

# COUGAR BAY EASEMENT ACQUISITION ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT



Coeur d'Alene Field Office  
IDI-37194  
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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.

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# Cougar Bay Easement Acquisition

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Purpose and Need

The Coeur d'Alene Field Office is proposing to acquire an easement across private property near Cougar Bay on Lake Coeur d'Alene, approximately 1 mile south of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. The easement is currently available from a willing landowner, and would cross approximately 695 feet of private land to access Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands. The parcels proposed for easement acquisition (0.48 acres trail and 0.57 acres road) are located in Kootenai County. The easement is for recreational values including hiking, wildlife viewing and access to Lake Coeur d'Alene. The proposed easement would connect an existing trail owned by The Nature Conservancy to public land that is managed by the BLM known as the John Pointner Memorial Wildlife Sanctuary. Following acquisition of the easement, the BLM would proceed with plans to construct a proposed foot trail system on the easement and adjacent public land (NEPA No. BLM-ID-C010-2011-0011-EA). Acquisition of the Cougar Bay easement and future construction of the foot trail system will provide the public access to over 200 acres of public lands with outstanding views of Lake Coeur d'Alene.

### 1.2 Relationship to Laws, Policies and Land Use Plans

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) requires an action under consideration be in conformance with the applicable BLM land use plan, and be consistent with other federal, state, local and tribal policies to the maximum extent possible.

#### 1.2.1 BLM Land Use Plan Conformance

The proposed action as described in chapter 2 of this EA is in conformance with the Coeur d'Alene Resource Management Plan (RMP), approved in June, 2007. The RMP is silent on the proposed action, but it is consistent with the following decisions for Recreation (RC):

**Objective RC-1.2** – Manage the Coeur d'Alene Lake SRMA for land- and water-based leisure activities for outdoor sport, relaxation, social group or family affiliation, and personal enrichment or learning through environmental study within accessible natural forested lakeshore settings.

**Action RC-1.2.8** – Continue to follow the multi-agency Memorandum of Understandings concerning joint recreation facility operations. Expand working relationships where possible for joint resource management activities.

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## 1.2.2 Consistency with Non-BLM Authorities

The proposed action is further consistent with other Federal, State and local land use policies and plans to the maximum extent possible. This action is consistent with the agreement for Cougar Bay between the BLM and The Nature Conservancy.

The following table identifies elements of the human environment that are regulated by a statutory or regulatory authority that would be affected and are analyzed in chapter 3 of this EA, as well as those that BLM determined would not be affected.

**Table 1.2.2: Review of Statutory Authorities**

ELEMENT/RESOURCE	Affected?	Comment
Air Quality	No	Trails would not affect air quality
Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)	No	No ACEC is in the area
Cultural Resources (National Historic Preservation Act)	No	A cultural resource inventory was conducted in the project area. No cultural resources were located.
Environmental Justice (EO 12898)	No	There are no minority or low income populations that would be disproportionately affected by the proposed acquisition.
Farm Land -Prime/Unique	No	None in the area
Floodplains	No	The easement lands are not located in the floodplain
Human Health & Safety	No	An Environmental Site Assessment prepared for the proposed acquisition did not identify any major concerns.
Migratory Birds	Yes	See section 3.2.2, Wildlife
Native American Concerns	No	See section 4.1(Consultation and Coordination). The Coeur d'Alene Tribe has no concerns for acquisition of the easement, and consultation for future trail development is ongoing.
Non-Native Invasive and Noxious Species	Yes	See section 3.2.4
Threatened/Endangered Species	Yes	See sections 3.2.1 (plants), 3.2.2 (aquatic species) and 3.2.2 (wildlife)
Water Quality (Surface/Ground)	Yes	See section 3.2.5 (water resources).
Wastes, Hazardous/Solid	No	A pre-acquisition survey did not find any evidence of hazardous substances.
Wetlands, Riparian Zones	Yes	See section 3.2.1 (Vegetation) and 3.2.5 (Wetlands/Riparian)
Wild & Scenic Rivers	No	None in the area
Wilderness	No	None in the area

## 2 ALTERNATIVES

This chapter describes the Proposed Action and No Action alternatives. It also describes an alternative that BLM considered but eliminated from further analysis in this EA.

### 2.1 Proposed Action

The proposed easement would grant the public access across approximately 695 feet of private land for the purpose of constructing a trail to access BLM lands. The legal description is:

**Boise Meridian, Kootenai County, State of Idaho**

T. 50 N., R. 4 W.,

sec. 21, SE1/4 SE1/4;

sec. 22, NW1/4 SW1/4 SW1/4.

The trail across private property would be labeled to inform the public that they are accessing BLM lands through private lands and to please stay on the designated trail through private lands.

The easement trail will be standard trail design of 2 ft bare ground and vegetation cleared on 2 feet on each side of the trail.

The BLM will sign the private lands to inform the public of the boundaries of the private lands adjacent to the public lands.

#### 2.1.1 Monitoring

Disturbed areas would be monitored for post-project vegetation recovery. Areas that do not revegetate quickly and would be vulnerable to weed invasion would be planted with native and/or desirable non-native species.

### 2.2 No Action

In the no action alternative the BLM would not acquire an easement from the private landowner. There would be trespass issues from the current Nature Conservancy lands across the private lands to BLM lands.

### 2.3 Alternatives Eliminated from Further Analysis

An alternative of a floating walkway across the wetlands to the BLM lands was eliminated from consideration due to probable impacts to the wetlands and probable high cost of building and maintaining such a structure.

## 3 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND EFFECTS OF ALTERNATIVES

This chapter characterizes the resources and uses that have the potential to be affected by the proposed action, followed by a comparative analysis of the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of the alternatives. Direct effects are caused by the action and occur at the same time and place. Indirect effects are caused by the action and are later in time or farther removed in distance, but are still reasonably foreseeable. Cumulative impacts result from the incremental impacts of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

### 3.1 Scope of Analysis

#### Setting

The proposed easement is located along Cougar Bay on the northwest section of Lake Coeur d'Alene, in Kootenai County, Idaho (please see Appendix for maps). Vegetation consists mainly of Douglas fir, cedar and grand fir on the north moist slopes. The trail easement is adjacent to the lake and below the very steep cliff south of the easement. The easement through private property is approximately 695 feet long and is located in similar vegetation and aspect as mentioned above. The area impacted by the proposed easement trail is approximately 0.48 acres.

#### 3.1.1 Potentially Affected Resources and Uses

Issues analyzed for impacts in this chapter are summarized below.

Section #	ELEMENT/RESOURCE/USE
3.2.1	Vegetation/Special Status Plants
3.2.2	Wildlife/Habitat
3.2.3	Aquatic/Special Status Species
3.2.4	Invasive, Nonnative Species
3.2.5	Soil & Water Resources

#### 3.1.2 Related Past, Present and Reasonably Foreseeable Actions

As defined by NEPA regulations (40 CFR 1508.7), "Cumulative impacts result from the incremental impacts of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-Federal) or person undertakes such other actions."

#### Past and Present Actions

There is little known of the past history of the easement. Most of this area of North Idaho was harvested at the turn of the century, so it is probable this area has been harvested 100

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years ago. Presently, there is a trail that meanders along the waterfront (not the proposed easement trail location).

## **Reasonably Foreseeable Future Actions**

If the proposed easement is acquired, the BLM will then pursue a trail system through adjacent BLM lands known as the John C. Pointner Memorial Wildlife Sanctuary.

## **3.2 Affected Environment and Effects of Alternatives**

The degree to which resources/uses may be affected by the proposed activities are discussed in the following subsections. Each subsection includes discussion of the:

- (1) Affected Environment (current condition) of the resource or use
- (2) Effects (direct and indirect) of the Proposed Action and No Action alternatives
- (3) Cumulative Impacts

### **3.2.1 Vegetation/Special Status Species**

#### **Affected Environment**

##### Vegetation Communities

Vegetation in the action area consists primarily of upland forest dominated by ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, grand fir, and western larch. Other tree species such as western white pine, western red cedar, and western hemlock grow where moisture, light, and soil conditions favor these species. Wetlands are present where the existing trail borders Cougar Bay, while small draws catch enough moisture to support a minor amount of riparian vegetation. Meadow or dry grassy vegetation occurs between the parking area and the easement section of trail, with invasive, non-native species present over much of this stretch.

##### Threatened or Endangered Plants

No water howellia (threatened) individuals or populations occur in the action area. Although potential habitat for water howellia is present (less than 0.1 acre) along the easement, the quality of the habitat is low, due to the combined effects of a non-natural hydrologic regime (a result of operation of the Post Falls Dam); the presence of the access road berm; the stream channel alteration on the lower end of Cougar Creek; and the conversion of upstream habitat to agricultural fields.

No Spalding's catchfly (threatened) individuals, populations or potential habitat occur in the action area.

##### Candidate Plants

No whitebark pine individuals, populations or potential habitat occur in the action area.

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## BLM Sensitive Plants

Clustered lady's-slipper, Henderson's sedge, and pine broomrape (all BLM Sensitive), occur nearby on BLM lakefront tracts. While no individuals or populations of these species were found in the trail easement area at Cougar Bay, potential habitat for clustered lady's-slipper, Henderson's sedge, pine broomrape, and certain rare moonwort species is present.

## Wetlands and Riparian Zones

Riparian and wetland vegetation in the action area is dominated by black cottonwood; thin-leaf and red alder; red-osier dogwood; cattails; reed canarygrass; sedges; rushes; and bulrushes.

## **Effects of Alternatives**

### **Proposed Action - Direct and Indirect Effects**

#### Vegetation Communities

Vegetation previously has been disturbed where a foot trail passes through a portion of the easement area. Upgrading the existing trail, where appropriate, or constructing a new trail tread to bare ground would impact about 0.48 acres of existing vegetation.

Vegetation on either side of the path would be cleared or trimmed to a width of two feet. Full-bench construction and other standard design features would decrease the potential for trail erosion to disturb vegetation near the trail corridor or be released into the wetland. Side-casting of excess soil from trail work could create a seed-bed in which common native vegetation or undesirable invasive species could re-grow. Periodic maintenance of trailside vegetation would prevent re-establishment and closing-off of this area, and would likely promote more sun-tolerant shrub and herbaceous species.

The risk of non-native, invasive plants being introduced into adjacent native vegetation would increase due to increased visitor use of the improved or new trail area over current levels. Weeds may out-compete and displace desirable, native vegetation, altering plant community composition, structure, and function both in the present and future. However, post-project monitoring and use of appropriate revegetation techniques would decrease project-related impacts to native vegetation, especially within an area with high potential for weeds to be distributed by hikers or pets.

#### Threatened or Endangered Plants

The proposed action would not affect water howellia individuals or populations. Although a small amount of potential habitat is present along the easement, the existing trail avoids this portion of the wetland. No new trail construction would occur in the wetland community that represents potential habitat. Therefore, this action would have no effect on water howellia habitat. The proposed action would not affect Spalding's catchfly individuals, populations, or potential habitat.

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## Candidate Plants

The proposed action would not affect whitebark pine individuals, populations, or potential habitat.

## BLM Sensitive Plants

Impacts to clustered lady's-slipper, Henderson's sedge, pine broomrape, or certain rare moonwort individuals or populations are not expected due to trail easement acquisition. Upgrade of the existing trail or construction of any new trail segment(s) could impact potential habitat for each of these species, though only amounting to about 0.48 acres of disturbance.

## Wetlands and Riparian Zones

The existing trail on private land does pass through a small amount of wetland vegetation (less than 0.1 acre) on the edge of Cougar Bay. Since there is no proposal to re-locate the established trail to avoid the wetland, no new impacts to this particular area are anticipated due to the proposed action. Any newly constructed trail segment would not be built in wetland habitat; therefore, no additional impacts to the wetland area would occur.

## **No Action -- Direct and Indirect Effects**

Continuation of casual trail use at Cougar Bay would impact desirable native vegetation, potential habitat for rare species, or wetland and riparian areas, if plants are trampled along "unofficial trails" or weeds are introduced. Monitoring may not immediately detect weeds brought in by casual use or along "pioneered" trails, giving weeds a chance to establish and possibly out-compete native vegetation.

## **Cumulative Effects**

The analysis area is the John Pointner Memorial Wildlife Sanctuary, the adjacent area containing connected trails, and the wetland complex of Cougar Bay. (approximately three square miles).

Several types of natural or human-caused disturbance in the analysis area have created the present mosaic of vegetation in various stages of succession, including fire activity; flooding; extreme weather events (e.g., ice storm); erosion; roadbuilding and maintenance; homesite development; recreational pursuits; stream re-alignment; agricultural use; and lake levels controlled by the Post Falls Dam since the early 1900s.

Present day influences on vegetation in the analysis area include road encroachment and maintenance; flooding; erosion; recreational pursuits; agricultural use; and lake levels controlled by the Post Falls Dam.

Reasonably foreseeable future actions affecting vegetation include road encroachment and maintenance; flooding; erosion; recreational pursuits at Cougar Bay including use of

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the adjacent Nature Conservancy and BLM's John Pointner Memorial Wildlife Sanctuary lands; agricultural use; and lake levels controlled by the Post Falls Dam.

Ongoing and future vegetation-disturbing activities in the analysis area would continue to promote a mosaic of plant communities in various stages of ecological succession. Ecological succession would proceed where vegetation is left undisturbed. Plant communities that revert to earlier ecological succession stages due to disturbance would begin the process of maturing all over again. Ongoing and proposed activities that impact vegetation would open up sites favorable to weed invasion due to ground disturbance and/or reduction of tree canopy cover. Where left untreated, weeds would continue to threaten native plant communities.

The proposed action would affect approximately 0.48 of about 1,920 acres of vegetation in the analysis area; therefore, this project is unlikely to contribute cumulative effects to vegetation communities, special status plant species, or wetland and riparian zones, due to the relatively small level of disturbance and its projected timing of implementation, when compared to the overall analysis area.

### 3.2.2 Wildlife

#### Affected Environment

##### *Wildlife Habitat*

The proposed easement is largely surrounded by upland vegetation dominated by ponderosa pine and Douglas fir. The presence of mature ponderosa pine forest in the Idaho Panhandle has decreased significantly over the last century. The relative abundance of mature ponderosa pine forest in north Idaho is low. This forest type has declined 60-70% in Idaho, and 85-98% in the greater Rocky Mountain and Inter Mountain West, and the eastside Cascade Mountains (Noss and others 1995). That makes the value of this habitat type to wildlife species, especially habitat specialists, disproportionate to its abundance.

The ponderosa pine community is host to several Special Status wildlife species. Both "generalist" wildlife species, such as coyote, and "habitat specialists" such as pygmy nuthatch, may inhabit the site. However, no formal surveys have been conducted on the site. The table below illustrates protected and Special Status species that may inhabit the site or were encountered during site visits.

##### *Threatened and Endangered Species*

Only three terrestrial wildlife species are considered threatened or endangered in the Field Office area. These include grizzly bear (*Ursos arctos horribilis*), woodland caribou (*Rangifer tarandus caribou*), and Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*). There is no documentation of Federally protected species on the site. The proposed easement does not fall within a Grizzly Bear Management Unit and is not considered core habitat. There is no designated critical habitat for Canada lynx or woodlands caribou on or near the easement.

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**Table 3.2.2. Migratory birds, raptors, Special Status Species, Species of Greatest Conservation Need and game animals that may inhabit the project site**

Species	Likely to Inhabit	Uncommon-May Inhabit	Encountered on Site Visit
Bald Eagle <sup>M</sup>	X		X
Northern Goshawk		X	
Northern pygmy owl*	X		
Flammulated owl* <sup>M</sup>		X	
Calliope hummingbird* <sup>M</sup>	X		
White-headed woodpecker*		X	
Lewis', woodpecker*		X	
Pygmy nuthatch*		X	
Cassin's finch* <sup>M</sup>	X		
Gray wolf*		X	
Fisher*		X	
Fringed Myotis		X	
Townsend's big-eared bat*		X	
Yuma myotis*	X		
Long-eared myotis*		X	
California myotis*		X	
Long-legged myotis*		X	
Western small-footed myotis*		X	
Common garter snake*	X		
Northern alligator lizard*		X	
Coeur d' Alene Salamander*		X	

\*Special Status Species, \*\* Threatened, Endangered, Proposed, or Candidate Species  
<sup>M</sup> Migratory Bird

### *Special Status Species*

Very often, species that are habitat specialists are BLM Special Status Species or Idaho State Listed Species of Greatest Conservation Need. Their populations tend to be less secure because loss of their specialized habitat results in more dramatic population declines and higher rates of extinction (R.L. Smith 1992). Recovery of declining populations requires restoration of lost habitat which may be difficult for many reasons. Ponderosa pine specialists require ponderosa pine during some portion of their life history. Brown creepers prefer mature ponderosa pine with knobby bark for foraging and nesting. They hide their nests behind a large slab of bark, or occasionally in an existing cavity. Lewis' woodpecker and white-headed woodpecker use large ponderosa pine for excavating nesting cavities and for foraging. Pygmy nuthatches forage for insects along the bole of the ponderosa tree, and they store pine seeds from the cones in the knobby bark. Pygmy nuthatches excavate a nesting cavity in the soft wood of a dead limb or snag. Small family groups roost in the nesting cavity during the non-breeding season. Calliope humming birds build their nests on pine boughs or on the base of an old pine cone (Kaufman, 1996).

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While the common garter snake is fairly common in north Idaho, the northern alligator lizard is relatively rare. The alligator lizard is a habitat specialist that can occur in many different upland habitats, but is limited to those habitats that have talus slopes, or rocky outcrops. Common garter snakes are found in many upland and riparian sites in the Panhandle region of Idaho. Usually they are not too far from a water source. They are habitat generalists that prey on insects, small fishes, amphibians, and occasionally small mammals and birds (NatureServe, 2009).

The Coeur d'Alene Salamander is associated with three habitat types; waterfall spray zones, springs and seeps, and stream edges. In wet weather they may be found under leaf litter, logs, and bark. Forest sites where they have been documented have at least 25% canopy cover but can be highly variable in cover type; from ponderosa pine to hemlock (Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, 2009). Because they respire (breath) through their skin, the most important habitat component for the Coeur d'Alene Salamander is moisture and humidity. On the project site, salamanders would be located in perpetually wet areas, such as a seep, spring or perennial stream banks.

The bat species found in Table 1 are habitat specialists because they require roosting and hibernating habitats that are very specific in their temperature and airflow requirements. Often bat populations, roosting sites, and life histories are not well known. This lack of knowledge leads most wildlife and land managers to take a more conservative approach when it comes to actions that may impact these bat species or their habitats. No mine workings, which would provide valuable roosting habitat, are known on this site. Some species that use snags, loose bark, cavities, or foliage for roosting may be present on the site. California myotis (*Myotis* is a species of bats) prefer dry conifer sites, and they may use this site for foraging. They may also roost under loose tree bark. The fringed myotis, which is relatively rare in north Idaho, is most likely to be found in low elevation ponderosa pine. Little is known about its roosting habitat requirements, but snags are one likely source in spring, summer, and early fall. Townsend's big eared bat may use this site for foraging and roosting. The long legged myotis and long eared myotis (bat) are both forest dwelling bats that use snags, caves, and sometimes structures as roosts. This site may provide both foraging and roosting habitat for these two species. Yuma myotis are most commonly found near open water so these bats are highly associated with wetlands.

### *Migratory Birds*

The open forest canopy and shrub understory on the project site provide foraging and nesting habitat for numerous neo-tropical migrants in spring and summer.

Mature ponderosa pine, with an open and shrubby understory is a habitat type that supports both specialist and generalist migratory birds. Unlike ponderosa pine specialists, migratory birds that are generalists on the project site can usually fulfill all of their life history requirements in mixed coniferous forests, the shrubby forest understory, or in sunny forest openings with grasses and shrubs. These generalists that are likely to

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be on the project site are usually relatively common. These birds may nest in pine trees, from near to ground level up to the highest branches. They may be secondary cavity nesters, or nest on the ground.

### *Other Wildlife*

There is evidence of elk, deer, and wild turkey use on the site. The low elevation and proximity to water make this parcel particularly valuable to many wildlife species. This project site provides necessary habitat components for mountain lion, bear, grouse, bobcat, and numerous small mammal species.

### **Effects of Alternatives**

#### **Proposed Action - Direct and Indirect Effects**

##### *Federally protected species*

No impacts to Federally protected species would be expected as a result of implementation of this easement. None of the three listed species have ever been documented on the site and no designated critical habitat for any of the three species is found on the site.

##### *General Effects Common to All Species*

Because there is no disturbance associated with the proposed action, no direct effects to wildlife species are expected. Indirect effects may include increased recreation on the project site resulting from increased awareness of the area and a higher recreational value due to increased access through private land. If there is an increase in recreation, there is potential for greater disturbance to wildlife on the site. Migratory birds and ground nesting birds would be particularly vulnerable to more human presence during the nesting season. However, it is not likely that recreation on the site will increase to such an extent that future impacts would be significantly greater than current impacts. Additionally, any increased impacts are not likely to have population level effects and would be limited to isolated impacts to small numbers of individuals.

#### **No Action - Direct and Indirect Effects**

Currently, recreationists are using the area on undesignated trails. Disturbance to wildlife is already occurring at some level and is not confined to a specific trail corridor. This disturbance would continue to occur under the No Action Alternative.

No increase in recreational use is expected to result from increased awareness of the site and increased recreational opportunities on private lands via the easement. Therefore, there would be no increased disturbance to migratory or Special Status birds during the nesting season and energetic costs to individuals or loss of nests and offspring. However,

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recreationists currently using the project area would continue to spread weeds by disturbing soil on pioneered trails and introducing seeds from their shoes, pets, tires etc.

### **Cumulative Effects**

The analysis area is the John Pointner Memorial Wildlife Sanctuary, the adjacent area containing connected trails, and the wetland complex of Cougar Bay (approximately three square miles).

Several types of natural or human-caused disturbance in the analysis area have created the present mosaic of wildlife habitat in various stages of succession, including fire activity; flooding; extreme weather events (e.g., ice storm); erosion; roadbuilding and maintenance; homesite development; recreational pursuits; stream re-alignment; agricultural use; and lake levels controlled by the Post Falls Dam since the early 1900s.

If the easement acquisition is completed, future construction of a recreational trail on the public lands for the John Pointner Memorial Wildlife Sanctuary is currently proposed and being analyzed (NEPA No. BLM-ID-C010-2011-0011-EA). Cumulative effects may include increased disturbance from public use of the trail when it is constructed. Disturbance during construction has the potential to temporarily disturb any wildlife inhabiting the site. Most species are easily able to leave the area if disturbance is significant enough. However, this still is an energetic cost to the individual and in extreme cases can result in increased predation risk to the individual or its offspring.

Ground disturbance from trail construction can result in increased presence of invasive nonnative weed species. This may ultimately lead to habitat degradation. Monitoring of and treatment of weeds along the trail corridor would help mitigate this effect.

Construction of new trail and improvements to existing trails will require brush removal and dirt work within the trail corridor. If construction takes place during the nesting season for migratory birds or Special Status birds, nest loss or abandonment may occur. Disturbance by laborers and equipment may be significant enough to cause stress to nesting birds and result in abandonment and/or predation of nests. Implementing trail improvements and construction outside of the nesting season would mitigate these impacts. Ideally construction would occur after August 1 and before April 1.

Other reasonably foreseeable future actions affecting wildlife in the analysis area include road encroachment and maintenance; flooding; erosion; recreational pursuits; agricultural use; and lake levels controlled by the Post Falls Dam.

Ongoing and future activities in the analysis area will continue to promote a mosaic of wildlife habitats in various stages of ecological succession. Ecological succession would proceed where vegetation is left undisturbed. Plant communities that revert to earlier ecological succession stages due to disturbance would begin the process of maturing all over again. Ongoing and proposed activities that impact wildlife habitat would open up

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sites favorable to weed invasion due to ground disturbance and/or reduction of tree canopy cover. Where left untreated, weeds would continue to degrade wildlife habitat.

The proposed action would not disturb wildlife habitat in the analysis area; therefore, this project is unlikely to contribute cumulative effects to wildlife communities or special status wildlife species.

### 3.2.3 Aquatic/Special Status Species

#### Affected Environment

The proposed action would take place adjacent to Cougar Bay on Coeur d'Alene Lake. Cougar Creek is a small tributary stream to Coeur d'Alene Lake that enters at Cougar Bay.

Twelve native fishes inhabit the Coeur d'Alene Lake basin: northern pikeminnow (*Ptychocheilus oregonensis*), reidside shiner (*Richardsonius balteatus*), torrent sculpin (*Cottus rhotheus*), shorthead sculpin (*C. confusus*), speckled dace (*Rhinichthys osculus*), longnose dace (*R. cataractae*), longnose sucker (*Catostomus catostomus*), largescale sucker (*Ca. macrocheilus*), bridgelip sucker (*Ca. columbianus*), mountain whitefish (*Prosopium williamsoni*), westslope cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki lewisi*) and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*). There are a variety of nonnative fish species found within the watershed as well, including smallmouth bass (*Micropterus dolomieu*), largemouth bass (*M. salmoides*), crappie (*Pomoxis* sp.), sunfish (*Lepomis* sp.), yellow perch (*Perca flavescens*), brown bullhead (*Ameiurus nebulosa*), channel catfish (*Ictalurus punctata*), northern pike (*Esox lucius*), brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*), rainbow trout (*O. mykiss*), chinook salmon (*O. tshawytscha*), and kokanee (*O. nerka*).

#### Threatened and Endangered Species

Coeur d'Alene Lake contains bull trout which are federally listed as threatened. The Columbia River bull trout Distinct Population Segment was federally listed as threatened on June 10, 1998 by the USFWS (63 FR 31647); this includes bull trout in Coeur d'Alene Lake. The USFWS issued a final rule for bull trout critical habitat on September 26, 2005, and on October 18, 2010 issued a revised designation of bull trout critical habitat, which includes Coeur d'Alene Lake.

Bull trout are found primarily in colder streams, although individual fish are migratory in larger, warmer river systems throughout the Columbia River basin (Fraley and Shepard 1989; Rieman and McIntyre 1993, 1995; Buchanan and Gregory 1997; Rieman et al. 1997). Water temperature above 59°F is believed to limit bull trout distribution, which may partially explain patchy distributions within a watershed (Fraley and Shepard 1989; Rieman and McIntyre 1995). Spawning areas are often associated with cold water springs, groundwater infiltration and the coldest streams in a watershed (Pratt 1992; Rieman and McIntyre 1993; Rieman et al. 1997). Bull trout typically spawn from August to November during periods of decreasing water temperatures. Fry normally emerge

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from early April through May, depending upon water temperature and increasing stream flows (Pratt 1992; Ratliff and Howell 1992).

Bull trout distribution and abundance is positively correlated with pools and complex forms of cover, such as large or complex woody debris and undercut banks, and coarse substrates (cobble and boulder) (Rieman and McIntyre 1993; Jakober 1995; MBTSG 1998). Stream bottom and substrate composition are highly important for bull trout (Pratt 1992), especially for juvenile rearing and spawning site selection (McPhail and Murray 1979; Graham et al. 1981; Rieman and McIntyre 1993). Fine sediments can influence incubation survival and emergence success (Weaver and White 1985), but might also limit access to substrate interstices that provide important cover during rearing and overwintering (Goetz 1994; Jakober 1995).

Currently, within the Coeur d'Alene Basin bull trout are found primarily in the upper portions of the St. Joe River subbasin (PBTTAT 1998), which contains spawning and rearing habitats. Migratory bull trout also use the St. Joe River, the Coeur d'Alene River and Coeur d'Alene Lake for foraging, migrating, and overwintering habitat. Little is known about the role of Coeur d'Alene Lake in providing habitat for bull trout populations within the Coeur d'Alene Basin. Bull trout may use Cougar Bay in conjunction with the rest of Coeur d'Alene Lake for foraging and overwintering habitat. Bull trout are not known or likely to use Cougar Creek, which is small and does not have the habitat to support bull trout spawning or rearing.

### **BLM Sensitive Species**

Westslope cutthroat trout, a BLM sensitive species, are found in Coeur d'Alene Lake and many of its tributaries including Cougar Creek. They spawn mainly in small tributaries from March through July, when water temperatures warm to about 50°F.

Westslope cutthroat trout stocks in the Coeur d'Alene Basin exist at a fraction of historic levels due to habitat degradation from activities such as mining, logging, development, and highway construction. Fishing pressure and introduction of non-native fish species has also contributed to reducing cutthroat numbers (USFWS, 1999; DuPont and Horner, 2003). Due to low numbers, the current fishing regulations for westslope cutthroat trout are catch-and-release in the entire Spokane River drainage, which includes the Spokane River above Post Falls Dam, Coeur d'Alene Lake and all tributary streams (Idaho Fish and Game website).

Westslope cutthroat trout use Cougar Creek year-round, and are also found in Cougar Bay.

# Cougar Bay Easement Acquisition

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## Effects of Alternatives

### Proposed Action - Direct and Indirect Effects

No direct effects to fish species inhabiting Cougar Creek or Cougar Bay would occur from acquisition of the easement. Indirect effects could occur from the public using the easement area if sediment were to be mobilized and enter the water. The area is well vegetated and use by the public would be expected to cause little disturbance. Due to the lack of disturbance and the vegetation sediment is not expected to move into Cougar Creek or Cougar Bay, therefore no indirect effects to fish or fish habitat are anticipated. The proposed action would have “No Effect” on bull trout or bull trout designated critical habitat.

The potential future trail construction is discussed under cumulative effects.

### No Action - Direct and Indirect Effects

No easement would be acquired; therefore there would be no direct or indirect effects of easement use by the public on fish or fish habitat in Cougar Creek or Cougar Bay.

### Cumulative Effects

Forest, agricultural practices, mining and development have had cumulative effects on fish and aquatic habitat within Coeur d’Alene Lake. Most of these activities, other than development, take place on tributaries to Coeur d’Alene Lake and are not directly adjacent to the lake. Development, including some clearing for houses and increase in roads does occur near the lake. In the vicinity of Cougar Bay, there is some development occurring, and Hwy 95 is adjacent to the bay to the west. Most of the land adjacent to Cougar Bay in the area of the proposed trail development is forested and in a relatively natural state.

Once the easement is obtained, construction of a trail through the easement and on to BLM land is planned. Indirect effects from construction and use of the trail could occur if sediment were to be mobilized and enter the water. However, only a portion of the proposed trail is near Cougar Bay; the rest of the trail would head up the hillside away from the water. Construction of the trail would mostly involve removal of small trees, shrubs, and downed wood with very little ground disturbance. Use of the trail also would be expected to create very little disturbance. Due to the lack of disturbance, the distance of most of the trail from Cougar Creek and Cougar Bay, and the vegetation that is located between the proposed trail and the water, sediment is not expected to move into Cougar Creek or Cougar Bay from construction or use of the trail. The proposed action would have “No Effect” on bull trout or bull trout designated critical habitat.

Since the proposed action is not expected to have any impacts on fish or aquatic habitat, there are no anticipated cumulative effects.

# Cougar Bay Easement Acquisition

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## 3.2.4 Invasive Species

### Affected Environment

Historic activities in the project area (primarily logging) created disturbances allowing the invasion of noxious weeds. The majority of the current weed populations are closely associated with these past activities. Old logging roads, skid trails, and the transition area between wetland and upland are areas with existing noxious weed populations. Despite these activities, the majority of the area is weed free or has only minor weed infestations. Noxious weeds currently identified in the project area are:

Spotted knapweed	<i>Centaurea maculosa</i>
Common tansy	<i>Tanacetum vulgare</i>
Meadow hawkweed	<i>Hieracium caespitosum</i>
Common mullein	<i>Verbascum thapsus</i>
Canada thistle	<i>Cirsium arvense</i>
Oxeye daisy	<i>Chrysanthemum leucanthemum</i>
Bull thistle	<i>Cirsium vulgare</i>

### Environmental Effects

#### Proposed Action - Direct and Indirect Effects

The trail improvement and use actions would likely have a direct effect by increasing the possibility of localized invasive plant invasion. Indirect effects would be introduction of new invasive species into the area caused by increased human traffic, and increase in invasive plants following construction activities. Trail construction disturbs the soil creating available sites for invasive plant establishment. Once established, trails also provide a conduit for invasive species spread. Weed seeds or other reproductive plant parts may inadvertently be carried into new areas by hikers, pets or wildlife.

Administrative actions will decrease the likelihood of invasive species establishment and/or spread. Trailheads will be posted with information asking people to stay on trails to avoid impacts to vegetation and to limit weed introduction into surrounding plant communities.

Disturbed areas will be monitored for post-project vegetation recovery. Areas that do not vegetate quickly and would be vulnerable to weed invasion will be planted with native and/or desirable non-native species.

#### No Action Alternative - Direct and Indirect Effects

No change from current conditions.

# Cougar Bay Easement Acquisition

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## **Cumulative Effects**

There are many factors in the analysis area that contribute to the spread of noxious weeds including: logging, wildlife, wildland fires, recreation and other uses.

Noxious weed control efforts in the project area would be conducted as part of the Inland Empire Cooperative Weed Management Area (IECWMA). These cooperators have noxious weed control responsibilities and interests on adjacent and co-mingled lands in the area. Uncontrolled weed populations in one jurisdiction greatly affect the ability of other land managers to control weeds on lands they administer. The IECWMA promotes an integrated weed management program throughout the area that includes public relations, education and training in the noxious weed arena, along with coordination of weed control efforts and methods, and sharing of resources.

Past events such as road-building and use; logging; and recreational activity have contributed to weed invasion on BLM and non-BLM lands. Where left untreated, these weeds may have persisted and continued to threaten native plant communities; although in areas where plant canopy has provided sufficiently shaded conditions, weeds may have not established or decreased in extent over time. Where effective treatment has occurred, weeds have been either eradicated or their spread into native vegetation was curtailed.

Future construction of a trail extending from this easement onto BLM land in the John Pointner Memorial Wildlife Sanctuary would also increase the threat of weed invasion into native plant communities. Other ongoing and reasonably foreseeable actions on non-BLM land which would increase the threat of weed invasion into native plant communities include road-building and use; logging; fire; wildlife, and recreational activity.

The short term effects of the proposed action may result in increased weed establishment and spread in areas of ground disturbance. Over the long term, established trails may provide avenues for weed seed dispersal into the project area. Alternatively, the trails will provide increased access for weed control activities such as monitoring and treatment. These efforts undertaken by BLM on public lands would contribute positive cumulative effects on noxious weeds through participation in the IECWMA and implementation of the proposed action.

## **3.2.5 Soil, Water Resources and Wetlands/Riparian**

### **Affected Environment**

#### Soil

The primary soil type in the project area is Kruse silt loam, on 20-35 percent slopes (USDA, NRCS, 2008). The soil is well drained and consists of silt loam and loam to a depth of 46-63 inches. It is derived from volcanic ash and/or loess over mixed colluvium. In the wetlands, the soil type is classified as Pywell muck, on slopes of 0-2 percent. The parent material is herbaceous and/or woody organic material.

# Cougar Bay Easement Acquisition

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## Wetlands and Riparian Zones

Wetlands are present where the existing trail borders Cougar Bay, while small draws catch enough moisture to support a minor amount of riparian vegetation. Riparian and wetland vegetation in the action area is dominated by black cottonwood; thin-leaf and red alder; red-osier dogwood; cattails; reed canarygrass; sedges; rushes; and bulrushes.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS**

### **Proposed Action - Direct and Indirect Effects**

A foot trail already passes through the easement area and since no on-the-ground changes to this segment are currently proposed, there would be no impacts to soil or water resources associated with trail construction and vegetation removal expected. The proposed new trail on BLM land would be located far enough upslope to leave an effective vegetative buffer between the trail and the lake. Full-bench construction, properly installed drainage, and other design features would decrease the potential for trail erosion into the wetland. Periodic maintenance of trailside vegetation would prevent re-establishment and closing-off of this area, and would likely promote more sun-tolerant shrub and herbaceous species.

The proposed action would not measurably affect water quality of Lake Coeur d'Alene or the wetlands. Although increased foot traffic would generate a small increase in erosion off of the trail, the vegetated buffer below the trail would effectively trap sediment. The new trail section would avoid wetland areas and be designed to drain properly, thereby, minimizing puddling and concentrated runoff. Through good drainage design, implementation of BMPs, and regular trail maintenance, impacts to soil or water resources would be very minimal.

### **No Action - Direct and Indirect Effects**

Continuation of casual trail use would have minor impacts on wetland and riparian areas if poorly maintained trails contribute sediment.

### **Cumulative Effects**

The analysis area is the John Pointner Memorial Wildlife Sanctuary, the adjacent area containing connected trails, and the wetland complex of Cougar Bay. (approximately three square miles).

As described in the vegetation section of this document, several types of natural or human-caused disturbance in the analysis area have created the present mosaic of vegetation in various stages of succession, including fire activity; flooding; extreme weather events (e.g., ice storm); erosion; roadbuilding and maintenance; homesite

## Cougar Bay Easement Acquisition

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development; recreational pursuits; stream re-alignment; agricultural use; and lake levels controlled by the Post Falls Dam since the early 1900s.

Present day influences on Lake Coeur d'Alene in the analysis area include road encroachment and maintenance; flooding; erosion; recreational pursuits; agricultural use; and lake levels controlled by the Post Falls Dam.

Reasonably foreseeable future actions affecting vegetation include future construction of the John Pointner Memorial Wildlife Sanctuary trail by the BLM, road encroachment and maintenance; flooding; erosion; recreational pursuits; agricultural use; and lake levels controlled by the Post Falls Dam.

The proposed trail easement would affect approximately 0.48 of about 1,920 acres of vegetation in the analysis area; therefore, this project is unlikely to contribute cumulative effects to water quality, vegetation communities or wetland and riparian zones, due to the relatively small level of disturbance and its projected timing of implementation, when compared to the overall analysis area.

### **3.4 Mitigation and Monitoring**

Trail improvements and construction should occur between August 1 and April 1 to mitigate impacts to migratory birds and Special Status birds during the nesting season. Signs should be posted advising users to stay on designated trails. Adherence to this would avoid or reduce impacts to wildlife and habitat quality outside of the trail corridor.

Disturbed areas should be monitored for post-project vegetation recovery. Areas that do not vegetate quickly and would be vulnerable to weed invasion should be planted with native and/or desirable non-native species.

Post-construction weed monitoring efforts should be implemented to track potential impacts from weed introduction and could lead to control methods that would limit negative effects to native vegetation.

The BLM trail should be posted with information encouraging users to stay on trails to avoid trampling impacts to site vegetation and to limit weed introduction.

Expanding interpretive displays at the trailhead could increase public awareness about lake ecology, the function of wetlands, and the vulnerability of site plant communities to weed invasion.

The Coeur d'Alene Field Office hydrologist will inspect the trail prior to ground-disturbing activities. If specific potential problem areas for drainage or erosion are found, they will be addressed through design measures. Following large floods or runoff events the trail should be inspected to insure soil stability and proper drainage is maintained.

## **4 CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION**

Scoping for the proposed easement acquisition was completed as part of preparation of the EA for the John Pointner Memorial Wildlife Sanctuary Trail (NEPA No. BLM-ID-C010-2011-0011-EA).

### **4.1 Persons, Groups, Agencies and Individuals Consulted**

Coordination with the following affected interests did not identify any significant issues for the proposed acquisition of the easement.

Coeur d'Alene Tribe  
The Nature Conservancy  
DBH Properties, LLLP  
US Fish and Wildlife Service  
US Army Corp of Engineers  
Idaho State Historic Preservation Office

This EA will be available during a comment period from the Idaho BLM public internet site at:

<http://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/info/nepa.html>

Copies may be requested by calling or visiting the BLM office in Coeur d'Alene (208-769-5000).

### **4.2 Preparers**

Kurt Pindel, Recreation/Project Lead  
  
LeAnn Abell, Botanist  
  
Larry Kaiser, Forester  
  
Doug Evans, Natural Resource Specialist  
  
Carrie Hugo, Wildlife Biologist  
  
David Sisson, Archeologist  
  
Mike Stevenson, Soils/Hydrology  
  
Cynthia Weston, Fisheries Biologist  
  
Lorrie West, NEPA Coordinator

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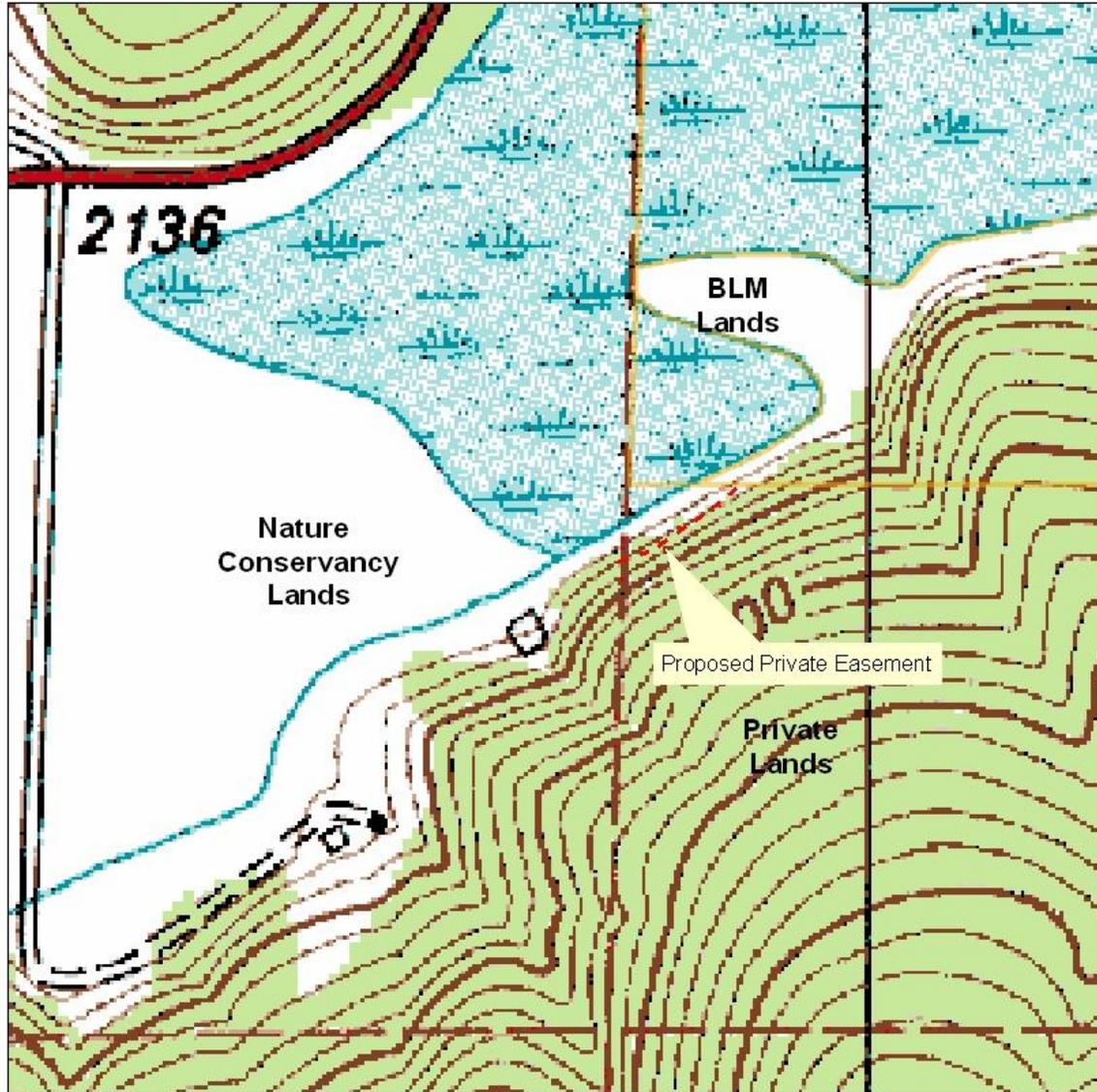
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# Cougar Bay Easement Acquisition

MAP 1. (T. 50 N., R 4 W., SECTION 21, SE1/4, SE1/4)

## Cougar Bay Easement Proposed Trail



0 0.035 0.07 0.14 Miles

 No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for use of this data for purposes not intended by the BLM

# Cougar Bay Easement Acquisition

Map 2. (T. 50 N., R 4 W., SECTION 21, SE1/4, SE1/4)

## Cougar Bay Easement Proposed Trail

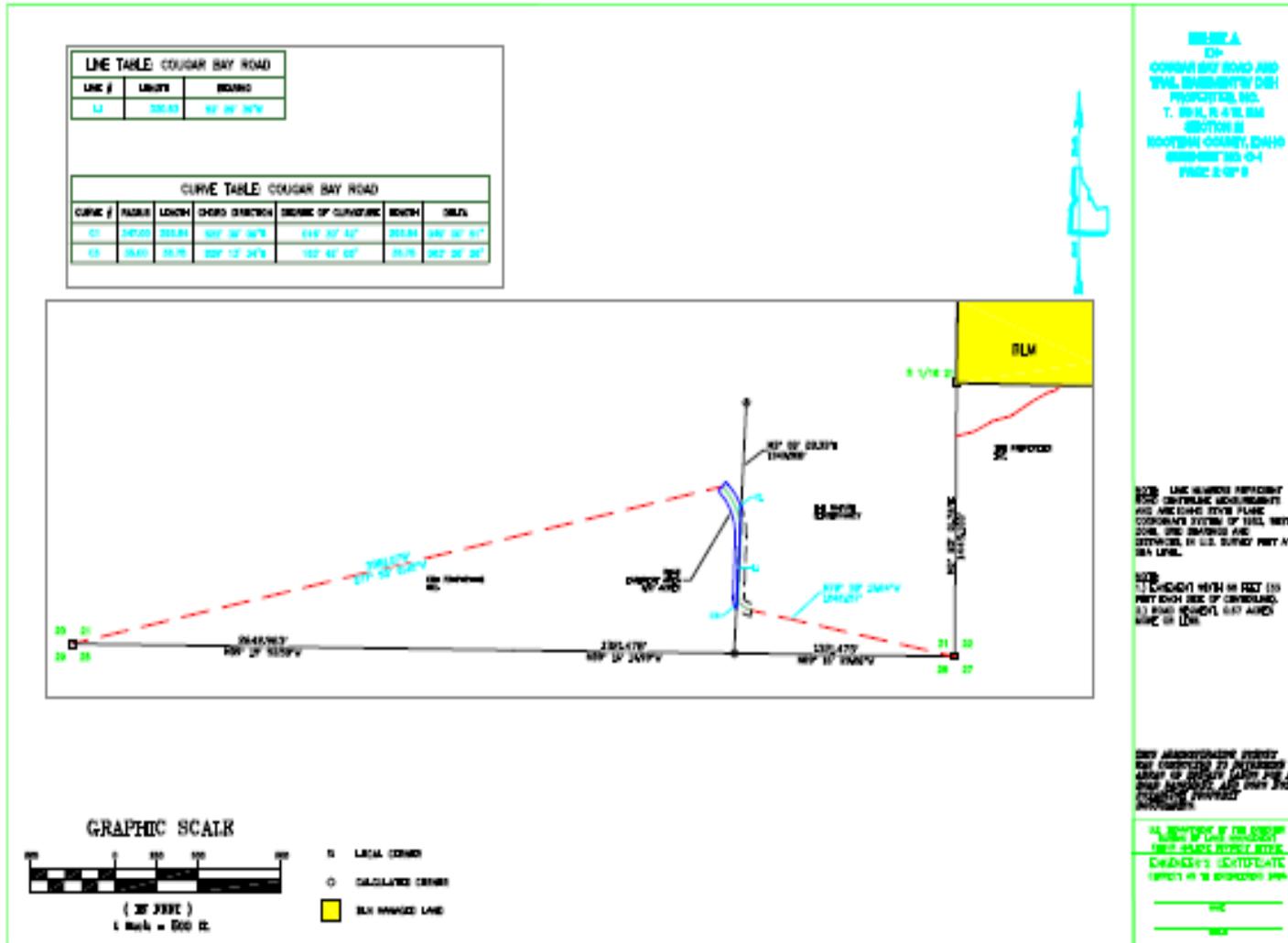


0 0.035 0.07 0.14 Miles

 No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for use of this data for purposes not intended by the BLM

# Cougar Bay Easement Acquisition

## Road Easement Area (T. 50 N., R 4 W., Section 21; 0.57 Acres)



# Cougar Bay Easement Acquisition

## Trail Easement Area (T. 50 N., R 4 W., Section 22; 0.48 Acres)

