

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

United States Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
Bishop Field Office  
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Bishop, CA 93514

**EA Number:** DOI-BLM-CAC-070-2012-0035-EA

**Proponent:** Bureau of Land Management, Bishop Field Office and Mono County

**Proposed Action Title:** Old Masonic Route Designation

**Proposed Action Location:** Old Masonic Road, northeast of Bridgeport, Mono County, California; Bishop RMP Bodie Hills Management Area; T. 5 N., R. 25 E., W ½ Section 10 MDM (Map 1)

### **A. Purpose and Need for Proposed Action:**

The purpose of the proposed action is to provide for the safety of the public and Bureau personnel through the designation of 0.75 miles of Old Masonic Road as Administrative Use only.

(Note: Old Masonic Road is also known as the McMillan Spring Road and called the McMillan Springs jeep trail in Environmental Assessment (EA) CA-170-97-21, the original EA that analyzed the lease and construction of the gun club. In this document, we refer to this road as Old Masonic Road, which is currently a commonly used name).

Approximately 1,300 feet of Old Masonic Road is within the boundaries of a Recreation and Public Purpose (R&PP) lease with Mono County (CACA30669). The purpose of the lease is to operate a gun range (Bridgeport Gun Club). Old Masonic Road runs east directly parallel to the rifle range and after leaving the R&PP lease it runs north directly behind the rifle range, which places vehicles in the line of fire and poses a health and safety hazard to anyone traveling along that portion of the road while firearms are in use.

Implementation of the proposed action is necessary to conform to the Bishop Resource Management Plan (RMP 1993), page 8, General Policies which states, "*Management of public lands will consider: Safety of the public and Bureau personnel.*"

### **B. Scoping and Issues:**

#### *Public Scoping*

A public meeting to discuss the proposed action was held May 17, 2012 in Bridgeport, California. The public meeting was a Regional Planning Advisory Council (RPAC) meeting sponsored by the Mono County Economic Development Department. Notice of the meeting and the agenda was posted on Mono County's Economic Development Website and distributed to interested parties, stakeholders, agencies and county supervisors. All in attendance agreed with the proposed action.

There were no written comments received. One oral comment was received from a local land owner who frequently uses an All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) along the road to walk his dog, and indicated disaffection over the route restriction. BLM analysis shows that there are alternative routes suitable for ATV/dog walking that are an equivalent distance from the individual's residence.

#### *Issues and Alternatives*

No additional issues or alternatives were identified as a result of public scoping.

#### **C. Tiering to Existing Land Use Plan(s)/Management Plan(s)/Environmental Assessment(s)**

The proposed action tiers off Environmental Assessment CA-170-97-21. That EA analyzed two alternatives for the construction of the shooting facility.

Alternative 1 of EA CA-170-97-21 (Proposed Action) analyzed Old Masonic Road for closure. It stated "The proposed action is to close 1300' of the [Old Masonic Road] starting at Hwy 182. Access to [Old Masonic Road] and Rock Creek Spring trail would be maintained through the shooting facility access road [Old Masonic Road]. Anyone using this trail would be inconvenience[d] by having to wait until shooting ceased in order to continue through the shooting range. This may lead to a safety problem unless the road use and shooting are coordinated."

Subsequently, Alternative 2 (modified proposed action) was selected, which was the same as Alternative 1 (proposed action) except there would be no road closure.

For both alternatives the impact analysis and mitigations concentrated on wildlife, wildlife habitat, Wilderness Study Area (WSA) and noise impacts. By current standards the original EA did not analyze recreation related impacts of restricted or Administrative Use of Old Masonic Road, and did not fully address whether the closure of Old Masonic Road would restrict access to any recreation site, given the existence of alternative routes in the immediate area. It also inadequately examined the safety hazard that would result from leaving the road unrestricted.

This EA, DOI-BLM-CAC-070-2012-0035-EA, proposes project design features and analyzes potential environmental effects of designating Old Masonic Road as Administrative Use only, and compares these with the effects of leaving it unrestricted.

#### **D. Plan Conformance:**

The proposed action is subject to the Bishop Resource Management Plan (RMP), as amended, approved March 25, 1993. The proposed action was developed to implement RMP guidance and is designed to ensure conformance with the General Policies, Area Manager's Guidelines, Valid Existing Management, Standard Operating Procedures, Decisions and Support Needs prescribed in the RMP. The proposed action has been reviewed and is in conformance with the plan.

The Bishop RMP (1993) provides for R&PP leases on public lands and states that public lands will be managed in a manner that "*will provide for outdoor recreation and human occupancy and use [Section 102(a)(8)]*" (Page 8, RMP 1993 Record of Decision, citing FLPMA).

Additionally, the RMP (1993) addresses vehicle use opportunities and restrictions on page 4, under Management Considerations, stating: “The Limited Use off-highway vehicle designation which covers most of the resource area is necessary to prevent adverse impacts that would result from unrestricted use. Detailed activity plans, developed with public participation, will identify specific vehicle use opportunities and restrictions.”

Limited Use designation is an area restricted at certain times in certain areas, and/or to certain vehicular use. These restrictions may be of any type, but can generally be accommodated within the following categories: number of vehicles, types of vehicles, time or season of vehicle use, permitted or licensed use only, use on existing roads and trails, use on designated roads and trails, and other restrictions. Limitations may be used to meet specific resource management objectives, protect resources, or public safety [43 CFR 8342.1].

The proposed action is within an area designated by the RMP (1993) as “Limited Use.”

#### **E. Proposed Action and Project Design Features:**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Bishop Field Office would designate 0.75 miles of Old Masonic Road as Administrative Use only and authorize Mono County to install two 12 foot pipe gates, as part of their R&PP lease. Steep terrain and dense vegetation would prevent motorists from driving around the gates.

This Administrative Use designation would allow access by grazing permittees to their grazing operations and access by local tribal members to traditional gathering sites, as well as other uses as determined by the Bishop Field Office. Access by the general public would be restricted, in order to promote public safety.

Project design features are a comprehensive range of proactive and preventive actions to preclude mitigation measures and associated residual impacts.

The following project design features would apply to the implementation of this route designation to Administrative Use:

- Sign the junctions of all main roads leading to the project area to advise the public of a locked gate ahead and post a map of alternative routes.
- Provide maps showing open routes in the general area via a map box on each of the locked gates.
- Provide contact information on the gates for both Mono County and the BLM Bishop Field Office.

The following project design features would apply to installation of the proposed pipe gates:

- If previously undiscovered surface or subsurface cultural resources are found during project implementation, the project would be stopped and the Bishop Field Office Archaeologist notified. All cultural resource evaluations and determinations would be carried out pursuant to the State Protocol Agreement between the California BLM State Director and the California

State Historic Preservation Officer (2004), BLM 8100 Manual guidance, and the National Historic Preservation Act.

- All vehicles, tools and material used during project implementation would be inspected and washed if necessary prior to transporting to the project site to avoid noxious weed seed transport.
- A project orientation would be provided to all construction personnel to educate them on project specific mitigation measures to minimize potential impacts during pipe gate installation.
- Vehicular access for gate installation would occur on the existing road/vehicle track.
- Gates would be located in previously disturbed areas or areas devoid of vegetation.

#### **F. No Action Alternative:**

The No Action alternative would continue the current vehicle use pattern along the road, posing a health and safety hazard to the public and Bureau personnel.

#### **G. Environmental Analysis:**

##### **AIR QUALITY**

###### Affected Environment

The proposed project area is not within any federal non-attainment/maintenance area under jurisdiction of the Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District (GBUAPCD). Federal actions are not subject to conformity determinations under 40 CFR 93.

###### Environmental Consequences

###### *Impacts of the Proposed Action*

Installation of the pipe gates and related support vehicles would raise dust while accessing and working in the project area. Support vehicles would emit various precursor emissions for ozone. The road restriction would also result in slight increases in emissions due to vehicles traveling a slightly greater distance to access recreation sites beyond the restricted route. Emission amounts resulting from the proposed action would be negligible. The proposed action would not result in the emission of PM<sub>10</sub>. The proposed action would not measurably affect air quality.

###### *Impacts of No Action*

No fugitive dust or precursor emissions for ozone would be emitted as the result of the no action alternative.

## **CULTURAL RESOURCES**

### Affected Environment

A class III, intensive pedestrian survey CA-017-94-004 of the Area of Potential Effect found no artifacts or cultural properties at the project site. All areas proposed for surface disturbing activities were completely surveyed.

### Environmental Consequences

#### *Impacts of the Proposed Action/No Action*

The proposed action and no action alternatives are not expected to affect cultural properties because none have been identified at the project location. See Project Design Features for the protocol to be observed if previously undiscovered surface or subsurface cultural resources are found during project implementation.

## **INVASIVE, NON-NATIVE SPECIES**

### Affected Environment

Small amounts of cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) occur within the vicinity of the proposed project area; other non-native species that are common to the area include mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*), tansy mustard (*Descurainia pinnata*) and tumble mustard (*Sisymbrium altissimum*), these later three species are generally restricted to road edges.

### Environmental Consequences

#### *Impacts of the Proposed Action*

The equipment used during the proposed gate installations could introduce invasive plants to the area; and the disturbance associated with installation may increase the potential for invasive, non-native plant seed to become established within the area of disturbance. Project design features are expected to minimize this risk and the proposed action is not expected to result in invasive, non-native plants adversely impacting the native plant communities.

Implementation of the road restriction is not expected to have an effect on the spread of invasive, non-native species.

#### *Impacts of No Action*

There would be no effect on the spread of invasive, non-native species as a result of the no action alternative.

## **NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURAL VALUES**

### Affected Environment

There are 11 Native American communities within, or in close proximity to, the eastern Sierra region administered by the Bishop Field Office. None of these communities are living on, or adjacent to, the proposed project area. No treaty rights (hunting, fishing, etc.) are associated with any of the communities or with the proposed project area.

Some members of these communities hunt and some do subsistence collecting of materials such as pinyon nuts, basket weaving materials and medicinal plants on public lands. However, this is general use and no specific "traditional use areas" have been identified at the project site by any of the tribes at this time. Any other traditional uses or use areas have not been divulged to this office.

### Environmental Consequences

#### *Impacts of the Proposed Action*

Installation of the pipe gates would have no effect on Native American cultural values.

With the proposed road restriction in place, areas in which traditional use may have occurred would still be accessible but would require slightly more travel time, or collaboration with Mono County to temporarily close the gun range and open the gates.

#### *Impacts of No Action*

Under the no action alternative, access to traditional use areas would not be affected, but Native Americans and others accessing these areas via the portion of the road adjoining the rifle range would continue to be subject to safety concerns.

## **RANGELANDS**

### Affected Environment

The proposed project area is within the Aurora Canyon cattle allotment. The permittee uses Old Masonic Road for grazing operations.

#### *Impacts of the Proposed Action*

Under the proposed action, the livestock permittee would continue to have administrative access to the gated road segment and would need to address safety concerns, e.g. by coordinating with Mono County and/or shooting range users before moving livestock along that segment.

#### *Impacts of No Action*

Under the no action alternative the permittee would continue to have the same access to Old Masonic Road for grazing operations, with the same safety concerns as under the proposed action.

## **RECREATION**

### Affected Environment

The proposed project site is adjacent to a developed recreational rifle and hand gun shooting facility. Other recreation use associated with the proposed action location and surrounding vicinity is characterized by light, infrequent dispersed use including exploration of primitive roads and access to hiking, hunting, and wildlife viewing. An electronic traffic counter that detects vehicles and time/date stamps the passage was placed along Old Masonic Road adjacent to the gun club during a two month period from June 3 through August 2, 2011. The results of the traffic counter showed that one to two vehicles used the road every few days, sometimes going a week with no use.

### Environmental Consequences

#### *Impacts of the Proposed Action*

The process of installing the pipe gates would have no effect on recreation.

The road restriction is intended to improve the safety of the adjacent shooting facility by protecting recreationists passing by. It would, for the general public, result in a slightly longer travel time to recreation sites located beyond the restricted portion of Old Masonic road. However, all dispersed recreation sites and areas would remain accessible via other existing routes in the immediate area.

For events that are permitted by the BLM under a Special Recreation Permit (SRP), permits issued by the Bureau would either require that the event use an alternate route, or stipulate that the permittee arrange with Mono County to open the gates and provide for safety (e.g. by closing the range during the event).

#### *Impacts of No Action*

The no action alternative would perpetuate the current health and safety hazard for anyone traveling along that road segment during use of the rifle range.

## **SOILS**

### Affected Environment

Soil information was obtained from the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) map unit descriptions of the Coleville-Bridgeport Area, Parts of Alpine and Mono Counties, California. Soils in the proposed project area are of the Brokenhoe-Fisherdig association. Soil parent material is derived from alluvium from volcanic rocks with additions of volcanic ash. Soils of this association are well drained.

## Environmental Consequences

### *Impacts of the Proposed Action*

Installation of the pipe gates would involve minor soil disturbance consisting of 4 holes approximately 12 inches in diameter and 24 inches deep. Project design features are expected to prevent soil erosion or soil displacement.

The route restriction would have no effect on soils.

### *Impacts of No Action*

There would be no effect on soils as a result of the no action alternative.

## **VEGETATION, including SPECIAL STATUS PLANTS**

### Affected Environment

Vegetation in the proposed project area is dominated by bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata* var. *tridentata*) and sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*) with occurrences of pinyon pine (*Pinus monophylla*). The understory is comprised of perennial grasses (*Stipa* species, *Elymus elymoides*) and perennial forbs.

### Environmental Consequences

The proposed action and no action alternatives would have no effect on vegetation because project design features preclude vegetation disturbance or removal.

### **Special Status Plants**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) uses the term "Special Status Plants" to include:

- 1) Federal endangered, threatened, and proposed plants.
- 2) BLM sensitive plants. Sensitive plants are those species that are not federally listed as endangered, threatened, or proposed for federal listing, but which are designated by the BLM State Director for special management consideration. By national policy, federal Candidate species are automatically treated as BLM sensitive. The California State Director has also conferred Sensitive status on California State endangered, threatened, and rare species, on species on List 1B (plants rare and endangered in California and elsewhere) of the California Native Plant Society's Inventory of Rare and Endangered Plants of California (unless specifically excluded by the State Director on a case-by-case basis), and on certain other plants the State Director believes meet the definition of Sensitive.

### Affected Environment

No federally-listed endangered, threatened or proposed plant species occur or are likely to occur within the proposed project area based on surveys conducted of the proposed project area, previous surveys of similar habitat, California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) occurrence information and current knowledge of the proposed project area.

Several BLM designated sensitive plants have potential to occur, but none are known to occur, within the proposed project area.

#### Environmental Consequences

Due to project design features and the small scale of the proposed area of impact, the proposed action and no action alternatives are not expected to impact any BLM designated sensitive plants.

### **VISUAL RESOURCES**

#### Affected Environment

The 1993 Bishop RMP designated the area encompassing the proposed project site as Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class III. Objectives for this class are to partially retain the existing character of the landscape, with moderate levels of change allowed. Management activities may attract attention from key observation points (KOPs) but should not dominate the view for the casual observer. The project site is located in a narrow drainage with a restricted viewshed. For the 1997 EA, two KOPs were identified along the Masonic Mountain Road.

#### Environmental Consequences

##### *Impacts of the Proposed Action*

The proposed gates are not expected to be visible from the KOPs or from any major travel route; they would only be visible at close range, and would be inconspicuous in the context of the adjacent shooting facility. The level of change would be within VRM Class III objectives.

##### *Impacts of No Action*

Under the no action alternative there would be no new visual impacts.

### **WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS**

#### Affected Environment

The route segment forms part of the northern boundary of the Masonic Mountain wilderness characteristics inventory unit, CA-010-1102-2, which was formerly a Wilderness Study Area (WSA). It was designated as a WSA when the 1978-1979 wilderness inventory found it to have wilderness characteristics (roadless acreage, naturalness, opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation), and it was subsequently managed under BLM policy to preserve those characteristics in each WSA until the U.S. Congress designates it as wilderness or releases it from further study. In 2009 Congress released it from WSA status as part of the Omnibus Act. A 2011 wilderness characteristics inventory found that the unit retains the same wilderness characteristics as identified in 1979 (Bishop Field Office inventory files).

## Environmental Consequences

### *Impacts of the Proposed Action*

Some persons using alternate vehicle routes as a consequence of the road restriction may use unimproved routes that pass through the Masonic Mountain inventory unit. This would have a temporary negative effect on the sense of solitude and the quality of primitive and unconfined recreation experiences. Because the number of people using the affected road segment has been very small, this effect is expected to be negligible. BLM would have the discretion to stipulate that events under a Special Recreation Permit avoid the Masonic Mountain unit to minimize effects to wilderness characteristics.

### *Impacts of No Action*

Under the no action alternative, no change to patterns of motorized use in the Masonic Mountain unit would be anticipated. There would be no effect to wilderness characteristics.

## **WILDLIFE and MIGRATORY BIRDS, including SENSITIVE, THREATENED AND ENDANGERED**

### Affected Environment

The area surrounding the project site is important habitat for the East Walker mule deer herd, as a migration corridor, holding area, winter range, and to a lesser extent, summer use area. Other wildlife includes birds such as mountain quail, and songbirds and raptors both migratory and resident; and mammals such as coyote, badger, and black-tailed hare. No threatened, endangered, or BLM designated sensitive wildlife species are known to occur in the area.

## Environmental Consequences

### *Impacts of the Proposed Action*

The proposed gates would not form barriers to wildlife movement because the gates are not associated with a fence line. The vegetation and terrain features that would prevent vehicles from circumventing the gates would not be impassible obstacles to wildlife. The pipe material would be sufficiently visible to wildlife that accidental impacts would be unlikely.

The road restriction would redistribute disturbance to wildlife by the occasional passage of vehicles into areas that are currently less disturbed, therefore of greater value as wildlife habitat, because they are not adjacent to the noise and activity of the shooting range. Because the number of vehicles using the affected road segment has been very small, this effect is expected to be minor. BLM would have the discretion to stipulate that events under a Special Recreation Permit avoid areas of importance to wildlife.

### *Impacts of No Action*

Under the no action alternative there would be no change to any factor affecting wildlife habitat.

## **GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE**

### Affected Environment

United States Department of Interior, Order Number 3226, signed January 19, 2001, Evaluating Climate Change Impacts in Management Planning, is an order to ensure that climate change impacts are taken into account in connection with planning and decision making. Climate change refers to any significant change in measures of climate (e.g. temperature or precipitation) lasting for an extended period of time (decades or longer). Climate change may result from natural processes, such as changes in the sun's intensity; natural processes within the climate system (e.g. changes in ocean circulation); human activities that change the atmosphere's composition (e.g. burning fossil fuels) and the land surface (e.g. urbanization) (IPCC, 2007).

### *Impacts of the Proposed Action*

The proposed action would result in some contribution of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions associated with the operation of vehicles and equipment required for project implementation. These contributions would not have a noticeable or measurable effect, independently or cumulatively, on a phenomenon occurring at the global scale and believed to be due to more than a century of human activities.

### *Impacts of No Action*

The no action alternative would not contribute to GHG emissions and would have no impact on climate change at either the local or global scale.

## **UNAFFECTED RESOURCES**

The proposed action and no action alternatives would have no effect on the following specially designated lands, because none are designated at or adjacent to the project area: Wilderness or Wilderness Study Area (WSA); Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC); essential fish habitat; farmlands, prime or unique; flood plains; wild horse herd management area; wild and scenic river corridor or eligible wild and scenic river study segment corridor.

The proposed action and no action alternatives would have no effect on water quality, either drinking or ground, or on wetlands or riparian zones because the proposed project areas are not located within or adjacent to any to any spring, stream, pond, lake or any other water body or ground water source, wetland, or riparian habitats.

The proposed action and no action alternatives would have no disproportionate impact, either negative or positive, on any low-income minority because the proposed project would occur in areas of vacant public land, and there are no low-income or minority populations living in the vicinity of or dependent upon them.

The proposed project area is not within or adjacent to any existing hazardous materials site. The proposed action does not involve the use or storage of hazardous materials, other than fluids used in the vehicles. No hazardous materials would be brought on site or produced during project operations. The proposed action would not generate any hazardous or solid waste within the proposed project areas.

**Cumulative Effects:**

Cumulative effects are defined as the “impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions” (40 CFR § 1508.7). A description of current conditions inherently includes the effects of past actions and serves as a more accurate and useful starting point for a cumulative effects analysis than attempting to discern the effects of individual past actions. “Generally, agencies can conduct an adequate cumulative effects analysis by focusing on the current aggregate effects of past actions without delving into the historical details of individual past actions.” (CEQ Memorandum ‘Guidance on the Consideration of Past Actions in Cumulative Effects Analysis’ June 24, 2005). By comparing the no action alternative (current condition) to the proposed action alternative, we can discern the cumulative impact resulting from adding the incremental impact of the proposed action to the current environmental conditions and trends.

There are no identified incremental or long-term negative impacts associated with implementation of the proposed action that would contribute to cumulative impacts in the larger project vicinity. The addition of the proposed action to existing and future regional activities and impacts would not add to, or cross a threshold of, impact that would result in a significant impact on the human environment.

**Implementation Monitoring:**

Bishop Field Office staff would direct and monitor project implementation to ensure conformance with requirements identified in the proposed action and project design features.

**Effectiveness Monitoring:**

Post project monitoring would be conducted annually to assess the proposed action’s effectiveness. Visitor use and compliance monitoring would be used to evaluate how successfully it meets Bishop RMP objectives.

**Persons/Agencies Consulted:****Preparer(s):**

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**Reviewed By:**

/s/ Steven Nelson

**Steven Nelson, Supervisory Natural Resource Specialist**

**Date: 7/24/2012**

# Bodie Hills MAP 1



Legend	
	Bureau of Land Management
	Forest Service
	State Lands
	County / City / Regional
	Private

Gun Club Location

Sign "Locked gate on Old Masonic"

Locked Gate

Locked Gate

Sign "Old Masonic to 182 locked gate ahead  
please use Masonic or Aurora"

182

