



United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
MEDFORD DISTRICT OFFICE



FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

for the

**STERLING MINE DITCH TRAIL
GRUB GULCH CONNECTION**

And

ARMSTRONG GULCH BYPASS

(DOI-BLM-OR-M060-2013-0006-EA)

INTRODUCTION

The Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Sterling Mine Ditch Trail Connection and Bypass Project (DOI-BLM-OR-M060-2013-0006-EA) documented the environmental analysis conducted to estimate the site-specific effects on the human environment that may result from the implementation of the project proposal.

The Sterling Mine Ditch Trail Connection and Bypass Project Environmental Assessment documented the analysis of the BLM's proposal within the Sterling Creek drainage of the Little Applegate River Watershed. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Ashland Resource Area, proposes to implement the Sterling Mine Ditch Trail Grub Gulch Connection and Armstrong Gulch Bypass Project, designed to implement specific Management Objectives consistent with the 1995 Medford District Resource Management Plan (RMP). The Project involves constructing approximately 1.9 miles of trail for non-motorized use in the lower portion of the Grub Gulch drainage and the middle portion of the Armstrong Gulch drainage. The Public Land Survey System description for the Sterling Mine Ditch Connector and Bypass Project Area is: T. 39 S., R. 2 W., NE ¼ of section 4; and T. 39 S., R. 2 W., east ½ of section 17; Willamette Meridian, Jackson County, Oregon.

Based on the context and intensity of the impacts analyzed in the Sterling Mine Ditch Trail Grub Gulch Connection and Armstrong Gulch Bypass Project (Chapter 3), I have determined that my decision to implement the proposal, as described in the Decision Record for the Sterling Mine Ditch Trail Connection and Bypass Project, is not a major Federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. I considered the following criteria, suggested by CEQ (40 CFR 1508.27), for evaluating intensity or severity of the impact of the Sterling Mine Ditch Trail Connection and Bypass Project.

The Sterling Mine Ditch Trail Connection and Bypass Project will:

1. Not result in significant beneficial or adverse effects.

- The loss of soil productivity minimized as:
 - The only area of soil that will be removed from vegetation production will be the area of the tread itself (approx. 1.9 miles total). There would be approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre of land removed from vegetation production and other than that minimal adverse impacts to the soil resource are anticipated as a result of project implementation (EA, p. 9)
 - Soil erosion through required Project Design Features (PDFs) (EA, pp. 6, 7).
 - Trail construction would occur during periods that will minimize disturbance to the soils and plants. (May 15 to Oct.15)
 - All disturbed soil should be seeded with native grass and mulched with native materials or weed-free straw.
 - The grade of the trail should be less than 8 percent and rolling, if possible, and tread should be outsloped. This will promote good drainage and minimize trail maintenance.
 - Water quality and aquatic habitat would be maintained:
 - Seeps, springs, and wet areas would be avoided. Trail construction would occur on the uphill side of such features.
 - Dry draw and channel crossings would be rocked, or stepping stones would be placed at strategic locations to reduce the amount of fine sediment entering channels.
 - By adhering to the project design features, no effects on fish or aquatic organisms are expected, because seeps, springs, and wet areas would be avoided and hence this project would lack hydrological connectivity with aquatic habitat. The one channel crossing over Armstrong Gulch would utilize an existing road and culvert, and disturbance to Riparian Reserve vegetation would be limited to ground covering species and minimal, given the proposed trail width. For these reasons, Aquatic Conservation Strategy objectives would not be impacted at any spatial scale of analysis.
 - The trail construction will not remove trees and will thus alter habitat only minimally and on a very small scale (trail width). The proposed trail construction is anticipated to have little impact on wildlife in the area. The only Federally Threatened or Endangered species whose habitat this trail would pass through is the Northern Spotted Owl. This action is not anticipated to alter the forest habitat in a way that would have any impacts on the NSO. The nearest known nest location for a NSO is more than one mile away. This action is anticipated to have no effect on NSOs.
 - Survey and Manage species known or suspected to occur in the area of the proposed project include:
 - Great Gray Owl (*Strix nebulosa*)
 - Chace Sideband snail (*Monodenia chaceana*)
- Bureau Sensitive species known or suspected to occur in the area of the proposed project include:
- Fisher (*Martes pennanti*)
 - Pallid Bat (*Antrosus pallidus*)
 - Townsend's Big-eared Bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii*)
 - Fringed Myotis (bat) (*Myotis thysanodes*)

- Black Salamander (*Aneides flavipunctatus*)
- Oregon Shoulderband (snail) (*Helminthoglypta hertleini*)
- Traveling Sideband (snail) (*Monodenia fidelis celeuthia*)
- Siskiyou Hesperian (snail) (*Vespericola sierranus*)
- Johnson's Hairstreak (butterfly) (*Callophrys johnsoni*)

Surveys are not required for these species prior to a trail construction project such as this due to the fact that canopy closure will not be significantly decreased. No effect is anticipated on Survey and Manage and Bureau Sensitive species. Any of these species that are currently present would be expected to persist and continue to use the habitat around the trail as they did prior to construction.

- The project area was surveyed for Bureau Special Status and Survey and Manage vascular and nonvascular plants, and noxious weeds during spring/summer of 2012. The project area is suitable habitat for Gentner's Fritillary – a federally-listed flowering plant, among other less rare species. No special status plant species or noxious weed species were found during surveys, and no historic sites exist in the immediate area. There will be no effect to *Gentner's Fritillary*, or any other Bureau Special Status, or Survey and Manage plant species.
- The construction of the 1 mile Grub Gulch Connector trail would enhance the Sterling Mine Ditch Trail system by providing a loop option for trail users, as an alternative to the current out-and-back option that currently exists, and it would help to deflect users away from the private land into which the historic mine ditch passes at the northern end.
- The Armstrong Bypass trail would be entirely in closed canopy forest, or thinned shrublands surrounded by forest. No VRM impacts are anticipated as a result of the trail project. Recreational opportunities for hikers on the SMDT will be preserved by providing a public access option to the portion which currently crosses private land.
- No new cultural resources were located during the field survey. The Sterling Mine Ditch is located within the project area and both the connector and by-pass routes will tie back into the existing Sterling Mine Ditch Trail system. No new cultural resources were located during the field survey. The Sterling Mine Ditch is located within the project area and both the connector and by-pass routes will tie back into the existing Sterling Mine Ditch Trail system.

2. *Not result in significant impacts on public health or safety.*

No aspects of the Sterling Mine Ditch Trail Connection and Bypass Project have been identified as having the potential to significantly and adversely impact public health or safety.

3. *Have no significant, adverse effects on unique characteristics of the geographic area.*

No wilderness areas, wilderness study areas, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers (or rivers suitable for wild and scenic designation), caves, parks, refuge lands, or areas of critical environmental concern exist in the Sterling Mine Ditch Trail Connection and Bypass Project. Not have highly controversial environmental effects.

“Highly controversial,” in the context of 40 CFR 1508.27(b) (4), refers to substantial disagreement within the scientific community about the environmental effects of a proposed action. It does not refer to expressions of opposition or expressions of preference among alternatives or differences of opinion concerning how public lands should be managed.

The Sterling Mine Ditch Trail Connection and Bypass Project is similar in nature to many other trail construction projects that have been implemented within the scope of the 1995 Medford District Resource Management Plan across the Medford District. The anticipated effects of the trail construction in the Sterling Mine Ditch Trail Connection and Bypass Project EA are well-known, and no highly controversial effects have been identified.

4. *Not have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or unique or unknown environmental risks.*

The analysis does not show that this action will involve any unique or unknown risks. The anticipated effects of implementing the Sterling Mine Ditch Trail Connection and Bypass Project are similar in nature to the effects estimated and observed for other trail construction projects implemented on the Medford BLM District.

5. *Not establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.*

The decision to implement the Sterling Mine Ditch Trail Connection and Bypass Project will not set any precedents for future actions with significant effects. The Sterling Mine Ditch Trail Connection and Bypass Project was designed to meet objectives and will implement actions approved for forest management under the 1995 Medford District Resource Management Plan, actions that have been implemented under the 1995 RMP for nearly two decades. This project is not precedent setting.

6. *Not result in significant cumulative environmental effects.*

Cumulative environmental effects are “the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions” (See definition of “cumulative impact” in 40 CFR § 1508.7).

A brief analysis was performed at multiple scales, and included the consideration of past actions (as reflected in current conditions), current actions, and foreseeable future actions on both private and federal lands. Details of these actions are included in Chapter 3 of the EA and the analysis was performed and documented by resource specialist. No significant cumulative impacts were identified.

Also refer to criteria number one above for determination of presence of significant adverse or beneficial effects that could contribute to significant cumulative effects. None were identified.

7. *Have no significant effects on scientific, cultural, or historical resources, including those listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.*

In accordance with the protocol for managing cultural resources on lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (specifically section 106), as amended, a literature review and archaeological reconnaissance was conducted for the Sterling Mine Ditch Trail Connection and Bypass Project. Have no adverse effects on species listed or proposed to be listed as Federally Endangered or Threatened Species, or have adverse effects on designated critical habitat for these species.

No effect is anticipated on Survey and Manage and Bureau Sensitive species. Any of these species that are currently present would be expected to persist and continue to use the habitat around the trail as they did prior to construction. (EA, p. 10)

Project implementation will not threaten and will have no effect to fish populations or distribution, Southern Oregon Northern California Coasts (SONCC) coho salmon, coho critical habitat (CCH), or essential fish habitat (EFH). Effects to aquatic habitat were determined to be of insufficient magnitude and of a nature to not meaningfully impact threatened fish or their habitats in the Little Applegate Watersheds (EA, p. 10).

The project area was surveyed for Bureau Special Status and Survey and Manage vascular and nonvascular plants, and noxious weeds during spring/summer of 2012. The project area is suitable habitat for Gentner’s Fritillary – a

federally-listed flowering plant, among other less rare species. No special status plant species or noxious weed species were found during surveys, and no historic sites exist in the immediate area. There will be no effect to Gentner's Fritillary, or any other Bureau Special Status, or Survey and Manage plant species.

8. *Not Violate a Federal, State, Local, or Tribal law, regulation or policy imposed for the protection of the environment.*

Through analysis documented in the EA, the BLM has determined that, with implementation of required Project Design Features, the proposed action would not threaten a violation of any federal, state, or local environmental protection laws.

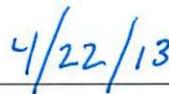
This project was reviewed for the potential for disproportionately high or adverse effects on minority or low income populations; no adverse impacts to minority or low income populations will occur (EA p. 12).

FINDING

I have determined the Sterling Mine Ditch Trail Connection and Bypass Projects do not constitute a major Federal action having a significant effect on the human environment; an environmental impact statement is not necessary and will not be prepared. This conclusion is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's criteria for significance (40 CFR § 1508.27), with regard to context and intensity of the impacts described in the EA, my understanding of the project, review of project analysis, and review of public comments. The analysis of effects documented in the EA has been completed within the context of multiple spatial and temporal scales and within the context of the 1995 Medford District Resource Management Plan, the Northwest Forest Plan, and associated Environmental Impact Statements. The anticipated effects are within the scope, type, and magnitude of effects anticipated and analyzed in those plans.



John Gerritsma
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Medford District, Bureau of Land Management



Date