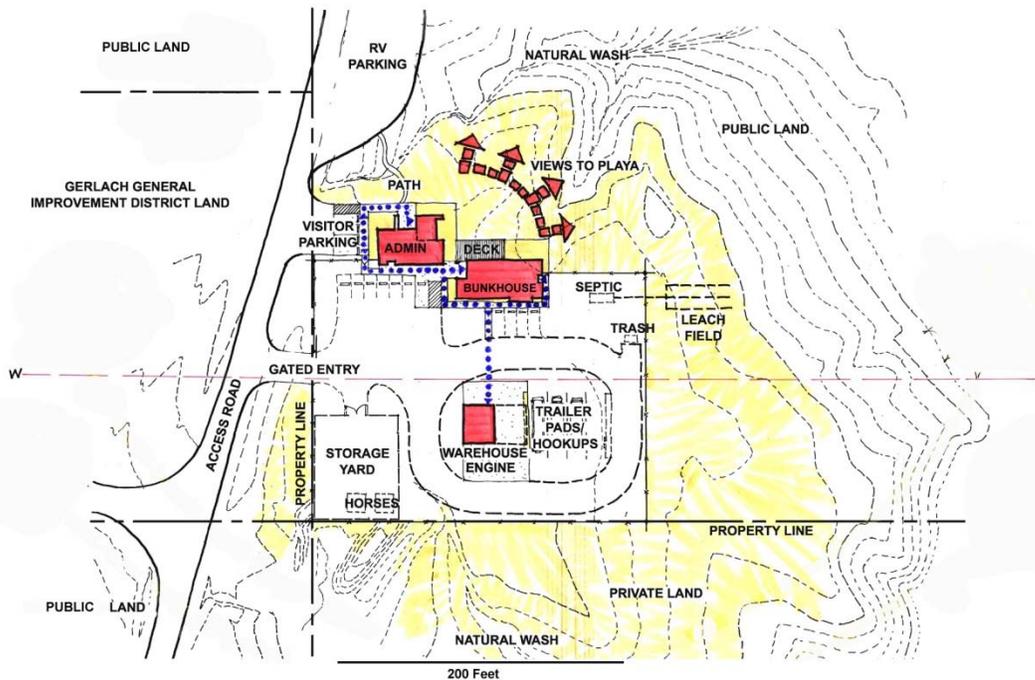


# Environmental Assessment

DOI-BLM-W030-2010-002-EA

## Black Rock National Conservation Area Administrative Facility



Prepared by:

December, 2009

U.S. Bureau of Land Management  
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It is the mission of the Bureau of Land Management to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

BLM/NV/WN/EA-10/08+1792

DOI-BLM-WO3000-2010-0002-EA

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# **1 INTRODUCTION/PURPOSE AND NEED**

## **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

The Bureau of Land Management, Black Rock Field Office (BLM) is proposing construction of a new administrative facility adjacent to Gerlach, Nevada (Map 1). Construction of the facility is being funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. The proposed facility would provide office, support buildings and temporary housing for BLM staff working in the Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area (NCA) and other nearby public lands. The site would include space for limited visitor services including outdoor displays and information, and inside space for volunteers to provide public information and sales of maps. The site would also be used to stage one or more BLM initial attack wild land fire engines during periods of high fire danger.

## **1.2 PURPOSE & NEED**

The purpose of the proposed administrative facility is to implement the Federal Land Management and Policy Act of 1976 and the legislation creating the NCA, specifically:

- Implement the decision in the 2004 Resource Management Plan for the Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails NCA to develop an administrative facility in the Gerlach area.
  - The administrative facility is would improve the ability of BLM to manage public lands within the NCA and adjacent areas. Management intensities would improve for activities associated with recreation, wild horse, minerals, livestock grazing and other resources and uses.
- Issue Rights-of-Way to facilitate public uses of public lands.
  - The issuance of Rights-of-Way for power, water, phone, road access and surface protection would allow for orderly development of the site, while providing legal status for the holders of the Rights-of-Way.

The needs for this project are:

- Implement the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA or Stimulus Bill)
  - The administrative facility is a project funded by ARRA and intended to increase economic activity and increase employment in the short-term.
- Comply with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)
  - Any projects on public lands must be analyzed to determine what impact they might have on the quality of the human environment. This environmental assessment will serve that function and lead to a conclusion as to whether significant impacts would be anticipated leading to further analysis in an environmental impact statement.

### **1.3 LAND USE PLAN CONFORMANCE STATEMENT**

The proposed administrative facility and associated infrastructure development would occur on public lands within the Winnemucca District's Sonoma-Gerlach land use plan area. The Proposed Action and No Action alternatives are also in conformance with the Sonoma-Gerlach Management Framework Plan (MFP) (BLM, 1980). Decision L 2.1 reserves the location of the proposed administrative site and surrounding public lands "for community expansion and for recreation and public purposes".

Although the proposed administrative facility is outside the planning area for the Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area and Associated Wildernesses, and Other Contiguous Lands in Nevada Resource Management Plan (RMP)(BLM, 2004). The proposed administrative facility including visitor center components are encouraged in or near the vicinity of the RMP planning area. Both the Proposed Action and No Action alternatives described below are in conformance with the Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area and Associated Wildernesses, and Other Contiguous Lands in Nevada Resource Management Plan (RMP)(BLM, 2004). Decisions VIS-1 and VIS-2 in the RMP provide for the development of visitor centers and an administrative site respectively.

### **1.4 RELATIONSHIPS TO STATUTES, REGULATIONS, AND OTHER PLANS**

The project is being funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and is consistent with the requirements of that legislation.

The property proposed for the Black Rock National Conservation Area Administrative Facility is within the area designated as the High Desert Rural Character Management Area and the General Rural Regulatory Zone in the Washoe County Department of Community Development High Desert Area Plan adopted in 2008 (Washoe County, 2008a). Land designated General Rural is intended for open space. Development within this zone is appropriate for public services and facilities (Washoe County, 2008b). The proposed administrative facility is consistent with the Washoe County High Desert Area Plan and applicable development codes.

This environmental analysis (EA) was prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and is in compliance with applicable regulations and laws passed subsequently, including the President's Council of Environmental Quality Regulations, US Department of Interior requirements, and guidelines listed in BLM Manual Handbook H-1790-1.

### **1.5 SCOPING AND ISSUE IDENTIFICATION**

The Black Rock Field Office staff identified the proposed administrative facility and secured funding for construction and operation. The BLM interdisciplinary team reviewed the proposal, comments and concerns identified by the public and other agencies, and developed the issues and resources included in this assessment.

The following issues were identified associated with the proposed administrative facility:

- Social and economic conditions in the Gerlach-Empire area and Washoe County.
- Potential geothermal exploration and development activities near Gerlach.
- Visual resources in the Gerlach area.

## 2 PROPOSED ACTION/ALTERNATIVES

### 2.1 PROPOSED ACTION

An administrative facility would be developed on public land approximately 0.8 miles northwest of Gerlach, Nevada in Washoe County. The facility would be located in Township (T.) 32 North (N.), Range (R.) 23 East (E.), Section (Sec.) 15: Lot 2, Mount Diablo Base & Meridian (MDM). The facility would include three structures that would provide the following services:

- Office and visitor services; approximately 1,700 sq. ft.
- Bunkhouse for seasonal and temporary employee use; approximately 2,000 sq. ft.
- Shop and storage building w/attached fire engine parking; approximately 1,800 sq. ft.

The administrative facility would be fenced for security and a parking area adjacent to the office/visitor services building would be developed at the site. Figure 1 shows the layout of the buildings and other facilities associated with the administrative facility. Development of the facility would require electric, phone and water utilities. Additionally, full development of the administrative facility site would include a water storage tank to meet local fire suppression codes, a radio antenna tower less than 100 foot tall, and a toilet accessible to the public when the visitor center is not open.

Development of the facility would require the granting of several rights-of-way (ROWs), issuing a gravel Free Use Permit and would require acquisition of one easement as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Rights-of-Way, Permits & Easements associated with the Proposed Facility

Purpose:	Type:	Issued to:	Description	Acres	Map and Description
Surface Protection	ROW	BLM	All of Lot 2	23.5	Figure 2
8" Buried Waterline	ROW	GGID	50 ft wide X 2,750 ft	3.16	Figure 3
Overhead Power Line	ROW	NV Energy	20 ft wide X 3,600 ft	1.65	Figure 4
Buried Phone Line Or Overhead Phone <sup>1</sup>	ROW	AT&T	20 ft wide X 475 ft	.22	Figure 5
			20 ft wide X 3,600 ft	1.65	
Access Road <sup>2</sup>	ROW	BLM	60 ft wide X 1,788 ft	2.46	Figure 6
Gravel	Permit	BLM		9.2	Figure 7
Access to the Site	Easement	BLM	60 ft wide X 50 ft	0.07	Figure 6
<b>Total Area</b>				<b>40.26<sup>3</sup></b>	

**Administrative Facility**– The facility would be constructed to approved BLM plans and specifications and include the following components:

<sup>1</sup> Final engineering studies will determine actual phone service option.

<sup>2</sup> Although GGID currently has access to the transfer station site, pursuant to a patent issued by BLM, the patent does not provide a precise legal description for the road ROW. With the concurrence of GGID, BLM would issue a congruent ROW to GGID.

<sup>3</sup> If Overhead phone option is utilized, total area for phone and power ROWs would be 1.65 acres.

- An office/visitor services building containing:
  - o Approximately 400 sq. ft. visitor center that would include displays, brochure racks, maps distribution and other public information. A half-bath would be available for public use when the visitor center is open. The visitor center would be used for day use by the public. No over-night public camping would be supported at the site.
  - o Approximately 1,300 sq. ft. of office and work space with security isolation from the visitor center. The office area would include an open workspace area, lockable storage closet, small conference room and half bath.
- A 2,000 sq. ft. bunkhouse building including:
  - o Common use kitchen area.
  - o Common use dining area/living room.
  - o Six to eight small bedrooms.
  - o Two full bathrooms with shower stalls.
- A 1,800 sq. ft. warehouse/shop/storage building including:
  - o Storage shelving.
  - o Workbenches.
  - o Rollup doors allow vehicles to access the building.
  - o Attached, covered fire engine parking.
- A chain link perimeter fence that would enclose the “official use” portions of the facility.
- A public parking area with a toilet available to the public when the visitor center is closed.

**Utilities** –Electrical service would be overhead from an existing NV Energy overhead line approximately 3,600 feet south of the site. Phone lines would either be on the same poles as electricity or buried underground from existing fiber optic cable east of Washoe County Road 34 depending upon costs. Water would be supplied via a 2,750 ft pipeline from the GGID water line south of the site. A water storage tank would be installed to meet local fire suppression requirements. Waste treatment would be onsite using conventional septic-leach systems. Utility lines would be constructed and connections would be made according to current building codes and industry standards. Connection to utilities would be in accordance with specifications set by the utility companies and GGID. A steel tower, not to exceed 100 feet in height, would be installed to support one or more radio antennas. Renewable energy use would be incorporated into the facility. Photovoltaic system (solar panels) and solar hot water systems would be suitable for the site.

**Access** - The entrance to the administrative site would be from the existing GGID transfer station road or Washoe County Road 34. Security fencing would consist of tall cyclone fence with barbed wire on the top. Pedestrian access would be through the main entrance of the office/visitor services building. Signs would be placed along the Nevada State Route 447 and Washoe County Road 34 roadways to inform the public that visitor services are available and how to access the facility.

**Parking** – Public parking would be provided for autos next to the visitor center and north of the site for longer vehicles (e.g. RVs and vehicles pulling trailers). Parking for BLM vehicles would be provided within the fenced yard.

**Best Management Practices-** The following best management practices would be utilized during the project to comply with federal energy conservation requirements, visual resources considerations and to minimize adverse environmental affects:

**Exterior Design Considerations:** Building designs and exterior finishes would include consideration of visual resource management requirements of the area and the environmental setting of the playa and NCA environment. Exterior design considerations would include screening of the warehouse-storage yard area with fence materials that reduce visibility; exterior finish colors compatible with the surrounding environment, building design that considers traditional architecture within this rural area, and use of natural surfaces for parking areas and driveways. All outdoor light fixtures would be constructed in such a manner that no light would be emitted above the horizontal plane of the fixture (full cutoff shielded lighting). Xeriscape landscaping would be incorporated with native shrubs and herbaceous vegetation.

**Green Building Technologies:** The project is required to be Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED™) certified and meet the requirements of Executive Order 13423, January 24, 2007, which stipulated that Federal buildings shall exceed the requirements of ASHRAE 90.1 by 30%. This is also in keeping with BLM directives that energy conservation and sustainable design be incorporated into all new buildings.

**Cultural Resources:** As always, respect for all cultural resources would be maintained. Contractors working on all aspects of the project would be informed about the need to protect cultural resources and the penalties involved in the collection or deliberate destruction of historic and prehistoric artifacts and features. Any cultural resource discovered on public or private lands that are part of the federal undertaking by any contractor, sub-contractors or any person working on their behalf would be left in place and immediately reported to the BLM. In the case of human remains that might be inadvertently discovered in the process of conducting the proposed project, all appropriate Federal laws would be followed. If discovered human remains were encountered, construction near the location of the finds would be halted and consultation with Native American tribes in the area would be initiated. The contractor would suspend all operations in the immediate area of such discovery of human remains or cultural resources until written authorization to proceed were issued by the BLM. An evaluation of the discovery would be made by the BLM to determine appropriate actions to prevent the loss of significant cultural values.

The prehistoric component of archaeological site CrNV-2-9020 would be protected by temporary fencing during construction.

**Invasive Species:** All construction vehicles would be required to be fully washed, including the undercarriages, prior to entry into the project area to remove seeds of undesirable plants.

## **2.2 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT ANALYZED IN DETAIL**

**Facility Location** - The following considerations were taken into account for facility location: Cost of construction, site preparation and access, absence of mining and millsite claims, and distance to utilities. Locating the facility on federal land would minimize annual operating and maintenance budgets. Two other locations near Gerlach were considered for the administrative facility.

The alternatives considered but not carried forward for full analysis are:

- Site 1 within the existing gravel pit above transfer station. The site was considered primarily because of the view of the playa of the Black Rock Desert. This site was dismissed due to lack of access to a paved road, the gravel pit in current use by the Nevada Department of Transportation (NDOT), and long distances from existing utilities for water, phone and power.
- Site 2 south of Nevada State Route 447 and west of the junction with Washoe County Road 34. This site was considered because it is closer to the existing water and electrical utilities. This site was dismissed because there is no view of the Black Rock Desert playa and the soils at the site would require extensive fill to mitigate the undesirable construction conditions.

## **2.3 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE**

Under the No Action Alternative the BLM would not construct, operate or maintain an administrative facility near Gerlach. BLM employees, interns and volunteers would continue to work out of the Winnemucca District Office and seasonal and temporary housing would not be available for federal employees.

## **3 THE AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT**

A variety of laws, regulations, and policy directives mandate that the effects of a proposed action and alternative(s) on certain environmental elements be considered. These are referred to as Supplemental Authorities. Not all of the Supplemental Authority elements will be present, or if they are present, may not be affected by the proposed action and alternative (Table 2). Only those Supplemental Authority elements that are present and affected are described in this section.

In addition to the supplemental authority elements, there are additional resources that require impact analysis relative to the proposed action and alternative. These are presented in section 3.2 Additional Resources.

To comply with the National Environmental Policy Act, the following elements of the human environment are subject to requirements specified by statute, regulation or executive order and

must be considered (Table 2). Some resources could be affected by the proposed action and alternative.

The assessment area for this project is approximately 40 acres within a 228.03 acre area that includes the proposed administrative facility, adjacent public parcels directly affected by the project and the GGID transfer station parcel. The affected parcels are shown on Map 2.

**Table 2: Supplemental Authority Elements of the Human Environment and Other Resources**

Supplemental Authority Element	Not Present	Present Not Affected	Present Affected	Reference Sections
Air Quality		✓		Although very small quantities of fugitive dust would be produced during construction, dust levels would be similar to those found normally in the area.
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs)	✓			Not applicable
Cultural Resources			✓	3.1.1, 4.1.1, 4.2.1
Environmental Justice	✓			Not applicable
Floodplains	✓			Not applicable
Hazardous or Solid Wastes			✓	3.1.2, 4.1.2, 4.2.2
Invasive Non-native Species			✓	3.1.3, 4.1.3, 4.2.3
Migratory Birds		✓		Potential impacts too small to measure
Native American Religious Concerns			✓	3.1.4, 4.1.4, 4.2.4
Prime or Unique Farmlands	✓			Not applicable
Threatened and Endangered Species	✓			Not applicable
Water Quality (Surface and Ground)	✓			Not applicable
Wetlands and Riparian Zones	✓			Not applicable
Wild and Scenic Rivers	✓			Not applicable
Wilderness	✓			Not applicable
<b>Other Resources</b>				
Geology, Minerals and Geological Hazards			✓	3.2.1, 4.1.5, 4.2.5
Lands and Realty			✓	3.2.2, 4.1.6, 4.2.6

Range Resources	✓	The study area is within the Buffalo Hills grazing allotment, but the project would not measurably affect livestock grazing.
Recreation	✓	3.2.3, 4.1.6, 4.2.7
Soils	✓	3.2.4, 4.1.8, 4.2.8
Special Status Species	✓	Not applicable
Socio-Economic Conditions	✓	3.2.5, 4.1.9, 4.2.9
Vegetation	✓	3.2.6, 4.1.10, 4.2.10
Visual Resources	✓	3.2.7, 4.1.11, 4.2.110
Wildlife	✓	3.2.8, 4.1.12, 4.2.12
Wild Horses and Burros	✓	Not applicable

### 3.1 SUPPLEMENTAL AUTHORITY ELEMENTS

The following supplemental authority elements have been identified in Table 1 as being present and affected by the Proposed Action or the No Action alternative:

#### 3.1.1 Cultural Resources

The area around the project area and the town of Gerlach has been a focus of human activity for thousands of years. Over 45 archaeological sites have been recorded within one mile of the project area and many archaeological surveys have been conducted over the past 20-25 years. Much of the archaeological recording in the area was associated with geothermal development, in part due to the proximity of Great Boiling Springs, which lies just to the northeast of the project area. While none of the past geothermal exploration has resulted in development of geothermal resources in the vicinity, applications for explorations are still being received and processed. Geothermal resources are attractive not only today, but also were locations of prehistoric habitation and in some cases places of spiritual or religious activity for Native Americans. Prehistoric resources in the vicinity of the project often occur near water sources or on playa margins where now extinct shorelines ringed lakes or wetlands. Prehistoric sites in the area include large and small lithic scatters, a rock feature that may have been a hunting blind, two rock shelters, and several sites described as prehistoric campsites. Historic resources include the historic town of Gerlach (founded in the first decade of the 20th century), dump sites associated with the town, the town cemetery and locations where the Nobles Route of the Applegate-Lassen Trail and the Fremont Exploration Route pass the project area.

An archaeological inventory of the main parcel, the waterline corridor, and the power line corridor resulted in the recording of three sites: two historic debris scatters and one historic debris scatter/prehistoric lithic scatter. One of the historic debris scatters was previously recorded as CrNV-22-5708 and had been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) in 1994. The other two sites (CrNV-2- 9021 and CrNV-2-9020) had not been previously recorded. CrNV-2-9021 has been determined not eligible for the NRHP, as has the historic component of CrNV-2-9020. The prehistoric component of CrNV-2-9020 is considered eligible under Criterion D for its potential to provide information pertinent to research issues in the region. Two small previously recorded sites in the main site parcel could not be relocated (these were near the paved road that runs along the west edge of the parcel) and may have been obliterated by road construction or maintenance. In addition, both the waterline corridor and the power line corridor extend into the boundary of CrNV-22-6814, recorded as the historic Gerlach town site and considered eligible for the NRHP, but other than several widely separated cans and a modern feature consisting of over 100 broken beer bottles (target shooting area?) no cultural resources were identified within the boundary.

### **3.1.2 Hazardous or Solid Wastes**

The project area including the proposed utility rights-of-way is associated with a large historic dump area. Much of the material within the dump areas is older than 50 years and is therefore considered a cultural resource. There are no known hazardous wastes located with the project area. Adjacent to the project site is the Gerlach General Improvement District's solid waste transfer station. Gerlach residents bring their solid wastes to the transfer station for disposal. On a regular basis, solid wastes collected at the site are transported to an approved landfill elsewhere in Washoe County.

### **3.1.3 Invasive Non-Native Species**

Invasive nonnative species spread from infested areas by people, equipment, livestock/wildlife and the wind. They represent a legal classification in indicates their spread is closely managed by the state of Nevada. Because of their aggressive growth and lack of natural enemies, these species can be highly destructive, competitive, or difficult to control. These exotic species can reduce crop yields, destroy native plant and animal habitat, damage recreational opportunities, clog waterways, lower land values, create erosion problems and fire hazards, and poison humans and livestock. These species may proliferate to the point of crowding out other plants that benefit wildlife and domestic animals. Wildlife and grazing animals do not often eat invasive nonnative species because their thorns, spines or chemical content make them unpalatable.

The state of Nevada lists 45 noxious weed species that require control (Nevada Administrative Code 555.10, effective 10-31-05). BLM lists eleven of these invasive nonnative species that have been inventoried and are known to occur within the Winnemucca Field Office District (BLM WFO 2002). Weed inventories conducted along

County Road 34 documented several occurrences of the noxious weed Russian knapweed (*Acroptilon repens*). Perennial pepperweed (*Lepidium latifolium*) has been documented within a few miles of the proposed Project Site on Nevada State Route 447.

### **3.1.4 Native American Religious Concerns**

The proposed site of the Black Rock Administrative Facility is clearly an area used by Native Americans in the past. The proposed area is within the traditional territory of Northern Paiute peoples. Three tribal groups, the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony, the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe, and the Summit Lake Paiute Tribe were contacted to request comments on the project.

As noted above, water sources, including hot springs, are often considered to be of religious or spiritual importance to Native Americans. The Great Boiling Spring, northwest of the project area, is likely to have had importance in the past and remains important to Native Americans currently. The spring is now on private land and access is restricted to Native Americans. There is another hot spring at the western edge of Washoe County Road 34, one-half mile north of the project area that has been identified as a spring currently used by the Summit Lake Paiute Tribe.

## **3.2 Other Resources**

In addition to the supplemental authority elements, the following resources and uses have been identified in Table 2 as being present and affected by the Proposed Action or the No Action alternative:

### **3.2.1 Geology, Minerals and Geologic Hazards**

The Project area is located at the south end of the Granite Range on the down-thrown side of a north-northeast trending basin and range fault zone that separates the granitic rocks on the west from the alluvial, lacustrine, and playa sediments on the east.

The Project area is located within the Gerlach Known Geothermal Resource Area (KGRA). In KGRAs, existing geothermal lease and lease application areas have the highest potential for future use. The Gerlach KGRA was designated because of the occurrence of several hot springs in the vicinity, including Great Boiling Spring, which is located on private land, approximately one-fourth mile northeast of the Project area. Most of the other hot springs are also located on private lands.

There are four geothermal leases within the Gerlach KGRA. The proposed project area is located on lease N- 55718 as shown on Map 3.

The Bureau of Land Management Winnemucca Field Office prepared the Mineral Assessment Report to accompany the Resource Management Plan (USDI, 2006) for the revision of the overall Resource Management Plan for the Winnemucca District. The mineral assessment was intended to provide management an intermediate level of detail regarding potential areas and settings for mineral occurrences and potential to assist with decision making within the planning area.

There are no mining claims located within the project area. The project area is situated near the distal edge of a favorable zone associated with the pluton related gold, silver and other metal deposits within the Deephole mining district located in the central Granite Range identified in the assessment. This district is about 15 miles north of the project area. However, the rock type hosting metal deposits within the district are absent within the project area.

According to the assessment report, the area east of the project area is prospective for gold occurrences present in deep basin and range type structures associate with high heat-flow as manifested by the Great Boiling Spring hot springs system. Though some criteria for predicting potential for mineral occurrence are present, the project area is not close to important deposits or prospects, and site specific analysis indicates it lacks the presents of hydrothermally altered rock typically associated with hot springs gold deposits.

There are deposits of decomposed granite within the vicinity of the proposed project area. The Washoe County Road Department and The Nevada Department of Transportation have excavated this material from pits within the project area.

The eastern slope of the Granite Range is prone to mass wasting events (such as landslides, rock falls, or debris flows) because of its steep slopes. Mass wasting events are caused by gravity in combination with a variety of geologic, climatic and, in some cases, human factors. The last mass wasting event in the project vicinity was on June 26, 2005 in response to a large scale thunderstorm.

### 3.2.2 Lands and Realty

The 40.26 acre project area is within federally owned parcels encompassing 223.03 acres of publically owned lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management and one, five-acre parcel that is owned by GGID and operated as a solid waste transfer station. The public lands are open space managed for multiple uses including potential community expansion, recreation, geothermal exploration, livestock grazing, and other public purposes.

The site of the proposed administrative facility is located in T. 32 N., R. 23 E., Sec. 15: Lot 2, MDM. ROWs needed for development of the administrative facility would be located in other portions of Sections 15 and 16.

The site of the proposed administrative facility was identified in 1947 as a potential site for an administrative facility. However in 1965, the site included in a 103.06 acre parcel was deeded to Washoe County for public purposes. In 1993, Washoe County relinquished to BLM all 103.06 acres. Subsequently, the BLM issued a patent to GGID for the five acre solid waste station site.

The project area includes portions of existing ROWs summarized below in Table 3.

Table 3: Existing Rights-of-Way within the Project Area

ROW	Owner	Description
-----	-------	-------------

CC- 017565	GGID	50 ft wide buried water pipeline supplying Gerlach
Nev 030888	NVDOT	59.33 acre road maintenance materials pit
N- 13103	AT&T	20 ft wide buried fiber optic phone line
N- 50145	NV Energy	25 ft wide overhead electric transmission line
N- 48648	Washoe County	100 ft wide road—NV SR 447
N- 60994	Washoe County	100 ft wide road—Washoe County Rd 34

None of the ROWs listed in Table 3 occur on the site of the proposed administrative facility. N-13103 (fiber optic line) and N- 60994 (Washoe County Road 34) are located in Lot 2, east of the proposed facility. If the buried phone line option were to be utilized, the new phone line would tie into the N- 13103 buried cable and cross under County Road 34. Nev 030888 (NDOT materials pit) covers the location of the proposed material Free Use Permit for gravel fill and surfacing at the administrative facility location. The proposed water line would tie into the existing waterline (CC- 017565). The proposed power line and overhead phone option would tie into the existing power line (N- 50145).

The road currently serving the GGID solid waste transfer station connects Washoe County Road 34 and Nevada State Route 447. GGID is presently the only formally designated party with access rights. GGID’s rights stem from BLM Patent # 27-93-0035 issued for the transfer station site. That Patent references “appurtenances”, which would include the access road. However the road location is not legally described in detail nor are dimensions provided in the patent text.

### 3.2.3 Recreation

The Gerlach area is a gateway to the Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area (NCA). The Black Rock Desert playa is a favorite recreation place for people from local surrounding communities; other areas in Nevada; and neighboring states (California, Oregon, Idaho, and Utah). Most visitors to the playa come during the time when the playa is dry (typically June through September), with the largest numbers of people participating in organized special recreation events. Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) use is high across the desert playa. Visitors participate in recreation individually or in small groups for casual or dispersed activities; others participate in organized events, either as participants or as spectators.

Additionally northern Washoe County provides dispersed recreation opportunities associated with hunting, rock-hounding, hiking, and sight-seeing. Most users visit the area because of its lack of development and low visitor use levels. Self discovery is a highly valued experience.

The private parcel east of the Project site is used by the owner as a falcon training site. The parcel includes a hack tower and falcons are known to use the private parcel and adjacent public lands during training flights.

### **3.2.4 Soils**

Two soil map units are associated with the proposed administrative facility and associated ROWs (USDA, 1997): the Trocken, stony-Mazuma and the Umberland associations.

The Trocken, stoney-Mazuma association occurs above the Umberland association and is derived from coarse decomposed granitic materials. The proposed administrative facility and upper portions of ROWs within this map unit are associated with the Trocken gravelly fine sandy loam. This soil is deep, well drained with low water and wind erosion potential. At lower landscape positions the Mazuma silt loam occurs, a deep well drained soil comprised of fine lake sediments over coarser decomposed granitic materials.

The Umberland association is formed from fine lake deposited sediments. The association is comprised of Umberland silty clay loams.

### **3.2.5 Socio-Economic Conditions**

As of 2008, Washoe County had an estimated total population of about 412,000 up from 339,500 in the 2000 census. The Gerlach-Empire Census Designated Place (CDP), in which the Project is located, is a population center within Washoe County having a year 2000 population of 499 (U.S. Census Bureau 2009).

In 2008, Washoe County had about 179,000 housing units. Approximately 88 percent of these units were occupied. The median value of owner-occupied units was \$338,600 (U.S. Census Bureau 2009). The Gerlach-Empire CDP had 305 housing units in 2000. Approximately 79 percent of these units were occupied. The median value of owner-occupied units in the Gerlach-Empire CDP was \$82,500 in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2009).

The labor force for Washoe County was estimated in the year 2008 to be about 220,000 up from about 181,000. Washoe County's leading employers included the management, professional and related industries (29.5 percent); the sales and office industry (28.9 percent) and the service occupations (19.9 percent) (U.S. Census Bureau 2009). The labor force for the Gerlach-Empire CDP was estimated in the year 2000 to be 394 persons. The leading employers included the construction, extraction, and maintenance trades (24.8 percent); the production, transportation, and materials moving industries (24.3 percent); and service occupations (19.3 percent) (U.S. Census Bureau 2009).

### **3.2.6 Vegetation**

Vegetation communities associated with the proposed administrative site and associated ROWs are dominated by alkaline tolerant shrub communities. At the lowest landscape positions, on ponded soils, iodine bush (*Allenrolfea occidentalis*), and inland saltgrass

(*Distichlis spicata*) dominate. On un-ponded soils the vegetation is primarily black greasewood (*Sarcobatus vermiculatus*) with an inland saltgrass understory. At higher landscape positions, greasewood decreases and shadscale (*Atriplex confertifolia*) and bud sagebrush (*Picrothamnus desertorum*) with an understory of bottlebrush squirreltail (*Elymus elymoides*) are the dominant vegetation types.

### 3.2.7 Visual Resources

The Bureau of Land Management initiated the visual resource management (VRM) process to manage the quality of landscapes on public land and to evaluate the potential impacts to visual resources resulting from development activities. VRM class designations are determined by assessing the scenic value of the landscape, viewer sensitivity to the scenery, and the distance of the viewer to the subject landscape. These management classes identify various permissible levels of landscape alteration, while protecting the overall visual quality of the region. They are divided into four levels (Classes I, II, III, and IV). Class I is the most restrictive and Class IV is the least restrictive (BLM 1986).

The Project is located in a VRM Class II area (BLM, 1982). The objective of VRM Class II is to retain the existing landscape character. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Management activities may be seen but should not attract a casual observer's attention. Any changes must repeat the basic elements of line, form, color and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape (BLM 1986).

The Project site is situated between 3,900 and 4,000 feet above sea level, in a relatively flat vegetated zone that transitions into the Black Rock Desert Playa. The Project area is most visible from the north and south along Washoe County Route 34, the main paved road accessing the Project area. The foreground consists of the paved County road that provides access along the eastern range front of the Granite Range. The road travels along the base of the mountain range and creates a horizontal line that blends in with the natural horizontal lines of the setting where the playa meets the base of the mountain. The middle ground consists of the Project site, the GGID transfer station and access road, the Washoe County Road Dept material storage yard, and the private parcel east of the Project site with structures, a wind turbine on a steel tower, and disturbances associated with past geothermal exploration. The vegetation ranges in color from dark to light green, and yellows, in the spring and summer. In the fall and winter the colors are light to dark browns, yellows, tans and grays.

As viewed from the south, the predominant feature of the background landscape is the playa, a flat, un-vegetated, smooth, and white to gray surface. The Granite Range is also very prominent and rises abruptly from the playa to the north and northwest of the Project site. The colors of the Granite Range are the light to medium gray of the rocks, and the

scattered greens of the juniper trees that occur in the higher elevations visible from Route 34. The higher slopes of the Granite Range are rounded at the top, and most of the drainage lines are diagonal. The lower slopes of the Granite Range display very prominent horizontal lines that are remnants of the high shorelines of Pleistocene Lake Lahontan. Mass wasting of granitic rocks has formed several gullies on the steep slopes that have partially obliterated the lake terraces. The gullies are much lighter than the surrounding material because the vegetation has been stripped.

A viewshed study (Map 4) from the proposed facility indicates that the facility can be seen from about 390 acres within the foreground viewshed (less than 0.6 miles of the facility), and the facility location could be seen from about 16,450 acres of the mid-view shed (0.6 to three miles) and about 15,400 acres of the distant viewshed (three to ten miles). The facility would be visible from a small area at the northern edge of Gerlach and from approximately 5.7 miles Washoe County Road 34. It would not be visible from Nevada State Route 447. The overhead power line and radio tower would be visible from north and western portions of Gerlach, a two mile section of Nevada State Route 447 and a four mile section of Washoe County Road 34, both immediately north of Gerlach.

### **3.2.8 Wildlife**

There have been no general wildlife species inventories within the Project vicinity. Based upon observations in similar type habitats, common species would include antelope ground squirrel (*Ammospermophilus leucurus*), black-tailed jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus*), horned lark (*Eremophila alpestris*), Great basin whip-tail (*Cnemidophorus tigris tigris*), and the gopher snake (*Pituophis catenifer*). Big game use is minimal, although pronghorn antelope (*Antilocapra americana*) may occasionally be found in the vicinity.

## **4 Environmental Consequences**

### **4.1 Proposed Action**

#### **4.1.1 Cultural Resources**

The project would have no adverse effect on any cultural resources listed in or eligible for listing in the NRHP. There are three sites eligible for the NRHP within the project area. Site CrNV-22-5708 would be avoided by construction.

Site CrNV-2-9020 would be crossed by both the waterline and the power line. The historic component of the site has been determined not eligible for the NRHP and the

portion of the prehistoric component affected by the waterline is in a disturbed part of the site where there are no intact deposits.

Site CrNV-22-6814 would be crossed by both the waterline and the power line. These corridors are located in non-contributing elements of the site and will therefore not affect the site's significance or its eligibility for the NRHP.

#### **4.1.2 Hazardous or Solid Wastes**

Construction of the administrative site including installation of the utilities within the ROWs would generate small quantities of construction debris. This material would be removed from the site during and at the end of construction to an approved landfill. During operations of the facility, small quantities of solid waste including office paper and kitchen waste would be generated. Materials that could not be recycled would be disposed of at a permitted landfill on an as needed basis. Sewage from the facility would be disposed of onsite using a septic tank – leach system designed and operated to meet current health and safety regulations. Periodically solid wastes from the septic tank would be removed from the site and disposed of at an approved site.

#### **4.1.3 Invasive Non-Native Species**

Surface disturbance associated with construction activities including utility related activities and use of construction related vehicles that may transport invasive, non-native species could contribute to the spread of invasive, nonnative species within the Project area. A requirement to wash vehicles prior to entry into the construction site would decrease the likelihood of new infestations of noxious weeds. Surface disturbance at the administrative facility and along linear ROWs would increase the likelihood that invasive annual grasses, particularly cheatgrass, and annual weeds would increase in density and composition on the decomposed granitic soil areas. The lower elevation lake sediment soils are less likely to be invaded by annual weeds because of the high water table and alkaline soils. This increase would be reduced over the long term as the disturbances associated with buried cables and pipes are re-occupied with native species and the administrative facility is graveled and covered with structures.

#### **4.1.4 Native American Religious Concerns**

There are no known sites of Native American spiritual or religious significance in the project area, although there are several hot springs, including Great Boiling Springs within a mile of the project area. No concerns about sacred or religious sites were raised in comments from the tribal groups contacted in connection with the administrative facility. Inclusion of information related to Native American cultures into the proposed visitor center would indirectly lead to greater awareness and appreciation of these values.

#### **4.1.5 Geology, Minerals and Geologic Hazards**

Construction of the proposed administrative facility including development of utilities would result in reduction of up to eight acres within the portion of Lot 2 west of Washoe County Road 34 from surface occupancy for the geothermal lessee. This would reduce the area available for use for exploration and development of potential geothermal resources by less than one percent within this lease. Federal geothermal leases provide for administration of the surface for multiple uses as long as they do not impede the lessees access to test and develop the potential resource. The surface area utilized by the administrative facility would not prevent the lessee's access to test or develop on the lease.

Additionally, the lessee has informed BLM they have no objection to the development of the administrative facility. Therefore there would be no measureable impacts on the future exploration and development of geothermal resources.

Although some criteria are present to indicate favorable conditions for locatable mineral occurrence at the site, the Project Area is not close to important deposits or prospects, and site specific analysis indicates it lacks the presence of hydrothermally altered rock typically associated with hot springs gold deposits or the favorable host rocks of the Deephole District deposits approximately 15 miles north. Development of the administrative facility would not measurably decrease the potential of finding an economically valuable deposit in the project area. However the potential for finding such a deposit is considered unlikely.

The proposed location of the administrative facility is on gentle sloping terrain away for steep slopes of the Granite Range. Construction of the administrative site would not contribute to mass wasting events nor would mass wasting events affect the administrative facility.

#### **4.1.6 Lands and Realty**

Development of the project site would require issuance of five, 30-year ROWs and one materials Free Use Permit (FUP). Additionally, BLM would have to obtain a 60-foot wide easement over a small portion of the GGID solid waste transfer site for a roadway/driveway from the existing roadway to the project site.

The two acre development area would be located at the southwest corner of 23.50 acre Lot 2, Sec. 15, T. 32 N., R. 23 E., The undeveloped land in Lot 2 north and east of the project area would remain open space subject to valid existing rights. The Black Rock Field Office would obtain a ROW from BLM covering all of Lot 2 to authorize development of the two acre administrative facility and to limit third-party future development on the remainder of the 23.50 acres. The ROW would increase the

likelihood that views of the playa and adjacent public lands would be maintained in the future.

The Black Rock Field Office would need to obtain relatively small quantities of gravel and grading materials for site preparation. A suitable, previously disturbed, materials site in Section 16, T. 32 N., R. 23 E. would provide the gravel and other material. The BLM would issue a FUP to authorize excavation of gravel and other material for use on the project site. This FUP would occur within a mineral materials ROW granted to the NDOT, which has informed BLM that it has no objection to the FUP and use of materials from the site for fill and surfacing. Therefore, there would be no impacts to the existing NDOT materials ROW.

Although renewable energy systems would be incorporated into the project, electricity from these systems would not be sufficient in quantity or 24-hour reliability to meet all the electrical needs. Connection to an existing Nevada Energy overhead line approximately 3,600 feet from the project site would require issuance of a 20-foot wide ROW. Construction of the power line would require crossing the 100-foot ROW for Nevada State Route 447 in compliance with appropriate agency specifications. Because the power line would be overhead, there would be no impact on the road. There would be short-term impacts on use of Nevada State Route 447 during installation of the overhead lines as traffic would be temporarily delayed or re-routed or on the ROW. There would be no long-term impacts to the State Highway.

Telephone service would also require a 20-foot wide ROW to be issued to AT&T. Two options would be considered to provide this service. One would be to connect to a fiber optic line located on the east side of Washoe County Road 34 (475 feet). The second option would be to co-locate phone lines on the electric poles to be installed by Nevada Energy (3,600 ft). The first option would require crossing the ROW for Washoe County Road 34 in accordance with appropriate agency specifications. If the pole mounted option were to be implemented, the ROWs for the electric and phone service would overlay the same land area. There would be short-term impacts to use of Washoe County Road 34 during installation of the cable as traffic would be temporarily delayed or re-routed or on the ROW. There would be no long-term impacts to the county roadway.

The 8-inch waterline described in section 2.1 would require that a 50-foot ROW approximately 2,750 feet long be issued to the GGID. Construction of the waterline would require crossing the 100-foot ROW for Nevada State Route 447 in accordance with agency specifications. There would be short-term impacts on use of Nevada State Route 447 during installation of the cable as traffic would be temporarily delayed or re-routed or on the ROW. There would be no long-term impacts on the state highway.

The road currently serving the GGID solid waste transfer station connects Washoe County Road 34 and Nevada State Route 447 and would provide access to the Black Rock Field Office project site. BLM use of this road would require that the Black Rock Field Office obtain a ROW since GGID is presently the only formally designated party with access rights. GGID's rights stem from a patent issued for the Transfer Station that references "appurtenances" but which does not provide a legal description for the road. With the concurrence of GGID, BLM would formalize the GGID road interest by issuing a ROW for the road to GGID at the same time BLM issues the congruent access road ROW to the Black Rock Field Office. Issuance of this ROW would benefit the GGID and its customers by providing clearly identified access to the Transfer Station parcel.

The location of the project site at the southwest corner of Lot 2 will require a 60-foot wide easement for access from the existing GGID roadway, through a small portion of the western part of the patented GGID solid waste transfer station site, to connect to the Black Rock Field Office Project site. The easement would be approximately 50 feet long. The GGID has indicated that it would be willing to grant this easement.

#### **4.1.7 Recreation**

Construction of the proposed administrative facility including development of utilities would have no direct impact on recreation on the project area during the short-term. Recreational use of the project area is very low and there are no recreation sites within the project area. Over the long-term about two acres would be removed from the millions of acres of public land available for dispersed recreation use in northwestern Nevada.

Development of the visitor center within the administrative facility would increase the likelihood that recreational visitors to northwestern Nevada would have enhanced recreational opportunities and experiences. This is because the visitor service component of the administrative site would provide the visiting public with maps, brochures and other information regarding recreational opportunities in the region.

Development of the proposed administrative facility would result in the addition of several additional vertical structures within one-half mile of the falcon hack tower on the private parcel east of the Project site. The guidelines for falconry include a one mile area of open space to flying the birds (CO Div. of Wildlife, undated). The additional vertical structures would include several new power poles and the radio antenna tower. These new structures would be in addition to an existing wind turbine tower on the private parcel where the birds are flown and a 100 foot communications tower on an adjacent private parcel. The new structures would be at the edge of the one mile circle centered on the hack tower and would have less impact than the two existing towers that are much closer to the hack tower.

#### **4.1.8 Soils**

Construction of the proposed administrative facility including development of utilities would result in disturbance of about five acres of soils within the project area during the short-term. Disturbances associated with installation of utilities to the site would be temporary and soils would return to pre-disturbance conditions and productivity within approximately two to five years after construction with lakebed soils healing more rapidly than granitic soils. Granitic soils at the two acre administrative facility would be permanently lost due to grading, filling and construction of buildings, sidewalks and other disturbances.

#### **4.1.9 Socio-Economic Conditions**

Construction of an administrative facility in the Gerlach area would increase economic activity in the Gerlach and Washoe County areas in the short-term. While no construction companies are currently based in Gerlach, it is likely that some local labor would be used. Economic activity in the county would be increased due to purchase of materials and services within the county.

In the long-term, revenues to the GGID would increase slightly due to payment by BLM for water provided by the district and fees for disposal of solid wastes generated at the facility. Additionally, extending water and electricity an additional half mile north of Gerlach may lead to future development on adjacent private lands which would contribute to the economies of the Gerlach area and Washoe County.

#### **4.1.10 Vegetation**

Construction of the proposed administrative facility including development of utilities would result in loss of vegetation on 5.2 acres within the project area during the short-term. Disturbances associated with installation of utilities to the site would be temporary and vegetation would return to pre-disturbance conditions and productivity within approximately two to five years after construction with vegetation on lakebed soils reestablishing more rapidly than on granitic soils because of better soil moisture availability. Vegetation at the two acre administrative facility would be permanently lost due to grading, filling and construction of buildings, sidewalks and other disturbances.

#### **4.1.11 Visual Resources**

Construction of the proposed administrative facility including development of utilities would result in short and long-term impacts to visual resources. The total estimated area of new surface disturbance required for construction of the administrative facility and utilities would be approximately 5.2 acres. About 3.2 acres of this would recover to pre-construction conditions within two to five years.

The Proposed Action would be consistent with the Class II VRM classification of the area. Impacts to visual resources would be temporary along the linear utility accesses,

and would primarily affect the elements of form, line, and color. The administrative facility would be constructed in the low, flat foreground of Washoe County Road 34 and would not be visible from the town of Gerlach or Nevada State Route 447. The estimated 12 new power poles and the radio antenna would be visible from the northern edge of Gerlach and Nevada State Route 447. There is already one powerline in this vicinity and an existing communications antenna in this vicinity. The two acre administrative facility, including the radio antenna and several of the power poles would be visible from Washoe County Road 34 for the foreseeable future, but would be located in an area of existing disturbances (e.g. the transfer station, materials storage yard, and two towers and structures on nearby private lands). The exterior finishes of the buildings at the facility would be designed to be consistent with the landscape and existing facilities in northern Washoe County. This would result in the little change to the form of the existing landscape at the project site.

#### **4.1.12 Wildlife**

Construction of the proposed administrative facility including development of utilities would result in a temporary displacement of non-game species from the project area during construction and loss of habitat on 5.2 acres within the project area during the short-term. Disturbances associated with installation of utilities to the facility would be temporary as vegetation returns to pre-disturbance conditions and productivity within approximately two to five years after construction. Habitats on lakebed soils would be anticipated to recover more rapidly than on granitic soils due to increased soil moisture. Wildlife habitats at the two acre administrative facility would be permanently lost due to grading, filling and construction of buildings, sidewalks and other disturbances. There would be no measureable impacts to game habitats because of the small size of the project area and the low levels of use associated with existing human uses within the project area.

## **4.2 No Action Alternative**

### **4.2.1 Cultural Resources**

There would be no new disturbances within the project area under the No Action Alternative. Therefore there would be no impacts to significant cultural resources.

### **4.2.2 Hazardous or Solid Wastes**

There would be no new disturbances within the project area. Therefore there would be no impacts to hazardous or solid wastes.

### **4.2.3 Invasive Non-Native Species**

There would be no new disturbances within the project area. Therefore there would be no impacts to invasive non-native species.

#### **4.2.4 Native American Religious Concerns**

There would be no new disturbances within the project area under the No Action Alternative. Therefore there would be no impacts to Native American religious or spiritual sites.

#### **4.2.5 Geology, Minerals and Geologic Hazards**

The administrative site would not be developed. There would be no new impacts to mineral resources.

#### **4.2.6 Lands and Realty**

The administrative site would not be constructed within the project area. Therefore there would be no necessary changes to existing lands and realty authorizations including most existing ROWs. A ROW for the existing access road to the GGID solid waste transfer station would not need to be issued to GGID, leaving the transfer station without clearly defined public access, unless GGID were to request that BLM convert the present “appurtenant” access road to a ROW pursuant to Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA).

#### **4.2.7 Recreation**

There would be no new facilities at the project site. Therefore there would be no impacts to recreational users of the area and northwestern Nevada. Opportunities to distribute information on public lands in the region would continue to rely on the visitor contact trailer during periods of the year when that facility would be open. There would be no impact to the falcon training on adjacent private lands.

#### **4.2.8 Soils**

There would be no new disturbances within the project area. Therefore there would be no impacts to soils.

#### **4.2.9 Socio-Economic Conditions**

The administrative site would not be developed. There would be no additional economic activity in the Gerlach area or in Washoe County.

#### **4.2.10 Vegetation**

There would be no new disturbances within the project area. Therefore there would be no impacts to vegetation.

#### **4.2.11 Visual Resources**

The administrative site would not be constructed within the project area. Therefore there would be no changes to visual resources.

#### **4.2.12 Wildlife**

There would be no new disturbances within the project area. Therefore there would be no impacts to wildlife populations or habitat.

### **5 Cumulative Impacts**

The Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing NEPA defines cumulative impacts as "...[T]he impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (Federal or Non-Federal) or person undertakes such actions." Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time (40 CFR 1508.7).

The 1,631 acre cumulative assessment area consists of the Gerlach General Improvement District, portions of Geothermal lease N- 55718 east of the crest of the Granite Range, and public and private lands east to the Black Rock Desert – High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails NCA RMP area as shown on Map 5. This area was selected to encompass potential impacts from the proposed administrative facility and other activities in the vicinity. The area was selected in part to incorporate the foreground viewshed of the proposed facility. Approximately one-third of the assessment area is public land managed by the Bureau of Land Management. The remaining portion is private or owned by the GGID. The assessment area is located in Washoe County, Nevada.

#### **5.1 PAST AND PRESENT ACTIONS**

The cumulative assessment area includes the community of Gerlach which has and continues to provide housing and limited services for a population of several hundred and thousands of visitors that travel through the town to reach other parts of Washoe County , northeastern California and southern Oregon. Economic activity in town has historically been associated with tourism, public sector functions (education, road maintenance and law enforcement), and services for the railroad, agriculture including livestock grazing, energy and mining industries.

#### **5.2 REASONABLY FORESEEABLE FUTURE ACTIONS (RFFA's)**

Past and present actions discussed above are expected to continue into the foreseeable future, though the relative intensity of these actions could vary depending on a variety of economic and other factors. It is anticipated that population will slowly increase, but not keep pace with overall growth in Washoe County. The demographic group expected to show the most growth in the Gerlach area will be retirees. Tourism is expected to continue to increase in the region and will result in greater need for tourist related services within the assessment area.

It is likely that geothermal exploration activities on the existing leases in the area will continue and at some point in the future, geothermal development may occur in or adjacent to the assessment area.

### 5.3 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Impacts associated with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions are generally created by ground or vegetation-disturbing activities that affect natural resources in various ways. Of particular concern is the accumulation of these impacts over time. This section of the EA considers the nature of the cumulative effect and analyzes the degree to which the proposed action and non action alternative contribute to the collective impact.

Potential cumulative impacts have been identified for the following actions and resources: socio-economics, and visual resources.

#### 5.3.1 Socio-Economic Conditions

##### *Impacts from Past and Present Actions*

Economic activities associated with railroad operations, mining, agriculture, tourism, transportation, and public sector services have resulted in the establishment and continued occupancy of the town of Gerlach.

##### *Impacts from Reasonably Foreseeable Actions*

Future increases in tourism, increasing numbers of resident retirees with disposable income, and geothermal exploration and possible development will lead to potential increases in economic activity in Gerlach and Washoe County. However, without new private sector ventures to provide local services in Gerlach much of the economic activity will occur outside Gerlach.

##### *Cumulative Impact*

#### **Proposed Action**

In addition to the impacts described above, development of the proposed administrative facility would act as a tourism magnet potentially increasing economic activity associated with tourist services (e.g. fuel, meals and lodging). Additionally, the extension of utility services to the facility would increase the possibility that new housing or small businesses could be developed on private lands between the town and the administrative facility.

#### **No Action**

No cumulative impacts were identified with the No Action alternative.

#### 5.3.2 Visual Resources

##### *Impacts from Past and Present Actions*

Development of the town of Gerlach and adjacent private lands added man-made features to the environment including structures, roads, power lines, and other disturbances. In the desert landscape of the Gerlach area, there is little tall vegetation to provide visual screening. However the small area of development, the flat nature of the Gerlach area and the enormity of the

surrounding landscape associated with the vast playa and the Granite range, decrease the apparent impact on the visual quality of the landscape.

#### *Impacts from Reasonably Foreseeable Actions*

Future geothermal development will add non-natural elements to the landscape during exploration and possible development leading to localized decreases in visual quality. Exploration related visual impacts would be short-term. Potential geothermal development would lead to long-term impacts to visual quality associated with above-ground pipes and construction of a power plant and transmission lines. It is estimated that these long-term disturbances could affect at most a few tens of acres within the cumulative assessment area. Requirements for consideration of visual impacts on activities on public lands could reduce impacts on visual quality.

#### *Cumulative Impact*

##### **Proposed Action**

In addition to the impacts described above, development of the proposed administrative facility would add additional disturbances to the assessment area. Development of a two acre facility with three buildings surrounded by fencing plus installing utilities including about 15 power poles would add additional non-natural features to the assessment area. The cumulative impact to visual resources would be at most a few tens of acres of new man-made features. Requirements for consideration of visual impacts on activities at the administrative facility and any geothermal facilities on public land would reduce impacts on visual quality.

##### **No Action**

No cumulative impacts were identified with the No Action alternative.

## **6 MITIGATION and MONITORING**

The ROW holders would have to follow the standard terms and conditions of the ROW grants. The BLM is responsible for monitoring the construction of the facility and the ROWs to ensure compliance under the provisions of 43 CFR 2800.

## **7 PERSONS, GROUPS, AND AGENCIES CONSULTED**

### ***LIST OF PREPARERS***

#### **Bureau of Land Management**

##### **NAME**

Kathryn Ataman

Roger Farschon

Mark Gingrich

Lynn Harrison

Lewis Trout

##### **Resource Area(s)**

Cultural Resources

Project Lead, Natural Resources, Visual Resources

Minerals

Environmental Coordination

Lands and Realty

## ***PERSONS, GROUPS, OR AGENCIES CONSULTED***

### **NAME**

AT&T

Gerlach-Empire Citizen's Advisory Board (GECAB)

Sylvia Fascio, Chair

Gerlach General Improvement District (GGID)

Lisa Bertschi, Chair

Gerlach Geothermal, L.L.C.

Nevada Energy

Black Rock-High Rock Implementation Sub-Group, NW NV-Sierra Front Resource Advisory Council

Reno-Sparks Indian Colony

Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe

Summit Lake Paiute Tribe

Washoe County Department of Community Planning

Contact was made with the Washoe County Department of Community Development regarding the proposed administrative center on May 28, 2009. A senior planner provided information on the consistency between allowable uses for the project area and the components of the administrative site. There were no uses identified that would be inconsistent county planning for the area. Follow up contacts were made and the planner for the Gerlach area was briefed in November, 2009.

The Northwestern Great Basin-Sierra Front Resource Advisory Council subgroup on Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon NCA implementation toured the proposed site on September 12, 2009. They also discussed the site at their December 12, 2009 meeting. The subgroup membership represents a broad range of interests from commodity based to environmental protection. The group endorsed the concept of the administrative site and supported the proposed location. The group also requested continued involvement in the development of public outreach products for the visitor center portion of the site.

A site visit was made on November 12, 2009 with a representative of the Summit Lake tribe and the center was further discussed in a phone conversation in November, 2009. Members of the Pyramid Lake tribe and reservation staff were briefed on the project on December 2, 2009. The Summit Lake Tribal Council was briefed on December 19, 2009 and had no objections to the project, but expressed interest in inclusion of information related to Native American cultures in the visitor center.

Written communication concerning the proposed project was sent to the tribal councils in the surrounding area in November, 2009 requesting their comments and concerns regarding the Proposed Action. BLM met with the Pyramid Lake and Summit Lake Paiutes, neither group had objections to the proposed administrative facility.

A public workshop was held in Gerlach on November 18, 2009 to inform members of the community about the proposed administrative facility and request comments on the proposal. Eight community members attended and comments submitted were considered in the development of the Proposed Action.

A preliminary Environmental Assessment (PEA) was circulated for a 15 day public comment period (December 8<sup>th</sup> through 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2009). The PEA was mailed to adjacent landowners, public agencies. The PEA was posted on the Winnemucca District website, a mailing made to about 90 individuals, groups and agencies and a press release was issued in the region. During the comment period BLM received 12 comments on the proposed administrative facility. Most commenter's supported the facility and suggested services that might be included to better serve visitors using the facility. Two comments were received that opposed the facility. One of these was concerned that installation of the power line would interfere with training of falcons on adjacent private lands. Comments received during both the scoping period and for the preliminary EA were considered in the development of the proposed action or resulted in changes in the affected environment or environmental consequences sections of the EA.

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## MAPS AND FIGURES

### 8.1 Maps

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