



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Needles Field Office
1303 South U.S. Highway 95
Needles, CA 92363
www.ca.blm.gov/needles



In Reply Refer To:
8560 (CA-690.41)

September 8, 2016

NOTIFICATION OF PROPOSED ACTION ON PUBLIC LANDS DESIGNATED PART OF THE NATIONAL WILDERNESS PRESERVATION SYSTEM

STATE: California

DISTRICT: California Desert District

FIELD OFFICE: Needles Field Office

COUNTY: San Bernardino County

WILDERNESS AREA: Clipper Mountains Wilderness

In the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) efforts to inform affected or interested public about proposed actions, specific emergencies, or unauthorized activities occurring within BLM Wilderness areas, the following information is provided.

1. Proposed Action:

The Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep (SCBS) volunteers, in association with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDF&W), have proposed to the Needles Bureau of Land Management Field Office, the need for continuing maintenance, renovations, and replacement activities associated with a 2300-gallon reservoir at Chuckwalla Spring site within the Clipper Mountains Wilderness. This is a structural habitat development necessary for fish and wildlife management, which was in existence prior to wilderness designation and was identified in the 1990 California Statewide wilderness study report, and that "Maintenance is required approximately two times per year and normally requires mechanized equipment and vehicles for transportation of materials to the site."



Photo 1: Bobcat at spring box



Photo 2: Quail at spring box

The Chuckwalla Springs site is located on the northeastern fringe of the wilderness and was designed to accommodate one reservoir to support the permanent population of bighorn rams, ewes and lambs within the wilderness unit; however, this area also supports numerous other mammal populations and bird species.

It is the goal of the SCBS to reduce impacts within wilderness, not increase them. The 2300-gallon reservoir on the original footprint would allow for a decrease of vehicle access into wilderness by the CDF&W and the SCBS volunteers. Carrying out this activity will ensure functional water developments that will require fewer maintenance visits, therefore fewer intrusions into the wilderness.

In addition, after project completion, restoration efforts would be conducted to reduce the visual impact within the wilderness unit to minimize the effects on wilderness characteristics.

2. Background:

Chuckwalla Spring, Clipper Mountains

The original reservoir was damaged and removed from the area a number of years ago. The replacement reservoir would be transported on October 8, 2016 by a CDF&W helicopter onto the preexisting footprint. Volunteers who have hiked into the area would assist with the placement and setup of the unit.

Chuckwalla Spring was developed in August 1984. Over the years, numerous storage reservoirs have been utilized and removed from the site as they aged. The site has accommodated both a 1800-gallon and a 500-gallon reservoir. The site is currently without a reservoir and is functioning with direct flow from the spring to a 40-gallon catchment tank. There is no control float for controlling the water flow.

Routine maintenance to replace hoses and remove old broken lines within the area, plus the reinstallation of a new 2300-gallon reservoir at Chuckwalla Spring was halted in

2014, due to an influenza breakout within the sheep population; this fatal outbreak endangered the lives of all bighorn sheep within the area.

Routine maintenance of this area should be addressed in order to repair the spring site, prevent the wasteful loss of water and protect the wilderness characteristic within the Clipper Mountains Wilderness.

3. Authority:

16 United States Code (U.S.C.) 410 (*California Desert Protection Act of 1994*), 16 U.S.C. 670 (*The Sikes Act of 1960, as amended 1978*) and 16 U.S.C. 1131 (*Wilderness Act of 1964*) and, 43 U.S.C. 1701 (*Federal Land Policy Management Act of 1976*)

The *California Desert Protection Act* (CDPA) provides the overriding management guidance for the Trilobite and Clipper Mountains Wilderness Units. The CDPA Title 1, section 103(e) Fish and Wildlife states “As provided in section 4(d)(7) of the Wilderness Act, nothing in this title shall be construed as affecting the jurisdiction of the State of California with respect to wildlife and fish on the public lands located in that state”, and [Section 103\(f\)](#) Fish and Wildlife Management states: “Management activities to maintain or restore fish and wildlife populations and the habitats to support such populations may be carried out within wilderness areas designated by this title and shall include the use of motorized vehicles by the appropriate State agencies.”

BLM Manual 6340 Management of BLM Wilderness
21. Wildlife, c. Project implementation.

“iii. Facility development and habitat alteration. In rare instances, facility development and habitat alteration may be necessary to preserve wilderness character by alleviating adverse impacts caused by human activities on fish and wildlife.”

A. All structural habitat developments necessary for fish and wildlife management that were in existence before wilderness designation may be permitted by the BLM to remain in operation if they remain the minimum necessary for the preservation of wilderness character. These actions must be the minimum necessary, as determined through the use of the MRDG and associated NEPA analysis.

Additional Guidance:

BLM Manual 6340 Management of BLM Wilderness
21. Wildlife, c. Project implementation.

ii. Research and surveys. The BLM does not manage overflights conducted by other agencies, but every effort should be made to communicate and cooperate with State wildlife agencies or other researchers so that the overflights minimize the disturbance of visitors and wildlife.

4. Advisory

Notification of the proposed action and analysis will be posted on the Bureau of Land Management's national register for Land Use Planning and National Environmental Policy Act documents website (https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/nepa/nepa_register.do). This notice is for disclosure purposes; specific comments are not required.

Michael W. Ahrens, Field Manager
Needles Field Office

Date