

USDI, Bureau of Land Management
Burns District
28910 Hwy 20 West
Hines, Oregon 97738

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)
FOR
STEENS MOUNTAIN TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLAN
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
EA OR-05-027-021

April, 2007

INTRODUCTION

The Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Act of 2000 (Steens Act) required development of the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area (CMPA) Transportation Plan which led to preparation of the Travel Management Plan (TMP). The TMP augments the CMPA Transportation Plan, the latter written as a part of the CMPA Resource Management Plan (RMP July 2005). The TMP uses an updated route inventory to further define the motor vehicle route network within the CMPA and provides guidance on maintenance, improvement and accessibility of the routes. Route inventories were completed with assistance from private landowners, grazing operators, members of the general public, and Harney County Court.

The attached Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed to analyze potential effects of implementing the Steens Mountain Travel Management Plan (TMP). This EA addresses issues raised by BLM specialists as well as those identified during public scoping. The Steens Mountain Advisory Council reviewed, and commented on, travel issues. Discussion in this EA also includes updated route inventory information.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTION

A Proposed Action alternative was analyzed as well as three additional alternatives. The Proposed Action is summarized as follows:

Of the alternatives analyzed this alternative is most closely aligned with current travel conditions. Roads specified in the RMP as remaining open to motorized vehicles would remain so. Five hundred fifty-five miles of Base Routes would remain open to public motorized use as Common Use Routes. Most Obscure Routes would continue to be accessible to the public; however, they would not be marked or signed. Permit Routes and Historical Routes in WSAs and public lands outside wilderness could be used in the same manner and degree as occurring at passage of FLPMA. Historical Routes may be used as long as their character does not change. Grazing permittees could be authorized to use Permit and Historical Routes in wilderness for specific activities.

STATEMENT OF FONSI

Based on the analysis of potential environmental effects contained in the attached EA, and all other available information, I have determined the proposed action analyzed does not constitute a major Federal action that would adversely affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is unnecessary and will not be prepared.

RATIONALE FOR FONSI

Analysis in the attached EA showed there would not be significant impacts from enacting the Proposed Action on any of the examined resources. These resources and rationales for a conclusion of no significant impact include:

Wilderness Study Areas

Wilderness Study Areas would continue to be managed as not to impair their suitability for wilderness designation by Congress. No new motorized access into WSAs would be established. Route conditions would not change.

Wilderness

Steens Mountain Wilderness would continue to be managed for preservation of wilderness values, including opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation, and for naturalness. Motorized travel in wilderness would be confined to that of grazing permittees on a limited, BLM monitored basis.

Wild and Scenic Rivers

No measurable changes to water quality, riparian function or fisheries are anticipated. Therefore, no alteration to the free flowing quality or outstandingly remarkable values of any WSR would occur.

Wildlife, Special Status Fauna, Migratory Birds

Because of seasonal road closures to Steens Loop Road, and surrounding primitive and secondary roads, the overall effects on wildlife would not be measurable. Limited traffic on open roads would have no significant effect.

Wetlands, Riparian Functioning Condition and Fisheries

Best Management Practices have been established to maintain water quality and quantity. Since effects to fish and fish habitat are a combination of effects to water quality, riparian habitat conditions, and proper functioning condition of streams would be maintained, effects to fish and fish habitat would not be measurable.

Noxious Weeds

As the road network in the CMPA would continue to be a high priority for monitoring and treating, enactment of the Proposed Action would not increase the possibility of noxious weed establishment.

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

These areas have protective measures in place and enactment of the Proposed Action would not contribute to degradation of relevant and important values.

Special Status Flora

Special status plants are not known to be present on any routes proposed to stay open. There should be no effect on those species.

Cultural and Paleontological Resources

No motorized/mechanized cross country travel is allowed in the CMPA, and no new roads or trails are anticipated; there should be no effects on these resources.

American Indian Traditional Practices

By direction of the Steens Act traditional practice areas, and Tribal member access to them, would be conserved and protected. Proposed changes in the travel system in the CMPA would involve coordination and consultation with the Burns Paiute Tribe. Therefore, there would be no effect on traditional practices.

Recreation

There would be no significant effect on recreational activities by enactment of the Proposed Action as effects would not measurably deviate from current conditions.

Off Highway Vehicles

Implementation of the Proposed Action would not result in effects measurably different from current conditions; therefore, there would be no significant effect on OHV use.

Visual Resources

Selection and implementation of the Proposed Action could result in reestablishment of some Obscure Routes. Resulting evidence of motorized travel could diminish scenic quality within the immediate vicinity of the routes. However, the resulting VRM classification would remain consistent with the designated VRM classification.

Soils

Effects on soils would not be detectably different from effects occurring under current travel conditions.

Vegetation

As no cross country travel is allowed within the CMPA, motorized/mechanized vehicle use would continue to be limited to previously established routes. Effects to vegetation would remain confined to current conditions.

Transportation/Roads

Implementation of the Proposed Action would not result in an appreciable change from current use of travel routes, and a significant effect on travel in the CMPA would not occur.

Grazing Management

Grazing management travel activities outside wilderness would continue as currently conducted. Within wilderness, continued, limited grazing management travel would be authorized and would be confined to major activities such as distribution of large quantities of salt and large scale range improvement maintenance. While limitation of travel in wilderness could be a level of economic hardship to grazing operators, all operations would continue and the hardship should not be significant.

Fire Management

Adoption of the Proposed Action would have no measurable effect on fire management activities as the route system which could be used for management, including fire fighting, would be substantially the same as currently exists.

Social and Economic Values

Changes to recreation and tourism and economic and social benefits accruing from them would not appreciably change as a result of implementing the Proposed Action since travel patterns would not be appreciably altered. As indicated above, there should be no significant effect on grazing operations.

Parcels with Wilderness Characteristics

Motorized use of travel routes under the Proposed Action are not expected to prevent the parcels from retaining wilderness characteristics. Changes to motorized use from the current situation to the proposed scenario are not expected to be significant.

Biological Soil Crusts

Since proposed changes to motorized travel are likely to be undetectable, change to the condition of biological soil crusts is not anticipated.

For the above reasons I have concluded implementation of the Proposed Action would not bring about a significant effect on any element of the human environment.

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Date: _____

Joan Suther, Three Rivers Resource Area Field Manager

Date: _____