



United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Challis Field Office
1151 Blue Mountain Road
Challis, Idaho 83226



In Reply Refer To:2800/1614 (IDI030)

Dear Interested Public:

The BLM, Challis Field Office is soliciting your thoughts and comments for individual projects by informing you of upcoming projects through an information document. Your comments will help to ensure that pertinent issues are identified early and the items that are of minimal concern do not unnecessarily consume valued time and effort.

Through this letter, the Challis Field Office is asking for your thoughts and comments for the Goldberg Creek Diversion Project, in the Pahsimeroi River Watershed, Central Idaho. The scoping/information package for this project proposal can be found on the internet at:

<http://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/fo/challis/0.html>

Your comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, preliminary issues, and alternatives. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received on or before December 10, 2009 and are directly relevant to the proposal and project area. The BLM will accept feedback beyond this date, however, such comments may be considered secondary to comments received in a timely manner.

Please submit your comments in writing to either the Challis Field Office or to id_challis_fo@blm.gov. The primary contact for questions and comments related to this analysis is Ryan Beatty, Fisheries Biologist, (208-879-6249)

Sincerely,

/s/ David Rosenkrance
Field Manager

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**

Idaho Falls District
Challis Field Office
1151 Blue Mountain Rd
Challis, Id. 83226

Scoping Information Document

The information in this package summarizes a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to grant a right-of-way (ROW) for an irrigation water pipeline and a new point of diversion (POD) on Goldberg Creek. The action being analyzed is issuance of a ROW for 0.8 mile pipeline and a new irrigation water diversion structure. Federal actions must be analyzed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations to determine potential environmental consequences.

The purpose of this document is to inform you and other interested and affected parties of this proposal, and to solicit your comments to assist us with the NEPA review of the proposal. The analysis of this proposal is currently ongoing, and will eventually be documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA) with an estimated completion date of January 1, 2010. Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential environmental issues related to the proposed action and to identify alternatives to the proposed action that meet the purpose and need for the project.

Purpose and Need for Action: The purpose of this action is to consider issuing a right-of way to the applicant. The need for the action is established by the BLM's responsibility under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act to respond to a right-of-way request.

Existing Condition:

The applicant currently diverts water from Goldberg Creek, approximately 0.8 miles downstream of the proposed new diversion point with an existing diversion structure and ditch. Diverted water is used for flood irrigation and to run a pivot to irrigate private land. The existing pivot uses a diesel pump to provide sufficient hydraulic pressure to run the pivot. The proposed pipeline ROW and new POD met funding criteria under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Natural Resource Conservation Service, as an energy conservation project because under the proposed project a diesel pump would no longer be needed to run the pivot.

The new point of diversion for this project requires the applicant to transfer a water-right to a new POD, and is pending approval from Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR). The BLM would issue a ROW contingent upon the point of diversion being approved by IDWR.

This project was re-posted to the BLM on-line NEPA database on Jan 14, 2009. No comments were received by the BLM. However, Western Watershed Project sent a letter to IDWR to protest the applicant's point of diversion request on March 3, 2008.

Location of Proposed Action: The proposed action would occur along Goldburg Creek, a tributary to the Pahsimeroi River, located approximately 30 miles from the confluence of the Pahsimeroi and Salmon River at Ellis, Idaho. The project is in Custer County; legal description is B.M., T. 12 N., R. 24 E., sections 5, 8.

Proposed Action:

The proposed action consists of the BLM issuing a 30-year term ROW grant for 0.8 mile by 24-foot wide (2.6-acres) for an irrigation water pipeline to convey 3.7-ft³/sec of water across BLM administered lands. In addition, this ROW would be granted to the applicant for installation of a new point of diversion on Goldburg Creek. This action will require an open ditch channel, bubble-screen to keep fish and debris out of the system, and a buried bypass pipe to return excess water, debris, and fish to Goldburg Creek. Additionally this new POD will require a permit from IDWR.

The ROW for the open ditch would be 85-feet long and approximately 35-foot wide (0.07-acres). The pipeline layout and design specifications will be described in the EA and best management practices (BMPs) to minimize impacts from construction activities will be described in an Appendix to the EA.

Installation of the ditch, bubble-screen and bypass pipe outlet would result in soil and vegetation disturbance of approximately 3,000 square feet. Upon completion of the project, the applicant would reclaim the disturbed areas and restore the site to the original contour of the ground, and seed all disturbed areas using a BLM-approved seed mix. Staging areas for construction equipment and bubble-screen materials would be located outside of the riparian area, on *private* lands, and would also be re-seeded following project completion. Travel from the staging areas to the construction sites would primarily occur on existing roads and along the new pipeline corridor.

Preliminary Issues: Preliminary issues and affected resources have been identified by an interdisciplinary team through meetings and by resource specialists reviewing the proposal. They are listed below and will be included in the environmental assessment.

Fisheries/Threatened and Endangered Fisheries: Federally protected anadromous salmonids do not occur in the Goldburg Creek sub-watershed, because of a combination of natural dewatering, flow diversion, and man-made diversion structures that impede fish movement. However, Goldburg Creek is designated by the National Marine Fisheries Service as 'critical habitat' and Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) for Snake River Chinook salmon. The proposed project would divert 3.7 ft³/sec of water from a stream reach which was not previously subject to a water withdrawal. The long-term nature of this project and continued reduction in flows over a 0.8-mile reach of Goldburg Creek results in the potential for adverse affects to designated critical habitat and EFH. However the lack of anadromous salmonids precludes effects to individuals.

Federally protected, Columbia Basin bull trout occur in the Goldburg Creek sub-watershed, but sampling since 1999 has not documented any bull trout downstream of the proposed diversion, but several bull trout were documented approximately 1-mile upstream during 1999. Based on the sparse population of bull trout, and associated project mitigations, the proposed irrigation diversion and pipeline installation would is not likely to adversely affect bull trout.

Economic and Social Values: Irrigation efficiency through gravity flow and reduced volume of water to irrigate the applicant's parcel is a positive economic and social impact. The social benefit is noise reduction and incremental decrease in particulate matter contribution to the atmosphere by the diesel pump.

Water Quantity:

The proposed action would result in an additional point of diversion on Goldburg Creek upstream of existing diversions, approximately 0.8 miles and would divert 3.7ft³/sec of flow. This would decrease stream flow relative to baseline conditions, upstream of the current diversions, for this 0.8 mile segment. Stream flow measurements in September 2007 estimated 9.7ft³/sec of flow below the proposed point of diversion; the proposed withdrawal would constitute a 38% reduction in stream flow during low flow conditions and would not dewater Goldburg Creek. The existing diversions are known to dewater Goldburg Creek during portions of the irrigation season, and this was also documented in September 2007. Because of the increased efficiency of the proposed irrigation system, and the net reduction in flow withdrawal by the applicant, a water savings of 3.94ft³/sec could alleviate dewatering in Goldburg Creek below the existing diversions.

Preliminary Alternative Development: The BLM is currently considering the proposed action as outlined above and the no action. Under the no action alternative there would be no ROW granted and therefore no new point of diversion on Goldburg Creek. The applicant would continue to use a diesel pump at his IDWR approved point of diversion.

Decision to be Made: The Challis Field Manager will decide whether to issue the ROW as described in the proposed action. The Field Manager will make a decision with management actions, mitigation measures and monitoring requirements incorporated into the NEPA documents.

Public Input Needed: Comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, preliminary issues and alternatives. Comments made on this proposal would be helpful if they are received by December 10, 2009 and are directly relevant to the proposal and project area. The BLM will not reject public feedback outside established public involvement timeframes: however, these comments may be considered secondary to comments received in a timely manner and may only be assessed to determine if they identify concerns that would substantially alter the assumptions, proposal, design or analysis presented in the EA.