

**Vale District Bureau of Land Management
Rooster Comb Fire Emergency Stabilization Plan (M738)
Environmental Assessment
EA No. OR-030-03-024**

Decision Record

This Decision Record documents my decision to select the proposed alternative for implementation of the Rooster Comb Fire Emergency Stabilization Plan. This action was analyzed in the attached Environmental Assessment (EA OR-030-03-024). This proposed action is tiered to and is consistent with the Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan dated September 2002, the Malheur County Land Use Plan, and BLM policy.

My decision is to implement actions to construct and maintain temporary fencing to protect approximately 3,659 acres of burned areas from livestock grazing and monitor natural recovery of desired native vegetation.

Signature pending 30 day comment period in
accordance with program specific guidance for
actions within WSA

Tom Dabbs
Field Manager
Malheur Resource Area

Date

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Finding of No Significant Impact

The Malheur Resource Area of the Bureau of Land Management, Vale District has analyzed a proposal to construct and maintain temporary fencing to protect areas burned during the August 2003 Rooster Comb Fire from livestock grazing and to monitor native vegetation recovery.

Based on the following summary of consequences and as discussed in the environmental assessment, I have determined that the proposed action will best meet resource management objectives defined in the Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision (USDI-BLM 2002), which constitutes the land use plan for Malheur Resource Area:

- \$ Construction and maintenance of temporary fencing to exclude livestock grazing would eliminate livestock grazing impacts upon fully available grasses and forbs, would reduce grazing impacts from deer, pronghorn, elk, and sheep, and allow recovery of desirable plant species which survived the fire by maximizing the potential of native vegetation to recover from fire impacts, . Retention of unburned portions of Red Butte Pasture available for livestock grazing as authorized by permit would avoid unnecessary impacts to the affected livestock operator and the local farming/ranching economy.

- \$ Short-term negative impacts from the fire to desired perennial vegetation communities and thus watershed stability would be diminished by the long-term benefits to these resource values and indirect benefits to wildlife habitat, support of local economic enterprises, and enhancement of amenities. Monitoring would provide valuable information for the analysis of treatment success.

Impacts to critical elements of the human environment, including ten points of significance identified in 40 CFR 1508.27(b), are not determined to be in excess of limits requiring the development of an environmental impact statement.

Additionally, management direction provided in the selected alternative is more consistent with the BLM policy (Emergency Fire Rehabilitation Handbook H-1742) and the record of decision of the Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan than other alternatives analyzed. The Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan states, "Areas burned by wildfire, including those subsequently rehabilitated, will be rested from grazing for one full year and through a second growing season at a minimum, or until monitoring data or professional judgment indicate that health and vigor of desired vegetation has recovered to levels adequate to support and protect upland function."

Thus, on the basis of the information contained in this environmental assessment and all other information available, it is my determination that the proposed action does not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment and that an environmental impact statement is not required.

\s\ Tom Dabbs

9-25-2003

Tom Dabbs
Field Manager
Malheur Resource Area

Date

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1. Purpose of and Need for Action

A lightning caused fire originating on public land in T.26 S., R.44 E., W.M. Section 5 was detected on August 19, 2003. Rooster Comb Fire (M738) spread to include approximately 3,659 acres prior to containment at 20:00 on August 21 and control at 17:00 on August 22 (figure 1). The fire occurred exclusively on public land administered by the Vale District Bureau of Land Management and the Bureau of Reclamation. Suppression activities were limited to direct attack and mop-up by hand crews, helicopters, a single engine air tanker, and heavy air tankers. Access to the fire was by way of two-tracks and roads within Dry Creek Buttes Wilderness Study Area (WSA), helicopter, and foot travel cross country.

Rooster Comb Fire occurred within the boundaries of Red Butte Pasture of Quartz Mountain Allotment (10406). The burned area is dominated by native sagebrush/bunchgrass vegetation communities with scattered annual species. Native communities contained dispersed Wyoming big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentate spp. wyomingensis*), rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus sp.*), bluebunch wheatgrass (*Pseudoroegneria spicata*), Thurber's needlegrass (*Achnatherum thurberianum*), and Sandberg bluegrass (*Poa secunda*). Cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), medusahead ryegrass (*Taeniatherum caput-medusae*), tumble mustard (*Sisymbrium altissimum*), clasping pepperweed (*Lepidium perfoliatum*), and other annual species are present, especially within pockets of heavy clay soils. Sagebrush steppe vegetation communities provide summer or year-long habitat for a number of wildlife species including big game animals, upland game species, and sagebrush dependent species.

Interagency guidance and BLM policy, as stated in the Interagency Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Handbook and draft Bureau of Land Management Supplemental ESR Guidance (May 20, 2002) provides for emergency stabilization and rehabilitation where fire has an adverse impact on vegetation, soils, and watersheds and also to minimize other adverse changes to the extent practicable, including the following:

- loss of vegetative cover for watershed protection;
- loss of soil and on-site productivity;
- loss of water control and deterioration of water quality;
- invasion of burned areas by flammable annual species which increase the potential for repeated wildfire.

Although the area burned by Rooster Comb Fire is not in need of immediate stabilization or rehabilitation to minimize soil movement, preserve on-site productivity, reduce the invasion and increased dominance of undesirable flammable annual plants or to reduce the potential for increased dominance of existing noxious weed, it is in need of short term protection from grazing impacts to ensure that the impacts identified above do not occur long term. Long term objectives can be met by protecting residual native vegetation communities during a period necessary for recovery of health and vigor. This

environmental assessment analyzes the benefits and risks of implementing stabilization actions to protect native perennial vegetation as compared to a no action alternative.

In addition to other National Environmental Policy Act requirements, this environmental assessment was completed to ensure that treatments identified in the Emergency Stabilization Plan are consistent with the applicable land use plan objectives and decisions. Construction of temporary fencing to control grazing impacts to fire impacted vegetation resources is consistent with the Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision (SEORMP&ROD) as follows:

- The Desired Range of Future Conditions (DRFC) (p 24) defines goals as follow:
 1. “Rangeland vegetation includes a mosaic of multiple-aged shrubs, forbs, and native and desirable nonnative perennial grasses. Shrub overstories are present in a variety of spatial arrangements and scales across the landscape level, including some large contiguous blocks, islands, and corridors. Plant communities not meeting DRFC’s show upward trends in condition and structural diversity. Desirable plants continue to improve in health and vigor. New infestations of noxious weeds are not common across the landscape, and existing large infestations are declining. Populations and habitat of rare plant species are stable or continue to improve in vigor and distribution.”
 2. “Upland soils have sufficient vegetation cover to minimize accelerated soil erosion. Physical and chemical soil properties as adequate for vegetation growth and hydrologic function appropriate to the specific soil type, landform, and climate.”
 3. “Western juniper dominance is limited to rock outcrops, ridges, mesas, or other sites where wildfire frequency is limited by site productivity. Western juniper generally occurs in low densities in association with vigorous shrub, grass, and forb species, consistent with site potential. Historic western juniper sites retain old growth characteristics.”
 4. “Wildland and prescribed fire play an active role in defining the composition of vegetation and limiting the dominance of woody species.”
 5. “The amount and diversity of wildlife habitat are maintained or improved through time. Late-seral grass/shrublands exist in blocks of various sizes in well-distributed patterns across the landscape. Ongoing management of rangeland habitat components and conditions (such as vegetation cover, forage, and roads) and of key areas helps to maintain big game populations near State wildlife agency objectives. ... Improvement in the conditions of grass/shrubland steppe and riparian areas benefits a variety of wildlife species by increasing the quality, quantity, and variety of habitat. Such species include upland game, raptors, and nongame species. ...”
 6. “Large portions of the landscape have a protective soil cover of deep-rooted plants and litter which supports proper hydrologic function.”
- Specific resource management objectives of the SEORMP&ROD include:
 1. Rangeland Vegetation: “Restore, protect, and enhance the diversity and distribution of desirable vegetation communities including perennial native and desirable introduced plant species. Provide for their continued existence and normal function in nutrient, water, and

energy cycles. Manage big sagebrush cover in seedings and on native rangeland to meet the life history requirements of sagebrush-dependent wildlife. Control the introduction and proliferation of noxious weed species and reduce the extent and density of established weed species to within acceptable limits.”

2. Forest and Woodlands: “Restore productivity and biodiversity in western juniper and quaking aspen woodland areas. Manage western juniper areas where encroachment or increased density is threatening other resource values. Retain old growth characteristics in historic western juniper sites not prone to frequent fire. ...”
3. Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat: “Manage upland habitats in forest, woodland, and rangeland vegetation types so that the forage, water, cover, structure, and security necessary for wildlife are available on the public land.”
4. Rangeland/Grazing Use: “Provide for a sustained level of livestock grazing consistent with other resource objectives and public land use allocations.”

Temporary fencing to ensure short-term exclusion of livestock from burned areas, pending recovery of residual vegetation, is also consistent with policy as stated in the Emergency Fire Rehabilitation Handbook (H-1742) and the SEORMP&ROD as stated on page 40, “Areas burned by wildland fire, including those subsequently rehabilitated, will be rested from grazing for one full year and through a second growing season at a minimum, or until monitoring data or professional judgment indicate that health and vigor of desired vegetation has recovered to levels adequate to support and protect upland function.”

Decisions to be made as a result of information provided in this environmental assessment include what practices would be implemented, if any, to exclude physical livestock impacts, herbivory, and other impacts which limit recovery and establishment of desired vegetation resources following the fire. No other federal, state or local government is involved in the NEPA analysis of the proposed actions, beyond issue identification, review, and comment on content of the document.

Internal scoping of issues relevant to the need for stabilization actions and protection from livestock impacts identified the need to ensure that vegetation communities are managed to attain desired future conditions subsequent to the fire, including meeting riparian, upland vegetation, watershed, special status species, and cultural resource management objectives presented in the land use plan. The level of controversy of potential stabilization actions implemented is moderate with two regional environmental organizations requesting to be informed of proposed actions in Quartz Mountain grazing allotment. Additionally, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife is typically informed of proposed fire stabilization actions, as is the Malheur County Court. Memoranda of Understanding between BLM and a number of Tribes (The Burns Paiute Tribe, The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation) are in place to define coordination. A number of individuals and groups have requested to be informed of proposed actions within wilderness study areas.

Proposed protection of vegetation resources would be implemented as annual workload for BLM staff

and/or through contract with private entrepreneurs. Temporary fencing would be maintained by the livestock operator benefiting from retaining the remainder of Red Butte Pasture available for grazing.

2. Alternatives Including the Proposed Action

Alternatives considered and analyzed include the proposed action to construct temporary exclusion fencing with annual monitoring and a no action alternative. Seeding of desirable native and/or nonnative grass and forb species was not considered due to the primarily late-seral condition of vegetation communities burned. Similarly, with the scattered presence of big sagebrush immediately adjacent to the area burned, it was determined that seeding of sagebrush or other shrub species would not be cost effective.

2.1. Alternatives Analyzed

2.1.1. Proposed Action:

Due to the location of Rooster Comb Fire internal to established pastures, approximately eight miles of temporary fencing would be proposed to exclude livestock grazing from areas burned by the fire (figure 1). The temporary fence would be built without vehicular access to the site and consistent with the Interim Management Policy for Lands Under Wilderness Review (IMP) (USDI-BLM 1995). The burned and enclosed area would be excluded from livestock grazing through July 15, 2005 and until monitoring indicates that desired residual perennial vegetation has recovered to levels that are adequate to support and protect upland function.

No seeding or planting of grass, forb, or shrub species is proposed as identified above. No repair of permanent livestock management fence is required since the fire was internal to Red Butte Pasture.

Monitoring of the burned area would consist of livestock use supervision, vegetation monitoring and weed monitoring. Detected weeds would be controlled utilizing herbicide and mechanical methods in accordance with the EA and Decision Record for the Noxious Weed Control Program 1994-1998 (USDI/BLM 1994). Additionally, monitoring of WSA would continue to ensure compliance with IMP.

2.1.2. No Action Alternative:

No emergency rehabilitation would be completed. Revegetation of the burned areas would be allowed to occur from seed and plant materials which remain on site and viable following the fire. Livestock would be excluded from Red Butte Pasture for two growing seasons. No monitoring of the burned area would be completed beyond that scheduled prior to the fire.

3. Affected Environment

This section presents relevant resource components of the existing environment; that is the baseline environment.

3.1. Vegetation, Soils and Watershed:

Native shrub steppe vegetation communities contained Wyoming big sagebrush, rabbitbrush, bluebunch wheatgrass, Thurber's needlegrass, and Sandberg bluegrass prior to the 2003 fire. Native perennial bunchgrasses were in or near the seed dispersal stage of growth, thus were not seriously depleted of reserves with the loss of this year's growth. Weather conditions did not support a hot fire in the crowns of plants. Scattered inclusions of clay soils supported small areas where medusa-head ryegrass dominated. Microbiotic crusts composed of cyanobacteria, green algae, lichens, mosses, microfungi, and/or other bacteria occupy many open spaces between higher plants.

The soils found in the area of the Rooster Comb Fire were surveyed and described in Oregon's Long Range Requirements for Water 1969, Appendix I 11, Owyhee Drainage Basin. The soil mapping unit in the area is Unit 96-98 on slopes of 20-60 percent. These land types consist of sediments forming badlands, cliffs, and escarpments along the Owyhee River. The individual land units are described as follows:

Unit 96 is a miscellaneous land unit called Rock Land. It consists 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. These areas are mainly used for wildlife and watershed purposes.

Unit 98 is a miscellaneous land unit that makes up approximately 30% of the burned area. It consists of highly eroded and dissected raw old lacustrine sediments occurring as "badlands" often on slopes steeper than 60 percent. These soils are not suited for rangeland seeding as native vegetative cover is very sparse in this soil.

No perennial water sources lie within the proposed treatment area. Drainage is to the east into Owyhee Reservoir, north to Snake River and Columbia River, and west to the Pacific Ocean.

3.2. Noxious Weeds:

Noxious weeds within the perimeter of Rooster Comb Fire are scarce with medusa-head ryegrass identified above and scattered cheatgrass in association with perennial grasses and forbs. Within riparian communities in the vicinity of Rooster Comb, salt cedar (*Tamarisk parviflora*) dominates a number of streambeds draining to Owyhee Reservoir. Whitetop (*Cardaria draba*) is present in

scattered patches adjacent to roads. Similarly, Russian knapweed is present approximately nine miles northwest of the fire at Ferguson Spring. Vehicle transport along roads and livestock remain the primary agent of noxious weed dispersal, especially for those seeds which are not wind dispersed.

3.3. *Livestock Grazing:*

Rooster Comb Fire is entirely within the 48,102 acre Red Butte Pasture of Quartz Mountain Allotment (10406). One livestock operator, Johnson Feedlot, is authorized to use Red Butte Pasture in conjunction with Willow Springs Pasture (16,255 acres) and Hole-in-the-Ground Pasture (7,681 acres) as winter range between October 20 and April 15 annually. Within the 95,424 acre (public) Quartz Mountain Allotment, Johnson Feedlot holds a permit for 7,472 animal unit months (AUMs) active authorization to graze cattle. Winter use in pastures identified above accounts for 3,994 AUMs of that authorization, whereas the remainder is used in conjunction with state and private land and within two public land summer range pastures. Johnson Feedlot's livestock operation at Mud Flat Ranch is based on rangeland forage year-round. No grazing authorization for use in Quartz Mountain Allotment is currently held in suspension.

Quartz Mountain Allotment was classified in the "M" (maintain) category allotments for management in the 1984 Southern Malheur Rangeland Program Summary Record of Decision, with that classification carried forward into the SEORMP-ROD.

3.4. *Wildlife:*

The proposed treatment area is within summer and/or year-long range for mule deer, elk and pronghorn antelope. Other wildlife species found in the area include neotropical migratory song birds, small mammals and reptiles. Periodic natural caused fires have tended to reduce the dominance of shrub species, primarily sagebrush, although quality wildlife habitat has been maintained with perennial herbaceous species and security provided by limited human activity.

No known wildlife species listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 are present within or adjacent to Quartz Mountain Allotment. Special status wildlife species found in the area include burrowing owls (BLM sensitive species). This species nests in annual vegetation habitat type typical of the low elevation areas outside the treatment area. Sage grouse leks and presumed nesting and brood rearing habitats are located within Red Butte and adjoining pastures, nine miles northwest, six miles southwest, nine miles east, and 15 miles northeast of the burned areas. Other special status wildlife species know from the area of Red Butte include Ferruginous hawk, loggerhead shrike, and long-eared myotis.

3.5. *Recreation and Visual Resources:*

Dispersed outdoor recreation near the proposed fire stabilization area consists primarily of hunting of

upland birds and big game animals. Some dispersed general sightseeing occurs. The burned area is within a visual resource management Class I area. The objective of Class I VRM is to preserve the existing character of the landscape. This class provides for natural ecological changes, and it allows limited management activity. The level of change should be low and must not attract attention. Class I is assigned to those areas where a management decision has been made to preserve a natural landscape. This includes areas such as wilderness study areas, the wild sections of national wild and scenic rivers, and other congressionally and administratively designated areas.

3.6. *Wilderness Study Areas:*

Dry Creek Buttes was inventoried for wilderness values in accordance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. Within the Oregon Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement (December 1989), the 51,800 acre wilderness study area was recommended not suitable for designation as wilderness, although pending congressional action relative to designation or release, the area continues to be managed in accordance with the Interim Management Policy for Lands Under Wilderness Review.

3.7. *Areas of Critical Environmental Concern:*

Rooster Comb Fire occurred within the Owyhee Views Acre of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The relevant and important values of the ACEC include the high scenic properties of the area as viewed from Owyhee reservoir, including virtually unaltered landscape, special status bighorn sheep and habitat, and special status plant habitat. The visual sensitivity of the area is elevated due to the current level and expected future increase of recreation use, both on the reservoir and within the ACEC.

3.8. *Cultural Resources and Paleontology:*

The continued use of the northern Great Basin is evident from the nature and extent of the diversity of the cultural resources that represent the prehistoric lifeways of Native American peoples. The tool kit assemblage represents styles which characterize big game hunters and represents the PaleoIndian period. The climax of cultural development from 11,000-8,000 B.P., is represented by a lithic technology characterized by seven different projectile point styles. The diversity in projectile point styles suggests not only an improvement in lithic technology but also experimentation with hafting methods. With the eruption of Mt. Mazama at 7070 B.P., people appear to be moving from lower elevation lake sites to higher elevation spring sites as the climate becomes hotter and drier. As climatic conditions shift to warm and moist after 5000 BP, the predominate projectile point style is a slender corner notched point with continued use of the previous styles. In the northern Great Basin, Catlow twine is now an important class of perishable artifact. From 3000 B.P. to 1000 A.D. occupation continues without much change in the northern Great Basin. The archaeological evidence suggests a rather stable cultural environment where changes reflect the relative intensity of certain activities. Beginning about 1000 A.D., the Numic speaking Northern Paiute settled into this area. Overall, the prehistory of the northern Great Basin shows long continuity and adaptive change to distinctive ecosystems with a changing

climate. The subsistence economy was strongly oriented toward the utilization of more than 50 plant species because these provided a more abundant and dependable than fowl, fish or mammals. Mammals provided skins, furs, tools and many other by-products of aesthetic and practical value. Insects were often eaten; beetles, grasshoppers, locusts, crickets, ants and caterpillars were consumed, as well as most eggs and larva which provided a readily available, storable, high protein food source. Prehistoric sites in the area reflect the diverse cultural heritage. Rock art (petroglyphs and pictographs), toolstone quarry sites which offer a wide variety of stone material for use (cherts, mudstones, jaspers, obsidians, quartz, basalts), camping sites, as well as rock alignments and rock cairns used as hunting blinds all reflect the presence of Native Americans on the landscape.

White European exploration into this area 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. A great push for settlement of the west came in 1843 when the Oregon Trail opened a corridor of travel to the Willamette Valley. Conflicts over the available resources arose between miners, settlers and Native Americans. It was up to the military to protect the settlers and miners. From 1864 to 1867, numerous military maps were made, roads were constructed and posts were established throughout eastern Oregon. The army's function was primarily to protect transport routes to the Owyhee Mines in the vicinity of Silver City, Idaho and to protect civilian settlements. After the end of General Crook's campaign in 1868, the Indians in southeastern Oregon were subdued and confined to reservations. Some Paiutes accompanied the Fort Hall Bannocks in a brief uprising called the Bannock War of 1878. By 1884, sheep had become more profitable than cattle and were moved to market in the east along the same routes that brought settlers to the west. The coming of the railroad also brought a new method of moving livestock to the stockyards. Both cattle and sheep raising prospered during the 1890s. Sheep outfits tended to be small and numerous, while cattle operations were larger and fewer. The Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 along with the Great Depression led to an abrupt and permanent drop in the number of sheep, while fostering a long-term increase in the number of beef cattle, which has continued to the present.

Cultural Resource surveys are often associated with surface disturbing projects such as the construction of pipelines, reservoirs, and/or spring development etc. The designation of this area as a Wilderness Study Area limits surface disturbing activities, thereby limiting surveys for prehistoric and historic cultural resources. Within the Rooster Comb Fire, and along the proposed fence alignment, no surveys for cultural resources have been conducted.

Paleontology

Fossil flora and faunal localities north of Rooster Comb are usually part of the Deer Butte or Grassy Mountain formations. The Deer Butte formation has yielded Miocene age vertebrates including a variety of shrews and moles, kangaroo rat, mice, beaver, carnivores and hoofed mammals including horse, rhino, antelope, and camel. In the area surrounding Red Butte and South Table, no fossil flora or faunal resources have been identified.

3.9. Special Status Plants:

No plant species listed or proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 are known to be present within the area burned. Surveys have located three sites of sterile milkvetch (*Astragalus sterilis*) within or immediately adjacent to the burned area. Additional special status species have been located in ash soils east of Owyhee Reservoir.

3.10. Climate/Topography:

Rooster Comb Fire occurred in rocky ridges and rolling hills between 2,650 and 4,350 feet elevation above sea level. Semi desert shrub steppe vegetation communities result from cold winters and hot dry summers. The long term average annual precipitation is 10-12 inches (SEORMP-ROD map HYDR-1)). Precipitation occurs primarily as snow fall during the winter with occasional mid-summer thunder storms, often accompanied by lightning.

Neither the proposed actions nor the no action alternative will impact climate or topography.

3.11. Other Mandatory Elements:

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

- Air Quality

- Wild Horse/Burro Management

- Native American Religious Concerns

- Hazardous Wastes

- Prime or Unique Farmlands

- Wetlands/Riparian/Flood Plains

- Wild and Scenic Rivers

- Environmental Justice

- Actions to Expedite Energy-Related Projects (Executive Order No. 13212 of May 18, 2001)

4. Environmental Consequences

This chapter is organized by alternatives to illustrate the differences between the proposed action and the no action alternative.

4.1. Proposed Action Alternative:

Consequences of implementing the proposed alternative, temporary fencing to exclude livestock grazing and monitoring of recovery of existing vegetation recovery, would result as summarized in the following sections.

4.1.1. Vegetation, Soils and Watershed:

Temporary exclusion of livestock from a portion of Red Butte Pasture would allow recovery of residual desirable species without impacts from cattle grazing and reduced impacts from wildlife species.

Soil erosion would increase in the short term as a result of loss of vegetative and litter cover from the fire. Soil erosion rates would decrease as perennial species, including grasses, forbs, and shrubs which in combination fill much of the soil profile with roots, regain dominance of the site in years subsequent to the fire.

4.1.2. Noxious weeds:

Reestablishment of perennial species would help prevent the potential for introduction and spread of noxious weeds, particularly whitetop and Russian knapweed. Reestablishment of a scattered shrub component through natural seed dispersal from surrounding vegetation communities would more fully occupy the soil profile with roots of desirable shrub species as compared to shallow rooted perennial grasses and forbs alone. Restoration of full occupation of the soil profile with roots of desirable species would provide additional competition to reduce establishment of deep rooted weedy species.

Reestablishment of diverse perennial vegetation communities including grasses, forbs, and shrubs would help prevent or minimize the proliferation and invasion of noxious weed species within the burned area and adjacent to roads impacted by suppression actions. A reduction in the occurrence of weeds adjacent to roads would limit transport of seed to new sites within the burn area and offsite. Increased inventory for noxious weeds and appropriate treatment would preclude their establishment and spread into niches opened by the fire.

4.1.3. Livestock Grazing:

Livestock would be excluded from the burned portion of Red Butte Pasture through at least two growing seasons and until existing perennial herbaceous species regain vigor. This area comprises approximately 4,000 acres (about 1 percent) of Red Butte Pasture. When combined with temporary enclosure fences constructed following the 2002 Birthday and Late fires in this pasture, less than two percent of the pasture would be excluded requiring no change in authorized grazing use. Most areas of Red Butte Pasture are only lightly used annually.

In the long term, slight positive benefits would accrue to the livestock operator due to the maintenance of perennial vegetation.

4.1.4. Wildlife:

The proposed action would result in the recovery of the herbaceous component of native rangelands. Structural habitat for sagebrush dependent species would be somewhat restored in the long term (greater than 30 years) with reestablishment of desirable shrub species through natural succession. Forage and habitat values provided by perennial herbaceous species would be enhanced by the two or more years of rest from livestock grazing. Relatively small burns, such as these, are great for providing a mosaic of habitats for wildlife and the rest would be beneficial. However, the lack of shrubs in the short term will result in poor habitat conditions for shrub dependent species such as sage sparrows, Brewers sparrows, and fall or winter use by big game animals.

The potential for wildlife entrapment in temporary fencing would be present. The solid green posts will increase the potential for wildlife mortality.

4.1.5. Recreation and Visual Resources:

Impacts to dispersed recreation activities would be insignificant. In the event that fencing activities occur during hunting seasons, any game species close to the activities would be temporarily disturbed.

Visual resources within and adjacent to the proposed action would be maintained with restoration of desirable perennial plant species and vegetation structure. Surface impacts of the proposed rehabilitation efforts do not exceed management objectives for visual resource Class I. Temporary visual evidence of the temporary fence would be minimal due to its size and location in obscure canyons sheltered from view.

4.1.6. Wilderness Study Area:

In accordance with IMP, new temporary livestock developments may be approved if they truly enhance wilderness values and satisfy the nonimpairment criteria. Surface disturbance created by construction and removal of approximately eight miles of temporary fence would be very minimal and be outweighed by the enhancement in opportunity to maintain late seral vegetation communities which contribute to Dry Creek Buttes WSA's wilderness values. In the event of wilderness designation, this temporary fence could be easily and immediately removed in the event it is found to not be consistent with designation.

4.1.7. Areas of Critical Environmental Concern:

Although portions of the proposed temporary fence would be visible from the reservoir and from the lower portion of Leslie Gulch on the east side of Owyhee Reservoir, long term benefits to maintain desired perennial vegetation would exceed short term visual impacts to ACEC values.

4.1.8. Cultural Resources:

A Class III cultural resources survey and a survey for paleo resources would be conducted prior to

surface disturbing activities. Recorded sites, prehistoric, historic or fossil localities would be flagged and avoided during rehabilitation activities.

4.1.9. Special Status Plants:

Proposed temporary fence construction is not within any known habitat of special status plant species inventoried to date. Fence layout would be rerouted in the event impacts to special status species are determined at the time of fence construction.

4.2. No Action Alternative:

Consequences of implementing the no action alternative, exclusion of livestock from the 31,000 acre Juniper Mountain Pasture of Turnbull Allotment to implement policy, would result as summarized in the following sections.

4.2.1. Vegetation, Soils and Watersheds:

Temporary exclusion of livestock from Red Butte Pasture would allow recovery of residual desirable species within the burned area without impacts from cattle grazing, although without reduced impacts from wildlife species.

Soil erosion would increase in the short term as a result of loss of vegetation and litter cover from the fire. Soil erosion rates would decrease as perennial species, including grasses, forbs, and shrubs, which in combination fill much of the soil profile with roots, regain dominance of the site in years subsequent to the fire.

4.2.2. Noxious weeds:

Reestablishment of perennial species would help prevent the potential for introduction and spread of noxious weeds, particularly whitetop and Russian knapweed. Reestablishment of a scattered shrub component through natural seed dispersal from surrounding vegetation communities would more fully occupy the soil profile with roots of desirable shrubs as compared to shallow rooted perennial grasses and forbs alone. Restoration of full occupation of the soil profile with roots of desirable species would provide additional competition to reduce establishment of deep rooted weedy species. Reestablishment of diverse perennial vegetation communities including grasses, forbs, and shrubs would help prevent or minimize the proliferation and invasion of noxious weed species within the burned area and adjacent to roads impacted by suppression actions. A reduction in the occurrence of weeds adjacent to roads would limit transport of seed to new sites within the burn area and offsite. Failure to intensify inventory for noxious weeds and appropriate treatment would encourage their spread and establishment into niches opened by the fire.

4.2.3. Livestock Grazing:

Livestock would be excluded from Red Butte Pasture through at least two growing seasons and until existing perennial herbaceous species regain vigor. This areas comprises approximately 48,000 acres of the 72,000 acres of public land within winter range of Quartz Mountain Allotment. Thus, two-thirds of the authorized 3,994 AUM authorization held by Johnson Feedlot for winter use would be suspended for two or more years. Alternate forage would need to be found for approximately 500 head of cattle and include the need to haul livestock away from a unit which supplies year-round rangeland grazing.

In the long term, slight positive benefits would accrue to the livestock operator due to the maintenance of perennial vegetation.

4.2.4. Wildlife:

The no action alternative would not result in the reestablishment and maintenance of high quality year-long forage, browse, and cover for mule deer, elk, and pronghorn antelope within the project area with the maintenance of desirable herbaceous and shrub species. Structural habitat for sagebrush dependent species would not be restored in the long term (greater than 30 years) with scattered reestablishment of desirable shrub species. Forage and habitat values provided by perennial herbaceous species would not be maintained. In the event introduced weeds become abundant with limited inventory and treatment, wildlife habitats would decline in value.

4.2.5. Recreation and Visual Resources:

Recreation and visual resources would not be impacted with no stabilization activity planned as a result of the 2003 Rooster Comb Fire. In the event introduced weeds become abundant with limited inventory and treatment, recreation opportunities and visual resource values could decline in value within the area burned as well as additional areas where those weed become established.

4.2.6. Wilderness Study Area

Wilderness values would not be impacted with no stabilization activity planned as a result of the 2003 Rooster Comb Fire. In the event introduced weeds become abundant with limited inventory and treatment, wilderness values could decline in value within the area burned as well as additional areas where those weeds become established.

4.2.7. Areas of Critical Environmental Concern:

ACEC values would not be impacted with no stabilization activity planned as a result of the 2003 Rooster Comb Fire. In the event introduced weeds become abundant with limited inventory and treatment, ACEC values could decline in value within the area burned as well as additional areas where those weeds become established.

4.2.8. Cultural Resources:

Cultural and paleo resources would not be impacted with no stabilization activity planned as a result of the 2003 Rooster Comb Fire.

4.2.9. Special Status Plants:

Special status plants would not be impacted with no stabilization activity planned as a result of the 2003 Rooster Comb Fire. In the event introduced weeds become abundant with limited inventory and treatment, plant habitat values could decline in value within the area burned as well as additional areas where those weeds become established.

5. Adverse Effects:

Unavoidable adverse effects from implementation of the proposed action or no action alternative are limited to those impacts to soil and vegetation function described in the text above.

6. Short-term and Long-term Impacts:

Short-term impacts to soil and vegetation resources during construction and removal of approximately eight miles of temporary fence would be offset by long-term benefits to upland vegetation community function consistent with standards for rangeland health and guidelines for livestock management. Long-term control of the spread and introduction of noxious weed species would also occur with increased inventory and treatment. Long-term benefits resulting from the limited accumulation of fine fuels of annual species would limit spread of future fire in the burned and adjacent areas.

7. Irreversible or Irretrievable Commitment of Resources:

Should the proposed fence not function as expected to protect recovering vegetation resources or should it have unforeseen negative impacts, it could be removed or redesigned with no irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources.

8. Mitigating Actions

Due to the proposed fence location within WSA, transport of materials to the project site for construction and removal of materials at the end of the period deemed necessary to protect vegetation resources would be limited to helicopter or horse packing. Fence posts for the temporary electric fence would be green without white tops to limit visual impairment. Brace points would be built with EZ

panels or similar structures to limit surface disturbance. The temporary fence would consist of one strand of electric cable or two strands, dependent on the need for a ground wire. All fence construction and removal would be without use of vehicles beyond BLM recognized roads and ways in WSA.

9. List of Preparers/Reviewers:

Steve Christensen	Rangeland Management Specialist
Bob Alward	Outdoor Recreation Planner, Wilderness
Jean Findley	Botanist
Diane Pritchard	Archaeologist
Shaney Rockefeller	Hydrologist/Soil Scientist
Al Bammann	Wildlife Biologist
Lynne Silva	Range Technician, Weeds
Tom Hilken	Planning and Environmental Coordinator
Tom Dabbs	Acting Field Manager, Malheur Resource Area

10. List of Agencies, Organizations, and Persons Notified of the Proposed Action:

Rick Johnson; Johnson Feedlot; Livestock Operators Turnbull Allotment
Hal Shepherd, Northwest Environmental Defense Center
Jon Marvel, Western Watersheds
Oregon Natural Desert Association
Oregon Natural Resources Council
Sierra Club, Oregon Chapter, High Desert Wilderness Committee
Joseph Higgins, Wilderness Watch, Pacific Northwest Office
Stuart Garrett, High Desert Chapter, Native Plant Society of Oregon
Audubon Society of Portland
Doug Heiken, Oregon Natural Resources Council
Mary Scurlock, Pacific River Council
Katie Fite, Committee for Idaho's High Desert
High Desert Wilderness Committee
Greeley Trust
Mark McKenzie
Sam McKenzie
Duncan McKenzie
Mary Ellen Allison

Bill Barnett, Owyhee Outback Ranch
John and Lisa Davis
Larry and Kay Davis
Walt Van Dyke, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Albert Teeman, Tribal Chairperson, Burns Paiute Tribe
Gary Burke, Tribal Chairperson, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation

A file search completed September 11, 2003, identified no additional requests by members of the public to be considered an interested public for Quartz Mountain Allotment or proposed actions within WSA.

11. Literature Cited:

USDI-BLM 1984. Southern Malheur Rangeland Program Summary (RPS). U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Vale District, Oregon. 24 p.

USDI-BLM 1994. Decision Record for the Noxious Weed Control Program for Vale District. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Vale District, Oregon.

USDI-BLM 1995. Interim Management Policy for Lands Under Wilderness Review (H-8550-1). U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Washington, DC. 49 p.

USDI-BLM. 2002. Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision (September 2002). U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Vale District, Oregon. 1 v.

