

United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Winnemucca Field Office
5100 East Winnemucca Boulevard
Winnemucca, Nevada 89445

CA-370-06-02

Decision Record

Wildlife Water Developments in the High Rock Area

Decision

It is our decision to approve Alternative I "Protection of Existing Spring Sources with Exclosures" subject to stipulations and mitigation measures identified, which are hereby incorporated into this decision. BLM will continue to monitor wild horse and burro populations and habitat use and recreation use levels in the area to ensure that unacceptable adverse effects are not occurring from recreation use to the bighorn population in the area. This alternative will result in the fencing of three springs in the High Rock area in 2006 with buck and pole style fencing: Buck Spring, HRSP #20 and HRSP #27. Additionally at Buck Springs, the road would be moved from the meadow, the old troughs removed from the meadow, and a new collection box, pipeline, and tire trough installed outside the exclosure fence. The locations of the three springs are shown on Map 2 contained within Appendix A of the attached environmental assessment.

The approved alternative will allow natural processes to restore healthy riparian conditions to three spring/meadow systems within the affected area. Its goal is to enhance the condition of these springs while reducing wild horse and unnatural impacts to the High Rock area. In addition, monitoring data will be gathered on changes to the spring conditions as a result of the approved actions and information will be collected about recreational user impacts on bighorn sheep. This information will be used in a comprehensive evaluation of direct and indirect impacts caused by human activities on bighorn sheep, other wildlife species and other resources in the High Rock area over a three year period. Additional information on the monitoring and evaluation is contained in the monitoring and evaluation section below. Therefore, a decision to build the two artificial water developments as proposed by the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) is deferred. However, if actions in the approved alternative do not sufficiently remedy impacts to Bighorn sheep populations, the NDOW proposal will be reconsidered during the evaluation.

NDOW also has expressed concern about the condition of other springs in the High Rock area not included in the selected alternative. We will be collecting monitoring information for these sites during the evaluation period that may result in the construction of additional protective fencing projects in the future.

Monitoring and Evaluation

In addition to the construction of the three exclosures the following monitoring and evaluation actions will be undertaken by the Bureau of Land Management.

- Recreational use level in High Rock Canyon will be monitored using traffic counters with data recorders that provide date and time information for each count reading. This information will be used to develop a seasonal profile of use and determine the amount of through traffic in the canyon over the next three years. Supplementing the counter data will be observations to better determine vehicle type and occupancy per vehicle.
- Riparian functional assessments will be made at the three springs being fenced during the 2nd year following fencing to evaluate improvement.
- The fences will be monitored each year and repaired as need to assure they are still functioning as exclosures.
- At least 20 unfenced spring meadows in the High Rock area will be monitored in late summer or fall for stubble height. Riparian functional assessments will be conducted within three years on these meadows.
- Stubble heights on riparian meadows in High Rock and Pole Canyon will also be monitored each year.
- An evaluation of the High Rock area will be conducted in three years. The evaluation will be conducted jointly by the Surprise and Winnemucca field offices, the Resource Advisory Council sub-group for Black Rock-High Rock implementation, and the Nevada Department of Wildlife. The evaluation will address the following issues:
 - What trends are occurring in recreational use in the High Rock area and what impacts are being caused by recreational users to wildlife populations and habitats?
 - What trends are occurring in wildlife populations, particularly bighorn sheep in the High Rock area?
 - Should adjustments be made in the AMLs for the High Rock and Warm Springs Canyon HMAs?
 - What other management actions related to wild horses, including fertility control, projects, HMA boundary adjustments should be undertaken?
 - Are spring exclosures an effective and practical means of improving spring meadows in the area?
 - What additional actions or projects are needed to protect wildlife populations and habitats, particularly riparian systems?
 - What changes in monitoring need to occur?

Rationale

1. Protecting existing naturally occurring water sources with exclosures would reduce impacts to the springs and associated riparian areas and benefit bighorn sheep populations. This action will ensure that the land health standards are met on these spring systems. Improvement of riparian systems is a high priority for management of the NCA and wilderness areas.
2. Springs and associated meadows require protection to reduce grazing and trampling impacts from wild horses. While construction of artificial water sources primarily for bighorn sheep could serve as temporary mitigation measures providing bighorn sheep with alternative water until spring conditions are improved, this would not correct these conditions.
3. The Bureau of Land Management is committed to gather and remove about 400 horses from the High Rock Herd Management Area (HMA) this year. Additionally the fence between the High Rock and Warms Springs Canyon HMAs will be repaired this year. The Warm Spring HMA was gathered in 2005 and 302 horses removed and released mares treated with 2 year fertility control implants. These actions are expected to result in improved conditions for some unfenced springs/meadows by reducing wild horse grazing pressure following the gather. The condition of springs and associated meadow systems associated with wild horse use was a primary consideration in NDOW's request to construct artificial water sources.
4. Construction of three exclosures, including one in wilderness, was determined to be the minimum necessary action required for the administration of the area as mandated by the Wilderness Act of 1964. Construction of the exclosures would cause less impact to the wilderness character of the East Fork High Rock Canyon Wilderness and result in less human manipulation within wilderness than constructing new water developments.
5. The selected alternative conforms to and is consistent with the Resource Management Plan for Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area and Associated Wilderness, and other Contiguous Lands in Nevada (NCA RMP).
6. Based on the environmental analysis, it is determined that the selected alternative will not result in any undue or unnecessary environmental degradation of the public lands and is consistent with federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and plans.
7. The selected alternative would not adversely impact any threatened or endangered species or significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

Public Input

A Notice of Proposed Action was originally sent out on the proposal on May 26, 2004. Seven comment letters were received and analyzed during the preparation of the preliminary EA.

A notice of availability was widely distributed to advise the public that the preliminary EA for the proposal was available for public review on December 14, 2005.

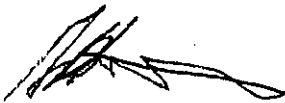
Twenty-eight (28) separate comment letters and three petitions with a total of 110 signatures were received on the preliminary EA. After review of interested public comment on the Preliminary EA, the comments were grouped into eight (8) categories: (1) Law/NEPA, (2) Rangeland Health/Riparian Conditions, (3) Recreation, (4) Wildlife, (5) Wild Horse/Livestock Management, (6) Wilderness, (7) Water Development/Exclosure Alternatives and (8) Visual Resource Management. Public comments were considered in the preparation of the Final EA. A summary of the comments is included as an attachment to this document.

Authorized Officers Signature


Owen Billingsley, Field Manager, Surprise Field Office

June 16, 2006

Date



Gail G. Givens, Field Manager, Winnemucca Field Office

June 16, 2006

Date

Attachments:

EA # CA-370-06-02

Comment Summary

Instructions on how to file an appeal

Appeal No. CA-370-06-02

Appeal and Request for Stay of Final Decision of EA CA-370-06-16,
Dated September 26, 2006

Response to the Request for a Stay

Exhibits and Chronology of Events

Exhibit		
<u>Number</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Document Description</u>
1	Oct. 6, 2006	BLM's Response to the Request for Stay.
2	Sept. 26, 2006	Ms. MacDonald's Appeal and Request for Stay.
3	Aug. 30, 2006	FONSI and Decision Record, Environmental Assessment CA-370-06-16. The Gather and Removal of Wild Horses from the High Rock Herd Management Area.
4		FONSI and Decision Record, Environmental Assessment CA-370-06-02, Proposal to Construct Wildlife Water Developments in the East Fork High Rock Canyon Wilderness Area within the Black Rock-High Rock Emigrant Trails NCA
5	Sept. 9, 2001	Environmental Assessment CA-370-01-07, Little High Rock Appropriate Management Level Establishment/Capture Plan.
6	June 22, 1993	Environmental Assessment CA-028-93-03, Wild Horse Gathering and Removal for the High Rock HMA, and other HMAs.