Wells Basin Allotment (#1070) Evaluation and Grazing Permit Modification
Environmental Assessment OR-035-06-02

Proposed Action: The Bureau of Land Management, Vale District, Baker Resource Area, proposes to implement management adjustments that would modify the existing 10-year grazing permits for the Wells Basin Allotment (#1070) including:

1. A decrease in active grazing preference within the allotment, going from 370 active AUMs to 272 active AUMs. One permit would go from 171 AUMs to 126 AUMs, and the other permit would go from 199 AUMs to 146 AUMs.
2. Adding to the terms and conditions of the permit the following language: "Utilization monitoring standards allow livestock to graze up to 50% on upland grasses, 45% on riparian sedges/grasses, and 30% on aspen. Active grazing use under this permit which contributes to exceeding the above utilization standards (at designated key areas) will result in a temporary reduction of 20% fewer AUMs of active use the following year. Two consecutive years of exceeding utilization standards will result in a year of rest (nonuse of this permit) the third year."

Type of Document: Environmental Assessment

Authorizing Document: Baker Resource Management Plan
Record of Decision
Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management

Preparing Agency: Baker Resource Area
Vale District
Bureau of Land Management

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Allotment Evaluation, Wells Basin Allotment #1070

CHAPTER 1
PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

A. Introduction and Background

This environmental assessment (EA) is a site specific analysis of the proposed Wells Basin Allotment #1070 – Allotment Evaluation and Grazing Permit Modification for the Baker Resource Area of the Vale BLM District. This proposal is in conformance with the Baker Resource Management Plan Record of Decision [(ROD), U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Vale District Office, Baker Resource Area, July 1989], and the Ironside Grazing Management Environmental Impact Statement – Rangeland Program Summary (1981). Those documents are available for review at the Baker Resource Area Office. This EA is tiered to those Environmental Impact Statement documents, and implements resource management program activities under those decisions.

The Oregon/Washington Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management (S&Gs) were developed in accordance with 43 CFR 4180.2(b) and approved by the Secretary of the Interior on August 12, 1997.

An interdisciplinary team conducted assessments of rangeland health baseline conditions in the Wells Basin Allotment (#1070) during 1999. The Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management - Record of Determination for the allotment were completed and signed on August 15, 2000. Standards and Guidelines were formally incorporated into the terms and conditions of the grazing permits or authorizations in the 2002 and 2003 grazing seasons.

The attached Allotment Evaluation for the Wells Basin Allotment includes an assessment of the results of livestock grazing management in relation to achieving the objectives established for the Lookout Mountain Geographic Management Unit under the Baker Resource Area RMP, and achieving the Oregon/Washington Standards and Guidelines. After the results of the evaluation were shared with the permittees, they took nonuse during the year of 2006 to rest the allotment, and they communicated their unwillingness to accept the long term recommendations in the evaluation for major permanent reductions in use.

This EA examines the results of ongoing implementation of BLM's Oregon/Washington Rangeland Standards and Guidelines on the Wells Basin Allotment and suggests a proposed action designed to achieve objectives and be acceptable to all parties.

B. Purpose and Need for Action

The BLM is directed to incorporate material in the Oregon/Washington S&Gs into planning documents and modify the terms and conditions of existing permits and leases to reflect standards and guidelines at the earliest possible date. Further, the S&Gs direct that 'the authorized officer shall take appropriate action as soon as practicable, but not later than the start of the next grazing year upon determining through assessment or monitoring by experienced professionals and interdisciplinary teams, that a standard is not being achieved and that livestock are a significant contributing factor to the failure to achieve the standards and conform with the guidelines.'

As described in the allotment evaluation, the BLM has determined that some elements of the

standards and guidelines have not been achieved, and determined that management adjustments taken in consultation with the permittees during past grazing seasons, including temporary reductions in seasons and numbers, have not resulted in significant progress toward fulfillment of the standards and significant progress toward conformance with the guidelines.

C. Objectives

The specific objectives for the proposed permit modifications are:

1. To adjust grazing use in the Wells Basin Allotment to meet proper utilization standards on riparian/meadow vegetation (45% on smallwing and Hood's sedge and 30% on aspen) to protect the resource from substantial and long term damage. Utilization standards are designed to provide for the physiological requirements of the plants and achieve an upward trend in riparian condition.

2. To enable the grazing permittees to still use this high-elevation allotment during the time it is most useful to their operations (mid to late summer).

D. Issues to be Analyzed

The primary issues important to this proposal were identified by an interdisciplinary team conducting the field examinations and assessment of Rangeland Standards and Guides in 1999.

1. How would the alternatives bring allotment management into compliance with upland and riparian utilization standards? Upland vegetation, herbaceous riparian vegetation, and woody riparian vegetation are addressed.

2. How would riparian areas be impacted by the alternatives? The structure and species composition of the riparian areas are analyzed. 'Critical Element' -Floodplains addressed.

3. How would water quality be impacted by the alternatives? Water temperature and sedimentation are analyzed.

4. How would aspen stands and aspen-meadow habitats be impacted by alternatives? Aspen regeneration, ecological processes, de-watering of meadows, and headcut erosion are addressed.

5. How would the alternatives impact grazing and livestock operations? Use of the allotment by cattle and associated ranch operations are addressed.

6. What is the impact of the alternatives on fish and goshawk habitat? - Perennial streams in the allotment provide or contribute habitat for resident redband trout, and goshawks are known to nest in the allotment.

E. Issues Considered and Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

Issues previously analyzed in existing planning documents are not further discussed or re-analyzed in this document. Other issues were eliminated from further analysis because they would not be impacted by any of the alternatives.

1. Noxious weeds – Noxious weed management has been addressed in the Vale District Noxious Weed Management Plan and environmental assessment (2001).

2. Forest Health/Forest Management issues have been considered and actions proposed under the Draft Lookout Mountain EIS (2002). Certain impacts of livestock grazing on aspen habitats and aspen regeneration are discussed.

3. What is the impact of the alternatives on Threatened or Endangered species? -No federally listed threatened or endangered species is known or likely to occur in the area.

CHAPTER 2
ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

Alternative 1 - No Action

Under the No Action Alternative, ongoing management actions would be implemented under the present terms and conditions of the 10-year grazing permits. It is assumed that BLM would continue to address resource issues through temporary adjustments based on monitoring results, within the scope of flexibility of the current grazing system and permit authorization. The scale and effect of temporary (year to year) adjustments in livestock numbers could be similar to Alternative 3. The permittees would be required to remove livestock from any pasture at the time utilization standards are reached or exceeded. Monitoring in all seasons and pastures would be based on maximum utilization of 50% on key upland forage species and 45% on herbaceous riparian species.

Within the framework of current regulations, BLM is required to adjust the 10-year grazing permit to reflect actual use and utilization data and to meet Oregon/Washington Rangeland Standards and Guidelines. The No Action Alternative would in effect delay or defer a decision to adjust the 10-year grazing permit to reflect the results of monitoring data.

Alternative 2 – Minor Decrease in Active Grazing Preference Coupled with Temporary Adjustments in Use If Utilization Limits Are Exceeded (Proposed Action Developed with Permittee Input)

Modify the existing 10-year grazing permits for the allotment including:

1. A decrease in active grazing preference within the allotment, going from 370 active AUMs to 286 active AUMs in 2007 and 272 active AUMs in 2009. This decrease in allowable use is calculated based on (1) formalizing the longstanding agreement (since 1988) to take voluntary nonuse so that active use would not exceed 286 AUMs (one permit would go from 171 AUMs to 132 AUMs, and the other permit would go from 199 AUMs to 154 AUMs), and (2) a decrease in the amount of available acreage for grazing in the allotment based on the removal from grazing of the 68 acres within the Bassar Diggins Exclosure. The allotment as a whole, given the foregoing allocation, would be 4.9 AUMs per acre. Subtracting the 68 acres therefore results in a decrease of 14 AUMs, apportioned as an additional 6 AUMs reduction to one permittee (46% of the 14 AUMs) and 8 AUMs to the other (54% of the 14 AUMs). The above 14-AUM reduction would take place in 2009 to give the permittees' two years advance notice in accordance with 43 CFR 4110.4-2(b).
2. Adding to the terms and conditions of the permit the following language: "Utilization monitoring standards allow livestock to graze up to 50% on upland grasses, 45% on riparian sedges/grasses, and 30% on aspen. Active grazing use under this permit which contributes to exceeding the above utilization standards (at designated key areas) will result in a temporary reduction of 20% fewer AUMs of active use the following year.

Two consecutive years of exceeding utilization standards will result in a year of rest (nonuse of this permit) the third year."

Alternative 3 – No Grazing Alternative

Require three years of rest (nonuse of both permits) for rangeland and riparian zone recovery before resuming grazing. The existing 10-year grazing permits for the Wells Basin Allotment (#1070) would be modified as follows, the change taking place when grazing is resumed:

1. A decrease in active grazing preference within the allotment, going from 370 active AUMs to 126 active AUMs. One permit would go from 171 AUMs to 53 AUMs, and the other permit would go from 199 AUMs to 62 AUMs.
2. Permanent adjustments in the grazing season of use. Season of use would be changed from 2 ½ months to 1 ½ months (July 16 to August 29), subject to minor adjustments depending on varying yearly conditions.

Actions Common to All Alternatives

This section describes actions which would be implemented in conjunction with all alternatives to minimize adverse impacts on the environment.

Grazing Controls – The permittees are required to herd livestock away from riparian areas and distribute them to achieve proper utilization in uplands. Salt supplements are placed on ridges and slopes at least ¼ mile from water to facilitate livestock distribution. Fencing may be used to control or exclude livestock from small sensitive areas. Forage utilization limits are monitored to achieve management objectives and protect resources from substantial and long term damage. The Draft Lookout Mountain EIS analyzes land treatments proposed for this allotment. Temporary non-use of burn and/or treatment areas may be required. Broadcast burned areas that are reforested would be fenced following treatment to exclude livestock. Other prescribed fire areas would be fenced if monitoring indicates livestock need to be excluded from the area.

Monitoring – Forage utilization, livestock actual use, vegetation trend, and riparian monitoring on an annual or periodic basis are part of the BLM's monitoring protocol.

Alternatives Considered and Eliminated from Further Analysis

1. Riparian Exclosures or Pastures – Alternatives involving extensive fence construction to re-configure pastures within the allotment or to exclude livestock from riparian areas were considered but eliminated in part because of the cost of construction and maintenance of fences in these locations, and also because a reduction in grazing is clearly necessary with or without more fencing. More fencing may be considered in the future if problems with over-utilization continue and funding becomes available.

2. Adding additional acreage to the allotment, specifically the so-called "Elk Pasture" to the north (Big Lookout Mountain) which is currently unallocated for livestock, was considered but eliminated because such action would be in conflict with the Baker RMP which specifies no livestock use in this allotment (the forage is currently allocated to wildlife). The issue could possibly be revisited when the Baker RMP Revision takes place (scheduled to begin in 2008).

CHAPTER 3
AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Critical Elements to the Human Environment:					
Critical Element	**Affected**		**Critical Element**	**Affected**	
	Yes	**No**		**Yes**	**No**
Air Quality		X	T & E (or "Sensitive") Fish	X	
ACECs		X	T & E (or "Sensitive") Plants		X
Cultural Resources		X	Tribal Concerns & Treaty Rights		X
Energy and Mineral Resources		X	Wastes, Hazardous/Solid		X
Environmental Justice		X	Water Quality, Drinking/Ground	X	
Farmlands, Prime/Unique		X	Wetlands/Riparian Zones	X	
Floodplains	X		Wild & Scenic Rivers		X
Migratory Birds		X	Wilderness		X
T & E (or "Sensitive") Animals	X				

This environmental assessment does not discuss impacts to the resource values designated above as "not affected"; either no site specific impacts were identified or the resource value did not occur within the analysis area.

Resource issues within the existing environment

1. What is the existing situation in regards to compliance with upland and riparian utilization standards?

Upland vegetation utilization has generally been within acceptable levels (under 50% of current annual growth).

Excessive utilization on herbaceous riparian vegetation was identified in 1999 as a contributing factor to various stream segments to be evaluated as "at risk". In particular, utilization levels contributed to poor vegetation vigor, lack of vegetation diversity, and lack of adequate vegetation cover to protect stream banks or stabilize sediments. Utilization of herbaceous riparian vegetation (especially the key species of Hood's sedge and smallwing sedge) has been above acceptable levels in all years of monitoring. The utilization limit for herbaceous riparian vegetation was set at 40% in the 2000 Record of Determination, but to be consistent with other BLM-managed areas the actual threshold for moving livestock is currently set at 45%.

Excessive utilization of aspen has been observed in every year except in the years the allotment was rested and in 2004 when livestock were removed early. The utilization limit for aspen and other woody riparian species was set at 30% in the 2000 Record of Determination.

Excessive utilization occurred regardless of season of use and regardless of livestock management practices including herding livestock away from streams.

2. What is the existing situation with riparian areas?

The 1999 S&G evaluation and Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) assessments determined that grazing management contributed to the stream being evaluated as "at risk". Species diversity was less than expected. There was a lack of woody species besides aspen and little to no reproduction of aspen. In particular, utilization levels contributed to poor vegetation vigor, lack of vegetation diversity, and lack of adequate vegetation cover to protect stream banks or stabilize sediments. Broad scale removal of herbaceous vegetation has continued to be excessive.

Floodplain sites are typically narrow, with 1 to 3 year floodplains ranging from 3 to 30 feet wide, and 50 to 100 year floodplains ranging from 15 to 150 feet wide. Historic floodplains may no longer be accessible in a particular stream reach during high flow events because of past down-cutting and channelization. Small floodplains in incised channels are generally poorly vegetated and unstable due to livestock utilization and trampling.

3. What is the existing situation with water quality?

A description and discussion of watershed and water quality data is presented in the Draft Lookout Mountain EIS. The portion of Sisley Creek located in this allotment is currently meeting standards for water quality, including stream temperature, turbidity, and lack of contaminants. Maintaining the correct level of grazing use is crucial to preserving the water quality.

4. What is the existing state of aspen stands and aspen-meadow habitats?

The 1999 S&G evaluation determined that aspen habitats in the allotment were being impacted by livestock use to the degree that aspen regeneration in some stands was prevented by browsing, and that many aspen-meadow habitats showed other signs of disruption of normal ecological processes. Headcuts progressing through the habitats are causing lowering of water tables and associated changes in vegetation species composition and productivity. Mid and late-seral herbaceous species like sedges have been partly replaced by grazing-tolerant species or non-palatable species like blue wildrye, senecio, and false hellebore.

Monitoring indicates aspen has continued to receive excessive use except during the years when the allotment was rested, and in 2004 when livestock were removed early. Substantial improvement in the survival and growth of aspen sprouts was noted in the years the allotment was rested.

5. What is the existing situation with grazing and livestock operations?

The present grazing use authorization is described in the attached allotment evaluation. The BLM grazing permits are used to provide good quality high elevation forage for cattle during a time of year when lower-elevation pastures are drying out and undergoing diminished forage quality. The numbers of livestock the permittee can maintain year round and the timing of grazing on the permittees' other lands (private land and other allotments) are partly dependent on the use of this allotment.

6. What is the existing state of fish and goshawk habitats?
Sisley Creek is a perennial stream that provides habitat for resident populations of redband trout, a BLM-designated "sensitive species". It provides spawning and rearing habitat and contributes to water conditions downstream. The extent of occupied habitat may depend on stream gradient and natural obstructions. Water quality, including oxygen content, sediment loads, and temperatures,

may affect habitat suitability and the physiology of the fish. Water quality is currently meeting standards but can be influenced by livestock grazing. Physical features of habitat structure directly and indirectly influenced by livestock grazing include channel depth and width, bank form and stability, and cover. Northern goshawks are known to nest in the vicinity of this allotment. Concerns of declining populations throughout many regions of the west prompted the BLM to designate the northern goshawk as a "sensitive species". Goshawks prefer healthy, dense, mature, or old growth conifer stands for breeding and fledgling rearing. The extent of occupied habitat depends on the health of the area and if it incorporates the characteristics described above. Habitat health for northern goshawks currently is minimal.

CHAPTER 4
ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This chapter will describe the anticipated consequences of implementing the alternatives. Anticipated impacts are displayed in relation to the issues identified in Chapter 1, Section E. Included in this analysis are direct, indirect, and cumulative effects on resources. These effects are not necessarily labeled.

Alternative 1 - No Action Alternative

1. How would the no action alternative bring allotment management into compliance with upland and riparian utilization standards?

BLM would continue to work with the permittees to achieve proper livestock distribution and compliance with monitoring and use adjustment requirements. In the short term, BLM would continue to negotiate with the permittees or issue decisions on annual use authorization agreements that would reduce the active use by livestock without changing the 10-year grazing permit. Based on past monitoring results, the active use allowable each year would have to be around 69% less than the grazing preference in order to comply with utilization standards.

Based on monitoring data, livestock use patterns, and the effectiveness of herding and other livestock management measures, riparian utilization standards would likely limit the extent to which upland carrying capacity could effectively be utilized. Livestock would be required to be removed from the allotment when utilization levels approached 45% on herbaceous riparian vegetation, but whether they are actually removed on time would be very uncertain. Given the workload required to monitor utilization and to move livestock, exceeding utilization limits would probably occur in most years under this alternative, and compliance would not be achieved on a regular basis.

2. How would riparian areas be impacted by the alternative?

Monitoring and actual use data would be used to adjust livestock numbers and the length of time livestock remained in the allotment. To the extent that these adjustments in use are successfully carried out, riparian vegetation would be expected to improve in vigor and density as average utilization levels were brought down to meet standards. Correcting excessive use on herbaceous riparian vegetation would also serve to alleviate heavy browsing of riparian brush species. We have insufficient data at this time to determine if rates of recovery of riparian habitats would differ because of seed production or root mass differences between the alternative treatments.

To the extent that riparian habitat standards are achieved, floodplain sites would generally be improved by increase in vegetation, stabilization of sediment, and re-establishment of normal dynamic hydrologic conditions. Some improvement and re-filling of downcut channels would occur, although in general, new floodplains must be built up from within incised channels, and historic floodplain levels would probably never be re-established. As hydrologic function improves and normal balances are achieved between floodplain stability and dynamic change, water interception and storage capacity would increase and downstream flood intensities would be decreased.

3. How would water quality be impacted by the alternative?

To the extent that riparian habitat standards are achieved, vegetation density, diversity, and structure, would improve. Stream banks would be less susceptible to trampling damage. Vegetation should reduce the degree of headcutting, and eventually stabilize all channels. Regeneration and recruitment of woody species (particularly aspen) should increase, stabilizing banks. Sediment, turbidity, and nutrient loading would decrease. Soil water-storage capacity would increase, providing more stable flow volumes, with greater quantities of water released during late spring, summer, and fall.

4. How would aspen stands and aspen-meadow habitats be impacted by the alternative?

Aspen regeneration would likely increase if utilization standards on key herbaceous forage species are achieved. Mid and late-seral herbaceous species, particularly Hood's sedge and smallwing sedge will increase in density and vigor. Stabilization of headcuts will enable recovery of water tables and tend to reverse associated changes in vegetation species composition and productivity.

5. How would the alternative impact grazing and livestock operations?

The present grazing use authorization is described in the attached allotment evaluation. The permittees would be required to make adjustments to active use on an annual basis to achieve utilization standards for upland and riparian forage species. The permittees would be responsible to monitor ongoing utilization levels and remove livestock from the allotment at the appropriate time to avoid exceeding utilization standards. Use adjustments would depend heavily on effective and timely monitoring, and real-life workload demands would likely result in missing the optimum time to remove cattle in most years. The allowable use periods might fluctuate from year to year, increasing uncertainty for the livestock operators and causing instability to their operations. But the permitttees would still have their full number of AUMs of grazing preference on paper, even though they probably would not be allowed to fully use this number.

Permittee operations on adjacent private lands will be affected to some degree. The permittees must find additional pasture or otherwise provide feed for livestock when they are not on the BLM allotment. Efficiencies of scale of operations and cost benefit ratios of livestock operations may also be affected. At some point, the effort and unit cost of maintaining miles of fence, water facilities, and other rangeland improvements on public land can outweigh the benefits of low forage costs when only a small number of livestock can be grazed or the season and timing of use is too restricted. At that point, the use of a livestock grazing allotment may become uneconomical. While there are many cost factors not directly under either BLM's or the permittee's control, adjustments on BLM permits do have direct and indirect effects on associated ranching operations. The permittees are concerned that the degree of reductions that would be necessary to fully meet riparian utilization standards would effectively make this grazing allotment uneconomical to operate.

6. What is the impact of the alternative on fish and goshawk habitat?

As riparian habitat standards are achieved, vegetation density, diversity, and structure, would improve. Stream banks would be less susceptible to trampling damage. Vegetation should reduce the degree of headcutting, and eventually stabilize all channels. Stream channel depth should increase and average stream width should decrease over time. Regeneration and recruitment of woody species (particularly aspen) should increase, stabilizing banks and trapping sediment. Sediment, turbidity, and nutrient loading would decrease. Soil water-storage capacity would increase, providing more stable flow volumes, with greater quantities of water released during late spring, summer, and fall. All of these changes would improve redband trout habitat. As an upward trend in Wells Basin is achieved, more potential northern goshawk habitat would be created.

Alternative 2 - The Proposed Action

1. How would the proposed action bring allotment management into compliance with upland and riparian utilization standards?

Reducing the existing 10-year grazing permits as described, a 27% reduction, would bring the permits closer to the observed carrying capacity based on monitoring data. The permittees would have a strong incentive to achieve proper livestock distribution because they would know they face temporary reductions the following year if utilization standards are not achieved.

2. How would riparian areas be impacted?

Riparian vegetation would improve in vigor and density as average utilization levels are brought down to meet standards, similar to the No Action Alternative. Floodplain sites would generally be improved by increase in vegetation and stabilization of sediment. Some improvement and re-filling of downcut channels would occur. As hydrologic function improves, water interception and storage capacity would increase and downstream flood intensities would be lessened. There is insufficient data to determine if rates of recovery of riparian habitats would differ between the alternative treatments.

3. How would water quality be impacted?

Impacts would be similar to the No Action Alternative. There is insufficient data to determine if degree of water quality would differ significantly between the alternative treatments.

4. How would aspen stands and aspen-meadow habitats be impacted?

Impacts would be similar to the No Action Alternative, but improvement would be more certain.

5. How would the proposed action impact grazing and livestock operations?

Reducing the existing 10-year permits as described would simply formalize the longstanding informal agreement with the permittees to keep the active use at this level. It would not be a real

change to the use they have been authorized, but it would show the AUMs of grazing preference they have not been allowed to use are now formally suspended. It would also reduce the amount of grazing use by 14 AUMs to reflect the acreage removed from grazing by the Bassar Diggins Exclosure. The permittees would also be penalized with temporary reductions in use any time they failed to meet utilization standards.

The permittees would still be responsible to monitor utilization levels and remove livestock from the allotment at the appropriate time. They would be allowed full use of their grazing permits the following year as long as they successfully met utilization standards. They would probably not be successful unless they used regular riding to continually move cattle away from the key riparian areas. Employing a rider would be an additional ranching expense, but discussions with the permittees have met with favorable reactions to this alternative. If either permittee took voluntary nonuse, he would not have to worry about facing any reduction based on the use the other permittee made in his absence. In the worst-case scenario for the permittees, they would have to rest the allotment 1 out of 3 years, placing it in temporary nonuse, and this is more acceptable to them than a large permanent reduction in the grazing preference as described in the No Grazing Alternative.

Permittee operations on adjacent private lands will be affected similarly to the No Action Alternative. The stability and predictability of the livestock operation would be enhanced by having less potential fluctuation in use periods from year to year.

6. What is the impact on fish and goshawk habitat?

Impacts would be similar to the No Action Alternative. There is insufficient data to determine if rates of recovery of fisheries habitats would differ between the alternative treatments. As an upward trend in Wells Basin is achieved, more potential northern goshawk habitat would be created.

Alternative 3 – No Grazing Alternative

1. How would the proposed action bring allotment management into compliance with upland and riparian utilization standards?

A three-year period of rest would be expected to result in zero utilization by livestock during this period. However, wildlife, primarily elk, would still be grazing the area, and possibly trespass livestock from adjacent lands could still access the allotment occasionally.

Reducing the existing 10-year grazing permits as described, a 69% reduction, would bring them down to the observed carrying capacity based on monitoring data. Subsequent utilization would be expected to be within standards, but if livestock are not moved frequently even this small amount of use could exceed standards on riparian zones.

2. How would riparian areas be impacted?

Riparian vegetation would improve in vigor and density as average utilization levels are brought down to meet standards, similar to the No Action Alternative. Floodplain sites would generally be improved by increase in vegetation and stabilization of sediment. Some improvement and re-filling of downcut channels would occur. As hydrologic function improves, water interception and storage capacity would increase and downstream flood intensities would be lessened. There is insufficient

data to determine if rates of recovery of riparian habitats would differ significantly between the alternative treatments.

3. How would water quality be impacted?

Impacts would be similar to the No Action Alternative. There is insufficient data to determine if degree of water quality would differ between the alternative treatments.

4. How would aspen stands and aspen-meadow habitats be impacted?

Impacts would be similar to the No Action Alternative, but improvement would be more certain. The formal adjustment of terms of the 10-year grazing permit is the main difference.

5. How would the no grazing alternative impact grazing and livestock operations?

Reducing the existing 10-year permits as described, a 69% reduction, would diminish the amount of use allowed in this allotment to the point where the permittees definitely believe it would no longer be economical to use the permits at all. The effort and unit cost of moving livestock, maintaining miles of fence, water facilities, and other rangeland improvements on public land would probably outweigh the benefits of low forage costs when only this small number of livestock can be grazed and the season and timing of use is that restricted. If they did choose to use the allotment under this lowered amount of use, they would not be able to afford to hire a rider to move cattle away from riparian zones. While there are many cost factors not directly under either BLM's or the permittees' control, adjustments on BLM permits do have direct and indirect effects on associated ranching operations.

6. What is the impact on fish and goshawk habitat?

Impacts would be similar to the No Action Alternative. There is insufficient data to determine if rates of recovery of fisheries habitats would differ significantly between the alternative treatments. As an upward trend in Wells Basin is achieved, more potential northern goshawk habitat would be created.

CHAPTER 5
CONTACTS, CONSULTATIONS AND PREPARERS

A. Agencies, Organizations, and Persons Consulted

Permittees in the Wells Basin Allotment

B. Future Public Notification

1. A 30 day public comment period will be established for review of this EA and the associated Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). A notice of availability of these documents will be published in the Baker City Herald in Baker City.

2. All parties affected will be notified of the availability of the EA and FONSI and the comment period.

3. A notice of decision would be published in the Baker City Herald if the decision is made to implement the proposal.

C. List of Preparers/Reviewers

Craig Martell	Range
Mary Oman	Cultural
Jackie Dougan	Fisheries
Melissa Yzquierdo	Wildlife/Botany
Kevin McCoy	Recreation/VRM
Todd Kuck	Hydrology/Soils/Riparian
Marc Pierce	Forestry
Mike Woods	Weed Management
Judy Reese	Minerals

APPENDIX

Allotment Evaluation, Wells Basin Allotment