



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Mother Lode Field Office
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El Dorado Hills, CA 95762
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Project (CA-180-10-12) Finding of No Significant Impact February 2010

It is my determination that this decision will 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 (RMP). 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 will 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.* Impacts would be short-term and miniscule. These impacts include vegetation removal, soil disturbance, and temporary noise and dust to build the stairwell/walkway. In the long run, construction of the stairwell/walkway would help to reduce erosion of soils and degradation of vegetation. The impacts are not significant. The beneficial impacts outweigh the negative impacts.
- 2) *The degree of the impact on public health or safety.* No aspects of the proposed action 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 by creating a safe walkway between the parking lot and the visitor center.
- 3) *Unique characteristics of the geographic area.* The general area is located within the Cosumnes River Preserve, which is known for its outstanding wildlife values. The project area specifically does not contain any unique characteristics.
- 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 the proposed 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.* The proposed action 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 proposed action is consistent with the Sierra RMP.

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 proposed action would not adversely affect cultural properties listed on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect ESA listed species or critical habitat.* No ESA listed species (or their habitat) are known to occur in the area potentially affected by the proposed action.

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

William S. Haigh
Field Manager,
Mother Lode Field Office

Date



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EA Number: CA-180-10-12

Proposed Action: Parking lot/visitor facilities improvements at the visitor center, Cosumnes River Preserve

Location: MDBM, T 5 N, R 5 E, Section 21. Refer to the map attached

1.0 Purpose of and Need for Action

The Bureau of Land Management's Mother Lode Field Office (BLM) and its partners at the Cosumnes River Preserve propose to make improvements to visitor facilities at the visitor center, located on BLM-administered land at the Preserve. The improvements include upgrades to the existing upper parking lot (new pavement markings/stripping). The improvements also include construction of a new concrete stairwell/sidewalk connecting the upper parking lot and the visitor center building. Presently, an informal trail has developed between these two points, as visitors take the straightest and shortest route possible between the upper parking lot and the visitor center. The new stairwell/sidewalk would replace this informal trail and is needed to provide a safe walkway for visitors.

1.2 Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plans

The proposed action is consistent with the 2008 Cosumnes River Preserve Management Plan. On page 5-38 of this plan under 1.5 it says to "[c]ontinue to provide a safe and functional trail system, including boardwalks and viewing platforms for visitors, throughout the Preserve".

The proposed action is consistent with the Sierra Resource Management Plan Record of Decision (ROD), approved in February 2008. On page 30 of the ROD it requires BLM to develop recreation sites that meet public health and safety standards.

2.0 Proposed Action and Alternatives

2.1 Proposed Action

BLM and its partners at the Cosumnes River Preserve propose to make various improvements to the parking facilities at the visitor center. The improvements include

1. Expansion of upper parking lot to include a portion of the dirt island within the existing parking lot.
2. Installation of new pavement markings/stripping in the upper parking lot.
3. Construction of a concrete stairwell and sidewalk connecting the upper parking lot and the visitor center building. The stairwell/sidewalk would connect to the parking lot at the head of the boat ramp sidewalk and extend toward the visitor center. It would connect to the driveway directly across from the existing stairwell to the visitor center. The sidewalk would be 6 ft wide and approximately 120 ft long. A crosswalk would be painted on the driveway to indicate pedestrian traffic to drivers entering the lower parking lot. Refer to the attached engineering schematic for the proposed work showing project details.

The expansion of the upper parking lot and installation of new pavement markings would occur within existing facilities. It would not have environmental impacts. It has clear benefits (safety, improved access, etc.) to the visiting public and is not discussed further in this EA. Construction of the stairwell/sidewalk also has clear benefits but would involve new construction/ground disturbance and these impacts are fully analyzed in this EA.

2.2 Project Design Features

Cultural Resources: If any cultural resources are unearthed during construction, work would cease until a BLM archaeologist inspects the discovery and makes management recommendations. Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act may continue at this point. If the cultural resources are significant, the work would not proceed until appropriate measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate potential adverse effects are taken.

Noxious Invasive Weeds: Equipment used on the project would be cleaned to help prevent spread of noxious invasive weeds before and after the project.

2.3 No Action

Under the no action alternative, the stairwell/sidewalk would not be built.

2.4 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

None

3.0 Affected Environment

Refer to Chapter 2 of the Cosumnes River Preserve Management Plan for a description of the affected environment including air, soils, and water resources, vegetation including special status plants and invasive nonnative weeds), wildlife, recreation, visual resources, cultural/Native American issues, and areas of critical environmental concern (ACEC)

Of note, under the 2008 Sierra RMP, BLM designated 2,035-acres of BLM-administered land within the Cosumnes River Preserve as an ACEC (this includes the area potentially affected by the proposed action). Relevant and important values include the existence or potential for restoration of:(1) valley oak (*Quercus lobata*) riparian forest; (2) seasonal wetlands; (3) vernal pools; (4) oak (*Quercus* spp.) savannah; and (5) agricultural lands such as irrigated pasture and crops that provide habitat for sandhill cranes (*Grus Canadensis*) and a buffer for the Preserve.

4.0 Environmental Effects

The following critical elements have been considered for this environmental assessment, and unless specifically mentioned later in this EA, have been determined to be unaffected by the proposal: air quality, prime/unique farmlands, floodplains, hazardous waste, wetlands and riparian zones, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness, and environmental justice.

4.1 Impacts of the Proposed Action

Air, soils, and water: Construction of the stairwell/sidewalk would have negligible short-term negative impacts on soils. Some soils would need to be excavated to build the stairwell/sidewalk. The soils here are not unique, and have been impacted previously when the upper parking lot was originally built. Construction may also cause some short-term minimal dust and noise. In the long-term, use of the new walkway would reduce dust and erosion of soils caused by use of the informal trail that has developed. **Vegetation/ invasive nonnative weeds:** Preserve specialists analyzed impacts of the project on vegetation resources, particularly special status species and ACEC values. No special status species or

their habitat would be impacted. Construction would be done in a way that would not introduce nonnative weeds.

Wildlife: Preserve specialists analyzed impacts of the project on wildlife, particularly special status wildlife and ACEC values. There would be no impacts to wildlife. It is possible that construction might cause some negligible and very temporary disturbance to wildlife. However, the project area is immediately next to the parking lot and visitor center where there is people and vehicles every day.

Recreation: In the long-term, recreation and visitor services would benefit from the new stairwell/sidewalk. This pathway would provide a safe pathway for visitors to get to and from the visitor center building and the upper parking lot. The informal trail that is currently used is not fully safe or reliable. It is possible that visitors (like small children, some senior citizens, and perhaps people with certain disabilities) could trip and fall on the trail.

Visual resources: The current informal trail is an eyesore. The new stairwell/sidewalk would improve visual resources (the look of visitor facilities in the immediately vicinity of the visitor center). BLM is managing Preserve lands in accordance with BLM Class II visual resource management (VRM) standards. The new pathway would help BLM meet this management standard.

Cultural/Native American concerns: The BLM archaeologist conducted a cultural resource study of the area potentially affected by construction and use of the new walkway. No cultural resources would be affected. This includes resources to which Native Americans attach religious or cultural importance.

Areas of critical environmental concern: None of the ACEC values exist within the area potentially affected by the proposed action and these values would not be affected.

4.2 Impacts of the No Action Alternative

Air, soils, and water: Use of the informal trail may continue to erode soils. There would, therefore, be potentially long-term but fairly minimal negative impacts to soils. There would be no impacts to air quality and water resources.

Vegetation/ invasive nonnative weeds: Similar to soils, use of the informal trail is degrading vegetation, albeit commonplace vegetation. In the long-term this impact is fairly negligible.

Wildlife: Wildlife would not be affected.

Recreation: In the long-term, recreation would be negatively impacted. This impact is minimal to moderate. Visitors are going to continue to use the informal trail because it is the straightest and shortest route between the upper parking lot and the visitor center. This route needs to be made a safe and reliable way to get to and from the visitor center. Tripping accidents are possible on the existing informal trail.

Visual resources: The current informal trail is an eyesore. There would be long-term negative impacts to visual resources in the immediate vicinity of the visitor center. The size of the impact is relatively small. However, it reflects poorly on management ability of BLM and other Preserve partners. The informal trail is not in line with BLM Class II VRM standards.

Cultural/Native American concerns: Cultural resources would not be impacted.

Areas of critical environmental concern: ACEC values would not be impacted.

4.3 Cumulative Impacts

There would be no negative cumulative impacts—impacts on a watershed scale.

5.0 Agencies and Persons Consulted

None

5.1 Interdisciplinary Team

Reviewers:

/s/ James Barnes

NEPA coordinator/cultural resources

/s/ Harry McQuillen

Recreation

/s/ Sara Sweet

Botany

/s/ Mark Ackerman

Wildlife

5.2 Availability of Document and Comment Procedures

This EA, posted on Mother Lode Field Office's website (www.blm.gov/ca/motherlode) under Information, NEPA (or available upon request), will be available for a 15-day public review period. Comments should be sent to the Mother Lode Field Office, 5152 Hillside Circle, El Dorado Hills, CA 95762 or emailed to us at jjbarnes@blm.gov.