

King Range Wilderness & Rocks and Islands Wilderness Management Plan Decision Record

DOI-BLM-CA-N030-2009-0003-EA

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Arcata Field Office
Arcata, CA**

Decision

It is the decision of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Arcata Field Office to implement the proposed action as described in the King Range Wilderness and Rocks and Islands Wilderness Management Plan (Plan) and associated environmental assessment (EA). The selected alternative best meets the purpose and need for the project which is to ensure that these two wilderness areas are administered in a manner that is consistent with the Northern California Coastal Wild Heritage Wilderness Act (2006), the Wilderness Act (1964), and the King Range Act (1970). This project is not expected to adversely impact elements of the human environment. This decision is consistent with the King Range National Conservation Area (NCA) Resource Management Plan (RMP) (2005) and the California Coastal National Monument RMP (2005) and other relevant laws, regulations and policies guiding management of the project area.

Alternatives Considered but not Selected

The no action alternative provided for continued management following the guidelines in the King Range NCA RMP (2005) and the California Coastal National Monument RMP (2005) along with law and policy requirements of the Wilderness Act and the Northern California Coastal Wild Heritage Wilderness Act. This alternative was considered, but not selected.

Rationale

The proposed action was selected because it provides a more comprehensive implementation of the law and policy requirements of the Wilderness Act and the Northern California Wild Heritage Wilderness

Act. Specifically the proposed action provides detailed direction that addresses the components of wilderness character that BLM is directed to manage. The proposed action also provides for monitoring of the effects of the proposed action as well as direction for adaptive management.

Consultation and Coordination

BLM received a letter from the Bear River Band of the Rohnerville Rancheria during the public scoping period that provided advice to BLM regarding the issues and content to be addressed in the Plan. Tribal comments were not received regarding the draft Plan.

Five species listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act occupy the area covered by this Plan. BLM staff determined that the actions proposed would have no effects to listed species. The BLM previously completed Section 7 consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service on the King Range NCA RMP and the California Coastal National Monument RMP.

BLM provided copies of the draft Plan to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Humboldt-Del Norte Ranger Unit. BLM prepared a letter of negative determination for the Federal Consistency Unit of the California Coastal Commission pursuant to 15 CFR 930.35 and received a letter of concurrence from the California Coastal Commission (ND-032-11). In addition, BLM consulted with the Northern California Resource Advisory Council regarding the content of the draft Plan.

Public Involvement

A public scoping period was held from December 5, 2008–January 23, 2009, as part of the planning process. Sixteen public comments were received and analyzed. The scoping input received was used to identify issues and other topics for analysis in the draft Plan and EA.

The draft Plan and EA were available for public comment from June 10–July 22, 2011. A postcard announcing the availability of the draft Plan and EA, and providing information on how to access the document, was sent to 193 people on June 7, 2011. On June 10, 2011 a press release announcing the availability of the draft Plan and EA was sent to newspapers in Humboldt, Del Norte, and Mendocino Counties as well as the San Francisco Chronicle. The press release was also sent to television and radio stations in Humboldt and Del Norte counties. The draft Plan and EA were available for review on the BLM Arcata Field Office website. A total of 13 copies of the draft Plan and EA were requested by and delivered to individuals, organizations, and agencies.

Comments Received

The BLM received a total of 13 written comment letters and e-mails during the public comment period. Three of the comments letters were from organizations and the remaining ten letters and e-mails were from individuals.

Organizations commenting were the Backcountry Horsemen of California, Incorporated, the Sierra Club North Group Redwood Chapter, and the California Wilderness Coalition.

Response to Comments

Although BLM's review of public comments did not indicate that changes to the analysis presented in the draft Plan and EA were warranted, several comments did lead to some minor changes to add clarification (see Changes Incorporated into the Final Wilderness Management Plan section below).

Most of the comment letters and e-mails received did not comment on specific information or portions of the draft Plan and EA. However, some comments warranted written responses.

Comment: Concern about the frequency of motor vehicle use allowed.

Response: Use of motor vehicles is prohibited in designated wilderness areas. The plan allows for some limited exceptions only under circumstances described in Appendix C. Vehicle routes are limited to those routes identified for access in Figures 2-11 and 2-12.

Comment: Concern about management proposed for grasslands within the wilderness area in regard to impacts on wilderness characteristics.

Response: Grassland management is necessary to preserve future opportunities to restore grasslands to a more natural ecological cycle. The King Range NCA RMP (2005) included management actions to encourage native species abundance and diversity in grasslands (section TEV 1.7 in the King Range NCA RMP). The actions proposed in the Plan preserve future opportunities to achieve healthy native grasslands.

Comment: Concern that motorized water craft, non-motorized water craft, and day-use visitors add to crowding, litter, and improperly handled human waste.

Response: Landing of motorized water craft in the wilderness is prohibited. Landing of non-motorized watercraft is allowed, however prevailing weather and ocean conditions limit the use of non-motorized watercraft in both wilderness areas.

Observations have shown that the greater majority of day use visitors stay in the proximity of trailheads and generally do not add to crowding of the camping areas in the King Range Wilderness.

Education efforts to reduce litter and improper disposal of human waste are directed at all user groups.

Comment: Marine debris may not detract from wilderness character but BLM use of a motorized vehicle to carry waste does detract from wilderness character.

Response: The marine debris that washes up on the beaches of the King Range Wilderness each year consists of industrial and human-made materials such as plastic bottles, ice chests, refrigerators, tanks, canisters, wheels, tires, and other industrial parts. Large quantities of materials accumulate on the beaches each spring. Accumulations of industrial and human-made debris reduce the natural character of the wilderness. If cleanup of this debris cannot be accomplished by other means, then limited vehicle use would be allowed following the restrictions in Appendix C.

Language was added to Section 2.2.2 to describe and characterize the marine debris that is deposited on beaches in the King Range Wilderness (see Changes Incorporated into the Final Wilderness Management Plan section below).

Comment: The concentration of 192 permitted visitors plus unpermitted visitors on 1,200 acres of the Lost Coast Trail portion of the King Range Wilderness does not provide opportunities for solitude.

Response: The BLM is directed to determine use capacities for wilderness areas in order to avoid degradation of wilderness character (BLM Manual 8560.14.C). The maximum total visitor load of 192 visitors under the permit system allows for overnight use within the entire King Range Wilderness. Although visitors tend to congregate along the Lost Coast Trail those who seek solitude can use other less travelled trails or visit during less crowded times. The proposed maximum total visitor load allows for growth in visitor use but limits potential growth compared with projections of no visitor use allocation. These restrictions maintain opportunities for solitude over the long term.

Comment: Regarding Section 3.3.1 and Grassland Action 1.1 coyote brush should be removed before, or concurrent, with removal of Douglas-fir seedlings.

Response: Section 3.3.1, Action 1.1 states that hand tools would be used to remove encroaching Douglas-fir species and brush species. These brush species include coyote brush.

Comment: Chain saws should not be used in the King Range Wilderness except for wildfire suppression.

Response: Use of chain saws is prohibited in the King Range Wilderness except for fire suppression. Other limited exceptions are made under certain circumstances as described in Appendix C.

Comment: The western snowy plover was not included in Section 2.6.4 description of endangered species.

Response: The western snowy plover is included in third paragraph of Section 2.6.4 and described as being observed infrequently.

Changes Incorporated into the Final Wilderness Management Plan

In: Chapter 1—Introduction and Background

Section 1.1 Introduction: Changed the number of acres in the King Range Wilderness from 42,585 to 42,625 due to acquisition of a 40-acre parcel that occurred between the completion of the draft Plan and the final Plan.

Rationale: Changes were necessary due to the recent acquisition.

Section 1.3 Location and Legislative History: Changed the depiction of the acquired 40-acre parcel in Figure 1-3 from private land to public land.

Rationale: Changes to the map were necessary due to the recent acquisition.

In: Chapter 2—Current Conditions and Trends in Wilderness Character and Management

Section 2.2 Natural: Added clarification to the definition of the concept of “naturalness” in the context of wilderness management. Also added a reference to a decision in the King Range NCA RMP (2005) that defined the pre-logging era of 1945 as the baseline for the goal of protecting and maintaining a mix of vegetation types.

Rationale: Comments received questioned the logic of taking actions in Section 3.3 to improve naturalness. Clarification of the concept of naturalness and the consistency with previous planning decisions are intended to provide additional background for the actions proposed in Section 3.3.

Section 2.2.2 Coastal Beach and Intertidal Zone: Added information to describe and characterize the marine debris that is deposited on

beaches in the King Range Wilderness.

Rationale: Comments received stated that marine debris may not detract from wilderness character. The types of marine debris and the amount of marine debris deposited annually was described in Appendix C but was absent from Chapter 2 in the draft Plan.

Section 2.2.7 Fire and Fuels Management: Changed the depiction of the acquired 40-acre parcel in Figure 2-10 from private land to public land.

Rationale: Changes to the map were necessary due to the recent acquisition.

Section 2.3.1 Livestock Management: Changed the depiction of the acquired 40-acre parcel in Figure 2-11, located on the western edge of the HJ Ridge Allotment, from private land to public land.

Rationale: Changes to the map were necessary due to the recent acquisition.

Section 2.3.2 Private Land (Inholding and Edgeholding) Access: The inholding described as Parcel 1 in the draft Plan was acquired by BLM after the draft Plan was released therefore the total number of inholdings changed from seven parcels to six parcels. The description of the acquired parcel was deleted and the remaining parcels were re-numbered. These changes were also made in Figure 2-12. In addition the description of Parcel 6 was changed to include the existence of an easement for the landing of non-jet, non-commercial aircraft.

Rationale: Changes to parcel numbers were necessary due to the recent acquisition. Comments received stated that the description of Parcel 6 did not include the easement for aircraft. The BLM conducted a title search and found that the easement exists and thus added that information to the description of the parcel.

Section 2.4.2 Recreation Facilities: Changed the depiction of the acquired 40-acre parcel in Figure 2-20 from private land to public land.

Rationale: Changes to figure were necessary due to the recent acquisition.

Section 2.6.1 Cultural Resources: Added that BLM is required by law to maintain historic structures listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Rationale: Comments received questioned the necessity of maintaining the Punta Gorda Lighthouse and Oil House — which requires use

of mechanical equipment— after the area was designated as wilderness.

In: Chapter 3—Proposed Wilderness Plan

Section 3.3.2 Fire and Fuels Management: Changed the depiction of the acquired 40-acre parcel in Figure 3-2 from private land to public land.

Rationale: Changes to figure were necessary due to the recent acquisition.

Section 3.5.1 Visitor Access, Action 1.1: Added language clarifying that increases in target capacities for upland areas would be based on monitoring data.

Rationale: The draft Plan stated that increases could occur but did not include information that would be used to support an increase.

Section 3.5.4 Recreation Facilities: Changed the depiction of the acquired 40-acre parcel in Figure 3-2 from private land to public land.

Rationale: Changes to figure were necessary due to the recent acquisition.

Section 3.5.4 Public Information and Management Presence, Action 1.6: Added that ongoing backcountry ranger presence exists in addition to the proposed law enforcement patrols described in the action.

Rationale: Comments questioned whether two proposed law enforcement patrol periods were adequate to provide a necessary level of education and enforcement. BLM maintains a staff of backcountry rangers dedicated to the King Range Wilderness that includes a permanent backcountry ranger and seasonal rangers employed during the peak season.

Section 3.6.1 Cultural Values, Action 2.2: Added that the historic orchard at Hidden Valley is considered to have historic value.

Rationale: Comments questioned the logic of maintaining an orchard within a designated wilderness. Under the Wilderness Act, an area's unique ecological, geological, scientific, educational, scenic, cultural, and historical values contribute to its wilderness character. The historic value of the orchard is detailed in Section 2.6.1.

In: Chapter 4—Environmental Assessment

Section 4.2.2.2 Management Actions to Maintain or Achieve Naturalness: In the Grassland Management section clarified language

regarding current management direction for management actions in grasslands.

Rationale: Language in the draft Plan did not accurately reflect decisions made in the King Range NCA RMP (2005).

Plan Consistency

Based on information in the EA, the project record, and recommendations from BLM specialists, I conclude that this decision is consistent with the King Range NCA RMP, California Coastal National Monument RMP.

Administrative Remedies

Administrative remedies may be available to those who believe they will be adversely affected by this decision. Appeals may be made to the Office of Hearings and Appeals, Office of the Secretary, U.S. Department of Interior, Board of Land Appeals (Board) in strict compliance with the regulations in 43 CFR Part 4. Notices of appeal must be filed in this office within 30 days after publication of this decision. If a notice of appeal does not include a statement of reasons, such statement must be filed with this office and the Board within 30 days after the notice of appeal is filed. The notice of appeal and any statement of reasons, written arguments, or briefs must also be served upon the Regional Solicitor, Pacific Southwest Region, U.S. Department of Interior, 2800 Cottage Way, E-1712, Sacramento, CA 95825.

The effective date of this decision (and the date initiating the appeal period) will be the date this notice of decision is posted on BLM's (Arcata Field Office) internet website.



Lynda Roush
Field Manager
Arcata Field Office

March 9, 2012

Date