

DOE CAMP FENCE
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
EA OR-026-00-17
(AMENDMENT)

Bureau of Land Management
Burns District Office
HC 74-12533 Hwy 20 West
Hines, OR 97738

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I. INTRODUCTION

The original Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared and sent to the interested parties in August 2000. Due to public comment the EA has been amended. The project area is located on the north side of the Steens Mountain, approximately 11.00 miles south of Diamond on the west side of McCoy Creek. The project is in the Oliver Springs Pasture of the Chimney Allotment #6033.

A. Purpose

The purpose of the project is to provide rest for the riparian area in this pasture and improve riparian conditions on 3.50 miles of McCoy Creek and 1.00-mile of Horton Creek. This would help meet resource objectives in the allotment as stated in the 1990 Otley Brothers Evaluation and the 1997 Draft Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (SEORMP/EIS). The objectives are to: 1) Maintain or enhance water quality, and 2) Obtain an upward trend on 20.98 miles of streamside riparian vegetation with additional management emphasis on riparian habitat, fisheries habitat, wildlife habitat, and ecological status of vegetation.

B. Need

In 1998, McCoy Creek was rated as functioning at-risk with a downward trend. Horton Creek was found functioning at-risk; trend was not apparent. Both were attributed to past grazing practices. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) stream functionality guidelines, and the riparian guidelines from the Range Standards and Guides, require immediate action to be taken to reverse the trend if a stream is found to be functioning at-risk and in a downward trend. In an attempt to alleviate the problem, BLM recommends that McCoy Creek be fenced off and rested for at least 2 years. The proposed project would benefit approximately 2.40 miles of private land and 2.10 miles of public land on both McCoy and Horton Creeks. In addition, downstream benefits are expected to stream and riparian conditions on public and private lands. Small numbers of livestock (20 to 30) leave the upland portion of the Oliver Spring Pasture and move into the steep narrow canyon of McCoy and Horton Creeks. It is then difficult for these livestock to leave the area and overgrazing of the riparian area results which cause utilization of the upland pasture to be moderate and utilization of the riparian area to be heavy. The total AUMs authorized in the pasture is approximately 248 but varies based on vegetative conditions.

C. Conformance

The objectives of the proposed project are to improve vegetative condition, to maintain or enhance water quality, to obtain an upward trend of riparian vegetation with an emphasis on fisheries and wildlife habitat. These are stated in and in conformance with the 1982 Andrews Management Framework Plan (MFP), the 1983 Andrews Grazing EIS, the 1990 Otley Brothers Allotment Evaluation, the 1997 Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health, and the Draft SEORMP/EIS as proposed, and the 2000 Sage Grouse Management Guidelines. The proposed project is part of the 9.30 miles of temporary exclusion fencing identified in the 1982 MFP (Page 26, Figure 4), and defined in the Grazing EIS (Pages 1-12; Exclusion). The grazing stated in the 1983 Grazing EIS would not occur in September. Findings indicate that the deferred grazing prescribed for September would not be beneficial to this pasture. An appropriate grazing system would be identified in an AMP prior to grazing the riparian area.

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

A. Proposed Action

The proposed action is to construct 3.50 miles of 3-wire fence in three sections. One section of fence would be 1.80 miles and would connect two existing fences to create a small riparian pasture along Horton Creek. The second section would be .80-mile long and run north from the Horton Creek fence and end at the top of a rock rim. The third fence would be approximately .90-mile long, and would begin on the north side of the steep ravine and go 1.00-mile north to an existing fence. The three fences are intended to control cattle movement into McCoy Creek. The fences would be located in T. 31 S., R. 33 E., Sections 28 and 33, and T. 32 S., R. 33 E., Sections 4 and 9.

Access to the project area would be by All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) using existing roads along the fence disturbance area. Although the fenceline would not be bladed, portions of the fenceline may be cleared using hand tools. The fence would be constructed using green steel posts. The top two strands would be barbed wire, and the bottom wire would be smooth wire, with a wire spacing of 18 inches, 26 inches, and 38 inches from the ground. Steel posts would be spaced 16 feet apart with one wood stay between each post. Four rock cribs would be constructed at corners, and six gates would be installed. The permittee will construct the short gap fences in Section 33, N2, (approximately .30-mile). The remaining 3.20 miles would be constructed through contract. The permittee would be assigned maintenance responsibility on the 3.50 miles of newly constructed fence.

Riparian area monitoring would be conducted along McCoy Creek to assess the effectiveness of the project in achieving an upward trend in condition. Portions of the fence tie into rim rock. Once fenced, if cattle find a way through to the creek, small (.25-mile) additional gap fences may be installed or extended enough to adequately control livestock into McCoy Creek.

After the initial 2 years of rest, monitoring would be conducted to determine riparian condition and trend. An interdisciplinary team would be used to ascertain if a grazing treatment could be resumed or if further rest is needed. If the trend is found to be static or downward, the affected portion of McCoy Creek would continue to be rested. If properly functioning condition or upward trend is attained, the appropriate grazing treatment for McCoy Creek will be identified in a management plan for the allotment.

The fence will remain in place and be utilized as a facility in preparing an AMP or removed if found not to contribute to achievement of future resource and grazing objectives.

B. No Action

The proposed project would not be constructed.

C. Other Alternatives Considered but not Analyzed

1. Removal of livestock from the Oliver Springs Pasture would create resource management problems in the remainder of the allotment and is not in conformance with the 1982 MFP.
2. Herding livestock in the Oliver Springs Pasture in an attempt to remove them from the riparian areas would be ineffective due to the rugged nature of the allotment and steepness of McCoy Creek Canyon.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. Landform and Climate

The elevation of the project area is approximately 6,250 feet. The major geological feature is McCoy Creek Canyon running from south to north and ranging from 300 to 500 feet deep throughout much of its course. The yearly precipitation ranges from 10 to 20 inches and comes primarily in the form of snow. Seasonal temperatures are variable with summer temperatures as high as 95 degrees F and winter temperature to - 40 degrees F.

B. Vegetation

Vegetation consists of western juniper, mountain big sagebrush, low sagebrush, quaking aspen, Thurber needlegrass, Idaho fescue, and Sandberg bluegrass. Riparian vegetation occurs along perennial streams and contains willow, alder, dogwood, black cottonwood, sedges, rushes, and other riparian species.

The Steens Mountain paintbrush (Bureau sensitive species) may be found on windswept ridges from 6,500 feet to 9,000 feet. The paintbrush has been detected approximately 2.00 miles south of the proposed project area, and is not expected to be found in the project area.

C. Riparian and Water Quality

McCoy Creek was evaluated for functionality in 1998. The portion of the creek affected by the proposed project was rated as functioning at-risk with a downward trend due to the lack of young woody species and excessive erosion. Water quality data indicate the average water temperature was 67 degrees F, in the warmest part of the year. This is above the Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ's) water quality standard for a 7-day average of 64 degrees F. In the same year, Horton Creek was found to be functioning at-risk with a trend not apparent, due to the lack of young woody species and low vegetative cover along the creek on the upland portion of the creek.

D. Fish and Wildlife

Wildlife in the area are summering and wintering mule deer, pronghorn antelope, Rocky Mountain elk, greater sage grouse, chukar, sage thrasher, common flicker, garter snake, and coyotes. The greater sage grouse is a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) sensitive candidate species and a BLM sensitive species.

Fish species found in McCoy Creek include mountain whitefish, speckled dace, Great Basin redband trout, and Malheur mottled sculpin. Redband trout and sculpin are managed as BLM sensitive species.

E. Cultural Resources

Existing cultural site inventories indicate there are no known resources in the proposed project area. Based on topography and land features, it has been presumed that there is a high potential for prehistoric as well as historic sites to occur in the area.

F. Wilderness Study Area and Recreation

There are no wilderness or Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) in the project area. The project area is being proposed as a Cooperative Management and Protection Area.

Recreation use occurs primarily during the summer and fall as most of the area is snowbound during the spring and winter. Recreation includes hiking, hunting, fishing, and sightseeing. This area is categorized as Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class II. The objective of the classification is to retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to landscape characteristics should be low.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Analysis of the Critical Elements

The following critical elements of the human environment are either not present or will not be adversely impacted by the proposed action: air quality, cultural or historic resource values, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs), floodplains, weeds, prime or unique farmlands, American Indian religious concerns, and hazardous or solid wastes, Environmental Justice, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and Threatened and Endangered species.

B. Proposed Action

1. Landform and Climate

There would be no impacts to landform or climate.

2. Vegetation

During construction some short-term disturbance to vegetation would occur along the fenceline. Impacts to vegetation would be minimized by removing shrubs, only when necessary; using an ATV on existing roads to access the project area; and, using hand tools to clear vegetation only when necessary.

A botanical clearance would be completed after the final fence alignment is flagged in the field. The fence alignment would be adjusted as necessary to avoid impacts to sensitive plants and Threatened and Endangered plant sites.

3. Riparian and Water Quality

Approximately 640 acres, of which 62.5 acres are riparian, would be excluded for a minimum of 2 years. After achieving the ecological objectives of the project, a grazing treatment would be identified that would continue to improve herbaceous cover and increase woody species while decreasing erosion along the riparian area.

4. Fish and Wildlife

Some wildlife may be temporarily disturbed or displaced by fence construction.

The fence may impact sage grouse by providing a perch for predators or may cause mortality if sage grouse fly into it. The fence is in compliance with the sage grouse guidelines which state: construction of new fences will be at least .60-mile from leks. Inventories indicate one lek located 1.20 miles from the project area across the McCoy Creek Canyon.

Fences in the area may restrict movement of wildlife. Gates would be left open when not in use, and combined with the wire spacing should minimize the obstacles and allow wildlife passage with little difficulty.

The proposed action would reduce the use on affected riparian vegetation, and contribute toward improving riparian conditions by increasing cottonwoods, willow, and other riparian species. It is anticipated that available fish habitat would increase with the improvement of riparian conditions and streambank stabilization.

5. Cultural Resources

There would be no impacts to cultural resources, as impacts to significant sites would be avoided or otherwise mitigated through fence realignment. A cultural resources inventory would be conducted to determine the existence of prehistoric and historic sites not previously identified. Any fence modifications necessary to avoid impacts may increase the length or change the course of the fence slightly. If any artifacts are encountered during construction, work will stop until further examinations can be conducted.

6. Wilderness Study Area and Recreation

There are no designated wilderness or WSAs in this area. The area is being considered for special designation.

The fence is expected to reduce the effects of grazing within this portion of McCoy and Horton Creeks which should benefit recreation by improving fish habitat and vegetation. Hikers, fishermen, and campers would find less evidence of livestock use along the creek. There is little or no recreation use in the vicinity of the fence. If a recreational user on foot encounters the fence the project may hinder but not prevent passage. One gate would be constructed on an existing road to allow access to users.

Visually, the fence would be an unnatural feature on the landscape. However, fence materials that blend into the landscape would be used. Most of the fence would be out of sight of the main road and would only be visible from the Doe Camp access road.

7. Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts include the enhancement of aquatic species and wildlife habitat through the improvement of woody species and the reduction in erosion, which, in turn, would improve downstream water quality on both public and private lands. Recreation would benefit from the improvement in camping and fishing opportunities.

From a wildlife standpoint this fence does pose some problems from the concentration of fences in the area as there are some existing fences to the east and west within about .50-mile of the proposed fence (see attached map). With the gaps in the fence, wire spacing, and the plan to leave gates open when not in use, wildlife would be able to negotiate the fences without much difficulty.

The proposed fence, in conjunction with other fences in the area, is intended to improve conditions on both public and private lands in the entire reach of the McCoy Creek drainage. Approximately 50 percent public and 50 percent private land, contained in the allotment, should benefit from reduced erosion and subsequent reduced deposition downstream of the project area.

C. No Action

1. Landform and Climate

There would be no impacts to landform or climate.

2. Vegetation

This alternative lacks mitigation of the effects of grazing on vegetation in riparian areas along the streams and meadows. Progress toward rangeland objectives would not be achieved because of the domestic livestock access to McCoy and Horton Creeks.

3. Fish and Wildlife

Without the proposed project, livestock use could not be adequately controlled in riparian and wetland areas. Opportunity to improve habitat management would be limited, thus habitat would be slower to improve.

4. Cultural Resources

There would be no impacts to cultural resources.

5. WSA and Recreation

There are no wilderness or WSAs in the project area. There would be no improvement to recreational opportunities through improved stream and riparian conditions. The benefits described under the proposed alternative would not occur. Visual evidence of livestock would be more evident along the riparian zones.

6. Cumulative Impacts

No action would delay recovery of the riparian areas. Additional grazing restrictions would be placed on the livestock operator in this pasture in an attempt to improve riparian condition and trend. This would likely affect the other pastures in the grazing rotation and may only be partially successful in achieving management objectives. Resource objectives may be unobtainable under the no action alternative.

V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Shirley and Earl Carson, Kiger Ranch
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

VI. PARTICIPATING STAFF

Manuel Berain, Range Technician
David Blackstun, Supervisory Natural Resource Staff Advisor
Mary Emerick, Recreation Planner
Rick Hall, Natural Resource Specialist
Brian Lampman, Fisheries Biologist
Gina Lampman, Fisheries Biologist
Matt Obradovich, Wildlife Biologist
Ellie Sippel, Hydrologist
Scott Thomas, Archaeologist

VII. MAPS

- A. Allotment Area Map
- B. Project Area Map

USDI, Bureau of Land Management
Burns District
HC 74-12533 Highway 20 West
Hines, Oregon 97738

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
for
Doe Camp Fence
EA OR-026-00-17

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Andrews Resource Area has analyzed the proposal and its alternatives to construct approximately 4.30 miles of 3-wire fence in the Chimney grazing allotment. This fence would improve the control of livestock and allow for improvement of riparian areas, water quality, and aquatic habitat in McCoy and Horton Creeks. This proposal is in conformance with the 1982 Andrews Management Framework Plan (MFP), the 1983 Andrews Grazing Management Program Final Environmental Impact Study, the 1990 Otley Brothers Allotment Evaluation, the 2000 Sage Grouse Management Guidelines, and the Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (SEORMP/EIS) as proposed.

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the attached Environmental Assessment (EA) and all other available information, I have determined that the proposal and its alternatives analyzed do not constitute a major Federal action that would adversely impact the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an EIS is unnecessary and will not be prepared. This determination is based on the following factors:

1. Beneficial, negative, direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts discussed in the EA have been disclosed. Analysis indicated no significant impacts on society as a whole, the affected region, the affected interests, or the locality. The physical and biological effects are limited to the Burns District, Andrews Resource Area and adjacent land.
2. Public health and safety would not be adversely impacted. There are no known or anticipated concerns with project waste or hazardous materials.
3. There would be no negative impacts to regional or local air quality, prime or unique farmlands, known paleontological resources on public land within the area, wetlands, floodplains, weeds, areas with unique characteristics, ecologically critical areas or designated Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. Floodplains, wetlands, riparian habitat, and water quality would be protected and enhanced.

4. There are no highly controversial effects on the environment.
5. There are no effects that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risk. Sufficient information on risk is available based on information in the EA and other past actions of a similar nature.
6. This alternative does not set a precedent for other projects that may be implemented in the future to meet the goals and objectives of adopted Federal, State, or local natural resource-related plans, policies or programs. It does not preclude consideration or adoption of various alternatives in the ongoing SEORMP, which will supersede the Andrews MFP.
7. No cumulative impacts related to other actions that would have a significant negative impact were identified or are anticipated.
8. Based on previous and ongoing cultural resource surveys, and through mitigation by avoidance, no negative impacts to cultural resources were identified or anticipated. There are no known American Indian religious concerns or persons or groups who might be disproportionately and negatively affected as anticipated by the Environmental Justice policy.

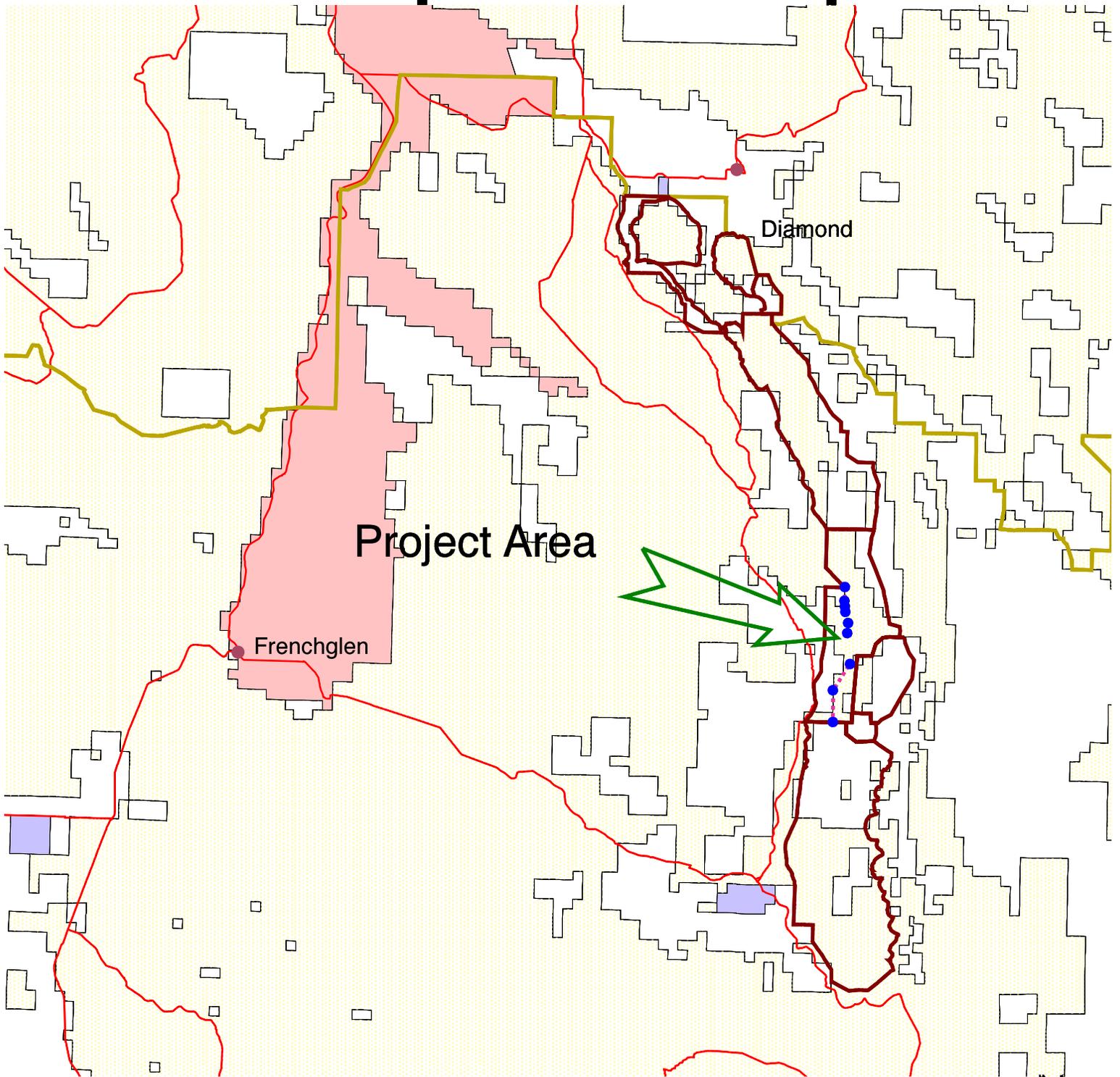
There are no wilderness or Wilderness Study Areas in the project area. Therefore, wilderness would not be affected.

9. No negative impacts to any threatened or endangered species or their habitat that was determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act was identified. Habitat for fish species which are BLM Sensitive Species, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Species of Concern, and Oregon Sensitive Species would be protected and enhanced. If, at a future time, there could be the potential for adverse impacts, treatments would be modified or mitigated not to have an adverse effect or a new analysis would be conducted.
10. This alternative is in compliance with relevant Federal, State, and local laws, regulations, and requirements for the protection of the environment.

Miles R. Brown
Andrews Resource Area Field Manager

Date

Doe Camp Fence Proposal

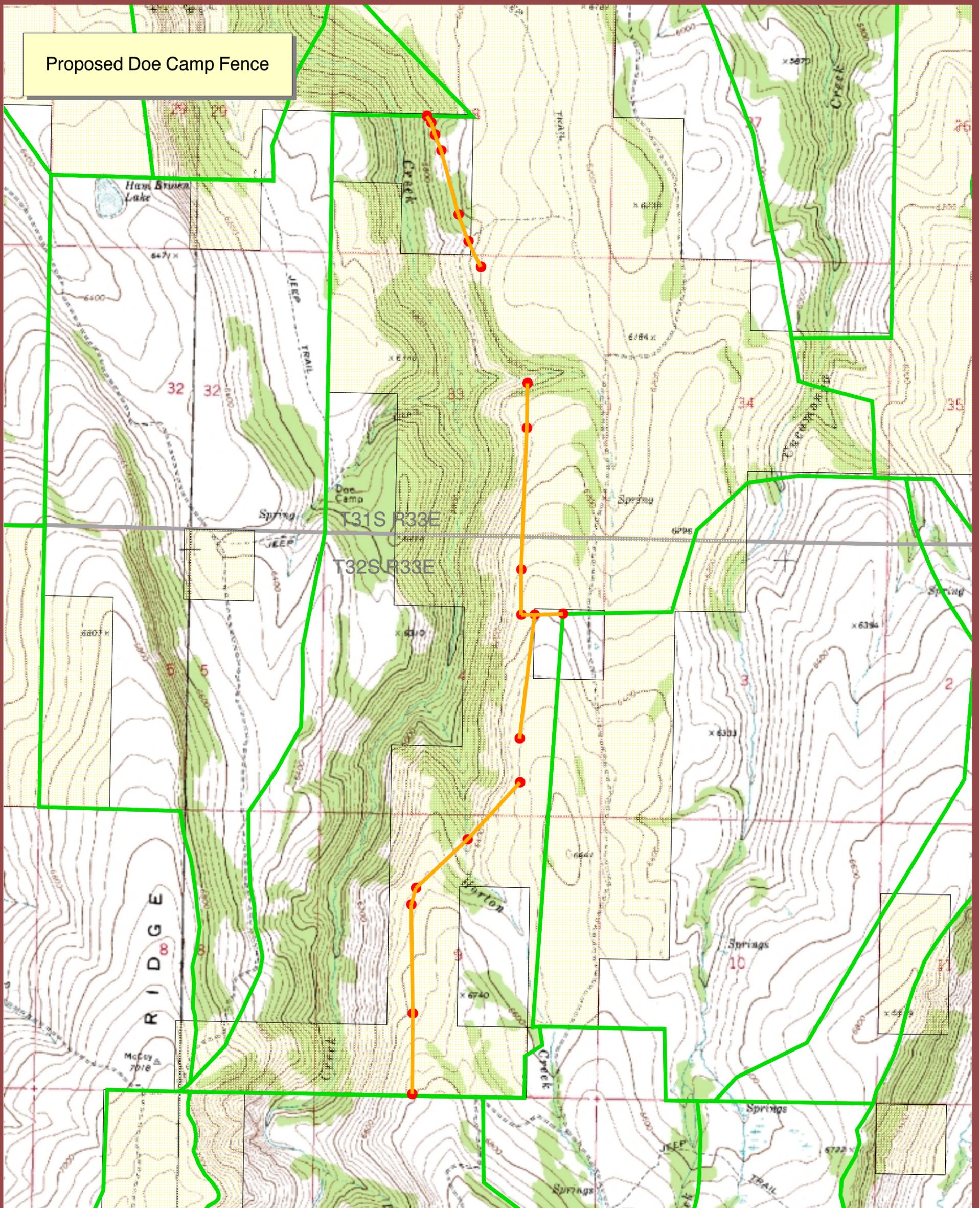


Andrews Resource Area
Chimney Allotment

-  Allotment Boundary
-  Roads



Proposed Doe Camp Fence



 Proposed Fence

 Corners

 Existing Fences

 Range & Townships

Ownership

 BLM Lands

 Private Lands

1:21120

0.5 0 0.5 1 Miles



No warranty made by the BLM for use of the data for purposes not intended by the BLM. Kelly Hazen, Burns BLM GIS October 12, 2000 doecamp.apr

