UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BLM, BOISE DISTRICT

EA #ID130-2006-EA-3065 Title Page

Applicant (if any): **BLM Action**		Proposed Action: **Hemingway Butte Play Area Mitigation Project**		EA No. **#ID130-2006-EA-3065**
State: **Idaho**	County: **Owyhee**	District: **Boise District**	Field Office: **Owyhee**	Authority: **NEPA, FLPMA,**
Prepared By **OFO ID Team**		Title: **Various**		Report Date: **6/2/2006**

LANDS INVOLVED

Meridian	Township	Range	Section(s)	Acres
Boise	**1S, 2S**	**3W**	**Various**	**192**

Consideration of Critical Elements

Critical Elements	N/A or Not Present	Applicable or Present, No Impact	Discussed in EA
Air Quality	**X**		
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern	**X**		
Cultural Resources			**X**
Environmental Justice (E.O. 12898)	**X**		
Farm Lands (Prime or Unique)	**X**		
Floodplain	**X**		
Hazardous Substances or Solid Wastes	**X**		
Migratory Birds			**X**
Native American Religious Concerns			**X**
Noxious Weeds, Invasive Species			**X**
Special Status Species (T&E)			**X**
Social Economics			**X**
Water Quality			**X**
Wetlands/Riparian Zones			**X**
Wild and Scenic Rivers (Eligible)	**X**		
Wilderness Study Areas	**X**		
Wild Horse Herd Management Areas			**X**

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
EA# ID-130-2006-EA-3065
Hemingway Butte Play Area Mitigation Project

CHAPTER 1 - PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

A. INTRODUCTION

The Owyhee Front Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) is a 261,487 acre area of public lands in rural Owyhee County, Idaho that has become increasingly popular for motorized, recreational off-highway vehicle use, principally by residents of nearby urban communities outside the county. (See Map 2) On all but 192 acres of this area, motorized recreational use is legally limited to travel on an established, managed trail system. That 192 acre area, the Hemingway Butte Play Area (HBPA), is designated by BLM as an "Open" area where unrestricted cross-country travel by Off-highway Vehicles (OHVs) is permitted by the Owyhee Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Environmental Impact State (EIS) of December, 1999.

As regional population has increased, the HBPA has received a growing amount of use, and without physical barriers on the southern and eastern boundaries to contain it, cross-country OHV use has spilled over from the HBPA into surrounding road/trail areas that are limited to established trails, causing the formation of new, unauthorized trails, especially on the lands that lie just across the Reynolds Creek Road, to the southeast.

B. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION

The project would clearly separate the HBPA "Open" area from the surrounding "Limited" area by enclosing the area with administrative fences on its currently unfenced east and south sides, placing trail stiles (gaps) in the new fences, including two gates to allow wild horse passage in the southern HBPA fence, relocating OHV road crossings and placing OHV cattleguards at the new crossing points to slow speeds and funnel riders onto a numbered, maintained trail system extending into the Owyhee Front, closing an unsafe, impromptu parking area along Reynolds Creek, developing three small parking areas off of major roads to focus recreational parking to just a few areas, relocating an entrance road into the HBPA at a safer location, relocating a trail in the HBPA to a safer location away from Reynolds Creek Road and relocating a trail crossing of Reynolds Creek Road to a safer location . The project would place informational/educational kiosks and directional and regulatory signs at several exit locations to inform the public of the boundaries of the HBPA and to educate the public about proper uses and behaviors in both the HBPA and on surrounding lands.

C. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The proposed project would: 1) reduce OHV-caused damages to public and private lands lying immediately east of the Reynolds Creek Road, public lands adjacent to Reynolds Creek Road south of HBPA, and public lands to the west of the Hemingway Butte Allotment Fence; 2) reduce the future spread of cross-country OHV use to the southeast, where such use is illegal; 3) improve public safety by reducing the possibility of vehicle accidents on Reynolds Creek Road. The mitigation would be achieved through a combination of facility developments, signs, and a program of public information efforts including displays, maps, and handouts. The proposed project is intended as a limited, interim measure to correct immediate resource damage and safety problems. A subsequent comprehensive transportation route designation process for the Hemingway/Rabbit/Fossil Creek area that will identify all the roads and trails available for a variety of public uses will begin later in 2006, and is scheduled for completion in 2007. (See Map 2)

The proposed action is needed to immediately address two major, growing problems: 1) the frequent uncontrolled crossing and illegal use of Reynolds Creek Road by OHVs and the related high risk of traffic accidents; and 2) the increasing amount of unauthorized cross-country OHV travel that is adversely affecting "limited use" public lands as well as private lands adjacent to and outside the HBPA. This uncontrolled use has resulted in the formation of a web of interconnected trails, the development of random hill climbing areas, continued trail widening, and the unauthorized development of new parking areas, all of which has resulted in loss of vegetation, increased soil erosion, and impacts to adjacent private landowners and to other public land users. The spread of new trails and unrestricted cross-country use to a growing area outside the HBPA has also violated the intent of the Owyhee Land Use Plan by changing the character of the public's available recreation opportunity in portions of the affected areas from *semi-primitive motorized*, to *roaded natural*.

D. PROJECT AREA DESCRIPTION

The proposed project lies principally on public lands inside the Owyhee Front SRMA, but outside the HBPA, including portions of the Owyhee County right-of-way (ROW) along Reynolds Creek Road running from the HBPA boundary south beyond the Windy Point-Kane and including the intersection of the Rabbit Creek and Black Mountain Roads, a distance of about ten miles, and on BLM-managed lands on either side of this same stretch of Reynolds Creek Road, but outside the Owyhee County Right-of-Way. The area is predominately within the legal description of T. 1 S., R. 3 W., Sections 23, 24, 25, 26, 35, 36, and T. 2S., R.3W., Section 2, and Sec. 32. (Map 1). The HBPA is currently bounded by the Hemingway Allotment Fence on the west, and a fenced private land boundary on the north. The proposed project would entirely fence the eastern and southern boundaries of the area, as well.

E. CONFORMANCE WITH APPLICABLE LAND USE PLANS

This project is in conformance with the Owyhee Resource Management Plan (ORMP)/EIS dated December, 1999. The ORMP Recreation Objective RECT 1 identified all public lands within the Owyhee Field Office as either "open", limited" , or "closed" to off-highway motorized vehicle (OHMV) use. The 261,487-acre Owyhee Front Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) that surrounds the HBPA is designated as “limited to designated roads and trails;” however, until formal designation of roads and trails is complete, the interim OHMV management of the SRMA is "limited to existing roads and trails year-round." During this interim period, only those trails that were in existence in December, 1999 are considered “existing” trails. In the vicinity of the Hemingway Butte Trailhead, 192 acres are designated as "open" to unrestricted OHV use. Recreation Objective RECT 2 "provides for special management attention" to the Owyhee Front SRMA. Recreation Objective RECT 4 dictates actions that “provide for high quality recreational opportunities and experiences at developed and undeveloped recreation sites by maintaining existing amenities and by providing new recreation sites for the public’s enjoyment, with emphasis on roaded natural and semi-primitive motorized settings....", such as those found along the Reynolds Creek Road. Recreation Objective RECT 5 calls for developing "...a trail system that provides for a range of motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities for the public's enjoyment of primitive, semi-primitive motorized, semi-primitive non-motorized, and roaded natural settings."

F. SCOPING AND DEVELOPMENT OF ISSUES

The spread of vehicle-related impacts beyond the 192-acre Hemingway Butte Play Area, including the proliferation of new play areas, trails, and parking areas surrounding the HBPA, and the unsafe conditions that have developed along Reynolds Creek Road were identified as major issues affecting the area through internal and external scoping. Dialogue between the Owyhee Field Office and various OHV groups has occurred on a regular basis and this project has been discussed with them on a number of occasions. The Owyhee Field Office has also had frequent, ongoing discussions about these issues with Owyhee County officials, as well as discussion occurring within mandated formal coordination and consultation meetings.

As a result of the growing controversy about OHV use in the and around the HBPA, and in other areas of the County, the Owyhee County Commission has formed an advisory group, the Owyhee County Recreation Task Force, that includes members representing OHV users, non-motorized recreation users, local landowners and ranchers, County officials, Idaho State Parks and Recreation Department, and conservation groups. This task force makes recommendations to the Commissioners about recreation management within Owyhee County, the Commissioners adopt or revise the task force recommendations as necessary, then formally transmit their plans to BLM as part of ongoing cooperative government relations. The Proposed Action and alternatives have been shaped as a result of both public scoping, and consultation with Owyhee County.

The Draft Environmental Assessment for this project that was issued for public review in March, 2006 received a number of comments from interested individuals and organizations. BLM has

considered all comments received in the preparation of this Final Environmental Assessment and Record of Decision. The majority of comments expressed concern over management of wild horses in the Black Mountain Wild Horse Herd Management Area (HMA).

The chief concerns expressed were: 1) the effects of fencing on the wild horse population of the HMA, 2) the effects of constructing new parking areas that providing a staging area for further encroachment of human disturbance in the HMA; 3) the publicizing and marketing of OHV opportunities and a related increase in recreation use in an area that the Wild and Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act declares is to be managed "primarily" for wild horses, 4) the encroachment of recreation use into wild horse range in the lower elevation areas that could endanger the survival of wild horses by forcing them to stay in higher elevation areas, even when harsh weather would normally force them to lower elevations.

BLM also received comments that suggested that BLM should not initiate this action until a comprehensive route designation for the entire Owyhee Front SRMA could be completed; and comments that the scope and detail of the alternative analysis was inadequate, particularly with respect to the effect that the three new parking areas might have on wildlife, wild horses, soils and vegetation as OHV recreation use grows in the area.

CHAPTER 2 - PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

A. ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The principal objective of alternative formulation was to find the most efficient ways to protect those lands outside the HBPA most affected by expanding, unauthorized cross-country OHV travel, while still providing the public safe and adequate recreation access to legal trails, until a comprehensive route designation process could begin. Several factors have influenced the development of alternatives in this document:

1) Geography: The affected area has a series of steep ridgelines that frame relatively flat areas to the north around the Hemingway Butte Trailhead, to the south near the PP&L high voltage power line, and along the east side of Reynolds Creek Road. The ridgelines influenced the location of new, unauthorized user-established trails, random OHV hill climbing activities, and areas of vegetation loss as cross-country OHV use impacts spread southeastward out of the flat topography adjacent to the Reynolds Creek Road.

2) Pattern of Established Trails: The most heavily-used trails leading away from the HBPA determined this project's proposed locations for administrative fences, trail stiles, OHV cattleguards, kiosks, and regulatory and informational signs. Several existing trails that were in existence before December, 1999 have been regularly maintained by BLM using mechanized equipment during 2004 and 2005. These trail segments have also been numbered to provide this area with some level of OHV management in the period before a comprehensive route designation process is completed.

3) Scope of the EA/Alternatives: The Hemingway Butte Allotment Fence limits westerly access out of the HBPA to just a few points, and a fence that runs roughly along the public/private land boundary restricts access to the north of the HBPA, so the areas of greatest concern in this project were the areas south and east of HBPA. Because of the urgency of dealing with ongoing resource damages and safety issues, this analysis deals principally with the heavily-used areas immediately adjacent to the HBPA and to specific problem areas along Reynolds Creek Road to the south and east of the HBPA. A larger and more comprehensive OHV route designation process that will deal with similar issues, but on a much larger geographic scale, (more than 200,000 acres will be examined in the area containing Hemingway Butte Trailhead, Rabbit Creek Trailhead and Fossil Creek Trailhead), is scheduled to begin later in 2006, and should be completed in 2007.

B. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT ANALYZED IN DETAIL

Despite any negative impacts to soils, vegetation, and wildlife, evaluation of whether or not BLM should continue to allow unrestricted cross-country use within the192-acre HBPA is not a matter for consideration in this Environmental Assessment. The HBPA was established by the 1999

Owyhee Land Use Plan (Environmental Impact Statement and Resource Management Plan), and any change to that designation would require a formal amendment of the Plan.

On the basis of coordination with Owyhee County officials, consultation with the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes, and input from the public, BLM decided to defer dealing with lands well outside the HBPA boundary until a more comprehensive route designation plan could be developed for trail management in the extensive (200,000 acres+) Hemingway/Rabbit/Fossil OHV Subunit, but it was also decided to immediately address a few of the most serious vehicle-related problems that were occurring near the corridor of Reynolds Creek Road for a distance of about ten miles south of the HBPA boundary .

C. DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES

1. Proposed Action Alternative

The Proposed Action (Maps 2 and 3) consists of a combination of facility developments and a program of public information efforts aimed at clearly defining the boundary of the 192-acre HBPA and containing cross-country use within the HBPA, and in influencing the public's behavior patterns outside the HBPA in order to assure natural resource stabilization, and enhancement of OHV recreation opportunities and public safety.

Boundary Fences, Gates and Stiles:

1) *HBPA Reynolds Creek Road Boundary Fence* (5,350 feet/1.01 miles) - install a wire fence along Reynolds Creek Road on the eastern boundary of the HBPA from the private property line at the legal boundary of T 1 S, R 3 W, Section 24, NWNE, to one-quarter mile past the high voltage PP&L power line in the NWSW portion of Section 24. The following gaps (trail stiles), cattleguards, gates, and changes in public access would occur along this fence:

a) Construct a new vehicle entrance to the HBPA on the northwest side of Reynolds Creek Road. Install a 14-foot cattleguard at the entrance, large enough for full-size vehicles. This cattleguard would lead into a new access road, discussed below in the Road/trail section of the Proposed Action. Construct a wire gate into the fence next to the 14-foot cattleguard to allow for movement of livestock in and out of the HBPA (see Map 2, features A and B).

b) Close the current entrance (see Map 3, feature D, below) to full-size vehicles.

c) Construct an ATV/motorcycle crossing area at the junction of the old entrance road and Reynolds Creek Road. Install an ATV (51" width) cattleguard from the HBPA to the west side of Reynolds Creek Road at this point. Construct a wire gate in the fence next to the cattleguard to allow for movement of livestock and wild horses in and out of the HBPA. The west side ATV cattleguard would allow ATV and motorcycle access in and

out of the HBPA, and would limit the majority of OHV crossings of Reynolds Creek Road to and from the HBPA to a single, defined location.(See Map 3, Feature D)

d) South of Hemingway Butte, but within the HBPA, install an ATV cattleguard and wire gate in the new fence. (See Map 3, Feature E)

e) Just north of the PP&L power line, install a double (24') cattleguard and wire gate through the new fence. (See Map 3, Feature F)

2) *HBPA Southern Boundary Fence*: (1220 feet .23 miles, see Map 3, Feature G) Install a wire fence running from the southern terminus of the HBPA/Reynolds Creek west side Fence, west to the junction of the Hemingway Butte Allotment Fence in T. 1S., R3W., Sections 23 and 24. The following, cattleguards and gates would be located along this fence:

a) Approximately 170 feet west of the Reynolds Creek Road, install an ATV cattleguard and wire gate to allow OHV users of Trail H-400 access through the HBPA Southern Boundary Fence, and to allow for exit of livestock or wild horses.(See Map 3, Feature H)

b) Near the junction of the HBPA Southern boundary fence and the Hemingway Butte Pasture Fence, install another ATV (51" width) cattleguard and wire gate to allow OHV users access through the fence and allow for exit of livestock and wild horses. (See Map 3, Feature I)

3) *Hemingway Butte/Reynolds Creek East OHV Fence* (1090 feet, .21 miles, see Map 3, Feature J) This fence would be constructed on the east side of Reynolds Creek Road, parallel to the road, and would extend south from an ATV cattleguard directly opposite an identical ATV cattleguard on the other, (west), side of Reynolds Creek Road. (See map 3, feature K) The following, cattleguards, stiles (openings) and gates would be located along this fence:

a) Install a small opening (stile)in the eastern fence to allow for passage of ATV's and narrower vehicles, approximately 1/8 mile south of the northern end of the fence (see map 3, Feature L).

b) Install a large stile opening in the eastern fence to allow for passage of full-size vehicles, livestock, and wild horses at the southern end of the fence (See map 3, Feature M).

4) *Hemingway Butte Pasture Fence* (existing livestock management fence that, in its northern section, forms the western boundary of the HBPA and in its southern portions runs along the west side of Reynolds Creek Road). The following, cattleguards, stiles (openings) and gates would be installed, or are already in place:

a) Install an ATV cattleguard and a horse access gate in the Hemingway Butte Pasture Fence to facilitate OHV use along Reynolds Creek Road approximately 1.5 miles south of the HBPA. (See Map 4, Feature B)

b) 200 yards on either side of the ATV cattleguard/horse gate in a), above, install a full-size wire gate to allow for livestock management. (See Map 3, Feature C).

c) Retain gates and OHV cattleguards at two locations in the allotment fence along the western boundary of the HBPA; one at the northern end of the fence, another about 850' south of the first cattleguard/gate. Place a gate next to the existing OHV cattleguard at a third location in the fence about 150 'north of the power line. (See Map 3, Features P, Q, R).

5) *Hemingway Butte Northern Boundary Fence.* Reconstruct the existing fence that forms the boundary between public and private lands on the northern edge of the HBPA, but realign the fence so that it accurately divides surveyed property boundaries.

Road and Trail Management

a) Trail H402 - this trail segment would be relocated in order to make a more direct, safer crossing of Reynolds Creek Road by OHVs. The trail would be reconstructed about 75 feet to the south, and the old trail obliterated (This trail segment connects directly to maintained trail H400). See Map 3, Feature N).

b) Hemingway Butte Trailhead Access Road - this access road would be re-located to the northeast of its present location by about 550 feet. The existing trailhead portal sign and associated boulders would move with the road.(See 1, A., above).

c) Within the HBPA, reroute the current unnumbered trail that skirts the eastern edge of Hemingway Butte and is immediately adjacent to Reynolds Creek Road to the west, about 50 feet. Contour the new trail higher up Hemingway Butte to link the flat areas to the north of the Butte with more advanced riding areas to the south.(See Map 3, Feature O).

d) To protect the vulnerable Windy Point/Kane Springs Pipeline from further damage, vehicle access to the pipeline would be limited to the livestock permittees in that area, and to BLM administrative use. No motorized recreational use of the pipeline would be allowed, and locked gates blocking access to the pipeline would be placed at the proposed parking area in T.2S., R.3W., Section 2 (See Map 4, Feature E).

e) The additional identification, numbering, and maintenance of multiple-use trails in the HBPA area would be determined by another area wide-planning process and EA for the Heminway/Rabbit/Fossil Creek Management Subunit. Until that larger designation process is completed, only the current numbered trails leaving the HBPA would continue to be maintained.

Parking Management

Parking management efforts are intended to correct immediate safety and access problems that have developed along major access roads in the area. As recreation use has grown, the Owyhee County Sheriff's Department has seen numerous impromptu parking areas spring up along Reynolds Creek and Rabbit Creek Roads, often located dangerously close to through traffic, and often located on steep, uneven slopes, resulting in damage to vegetation and soil erosion, and sometimes blocking routes used by ranchers to move their livestock. In April of 2006, in an effort to control recreational parking-related problems within its road-right-of-ways, Owyhee County passed ordinances limiting parking to designated areas along Reynolds Creek and Rabbit Creek Roads, and reducing the vehicle speed limits along Reynolds Creek Road to 25 mph. By consolidating parking to just three areas on BLM lands south of Hemingway Butte, and as a result of Owyhee County's signage, patrol and enforcement of its ordinances along the road corridor, most vehicle parking would occur in safe, flat areas, reducing both the probability of vehicle accidents the development of new, unauthorized parking areas that would cause new disturbances to soil and vegetation.

The parking areas proposed in this EA are temporary, and would be re-evaluated during the route designation process for this area in 2006-2007. If that EA determines that the trails that link with the proposed parking areas are to be closed, the parking areas will be closed or relocated, perimeter fencing or rocks removed and the disturbed area re-seeded. Each of the three proposed parking areas would receive minimal development (leveling, signing and perimeter rock placement).

a) Eliminate an impromptu parking area on the west side of Reynolds Creek Road in T.1S., R3W., Sec. 26 NE1/4 SW1/4 NE1/4, approximately one mile south of the PP&L power line. Rip and reseed disturbed area with native vegetation, or closely-related cultivars. (See map 4, Feature A).

b) Establish a new designated parking area on the east side of Reynolds Creek Road in T. 1S., R3W., Sec. 35 SW1/4 NW1/4 NE1/4, approximately 1.75 miles south of the PP&L power line. The parking area would principally serve equestrian users and would be about 2 acres or less in size. The parking area perimeter would be delineated by barrier structures (e.g. rocks, posts or fence) to contain vehicles inside the parking area. Signs at this parking area would emphasize that the area was intended primarily for equestrian use and would request that other trail users conduct their activities in ways that minimized conflicts between users and minimized disturbance and maximized safety for equestrian users and wild horses. (See Feature D, and Map 5).

c) Establish a second parking area south of the Reynolds Creek Road near the Kane Springs/Windy Point pipeline in T. 2S., R. 3W., Sec.2, SE1/4 SW1/4 NW1/4, approximately 3.2 miles south of the PP&L power line that would also principally serve equestrian users. The perimeter of the parking area would be bounded by barrier structures (e.g. rocks, posts or fence), and would be less than 2 acres in size. Signs at this parking area would emphasize that the area was intended primarily for equestrian use and would request that other trail users conduct their activities in ways that minimized conflicts between users and minimized disturbance and maximized safety for equestrian users and wild horses. (see Map 3, Feature E, and Map 6).

(d) Establish a temporary parking area at the intersection of the Rabbit Creek Road and Black Mountain Road in T. 2S., R. 3W., Sec. 32 SE1/4 SE1/4. The perimeter of the parking area would be bounded by barrier structures (e.g. rocks, post, or fence), and would be less than 2 acres in size (see Map 4, Feature N, and Map 7).

Signing:

a) Install roadside portal signs (3) along the Reynolds Creek Road that can be read while traveling from either direction. Two of the signs would define the extent of the HBPA. The other sign would denote the beginning of the "limited use" area along Reynolds Creek Road, south of the HBPA boundary. The signs would meet the current National BLM sign standards, and would be mounted on two-posted steel bases that are erected outside the Owyhee County right-of-way.

b) Install trailside regulatory signs at each of the trail ingress/egress points paralleling the Reynolds Creek Road and along the Hemingway Butte Pasture Fence. The signs would ask trail users to stay on maintained numbered and unnumbered trail routes after they leave the HBPA. Additional signs would include general information regarding wild horse herd area management and requirements to leave gates as they are found.

c) Install two (2) informational kiosks on the flat terrain within the HBPA administrative fence in the vicinity of trail stiles (gaps) for Trail H100 and H402. The kiosk would disseminate educational and regulatory information on acceptable user behavior on public lands within the Hemingway Butte Play Area and acceptable behavior once past the boundary of the HBPA. Additionally at the kiosk locations, general information and maps regarding wild horse herd area management and requirements to leave gates as they are found would be provided.

d) Install an informational kiosk on the flat terrain just outside the HBPA boundary (east of Reynolds Creek Road) in the vicinity of the Trail H100 and H300 trail junction. The kiosk would disseminate educational and regulatory information on how to behave on public lands in the Owyhee Front Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) outside of the HBPA. Additionally at the kiosk locations, general information and maps

regarding wild horse herd area management and requirements to leave gates as they are found would be provided.

e) Install three (3) additional "HILL CLIMBING PROHIBITED" signs at the base of the buttes just east of the Reynolds Creek Road.

f) Coordinate with the Owyhee County Sheriff's Office and other County agencies to install roadway regulatory signs along the Reynolds Creek Road which would prohibit OHV travel along the road, and would warn motorists of OHV cross-traffic.

g) Install signs at all wild horse herd management gates which would indicate trails as open or closed and requirements for leaving gates as they are found. These signs would also include specific dates for when gates would be opened and closed for livestock management and free wild horse movement purposes.

Mitigation

1) Gates will be installed along the southern and western sides of the HBPA fence to allow for free-wild horse movements through the 192-acre HBPA area. These gates would remain open yearlong except during the East Reynolds Creek and Hardtrigger allotments authorized livestock use periods (April 1-May 15).

2) Instead of fully developing the three new parking areas, each will contain minimal facility development necessary to safely accommodate recreation use and improve public safety. Each parking area will be ringed by boulders to prevent enlargement by vehicles, will contain a kiosk with safety, directional and ethics information, and the none of the areas will be graveled. The parking areas proposed in this EA are temporary, and would be re-evaluated during the route designation process for this area in 2006-2007.

3) Each OHV cattleguard installed in the HBPA Reynolds Creek Boundary Fence, the HBPA Southern Boundary Fence, the Hemingway Butte/Reynolds Creek Road East Fence, and the Hemingway Butte Pasture Fence would be modified with rebar tofacilitate safer passage of wild horses and reduce the probability of leg injury.

4) Additional signs, kiosks, educational materials, and maps regarding wild horse herd management would be included at the trailhead, parking areas, gates and at other staging areas to help improve public awareness about wild horse management within the Hardtrigger HMA.

Monitoring

Monitor the effectiveness of the actions adopted in this environmental assessment in the following ways and with the following frequencies:

1) Each year, February through November, BLM will walk or ride the perimeter of the Hemingway Butte Play Area enclosure fence to insure that the fence, gates, stiles, signs and kiosks are in place, functional, and that they are effective in accomplishing their intended purpose, including allowing easier passage of wild horses through the HBPA. Repairs or modifications of facilities required will be accomplished quickly after they are noted.

2) Each year, February through November, BLM will inventory roads and trails within a one-half mile radius of the HBPA to determine if new, unauthorized routes have been established. Unauthorized routes will be signed and physically closed.

3) Each February through November, BLM will inventory roads and trails within a one-half mile radius of each of the three new parking areas to determine if new, unauthorized routes have been established. Unauthorized routes will be signed and physically closed. The condition and effectiveness of parking area facilities, including rock barriers, signs and kiosks will also be assessed, and repairs or modifications required to make them functional will be accomplished after they are noted.

4) BLM will monitor use of the HBPA by wild horses annually. After four years, depending on whether or not wild horse use is detected, BLM could consider removing facilities or modify existing facilities to further mitigate for wild horses.

2. No Action Alternative

The No Action alternative would continue current management. Existing numbered trail segment H402 would remain open, and would be maintained at its present location for access into surrounding Owyhee Front Management Area lands. The roadside signs described under signing, in the Proposed Action would be installed as previously designed and located, but since there would be no additional fencing, there would be no clear delineation of the HBPA boundary. Three "HILL CLIMBING PROHIBITED" signs at the base of the buttes east of Reynolds Creek Road would be installed as part of the long-standing efforts to mitigate for unauthorized OHV hill climbing activities.

CHAPTER 3 - AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. PHYSICAL FACTORS

1. Soils

The soils in the project area formed in alluvium and residuum-derived sedimentary materials (dominantly lacustrine) and welded rhyolitic tuffs. Soil profile characteristics have been influenced by wind deposited materials (loess) which is the major source of carbonates in the area. These soils are shallow to very deep and well-drained to excessively drained. They are chiefly composed of sand, loam, and calcareous loam in a variety of texture combinations. Risk from wind erosion in these soils is slight to high and the risk of water erosion ranges from slight to severe. Erosion from water is the primary concern and occurs in the form of sheet, rill, and gully processes. OHV use has accelerated erosion on hill slopes in the area, leading to severe rill and gully erosion in some instances. Landform features within the project area are slopes, swales and terraces.

B. BIOLOGICAL FACTORS

1. Vegetation

The plant communities associated with the area's soils are characterized by salt-desert shrub and Wyoming big sagebrush overstories with ricegrass, needlegrass, squirreltail, and Sandberg bluegrass understories. Vegetation within the project area is in generally poor condition, in part attributable to years of relatively uncontrolled OHV activity in the area, particularly near the popular Hemingway Butte trailhead. Native vegetation has adapted to survive in low precipitation ranges and periods of drought, but is unable to survive severe, frequent OHV-related damages including soil compaction during periods of critical growth, and direct impacts as a result of vehicles repeatedly flattening and breaking shrubs and grasses in their line of travel.

2. Wildlife

The project area contains winter and spring habitat for pronghorn antelope and mule deer and yearlong or seasonal habitat for a large diversity of raptors, other non-game birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians.

A number of species classified as BLM "Sensitive Species" or State of Idaho "Species of Special Concern" are also known or likely to occur within the project area. These include prairie falcon, ferruginous hawk, loggerhead shrike, sage sparrow, Brewer's sparrow, Piute ground squirrel, Mojave black-collared lizard, longnose snake, western ground snake, western toad, Wodhouse's toad, and possibly others. Several other species that are included on the BLM "Watch List" including the burrowing owl and long-billed curlew are also known to nest in the immediate vicinity.

3. Wild Horses

The project area is located within the northernmost end of the Black Mountain wild horse herd management area (see HBPA Overview Map1). In accordance with the 1999 Owyhee Resource Management Plan (1999 ORMP), BLM is to manage for a viable wild horse population range between 30-60 head, with an appropriate management level (AML) of 45 head. Population estimates as of the spring 2006 for the Black Mountain HMA, are estimated to be approximately 45 wild horses (estimates made before March 2006-the general start of the next foaling season). Wild horse foaling areas have been observed south of the Hemingway Butte Play Area at mid to high elevation (3200-5000 feet) away from Reynolds Creek Road and other areas associated with heavy recreational use. Other identified foaling areas located at similar elevations include Windy Point Peak and its associated mountainous terrain from Soldiers Cap (in the Hardtrigger HMA) to Kane Springs. Wild horses within this HMA are known to traditionally range from the headwaters of Rabbit Creek at the southern end to the higher elevations of Hemingway Butte at the northern end. Census flights and ground counts conducted since 1999 support that the wild horse key use areas within this HMA include: Roan Springs, Little Kane Springs, Rabbit Creek, and Moores Creek (USDI-BLM-Owyhee Field Office, 1999-2006). Wild horses have been observed in the Roan Spring and Little Kane Springs area year long. Horses tend to stay in the higher elevations of Moores Creek and Rabbit Creek until winter weather forces them to the lower elevations of Moores Creek and Kane Springs. Map 8 – Wild Horse Winter Use Locations, identifies wild horse winter use areas as they were identified in the 1999 Owyhee Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Over time, wild horses have responded to the heavier recreational use areas around the Rabbit Creek and Hemingway Butte trailheads by avoiding these areas. Wild horses are consistently found within the rougher terrain of Reynolds Creek Canyon (approximately 5-7 miles southwest of the Hemingway Butte trailhead).

In the management of wild horses, it is critical to minimize livestock grazing and recreation impacts (including both casual and competitive recreational uses) on herds both during the winter months and the peak foaling season. Grazing permits associated with both the East Reynolds Creek and Hardtrigger allotments (which overlap with the Black Mountain HMA) contain Terms and Conditions which require that grazing permittees open gates located along interior fencelines found within the Black Mountain HMA within 15 days of the end of the grazing season for each pasture. This Term and Condition currently applies to the western fenceline (Hemingway Butte Pasture – Hardtrigger Allotment #516) of the HBPA proposed action alternative of this EA. The peak foaling season is between March 1 and June 30 within all of the Owyhee Resource HMAs (1999 Owyhee Final EIS). During the foaling season, it is critical that recreation activities within the HMAs are minimized (1999 Owyhee Final EIS). BLM has observed that harassment of wild horses during this season can directly impact a mare's success in foaling, foal survival rates, and mare-foal separation.

The Bureau of Land Management is required to manage healthy and sustainable wild horse populations in accordance with the Wild and Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 (PL92-195, as amended). This Law requires the BLM to: (1) to provide protection, management and control of wild horses on public lands; (2) manage wild horses in the area where presently

found (as of 1971), as an integral part of the natural system of public lands; (3) manage for a thriving natural ecological balance and as self-sustaining populations in balance with other uses and the productive capacity of their habitat; and (4) undertake management activities affecting wild horses with the goal of maintaining wild horse free-roaming behavior.

The 1999 Owyhee Resource Management Plan, Wild Horse Management objective WHRS 1, Management Actions and Allocations, item 6 states, “Manage for recreational opportunities and experiences within HMAs through coordination with affected parties and route designation, while protection wild and free-roaming behavior of wild horses within HMAs.”

C. SOCIAL FACTORS

1. Recreation

<u>The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum:</u>

The BLM uses an inventory concept known as the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) to define the type of recreation opportunities and settings available in a planning area based upon the proximity of lands to road and trail travel corridors. For a more detailed description, refer to the recreation portion of the Owyhee Resource Management Plan/EIS (1999) to find details on how roads define a variety of opportunities, settings, and recreation experiences ranging from "Roaded Natural", "Semi-primitive Motorized", "Semi-primitive Non-motorized", and "Primitive" within the Owyhee Field Office (see 1999 ORMP Map RECT-1).

The HBPA is a developed recreation site that provides a "roaded natural" setting within a 192-acre area that offers opportunities for hill climbing and OHV play by motorcycles and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), and some 4WD trucks. Roaded natural experiences usually occur in proximity to major travel corridors, such as the Reynolds Creek Road corridor, where higher volumes of traffic and visitor use lead to more intensive development of recreation facilities. In a roaded natural areas, users might typically encounter a well-signed, mapped, and over a portion of the area, groomed motorized trail experience, with moderate to high levels of use. Signs occur at fairly regular intervals, and the establishment of a variety of loop trail opportunities for various OHV user skill levels and vehicle types is emphasized. Regulatory and enforcement personnel may be frequently encountered. Dominant experience opportunities provided in a roaded natural area include interaction with individuals and groups at densities higher than in most other ROS categories, and a moderate to high level of risk and challenge typical to motorized sports. There is heavy recreation use of the HBPA, especially in the cooler months in spring and fall. The trailhead is used as a staging area for organized events (races) as well as for casual users.

The part of the Owyhee Front Management Area outside, but within ½ mile of the Hemingway Butte Play area is designated as a "limited use" area, and, like the HBPA, provides roaded natural settings and experiences. On the relatively flat terrain in proximity of the Reynolds Creek Road a tightly linked interconnecting web of unauthorized OHV trails and ATV/motorcycle racing loops has developed that eventually leads OHV users to a series of unauthorized hill climbs up nearby buttes or ridgelines.

At a distance of one-half to one mile southeast of the Reynolds Creek Road, the ROS environment changes to a "semi-primitive motorized" setting. Within semi-primitive motorized settings, recreation users seek out and expect a more natural landscape in which to enjoy OHV riding experiences. Here, the rider encounters fewer people, sees fewer regulatory signs or personnel, and experiences more solitude and interaction with nature than he would in a roaded natural setting. Normally, in these areas, the trail web begins to thin to a low density network. Concentration of visitors is lower, and signage and the presence of regulatory and enforcement personnel are less frequent than in roaded natural areas. In the past, this area was characterized by readily distinguishable, individual, narrow-width trails. But today, uncontrolled, heavy vehicle use has extended the web-like maze of trails from HBPA and its immediate environs into this area, transforming it from its intended, semi-primitive motorized ROS setting, to a roaded natural setting.

OHMV Designations:

The Owyhee Resource Management Plan (ORMP)/EIS, Recreation Objective RECT 1 determined that off-highway motorized vehicle (OHMV) use would be "limited" to only designated roads and trails on all public lands within the Owyhee Front SRMA, except within the Hemingway Butte Play Area. The Play Area is designated as "open" to cross-country travel by OHVs.

Road and Trail Inventories and Conditions:

The Owyhee Field Office has completed an inventory of all existing roads and trails found within the Owyhee Front SRMA, including those in the Hemingway Butte area. Trail conditions facing ATV and motorcycle users throughout the Owyhee Front, particularly in the semi-primitive motorized settings, in the vicinity of Hemingway Butte and Rabbit Creek, are generally poor because of high use and the lack of a comprehensive trail maintenance program.

In 2004, the Owyhee Field Office started an annual trail maintenance program on the Owyhee Front, as authorized by the Road and Trail Maintenance Decision/EA #ID-01094017. This DR/EA authorizes up to 100 miles of trail maintenance in the Boise District per year. To some extent, trail maintenance has helped to keep OHVs on the existing, numbered trail system, though it has not entirely stopped the formation of new, unauthorized trails that contribute the expanding trail web that has spread southeastward from Reynolds Creek Road. A more extensive and systematic trail maintenance program for this area will be addressed in a route designation EA for the popular Hemingway/Rabbit Creek/Fossil Creek areas scheduled to begin later in 2006.

2. Visual Resource Quality

Visual resource management (VRM) classifications are developed to establish guidelines for the levels and types of visually disturbing activities that would be allowed within each classification. Road and trail travel corridors play a major role in determining VRM classifications by defining

the level of sensitivity the managing agency must consider due to the amount of public travel through the road or trail corridor. In general, the more use of a travel corridor, the more visual sensitivity needed in designing a project. Also, the more scenic a natural landscape is, especially in major travel corridors, the greater the concern for visual resources. Consequently, highly scenic, well-traveled road and trail corridors usually rate a higher VRM classification such as VRM Class II, or III, than would a less scenic and more lightly-traveled corridor which would generally rank out as a lower, VRM Class IV area. The visual resource section of the Owyhee RMP/EIS (1999) described the various VRM classifications assigned to public lands in southwest Idaho. By reviewing the VRMs contained in the 1999 Owyhee RMP, it can be seen how road corridors affect VRM classifications (see 1999 ORMP Map VISL-1).

The HBPA (including the trailhead site) lies within the Reynolds Creek Road and Highway 78 viewshed and possesses features of only moderate scenic value. This area would normally be rated as VRM Class IV. However, because the viewshed receives a high level of travel along the Reynolds Creek Road and Highway 78 corridor, it has a high level of sensitivity and is therefore assigned a higher, more protective Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class III rating.

The recreation facilities developments at the Hemingway Butte Trailhead site as presently designed have no impact to visual resources when viewed from Highway 78 (a key observation point or KOP), but the hill climbs of the surrounding HBPA are readily visible. Across Reynolds Creek Road, developing OHV hill climbing scars and unauthorized ATV/motorcycle tracks have been causing notable adverse impact to scenic quality when viewed by those driving the Reynolds Creek Road.

3. Cultural Resources

The Hemingway Butte area has attracted OHV users for over thirty years, but it was not until 1988 that the first cultural resources inventory of the area was completed to assess the presence of historic properties. Another more intensive inventory occurred in 1998. Both reported negative findings. The long term and ever-increasing popularity of the location may play some role in the dearth of historic material. The sparse growth or total lackof vegetation over large expanses facilitate surface collecting by visiting recreationists. Conversely, there may not have been any indicators of past human use left behind in this general area or they may be buried beneath the compacted sediments.

D. ECONOMIC FACTORS

1. Rangeland Resources

The HBPA is proposed within East Reynolds Creek Grazing Allotment (#651) – Pasture 1 (see HBPA Overview Map1). Currently, two active BLM grazing permits authorizing livestock grazing in this allotment exist. The two grazing operators are Jaca Livestock c/o Elias Jaca and Chipmunk Grazing Association. The authorized season of use in pasture 1 is April 5 through May 10, annually. The primary source of livestock water for pasture 1 is provided by the Kane-Windy Point Pipeline (see HBPA Overview Map1). This pipeline functions over a 12 mile

reach, from its two sources located at Kane Spring and the Windy Point Well to the south to a single watering trough located in the Rabbit Creek/Peters Gulch Allotment (#517) in the north. This pipeline is critical for watering over 450 cattle during the spring use period in pasture 1. Numbered trail H400, and associated trail H402, run along, in proximity or over the top of the Kane-Windy Point Pipeline. The use of the pipeline as an OHV trail came about when the public adopted the pipeline's maintenance route as a recreation "trail." This adoption has resulted in an ongoing decline in the overall condition of the pipeline system because of soil erosion, the breakage of exposed section of pipe by OHV traffic, and, on occasion, the deliberate vandalism of the pipeline system components (valve access ports and watering troughs). During the 2005 winter period, BLM in cooperation with the grazing permittees has completed maintenance, reconstruction, and replacement of many of the old water troughs across the majority of the pipeline's reach.

2. Social-Economic

According to the 2003 Regional Economic Impact Model of Owyhee County, Idaho and the Four County Area Including Ada, Canyon, Elmore, and Owyhee Counties, relatively few purchases are made in Owyhee County as a direct result of OHV activity despite the high use of the Hemingway Butte Trailhead and other OHV recreation sites in the area. However, sales of recreational OHVs, as well as sales of related services and accessories are growing contributors to the regional economy of southwestern Idaho. Between the years 2000 and 2004, registrations of OHV motorcycles and ATVs increased at a rate far above the rate of regional population growth. OHV registrations grew 69.9% in southwestern Idaho over all, and increased 60% in Ada County, 95.8% in Canyon County, and 78% in Elmore County (http://www.idahoparks.org/pdf/2000-2004mbatv.pdf), three counties whose citizens represent a large share of the recreational users of public lands in Owyhee County. Within Owyhee County, high levels of OHV recreation in and around Hemingway Butte have resulted in un-reimbursed County expenditures in law enforcement, search and rescue, and other emergency response efforts.

Growing levels of OHV recreation have also degraded the quiet atmosphere that local rural residents and public land permittees who live and work near Hemingway Butte once enjoyed. During weekends in the spring and fall, high levels of recreation use have sometimes resulted in periods of frequent high decibel noise from OHV operation, OHV-generated dust, littering, trespass on adjacent private lands, harassment and displacement of livestock, and damages to livestock fences, troughs and pipelines, on both private and public lands.

CHAPTER 4 - ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. PROPOSED ACTION ALTERNATIVE

1. PHYSICAL FACTORS

a. Soils

The projects proposed in this alternative, including the establishment of clear boundaries around the HBPA, will help to contain impacts to the soil resource by reducing the rate of spread of illegally-established OHV trails across the landscape surrounding the HBPA.

The proposed action would help limit the spread of a variety of impacts to soils on thousands of acres of public lands by more effectively containing unrestricted cross-country use within the HBPA, and reducing its occurrence outside, thereby limiting and reducing a range of impacts related to cross-country travel including loss of vegetation, increases in soil compaction, reduction in the soil's water holding capacity, infiltration, reduction in groundwater recharge and increases in surface runoff resulting in rill, gully and trench erosion. The establishment of three parking areas will result in some additional, localized soil disturbance, but by establishing designated parking and channeling recreation use onto already established trails, less random, unauthorized trail development is likely to occur in the area, reducing the levels of new disturbance to soils.

2. BIOLOGICAL FACTORS

a. Vegetation

Under the Proposed Action, impacts to plant communities outside the HBPA including soil compaction during periods of critical growth, and direct impacts to vegetation as a result of vehicles repeatedly flattening and breaking shrubs and grasses in their line of travel would be reduced by channeling OHV access onto public lands through just a few places in the newly-built fences, where users would be directed onto the numbered, signed and maintained trail system. At each of these entry points, as they were forced to reduce speed as they crossed a cattleguard, OHV users leaving the HBPA would encounter kiosks displaying rules, regulations, maps, and information about trail conditions and available recreation opportunities. The creation of this well-signed and maintained system would lead to somewhat less cross-country OHV use and, consequently, reduced impacts to soils and vegetation. By limiting most OHV users to established trails and reducing the amount of cross-country travel, the likelihood of OHV-created wildfire would also be reduced.

Because it is already designated as an Open area in the Owyhee Land Use Plan, vegetation within 192-acre HBPA will continue decline in both health and numbers under any alternative. The eventual loss of most perennial vegetation in the HBPA would result in an increase in exotic

annual plant species. Without regular weed treatment, exotic annuals could spread to the surrounding areas.

b.Wildlife

This alternative will result in some minor short-term disturbance of wildlife populations and habitat during construction activities, but it is expected to reduce population disturbance and habitat destruction over the long term, outside the fenced area, by reducing unauthorized off-trail activity and encouraging the use of designated parking areas.

c. Wild Horses

Under this alternative, approximately 1.5 miles of new fence would be constructed to segregate the authorized play area from the remaining rangelands. Other projects associated with this alternative include installing gates along the fence(s), installing OHV style cattleguards modified to allow for safer horse passage, and placing kiosks and signs at key entry points and at gates locations. The new fences in the short term would have an impact on movements into previously unfenced HMA rangelands. However, in the long term, and as long as the identified mitigation is adhered to, impacts would be expected to be minimized once wild horses become familiar with open gate locations (found along the western and southern fenceline of the HBPA). Compliance assuring that these gates are opened is important to mitigate for wild horse movements in and out of the HBPA. OHV use along the Reynolds Creek Road and trailhead parking area (along the east end of the HBPA) is expected to force wild horses to the opposite fenceline (along the west end of the HBPA) when wild horses are within the HBPA project area. With this in mind, wild horses should be able to exit the HBPA along the western fenceline where the least amount of OHV/recreation activity would be expected to exist. Regardless, it has been well documented that since before 1999, wild horses have become accustomed to avoiding the Hemingway Butte area in its entirety, regardless of season (USDI-BLM-Owyhee Field Office, 1999-2006). This trend is expected to continue as the overall degree of OHV activity near the HBPA continues to increase. Fencing and improved regulation of OHV accessibility would actually decrease interactions between wild horses and recreationists and help eliminate further degradation to wild horse habitat with more restrictions on OHV use outside of the HBPA. This alternative would decrease the proliferation of new OHV trails and disturbances into occupied wild horse habitats found to the south of the Hemingway Butte trailhead during the critical foaling season (generally March through June) at the mid to high elevations. Such mid-elevation areas include Windy Point Peak and its associated mountainous terrain from Soldiers Cap (in the Hardtrigger HMA) to Kane Springs. Containing cross-country use within the HBPA in the northern most portion of the Black Mountain HMA would help decrease the occurrence of human encounters with wild horses during the foaling season. In addition, wild horse herd management information and additional signs would be provided at the boundaries exiting the HBPA to better educate recreational uses about the importance in avoiding human encounters with wild horses outside of the play area boundaries, specifically during the foaling season.

Construction of three parking areas along Reynolds Creek and Rabbit Creek Roads using natural materials including large boulders would not impact wild horse use of or movement through the area. The construction of parking areas would help funnel OHV use onto existing trails, and reduce the formation of new trails in relatively undisturbed rangelands, thereby reducing impacts to wild horse habitat and enhancing overall rangeland health.

Under this alternative, the levels of human encounters with wild horses would be expected to decrease, particularly during the foaling season. In the long term, coupled with subsequent route designation efforts in the future, this alternative would be expected to improve BLM's control of OHV expansion into the more intact habitats of the Black Mountain HMA. This alternative would not be expected to hinder the management of wild horses, nor would it hinder the maintenance or improvement of the rangeland ecosystem. Actions under this alternative would not be expected to adversely impact distribution of wild horse free-roaming behavior within the HMA. The requirement to leave gates open after the livestock use period has been completed would allow for wild horse movements in and out the HBPA, especially during the winter months when the greatest potential could exist for wild horses to actually use the HBPA.

Cumulative Impacts

Over the long-term, this alternative would help BLM achieve and maintain multiple use objectives throughout the Reynolds Creek watershed. Implementation of the Proposed Action would provide moderate improvements to rangeland health and the health of the Black Mountain and Hardtrigger wild horse herds. Increased control of recreation (OHV) activities through a combination of facility development, signing, education, and enforcement would decrease OHV interactions with wild horses and would provide some improvements in preserving their free roaming nature throughout the Black Mountain and Hardtrigger HMAs. In addition, once trail and route designation actions are implemented, interactions and inadvertent harassment of wild free-roaming horses found within the Reynolds Creek watershed are anticipated to further decrease, and rangeland health is expected to improve.

3. SOCIAL FACTORS

a. Recreation

The Proposed Action for the HBPA and other closely associated Owyhee Front lands would enhance or stabilize the overall long-term quality of both "roaded natural" and "semi-primitive motorized" experiences for both ATV and motorcycle users.

The principal facility development (fencing) and associated regulatory/information signing at trail stiles for the HBPA would help confine cross-country travel activities within a well defined 192-acre area The HBPA would continue to be fully open for cross-country and hill climbing experiences on ATVs, MCs and trucks, and even snowmobiles during those infrequent winter periods where there is sufficient snow to operate. On adjoining Owyhee Front lands, just east of the Reynolds Creek Road, ATVs and motorcycles would be provided continued hill climbing experiences via Trails H100, H300, and the H400 series, but they would be limited or restricted

to specific numbered trail segments rather than to random use, as dictated by information contained on the kiosk to be located at the junction of Trail H100 and H300, and on the kiosks within the HBPA itself. The public would be prohibited from expanding random hill climbing experiences to the southeast into semi-primitive motorized settings. The placement of OHV cattleguards and narrow width stiles in the new fences would funnel OHV use from the HBPA onto the groomed, numbered trail system at just a few well-signed locations, and would discourage the random formation of new trails.

The relocation of the trailhead access road and delineation of OHV road crossing areas would further improve public safety by providing vehicle access in and out of the HBPA in locations that gave recreational users of the Play Area as well as drivers along Reynolds Creek Road a longer, unobstructed view of the road so that accidents involving full-size motor vehicles and OHVs could be more easily avoided. The establishment of three temporary parking areas south of the HBPA along or near Reynolds Creek Road, and the closure of one existing parking area would provide users of the extensive trail system to the south and east of Hemingway Butte safe, legal parking at major trail junctions, off of the heavily-trafficked Reynolds Creek and Rabbit Creek Roads, and would limit the formation of new, unauthorized parking areas along these major transportation routes. The closure of the Windy Point/Kane Springs pipeline to recreational vehicle use would marginally reduce recreational OHV opportunity, but would help protect and maintain a water delivery system crucial to effective livestock management in the East Reynolds Creek Grazing Allotment.

Cumulative Impacts:

Hemingway Butte Play Area is an increasingly attractive destination for OHV enthusiasts across the Treasure Valley because it is one of the few remaining areas available for legal cross-country travel experiences in southwest Idaho. Across the west there has been a steady erosion of opportunities for unrestricted cross-country travel which had been commonly enjoyed by ATV, motorcycle and truck users of public lands in the past. Given the emerging shift in public support towards the establishment of designated travel systems for all public lands across the west, it is likely that the HBPA is likely to experience more intensive use as fewer cross-country OHV areas are available and regional population grows. In spite of the modest improvements in control of unauthorized cross-country use outside the HBPA that would result from this action, rising OHV use will continue to challenge the vigilance and resources of BLM and Owyhee County as they attempt to contain cross-country OHV use within the HBPA.

Recreationally, this area of the Owyhee Front is dominantly used for OHV recreation, and has been for at least 30 years. Though the area in and around Hemingway Butte is nominally available for non-motorized recreation, these uses have been effectively pushed elsewhere on the Owyhee Front, most notably, into the 28,000 acre Wilson Creek area to the west, and to other areas of Owyhee County to the south. Nothing proposed in this alternative would change the dominance of OHV recreation in this area.

Current projections for 2030 population in the ten county southwest Idaho region are for about one million people, an approximate doubling of current population.(COMPASS, 2006) Much of

that growth will occur in Canyon and Ada Counties, and a significant part of that growth will occur in areas that are currently undeveloped, low-density, and rural in character, including some areas that are very near the Snake River and Owyhee County. Should population growth and development occur as predicted, it would place much of the Owyhee Front virtually in the backyard of many of the Treasure Valley's 2030 residents. If the growth in OHV uses merely parallels the anticipated growth in population, there would be twice as many OHVs using public lands in 2030 than at present. However, OHV sales and registration in southwest Idaho have actually grown much more rapidly than population. Between 2000 and 2005, OHV registrations in southwest Idaho rose by 69.9% over all, and increased 60% in Ada County, 95.8% in Canyon County, and 78% in Elmore County (http://www.idahoparks.org/pdf/2000-2004mbatv.pdf), three counties whose citizens represent a large share of the recreational users of public lands in Owyhee County. Across Idaho and the West, OHV recreation is an important and growing recreation use. An Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation survey estimates that 33.7% of adult Idahoans now participate in ATV activities as well as 20.4% of Idaho's children. (IDPR, 2004)

The upcoming Hemingway Butte/Rabbit Creek/Fossil Creek Route Designation/Transportation Plan when implemented, would restrict recreational OHV use to signed, designated trails and should further reduce impacts to natural and cultural resources and to local landowners by closing redundant or poorly located trails, drastically reducing the formation of new trails, maintaining major connector routes and providing loop opportunities for OHV users, designing trail systems that avoid the most vulnerable and undisturbed areas, educating and informing the public with signage throughout the trail system, and providing higher levels of enforcement and public contact.

The effects of the Proposed Action would, in a small way, help continue those improving trends in recreation experience and resource condition. However, the activities associated with this Proposed Action would not significantly change the level, type, or pattern of use this area receives. As such, it should have no direct or indirect cumulative impacts on physical, natural, or cultural resources, or socio-economic factors.

b. Visual Resource Quality

From both of the Reynolds Creek Road KOPs, travelers along this roadway encounter a landscape that has had its scenic quality severely degraded by extensive OHV activities over the past 40 years. Nothing in the Proposed Action would stabilize or reverse the degradation to scenic quality that occurs from hill climbing activities on and around Hemingway Butte, within the HBPA. Efforts identified in the Proposed Action would stop and eventually reverse OHV caused visual degradation that is viewable on the series of ridges and buttes southeast of the Reynolds Creek Road KOPs. Helping to stop or restrict unauthorized OHV travel up steep slopes that are readily visible from Reynolds Creek Road would eventually eliminate the sharp contrast in line,

form, color and texture between naturally vegetated slopes and barren hill climb routes, but because of the arid growing environment of the area, such improvements in visual quality would occur slowly, and over a long (more than 20 years) period of time.

Cumulative Impacts

Efforts in containing cross-country OHV use within the HBPA, combined with other efforts at curtailing unauthorized hill climbing areas along the Highway 78 travel corridor should eventually make improvements in the Owyhee Front's overall visual quality. However, because of the arid growing environment that prevails in this area, any improvements in visual quality would be slow, and would only become noticeable to the average observer in the very long term (20-50 years).

c. Cultural Resources

Inventory of areas where soil disturbance would occur as a result of actions planned in the Proposed Action including construction of fencelines, parking areas, and placement of kiosks and signs yielded no evidence of cultural resources. On the basis of the negative results of this inventory, it is judged that implementation of the Proposed Action would have no direct, negative impacts on cultural resources.

Cumulative Impacts

The imposition of controls on OHV use in the Proposed Action, including fencing, stile openings, signs and informational kiosks should reduce the incidence of cross-country travel in the area outside the HBPA, and thereby reduce potential future impacts to cultural resources.

4. ECONOMIC FACTORS

a. Rangeland Resources

The activities associated with this project are anticipated to have a minimal impact on the level and distribution of livestock use in the area. Livestock and recreation users have been interacting in this pasture for many years, and the actions outlined in this alternative are not introducing any new activities into an area where these activities didn't exist in the past. Ever since the increase in overall recreational use during the spring season in this area (over the past ten year period), livestock distribution has been altered. The implementation of the actions associated with this alternative would be expected to slow the expansion of impacts to livestock grazing distribution. Currently, during the spring recreational use period while cattle are in pasture 1, livestock tend to avoid the areas near the trailhead. Projects in the Proposed Action designed to keep OHV riders on trails and reduce the intensity of OHV activities outside the HBPA should result in positive effects on each grazing permittees' livestock operations.

Currently, the rangeland health conditions on public lands near the play area are poor, dominated by exotic and invasive plant species. During the month of April, as green-up of cheatgrass and

other weedy grasses and forbs occurs in the lower elevations along the Owyhee Front, cattle are drawn to the lush new growth of some of these plant species. However, cattle only graze within these areas when OHV activities are not occurring. Once spring season weather conditions begin to persist, usually during late March and April, the OHV activities in these areas begin to intensify. When this occurs, cattle tend to move out of the lower elevations and move to higher elevations to the south. The construction of the new fences and installing cattleguards in and around the HBPA should not have any additional impacts to livestock distribution during the April use period since cattle generally tend to avoid areas surrounding the HBPA as OHV activities intensify each spring. The installation of gates and cattleguards in the new fences near the HBPA would help minimize opportunities for the fenced areas to trap cattle within the play area.

Under this alternative, the Kane Springs-Windy Point Pipeline route would be closed to recreational motorized use, but could be used by BLM for administrative motorized access and occasionally for grazing permittees to maintain and repair the pipeline and related facilities. The pipeline route would also be open to non-motorized recreational uses. This action would help reduce damage to the pipeline and further help facilitate effective livestock management in pasture 1. With the closure of the pipeline roads to OHVs, positive financial and multiple use benefits would be expected to occur. By eliminating the use of the pipeline roads to OHV activities, fewer dollars would be required annually for maintenance and reconstruction from both the BLM and permittees. Furthermore, the closure would reduce the potential for the spread of OHV use into more critical habitats and rangelands that are currently OHV trail-free.

b. Social-Economic Factors

By imposing controls including perimeter fencing of the Open area with well-defined exit points; creation of a well-signed and maintained route system, and placement of informational, regulatory, and directional information at key exit points, illegal cross-country travel would be reduced in areas directly surrounding the Hemingway Butte Play area. This reduction in cross-country use would reduce the noise, dust, livestock harassment, vandalism and private-land trespass problems that are currently affecting local residents and permittees during the highest OHV use periods in the spring and fall.

Cumulative Impacts

The effects of the Proposed Action would, in a small way, help reduce the negative effects of intensive OHV recreation on local ranching operations as well as on other socio-economic interests. However, the activities associated with this Proposed Action would not significantly change the level, type, or pattern of use this area receives. As such, it should have no direct or indirect cumulative impacts on physical, natural, or cultural resources, or socio-economic factors

C. NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

1. PHYSICAL FACTORS

a. Soils

Under this alternative, impacts to soils related to unregulated cross-country travel would include increases in soil compaction, reduction in the soil's water holding capacity, infiltration, reduction in groundwater recharge and increases in surface runoff resulting in rill, gully and trench erosion.

These impacts to soil resources would continue to intensify and spread to an ever-larger geographic area due to: 1) the lack of a clear identifiable boundary fence separating the HBPA Open designation from surrounding areas where vehicles are legally limited to a route system; 2) the lack of controlled road crossing and entry points; 3) the lack of established parking areas with clear boundaries, and; 4) the lack of a coordinated sign and kiosk system to inform users of the rules of use.

2. BIOLOGICAL FACTORS

a. Vegetation

Adoption of the No Action Alternative would result in the continuation of impacts to vegetation in the areas surrounding the HBPA, particularly the area to the southeast. These impacts include increasing loss of perennial vegetation up to ten miles south of the HBPA and within one to three miles on either side of the Reynolds Creek Road, leading to increased wind and rain erosion on soils already at high risk, and increased risk of OHV-caused wildfire as users pioneer new routes through areas of heavy fuels. The long-term effects of this will be the reduction of the soils' ability to support perennial vegetation and an increase in exotic annual plant species. Without regular weed treatment, these effects could also have negative impacts on ever larger areas of public lands by allowing exotic annuals to thrive and spread to surrounding areas.

Such impacts would be likely to occur due to the lack of a clear identifiable boundary fence separating the HBPA Open designation from surrounding areas where vehicles are legally limited to a route system, the lack of controlled road crossing and entry points, the lack of established parking areas with clear boundaries, and the lack of a coordinated sign and kiosk system to inform users of the rules of use.

b. Wildlife

This alternative will result in the continued degradation of wildlife special species habitat and disturbance resulting from unauthorized OHV activities outside of the designated open use area.

c. Wild Horses

Under the No Action Alternative negative impacts to wild horse populations in the Black Mountain HMA would be expected to persist and increase over time. Because the Owyhee Front is within easy driving distance of Idaho's largest and fastest-growing urban area, recreation use, particularly motorized use is likely to rapidly increase. If recreational use in the Hemingway Butte Area continues under the current management practices, the current network of user-built trails would likely spread to the south and into the remaining wild horse habitats (including foaling areas currently found at the mid and upper elevations of pasture 1 of East Reynolds Creek Allotment). An increase in OHV interactions with wild horses, during foaling season and within the foaling areas would be expected to negatively impact the behavior and population dynamics of each band and the entire HMA herd in the short and long terms. Should significant further spread of the OHV trail system occur, future wild horse herd management area actions may be required, including reducing the size of the HMA to accommodate increases in recreational uses, and/or serious consideration of whether a viable wild horse herd can be managed to achieve the legally mandated attributes of a thriving natural ecological balance and preservation of wild and free-roaming character within a smaller-sized Black Mountain HMA.

3. SOCIAL FACTORS

a. Recreation

The No Action Alternative would allow for the continued expansion of unauthorized parking areas, trail "webbing", hill climbing and cross-country OHV travel across the Owyhee Front in proximity of the Hemingway Butte Play Area. There would be, over time, further unauthorized expansion of the "open" use around the Hemingway Butte Trailhead onto surrounding lands that are suppose to support semi-primitive motorized trail settings

b. Visual Resource Quality

The quality of visual resources of areas outside the HBPA would continue to decline as random hill climbing and uncontrolled cross-country travel continued. Deterioration of the visual resources in the surrounding Owyhee Front lands would be much more noticeable than in the HBPA where much of the vegetation has already been lost due to past OHV travel. As the steep vegetated slopes of ridgelines and small buttes were transformed by hill climbing activities into a series of barren strips of soil, the contrasts in line, form, color and texture with remnant areas of undisturbed vegetation would be very noticeable to the average observer.

c. Cultural Resources

Implementation of the Proposed Action would have no direct, negative impacts on cultural resources. In this Alternative, since there would be few of the controls on OHV use as there would be in the Proposed Action such as fencing, stile openings, signs and informational kiosks, there would be no reduction in the incidence of cross-country travel in the area outside the

HBPA, and higher levels of impacts to as yet undiscovered cultural resources could be expected there over the long term, as new, unauthorized roads and trails are created.

4. ECONOMIC FACTORS

a. Rangeland Resources

The No Action Alternative would not alter the level, type, or pattern of grazing activities in the area in the short term. Livestock and recreation users have been interacting in the East Reynolds Creek Allotment for many years and the two have, for the most part, successfully co-existed. At current levels of recreational use in the Hemingway Butte area, minimal vegetative resource changes would be expected to occur in the short term. Current livestock distribution and key use areas would be expected to remain unchanged. Few or no impacts to livestock operations would be expected to occur under the No Action Alternative in the short term.

In the long term, negative impacts to livestock operations and rangeland resources would be expected to expand and intensify well beyond the HBPA. Plant communities would continue decline in both health and numbers. The eventual loss of perennial vegetation in the area immediately surrounding the HBPA would lead to increased wind and rain erosion on soils already at high risk. The long-term effect of this would be the reduction of the soil's ability to support perennial vegetation and an increase in exotic annual plant species, reducing forage for livestock and wildlife. Without regular weed treatment, these effects could trigger further negative impacts on ever larger areas of public lands by allowing exotic annuals to thrive in the HBPA and spread to the surrounding areas. As route proliferation increased, livestock distribution in pasture 1 would change, driving animals into higher elevations and into smaller areas. With continued recreational OHV use along the road used to maintain the Kane-Windy Point Pipeline, increased costs to keep the livestock watering system operational would be expected. Without BLM intervention to take action to control route proliferation spreading from the Hemingway Butte area, BLM might ultimately be forced to evaluate whether or not livestock grazing and OHV uses could continue to coexist in that area.

b. Socio-Economic Factors:

Without imposing controls including fencing of the Open area with well-defined exit points; creation of a well-signed and maintained route system, and placement of informational, regulatory, and directional information at key exit points, illegal cross-country travel would continue in areas directly surrounding the Hemingway Butte Play area. With rising recreation use, this continuation of cross-country vehicle travel would lead to an increase in the noise, dust, livestock harassment, vandalism and private-land trespass problems that are currently affecting local residents and permittees during the highest OHV use periods in the spring and fall.

Cumulative Impacts:

If this alternative were the only approach to OHV management employed by BLM for the long term, it would not successfully maintain a thriving natural ecological balance within the Reynolds Creek watershed (including the Black Mountain and Hardtrigger HMAs). The *No Action* alternative would allow OHV-related rangeland degradation to continue and intensify, and it would negatively impact wild horse habitat. Continued BLM lack of control over recreation (OHV) activities and expansion of OHV recreation use across the rangelands adjacent to the Hemingway Butte Trailhead would increase OHV interactions with wild horses throughout the Black Mountain and Hardtrigger HMAs both in the spring and winter seasons. However, the mandated, upcoming Route Designation/Transportation Plan for the Hemingway/Rabbit/Fossil Subregion is likely to bring much more effective control of OHV recreation, a reduction in disturbance to wild horse herds, and reductions of OHV-related impacts to rangeland health.

Without the introduction of OHV access control structures, fencing, designated parking areas, and a program of information and signage, the current trail maintenance program alone would not be able to effectively slow the spread of unauthorized play areas outside the HBPA. Over time this would result in mounting impacts to soils, vegetation, wildlife, cultural and visual resources, and local residents, in an expanding area surrounding the HBPA. However, because the scale of this project is minor, focusing on a relatively tiny proportion of the Owyhee Front, impacts or benefits that might occur as a result of the No Action Alternative are not anticipated to significantly change the level, type or pattern of use this area receives. As such, it should have no direct, indirect or cumulative impacts on physical, biological, cultural or socio-economic factors.

CHAPTER 5 - CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

1. LIST OF AGENCIES, ORGANIZATIONS, AND INDIVIDUALS CONSULTED

   Owyhee County Commissioners and Sheriff
   Owyhee Natural Resources Committee
   Owyhee County Recreation Task Force
   People for the Owyhees
   Shoshone-Paiute Tribes
   Idaho Dept. of Parks and Recreation
   Idaho Conservation League
   Idaho Wildlife Federation
   The Wilderness Society
   Boise District BLM Resource Advisory Committee (RAC)
   Idaho ATV Association
   Southern Idaho Desert Racing Association (SIDRA)
   Treasure Valley Trail Machine Association (TVTMA)
   Elias and Inez Jaca – Jaca Livestock and Chipmunk Grazing Association
   Bob Amidon
   Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER)
   Ralph Richardson

2. List of Preparers

Frank Jenks	Outdoor Recreation Planner
John Benedict	Outdoor Recreation Planner
J.J. Thomas	GIS (mapping)
Mike Mathis	Wildlife Biologist
Kathi Kershaw	Ecologist (Botany)
Jake Vialpando	Supervisory Rangeland Management Specialist (Wild Horses)
Brian McCabe	Archaeologist

Appendix B: References:

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