



**2007 ACTIVITIES ON THE
BRIDGEPORT RANGER DISTRICT
HUMBOLDT-TOIYABE NATIONAL FOREST**

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS

October 24, 2007

Carson City, Nevada

Cheryl F. Probert

Bridgeport District Ranger

INTRODUCTION

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and committee members. It is a pleasure to have this opportunity to give you an update on activities on the Nevada side of the Bridgeport Ranger District. My name is Cheryl Probert and I am the District Ranger in Bridgeport.

Today I will address six different emphasis areas or projects on the District. They are: 1) domestic sheep grazing in Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep habitat, 2) Rosaschi Ranch Restoration, 3) vegetation management projects, 4) private land access, 5) livestock grazing management and 6) travel management planning.

DOMESTIC SHEEP GRAZING IN SIERRA NEVADA BIGHORN SHEEP HABITAT

As you are most likely aware, two Nevada ranchers run bands of sheep on the Bridgeport Ranger District, in both California and Nevada. Four of the allotments that have domestic sheep on them are in the draft recovery area for the Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep. One permittee, Ted Borda, has opted to utilize an allotment outside of the bighorn recovery area. The other permittee, Fred Fulstone (dba F.I.M. Corporation) has been continuing to graze in the bighorn habitat. For the past two years, F.I.M. Corp. has not been authorized on one of the allotments in SNBS habitat (Dunderberg) and the other two allotments have been grazed together by only one band. As part of

the Forest Service's obligation under the Endangered Species Act, we have consulted with the Fish and Wildlife Service regarding the impacts of sheep grazing on bighorn sheep recovery for the past 4 years. The Fish and Wildlife Service has issued biological opinions containing several mitigation measures required to avoid a jeopardy opinion. In the 2005, 2006, and 2007 grazing seasons we found no evidence of any interactions between domestic and wild sheep throughout the season. The SNBS continue to move farther north into the Bridgeport District and monitoring has indicated that wild sheep have been on the allotments undetected. This is making it increasingly difficult to authorize domestic livestock grazing on the allotments and support recovery of the bighorn. The Bridgeport District has been working with F.I.M. Corporation to find alternate allotments for them to graze. To date, we have not been able to offer allotments which meet F.I.M. Corp.'s needs.

Last month the US Fish and Wildlife Service proposed to designate critical habitat for Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep. Some of this would be on the Bridgeport District, on and adjacent to allotments that F.I.M. Corp. is permitted on. Mono County, California is sponsoring a public workshop to discuss the implications of this designation later today.

ROSACHI RANCH RESTORATION

Another ongoing project for the District is the Rosachi Ranch Restoration on the East Walker River, in the Sweetwater area of Lyon County. We have been working with several groups and agencies over the years to restore the upland and wetland vegetation. Ultimately we are trying to establish vegetation communities that will be sustainable without irrigation. In 2005 and 2006, a contractor seeded approximately 64 acres of uplands with native vegetation. This seeding has largely been unsuccessful so we have now enlisted the help of experts from the Great Basin Plant Materials Center of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Resource Concepts, Inc. and the Rocky Mountain Research Station to assist us with upland recovery. We are finalizing a research project which will analyze the effectiveness of different plant species and seed preparation methods for restoration. We hope that this information could eventually be used elsewhere in ranch restoration on the Walker River. In addition, we have now

removed all of the interior fences, removed the old, unsafe buildings, and have a riparian burning plan to maintain vegetation. We are also competing for grant money to construct recreational improvements including interpretive panels, an accessible trail to the river, and a parking area. We continue to expand our partners to include the educational community and others to broaden the use and potential of the ranch.

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

Another of our emphases is to complete implementation of two pinyon pine reduction projects covering a total of approximately 5,000 acres. Both of these projects are in Lyon County in the Sweetwater and Bald Mountain areas. The Sweetwater project is designed to improve sage grouse habitat by removing pinyon trees which have encroached into the sagebrush. This project is jointly funded by the Forest Service and the Nevada Department of Wildlife. Our fire crews are about 80% done with felling the pinyon trees. Firewood cutters have been taking most of the wood and this winter we will pile and burn the slash. The Bald Mountain project is designed to reduce fuel loading and improve overall watershed conditions by burning dense pinyon stands under controlled conditions. We are planning to burn this fall if the conditions allow. On the California side of the District, we completed planning for the Mill Canyon Fuel Reduction project which includes timber harvest and prescribed burning in that drainage outside of Walker, CA.

This fall we are beginning the planning effort for another fuel reduction/sage grouse habitat improvement project in the China Camp area, located in Lyon County. Other projects for the outyears include one north of the Sceirene Ranch in the Frying Pan area and Silverado Canyon on the southwest side of the Sweetwater Range.

PRIVATE LAND ACCESS

The District has finished up work on several pending requests for access to private lands. We signed three decisions this year authorizing road construction for private land access and another decision is imminent. Three of these four are in the Smith Valley area.

LIVESTOCK GRAZING MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

In September of this year I signed the Record of Decision for the Great Basin South Environmental Impact Statement. This decision authorizes grazing on 11 allotments and closes one allotment which has been vacant for many years. The analysis covered over 410,000 acres in Mineral and Lyon Counties, Nevada and Mono County, California from Mono Lake on the south to the Sweetwater Mountains on the north. Range conditions in this area are less than potential and the decision incorporates periods of rest into the grazing management intended to improve conditions. It also closes a portion of the Huntoon Allotment which can not sustain livestock grazing due to degraded conditions. This decision is in the administrative appeal period now.

During the summer of 2007 Bridgeport rangeland management specialists began gathering data for our next Recission Act grazing analysis—Sierra Basin EIS. This analysis will cover the remainder of the District from the Sweetwater Mountains west to the Sierra Mountains. I expect to publish the Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS for this project in early winter of 2008 and to have a Draft EIS out for public comment in September of 2008.

Since I arrived on the District two years ago, we have doubled our staffing in the range management program area. We are emphasizing more on-the-ground monitoring and management with permittees. Due to the extreme drought conditions this year, most permittees moved off the allotments several weeks early in order to comply with grazing standards. In July of 2007 we gathered 80 head of wild horses off the Powell Mountain Wild Horse and Burro territory in an attempt to reach the Appropriate Management Level of 29 head.

Finally, in 2008 we will celebrate the 100 year anniversary of the Little Walker Grazing Association. This is the oldest grazing association in the entire National Forest System.

TRAVEL MANAGEMENT

The Bridgeport District is also working on travel management planning in order to comply with the Service-wide Travel Management Rule. Most of the District's lands in Nevada are currently open to cross-country motorized travel. The travel management plan will designate which routes are open to motorized travel and the remainder of the lands will be closed to motorized travel. We have approximately 500 miles of roads and trails which are not part of the Forest Service transportation system. The preliminary proposed action would incorporate about half of those miles into the system and the remainder would be closed. We are in the process of gathering focused public input on our preliminary proposal. We expect to have a proposed action finalized in March of 2008 and we will then begin preparation of an EIS.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I want to again thank you for the opportunity to give this testimony and I look forward to working with the people of Nevada and eastern California to manage the National Forest resources. The attached pages have additional details on District accomplishments this year. Please feel free to contact me for any further updates or more information on any of these projects.

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Bridgeport Ranger District



2007 Accomplishments

A photograph of a forest fire with the word "Fire" overlaid in a stylized font. The fire is visible in the background, with flames rising from the ground and trees. The foreground shows green foliage and trees. The text "Fire" is in a dark brown color with a white outline, slanted upwards from left to right.

Fire

A photograph of a forest fire with the word "Fuels" overlaid in a stylized font. The fire is visible in the background, with flames rising from the ground and trees. The foreground shows green foliage and trees. The text "Fuels" is in a bright yellow color with a white outline, slanted upwards from left to right.

Fuels

- 
- ❖ 600 Acres treated for Hazardous Fuels Reduction
 - ❖ Three dump trucks of trash removed from Bridgeport District near Camp Antelope
 - ❖ Three Fire Safe Councils *“Reignited”*



▶ 17 Fires / 7 Human Caused

▶ 924 Acres Burned

▶ 4 Off District Engine / 13

Off District Overhead

Assignments

TACKASS FIRE

2006

Natural Revegetation





Heritage Resources

- ✓ 2020 Volunteer Hours
- ✓ Six Section 106 Submittals
- ✓ Tons of Miles of Roads Surveyed

Wildlife

- ☺ 500 Acres of Pinyon Treated for Sage Grouse Habitat Improvement
- ☺ Multiple Educational Programs given at Local Campground
- ☺ Two Interpretive Signs Completed & Ready for Installation
- ☺ Remaining Deer Migration Inhibiting Fences Removed from Rosaschi Ranch Property
- ☺ Aspen Enhancement Project Surveys Completed

Bridgeport Ranger District

Fisheries

Designed and fabricated 8 new amphibian trailhead signs and 8000 amphibian posters and brochures.



Amphibian Panel

**Walker River Watershed
Stream Habitat Surveys (04 - 07)
&
Silver and Wolf Creeks:
Stream Habitat Monitoring**

- Completed stream habitat surveys of the entire Walker River watershed.
- Surveyed a total of 43 streams/Surveyed a total of 284 miles of stream habitat/ Completed reports are on the FS internet website.



Lahontan Cutthroat Trout Habitat Restoration: By-Day and Mill Creeks



- Improved a ford road-stream crossing by installing a culvert in By-Day.
- Restored fish passage at two artificial fish barriers.
- Improved a ford-stream crossing by installing a bridge across Mill Creek.

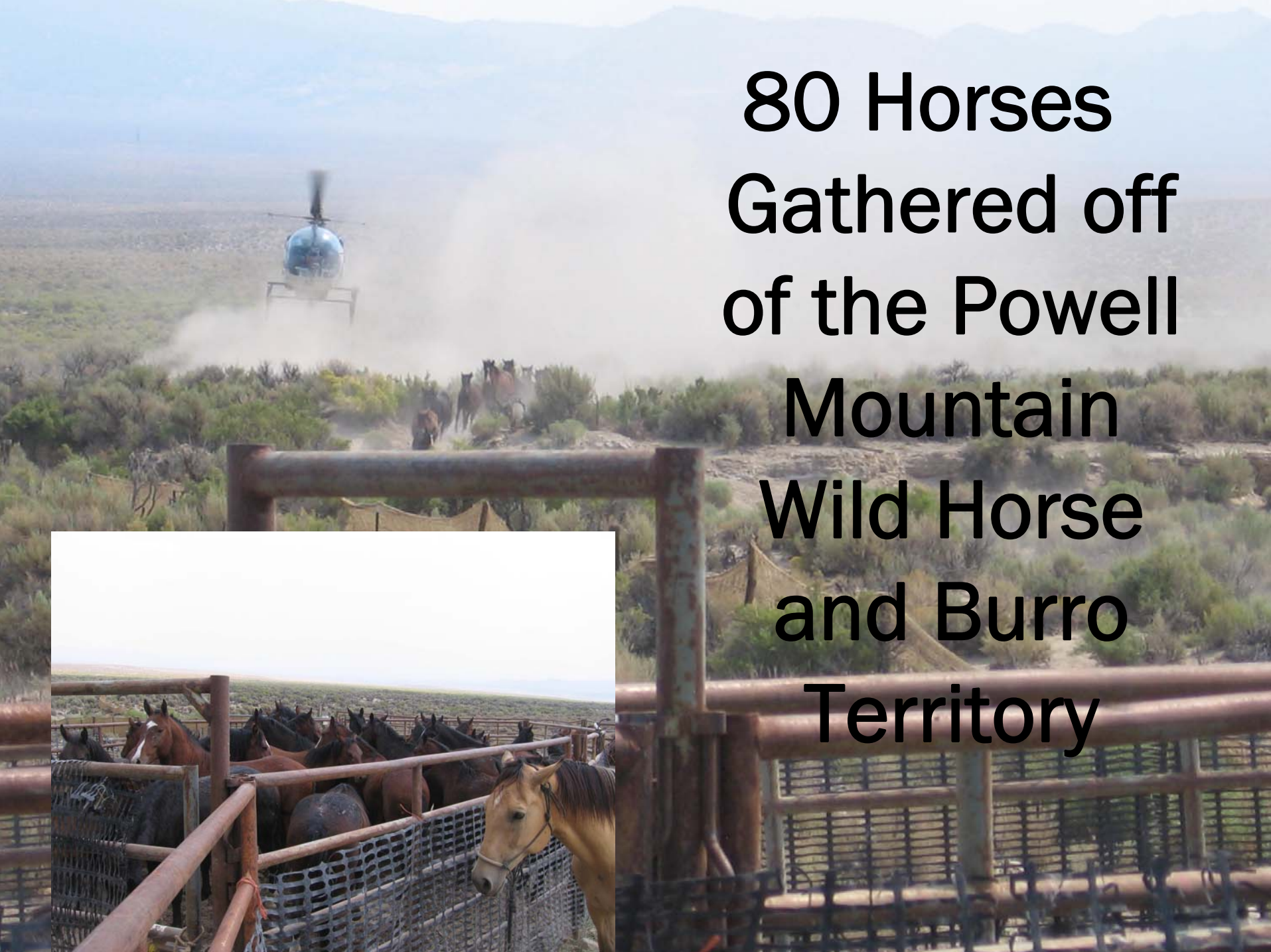
Rangeland Management

☺ Great Basin South
Rangeland Project
Record of Decision
Signed

☺ 12 Allotments

☺ ~410,500 Acres

**80 Horses
Gathered off
of the Powell
Mountain
Wild Horse
and Burro
Territory**





➤ 14 Allotments
Administered
to Standard
covering
225,609 acres

➤ 37 Long term
trend plots
reads

➤ Five Biological
Opinions

Minerals



- 24 active locatable operations were administered to standard.
- Five plans of operation were processed
- 5 mineral materials inquiries
- Dangerous openings at the Masonic Hills Chemung Mine were foamed or bat gated in Fall 2006.
- A draft Decision Notice dovetailing with an EA and DN/FONSI issued by the BLM in regard to geothermal leasing has been signed.
- Assisting USGS with stream sampling & old mill sites in the Aurora area for mercury contamination.

Recreation

- 60 miles of trails maintained
- Completed Wilderness Education Plan
- Wilderness Stewardship Challenge 51 Points
- 21,704 visitors to front desk
- 1402 Wilderness permits issued
- 917 Christmas Tree Tags Sold
- 2,000 cords of fuelwood sold



- **Bridgeport's Developed Campgrounds bring in the 2nd highest revenue in the entire Intermountain Region.**
- **Occupancy at Twin Lakes area campgrounds is over 75%.**
- **Completed weekly campground inspections on all 19 sites.**

Special Uses

Marine Corps MWTC

- **21 Base Improvement Projects**
- **8 Misc. Special Use Permits**

Other Special Uses

- **12 Annual OG Permits Issued**
- **3 Recreation Residences Permits reissued and 58 inspections**
- **2 recreation events and filming permits**
- **3 road access decisions**

Thank you !

