

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**

Twin Falls District  
Shoshone Field Office  
400 West F Street  
Shoshone, Idaho 83352

**Scoping Information Package  
Blue Fire Special Recreation Permit  
DOI-BLM-ID-T030-2015-0004-EA**

This information package summarizes a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal from Blue Fire Wilderness Therapy for a 10-year commercial Special Recreation Permit (SRP). 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 sending this package 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 with an estimated decision date by June 15, 2015. 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**

The BLM's purpose and need is to respond to the Blue Fire special recreation permit application for a 10-year SRP. Special Recreation Permits are authorizations which allow for recreational uses of the public lands and related waters. They are issued as a means to control visitor use, protect natural and cultural resources, and provide for the health and safety of visitors. Commercial SRPs are also issued as a mechanism to provide a fair return to the United States for the commercial recreational use of public lands.

### **Proposed Action**

#### **Program Overview**

Blue Fire is a licensed outdoor therapeutic program that offers services to youth, ages 11-17, who are dealing with emotional, social, academic or family issues. Use of public land primarily consists of hiking, camping, and storing water and supplies in the Bennett Hills to support staff and clients, see Blue Fire Operating Plan below for details. They would operate year round with an average client treatment period of 60 days. Expected client capacity is 60 in the summer, 20 in the fall/winter and is anticipated to take a number of years to reach capacity. Group size will range from 3-15 with a 4:1 student/staff ratio.

All activities on public and private lands will incorporate a minimum impact approach and follow all guidelines, restrictions, and stipulations as they relate to Idaho Health and Welfare, wildlife habitat, fire prevention, greater sage-grouse, and other applicable resources on public lands. Use would be in compliance with any stipulations associated with the permit.

## **Blue Fire Operating Plan Overview (See Map)**

1. Headquarters Overview – Blue Fire will operate out of administrative offices located at 1120 Montana St, Gooding, Idaho. Clients will only be at this location for the intake process and weekly showers. Blue Fire has established three Base Camps on private property with yurts and will consider including latrine/shower facilities in the future. Locations include Timber Gulch, Homestead, and Patterson Reservoir. Groups will be in their respective Base Camps on a weekly basis for 3-4 days. Other private land will have either yurts or canvas shelters for winter operations. Sites on public land will be selected in collaboration with BLM representatives.
2. Accessing Trails and Campsites – Blue Fire will have groups hiking to/from their Base Camps at times, and at other times groups will be transported by vehicles to various drop off points in the permit area. Groups will engage in multi-day trekking, which means leaving Base Camp and hiking from one primitive campsite to another moving 2-10 miles every day. This also means moving from one water barrel location to another unless other water sources are available. Blue Fire plans to utilize primitive campsites infrequently, in order to have less impact on any one area. At the end of the trek, groups will return to their originating Base Camp. For example, the Boys group will be based out of Timber Gulch and the Girls group based out of Homestead. They will not share these Base Camps and these camps will be where groups receive their rations and supplies. Hiking may be for a single day or multiple days, depending on physical ability and treatment goals. Groups will leave some gear/supplies at their Base Camp if they are going for a short duration. Groups will be at Headquarters every other week, rotating one group in at a time.
3. Use of Lands – The overall use of public lands will be for hiking, camping, storing water, environmental education, skills work (i.e. primitive fire making), and engaging in seasonal adventure activities such as mountain biking, snow shoeing, and cross country skiing. Therapists will visit groups both at camp sites and at Headquarters.
4. Water – Blue Fire will provide potable water to groups by having 50 gallon water barrels in specified locations (see Map), smaller jugs for more primitive camping, and water filters when groups hike in areas with flowing water (seasonally). During the winter, water will be delivered daily to avoid freezing barrels. Groups will plan and coordinate their hiking itineraries with the Field Director daily.
5. Food – Groups carry edible and approved food with them at all times. Rations are provided to groups regularly. Fresh fruits and vegetables and a variety of dry foods are made available. Blue Fire coordinates with a nutritionist who provides recommendations for proper calories, balanced nutrition, and alternate choices for specific allergies and religious needs.
6. Communications – Field staff will carry 2-way radios and/or satellite phones and will have a cell phone for back up communication. Each group will carry maps and a GPS and will coordinate their hiking and camping plans with the Field Director daily. These calls are recorded and available for all staff and emergency personnel.
7. Emergency Team – Communication with groups is monitored 24 hours per day, 365 days a year. At all times there are Blue Fire staff who are “on-call” and available to respond to any emergency that arises in the field. Staff coordinate with local emergency departments as needed (sheriff, hospital, search and rescue, fire departments) and also carry numbers for these departments and surrounding neighbors. Each group has at least one staff who is a trained Wilderness First Responder.

8. Primitive Skills – Blue Fire teaches clients to make primitive fire as part of the program. Bowdrill, spark rock, and hand drill are 3 common methods which are taught. Other skills include making primitive shelters and trapping skills (for learning purposes only, NO trapping of animals will be done). Willow and sage are the most common materials used. Blue Fire will follow minimal impact guidelines as they harvest the materials needed. Unused willow is replanted into wet soil and the only sage that will be used for fires will be dead, down and detached.

9. Camp Fire – Blue Fire groups will make fires every night during the fall, winter, and spring months. They use fire primarily for heat as they will be cooking on camp stoves. They will gather dead, down and detached sage for fires. During winter months Blue Fire will provide firewood to winter campsites.

10. Camping & Shelters – During spring, summer and fall months groups carry tarps to set up a-frame shelters or may carry light-weight pop up tents. These primitive campsites are within ¼ mile of the water barrels. Camping will happen on both private and public lands according to the permit guidelines. During winter months, groups will camp at and sleep in shelters with heat. Types of shelters they will use in the winter include yurts, canvas frame shelters, and cold season tents.

11. Hiking & Activities – Blue Fire groups will operate from Base Camps which are on private lands. From these Base Camps, groups will go on multi-day treks which could be anywhere from 3-4 days in duration depending on the ability of the group members. Hiking will be done primarily on existing roads and occasionally cross country. Trekking is one of many activities groups will engage in to learn healthy and positive life skills. Group members will participate in the planning and preparing for treks including food and gear needs. Field staff will plan the routes; clients will not have access to the area maps. Upon return to their Base Camps, groups will engage in therapy sessions, letter writing or skype calls with parents, showers, re-rations, and education curriculum activities..

12. Human Waste and Trash - Toilet facilities will consist of the following: Base Camps will have portable latrines provided and serviced from a private contractor. Winter shelter sites will have large holes dug each fall and filled in each spring. Primitive campsites will have a group hole dug and filled daily, and while hiking, participants will dig and fill cat holes as needed. Each “toilet” will be located at least 200 feet from camping structures. Groups will use hand sanitizer on hikes and do basic hand washing in a sump-hole while in camps. Showers will happen at Headquarters. Each group will carry trash bags, which will be removed as needed from the desert and disposed of at the base of operations location.

## **Existing Condition**

The proposed permit area is within Camas, Gooding, and Lincoln counties. Vegetation consists of a sage brush steppe environment and several perennial and intermittent streams flow through the area. Nineteen BLM sensitive wildlife species may occur in the area along with three special status plant species. There are five wilderness study areas within the proposed permit area. The permit area has several livestock allotments and associated infrastructure, fences, water tanks, etc. Several roads and primitive roads pass through and access public lands within the proposed permit area.

## **Preliminary Issues**

Following is a list of preliminary issues the Shoshone Field Office has identified. These are issues that will likely be addressed in the environmental analysis. Issues may warrant the development of an alternative, can be addressed through permit stipulations or mitigation, or are addressed through environmental analysis and disclosure.

1. Federally listed and proposed wildlife species that could incidentally occur in the proposed permit area include Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) and yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*). The greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), a federal candidate, is known to occur throughout the area year-round; the proposed permit area contains priority habitat for the species.
2. The proposed permit area contains crucial winter range for mule deer.
3. The proposed permit area provides habitat for three migratory bird species of conservation concern that are not listed as Idaho BLM Sensitive species including golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), mountain bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*), and lesser goldfinch (*Spinus psaltria*). These species would utilize the proposed permit area during nesting, brood-rearing, and/or wintering activities.
4. Idaho BLM sensitive and watch list wildlife species that could occur in the proposed permit area include pygmy rabbit (*Brachylagus idahoensis*), gray wolf (*Canis lupus*), bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), northern leopard frog (*Rana pipiens*), sage sparrow (*Amphispiza belli*), western toad (*Bufo boreas*), ferruginous hawk (*Buteo regalis*), woodhouse toad (*Bufo woodhousii*), trumpeter swan (*Cygnus buccinator*), willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii*), prairie falcon (*Falco mexicanus*), peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum*), loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*), Lewis' woodpecker (*Melanerpes lewis*), Townsend's big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii*), Piute ground squirrel (*Spermophilus mollis artemisae*), brewer's sparrow (*Spizella breweri*), calliope hummingbird (*Stellula calliope*), common garter snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis*), grasshopper sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*), short-eared owl (*Asio flammeus*), swainson's hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*), brewer's blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*), long-billed curlew (*Numenius americanus*), sage thrasher (*Oreoscoptes montanus*), Wilson's phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*), green-tailed towhee (*Pipilo chlorurus*), and western burrowing owl (*Speotyto cunicularia*). Gray wolves would utilize the project area primarily during the winter while pursuing or preying upon mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) and/or elk (*Cervus elaphus*). Expected use of habitat in the project area by the other sensitive or watch list wildlife species varies from incidental foraging activities to year-round use.
5. There is one fish bearing stream (Clover Creek) within the area encompassed by the proposed special recreational use permit. Clover Creek contains suitable habitat for redband/rainbow hybrids and various native non-game fish.
6. There are approximately 855 miles of perennial and intermittent streams within the proposed permit area. A perennial stream is defined as a stream or stretch of stream that flows continuously for most months of most years. Perennial streams are generally fed in

part by springs or discharge from groundwater. An intermittent stream is defined as a stream or stretch of stream which flows only at certain periods of the year when it receives water from springs, discharge from groundwater, or melting snow in mountainous areas. These streams generally flow continuously at least one month most years.

Additionally, there are two wetland and/or open water areas within the proposed permit area, Thorn Creek Reservoir and Bray Lake. No use is planned in the Bray Lake area. Incidental use may occur near Thorn Creek Reservoir.

7. Bugleg goldenweed (*Pyrrhocoloma insecticruris*), Mourning milkvetch (*Astragalus atratus* v. *inseptus*), Malheur Prince's Plume (*Stanleya confertiflora*), and Bugleg goldenweed (*Pyrrhocoloma insecticruris*) are BLM Special Status Species Plants that occur within the proposed permit area. Hiking and camping through their habitats may impact these sensitive plant species.
8. The following noxious weeds and invasive plants are found in the proposed permit area: Cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) and medusahead wildrye (*Taeniatherum caput-medusae*) are both invasive annual grasses that are present in the project area. Cheatgrass is widespread, and medusahead wildrye is isolated to mostly the southern half of the proposed permit area. Japanese brome (*Bromus japonicus*) is also present in the proposed permit area, although it is scattered and mostly located in the northern half.

The following plants are listed by the Idaho State Department of Agriculture as noxious weeds: Diffuse knapweed (*Centaurea diffusa*) is scattered throughout the proposed permit area, concentrated particularly along roads. Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) is located primarily in and near riparian or ephemerally wet areas in the proposed permit area. Russian knapweed (*Acroptilon repens*) is located on BLM lands primarily next to agriculture fields. Rush skeletonweed (*Chondrilla juncea*) is scattered across the lower half of the proposed permit area. Puncture vine (*Tribulus terrestris*) and scotch thistle (*Onopordum acanthium*) are also likely to occur in scattered, small patches across the proposed permit area.

All of the listed noxious weeds are readily transported by both people and vehicles traversing an area.

9. Cultural resources exist within the proposed permit area.
10. The following Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) exist within the proposed permit area: Gooding City of Rocks West, Gooding City of Rocks East, Black Canyon, Little City of Rocks and Black Butte. The proposed permit area may also contain public lands with wilderness characteristics.
11. The Portuguese Creek Common Use Area is within the proposed permit area. BLM sells landscape rock to the public from this site.
12. Livestock allotments potentially affected by Blue Fire activities include: Clover Creek, Davis Mtn, Black Canyon, North Gooding, Gwin Ranch, Curtis Lake, Finch, Black Butte, Rattlesnake, 46, North Shoshone, and parts of Pothole, Hash Springs, West Spring

Creek, East Spring Creek, and Macon Flat. Livestock use would occur at the same time that the proposed activities would take place so there is the potential for use conflicts.

13. The project falls within an Extensive Recreation Management Area (ERMA). ERMAs are identified areas where recreation is planned for and actively managed on an interdisciplinary-basis in concert with other resources/resource programs. ERMAs offer recreation opportunities that facilitate visitors' freedom to pursue a variety of outdoor recreation activities and attain a variety of outcomes. Based on field observations and professional knowledge hunting, hiking and driving for pleasure are the primary activities that occurs or may occur within the project area. This proposal allows those recreation opportunities to continue to be available. However there is the potential for visitor health and safety issues between recreationists and the applicant. There is also potential for impacts to natural and cultural resources from the applicants program.
14. The project is within Visual Resource Management class areas ranging from Class I to Class IV. The proposal must be in compliance with management objectives.
15. The current and growing popularity of searching for and collecting shed big game antlers in the proposed permit area is resulting in increased disturbance of wintering big game animals during the period of the year when body energy reserves are at their lowest levels.

### **Preliminary Alternative Development**

The BLM will consider the No Action alternative. The No Action consists of denying the SRP application.

In addition, BLM will consider alternatives to the proposal. Alternatives may include but are not limited to restricting or expanding the permit area, changing seasons of use, changing the amount of use, and/or adding stipulations.

### **Decision to be Made**

The BLM Shoshone Field Manager will decide whether to deny the SRP application, authorize the SRP, or authorize the SRP with modifications.

## **Public Input Needed**

Comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, preliminary issues and preliminary alternatives. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received by March 20, 2015 and are directly relevant to the proposal and permit 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. Written comments must be submitted to:

Codie Martin  
Shoshone Field Manager  
400 West F Street  
Shoshone, ID 83352.

The office business hours for submitting hand-delivered comments are 7:45 AM – 4:30 PM Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), Word (.doc), or portable document format (.pdf) to [jkurtz@blm.gov](mailto:jkurtz@blm.gov). E-mails submitted to e-mail addresses other than the one listed, in other formats than those listed, or containing viruses will be rejected. To be most helpful, comments sent electronically should include 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.

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, be advised that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold from public review your personal identifying information, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

The primary contact for questions and comments for this analysis is John Kurtz, Outdoor Recreation Planner, (208) 732-7296.