

SCOPING/INFORMATION PACKAGE

Little Weiser River Streambank Stabilization

Four Rivers Field Office

This information package summarizes a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to stabilize eroding streambanks along Little Weiser and Weiser rivers in accordance with Cascade Resource Framework Plan. Federal actions 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 September 2010. Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential environmental issues related to the proposed action, and to identify alternatives to the proposed action that meet the purpose of and need for the project.

Purpose and Need for Action

Little Weiser (LWR) and Weiser River (WR) are 303(d) listed water quality impaired streams. After analyzing water quality in the Weiser River watershed (*Weiser River Watershed Assessment and TMDL*, 1996) Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ 2006) developed Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) targets to reduce suspended sediment, water temperature, bacteria levels, and nutrient levels in each waterbody. At present TMDL sediment targets are not being met on BLM managed stream segments of LWR with WR due to high sediment yields generated from rapidly eroding streambanks. In addition, TMDL shade targets for reduction of water temperature are not presently being met due to absence of shade producing trees and other riparian vegetation along each stream.

The objectives of this project would be to improve water quality in LWR and WR by stabilizing eroding streambanks, and increasing stream shading along both rivers to levels supporting IDEQ TMDL targets in the watershed.

Existing Condition

Both LWR and WR were rated in functioning-at-risk condition in a 2009 assessment due to high to extreme bank erosion rates, and very low frequency of stabilizing deep-rooted riparian vegetation. Severe bank erosion is occurring on 95% of the north streambank, and 25% of the south streambank along a 550-foot-long segment of LWR. Approximately 350-feet of WR are actively eroding along three disconnected reaches. Erosion along these vertical 6-10-foot-high streambanks is contributing to elevated levels of suspended and fine bedload sediment in each waterbody. Persistent annual lateral movement of LWR would eventually result in permanent loss of private farmland, further jeopardizing water quality.

Riparian vegetation, including deep-rooted shade producing trees and shrubs is absent along LWR so water temperatures are not protected from heating by solar radiation. The stream segments are habitat for redband trout, a BLM special status species. Further, the LWR segment is *proposed critical habitat* (USFWS Feb. 2010) for bull trout, a federally listed *Threatened Species* (USFWS 2006). Woody and herbaceous vegetation along Weiser River is in much better condition, and is likely near potential to support shade targets along streambanks which are not actively eroding.

Wildlife habitat in the project area has been degraded by historic and on-going loss of woody and herbaceous vegetation in riparian habitats. Noxious weeds on the stream terraces bordering each stream also have degraded habitat quality.

Proposed Action

The proposed action is located in Washington County, 2 miles south of Cambridge, Idaho at the confluence of Little Weiser River with Weiser River.

Streambanks would be protected by a series of barbs which would divert stream energy away from eroding streambanks. The project would include re-sloping of vertical streambanks on the north side of LWR and portions of WR to a 3:1 slope before bank barbs are constructed. The stream channel of LWR would be adjusted accordingly to accommodate flows diverted from streambank areas and promote effective bedload sediment transport through the reach. In addition, rip-rapping, placement of large woody debris, or other appropriate erosion control structures would be installed along selected areas of WR. The project would include re-vegetating streambanks and constructed barb structures with willows, cottonwood trees, and other adapted native vegetation. A temporary enclosure fence would be constructed around the LWR portion of the project area. The enclosure would remain in place until restored riparian vegetation is well established. Noxious weeds would be treated throughout the project area.

Preliminary Issues

The Federal Clean Water Act (1972, as amended) requires that states and tribes restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the nation's waters. States and tribes must adopt water quality standards necessary to protect fish, shellfish, and wildlife while providing for recreation in and on the waters whenever possible. The Clean Water Act also requires that these standards apply to waters flowing through federally managed lands.

Because the proposed action would occur very near the private/BLM boundary, a GPS based land survey of the area would occur early in the project planning phase in 2010. A cooperative agreement between private landowners, BLM, and Natural Resources Conservation Service may be necessary prior to initiating the proposed action

The affected portion of LWR was proposed as bull trout critical habitat on January 14, 2010 (75 FR 2270). The final designation of bull trout critical habitat is anticipated for September 30, 2010. Informal consultation with USFWS regarding the potential effects the project may have on proposed bull trout critical habitat was first initiated through the Level One team on April 26, 2010.

Preliminary Alternative Development

Prior to developing alternatives, BLM resources specialists including the Four Rivers Field Office botanist, wildlife biologist, and archeologist, examined the area to determine whether special status plant and animal species, or sensitive cultural resources were present which would require consideration before formulating a plan.

The stream segments were evaluated for proper functioning condition in 2009 by the BLM natural resource specialist. The Idaho State Office hydrologist and fisheries biologist have toured the project area and provided guidance and preliminary recommendations to remediate the erosion problems. A soil conservation specialist from Washington County Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) has toured the site and provided technical input for project design. The adjacent private landowner was consulted in regard to access, possible construction methods, and other necessary considerations.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) personnel were consulted via the Level One Team in May 2010, in regard to possible impacts and necessary mitigations that would require considered for bull trout.

Decision to be Made

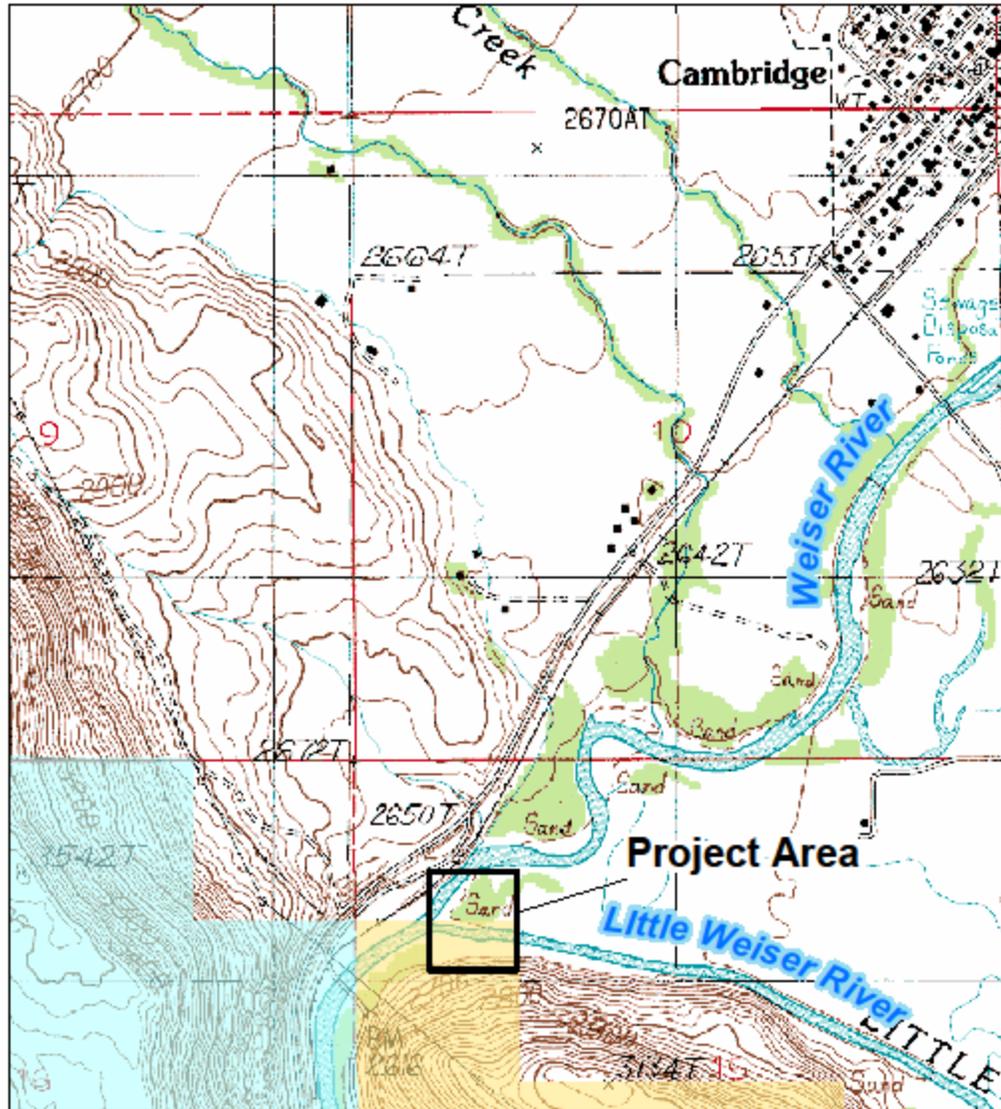
The Four Rivers Manager will decide whether to approve implementation of the proposed action or an alternative to the proposed action based upon the outcome of an environmental assessment and the issuance of a Finding of No Significant Impacts (FONSI). The decision will include any mitigation and/or monitoring requirements as outlined in 43 CFR 5003.3 (a) and (b), protests of the decision may be made within 15 days of the publication date.

Public Input Requested

Comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, preliminary issues, and alternatives. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received by August 30, 2010 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 james_tarter@blm.gov with the title of this project in the subject line. Please identify whether you are submitting comments as an individual or as the designated spokesperson on behalf of an organization. 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: J. Allen Tarter, Natural Resources Specialist, 3948 S. Development Avenue, Boise ID 83705. (208) 384-3349.

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7/29/2010. UTM 11, NAD 83, Meters

Legend

- BLM (Yellow square)
- STATE (Cyan square)
- PRIVATE (White square)

