

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
 BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
 Vale District Office
 Jordan Resource Area

INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM REVIEW RECORD

EA Number OR-030-02-023 **Date Submitted for Comment** October 1, 2003 **Complete Review**
Proposed Action Change Permit
Proposed Name Mackenzie Permit Change
Project Leader Andy Bumgarner

DISCIPLINE/NAME	DATE REVIEWED	INITIALS	REVIEW COMMENTS
Range & Wild horses Bumgarner			
Vegetation Bumgarner			
Botany & T&E Plants Findley			
Wildlife & T&E Animals Sadowski			
Fisheries Tait			
Soil/Water/Air Wenderoth			
Geology/Minerals Westfall			
Cultural Sudman			
Lands & Realty Manezes			
Recreation/Wild & Scenic River Christensen			
Wilderness Christensen			
Fire Management Hartwell			
Engineering & Force Acct. Pritchard			
Noxious Weeds Silva			
P&E Coordinator Sadowski			Final Review & Filing
Project Leader Bumgarner			Final EA & FONSI/Decision Record Preparation
Area Manager Taylor			Final EA Review & FONSI/Decision Preparation

This page is to be filed with the

AD/CE/EA & FONSI/DECISION RECORD
MACKENZIE PERMIT CHANGE
Environmental Assessment
EA # OR-030-02-023

BLM OFFICE: Vale District, Jordan Resource Area

PROPOSED ACTION: Modify the Mackenzie grazing permit to allow grazing to occur until March 30th.

LOCATION: Morcum Allotment

APPLICANT: Duncan Mackenzie

CONFORMANCE WITH APPLICABLE LAND USE PLAN

This proposed action is subject to the following land use plans:
Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision (SORMP), September 2002
Main, West Little and North Fork Owyhee National Wild and Scenic Rivers Management Plan and
Environmental Assessment, September 1993.

These plans have been reviewed to determine if the proposed action conforms with the land use plan terms and conditions as required by 43 CFR 1610.5. Grazing management will continue according to plan objectives determined under the previous land use plan.

NEED FOR PROPOSED ACTION

The primary need for the proposed action is to facilitate livestock management for the permittee between the Morcum Allotment (see attached map) of the Jordan Resource Area and the Birch Creek Allotment of the Malheur Resource Area. Approving this permit change would allow the operator to better manage his cattle herd in conjunction with his neighboring BLM permit. Currently, the authorized use in the Morcum Allotment is during the winter only period 11/1-2/28 with 54 cattle. The permittee has requested to change his permit to reflect the authorized dates of 12/1 -3/30 with 54 cattle. This time frame accommodates the permittee and his ranching operation while having no adverse effects on the allotment.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

A. Alternative I: Proposed Action

The proposed action is to change the permittee's ten year grazing permit to authorize the following grazing

Date	Head Number	AUM'S

12/1 to 3/30	54 C/C	213
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The current authorized livestock use in the pasture is

Date	Head Number	AUM'S
11/1 to 2/28	54 C/C	213
11/1 to 11/30	1 C/C	1

The SEORMP shows the Morcum Allotment to be in the custodial category. Authorization of the proposed use will have no new or adverse effects on the allotment.

The attached map shows the location of the Morcum Allotment.

B. Alternative II

The permit will not be changed.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Vegetation

Approximately seventy five percent of the landscape surrounding the Morcum Allotment is dominated by bluebunch wheatgrass (*Pseudoroegneria spicata*), and Wyoming big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata sp. wyomingensis*). Other remnant plant species in the allotment that make up approximately twenty five percent are cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) and Sandberg bluegrass (*Poa sandbergi*). These species are prominent in the lower elevations of the allotment which historically were private property and received greater amounts of disturbance. Woody species such as coyote willow (*Salix exigua*) exist along the banks of the Owyhee River, and yellow willow (*Salix lutea*) occurs in two draws which contain springs. Most precipitation occurs during the winter and spring. The growing season is approximately 100 days occurring in March, April, May, and June. Spring green up can occur from February 15 to April 15 depending upon the year. The key species for the allotment is bluebunch wheatgrass. The critical growing period for bluebunch wheatgrass is March 15th through July 1st which is also dependent upon the year.

Soils and Water Resources

Soils

General soils found in the Morcum Allotment were surveyed and described in Oregon's Long Range Requirements for Water 1969, Appendix I-12, Malheur Lake Drainage Basin . The project area consists mainly of three soil mapping units from this fourth-order soil survey; 84-83-82/5-6, 96-98/5-6, and 76/2-3. The three units incorporate six classification units that occur in various percentages have four slope groups that range between 7 to 60 + percent.

Unit 84-83-82/5-6

Unit 84 soils with about 30 percent Unit 83 soils and 20 percent Unit 82 soils, 35-60+ percent slopes.

Unit 96-98/5-6

Unit 96 (rock land) with about 30 percent Unit 98 (steep raw sediments, 35-60+ percent slopes).

Unit 76/2-3

Unit 76, 7-20 percent slopes.

Classification Unit 76

Soils are shallow, clayey, very stony, well drained soils over basalt, rhyolite, or welded tuff. They occur on gently undulating to rolling lava plateaus and some very steep faulted and dissected terrain. Soils occur at elevations from 3,500 to 6,500 feet and stones limit potential for range seeding. Average annual precipitation ranges from 8 to 11 inches, and mean annual air temperature centers around 47 degrees F. The soil profile by depth consist of gray very stony silt loam, brown stony silty clay, to brown stony and channery heavy silty clay loams over fractured bedrock at 18+ inches. Native vegetation consists mostly of bluebunch wheatgrass, Sandberg bluegrass, big and low sagebrush.

Classification Unit 82

Soils are moderately deep, loamy, well drained soils derived from thin loess over basalt or rhyolite bedrock. They are on mostly northerly slopes on gently to very steeply sloping terrain. Elevations range from 4,500 to 7,500 feet. Average annual precipitation is from 11 to 15 inches, and mean annual air temperature centers around 43 degrees F. The soil profile by depth consist of silt loams to stony silt loams. Native vegetation consists mostly of Idaho fescue, bluebunch wheatgrass, and big sagebrush.

Classification Unit 83

Soils are shallow, very stony, well drained soils over basalt, rhyolite, or welded tuff. They occur on gently undulating to rolling lava plateaus with some very steep faulted and dissected terrain. Soils occur at elevations mostly above 5,000 feet. Average annual precipitation is from 11 to 15 inches, and mean annual air temperature centers around 43 degrees F. The soil profile by depth consist of very stony silt loam, stony silty clay loam, to stony silty clay. Native vegetation consists mostly of Idaho fescue, bluebunch wheatgrass, Sandberg bluegrass, and big sagebrush.

Classification Unit 84

Soils are very shallow, very stony, rocky, well drained soils over basalt, rhyolite, or welded tuff. They occur on gently undulating to rolling plateaus and very steep canyon lands and escarpments. Soils occur at elevations mostly above 5,000 feet. Average annual precipitation is from 11 to 15 inches, and mean annual air temperature centers around 43 degrees F. The soil profile by depth consist of very stony gravelly loam to stony gravelly loam. Native vegetation consists mostly of bluebunch wheatgrass, Idaho fescue, Sandberg

bluegrass, big and low sagebrush.

Classification Unit 96 (Rock land)

This is a miscellaneous land unit consisting of rough, steeply sloping areas that are predominantly shallow, very stony soils interspersed with rock outcroppings. Steep Rock land occurs mainly as canyons and escarpments along margins and dissected portions of lava plateaus.

Classification Unit 98 (Steep raw sediments)

This is a miscellaneous land unit consisting of highly eroded and dissected raw old lacustrine sediments occurring as “badlands”. Vegetation cover is very sparse.

The majority of the area in the allotment from the Owyhee River and 2/3 of the way upslope to the top of the rim is comprised of Unit 96-98/5-6, while the remaining land below the rim consists of Unit 84-83-82/5-6. One small bench in the northeastern portion of the allotment consists of Unit 76/2-3. Additional soil inclusions can be found throughout the project area.

Water Resources

The Morcum Allotment is bounded along most of its northern edge by the perennial flowing Owyhee River. The interior of the allotment is comprised of numerous small first and second order ephemeral to intermittent flowing drainages scattered throughout and drain into the Owyhee River. In addition to the Owyhee River, Twomile Spring and a spring area in a drainage within the Deer Park area are the only major perennial water sources within the allotment.

Air Quality

Air quality is considered to be very good in the area.

Noxious Weeds

Known weeds within the allotment include many annuals often associated with abandoned farmland, i.e., mustard species, kochia (*Kochia scoparia*), Russian thistle (*Salsola iberica*) and cheatgrass. Small sites of Scotch thistle (*Onopordum acanthium*), an aggressive biennial, have been found along roads and the Owyhee River within the allotment, as have small sites of whitetop (*Cardaria draba*), perennial pepperweed (*Lepidium latifolium*), and Russian knapweed (*Acroptilon repens*), all long-lived, invasive perennials.

Livestock

The Morcum Allotment (#10907) is located North West of Jordan Valley Oregon. The allotment lies within the Owyhee Breaks (OR-3-59) and Lower Owyhee Canyon (OR-3-110) wilderness study areas. It is bordered on the North West by approximately 10 miles of the Owyhee Wild and Scenic River.

The topography of the Morcum Allotment ranges from impassable rock rims to flat river bottoms with rolling to steep slopes in between. Elevation ranges from 2,800 feet to 4,400 feet.

The Morcum Allotment is one pasture containing 6,033 acres and has one authorized permittee (Duncan Mackenzie). Mr. Mackenzie is currently authorized to graze 54 CC from 11/1 to 2/28 and 1CC from 11/1 to 11/30, for a total of 214 active AUM's. Cattle water out of the Owyhee River and two perennial springs. Both springs are located approximately one half mile up from the river at 3,100 feet elevation and are one quarter of a mile apart. There is one reservoir that holds water on wet years. Some cattle generally cross the ridge into the area know as Deer Park. The only water in this basin is spring runoff. The runoff is sufficient to water the cattle during the spring depending upon the year. When the runoff subsides the cattle are forced to move back to the other side of the ridge.

Wildlife

No recent wildlife survey work has been conducted within Morcom Allotment. However, based on habitat types present typical sagebrush steppe wildlife that likely occupy the proposed action area include the following; chukar partridge, greater sage-grouse, loggerhead shrike, brewers sparrow, mule deer, coyote, deer mouse, and sagebrush lizard. Northern bald eagles often winter within the Owyhee River which forms the northern boundary of the allotment. Upland habitat quality is generally considered to be good and it supplies the necessary habitat elements to support healthy and sustaining wildlife communities.

Special Status Species

Plants – No plant species listed under The Endangered Species Act occur in the allotment. However, sterile milk-vetch (*Astragalus sterilis*), a species listed by the state of Oregon as threatened, may occur in the area.

Fisheries and Aquatic Species - There are no listed Threatened, Endangered, or Candidate fish or other aquatic species, such as amphibians, in the affected area. Pacific treefrogs and possibly western toads may use the perennial springs or the margins of the Owyhee River for breeding. Bullfrogs are present but are not a protected species. Dominant Owyhee River fish species include smallmouth bass, channel catfish, large scale suckers, and carp.

Recreation and Visual Resources

The allotment falls within a visual resource management (VRM) class I area. This class provides for natural ecological changes and allows limited management activity. The level of change should be very low and must not attract attention. The only outstanding remarkable value (ORV) that is affected is recreation. Recreational pursuits in the allotment include whitewater boating, hunting, 4-wheel-drive touring/sightseeing, wildlife viewing and nature study. During the period primarily affected by the proposed action (i.e., the month of March), the main affected activity would be whitewater boating, since vehicular access is often troublesome at that time due to ground moisture, and hunting seasons are typically closed.

Regarding whitewater boating, flows for most of March allow such use, but the late winter/early spring weather extremes tend to keep most boaters away until days lengthen and daytime temperatures climb a bit higher.

Cultural Resources

Pre-European contact Native American peoples living in southeastern Oregon were entirely dependent upon the locally available food resources. As climatic fluctuations created population and habitat changes in the plant and animal communities, humans adjusted their hunting and gathering areas and their technology accordingly. The Native people of the Great Basin, who practiced the ancestral life ways into the 19th century, were heirs to an extremely ancient cultural tradition with a technology both effective and efficient, with many multi-functional, light-weight and expendable tools.

Exploration into this area during the Historic period began with the expeditions of John Jacob Aster, after he heard the stories from the Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1804-1806. The first written observations of southeastern Oregon can be found in journals kept by men involved in the expansion of fur trapping territory. Trapping occurred along the major and minor tributaries of the Owyhee River. The era of the fur trade provided the basis for American families to travel west.

Prehistoric and historic use of southeastern Oregon is documented by the archaeological record. Several archaeological excavations have generated information that establishes long-term human occupation in Malheur and Harney Counties. Excavations at five stratified spring sites indicate that prehistoric people occupied southeast Oregon from about 11,000 to 150 years ago. An excavation at the Dirty Shame rockshelter, on a tributary of the Owyhee River, documented occupation of the shelter from 9500 to 400 years ago.

Other Mandatory Elements

The following mandatory elements are either not present or would not be affected by the proposed action or alternatives:

	Affected	
<u>Critical Elements</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
ACES		X
Cultural Resources		X
Farmlands, Prime/Unique		X
Flood plain		X
Nat. Amer.Rel. Concerns		X
T & E Species		X
Wastes, Hazardous/Solid		X
Water Quality (Surface and Ground)		X

Wetlands/Riparian Zones	X
Wild and Scenic Rivers	X
Wilderness	X
Wildlife	X
Invasive, Non-native Species	X
Environmental Justice	X

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Alternative I: Proposed Action

The proposed action is to change the permittees grazing permit to authorize grazing from 12/1 to 3/30 with 54 CC for a total of 213 AUM’s.

Vegetation

According to BLM records dated as far back as 1991, utilization levels in this allotment have never exceeded 34% which is in the light utilization class. Approximately 90% of the normal light utilization occurs between 2,800 feet and 3,500 feet elevation, leaving the remaining upper elevations virtually ungrazed due to the lack of livestock water. The proposed change in grazing will sustain native plant communities and woody species while maintaining health and vigor. The following statements from the SEORMP Record of Decision that support the proposed action can be found on pages R-2, R-3, R-4, R-5 and R-6: “Generally, the vigor of key grass species can be sustained with light and moderate utilization.” “Light to moderate utilization of standing cured herbaceous vegetation is not detrimental to health and vigor of plants.” “Light to moderate utilization levels will retain adequate standing material and litter for soil protection from wind erosion, rainfall impact, and late winter and spring runoff.” “Minimal impacts to plant vigor and health occur with light to moderate utilization of early growth when adequate soil moisture is available for regrowth and completion of the annual growth cycle.” “Riparian vegetation communities are less vulnerable to negative impacts from livestock use during this season (spring).” This allotment has historically been grazed during the same time period that is being proposed; therefore, no new impacts would occur. Under the proposed action grazing could occur during a few weeks of the critical plant growth period. Cattle would, however, be removed in time to allow for sufficient regrowth for completion of the annual cycle prior to soil moisture depletion.

Soils

The proposed action would not create new or alter existing affects to soil and water resources by changing the timing of use within the allotment.

Air Quality

No impacts would occur to the air quality.

Noxious Weeds

There would be no new or different impacts for noxious weeds.

Livestock Grazing

The permittee owns private property approximately 12 miles from the Morcum Allotment. He grazes this property in the fall until the 1st of December. Some of the cattle grazing the private property are then taken to the Morcum Allotment. Currently, the permittee is also licensed to graze in the Birch Creek Allotment, Malheur Resource Area, which is directly adjacent to the Morcum Allotment. His permitted date to turn into the Birch Creek Allotment is April 1st. The proposed action of moving the off date in the Morcum Allotment to March 30th will allow the permittee to move his cattle directly to the adjacent Birch Creek Allotment. Approving the permit change would allow the permittee to better manage his livestock operation in conjunction with his neighboring allotment and private property.

Depending upon the year the Morcum Allotment can become virtually inaccessible due to mud and snow accumulation. Often times the only way to enter the allotment is along the Owyhee River from the Birch Creek Ranch. If the proposed action is approved, the change in dates will give the permittee better access to the allotment to improve livestock practices.

Wildlife

The proposed timing shift in grazing use would not be expected to appreciably impact the quality or amount of habitat currently available within Morcom Allotment. The minor change to grazing use proposed would not have any significant effects on bald eagles and therefore consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act would not be necessary.

Special Status Species

Plants – There would be no new or different impacts on special status plant species, should they be found at a latter time.

Fisheries and Aquatic Species - The proposed action would not detrimentally affect riparian areas or aquatic habitats. Early season and winter livestock use in riparian areas would allow for spring and summer regrowth of herbaceous plants, thereby ensuring adequate vegetation cover on banks and wetlands. Woody plant species, such as willows, that occur at the spring sites would be less palatable in early season and would sustain minimal livestock browse.

Recreation and Visual Resources

The proposed project would have slight visual impacts and potentially very slight recreation impacts. The change in grazing dates would probably expose a few recreating whitewater boaters to viewing cattle along the river during a time period (the month of March) when the river has typically been cattle-free. Very few boaters, either private or commercial, tend to float the Owyhee River in March, so negative effects upon the overall recreational experience are anticipated to be minimal.

Cultural Resources

The proposed action would have no additional effect on cultural properties in the project area.

B. Alternative II- No Action

Under this alternative the permit would remain as is, therefore no new impacts would occur.

Vegetation

No new or different impacts would occur to the vegetation.

Soils

Same as proposed action

Air Quality

There would be no impacts on the air quality of the area.

Noxious Weeds

No new or different impacts would occur to noxious weeds.

Livestock Grazing

Livestock grazing would continue with the current season of use creating a huge burden upon the permittee and his livestock operation.

Wildlife

Habitat quality for wildlife in Morcom Allotment would remain unchanged and in what is considered to be a generally good condition.

Special Status Species

Plants - Same as proposed action.

Fisheries and Aquatic Species – Same as proposed action.

Recreation and Visual Resources

Impacts to dispersed recreation activities and visual resources would remain the same as they are now.

Cultural Resources

The proposed action would have no additional effect on cultural properties in the project area.

MITIGATION MEASURES AND RESIDUAL IMPACTS

The authorization of this change in use would require periodic monitoring of average annual utilization and distribution to insure management objectives are met. The applicant would assure that utilization does not exceed the maximum allowable level (50%) for the pasture.

PERSONS CONSULTED

Mark Mackenzie, authorized representative for the livestock permittee.

BLM STAFF SPECIALISTS

Andy Bumgarner, Rangeland Management Specialist

Cynthia Tait, Fisheries Biologist

Jon Sadowski, Wildlife Biologist/T & E Animals

Brandon Knapton, Wildlife Biologist

Natalie Sudman, Archeologist

Jean Findley, Botanist

Susie Manezes, Reality Specialist

Jack Wenderoth, Soil/Air/Water

Tom Christensen, Recreation/Wilderness

Lynne Silva, Weeds Specialist

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS

I have reviewed EA, OR-030-02-023, and determined that the proposed action will not have any significant impacts on the human environment and that an EIS is not required. My rationale for this finding of no significant impacts is as follows. The proposed change would not cause detrimental affects to the vegetation. Grazing use would merely be made at a slightly different time during the same basic winter/spring grazing season. By March 31st, very little growth if any will have occurred, therefore minimizing the affects to the vegetation. Grazing at this time would normally occur outside of the growing season after plants are quiescent. A small amount of spring growth could occur if the lows were above freezing and the daily highs remained quite warm but would still be outside the critical growing season.

The proposed action would neither enhance nor degrade the wilderness study area values. Values such as primitiveness, unconfined recreation, solitude, species diversity, scenery, etc would still be available to the public and not affected by the proposed action. The manner and degree of use within the WSA would not be significantly changed. Soils, air quality, noxious weeds, wildlife, special status plant species, recreation, cultural resources, and areas of critical environmental concerns would not be affected.

Allowing this permit change is a reasonable action. No impacts were identified that would significantly affect any aspect of the human environment. I have determined that the proposed project is in conformance with the land use plan.

s/Susie K. Manezes, Acting Field Manager

September 30, 2003

Signature of Authorized Official

Date

