the allotment from the recent wildfire, this allotment does not provide suitable wintering and breeding sage grouse habitat. The amount of active sage-grouse use made in the allotment is not known. Bug-leg goldenweed, *Haplopappus insecticruris*, a sensitive plant, may occur within the allotment due to there being known populations in the area. At this time, there are no documented populations in the Water Gulch Allotment.

Determination:

I have determined that Standard 1(Watersheds) is being met and that Standard 4 (Native Plant Communities) and Standard 8 (Threatened and Endangered Species) are not being met but current livestock grazing is not a factor in these standards failure. Current livestock management conforms with all applicable Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management in the Water Gulch Allotment #80230. Standard 2 (Riparian Areas and Wetlands) and Standard 3 (Stream Channel and Floodplains), Standard 5 (Seedings), Standard 6 (Exotic Plant Communities), and Standard 7 (Water Quality) do not apply to the Water Gulch Allotment.

Since the Water Gulch Allotment is meeting the Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health, the action listed below will be considered in the Environmental Assessment.

1. Renew a 10 year grazing permit in the Water Gulch Allotment for the same season of use and for the same active preference of 128 AUMs.

/s/ Lori Armstrong

October 8, 2008

Shoshone Field Office Manager

Date

No comment letters were received for the Water Gulch Allotment Assessment.

Idaho Guidelines per the *Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management*

1. Use grazing management practices and/or facilities to maintain or promote significant progress toward adequate amounts of ground cover (determined on an ecological site basis) to support infiltration, maintain soil moisture storage, and stabilize soils.
2. Locate livestock management facilities away from riparian areas wherever they conflict with achieving or maintaining riparian –wetland functions.
3. Use grazing management practices and /or facilities to maintain or promote soil conditions that support water infiltration, plant vigor, and permeability rates and minimize soil compaction appropriate to site potential.
4. Implement grazing management practices that provide periodic rest or deferment during critical growth stages to allow sufficient regrowth to achieve and maintain healthy, properly functioning conditions, including good plant vigor and adequate vegetative cover appropriate to site potential.
5. Maintain or promote grazing management practices that provide sufficient residual vegetation to improve, restore, or maintain healthy riparian-wetland functions and structure for energy dissipation, sediment capture, ground water recharge, streambank stability, and wildlife habitat appropriate to site potential.
6. The development of springs, seeps, or other projects affecting water and associated resources shall be designed to protect the ecological functions, wildlife habitat, and significant cultural and historical/archaeological/paleontological values associated with the water source.
7. Apply grazing management practices to maintain, promote, or progress toward appropriate stream channel and streambank morphology and functions. Adverse impacts due to livestock grazing will be addressed.
8. Apply grazing management practices that maintain or promote the interaction of the hydrologic cycle, nutrient cycle, and energy flow that will support the appropriate types and amounts of soil organisms, plants, and animals appropriate to soil type, climate, and landform.
9. Apply grazing management practices to maintain adequate plant vigor for seed production, seed dispersal, and seedling survival of desired species relative to soil type, climate, and landform.
10. Implement grazing management practices and /or facilities that provide for complying with the Idaho Water Quality Standards.

11. Use grazing management practices developed in recovery plans, conservation agreements, and Endangered Species Act, Section 7 consultations to maintain or improve habitat for federally listed threatened, endangered, and sensitive plants and animals.
12. Apply grazing management practices and/or facilities that maintain or promote the physical and biological conditions necessary to sustain native plant populations and wildlife habitats in native plant communities.
13. On areas seeded predominantly with non-native plants, use grazing management practices to maintain or promote the physical and biological conditions to achieve healthy rangelands.
14. Where native communities exist, the conversion to exotic communities after disturbance will be minimized. Native species are emphasized for rehabilitating disturbed rangelands. Evaluate whether native plants are adapted, available, and able to compete with weeds or seeded exotics.
15. Use non-native plant species for rehabilitation only in those situations where:
 - a. native species are not readily available in sufficient quantities;
 - b. native plant species cannot maintain or achieve the standards; or
 - c. non-native plant species provide for management and protection of native rangelands.Include a diversity of appropriate grasses, forbs, and shrubs in rehabilitation efforts.
16. On burned areas, allow natural regeneration when it is determined that populations of native perennial shrubs, grasses, and forbs are sufficient to revegetate the site. Rest burned or rehabilitated areas to allow recovery or establishment of perennial plant species.
17. Carefully consider the effects of new management facilities (e.g., water developments, fences) on healthy and properly functioning rangeland prior to implementation.
18. Use grazing management practices, where feasible, for wildlife control and to reduce the spread of targeted undesirable plants (e.g., cheatgrass, medusa head, wild rye, and noxious weeds) while enhancing vigor and abundance of desirable native or seeded species.
19. Employ grazing management practices that promote natural forest regeneration and protect reforestation projects until the Idaho Forest Practices Act requirements for timber stand replacement are met.
20. Design management fences to minimize adverse impacts, such as habitat fragmentation, to maintain habitat integrity and connectivity for native plants and animals.

INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM ANALYSIS RECORD CHECKLIST

Project Title: Permit Renewal for Water Gulch Allotment #80230 located in Blaine County

NEPA Log Number: ID-230-2007-EA-3560

File/Serial Number:

Project Leader: Joanna Tjaden

DETERMINATION OF STAFF: (Choose one of the following abbreviated options for the left column)

NP = not present in the area impacted by the proposed or alternative actions

NI = present, but not affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required

PI = present with potential for significant impact analyzed in detail in the EA; or identified in a DNA as requiring further analysis

NC = (DNAs only) actions and impacts not changed from those disclosed in the existing NEPA documents cited in Section C of the DNA form.

Det ermi- nation	Resource	Rationale for Determination	Signature	Date
CRITICAL ELEMENTS				
NI	Air Quality (Joanna Tjaden)	There is no official air quality designation for the area. In any case, air quality is not going to be affected by renewing the permit.	JPT	09/19/07
NP	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (Joanna Tjaden)	No ACECs are present within the allotment boundary.	JPT	09/19/07
NP	Cultural Resources (Lisa Cresswell)	No previously recorded cultural resources are present.	LTC	9/20/07
NP	Environmental Justice (Joanna Tjaden)	NP	JPT	09/19/07
NP	Farmlands (Prime or Unique) (Joanna Tjaden)	No farmlands are present in the area.	JPT	09/19/07
NP	Floodplains (Joanna Tjaden)	No floodplains are present in the area.	JPT	09/19/07
PI	Invasive, Non-native Species (Julie Hilty)	There are no documented noxious weed populations within the allotment boundary and none were observed during the rangeland health assessment. However, there are documented populations of diffuse knapweed in the vicinity. Cheatgrass is common on south aspects in the allotment.	JH	9/21/07
NP	Native American Religious Concerns (Lisa Cresswell)	No Native American religious concerns have been identified by local tribes.	LTC	9/20/07
NP	Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Plant Species (Julie Hilty)	There are no Threatened, Endangered, or Candidate plants within the allotment.	JH	9/21/07
PI	Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Animal Species (Gary Wright)	The listed animal species which potentially may occur in the allotment gray wolf (<i>Canis lupus</i>). Recent and continuing expansion of gray wolves in the Big Wood River watershed and adjacent areas has increased the likelihood that gray wolves may make use of lands in the Water Gulch Allotment on an incidental but year-round basis.	GW	1/21/07
NP	Wastes (hazardous or solid) (Timothy Fuller)	Herbicide use, if any, should comply with WO IB No 2007-111. Permittee should indemnify the US if a hazmat incident occurs.	TF	9/21/07
NI	Water Quality (drinking/ground) (Lisa Jaro)	This project is not at a level to require a further analysis.	LJ	11/27/07
NP	Wetlands/Riparian Zones (Joanna Tjaden)	There are no wetlands and riparian areas are present in the allotment	JPT	09/19/07

Det ermination	Resource	Rationale for Determination	Signature	Date
NP	Wild and Scenic Rivers (David Freiberg)	No WSRs occur in the area.	DSF	11/01/07
NP	Wilderness/WSA (David Freiberg)	No Wilderness or WSA in the project area	DSF	11/01/07
PI	Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines (Joanna Tjaden)	This allotment is currently not meeting all applicable Standards for Rangeland Health but current livestock grazing is not a significant factor in the failure of Standard 4 and Standard 8.	JPT	09/19/07
PI	Livestock Grazing (Joanna Tjaden)	PI- Term grazing permit is/has expired and needs to be renewed. Current allotment mgmt needs to be reviewed and other mgmt schemes need to be analyzed to order to help all resources meeting or maintaining RH Standards for the future.	JPT	09/19/07
NP	Woodland / Forestry (Kasey Prestwich)	No woodland or forest vegetation are with in this allotment	Kcp	10/10/07
PI	Vegetation including Special Status Plant Species other than FWS candidate or listed species (Julie Hilty)	North-facing slopes in the allotment are dominated by native perennial grasses. South-facing slopes were dominated by cheatgrass, bluebunch wheatgrass, and lupine at the time of assessment. Shrubs, including sagebrush and bitterbrush, were largely missing due to a 2002 wildfire that burned about 60% of the allotment. There was a lower abundance of forbs than would be expected for the ecological sites present within the allotment. The allotment is within the known range of bugleg goldenweed (<i>Haplopappus insecticuriis</i>), a BLM Sensitive plant. There are no known populations within the allotment boundary. There is a low probability of occurrence for bugleg goldenweed within the allotment due to steep topography and lack of appropriate habitat.	JH	9/21/07
PI	Fish and Wildlife Including Special Status Species other than FWS candidate or listed species eg. Migratory birds. (Gary Wright)	BLM Sensitive animals that may use habitat on public land in the allotment during all or a portion of the year are: bald eagle, prairie falcon; grasshopper sparrow, wolverine, fringed myotis and Townsend's big-eared bat. The Sensitive wildlife species that made use of sagebrush and native bunchgrass habitat on the allotment prior to the recent wildfire include: greater sage-grouse, loggerhead shrike, Brewer's sparrow, sage sparrow. The four Sensitive species benefit from the habitat conditions created by the presence of mature sagebrush in the plant community.	GW	9/21/07
PI	Soils (Joanna Tjaden)	Grazing use/mechanical impacts to the soil/watershed resource are expected.	JPT	09/19/07
NI	Recreation (John Kurtz)	The project falls within the Monument Extensive Recreation Management Area (ERMA). Within ERMA's BLM recreation management actions are limited to only those of a custodial nature allowing for recreational activities to take place while reacting to visitor health and safety, use and user conflicts and resource protection. Activities that occur or may occur within the project area primarily include hunting, and some dispersed hiking. This project poses no impacts to visitor health and safety, use or user conflict or recreation resource protection. Therefore no further analysis is required.	JK	12/5/07
NI	Visual Resources (David Freiberg)	This project occurs in Class II and III VRM Inventory Class areas. The objective class II is to retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Management activities may be seen, but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Any changes must repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape. The objective of Class III is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be moderate. Management activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Changes should repeat the basic elements	DF	11/01/07

Determination	Resource	Rationale for Determination	Signature	Date
		found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape. This project complies with both VRM Inventory Class II and III objectives.		
NP	Geology / Mineral Resources/Energy Production (John Garth)	There are no active or proposed locatable, leasable, or salable minerals projects located on the BLM land described in the legal description where this proposed action is to take place.	JG	10/10/2007
NP	Paleontology (Lisa Cresswell)	There are no known paleontological resources present.	LTC	9/20/07
NI	Lands / Access (Tara Hagen)	The City of Hailey has a right-of-way for a portion of the Toe-of-the-Hill Trail that crosses through the SWNW of sec. 14, T. 2N, R. 18E. However, the proposed action will not impact the right-of-way	TH	9/21/07
NI	Fuels / Fire Management (Joe Russell)	The grazing permit renewal would have no impact to the existing fire and fuels management.	JR	10/11/07
NI	Socio-economics (Joanna Tjaden)	The changes to the grazing permit will not have a significant affect upon permitholder's personal economy.	JPT	09/19/07
NP	Water Rights (Lisa Jaro)	No public or private water rights would be affected by the proposed action	LJ	11/27/07
NP	Wilderness characteristics (David Freiberg)	This area has been evaluated for Wilderness characteristics and found not to contain them.	DSF	11/01/07