

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
FOR THE
MURPHY SUBREGION TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLAN
EA# ID130-2007-EA-3431**

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based on the findings documented in Environmental Assessment ID130-2007-EA-3431, implementation of the Proposed Action would not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, no Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required.

The findings are based on the following:

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The Environmental Assessment (EA) considered both beneficial and adverse impacts of the Proposed Action. The Murphy Subregion would benefit from implementation of this Travel Management Plan (TMP) through items such as:

- Route designation throughout the entire subregion and a 34% reduction in total routes which protects natural and cultural resources and prevents unauthorized route proliferation. The establishment of designated routes would also help protect recreational diversity throughout the area by securing high quality recreational experiences.
- Closure of multiple unauthorized play areas, hill climbs, and unsustainable routes which protects natural and cultural resources while reducing erosion and sediment in streams.
- Seventeen miles of permanent closures and 68 miles of seasonal closures for the protection of sage grouse. These closures protect over 42,000 acres of habitat for nesting and early brood rearing.
- Forty-eight miles of routes closed for the protection of Golden Eagles.
- Eighty-six miles of route closures in areas identified as habitat for bighorn sheep.
- Closure of routes in sensitive soils, within riparian areas, and paralleling streams.
- Restriction of certain users to designated routes which eliminates user conflicts providing for a safer riding environment and improving the overall quality of the recreation experience.
- Retaining approximately 90% of historically used competitive trails and allowing competitive use to occur on routes that have not been previously used would provide event holders and competitors an abundant collection of routes and establish and secure a quality motorized competitive system.
- Designation of six parking areas (Chalky Butte, Kane Springs, Black Mountain, "45", Silver City/Old Stage Road junction, and a parking area one mile south of this junction) provides users additional access to the transportation system while eliminating congestion at the three major trailheads (Hemingway Butte, Rabbit Creek, and Fossil Creek), thus improving the overall recreation experience.

- Allowing for maintenance on all routes within the transportation system would reduce moguls and other hazards from routes which aid in preventing trail widening and braiding, unauthorized route proliferation, provides for a safer riding environment, and enhance the overall quality of the recreation experience.
- Installation of an integrated system of informational, educational, and interpretative signs and trailheads, parking areas, and on all routes provides users with important information and navigational tools providing for a safer riding environment and enhancing the overall quality of the recreation experience.
- The implementation of adaptive management which allows the BLM to respond to needed changes in management and modify management actions to incorporate new information gained over time.

Adverse effects due to implementation of the Proposed Action (Section 2.5.4) would consist of:

- Reductions in available route mileage may have an adverse affect on motorized users as the population continues to grow and OHV sales increase, potentially causing overcrowding in areas and reducing the quality of the recreation experience.
- Eliminating access to the defacto play areas would also have an adverse effect on some motorized recreationists. These play areas are very popular with a variety of motorized recreationists and currently the Owyhee Field Office is only permitted to provide users with one 192-acre OHV play Area (Hemingway Butte Play Area) in conformance with the Owyhee RMP OHV designations.
- Temporary closures due to adverse environmental conditions would also have a detrimental effect on motorized recreationists throughout the area. Closures would most likely occur in the spring when resources are threatened and recreation use in this area is at its highest. Motorized recreation may be eliminated during this time period forcing users to explore new areas for recreation.

2. The degree to which the Proposed Action affects public health or safety.

The Proposed Action (Section 2.5.4) would reduce the level of dust and noise from recreational use that is currently occurring in the area and would result in a healthier environment for local residents and other users of the public lands. Additionally, with the proposed closure of 430 miles of routes and the elimination of routes within sensitive soils, riparian areas, and paralleling streams, reduced sediment load and improved water quality (Section 3.4) would occur throughout the subregion.

Allowing for maintenance of all routes within the subregion would improve public health and safety by reducing moguls and other hazards along routes while protecting natural and cultural resources. Signing and educational information would also promote public health and safety by serving as informational and navigational tools for recreationists.

Allowing for temporary closures throughout the entire subregion during adverse environmental conditions would promote public health and safety by preventing access during wet and muddy seasons. This will reduce the potential for stranded recreationalists needing the services of search and rescue personnel while at the same time protecting natural and cultural resources.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

No major effects on any unique characteristics were identified in the EA. Concern about cultural resources located within the subregion resulted in the elimination of routes near identified sites. The Proposed Action (section 2.5.4) also imposes 17 miles of closures near sage grouse leks in addition to 68 miles of seasonal closures, eliminates 48 miles of routes for the protection of Golden Eagles, and closes 86 miles of routes in areas identified as habitat for bighorn sheep (Section 3.5.2.4).

Virtually one third of the subregion lies within the Black Mountain Wild Horse Management Area (WHMA). The analysis (Section 3.8.2.4) showed that by channeling recreational use onto signed and maintained routes there would be beneficial effects for wild horses by keeping concentrated recreational use away from relatively undisturbed areas where horses congregate.

Elimination of motorized use in Sinker Creek would improve riparian and wetland conditions.

No parklands, prime farmlands, or wild and scenic rivers occur in the study area.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment is likely to be highly controversial.

No effects on the human environment were identified as being highly controversial. The Proposed Action is similar to actions taken in other travel management plans BLM has completed.

One of the overall objectives of this plan is to improve the quality of the human environment throughout the Murphy Subregion. Through the travel planning process the BLM is minimizing impacts to wildlife habitat; reducing the introduction and spread of invasive weeds; lessening conflicts among various motorized and non-motorized recreation users; and preventing damage to cultural resources resulting from the unauthorized proliferation of roads and trails on public lands.

Extensive public scoping throughout this process indicated general support for placing controls on the increasingly uncontrolled recreational use in the Murphy Subregion and for providing improved motorized recreational opportunities.

Some input received from the public (Appendix 2) expressed concerns about the effects of recreation development and use of the area on sage grouse, bighorn sheep, and Golden Eagles. The Proposed Action (Section 2.5.4) incorporates a combination of signing and monitoring (section 2.3.3) in order to assess these particular effects, and in addition would impose 17 miles of closure near sage grouse leks as well as 68 miles of seasonal closures (March 1 through June 15). As a result of these closures, over 42,000 acres would be protected for sage grouse nesting and early brood rearing. The Proposed Action also eliminates 48 miles of routes for the protection of golden eagles, and closes 86 miles of routes in areas identified as habitat for bighorn sheep. Analysis in the EA (Section 3.5.2.4) reveals that wildlife would benefit from the measures being taken in the Proposed Action.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The analysis did not identify any effects on the human environment which are highly uncertain or involve unknown risks as a result of the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action is similar to actions taken in other travel management plans BLM has completed. As such, the Proposed Action does not include any actions or effects that would be considered highly uncertain, unique or involve unknown risks.

No action would likely result in a variety of additional risks and impacts as uncontrolled recreational use expands into important horse and wildlife areas. As the regional population of the Boise area grows, BLM faces an inevitable increase in human use of the Owyhee Front. The agency proposes to use a variety of standard management tools that have been successfully applied elsewhere (Wilson Creek Travel Management Area) to minimize the impacts of intensive recreational use, including: establishing a designated transportation system with maps and directional, regulatory, and educational signs that establish clear rules and reasonable expectations for public behavior, designation and fencing of staging areas, elimination of unauthorized play areas, hill climbs and other unsustainable routes, closure of routes in sensitive soils, riparian areas and paralleling streams, along with maintenance of routes within the transportation system.

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The actions and practices analyzed in the EA are normal practices that have been successfully implemented elsewhere including the Wilson Creek Travel Management Area. This EA does not set a precedent for future actions that have significant effects. Implementation of a transportation planning system is mandated by decisions made in the 1999 Owyhee Resource Management Plan. The EA provides for flexibility and potential changes in management actions through use of adaptive management principles; however, any future projects in the Murphy Subregion that have impacts outside the scope of this document would require a separate analysis.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

This EA considered potential cumulative impacts of the Proposed Action and concluded that implementation would not cause significant cumulative effects on biological, cultural, or social resources, even when considered in relation to other actions.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

Based on the analysis documented in the EA (Section 3.9.2.4), the Proposed Action would not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. Concern about cultural resources located within the subregion resulted in the elimination of routes near the sites.

Currently undiscovered eligible or listed properties that might be discovered in the future would be protected from loss or destruction using adaptive management techniques, including route closure or avoidance (Section 2.3.2).

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

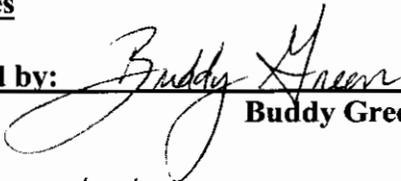
The Murphy Subregion contains no threatened or endangered species or habitat that has been determined critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law for requirements imposed for protection of the environment.

The Proposed Action was developed in accordance with Federal, State, and local laws for the protection of the environment (Section 1.5). The EA disclosed the effect of the Proposed Action on all critical and non-critical elements and it was determined that the Proposed Action would not adversely affect any of these elements or violate any existing Federal, State, or local law imposed for the protection of the environment.

Signatures

Approved by:



Buddy Green, Owyhee Field Office Manager

Date:

4/17/09