

Categorical Exclusion Review
 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
 BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
 Boise District Office
 Four Rivers Field Office

NCA Soil Characteristics Study

CE No.: DOI-BLM-ID-B011-2010-0006-CX	Lease/Serial/Case File No.:
<p>Purpose and Need for Action: The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) maps and characterizes soils in the United States. In order to more accurately characterize soil characteristics, the NRCS must occasionally collect soil samples from soil profiles. Sixteen Benchmark soils have been selected as representative of the hundreds of soils identified and mapped over the western part of the Snake River Plain (Major Land Resource Area 11-west). Each of these selected soils is broadly extensive and holds a key position in the national soil classification system. Collectively, they reflect the major diversity of soils within the area. The current sampling effort will fill identified data gaps. The NRCS has requested access to BLM administered lands to collect samples for two soil series that are part of the Benchmark soils mapping effort.</p>	
<p>Description of Proposed Action: A backhoe would be used to dig two separate pits 2' wide, 6' long, and 5' deep. Soil samples would be collected and sent to a lab for characterization. Sampling would take 1/2 day per pit. The excavations would be back-filled upon completion of sampling and a native seed mixture consisting of Sandberg bluegrass (<i>Poa secunda</i>) and squirreltail (<i>Elymus elymoides</i>) would be raked into the disturbed areas in fall of 2010. Appropriate measures would be taken to ensure no fires are caused by the sampling. Vehicle travel would be limited to existing roads except for the backhoe which would travel up to 250' cross country. Slickspots would be avoided.</p>	
<p>Project Location: 10 miles SW and 15 miles W of Mountain Home, ID; Sample Site 1 (SS1) - T 02 S R 04 E Section 34 NWNW, Sample Site 2 (SS2) - T 05 S R 06 E Section 07 NESE</p>	
<p>Applicant (if any): NRCS</p>	
<p>Part I – Plan Conformance Review</p> <p>This proposed Action is subject to the following land use plan: Snake River Birds of Prey NCA RMP Date Plan Approved: September 30, 2008</p> <p>The proposed action is in conformance with the LUP, even though it is not specifically provided for, because it is clearly consistent with the following LUP decision(s) (objectives, terms, and conditions): Soil and vegetation objectives recognize the importance of maintaining or improving soil productivity in the NCA. Specific management actions designate up to 5,000 acres for research purposes.</p>	
<p>Part II – NEPA Review</p> <p>A. Categorical Exclusion Review: This proposed action qualifies as a categorical exclusion under 516 DM 2, Appendix 1 Category description: 1.6 Nondestructive data collection, inventory (including field, aerial, and satellite surveying and mapping), study, research, and monitoring activities.</p> <p>B. Departmental List of Extraordinary Circumstances Review: Before any non-Energy Act CX is used, you must conduct sufficient review to determine if any of the following extraordinary circumstances apply (516 DM 2, Appendix 2). If any of the extraordinary circumstances are applicable to the action being considered, either an EA or an EIS must be prepared for the action. Part 516 of the Departmental Manual (516 DM 2, Appendix 2) states that extraordinary circumstances exist for individual actions within CXs which may: (Mark applicable answer for each item. If "yes", prepare an EA/EIS and append this form to it.)</p>	

List of Extraordinary Circumstances		
1. Have significant impacts on public health or safety.		
Yes	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Specialist Signature/Date: <i>Matthew McCoy</i> 8/18/10
<i>Comments/Explanation:</i> The proposed location for this research project is the Snake River Birds of Prey NCA, ID. No water supply, either sole or communal is located in the vicinity of the proposed sample sites. Additionally, safety precautions would be taken to ensure that no hazardous materials would be released during field data collection.		
2. Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation, or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order 11990); floodplains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; or ecologically significant or critical areas, or is not in compliance with the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act.		
Yes	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Specialist Signature/Date: <i>Matthew McCoy</i> 8/18/10
<i>Comments/Explanation:</i> The proposed sample sites are located within the boundaries of the Morley Nelson Snake River Birds of Prey NCA, which is part of the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System. This study would in no way impact nesting birds of prey, or any other members of the local ecosystem due to the scale and nature of the proposed sampling. The proposed sites are located near slickspot peppergrass (LEPA) habitat (slickspots identified during Stage 1 surveys); however, impacts to slickspots would be avoided because vehicles would remain on established roads and sample sites would avoid slickspots. The sample sites would be occupied for only a short period of time and would have negligible impacts on other uses of the NCA.		
3. Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA Section 102(2)(E)].		
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Specialist Signature/Date: <i>Matthew McCoy</i> 8/18/10
<i>Comments/Explanation:</i> Soil sample collection would have negligible environmental impact and would not promote conflict regarding such impacts. The utilization of public and private resources at the site would be limited to occupation of public recreation area at a small spatial and temporal scale. No other site resources would be required for completion of sample collection. The impacts associated with collecting small, discrete soil samples are well understood and not controversial in the scientific community.		
4. Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.		
Yes	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Specialist Signature/Date: <i>Matthew McCoy</i> 8/18/10
<i>Comments/Explanation:</i> There would be virtually no uncertainty regarding the environmental impact of this study. Soil samples would be collected in relatively small (12 sq ft) areas. The effects on soil biota at this scale would be negligible when considering volume of soil resources in the NCA.		
5. Establish a precedent for future actions or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.		
Yes	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Specialist Signature/Date: <i>Matthew McCoy</i> 8/18/10
<i>Comments/Explanation:</i> No alternative use of public resources within the NCA would be motivated or promoted by this study. Vehicle use would be constrained to roadways (or within 250 ft) that are already established and care would be taken to ensure that there would be minimal disturbance to local biota beyond the specific sample sites.		
6. Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant, but cumulatively significant environmental effects.		
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Specialist Signature/Date: <i>Matthew McCoy</i> 8/18/10
<i>Comments/Explanation:</i> The impacts associated with data collection would be inconsequential both spatially and temporally; therefore, they would not be expected to overlap with other actions that could have similar impacts.		
7. Have significant impacts on properties listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by either the bureau or office.		
Yes	No	Specialist Signature/Date: <i>Dean Shaw</i> 8/18/10

<i>Comments/Explanation:</i> There are no sites eligible for the National Register of Historic Places in Idaho in the vicinity of the .		
8. Have significant impacts on species listed or proposed to be listed on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or on designated Critical Habitat for these species.		
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Specialist Signature/Date for Plants: <i>Mark Steiger</i> 8/25/10 Specialist Signature/Date for Wildlife: <i>Jill Holderman</i> 8/18/10 Specialist Signature/Date for Aquatics: <i>Allen Farter</i> 8/18/10
Plants <i>Comments/Explanation:</i> Habitat (slickspots) for the small annual/biennial mustard commonly known as slickspot peppergrass (<i>Lepidium papilliferum</i>) has been identified in sections adjacent to SS1. This small herbaceous plant is currently listed as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act and would receive special attention for the duration of this study. Slickspot peppergrass grows in visually distinct micro-sites, and the avoidance of such sites is not only ecologically important, but necessary to ensure that the sample at SS1 would be representative of the extensive soil series being sampled and not slickspot micro-sites. Although SS1 occurs within 0.5 mile of slickspot peppergrass habitat (known, but not necessarily occupied, slickspots), the proposed activity would be expected to have no effect on slickspot peppergrass (attached No Effect Documentation). SS2 does not occur within slickspot peppergrass habitat and is >0.5 mile from a Davis' peppergrass (<i>L. davisii</i>) habitat. Davis's peppergrass is a Type 3 BLM special status species.		
Wildlife <i>Comments/Explanation:</i> Several special status raptors, songbirds, and reptiles occur in the area. None are listed under the Endangered Species Act. Field data collection would occur after avian species have fledged their young. Reptiles would generally be active above ground. The limited spatial and temporal disturbances associated with the proposed data collection would have minimal impacts to special status wildlife species.		
Aquatics <i>Comments/Explanation:</i> There are no aquatic ecosystems within 1 mile of the project area.		
9. Violate a Federal, State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.		
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Specialist Signature/Date: <i>Matthew McCoy</i> 8/18/10; <i>Dean Shaw</i> 8/18/10
<i>Comments/Explanation:</i> The proposed action would be in compliance with laws associated with the protection of the environment.		
10. Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898).		
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Specialist Signature/Date: <i>Matthew McCoy</i> 8/18/10
<i>Comments/Explanation:</i> There are no low income or minority populations living in the project area. Low income or minority visitors to the area would not be affected any differently by the proposed activities than any other visitor.		
11. Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (Executive Order 13007).		
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Specialist Signature/Date: <i>Dean Shaw</i> 8/18/10
<i>Comments/Explanation:</i> Access to the area would not be affected by the proposed action.		
12. Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and Executive Order 13112).		
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Specialist Signature/Date: <i>Anne Halford</i> 8/18/10
<i>Comments/Explanation:</i> Non-native invasive plants are common in some portions of the proposed sample sites. Because of the limited surface disturbance associated with the project, it would not be expected to alter their present distribution. Isolated occurrences of noxious weeds; whitetop, rush skeletonweed, and Scotch thistle have been identified and treated within 2 miles of the proposed sample sites before or during 2007. This action would not be expected to facilitate the spread of these occurrences. Reseeding disturbed areas would reduce the potential for changes in invasive non-native species distribution and density and reduce risks caused by sampling that could adversely affect slickspot peppergrass habitat.		

I certify that none of the Departmental exceptions (Extraordinary Circumstances) listed in the above Part II (516 DM 2, Appendix 2) apply to this action; therefore, this categorical exclusion is appropriate for this situation.

Remarks:

Authorizing Official: /s/ Patricia Roller

Date: 9/10/2010

Name: Patricia Roller

Title: Field Manager, Morley Nelson Snake River Birds of Prey NCA

Part III – Decision

I have reviewed this plan conformance and NEPA compliance record and have determined that the proposed project is in conformance with the approved land use plan and that no further environmental analysis is required. It is my decision to implement the project, as described, with the mitigation measures either identified below or with the stipulation(s) described above.

Any appeal of this decision must follow the procedures set forth in 43 CFR Part 4. Within 30 days of the decision, a notice of appeal must be filed in the office of the authorized officer at the Four Rivers Field Office, Boise District, 3948 Development Ave, Boise, ID 83705. If a statement of reasons for the appeal is not included with the notice, it must be filed with the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of Hearings and Appeals, U.S. Department of the Interior, 801 North Quincy St. Suite 300, Arlington, VA 22203 within 30 days after the notice of appeal is filed with the authorized officer.

To file a petition for stay pursuant to 43 CFR part 4.21(b), it must accompany your notice of appeal and must show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

- (1) The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied.
- (2) The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits.
- (3) The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted, and
- (4) Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

If a petition for stay is submitted with the notice of appeal, a notice of appeal and petition for stay must be served on each party named in the decision from which the appeal is taken, and with the IBLA at the same time it is filed with the authorized officer.

A copy of the notice of appeal, any statement of reasons, and all pertinent documents must be served on each adverse party named in the decision from which the appeal is taken and on the *Office of the Solicitor, Field Solicitor-U.S. Department of the Interior, University Plaza, 960 Broadway Avenue, Suite 400, Boise, Idaho 83706*, not later than 15 days after filing the document with the authorized officer and/or IBLA.

Mitigation Measures/Other Remarks:

Remarks:

Authorizing Official: /s/ Patricia Roller

Date: 9/10/2010

Name: Patricia Roller

Title: Field Manager, Morley Nelson Snake River Birds of Prey NCA