

-Navajo Nation, Navajo-Hopi Land Commission, FBFA Chapters and LGSC staff, May 15, 2014.

#### Approval, Adoption and Implementation of the Final Integrated Resource Management Plan for the Former Bennett Freeze Area

Rudy Shebala, PhD – Executive Director of Natural Resources Tony Robbins, BIA Natural Resource Manager- Western Navajo Agency Leonard Notah, BIA NEPA Coordinator - Navajo Regional Office

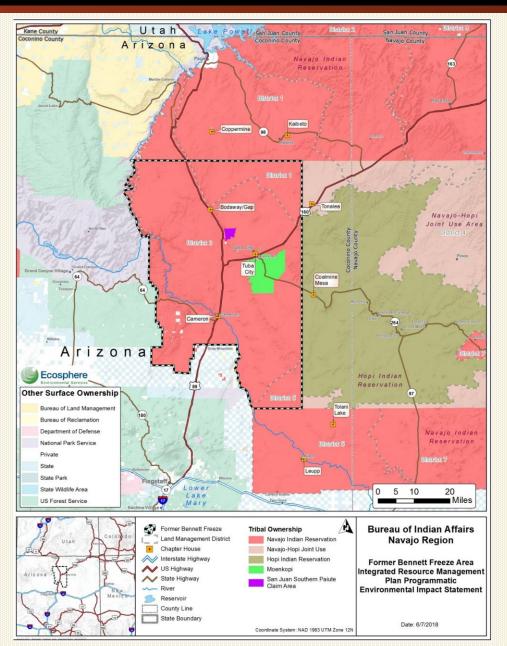
24th Navajo Nation Resources & Development Committee Leadership Meeting



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# **Meeting Agenda**

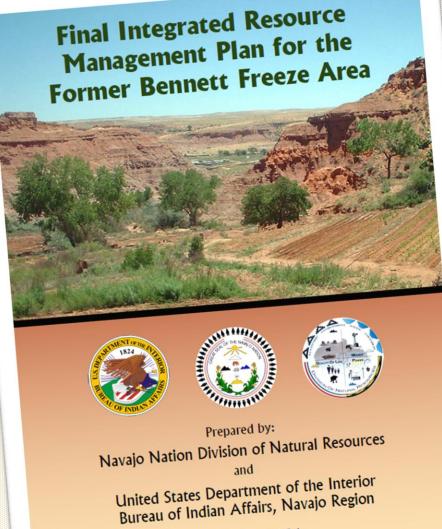
Presentation on the
 Final Programmatic Environmental
 Assessment (PEA) for the Final
 Integrated Resource Management
 Plan of the Former Bennett Freeze
 Area





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### Final Integrated Resource Management Plan for the Former Bennett Freeze Area



September 2021



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#### The Integrated Resource Management Plan (IRMP)

- The IRMP was prepared in accordance with the American Indian Agricultural Resources Management Act (AIARMA), 25 U.S.C. § 3701 et seq.
- AIARMA obligates the Secretary of the Interior to conduct all land management activities on Indian agricultural land in accordance with goals and objectives set forth in an approved agricultural resource management plan, and in an integrated resource management plan. (25 U.S.C. at § 3712(a)).
- The purpose of the IRMP for the Former Bennett Freeze Area is to provide a strategic, visionbased, long-term tribal management plan based on Navajo Nation members' interests, needs, and concerns for their lands, and natural and cultural resources. The IRMP will allow for integrated natural resource management in the FBFA.
- The Navajo Nation is currently developing an Agricultural Resource Management Plan (ARMP) through a self-determination agreement pursuant to AIARMA.
- ♦ The Final IRMP will be made available once BIA receives Navajo Nation approval.



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### **IRMP Approval and Adoption Process**

The Navajo Nation Resources and Development Committee (RDC) of the Navajo Nation Council is the approval body for this IRMP.

- 1) The RDC approved the Draft IRMP on October 7, 2020;
- 2) The BIA completed the Final PEA in September 2021, but the RDC needs to take final action to approve the Final IRMP and select the preferred alternative;
- The RDC selects its preferred alternative from the two alternatives analyzed in the PEA during the NEPA process (the No Action Alternative and the Balanced Growth Emphasis Alternative);
- 4) The BIA Regional Director will issue a decision to adopt the IRMP based on the RDC's recommendation.



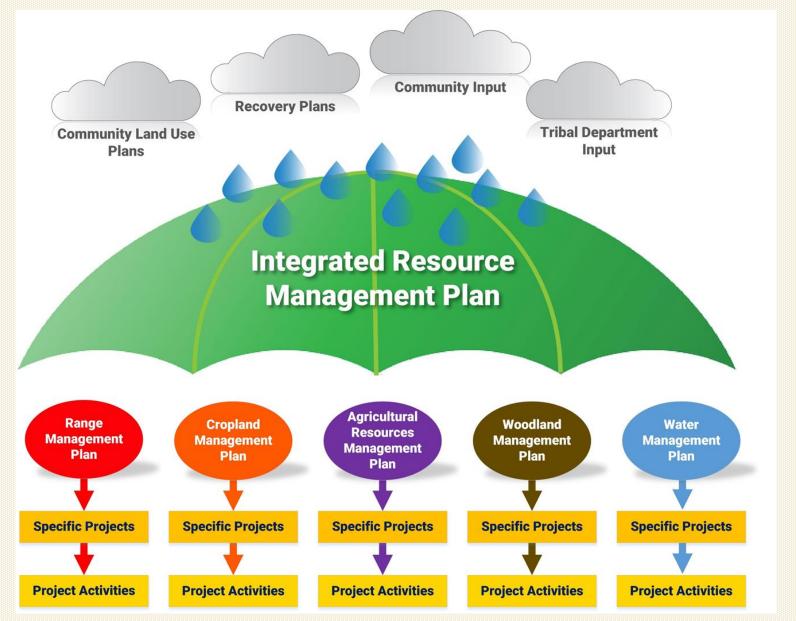
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## **IRMP Implementation**

- Implementation of the IRMP and the preferred management alternative will be pursued through multiple avenues, including preparation and implementation of certain actions (range management plans, conservation plans, annual work plans, etc.) Reference: Final FBFA PEA, page 9-11, Section 1.5.
- Subsequent resource specific implementation plans, such as an ARMP, would be consistent with or conform to the IRMP. The implementation process also includes the Navajo Nation's review of its existing regulations and codes to determine conformance with the IRMP.
- Prioritizing implementation of management actions may depend on funding availability, and programs may use the IRMP to support their future funding requests.
- The IRMP is a living document and will be updated as determined by the Navajo Nation.



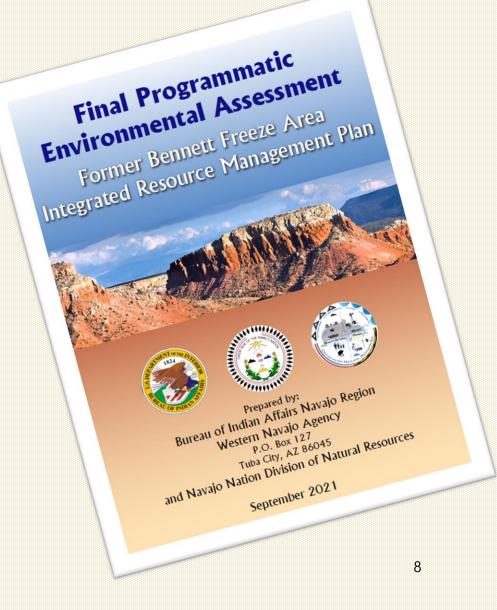
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## The NEPA Process and the Programmatic Environmental Assessment for the IRMP





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### National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Process

- 1. NEPA requires federal agencies to assess the environmental effects of proposed federal actions prior to making decisions.
- 2. A Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) is a concise document that is driven by issues and written to analyze impacts on a broad scale.
- 3. The BIA was the lead Federal agency for the PEA, and the Navajo Nation participated as a cooperating agency.
- 4. The PEA process concludes with a determination of whether to prepare a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).
- 5. The Final Programmatic EA will be available after BIA receives the RDC approval.



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#### Project Interdisciplinary Team: Navajo Nation and BIA Natural Resources Staff

- The project interdisciplinary (ID) team included specialists from the BIA and the Navajo Nation Division of Natural Resources. The ID team was integrally involved in the internal scoping to identify potential issues, understand the proposal, develop the purpose and need, and develop the Proposed Action.
- Through the ID Team, BIA sought the Nation's review and comment on drafts of the PEA and revisions to the draft IRMP.



-Navajo Nation, Navajo-Hopi Land Commission, FBFA Chapters and LGSC staff, May 15, 2014.

### **Public Participation in the NEPA Process**

- Because the IRMP is the Nation's strategic plan for the management of its own resources, and at the request of the RDC, BIA chose to maximize opportunities for public input and participation in the PEA process.
- CEQ and DOI regulations do not require public scoping for environmental assessments, but BIA opted to conduct public scoping to increase public participation and feedback on the draft IRMP and PEA.
- CEQ or DOI regulations implementing NEPA do not require publication of a draft EA for public comment. However, the BIA made the determination that the level of public interest among the Navajo Nation, including the Chapters and community members within the FBFA, warranted publication of a draft PEA for public comment.



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### **Public Participation**

December 1 to 3, 2020

- 45-day public scoping period between November 16, 2020 and December 30, 2020
- Five 2-hour virtual outreach meetings were held in Navajo and English

#### June 2 to 5, 2021

- 30-day public comment period between May 24, 2021 and June 23, 2021
- Four 2-hour virtual outreach meetings were held in Navajo and English
- Each virtual meeting was announced through the radio, website, newspaper, and social media. Interested parties had the opportunity to submit commens by attending the virtual meetings, through the project website, via mail, fax, or email.
- Following the close of the public scoping period, comments were compiled and analyzed to identify issues and concerns.



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- The proposed federal action is the adoption of the IRMP for the FBFA prepared by the BIA Navajo Region and Navajo Nation.
- Two alternatives were analyzed in the PEA: The No Action Alternative and Balanced Growth Emphasis Alternative.



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## **No Action Alternative**

- The IRMP would not be adopted and implemented to meet the FBFA goals and objectives for resource management
- Current land use and resource management activities would continue using existing laws and policies, land use practices, management plans and agreements
- FBFA-wide planning and direction for desired development and land management would not occur and Land Management Areas would not be delineated
- There would be no long-range management plan based on Navajo Nation members' interests, needs, and concerns for their lands, and natural and cultural resources
- The BIA would not have a guiding document for the Secretary's land management activities carried out under AIARMA.



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### **Balanced Growth Emphasis Alternative**

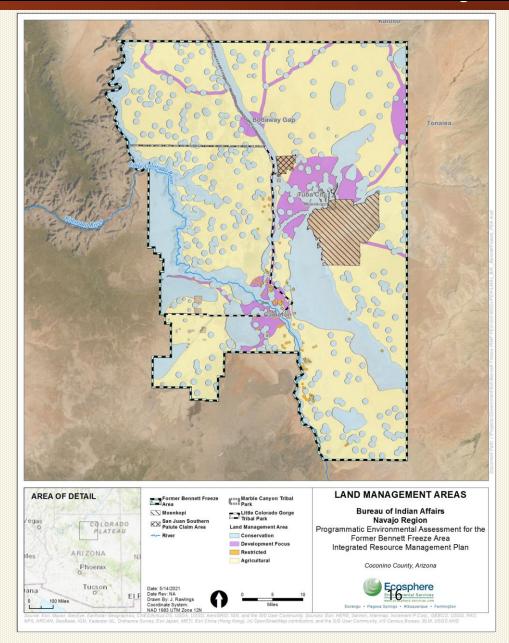
- Supports environmentally and culturally responsible growth and economic development
- Considers current Navajo Nation protection zones and restrictions on development and requires the more robust integrated management techniques identified in the IRMP
- Development would be in line with the goals and objectives of the IRMP
- Focuses on balancing growth and economic development with minimal impact on environmental and cultural resources



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### Balanced Growth Emphasis Alternative (continued)

- The proposed action is based on implementation of the Balanced Growth Emphasis Alternative
- This alternative supports environmentally and culturally responsible growth and economic development by identifying Land Management Areas for
  - Conservation Land Management Areas
  - Development Focus Land Management Areas
  - Restricted Development Land Management Areas
  - Agriculture and Open Space Land Management Areas



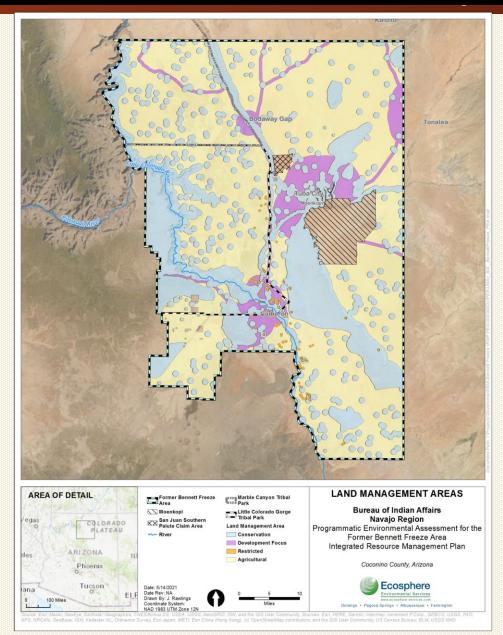


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### **Conservation Areas**

These areas were derived to protect resources such as

- Threatened or endangered species
- Water quality in streams and other water sources
- Cultural resources, traditional cultural properties, and Navajo-Hopi Intergovernmental compact areas are not included in the Conservation Land Management Areas as these areas would continue to be protected through the existing permitting system which requires cultural clearance for any proposal.
- No or limited development would occur in these areas to conserve natural and cultural resources





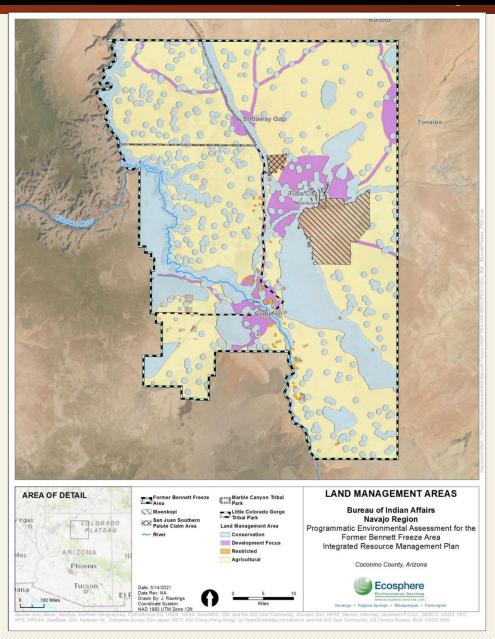
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### **Development Focus Areas**

These areas include:

- 0.25-mile-wide corridors along primary and secondary highways and roads
- Buffers around communities such as Cameron and Tuba City that are expected to expand
- Other areas where development is proposed such as the Gap

Development would continue to be subject to permitting and screening processes such as cultural reviews/surveys

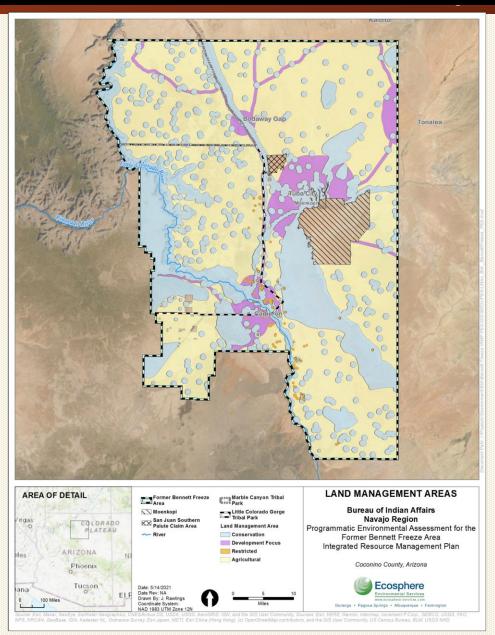




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#### Restricted Development Areas

- These areas include abandoned uranium mines (AUMs) or other safety hazards where development or use is discouraged
- ♦ 0.25-mile buffer on AUMs



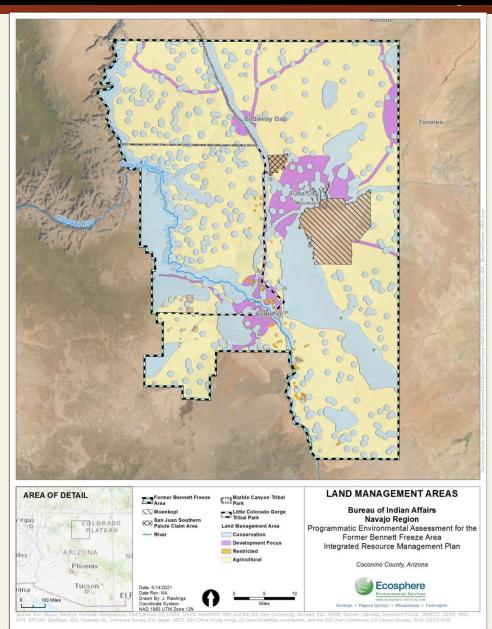


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## **Agricultural Areas**

These areas retain the rural nature of the FBFA for livestock grazing and agriculture, while balancing the need for growth and development. Recommended uses are:

- ♦ Grazing
- Agriculture (including Farm Plots)
- Scattered homesites
- Open space land





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## **Management Actions in the IRMP**

- Adopting the IRMP would not approve any site-specific projects
- Future project-specific management actions that will result in surface disturbance will require additional site-specific environmental analyses under the NEPA



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### **Surface Disturbing Management Actions**

- Update, expand, and maintain water distribution systems to improve access to clean potable water
- Provide viable water supply alternatives
- ♦ Fence riparian areas to limit grazing
- Riparian and other habitat improvements such as streambank stabilization
- Mitigate sand dune migration
- Noxious weed removal/treatment
- Install best management practices (BMPs) to limit erosion



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## **Resources Not Impacted**

- Topography
- ♦ Geology
- ♦ Minerals
- Environmental Justice
- Hunting, Fishing, Gathering
- Timber Harvesting
- Public Health and Safety

- Recreation
- Transportation Network
- ♦ Indian Trust Assets
- Socioeconomics
- ♦ Wilderness



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## **Resources Not Impacted**

**Special Status Species** 

- There would be no change in the Biological Resource Land Use
   Clearance Policies and Procedures
- Any future proposed
   development would be assessed
   for threatened, endangered, or
   other sensitive species

**Cultural Resources** 

- Implementing the Proposed
   Action would not approve any
   site-specific development
- Any future proposed development would be inventoried for cultural resources and Traditional Cultural Properties



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## **Air Quality Impacts Analysis**

#### No Action

 Dust and emissions during construction activities, temporary, localized

- Dust and emissions during construction activities, temporary, localized
- Integrated management of soils, water, agriculture, and livestock grazing would improve rangeland ecological health reducing soil erosion
- Positive impacts from stabilizing sand dunes
- No significant adverse or beneficial effects on air quality are expected from implementing the Proposed Action.



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## **Soil Resource Impacts Analysis**

#### No Action

- Soil mixing and compaction from disturbance
- Where soils are disturbed, increased potential for erosion
- Continued soil loss/erosion and diminished vegetation cover
- Agricultural tilling disturbs soil microbial life and increases wind blown soil loss

- □ Soil mixing and compaction from disturbance
- Where soils are disturbed, increased potential for erosion
- Reduce erosion and increase soil stability with integrated rangeland, soil, water, and vegetation management actions
- Develop and use different types of irrigated and dryland farming practices to improve soil quality and limit wind blown soil loss
- No significant adverse effects on soils are expected from implementing the Proposed Action.



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## Water Quality Impacts Analysis

#### No Action

- Where soils are disturbed, increased potential for sediment to reach waterways
- Potential for accidental spills/leaks of industrial fluids (gas, diesel) during construction
- Soluble pollutants such as pesticides, herbicides, and chemical fertilizers in runoff

- Where soils are disturbed, increased potential for sediment to reach waterways
- Potential for accidental spills/leaks of industrial fluids (gas, diesel) during construction
- Develop different farming practices to reduce agricultural pollutant runoff
- □ Protect waterways with 0.25-mile buffer
- □ Limit grazing from riparian areas
- Stabilize streams, washes, wetlands, and springs through conservation activities
- No significant adverse effects on water quality are expected from implementing the Proposed Action.



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## Water Quantity Impacts Analysis

No Action

#### Increased water use

**Proposed Action** 

□ Increased water use

- Identify water infrastructure deficiencies and quantify system water loss
- Implement strategies to prioritize and combat system losses
- The Proposed Action is not expected to result in significant effects on water quantity.



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## **Vegetation Impacts Analysis**

#### No Action

- Vegetation removal or modification from ground disturbance
- □ Introduction and spread of noxious weeds

- Vegetation removal or modification from ground disturbance
- Employ integrated noxious weed management
- Establish conservation areas
- □ Improve woodland management practices
- Preserve and restore riparian and wetland ecosystems
- Under the Proposed Action, no significant adverse or beneficial effects on vegetation are likely.



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## Wildlife Impacts Analysis

No Action

- No change in the Biological Resource Land Use Clearance Policies and Procedures
- Habitat loss or modification from vegetation removal and ground disturbance
- □ Wildlife avoidance where activities are taking place
- Diminished water quality from sediment, agricultural pollutants, and accidental spills/releases

- No change in the Biological Resource Land Use Clearance Policies and Procedures
- Habitat loss or modification from vegetation removal and ground disturbance
- □ Wildlife avoidance where activities are taking place
- □ Protective buffers along waterways
- □ Limit grazing access in riparian areas
- □ Restore wetlands, riparian areas, and springs
- Habitat improvement projects
- With adherence to the existing policy and implementing BMPs and mitigation measures, no significant effects on wildlife are anticipated.



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## **Agriculture Impacts Analysis**

No Action

 Agriculture Land Use Permits (ALUPS) would continue to be maintained and permitted

- ALUPs would continue to be maintained and permitted
- □ Inventory ALUPs and monitor annually
- Restore agricultural areas of concern to preserve productive areas
- Employ integrated noxious weed management
- Develop different irrigated and dryland farming practices to increase crop yields
- □ Promote best management practices
- These effects on agriculture are not likely to be significant.



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## **Grazing Impacts Analysis**

No Action

- Existing rangeland management and livestock grazing would continue
- Unauthorized grazing use would continue
- Existing permits may need to be modified to reduce stocking rates to meet carrying capacity

- Open rangeland for grazing and wildlife would be retained
- Enforce Navajo Nation grazing regulations and permit requirements
- Existing permits may need to be modified to reduce stocking rates to meet carrying capacity
- Establish a Former Bennett Freeze District Grazing Committee
- **Barrier Stablish a Livestock Management Program**
- Restrict grazing from riparian, restoration, and preservation areas
- □ Improve or repair livestock water features/structures
- The Proposed Action would have no significant adverse effects on rangeland or livestock grazing.



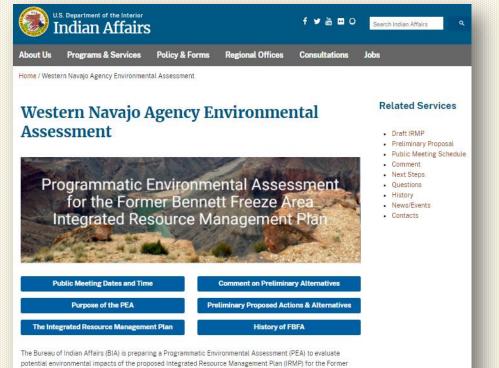
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#### **Question & Answer.** Thank you.

We are requesting from the RDC to approve the IRMP, select the preferred alternative, and make a recommendation to the BIA Navajo Regional Director.

For more information, go to the BIA Project Website at <u>https://www.bia.gov/FBFA-EA</u>

Thank you for your support.



The Bureau of Inbian Attairs (bia) is preparing a Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) to evaluate potential environmental impacts of the proposed Integrated Resource Management Plan (IRMP) for the Former Bennett Freeze Area (FBFA). The BIA, in close consultation with the Navajo Nation, developed the IRMP in accordance with the American Indian Agricultural Resources Management Act (AIARMA) and other applicable laws and regulations. The PEA will be prepared in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The BIA and Navajo Nation are requesting that you consider the IRMP and any environmental impacts it may have.

#### Vision Statement

"A rehabilitated Former Bennett Freeze Area (FBFA) with well-managed natural resources and environmental conditions, improved economic conditions and quality of life, with preserved Diné culture and traditions." by Navajo Nation, Navajo-Hopi Land Commission, FBFA Chapters and LGSC staff, May 15, 2014.