



U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

# Interpretation Assistance Program Report

Owyhee River Canyon Corridor, including the Rome Launch Site & Historic Hole-in-the-Ground, Birch Creek, and Morrison Pinnacle Ranches



# **Interpretation Assistance Program Report**

## **Owyhee River Canyon Corridor, including the Rome Launch Site & Historic Hole-in-the-Ground, Birch Creek, and Morrison Pinnacle Ranches**

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# Executive Summary

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## Overview

This is a comprehensive report prepared by Gregory Shine, National Interpretation Program Lead in the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Division of Recreation and Visitor Services (HQ430), with input and insights of staff from the BLM Malheur Field Office and the BLM Oregon-Washington State Office. It focuses on enhancing the visitor experience through improved interpretation resources at various sites along the Owyhee River. The report is a result of a site visit conducted by BLM staff from April 15-19, 2024, and includes assessments of multiple sites such as the Rome Launch Site, Hole-in-the-Ground Ranch, Birch Creek Ranch (Upper and Lower Tracts) and Morrison Pinnacle Ranch.

## Purpose

The purpose of the report is to provide interpretive support to the Malheur Field Office through the BLM Interpretation Assistance Program. This program, as outlined in the report, is designed to elevate the visitor experience, and foster a deeper connection to public lands by enhancing interpretation facilities programming signs and digital media. The goals include enhancing visitor experience, deepening visitor connection and engagement, promoting stewardship, and optimizing resources.

## Current Conditions and Assessments

The report details the current conditions of the sites visited, documenting the presence of basic amenities and interpretation facilities at some locations, and the lack of interpretation resources at others.

## Recommendations

Key recommendations include the development of an interpretation plan to guide future efforts, enhance thematic connections between sites, and address gaps in interpretation. The report suggests improving digital media and publications, enhancing physical interpretation facilities, and expanding programming to better engage visitors. Specific recommendations for each site are detailed, focusing on both immediate improvements and long-term strategic planning. Inclusive community engagement is recommended to facilitate any planning and action.

## Strategic Alignment

The recommendations of this report are informed by and align with area management planning. The recommendations also align with the BLM's national strategic plans, including the *BLM's Blueprint for 21st Century Outdoor Recreation* and the *BLM Partnerships and Community Engagement Strategy*. These plans emphasize the importance of community engagement, stewardship, partnership, and the effective use of resources to enhance public land management and visitor experiences.

## Conclusion

This report provides a thorough analysis of current interpretation resources along the Owyhee River and offers a strategic framework for enhancing these resources. Through the recommended actions, the BLM aims to significantly improve the quality of visitor interactions with the natural and cultural resources of the area, fostering greater appreciation and stewardship of public lands.

# Introduction

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From April 15-19, 2024, BLM HQ staff members Gregory Shine (National Interpretation Program Lead) and Matt Blocker (National Recreation Planning Lead) visited the BLM Malheur Field Office, Vale District, and traveled on the Owyhee National Wild & Scenic River from the BLM Rome Launch Site to the BLM Leslie Gulch Boat Ramp. The group included Elisabeth Murphy (Malheur Field Office Archaeologist) and Rob Gomulak (Baker Field Office Archaeologist) and was led by Dan Thomas (Malheur Field Office).

During this visit, Shine participated in a review of the current state of interpretation resources in and associated with the river corridor area, and, with input from trip participants, identified opportunities for enriching the visitor experience through interpretation. In consultation with Thomas, the locations assessed included the Rome Launch Site, the Hole in the Ground Ranch Site, the Birch Creek Ranch (Upper Tract), and the Morrison Pinnacle Ranch (Birch Creek Ranch Lower Tract). Categories of assessment for each site included interpretation facilities, interpretation signs, interpretation programming, and online/digital media and publications.

Recommendations included in this report align with BLM national strategic plans, including the *BLM's Blueprint for 21st Century Outdoor Recreation (2023)* and the *BLM Partnerships and Community Engagement Strategy (2024)*. This report was prepared by Shine with input from the visit participants and others, including Kari Points (Outdoor Recreation Planner in the Vale District Office), Jonah Blustain (Field Manager of the Malheur Field Office), Lauren Pidot (OR/WA National Conservation Lands Program Lead), and Cory Roegner (Deputy Division Chief, BLM Division of Recreation & Visitor Services [HQ430]).

# Purpose

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The BLM Interpretation Assistance Program aims to elevate the visitor experience and foster a deeper connection to public lands by providing expert assistance to BLM-managed recreation sites in enhancing their interpretation assets, programs, and resources. The goals of the program are to:

- Enhance Visitor Experience: Improve interpretation facilities, programming, signs, digital media and publications to create engaging experiences that captivate and inspire visitors.
- Deepen Visitor Connection & Engagement: Increase connection and engagement, and participation through interpretation that encourages exploration, discovery, and meaningful connections with public lands resources.
- Promote Stewardship: Lead visitors to value the importance of stewardship and conservation, empowering them to become advocates for public lands.
- Optimize Resources: Provide recreation sites with the tools, guidance, and support needed maximize the impact of their interpretation efforts and effectively use available resources.
- Increase Accessibility: Ensure interpretation resources are accessible and inclusive to all audiences, including diverse communities, individuals with disabilities, and underserved populations.

- **Build Capacity:** Connect site staff to training and technical assistance opportunities that enhance their interpretation skills and build their capacity to deliver high quality interpretation products, programs and experiences.
- **Foster Collaboration:** Facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing among recreation sites to leverage best practices, innovative and cost-efficient approaches, and lessons learned in interpretation.

## Current Conditions

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### ROME LAUNCH SITE

The Rome Launch Site is a BLM recreation site that provides amenities including a ramp for non-motorized boat access to the Owyhee River, overnight parking, campsites with fire rings and picnic tables, an irrigated day-use area with a double-sided brick grill, and two vault toilet facilities. A BLM office/information desk/bunkhouse facility and a boat storage barn are located on the facility's east side (Photo 1).

Online at the BLM Recreational Opportunities website, it is listed as The Rome Launch Site ([https://webmaps.blm.gov/program\\_apps/BLM\\_Natl\\_Recreation\\_Opportunities/](https://webmaps.blm.gov/program_apps/BLM_Natl_Recreation_Opportunities/)). Its feature type is listed as Campground, and its feature subtype is listed as Campground.

### Interpretation Facilities

The BLM office/information desk/bunkhouse facility includes an information desk and visitor reception area with an assortment of brochures and information available. Current staffing capacity does not allow for this resource to be open regularly to the public or enhanced with interpretation panels or exhibits (Photo 2).

### Interpretation Signs

Interpretation-related signs onsite include one kiosk located at the top of the boat ramp that is used to share important information for boaters, including rules for self-registration permits and use of toilets, waste and wastewater, fire pans or blankets, etc., while on the river (Photo 3).

Though not directly an interpretation sign, a portal sign on an impressive river rock base is located at the entrance to the site from U.S. Route 95.

### Interpretation Programming

Dan Thomas provides the public with roving information and interpretation contacts when onsite. As observed, Thomas' roving contacts with visitors significantly enhance the visitor experience onsite and deserve special acknowledgement for their high quality.



NOTE: The group did not stop at the Hole-in-the-Ground Ranch but photographed it from the river while Dan Thomas provided key information.

### **Interpretation Facilities**

No interpretation facilities currently exist onsite.

### **Interpretation Signs**

No interpretation signs or kiosks currently exist onsite.

### **Interpretation Programming**

No interpretation programming currently takes place onsite. Outfitter groups that use the nearby Morcum Campsite may occasionally provide interpretive talks about the site to boaters, and boaters may walk to the site and explore it on their own.

### **Digital Media & Publications**

The BLM Recreational Opportunities site listed above provides basic location information. There is no BLM.gov Visit page for the site.

Non-BLM websites, including Owyhee Marginalia (<https://www.zhuangzismuddytail.com/owyheemarginalia/ranch-at-hole-in-the-ground.html>) and Friends of the Owyhee (<https://www.friendsofthewyhee.org/post/lost-time-at-hole-in-the-ground>) have basic information and photos—both contemporary and historic—of the site and Conley and Stacia Davis’s association with the site.

## **BIRCH CREEK RANCH (UPPER TRACT)**

The historic ranch is part of the larger Birch Creek Ranch Historic Rural Landscape and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It consists of two separate tracts separated by about a half mile: the Birch Creek Ranch (Upper Tract) is the upriver ranch (Photos 5-9). According to the National Register Nomination, the period of significance for the Birch Creek Ranch is 1900-1937, ending with the departure of the Basque Acordagoitia family.

This site is not listed online at the BLM Recreational Opportunities site ([https://webmaps.blm.gov/program\\_apps/BLM\\_Natl\\_Recreation\\_Opportunities/](https://webmaps.blm.gov/program_apps/BLM_Natl_Recreation_Opportunities/)). The ranch grounds are open for public visitation, and a dirt parking lot allows vehicles to stop at the site and not block the road. All the buildings are closed to the public.

Current management documents identify interpretation-related opportunities at the site. These include:

- Grazing at the Historic Birch Creek Ranch is authorized at the discretion of the BLM and only on a temporary basis for administrative and/or Interpretive purposes (*Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan & Record of Decision* [2002]).

- Designated buildings at the Birch Creek Historic Ranch will be available to the public for overnight use and other compatible uses consistent with public safety requirements (*Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan & Record of Decision* [2002]), p. 103-104)
- Provide on- or off-site interpretation of appropriate sites, including the Birch Creek Historic Ranch (*Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan & Record of Decision* [2002]), p. 107 & Table U-1).
- Manage the Historic Owyhee River Ranch (Birch Creek and Morrison Pinnacle Ranches) as an historic rural landscape and provide public use and enjoyment of this unique area, consistent with protection and enhancement of the ORVs, by: 2) Increasing cultural and natural resource education/interpretation of the area (*Main, West Little and North Fork Owyhee, National Wild and Scenic Rivers Management Plan and Environmental Assessment* 1993], p. 26-28).
- Develop interpretive brochures and install signs providing visitors with information on the cultural and natural values of the area (*Main, West Little and North Fork Owyhee, National Wild and Scenic Rivers Management Plan and Environmental Assessment* 1993], p. 26-28).
- Use one of the existing buildings, such as the older Birch Creek Ranch house, as an interpretive station to display area artifacts and information for visitors (*Main, West Little and North Fork Owyhee, National Wild and Scenic Rivers Management Plan and Environmental Assessment* 1993], p. 26-28).

One of the management objectives for the ranch, as identified in the *Historic Structures Report: Birch Creek Ranch Historic Rural Landscape* (1996), is “to interpret the history of the ranch and the prehistory of the immediate area for the public insofar as it is consistent with protecting archaeological resources.” The plan includes the following planned action for this interpretation objective: “Regarding interpretation, the BLM’s planned action is to develop interpretive materials (signs, brochures, self-guided tours, etc.) in coordination with the BLM’s Recreation Program. This action will likely be more defined once the Historic Structure Report is incorporated into the management plan.”

## **Interpretation Facilities**

No interpretation facilities currently exist onsite.

## **Interpretation Signs**

No kiosks or interpretation signs are present at the site. A portal sign is in place near the site. A directional sign at the riverbank, oriented to river traffic, directs people to “Owyhee River Take-Out 1 Mi.” Approximately a half mile away, at the boat launch site on the Morrison Pinnacle Ranch (Lower Tract), three signs provide basic site and safety information. (See description in following section.)

## **Interpretation Programming**

BLM staff member Dan Thomas often provides the public with roving information and interpretation contacts when onsite. In the past, caretakers have lived onsite during the visitation season and provided basic interpretive services, including informal tours of the site, but these have not taken place since approximately 2019.

Management documents authorize grazing on a temporary basis for interpretive purposes. Specifically, the *Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan & Record of Decision* (2002) states that grazing



Current management documents listed in the section above identify interpretation-related opportunities at the site.

## **Interpretation Facilities**

No interpretation facilities currently exist onsite.

## **Interpretation Signs**

The site has one large and one small sign panel beside the vault toilet facility near the boat launch (Photo 14). The larger sign is a National Conservation Lands Owyhee Wild and Scenic River map that includes two text blocks; one, titled Birch Creek to Leslie Gulch, provides information about the river between these two locations, and the other, titled The Birch Creek Ranch, introduces the site history. The smaller sign hosts three fire prevention notices for the public.

At the top of the boat launch area are three signs: an informational sign for the Owyhee River Take-Out, a small “No Garbage Collection” sign, and a larger, generic sign titled “Stop Oregon’s Invaders!” with information about protecting the cleanliness of Oregon’s waterways.

## **Interpretation Programming**

BLM staff member Dan Thomas often provides the public with roving information and interpretation contacts when onsite. In the past, caretakers have lived at the upper tract during the visitation season and provided basic interpretive services, including informal tours of the site, but these have not taken place since approximately 2019 .

As noted above, management documents authorize grazing on a temporary basis for interpretive purposes. Specifically, the *Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan & Record of Decision* (2002) states that grazing may be authorized at the Historic Birch Creek Ranch “only on a temporary basis for administrative and/or interpretive purposes,” (p. 58). It also states that “[t]he acquired properties known as the Birch Creek Historic Ranch will be closed to application for term grazing permits except for temporary grazing authorizations. These will be issued at the discretion of the BLM for management purposes (including, but not limited to, vegetation manipulation or field management), administrative purposes, and interpretive needs,” (p. 103-104).

## **Digital Media & Publications**

The BLM online interpretation-related resources listed in the section above (Birch Creek Historic Ranch Upper Tract) include general reference and orientation to this ranch site.

A BLM brochure for the Birch Creek Ranch (2011) includes basic site information, directions, contacts, and other information, as well as basic interpretation messaging. This brochure can be found online at [https://www.blm.gov/sites/default/files/documents/files/val\\_birchckranch\\_brochure.pdf](https://www.blm.gov/sites/default/files/documents/files/val_birchckranch_brochure.pdf).

At least one earlier version of an interpretation brochure exists for the site (circa. 2008). It includes additional interpretive text not available in the 2011 brochure, including sections on geology, wildlife, and cultural history. It is available digitally through GPO at

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-I53-PURL-gpo78996/pdf/GOVPUB-I53-PURL-gpo78996.pdf>.

Additional BLM online interpretation-related resources include:

- a BLM.gov webpage: <https://www.blm.gov/visit/birch-creek-historic-ranch>
- a BLM site map showing amenities: <https://flic.kr/p/MN9dKF>
- a BLM Flickr photo album:  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/blmoregon/albums/72157660389039602/>

Non-BLM websites, including Owyhee Marginalia

(<https://www.zhuangzismuddytail.com/owyheemarginalia/ranch-at-hole-in-the-ground.html>) and Friends of the Owyhee (<https://www.friendsoftheowyhee.org/post/lost-time-at-hole-in-the-ground>) have basic information and photos—both contemporary and historic—of the site.

## OTHER RELATED RESOURCES WITH INTERPRETATION CONTENT

### **Owyhee, Bruneau, and Jarbridge Rivers Boating Guide (rev. 2017)**

In addition to providing detailed maps of these rivers, including the stretch of river from Rome to Leslie Gulch, this document contains interpretive components that help connect river travelers to a deeper understanding of the river and its resources and stories.

It includes narrative chapters on Natural History (including sections on Geology, Botany and Wildlife), Human History, the Owyhee River System, and the Bruneau-Jarbridge Rivers System. For the section of river included in this report, the document includes the following informational and interpretive passages as pop-out text boxes on the maps:

- Rome (History)
- Owyhee Crossing (History)
- Chalk Basin (Geology)
- Lambert Rock Flows (Geology)
- Potters Cave (Cultural History/Archaeology)
- Iron Point Canyon (Geology)
- Morcum Dam (Historic)
- Upper Greeley Bar (Wildlife)
- Birch Creek (History)
- Owyhee Reservoir (History)

This document is available online at [https://www.blm.gov/sites/blm.gov/files/documents/files/Media-Center\\_Public-Room\\_Idaho\\_Bruneau-Jarbridge-Owyhee\\_BoaterGuide.pdf](https://www.blm.gov/sites/blm.gov/files/documents/files/Media-Center_Public-Room_Idaho_Bruneau-Jarbridge-Owyhee_BoaterGuide.pdf).

# Opportunities & Recommendations

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## GENERAL OWYHEE RIVER CANYON CORRIDOR

### Interpretation Planning

Development of an interpretation plan for the sites in the canyon corridor would help guide future efforts in interpretation and aid in unifying messaging, connecting sites thematically, identifying gaps and needs in interpretation, prioritizing efforts, and more effectively engaging visitors.

Interpretive planning is essential for creating meaningful, engaging, and educational experiences for visitors while supporting management goals and fostering a culture of stewardship and conservation. It enhances visitor satisfaction, promotes responsible behavior, and helps secure funding and partnerships, ultimately contributing to the long-term sustainability and success of a site.

Interpretation planning is a broad field and can be adapted to meet specific needs. It can be contracted through various private planning firms or through BLM-led teams that include key partners, Tribal representatives, community leaders, and others. More information is available through the National Interpretation Program Lead.

### Community Engagement

As part of the interpretive planning process for the corridor (and individual sites within it), community engagement is strongly recommended. Community engagement is a time-tested strategy for building trust and transparency, growing capacity to meet shared goals, and increasing understanding for and commitment to conservation. Involvement of groups including Tribes, partners, local governments and stakeholders, the public, and BLM staff can provide valuable insights into interpretation efforts throughout the corridor and cultivate knowledge, inspire stewardship, and build trusted partnerships that reach beyond interpretation.

The BLM released its final *Partnerships and Community Engagement Strategy* in the fall of 2024, and this document envisions progressively greater community engagement in support of durable land management and conservation that meets the shared goals of the BLM and the communities and public that the agency serves. It advances community engagement as a strategic land management tool to improve relationships, reduce conflict, expand collaboration, increase efficiency and effectiveness, and achieve mutual objectives. It also provides big picture assistance in understanding the value of community engagement, specific bureau strategic themes and goals, and helpful planning tools such as *A Spectrum of Community Engagement for Public (Federal) Land Management*.

In 2024, each BLM State Office designated a community engagement lead who has since been trained to deliver the Community Engagement 101 Workshop, a key tool for developing the principles and benefits of community engagement across the BLM and the communities it serves.

This workshop is an introduction to the practice and benefits of community engagement, designed to be adaptable in duration, ranging from 30 minutes to two hours. Delivery formats can vary, including formal training workshops and small group meetings. The community engagement lead for OR/WA State Office is Morgan Rubanow ([mrubanow@blm.gov](mailto:mrubanow@blm.gov)). Consideration should be given to contacting Morgan and arranging for a field office training session and assistance. Morgan will be a valuable resource for helping connect the Malheur Field Office with communities as part of any interpretive planning activities, including those listed in the sections below.

## **Interpretation Themes**

The development of interpretive themes for the canyon corridor will help focus future activities and resources onsite. While these are best created through collective work and collaboration, existing management documents, especially the river's Outstandingly Remarkable Values, provide several prospective thematic areas ripe for further development: Recreation, Scenery, Geology, Prehistoric/Cultural, Historic/Cultural, and Wildlife. These could be used as starting points for any designated group or team. The National Interpretation Program Lead would be happy to participate or support, if/as needed.

## **Interpretation Signs**

Interpretation signs, added in very limited, well-selected locations, would help improve the visitor experience by providing important information, context, perspective, and connection in the river corridor. Any such signs would need to be consistent with applicable laws, policy, and management plans (including those for Wilderness Study Areas and Wild and Scenic Rivers) and be compatible or in harmony with the landscape.

For example, as provided in Manual 6330—Management of BLM Wilderness Study Areas, the BLM will only allow new permanent and ground disturbing projects in a wilderness study area when such a project meets an exception to its non-impairment standard. The exception most likely to be met by new interpretive signs, panels, or kiosks is that that project would protect or enhance the areas naturalness or supplemental cultural values.

The 1993 *Main, West Little and North Fork Owyhee National Wild and Scenic Rivers Management Plan and Environmental Assessment* identifies interpretation signs as action items in several affected environments:

- In Acquired Properties, “Develop interpretive brochures and install signs providing visitors with information on the cultural and natural resource values of the area [Birch Creek Ranch units],” p. 27 & 58.
- In Cultural, “Provide visitors with education, interpretation, and information designed to minimize visitor impacts and to encourage appreciation of cultural resources. Include this information in commercial permits, boating guides, bulletin boards, signs, brochures, interpretive displays, and through personal contact,” p. 28 & 108.
- In Geology, “Increased education efforts through brochures, signs, and visitor service would provide interpretation of the geological resource of these river corridors. Impacts from collecting and vandalism would be reduced through education efforts,” p. 111.

- In WSAs, “Some recreation developments may occur within the WSA (signs, bulletin board, barriers), but WSA values would not be impaired,” p. 123.

Interpretation signs can be considered as a tool to assist with natural (geology) and cultural resource protection in very specific instances. Interpretations signs placed at limited, critical locations can help reduce the number of adverse impacts to natural and cultural sites occurring in the river canyons—especially sites used today as recreation campsites or day use areas.

Placement and messaging of any such interpretation signs must be done in a mindful and collaborative manner with staff archaeologists, geologists, and other subject matter experts, consistent with national policy and practice, management planning documents and guidance, Tribal consultation, and other relevant direction.

Since interpretation signs also focus visitor attention and interest, there is a possibility that, despite the best efforts at design and content, signs could provoke adverse impacts to natural and cultural sites, such as casual surface collection of artifacts and attempts at excavation of a cultural site. Understanding this, interpretation signs should only be placed near natural and cultural sites recommended by staff archaeologists, geologists, and Tribal partners, who should also collaborate on any content.

It is important to note that interpretation signs can also be used to deter illegal activities, including adverse impacts to natural and cultural sites, by redirecting visitor attention and interest away from sensitive areas and topics to other topics and locations. For example, an interpretation sign could be placed facing away from a cultural site and focus visitor attention in another direction and on another topic, such as the geology of a nearby canyon wall.

In addition to the information in the following sections, possible sites for consideration of interpretation sign placement include the Chalk Basin/Lambert Dome area (geology) and Potter’s Cave (cultural history and archaeology)—again, only as consistent with applicable laws, policy, and management plans (including those for Wilderness Study Areas and Wild and Scenic Rivers) and if compatible or in harmony with the landscape.

## **Accessibility**

A focused approach to improving accessibility across all sites with interpretation assets could further enhance the visitor experience, particularly for individuals with disabilities and other accessibility needs. Incorporating accessibility improvements will not only enhance the inclusivity and accessibility of the sites but also ensure compliance with legal requirements and best practices in public land management. These enhancements will contribute to a more welcoming and engaging environment for all visitors regardless of their abilities.

While this report is not an accessibility audit, recommendations for interpretation-related accessibility improvements and enhancements include:

- Including a review of interpretation assets in any comprehensive accessibility auditing: In any comprehensive accessibility auditing of recreation sites, consider including auditing of all interpretation sites within the Owyhee River corridor. From an interpretation perspective, this audit should assess physical access to facilities, signage, programming, and digital media. The audit results should then help guide the prioritization of accessibility enhancements.

- Developing accessible interpretation materials: Develop and provide interpretation materials and services in multiple formats to serve people with disabilities. Examples include Braille versions of printed materials, print options for signs and publications, sensory-friendly materials, and programs for visitors with sensory processing challenges. Multilingual signs and publications are also recommended to expand access and reach additional visitors, including those from underserved communities.
- Designing inclusive programming: For sites with interpretive programming, the development of interpretation programs that are inclusive of visitors with diverse abilities is recommended. This could include sensory friendly events and programs that are specifically designed for visitors with cognitive disabilities and sensory processing challenges.
- Collaborating with disability advocates: Identify and engage with local and national disability advocacy groups to review planned improvements and gather feedback on how to better serve visitors with disabilities through interpretation. This collaboration can also help in promoting the sites to individuals with disabilities. Possible connections include the Malheur Council on Aging, the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) Aging and Disability Services, and the ODHS Aging and Disability Resource Connection (855-673-2372).

## **Action Plan**

Development of an action plan is recommended to help review, prioritize, and meet the suggestions and recommendations identified throughout this report. Such a plan could outline specific steps, responsible parties, timelines, and expected outcomes related to this report.

Example steps might be identifying key personnel to review the report and/or scheduling a work session where recommendations are reviewed, the top 3-5 priorities are identified, and specific tasks are built into annual work plans.

Effective tools that could assist the action planning process include a SOAR analysis (strengths, aspirations, opportunities, and results) and SMART goals (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound).

## **ROME LAUNCH SITE**

### **Interpretation Facilities**

#### *Visitor Reception Area*

The visitor reception area of the BLM office/bunkhouse facility provides an exceptional opportunity to connect with visitors. Enhancements such as interpretive signs, posters, maps, and/or artwork; small interpretive exhibits or displays that include touchable and accessible elements; and additional, up-to-date brochures and publications will help fill the empty wall and floor space and provide visitors with additional opportunities for understanding and connecting to the significance of the site and the entire Owyhee River corridor.

While understanding that current staffing capacity does not allow for this resource to be open regularly with BLM staff present to assist visitors, consideration could be given to opening the facility irregularly to the public as an unstaffed, self-serve resource at times when staff are onsite and focusing on other

duties. In such an instance, the door leading from the information desk area to the BLM office could be locked, therefore limiting public access to the visitor reception area, where they could learn about the area through additional interpretation materials and enhancements.

### *Central Lawn Day Use Area*

The central lawn day use area also provides an exceptional opportunity to connect visitors with the significance of the site and the river. The area could be used for formal and informal interpretive talks or presentations as described below. In such instances, visitors could bring their chairs or sit in the grass, and a presenter could speak at the central fire grill structure.

If desired, bench seating could be procured for the site and stored onsite; perhaps in the barn if space permits. Local resources could also be used to build community interest and support. For example, wooden benches could be produced for the site by area Scout groups (especially youth seeking culminating projects for the Eagle Scout rank), by community service groups such as Rotary International in Vale or other communities, or through an advertised volunteer project for National Public Lands Day; especially if the BLM could provide the basic materials.

## **Interpretation Signs**

The addition of interpretive signs at the Rome Launch Site would enhance the visitor experience and help the BLM meet management goals outlined in its supporting plans.

The current kiosk is well positioned rear the top of the boat ramp to reach the primary site user group (boaters) and other site visitors (ION Highway travelers seeking a rest break, site picnic and day-use visitors, etc.). One additional kiosk, placed adjacent to the existing one, will provide opportunities for additional messaging and connection onsite.

On the two kiosks, mounting of four additional interpretation signs is recommended to focus on the following interpretive themes, adding to the existing information sign about river rules and boater safety:

- 1) The geology of the Owyhee River canyon and its significance.
- 2) The river's status as a National Wild and Scenic River, including its Outstanding Remarkable Values, and the four wilderness study areas through which it flows.
- 3) The cultural history of the canyon, including the general presence and significance of cultural sites, the importance of cultural resource protection, and any related Tribal messaging resulting from BLM engagement with Tribal communities.
- 4) The role of the Rome site (and other nearby areas) as a nationally significant boat launch area with a history and tradition of use since the 1950's, tying to the Rome area's historic role as a transportation nexus and traditional place for human river crossing (from Tribal communities, miners, settlers, to current-day highway travelers).

Multilingual signs are recommended, as are accessibility features such as Braille and touchable components.

Additional interpretation signs could be placed inside the visitor reception area of the BLM office/information desk/bunkhouse facility, to help serve the visiting public when the facility is open. These signs could build on the themes and content of the signs at the kiosk or introduce additional themes not included in the kiosk signs. Duplication of the signs at the kiosk is not recommended.

## **Interpretation Programming**

The presence of overnight camping at the site presents an opportunity for interpretive programming and related community engagement. The site's captive, overnight audience could be reached through a variety of program types, including informal and formal talks, hands-on demonstrations, or other presentations—but only as capacity allows. The breadth of site-specific themes—including boating and river safety, wild and scenic river protection, and the history, geography, resource protection, and wildlife associated with the river corridor—provides many opportunities to further connect visitors to the significance of the site, the river, and the BLM.

Understanding the limited BLM staffing available onsite, creative use of staff resources could be considered. For example, BLM subject matter experts often accompany BLM river rangers on river patrols to monitor resources that are difficult to reach by motor vehicle. On some occasions, these staff members could offer onsite programming the evening before a patrol launches and help visitors understand their work and its connection to the river. These programs could be flexible in size and scope, ranging from formal talks, advertised on the kiosk and/or communicated to any known scheduled groups in advance, to informal pop-up talks or discussions.

Tribal representatives, partner organizations, and others such as outfitter or boating industry leaders could also be invited to present a similar range of programs. (Outfitters could be encouraged, through permit language, to provide similarly styled talks or programs.) As one community example, the Malheur County Trust has an online resource for local county-area talent and project contacts interested in presenting on topics including heritage, visual arts, performing arts, literary/language arts, humanities, and tourism-related business and industry. Link: <https://malheuristiculturaltrust.org/>.

The central lawn area is a fitting resource for interpretive programming and could be used for formal and informal interpretive talks or presentations, as described above. Visitors could bring their chairs or sit in the grass, and a presenter could speak at the central fire grill structure.

The area could also be a location for issue-specific established programming, like Leave No Trace (LNT) and Tread Lightly. LNT programming would help reinforce key messaging for boaters in the hours before their trips. The BLM facilitates a program to bring LNT to interested BLM units through the Leave No Trace Spotlight program each year. Spotlights are designed to energize local Leave No Trace efforts by rallying the community, connecting partners, and inspiring continued action. This free program provides opportunities for Leave No Trace training, community outreach, and volunteer stewardship. Selected areas receive up to 3 days of Leave No Trace on-the-ground programs for staff, partners, and the local community. The BLM LNT program is coordinated in HQ420, and the contact is by Tarryn Bartkus (tbartkus@blm.gov).

Formal interpretation programming is not recommended for the area near the boat launch area, as it would obstruct the loading and unloading of boats, supplies, and people, and present a safety hazard. Informal or roving interpretation should continue as long as it does not impede access or create a safety hazard.

## **Digital Media & Publications**

To help better connect visitors with the site and its role in river recreation, consideration can be given to updating and enhancing the basic digital presence of the site, starting with additional information and links at the Owyhee Wild & Scenic River – Visit webpage (<https://www.blm.gov/visit/owyhee-wild-scenic-river>).

Consideration should also be given to establishing a [blm.gov/visit](http://blm.gov/visit) webpage for the Rome Boat Launch site itself, consistent with other recreation sites. This webpage can then be shared with outfitters to ensure that visitors are getting the most accurate and up-to-date information about the site and access to it. Including links to additional resources that connect visitors to the site and the reasons why it is a special place with special stories and resources would add value to visitors.

Consideration can also be given to reviewing, updating, and reusing past and existing interpretive content, including text from the expanded 2008 site brochure. Sections from the brochure text such as Geology, Wildlife, Cultural, and Recreational Activities could be quickly reviewed and updated, then posted.

Existing descriptive text from the Outstanding Remarkable Values / Special Attributes section of the *Main, West Little and North Fork Owyhee, National Wild and Scenic Rivers Management Plan and Environmental Assessment* (1993) could be adapted for inclusion, as well.

With several historic photos of the river and its ranching past in existence, a web feature could be developed that displays historic photos juxtaposed with current site images, helping visitors better understand and connect to resources they will be passing on the river.

A narrative audio tour for the river corridor, like those used for auto touring, is not recommended. An audio tour would detract from the actual visitor experience on the river and compete with the natural aural landscape.

A video tour, available digitally with audio description and captions, could bring some of the river experience to people unable to take an actual trip on the river. Such a video could address the major interpretive themes and include sights and sounds of the river, descriptions of primary features, and interviews with people like BLM subject matter experts, outfitters, and Tribal representatives.

## **HOLE-IN-THE-GROUND RANCH**

### **Interpretation Planning**

Management actions would help inform any future interpretation planning prior to its initiation. As noted above, the 1993 *Main, West Little and North Fork Owyhee National Wild and Scenic Rivers Management Plan and Environmental Assessment* called for the inventory and evaluation of the property to determine eligibility for inclusion to the National Register of Historic Places. Accordingly, qualifying structures will be managed within appropriate laws, and any structures that do not qualify will be removed. This inventory and analysis would be an important guiding document for any interpretation planning, and any interpretation at the site.

As an alternative to the recommendation above for a canyon corridor-wide interpretation plan, an interpretive plan for the site—including or excluding the Morcum Campsite—could be considered as a comprehensive guiding framework for any future actions related to interpretation.

As another alternative, based on similar themes and location, the ranch could be included in an interpretation plan for the entire Birch Creek Ranch Historic Rural Landscape, as described in the section below.

While an interpretive plan is beyond the scope of this document, it is recommended. The information in this section may help guide interim interpretation and inform future development of the plan.

Clarification is also needed on the recreation status of the site—day use or overnight camping—and external references should be reviewed and updated.

## **Interpretation Facilities**

Management planning for the site will better inform any future opportunities for interpretation facilities.

As a day use site, consideration could be given for use of one of the site's covered structures to provide visitors with protection from the sun and wind, and a place to picnic.

In such a case where future management planning calls for the removal of the ranch house, consideration could be given to preserving the river-rock chimney feature and incorporating it into a day use structure, such as an open-sided, covered picnic shelter. This shelter could be designed to approximate the dimensions of the ranch house and provide an opportunity for interpretation signs, as well.

Sections of the grassy yard adjacent to the ranch house could provide opportunities for informal interpretation talks, if/as warranted.

## **Interpretation Signs**

The addition of an interpretive sign or signs onsite could enhance the day-use visitor experience and help the BLM meet management goals outlined in its supporting plans. Signs provided in multiple languages and Braille could increase accessibility onsite.

An introductory sign or kiosk, including basic ranch history and site rules and regulations, would provide visitors with an introduction to the site, raise awareness of its significance, and instill cultural resource protection messages. This sign could be placed prominently along the near the ranch house or near the intersection of the Morcom Road and the ranch drive.

If a structure is opened to the public in the future, additional interpretation signs could be placed inside to help serve the visiting public when the facility is open. These signs could build on the themes and content of the signs at the kiosk or introduce additional themes not included in the kiosk signs. Duplication of the signs at the kiosk is not recommended.

Recommended themes for additional signs could include:

- The site's ranching history, especially ranch residents and their stories: Riley Horn's ranching onsite; Frank and Leora Blanton Davis's ranching onsite; S. [Scott] Conley and Stacia Hall Davis's ranching onsite, their earlier and simultaneous ranching at the Griffith Ranch site downriver, and their raising of thoroughbred and quarter horses (and other horses for the Army Remount Service); H.T. Morcom's ranching onsite.
- Ranching traditions in the region, and how the site relates to the Birch Creek Ranch and Morrison Pinnacle Ranch sites downriver.
- Ranch architecture and building design and function.
- The site's natural history and the river's wild and scenic designation.
- Cultural resource protection messaging.

- The site’s possible association with the actor Spencer Tracy and the filming of Northwest Passage (1940), shot near McCall, Idaho. (<https://www.owyheemarginalia.com/life-in-the-owyhee/>)

## **Interpretation Programming**

The breadth of site-specific interpretive themes at this day use site—including boating and river safety, wild and scenic river protection, and the history, geography, resource protection, and wildlife associated with the river corridor—provides many opportunities to further connect visitors to the significance of the site, the river, and the BLM. However, programming may not be the most efficient use of limited resources for interpretation at this site.

Understanding the limited BLM staffing available in the area and the small and unpredictable site visitation, creative use of staff resources could be considered if programming is desired. For example, BLM subject matter experts often accompany BLM river rangers on river patrols to monitor resources. On some occasions, these staff members could offer informal interpretation talks at the site or the nearby Morcum Campsite if any visitors are encountered.

## **Digital Media & Publications**

Depending on management goals and priorities, consideration could be given to establishing a digital presence to the site through a [blm.gov/visit](http://blm.gov/visit) webpage for the site or the nearby Morcum Campsite, consistent with other recreation sites. Including links to additional resources that connect visitors to the site and the reasons why it is a special place with special stories and resources would add value to visitors.

Consideration can also be given to creating a site brochure. Sections from other existing site brochures could be adapted and/or modeled. This brochure could be made available onsite to unscheduled visitors and compliment any interpretation signs produced.

With several historic photos of the site’s ranching past in existence, a web feature or brochure (or section of a brochure) could be developed that displays historic photos with current site images, helping visitors better understand and connect to the site’s significance.

As an alternative to—or to complement—interpretive signs onsite, a self-guided tour booklet could be developed to provide visitors with additional context and connection to the site and its buildings and features. This booklet could be laminated and provided in multiple languages and Braille to increase accessibility onsite.

A video tour, available digitally with audio description and captions, could bring some of the ranch site experience to people unable to visit in person. Such a video could address the major interpretive themes and include sights and sounds of the site and the adjacent river, descriptions of primary features, and interviews with people like BLM subject matter experts, outfitters, and Tribal representatives.

Staff could also explore expanding interpretation of the site through 3D digital storytelling tools, similar to what was done for the Shirk Ranch in the BLM Lakeview District. (See <https://www.cyark.org/projects/shirk-ranch/overview>)

## **BIRCH CREEK HISTORIC RANCH (UPPER TRACT)**

### **Interpretation Planning**

As an alternative to the recommendation above for a canyon corridor-wide interpretation plan, an interpretation plan for the entire Birch Creek Ranch Historic Rural Landscape could be considered as a comprehensive guiding framework for any future actions related to interpretation. While such an interpretive plan is beyond the scope of this document, the information in this section may help guide interim interpretation and inform future development of the plan.

Completion of a Recreation Management Plan for the site and the Recommendations for Future Work identified in the Historic Structures Report—including a Historic Plant Inventory, a comprehensive Cultural Landscape Inventory, a Cultural Landscape Report, a Preservation Management Plan, and other items—will also inform interpretation onsite.

### **Interpretation Facilities**

The presence of historic and non-historic ranch buildings and features presents a unique opportunity for interpretation within the river corridor. With the grounds already open to public access, and with an extant portal sign and parking area, consideration can be given to opening buildings or portions of buildings to provide visitors with additional opportunities to connect with site themes and learn about the site and its history—provided that adequate safety, resource protection, and accessibility can be ensured. Such use is identified in core management documents, including the *Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan & Record of Decision* (2002).

Other historic ranch sites on the National Register of Historic Places and operated by the BLM in Oregon, including the Riddle Brothers Ranch in the BLM's Burns District and the Shirk Ranch in the BLM's Lakeview District, could be consulted and best practices modeled. Both sites allow public access to historic buildings, the former with seasonal volunteers onsite and the latter without personnel onsite.

The Rust Cottage and the Acordagoitia House are both well positioned to serve as a central place to welcome visitors and provide basic site information, orientation, and interpretation, should staffing be available by BLM employees or qualified volunteers, and should funding to refurbish, operate, and maintain the facility be available. Consideration could be given to either facility to be adapted for this function, consistent with guiding policy and plans and based on cost and other management considerations. Either facility could also be adapted to house staff or volunteers on a seasonal basis, as in past years.

Consideration could also be made to providing access to other structures, such as the Root Cellar, the Bunkhouse/Shop, and/or the Barn for interpretive purposes, and possibly furnishing them to the period of significance. Likewise, consideration could be made to reestablishing small portions of the ranch's historic orchards.

To ensure accessibility, it is recommended that the bureau provide barrier-free access that promotes independence for people with disabilities to the highest degree practicable, while preserving significant historic features.

## Interpretation Signs

The addition of interpretive signs onsite will enhance the visitor experience and help the BLM meet management goals outlined in its supporting plans. Signs provided in multiple languages and Braille could increase accessibility onsite.

An introductory sign or kiosk, including basic ranch history and site rules and regulations, would provide visitors with an introduction to the site, raise awareness of its national significance, and instill cultural resource protection messages. This sign could be placed prominently near the Rust Cottage or Acordagoitia House, adjacent to primary access points for visitors.

While individual interpretive signs outside of each ranch building is not recommended, one or two additional interpretation signs could be placed on the site in such a way as they are compatible or in harmony with the landscape.

Recommended theme topics for additional signs include:

- The site's nationally significant ranching history.
- Juan Domingo and Timothy Lequerica, Donato Uberuaga, the Simon and Mercedes Acordagoitia family, and Basque ranching traditions in the region.
- Ranch architecture and building design and function.
- The site's natural history and the river's wild and scenic designation.
- Cultural resource protection messaging.
- How all the site's features combine to form a nationally significant historic rural landscape.

As noted in the Historic Structures Report, "the primary significance of Birch Creek Ranch Historic Rural Landscape lies in how all of its parts—plantings, roads, fences, corrals, irrigation works, archaeological remains, as well as buildings and structures—convey the heritage of this particular cultural property," (p. 68).

Such interpretation, including signs, is identified in core management documents, including the *Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan & Record of Decision* (2002) and the *Main, West Little and North Fork Owyhee, National Wild and Scenic Rivers Management Plan and Environmental Assessment* (1993).

## Interpretation Programming

As noted above, the presence of historic and non-historic ranch buildings and features presents a unique opportunity for interpretation within the river corridor. The site's infrequent and unscheduled visitation makes formal, scheduled interpretive programming inefficient and ineffective at the site, when factoring in the limited staffing and capacity available.

Visitors could be reached through other interpretation program types, including informal talks, hands-on demonstrations, costumed interpretation activities, or living history talks—but only as capacity allows.

Informal and roving interpretation talks have been provided in the past by staff (when on the premises) and site volunteers, and could be continued on a case-by-case basis, as capacity allows. The BLM's Dan Thomas possesses both an encyclopedic knowledge of the site and strong interpretation and speaking skills, and provides exceptional visitor contacts when onsite that should continue. When opportunities

arise to have Dan's talks recorded, these resources could be shared online with people unable to visit the site in person.

As noted above, management documents authorize onsite grazing on a temporary basis for interpretive purposes. This authorization provides a unique opportunity for cultural demonstrations or living history programming to help connect visitors tangibly to the site's historic use.

Cultural demonstrations, costumed activities, and living history talks require significant investment, development, and practice, and should be undertaken only with considerable planning and as outlined by an interpretive plan for the site. Other interpretive tools, such as signs and publications, may be a better investment of limited agency resources for interpretation.

An Artist in Residence Program can build goodwill, increase awareness, and foster community interest in public lands and resources. If overnight accommodations can be identified onsite, either in a structure or designated camping area, an Artist in Residence program could be established. In nearby Burns District, the BLM has established an Artist in Residence Program at the Riddle Brothers Ranch, and it could help inform the development of a program onsite. According to Burns District staff (Tara Thissell), the artist stays in the site's Caretaker's Cabin; it is a studio situation with water, solar electricity, a cooking stove/oven, a wood-burning stove, and a refrigerator/freezer. For restroom facilities, they use the public vault toilet onsite. They also have access to a BLM Administrative House about a mile away where they can shower/bathe and have more food storage. They have an agency radio in the Caretaker's Cabin for emergency communications, but cell phones work decent in that area. They also have the responsibility of "hosting" the ranch site. While it is not a perfect fit for the Birch Creek Ranch, it can serve as a model. For more information about the BLM's Artist in Residence Program, contact the program's national coordinator, Gregory Shine (gshine@blm.gov).

## Digital Media & Publications

### *Digital Media*

Efforts to update and enhance the basic digital presence of the site, starting with additional information and links at <https://www.blm.gov/visit/birch-creek-historic-ranch>, would increase public connection and engagement. Consideration could be given to adding links to additional resources that connect visitors to the site and the reasons why it is a special place with special stories and resources. This can also ensure that outfitters and visitors are getting the most up-to-date information about the site.

Other recommended considerations include the following:

- Consider reviewing, updating, and reusing past and existing interpretive content, including text from the expanded 2008 site brochure. Sections from the brochure text such as Geology, Wildlife, Cultural, and Recreational Activities could be quickly reviewed and updated, then posted.
- Consider identifying additional online interpretive content that would connect visitors to the site's resources, using the theme topics listed above.
- Consider adapting existing descriptive text from *Historic Structure Report: Birch Creek Ranch Historic Rural Landscape* (1996), *the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Birch Creek Ranch Historic Rural Landscape* (1997), and the Outstanding Remarkable Values / Special Attributes section of the *Main, West Little and North Fork Owyhee, National Wild and Scenic Rivers Management Plan and Environmental Assessment* (1993).

- Consider sharing historic photos of the site, and/or historic photos juxtaposed with current site images, to help illustrate the landscape changes and similarities over time.
- Consider digitizing the Owyhee Tapes Narratives from 1980 that have been transcribed and making them available to a wider audience to help understand and connect with the ranching experience in the region.

### *Digital Storytelling Tools*

Consideration could be given to expanding interpretation of the site through 3D digital storytelling tools, similar to what was done for the Shirk Ranch in the BLM Lakeview District (<https://www.cyark.org/projects/shirk-ranch/overview>) and for the sites of Dinetah in the BLM Farmington District (<https://tapestry.cyark.org/content/dinetah>).

A video tour, available digitally with audio description and captions, could bring some of the ranch site experience to people unable to visit in person. Such a video could address the major interpretive themes and include sights and sounds of the site and the adjacent river, descriptions of primary features, and interviews with people like BLM subject matter experts, outfitters, and Tribal representatives.

### *Interpretation Publications*

Interpretation publications, such as brochures and self-guided tour booklets, are valuable tools for a remote site with sporadic, seasonal visitation and no regular staffing.

There is value in updating and printing copies of a revised version of the site's 2008 interpretive brochure. The current information brochure lacks the specific interpretation focus and content of the 2008 brochure and misses the opportunity to connect readers more fully to the site's significance. Sections from the 2008 brochure text such as Geology, Wildlife, Cultural, and Recreational Activities could be quickly reviewed and updated, then published in the current BLM design format. If the brochure's content is updated per the recommendation in the Online/Digital Interpretation section above, this action could result in new digital content and a new brochure.

As an alternative to—or to complement—interpretive signs onsite, a self-guided tour booklet could be developed to provide visitors with additional context and connection to the site and its buildings and features. This booklet could be laminated and provided in multiple languages and Braille to increase accessibility onsite.

Additional interpretive brochures could be created, based on the themes shared above, using the digital content suggested above as a start.

## **MORRISON PINNACLE RANCH (BIRCH CREEK RANCH LOWER TRACT)**

### **Interpretation Planning**

As noted above, as an alternative to the recommendation above for a canyon corridor-wide interpretation plan an interpretation plan for the entire Birch Creek Ranch Historic Rural Landscape could be considered as a comprehensive guiding framework for any future actions related to interpretation. While such an interpretive plan is beyond the scope of this document, the information in this section may help guide interim interpretation and inform future development of the plan.

Completion of a Recreation Management Plan for the site and the Recommendations for Future Work identified in the Historic Structures Report—including a Historic Plant Inventory, a comprehensive Cultural Landscape Inventory, a Cultural Landscape Report, a Preservation Management Plan, and other items—will also inform interpretation onsite.

## **Interpretation Themes**

In addition to the recommendations above, consideration should be given to including an additional theme not identified in management plans. If validated, interpretation of rancher James Morrison and the region’s geology could be enhanced by exploring and sharing the story of Morrison Rock Jasper, also called Morrisonite and the “King of Jaspers.” Resources suggest that this rock was named for James Morrison who reportedly first found the stones on his ranch. Additional research is recommended to ground truth and clarify this information. Basic information is available online at sites, including:

- <https://www.mineralauctions.com/items/morrison-ranch-jasper-morrisonite-101334>
- <https://thegemshop.com/pages/history-of-morrisonite>
- <https://thegemshop.com/pages/the-history-of-morrisonite-updated>
- <https://rarerocksandgems.com/morrisonite-the-king-of-jaspers/>
- <https://geologyscience.com/gemstone/morrisonite-jasper/?amp>
- <https://thegemshop.com/pages/morrisonite-location>

## **Interpretation Facilities**

The presence of historic and non-historic ranch buildings and features – plus a vault toilet, a boat launch, a parking area, and a dispersed camping area – affords additional opportunities for a wider range of interpretive programming than any other site within the river corridor.

With the grounds already open to public access, and with the terminal travel location of a boat launch and a dispersed camping area, an extant portal sign and parking area, consideration can be given to opening buildings or portions of buildings to provide visitors with additional opportunities to connect with site themes and learn about the site and its history—provided that adequate safety and accessibility can be met.

As noted above, other historic ranch sites on the National Register of Historic Places and operated by the BLM in Oregon, including the Riddle Brothers Ranch in the BLM’s Burns District and the Shirk Ranch in the BLM’s Lakeview District, could be consulted and best practices modeled. Both sites allow public access to historic buildings, the former with seasonal volunteers onsite and the latter without personnel onsite.

The Morrison Root Cellar/Bunkhouse and the Morrison/Wright House are well located to serve as a central place to welcome visitors and provide basic site information, orientation, and interpretation, should staffing be available by BLM employees or qualified volunteers. These structures should be considered for this function along with (and not independent of) the two houses in the upper tract identified above, consistent with guiding policy and plans and based on cost and other management considerations. The Morrison/Wright House could also be adapted to house staff or volunteers on a seasonal basis, if practical.

Additionally, the lawn area near the Morrison/Wright House could be considered as a location for interpretive programming and could possibly be used for formal and informal interpretive talks or presentations, as described below.

Consideration could also be made to providing access to the Honeymoon Cottage (Stud Barn) for interpretive purposes, and possibly for staff, volunteers, or an Artist-in-Residence Program.

Consistent with the recommendation of the Historic Structures Report, the Stone Dugout/Root Cellar Ruin could be a site for interpretation—in its current ruined state or as a restored structure.

To ensure accessibility, it is recommended that the bureau provide barrier-free access that promotes independence for people with disabilities to the highest degree practicable, while preserving significant historic features.

## **Interpretation Signs**

The addition of interpretive signs onsite will enhance the visitor experience and help the BLM meet management goals outlined in its supporting plans. Signs provided in multiple languages and Braille could increase accessibility onsite.

Recommended themes for additional signs (and site interpretation in general) include:

- The site's nationally significant ranching history.
- James Morrison and Owyhee River Canyon cattle ranching traditions (possibly including the William and Jamshall Griffith family ranching on river left).
- Ranch architecture and building design and function.
- The site's natural history and the river's wild and scenic designation.
- Morrisonite/Morrison Rock Jasper and its association with the site.
- Cultural resource protection messaging.
- Recreational boating in the area and its history.
- How all the site's features combine to form a nationally significant historic rural landscape.

An introductory sign or kiosk, including basic ranch history and site rules and regulations, would provide visitors with an introduction to the site, raise awareness of its national significance, and instill cultural resource protection messages. It would also complement the Owyhee Wild and Scenic River map and sign on the existing kiosk.

While placement of individual interpretive signs near each ranch building is not recommended, one or two additional interpretation signs could be placed on the site in such a way as they are compatible or in harmony with the landscape.

An additional sign could be placed prominently near the Morrison Root Cellar/Bunkhouse or the Morrison/Wright House, adjacent to the site's primary access road. Another could be placed near the water wheel or along a pathway leading to it.

For river interpretation, consider adapting existing descriptive text from the Outstanding Remarkable Values / Special Attributes section of the *Main, West Little and North Fork Owyhee, National Wild and Scenic Rivers Management Plan and Environmental Assessment* (1993). As noted in the Historic Structures Report, "the primary significance of Birch Creek Ranch Historic Rural Landscape lies in how

all of its parts—plantings, roads, fences, corrals, irrigation works, archaeological remains, as well as buildings and structures—convey the heritage of this particular cultural property,” (p. 68).

## **Interpretation Programming**

The presence of historic and non-historic ranch buildings and features – plus a vault toilet, a boat launch, a parking area, and a dispersed camping area – affords additional opportunities for a wider range of interpretive programming than any other site within the river corridor.

As noted above, management documents authorize onsite grazing on a temporary basis for interpretive purposes. This authorization provides a unique opportunity for cultural demonstrations or living history programming to help connect visitors tangibly to the site’s historic use.

The campground’s captive, overnight audience could be reached through a variety of program types, including informal and formal talks, hands-on demonstrations, or other presentations—but only as capacity allows. Similar to the Rome Launch Site, the breadth of site-specific themes at this site—including boating and river safety, wild and scenic river protection, and the history, geography, resource protection, and wildlife associated with the river corridor—provides many opportunities to further connect visitors to the significance of the site, the river, and the BLM.

Understanding the limited BLM staffing available onsite, creative use of staff resources could be considered. For example, BLM subject matter experts often accompany BLM river rangers on river patrols to monitor resources that are difficult to reach by motor vehicle. On some occasions, these staff members could offer onsite programming and help visitors understand their work and its connection to the river. These programs could be flexible in size and scope, ranging from formal talks, advertised on the kiosk and/or communicated to any known scheduled groups in advance, to informal pop-up talks or discussions.

Ranchers, Tribal representatives, partner organizations, and others such as outfitter or boating industry leaders could also be invited to present a similar range of programs. (Outfitters could be encouraged, through permit language, to provide similarly styled talks or programs.) As noted above, the Malheur County Trust has an online resource for local county-area talent and project contacts interested in presenting on topics including heritage, visual arts, performing arts, literary/language arts, humanities, and tourism-related business and industry. Link: <https://malheurculturaltrust.org/>.

Formal interpretation programming is not recommended for the area near the boat launch area, as it would obstruct the loading and unloading of boats, supplies, and people, and present a safety hazard. Informal or roving interpretation should continue if it does not impede access or create a safety hazard.

Visitors could be reached through other interpretation program types, including informal talks, hands-on demonstrations, costumed interpretation activities, or living history talks—but only as capacity allows. Informal and roving interpretation talks have been provided in the past by staff (when on the premises) and site volunteers, and could be continued on a case-by-case basis as capacity allows. As noted above, the BLM’s Dan Thomas possesses both an encyclopedic knowledge of the site and strong interpretation and speaking skills and provides exceptional visitor contacts when onsite that should continue. When opportunities arise to have Dan’s talks recorded, these resources could be shared with people unable to visit the site in person.

Cultural demonstrations, costumed activities, and living history talks require significant investment, development, and practice, and should be undertaken only with considerable planning and as outlined by

an interpretive plan for the site. Other interpretive tools, such as signs and publications, may be a better investment of limited agency resources for interpretation.

As described above, an Artist in Residence Program can build goodwill, increase awareness, and foster community interest in public lands and resources. If overnight accommodations can be identified onsite, either in a structure or designated camping area, an Artist in Residence program could be established. In nearby Burns District, the BLM has established an Artist in Residence Program at the Riddle Brothers Ranch, and it could help inform the development of a program onsite.

## **Digital Media & Publications**

### *Digital Media*

The proximity of the Morrison Pinnacle Ranch to the Birch Creek Ranch, and its inclusion in the Birch Creek Ranch Historic Rural Landscape, presents challenges as to how the site is identified and interpreted, and how and when – or if – the Morrison Pinnacle Ranch identity is used onsite, online, and in publications. Clarification of this will aid the visitor experience in the future.

Efforts to review, update and clarify the basic digital presence of the site would also aid the visitor experience. Consideration should be given to including the campground area to the BLM Recreational Opportunities website to be consistent with current publications, maps, and other online information at <https://www.blm.gov/visit/birch-creek-historic-ranch>.

If a stand-alone website, digital media or publication is desired for the Morrison Pinnacle Ranch specifically, consideration can be given to using relevant information from the National Register nomination form and from the Historic Structures Report.

As noted above for the upper tract, consideration can be given to identifying additional online interpretive content that would connect visitors to the site's resources. Possible additional topics could include those listed above.

Other shared considerations shared with the Upper Tract:

- Consider adapting existing descriptive text from *Historic Structure Report: Birch Creek Ranch Historic Rural Landscape* (1996), *the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Birch Creek Ranch Historic Rural Landscape* (1997), and the Outstanding Remarkable Values / Special Attributes section of the *Main, West Little and North Fork Owyhee, National Wild and Scenic Rivers Management Plan and Environmental Assessment* (1993).
- Consider sharing historic photos of the site, and/or historic photos juxtaposed with current site images, to help illustrate the landscape changes and similarities over time.
- Consider digitizing the Owyhee Tapes Narratives from 1980 that have been transcribed and making them available to a wider audience to help understand and connect with the ranching experience in the region.

### *Digital Storytelling Tools*

As noted for the Upper Tract, explore expanding interpretation of the site through 3D digital storytelling tools, similar to what was done for the Shirk Ranch in the BLM Lakeview District. (See <https://www.cyark.org/projects/shirk-ranch/overview>)

A video tour, available digitally with audio description and captions, could bring some of the ranch site experience to people unable to visit in person. Such a video could address the major interpretive themes and include sights and sounds of the site and the adjacent river, descriptions of primary features, and interviews with people like BLM subject matter experts, outfitters, and Tribal representatives.

### *Interpretation Publications*

Interpretation publications, such as brochures and self-guided tour booklets, are valuable tools for a remote site with sporadic, seasonal visitation and no regular staffing.

There is value in updating and printing copies of a revised version of the site's 2008 interpretive brochure, and expanding its content related to the Morrison Pinnacle Ranch and Morrisonite Jasper. As noted above, the current information brochure lacks the specific interpretation focus and content of the 2008 brochure and misses the opportunity to connect readers more fully to the site's significance. Sections from the 2008 brochure text such as Geology, Wildlife, Cultural, and Recreational Activities could be quickly reviewed and updated, then published in the current BLM design format. If the brochure's content is updated per the recommendation in the Online/Digital Interpretation section above, this action could result in new digital content and a new brochure.

As noted above for the Upper Tract, as an alternative to—or to complement—interpretive signs onsite, a self-guided tour booklet could be developed to provide visitors with additional context and connection to the site and its buildings and features. This booklet could be laminated and provided in multiple languages and Braille to increase accessibility onsite.

Additional interpretive brochures could be created, based on the themes shared above, using the digital content suggested above as a start.

## **Implementation Support**

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### **Technical Assistance**

Opportunities for technical assistance for interpretation are available through a variety of sources, from the district, state office, BLM Headquarters, colleges and universities, and the private sector.

District resources include a Certified Interpretive Trainer (CIT) certified by the National Association for Interpretation (Sarah Sherman) and staff, volunteers, and partners at the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center in Baker City.

Each BLM State Office has designated a state program lead for interpretation. This person can also assist and support, as might other employees in the state with backgrounds in interpretation, including staff at Yaquina Head Outstanding Natural Area and Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument. Other sources for technical assistance in the state include staff in Lakeview and Burns Districts, where historic high desert ranches also exist and may have advice and best practices to share. Contacts in these districts include Tara Thissell (Burns) and Lisa McNee (Lakeview).

At BLM Headquarters, the National Interpretation Program Lead (Gregory Shine) is available to help provide technical assistance and connect staff with additional resources. Shine works remotely from Portland, Oregon, so he is closer geographically to the Owyhee than many BLM Headquarters staff.

Many online resources are available, including those through the BLM National Interpretation SharePoint at <https://doimspp.sharepoint.com/sites/blm-hq-430/SitePages/Interpretation.aspx>.

Technical assistance may also be available from community resources, including those noted above. In addition, there are 21 colleges and universities within 200 miles of the district office in Vale, Oregon, and many have programs in history, communications, and other topics that could assist interpretation activities. National organizations, including the National Association for Interpretation and the National Council on Public History, also have resources available. The National Interpretation Program Lead is available to help facilitate initial introductions, if needed.

National strategic plans can also help at the macro level. For example, the BLM's *Partnerships and Community Engagement Strategy (2024)* provides big picture assistance in understanding the value of community engagement, specific bureau strategic themes and goals, and helpful planning tools such as *A Spectrum of Community Engagement for Public (Federal) Land Management*.

## **Training and Capacity Building**

Many interpretation-related training opportunities and resources are available to assist staff with the recommendations made in this document.

The BLM manages a SharePoint site with information and resources that support Interpretation-related needs of field staff on topics that include interpretation signs, interpretation publications, templates and toolkits, interpretation training, and others ( <https://doimspp.sharepoint.com/sites/blm-hq-430/SitePages/Interpretation.aspx>).

Through an agreement with the Eppley Center at Indiana University, twelve online, self-paced interpretation courses are available to BLM staff in DOI Talent. More information can be found on the BLM Interpretation SharePoint site (<https://doimspp.sharepoint.com/sites/blm-hq-732-rpp-rrp-new/SitePages/Interpretation.aspx>).

Virtual and in-person interpretation training is also available. The BLM's network of Interpretation Trainers offers interpretation training to BLM employees, volunteers, and partners each year. Courses include the Certified Interpretive Guide and Certified Interpretive Host courses. As noted above, district training resources include Sarah Sherman, a Certified Interpretive Trainer. In addition, the National Interpretation Program Lead is a Certified Interpretive Trainer, and a team of BLM Interpretation Trainers exists to provide these training courses to staff, volunteers, and partners.

The National Association for Interpretation provides training and support services for members. The BLM is pursuing an annual agency membership which has the potential to connect more employees to NAI resources.

## **Monitoring & Evaluation**

Mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating interpretive assets allow for continuous improvement and adaptation to changing visitor needs and site conditions.

Regular monitoring and evaluation of interpretation signs, programs, digital media, and publications is recommended for any site with interpretive resources. The Malheur Field Office is encouraged to establish a plan – formal or informal – to do so.

This plan could include a basic, regularly occurring inventory and review of existing interpretive assets. A basic inventory could include information like date of publication and any associated costs. The OR/WA State Interpretation Program Lead and National Interpretation Program Lead can assist in helping develop a plan or process, as needed.

Regular feedback from visitors and stakeholders can help ensure that programs remain relevant and effective. The presence of outfitters is notable here; they could assist staff in collecting this feedback, both formally and informally.

A tool available to BLM recreation sites to measure visitor impact is a Visitor Satisfaction Survey. Through it, visitors' opinions are collected to provide information to the BLM regarding satisfaction among its customers. Results can be used by sites to evaluate and improve the BLM's recreational services. The survey is recreation-focused and gathers data that provides insight into many areas, including site interpretation programs and products (e.g., how well the BLM provides interpretive and educational material). The BLM has an agreement with Washington State University to compile these reports each year, and the information is posted online at <https://sesrc.wsu.edu/blm/>.

For sites interested in participating, an annual IB outlines the procedure. It requests each state director, in collaboration with their Recreation and National Conservation Lands program leads, to select two sites within their jurisdiction to participate in the survey. In choosing sites, one of the requirements is to "select one site/area, if possible, that provides interpretive programming and/or facilities." For reference, the 2024 IB is [IB2024-020](#).

# Photos

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Photo 1: BLM Rome Launch Site, April 15, 2024. Photo by Greg Shine, BLM.



Photo 2: Interior of BLM facility at Rome Boat Launch, April 2024. Photo by Greg Shine, BLM.



Photo 3: Kiosk at Rome Boat Launch, April 2024. Photo by Greg Shine, BLM



Photo 4: Hole-in-the-Ground Ranch, April 2024. Photo by Greg Shine, BLM



Photo 5: Rust Cottage, Birch Creek Ranch, April 2024. Photo by Greg Shine, BLM.



Photo 6: Birch Creek Ranch grounds, Acordagoita House (left) and Bunkhouse/Shop (right), April 2024. Photo by Greg Shine, BLM.



Photo 7: Birch Creek Ranch grounds, Barn and Tack Room, April 2024. Photo by Greg Shine, BLM.



Photo 8: Acordagoita House at Birch Creek Ranch, April 2024. Photo by Greg Shine, BLM.



Photo 9: Root Cellar at Birch Creek Ranch, April 2024. Photo by Greg Shine, BLM.



Photo 10: Morrison Pinnacle Ranch looking south, April 2024. Photo by Greg Shine, BLM.



Photo 11: Morrison Pinnacle Ranch, looking north toward vault toilet and hangar, April 2024. Photo by Greg Shine, BLM.



Photo 12: Barn/Shop at Morrison Pinnacle Ranch, with Morrison/Wright House in background. Photo by Greg Shine, BLM.



Photo 13: Morrison Pinnacle Ranch buildings, Root Cellar/Bunkhouse (right) and Morrison/Wright House (left), April 2024. Photo by Greg Shine.



Photo 14: Vault toilet and signs at Morrison Pinnacle Ranch site, April 2024. Photo by Greg Shine.



## Appendix: Guiding Documents

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### BLM Planning Documents

(Listed in chronological order by date of publication)

*Owyhee Wild and Scenic River Study: Final Report -Environmental Statement* (1979)

*Recreation Area Management Plan: Owyhee River* (1983)

*National Wild River Management Plan: Owyhee River (Draft)* (1985)

*Vale District Planning Update for the Jordan Resource Area* (1992)

*Main, West Little and North Fork Owyhee, National Wild and Scenic Rivers Management Plan and Environmental Assessment* (1993)

*Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision* (2002)

*BLM's Blueprint for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Outdoor Recreation* (2023)

*Southeastern Oregon Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment* (2024)

*BLM Partnerships and Community Engagement Strategy* (2024)

### Other Documents

*Owyhee Tapes Narrative [Transcription of Oral History Interviews]* (1980)

*Historic Structure Report: Birch Creek Ranch Historic Rural Landscape* (1996)

*National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Birch Creek Ranch Historic Rural Landscape* (1997)

*Owyhee, Bruneau and Jarbidge Wild and Scenic Rivers Boating Guide* (2011, 2017)