

**Proposed Decision, Rationale and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)
For EA#OR135-01-EA-01 (Irby Allotment Management Plan)**

Dear Interested Public:

The following Proposed Decision and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Environmental Assessment of the proposed Irby Allotment Management Plan is enclosed for your review. If you wish to protest or appeal this proposed decision, you may do so in accordance with the procedures described below.

Proposed Decision and Rationale

Proposed Decision: Under the authority of the Code of Federal Regulations (43 CFR 4120.2[c] and [d], 43 CFR 4130.2[a] and [d], and 43 CFR 4160.1[a]), it is my proposed decision to adopt and implement Alternative 1 (Proposed Action), and to issue a 10-year grazing lease subject to management actions described in the attached EA as a term and condition of the grazing lease.

Rationale: The proposed allotment management plan is in conformance with the Record of Decision (ROD) for the Spokane Resource Management Plan and amendment. The ROD 1987 (1987) (pages i and 24-27) specified that livestock grazing focus on achieving 50 percent utilization of key forage species through development of Allotment Management Plans (AMPs) to establish livestock use levels, grazing systems, seasons of use, and range improvements. This AMP also addresses the requirement to take actions to achieve Standards for Rangeland Health (43 CFR 4180.2).

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

On the basis of environmental assessment #OR135-01-EA-01 and other available information, it is my determination that Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) does not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment (a finding of no significant impact). Therefore, this action does not require preparation of an environmental impact statement.

Protest

If you wish to protest this proposed decision in accordance with 43 CFR § 4160.2, you are allowed 15 days from receipt of this notice, as established by legal notice in the Davenport Times newspaper or by certified mail, to file a protest at the above address. A protest must be in writing and specify the

reasons, clearly and concisely, as to why you believe the proposed decision is in error. If a protest is filed within the time allowed, the statement of reason and other pertinent information will be considered and a final decision will be issued with a right of appeal (43 CFR 4160.3[b]).

In the absence of a protest within the time allowed, the above proposed decision will constitute my final decision without further notice in accordance with 43 CFR § 4160.3[a]. If this becomes my final decision and you wish to appeal this decision for the purpose of a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge, in accordance with 43 CFR §§ 4160.4 and 4.470, you are allowed 45 days from receipt of this notice to file an appeal at the above address. The appeal must be in writing and shall state clearly and concisely why you think the decision is in error. Any request for a stay of this decision in accordance with 43 CFR § 4.21 must be filed with the appeal.

Kevin R. Devitt
Field Manager, Border Resource Area

Date

**Environmental Assessment for
Grazing Lease #360687
Irby Allotment
EA#OR135-01-EA-1**

**Bureau of Land Management
Spokane District
August 2001**

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**Environmental Assessment
For Grazing Lease #3060687
Irby Allotment Management Plan**

Introduction

This Environmental Assessment (EA) addresses Irby Grazing Allotment (#3060687) on public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Spokane District. The lands are located 1 mile northwest of the town of Irby, Washington, in Lincoln County (see Map 1). These lands are within the Upper Crab Creek Management Area of the Border Resource Area, in the Spokane BLM District.

Purpose and Need

The purpose and need of this EA is to evaluate renewal of a 10-year grazing lease on allotment #3060687 in compliance with *Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management*. The EA is also needed to address a change in some terms of the lease. Additionally, the Spokane Resource Management Plan Record of Decision (ROD) 1987 (page 26), specifies developing Allotment Management Plans (AMPs) to establish livestock use levels, grazing systems, seasons of use, and range improvements.

Background

This allotment encompasses approximately 200 acres of BLM-managed public lands in T. 22 N., R. 31 E., Section 26, a portion of which was acquired by BLM in 1990 (see Map 1). Since 1991, the acquired parcel has had a BLM grazing lease. The RMP categorized Allotment #306087, in its original boundaries, as a Custodial 2 (C2) allotment (1987 RMP ROD), encompassing 160 acres, authorizing 27 AUMs with a grazing season of 4/1 to 10/31.

Conformance With Land Use Plans: The 1985 Spokane District RMP (page 174) and its ROD (1987, page 51) provide for a grazing allotment in this area. The original grazing lease identified in the RMP included 120 acres in T. 22 N., R.31 E., Section 12, N1/2NE1/4, NE1/4NW1/4. Because of changes in ownership of private lands, this 120 acres is no longer in Allotment #360687.

Description of Alternatives

Three alternatives are analyzed in this EA: Alternative 1 (Proposed Action), Alternative 2 (Continue Present Grazing Plan), and Alternative 3 (No Action). Management goals consistent with multiple use objectives of livestock grazing, wildlife habitat, and watershed needs, as outlined by the Spokane Resource Management Plan ROD (1987), are incorporated into the grazing plans in Alternatives 1 and 2.

This allotment management plan proposes grazing strategies consistent with the *Fundamentals for Rangeland Health and the Standards for Rangeland Health*.

Alternative 1 - Proposed Action

The proposed action is to issue grazing lease #360687 to Eugene Wraspir for 10 years. The lease would be for approximately 25 AUMs on about 200 acres of BLM-administered public land as identified on Map 1. The duration and season of use could vary, depending on environmental and management factors, as determined by the BLM Authorized Officer in consultation with BLM staff and the grazing lessee.

Grazing would be as follows:

Pasture 1 (147 acres) - BLM land south of the railroad tracks

Duration and Season of Use: Graze for approximately two weeks, the last week in February through first week in March each year.

Pasture 2 (20 acres) - BLM lands north of the tracks and south of the cliff

Duration and Season of Use: Graze with private lands, depending on weather and calving activities of the grazing lessees cattle herd, for approximately one week, between February and April each year.

Pasture 3 (19 acres) - BLM lands north of the cliff that are fenced in with a large block of private land (approx.1,800 acres).

Duration and Season of Use: Graze six months, April through September each year.

Alternative 2 - Continue Present Grazing Use

This alternative proposes continuing the current grazing regime (35 AUMs) and authorizing grazing throughout the vegetative growing season, every year. Pastures 2 and 3 are part of large pastures comprised mostly of private land, making it unlikely they can be rested. Grazing use would approximate levels of Alternative 1.

Alternative 3 - No Action

This alternative is to not renew the grazing lease. Pasture 3 would be fenced to prevent trespass on the BLM parcel.

Management Actions Common to Alternatives 1 and 2

Range Improvements

- Additional range improvements could be constructed, based on monitoring, to achieve or maintain rangeland health standards as required by 43 Code of Federal Regulations, Subpart 4180 (Rangeland Health). Range improvements include any project or construction activity occurring within the rangeland ecosystem that is designed to achieve or maintain Rangeland Health Standards

as described in Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Grazing Management (USDI 1997).

- The grazing lessee will maintain all range improvements. The BLM may contribute materials, if available, for major repair work.

Resource Inventories

- Appropriate resource inventories (including cultural, botanical and wildlife) will be conducted prior to implementing specific projects on the allotment. If important resources are identified or located, the project would be redesigned to reduce or eliminate impacts to those resources. If cultural properties cannot be avoided, consultation will be conducted with the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, tribal governments or historical societies, as appropriate, and in some cases the Advisory Council of Historic Preservation.

Noxious Weed and Invasive Plants

- Noxious weeds/invasive plants on the allotment will be treated in accordance with the Spokane District Noxious Weed Control Environmental Assessment.

Monitoring and Evaluation

- Monitoring and evaluation will be done in accordance with the Spokane District Monitoring Plan.
- Monitoring will be established in Pasture 1.
- Riparian herbaceous communities, hardwood/shrub communities, and stream form and function criteria will be monitored, considering site capability and potential and consistent with Rangeland Health Standards. Additional photo monitoring will be established in the allotment to monitor hardwood/shrub trend. This would be used to determine site potential and site capability criteria of shrubs and hardwood species.
- Herbaceous stubble height in riparian areas and wetlands will be measured using the Photographic Guide to Median Stubble Heights technique (USDI 1999).
- Utilization levels of key upland native plant species will be 50% utilization of current year's growth by weight.
- Upland bunch grasses will be monitored to assess the effects of grazing and to determine any needed changes in management.
- Invasive plant species will be monitored and appropriate control measures taken if necessary.
- Other evaluations of the allotment use and resource values, in addition to the Rangeland Health Assessment, will be conducted as needed, after reviewing the monitoring reports.

Administrative

- This parcel will be recategorized, from “C2” (custodial) to “I” (improve) category, because of riparian values.

Affected Environment and Environmental Impacts

The allotment evaluation considered potentially significant impacts (direct, indirect, and cumulative) for each alternative. The cumulative effects analysis considered past, present and future actions within the allotment. Reasonable foreseeable future actions considered were all forms of recreation, grazing and vehicular road use. Reasonable foreseeable future actions are those activities that may occur over the next 10 years, which is the length of the proposed grazing lease.

Soils, Water and Vegetation

Rangeland Soils: The dominant soil type within the allotment is the Roloff/Bakeoven/Rock Outcrop Complex. Roloff soils are moderately deep and well drained with moderate permeability and a depth of 20 to 40 inches to underlying basalt. Bakeoven soil is very shallow and well drained, with a depth of 4 to 10 inches to underlying basalt.

Water Resources: Crab Creek (a low gradient, mostly perennial creek) flows through Pasture 1 for approximately 0.75 mile. This section of the creek is in good condition with most meeting Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) per an assessment done in 2000. Crab Creek, at Irby, is identified by the state of Washington as a Class B surface water. Recent water quality testing of Crab Creek, above and below this allotment, indicates water quality of Crab Creek as it flows through BLM land meets or exceeds water quality standards for Class B surface water in the state.

In addition, one intermittent unnamed creek flows through the southwest corner of the allotment.

Upland Vegetation/Plant Communities

The Irby allotment falls within Daubenmire’s big sagebrush/bluebunch wheatgrass zone. The flood plain is dominated by non-native plants, including bulbous bluegrass, Kentucky bluegrass, cheatgrass and tumble mustard. Crab Creek contains an abundance of woody vegetation including chock cherry, service berry, hawthorn, willow, birch, and red-osier dogwood. Reed canary is also a common component of Crab Creek. The riparian zone has clusters of native shrubs (water birch, coyote willow, and wavy lead alder). Big sagebrush/bluebunch wheatgrass, big sagebrush/needle- and-thread, big sagebrush/Idaho fescue and stiff sagebrush/Sandburg’s bluegrass communities grow on creek terraces.

Although all of the plant communities include non-native species such as cheatgrass, upland areas are generally in good condition with an upward trend, particularly above the bluffs in Pastures 1 and 3 where grazing pressure has been less concentrated. Near the northern boundary of the property in Pasture 3 are a number of alkaline depressions that support greasewood and basin wild rye, and a steep-sided pond.

Special Status Plants: No listed, proposed, or Bureau sensitive plant species have been found on the allotment.

Plants of Cultural Importance: Among the culturally important, berry-producing plants on the allotment are serviceberry, choke cherry, golden currant, wax currant, elderberry, and Wood's rose. These grow in "shrub garlands" associated with rocky outcrops and talus slopes. Culturally important root crop plants include various lomatium (bigseed, Coeur d'Alene, and Canby's or "white camas") and bitterroot on shallow soil areas, and yampah in meadows and gently sloping grasslands.

Invasive Species: This allotment contains scattered light populations of noxious weeds, including thistles (both Canada and Russian) and cheatgrass.

Impacts on Soils, Water and Vegetation

The alternatives should continue an upward trend in native plant communities that are more resistant to weed establishment.

Alternative 1 - Proposed Action: The proposed action would allow upland plant communities to maintain or advance their current ecological status. Late-winter grazing of Pasture 1 would avoid grazing pressure during the critical growth period for bunchgrasses. The BLM portion of Pasture 3 is located a mile away from water and the irrigated pasture that cattle frequent throughout the vegetative growing season. Therefore, it is expected that livestock utilization on this pasture would continue to receive light to moderate use.

Alternative 2: The ecological status of upland plant communities would likely be unchanged.

Alternative 3: With no grazing, the native species in both upland and riparian habitats would be likely to increase in cover and ecological status.

Wildlife Habitat

This allotment has several important plant communities and state priority habitats that provide necessary habitat for Bureau Special Status Species (SSS). Most of the allotment (120 acres) is in the central-arid steppe vegetative zone; the remaining acres are basalt and talus cliffs, and a short riparian zone along Crab Creek. Basalt and talus cliffs are important nesting and perching habitat for raptors, as well as roosting/rearing habitat for bats. Central-arid steppe vegetative zone has been identified in the Washington State gap analysis conservation priority index as a moderately high priority habitat with about 50% already converted to agriculture, making its conservation important to wildlife management. Migratory land birds, waterfowl, and shorebirds rely on riparian habitat for breeding and brood rearing. Other riparian wildlife use includes mule deer fawning cover, and amphibian species breeding/rearing habitat.

Wildlife known to use the allotment include migratory birds, upland birds, big game, amphibians, reptiles, and raptors. See Table 1 for a list of wildlife observed on the allotment during a survey in 2000.

Special Status Wildlife

There are no known Federally listed Endangered, Threatened, or Proposed to list species within the allotment area based on historical records and current wildlife surveys (2000).

Table 1. Wildlife Species Sightings on the Irby Allotment (#00687) During 2000 Surveys
<p>Mammals Badger (<i>Taxidea taxus</i>) (burrows) Coyote (<i>Canis latrans</i>) (scat) Mule deer (<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>)</p>
<p>Fish/Reptiles Carp (<i>Cyprinus carpio</i>) Western skink (<i>Eumeces skiltonianus</i>)</p>
<p>Birds Black-billed magpie (<i>Pica pica</i>) Chipping sparrow (<i>Spizella passerina</i>) Great blue heron (<i>Ardea herodias</i>) Mourning dove (<i>Zenaida macroura</i>) Northern harrier (<i>Circus cyaneus</i>) Red-tailed hawk (<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>) Say's phoebe (<i>Sayornis saya</i>) Western meadowlark (<i>Sturnella neglecta</i>)</p>

Two Bureau Special Status Species have been documented within the allotment. The Western pipistrelle (Bureau Tracking in Washington) has been observed on several occasions roosting within the cliffs of the northern section of the allotment. The other SSS documented within the allotment is the striped whipsnake (Bureau Tracking in Washington).

Although greater sage grouse (Federally Petitioned to list, Washington State Threatened) and Columbia sharp-tailed grouse (Washington State Threatened, Bureau Sensitive in Washington) have not been documented on the allotment, the allotment is within the historic range of both species. In the long term, the riparian areas could provide wintering habitat for greater sage grouse, as well as nesting and wintering habitat for Columbia sharp-tailed grouse.

Impacts Common to All Action Alternatives

Neither of the action alternatives would likely impact Bureau SSS habitat or contribute to the need to list the Western pipistrelle, striped whipsnake, greater sage grouse, or Columbian sharp-tailed grouse.

Alternative 1

The timing, duration, and utilization levels of Alternative 1 would be consistent with wildlife values on the allotment. Proposed times and duration of grazing would provide adequate regrowth and rest for plants, ensuring residual cover for wildlife. Riparian utilization and soil compaction by livestock would have less impact during late February to early March than grazing during the vegetative growing season (May-July) and/or hot-season (July-September). Winter grazing would have minimal impacts on species that utilize the allotment during late March through fall, such as migratory landbirds, mule deer during fawning, waterfowl breeding/rearing, and amphibian breeding/rearing. Cool season grazing would provide ample time for regrowth and seed production for native upland grass species. Cattle may select annual grass species, which are more palatable during this time, rather than dormant native perennials, possibly reducing the percent of weedy species within the allotment over time.

Overall, Alternative 1 would have good opportunity to control livestock use on the allotment and protect habitat for wildlife, including the striped whipsnake and Western pipistrelle.

Alternative 2

Year-round grazing would have more impacts on riparian, woody, and upland vegetation than Alternative 1. The riparian areas and uplands would be grazed during the same period critical for most wildlife species (late spring and summer). Grazing during the growing period could reduce forage and increase disturbance/displacement to native wildlife species. The duration and timing of grazing under Alternative 2 would have greatest impact to riparian habitat by increasing mechanical damage to woody vegetation, and decreasing woody recruitment.

Alternative 3 (No Action)

This alternative would expedite recovery of important wildlife habitats, primarily the native upland grasses and woody regeneration of the riparian corridor. Eliminating cattle grazing on this area would remove potential impacts, such as forage competition, disturbance, and displacement of wildlife species.

Fisheries

The only fish observed within the allotment area is carp in Crab Creek. None of the alternatives is expected to affect fishery values.

Cultural Resources/Native American Values

While previous BLM Cultural Resource surveys have included nearby lands, Section 26 has not been inventoried. Examination of the Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (OAHP) data base and BLM files and records indicates that no significant cultural sites have been recorded in this township and range. Surveys conducted in the late 1980s and early 1990s on BLM lands in adjacent townships resulted in the recording of several, probably prehistoric, rock features. A

recent survey in an adjacent township located several historic sites. This parcel's streamside location and the cultural context described below make the allotment a likely location for both Native American and EuroAmerican cultural sites.

This allotment is within an area traditionally used by members of the Coville Confederated Tribes. The allotment is located in an area designated by ethnographers as the "Plateau Culture Area" whose residents share a number of broad cultural traits. Among these are a strong riverine orientation, a pattern of seasonal movement, and the sharing of resource areas by members of several groups. Although the most visible native settlements were located along major rivers, seasonal movements that coincided with the ripening of important food plants took most people into the Channeled Scablands for part of the spring and summer. Such areas provided significant food resources, many of which are still present here. These are primarily edible roots including several *Lomatium* species, bitterroot and yellow bell, fruits such as service berries and chokecherries, and game animals. Territorial "boundaries" in the uplands of the Plateau were generally not well defined, so resources were likely shared with neighboring groups including the Spokane. In addition to the native food plants harvested in the uplands, this area offers access to water and water-related resources at Crab Creek.

Although representatives of the various fur trading companies probably passed through the Crab Creek area, permanent Euro-American settlement here did not occur until the 1870s. Early settlers favored Crab Creek's floodplain. Many of the earliest settlers were primarily stock raisers. Markets for less portable products were not easily accessible until railroads reached the area in the 1890s. This connection with national markets encouraged a transition to dry land wheat farming. Although the first Euro-American settlement on Crab Creek preceded most such settlement in what is now Lincoln County, this section of Crab Creek was unsettled as late as 1873 when General Land Office surveyors came through the area. Their plat maps and survey notes indicate a short stretch of "Indian trail" in the northwest quarter of Section 26, but show no cultural features in the grazing allotment area. The Crab Creek floodplain provided a level route for the Great Northern Railroad when track was laid in the 1890s.

Alternative 1: If the two-week grazing period in Pasture 1 were the first week in March, the effects would be comparable to the present effect (basically Alternative 2). Grazing in February in Pastures 1 and 2 could allow upland plant communities there, including native food plants, to maintain or improve their present condition. Reduced levels of grazing could result in less disturbance and erosion on any archaeological resources that may be present here.

Alternative 2: The present condition of native plants, including food plants, would be unchanged from present effects. Effects on any archaeological material, if present, would be unchanged..

Alternative 3: Absence of grazing would remove livestock-related impacts, possibly allowing native plant communities to maintain or improve their present condition. Absence of grazing could result in less disturbance and erosion on any archaeological material that may be present on the parcel.

Impacts on Cultural/Native American

Alternative 1: The reduction in grazing use proposed in Alternative 1 would reduce the availability of edible roots for harvest in Pasture 2. Grazing during March and April could result in consumption of the identifiable above-ground parts of these plants, possibly reducing chances of locating traditional plants. The grazing rotation may allow upland plant communities, including native food plants, to maintain or improve their present condition. Reduced levels of grazing may result in less disturbance and erosion on any archaeological resources that may exist here.

Alternative 2: The present condition of native plants, including food plants, would be unchanged. Effects on any archaeological material, if present, would be unchanged.

Alternative 3: Native plant communities on the allotment would maintain or improve their present condition. The absence of grazing would result in less disturbance and erosion on any archaeological material that may be present on the parcel.

Recreation

The allotment area is within a dispersed recreation area and is also highly valued for its scenic qualities as part of the Channeled Scablands. Because the allotment area is surrounded by private land, public use that occurs on the allotment (hunting of upland birds and waterfowl, and deer) is limited due to lack of public access.

Impacts on Recreation

None of the alternatives are expected to impact current recreational uses of the area.

Socioeconomic

The economic value of this grazing lease is approximately \$50 per year at current BLM animal unit month costs.

Impacts on Socioeconomics

Under the action alternatives (Alternatives 1 and 2), the BLM would receive \$50 annually in grazing fees. Under Alternative 3, there would be a loss of \$50 in receipts in the grazing program, and the local community would lose approximately 25 animal unit months of forage.

Other Resource Elements Analyzed

Environmental Justice: No disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority or low-income populations are expected to result from implementation of any of the alternatives addressed in this EA.

Other Resource Elements: Other resource values or elements considered in analyzing the alternatives included:

- Air quality
- Paleontological resources
- Wild and scenic rivers
- Prime/unique farmlands
- Special area designations
- Wilderness
- Hazardous/solid materials

Air quality would not be affected, and none of the other elements listed above occur on the allotment.

Cumulative Impacts

This allotment is part of the Upper Crab Creek subbasin (1,172,104 acres), which consists of only slightly more than 4 percent of BLM-managed lands (51,267 acres) in the subbasin. Of the 51,267 acres managed BLM within the sub-basin, approximately 40,756 acres are managed as grazing allotments (see Map 2). Most private land within the sub-basin is used for commercial production of various agricultural products.

The acreage in the Irby Allotment represents less than one percent of the BLM-administered lands in the sub-basin, and only about half of one percent of public lands in grazing allotments in the sub-basin. Although a small parcel, the Irby Allotment is of local importance in that it provides some important habitat for local plants and animals. The timing, use levels, and duration of grazing, as well as the monitoring and various provisions are expected to protect important resource values. The actions should not contribute cumulatively to any substantive impact on any resource value.

Coordination With Other Agencies, Groups, and Individuals

This allotment management plan and environmental assessment was prepared by an interdisciplinary team of BLM resource specialists.

Consultation was initiated with the following:

- Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation
- Spokane Tribe of Indians
- Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation

The environmental analysis process involved coordination with the grazing permittee (Eugene Wraspir).

Availability of the EA for public review and comment will be announced through a legal publication in the Davenport Times newspaper in Lincoln County, as well as a news release to the Odessa Record newspaper. The EA will also be placed on the Spokane BLM website at www.or.blm.gov/spokane. Copies of the EA will be mailed for review and comment to the grazing permittee, the tribes listed above, and other individuals or groups who have expressed specific interest in the allotment.