

Categorical Exclusion Review
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Boise District Office
Four Rivers Field Office

SIDGS Translocation Sites

CE No.: DOI-BLM-ID-B010-2012-0016-CX

Background: Southern Idaho ground squirrels (SIDGS) became a candidate October 30, 2001. The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), by court action, is required to determine, by 2015, whether to list the species under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA). Local extirpation has occurred at the northern end of the squirrels range, probably due to habitat modification through wildfires. Successful translocation of this species into suitable habitat sites provides a means in which to maintain or increase populations. Translocation is usually done to establish a new population, reestablish an extinct population, or augment a declining population. However, translocation is difficult and frequently ends in failure and previous attempts for SIDGS has been limited. Maintaining or increasing populations by successful translocation attempts on public lands could provide needed information to prevent listing of the species. Extensive review of literature for like species successfully translocated has been reviewed and a design criteria for SIDGS has been created to enhance previous translocation attempts. Two suitable translocation sites that fall in the current range of SIDGS have been located. The sites were determined to be suitable because of habitat, ease of setup and transport and currently not inhabited by SIDGS. The sites will be referred to as the Black Canyon (falls within the Hadley Individual or Montour Individual Grazing Allotments) and George Way Gulch (falls within the Paddock Valley Individual Grazing Allotments) sites.

Since 2002 Zoo Boise has maintained a small population of SIDGS and has been successful in breeding the squirrels in captivity. Successful reproduction puts a strain on Zoo Boise's captive propagation facility and it is periodically overcrowded. In addition, two golf courses (Payette and Weiser golf courses) and a private property with a Candidate conservation agreement with assurances (CCAA) for SIDGS periodically become overcrowded with SIDGS. This creates a nuisance for their business operations. Zoo Boise, the golf courses, and the private landowner, will provide squirrels for translocations. A professor from the college of Idaho along with 3-5 students will translocate the squirrels to the sites, set up the pens, and supplementally feed the squirrels for approximately one week.

Description of Proposed Action: The proposed action implements a protocol to improve translocation success for SIDGS. This would require a soft release technique where squirrels are placed in pens and supplementally fed for approximately one week by a professor and students from the College of Idaho. Eight pens per site will be utilized and are approximately 8 feet long, 4 feet wide, and 4 feet high in size and will accommodate 8 animals per pen. Each pen has an access panel on the top of the pen to introduce squirrels for translocation and to provide access for supplemental feeding. The bottom of the pens are open to allow the squirrels to dig out of the pens. In order to retain the squirrels for a week or more, the side panels of the pens are buried from 9-18" into the ground. Burying the panel sides of the pen will also provide additional protection from predators. The soft release technique will delay the squirrels from digging out long enough for them to recover from the stress of translocation, orient to their new surroundings, and acquire site fidelity. Idaho Fish and Game permit allows for up to 100 squirrels to be translocated per site. Thus, the proposal is to translocate 60-100 individual squirrels per site. Due to timing and limited personnel to access sites for daily supplemental feeding, it is likely only one site per year will be utilized for translocation over a succession of 2-3 repeated years.

Once outside their holding cages or pens SIDGS will begin to dig burrows. Digging burrow systems is energetically expensive. Translocation should occur early enough in the active season for the animal to have time to dig a new

burrow system, recover, and store adequate fat to survive 8 months of seasonal torpor below ground (aestivation and hibernation).

Because juvenile ground squirrels have a high mortality rate whether translocated or not, translocation success could be improved by moving adults and yearlings, rather than juveniles. Therefore the preference is to translocate adults. However, wild adults (especially males) are hard to capture, and field time is expensive. For that reason, it is likely that a mix of some yearlings, a few larger juveniles, and adults will be translocated. Adult active seasons are earlier than those of juveniles (Barrett, 2005). Therefore early April or late March would be appropriate.

The site will be visited daily after translocation to monitor the squirrels until the squirrels begin to hibernate (usually in June)

A BLM Archeologist will be present while the pens sites are being dug.

Project Location: Black Canyon Site T7N, R1 E Sects 17 and 18: and George Way Gulch Site, T 10N, R1W Sections 13 and 24.

Applicant (if any): None

Part I – Plan Conformance Review

This proposed Action is subject to the following land use plan: Cascade RMP
Date Plan Approved: July 1, 1988

Remarks: Though the proposed action is not specifically provided for in the Land Use Plan (LUP) it is in keeping with national BLM direction for candidate species and is therefore in conformance with the overall objectives of the LUP.

Part II – NEPA Review

A. Categorical Exclusion Review: This proposed action qualifies as a categorical exclusion under 516 DM 11.9 A (5) routine augmentations, such as fish stocking, providing no new species are introduced and with the following IM and manual. Instruction Memorandum No. 2012-042 Review of the draft Introduction, Transplant, Augmentation, and Reestablishment of Fish, Wildlife, and Plants Manual – 1745d . Category description: 516DM 11.9

List of Extraordinary Circumstances

1. Have significant impacts on public health or safety.

Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Specialist Signature/Date: /s/ Jill Holderman Wildlife Biologist 2/22/12
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Comments/Explanation: The Proposed Action would not have any significant impacts to public health or safety. The activities would be localized to two sites on BLM lands

2. Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation, or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order 11990); floodplains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; or ecologically significant or critical areas, or is not in compliance with the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act.

Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Specialist Signature/Date: /s/ <i>Dean Shaw</i> , Four River FO Archaeologist, 2/28/2012
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Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Specialist Signature/Date: /s/ <i>Jill Holderman</i> , Wildlife Biologist 2/28/12
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Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Specialist Signature/Date: /s/ <i>Mark Steiger</i> , Botanist 2/28/2012
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Comments/Explanation: Activities would occur during early spring before many birds would be nesting and activities are limited so disturbance to migratory birds would be minimal. The Proposed Action is also not within any specially designated areas (e.g. wilderness, ACEC) and would not impact cultural sites or any special status plants.

3. Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA Section 102(2)(E)].		
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Specialist Signature/Date: /s/ <i>Jill Holderman</i> , Wildlife Biologist 2/28/12
<i>Comments/Explanation:</i> There is no controversy over the effect of this proposal. The effect of placing temporary holding pens for translocation of SIDGS a candidate species could provide a means in which to maintain or increase the population of a candidate species. Idaho Power permitted for the Brownlee Bench Line 911 near the George Way Gulch site and the Cascade Warm Lake Line 328 near the Black Canyon site would not be impacted in regards to regular line maintenance for SIDGS.		
4. Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.		
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Specialist Signature/Date: /s/ <i>Jill Holderman</i> Wildlife Biologist 2/28/12
<i>Comments/Explanation:</i> The BLM has provided funding for graduate student translocation projects. High mortality rate in ground squirrels is common and the risk to squirrels through translocation is out weighed by the benefit of increasing populations to reduce the likelihood of listing.		
5. Establish a precedent for future actions or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.		
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Specialist Signature/Date: /s/ <i>Jill Holderman</i> Wildlife Biologist 2/28/12
<i>Comments/Explanation:</i> This proposal would not set a precedent or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects. Any future proposals will be analyzed on their own merits based on law, federal regulations, and BLM policy. No impact or modification to the permittees grazing permit will be needed. Permittees will be informed of pen locations and of college personnel in the area making daily checks of translocated squirrels.		
6. Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant, but cumulatively significant environmental effects.		
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Specialist Signature/Date: /s/ <i>Jill Holderman</i> , Wildlife Biologist 2/28/12
<i>Comments/Explanation:</i> The impacts would be beneficial if translocation is successful, because this could reduce the need to list SIDGS under the Endangered Species Act. Although some vegetation will be modified by pen placement, these impacts would not add, in any noticeable way, to any impacts from other activities in the area administered by the BLM		
7. Have significant impacts on properties listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by either the bureau or office.		
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Specialist Signature/Date: /s/ <i>Dean Shaw</i> , Four Rivers FO Archaeologist, 2/28/2012.
<i>Comments/Explanation:</i> The current proposal allows for the digging of trenches and nest boxes (that occur within the pens) and for placement of temporary holding pens for SIDGS. The archeologist has reviewed the proposed areas and will be on site for actual digging to determine if pen site location will need to be modified to protect cultural resources.		
8. Have significant impacts on species listed or proposed to be listed on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or on designated Critical Habitat for these species.		
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Specialist Signature/Date for Plants: /s/ <i>Mark Steiger</i> , Botanist, 2/128/12 Specialist Signature/Date for Wildlife: /s/ <i>Jill Holderman</i> , Wildlife Biologist 2/28/12 Specialist Signature/Date for Aquatics: /s/ <i>Allen Jarter</i> , Fisheries Biologist 2/28/12
Plants <i>Comments/Explanation:</i> No special status plants or listed plants or suitable habitat would be impacted by implementing this project. No known occurrences were identified in district databases and a field visit confirmed the lack or special status plants in the project area.		
Wildlife <i>Comments/Explanation:</i> The Proposed Action would enhance conditions for Southern Idaho ground squirrel (Candidate for ESA Listing) by facilitating the potential increase or maintenance in squirrel populations.		
Aquatics <i>Comments/Explanation:</i> Columbia River bull trout are the only federally listed fish species with individuals or habitat that occur on the Four River Field Office. The subject action would have no effect on bull		

trout because the species and its critical habitat are not located within the project area or within close enough proximity to be influenced or affected by any off-site effects.		
9. Violate a Federal, State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.		
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Specialist Signature/Date: /s/ <i>Jill Holderman</i> , Wildlife Biologist 2/28/12
<i>Comments/Explanation:</i> The Proposed Action would be in compliance with all laws and requirements that pertain to environmental protection in the area.		
10. Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898).		
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Specialist Signature/Date: /s/ <i>Jill Holderman</i> , Wildlife Biologist 2/28/12
<i>Comments/Explanation:</i> Low income or minority visitors to the area would not be affected any differently by the proposed activities than any other visitor.		
11. Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (Executive Order 13007).		
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Specialist Signature/Date: /s/ <i>Dean Shaw</i> 2/28/2012
<i>Comments/Explanation:</i> The Proposed Action would not limit access to ceremonial use of sacred Indian sites on federal lands or adversely affect the physical integrity of known sacred sites		
12. Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and Executive Order 13112).		
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Specialist Signature/Date: /s/ <i>Jonnie Huter</i> 2/28/2012
<i>Comments/Explanation:</i> There are currently no known populations of noxious weeds located in the project area. Any noxious weeds encountered during or after project implementation would be treated, monitored, and retreated as necessary, consistent with established BLM procedures, to prevent infestations from establishing and spreading in the project area		
I certify that none of the Departmental Manual (Extraordinary Circumstances) listed in the above Part II (516 DM 2, Appendix 2) apply to this action; therefore, this categorical exclusion is appropriate for this situation.		
Remarks:		
Authorizing Official: /s/ <i>Terry A Humphrey</i>		Date: 2/28/2012
Name: Terry Humphrey		
Title: Field Manager, Four Rivers Field Office		