

**Finding of No Significant Impact**  
**Grazing Permit Renewals – Sunnyside Watershed**  
**Environmental Assessment: ID-111-2006-EA-1772**

I have reviewed the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (CEQ) for significance (40 CFR 1508.27). I have determined the proposed actions analyzed in Environmental Assessment ID-111-2006-EA-1772 will not constitute a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. This FONSI determination was made by considering both the context and intensity of the potential effects, as described in EA #ID-111-2006-EA-1772, using the following factors defining significance:

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

EA #ID-111-2006-1772 documents that repeated season-long grazing during the growing season provides perennial forage species no deferment or rest, and contributes to a decline in their vigor by not allowing the plants to restore depleted carbohydrate root reserves. Grazing systems that provide periodic deferment or rest for perennial species during their growing season will allow plants to restore depleted carbohydrate root reserves and maintain vigor. Moving spring grazing to the dormant season or continuing dormant season only grazing will also benefit perennial vegetation and soils, including special status plants, such as slickspot peppergrass (Sections 4.1 and 4.2), and wildlife populations and habitats (Section 4.4). Grazing permits for allotments containing perennial pastures will include possible season of use modifications, and will impose a requirement for grazing system(s) that provide perennial pastures with growing season deferment or rest.

In annual pastures, ecological improvements will not occur through livestock grazing management, but rather through habitat restoration and/or fuels management projects implemented as part of the wildlife habitat and fuels management objectives in the soon-to-be-released NCA RMP. Actions proposed in annual pastures to limit grazing to either spring or fall, but not both seasons in the same year, and to ensure that adequate residual cover remains following livestock removal will benefit small mammal populations and enhance watershed protection. Also, extended seasons of use are expected to provide permittees with greater management flexibility, while benefiting BLM by making permit administration and allotment management more efficient and cost effective.

Conservation measures will be incorporated in all affected permits to reduce or eliminate potential effects to slickspot peppergrass and Jackson Lake springsnail.

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

No major effects on public health and safety were identified in EA #ID-111-2006-EA-1772.

*(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.*

The Sunnyside Watershed lies north of the Snake River, and mostly within the Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area. The watershed contains no parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, or wild and scenic rivers. A 2005 Biological Assessment determined that grazing allotments lying along the Snake River support critical habitat for the threatened bald eagle and the endangered Idaho (now Jackson Lake) springsnail, both of which have since been de-listed. The BA determined that livestock grazing would not adversely affect wintering bald eagle populations or habitat, but could potentially affect Jackson Lake springsnail populations and habitats. As such, the BA identified conservation measures that will be imposed through this permit renewal process to reduce or eliminate adverse effects of grazing on the Jackson Lake springsnail. The Guffey Butte – Black Butte Archaeological District is located along the Snake River Canyon within the Sunnyside Watershed, but conservation measures aimed at protecting Jackson Lake springsnail populations and habitat will reduce livestock access to the Snake River Canyon, and thus reduce potential impacts to known and unknown cultural resources.

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

The scoping and NEPA processes identified no controversy or disagreement concerning effects on the quality of the human environment. The cumulative effects section of EA #ID-111-2006-1772 showed that livestock grazing of annual or perennial vegetation under the proposed action will not have a significant impact, either beneficial or adverse, to human populations in surrounding communities, as it is a continuation of an historic use of the lands.

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

No highly uncertain effects to the human environment or effects that involve unique or unknown risks were identified in EA #ID-111-2006-1772. Since passage of the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934, livestock grazing has been the primary use of the area. Today, however, livestock grazing is managed in a way that is consistent and compatible with the 1993 NCA-enabling legislation. While large areas of the Sunnyside Watershed have been significantly degraded, and have reverted to annual exotic rangeland from a combination of wildfire, grazing, military training, and recreation, in most cases, these combined effects cannot and will not be reversed through grazing management alone. The effects will, in most cases, be reversed only through extensive habitat restoration, wildfire rehabilitation, or fuels management projects (or a combination of the three).

*(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.*

Implementation of the proposed action will trigger no future actions other than the possible construction and repair of livestock facilities, including fences and cattleguards, as well as monitoring to ensure that authorized actions are having the desired result(s). However, following initiation of vegetation treatment projects, grazing management will be adjusted to protect and conserve the ecological and monetary investments reflected in the projects. Vegetation treatment projects would adversely impact livestock grazing in the short-term through the imposition of AUM reductions necessitated by post-treatment rest periods during treatment establishment. Conversely, habitat restoration and fuels management projects would have long-term benefits to both livestock and wildlife (especially small mammal populations) by producing a more stable and reliable perennial forage base. A more stable forage supply will result in a more stable small mammal population, which will benefit raptor species that depend on the small mammals for prey.

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

EA #ID-111-2006-1772 identified no known significant direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts associated with implementation of the proposed action. Although unrelated to the proposed action, landscape-scale habitat restoration and fuels management projects implemented pursuant the soon-to-be-released NCA RMP would adversely effect livestock grazing in the short-term from AUM reductions necessitated by post-treatment rest periods imposed while vegetation becomes established. Conversely, habitat restoration and fuels management projects would have long-term benefits to wildlife and livestock by producing a more stable and reliable forage base. Prior to livestock reintroduction, treated areas would be evaluated to determine how and to what extent livestock grazing would be managed to protect the ecological and monetary investments made in the treatments.

*(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 Guffey Butte – Black Butte Archaeological District is located along the Snake River Canyon within the Sunnyside Watershed. Conservation measures aimed at protecting Jackson Lake springsnail populations and habitat will reduce livestock access to the Snake River Canyon, and thus reduce potential livestock-related impacts to known and unknown cultural resources.

In Section 4.5 of EA #ID-111-2006-1772, we stated that there is no known basis for determining how and to what extent the various grazing management alternatives might differ in their generic effects on cultural resources. It is assumed, however, that management actions that help to improve ecological conditions would, in most cases, result in increased ground cover, which should reduce ground visibility, and thus reduce

human impacts to both known and unknown cultural sites and artifacts. As such, the renewal of grazing permits, which include Terms and Conditions and Management Requirements, should not result in significant adverse effects to natural, scientific, cultural or historic resources.

*(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.*

There are currently no known threatened or endangered plants or animals or their habitat in any of the allotments in the Sunnyside Watershed. During development of EA #ID-111-2006-1772, the endangered Idaho springsnail and threatened bald eagle were de-listed. During this process, the Idaho springsnail was reclassified as the Jackson Lake springsnail. These species are now being managed as BLM sensitive species to ensure that actions authorized by BLM do not contribute to the need for their re-listing. In addition, the bald eagle is still protected under the Bald Eagle Protection Act of 1940.

During development of EA #ID-111-2006-1772, slickspot peppergrass, a previous candidate species, was determined to not warrant listing, and will also continue to be managed as a BLM sensitive species. BLM will continue to manage all activities in slickspot peppergrass-affected areas pursuant to direction in the 2006 slickspot peppergrass CA. Conservation measures from the CA have reduced or will reduce potential grazing-related impacts to slickspot peppergrass or its habitat. Further, the 2006 CA contains an adaptive management protocol which BLM will use to determine when and to what extent actions may be needed to remedy or mitigate potential grazing-related effects to slickspot peppergrass or its habitat.

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

The proposed action analyzed in EA #ID-111-2006-1772 is consistent and compatible with all known Federal, State, and local laws, regulations, or requirements imposed for protection of the environment. Specifically, the proposed action conforms with the NCA-enabling Act, in that it ensures to the degree possible that continued livestock grazing will contribute to BLM's meeting the purposes of the Act - the protection, conservation, and enhancement of raptor populations and habitats.

/s/ Rosemary Thomas  
Four Rivers Field Manager  
September 27, 2007