



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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EA Number: CA-180-16-29

Proposed Action: Issue a Special Recreation Use Permit for the “Merced Canyon Endurance Run”. This proposed foot race is a community event.

Location: Mariposa County, Merced River Recreation Area:

- T. 4 S., R. 18 E., within sections 10, 9, 8, 5, 6, 3, and 2;
- T. 3 S., R. 18 E., within sections 33, 34, and 35;
- T. 4 S., R. 17 E., within sections 1 and 2.

1.0 Purpose and Need

The purpose of the proposed action is to evaluate Humanity Running’s application for a Special Recreation Permit (SRP) allowing access to existing trails and roads to conduct both a 14K and a 44K endurance run on portions of BLM managed lands. All proceeds after expenses will go to benefit the South Fork Merced River Trail Collaborative. The need for the proposed action is to respond to a FLPMA permit request submitted by the proponent to authorize a competitive race on public lands administered by the BLM Mother Lode Field Office.

1.1 Decision and Rationale

This EA discloses the environmental consequences of implementing the proposed action or alternatives to that action. The Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) describes the findings of the analysis in this EA. The BLM Mother Lode Field Office Manager is the Deciding Official. His decision and the rationale for that decision will be stated in a separate Decision Record. Based on the information provided in this EA, the BLM Manager will decide whether to grant the permit application with appropriate mitigation measures, or whether to reject it.

1.2 Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plans

The Sierra Resource Management Plan (RMP), February 2008, covers land use planning decisions for the subject area. This SRP proposal has been reviewed to determine that the proposed action conforms to the land use plan terms and conditions as required by 43 CFR 1610.5. The proposal is in conformance with the RMP as outlined on page 26 which states that the goal of the Recreation program is to “ensure the continued availability of outdoor recreational opportunities while protecting other resources and uses.” The RMP goes on to state that the field office will, “manage for whitewater and other types of recreation,” within the Merced River SRMA (page 29).

The proposed action is also consistent with the Merced Wild and Scenic River Management Plan (1991) which states on page 5 that the office will, “Maintain a diversity of land based and water based recreational opportunities.”

1.3 Relationship to Statutes, Regulations or Other Plans

Under Section 2931.3 the statutory authorities underlying the BLM recreation permit regulations are the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, 43 U.S.C. 1701 et seq., and the Federal Land Recreation Enhancement Act, 16 U.S.C. 6801 et seq.

(a) The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) contains the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM's) general land use management authority over the public lands, and establishes outdoor recreation as one of the principal uses of those lands (43 U.S.C. 1701(a)(8)). Section 302(b) of FLPMA directs the Secretary of the Interior to regulate through permits or other instruments the use of the public lands, which includes commercial recreation use. Section 303 of FLPMA authorizes the BLM to promulgate and enforce regulations, and establishes the penalties for violations of the regulations.

(b) The Federal Land Recreation Enhancement Act (REA) authorizes the BLM to collect fees for recreational use in areas meeting certain criteria (16 U.S.C. 6802(f) and (g)(2)), and to issue special recreation permits for group activities and recreation events (16 U.S.C. 6802(h)).

2.0 Proposed Action and Alternatives

2.1 Proposed Action

The proposed action is to grant Humanity Running a SRP to organize and conduct two separate endurance-running races within the Merced River Recreation Area on May 14, 2016. The event would consist of a 14K and a 44K race. Each race would start and finish at the Briceburg Day Use Area travelling completely on existing trails and/or roads. No new ground disturbance or trails would be created. The race would be limited to 50 participants combined for both races. The races would be scheduled to start at 8:30 am. The 14K race would be concluded by noon while the 44K race would be finished by around 4:00 pm. Parking would be limited to 30 cars at the Briceburg Day Use Area; off-site parking would be required for any cars unable to fit in the day use parking area. Event signs would be placed one week prior to the day of the event, informing the public that the race would be taking place. This would minimize user conflict on the day of the race and allow other recreationist to choose other trailheads during the duration of the race.

Aid stations would be set up and manned the day of the race. These stations would be placed on the north side of the Briceburg Suspension Bridge, the top of the Burma Grade near turnaround, and at the Railroad Flat Campground. The aid stations would be staffed with medical professionals, and would have communication with the start /finish line. Race staff would be posted at each of the three turn-around points. A post-race sweep of all race courses would be conducted by the event staff after the race to ensure all participants were accounted for, and that all race related marking and trash was picked up. Emergency ingress and egress would be maintained at all times in the Briceburg Day-Use parking lot and on Merced River Campground Road.

2.2 Project Design Features

The following permit stipulations for this race proposal would be implemented to minimize user conflicts and other impacts:

- Pre-race signage will be placed to inform the public of the date and time of the races
- Event staff will direct race parking and insure safe emergency vehicle access
- Event staging area will be cleared of vegetation to minimize fire danger and reduce the potential spread of noxious weeds.
- The permit holder will understand that the public lands are multiple-use in nature; there will be times when additional users are in a given area. The permit holder must be cognizant of other users' needs in relation to each other's own uses. Issuance of this permit does not constitute exclusive use of the public lands by the permittee.

2.3 No Action

Under the no-action alternative, the BLM Mother Lode FO would deny Humanity Running's SRP application, and the proposed action of allowing a 14K and 44K race on public land would not be initiated. The no-action alternative is considered as a part of BLM's NEPA process and provides a comparative impact base for other alternatives. It could be selected by BLM if warranted by the findings of the environmental analysis. The no action alternative would meet the purpose and need of the BLM but would not address the multiple use mandates set forth for the BLM by FLPMA.

3.0 Affected Environment

The proposed races would take place entirely on existing trails and roads in the Merced River Recreation Area, a very popular recreation area in the Sierra foothills west of Yosemite within Mariposa County. Elevations within the project area average 950-2000 feet above sea level.

Botany: Chamise chaparral dominates on the south facing slopes. Chaparral species include chamise, whiteleaf manzanita, mewukka manzanita, buckbrush, toyon, Western Mountain mahogany, flowering ash, golden fleece, blue elderberry, keckiella, holly-leaf redberry, and poison oak. Associated tree species include knob cone pine, gray pine, sugar pine, California juniper, and interior live oak. No unique soil formations exist in the project area. The Merced River Canyon supports a number of special status plant species. Mariposa clarkia (*Clarkia biloba*) occurs all along the old railroad grade which makes up the Merced Campground Road and single track trails that will be within the proposed race course. Elderberry is a protected native shrub that is known to occur in the general vicinity.

Wildlife: The proposed racecourse lies almost entirely within the Merced River Recreation Area and Merced Wild and Scenic River corridor. These areas have been surveyed for special status species over the years for various projects. The proposed race is within the range of the limestone salamander, which is a state-listed species. Limestone salamanders live in shady talus slopes and are not usually out during the daytime or in dry conditions.

The Bear Creek Bridge on Highway 140 at the Briceburg Day-Use Area supports a large maternity roost of Mexican free-tailed bat, a BLM sensitive species. Bear Creek Bridge is a section of Highway 140 that crosses the Bear Creek where it enters the Merced River. The BLM's Briceburg Visitor Center, parking lot, and a river access point are located adjacent to this bridge. Joints between the concrete spans of this bridge provide important habitat for a major Mexican free-tail maternity roost. Other species of bats have also been seen roosting under the bridge.

Recreation: The proposed endurance running race is proposed to be almost entirely within the Wild and Scenic Merced River, and/or the Merced River Recreation Area. The proposed course starts and finishes within a recreationally designated reach of the Wild and Scenic River. Vehicle access and aid stations would be located there. The downstream turn-around would be located in a Wild designated section of the Wild and Scenic River and would have no vehicle or motorized access. The third turn-around would be located high up above the river at the top of the Burma Grade (Bull Creek Road), which is outside the Wild and Scenic corridor and outside the Merced River Recreation Area. The ORVs that make the river eligible for wild and scenic status are geology, rare plants, threatened or endangered species, recreation and cultural resources.

This section of the Merced is a popular recreation destination during the spring and summer. Bike riders, Campers, whitewater boaters, wildflower enthusiasts, fishermen, and day hikers are the primary users. Its 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 and wildflower viewing in the spring and excellent camping throughout the year.

Visual Resources: The BLM manages this area in accordance with class I and II visual resource management (VRM) standards. The BLM's objective for class I visual resources are to preserve the existing character of the landscape (changes generally should not occur). The BLM's objective for class II is to retain the existing

character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Management activities may be seen, but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Any changes must repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.

Cultural History:

The famous American explorer, soldier, and politician John Fremont was among the earliest Euro-Americans to settle in the region. In 1847, he acquired a large Mexican land grant called Las Mariposas that included the present-day town of Mariposa. Not long after the start of the Gold Rush in 1848, prospectors began scouring his land, the Merced River canyon, and elsewhere in the area for placer gold. Sherlock Creek, named for the Sherlock brothers, may have been one of the earliest creeks to be mined in the Merced River canyon. Placer mining waned by the early 1850s as the easily found placer gold became depleted.

By the late 1800s, hardrock gold mining became a dominant industry within the Merced River watershed and Mariposa County generally. Production may have peaked during 1860s-1880s, (mining activity/returns for this period were poorly documented). The patented Mountain King Mine, located along the Merced River, was discovered sometime during the mid- to late 1800s, but little is known about its early history. By 1904, the mine was being developed by the Omparisa Mining Company. A five-stamp mill was installed in 1905 and was increased to ten stamps later the same year. The mine also had a hydroelectric facility built by PG&E. The remains of the facility include a diversion, wooden flume, transmission lines, and powerhouse foundations, all located on BLM-administered land. The development of the mine was sporadic during the 1910s when the Mountain King Mining Company took over operations. The company called it quits in 1922 because operating costs exceeded production returns. After a few years of development under lease, the mine was abandoned.

Railroad Flat was the location of a small town called Hart associated with the Mountain King Mine. The town reportedly consisted of houses and a few businesses, including a “cat house.” There is a small cemetery (with historic and modern graves) at Railroad Flat, located near the BLM campground that now occupies much of the area. McCabe Flat, also a BLM campground, has seen sporadic mining and residential activity since the Gold Rush. Recently, BLM was told that Alexander Matlock and his wife Lenoria Landrum (part Miwok) lived along the Merced River between Railroad Flat and McCabe Flat during the late 1800s and early 1900s. The couple was married around 1897. They may have operated a saloon along the river catering to miners working at the Mountain King and living at Railroad Flat.

The opening of Yosemite Valley as a major tourist destination by the turn of the century reinvigorated and changed the economy of Mariposa County. The Yosemite Valley Railroad, built in 1907, was designed to help get people to and from Yosemite Valley. The railroad grade ran along the Merced River from Merced in the Central Valley to El Portal just west of Yosemite Valley. The train passed through the BLM-administered part of the canyon, including portions of the Mountain King Mine complex, Railroad Flat, McCabe Flat, and Briceburg.

During the 1910s Briceburg consisted of a store owned by William Brice, the Brice house, and a small schoolhouse. The Yosemite Valley Railroad made regular stops at the store. The construction of the “all weather highway” to Yosemite Valley during the 1920s (current Highway 140) led to the abandonment of the Yosemite Valley Railroad by the end of World War II. (The railroad grade survives, in part, as an access road and recreational trail.) A bridge was put in across the Merced River at Briceburg to move supplies from the railroad to the construction sites. Convict workers from San Quentin were used to build the highway. A residential camp (Camp E) for the workers and their supervisors was placed along the highway near Briceburg. The camp consisted of various tent structures occupied from 1923 to 1925.

Built in 1927 the River View Tavern (later known as the Briceburg Inn) was a full-menu Italian restaurant and Standard Oil gas station located along the highway at Briceburg. A motel was added later. For years, the Briceburg Inn catered to travelers on the highway connecting Mariposa and Yosemite. In the late 1980s, the building was acquired by BLM and turned into a visitor center. In the 1930s a new bridge was put in across the

Merced River at Briceburg. The bridge was part of the Ponderosa Way Fire Break, a Civilian Conservation Corps project administered by the U.S. Forest Service. The firebreak follows the route of Bull Creek Road.

4.0 Environmental Effects

The following critical elements have been considered for this environmental assessment, and unless specifically mention later in this chapter, have been determined to be unaffected by the proposal: air quality, areas of critical environmental concern, prime/unique farmlands, floodplains, water quality, threatened or endangered species, hazardous waste, native American concerns, wetlands and riparian zones, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness, invasive, nonnative weeds, and environmental justices.

4.1 Impacts of the Proposed Action and Alternatives

Soils: No special status soils are known to exist along the proposed course. The impacts to soils by runners on the existing trails will be negligible based on the proposed amount of runners being under 100.

Vegetation/Botany: The BLM Botanist analyzed the impacts of the proposed action on botanical resources, especially special status plants. The analysis included a background records search through the California Natural Diversity Database as well as an internal BLM natural resources geodatabase. The proposed action would cause negligible effects to common vegetation. Mariposa clarkia occurs along the roads and trails of the course but does not grow directly in the roads and trails where the foot traffic will occur. Mariposa clarkia commonly occurs along roadsides, indicating it can tolerate and may even respond positively to some surface disturbance. Overall the issuance of this permit should have no effect on special status species because the event will take place on, and be limited to existing trails.

Wildlife: The wildlife biologist analyzed the impacts the proposed action on wildlife, especially special status animals. The analysis was designed to help the BLM meet its obligations under the Endangered Species Act and other special status species policy. During previous site visits special status animals were not found within the permit area.

Limestone Salamanders occur in the general area but are not known to occur within the proposed race area. The salamander's habitat is shady, moist, and generally located on north-facing mossy talus slopes. The trails and roads proposed for this racecourse are mostly south facing. The limestone salamander is rarely seen and seems to live mostly underground in the crevices under the rocky slopes.

The proposed action would not affect threatened and endangered animals or other BLM special status animals. The proposed action would cause temporary disruption to wildlife through the production of dust and noise. The impacts would be localized and temporary. The proposed action would cause negligible effects to common wildlife.

Cultural Resources: There are cultural resources in the area that are vulnerable to looting and vandalism (i.e., prehistoric camp sites). Most, however, are not vulnerable (i.e., bedrock mortars, Yosemite Valley Railroad grade, mining areas, etc.). Because this special event would be confined to existing recreation/user facilities (i.e., roads, trails, campgrounds, day use areas, parking areas, etc.) within the BLM's Merced River Special Recreation Area, no impacts to cultural resources are anticipated. The existing recreation/user facilities are free of "at risk" cultural resources. No cultural resources were identified within the permit area that would be affected by the proposed action therefore; the issuance of a SRP for a Competitive Event under this EA will have no potential to affect significant cultural resources

Recreation: The proposed permit area is in the Merced River Special Recreation Management Area; these area designations recognize the need for intensive recreation management and investment. The potential displacement of recreation users is always a possibility when considering a Special Recreation Permit and competitive events. The majority of recreational use in this area consists of mountain biking, hiking, wildflower/wildlife viewing, and family camping and picnicking. Parking would be the largest impact from this competitive event. Humanity Running Staff would act as parking attendants to assist with parking at the Briceburg Day-Use Area in a safe and efficient manor. Additional parking would be located on the north side of

the river along the Merced Campground Road. This scenario would have the possibility of causing recreation users to be displaced to another area. Any member of the public who wished to use the Briceburg Day-Use Area trailheads during the proposed race could, and would be able to do so. Special Recreation Use Permits are non-exclusive, meaning the permit holder would have no right to interfere with other members of the public wishing to recreate in the same area. The Proposed race would only last for about five hours, so the potential impacts from displacement would be temporary. Based on the proposed action no significant impact to recreation would occur as a result of the proposed Endurance Race/Competitive Event SRP.

Visual resources: BLM Class I visual resources guidelines indicate that the BLM will preserve the existing character of the landscape. The proposed race would only have non-permanent temporary impacts through the use of temporary shade structures, banners and signs being placed at the Briceburg Day-Use Area. Since the impacts of the proposed action are temporary in nature the proposed action would not have a significant impact on visual resources.

Fire/fuels: The proposed action would take place in the spring, typically a low fire danger season, if unusual fire conditions exist at the time of the race the permit holder will be required to post no smoking signs around the start finish area. Permit stipulations will require the start finish area to be cleared of weeds prior to race day. This stipulation and the time of year the race is scheduled make it unlikely that a fire will occur.

4.2 Impacts of the No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative there would be no change to the current status or quality of the site or landscape. Impacts to resources described above would not be expected from the No Action alternative. Under the No Action alternative the BLM would not be maintaining a diversity of land based and water based recreational opportunities as required in the Merced Wild and Scenic River Management Plan (1991) (page 5).

4.3 Cumulative Impacts

Because no site-specific adverse impacts are expected for any of the resources described above, cumulative impacts at the larger scale are not anticipated under the proposed action.

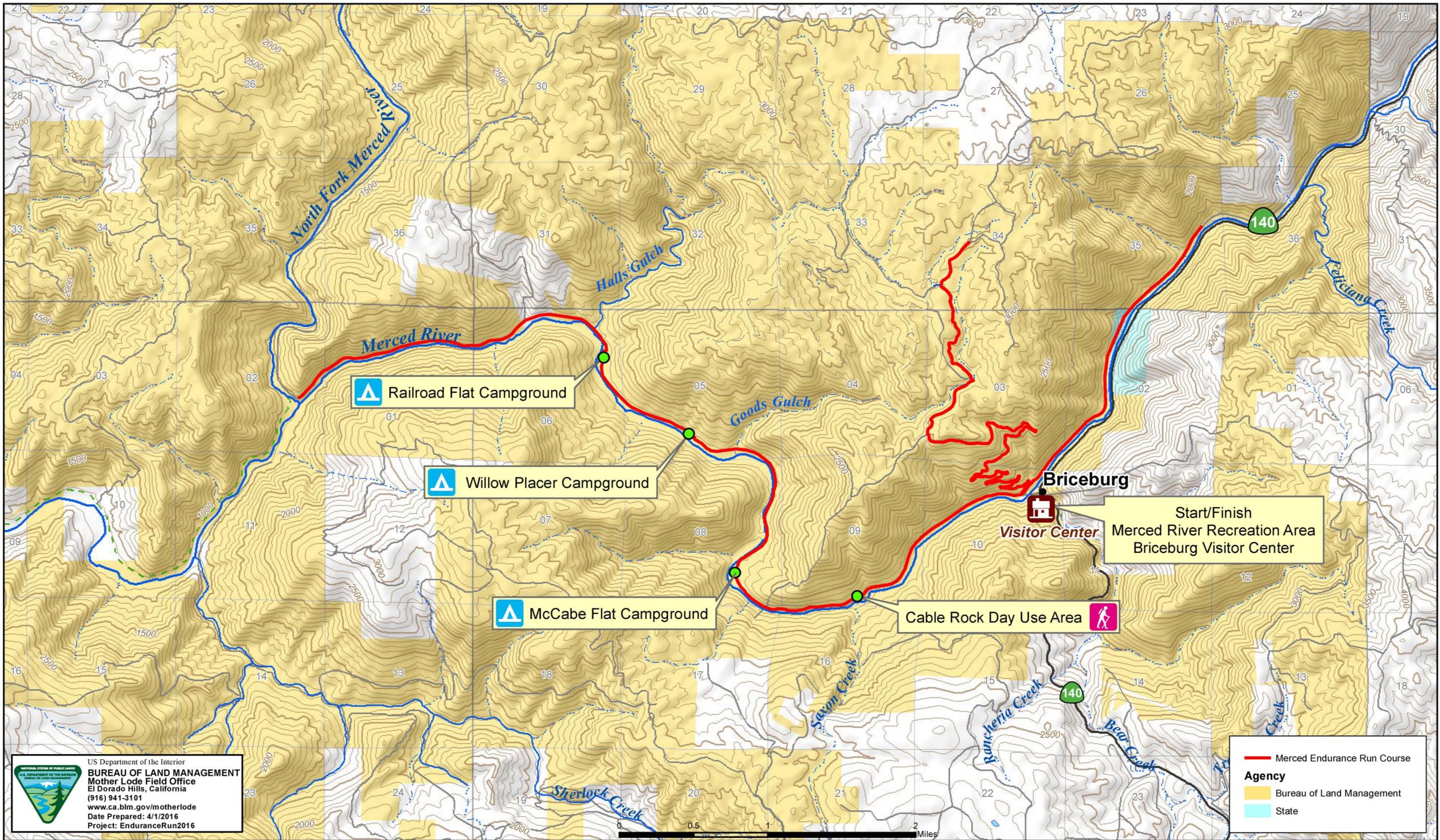
5.1 BLM Interdisciplinary Team

<i>/s/ Peggy Cranston</i>	<i>3/19/16</i>
Peggy Cranston Wildlife Biologist	Date
<i>/s/ Alden Neel</i>	<i>2/22/16</i>
Alden Neel Cultural Resources	Date
<i>/s/ Beth Brenneman</i>	<i>3/7/16</i>
Beth Brenneman Botanist	Date
<i>/s/ Jeff Horn for David Greenwood</i>	<i>3/24/16</i>
David Greenwood Recreation/Visual Resources	Date
<i>/s/ Heather Daniels</i>	<i>3.24.2016</i>
Heather Daniels NEPA Coordinator	Date

6.3 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, ATTN: Heather Daniels, 5152 Hillside Circle, El Dorado Hills, CA 95762 or emailed to us at hdaniels@blm.gov.

Merced Canyon Endurance Run 2016



Railroad Flat Campground

Willow Placer Campground

McCabe Flat Campground

Briceburg
 Visitor Center
 Start/Finish
 Merced River Recreation Area
 Briceburg Visitor Center

Cable Rock Day Use Area


 US Department of the Interior
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 Date Prepared: 4/1/2016
 Project: EnduranceRun2016

Merced Endurance Run Course
Agency
 Bureau of Land Management
 State

R17E

1:47,000

R18E

1 in = 1 mile

R19E

T3S

T3S

T4S

T4S