

**United States Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management**

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**Environmental Assessment  
DOI-BLM-UT-Y010-2013-0224 EA**

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**December 2013**

**Special Recreation Permit Amendment for Western River  
Expeditions**

*Location:* Hiking locations throughout the Moab Field Office

*Applicant/Address:* Western River Expeditions, Main Street, Moab, Utah

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Moab Field Office  
82 East Dogwood  
Moab, UT 84532  
435-259-2100



Special Recreation Permit Augmentation for Western River Expeditions  
DOI-BLM-UTY010-2013-0224 EA

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**CHAPTER 1**

**INTRODUCTION AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION**

**INTRODUCTION**

Western River Expeditions seeks augmentation of its Special Recreation Permit (SRP) to conduct hiking tours throughout the Moab Field Office.

**PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION**

Western River Expeditions seeks to augment its SRP to offer guided hiking throughout the Moab Field Office. As required by 43 CFR 2930, Western River is required to change its commercial SRP to offer this activity.

**CONFORMANCE WITH BLM LAND USE PLAN(S)**

The proposed action has been determined to be in conformance with the terms and conditions of the Moab Resource Management Plan (approved in October, 2008) as required by 43 CFR 1610.5.

Moab's RMP states the following:

- **REC-46** "Special Recreation Permits are issued as a discretionary action as a means to: help meet management objectives, provide opportunities for economic activity, facilitate recreational use of public lands, control visitor use, protect recreational and natural resources, and provide for the health and safety of visitors." (page 97)  
**and**
- **REC-47** "All SRPs will contain standard stipulations appropriate for the type of activity and may include stipulations necessary to protect lands or resources, reduce user conflicts, or minimize health and safety concerns....Issue and manage recreation permits for a wide variety of uses to enhance outdoor recreational opportunities, provide opportunities for private enterprise, manage user-group interaction, and limit the impacts to such uses upon natural and cultural resources." (page 98).

**RELATIONSHIPS TO STATUTES, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PLANS**

The proposed action is consistent with page 48 of the Grand County General Plan Update (2004), which states: "The public lands of Grand County should be managed for the enjoyment and benefit of people of Grand County and the nation so as to maintain the integrity and value of natural and cultural resources. Furthermore the Grand County General Plan Update states under the category "Economic use of public lands: Grand County encourages the expeditious processing of use permits for economic uses of public lands consistent with the policies of the Plan, and specifically, film, mineral extraction, and recreation, for the benefit of Grand County

## **CHAPTER 2 DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This EA focuses on the Proposed and No Action alternatives. No other alternatives were considered. The No Action alternative is considered and analyzed to provide a baseline for comparison of the impacts of the proposed action.

### **PROPOSED ACTION**

Western River Expeditions seeks to augment its SRP to offer commercial hiking tours. The following locations are requested: Negro Bill Canyon, Culvert Canyon to Jeep Arch, Day Canyon to top and back, Moki Canyon to overlook of river, Portal Trail to Poison Spider, Moab Rim to Hidden Valley, Mary Jane/Professor Creek, Tusher Tunnel to Determination Towers, Mill Canyon Dinosaur Track, Mill Canyon Dinosaur Tracksite, Bartlett Alcove and rock art along Highway 313, Gemini Bridges to overlook of Bull Canyon, Long Canyon photo point and Jughandle Arch, Mill Creek, including Flat Pass, Navajo Ridge and Powerdam entrances, Cable Arch, Pickle and Mashed Potato, Tombstone Trail in Kane Creek, Kane Creek Rock Art, Cliffhanger Rock Art, Jackson Trail, Captain Ahab Trail, Gatherer Canyon, Hunter Canyon, Hunter Canyon Rim, Behind the Rocks/Pritchett and Picture Frame Arch Butte, Copper Ridge Dinosaur tracks, Richardson Amphitheater Trail, Jewel Tibbetts Arch Trail, Pipedream, Moonflower, Monitor and Merrimac and Fisher Towers hiking routes. In addition, guided hiking would be allowed on all single track mountain bike trails.

All guests would be led by a guide.

### **NO ACTION**

The No Action Alternative is to deny the augmentation of its SRP to Western Rivers.

## **CHAPTER 3 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT**

### **INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL SETTING**

The affected environment was considered and analyzed by an interdisciplinary team as documented in the Interdisciplinary Team Checklist. The checklist indicates which resources of concern are either not present in the project area or would not be impacted to a degree that requires detailed analysis; see Appendix A. Resources which could be impacted to a level requiring further analysis are described in Chapter 3 and impacts on these resources are analyzed in Chapter 4 below.

#### **Fish and Wildlife Excluding USFW Designated Species**

Several of the proposed routes are within crucial bighorn sheep habitat.

#### **Migratory Birds**

Many of the proposed routes are in areas that have the potential to be chosen by a raptor for a nest site.

#### **Recreation**

The hiking routes requested by Western River are used by thousands of private visitors annually.

### **Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Animal Species**

Two species, the Mexican Spotted Owl (MSO) and the southwestern willow flycatcher (SWFL) could be found in the proposed areas. The SWFL typically occupies dense riparian areas. Migratory SWFLS have been identified within the Moab Field Office (MFO) area, but no nesting has known to occur. MSO habitat includes much of the areas within the MFO. Occupancy and nesting is known to occur within the MFO.

### **Utah BLM Sensitive Species**

Many of the proposed routes are in areas that have the potential to have kit fox. The kit fox is native to much of the western United States and northern Mexico and is primarily nocturnal, but individuals may be found outside of their dens during the day. The species most often occurs in open prairie, plains, and desert habitats. Currently no dens have been documented within the project area but there is known occurrence near the project area.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS**

#### **DIRECT AND INDIRECT IMPACTS**

#### **PROPOSED ACTION**

This section analyzes the impacts of the proposed action to those potentially impacting resources described in the affected environment, Chapter 3, above.

#### **Fish and Wildlife Excluding USFW Designated Species**

The presence of humans in crucial bighorn lambing areas could cause stress at crucial times. However, the proposed locations (such as the photo point in Long Canyon) are used by private visitors as well as commercial visitors, so additional disruption is expected to be minimal.

#### **Migratory Birds**

Raptors: Many of the proposed hiking routes are within areas that have the potential to be chosen by a raptor for a nest site. The presence of hiking activities could disturb nesting raptors, although the number of private hikers exceeds that proposed for this commercial activity. If it is determined that there is an active nest within 0.5 miles of a portion of any of the proposed locations, the BLM may implement the USFWS Guidelines for Raptor Protection. This would mean that a hiking location may be signed as closed for the duration of the nesting period or until the chicks have fledged the nest. These stipulations would lessen the impacts to nesting raptors in the back country.

#### **Recreation**

The proposed hiking tours would provide a recreation opportunity for those who wish to engage the services of a guide to further their hiking experience. There would be no displacement of other recreation visitors from such a small activity.

### **Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Animal Species (MSO and SWFL)**

The recreation program provides for the issuance of permits for commercial users and organized groups. Authorized recreation activities have the potential to increase human presence in MSO and SWFL habitats. Associated visual and auditory disturbances may adversely affect the behavior of MSO and SWFL during breeding, nesting or foraging activities if occupancy and/or nesting were to occur.

Typically SWFLs occupy dense riparian areas that would not be impacted by hiking activities.

The presence of hiking activities could disturb nesting MSOs, although the number of private hikers exceeds that proposed for this commercial activity. If it is determined that there is an active nest within 0.5 miles of a portion of any of the proposed locations, the BLM may initiate consultation with USFWS. This may result in hiking location may be signed as closed for the duration of the nesting period or until the chicks have fledged the nest. These stipulations would lessen the impacts to nesting MSO in the back country.

Most of the routes have been utilized by the general public for decades for hiking. No new routes are proposed in SWFL or MSO habitats. No new or additional impacts are expected by issuing a commercial permit in areas that are heavily utilized by the general public.

### **Utah BLM Sensitive Species**

Although currently no kit fox dens or individuals have been documented along the hiking routes, there is potential habitat and individuals have been sighted near these locations. Permitted activities would create no surface disturbances and activity on the routes would typically occur during daylight hours when fox are least active. Impacts to kit fox that may occupy the areas adjacent to hiking routes and their habitats are expected to be minimal. .

### **NO ACTION**

The No Action alternative would not meet the need for the proposed action; the benefits of augmenting an SRP for Western Rivers would be foregone. There would be no environmental impacts from the proposed action because the action would be denied.

### **Fish and Wildlife**

There would be no impact from permitted hiking to crucial bighorn lambing areas. However, disallowing permitted hiking could result in an increase in private hiking. This type of hiking would occur without trained guides and without protective stipulations attached.

### **Migratory Birds**

There would be no additional disturbance to nesting raptors from the permitted use of hiking routes, although all other uses, including private hiking, would continue.

### **Recreation**

The recreation benefit of the permit would be foregone because it would not occur. Some individuals desiring guide services for hiking would be denied the opportunity to go to the places listed in the Proposed Action.

### Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Animal Species (MSO and SWFL)

There would be no additional disturbance from permitted hiking; however, all other uses, including private hiking, would continue.

### Utah BLM Sensitive Species

In the No Action Alternative there would be no increase in the impacts to Utah BLM Sensitive Species.

### CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

The proposed action is not expected to have a cumulative impact on past, present or future actions in the affected areas within the Moab Field Office.

## CHAPTER 5 PERSONS, GROUPS, AND AGENCIES CONSULTED

During preparation of the EA, the public was notified of the proposed action by posting on the ENBB on August 2, 2013. No one has contacted the BLM in response to the notice. A public comment period was not offered because very little interest in the proposal has been expressed.

### List of Preparers

Table 5.2. List of Preparers

#### BLM Preparers

Name	Title	Responsible for the Following Section(s) of this Document
Ann Marie Aubry	Hydrologist	Air Quality, Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Floodplains, Soils, Wetlands/Riparian Zones, Water Resources
Katie Stevens	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Areas of Critical Environmental concern, Visual Resources, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Recreation
Aron King	Archeologist	Cultural Resources, Native American Religious Concerns
Becky Doolittle	Geologist	Wastes, Geology
Jan Denney	Realty Specialist	Lands/Access
Bill Stevens	Outdoor Recreation Planner	BLM Natural Areas, Socioeconomics, Wilderness/WSA, Lands with Wilderness Characteristics, Environmental Justice
Pam Riddle	Biologist	Fish and Wildlife, T&E Animal Species, Migratory Birds, Utah Sensitive Species

Dave Williams	Rangeland Management Specialist	Invasive Species, Woodland/Forestry, Rangeland Health Standards, Livestock Grazing, Vegetation, T and E Plants
Rebecca Hunt Foster	Paleontologist	Paleontology

**Appendix A: Interdisciplinary Team Checklist**

## INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM CHECKLIST

**Project Title:** Special Recreation Permit Amendment for Western River Expeditions, Inc. and Canyon Country River Adventures, Inc. DBA Adventure Center and Western River Expeditions

**NEPA Log Number:** DOI-BLM-UT-Y010-2013-0224 EA

**File/Serial Number:** MFO-Y010-10-007R

**Project Leader:** Jennifer Jones

**DETERMINATION OF STAFF:** *(Choose one of the following abbreviated options for the left column)*

NP = not present in the area impacted by the proposed or alternative actions

NI = present, but not affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required

PI = present with potential for relevant impact that need to be analyzed in detail in the EA

NC = (DNAs only) actions and impacts not changed from those disclosed in the existing NEPA documents cited in Section D of the DNA form. The Rationale column may include NI and NP discussions.

The following elements are not present in the Moab Field Office and have been removed from the checklist:  
Farmlands (Prime or Unique), Wild Horses and Burros.

Determination	Resource	Rationale for Determination*	Signature	Date
<b>RESOURCES AND ISSUES CONSIDERED (INCLUDES SUPPLEMENTAL AUTHORITIES APPENDIX I H-1790-1)</b>				
NI	Air Quality Greenhouse Gas Emissions		Ann Abov	8-23-13
NI	Floodplains		Ann Abov	8-23-13
NI	Soils		Ann Abov	8-23-13
NI	Water Resources/Quality (drinking/surface/ground)		Ann Abov	8-23-13
NI	Wetlands/Riparian Zones		Ann Abov	8-23-13
NP	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern		K. Stevens	8/19/13
PI	Recreation	would benefit rec users	K. Stevens	8/10/13
NI	Wild and Scenic Rivers		K. Stevens	8/19/13
NI	Visual Resources		K. Stevens	8/19/13
NP	BLM Natural Areas		J. Stevens	8-19-13
NI	Socio-Economics		J. Stevens	8-19-13
PI	Wilderness/WSA	IMP	J. Stevens	8-19-13

Determination	Resource	Rationale for Determination*	Signature	Date
NP	Lands with Wilderness Characteristics	No effects to cultural resources are expected as a result of this undertaking. →	JR Stevens	8-19-13
NI	Cultural Resources		RC Stevens	8/19/13
NI	Native American Religious Concerns		RC Stevens	8/19/13
NI	Environmental Justice		JR Stevens	8-19-13
NE	Wastes (hazardous or solid)	Conditions to handle trash + waste would be added to permit	R. Doolittle	8/19/2013
AI	Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Animal Species		J. Smith	8/19/13
PI	Migratory Birds		J. Smith	8/19/13
PS	Utah BLM Sensitive Species		J. Smith	8/19/13
RF	Fish and Wildlife Excluding USFW Designated Species		J. Smith	8/19/13
NI	Invasive Species/Noxious Weeds		D. Walker	8-26-13
NI	Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Plant Species		D. Walker	8-26-13
NI	Livestock Grazing		D. Walker	8-26-13
NI	Rangeland Health Standards		D. Walker	8-26-13
NI	Vegetation Excluding USFW Designated Species		D. Walker	8-26-13
	Woodland / Forestry			
NI	Fuels/Fire Management		Joshua Smith	8/26/13
NP	Geology / Mineral Resources/Energy Production		R. Doolittle	8/19/2013
NI	Lands/Access	No conflict with lands authorizations of Denny	JR Stevens	8-19-13
	Paleontology			

**FINAL REVIEW:**

Reviewer Title	Signature	Date	Comments
Environmental Coordinator	RC Stevens	12/30/13	
Authorized Officer	Joshua Smith	12/7/14	

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
AND  
DECISION RECORD

Western River Expeditions (Hiking tours)  
DOI-BLM-UT-Y010-2013-0224 DNA

**FONSI:** Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the present document, I have determined that the action will not have a significant effect on the human environment and an environmental impact statement is therefore not required.

**DECISION:** It is my decision to augment Special Recreation Permit MFO-Y010-10-007R with Western River Expeditions for commercial hiking trips in the locations listed under the Proposed Action. This decision is contingent upon meeting all stipulations and monitoring requirements attached.

**RATIONALE:** The decision to augment the Special Recreation Permit for Western River Expeditions has been made in consideration of the environmental impacts of the proposed action. The action is in conformance with the Moab Resource Management Plan, which allows for recreation use permits for a wide variety of uses to enhance outdoor recreational opportunities, provide opportunities for private enterprise, manage user-group interaction, and limit the impacts to such uses upon natural and cultural resources.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Authorized Officer

1/2/14  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date