



United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
MEDFORD DISTRICT OFFICE
ASHLAND RESOURCE AREA
3040 Biddle Road
Medford, Oregon 97504



FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT for the JACK-ASH TRAIL PROJECT

(DOI-BLM-ORWA-M060-2016-0011-EA)

Introduction

The Medford District Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Ashland Resource Area analyzed the impacts of the construction of 4.7 miles of trail and four trailheads (Phase 1) located south of the cities of Jacksonville and Medford, OR in the *Jack-Ash Trail Project Environmental Assessment* (DOI-BLM-ORWA-M060-2016-0011-EA) (EA).

Phase 1 is a portion of planned larger trail system that would ultimately provide non-motorized trail opportunities for equestrians, hikers, runners, and mountain bikers that would connect the cities of Jacksonville and Ashland with a trail system, primarily along the ridges and crests of the Siskiyou Mountains, Jackson County, Oregon. Phase 1 connects to the existing Sterling Mine Ditch Trail to create a stand-alone loop trail. The trailheads would be designated in areas that already receive some recreational parking use. The trail would be accessible to all levels of non-motorized users.

The EA analyzed the potential impacts of the following recreation management activities: trail construction, parking area/trailhead construction, and sign installation.

Based on the context and intensity of the effects analyzed in the Jack-Ash Trail Project EA, (pp. 27-39), I have determined Alternative 2, the Proposed Action, with the incorporated Project Design Features, is not a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area.

The Jack-Ash Phase 1 Trail Project will not have significant effects beyond those described in the broader analyses conducted and disclosed in the *Western Oregon Proposed Resource Management Plan /Final Environmental Impact Statement* (PRMP/FEIS) and the 2016 *Southwestern Oregon Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan* (ROD/RMP), or the effects have been determined to be insignificant. Environmental effects do not meet the definition of significance in context or intensity as defined in 40 CFR § 1508.27. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary and will not be prepared.

In making this finding, I considered the following criteria, as required in 40 CFR § 1508.27 by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) for evaluating the significance of the effects of the activities proposed in the Jack-Ash Phase 1 Trail Project.

Context

The Jack-Ash (Phase 1) Trail Project EA analyzed site-specific actions on 4.7 miles (approximately 10 feet wide) of vegetation clearing and trail construction and the designation of four existing graveled parking areas as trailheads.

Alternative 2 will include implementation of the project design features listed in the EA (pp. 24-25) and applicable Best Management Practices in Appendix C of the 2016 ROD/RMP. These project design features are a compilation of resource protection measures identified by the Interdisciplinary Team and Best Management Practices. By implementing these protective measures, the BLM will avoid or reduce adverse effects from management activities.

The Jack-Ash Trail Project is consistent with the 2016 ROD/RMP and the effects anticipated from implementation of that plan.

Intensity

I have considered the intensity of the effects anticipated from the Jack-Ash (Phase 1) Trail Project relative to the severity of the effects, as described in the 10 considerations for evaluating intensity in the CEQ regulations [40 CFR § 1508.27(b)].

Chapter 3 of the EA (pp. 27–39) details the effects of the project. None of the effects identified, including direct, indirect, and cumulative effects, are considered to be significant and all anticipated effects are of the type and within the magnitude of effects analyzed and described in the FEIS for 2016 Southwestern Oregon RMP.

The following discussion is based around the ten considerations for evaluating intensity.

1. Effects that may be both beneficial or adverse.

Based on the analysis documented in the EA, no significant adverse or beneficial effects will result from implementing the Selected Alternative (Alternative 2) in the Jack-Ash (Phase 1) Trail Project EA. All effects are of the type and within the magnitude of effects described in the FEIS for the 2016 Southwestern Oregon RMP.

The EA documented the site-specific analysis of effects to the environment. Required project design features (EA, p. 24-25), an integral part of the Jack-Ash (Phase 1) Trail Project, will ensure the potential for adverse effects on resources is avoided or minimized to the extent possible.

- a) Developing the trails and parking areas analyzed in the Jack-Ash (Phase 1) Trail Project will result in increased recreational use of the area by equestrians, hikers, runners, and mountain bikers. The construction of new trail segments (off-road segments) will increase the non-motorized trail opportunities, reducing potential conflicts with OHV users on the Anderson Butte ridge complex (EA, p. 36).
- b) The Jack-Ash (Phase 1) Trail Project will provide local residents with a high quality off-road outdoor recreation experience through woodlands and grassy meadows as opposed to mostly gravel roads (EA, p. 36).

- c) Increased traffic to the area could increase a potential risk for trespassing on adjacent private lands; private land adjacent to the trail would be signed as such which would focus on minimizing private property trespass issues (EA, p. 22).
- d) Soil erosion from trail construction and sign/kiosk construction will be avoided or minimized through implementation of project design features (EA, pp. 24-25). There may be a slight increase in soil erosion during the first year after trail construction until the vegetation reestablishes. The EA included summary of possible effects to soils (pp. 36-37 and Appendix B: Soil Resources).
- e) Sedimentation from drainage features (retaining walls and crib walls) will be minimized through specific drainage crossing designs that will be implemented during trail construction (EA, p. 20). Trails will be designed with grade reversals before and after drainage crossings to minimize sedimentation to the channel. Also, rocks on site will be used to harden the drainage crossings. This will protect stream sediment levels and prevent hazardous materials from entering streams.
- f) Proposed project elements do not include activities that would substantially increase fire hazard and risk as fuels created from the brushing and clearing would be hand piled and burned, lopped and scattered, or chipped (EA, pp. 38-39).
- g) The Jack-Ash (Phase 1) Trail Project will minimize or avoid the potential for the introduction or spread of existing noxious weed populations by implementing noxious weed project design features (EA, pp. 24-25). Project design features and other mitigation measures will reduce the risk of spread or introduction of noxious weeds. The effects to noxious weeds are discussed in the EA on page 38 and in Appendix E, pages 51–54.
- h) Effects to endangered species and listed threatened wildlife and plant species are discussed in CEQ consideration Number 9 (below).

2. The degree to which the Selected Alternative will affect public health or safety.

Construction will meet Occupational Safety and Health Association (OSHA) regulations for worker and public safety. The trail system will be constructed using trail standards in the USFS Trail Construction and Maintenance Handbook and BLM Trails Handbook 9114. Although some risk is inherent in horseback riding, mountain biking, hiking, and running, standard safety measures are included in the project design to reduce risk (removal of tree stumps, etc.) to levels acceptable to the sport. Potential safety conflicts between trail users would be minimized through trail design (EA, p. 20). Recreational target shooting in the vicinity of the trail would be addressed through law enforcement and maintenance patrols in an area. Signs would be posted in areas of trailheads. Concrete barriers to deter use would be installed where conflicts with target shooting exist within range of Phase 1 of the trail. The BLM will also continue its education efforts regarding responsible shooting (EA, p. 13). Trail construction would provide the public with new opportunities for physical activity to improve fitness and health. Trail route signs would be posted on the shared-use roads to reduce conflict between motorized and non-motorized uses. No public health issues such as impacts to air or water quality were identified from the project.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

The Jack-Ash (Phase 1) Trail Project Area does not contain and will not affect park lands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas. Where required, the BLM completed surveys and inventories to identify areas with unique characteristics. This allowed the BLM to design the project in such a way to avoid effects to these features as follows:

- Cultural surveys for the Project Area were completed and the project archaeologist assessed the project as “No Effect Determination, No Resources.”
- No projects will occur within wetlands; therefore, wetlands will not be destroyed, lost, or degraded in accordance with Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

The effects of Alternative 2 for the Jack-Ash (Phase 1) Trail Project are similar in nature to other projects that have been implemented across the Medford District BLM. The anticipated effects of the projects, documented in the EA, are disclosed in Chapter 3 of the EA (pp. 27-39). There is no indication of any highly controversial effects on the quality of the human environment.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The analysis did not indicate the effects of the Alternative 2 will involve any unique or unknown risks. The anticipated effects of implementing the Jack-Ash (Phase 1) Trail Project are similar in nature to the effects estimated and observed for other projects implemented on lands in the Medford District BLM and are well supported with referenced literature throughout the EA.

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about future considerations.

The decision to implement Alternative 2 of the Jack-Ash (Phase 1) Trail Project will not set any precedents for future actions with significant effects nor does it represent a decision in principle about future considerations. The Jack-Ash (Phase 1) Trail Project will implement actions that meet management direction in the Southwestern Oregon ROD/RMP that directs the BLM to “Manage Special Recreation Management Areas and Extensive Recreation Management Areas, identified in Appendix G, in accordance with their planning frameworks” (p. 107) and “Pursue and prioritize public access to BLM-administered lands that have high recreational potential consistent with BLM designations and allocations” (p. 107). Phase 1 is a portion of planned larger trail system that would ultimately provide a non-motorized trail system for equestrians, hikers, runners, and mountain bikers and connects to the existing Sterling Mine Ditch Trail to create a stand-alone loop trail. Any future phase(s) would have its (their) own set of conditions and would be evaluated through the NEPA process and subject to funding availability.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant effects.

The analysis did not identify any significant cumulative effects outside of those addressed and anticipated in the FEIS for the 2016 Southwestern ROD/RMP. The project’s interdisciplinary

team performed analyses for various resources at multiple scales and included past, current, and foreseeable future actions on both private and federal lands. The effects of implementing Alternative 2 on each resource are disclosed in the EA in Chapter 3 (EA, pp. 27-39).

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.

The project archaeologist surveyed the Project Area for cultural and historic resources and none were identified. Implementation of Alternative 2, including project design features, will not affect objects listed on the National Register of Historic Places, nor will it cause destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources. If cultural resources are located during project implementation, the project will be stopped and the BLM archaeologist will determine appropriate mitigation.

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened (T&E) species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

T&E Plant Species

Jack-Ash (Phase 1) Trail Project Area contains one T&E plant species, the federally endangered vascular plant, *Fritillaria gentneri*. However, no Special Status vascular and non-vascular plants (including federally threatened, endangered, or Bureau Sensitive) were found during 2015 botany surveys of the proposed trail corridor and parking areas/trailheads. All required surveys have been completed along the proposed trail and at the parking areas; no rare plants were discovered.

T&E Fish Species

The Jack-Ash (Phase 1) Trail Project Area does not contain any T&E fish species. Furthermore, there are no project activities proposed in or adjacent to fish-bearing streams, and no new trail segments would cross any riparian reserves or stream channels.

T&E Wildlife Species

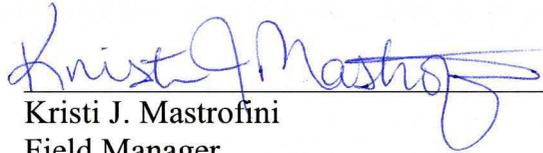
The Jack-Ash (Phase 1) Trail Project Area contains one T&E wildlife species, the federally threatened northern spotted owl. The project wildlife biologist determined the Phase 1 actions proposed in Alternative 2 are a *may affect, not likely to adversely affect (NLAA)* ESA determination. Spotted owls may use the area for nesting, roosting, and foraging and Dispersal (EA, pp. 32-33). A summary of potential impacts to T&E and Bureau Special Status wildlife species is in the EA (pp. 32-33 and 38).

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or Local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Alternative 2 will not violate Federal, State, or local environmental protection laws. Project design features, an integral part of this project, ensure project activities are consistent with the 2016 ROD/RMP, as well as comply with legal requirements applicable to this project (EA, pp. 14-16).

Finding

I have determined Alternative 2 does not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment; therefore, an EIS is not necessary and will not be prepared. This conclusion is based on my consideration of the CEQ's criteria for significance (40 CFR §1508.27) with regard to the context and intensity of the effects described in the EA, and on my understanding of the project, review of the project analysis, and review of public comments. As previously noted, the analysis of effects has been completed within the context of the 2016 Southwestern Oregon RMP. This conclusion is consistent with the 2016 ROD/RMP and the anticipated effects are within the scope, type, and magnitude of effects anticipated and analyzed in that plan. The analysis of project effects has also occurred in the context of multiple spatial and temporal scales as appropriate for different types of effects and the effects were determined to be insignificant.



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9/30/16
Date