



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



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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: Trilobite 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 of a 2300-gallon reservoir at the Teresa Spring guzzler site within the Trilobite 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, as "...two big game guzzlers and several other water sources have been constructed. All of these waters are utilized, at least on a seasonal basis, by bighorn sheep."

The Teresa Springs guzzler site is located on the western fringe of the wilderness and was designed to accommodate two reservoirs to support the nursery population of bighorn ewes and lambs within the Trilobite Wilderness; only one reservoir is currently in place. Within the 1990 report it was also noted under Special Features for Wilderness Characteristics that the "Marble Mountains have one of the larger and more

rapidly growing desert bighorn sheep herds in the eastern Mojave Desert. The desert bighorn sheep is a BLM sensitive species. Ten years ago, [1980] the range was considered marginal and to support no more than 20 head of permanent bighorn sheep. Today, [1990] the range supports well in excess of 100 desert bighorn sheep.”

The second supportive reservoir would be transported on October 8, 2016 by a CDF&W helicopter onto the preexisting graded and cleared footprint. Volunteers who have hiked into the area would assist with the placement and setup of the unit.

It is the goal of the SCBS to reduce impacts within wilderness, not increase them. The addition of the second reservoir to the originally designed 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.



Photo: Preexisting guzzler pad

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:

Teresa Spring, Marble Mountains

Don Landells flew in construction materials to Teresa Spring during March 1984. Don mistook Teresa Spring (which was not known to exist at the time the delivery was scheduled) for Vern Andy Les Spring. Thus, Don actually discovered Teresa Spring by accident while thinking he was delivering construction materials to Vern Andy Les Spring; he had never been to either site previously. Teresa Spring, named for Don's wife, was developed and fenced on April 14, 1984.

Teresa Spring was inspected in July 1984, twelve bighorn sheep were observed at the spring on that visit. Teresa Spring was inspected again in June 1985, and was found to be receiving heavy use by bighorn. The fence installed to prevent wild burro damage to the guzzler was working well, with no evidence of donkeys inside the fence.

In 1990, a permanent population of desert bighorn sheep was identified as residing in the Clipper Mountains estimated at about 40 individuals with as much as 50 or more bighorn sheep throughout the Wilderness Study Area.

Approximately, 1999 after the removal of burros from the area the fence enclosure was removed and stored on site due to moving populations of burros from the east and the anticipated need for reinstallation in the future.

Routine maintenance to replace hoses and prepare area for the much needed 2300-gallon reservoir at Teresa 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. Due to this stress factor and those of the continued drought within California and the effects of climate change upon the Mojave Desert, the SCBS has had to make numerous trips during the last year to supply water to guzzler reservoirs. The first reservoir is not meeting the needs of the resource which it support, during normal climate conditions it operates at peak load, however the lack of water within the area is becoming an urgent matter since monsoonal weather is nearing an end and winter storms are not expected for many months.

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