

Notice of Decision
Grazing Permit Renewals
United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Baker Resource Area
3165 10th Street, Baker City, Oregon 97814

Notice is hereby given that on August 28, 2001, Penelope Dunn Woods, Baker Resource Area Field Manager, Bureau of Land Management, issued a decision to authorize the renewal of six (6) grazing permits within Baker County, Oregon. This decision authorizes the renewal of these grazing permits for a 10-year period. New or additional mitigation requirements to authorize livestock grazing under each permit have been identified and will be incorporated into the terms and condition section of each grazing permit. Implementation of this action(s) may start as soon as the appeal/protest period is completed.

This decision is consistent with the BLM's 1989 Baker Resource Management Plan, the Standards For Rangeland Health (August, 1997) and is in accordance with 43CFR 4130.2. The grazing allotments associated with these permits are located within Townships 7 through 13, South, Range 40 through 44 East, of the Baker Resource Area and vary in size from 21 acres to 11,402 acres. A copy of the Decision Record may be obtained by writing to the Baker Resource Area, Bureau of Land Management, 3165 10th Street, Baker City, Oregon 97814 or by calling (541) 523-1438.

For a period of 30 days from the date of publication of this notice in the Baker City Herald, this decision shall be subject to protest and/or appeal (43 CFR Part 4). Interested parties may protest this decision by providing written comment or objections to the Baker Resource Area Field Manager, at the above Baker City address. Protests/appeals must be filed within the 30 day time period to be considered.

Dated:__August 28, 2001_**Baker Resource Area Field Manager:**_ /s/ Penelope Dunn Woods_

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR
GRAZING PERMIT #366210**

EA #OR035-01-09

Bureau of Land Management
Vale District
Baker Resource Area

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Environmental Assessment for Grazing Lease #366210

INTRODUCTION

This environmental assessment (EA) addresses grazing permit #366210, which is administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Baker Resource Area, Vale District BLM. The lands are located approximately 12 miles northeast of Baker City, Oregon in Baker County (see map).

PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action is to reissue a ten year grazing permit for grazing permit #366210.

- ! Adds additional terms and conditions to the permit (see mitigation measures).
- ! Continue grazing rotations, season of use, and stocking rates.
- ! Continue management practices such as pasture rotations, salting, riding, and range improvement maintenance.

PURPOSE AND NEED

This EA is to evaluate the renewal of grazing permit #366210 for a maximum of 10 years. When grazing permits expire, the authorized officer determines if the applicant is in substantial compliance with the terms and conditions of the existing Federal grazing permit for which renewal is sought (43 CFR 4110.1(b)(1)). The authorized officer may take into consideration circumstances beyond the control of the applicant in determining whether the applicant is in substantial compliance with permit terms and conditions and applicable rules and regulations (43 CFR 4110.1(b)(1)(ii)).

Reissuing this permit would authorize 343 AUMs active use and 26 AUMs suspended non-use for a total of 369 AUMs in the Salt Creek Allotment #2019, 420 AUMs active use and 169 AUMs suspended non-use for a total of 589 AUMs in the Crews Creek Allotment #2020, and 150 AUMs active use in the Seeding Allotment #2021.

BACKGROUND

This grazing permit encompasses three allotments Salt Creek #2019, Crews Creek #2020, and Seeding #2021 (see maps). These are individual allotments, which means there is only one permittee authorized to graze livestock in the allotments. These allotments are normally grazed in a spring and fall rotation. These allotments are located in the Baker County Miscellaneous Geographic Unit (GU) and are scheduled for standard and guide inventory and assessment in 2007. No new range improvement projects are proposed at this time in any of the allotments.

Salt Creek Allotment contains 2,017 acres of public land and 2,447 acres of private land. Most of the blocked-up public lands are in the north pasture, and where BLM administration is more intense. This is a maintain category allotment where satisfactory management has already been achieved.

Crews Creek Allotment contains 2,996 acres of public land and 962 acres of private land. The allotment has three pastures which are grazed in a rotation with the north pasture of Salt Creek. The private land is located in the south pasture. This is an “Improve” category allotment that has the potential for resource improvements.

Seeding allotment contains 400 acres of public land and is categorized a maintain allotment. This allotment was seeded to crested wheatgrass in the mid-1960's.

Historically, the Powder River system supported native runs of steelhead and chinook salmon. Construction of the dams on the Powder River (Thief Valley) and the Snake River (Brownlee, Oxbow and Hells Canyon Dams) currently prevents any passage of anadromous fish. Bull trout have been identified upstream, above the dam in the North Powder River drainage and tributaries (ODFW 1994). There are unconfirmed reports of isolated sightings of bull trout below the dam and in the Big Creek drainage.

The Powder River has been stocked with fish, at Thief Valley reservoir and downstream in the main Powder River. The rainbow fishery below the dam is totally dependent on discharge water flows from the dam. As the flows are regulated by the dam, the fishery varies dramatically (USDI, 1994). There is some natural reproduction of native trout although fish production is limited. Redband trout, however, is the principal native fish that exists in the Powder River and its tributaries, especially since the tributaries have never been stocked with fish. Redband trout is listed as “sensitive” by the BLM.

DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES

Two alternatives are analyzed in this EA: Alternative 1 (Not to issue grazing permit) and Alternative 2 (Continue present grazing with additional terms and conditions).

Alternative 1 - Not to issue grazing permit

Under this alternative, grazing permit #36621 would not be reissued. This would not authorize grazing on the public lands. The private lands within these allotments could be grazed, but some livestock barrier to public lands would be required.

Alternative 2 - Continue present grazing with additional terms and conditions

The proposed action is to reissue permit #366210 for 343 AUMs active use and 26 AUMs suspended non-use in the Salt Creek Allotment, 420 AUMs active use and 169 AUMs suspended non-use in the Crews Creek Allotment, and 150 AUMs active use in the Seeding Allotment.

Additional terms and conditions would follow appropriate Department of Interior guidelines to maintain and enhance existing sage grouse habitat, protection of historic and archaeological properties, and implement riparian utilization standards.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Soils, Water, and Vegetation

Rangeland Soils:

The allotments have many soil phases depending on slope, stoniness, degree of erosion, and other characteristics that affect their use. Dominant soils are on a 2 to 35 percent slope, receive 9 to 12 inches of precipitation, and are shallow to moderately deep and well drained.

Water Resources:

Salt Creek and Crews Creek are tributaries to the Powder River. They all flow into the Duncan or Basche Ditches before flowing into the Powder River, below the Thief Valley Reservoir and the Wild and Scenic section of the river.

Stream temperatures were monitored in the Powder River in 1995-96 by the Baker Valley Irrigation and the Soil and Water Conservation Districts. There were several monitoring points on the river. The monitoring station right below the Thief Valley Reservoir had a high stream temperature of 71.4 on August 2, 1995.

The Powder River is listed on Oregon State DEQ 303-D list for Water Quality Limited streams for: excessive stream temperatures, flow modifications, dissolve oxygen, and fecal coliform (DEQ 1996).

Vegetation:

Wyoming big sagebrush is the dominant shrub component with an understory grass cover of bluebunch wheatgrass, Idaho fescue, or needle and thread grass. Crested wheatgrass was seeded in two of the three allotments.

Whitetop is the primary noxious weed of concern in these three allotments. Minimal treatment is planned due to the widespread nature of whitetop in the Keating area. There is some chance of either yellow starthistle and/or diffuse knapweed being discovered in the Seeding Allotment 2021 due to its close proximity to known populations of these two noxious weed species. These sites will be treated if discovered as time and funds allow.

There are no federally listed threatened, endangered, or candidate plant species known or likely to occur in the vicinity of these allotments.

These allotments have not been completely surveyed for BLM special status plants. Based on historic records, only one BLM data tracking species, *Astragalus atratus* var. *owyheensis*, the Owyhee milkvetch, is known to occur in the vicinity. This species occurs scattered in the understory of sagebrush habitat.

Surveys for other special status plant species have not been completed. Perennial and intermittent streams may provide habitat for several BLM special status species which are generally restricted to riparian habitats. All stream channels in these allotments have intermittent or seasonal (ephemeral) flows. Wetland habitats are limited in extent. These habitats are typically heavily used and altered by historic grazing pressure associated with use of adjacent uplands.

Impacts on Soil, Water, and Vegetation

Alternative 1: With no grazing, upland and riparian vegetation and litter would likely increase in cover. Desired future conditions could be obtained in shorter time frame without livestock grazing.

Alternative 2 - Proposed Action: Grazing livestock affect soil resources primarily by removing protective plant materials and compacting the soil surface. These actions tend to reduce soil infiltration rates and increase surface runoff. The result is greater surface soil losses during major precipitation events (summer cloud bursts).

Wetland/riparian habitats throughout the allotments will continue to be degraded over the near term unless utilization standards are adjusted to protect small inclusions of wetland habitats. Riparian habitats will continue to offer limited capability to support populations of special status plant species.

Owyhee milkvetch is normally not grazed by livestock, and is unlikely to be impacted by continuation of grazing.

The impacts to rangeland vegetation are generally slight and site specific. Rangeland vegetation diversity, ecological condition, and vigor would remain unchanged for the majority of the area.

WILDLIFE HABITAT

Allotment 2019 is located in deer winter range and is adjacent to crucial deer winter range. The Powder River Canyon is an important wintering habitat area for bald eagles.

There is an active greater sage grouse lek located on one of the allotments under this permit. Sage grouse are a Bureau sensitive species and management guidelines for Bureau Sensitive species (BLM Manual 6840) dictate that actions on federal lands do not contribute to the need to list wildlife species on the Endangered Species List.

Impacts on Wildlife Habitat

Alternative 1: Immediate impacts associated with eliminating grazing on these allotments would be the increase in winter forage for mule deer in the area. Because of the lack of competition for winter forage, the health of the deer population in the area would increase. Eliminating grazing on public land would potentially concentrate grazing on private lands. Therefore, deer would concentrate use on public lands where higher quality and quantity of winter forage would occur.

Impacts to greater sage grouse would be the increase in forb species that sage grouse young rely on during their first few months of development. In addition, grass species would continue to increase in quantity and height, increasing the quality and quantity of suitable nesting and brood rearing habitat.

Impacts to bald and golden eagles and other raptor species in the area would be minimal. Disturbance to raptors using the area would decrease, however, there is very little disturbance to raptors in the area at this time associated with grazing.

Alternative 2: Impacts to deer in the area associated with continuing the current grazing management practices would maintain the current situation. Deer and cattle would continue to compete for winter forage. Winter forage in the area would be maintained at its current level, with a high potential for decreasing. The status of the deer population in the area would not change unless restrictions to grazing did occur with further analysis from Rangeland Health Standards and Guides. Utilization standards should be monitored closely to maintain important winter forage for wintering mule deer and management activities with the allotment should continue to minimize impacts on winter forage.

Impacts to greater sage grouse in the area would be minimal. Continued grazing use in the fall would not impact breeding sage grouse, because breeding does not occur during this time. However, continued grazing in and around the lek would exacerbate the continued encroachment of sage brush and other shrubs. Eventually the lek would be unusable by sage grouse because of the over abundant amount of sage brush. Projects associated with reducing sage brush cover on the leks would mitigate this situation.

Because grazing occurs during the fall when raptor species in the area are less sensitive to disturbance, there is minimal impacts associated with this alternative on raptors. Management actions within this area should be consistent with maintaining the quality of the habitat for raptors.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Most of the BLM allotments have not been intensively surveyed for cultural resources. Proposed ground disturbing range projects are inventoried and typically designed to avoid potential impacts to cultural resources. Four lithic scatters, isolated lithics, rock alignments and historic structures are recorded on BLM land in the three allotments.

Alternative 1 (No Grazing): This alternative would avoid impacts of stock grazing on any archaeological materials in the area.

Alternative 2: Riparian fences and rotation of cattle reduce trampling of streambanks, which avoids disturbance to areas having more likelihood for cultural occurrence. Although dispersed livestock grazing generally has little observable effect on cultural resources, livestock congregation may trample surface sites, especially near older spring developments which are not well maintained or properly functioning. Depending upon the season of use for particular pasture, stock may congregate at or near sites proximate to water sources for short periods of time during the grazing rotation. Known sites would be monitored for such impacts. High probability riparian areas and older spring developments (for example those installed in the early 1970s) would be examined for cultural resources and proper functioning as part of the review for standards and guidelines for rangeland health. If disturbance to important sites is observed, the location would be removed from grazing or protected by enclosure fencing, salting, riding or other corrective measures such as ensuring that older range developments are properly located and maintained to achieve cultural resource objectives.

CULTURAL PLANT HABITAT

The allotment is located within the traditional use area of the Paiute, Umatilla, Walla Walla and Cayuse Tribes. Habitat for riparian berry-producing plants occurs along stream bottoms and for dry land native root plants on rocky ridges in the Powder River watershed.

Impacts on Cultural Plant Habitat

Alternative 1: This alternative would avoid impacts of grazing on native plants.

Alternative 2: Rotation of cattle and riparian fencing lessens impacts on native food plants, although grazing may remove distinctive root plant foliage. This area is not a regular known plant gathering site, so impacts on opportunities for harvesting native food plants are expected to be minimal.

RECREATION

The primary recreational uses are hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding, hiking, and off roading on existing 4x4 trails.

Impacts on Recreation

Alternatives 1 and 2: There would be slight to no impacts on recreationists, since there are no developed campsites. Livestock grazing in one pasture and elk hunting season occur at the same time, but this pasture is not normally inhabited by elk.

SOCIOECONOMICS

These allotments are grazed in conjunction with private lands to form a continuous livestock operation. The public lands are used to mainly provide spring and fall grazing.

Impacts on Socioeconomics

Alternative 1: This would result in permittee having to find other spring and fall pasture or reduce livestock numbers.

Alternative 2: The impact to the permittee would remain unchanged.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

The cumulative effects analysis considers past, present and future actions within the allotment. Cumulative impacts of the proposed action, when considered within the larger region, or across a longer time period may occur. The most pronounced impacts would be related to continued removal of a portion of the annual palatable plant production. This may impact the numbers of wildlife species that can survive in the region which rely on the forage, seeds, or cover that the palatable plants provide. A second impact may be to the frequency and size of fires that occurs in the region. Continued removal of the fine fuels could reduce the fire size and frequency, and promote the dominance by woody species, which may be detrimental to the herbaceous species and wildlife species that are associated with their presence, however could enhance habitat for woody dependent wildlife species. Managed grazing that allows rest during some periods throughout the grazing season, and provides for good livestock distribution may limit adverse cumulative impacts to vegetation from grazing.

MITIGATION

These additions will be made to the grazing permit:

- ! Utilizations standards for riparian habitat
- ! Protection of historic and archaeological properties
- ! Interim guidelines for active sage grouse leks

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitoring would be done each year during the grazing season to ensure compliance with the grazing time frames and to check the condition of resource values for possible changes in the grazing use.

A Rangeland Health Determination addressing the five Rangeland Standards will be conducted in the year 2007. Other new data on resource values or concerns would be used for evaluation.

A fish presence and absence survey has not been completed for any of the creeks in the allotment. The Powder River has had several surveys for fish presence, one of which was completed by ODFW in 1996. Bull trout, brook trout and brook/bull trout hybrids were confirmed above the dam. Redband and rainbow trout are the largest fish found below the dam. Other fish species in the river include redband shiners, suckers and dace.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

The following resources were all considered in preparation of this EA and are either not present or would not be affected by the proposed action:

	Affected	
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Air Quality		X
ACEC/Wilderness		X
Environmental Justice		X
Prime/Unique Farmlands		X
Floodplain		X
Native America Religious Concerns		X
Threatened or Endangered Species		X
Wastes, Hazardous or Solid		X
Wild & Scenic Rivers		X

Interdisciplinary Analysis: Team members participating in the NEPA analysis and preparation of this document.

Name	Title
Rubel Vigil	Supervisory Natural Resource Specialist
Greg Miller	Wildlife Biologist
Clair Button	Botanist
Todd Kuck	Hydrologist
Mary Oman	Cultural/Archeologist
Kevin McCoy	Recreation/Wilderness Specialist
Jackie Dougan	Fisheries Specialist
Mike Woods	Weeds Specialist
Gene McLaughlin	Rangeland Management Specialist

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS/DECISION RECORD

On the basis of the information contained in this EA (OR-035-01-09), it is my determination that the proposed alternative and potential environmental and human consequences and mitigation measures does not constitute a major Federal action affecting the quality of the environment. Therefore, an EIS is not necessary and will not be prepared. I have determined that the proposed action is in conformance with the District's land use plan.

Authorized Official: _____

Date: _____

Penelope Dunn Woods
Field Manager
Baker Field Office

MITIGATION MEASURES/REMARKS

Utilization on upland grass species shall not exceed an average of 50% use in the South Crews Creek pasture and 60% in the other pastures on native and seeded grass species.

Two growing seasons rest will be required for areas that receive vegetation treatments or wildland fire events.

The BLM range conservationist will work with the permittee to find opportunities to allow portions of the allotment to receive occasional rest in order to increase plant vigor.

If human remains or historic, archaeological, or paleontological materials are found in the course of any allotment activities, the operator shall refrain from further activities that might impact the materials and contact the BLM.

Contact the BLM prior to any rangeland maintenance activity which would require soil surface disturbing activities.

Grazing will be done in a manner that does not encourage the establishment or spread of noxious weeds, or significant degradation of the native plant community. Permittee is not authorized to use chemical nor biological methods of control unless you have received prior approval from the Authorized Officer and have an approved Pesticide/Biological Use Proposal.

Grazing management changes will take place as needed to comply with Rangeland Health Standards and Guides Assessment.

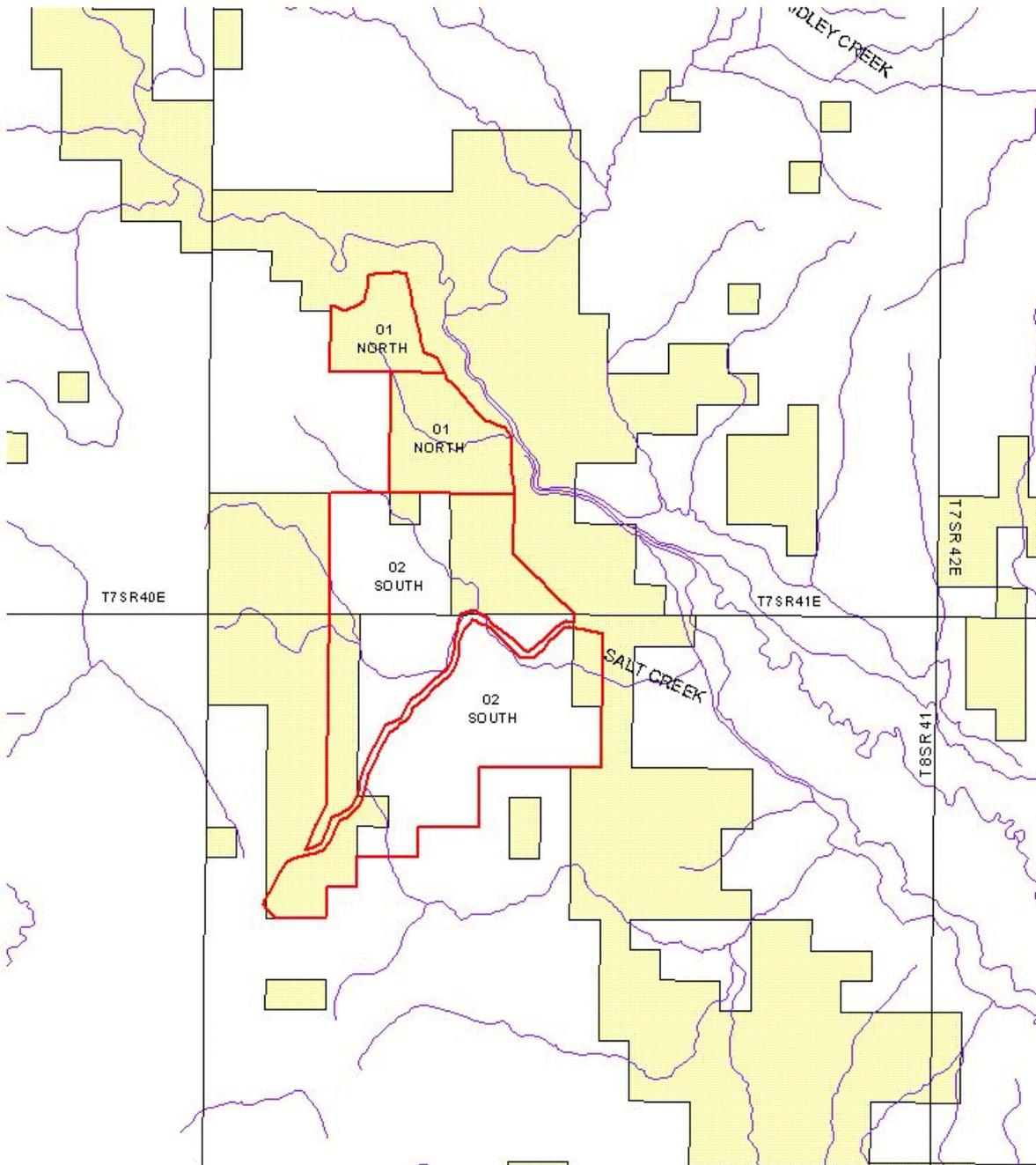
This permit would be reissued for 10 years, but could be modified as a result of information obtained from the Rangeland Health standard and guide analysis. Additional terms and conditions would be added for protection of historic and archaeological properties in compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended; the Archaeological Resources

Protection Act of 1979, as amended; and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990.

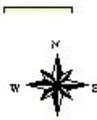
Active sage grouse leks would be managed according to interim guidelines established in the Greater Sage Grouse and Sagebrush-steppe Ecosystems Management Guidelines of August 21, 2000.

Riparian utilizations would not exceed 45% on herbaceous plant species and/or 30% on shrubs of the current year's growth.

Salt Creek Allotment 2019



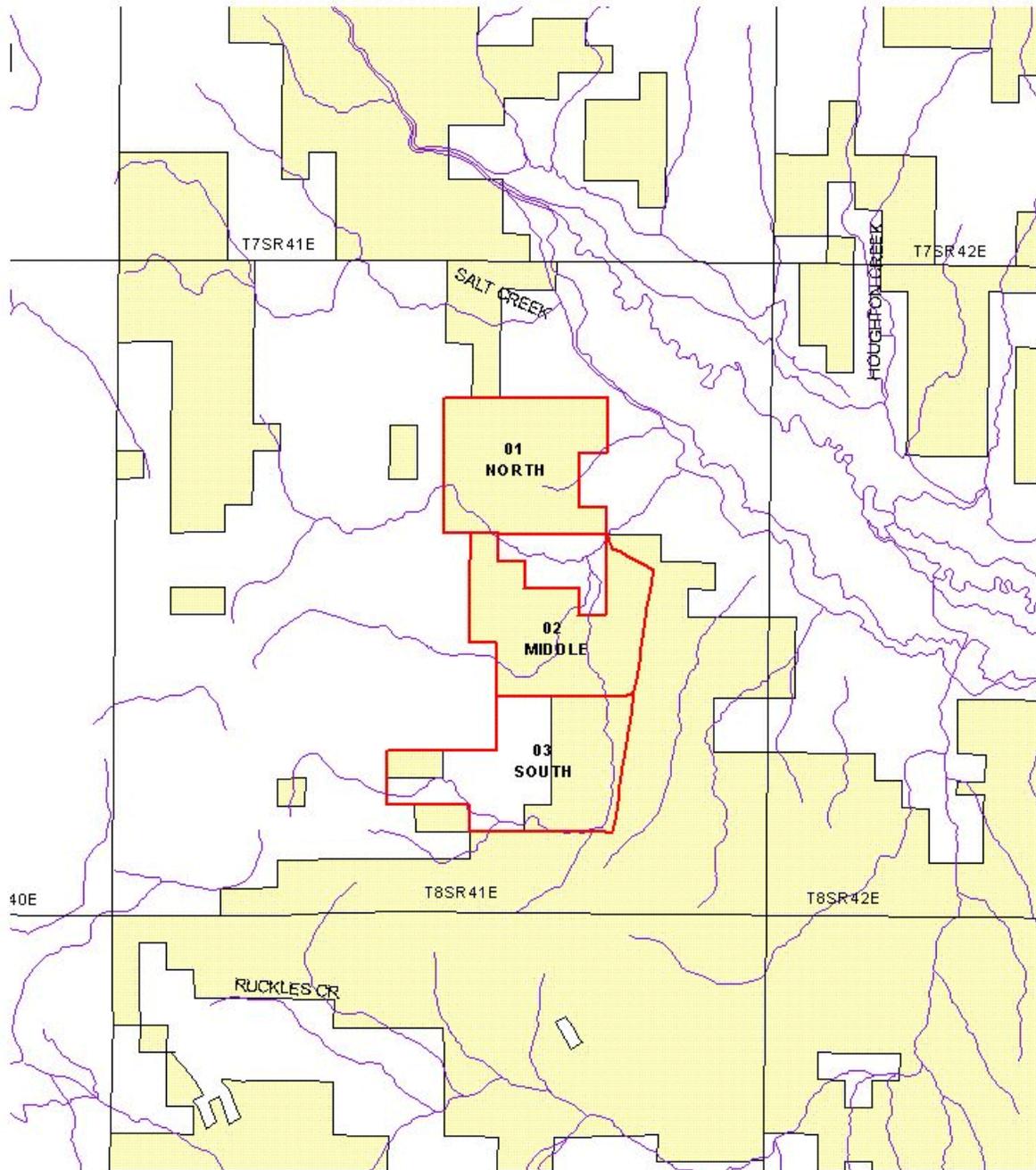
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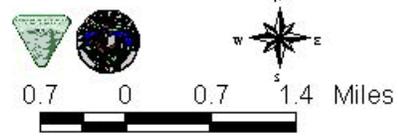
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- Range Allotment 2019
- ~ Streams
- Ownership
- Federal Regulatory Commission
- U.S. Forest Service
- Bureau of Land Management

Crews Creek Allotment 2020

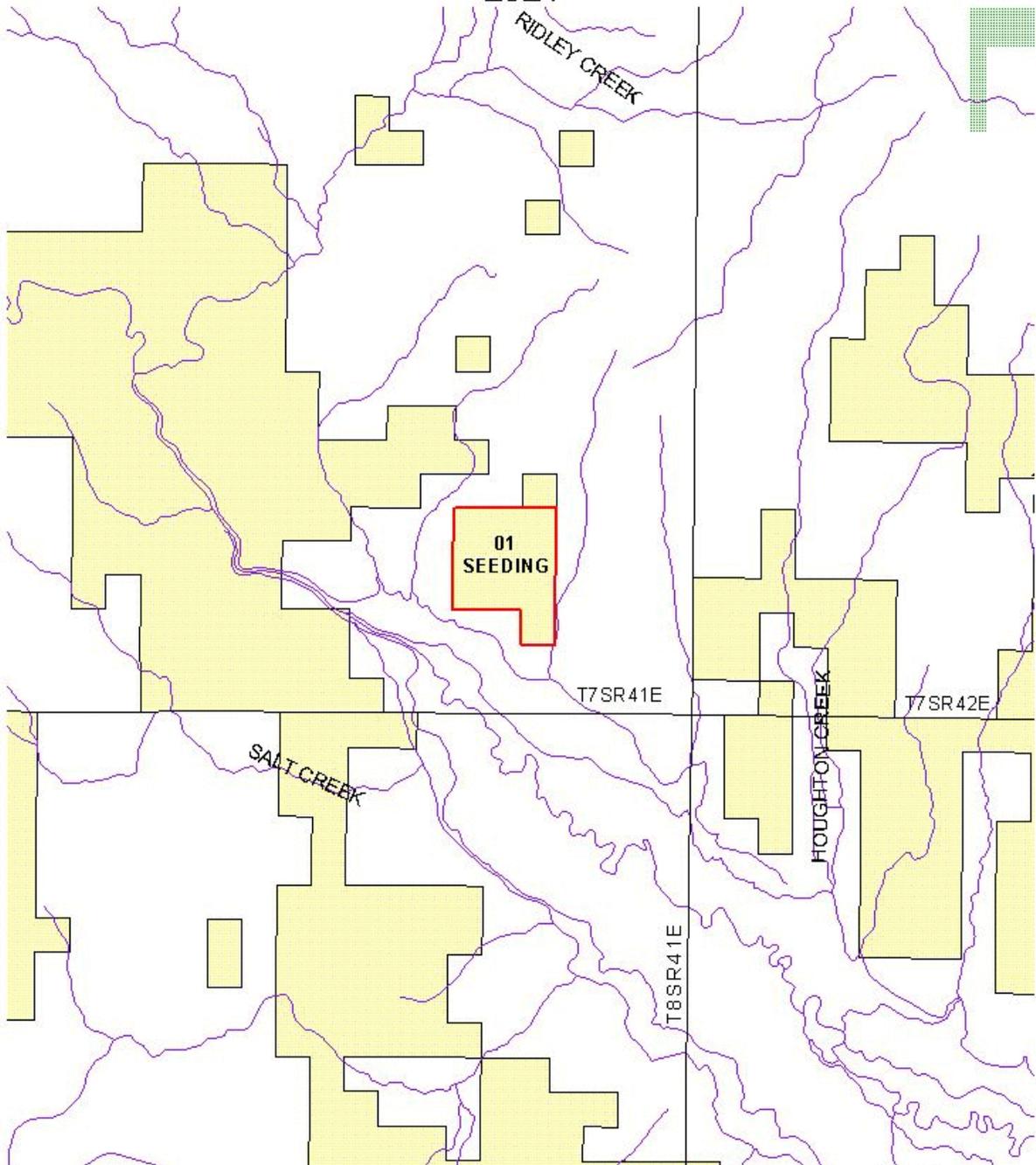


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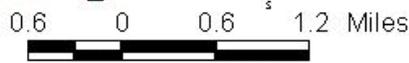


- Range Allotment 1069
- ~ Streams
- Ownership
- Federal Regulatory Commission
- U.S. Forest Service
- Bureau of Land Management

Seeding Allotment 2021



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-  Range Allotment 2021
-  Streams
- Ownership**
-  Federal Regulatory Commission
-  U.S. Forest Service
-  Bureau of Land Management

