



**Laura Cunningham**  
**California Director**  
**Western Watersheds Project**

PO Box 70  
Beatty, NV 89003  
tel: (775) 513-1280  
fax: (208) 475-4702  
email: [lcunningham@westernwatersheds.org](mailto:lcunningham@westernwatersheds.org)

---

Adam Barnett  
Inyo National Forest,  
Mono Ranger District, White Mountain Ranger District  
[adam.barnett@usda.gov](mailto:adam.barnett@usda.gov)

Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager,  
Ridgecrest Field Office  
Bureau of Land Management  
[tbickaus@blm.gov](mailto:tbickaus@blm.gov)

Michelle Van Der Linden  
[mvanderlinden@blm.gov](mailto:mvanderlinden@blm.gov)

Via email and web portal <https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public//CommentInput?Project=57325>

August 6, 2021

**RE: Cottonwood Creek Wild & Scenic River Plan EA, DOI-BLM-CA-D050-2020-0025-EA**

Dear Project Managers,

Western Watersheds Project submits comments on the Cottonwood Creek Wild and Scenic River proposed plan. The Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are developing Comprehensive River Management Plans (CRMP) for the Cottonwood Creek and Owens River Headwaters Wild and Scenic Rivers on the Inyo National Forest (the Forest) in California. A portion of Cottonwood Creek is located on land managed by the BLM. Each of these two rivers was designated as a Wild and Scenic River by the 2009 Omnibus Public Land Management Act, as an amendment to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 (the Act). The Act requires agencies to develop a CRMP for all rivers added to the National Wild and Scenic River System in order to protect and enhance the rivers' outstandingly remarkable values, free-flowing condition, and water quality.

The project includes plans for approximately 21.5 miles of Cottonwood Creek, of which 17.4 miles are managed by the Inyo National Forest and 4.1 miles are managed by the BLM.

Western Watersheds Project is a non-profit organization with more than 12,000 members and supporters. Our mission is to protect and restore western watersheds and wildlife through education, public policy initiatives, and legal advocacy.

Cottonwood Creek has outstanding wild and scenic values, as evidenced by the introduced refugial population of Paiute cutthroat trout, which I have worked with as a fishery biologist in the 1990s. This alone should elevate the importance of the wild and scenic river status of this river. The extremely rugged and picturesque scenery of the Cottonwood Creek watershed in the White Mountains also easily qualify this stream for a higher level of protection.

We have a few comments concerning future management.

### **Livestock Grazing**

Congress enacted the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act in 1968 to preserve the free-flowing condition, water quality, and outstandingly remarkable natural and cultural values of certain streams. The act allows existing uses of a river to continue and future uses to be considered, so long as existing or proposed uses do not conflict with the protection of river values.

As Oregon conservationist and writer Andy Kerr commented:

Since first enacted in 1968, and amended many times since then, the *only* occurrence of the word “grazing” in the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (WSRA; 16 U.S.C. 1271-1287) is one instance and in the context of specifying a particular grazing allotment as the terminus for a protected stream segment. “Livestock” is never mentioned.<sup>1</sup>

The wild and scenic river portion of Cottonwood Creek in Inyo National Forest is part of the Cottonwood grazing allotment which has been vacant since 2000.

For the Bureau of Land Management portion of Cottonwood Creek, the stream lies within the active cattle-grazed South Oasis allotment that is located partially within the wild and scenic river corridor and to the south, bordering with Forest Service land.

---

1

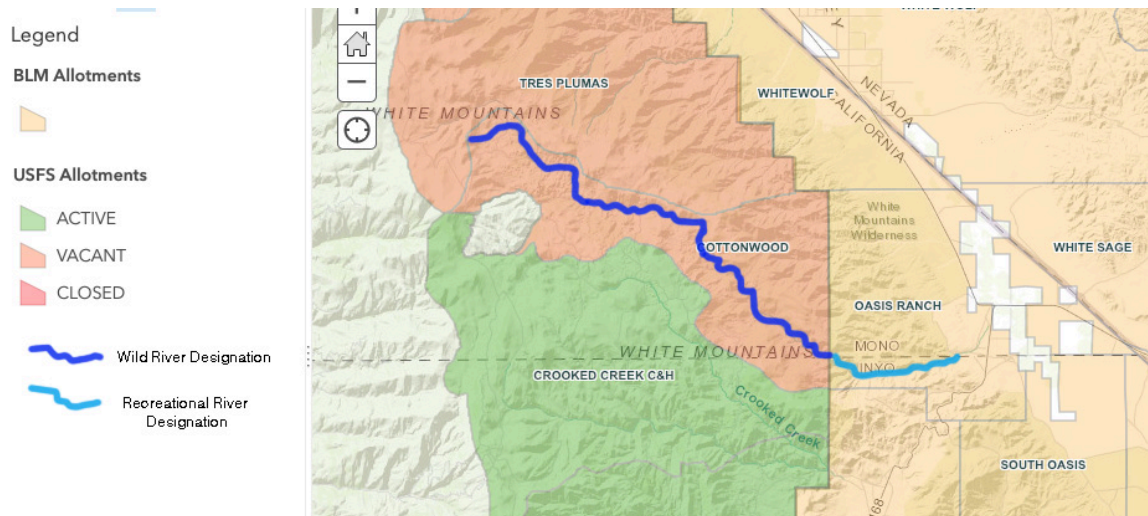


Figure 1. Map showing the Cottonwood Creek Wild and Scenic River and overlapping livestock grazing allotments on US Forest Service and BLM managed lands.

The plan should detail the livestock allotment status and any plans to remove cattle permanently from the Wild and Scenic River corridor. Agencies should explain the status of grazing allotments in detail.

The Inyo National Forest Cottonwood allotment is listed as vacant but not closed. Will the US Forest Service be re-opening this allotment in the future to cattle grazing in the upper Cottonwood Creek watershed in the White Mountains? We recommend this allotment be permanently closed for conservation values.

The BLM-managed Oasis Ranch allotment is actively grazed by cattle, from our observations, but perhaps stocking rates and on and off-times have been changed during the current extreme drought. These management measures of cattle grazing along the lower Cottonwood Creek corridor should be discussed in detail in the future CRMP—including drought management changes, allotment stocking rates, any fencing of river reaches, Allotment Management Plans, Annual Operating Instructions, and other documents for livestock management on public lands. In our observations, cattle have had significant impacts to stream, riparian, meadow, and upland resource values, as well as contributing to lower water quality standards. These water quality impacts could significantly impact recreational values on the lower Cottonwood Creek reaches. These need to be analyzed and addressed in a full Environmental Impact Statement.

We will be providing more comments during this review process to detail these impacts of livestock grazing to wild and scenic river designations along Cottonwood Creek, as well as water quality and fishery impacts to recreational designations in future comments. There are native grasses, sedges, rushes, orchids, scouring rushes, willows, and water birches, to name a few riparian, meadow, and floodplain plant habitats that are heavily impacted by cattle grazing. Streambank and water quality issues should be analyzed in an EA or EIS.

Thank you for considering these comments. Western Watersheds Project thanks you for this opportunity to assist the Inyo National Forest and the BLM by providing comments for this project. Please keep Western Watersheds Project informed of all further substantive stages in this and related NEPA processes and documents by contacting me at [lcunningham@westernwatersheds.org](mailto:lcunningham@westernwatersheds.org).

Thank you,

Laura Cunningham

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Laura Cunningham', with a stylized flourish at the end.

California Director  
Western Watersheds Project  
Cima CA 92323  
Mailing: PO Box 70  
Beatty NV 89003  
775-513-1280  
[lcunningham@westernwatersheds.org](mailto:lcunningham@westernwatersheds.org)