

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT, FONSI AND DECISION RECORD

**BLM, Bishop Field Office  
351 Pacu Lane, Suite 100  
Bishop, CA 93514**

**EA Number:** CA-017-04-52

**Proposed Action Title/Type:** Water Developments, East of Eastside Lane  
West Walker Mule Deer Winter Range

**Location of Proposed Action:** Unit 1 - Rickey Canyon: MDM, T. 9 N., R.  
23 E., Sec. 21, NE 1/4, SE 1/4.

Unit 2 - Blackwell Canyon: MDM, T. 9 N., R.  
23 E., Sec. 33, NE 1/4, NE 1/4.

**Applicant (if any):** BLM Wildlife Project

### **Plan Conformance:**

The proposed action is subject to the Bishop Resource Management Plan (RMP), approved 25 March 1993. The proposed action conforms to overall RMP direction to improve or maintain habitat conditions for mule deer. The RMP further identifies cooperation with the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) on deer herd management plans as a General Policy. Specifically, the RMP prescribes the following Support Needs for the Coleville Management Area: 1) "Develop water sources for mule deer east of Eastside Lane" and 2) "Develop water sources for native quail populations." The RMP also prescribes the design and implementation of habitat improvement projects in cooperation with the Mule Deer Foundation (MDF), Quail Unlimited (QU) and other conservation organizations as an Area-Wide Support Need.

### **Need for Proposed Action:**

The proposed action is located within critical winter/spring range occupied by the West Walker mule deer herd. Water is limited on the eastern portions of this herd's winter range and wintering deer are required to venture into Antelope Valley for water. The proposed action is designed to improve water availability on key mule deer concentration areas east of Eastside Lane and reduce human-deer conflicts in Antelope Valley. The development of new water sources east of Eastside Lane is identified in both the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Bishop Resource Management Plan (1993) and the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) West Walker Deer Herd Management Plan (1984). The proposed action would also help meet RMP objectives to develop water sources for native quail populations in the Coleville Management Area.

Over the past several years, the California Deer Association, Mule Deer Foundation, Inyo/Mono Fish and Game Advisory Committee, Quail Unlimited, Bureau of Land Management, and Inyo National Forest have cooperated to improve mule deer access to water throughout the Eastern Sierra region. The proposed action is a continuation of that effort.

### **Description of Proposed Action:**

The proposed action is to install two 1,300 gallon wildlife drinker systems east of Eastside Lane in the Coleville Management Area. Unit 1 would be installed near the eastern boundary of BLM managed lands in Rickey Canyon. Unit 2 would be installed near the eastern boundary of BLM managed lands in Blackwell Canyon (Figure 1). The proposed locations were identified in consultation with Tim Taylor, California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), Mono County Unit Biologist, during a field visit to the Eastside Lane area on 18 August 2004.

Each drinker would consist of a 1,300 gallon storage tank, an approximately 30 ft x 22 ft polypropylene rain collection apron and an external drinker. If project monitoring indicates that deer trampling is likely to damage the rain collection apron or storage tank, a small enclosure fence would be constructed to protect the site. The storage tank, rain collection apron and external drinker would be sited to limit the amount of vegetation removal and digging required for installation. Excavation for the storage tank, external drinker and required plumbing would be completed using a backhoe. Vegetation removal and ground leveling for the rain collection apron would be completed using hand tools. All backfill and site re-contouring would also be completed using hand tools. The completed drinkers would be low profile with neutral coloration making them difficult to see except when in very close proximity to the sites.

Vegetation removal and soil disturbance would be limited to the minimum required for drinker installation. Cross country vehicle travel would be limited to a one time trip with the backhoe to perform excavation work for placement of the storage tank, external drinker and required plumbing. All backhoe tracks would be rehabbed and re-contoured using hand tools. The access points from existing roads would be camouflaged and blocked to discourage off-road vehicle travel or the creation of new roads to the drinker sites. All materials, supplies and tools required for drinker installations would be hand carried from existing roads to the project sites. All vehicles, materials and tools used for drinker construction would be washed prior to delivery to the sites. All vehicle and tools used for drinker construction would be washed immediately following project completion. Installations would be performed by volunteers from the Eastern Sierra Chapters of Quail Unlimited and the California Deer Association working under direction of BLM and the California Department of Fish and Game.

### **Environmental Impacts:**

The proposed drinker sites are not within a Wilderness, Wilderness Study Area, Area of Critical Environmental Concern, nor Wild and Scenic River corridor, and there would be no impacts to any lands so designated.

Air quality would not be affected. The proposed action would not result in the emission of PM<sub>10</sub> nor contribute to the formation of fugitive dust. The proposed drinker sites are not within a federal air quality non-attainment area.

There would be no impacts to listed or sensitive species. There are no known listed or sensitive species or habitats within the vicinities of the proposed drinkers.

There would be no impacts to prime farm lands, flood plains, nor water quality (including ground or surface waters).

There would be no disproportionate impacts to low income or minority groups, per Executive Order 12898 (2/11/94).

### **Cultural resources**

The proposed drinker sites were surveyed for cultural resources on 27 August 2004. Details of this survey are provided in Cultural Resources Report CA-170-03-12. In summary, no cultural sites or resources were found during the survey and the probability of encountering sites during drinker installation is low. If previously undiscovered surface or subsurface cultural resources are found during drinker installation, installation would be stopped and the Bishop Field Office Archeologist notified. The proposed action would not negatively impact cultural resources.

### **Visual resources**

The proposed drinker sites are located within a Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class III Objective area. Under this VRM Class, the level of change to the characteristic landscape may be moderate. Management activities may attract attention from key observation points, but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Changes should repeat the basic elements found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.

Though allowable under VRM standards, the proposed drinker sites are not visible from any key observation points. The proposed drinkers were purposely located to discourage discovery from the casual viewer. In addition, the low profile and neutral coloration of the proposed drinkers would make them difficult to see except when the viewer is in very close proximity to the sites. The proposed action would not negatively impact visual resources nor violate VRM standards identified in the Bishop RMP.

### **Vegetation**

Vegetation at the drinker sites is dominated by low sagebrush (*Artemisia arbuscula*) and singleleaf pinon (*Pinus monophylla*). Both sites also include some ephedra (*Ephedra* spp.) and juniper (*Juniperus* spp.). Big sagebrush (*Artemisia* spp.) and antelope bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*) are present at the Blackwell Canyon site. Both sites are characterized by a limited perennial grass understory that includes needlegrasses (*Achnatherum* spp.), squirreltail (*Elymus elymoides*) and Indian ricegrass (*Achnatherum hymenoides*). Though not dominate, cheat grass (*Bromus tectorum*) is present at both sites.

Installation of the proposed drinkers would result in the removal of a small number of individual plants. A combination of selective removal and avoidance would be used to minimize this direct impact to the plant community. Deer utilization of browse species would also increase in the immediate vicinity of the drinker sites. The proposed action would not significantly alter the overall extent or health of native plant communities in the project area.

### **Invasive, non-native species**

Cheat grass (*Bromus tectorum*) is present at both proposed drinker sites and soil disturbance and vegetation removal associated with drinker installations could promote increased cheat grass densities in the project vicinities. Using a minimal disturbance approach should reduce the probability that site conditions conducive to increased cheat grass density would be created during drinker installation. The presence of cheat grass at the proposed drinker sites would also involve some risk of cheat grass spread. All vehicles, materials and tools used for drinker construction would be washed prior to delivery to the sites. In addition, all vehicles and tools used for drinker construction would be washed immediately following project completion. With

these protective measures incorporated, the proposed action should not contribute significantly to the introduction or spread of noxious weeds.

### ***Wildlife habitat***

The proposed drinker sites are located within critical winter/spring habitat for the West Walker mule deer herd. The proposed drinkers would increase water availability and improve deer distribution on this key habitat. Improved distribution would provide deer better access to limited forage resources during both the stressful winter period and the key spring green-up season. Deer would leave the winter range in better overall condition. Improved distribution should also reduce susceptibility to predation. Increased water availability would also decrease the need for deer to travel into Antelope Valley for water. The proposed drinkers would also increase water availability to other non-target wildlife species. Benefits to non-target species inhabiting the project area would be similar to those cited for deer. The proposed action would not negatively impact wildlife habitat or associated wildlife species in the project area.

### ***Range***

The proposed drinker sites are not located within any BLM administered grazing allotments and no loss of AUIMS or impacts to active grazing allotments would occur as a result of the proposed action.

### ***Minerals***

The proposed drinker sites are within an area characterized by historic mineral exploration and development activity. The project vicinities remain open to mineral location and valid claims still exist in the area. The proposed action would not preclude mineral exploration or development and would not negatively impact any existing or future mineral rights.

### ***Cumulative effects***

The limited scale and magnitude of the proposed action and associated environmental impacts significantly reduces the probability of negative cumulative effects associated with project implementation. The proposed action would not contribute to negative cumulative effects to the human environment or resource values in or adjacent to the project vicinities.

### **Description of Mitigation Measures and Residual Impacts:**

The following protective measures were incorporated into the project design to reduce the probability of residual impacts and the need for subsequent mitigation:

1. If previously undiscovered surface or subsurface cultural resources are found during drinker installation, installation would be stopped and the Bishop Field Office Archeologist notified.
2. Vegetation removal and soil disturbance would be limited to the minimum required for drinker installation.
3. All vehicles, materials and tools used for drinker installation would be washed prior to transport to the project sites to avoid the spread of noxious weeds.

4. All vehicles and tools used for drinker installation would be washed following project completion to avoid the spread of noxious weeds.
5. Cross-country backhoe tracks created to access the drinker sites would be rehabbed and re-contoured using hand tools. Access from existing roads would be blocked at the entry point to ensure that new vehicle routes are not established as the result of drinker installations.

**Persons/Agencies Consulted:**

Anne Halford	BLM Botanist
Erica McCormick	BLM Archeologist
Diana Pietrasanta	BLM Outdoor Recreation Planner
Cheryl Seath	BLM Minerals Specialist
Mark Gish	BLM Range Conservationist
Tim Taylor	CDFG Mono County Unit Biologist

**Preparer(s):**

Steven Nelson            BLM Resource Information Specialist

**Date:** 13 September 2004

**Reviewed By:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Joe Pollini, Environmental Coordinator

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT/DECISION RECORD**

I have reviewed this environmental assessment including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant environmental impacts. I have determined that the proposed action will not have any significant impacts on the human environment and that an EIS is not required.

There will be no effect on threatened or endangered species as a result of the action.

I have determined that the proposed project is in conformance with the Bishop Resource Management Plan, which was approved March 25, 1993. This plan has been reviewed, and the proposed action conforms with the land use plan terms and conditions as required by 43 CFR 1610.5.

It is my decision to implement the project as proposed.

**Mitigation Measures/Remarks:**

**Authorized Official:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Bill Dunkelberger, Bishop Field Office Manager

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_