

BURNS WILD HORSE CORRAL IMPROVEMENTS
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
EA OR-025-01-012

Bureau of Land Management
Burns District Office
HC 74-12533 Hwy 20 West
Hines, Oregon 97738

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Three Rivers Resource Area of the Burns District is proposing to implement improvements at the Burns Wild Horse Corral site. This area is located approximately 7 miles southwest of Burns, Oregon, in Harney County.

A. Purpose of and Need for Action

The purpose of this project is to increase the capacity of the District's wild horse corrals and provide a secondary containment area to facilitate capture of escaped horses.

A number of events have recently occurred affecting the Bureau's wild horse management program, creating a need for handling greater numbers of wild horses at the Burns facility.

These events include a new National program to bring all Herd Management Areas to Appropriate Management Levels (AMLs) within the next 4 years and numerous unexpected gathers having to be conducted due to severe forage shortages brought on by drought and wildfire.

Because of the way the existing facility is situated, any escaped horses can move in a northerly direction unobstructed for several miles onto both private and public lands. There is a need to have a secondary containment area because capture of escaped horses is difficult and costly due to the ruggedness and limited accessibility of the terrain to which they move. The potential also exists for escaped horses to enter the corridor along Highway 20 and cause a public safety hazard.

The investment in facilities and the services provided to the public necessitate protection and enhancement of the long-term integrity of existing and planned facilities, as well as improvements now located on public land and to provide for public safety.

B. Conformance with Land Use Plans, Laws, Regulations and Policy

This action is in conformance with the 1971 Wild Horse and Burro Act (as amended) and Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 4700 and the Three Rivers Resource Management Plan (RMP) (1992).

II. ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

A. Proposed Action

The proposed action is to construct additional corrals adjacent to the existing facilities, enclosing approximately 10 acres, constructing approximately 1-mile of 4-strand barb wire fence following standard design as set forth in the Three Rivers RMP to establish a secondary containment area (Appendix A). Also proposed is to extend an existing pipeline approximately 600 feet and move the water trough, and grant right-of-way reservations for the existing and proposed facilities not currently included in the administrative withdrawal area (Appendix B). No additional lighting would be added to the expanded corral area.

B. Alternative A: No Action

No additional corrals would be constructed, no secondary containment area fence would be constructed, there would be no changes to the existing waterline and water trough, and no right-of-way reservations would be granted.

C. Alternatives Considered but not Developed

Expanding the corral system to the east. This alternative was considered but not developed because it would have additional impacts to an existing drainage and would require extensive reconstruction of the corrals to manage the safe, orderly movement of horses.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The following critical elements of the human environment are either not present or would not be impacted by the proposed action or the alternatives: Threatened or endangered plant or animal species, floodplains, air quality, prime or unique farmlands, Wild and Scenic Rivers, American Indian religious concerns, paleontological resources, hazardous materials, wilderness or Wilderness Study Areas, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, or Environmental Justice concerns. Noncritical elements of the human environment that are not present or impacted by the proposed action include Special Status Species, fish, recreation, and minerals.

A. Wildlife

Wildlife species occasionally observed in the area include mule deer, coyote, and jackrabbit. A variety of songbirds, reptiles, and small mammals also frequent the area. Due to the level of human and horse activity at the corrals, wildlife infrequently use the area adjacent to the corrals.

B. Vegetation

The vegetation consists primarily of shrub species such as mountain big sagebrush, rabbitbrush, and low sagebrush. Grasses include bluebunch wheatgrass, squirreltail, Idaho fescue, needlegrass, cheatgrass, and Sandberg bluegrass.

The corral area is inspected annually for noxious weeds and occasionally noxious weeds have been located and then treated.

C. Soils

The soils are generally shallow and rocky on the hills and ridges with shallow to moderately deep loams on the slopes.

D. Water Resources

No water resources or riparian areas exist in the project area. The Willow Creek drainage runs through the corral site. The drainage runs water only during spring runoff.

E. Cultural and Historic Resources

A cultural resource survey located a natural obsidian source of scattered cobbles that showed signs of having had prehistoric use. No other cultural resources were located.

F. Rights-of-Way

A powerline right-of-way exists just north of the corral facilities.

G. Range

The East Sagehen Allotment is adjacent to the north end of the administrative corral site. A water trough just north of the corrals is utilized by the cattle in the allotment during the grazing season.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The following impacts would result from implementation of the proposed action or any of the alternatives.

A. Wildlife

Proposed Action: There would be no measurable direct or indirect impacts on the wildlife species that occasionally use the area.

Alternative A - No Action: There would be no impacts to wildlife in the area.

B. Vegetation

Proposed Action: All vegetation within the corral area would be eliminated within the first year due to trampling and continuous grazing by the horses. No indirect impacts were identified. A minor amount of vegetation would be damaged or destroyed along a narrow corridor (about 24 inches wide) where the pipeline and fence are installed. As more soil is exposed from trampling of the vegetation, the corrals would become susceptible to invasive weeds, however, weeds would not be able to get established because any vegetation attempting to grow would be trampled, consumed or treated.

Alternative A - No Action: There would be no direct or indirect impacts to the vegetation.

C. Soils

Proposed Action: Within the corrals, the continued trampling would compact the soil and expose it to erosion from wind and surface runoff. The long-term indirect impact would be the loss of soil productivity. There would be short-term soil disturbance where the pipeline is installed.

Alternative A - No Action: There would be no impacts to the soil resource.

D. Water Resources

Proposed Action: No water resources would be impacted.

Alternative A - No Action: No water resources would be impacted.

E. Cultural and Historic Resources

Proposed Action: No direct or indirect impacts to historic or prehistoric sites were identified.

Alternative A - No Action: There would be no impacts to any cultural resources.

F. Rights-of-Way

Proposed Action: The existing right-of-way would not be impacted. Granting right-of-way reservations for the existing and proposed facilities would restrict the kinds of activities that could take place on these areas in the future.

Alternative A - No Action:

G. Range

Proposed Action: The East Sagehen Allotment would be reduced by about 250 acres. A review of the allotment records determined that no adjustments to the permit would need to be made.

Alternative A - No Action: There would be no effect on the East Sagehen Allotment.

V. CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Proposed Action: In considering the proposed action, with those activities that have previously occurred at or in the vicinity of the project site or those activities that may occur in the reasonably foreseeable future, no cumulative effects were identified or anticipated.

Alternative A - No Action: There would be no cumulative impacts associated with this alternative.

VI. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

A. Participating Staff

Dean Bolstad, Wild Horse Management Specialist
Gary Foulkes, Planning and Environmental Coordinator
Rudy Hefter, Supervisory Natural Resource Specialist
Brian McCabe, Archaeologist
Willie Street, Range Management Specialist
Fred Taylor, Wildlife Biologist
Nora Taylor, Botanist

B. Persons, Groups, and Agencies that will be or have been Consulted

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife