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AD/CE/EA & FONSI/DECISION RECORD
Jackies Butte TNR
Environmental Assessment
EA # OR-030-04-001

BLM OFFICE: Vale District, Jordan Resource Area
PROPOSED ACTION: Temporary Nonrenewable Grazing Application
LOCATION: Jackies Butte Summer Allotment (#01101)
APPLICANT: Robert J. Corbari, Jesse D. White, Kenneth Matteri, C.E. Dowell

CONFORMANCE WITH APPLICABLE LAND USE PLAN

This proposed action is in conformance with the Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision (SORMP), September 2002. Until an Oregon/Washington Standards and Guides assessment and evaluation of management strategy are conducted in the affected grazing allotment, stocking rates and seasons of use will continue as specified in the Preferred Land Use Alternative and Rangeland Program Summary. This plan has been reviewed to determine if the proposed action conforms with the land use plan terms and conditions as required by 43 CFR 1610.5.

LUP Name:	<u>Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision (SEORMP)</u>	Date Approved: <u>2002</u>
Other documents:	Southern Malheur Rangeland Program Summary (RPS)	Date Approved: <u>1984</u>
	Preferred Land Use Alternative Program Summary Update	Date Approved: <u>1983</u>

NEED FOR PROPOSED ACTION

The primary need for the proposed action is to provide livestock forage for the applicants and to invigorate decadent (wolfy), crested wheatgrass plants in the Rome South Pasture. The proposed action would also maintain the health and vigor of traditionally used seedings within the pasture. This request by the applicants is consistent with CFR 4130.6-2.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

A. Alternative I: Proposed Action

The proposed action is to issue temporary nonrenewable grazing authorizations to the above mentioned qualified applicants. This TNR application is for a one time shift of grazing use outside of the normal permitted grazing dates. The authorizations would be issued for temporary grazing within the Rome South Pasture of the Jackies Butte Summer Allotment (#01101). TNR would be authorized for 953 dry cows to graze 2,194 AUM's from November 7, 2003 to January 15, 2004. The proposed use, though outside the normal permitted end date, would be within the same season of use and would have no greater impact. This pasture is comprised mainly of crested wheatgrass seedings with some native range occurring on the outskirts of the pasture. Approving this permit request would allow the operators to better manage crested wheatgrass seedings within the Rome South Pasture (see attached map), of the Jackies Butte Allotment while taking advantage of available forage from this year. In the event that fall precipitation triggers the onset of crested wheatgrass growth (green-up), grazing use would be terminated.

Approximately 2,000 acres on the east side of the pasture has been identified as the most vulnerable vegetation to the proposed action. The 2,000 acres is located in a basin directly adjacent to the water gap to the Owyhee River and is mostly comprised of private property. It has been agreed upon by the applicants that when this basin reaches 60% utilization that cattle will be removed from the pasture. This will ensure that the total utilization of the pasture will not exceed 40%.

B. No Action Alternative

TNR would not be authorized.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Vegetation

Approximately sixty percent of the landscape within the Rome South Pasture is dominated by crested wheatgrass (*Agropyron cristatum*) seedings. Other remnant plant species in the allotment that make up approximately forty percent are bluebunch wheatgrass (*Pseudorogneria spicata*), bottlebrush squirreltail (*Elymus elymoides*), Wyoming big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata ssp. wyomingensis*), cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), and Sandberg bluegrass (*Poa sandbergi*). These species are prominent in the portions of the pasture which have not been seeded, and on private property which is checker-boarded throughout the Rome South Pasture. Most precipitation occurs during the winter and spring. The growing season is approximately 120 days occurring in March, April, May, and June. Spring green-up can occur from February 15 to April 15 depending upon the year. The critical growing period for crested wheatgrass is March 15th through August 1st which is also dependent upon the year. Old, decadent crested wheatgrass plants are common in the western half of the Rome South Pasture. These plants would be invigorated and greatly benefited by grazing.

Special Status Plant Species – No plant species listed under The Endangered Species Act occur in the allotment. No special status plants are known or suspected in the area.

Soils and Water Resources

Soils - Soils within the Rome South pasture were surveyed and described in Oregon's Long Range Requirements for Water 1969, Appendix I-11, Owyhee Drainage Basin. The pasture area mainly consist of five soil mapping units, described below, from this fourth-order soil survey. Soils within the pasture consist of shallow to moderately deep, mostly well drained, loamy sands to gravely heavy clay loams with some soils containing cemented pans at depths of about 20 inches. The effective rooting depth on soil Units 50, 55, 56, and 60 is shallow to moderately deep (10-20 inches) and is limited primarily by cemented pans, parent material or low annual precipitation. The five soil mapping units incorporate five classification units that occur in various percentages within each unit and have three slope groups that range between 1-20 percent.

Unit 55/2-3 and 55/4
3-20 percent slopes.

Unit 55-60/4
CU 55 soils with about 30 percent CU 60, 12-20 percent slopes.

Unit 94-60/4
CU 94 soils with about 30 percent CU 60, 12-20 percent slopes.

Unit 56/2-3
3-12 percent slopes.

Unit 50/1-2
1-3 percent slopes.

Classification Unit 50

Soils are shallow, somewhat excessively drained underlain by hardpan on nearly level old fans and terraces. Soils occur usually at elevations of 4,000 to 5,000 feet and have a some potential for range seeding. Average annual precipitation ranges from 8-10 inches and mean annual air temperature centers around 45 degrees F. The soil profile by depth consist of brown loamy sand, to brown sandy loam, to brown sandy loam, to silica cemented pan in a gravelly loam matrix 4 to 20 inches thick. Native vegetation consists of big sagebrush, Atriplex spp., budsage, rabbitbrush, horse brush, squirreltail grass, and neddlegrass.

Classification Unit 55

Soils are shallow, loamy, well drained with cemented pans on very extensive to moderately steep old fans and high terrace remnants. Soils occur usually at elevations of 3,000 to 5,500 feet and have a good potential for range seeding. Average annual precipitation ranges from 8-11 inches and mean annual air temperature centers around 47 degrees F. The soil profile by depth consist of brownish gray gravelly loam, to brown gravelly loam, to silica and lime cemented pan 6 to 20 inches thick over stratified loamy sand and gravel. Native vegetation consists of big sagebrush, low sagebrush, rabbitbrush, budsage, Atriplex spp., neddlegrass, Sandberg bluegrass, and squirreltail grass.

Classification Unit 56

Soils are shallow, well drained with clayey subsoils and cemented pans on very extensive, gently sloping to moderately steep old fans and high terrace remnants. Soils occur usually at elevations of 3,000 to 5,500 feet and have potential for range seeding limited by hardpan and slope. Average annual precipitation ranges from 8-11 inches and mean annual air temperature centers around 47 degrees F. The soil profile by depth consist of brownish gray gravelly loam, to light brown gravelly clay loam, to brown gravelly heavy clay loam, to silica cemented gravelly pan 6 to 20 inches thick over stratified loamy sand and gravel. Native vegetation consists of big and low sagebrush, rabbitbrush, budsage, shadscale, needlegrass, and squirreltail grass.

Classification Unit 60

Soils are moderately deep, fine textured, well drained soils over lacustrine sediments. They occur on gently sloping to hilly uplands. Elevations range from 2,500 to 4,000 feet. Average annual precipitation is on the low side of the 8 to 11 inch range, and mean annual air temperature centers around 47 degrees F. The soil profile by depth consist of loam, clay loam, and stratified clay loam and loam lacustrine sediments. Native vegetation consists of big sagebrush, rabbitbrush, bluebunch wheatgrass, and Sandberg bluegrass.

Classification Unit 94

Unit 94 is a miscellaneous land unit consisting of gently sloping to moderately steep raw old lake sediments where active erosion has prevented soil formation.

Water Resources

The Jackies Butte Allotment is bounded along most of its eastern 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 that drain into the Owyhee River.

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 Jackies Butte Summer Allotment (#01101) is located southwest of Rome Oregon. Currently, the authorized use in the Jackies Butte Summer Allotment is during the spring, summer, and fall period 4/1-10/31 with 2,180 cattle and 14,274 active AUM's. The allotment contains portions of the Owyhee River Canyon (OR-3-195) wilderness study area. It is bordered on the North and East by approximately 40 miles

of the Owyhee Wild and Scenic River. The Owyhee River is inaccessible to livestock and closed to grazing except for a water gap in the Rome South Pasture.

The topography of the Rome South Pasture consists of flat river bottoms and rolling hills and benches. Elevation ranges from 3,400 feet to 3,900 feet.

The Rome South Pasture contains 33,980 acres of which 58 percent is public domain and 42 percent is private property. The Jackies Butte Summer Allotment has a deferred use grazing system in which the Rome South Pasture is used in the fall two out of three years and in the spring one out of three years. The management objective for the Rome South Pasture, stated in the SEORMP (pg. E-155), is to maintain the ecological condition of upland vegetative communities. The SEORMP also states that the upland trend is static (pg. E155). Based on trend data taken in the Rome South Pasture on October 14, 2003 the upland trend remains at a static level.

According to BLM records dated as far back as 1992, utilization levels in the Rome South Pasture have exceeded 41% (minimum % to reach the moderate utilization category), twice, more specifically 41% in 1994 and 43% in 1992. All years prior to 1992 were recorded in the slight to light utilization category. Approximately 70% of the normal use occurs in the eastern half of the pasture due to water locations, leaving the western half virtually ungrazed, thus resulting in woody plants. During the 2003 grazing season this pasture has not received any use and will not prior to November 7, 2003.

Cattle water out of the Owyhee River on the east boundary of the pasture, out of one trough located on the south central boundary of the pasture, and one trough located in the southwestern corner of the pasture. This year a well was drilled on private property in the west central portion of the pasture. This well is located on the west side of a large crested wheatgrass seeding which generally receives no to slight use by livestock because of its distance from water. This new water source will effectively shift much of the traditional use and redistribute grazing in a more uniform manner throughout the pasture.

Several factors in the 2003 grazing season on the Jackies Butte Summer Allotment have resulted in no use being taken out of the Rome South Pasture and therefore, application for TNR in the Rome South Pasture. On April 1 of 2003 the Jackies Butte Permittees were allowed to turn out one half of their permitted numbers due to the lack of reservoir water for livestock use. There was also the potential that the Dry Creek Native Pasture would not be available for livestock use for the third year in a row due to the Jackies Butte Fire of 2001 and the consequential seedings that occurred afterward. After much consultation and cooperation between the affected permittees, interested publics, and agency personnel, the permittees were authorized to turn out the remainder of their permitted cattle numbers on April 15, 2003. By this time one of the larger operators had already found pasture elsewhere for one half of his permitted numbers, resulting in approximately 1,600 AUM's taken out of the Jackies Butte Summer Allotment. Also due to the late turnout another operator did not buy enough cattle to fill his permit and therefore did not use 380 AUM's of his permitted use. Still another operator decided not to return to the allotment after taking his cattle home to wean the calves during the first week of October, this resulted in approximately 700 more AUM's not taken from the Jackies Butte Allotment.

The other factor contributing to the possibility of TNR in the Rome South Pasture was that in late July it was decided that cattle would be allowed to graze the Dry Creek Native Pasture. Three years of unused

vegetation coupled with the newly constructed Corbin Creek Pipeline allowed cattle to graze longer than anticipated while still leaving the pasture with slight to light utilization levels.

Wildlife

Rangelands within Rome South seeding are part of the most extensive block of grassland habitat found in Jordan Resource Area. Multiple wildfire incidents and vigorous crested wheatgrass seedings currently supporting little or no native shrub cover have profoundly altered native wildlife habitat character in the Cow Creek and Jackies Butte Geographic Management Areas (GMA's). Wyoming big sagebrush forage, cover, and structure vital to the support of healthy sagebrush steppe wildlife communities is generally absent in Rome South seeding except in scattered and isolated patches. Based upon the best available fire and land treatment information, Jackies Butte GMA is about 45% grassland habitat and Cow Creek GMA is about 65% grassland habitat.

Wildlife species of management interest in the proposed action area include the following;

Game species - mule deer, pronghorn

Mule deer spring-summer-fall habitat is generally limited and confined to draws within close proximity to irrigated farmlands where they can find green forage. Winter use in Rome South seeding by mule deer can be substantial due to the influx of migratory herds that summer in the state of Idaho. Mule deer use of native and exotic grass green-up during winter months [when it is available due to fall precipitation] has been documented. Pronghorn use the entire area on a year long basis.

Non-game species - coyote, badger, western whiptail lizard, sagebrush lizard, gopher snake, desert horned lizard, and western rattlesnake, horned lark, raven, red-tailed hawk, northern harrier, and burrowing owl.

There are no federal Threatened or Endangered terrestrial wildlife species in the proposed action area so there will be no need to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding Section 7 of The Endangered Species Act.

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 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 IV area. This class provides for management activities that require major modification of the landscape. The level of change may dominate the view and become the focus of viewer attention. However, every effort should be made to minimize the impacts of projects by carefully locating activities, minimizing disturbance, and designing projects to conform to the characteristic landscape. Recreational pursuits in the allotment include hunting, 4-wheel-drive touring/sightseeing, wildlife viewing and nature study.

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.

The Jackies Butte area has been seeded and burned more than once. Although Class III cultural resource inventories have rarely been completed for this area, a number of Class II inventories have been conducted. Few cultural sites have been found in this area. There is very little natural live water, and the area offers little in the way of shelter or other amenities for camping. The area of Jackies Butte may have been utilized lightly for hunting or gathering, but it appears that this area was never intensively or extensively utilized by prehistoric people.

The proposed grazing will have no effect on cultural resources in the area.

Other Mandatory Elements

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

<u>Critical Elements</u>	Affected	
	<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

Alternative I: Proposed Action

Vegetation

The TNR application is for a one time shift of grazing use outside of the normal permitted grazing dates. However, the proposed use, though outside the permitted end date, would be within the same season of use and have no greater impact. The proposed authorization of TNR would allow for a maximum of 40% average utilization within the Rome South Pasture. This use would help reduce decadent plant material in the western half of the pasture that has accumulated over past years of no to slight grazing use. This use would sustain plant communities while maintaining the health and vigor of crested wheatgrass seedings traditionally used within the pasture.

The following statements from the SEORMP Record of Decision support the proposed action and can be found on pages R-2, R-3, and R-4: “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.” The proposed action is also consistent with the TNR language set forth in the SEORMP on pages 59 and 60: “TNR may be authorized to facilitate meeting vegetation management objectives (such as reducing the quantity of standing dead herbaceous material in nonnative seedings while continuing to meet resource objectives).” The proposed action conforms with the criteria listed in the SEORMP on page 60 for issuing TNR.

The TNR being applied for is not use above and beyond the allocated AUM’s for the allotment. If TNR is authorized, total AUM’s taken from the allotment will be approximately 486 AUM’s less than what is allocated for the total active AUM’s in the allotment.

Special Status Plant Species - There would be no impacts to special status plant species.

Soils and Water Resources

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

Air Quality

No impacts would occur to the air quality.

Noxious Weeds

There would be no new or different impacts for noxious weeds. No new transport of weed seeds due to livestock would occur.

Livestock Grazing

During the 2002 grazing season the actual use taken out of the Rome South Pasture was 2,157 AUM's with an ending utilization for the pasture of 34%. Annual production of the pasture is believed to be relatively the same this year as it was for last year. There is now a developed water source in the west central portion of the pasture which will dramatically help with distribution of cattle within the pasture and allow for use to occur where historically it has been very minimal. Dry cattle (cows without calves) would be grazing the pasture, this combined with cool weather would also aid in livestock distribution. Permittees would make better use of crested wheatgrass seedings in the Rome South Pasture while utilizing excess forage from this year. The permittees operations would benefit economically because less hay would be fed during the winter months. Based on these factors and data we are confident that no adverse affects to the resources would occur if the proposed action is authorized.

Wildlife

Based on the wildlife habitat values present in Rome South seeding, the proposed amount and season of grazing use would not be expected to adversely impact wildlife habitat values to any substantial degree. Grazing affects on non-game wildlife breeding activities would be avoided and adequate residual grass cover would be left available for forage and habitat structural needs. In the event of a fall green-up, termination of authorized grazing use would conserve mule deer winter forage important to migratory mule deer herds known to use Rome South seeding.

Fisheries and Aquatic Species - The proposed action would not detrimentally affect riparian areas or aquatic habitats. 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.

Recreation and Visual Resources

The proposed project would have only very slight visual impacts. The change in grazing dates would probably expose a few recreationists to viewing cattle during a time period when this particular area has typically been cattle-free. 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

TNR would not be authorized therefore there would be no new impacts.

Vegetation

Impacts would mainly be seen on crested wheatgrass seedings. All ready wolfy stands of crested wheatgrass plants would become more decadent. Healthy, vigorous crested wheatgrass seedings traditionally used within the pasture would have the potential of becoming decadent.

Special Status Plant Species – Same as proposed action.

Soils and Water Resources

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 not be authorized in the Rome South Pasture and cattle would be removed from the allotment by November 7, 2003.

Wildlife

All grassland cover values for wildlife would be conserved through the fall of 2004. Slight reductions in the overall availability of forage and standing cover for wildlife would be avoided.

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 proposed action would require weekly monitoring of average annual utilization and distribution to insure management objectives are met. The applicants would assure that utilization would not exceed the maximum allowable level (40%) for the pasture.

PERSONS CONSULTED

Jackies Butte Permittees:

C.E. Dowell

Jesse D. White

Kenneth Matteri

Robert J. Corbari

BLM STAFF SPECIALISTS

Andy Bumgarner, Rangeland Management Specialist

Cynthia Tait, Fisheries Biologist

Jon Sadowski, Wildlife Biologist/T & E Animals

Natalie Sudman, Archeologist

Jean Findley, Botanist

Jack Wenderoth, Soil/Air/Water

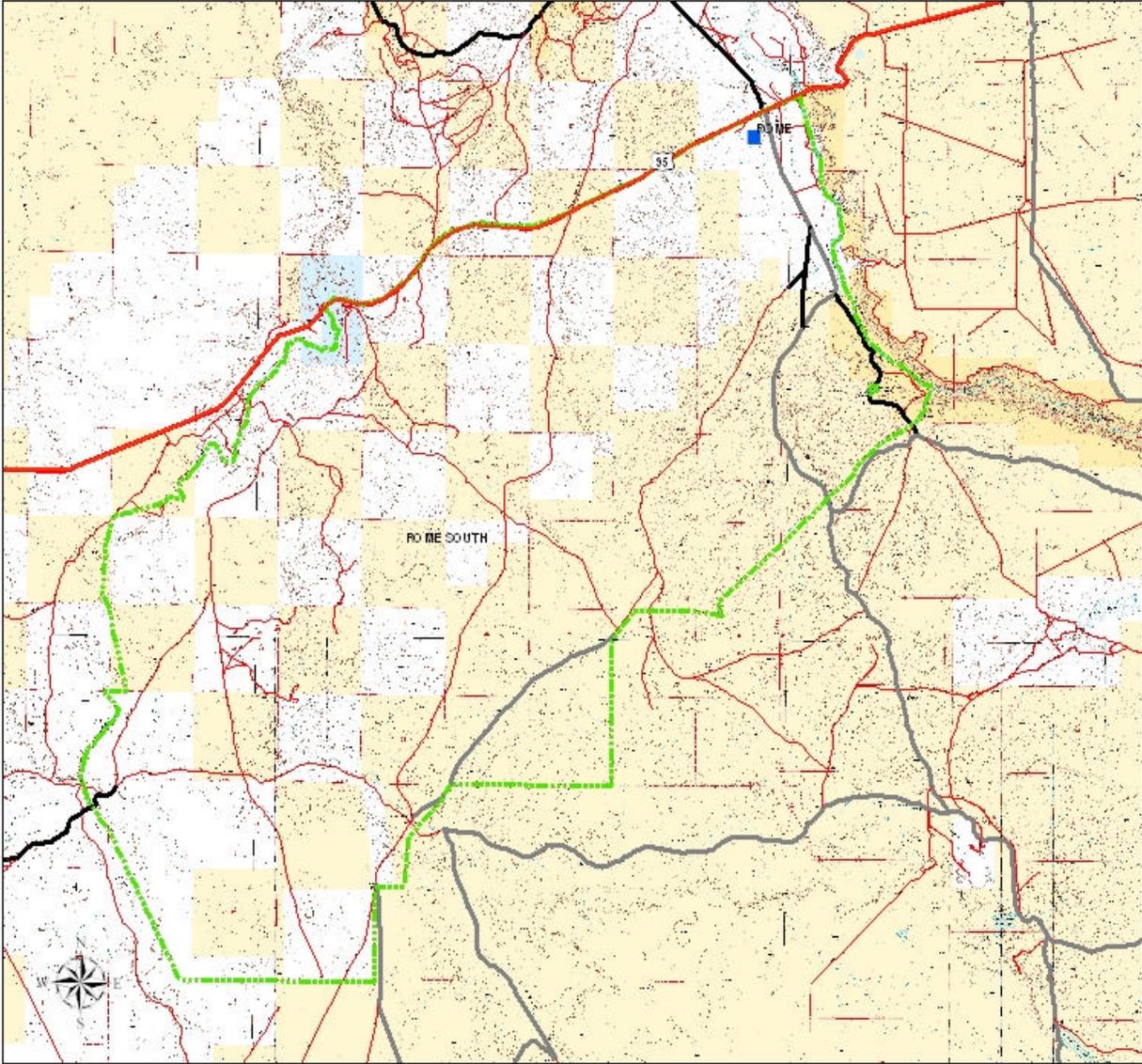
Tom Christensen, Recreation/Wilderness

Lynne Silva, Weeds Specialist

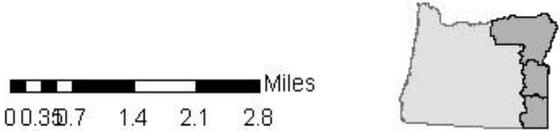
Jerry L. Taylor, Resource Area

Manager

ROME SOUTH PASTURE



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Legend	
Places	Ownership
Cities	Bureau of Land Management
State and US Highways	State Land
<small>Roads 241</small>	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Land
BLM Inventory Roads	U.S. Forest Service Land
BLM Unimproved Routes	Bureau of Reclamation Land
USFS Designated Roads	Indian Reservation
County Roads	Federal Regulatory Commission
Interstate Highways	U.S. Corps of Engineers
Private	Department of Defense
State Highways	Undetermined
US Highways	Private Land