# United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Folsom Field Office
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Folsom, CA 95630
www.blm.gov/ca/folsom

**EA Number:** CA-180-08-47

**Proposed Action:** Briceburg visitor center rehabilitation project

**Location:** T 4 S, R 18 E, Section 10, Mariposa County, California

## 1.0 Purpose of and Need for Action

### 1.1 Need for Action

The visitor center at Briceburg is administered by the Bureau of Land Management's Folsom Field Office (BLM). The center is the first point of contact for most visitors to the Merced River Special Recreation Management Area and Merced Wild and Scenic River. It is the only BLM-staffed contact desk in the area. Currently it is open three days per week during the summer. The Merced River SRMA is a high-use area as noted in BLM's Sierra Resource Management Plan. It receives high use on a year-round basis. While thousands of people visit the Merced River SRMA annually, only an average of 1600 visitors stop into the center. Informal surveys of the visiting public indicate that there is confusion about when the center is open to the public. Vehicle access into the parking area off of Highway 140 is difficult, if not dangerous. The building contains a road map and simple displays to teach visitors about local wildflowers and history. The building also houses a small book store.

The visitor center building has significant historic qualities and has been determined by BLM to be eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. The building is over 80 years old and is in need of upkeep. Rainwater runoff and other sources of moisture continue to degrade the building. Poorly locking doors are another problem. About a quarter of the building is currently used as storage and is not assessable to the public.

The proposed action is needed to expand and improve the visitor center's services by enhancing its interior and exterior interpretive displays and making vehicle access to the building safer. The visitor center would be staffed seven days per week during peak visitor season for two seasons, and funding would be sought to continue full time staffing of the center. The proposed action is also needed to help protect the visitor center building from further water damage and to bring it up to current building standards, while at the same time preserving the historic qualities that make it eligible for the National Register.

### 1.2 Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plans

The proposed action is consistent with the Sierra Resource Management Plan's Record of Decision (ROD), approved in February 2008. The proposed action would occur within the Merced River Special Recreation Management Area. Objectives for this area include providing for river-oriented and land-based recreation opportunities, protecting archaeological and historical resources, and maintaining the visitor center and other visitor facilities in accordance with federal standards (see ROD, page 27).

# 2.0 Proposed Action and Alternatives

## 2.1 Proposed Action

The proposed action would be implemented under a Sierra Nevada Conservancy grant obtained by the Mariposa Resource Conservation District (RCD). With BLM oversight, RCD would be in charge of implementing the proposed action. The proposed action would involve the following elements:

Building exterior

The name of the visitor center would be changed to the "Merced River Center at Briceburg". This name would reflect the broader purpose of the building: to educate visitors about the Merced River and the history of the Briceburg area. The place name "Briceburg" would remain as part of the name so that part of history is retained.

A French drain would be installed to help protect the building from water damage. The back of the building is adjacent a steep hillside and is particularly vulnerable to damage from rainwater runoff and pooling between the back of the building and the excavated portion of the hillside. Efforts have been made by BLM to curtail damage caused by rainwater runoff and other sources of moisture (i.e., externally applied water proof paint, drainage ditch dug, rain-gutters installed on the back of the building). A French drain installed along the south side of the building would help keep rain runoff from seeping into the building. The French drain would be 30 ft long by 1 ft deep by 1 ft wide. It would be built with hand tools in the existing drainage hole previously dug by BLM along the backside of the building. The drain would consist of crushed rock and drainage pipe.

The two doors in the front of the building would be replaced with modern doors made to match the current doors. The current doors need replacement because the locks are difficult to manipulate and they are not energy efficient. The replacement doors would not be cosmetically different from the current doors except for the appearance of modern locks, but they would be easier to operate, enhance energy efficiency, and provide a higher level of security for the building.

Signs would be installed to communicate the building's purpose as well as hours of operation. These signs would be modeled after the large black and white "Briceburg Inn" sign seen on the building in a circa 1950 photo. This photo is included in the cultural resources case file (CA-018-S-TM-08/15). The signs would face north and south on Highway 140 to help motorists see the visitor center and its open hours from the highway. These signs would convey the visitor center's new name (see above) and reflect the contemporary use of the building rather than the historic use as a motel, restaurant, gas station, etc.

A modern prebuilt storage shed would be installed to relocate items currently stored inside the visitor center. It would be installed in the area located just uphill from the visitor center on a terrace associated with the 1920s-era Camp E convict labor camp site. There would be no effects to the terrace or the site. Electricity for lighting and other work within the storage shed would be provided via a small solar power station. Installation of the solar power station would not cause ground disturbance.

The soffits and railings would be repainted. As routine maintenance, building surfaces would be refreshed with a coat of paint. The color of the paint would either be identical to the paint currently used on these surfaces or a color popular in late 1920s California would be selected.

To facilitate education about the area, two outdoor educational displays would be installed in the building footprint. These displays would be accessible to the public whether the building is open or not. These displays would be located on the north side of the building.

Building interior

A wall in the large room would be removed. The wall was installed by BLM around 1989 in order to create more usable floor space. Removing the wall would open up the entire 30 ft length of the room for meetings, displays, etc. The coverings over the windows and doors in portion of the room opened up for use would be removed and the windows and doors would be made to look like the other doors and windows in the building.

New carpeting would be put in and the interior walls would be painted. The large room currently has non-historic wall-to-wall carpet. The flooring would be updated to enhance public use of the room. All interior walls would be repainted. Efforts would be made to use modern materials to create a décor that would have been typical for rural businesses (especially restaurants) and residences in California around 1927. If this cannot be accomplished, the same colors and the same kind of carpeting would be used.

The cement floor in the small room would be repaired. The cement floor in the small room has been degraded by moisture. Once the external French drains are built to help control the moisture, a new cement floor would be poured on top of the existing cement floor. The new floor would be 2 inches higher than the existing floor but would have the same appearance.

The electrical system would be enhanced and upgraded. In 1989 BLM upgraded the building's electrical system and replaced the interior lighting. The current electrical system and interior lighting would be updated to meet current building codes and to facilitate the building's use as a visitor center. A trench would be dug into the cement floor to allow for the installation of phone and computer lines as well as electrical lines. The trench would not be visible.

The radon fan in the attic space would be replaced with a quieter fan. To help protect the health of employees and visitors, BLM installed a radon fan in 1989 to evacuate the air space in the large room. This fan is too loud to operate during business hours. A quieter fan (or series of fans) would be installed in the attic space to evacuate the air on a regular basis, even during business hours. A manual switch to operate the fan would be located on one interior wall. Roof vents would be upgraded to allow adequate air exchange and to improve radon venting. The roof vent upgrades would not be conspicuous.

A counter and movable bookshelves would be built and installed. To facilitate multiple uses of the center, new bookshelves would be built which are smaller and designed to be moved. A counter that runs the width of the building would be designed and installed. The counter would have locking cabinets and might include a locking safe for safeguarding valuable articles and money. The counter would also house the tables and chairs used for community meetings and educational purposes. The counters and bookshelves would be free standing and not attached to the walls or floors.

Chairs, tables, and a ceiling-hung projection unit and screen would be purchased and installed. Tables, chairs, and various other items are necessary for educational meetings/presentations and other gatherings.

Local high school students would be asked to create a mural depicting the natural and cultural history of the area. The mural would be painted at the school site on commercial mural panels. The panels

would be mounted on the walls of the small room. By working with local students and community members to develop their sense of stewardship, we hope to protect the center and inspire its use for years to come.

A modern security system would be installed. A small commercial security system involving cameras and a monitor would be discretely mounted in the building.

Several educational displays would be designed by a professional artist using input from the public. These displays would reflect the interpretive themes of Yosemite National Park, as much as possible, because they are well done and many visitors to the visitor center are on their way to the park. However, the displays would be "stand alone" and would not require a trip to the park. The displays would educate visitors about the natural and cultural history of the Briceburg area and the Merced River canyon.

Vehicle access:

BLM would work with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to lower the speed limit on Highway 140 near the turnoff to the visitor center. Also, BLM would work with Caltrans to install better highway signs and, if possible, put in a left-turn lane for east-bound traffic. The entry into the visitor center is difficult, if not dangerous. The entry is located on a turn at the bottom of a steep grade. Currently there are highway signs indicating the entry to the building, but these signs could be improved to communicate the purpose of the building and hours of operation. A left-turn lane would facilitate safe access to the visitor center.

### 2.2 Project Design Features

In 1989, BLM determined that the visitor center building was historically significant. The State Historic Preservation Officer agreed with this determination. The building is eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places under criterion A (association with the highway) and criterion C (its architecture). The building's period of significance is 1927. To avoid adverse effects to this building, all project work would be done in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties (36 CFR 68). Specifically, the work would be done in accordance with the rehabilitation standards as defined at 36 CFR 68.2(b) and further described in a National Park Service publication titled *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic Buildings*. In planning the proposed project, we referred to the chapter on Standards for Rehabilitation & Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings.

Potential introductions of noxious invasive weeds by the storage shed delivery truck would be minimized by limiting the number of trips to the project area and by cleaning the truck prior to delivery of the storage shed. The shed would be located in a previously disturbed area out of sight of any roads.

### 2.4 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

No alternative proposals were considered but eliminated from detailed analysis.

## 3.0 Affected Environment

The affected environment is the BLM visitor center and its immediate surroundings. The visitor center is located just off of Highway 140, on the south side of the Merced River, near the Bear Creek

confluence. The elevation is 1150 feet above sea level. The terrain is this portion of the Sierra Nevada consists of low-elevation peaks, narrow stream canyons, and steep brushy hillsides. The slopes of the Merced River canyon and Bear Creek canyon support several plant communities that intergrade including chamise chaparral; mixed chaparral with Mariposa manzanita, mewukka manzanita, chamise, toyon, birch leaf mountain mahogany, California ash, western redbud, keckiella, poison oak and scattered gray pine; and live oak woodland dominated by interior live oak and canyon live oak and often with an understory of chaparral species..

The Briceburg section of the Merced River is a popular recreation destination, especially during the late spring and summer. The area's proximity to Yosemite National Park makes it an attractive alternative to the crowds of summer while still being close enough for daily visits to the park. The area offers outstanding whitewater boating in the spring and excellent camping throughout the year. The project area is located in a section of the Merced Wild and Scenic River classified as recreational. The outstandingly remarkable values that made the river eligible for wild and scenic status are water quality, recreation, and cultural resources.

The proposed action would occur within the Merced River Wild and Scenic River. BLM has assigned this area a visual resource management (VRM) class I. BLM's management objective for class I is to preserve the existing character of the landscape—in this case, the Merced River canyon. This class provides for natural ecological changes; however, it does not preclude very limited management activity. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be very low and must not attract attention.

There are many cultural resources in the Briceburg area. The primary cultural resource within the affected environment is the visitor center building. The history of this building—the old Briceburg Inn—is closely tied to the construction of the highway connecting Merced to El Portal. In 1923 the Rolandi Construction Company of San Francisco did the preliminary grading for the highway in the vicinity of Briceburg and built a bridge across the river. The old foot bridge across the river was replaced by a narrow suspension bridge, so materials and supplies could be hauled from the railroad to the highway construction site. An area located on south side of the river, opposite Briceburg, was turned into a camp (40 tents and over 200 men) for convicts from San Quentin brought to the area to build the highway. A few non-convict families set up camps in Briceburg. The camp was occupied until 1925, when convict laborers were relocated. Work on the highway was completed in 1926, when the highway was formally dedicated by California governor Richardson.

Around this time the Briceburg Inn, originally named the River View Tavern, was established by Frank and Elsie Dovidio on Elsie's mining claim on the south side of the river, where the convict labor camp had been abandoned in 1925. Elsie had her claim, known as the Agatha Placer, surveyed in 1926 and it was patented to her in 1928. Elsie and Frank sought to acquire title to this property because it was clear to them that the commercial facilities should be relocated to adjoin the highway rather than the Yosemite Valley Railroad, which was diminishing in importance as freight was increasingly shipped by truck on the new highway.

Construction of the Briceburg Inn building (now the visitor center) began around 1926 and was undertaken by a small crew of Italian stone masons brought in by Frank from San Francisco. William Maxwell Brice assisted the crew while they worked on the building. When completed in 1928, the Inn included a full menu Italian restaurant, with Frank as head chef, and a Standard Oil gas station. At this time, Frank and Elsie closed their store on the Yosemite Valley Railroad, on the north side of the river. The post office was terminated. The family also moved their residence across the river into a new house separate from and located uphill from the Inn building/restaurant. The Dovidio house burned down in 1950.

Frank worked in the restaurant for only a couple of years before he left Briceburg. The reason why he left is unclear, but he ended up as a cook in Jackson, CA where he died in 1959. After Frank's departure Elsie chose to lease the operation at Briceburg and she moved to San Rafael, CA where her son William Maxwell and his wife were living. William Maxwell and his wife Leona returned to operate the business in 1933-34 and 1948-49 when no lessee could be found.

During the 1930s the US Forest Service built a new suspension bridge across the Merced River at Briceburg to improve access to national forest lands in the area. Ponderosa Way (now called Bull Creek Road) was built through Briceburg during this time. Also, floods on the Merced River in December 1937 and February 1945 damaged the Yosemite Valley Railroad. The railroad ceased operations in August 1945 and went out of business. At some point afterward, the tracks and other railroad facilities were removed.

The nature of the Briceburg Inn operation changed somewhat from one lessee to the next, after Elsie began leasing the property. There was never again a full menu Italian restaurant at Briceburg. A garage and auto repair was added by the first lessee. A later lessee put in a wing of rooms to board construction workers during a highway widening project. The eating establishment became increasingly oriented to short-order and soda fountain specialties.

The last operators of the Briceburg Inn, Ruth (Outzen) and Ernie Womak, ran the business from 1951 to 1958. Upon arrival they immediately constructed a new residence cottage (Elsie and Frank's house burned down in 1950) and made a number of other improvements. The Inn was reopened on Memorial Day 1951. When commercial operations finally ceased for good in 1958 (because Ernie suffered a debilitating stroke), the property continued to be occupied. BLM acquired the property in 1989.

## 4.0 Environmental Effects

The following critical elements have been considered in this environmental assessment, and unless specifically mention later, have been determined to be unaffected by the proposed action: air quality, areas of critical environmental concern (ACEC), prime/unique farmlands, hazardous waste, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness, and environmental justice.

### 4.1 Impacts of the Proposed Action and Alternatives

The Merced River, Bear Creek, and other local water sources would not be affected. There are no unique soils/geological formations within or near the project area. The ground disturbance would be minimal. Disturbance would occur during the installation of the storage shed, French drain, and the flagpole.

While a number of special status plants occur within the Merced River canyon, only Mariposa clarkia (*Clarkia biloba*) occurs in Briceburg area. However the species does not occur at the project area and should not be affected by the project. The BLM botanist may conduct additional studies in the Camp E site to determine if installation of a proposed storage shed would negatively impact special status plants.

The Merced River canyon contains habitat for numerous special status animals. A BLM wildlife biologist analyzed the proposed action to determine whether any of these animals or their habitats would be affected. The BLM biologist found that the special status species most relevant to the proposed action is the limestone salamander (*Hydromantes brunus*), which has been seen by BLM staff in the general area. The limestone salamander is listed as threatened under the California

Endangered Species Act, and BLM treats the limestone salamander as a special status species. The BLM biologist determined that no salamanders or salamander habitat would be affected by the proposed action, including the construction of a French drain and the installation of a prebuilt storage shed on the hillside above the visitor center. The project area is not located within BLM's Limestone Salamander Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

Of note, a colony of Mexican free-tailed bats (a special status species) lives under the Bear Creek bridge on Highway 140, within 50 yards of the project area. The proposed action would not affect this colony.

The proposed action would have a long-term beneficial impact on public recreational and educational opportunities. More members of the public—mainly motorists on their way to Yosemite—would see the visitor center and stop in during open hours. This would likely allow more people to learn about recreation on BLM-administered lands in the area. More people could find out about the BLM day-use areas, trails, and campgrounds in the area. There would be no impacts to the Merced Wild and Scenic River's outstandingly remarkable values. The recreation ORV would likely be enhanced.

The proposed action would occur within the Merced River Wild and Scenic River corridor. BLM has assigned this area a visual resource management (VRM) class I standard. This is the highest standard. It does not preclude very limited management activity like the proposed action, but the level of change to the characteristic landscape should be very low and must not attract attention. Because the proposed changes to the visitor center would be done in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties (see below) the visitor center building would not look much different from its 1927 appearance. This level of change would be very low and would not attract attention.

As mentioned above, the visitor center building is historically significant because of its distinctive architecture and its association with the highway to Yosemite. BLM is required to consider significant cultural resources during project planning and find ways to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse effects on such resources. To meet this requirement, the proposed action would be done in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties (36 CFR 68). Specifically, the work would be done in accordance with the rehabilitation standards as defined at 36 CFR 68.2(b). A BLM archaeologist helped to plan the project and analyzed the effects of the proposed action on the building and any other significant cultural resources that might fall with the project's area of potential effects. The BLM archaeologist determined that if the proposed action is done in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, there would be "no adverse effect". In other words, it would be unnecessary to resolve adverse effects pursuant to the regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (refer to the memo attached from the BLM archaeologist). The following describes, point by point, how the proposed action meets the rehabilitation standards and either avoids or minimizes potential adverse effects.

1. A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces and spatial relationships.

The visitor center building would be given a new use requiring no change to its distinctive masonry architecture, features and spatial relationships.

2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.

The building's historic character would be retained and preserved, with some minor modifications. Of note, the most distinctive elements are the building's masonry architecture and setting along the highway near the Bear Creek confluence. The masonry architecture would be retained and preserved. Most of the modifications would affect the building's interior. Virtually nothing is known about the interior décor in 1927. No photos of the interior dating to this period have been found. No other historical information about the 1927 décor has been found. When BLM acquired the building in 1989, people had been using it as a residence for years. These people had made extensive alterations to the interior. In fact, the 1927 décor may have been modified early on—perhaps as early as the 1930s to suit the changing ownership/use of the building. A post-1989 wall would be taken out, restoring the interior special relationship.

The French drain would be built to help protect the building from damaged caused by rainwater runoff and pooling. No removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces and spatial relationships that characterize the building would be necessary. The French drain would hardly be visible and would help prevent further damage caused by rainwater runoff and pooling.

A prebuilt storage shed would be installed on the hillside above the visitor center building. The shed would be built in the location of the Camp E convict labor camp (occupied during the mid-1920s). This site has been determined to be not eligible for the National Register. It does qualify as a California state Point of Historic Interest and deserves some consideration. The shed would be installed and used in way that does not affect the visitor center building, the associated outbuilding, or the Camp E site. The shed would be located in an area not visible from the highway or the visitor center.

Roof vents would be upgraded to allow adequate air exchange and to improve radon venting. They are necessary for public safety. These upgrades would not change the visitor center's current appearance.

A trench would be dug into the cement floor to allow for the installation of phone and computer lines as well as electrical lines. The trench would be refilled with concrete and covered with carpet so no aesthetic change to the interior would occur.

A section of cement floor in the small room has been damaged by moisture over the years would be repaired by re-pouring a new 2-inch thick floor on top of the existing damaged floor. No other structural changes would need to occur. Murals are proposed for the small room. The murals would be mounted on the walls using bolts. They would not become a permanent fixture. Doors would be replaced with new doors milled to replicate existing doors precisely except for updated hardware for security purposes.

An interior wall put in by BLM in 1989 would be removed. The windows and the door in the portion of the building opened up by the wall removal would be restored to look like the other doors and windows in the building. This project work would enhance the building's historic character.

Other elements of the proposed action would slightly diminish the building's historic character but are necessary to bring the building up to code and make it a viable modern visitor center. This work includes electrical system upgrades; non-permanent counters and bookshelves; new roof signs; new chairs, tables, and a ceiling-hung projection unit and screen; new exterior paint for the soffits and railings; new interior wall paint; new interior carpeting; two exterior interpretive displays; a security system; and movable interior interpretive displays. The electric box would be upgraded to include a "ground" and publicly accessible outlets would be changed to GFCI-protected outlets. These changes are minor and are not permanent. They mainly affect the interior, for which we have little information

about the 1927 décor. The new roof signs would be modeled after ones seen in a circa 1950 photograph of the building. This is the best we could do based on the existing photographic evidence and, again, they are not permanent. The paint color would either remain the same or replicate colors popular in late 1920s California.

3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, will not be undertaken.

No conjectural features or elements would be added. BLM would not allow the addition of features and elements that create a false sense of historical development.

4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.

No changes were made to the building after its construction in 1926-1927 that have acquired historical significant in their own right.

5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.

The most distinctive feature of the building is its setting along the Highway near the Bear Creek confluence and the massive masonry architecture. Both would be preserved.

6. Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.

The only deteriorated historic features are the entry doors and a section of concrete floor degraded by moisture. The doors will be replaced with new doors milled to replicate existing doors precisely except for updated hardware for security purposes.

A section of cement floor damaged by moisture over the years will be repaired by re-pouring a new floor on top of the existing damaged floor. No other structural changes would need to occur to accommodate this new floor.

These rehabilitation efforts will enhance the longevity and utility of the historic building.

7. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.

No chemical treatments would be used to implement the proposed action.

8. Archeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.

No archeological resources would be disturbed by the proposed action. If such resources are discovered during project implementation, all work will stop and a BLM-approved archaeologist will be called in to assess the resource and recommend a treatment.

9 and 10. New additions, exterior alterations or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment. New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

Under the proposed action, some new additions and exterior alterations would be installed. They would mostly be minor and impermanent. They would not destroy the historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the building. Of note, the building's distinctive masonry architecture would not be affected. Most of the effects would be to the building's interior, which we have little information about the 1927 décor.

Perhaps the proposed action's biggest "threat" to the building's historic character is the installation of a storage shed on the hillside just to the west. The building was determined to be historically significant, in part, because of its setting—namely its location along the highway to Yosemite. The shed is out of character with the building's 1927 period of significance. However, it is not a permanent. The shed would be placed well up the hill and out of sight on a terrace in the Camp E site. Installation would not affect the Camp E site. The existing outbuilding associated with the visitor center building (also considered significant) would be used without further modification for storage.

Roof vents would be upgraded to allow adequate air exchange and to improve radon venting. The vents would not be conspicuous and are necessary for public safety. The upgrades to the vents would be done in a way that is not noticeable. New signs would be put on the roof. The signs would be resemble signs seen on the building in a circa 1950 photo. Again, these additions are impermanent and the historic photos suggest that there have been minor modifications to the property over time—modifications that have come and gone.

A section of cement floor in the small room has been damaged by moisture over the years would be repaired by re-pouring a new 2-inch thick floor on top of the existing damaged floor. No other structural changes would need to occur. Murals are proposed for the small room. The murals are not permanent; they would be mounted with bolts on the existing concrete walls. We do not know much about the 1927 interior décor. The new flooring would be permanent, but it adds only 2 inches to the existing original floor. This is not much of a difference.

The proposed redon fans, wall paint, carpeting, and electrical upgrades are impermanent. We have little information about the building's 1927 interior décor. BLM would not attempt to speculate about the décor. A trench would be dug into the cement floor to allow for the installation of phone and computer lines as well as electrical lines. The trench would be refilled with concrete and covered with carpet so no aesthetic change to the interior would occur.

### 4.2 Impacts of the No Action Alternative

The no action alternative would not affect the Merced Wild and Scenic River and its ORVs. Also, it would not affect biological values, water quality, or soils. However, there would be negative effects to public recreation. Currently there is a large demand for recreational and educational opportunities on BLM-administered land in the Briceburg area. The proposed action would help meet this demand by expanding and improving the public's use of the visitor center. Without the proposed action, the public's recreational use of the Merced River would likely be less satisfying than if the proposed action was implemented and the improvements were made.

The effects on significant cultural resources would be negligible. The significant visitor center building would continue to be affected by water damage, but BLM would likely continue to make repairs as needed to deal with this problem. The building would not be adverse affected whether the proposed action is implemented or not.

### 4.3 Cumulative Impacts

There are an abundance of recreational and educational opportunities in the Merced River canyon. Deciding not to implement the proposed action would not have a negative cumulative impact on these opportunities. The recreating public could continue to use the visitor center and BLM-administered land in their current state, or they could use US Forest Service- and National Park Service-administered lands with many similar recreational and educational opportunities farther up the Merced River canyon.

The proposed action would be done in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and would not have an adverse effect on the significant visitor center building. There would not be cumulative impacts to the region's inventory of historically significant buildings.

## 5.0 Agencies and Persons Consulted

### 5.1 EA preparers

Terry McLaughlin, Mariposa Resource Conservation District

David Greenwood, BLM Outdoor Recreation Planner

James Barnes, BLM NEPA Coordinator and Archaeologist

### 5.2 Reviewed by BLM Interdisciplinary Team

James Barnes 8/28/08

James Barnes, NEPA Coordinator and Archaeologist — Date

Jeff Horn 8/28/08

Jeff Horn, Outdoor Recreation Planner — Date

Al Franklin, Botanist — Date

Peggy Cranston 8/28/08

Peggy Cranston, Wildlife Biologist — Date

### 5.3 Availability of Document and Comment Procedures

The EA, posted on Folsom Field Office's website (www.blm.gov/ca/folsom) under Information, NEPA (or available upon request), would be available for a 15-day public review period. Comments should be sent to the BLM at 63 Natoma Street, Folsom, CA 95630 or emailed to us at ca180@ca.blm.gov.

# United States Department of the Interior

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## Briceburg Visitor Center Rehabilitation CA-180-08-47
## Finding of No Significant Impact
## August 28, 2008

It is my determination that this decision would not result in significant impacts to the quality of the human environment. Anticipated impacts are within the range of impacts addressed by the Sierra Resource Management Plan's Record of Decision, approved in February 2008. Thus, the proposed action does not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement (EIS) is not necessary and would not be prepared. This conclusion is based on my consideration of CEQ's following criteria for significance (40 CFR §1508.27), regarding the context and intensity of the impacts described in the EA and based on my understanding of the project:

*1) Impacts can be both beneficial and adverse and a significant effect may exist regardless of the perceived balance of effects.* The proposed action would not have a significant impact. There would be no adverse effects to the significant building.

*2) The degree of the impact on public health or safety.* No aspects of the project have been identified as having the potential to significantly and adversely impact public health or safety. In fact, the project is designed to enhance public health through education about water resources.

*3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area.* The project area is within the Merced Wild and Scenic River corridor. However, the project would not significantly affect outstandingly remarkable values for the Merced Wild and Scenic River.

*4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial effects.* No anticipated effects have been identified that are scientifically controversial. As a factor for determining within the meaning of 40 C.F.R. § 1508.27(b)(4) whether or not to prepare a detailed environmental impact statement, "controversy" is not equated with "the existence of opposition to a use." *Northwest Environmental Defense Center v. Bonneville Power Administration*, 117 F.3d 1520, 1536 (9th Cir. 1997). "The term 'highly controversial' refers to instances in which 'a substantial dispute exists as to the size, nature, or effect of the major federal action rather than the mere existence of opposition to a use.'" *Hells Canyon Preservation Council v. Jacoby*, 9 F.Supp.2d 1216, 1242 (D. Or. 1998).

*5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are likely to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.* The analysis does not show that this action would involve any unique or unknown risks.

*6) The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.* Facilities maintenance/improvement is not precedent setting.

*7) Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.* No significant site specific or cumulative impacts have been identified. The project is consistent with the actions and impacts anticipated in the Sierra RMP and Final Environmental Impact Statement.

*8) The degree to which the action may adversely affect National Historic Register listed or eligible to be listed sites or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.* The building has been determined to be eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. The proposed action would not cause adverse effects to the building because the work would be done in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties (36 CFR 68). Specifically, the work would be done in accordance with the rehabilitation standards as defined at 36 CFR 68.2(b).

*9) The degree to which the action may adversely affect ESA listed species or critical habitat.* No ESA listed species (or their habitat) would be affected by the proposed action.

*10) Whether the action threatens a violation of environmental protection law or requirements.* There is no indication that this decision would result in actions that would threaten such a violation.

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William S. Haigh Date
Manager, Folsom Field Office