

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management**

**Environmental Assessment
DOI-BLM-NV-L030-2013-0032-EA
December 2013**

TEMPORARY CLOSURE OF THE ASH SPRINGS RECREATION SITE

**Location:
Lincoln County, Nevada**

**Applicant:
BLM**

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CHAPTER 1: PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

1.1 Introduction

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Caliente Field Office (CFO) is proposing to temporarily close the Ash Springs Recreation Site to public use. This Environmental Assessment (EA) analyzes two alternatives and is a site-specific analysis of potential impacts that could result from implementation of the proposed action or the no action alternative. The EA balances the need to ensure the continued protection and viability of natural resources with the need to protect the public while providing viable recreational opportunities as mandated by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). Upon completion of this process in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the BLM may either take no action or temporarily close the Ash Springs Recreation Site to protect the public and the federally-endangered White River springfish (*Crenichthys baileyi baileyi*) and its critical habitat.

The BLM, as authorized under the provisions of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 and pursuant to the Code of Federal Regulations on Closures and Restrictions [43 CFR 8364], proposes to temporarily close the Ash Springs Recreation Site located in Lincoln County, Nevada for public safety purposes and resource protection for Federally listed endangered species and BLM sensitive species.

1.2 Background

Ash Springs is the southernmost, largest, and warmest of the three primary spring systems in Pahrangat Valley, located in the community of Ash Springs along U.S. Highway 93 in Lincoln County, Nevada, about nine miles north of the town of Alamo and approximately 100 miles north of Las Vegas. Historically, Ash Springs may have been the least altered of the spring systems, because it was home to the Ash Ute Indians who were hunters and gatherers rather than cultivators. It later became an important source of water for travelers.

Ash Springs consists of at least seven springs which issue from a contact between alluvium and bedrock (Garside and Shillings 1979). The springs have a common outflow stream, which was impounded by construction of U.S. Highway 93 and now forms a large pool. The spring pool provides good stream flow when the control gate impounding the water level is open. Ash Springs was historically a stream with continuous flow before it was modified into the existing deep pool. Below the highway, the outflow stream flows southwest to join the outflow stream from Crystal Springs. From this point on, the stream is referred to as the Pahrangat Ditch.

Ash Springs Recreation Site is a high use hot springs recreation area. This site is one of the most visited recreation sites in Lincoln County. It is primarily visited by Clark County residents, local residents from Lincoln County, and motorists traveling along Highway 93. Ash Springs Recreation site is approximately 1.18 acres in size. Site facilities include picnic tables near the spring, a vault toilet near the existing parking area, and one outdoor grill for cooking. Currently, the road used to access the site is on private land. There is no legal easement for the public to use this road, although the land owner has been tolerating the use. The BLM constructed a fence

across portions of the spring to delineate the private property boundary. There is one man-made pool with constructed sidewalls and steps leading into the water. The pool contains the spring source. From there the water falls into the natural main pool. The water eventually flows into the Pahranaagat Ditch.

1.3 Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

Closure of the Ash Springs Recreation Site is necessary due to extensive unauthorized modification of the man-made pool by public users, thereby causing a threat to human safety and degrading habitat for federally-endangered species and BLM sensitive species. The BLM-constructed block wall forming the soaking pool is deteriorating with large sections separating from the rest of the wall. Under current conditions, a child or adult swimmer could potentially become injured or trapped under water and debris if or when it collapses further. In addition, ongoing degradation to the steam banks and natural pool has occurred over time from public use, which in turn leaves them vulnerable and less resilient to natural disturbance events. Bank trampling, destruction of vegetation, and damming of the water to deepen the pool are among some of the impacts to the natural environment at the site by public users. Large amounts of improperly disposed garbage and human waste, such as bottles, cans, and diapers, is a continual problem at the recreation site further leading to the environmental degradation of the spring system and posing an additional threat to human health and safety.

During the closure period, the BLM will consider the range of possibilities for managing the recreation site, whether repairs to the pool are feasible, and if traditional uses are impairing habitat for the endangered White River springfish (*Crenichthys baileyi baileyi*). In addition to the endangered species, Ash Springs contains several BLM sensitive species, which include the Pahranaagat naucorid bug (*Pelocoris shoshone shoshone*), Grated tyronia (*Tyronia clathrata*), and Pahranaagat pebblesnail (*Pyrgulopsis merriami*). Any substantial repairs would require additional funding, planning, and public coordination.



Figure 1. Ash Springs pool, large portions separating from the rest of the wall. June 6, 2013.



Figure 2. Ash Springs pool, large portions separating from the rest of the wall. June 6, 2013.



Figure 3 Ash Springs collapsed wall, November 26, 2013.

1.4 Location of Proposed Action

The proposed closure occurs on public lands administered by the BLM Ely District. The recreation site is located in the Pahrangat Valley approximately 100 miles north of Las Vegas U.S. 93 in Ash Springs, Lincoln County, Nevada. The site is accessed from the east side of the highway. The legal description is Mount Diablo Meridian, Township 6 South, Range 61 East, Section 6, Lot 8. The affected area contains 1.18 acres.

1.5 Conformance with Land Use Plan

The proposed action is in conformance with the Goals and Objectives of the Ely District Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan (RMP; 2008), which follow.

Recreation

Goals – Recreation (page 79)

Provide quality settings for developed and undeveloped recreation experiences and opportunities while protecting resources.

Management Actions – Recreation (page 79-81)

Parameter – Special Recreation Management Areas

REC-3: *Develop recreation sites, as appropriate, to proactively manage for tourism and recreation experiences.*

REC-6: *Manage for recreation facilities and services such as trails, trailheads, staging areas, and associated structures in extensive recreation management areas following activity-level plans and NEPA analysis for the management of designated wilderness, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, the Silver State Off-highway Vehicle Trail, backcountry byways, and where appropriate, for management of recreational impacts to natural and cultural resources.*

Fish and Wildlife (page 33)

Section 102(8) of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, as amended, states it is policy to manage public lands in a manner that will protect the quality of multiple resources and provide habitat for fish, wildlife, domestic livestock, and wild horses. Standards and guidelines direct BLM to foster productive and diverse populations and communities of plants and animals. It also is BLM policy to cooperate with state agencies to accommodate species management population goals to the extent that they are consistent with the principles of multiple use management. The BLM acknowledges the role of the State of Nevada and the Nevada Department of Wildlife, under the direction of the State Board of Wildlife Commissioners, in managing, protecting, augmenting, and restoring fish and wildlife populations. The Ely District Office will work in close coordination with the State of Nevada and the Nevada Department of Wildlife and draw on and implement the goals, objectives, and actions outlined in Nevada's Wildlife Action Plan and various species management plans, as appropriate.

The ecological condition of the various vegetation communities greatly influences the quality of wildlife habitat. The Ely District Office fish and wildlife habitat management, as presented in this RMP, will emphasize restoration to achieve the desired range of conditions for the various vegetation communities.

Goals – Fish and Wildlife (page 34)

Provide habitat for wildlife (i.e., forage, water, cover, and space) and fisheries that is of sufficient quality and quantity to support productive and diverse wildlife and fish populations, in a manner consistent with the principles of multi-use management, and to sustain the ecological, economic, and social values necessary for all species.

Mojave/Southern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council Standard

Habitats and watersheds should sustain a level of biodiversity appropriate for the area and conducive to appropriate uses. Habitats of special status species should be able to sustain viable populations of those species.

Objectives – Fish and Wildlife (page 34)

To manage suitable habitat for aquatic species, priority wildlife species, and migratory birds in a manner that will benefit wildlife species directly or indirectly and minimize conflicts among species and wildlife or habitat losses from permitted activities.

Management Actions – Fish and Wildlife (page 36)

WL-18: *Restore natural water sources (i.e., springs and seeps) to increase water availability through restoration of riparian habitats and proper livestock and wild horse management.*

Special Status Species (page 37)

Section 102(8) of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, as amended, requires that public land be managed to protect the quality of multiple resources and to provide habitat for fish, wildlife, domestic livestock, and wild horses. Special status species include federally listed, proposed, or candidate species; state listed species; and BLM sensitive species. The BLM must follow the requirements of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, and BLM policy to conserve federally listed threatened and endangered species and the ecological systems on which they depend. BLM policy also states, "...ensure that actions requiring authorization or approval by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM or Bureau) are consistent with the conservation needs of special status species and do not contribute to the need to list any special status species, either under provisions of the ESA or other provisions of this policy." The Ely District Office will manage special status species following the direction and guidance identified in BLM Manual 6840; recovery plans; biological opinions; conservation agreements, plans, and strategies; habitat conservation plans; and the recommendations from interagency recovery implementation teams.

Goals – Special Status Species (pages 37-38)

Manage public lands to conserve, maintain, and restore special status species populations and their habitats; support the recovery of federally listed threatened and endangered species; and preclude the need to list additional species.

Mojave/Southern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council Standard

- *Habitats and watersheds should sustain a level of biodiversity appropriate for the area and conducive to appropriate uses. Habitats of special status species should be able to sustain viable populations of those species.*
- *Watersheds should possess the necessary ecological components to achieve state water quality criteria, maintain ecological processes, and sustain appropriate uses. Riparian and wetlands vegetation should have structural and species diversity characteristic of the stage of stream channel succession to provide forage and cover, capture sediment, and capture, retain, and safely release water (watershed function).*

Objectives – Special Status Species (page 38)

To manage suitable habitat for special status species in a manner that will benefit these species directly or indirectly and minimize loss of individuals or habitat from permitted activities.

Management in Mojave Desert riparian habitat will benefit the following special status species:

- *White River springfish (federally listed endangered species)*
- *Hiko White River springfish (federally listed endangered species)*
- *Pahranagat roundtail chub (federally listed endangered species)*

Management Actions – Special Status Species (page 39-41)

Parameter – Special Status Species Habitat

SS-1: *Prioritize conservation, maintenance, and restoration actions for special status species based on the following order of importance: 1) federally listed endangered species, 2) federally listed threatened species, 3) federal proposed species, 4) federal candidate species, and 5) BLM sensitive species.*

SS-3: *Participate on interagency recovery implementation teams to identify and address implementation of management actions for the recovery of listed species in the Ely planning area.*

SS-9: *Perform springsnail surveys prior to the development of any spring source.*

Parameter – Mojave Desert Riparian Habitat

SS-21: *Manage White River springfish habitat at Ash Springs by implementing those actions and strategies identified in the Recovery Plan for the Aquatic and Riparian Species of Pahranagat Valley and the Ash Springs Coordinated Management Plan that the Ely District Office has the authority to implement (also see Appendix D).*

1.6 Relationships to Statutes, Regulations, and Other Plans

The proposed action is consistent with the Lincoln County Public Land and Natural Resource Management Plan (2007), which states, “public lands will be managed for the benefit [of] its own citizenry while welcoming the constructive development of recreational activities and beneficial use of other natural resources” (page 12, paragraph 9).

CHAPTER 2: DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

2.1 Proposed Action

Under the proposed action, the BLM would temporarily close the Ash Springs Recreation Site to public use for a period of up to two years to protect public safety and to prevent further degradation to habitat of the endangered White River springfish and other BLM sensitive species. During the closure period, the recreation site entrance would be barricaded to prevent entry. The BLM would post signs notifying public users that the site is temporarily closed, who to contact, under what authority the site is closed, and possible penalties for entering and using the site. During the closure period, the BLM would work collaboratively with the public, stakeholders, and local, State, and Federal government entities to develop a plan for properly managing the site safely and in conformance with Federal, State, and local laws.

2.2 No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative means the Ash Springs Recreation Site would not be closed to the public. The site would remain open to use and the threat to human health and safety would prevail until sufficient funding becomes available to adequately plan for and implement repairs to the recreation facility. Visitors would continue to enter the sensitive area and continued degradation to endangered species habitat would likely occur. Under this alternative, the purpose and need for the proposal would not be met. This alternative is not in compliance with the Ely RMP, the RMP Biological Opinion, or Federal laws and regulations.

CHAPTER 3: AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND IMPACT ANALYSIS

3.1 Introduction

The affected environment was considered and analyzed by resource type by an interdisciplinary team (see Chapter 5). Table 1 summarizes this analysis and indicates which resources of concern are present/not present in the project area and which resources are analyzed in greater detail in the EA.

Table 1. Summary of resources/concerns dismissed with rationale and those carried forward for further analysis.

Resource/ Concern	Issue(s) Analyzed (Yes/No)	Rationale for Determination

Air Resources		
Air Quality	N	The closure would have no effect or a beneficial effect on air quality due to the temporary non-surface disturbing nature of the action.
Water Resources		
Water Quality, (Drinking/Ground)	N	The closure would have no effect or a beneficial effect on water quality due to the temporary non-surface disturbing nature of the action.
Water Resources (Water Rights)	N	Water rights would not be affected.
Soil Resources		
Farmlands, Prime and Unique	N	The resource is not present.
Vegetation Resources		
Forest Health	N	The resource is not present.
Rangeland Standards and Guidelines	N	The resource would not be affected. The site is fenced from the remainder of the surrounding grazing allotment.
Wetlands/Riparian Zones	N	The closure would have no effect or a beneficial effect due to the temporary non-surface disturbing nature of the action.
Fish and Wildlife		
Fish and Non-avian Wildlife	N	The proposed action would have no effect or a beneficial effect on fish and non-avian wildlife due to the temporary non-habitat-disturbing nature of the action.
Migratory Birds and Sensitive Avian Species	N	The proposed action would have no effect or a beneficial effect on birds due to the temporary non-habitat-disturbing nature of the action.
Special Status Species		
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Listed Species or Critical Habitat. ACECs ¹ Designated to Protect Listed Species Habitat.	Y	This resource/concern is analyzed in detail in Chapters 3 and 4.
Sage Grouse and Non-avian Sensitive Animal Species.	N	Sage grouse and their habitat are not present in the project area. The proposed action would have a beneficial effect on the Pahrnagat naucorid bug (<i>Pelocoris shoshone shoshone</i>), Grated tyronia (<i>Tyronia clathrata</i>), and Pahrnagat pebblesnail (<i>Pyrgulopsis merriami</i>), all BLM sensitive species present on the site, due to a reduction in direct impacts and habitat disturbance.

Sensitive Plant Species and ACECs Designated to Protect Sensitive Plant Species	N	There are no sensitive plant species and no ACECs designated to protect sensitive plant species within the project area.
Wild Horses		
Wild Horses	N	Wild horses are not present in the project area.
Cultural Resources		
Cultural Resources	N	The resource would not be affected due to the non-surface-disturbing nature of the action.
ACECs designated for Cultural Resources	N	There are no ACECs within the project area.
Heritage Special Designations (Historic Trails, Archaeological Districts and Areas)	N	There are no special designation areas within the project area.
Paleontological Resources		
Paleontological Resources	N	The resource would not be affected due to the non-surface-disturbing nature of the action.
Visual Resources		
Visual Resource Management (VRM)	N	The proposed action is located within an area that is assigned VRM Classification 2. The objective of this classification is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape. The resource would not be affected due to the non-surface disturbing nature of the action.
Lands and Realty/Renewable Energy		
Land Uses	N	Resource or use is not present.
Travel Management		
Transportation/ Access	N	Not affected due to the temporary nature of the action.
Recreation		
Recreation Uses including Back Country Byways, Caves, Rock Hounding Areas	Y	This resource/concern is analyzed in detail in Chapters 3 and 4.
Livestock Grazing		
Grazing Uses/Forage	N	Livestock grazing does not occur at the recreation site therefore it is not affected.
Forest/Woodland Products		
Forest/Woodland and Other	N	No forests/woodlands are present. The closure would have no effect or a beneficial effect on vegetative products due to the

Vegetative Products (Native Seeds, Yucca and Cactus Plants)		temporary non-habitat disturbing nature of the action.
Geology and Mineral Extraction		
Mineral Resources	N	There would be no impact to mineral resources. There are no active mine claims within The legal description is Mount Diablo Meridian, Township 6 South, Range 61 East, Section 6, Lot 8.
Watershed		
Soils/Watershed	N	The closure would have no effect or a beneficial effect due to the non-surfacedisturbing nature of the action.
Floodplains	N	The resource is not present in the project area.
Fire		
Fuels	N	The resource would not be affected due to the non-surface-disturbing nature of the action.
Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation	N	No emergency stabilization and rehabilitation projects are planned under the proposed action.
Noxious and Invasive Weeds		
Non-native Invasive and Noxious Species	N	BLM prepared a weed risk assessment (WRA). The WRA assigned a risk rating of zero (0) due to the character of the action and the current lack of invasive species.
Special Designations		
Wilderness/ Wilderness Study Area	N	No Wilderness or Wilderness Study Areas are present.
Wild and Scenic Rivers	N	The resource is not present.
Other Concerns		
Human Health and Safety	Y	This resource/concern is analyzed in detail in Chapters 3 and 4.
Native American Religious and other Concerns	N	Native American consultation resulted in no identified impacts.
Wastes, Hazardous or Solid	N	The proposed action will not generate any hazardous wastes.

Environmental Justice	N	No individuals or groups would be disproportionately affected by the proposed action.
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¹Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) are designated by the BLM.

3.2 General Setting

Ash Springs is a naturally occurring hot springs ecosystem located in Pahrangat Valley within the Mojave Desert ecoregion. The springs originate at the 3,500 foot elevation.

3.3 Proposed Action

3.3.1 Affected Resource/Concern 1

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Listed Species and Critical Habitat

Ash Springs contains critical habitat for the endangered White River springfish (*Crenichthys baileyi baileyi*). The springfish was listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act in 1985 with critical habitat designated at the same time. Critical habitat at Ash Springs for this species includes Ash Springs, its outflow, and the surrounding land area to a distance of 50 feet from the springs and outflows [FR 50:188]. Primary constituent elements of the critical habitat include the warm water springs and their outflows and the surrounding land areas that provide vegetative cover that contributes to uniform water conditions and provides habitat for insects and other invertebrates which comprise a substantial portion of the springfish diet. Overuse of the area has impacted and degraded the critical habitat for the springfish.

According to a Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) field trip report, 229 springfish were observed in Reach 4 (the BLM portion of Ash Springs) during a snorkel survey of Ash Springs on June 28, 2012. The majority of the habitat for this species occurs on private land just southwest of the BLM recreation site, however the recreation site is the headwaters for the spring ecosystem.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action

The BLM is concerned that unauthorized modifications to the recreation site may impact White River springfish and/or its critical habitat if not remedied. Therefore, temporary closure of the site will be beneficial to the species and its associated critical habitat as no further unauthorized modifications would occur during the closure period. The BLM submitted a request for concurrence to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for an informal consultation regarding the beneficial effect of the temporary closure.

Both the NDOW and the USFWS sent letters of support to the BLM for the temporary closure of Ash Springs, and both agencies expressed interest in participating in future planning efforts for the area.

3.3.2 Affected Resource/Concern 2

Recreation Uses Including Back Country Byways, Caves, and Rock Hounding Areas

High Recreation Use: Ash Springs Recreation Site is a high-use hot springs recreation area, and one of the most visited recreation sites in Lincoln County. It is primarily visited by Clark County residents, local residents from Lincoln County, and motorists traveling along U.S. Highway 93 with most use occurring from March through November. Visitor levels during this period are consistent from year to year. Excessive use occurs on three-day weekends. Bureau of Land Management traffic counters recorded 380 vehicles entering the site in one 24-hour period over the Memorial Day weekend in 2010. The BLM counted 279 visitors at the 1.18 acre site within a three-hour period on the same weekend.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action

During the temporary closure period, public use at the recreation site will be prohibited. Recreationists accustomed to using the area will have to travel to alternative water-based recreation areas.

3.3.3 Affected Resource/Concern 3

Health and Human Safety

The pools at the spring source are utilized by the recreating public for swimming/soaking. High use by visitors occurs not only in the water, but on the banks and in the riparian area as well. At present, the block wall, built to provide a small, deep soaking pool, is crumbling with large sections falling into the pond. The enhanced embankment surrounding the soaking pool is deteriorating from human activity causing undercutting and bank erosion, thereby posing a risk to the public. Improperly disposed trash and human waste (e.g., food products, glass, and used diapers) also pose an imminent threat to human health and safety.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action

Under the proposed action, public risk would be minimized because all recreational use would be temporarily prohibited within the boundaries of the recreation site. Unauthorized use would still pose a risk to the public.

3.4 No Action Alternative

3.4.1 Affected Resource/Concern 1

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Listed Species and Critical Habitat

Under the No Action Alternative, unauthorized modifications to the spring pool by users of the recreation site and excessive use at the site would likely continue, contributing to unmitigated degradation of the spring ecosystem and associated riparian habitat, which are designated critical habitat for the White River springfish. The Endangered Species Act of 1973 requires Federal

agencies to ensure that any action they authorize, fund, or undertake is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any listed species or result in destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitats for such species. This requirement of the law would not be met under this alternative.

3.4.2 Affected Resource/Concern 2

Recreation Uses including Back Country Byways, Caves, and Rock Hounding Areas

Under the No Action Alternative, physical and environmental impacts to the recreation site would likely continue. The quality of the user experience would likely continue to diminish. Enjoyment of natural resource values, such as wildlife observation and solitude, would not be enhanced. Private property owners adjacent and downstream of the recreation site would continue to experience negative impacts.

3.4.3 Affected Resource/Concern 3

Health and Human Safety

Under the No Action Alternative, the site would remain open, thereby exposing the recreating publics to potentially hazardous conditions that could result in severe injury or death. Further degradation of the recreation site would continue, further exacerbating the problem.

SECTION 4 CHAPTER 4: CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Cumulative impacts result from the incremental impact of an action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative impacts could result from individually minor, but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time [40 CFR § 1508.7] .

According to the BLM publication, *Guidelines for accessing and documenting cumulative impacts* (1994), the analysis should be focused on those issues and resource values identified during scoping that are of major importance. No significant cumulative impacts were identified during scoping; therefore a more detailed analysis is not warranted.

SECTION 5 PERSONS, GROUPS AND AGENCIES CONSULTED

Name	Title	Resource Represented
Elizabeth Domina	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Recreation, Travel Management, Visual Resources
Travis Young	Planning and Environmental Coordinator	Air Quality, Environmental Justice, NEPA
Cameron Boyce	Rangeland Management	Rangelands Standards and

Name	Title	Resource Represented
	Specialist	Guidelines, Livestock Grazing Riparian/Wetlands
Clint Wertz	Assistant Field Manager	Water Resources, Soil Resources, Watershed
Alicia Styles	Wildlife Biologist	Fish and Wildlife, Special Status Species
Todd Trapp	Wildlife Biologist	Fish and Wildlife, Special Status Species
Benjamin Noyes	Wild Horse Specialist	Wild Horses
Nicholas Pay	Archaeologist, Planning and Environmental Coordinator	Cultural Resources, Paleontological Resources
Tyrone Chamberlain	Realty Specialist	Lands/Energy
Miles Kreidler	Geologist	Mineral Resources
Kyle Teel	Fire Ecologist	Fuels
Erica Husse	Rehabilitation Manager	Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation
Cameron Boyce	Natural Resource Specialist	Noxious and Invasive Species
Emily Simpson	Wilderness Planner Environmental Protection Specialist	Wilderness Wastes, Hazardous and Solid, Human Health and Safety
Elvis Wall	Native American Coordinator	Native American Concerns
Shirley Johnson	Assistant Field Manager	Editor
Russell Jensen	Environmental Protection	Wastes, Hazardous and Solid, Human Health and Safety

Other Agencies Contacted

Nevada Department of Wildlife
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Lincoln County Board of Commissioners

Literature Cited

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RISK ASSESSMENT FOR NOXIOUS & INVASIVE WEEDS
NOTICE OF TEMPORARY CLOSURE TO ASH SPRINGS RECREATION SITE
Lincoln, Nevada

On August 22, 2013 a Noxious & Invasive Weed Risk Assessment was completed for the Ash Springs Recreation Site to conduct a temporary closure in Lincoln County, NV. Closure of the Ash Springs Recreation Site is necessary due to extensive modification of the man-made pool by public users that is causing a threat to human safety and degrading habitat for endangered species. During the closure period the BLM will consider the possibilities for managing the recreation site, whether repairs to the pool are feasible, and if the traditional uses are impairing habitat for endangered species White River springfish and BLM sensitive species, such as Pahranaagat naucorid bug (*Pelocoris shoshone shoshone*), Grated tyronia (*Tyronia clathrata*), and Pahranaagat pebblesnail (*Pyrgulopsis merriami*). Substantial repairs require additional funding, planning and coordination. The closure would be up to two years.

The Ely District weed inventory data was consulted, and shows that Scotch thistle (*Onopordum acanthium*) and salt cedar (*Tamarix* spp.) was detected in the project area in 2004. Recent field surveys did not detect Scotch thistle or other noxious weeds in the project area. There are currently no known weed infestations within the project area.

There are also probably undocumented weeds found scattered along roads in the area. The project area was last inventoried for noxious weeds in 2013.

A list of species undocumented in the District's follows:

<u>Latin Name</u>	<u>Common Name</u>
<i>Arctium minus</i>	Common burdock
<i>Bromus diandrus</i>	Rippgut brome
<i>Bromus rubens</i>	Red brome
<i>Bromus tectorum</i>	Cheatgrass
<i>Ceratocephala testiculata</i>	Bur buttercup
<i>Convolvulus arvensis</i>	Field bindweed
<i>Elaeagnus angustifolia</i>	Russian olive
<i>Erodium circuitarium</i>	Filaree
<i>Kochia scoparia</i>	Kochia
<i>Halogeton glomeratus</i>	Halogeton
<i>Marrubium vulgare</i>	Horehound
<i>Salsola kali</i>	Russian thistle
<i>Sysimbrium altissimum</i>	Tumble mustard
<i>Tragopogon dubius</i>	Yellow salsify
<i>Ulmus pumila</i>	Siberian elm
<i>Verbascum thapsus</i>	Common mullein

Factor 1 assesses the likelihood of noxious/invasive weed species spreading to the project area.

None (0)	Noxious/invasive weed species are not located within or adjacent to the project area. Project activity is not likely to result in the establishment of noxious/invasive weed species in the project area.
Low (1-3)	Noxious/invasive weed species are present in the areas adjacent to but not within the project area. Project activities can be implemented and prevent the spread of noxious/invasive weeds into the project area.
Moderate (4-7)	Noxious/invasive weed species located immediately adjacent to or within the project area. Project activities are likely to result in some areas becoming infested with noxious/invasive weed species even when preventative management actions are followed. Control measures are essential to prevent the spread of noxious/invasive weeds within the project area.
High (8-10)	Heavy infestations of noxious/invasive weeds are located within or immediately adjacent to the project area. Project activities, even with preventative management actions, are likely to result in the establishment and spread of noxious/invasive weeds on disturbed sites throughout much of the project area.

For this project, the factor rates as None (0) at the present time. Closing the recreation area will prevent weed vectors from transporting weeds in to the area which is currently free of noxious weeds.

Factor 2 assesses the consequences of noxious/invasive weed establishment in the project area.

Low to Nonexistent (1-3)	None. No cumulative effects expected.
Moderate (4-7)	Possible adverse effects on site and possible expansion of infestation within the project area. Cumulative effects on native plant communities are likely but limited.
High (8-10)	Obvious adverse effects within the project area and probable expansion of noxious/invasive weed infestations to areas outside the project area. Adverse cumulative effects on native plant communities are probable.

This project rates as Low (1) at the present time. If weeds become established in this riparian system, they are likely to be adapted to riparian soil conditions and restricted to soils that support riparian vegetation. Because of the small size of the area, noxious weeds are easily detected and treated. The consequences from noxious weeds are insignificant in light of past anthropogenic impacts.

The Risk Rating is obtained by multiplying Factor 1 by Factor 2.

None (0)	Proceed as planned.
Low (1-10)	Proceed as planned. Initiate control treatment on noxious/invasive weed populations that get established in the area.
Moderate (11-49)	Develop preventative management measures for the proposed project to reduce the risk of introduction of spread of noxious/invasive weeds into the area. Preventative management measures should include modifying the project to include seeding the area to occupy disturbed sites with desirable species. Monitor the area for at least 3 consecutive years and provide for control of newly established populations of noxious/invasive weeds and follow-up treatment for previously treated infestations.
High (50-100)	Project must be modified to reduce risk level through preventative management measures, including seeding with desirable species to occupy disturbed site and controlling existing infestations of noxious/invasive weeds prior to project activity. Project must provide at least 5 consecutive years of monitoring. Projects must also provide for control of newly established populations of noxious/invasive weeds and follow-up treatment for previously treated infestations.

For this project, the Risk Rating is None (0). This indicates that the project can proceed as planned as long as the following measures are followed:

Pick the BMPs from the following list that are pertinent to the project:

Continue to use integrated weed management to treat weed infestations and use principles of integrated pest management to meet management objectives and to reestablish resistant and resilient native vegetation communities.

Develop weed management plans that address weed vectors, minimize the movement of weeds within public lands, consider disturbance regimes, and address existing weed infestations. When manual weed control is conducted, remove the cut weeds and weed parts and dispose of them in a manner designed to kill seeds and weed parts.

All straw, hay, straw/hay, or other organic products used for reclamation or stabilization activities, must be certified that all materials are free of plant species listed on the Nevada noxious weed list or specifically identified by the Ely District Office.

Where appropriate, inspect source sites such as borrow pits, fill sources, or gravel pits used to supply inorganic materials used for construction, maintenance, or reclamation to ensure they are free of plant species listed on the Nevada noxious weed list or specifically identified by the Ely District Office. Inspections will be conducted by a weed scientist or qualified biologist. Where appropriate, vehicles and heavy equipment used for the completion, maintenance, inspection, or monitoring of ground disturbing activities; for emergency fire suppression; or for authorized off-road driving will be free of soil and debris capable of transporting weed propagules. Vehicles and equipment will be cleaned with power or high pressure equipment prior to entering or leaving the work site or project area. Vehicles used for emergency fire suppression will be cleaned as a part of check-in and demobilization procedures. Cleaning efforts will concentrate on tracks, feet and tires, and on the undercarriage. Special emphasis will be applied to axels, frames, cross members, motor mounts, on and underneath steps, running boards, and front bumper/brush guard assemblies. Vehicle cabs will be swept out and refuse will be disposed of in waste receptacles. Cleaning sites will be recorded using global positioning systems or other mutually acceptable equipment and provided to the Ely District Office Weed Coordinator or designated contact person.

To minimize the transport of soil-borne noxious weed seeds, roots, or rhizomes, infested soils or materials will not be moved and redistributed on weed-free or relatively weed-free areas. In areas where infestations are identified or noted and infested soils, rock, or overburden must be moved, these materials will be salvaged and stockpiled adjacent to the area from which they were stripped. Appropriate measures will be taken to minimize wind and water erosion of these stockpiles. During reclamation, the materials will be returned to the area from which they were stripped.

Prior to project approval a site-specific weed survey will occur and a weed risk assessment will be completed. Monitoring will be conducted for a period no shorter than the life of the permit or until bond release and monitoring reports will be provided to the Ely District Office. If the presence and/or spread of noxious weeds is noted, appropriated weed control procedures will be determined in consultation with Ely District Office personnel and will be in compliance with the appropriate BLM Handbook sections and applicable laws and regulations. All weed control efforts on BLM-administered lands will be in compliance with BLM Handbook H-9011, H-9011-1 Chemical Pest Control, H-9014 Use of Biological Control Agents of Pests on Public Lands, and H-9015 Integrated Pest Management. Submission of Pesticide Use Proposals and Pesticide Application Records will be required.

Determine seed mixes on a site specific basis dependant on the probability of successful establishment. Use native and adapted species that compete with annual invasive species or meet other objectives.

For soil disturbing actions which will require reclamation, salvage and stockpile all available growth medium prior to surface disturbances. Seed stockpiles if they are to be left for more than one growing season. Re-contour all disturbance areas to blend as nearly as possible with the natural topography prior to re-vegetation. Rip all compacted portions of the disturbance to an appropriate depth based on site characteristics. Establish an adequate seed bed to provide good seed-to-soil contact.

Conduct mixing of herbicides and rinsing of herbicide containers and spray equipment only in areas that are a safe distance from environmentally sensitive areas and points of entry to bodies of water (storm drains, irrigation ditches, streams, lakes, or wells).

Keep removal and disturbance of vegetation would be kept to a minimum through construction site management (e.g. using previously disturbed areas and existing easements, limiting equipment/materials storage and staging area sites, etc.)

Certify that all interim and final seed mixes, hay, straw, and hay/straw products are free of plant species listed on the Nevada noxious weed list.

When managing in areas of special status species, carefully consider the impacts of the treatment on such species. Wherever possible, hand spraying of herbicides is preferred over other methods.

Do not conduct noxious and invasive weed control within 0.5 mile of nesting and brood rearing areas for special status species during the nesting and brood rearing season.

When maintaining unpaved roads on BLM-administered lands, avoid the unnecessary disturbance of adjacent native vegetation and spread of weeds. Grade roads shoulders or barrow ditches only when necessary to provide for adequate drainage. Minimize the width of grading operations. The BLM Authorized Officer will meet with equipment operators to ensure that they understand this objective.

Consider nozzle type, nozzle size, boom pressure, and adjuvant use and take appropriate measures for each herbicide application project to reduce the chance of chemical drift. All applications of approved pesticides will be conducted only by certified pesticide applicators or by personnel under the direct supervision of a certified applicator.

Prior to commencing any chemical control program, and on a daily basis for the duration of the project, the certified applicator will provide a suitable safety briefing to all personnel working with or in the vicinity of the herbicide application. This briefing will include safe handling, spill prevention, cleanup, and first aid procedures.

Store all pesticides in areas where access can be controlled to prevent unauthorized/untrained people from gaining access to chemicals.

Do not apply pesticides within 440 yards (0.25 mile) of residences without prior notification of the resident.

Areas treated with pesticides will be adequately posted to notify the public of the activity and of safe re-entry dates, if a public notification requirement is specified on the label of the product applied. The public notice signs will be at least 8 1/2" x 11" in size and will contain the date of application and the date of safe re-entry.

Whenever possible, hand spraying of herbicides is preferred over other methods at heavily used recreation sites (i.e. campgrounds, trailheads, etc.).

Reviewed by: /s/Cameron Boyce _____ Date _____
Cameron Boyce
Caliente Field Office Noxious & Invasive Weeds
Coordinator