

**City of West Richland Water Facility Right-of-Way
Environmental Assessment EA#OR135-06-001**

Introduction/Background

The City of West Richland has experienced significant population growth in the last decade. In particular, the city of West Richland has grown from a small town of 2500 residents to a city of 11000 residents.

During 2002 and 2003, the city created more than 1,220 new platted lots and homes were built on each of them. The area is slowly developing to accommodate the growing community. Presently there are no paved roadways, no access to the City's sanitary sewer systems, and a high demand on potable water sources. Local residents have been unsuccessful in several attempts to form a Local Improvement District which could help secure funds for the construction of paved roadways, extension of sewer lines and development of non potable water source for this area.

Purpose and Need for the Proposal

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to address the City of West Richland's need to provide non-potable irrigation water to its growing community. The city is requesting that it be allowed a right-of-way from BLM to use public land as a reservoir area to store approximately 500 million gallons of irrigation water which will be pumped to the site from the Columbia Irrigation District (CID) canal. This will allow the city to conserve potable water sources, by lowering the peak demand, because residence can water land without depleting the potable water supply. The water from the reservoir would be available for non-potable use by the residents in this area.

On July 31, 2006, the City of West Richland has submitted an application (WAOR-63764) for a right-of-way grant from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) - Spokane District. The City of West Richland is interested in constructing an irrigation water reservoir and pump station on two 2.5 acre parcels of public land situated within the city limits of West Richland. (Refer to attached maps).

The property under application is legally described as:
T. 9. N., R. 28 E., Section 6, lots 206 and 207, Willamette Meridian, Benton County, Washington.

The Proposed Action addresses the need for expanded water facilities to support the area's population growth.

Conformance with Land Use Plans and Other Laws

The proposed Right of way on the subject lands is in conformance with the Spokane Resource

Management Plan (RMP)(1987). Page 16 of the RMP identifies “issuance of rights-of-way, small tract leases, and/or other leases and permits” as a high priority.

The proposal is authorized Under Sec.501 [43 USC 1761] of the Federal Land Management Policy Act (1976) in it “The Secretary, with respect to the public lands...are authorized to grant, issue, or renew rights-of-way over, upon, under or through such lands for...reservoirs, canals...and other facilities and systems for the improvement, storage, transportation or distribution of water.

Description of Alternatives

Two alternatives were developed to address the City of West Richland’s Right-of-Way Grant application: Alternative 1 (Proposed Action), and Alternative 2 (No Action). Alternatives are described individually below.

Alternative 1 (Proposed Action)

The Proposed Action is to grant a right-of-way for the city of West Richland to utilize two 2.5(5) acre parcels of public land from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Spokane District, for a reservoir site as shown on maps in the Appendix. The City desires to use public land to construct a storage reservoir in which to store approximately 500 million gallons of irrigation water which will provide non-potable water to roughly 450 acres, presently with 1300 single family homes. The water will be pumped from the Columbia Irrigation District (CID) canal. The reservoir will allow the CID to pump water from their canal at a relatively consistent rate. Large, rapid changes in water demand in the Belmont Irrigation System will be met by either withdrawing water from or discharging to the reservoir. The constructed pond is anticipated to provide less fluctuation in water demand in the Belmont Irrigation system. Without it, this fluctuation would lower the canal water level, negatively affecting downstream water users. The grant duration would be for a period of 30 years, subject to renewal.

Proposed development/management of the parcel includes:

- Construction of a 10’x10’ building to house pumping station controls.
- Construction of a 20 acre-ft earthen storage pond (6’ depth x 285’ wide x 500’ long)
(*See-project map*)
- Construction of a 6’ cyclone security fence around 5 acre parcel.

Mitigation Measures

The following actions and mitigation measures were identified to reduce the potential impacts associated with the City of West Richland proposed grant. These actions would be implemented as part of Alternative 1 (Proposed Action):

- If previously undiscovered cultural resources are encountered during construction, the disturbing activity will be halted and a BLM Archaeologist will be contacted. The

cultural material will be protected until a BLM archaeologist has assessed the historic significance of the resource.

- If buried waste materials are uncovered during property excavation activities, work would stop and BLM would be notified as soon as possible so the waste materials can be assessed and removed.
- According to guidance of USC Title 16, Ch. 7, Sub. II, Sec. 703 of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), all project activities that may destroy active nests during initial construction (such as leveling, grading, or clearing of vegetation) will not be conducted during the nesting season for migratory birds (March 15 through July 1)[Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNNL) memo dated March 26, 2004]. Disturbance activities proposed to occur during the nesting period will be coordinated with the BLM wildlife biologist to determine if nesting is present within the footprint of the ground-disturbing activity.
- Measures will be implemented to ensure Townsend's ground squirrel and burrowing owl burrows are protected as guided by the BLM 6840 Special Status Species policy and the WDFW Priority Habitat and Species management recommendations: (1) Prohibition of ground disturbing activities within 400 meters of an active burrowing owl nest burrow, year long to protect future use for nesting; and (2) Prohibition of ground disturbing activities within 400 meters of active ground squirrel habitat, year long.
- If a federally threatened or endangered species is discovered, the BLM wildlife biologist will be contacted and appropriate measures taken as determined by BLM at the time.
- Maintain natural habitat around proposed activity sites for future wildlife use.
- Water during site construction to prevent temporary decreases in air quality, from equipment operation and increase bare ground surface area.
- Reduce visual impacts of permanent infrastructure; ensure building is tan or light brown and insert tan or dark brown plastic slates into cyclone fence, to maintain area's natural setting.

Alternative 2 (No Action)

The No Action Alternative would be to deny the City of West Richland's right of way application.

Affected Environment & Environmental Impacts

This section focuses on those portions of the environment that have the potential to be significantly affected by either alternative (vegetation, wildlife, minerals, recreation, and socioeconomics). Primary issues identified with the right-of-way grant application include:

habitat for burrowing owls and grounds squirrels.

General Area Description

The five-acre parcel is currently surrounded by a low-density, high value residential subdivision, farmland, and open space. A review of the wildlife report photos (Phillips, 2006) and 2004 aerial photo, shows that the parcel appears to be minimally disturbed, without roads/trails cutting through it.

Vegetation

Vegetation - Affected Environment

The vegetation is predominantly cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) and tumble mustard (*Sisymbrium altissimum*) with scattered gray rabbitbrush shrubs. There are pockets of native grasses, including Sandberg's bluegrass and bluebunch wheatgrass, within the parcel. There are several forb species present that occur in native sagebrush steppe, such as yellow bells and big-seed desert parsley, but noxious weeds including rush skeletonweed, yellow starthistle, and diffuse knapweed also occur on the parcel.

This parcel has not been field surveyed for Special Status plants. However, according to the Geographical Information System (GIS) coverage for Special Status Plants for the Washington Natural Heritage Program and the Border Resource Area, there are no records of Special Status plants either on the parcel or in close proximity to the parcel.

Vegetation - Potential Impacts

Under Alternative 1 (Proposed Action), much of the existing vegetation would be damaged or destroyed during facility construction. The irrigation reservoir will permanently cover approximately 3 acres, and vegetation adjacent to the reservoir boundaries is likely to be affected by the movement of machinery and materials during the construction process.

It is highly unlikely that any Bureau Special Status plants are present on the parcel, given the low diversity of native forbs and dense cover of non-native plants. One Bureau Assessment (State Sensitive) species, Piper's daisy (*Erigeron piperianus*), sometimes occurs in moderately disturbed habitats and has been found at a number of locations in Benton County. If Piper's daisy is present, loss of any plants on this parcel would not lead to the need to list this species.

Under Alternative 2 (No Action), some vegetation is likely to be damaged or destroyed by dispersed recreation, particularly unauthorized off-highway vehicle use. Although the aerial photo indicates that this parcel does not have trails through it, the likelihood of this type of disturbance on "vacant" lands increases as more of the area is developed.

Invasive Non-native Species

Invasive Non-native Species - Affected Environment

Washington State listed noxious weed that are present within the proposed project parcel

include; rush skeletonweed, yellow starthistle and diffuse knapweed.

Invasive Non-native Species - Potential Impacts

Under Alternative 1 (Proposed Action), noxious weed populations will spread from the affects of human and mechanical surface disturbances, as well as continue to spread due to windborne seed creating seed banks. The operator would only be responsible for managing noxious weed issues within areas of construction disturbance; this is a standard stipulation for mitigation, covered within the right of way grant.

Under Alternative 2 (No Action), noxious weed populations would continue to spread due to windborne seed creating seed banks, and from the affects of human and mechanical surface disturbances.

Wildlife Habitat

Wildlife Habitat - Affected Environment

Based on a BLM wildlife evaluation report (2004; 2006) and WDFW records (2006), the parcel is not known to contain habitat for any federally listed or proposed species, nor are these species known to occur in the area.

Two Special Status Wildlife Species are known to occur in the area: Townsend's ground squirrel (State Candidate), and the burrowing owl (State Candidate, Federal species of Concern).

The burrowing owl is declining throughout its range, particularly in California, Oregon, and Washington states and is federally listed in Canada. According to research records from the University of Arizona & BLM study Conway (2004), there are two burrowing owl burrows in the vicinity of the parcel, although none were detected within the parcel. The burrowing owl has a strong site fidelity to a burrow or territory and is likely to inhabit the parcel during subsequent breeding seasons if suitable habitat is maintained.

The Townsend's ground squirrel, subspecies *Spermophilus townsendii townsendii* (subspecies determination, Sherman (2004) has been observed to occur within the vicinity of the parcel, and during 2006 surveys one potential ground squirrel dropping was detected. According to Sherman and WDFW biologists (2006), the Townsend's ground squirrel has declined throughout its range. The area east of this parcel contains one of the largest colonies for Townsend's ground squirrel known to occur in the Tri-Cities area. Although concentrated burrow activity occurs in the parcel to the east of the proposed action, it is unknown if these were created by Townsend's ground squirrel or if they are currently active (Phillips, 2006).

Wildlife - Potential Impacts

Under Alternative 1 (Proposed Action), the use of the BLM parcel for the proposed action would not affect any federally listed or proposed wildlife species and/or their habitat.

Permanent habitat loss of 5 acres on the parcel could impact habitat for one nesting burrowing owl pair or a small ground squirrel colony. Given the current lack of larger (60 acres +) sized un-

developed public land parcels in a native vegetative state, and continued development surrounding the area, continued loss of habitat would occur. If a burrowing owl or ground squirrel colony does occur within the parcel, the proposed mitigation measures under this alternative are expected to reduce potential disturbance and loss of habitat impacts to the species, which could prevent the need to list the species in the future (see Cumulative Impacts section).

Under Alternative 2 (No Action), there would be no change from current impacts to special status species. Continued illegal dumping, use by stray dogs and cats, and use for public recreation will increase with surrounding development. Native vegetative habitat would be available for use by wildlife species, to include future use by burrowing owl and ground squirrel.

Cultural/Paleontological Resources

Cultural/Paleontological Resources - Affected Environment

The five-acre parcel is within the territory traditionally used by members of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and the Yakama Indian Nation. Consultation with both of these groups and the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation was initiated by letters dated September 7, 2006. The entire parcel, except for a strip approximately 30 meters wide at the east end of the parcel occupied by stored material from an adjacent residence, was examined by a BLM Archaeologist on October 18, 2006. No cultural resources were found.

This survey was a Class III survey in which the surveyor walked transects across the survey area at 30-meter intervals.

There are no known paleontological resources in the immediate area. No paleontological material was noted in the survey.

Cultural Resources - Potential Impacts

Under Alternative 1 (Proposed Action), granting of right of way on the BLM parcel for the proposed construction would not affect any known cultural resources since none have been identified to exist on the parcel. The excavation for reservoir and pump station construction could damage previously unknown sub-surface cultural materials. However, the mitigation measure to stop activities should any cultural resources be found during facility construction should provide adequate protection for cultural resources.

Under Alternative 2 (No Action), denial of the city's application would not directly impact known cultural resources or paleontological materials since there are none in the area. With the No Action Alternative, there would be no large scale excavations that could damage previously undiscovered sub-surface cultural material. The continued recreational use of the parcel by the rapidly expanding local population could increase erosion of the parcel's surface, which could result in damage to previously undiscovered sub-surface cultural or paleontological material.

Paleontological Resources - Potential Impacts

There would be no impact to paleontological resources under either of the alternatives, because none are known to exist in the subject parcel or its immediate surroundings.

Mineral/Energy

Mineral/Energy - Affected Environment

This BLM parcel has moderate potential for sand, gravel, and basalt resources. It is also prospectively valuable for oil and gas discovery; presently there are no oil and gas lease, but this area is available for leasing. No other important mineral or energy resources are known at the site. There are no known mining claims located on this parcel.

Local water well litho logic records, test pit (10 foot maximum depth) data, and direct site observations indicate the presence of sand and gravel resources from surface to about 30 feet.

Mineral/Energy – Potential Impacts

Under Alternative 1 (Proposed Action), reservoir development on this parcel would effectively create a permanent loss of the underlying mineral resource due to surface activities and subsequent inaccessibility. No future mining of the sand and gravel resource could occur.

Considering the projected use of the general area of the parcel, it is highly unlikely that the sand and gravel resource could ever be successfully recovered. Oil and gas resources should remain accessible due to the limited surface area disturbance associated with the reservoirs proposed development and the limited surface area required to extract oil and gas resources.

Under Alternative 2 (No Action), the parcel would remain in its natural state and physical surface access to minerals would be maintained.

Given the residential nature of the surrounding area, however, mining would not likely occur on this five-acre parcel. The area is already surrounded by low density residential structures, so an active mining operation at this site would probably be strongly opposed by local residents due to many factors, including visual effects, noise elements, and safety concerns that could be associated with a mining operation in such close proximity to residential areas.

Recreation

Recreation – Affected Environment

This five-acre parcel offers dispersed/open space recreation within an urban interface area. Local residents have used the area for various activities, including walking, horseback riding, and some off-highway vehicle use. With its small size, this parcel is difficult to manage for recreation opportunities. This five-acre parcel also offers open space and natural area as a Visual Resource.

There are several BLM parcels within a 1-mile radius of this five-acre parcel. These parcels

range in size from about two-acres to twenty-five-acres and have legal and/or physical access. Horse Heaven Hills and Juniper Forest/Juniper Dunes Wilderness areas are located within 20 miles of this parcel and offer a variety of undeveloped, dispersed recreational opportunities.

Recreation – Potential Impacts

Under Alternative 1 (Proposed Action), pump and storage pond development would create a permanent onsite presence that would limit and/or restrict off-highway vehicle and other traditional recreation uses such as hiking. The visual resource of open space and natural area would be impacted with permanent infrastructure development. Proper color choices of materials and design features which reflect the natural background elements of the area would reduce the visual impacts (see mitigation measures for color specifications).

Under Alternative 2 (No Action), the parcel would remain in its natural state with some recreational use by the surrounding residents. There could be an increase in off-highway vehicle use and other recreational activities which would probably create noise and other disturbances in the residential area. Visual resources would remain the same as open space, and natural area with an increase of recreational activity as the density of the residential area continues to grow.

Socioeconomic and Environmental Justice

Socioeconomic - Affected Environment

The city of West Richland has experienced a significant amount of growth since 2004. In addition, the City has created over 1,220 new platted lots during 2002 and 2003, and has built more than 1300 single family residences over time. Nearly all the building lots available in West Richland, contiguous to and in the vicinity of this site, have been platted for development.

The population of West Richland grew by over four times, within the last 11 years, from about 2,500 residents to more than 11,000.

There is no minority or low income population in the vicinity of the proposed action that would indicate an environmental justice concern, as described in Executive Order 12898. The estimated occurrence of minorities in the populations of West Richland and Benton County is equal to, or below the national and state averages (U.S. Census 2000 and 2005.). The number of families living below the poverty level is also well below the national and state averages (U.S. Census 2000 and 2005). The proposed action is adjacent to a new, high-value, residential development.

Socioeconomic - Potential Impacts

Under Alternative 1(Proposed Action), development of an irrigation pump station and storage pond provides a low cost water source to users and avoids adversely impacting existing downstream water users. It may also encourage future expansion of residential development.

Under Alternative 2 (No Action), the parcel would remain in its natural state, and maintaining “open space” areas within an urban growth area may be appealing to future residential development.

Loss of access to a potential mineral resource on this parcel should have no significant impact on socioeconomics of the area due to the availability of these resources at other nearby sites.

Air Quality

Air Quality - Affected Environment

The air quality at the proposed project area is generally good. Air quality is influenced by storm fronts from the Pacific Ocean and prevailing winds out of the Columbia River Gorge. Temporary decreases in air quality may be influenced by particulate matter and/or fugitive dust. Sources related to these affects include; wind blown dust from construction sites, agricultural areas and open lands, agricultural burning, wood burning stoves and fireplaces, wildfires, industrial sources and motor vehicles.

Air Quality - Potential Impacts

Under Alternative 1 (Proposed Action), temporary decreases in air quality may occur when construction equipment is operating within the proposed project area, and as a result of increased bare ground surface area. This effect would be minimized by the proposed mitigation measure to apply water to the construction area.

Under Alternative 2 (No Action), decreases in air quality at the proposed project area would continue at the present level as influenced by off site sources.

Other Resource Elements Analyzed

Critical Elements That Were Considered

Other critical elements addressed in addition to those above (cultural resources, threatened/endangered species, etc.) are listed below. No impacts were identified from the two alternatives on the following critical elements.

- Prime/unique farmlands
- Floodplains
- Native American Religious Concerns
- Wetlands/Riparian zones
- Special area designations (including Wild & Scenic Rivers, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, and Wilderness)
- Adverse impacts to Energy
- Hazardous Materials

Cumulative Impacts

Alternative 1 (Proposed Action)

The increased development on private lands surrounding the Richland area and the subject parcel has resulted in loss of existing and potential burrowing owl and ground squirrel habitat. For the

purpose of this analysis, it is assumed that the proposed City of West Richland water reservoir could encourage further development of surrounding open spaces. It is likely that the proposed actions would cumulatively result in abandonment or loss of an owl nest burrow, if present, even with the proposed mitigation measures.

Continued loss of burrowing owl and ground squirrel habitat on public and private lands could contribute to the need to list the species in the future.

If reservoir development occurs as proposed under Alternative 1, the incidences of off-highway vehicle use and debris dumping, which is currently occurring on nearby BLM land, could increase, potentially causing cumulative resource damage such as vegetation loss and erosion of the parcel's surface which could result in damage to previously undiscovered sub-surface cultural or paleontological material. After the 5 acre parcel is developed, local residents would have reduced local open space and/or dispersed recreation opportunities.

Coordination/Consultation with Other Agencies, Groups and Individuals

During the environmental analysis process, BLM staff coordinated with the following individuals regarding the reservoir right of way application and proposed future use of the 5 acre parcel:

- Roscoe Slade III P.E, Public Works Director, City of West Richland.

Formal consultation regarding the proposed grant was completed with the following:

- Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation, The Yakama Indian Nation, and the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, initiated by letters dated September 7, 2006. There was no response to the letters to the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation or The Yakama Indian Nation as of February 7, 2007. In a letter dated January 25, 2007 the Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation stated that the cultural resources inventory report for this action had been reviewed and concurred with the BLM's finding of No Historic Properties Affected.

References

BLM wildlife staff evaluation report. (2004; 2006). Spokane BLM District files.

Conway, D. 2004 Annual burrowing owl survey and monitoring report. (2000-2003).University of Arizona/BLM cooperative project.

Phillips, D. 2006. City of West Richland Irrigation Reservoir Memo.

Public Law 94-579.1976. Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976.

Sherman, P. 2004. Cornell University Study

U.S. Census. 2000. U.S. Census Bureau American Fact Finder, West Richland Washington,

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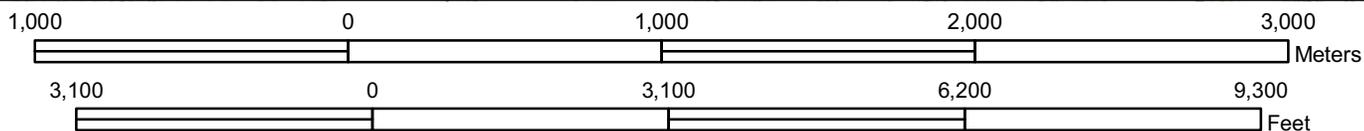
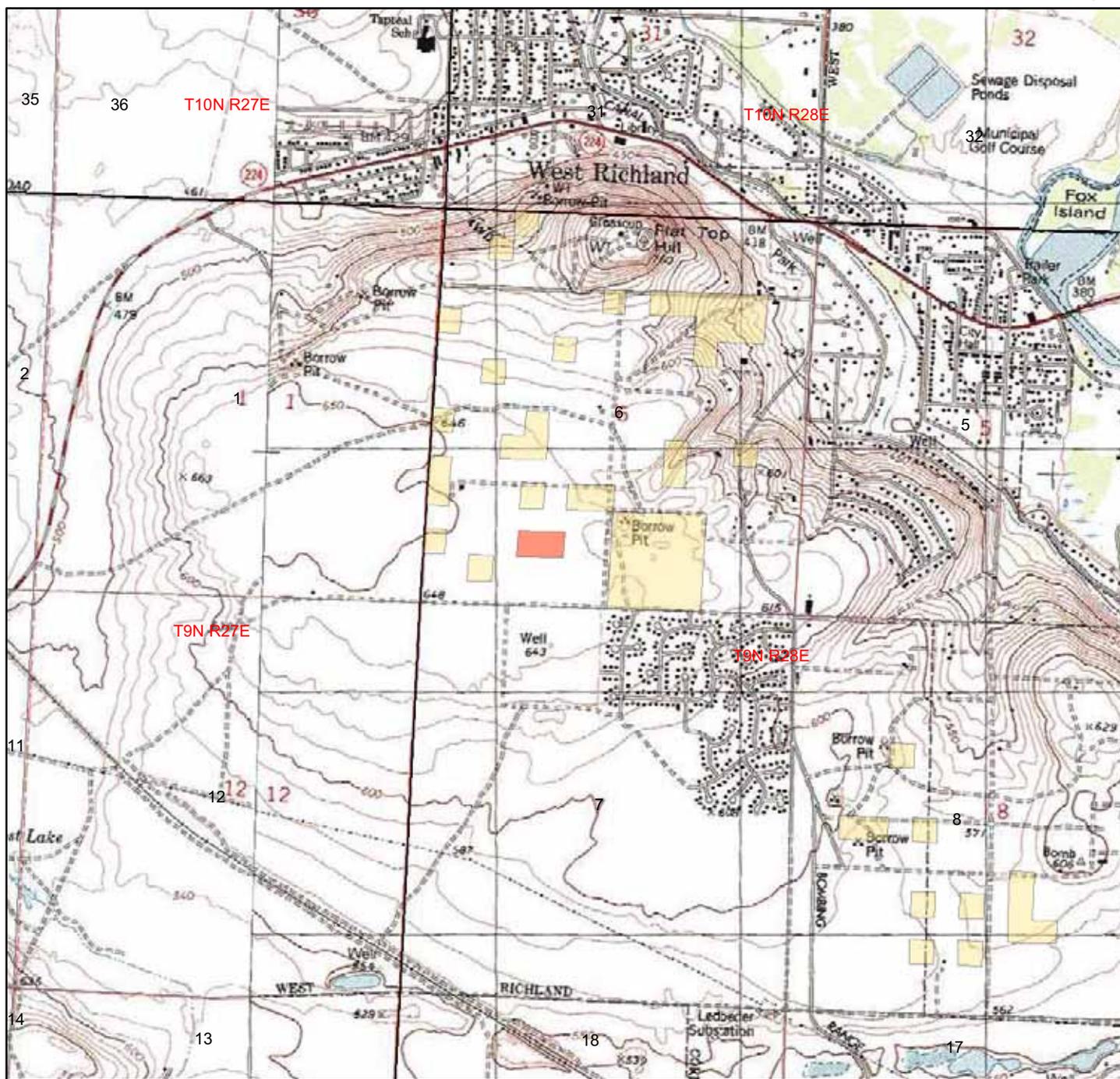
List of Preparers

This environmental assessment was prepared by an Interdisciplinary Team of various resource specialists. Some specialists conducted field trips to this or adjacent parcels to gather site-specific data to include in this analysis. Others were responsible for proposal review during the environmental analysis process. Resource specialists who assisted in contributing to the resource analysis and preparation of this environmental assessment are:

- Nick Teague, Outdoor Recreation Planner
- Barbara Benner, Botanist
- Lakisha Sloan, Realty Specialist, Team Lead
- Scott Pavey, District Planner and Environmental Coordinator
- Rick McComas, Natural Resource Specialist
- Madilane Perry, Archaeologist
- T. Michael Sweeney, Geologist
- Joyce Whitney, Wildlife Biologist

City of West Richland

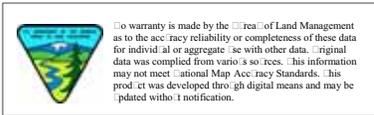
Irrigation Reservoir and Pump House Application -- WAOR-63764



CONTOUR INTERVAL 40 FEET

1:24,000

Willamette Meridian, Benton County, Washington
 T. 9 N., R. 28 E., Section 6. Lots 206 & 207.
 (5 acres more or less)



Legend

- BLM Lands
- Project Location

