

**Moon Rocks Off-highway Vehicle Area**  
**Scoping/Information Package**  
**Sierra Front Field Office Recreation Improvements**  
**NEPA # DOI-BLM-NV-C020-2021-0009-EA**

**Introduction**

The information in this package summarizes a Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Sierra Front Field Office (SFFO) proposal that would address public health and safety issues and administrative needs on public lands located at Moon Rocks Off-highway Vehicle (OHV) area north of Reno, Nevada.

The purpose of this document is to inform potentially interested and affected parties of the BLM's proposal, and to invite comments to assist with the review of the Proposed Action in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations. An Environmental Assessment (EA) will be prepared to determine the effects that could occur from the Proposed Action and to identify any mitigation measures that may be needed to protect resources.

Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential environmental issues related to the Proposed Action.

**Location**

The project area is known as Moon Rocks and located in Washoe County, Nevada, approximately 20 miles north of Reno, NV. The project area encompasses public lands in T. 23 N., R. 20 E., Sections 15-22, 27-34; T. 22 N., R. 20 E., Sections 3-10, 15-22; T. 23 N., R. 19 E. Sections 14-15, 23-24, 36; T. 22 N., R. 19 E., Sections 1-2. See Map 1 (attached).

**Project Area**

Moon Rocks is an area managed by the SFFO for motorized and nonmotorized recreation activities consistent with the Carson City District Office's Consolidate Resource Management Plan (CRMP, 2001). Moon Rocks is recognized as an important recreation area based on significant user demand and the need for increased management including activity-based planning, supplemental rules, and focused law enforcement. The area was evaluated and identified for potential designation as a Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) during the CCDO's recent planning process (2019).

The project area is defined by an "Open"<sup>1</sup> OHV designation approximately 20,000 acres in size and segments of Bedell and Antelope roads that extend beyond the OHV open boundary. The area attracts both community and destination-based visitors from the Reno area and central California. Recreation opportunities are varied but the dominant activities include camping and intensive off-highway vehicle use. Moon Rocks is not a designated fee site.

Moon Rocks is a large open area with a variety of roads, trails, and camp areas in a high desert setting. The area has become increasingly popular over the last five years. The Memorial Day

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<sup>1</sup> Open: A designated area where all types of OHV travel is permitted at all times anywhere in the area. Open OHV area designations are made to achieve a specific recreational goal, objective, and setting.

weekend continues to be the most popular time with a dramatic increase in visitors and use. In 2020, the area saw a large increase in use outside of Memorial Day weekend, due in part because of COVID 19 closures in California and its proximity to the urban interface in both Nevada and California.

Moon Rocks generally encompasses public lands designated “open” to OHVs, however; during periods of moderate to high recreation visitation, use often expands into surrounding public lands to the west (Bedell Flat, Sand Hills) and northwest (Dogskin Mts). Main vehicle access to these surrounding areas is provided by Bedell Flat and Antelope Junction roads. The Moon Rocks area gets its name from the large rock formations near the main staging and camping area.

### **Background**

Public Lands managed by the SFFO are a popular destination in Northern Nevada for outdoor recreation opportunities including off-highway vehicle (OHV) use, mountain biking, hiking, horseback riding, hunting, and access for water related activities. With a population of around 20 million northern Californians two to four hours away, the Sierra Front urban interface is an attractive and convenient area to visit. Fueled by local tourism interests aggressively marketing the Sierra Front’s outdoor recreation opportunities, the urban interface experiences a high volume of destination-based outdoor recreation visitors throughout the year.

Within the Reno-Carson City urban interface, local recreation users expect their public land to provide daily recreation opportunities consistently throughout the year. This constant community-based recreation demand, combined with the regional demands described above, place tremendous pressure on the resources, the BLM, and community-based partners to provide quality outdoor recreation experiences to the public. The Sierra Front attracts a large population of local and regional outdoor recreation enthusiasts with diverse and often competing interests. With limited road and trail designations, staging areas, and onsite public information, recreation user groups often compete for these limited facilities to the detriment of resources, public health and safety, and quality recreation opportunities.

### **Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action**

The purpose of this project is to facilitate improvements within the designated OHV Open area and main access roads that would address immediate public health and safety concerns and to manage environmental impacts caused by an observed increase in visitation to the area. Specifically, the purpose for the proposed action is to address public health and safety issues, increase regulatory oversight, provide adequate on-site security and safety of government agency personnel and property, and reduce impacts to natural resources.

Focused management is needed to provide for public health and safety and to limit impacts and prevent future degradation of resource values. The need for the action is to minimize public health and safety issues associated with sanitation, vehicle speeds and related visibility issues on main roads and camp areas and impacts to vegetation and soils. The action is needed to define the area’s physical onsite boundary and primary public access points, establish additional regulatory

compliance, provide adequate public health and safety infrastructure, and provide for the safety and security of support personnel and property.

The decision to be made is whether to construct recreational area improvements and manage the Open OHV area as a developed recreation site. A decision to move forward with the proposed action would allow area improvements to enhance visitors' safety and experiences and mitigate environmental impacts in the area.

## **Proposed Action**

### **Recreation Area Improvements**

The project area would be defined as the Open OHV designated area including segments of Bedell Flat and Antelope roads that extend beyond the open area (Map 2). Establish the Open OHV designated area (~20,000 acres) as a developed recreation site per the minimum standard set forth in 43 CFR 8360. The following proposed action items, all or in part, represent requirements needed to meet the standard:

Range Land Access - a popular staging area, located southeast of Moon Rocks proper, directly off Winnemucca Ranch Road. Primary uses include OHV day use staging and overflow camping during busy weekends. Direct access is not guaranteed, as the public must pass through private land to access public land:

- provide additional signage where needed in main disturbed area and access road
- grade main public access route and disturbed area near current kiosk (acreage TBD by GIS)
- construct bypass road north of private land to provide long term, legal public land access to Range Land Access area.
- Construct up to two OHV loading ramps within existing disturbed area
- no new surface disturbance associated with this proposed action

Agency Administration Site - a proposed new facility at the junction of Winnemucca Ranch and Bedell Flat roads that would allow agency administrators and their partners to safely stage personnel and equipment during high visitation periods:

- approximately 1.0 acre of surface disturbance to support constructed/graded staging area
- approximately 0.15 acre of surface disturbance to support constructed/graded staging area access roads (2); one administrative and one public
- staging area and roads would be surfaced with material (e.g., gravel)
- staging area and roads would receive routine mechanical maintenance
- staging area perimeter would be fenced and gated (2)
- portion of staging area would be dedicated as a heli-pad for emergency medical response
- portion of staging area would be dedicated for onsite storage
- site would include hooded, solar-based security lighting

The following three areas (Moon Rocks, Middle Flat, Big Wash/Prospect Hill) are the primary OHV staging and camping areas located within the OHV Open area off Bedell Flat Road. Each of these three areas are known for high density use during high visitation periods:

#### Moon Rocks

- Use a combination of signage and permanent and temporary fencing barriers to establish and maintain a perimeter at Moon Rocks to control vehicle flow, use and access.
- Within existing disturbed area construct and maintain a fixed cement pad with screens to contain several porta-potties
- Provide for temporary sanitation needs (e.g., dumpster(s), additional porta-potties)
- Routinely grade existing disturbed area to promote user behavior associated with traffic flow, access, and camping
- Install additional kiosk(s) and signage where needed
- Allow stationary vending SRP to address public health and safety needs (riding gear, etc.)
- Provide ancillary route maintenance to encourage egress/ingress at site.

#### Middle Flat

- Use a combination of signage and permanent and temporary fencing barriers to establish and maintain a perimeter at Middle Flat to control vehicle flow, use and access.
- Construct and maintain a fixed cement pad with screens to contain several porta-potties
- Provide for temporary sanitation needs (e.g., dumpster(s), additional porta-potties)
- Routinely grade existing disturbed area to promote user behavior associated with traffic re needed. flow, access, and camping
- Install additional kiosk(s) and signage where needed
- Allow stationary vending SRP to address public health and safety needs (riding gear, etc.)
- Provide ancillary route maintenance to encourage safe ingress/egress at site.

#### Big Wash / Prospect Hill Junction

- Use a combination of signage and temporary fencing barriers to establish and maintain a perimeter at these two areas to control vehicle flow, use and access.
- Provide for temporary sanitation needs (e.g., dumpster(s), additional porta-potties)
- Routinely grade existing disturbed area to promote user behavior associated with traffic re needed. flow, access, and camping
- Install additional kiosk(s) and signage where needed
- Allow stationary vending SRP to address public health and safety needs (riding gear, etc.)
- Provide ancillary route maintenance to encourage safe ingress/egress at site.

Main Access Roads – includes Bedell Flat and Antelope Junction roads. Both road alignments extend outside the designated Open OHV boundary and are included as part of the project boundary:

- Provide routine road maintenance
- Engineer roads and establish crown, gravel
- Provide and maintain fencing barriers and signage as needed

Controlled Access – although there are numerous entry points (i.e., routes) into the designated Open OHV area the BLM will manage and direct public access via controlled access points:

- Establish and maintain site perimeter boundary (est. at 25 miles) through a combination of signage and fencing, where practical and as needed.
- Establish and maintain six (6) primary access points to the site.

Recreation Route Maintenance - Provide routine maintenance and or segment-based realignment (not wholesale route re-alignment) on recreation routes located within the project area; contingent on meeting the following criteria:

- Route(s) have been subject to cultural resources inventory or determined to be exempt from inventory under the 2019 Nevada Protocol Agreement
  - DNA (adaptive management)
- Route(s) have inventory data that meets BLM standard
- Route segment re-alignment(s) would be confined to area that have had cultural resources inventory
- Route is designed for minimal maintenance
- Route is identified as a critical component of the recreation areas trail system
- Route alignment does not conflict with Greater Sage Grouse habitat protocols

In summary, the following improvements which would be analyzed under the Proposed Action are:

- Toilet pads and related screens to hold rental toilets.
- Provide trash dumpsters on a temporary, as needed basis.
- Vegetation removal and soil manipulation at administrative site.
- Barriers, fencing, gates, and signs to manage vehicle access.
- Increased maintenance of main access roads and installation of erosion control devices such as turnouts, culverts, improved tread, and crowning.

In summary, the following management controls which will be analyzed under the Proposed Action are:

- Establish the existing Open OHV area as a developed recreation site
- Prohibit possession or burning of any firewood containing nails, screws, or other metal hardware (e.g., pallets)
- Establish 15 MPH speed limit within 50 feet of a campsite
- Establish speed limits on main access roads (Bedell, Antelope Junction)
- Prohibit drinking an alcoholic beverage, or have in your possession or on your person any open container that contains an alcoholic beverage, while operating in or on a motorized vehicle
- Prohibit dumping of gray or wastewater from a vehicle, trailer, or container.

Recreation site improvements include the construction and maintenance phases. During construction of the administration site, related access roads, and restrooms, earth moving equipment and support vehicles would operate on-site during the day for a period of about one month. Ground disturbance during construction could be approximately 1.15 acres, but after construction and rehabilitation is completed, the final surface disturbance is estimated to be less than one (1) acre. The installation of signs and barriers (site perimeters, road access) will not require the use of earth moving equipment and surface disturbance would be minimal.

The maintenance phase would be continuous and occur after the construction phase. Contractor(s) would visit the recreation area as needed to maintain the toilets and to manage temporary trash dumpsters. BLM Staff would use hand tools to maintain signs and barriers, fencing, etc. Graders and excavators would be used to maintain roads and erosion control devices.

The following are best management practices and design features related to the improvements described in Alternative A:

- A limited palette of materials, styles, colors, ~~etc~~ and hues would be selected for consistency.
- Access to restroom facilities would be designed and developed to meet ADA/ABA Accessibility Guidelines such as utilizing concrete to improve travel between the parking areas and restrooms.
- Short-term ground disturbance may occur from the construction and installation of the restroom pads. After construction is completed site rehabilitation and re-seeding would occur.
- Clearing vegetation using heavy, mechanized equipment for administrative site/roads, and toilet pad(s) installation activities would occur between March 8<sup>th</sup> and May 25<sup>th</sup>.
- The existing access roads may be improved as needed but road width (i.e., tread surface, wing ditches, etc.) would not expand outside of the existing road dimensions. Application of gravel as well as other erosion control measures such as culverts, crowning, turn outs would be constructed on roads to minimize erosion.

### **No Action Alternative**

In accordance with Chapter VI, Section 6.6.2 of BLM Handbook H-1790-1, this EA would evaluate a No Action Alternative. The objective of a No Action Alternative is to describe the environmental consequences that may result if the Proposed Action were not implemented. The No Action Alternative forms the baseline from which the impacts of the Proposed Action can be measured.

Under the No Action Alternative, no improvements to the listed recreation site would be made. The existing area would be managed in the current state.

## **Preliminary Issues**

Issues are generated through internal and public scoping processes, a review of the CRMP, and/or generated from a need for compliance with laws or regulations. Preliminary issues that have been identified through internal scoping include:

- How would construction and ground disturbance effect Sage-Grouse habitat?
- How would construction and ground disturbance effect Carson Wandering Skipper habitat?
- What is the potential for introducing noxious weeds due to the vegetation removal at the administration site?
- Would introducing facility improvements and management controls reduce the risk to public health and safety as well as reducing site degradation by directing and managing use?

## **Public Input Invited**

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 your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

The primary contact for questions and comments for this project is Arthur Callan, Outdoor Recreation Planner, Sierra Front Field Office, (775) 885-6141, or email at [acallan@blm.gov](mailto:acallan@blm.gov).

## **HOW TO COMMENT**

This scoping notice is intended to provide those interested in or affected by this project with an opportunity to provide input on potentially affected resources, environmental issues to be considered and the agency's planned approach to analysis.

We encourage the participation of interested individuals, organizations, and agencies now and throughout the process. We invite your comments on the proposed action and encourage you to be as specific as possible.

If you have comments you are encouraged to submit them in writing to:

BLM, Carson City District  
Attn: Arthur Callan  
5665 Morgan Mill Rd.  
Carson City, NV 89701

or

[acallan@blm.gov](mailto:acallan@blm.gov)

Comments should be received by January 21, 2021

## INFORMATION

For additional information you may contact the following BLM staff by phone or e-mail:

Project Lead: Arthur Callan, (775) 721-7104, [acallan@blm.gov](mailto:acallan@blm.gov)

Assistant Field Manager, Sierra Front Field Office: Paul Fuselier (775) 885-6177, [pfuselier@blm.gov](mailto:pfuselier@blm.gov)

### **Related Documents:**

- 1 - Map 1 – Regional Area Map
- 2 - Map 2 – Moon Rocks Project Area



