



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Boise District Office

Four Rivers Field Office

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SCOPING REPORT

Boise District Road & Trail Maintenance Program

This report summarizes a Bureau of Land Management proposal to authorize road and trail maintenance activities within the Boise District in accordance with the 1983 Bruneau and Kuna Management Framework Plans (BKMFPs), the 1999 Owyhee Resource Management Plan (ORMP), the 1988 Cascade Resource Management Plan (CRMP), and the 2008 Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area Resource Management Plan (SRBOPRMP). Federal actions such as road and trail maintenance must be analyzed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations to determine potential environmental consequences.

The purpose of this report is to inform interested and affected parties of the proposal and to solicit comments to assist with the NEPA review of the proposal. Analysis of the proposal is ongoing, and will be documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA) with an estimated completion date of October 30, 2009. Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify alternatives to the proposed action that meet the purpose of and need for the project and identify issues the public is concerned about relative to the project.

Purpose and Need for Action

The last environmental assessment (EA) and decision record (DR) concerning the road and trail maintenance program in the Boise District as a whole occurred in 1994 with the Boise District Road and Trail Maintenance DR/EA #ID010-94017. This DR/EA addressed environmental impacts based upon typical annual maintenance of 300 to 500 miles of roads and 10 to 100 miles of trails. It is expected that the amount of maintenance needed on the District's previously maintained travel routes and previously non-maintained travel routes will increase over time as the demand for public access to BLM lands increases; the population of southwest Idaho increases; and tourism use of public lands increases. Given the increased need for additional maintenance activities along road and trail corridors, and the need for increased flexibility to incorporate ongoing resource management plans (RMPs), travel management planning (TMP) efforts and site/project plans, the 15-year-old DR/EA #ID010-94017 is becoming inadequate to meet the long-term needs of the District.

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to provide for resource protection, public safety, and improved access to public lands throughout the Boise District by clearly defining standard or typical methods and techniques of mechanized and/or hand tool maintenance for existing constructed roads and trails authorized by the Boise District Transportation Plan, and for routes authorized by other plans and environmental assessments: more specifically, those actions which directly affect the ongoing condition

of a travel route's "profile". A route profile is defined as being those linear physical disturbances created at the time of a travel route's initial construction or reconstruction. Physical disturbances include the roadbed or trailbed surface and all associated structures such as slope cuts, slope fills, borrow ditches, run-out ditches, soil berms, vegetation clearance areas (usually a cleared strip of soil located to the outside of borrow ditches), and the installation of support facilities including cattleguards, culverts, directional/informational signs, kiosks, guardrails, low water crossings (gravel/concrete/geogrid), and route markers. Maintenance actions also include non-soil disturbing activities that call for the application of surface hardening chemical solutions such as magnesium chloride (MgCl) and other new-generation stabilizer solutions.

It is **not** the purpose of Proposed Action to determine which travel routes are to remain open or closed for public use, or to designate the type of use any travel route may support. Such determinations are to be left to the broader planning process known as travel management planning (TMP).

Existing Condition

The BLM, Boise District public lands stretch across southwest Idaho from the Oregon border eastward to the boundary of the BLM, Twin Falls District (generally down King Hill Creek, then along the Snake River, and up the Bureau River and West Fork Bruneau River); from McCall, Idaho, southward to the Nevada border (see map for the Boise District Road and Trail Maintenance Plan). Over the last 15 years, the BLM has regularly (annually or periodically) maintained about 135 miles of roadway within its current administrative boundaries. During this same time period, it is estimated that other authorized agencies or individuals have regularly maintained at least 300 miles of roadways. This represents only about 16 % of the inventoried (numbered) road segments within the District. Regular trail maintenance activities remained at under 100 miles until 2004 when trail maintenance activities on the Owyhee Front of the Owyhee Field Office was intensified in response to deteriorating recreation and natural resource conditions; resulting in 200 miles of trail maintenance being reported in 2008. There has also been a number of road segments which have received occasional (as needed) maintenance in response to flood washout events or other needs, such as allowing for the placing of communication towers or allowing access for emergency fire equipment.

Transportation management (road and trail maintenance) is prescribed on an annual basis by consulting a series of 1:100,000 scale surface ownership maps known as the current Boise District Transportation Plan and field office staff. The Transportation Plan identifies routes that are maintained primarily for administrative access to areas across the Boise District.

Objectives

The objective of the Boise District Road and Trail Maintenance Program is to allow for route maintenance that provides safe access to the public lands, while maintaining resource values.

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action calls for authorizing ongoing maintenance of existing motorized and non-motorized travel route profiles on public lands throughout the Boise District of southwest Idaho. Affected routes include those existing roads and trails that are delineated as constructed routes on the Boise District Transportation Plan and those routes authorized for maintenance as amended by recent and future planning efforts, such as resource management plans (RMPs), travel management plans (TMPs), or specific site/project plan DRs/EAs. "**Maintenance**" includes the customary actions that perpetuate the

existing elements of a route's profile, including road/trail surfaces, cuts/fills, ditches/culverts, and associated facilities such as cattleguards and signs/kiosks. Maintenance would utilize standardized methods and techniques for both mechanized and non-mechanized operations, as appropriate to minimize environmental impacts, along all authorized routes within the Boise District on a regular (annual or periodic) or occasional (as needed) basis. The total amount of maintenance done each year would depend upon the availability of funding and priorities set by management plans, but it is expected that road and trail maintenance would not exceed a total of 2,000 miles per year. The Proposed Action allows the BLM, BLM contractors, and/or other authorized entities to undertake maintenance activities as allowed by established laws and regulations. The Proposed Action does **not** address the validity of R.S. 2477 assertions by affected counties on any segment of road or trail. In addition, the Proposed Action does **not** affect those road corridors authorized by existing Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) rights-of-way (ROWs) held for federal, state or county agencies, or by private individuals or companies. In addition, it does **not** include those road profiles which lie in ground-based military operations areas (MOAs), such as the National Guard Range just south of Boise, Idaho.

Preliminary Issues

Vegetation

- Maintenance could facilitate the establishment or spread of noxious or invasive weed species.
- Maintenance could occur in occupied or suitable special status plant habitat.
- Unmaintained routes could deteriorate and adversely affect adjacent vegetation communities.

Water Quality

- Improper maintenance activities could alter water quality.

Wildlife

- The season of maintenance could disrupt breeding, nesting, hibernation, or overwintering activities of local wildlife.
- Maintenance could facilitate increased human use in sensitive wildlife habitats.

Recreation

- Potential increased use and degradation of roads and trails by members of the public.

Preliminary Alternative Development

The preliminary alternatives were developed by reviewing the past 15 years of road maintenance actions undertaken across the Boise District since the completion of the Boise District Road and Trail Maintenance DR/EA #ID010-94017, and by experimentation with the new generation of lighter mechanized trail maintenance equipment such as the SWECO Trail Dozer, ATV-Deschutes Drag Sled, and ATV-Trail Rake units. The use and potential effects of mechanized trail equipment was reviewed in two phases. The first phase was to make two informational gathering trips to existing OHV Management Areas around Bend, Oregon to observe and participate in the ongoing trail maintenance program being run by the BLM and U.S. Forest Service. The second phase was to utilize similar or identical equipment on select routes within the Murphy Sub-region of the Owyhee Front SRMA under the authority of DR/EA #ID010-94017.

Beginning in 2004, the Boise District started a corrective and annual scheduled maintenance program on the Owyhee Front under authority of the Boise District Road and Trail Maintenance DR/EA ID010-94017. During this first year, 43 miles of ATV/motorcycle trail underwent repair (corrective

maintenance), as well as the placement of trail marker posts to delineate maintained trail segments. Corrective work also included some rehabilitation of adjacent trail braiding. An additional 32 miles of ATV/motorcycle trails underwent corrective management and marker post delineations in 2005. Annual maintenance for these 75 miles of trails occurred from 2005 to the present. As a result of these efforts, it was found that the assortment of trail maintenance equipment used was well suited for correcting long standing trail profile problems (principally trail width, “whoop-de-doos” and trail braiding). The maintenance standards developed between 2004 and 2005 helped formulate the management actions contained in the Wilson Creek and Murphy Sub-region TMPs, and will be described in the 2009 Boise District Road and Trail Maintenance Program EA.

Given that any or all of the methodologies and techniques detailed in the EA could be applied to any segment of road or trail, the development of alternatives for an overall road and trail maintenance program in the Boise District will be restricted to variations in the amount of work the Boise District, affected counties, and/or other authorized entities could reasonably undertake in a given year. The Boise District has a choice to either retain its present level of overall maintenance including those routes designated by recent TMPs, or to take advantage of whatever additional funding may become available to increase the maintenance program, and as specified in RMPs and TMPs that are subsequently completed. The key point is to have a maintenance program with the greatest degree of flexibility within parameters defined by RMP and TMP efforts.

Decision to be Made

The Boise District Manager is the official responsible for decisions regarding road and trail maintenance within the action area. Based on the information presented in the NEPA analysis, the District Manager will issue a document which will determine the significance of the environmental effects and whether an environmental impact statement (EIS) will be prepared. If the District Manager determines it is not necessary to prepare an EIS, the Manager will decide which management actions will be prescribed for the project area and any necessary mitigation measures, utilization indicators, or monitoring requirements.

Public Input Needed

Comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, preliminary issues, method of analysis, and alternatives that will meet the purpose and need for the action. Suggestions for additional actions that may be undertaken to facilitate achievement of desired conditions are encouraged. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received by October 23, 2009 and are directly relevant to the proposal and project area. The BLM will not reject public feedback outside established public involvement timeframes; however, these comments may be considered secondary to comments received in a timely manner and may only be assessed to determine if they identify concerns that would substantially alter the assumptions, proposal, design, or analysis presented in the EA. Comments sent electronically should be sent to Matthew.McCoy@blm.gov with “Boise District Road and Trail Maintenance Program” in the subject line. Please identify whether you are submitting comments as an individual or as the designated spokesperson on behalf of an organization or public agency. Issues that are outside the scope of the proposal will not be addressed at this planning level.

The primary contact for questions and comments for this analysis is Matt McCoy, 3948 Development Ave., Boise, ID 83705, 208-384-3343.