

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
NM-020-01-037

GRAZING PERMIT RENEWAL
FOR THE
CERRO DE LOS TAOSSES ALLOTMENT #873

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
FOR THE
CERRO DE LOS TAOSSES ALLOTMENT #873
EA# NM-020-01-037**

PURPOSE AND NEED:

One of the major uses of public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has traditionally been the grazing of cattle, sheep or horses for the benefit of individuals and communities throughout the western United States. This use is regulated by public land legislation, including the Taylor Grazing Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, and the Public Rangelands Improvement Act. This document provides information needed to determine whether the BLM should renew a 10-year permit for cattle grazing on the Cerro de los Taoses allotment (#873). This allotment has been in a state of non-use as far back as records show. Based on the Analysis, Interpretation, and Evaluation (AIE) completed in July 2001, it was determined that this allotment may benefit from a short, intense grazing period during mid-summer, with total AUMs not to exceed 48. Thus the BLM is recommending that grazing be authorized as described in the proposed action.

PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Proposed Action: Renew the term grazing permit under the following guidelines. For additional information refer to Appendix 1 - Analysis, interpretation, and Evaluation.

Livestock Type	cow/calf
Seasons of Use and Numbers	70 cattle from July 15 th to July 31 st - This gives a total of 39 AUMs.
Total Acres	960 public acres
Pastures	None
Grazing System	By installing a short intense grazing period after seeds have ripened, the cattle will increase seed shatter as well as work the seed into the ground. In addition, a short mid-summer grazing period provides both cool and warm season rest.
Proposed Improvements	Installation of fencing along all unfenced BLM boundaries of the allotment. Other improvements may be negotiated with the permittee in the future.

Monitoring	The BLM would continue the long-term rangeland monitoring study program, continue to consult with the grazing permittee on placement of mineral and supplemental feed, and continue monitoring for new populations of noxious weeds.
Location and Maps	The allotment is located approximately 14 miles northwest of Taos, NM. Allotment map is attached. USGS 7 ½ Quad: Tres Orejas and Cerro de los Taoses

No Action Alternative: Do not issue the permit to graze this allotment, thereby continuing the state of non-use.

Alternative 1 - Disposal: The Taos Resource Management Plan (RMP) (USDI, BLM, 1988) identified sections 8 and 29 of T 26N, R 11E of NMPM as lands for disposal. If an individual or corporation would be interested in the outright purchase or trade of these lands, the grazing permittee would be given 2 years notice and the permit would be reissued for 2 years. Upon transfer of the land, the BLM grazing preference would be canceled. This action would be considered in the future even if a permit had been issued. A separate EA would have to be completed for the transfer.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT/ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Resource or Issue	Affected Environment/Environmental Impacts
Areas of Environmental Concern/Special Management Areas	There are none in or adjacent to the allotment, so there would be no effects from any of the actions.
Wilderness/Wilderness Study Areas	There are none in or adjacent to the allotment, so there would be no effects from any of the actions
Wild and Scenic Rivers	There are none in or adjacent to the allotment, so there would be no effects from any of the actions.
Air Quality	Under the proposed levels of use, livestock grazing will not significantly affect air quality. There would be no measurable impacts from the proposed action or the no action alternative. Alternative 1 would convert the parcels from public to private, so this issue would be beyond the control of the BLM.

<p>Soils</p>	<p>The soils include Hernandez-Petaca loam association, Fernando-Hernandez loam association, and the Orejas-Montecito stony loam association. (USDA, SCS, 1982)</p> <p>Livestock affect soils both positively and negatively. Livestock movement over moderately steep terrain or wet soils can result in increased erosion. Intense, repeated hoof trampling in limited, confined areas may cause soil compaction of the surface layer and reduce the infiltration rate in the short term, as well as reduce the basal vegetation cover. Healthy biological soil crusts and natural processes (such as freeze-thaw cycles, microbial decomposition activity, or interactions of ecosystems components) progressively improve soil infiltration rates to predisturbance levels in the long term when livestock grazing is periodic. Conversely, limited livestock trampling can loosen compacted soil and break up the hydrophobic crust, and improve infiltration. In addition, livestock manure improves soil fertility.</p> <p>Under the proposed action, livestock would be on the allotment for only 2 weeks every year. During that time they will have both positive and negative impacts on the soil. Since the grazing period is very short, soils will have time to fully recover from any negative impacts that livestock have caused. In addition, the grazing period does not occur during the normal monsoon season; this will help prevent erosion caused by the movement of livestock over wet soils.</p> <p>The no action alternative would eliminate both the positive and negative effects of grazing. Alternative 1 would convert the parcels from public to private, so this issue would be beyond the control of the BLM.</p>
<p>Wetlands/ Riparian Areas</p>	<p>There are no wetlands or riparian areas within allotment, so there would be no effects from any of the actions.</p>
<p>Floodplains</p>	<p>There are no floodplains within the allotment, so there would be no effects from any of the actions.</p>

<p>Water Quality</p>	<p>The most recent data from the 1996 New Mexico State Water Quality and Water Pollution Control Commission indicates that this allotment's public land acreage is .0004% of the Upper Rio Grande drainage sub-basin, No. 13020101, which contains 1,980,467 acres total. The BLM administered land in this sub-basin is 19.11% of the total. The Upper Rio Grande basin contains tributary watersheds that only partially support their attainable uses due to causes such as siltation, turbidity, sedimentation, river bank destabilization, reduction of riparian vegetation, and flow alteration. This allotment is west of the Rio Grande, which is identified as a non-affected stream in this portion of the basin. Negative grazing impacts are minimal because livestock use is none or well below proper use levels. The major non-point source pollution production problem is sediment.</p> <p>The proposed action would cause minimal sediment production because of limited use. Presently the inadequate plant cover, the inadequate amount of litter, and the poor reproduction and low frequency of grasses, conditions that were not created by overgrazing, require vegetative treatment projects, which may not have a favorable cost/benefit ratio. Vegetative treatments would result in increased ground cover, and increased density and frequency of desirable species, which would protect the soil surface and minimize erosion. In addition, in order to ensure that livestock management does not significantly contribute to degraded water quality or sediment production, the best management practices would be followed:</p> <p><i>Controlling Livestock Numbers and Season of Use</i> - Although proper stocking rate and season of use are specified in the permit, periodic field checks would be made to identify if adjustments in livestock number or season are needed. Checks include the following: Range readiness evaluations to assure that the soil is not too wet and that sufficient forage growth has occurred; stock counts to assure that only permitted livestock enter the allotment; utilization measurements to provide data for grazing use patterns and improved livestock distribution and allocation; and assessments of rangeland health. Livestock numbers and season of use may be adjusted annually to reflect current climatic conditions.</p>
-----------------------------	---

<p>Water Quality Continued</p>	<p><i>Controlling Livestock Distribution</i> - Livestock use within allotments is typically not uniform due to variations in topography, water availability, and vegetation type and condition. Techniques being used to achieve proper distribution or to lessen the impact to sensitive areas or areas that are naturally overused include strategic placement of supplements, placement of water, and herding.</p> <p>There would be no effect to water quality under the no action alternative. Alternative 1 would convert the parcels from public to private, so this issue would be beyond the control of the BLM.</p>
<p>Prime or Unique Farmland</p>	<p>No prime or unique farmlands have been identified within the Taos Field Office area, so there would be no impact from any of the actions.</p>
<p>Vegetation</p>	<p>The plant association can be described as a shrub/grassland. Big sagebrush heavily dominates the swales and nearly level areas, while grasses dominate the ridges. Grasses present include ring muhly, galleta, blue grama, bottlebrush squirreltail, threeawn, and Indian ricegrass. Broom snakeweed and prickly pear cactus are common in the lower elevations. Winterfat is found in the mid-elevations. Pinyon and juniper are present at ridge tops.</p> <p>The short, intense grazing system described under the proposed action will affect vegetation positively. The livestock will be used as a tool to increase seed shatter and to work seed into the ground. The no action alternative would not affect vegetation. Alternative 1 would convert the parcels from public to private, so improvement of vegetation on the allotment would be beyond the control of the BLM.</p>
<p>Noxious Weeds</p>	<p>There are no known populations of noxious weeds on the allotment. Noxious weeds can be introduced to the area by livestock, livestock supplemental feed, wildlife, or public land users. The proposed action would cause no additional risks of the introduction of noxious weeds above the present situation. These risks are minimal and acceptable.</p> <p>The no action alternative would eliminate the risks that are a result of livestock use. Alternative 1 would convert the parcels from public to private, so this issue would be beyond the control of the BLM.</p>

<p>Cultural Resources</p>	<p>The allotment is composed of two parcels. One mile southwest of the northern parcel are LA 88653-55 and 88500, mostly lithics dating from Late Archaic to Basketmaker. Two-and-a-half miles north are lithic scatters LA 76112-3 at hunting and processing camps with similar dating. LA 64796, two-and-a-half miles east of the southern parcel, is a hunting and camping site encompassing all Archaic cultural periods.</p> <p>A reconnaissance survey was carried out by Russell Nyland and a three-member range team, on June 22 and 25, 2001. Five sites, LA 133691, 133698, 133706, 133711, all undatable lithic scatters on the northern parcel, were recorded. No adverse effect on cultural resources was noted. Based upon the literature review, and the reconnaissance survey, it is likely that no damage would result from grazing.</p> <p>Grazing on this allotment could impact cultural resources in two ways. First, grazing could result in trampling of artifacts and features. Second, grazing could increase natural erosion, damaging sites. There are no known impacts to cultural resources within the allotment and grazing impact will likely remain low under the proposed action. Furthermore, all proposed range projects that include earth disturbing activities will be inventoried for cultural resources and any sites will be avoid or the impacts mitigated.</p> <p>The no action alternative will have no effect on cultural resources.</p>
<p>Native American Religious Concerns</p>	<p>There have been no areas of concern identified within this allotment. As a part of the EA process, all tribes within the Taos Field Office boundaries will receive the opportunity to provide any areas of concern in or near the allotment.</p>

<p>Wildlife</p>	<p>Existing habitats within the area range from pinyon-juniper woodlands to shrub/grassland and support species such as coyote, porcupine, jackrabbit, cottontail rabbit, sharp-shinned and red-tailed hawks, western bluebirds, hummingbirds, western meadowlark, mourning dove, barn swallow, black-billed magpie, golden eagle, montaine voles, northern pocket gophers, meadow jumping mice, whiptail lizard, collared lizard, gopher snake, western rattlesnake, upland chorus frog, tiger salamander, and a variety of insects. This area also provides habitat for big game species such as elk, mule deer, and mountain lion. Despite the existence of this habitat, large game and certain other species rarely use the area because of the increasing presence of people and domestic animals (dogs&cats) associated with the housing developments adjacent to the allotment.</p>
<p>Wildlife continued</p>	<p>The proposed action would cause minimal impacts to wildlife. The no action alternative would cause no impacts to wildlife. Alternative 1 would convert the parcels from public to private, so this issue would be beyond the control of the BLM.</p>
<p>Threatened or Endangered Species</p>	<p>Four federally listed threatened and endangered species, one proposed threatened species , and twenty-seven species of concern have the potential to occur within Taos County (USDI, FWS, 2000), which include bald eagle, Mexican spotted owl, mountain plover, southwestern flycatcher, and several species of bats. There is no known current or potential habitat that exists within the allotment to support these species. Therefore, there would be no effects on threatened or endangered species from any of the actions.</p>
<p>Social/Economic Issues</p>	<p>Currently the allotment does not provide income for a permittee, nor grazing fees to the county. The no action alternative would continue the present situation. Under the proposed action the permit would be for no more than 48 AUMs, and thus it is unlikely that it would provide significant financial growth for a future permittee or significant funds to the county in the form of grazing fees. Alternative 1 would convert the parcels from public to private, and the issue would then be beyond the control of the BLM. None of the actions would result in impacts that would occur disproportionately in low-income groups, minorities, or Indian tribes.</p>

Recreation	<p>There are no developed recreation sites on or near the allotment. There would be acceptable impacts from the proposed action because livestock grazing has minimal conflicts with recreation in this area. There would be no impacts from the no action alternative. Alternative 1 would convert the parcels from public to private, and the issue would then be beyond the control of the BLM.</p>
Fundamentals for Rangeland Health	<p>The 2001 functionality assessment determined that in many areas the allotment is not making significant progress towards meeting the Fundamentals of Rangeland Health. Livestock use is not the cause this static to downward trend. Vegetative treatments are necessary to improve the trend. The first step will be to use livestock as a tool to this end. Other treatments such as discing or prescribed burns could be negotiated with a future permittee.</p> <p>If future assessments result in a determination that changes in the season of use or number of AUMs are necessary, the permit will be reissued subject to revised terms and conditions.</p>
Fundamentals for Rangeland Health continued	<p>The no action alternative would have no impacts on rangeland health. Alternative 1 would convert the parcels from public to private, and the issue would then be beyond the control of the BLM.</p>
Residual Impacts	<p>Residual impacts of livestock grazing would be annual forage growth removal at acceptable levels. Grazing may be detectable by visitors to the area, but this is an acceptable impact. The presence of livestock on the landscape may be an aesthetically unacceptable scenic experience for some public land users but pleasing to others. The existing roads located on the allotments do not have Rights of Way. Installation of the proposed fencing may cause the closure of these roads, and access to the subdivisions would have to be constructed on private land.</p>

Cumulative Impacts	Since the allotment comprises only .0004% of the sub-basin, the proposed action would have an immeasurable contributing effect on the cumulative impact on water quality. Other uses within the drainage basin include big game grazing, Forest Service administered grazing, New Mexico state administered grazing, private livestock ranch grazing, private gravel pits, hunting, right-of-way development, and the development of new housing subdivisions. The impacts of the proposed action would be minimal in their contribution to the cumulative combination of surface disturbing activities occurring in the area, especially in regards to the allotment's small acreage compared to the basin's total acreage. Alternative 1 would convert the parcels from public to private, and the issue would then be beyond the control of the BLM.
Other	Housing subdivisions are located north, northwest, west and southwest of the BLM parcels of this allotment. The activities and influences of these subdivisions have direct and indirect effects on the management of this land. The roads associated with the subdivisions drift onto BLM. These need to be surveyed. The domestic animals associated with the allotment may need to be controlled. The issue of domestic animals disturbing livestock would fall under New Mexico State Law.
Conformance with Plans	The proposed action , the no action alternative, and Alternative 1 are in conformance with the Taos Resource Area Management Plan (USDI, BLM, 1988). Livestock grazing impacts were analyzed on an area wide basis in the Taos Resource Management Plan. An Analysis, Interpretation, and Evaluation document has been prepared and follows. (See Appendix 1.)

**Appendix 1- Analysis Interpretation and Evaluation (AIE)
Cerro del los Taoses # 873 Allotment**

Permittee		None
Livestock Use	Preference AUMs	180
	Period of Use	Has been in a state of non-use as far back as records show.

	Kind of livestock	cow / calf
	Percent Public Land	100%
Allotment Profile	Physical Description	The allotment is approximately 14 miles northwest of Taos, NM. The allotment has elevations ranging from 7,110 ft. to 7,580 ft. It is divided into two parts. One part consists of the northern half of section 29, T26N, R11E, Tres Orejas Quadrangle. The other part, section 8 T26N, R11E, Cerro de los Taoses Quadrangle is 2 miles directly north. There is no allotment boundary fencing or permanent water source developments. The plant association is a shrub grassland. Big sagebrush heavily dominates the swales and nearly level areas, while grasses dominate the ridges. Grasses present include ring muhly, galleta, blue grama, bottlebrush squirreltail, threeawn, and Indian ricegrass. Broom snakeweed and prickly pear cactus are common in the lower elevations and there is some winterfat. Pinyon and juniper are present at ridgetops. The soils include the Hernandez-Petaca loam association, the Fernando-Hernandez loam association, and the Orejas-Montecito stony loam, loam association. (USDA, SCS, 1982.)
	Land Status Acreage	960 public acres

	Management Objectives	The allotment fall into the “C” management category. C category allotments have a “not apparent” to “upward” long term trend, have no significant resource conflicts, and have a low potential for improvement in vegetative production. Also the allotments contain less than 1,540 acres of public land. Management practices include providing partial cool or warm season rest with grazing during the dormant period. Cattle are removed from the allotment when proper use levels are reached on the key species. This provides optimum vegetative ground cover to protect the area from erosion and reduces the potential conversion of plant communities by overutilization of desirable species.
	Key Forage Species	blue grama, Indian ricegrass, winterfat,
	Grazing System	None
Management Evaluation	Actual Use	None
	Utilization	There appears to be little if any utilization of the vegetation on this allotment.
	Precipitation	The NOAA data (Tres Piedras) is substantially incomplete. (See Appendix 2.)
	Trend	Long term range trend data is not available. From the most recent visit to the allotment we can state that erosion is moderate to severe in swales and slight to moderate on up slopes and ridges. This may be largely a result of negative changes in plant community composition and distribution as well as an increase in the amount of bare ground. In particular, section 29 and the southern part of section 8 have very low species diversity, the dominant species being sagebrush. In these areas there are numerous gullies. In addition, pedestaling is common throughout the allotment.

<p>Issues and Concerns</p>		<p>The western boundary of section 8 is bordered by a new subdivision. The northern and western boundaries of section 29 are also bordered by new subdivisions. There are already number of houses in the subdivisions. These people may not favor cattle grazing near their homes.</p> <p>Additionally, a road has been created to provide access to a number of homes in the subdivision. This road runs through the western border of section 8 and will need to be surveyed.</p> <p>Finally, along the northern border of section 29 there is a household having a large number of dogs (eight to ten) that roam freely over the allotment. These dogs may harass cattle grazed on section 29.</p>
<p>Conclusions and Recommendations</p>		<p>The outcome of future management practices should be increased ground cover and increased species diversity. Especially important is increasing the number of grass species as well as the total amount of grass in this allotment. Appropriate management practices may include prescribed burning, discing and seeding, as well as the use of livestock.</p> <p>Though the above mentioned management practices may increase wildlife diversity, the human development that is encroaching on the boundaries of this allotment suggests that this area will not serve as prime wildlife habitat in the future. In addition, management becomes increasingly difficult with the rising number of homes in the area. Thus disposal of this land is an option that should be considered seriously.</p>

Appendix 2 - Precipitation Data for Tres Piedras

Year	Precipitation (inches)	Departure From Normal (inches)
1991	19.50	Unavailable
1992	14.79	2.11
1993	Unavailable	Unavailable
1994	18.78	Unavailable
1995	16.80	Unavailable
1996	14.88	Unavailable
1997	Unavailable	Unavailable
1998	Unavailable	Unavailable
1999	15.21	Unavailable
2000	Unavailable	Unavailable

Appendix 3 - Process Record

These documents include letters, maps, and other information relating to the issuance of the grazing permit. They are available for review at the Taos Field Office, 226 Cruz Alta Rd., Taos, NM 87571, (505) 758-8851. Office hours are 7:45 a.m. through 4:40 p.m. Monday through Friday.

#	Date	Description	Location
1	2000-present	Cerro de los Taoses permittee file	Taos Field Office
2	2001-present	Cerro del los Taoses allotment file	Taos Field Office
3	1982	Soil Conservation Service Soil Survey of Taos County Area	Taos Field Office
4	1988	Taos Resource Management Plan	Taos Field Office
5	1996	Taos Weed Prevention Plan	Taos Field Office
6	7-7-98	Public meeting regarding permit renewal process	Tres Piedras
7	7-8-98	Public meeting regarding permit renewal process	Taos
8	7-9-98	Public meeting regarding permit renewal process	Espanola
9	7-20-98	Public meeting regarding permit renewal process	Las Vegas
10	7-21-98	Public meeting agenda and attendee list	Taos Field Office - NEPA Process File
11	8-17-98-8-24-98	Letter requesting written notice of interested public status and replies received	Taos Field Office-NEPA Process File
12	8-14-01-8-28-01	Analysis, Interpretation, and Evaluation Document sent and comments requested	Taos Field Office-NEPA Process File

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

The following groups or individuals received copies of the AIE and will receive this EA:

New Mexico Department of Game and Fish	Earth Justice Legal Defense Fund
New Mexico Cattle Growers Association	New Mexico Wilderness Alliance
National Audobon Society	Center for Biological Diversity
New Mexico Public Lands Council	NM RAC Chairperson, Cecilia Abeyta
People for the USA	Roger Pattison
Santa Fe Group Sierra Club	Charles Pergier
Forest Guardians	Jerry M. Ryburn
New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau	Robyn Tierny
Pueblo of Cochiti	Patrick Torres
Pueblo of Nambe	Richard Zierlein
Pueblo of Picuris	Joe A. Romero
Pueblo of Pojoaque	Larry L. Baker
Pueblo of San Ildefonso	Anthony Benson
Pueblo of San Juan	William C. Buss
Pueblo of Santa Clara	Phil Kennicott
Pueblo of Santo Domingo	Roger Pattison
Pueblo of Taos	Clifford K. Larsen
Pueblo of Tesuque	Barbara Johnson
Eight Northern Pueblos Council	Bennett Brown
Jicarilla Apache Tribe	Randolph Barnhouse
Navajo Nation	
The Hopi Tribe	
State Land Office	
New Mexico Wool Growers, Inc.	

PREPARERS:

Sam DesGeorges, Assistant Field Manager, Multi-Resources
Linus Meyer, Rangeland Management Specialist
Russell Nyland, Archaeologist
Kimberly Franklin, Range Technician

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- New Mexico Surface Water Quality Commission. 1996. *New Mexico State Water Quality and Water Pollution Control Report*.
- U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service. 1982. *Soil Conservation Service Soil Survey of Taos County, New Mexico*.
- U.S. Dept. of Commerce, National Oceanic Atmospheric Association. 1991-2001. *NOAA Climatological Data Annual Summaries*.
- U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management. 1988. *Taos Resource Management Plan*.
- U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service. 2000. *Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species List for Taos County*.

This Environmental Assessment will be mailed to all individuals or organizations who have notified the Taos Field Office of their interest. These individuals or organizations will be given 15 days to make comments on the accuracy of the document.

Prepared by: Linus Meyer 10-5-2001
Rangeland Management Specialist Date

I concur: Ron Huntsinger 10-5-2001
Field Office Manager Date