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Skinny Dipper Hot Springs Unauthorized Use

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U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
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Boise, ID 83705

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Need for and Purpose of Action

Skinny Dipper Hot Springs has been a popular soaking destination for over two decades. Human development has enhanced the soaking opportunities at the hot spring. The geology of the area doesn't allow natural soaking pools to develop and the water temperature is too hot for comfortable soaking. Subsequently, over the years, individuals have created soaking pools out of materials found on site (rocks and soil), and concrete. They have also created a complex plumbing system that mixes hot and cold water, resulting in a comfortable soaking experience. BLM has not issue a permit to any group or individual to build permanent structures on public land in this regard, therefore the soaking pools and plumbing system are considered an unauthorized development (trespass).

The trespass has created a soaking experience within 40 miles of Boise, Idaho. Unfortunately, nighttime activity often results in unsafe and often illegal activities at the hot spring. For example, Boise County Sherriff dispatch has received 86 calls since May 2007 (see attached table). The calls included: death, sexual assault; shooting, underage drinking, drunken behavior, medical mishaps, illegal drugs, theft, and vandalism. Boise District enacted a nighttime closure on May 25, 2012 to stop these activities. BLM rangers issued 44 closure violations between May 25, 2012 and March 2013. The closure has reduced the nighttime use, but violations are still occurring (Table 1).

Table 1. Law enforcement incidents (May 2007– March 2013); Skinny Dipper Hot Springs, Idaho.

Nature of Call	**Totals**
Controlled Substance — Includes alcohol and illegal drugs	17
Theft	39
Assault — Includes Guns	12
Vehicle Accidents	5
Medical Includes falls and one Death	11
Other	2

On April 19, 2012, BLM received documentation from Central District Health (Idaho Health District 4) concerning Skinny Dipper Hot Springs. Central District Health's concerns referenced sewage disposal at the site. They "noticed the large volume of users at this site both day and night without a convenient port-a-potty or vault privy to use". In addition BLM found a makeshift toilet inside a burned-out tree approximately 300 feet east of the spring.

The purpose of this proposal is to address the unauthorized development of soaking pools at the Skinny Dipper Hot Springs as per 43 CFR 2920.1-2. This proposal is needed because the trespass has created an environment where unsafe and often illegal activities occur at day and night. The high volume of users, day and night, has raised concerns of human waste accumulation and disease.

1.2 Location and Setting

Skinny Dipper Hot Springs is located on the north side of the Banks-Lowman Highway, approximately 4 miles east of State Highway 55 (Map 1). The springs are accessed by an unauthorized trail. The springs flow into the South Fork Payette River.

1.3 Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plan

The project is in conformance with the 1987 Cascade Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (Cascade RMP). The Cascade RMP resource management guidelines (USDI 1987) state on page 44 that:

> "It is BLM policy to identify, abate, and prevent unauthorized use of public lands. Trespass settlement is geared to recover at least fair market value for the unauthorized use and to require rehabilitation of the land and resource damaged by the unauthorized action."

The plan also states on page 58 that:

> "BLM will manage recreation on public lands. Some areas may be subject to special restrictions to protect resources or eliminate or reduce conflicts among uses."

1.4 Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, and Other Requirements

This action is proposed as to ensure the agency's compliance with the Code of Federal Regulations Title 43 §2920.1-2 in addressing Unauthorized Use.

1.5 Scoping and Development of Issues

Public scoping began in June 2013 when BLM contacted known skinny dipper stakeholders to discuss the BLM's proposal to remove the soaking pools. Additional stakeholders contacted BLM and requested a meeting to discuss the BLM's proposal and possible alternatives. BLM staff met with a group of concerned citizens on July 8, 2013 at the Boise District Office (see attendee list in the project record).

BLM staff briefed the Boise County Commission on July 16, 2013. In addition, BLM hosted a scoping meeting in Boise on July 17, 2013, and a scoping meeting in Crouch Idaho on July 18, 2013. BLM's scoping effort resulted in email public scoping comments, written comments from the meetings, flip chart comments from the meetings, one letter, and one hand delivered alternative (see the issues analysis in the project record). The components of public submitted alternative are included in

Table 2.

BLM continued to communicate with project stakeholders while they tried to develop an alternative to BLMs proposal. In September of 2013 the stakeholders informed BLM that the only alternatives that were plausible were the alternatives that they mentioned in earlier meetings and correspondence (see email correspondence in the project record). These solutions do not address the unauthorized development and therefore do not meet the project's Purpose and Need.

For the purpose of BLM NEPA analysis, an "issue" is a point of disagreement, debate, or dispute with a proposed action based on some anticipated environmental effect. An issue is more than just a position statement, such as disagreement with grazing on public lands. An issue:

- has a cause and effect relationship with the proposed action or alternatives;
- is within the scope of the analysis;
- has not be decided by law, regulation, or previous decision; and
- is amenable to scientific analysis rather than conjecture.

BLM received 39 comment submissions. No significant issues were raised in any of the 39 submissions. The letters consisted of opinion statements and some possible alternatives for BLM to pursue (

Table 2).

2.0 Description of the Alternatives

2.1 Alternatives Considered But Not Analyzed in Detail

The BLM conducted field trips to Skinny Dipper on 03/01/13 and 03/14/13 to discuss the proposal. While on site, the team identified the following alternatives considered but eliminated from detailed study:

- Use a helicopter to remove the concrete materials and piping. This would not be feasible because of safety concerns for workers on the ground and cars on the highway (see notes of field trip with Joe Rogan (Boise Helitack).
- Complete removal and return to natural state. There is no easy, safe way to get material off site. A pack string is not feasible because of steep rocky terrain.
- Permit the unauthorized activity. This alternative was eliminated from detailed study because the BLM has not, to date, received an application for a special use permit regarding this hot spring. Additionally, the required permitting process for obtaining water rights may negate this as a possibility.
- Provide sanitary facilities. BLM standards would require a vault toilet or portable toilet that could be pumped. The geology and topography of the site would not allow for a vault toilet and the distance from the main road would make pumping a portable toilet impossible.

Several of the scoping letters sent in response to BLMs proposal contained alternative solutions. Unfortunately, none of the alternatives met the purpose and need to address unauthorized development at the hot spring (Table 2.1).

Table 2. Alternatives provided during scoping, Skinny Dipper Hot Springs, Idaho.

Alternative Solution	Meets Purpose and Need?	Reason for not considering in Detail
Permit the trespass	Yes, if the permit was written to solve the safety and human waste problems at the site.	A detailed proposal was not submitted for BLM to analyze as an alternative and applications have not been submitted.
Make the area a fee area	No	Does not address the unauthorized development and therefore does not meet the purpose and need.
Greater law enforcement	No	Does not address the unauthorized development and therefore does not meet the purpose and need.
Provide a toilet and dumpster	No	Does not address the unauthorized development and therefore does not meet the purpose and need.
Close area at night	No	Does not address the unauthorized development and therefore does not meet the purpose and need.
Develop a fee parking area	No	Does not address the unauthorized development
Tow vehicles on Friday and Saturday nights and evenings before holidays	No	Does not address the unauthorized development and therefore does not meet the purpose and need.
Install lights to the parking area	No	Does not address the unauthorized development and therefore does not meet the purpose and need.
Increase closure fine	No	Does not address the unauthorized development and therefore does not meet the purpose and need.
Boot vehicles parked at night	No	Does not address the unauthorized development and therefore does not meet the purpose and need.
Ask keepers to voluntarily remove most of the unused piping, replace the white piping with black, and simplify the plumbing system.	No	Does not address the unauthorized development and therefore does not meet the purpose and need.
Provide minimal trail improvements on the steeper middle-portion of the access trail.	No	Does not address the unauthorized development and therefore does not meet the purpose and need.
Work with Boise County to allow them to cite parked cars at night.	No	Does not address the unauthorized development and therefore does not meet the purpose and need. However, Boise County has passed an ordinance that allows county law enforcement to cite cars parked at the parking area at night.

2.2 Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives

2.2.1 Alternative 1 – No Action/Continue Present Management

All unauthorized development of Skinny Dipper Hot Springs would be left in place and any closure enforcement would be discontinued at the springs and parking area. This alternative would also not address the requirement for BLM to comply with Federal Regulations as described above or address safety concerns. Though it does not comply with regulations and does not address the Purpose and Need, it is analyzed to provide a baseline condition and a means of comparison.

2.2.2 Alternative 2 – Proposed Action (Remove pool, piping, and trail)

The Boise District BLM proposes to drain and render inoperable the unauthorized soaking pools and remove piping at Skinny Dipper Hot Springs, approximately 4 miles east of Banks, Idaho.

The BLM would use hand-held tools to breech the soaking pool dams. The removed material would be carried out or left on site above the mean high water mark of the stream.

The BLM would dismantle and remove the surface pipes. Hot and cold water pipes that are cemented into the bedrock would be removed or plugged. The BLM would also remove the seat and accumulated waste from the tree-snag latrine.

The unauthorized access trail (0.25 miles) would be re-contoured and revegetated with forb and grass species known to grow on the site. Fire-killed trees would be felled across the rehabilitated trail to discourage used and to stabilize the site during revegetation. The BLM would construct waterbars across the slope to divert water away from the rehabilitated trail.

The estimated project completion date would be Spring of 2017.

An area closure would be in place for five years after completion to facilitate trail and hot springs rehabilitation. The parking area would also remain closed during the 5-year area closure.

3.0 Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences

Impact Descriptors
Effects can be temporary (short-term) or long lasting/permanent (long-term). These terms may vary somewhat depending on the resource; therefore, each will be quantified by resource where applicable. Generally speaking:

- **Short-term**: 0-3 years (effects are changes to the environment during and following ground-disturbing activities that revert to pre-disturbance conditions, or nearly so, immediately to within a few years following the disturbance).
- **Long-term**: >3 years (effects are those that would remain beyond short-term ground disturbing activities).

The magnitude of potential effects is described as being major, moderate, minor, negligible, or no effect and is interpreted as follows:

- **Major** effects have the potential to cause substantial change or stress to an environmental resource or resource use. Effects generally would be long-term and/or extend over a wide area.
- **Moderate** effects are apparent and/or would be detectable by casual observers, ranging from insubstantial to substantial. Potential changes to or effects on the resource or resource use would generally be localized and short-term.
- **Minor** effects could be slight but detectable and/or would result in small but measurable changes to an environmental resource or resource use.
- **Negligible** effects have the potential to cause an indiscernible and insignificant change or stress to an environmental resource or use.
- **No effect =** no discernible effect.

3.1 Resources Considered but not Analyzed in Detail

The limited scope of the proposal results in limited effects. There would be limited surface disturbance at the spring site and no removed material would be left below the mean high water

mark of the stream. Trail rehabilitation would require limited site re-contouring; however, the site is bare, decomposed granite soil.

3.1.1 BLM Special Status Plants

During internal scoping for this proposal an issue was raised that giant helleborine (*Epipactis gigantea*), a BLM Type 3 special status plant, occurred in the vicinity of the springs. Upon further discussion with the Four Rivers Field Office botanist, it was determined that no sensitive plant species are known to occur within the confines of the project area and detailed photographs of the site revealed that no habitat for this species exists within the proposed project site. Habitat and element occurrences (EOs) exist downstream of the soaking pools. However, the proposed action would have minimal to no impact on these sites because no work would happen near the EOs and no sediment resulting from pool draining would reach the sites. This proposal was given a full clearance for special status species.

3.1.2 Water Quality

All surface waters in Idaho are protected for the following beneficial uses: wildlife habitat, agricultural water supply, and industrial water supply (Idaho Administrative Procedures Act [IDAPA 58.01.02]. All undesignated surface waters are protected for the following beneficial uses: primary or secondary contact recreation, cold water aquatic life, and the protection and propagation of fish, shellfish, and wildlife, where achievable.

Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ) assumes intermittent streams meet stream temperature standards for seasonal cold water aquatic life during periods of optimum flow. Water quality standards only apply to intermittent waters during optimum flow periods sufficient enough to support the beneficial uses for which the water body has been designated. The optimum flow for cold water aquatic life (water temperature) is equal to, or greater than, one cubic-feet-per-second (1-cfs). The optimum flow for contact recreation is ≥five-cfs (IDAPA 58.01.02.070.07). Although Idaho considers spring flows to be waters of the state, Idaho has no standards specific to springs, unless flow volumes are at minimum levels described above for intermittent flow regime streams (e. g., 1-cfs and 5-cfs for water temperature and contact recreation, respectively.

There would be no effect to water resources from this proposal because the removal of man-made structures that restrict surface flow would not introduce measureable sediment to the stream that would, in turn, reach the Payette River. Any sediment from the removal of the man-made structures would be captured in the vegetated canyon below the soaking pools long before reaching the Payette River. There would not be any surface digging that would introduce sediment into the system. Although this proposal would not affect water resources and there are no standards specific to springs, BLM is coordinating with the Idaho Department of Water Resources for any structure removal in the project area.

3.2 Recreation

3.2.1 Affected Environment – Recreation

Idaho's violent geologic history has created areas where hot water bubbles up creating natural hot springs. These natural hot springs have been used by people for hundreds and possibly

thousands of years for a variety of purposes including soaking and relaxing. Throughout Idaho people have historically taken it upon themselves to create some type of catchment for the warm water in which to soak. Catchments ranged from rocks and boulders to bathtubs or wooden boxes. As the popularity of soaking in hot springs grew, many of the hot springs, especially those on private land, were developed to accommodate more people and fees were charged for use.

On Idaho's tourism website (http:www.visitidaho.org/hot-springs/), the Idaho Department of Commerce promotes soaking in natural hot springs as a prominent attraction to draw visitors to the state (IDC 2015). The site lists primarily commercial hot springs but also includes some hot springs on public land. The level of development ranges from river rocks stacks in a circle to catch the warm water to landscaped swimming pools with bath houses with adjacent restaurants. Most of the developed hot springs charge a use fee ranging from $5.00 per car to $20.00 per person. In west-central Idaho there are about 16 developed hot springs with five developed hot springs identified along the South Fork Payette River.

Skinny Dipper Hot Springs is located along the South Fork Payette River about 45 miles from downtown Boise and four miles upstream from State Highway 55 at Banks, Idaho. The area is characterized by a steep, narrow river canyon with heavily forested north facing slopes and more open timbered south facing slopes. The Banks-Lowman Highway parallels the river. The hot springs pools are located about 300 feet above the Payette River and are accessed by a steep, 0.25 mile long trail from the Banks-Loman Highway. Skinny Dipper Hot Springs is situated on a south facing slope in a small, steep stream and consists of four man-made pools. The four pools vary in size with the uppermost pool being the smallest, accommodating only one or two people. The pools increase in size as one moves downstream. The lowest pool is the largest and can accommodate close to 40 people.

It is unknown exactly when the hot springs were first used by people, but development of the hot springs to accommodate soaking with stones, concrete, and piping is believed to have taken place in the early 1990s. A local group known as "The Keepers" has voluntarily been maintaining the pools since their construction. On a regular basis the volunteers drain and clean each pool and pick up and remove all trash.

Use at Skinny Dipper Hot Springs has historically occurred both day and night on a year-round basis. Use varies seasonally with the colder months being more popular and weekend use greater than weekday use. Daily use estimates range from 15-30 visitors with an estimated annual visitation of around 8,000–10,000 people (BLM LEOs, personal communication, 2015). As the name implies, wearing a swimsuit in the pools is optional, but from observational data only about half of users choose the no-swimsuit option. In August 2012 the BLM temporarily restricted the hot springs area to day use only for a two year period due to unsafe and illegal activities that were occurring at night. The area around Skinny Dipper Hot Springs was also temporarily closed to all human use for three months during the spring of 2013 due to public safety concerns of rock fall and landslide potential from the effects of a wildfire the previous summer.

3.2.2 Environmental Consequences – Recreation

3.2.2.1 Alternative 1 – No Action

Not removing the pools, piping, and trail at Skinny Dipper Hot Springs would continue to provide the recreating public an opportunity to soak and relax in hot springs pools in a natural setting location. Users would have the opportunity to visit a clothing optional hot springs and not be required to pay a fee for its use. This opportunity would be available within a fairly short drive from the largest population base in Idaho. This type of user experience is a somewhat limited opportunity in the general area. A similar opportunity was available on USFS administered lands until its removal in 2009. Allowing the continued existence of pools at Skinny Dipper Hot Springs would have a positive impact to the estimated 8,000 to 10,000 annual visitors.

Use would continue to be allowed both day and night at any time of the year. Without additional law enforcement presence some of the identified illegal activities that have occurred, primarily at night, would likely continue and would have adverse effects on those who use the area during these times. Additionally, this alterative would not address Central District Health (Idaho Health District 4) concerns regarding sanitary conditions on the site.

3.2.2.2 Alternative 2 – Proposed Action (Remove pool, piping, and trail)

Along the South Fork Payette River and within the Payette River watershed there are a number of opportunities for the public to soak in hot springs ranging from undeveloped sites to highly developed commercial operations. Likewise the experiences provided by these different opportunities span a similar gamut. A slight majority of hot springs in the area charge a use fee, even some of those on public land. There are a very limited number of hot springs that offer the opportunities to soak in hot springs in an undeveloped setting, where fees are not charged, and one is not required to wear clothing. The proposed action would remove the trail and all piping around the hot springs and render the pools useless for soaking. This action would eliminate this opportunity and have an adverse effect on the public seeking this type of experience.

The majority of the current visitors to Skinny Dipper Hot Springs would likely seek a similar experience and would be required to travel a longer distance for this experience. This displaced use would increase the amount of use at other sites and likely adversely impact the experience of other hot springs users. There are likely to be a small portion of current Skinny Dipper Hot Springs users that would continue to try to use hot springs and attempt to rebuild pools for soaking.

3.2.3 Cumulative Impacts – Recreation

3.2.3.1 Scope of Analysis

The scope of the cumulative impacts analysis includes recreational users who seek soaking in hot springs as a recreational experience and who reside primarily in the Treasure Valley. The cumulative impacts analysis area (CIAA) is considered to be the area within a two-hour drive from Boise. This area is used based on a two-hour drive being the extent to which a majority of visitors would travel to soak in hot springs. The time frame used for analysis is ten years.

3.2.3.2 Current Conditions

Soaking in the warm waters produced by hot springs is a favorite recreational experience for many individuals. The geology of the CIAA has produced many hot spring locations, likely many that are still unknown. North of Boise, the Payette River and Boise River watersheds

contain more than 25 developed and undeveloped hot springs that are used by the public for soaking. Typically, the more developed hot springs occur on private land and while the undeveloped ones are on public land. South of Boise, hot springs, associated with the Snake River Plain, exist but are not as numerous. Most of these are privately owned and developed. There are no estimates for the total amount of visitor use specific to hot springs use in the CIAA.

3.2.3.3 Environmental Consequences – Cumulative Impacts

Alternative 1 – No Action
User experiences at hot springs vary depending on the level of development and the amount of use. Undeveloped hot springs that are remote or more difficult to access tend to attract a more free-spirited type of user who is more accepting of a variety of behaviors including a clothing optional experience. Maintaining soaking pools would continue to provide this experience to many users seeking this opportunity. Over the short- and long-term the cumulative impacts to most users would be negligible to no effect. If illegal activities continue as in the past, current users and new users of the hot springs may be displaced to other hot springs in the area to avoid these activities. This could cause increases in use numbers which in the short-term could have a minor to moderate effect on users seeking a lower use level experience. These impacts would decrease over time and result in a long-term minor to negligible impact.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action
The opportunity to soak in a hot springs in a natural, somewhat undeveloped setting, with no clothing required, is limited in the CIAA. Removing Skinny Dipper Hot Springs from the available list of places to experience this would be a moderate to major effect in both the short and long-term for the individuals seeking this type of experience. However, when comparing removing the hot springs with all hot springs users, the effect would be moderate to major in the short-term but as users are displaced to other hot springs the long-term effect would be minor to negligible.

3.3 Vegetation /Watershed

3.3.1 Affected Environment – Vegetation /Watershed

Vegetation in the immediate vicinity of the springs is characterized by native and exotic grasses and forbs that are able to withstand regular disturbance. In less disturbed areas above and below the spring development, riparian vegetation includes willow, dogwood, cattail, rush, and sedge species. The springs supports 0.33 miles of riparian vegetation. Upland vegetation includes mountain shrub (syringa, mallow ninebark, bitter cherry, bitterbrush) or ponderosa pine overstories and native and exotic grass/grasslike (bluebunch wheatgrass, sedge, cheatgrass) and forb (yarrow, penstemon) understories. Two noxious weed species (Japanese knotweed, poison hemlock) were documented along the highway below the spring and treated in 2009 and 2010. Their current status is unknown. Although the area burned in the 2012 Springs (a human caused fire originating at the spring development) and 2010 Frazier (lightning caused) fires, limited tree mortality occurred and shrubs, forbs, and grasses recovered with good vigor that provides suitable watershed stability and cover. The natural fire return interval is typically 10-22 years for ponderosa pine forests (Meyer and Pierce 2003). Soils (Garval-Kirsky-Rock outcrop complex) have low susceptibility to wind and water erosion (K-factor = 0.1); however, potential is moderate-high to high when vegetation is removed.

3.3.2 Environmental Consequences - Vegetation /Watershed

3.3.2.1 Alternative 1 – No Action

Disturbance tolerant, early seral, and exotic species would continue to dominate disturbed areas along the trail and around the spring development. These areas would be susceptible to noxious weeds over the long term (>3 years), depending on available seed sources (e.g., humans, dogs, livestock). Vegetation outside the disturbance area would recover to pre-fire conditions over the short term (≤3 years). The area would remain susceptible to fire over the long term, especially where fine fuels (e.g., cheatgrass, pine needles) occur near the spring. Vegetation conditions would decline (increases in fire-adapted species such as cheatgrass, decreases in non-fire-adapted species) over the long term if fires occur with greater frequency than 10-15 year intervals. Watershed conditions would remain stable except where shallow rooted exotic annuals dominate over the long term or vegetation is absent (e.g., trail, post fire). Recently burned areas would be susceptible to minor to major erosional events (Meyer et al. 2001).

3.3.2.2 Alternative 2 – Proposed Action (Remove pool, piping, and trail)

Vegetation would be damaged or destroyed in the immediate vicinity (<0.1 acres) of the spring where removal activities occur and removed concrete is placed. Down-slope seed sources would allow short-term recovery of wetland vegetation. Increased sediment inputs would occur until vegetation stabilizes disturbed areas; however, the sediments would be trapped by riparian vegetation below the spring and the highway. With reduced disturbance, native species would be expected to dominate over the long term. Seeded species would establish and stabilize the restored trail over the short and long term. Upland species would recover as described in Alternative 1 over the short term. However, substantially reduced human use that minimizes human-caused fires at the spring would allow vegetation conditions to be maintained in desirable conditions over the long term. The area would be less susceptible to noxious weeds where vegetation cover increases and recreational use seed sources are reduced. Minor increased sediment input to the spring from disturbed areas would occur over the short term until vegetation cover is established. Stabilization and revegetation would eliminate erosion on 0.25 miles of trail over the long term. Long-term watershed stability would be greater than Alternative 1 if fire frequency is reduced.

3.3.3 Cumulative Impacts – Vegetation /Watershed

3.3.3.1 Scope of Analysis

The cumulative impacts analysis area (CIAA) is characterized by a 960 acre watershed surrounding the spring. The watershed describes a natural boundary of most of the activities described above. A 10-year analysis time frame coincides with the impacts described above.

3.3.3.2 Current Conditions

Vegetation communities include ponderosa pine/mountain shrub/grassland (52%), grassland (30%) and mountain shrub (18%). Two intermittent streams support approximately 1.2 miles of riparian vegetation. Almost all of the CIAA has been burned by wildfires (three human-caused, one natural-caused) between 2010 and 2013, and approximately 500 acres have burned twice. However, the fires were low intensity and only minor ponderosa pine mortality has occurred. Other vegetation conditions are similar to those described above; however, approximately 10% of the area is dominated by invasive annuals. One other occurrence of poison hemlock has been identified and treated. The area is grazed for short periods during the spring and fall by domestic

sheep. Recreational use is primarily associated with the South Fork Payette River and the Banks-Lowman Highway, with some fall hunting use in the CIAA.

3.3.3.3 Environmental Consequences – Cumulative Impacts

Alternative 1 – No Action
Increased fire starts and consequent increases in exotic annual grass cover and loss of native vegetation associated with continued use of the spring development would have minor (small, occasional burns) to major (multiple, large burns) additive adverse impacts on vegetation and watershed conditions. Fire starts associated with the Banks-Lowman Highway would have moderate to major long term adverse impacts to vegetation and watershed conditions, especially where invasive annuals increase or dominate. Livestock grazing would have minor adverse vegetation condition impacts by reducing native perennial species in areas receiving consistent spring use. Degraded conditions associated with the spring development would have minor additive impacts to wetland vegetation. Short duration spring and fall grazing would have minor (occasionally grazed) to moderate (where animals consistently water) adverse impacts to wetland vegetation conditions. Increased susceptibility to noxious weeds around the spring development would have minor additive impacts. Sheep bands and traffic on the Banks-Lowman Highway would have moderate long-term adverse impacts by regularly introducing and transporting seeds potentially throughout the CIAA. Degraded habitats (e.g., invasive annual dominated) would be most susceptible to weed establishment and proliferation; however, all areas would be at risk.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action
Short-term vegetation loss associated with reclamation activities would have negligible additive impacts to vegetation conditions in the CIAA. Trail stabilization would have negligible long-term additive benefits for vegetation and watershed conditions. Temporary loss of vegetation cover associated with wildfires could affect substantially larger areas. Reduction or elimination of fire starts associated with the spring development would have minor to moderate long-term additive benefits to vegetation and watershed conditions. A long-term reduction in noxious weed susceptibility would have minor additive benefits relative to other seed sources and disturbances associated with fire. Fire start and noxious weed impacts from other sources would be as described in Alternative 1. Improved watershed stability would have a minor to moderate additive benefit over the long term.

3.4 Wildlife/Fisheries

3.4.1 Affected Environment – Wildlife/Fisheries

Open ponderosa pine woodlands and mountain shrub communities provide suitable habitat for a variety of species including raptors (e.g., northern goshawk a BLM Type 2 sensitive species), snag-dependent species (e.g., Lewis' woodpecker, Type 2), migratory songbirds (e.g., Cassin's finch, Type 2), several bat species, predators (e.g., gray wolf, Type 2), and reptiles and amphibians (e.g., western toad, Type 2; night snake; garter snake). Riparian areas provide important habitat components (food, water, shelter) for approximately 80% of the species during some portion of their life cycles. Species are either year-round residents or use the area seasonally (e.g., migratory songbirds that nest and raise young in the spring and summer). The area is classified as mule deer and elk winter range, although some year-round residents are also present.

The South Fork Payette River provides habitat for bull trout (threatened under the Endangered Species Act) and redband trout (BLM Type 2). The spring/river confluence is approximately 3 miles below designated bull trout critical habitat. Bald eagles (Type 2) forage in the river and use adjacent trees for perching and roosting.

High levels of human disturbance associated with recreational use of the spring and river corridor adversely affect habitat suitability for disturbance sensitive species. Repeated burns that reduce or eliminate fire intolerant species (e.g., bitterbrush) and increase invasive annuals have decreased winter range suitability for mule deer and elk and nesting and foraging habitat quality for a variety of species. Increased sediment loads from post-fire erosion events have adversely affected water quality (short term) and spawning habitat (long term). However, burns have benefitted snag-dependent species by creating additional foraging and nesting habitat.

3.4.2 Environmental Consequences – Wildlife/Fisheries

3.4.2.1 Alternative 1 – No Action

Degraded habitat conditions immediately surrounding the spring would have negligible long-term adverse impacts, primarily to species that forage there. Disturbance associated with continual recreational use would cause most species to avoid the area or limit use. Increases in noxious weeds and invasive annuals would cause minor (isolated occurrence) to major (weeds are widespread and dominate community) decreases in habitat quality over the long term. Snag-dependent species would benefit from periodic understory burns and even stand replacing burns over the short and long term, but they would adversely affect other forest-dependent species. Fire associated loss of browse and native grass species would degrade big game winter range over the long term. Species that depend on diverse native vegetation communities would also be adversely affected. Because of the small area involved and protection provided by the highway borrow ditch, sediment from disturbed areas associated with the spring and trail would not affect fisheries habitat; however, runoff events associated with recently burned areas could have short or long term adverse impacts to bull trout.

3.4.2.2 Alternative 2 – Proposed Action (Remove pool, piping, and trail)

Vegetation loss around the spring would have minor short-term impacts to wildlife until recovery occurs. Improved vegetation conditions would benefit most wildlife over the long term. Disturbance associated with removal activities would cause wildlife avoidance during the work period. Impacts would be minor if work occurs outside critical wildlife use periods (e.g., breeding, nesting, early brood rearing, or winter) and for a short time period (e.g., 1-2 weeks). A substantial reduction or elimination of human activity at the spring would allow greatly increased wildlife use over the long term. Reduced fire frequency that maintains habitat conditions would benefit most species. Fewer snags would be created for snag-dependent species; however, the majority of species would benefit improved structural diversity and forage quality over the long term relative to Alternative A. Minor increased sediment input prior to vegetation stabilization of the spring and trail would not reach the South Fork Payette River; therefore, there would be no effect on bull trout.

3.4.3 Cumulative Impacts – Wildlife/Fisheries

3.4.3.1 Scope of Analysis

The Vegetation/Watershed CIAA will be used to characterize wildlife cumulative impacts. The watershed represents an average use area for avian species and is representative of south-facing big game winter range. The South Fork Payette River between the Middle and North Forks and associated intermittent streams on the north shore will be used for the fisheries CIAA. This represents the scale at which impacts described in Alternative A would typically occur. A 10-year analysis time frame coincides with the impacts described above.

3.4.3.2 Current Conditions

The vegetation conditions described in Section 3.3.3.2 provide suitable habitat for ponderosa pine, snag, grassland, and riparian dependent wildlife species. Recent fire-associated declines in shrubs have adversely affected winter forage for mule deer, but not elk. Riparian vegetation associated with intermittent streams recovered quickly. Riparian habitat quantity and quality along the South Fork Payette River has been affected by highway (e.g., rip-rap) and recreation activities. Invasive annual dominated areas provide marginal or unsuitable habitat for most wildlife species. Spring livestock use coincides primarily with avian nesting periods. Banks-Lowman Highway traffic is a consistent source of disturbance. Hikers, boaters, and hunters are present primarily spring through fall. Minor amounts of sediment associated with post Spring Fire runoff events reached the South Fork Payette River in 2013.

3.4.3.3 Environmental Consequences – Cumulative Impacts

Alternative 1 – No Action

Degraded wetland/riparian conditions would have minor additive adverse impacts to riparian dependent species. Livestock use would have moderate long-term adverse impacts, primarily in isolated areas where livestock access water sources. Periodic wildfires would have minor to moderate short-term adverse impacts to riparian areas. Highway maintenance and recreational uses would have minor adverse impacts to riparian vegetation conditions over the long term. Increased fire starts and resulting degraded terrestrial and aquatic habitat conditions would have moderate (one fire start) to major (>1 fire start, substantial portions of CIAA burn repeatedly) additive impacts over the long term. Highway and other recreational users would likely account for the majority of fire starts causing moderate to major degradation in habitat conditions over the long term. Hot springs use would have minor additive disturbance impacts. Highway traffic causes minor (species are tolerant) to major (intolerant species avoid highway corridor) disturbances over the short and long term. Recreational uses cause minor to moderate disturbances where animals are either temporarily displaced or avoid high use areas. Livestock use and trailing activities would have minor disturbance and habitat structure (e.g., trampling at concentrated use areas) impacts annually during use periods.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

Short-term vegetation loss and potential increased sedimentation and long-term improvements would have negligible additive habitat condition impacts. Reduction or elimination of disturbances would have minor additive benefits. Reduced fire starts and consequent reduced sedimentation would have minor to moderate additive habitat condition benefits over the long

term. Impacts from highway, recreational, and livestock uses would be as described in Alternative 1.

4.0 Consultation and Coordination

4.1 List of Preparers

Name	Title	Responsible for the Following Section(s) of this Document
Jonathan Beck	Boise District Planning and Environmental Coordinator	IDT Lead
Tate Fischer	Field Manager	Review and Approval
Matt McCoy	Assistant Field Manager	Vegetation, Watershed, Wildlife, Fisheries
Jeremy Bluma	Realty Specialist	Review
Kyle Paffett	Boise District Hydrologist	Water Quality, Watershed
Janelle Alleman	Boise District Fisheries Biologist	Fisheries
Allen Tarter	Natural Resource Specialist	Water Quality
Daylon Dubkowski	Boise District Lead Engineer	Engineering
Tim Burke	Boise District Health and Safety Officer	Review
Larry Ridenhour	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Recreation
Anne-Marie Sharkey	BLM Ranger	Review

4.2 List of Persons, Agencies and Organizations Consulted

Name	Purpose for Coordination
US Bureau of Reclamation	Affected lands under a BOR withdrawal
Boise County Sheriff	Data sharing of violations at the hot springs.
Boise County Commission	Updates of a potentially contentious proposal within their county.
Hot Spring Keepers	Main stakeholder — maintains the soaking pools and piping at the hot springs.
Shoshone-Paiute Tribes – Wings & Roots	Tribal (Government to Government) Consultation
Public Meeting – Boise, Idaho; July 17, 2013	Seek input from users and interested public on issues and possible solutions
Public Meeting – Crouch, Idaho; July 18, 2013	Seek input from users and interested public on issues and possible solutions

Native American Consultation

BLM is required to consult with Native American tribes to "help assure (1) that federally recognized tribal governments and Native American individuals, whose traditional uses of public land might be affected by a proposed action, will have sufficient opportunity to contribute to the decision, and (2) that the decision maker will give tribal concerns proper consideration" (U.S. Department of the Interior, BLM Manual Handbook H-8120-1). Tribal coordination and consultation responsibilities are implemented under laws and executive orders that are specific to cultural resources which are referred to as "cultural resource authorities," and under regulations that are not specific which are termed "general authorities." Cultural resource authorities include: the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended (NHPA); the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 (ARPA); and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990, as amended (NAGPRA). General authorities include: the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1979 (AIRFA); the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA); the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA);

and Executive Order 13007-Indian Sacred Sites. The proposed action is in compliance with the aforementioned authorities.

Southwest Idaho is the homeland of two culturally and linguistically related tribes: the Northern Shoshone and the Northern Paiute. In the latter half of the 19th century, a reservation was established at Duck Valley on the Nevada/Idaho border west of the Bruneau River. The Shoshone-Paiute Tribes residing on the Duck Valley Reservation today actively practice their culture and retain aboriginal rights and/or interests in this area. The Shoshone-Paiute Tribes assert aboriginal rights to their traditional homelands as their treaties with the United States, the Boise Valley Treaty of 1864 and the Bruneau Valley Treaty of 1866, which would have extinguished aboriginal title to the lands now federally administered, were never ratified.

Other tribes that have ties to southwest Idaho include the Bannock Tribe and the Nez Perce Tribe. Southeast Idaho is the homeland of the Northern Shoshone Tribe and the Bannock Tribe. In 1867 a reservation was established at Fort Hall in southeastern Idaho. The Fort Bridger Treaty of 1868 applies to BLM's relationship with the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes. The northern part of the BLM's Boise District was also inhabited by the Nez Perce Tribe. The Nez Perce signed treaties in 1855, 1863 and 1868. BLM considers off-reservation treaty-reserved fishing, hunting, gathering, and similar rights of access and resource use on the public lands it administers for all tribes that may be affected by a proposed action.

BLM discussed soaking pool removal with the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes during Wings and Roots consultation. Tribal representatives accompanied BLM on a field trip to the site to see the trespass. The Tribes support BLMs proposal to remove the piping and soaking pools.

4.3 Public Participation

The BLM received public scoping comments from the following identified individuals and entities:

Michael Struth Adams
Dirk Anderson
Doug Atkinson
Danny Bade
Jeffrey Baehr
Brian Bothwell
Michael Brooks
Barbara Carlson
Robert Christensen
Molly Devinaspre
Noah Geier
Steve Givens
Gordon Hamilton
Robert Hatfield
Joshua Headrick
Chris Heavin
Connie Hendricks
John Hergenrather
DinoHugon
Michael Hunt
Angela Johnson
Bill Jones
Melanie Krause
Laurie Kuntz
Richard Lockett
Davis and Jean Anne Martens
Kevin Martin
Dave May
Dennis McDorman
Chad Rencher
John Rhodes
Judy Roberts
Gordon Sanders
Katja Stringfield
Thomas Todrank
Tim Trimmell

Rose Ward
Beth Weaver

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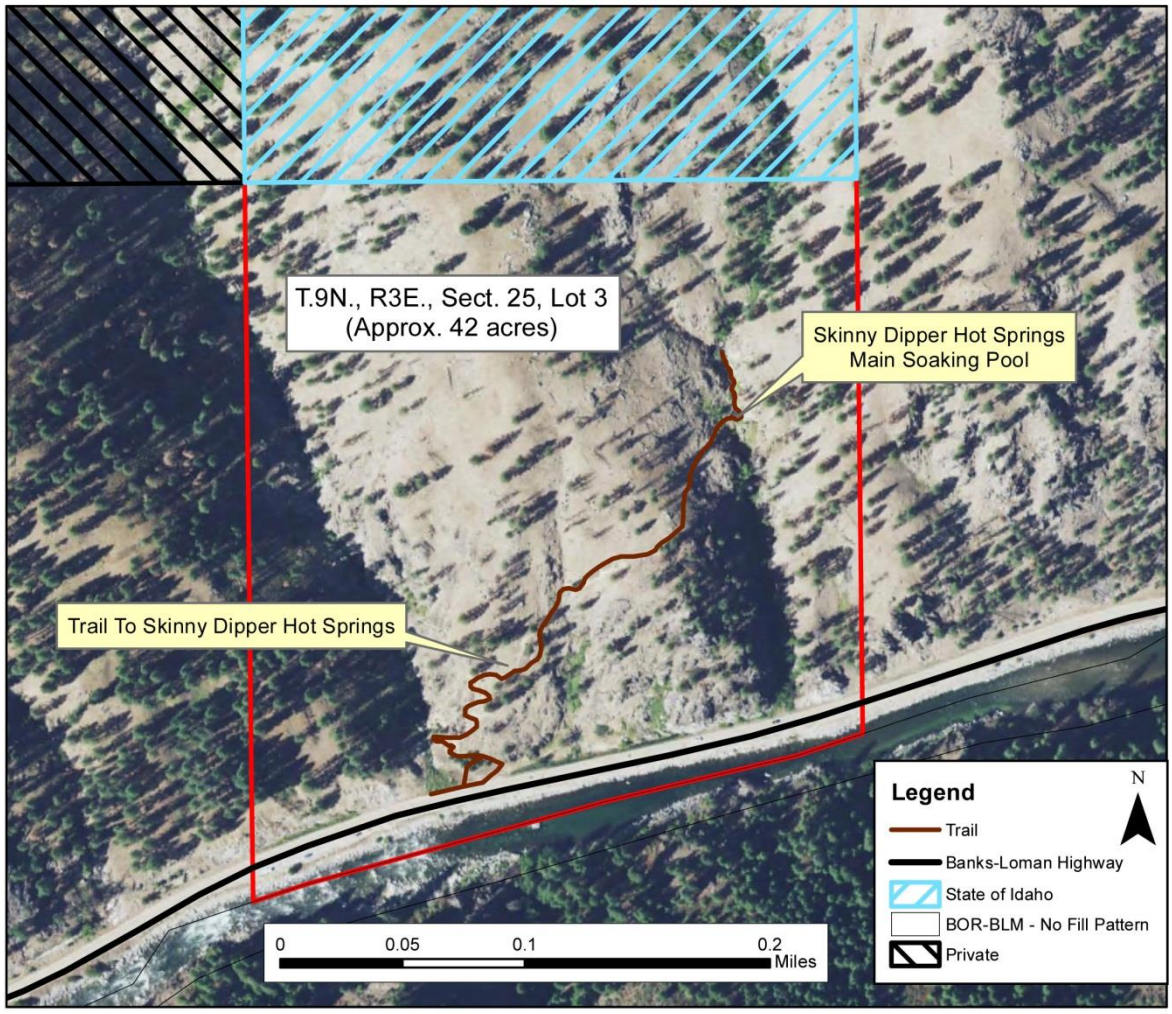
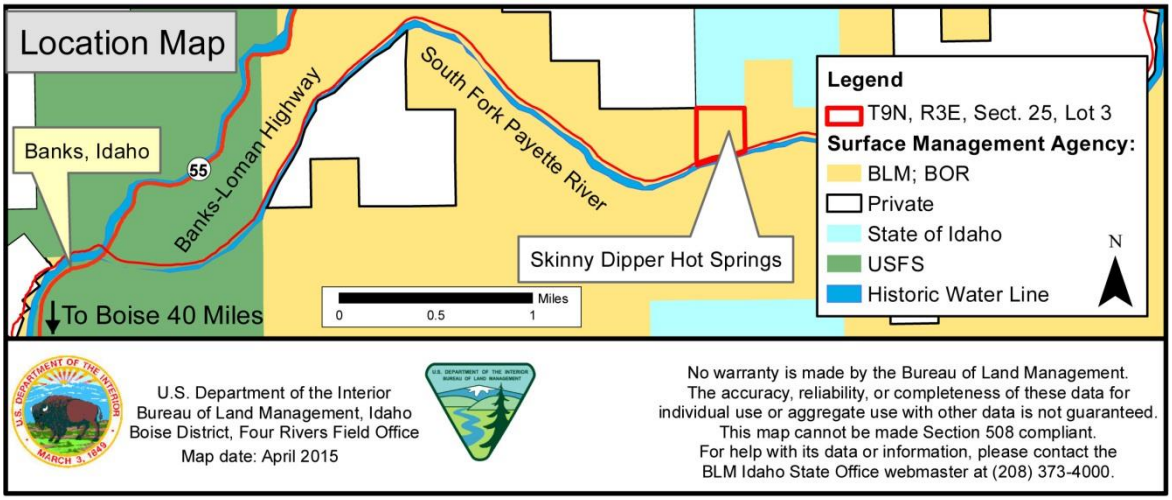
Meyer, G. A. and J. L. Pierce. 2003. Climatic controls on fire-induced sediment pulses in Yellowstone Natioonal Park and central Idaho: a long-term perspective. Forest Ecol. and Manage. 178:89-104.

USDI (US Department of the Interior). 1987. Cascade Proposed Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement. USDI, BLM, Boise, ID. 457 pp.

6.0 Maps

Map 1. Skinny Dipper Hot Springs





U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management, Idaho
Boise District, Four Rivers Field Office
Map date: April 2015

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