

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Bureau of Land Management
Gila District
Tucson Field Office
3201 East Universal Way
Tucson, AZ 85756

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
for SPRNCA Allotments Lease Renewals

DOI-BLM-AZ-G020-2021-0013-EA

INTRODUCTION

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) completed an environmental review DOI-BLM-AZ-G020-2021-0013-EA for the renewal of four livestock grazing leases (Babocomari, Brunckow Hill, Three Brothers, and Lucky Hills) partially located in the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (SPRNCA) in Sierra Vista, Arizona. The selected alternative is the Proposed Action (Alternative A) – not to include the modifications to the Proposed Action (Alternatives A.1 and A.2) – as described in Section 2.2 of the attached environmental assessment (EA). The Proposed Action (Alternative A) includes the renewal of the four livestock grazing leases partially located in the SPRNCA with new terms and conditions that include an adaptive management strategy. The selected alternative includes range improvements, such as fences and livestock waters, that would be constructed to help implement the adaptive management strategy. The Proposed Action (Alternative A) also includes integrated vegetation management (IVM) treatments to address areas on the SPRNCA allotments not meeting Arizona Land Health Standard 3.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based on my review of the attached EA and supporting documents, I have determined that the selected alternative will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Additionally, the environmental effects do not exceed those effects described in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the SPRNCA (BLM 2019b) and the Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides on BLM Lands in 17 Western States Programmatic EIS (BLM 2007). Therefore, an EIS is not required. This finding is based on the degree of the effects described in the following sections within the identified affected environment.

Potentially Affected Environment (40 CFR § 1501.3(b)(1))

The Proposed Action (Alternative A) occurs on the four SPRNCA livestock grazing allotments (Babocomari, Brunckow Hill, Three Brothers, and Lucky Hills) which encompass 51,514 acres of BLM, Arizona State Trust (state), and private lands, partially located on the 55,900-acre SPRNCA which is located just outside of Sierra Vista, Arizona. Within the four SPRNCA Allotments, the BLM is responsible for the management of 15,992 acres, 6,903 acres of which are located inside the SPRNCA.

As described above, the Proposed Action (Alternative A) occurs partially in the SPRNCA which is a congressionally designated Riparian National Conservation Area that is part of the BLM's National Conservation Lands (NCL) and was designated in 1988 to conserve, protect, and enhance the riparian area and the aquatic, wildlife, archeological, paleontological, scientific, cultural, educational, and recreational resources of the conservation area. Portions of both the Babocomari and San Pedro Rivers run through the area that could potentially be affected by the selected alternative. The Babocomari and San Pedro Rivers are both eligible and suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River

System under the recreational classification. EA Section 3.3.3 describes how the selected alternative would not affect the Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs) which make the Babocomari and San Pedro Rivers eligible and suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System. Four threatened and endangered species occur in the area affected by the selected alternative: the Huachuca water umbel, northern Mexican gartersnake, western yellow-billed cuckoo, and southwestern willow flycatcher. The area affected by the selected alternative includes designated critical habitat for Huachuca water umbel, western yellow-billed cuckoo, and southwestern willow flycatcher.

Each resource that is analyzed in detail in the EA has a different geographic scope for the analysis area which takes into account resource-specific considerations. See EA Sections 3.4.1.1, 3.4.1.2, 3.4.2, 3.4.3, 3.4.4, 3.4.5, 3.4.6, and 3.4.7 for a description of the resource-specific analysis areas.

Impacts to the area that could be affected by the selected alternative are described by resource in EA Sections 3.4.1.1, 3.4.1.2, 3.4.2.3, 3.4.3.2, 3.4.4.3, 3.4.5.3, 3.4.6.3, 3.4.7.2. Each section provides a quantitative analysis of impacts where appropriate in the context of the surrounding area.

Degree of Effects (40 CFR § 1501.3(b)(2))

The following have been considered in my evaluation of the selected alternative:

i. Short- and long-term effects

The Proposed Action (Alternative A) would result in both short- and long-term effects to the environment. Effects from livestock grazing such as consumption of perennial grass and other forage plants, trampling of vegetation and soil, reduction of vegetative cover in areas where livestock concentrate, and contribution to *E. coli* levels in the Babocomari and San Pedro Rivers have the potential to occur for the 10 years that livestock grazing would be authorized under the Proposed Action (Alternative A) subject to reductions in grazing use that would be implemented through adaptive management when resource objectives are not being met. Under the Proposed Action (Alternative A) there would be short-term impacts from the construction of fences including temporary vegetation removal (see EA Table 32 for a quantitative analysis of the short-term impacts to vegetation from fence construction) and soil disturbance (see EA Table 22 for a quantitative analysis of the short-term impacts to soils from fence construction). The vegetation and soil Best Management Practices (BMPs) described in EA Section 2.2.3 would be implemented as part of fence construction to reduce those short-term effects. The long-term effects from the continuing presence of the newly constructed fences on the landscape would be negligible. Under the Proposed Action (Alternative A), IVM treatments would also result in short-term effects, including direct removal of vegetation by prescribed fire, damage and mortality to target woody upland species from herbicide treatments—temporarily reducing total ground cover and increasing bare ground until perennial grasses and forbs increase in cover—and isolated crushing or removal of vegetation from erosion control treatments. Long-term effects from IVM treatments include changes in plant community composition in treated areas (a decrease in shrub cover and increase in perennial grass cover) from herbicide and prescribed fire treatments with a potential long-term impact to black gramma grass from prescribed fire (see EA Section 3.4.2.3). These short- and long-term changes to vegetation from the IVM treatments and how they affect soil, wildlife, threatened and endangered species, and visual resources are described in the EA in Sections 3.3.6, 3.4.3, 3.4.5, and 3.4.7, respectively.

ii. Beneficial and adverse effects

The Proposed Action (Alternative A) would result in both beneficial and adverse effects to the environment. The magnitude of adverse effects from livestock grazing such as the consumption of perennial grass and other forage plants, trampling of vegetation and soil, reduction of vegetative cover in areas where livestock concentrate, and contribution to *E. coli* levels would be reduced as compared to current conditions as a result of the 50% reduction to Animal Unit Months (AUMs) that is part of the Proposed Action (Alternative A) as well as through adaptive management when resource objectives are not met. These adverse effects are within the contemplated range of management options and do not compromise the goals and requirements of Public Law (P.L.) 100-696 or the objectives of the SPRNCA RMP (BLM 2019a). The adverse effects were previously analyzed in the SPRNCA Final EIS (BLM

2019b). Under the Proposed Action IVM treatments there is the potential for adverse effects to water quality (as described in EA Section 3.4.1.2), non-target upland plant species (as described in EA Section 3.4.2.3), and threatened and endangered species (as described in EA Section 3.4.5.3), specifically the western yellow-billed cuckoo. Adverse effects from IVM treatments on water quality, non-target upland plant species, and the western yellow-billed cuckoo would be reduced through the application of the Guidelines Applicable to All Proposed IVM Treatments (described in EA Section 2.2.4), BMPs (Appendix G), and Standard Operating Procedures (Appendix H). There would also be beneficial effects from the IVM treatments including an increase in perennial grass cover and a decrease in shrub cover that would move plant communities toward meeting Desired Plant Community objectives. Achievement of the objectives would also result in indirect long-term beneficial effects such as reduced sediment yield from the uplands into the Babocomari and San Pedro Rivers.

iii. Effects on public health and safety

The selected alternative is designed to reduce and/or eliminate the potential for *E. coli* contributions from livestock associated with the Babocomari Allotment lease and would not otherwise affect public health and safety..

iv. Effects that would violate Federal, State, Tribal, or local laws protecting the environment

The selected alternative would not violate the Federal, State, local, or Tribal laws or requirements including P.L. 100-696 imposed for the protection of the environment.

See EA Chapter 4 for a description of the Endangered Species Act Section 7 consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as well as a description of the government-to-government consultation with tribes.

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Collen Dingman, Tucson Field Manager

Date