ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Rams Butte Well/Pipeline
and
Paul Well Pipeline

EA-OR-025-01-037

I. INTRODUCTION

The Three Rivers Resource Area of the Burns District is proposing to implement two water improvement projects in the West Wagontire and Riddle Mountain Allotments.
(Maps Attached)

Purpose of and Need for Action

The purpose of the Rams Butte Well and Pipeline project is to provide a reliable water source and improve livestock distribution in the Rams Butte Pasture. The project was identified as a project needed to implement the West Wagontire Allotment Management Plan.

The only water source on public land in this pasture is a small water hole that has water in it only every other year. This pasture when it has water, serves as an excellent turnout pasture that always has good carryover forage.

The well and pipeline are needed to provide a permanent source of water for livestock during turnout in the spring and gathering in the fall. The pipeline would improve distribution and cause less concentration by livestock on the south side of the pasture.

The adjacent land owner has provided water from his well in the past, but has indicated he may no longer be willing to do this.

The purpose of the Paul Well Pipeline is to move cattle away from a high concentration use area at the lowest elevation area within the Riddle Mountain Pasture.

B. Conformance With Land Use Plans, Laws, Regulation an Policy

This action is in conformance with the Three Rivers Resource Area Management Plan (1992)(RMP).

II. ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

A. Proposed Action

The proposed action is to drill a stock well and supply electricity with a power pole in T. 27 S., R. 23 E., Section 8, SW1/4NW1/4 (Rams Butte). Black plastic pipe-2" in dia.-would then be buried to a depth of 24" to the north of the well for approximately 1 ½ miles. A 30' round bottomless trough would then be installed at the end of the pipeline. Cattle would use this watering source every year in March and April.

The proposed action at the Paul Well pipeline location in T. 28 S., R. 34 E., Section 32 and 33 is to connect a 2" pipeline to the existing well and bury it for 3/4 mile to the NE. A 16' bottomless trough would then be installed at the end. Cattle would use this watering system every other year in May and June.

B. Alternative A: No Action

No improvements would be made at these sites.

C. Alternatives Considered but not Developed.

Continue to haul water at the Rams Butte location.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The following critical elements of the human environment are either not present or would not be impacted by the proposed action or the alternatives: Threatened or endangered plant or animal species, floodplains, air quality, prime or unique farmlands, Wild and Scenic Rivers, American Indian religious concerns, paleontological resources, hazardous materials, wilderness or wilderness study areas, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Migratory Birds, Adverse Energy Impacts, or Environmental Justice concerns. Non-critical elements of the human environment that are not present or impacted by the proposed action include: Special Status Species, fish, water resources, recreation and minerals.

A. Wildlife

Wildlife species in these areas include mule deer, pronghorn antelope, deer mouse, Brewer's sparrow, western fence lizard, and numerous other species common to the sagebrush steppe of Southeastern Oregon.

Sage grouse habitat occurs in both these areas but no specific seasonal habitat has been identified. No other special status species are known to exist in these areas.

B. Vegetation

The vegetation consists primarily of shrub species such as Wyoming big sagebrush, rabbitbrush, and low sagebrush. Grasses include bluebunch wheatgrass, squirreltail, Idaho fescue, Thurber needlegrass, cheatgrass, and Sandberg bluegrass.

There are no known sites of special status plants in the vicinity of these projects. There has been little inventory done in these areas and there is moderate potential for special status plants to occur in these project areas. Special status plant surveys would be conducted along the pipeline routes prior to construction.

C. Soils

The soils are generally shallow and rocky on the hills and ridges with shallow to moderately deep loams on the slopes and drainage bottoms.

D. Cultural and Historic Resources

A cultural resource survey was conducted in the summer of 2001 and no cultural resources were identified at either location.

E Range

The Rams Butte well and pipeline is located in the West Wagontire Allotment. Livestock use typically occurs in March and April in the Rams Butte Pasture. This pasture is in good range condition and mid to late seral stage ecological status. The Paul Well pipeline is located in the Riddle Mountain pasture and use occurs every other year in May and June. The new water location is in very good range condition.

F . Weeds

Rams Butte Site:
There have been no official weed inventories in the vicinity of this proposed project.

Paul Well Site:
There are known, large infestations of medusahead rye in the near vicinity of this project.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The following impacts would result from implementation of the proposed action or any of the alternatives.

A. Wildlife

Proposed Action: Disturbance of wildlife during construction would take place and some short duration displacement is expected. Reliable water would be made available in the Rams Butte pasture where currently few water sources exist. Sage grouse and other birds have been known to drown in water troughs and bird ramps would need to be firmly secured at both trough locations.

Alternative A-No Action: There would be no impacts to the areas wildlife.

B. Vegetation

Proposed Action: Vegetation would be completely removed from the trough locations due to leveling and installation as well as trampling from livestock. Increased utilization on the surrounding vegetation would occur near the new water locations.

Alternative A-No Action: There would be no direct or indirect impacts to the vegetation.

C. Soils

Proposed Action: Soils would become compacted around the trough sites over time.

Alternative A-No Action: There would be no impacts to the soil resource.

D. Cultural Resources

Proposed Action: No direct or indirect impacts to historic or prehistoric sites were identified.

Alternative A-No Action: There would be no impacts to any cultural resources.

E. Range

Proposed Action: Livestock distribution would improve and utilization levels would decrease at the limited existing water sources. In the Rams Butte pasture the early season use treatment would be easier to maintain on poor winter precipitation years. In the Riddle Mountain pasture water would be pumped to a higher elevation and thereby reduce livestock concentrations at the Paul Well watering site.

Alternative A-No Action: Livestock distribution would not improve and heavy utilization levels would continue at the two existing water sites.

F. Weeds

Rams Butte Site:
If there are infestations of noxious weeds in the vicinity of the proposed pipeline and trough, the disturbance of installing the pipeline, and the increased disturbance at the trough location from cattle impacts could lead to increasing weed problems.

Paul Well Site:
On Oregon BLM lands we currently do not have effective control methods for medusahead rye and can only attempt to reduce the spread of existing infestations and inhibit new introductions by maintaining diverse, productive, competitive plant communities. The well and pipelines would distribute use and minimize concentrations of livestock that could cause bare areas for weeds to invade.

V. MITIGATING MEASURES

Rams Butte Site:
There will be a site-specific plant clearance done prior to construction. Noxious weeds will be recorded as part of that clearance. If noxious weeds are found, treatments will be conducted to manage those weeds as necessary to maintain the integrity of the area. The pipeline and trough site should be reseeded following installation to re-create a relatively weed-resistant area. All equipment used for the project should be cleaned prior to transport to the site and upon completion of the project.

Paul Well Site:
The early season grazing use in the allotment should help reduce the spread of medusahead seed, as the livestock will be in there prior to seed ripe. Some grazing of medusahead may occur in that time period which may help reduce seedhead production. As soon as effective treatments become available, medusahead infestations in this area will be treated. The pipeline and trough site should be reseeded following installation to create a relatively weed-resistant area. All equipment used for the project should be cleaned prior to transport to this site and upon completion of this project.

Rare plant sites would be avoided and trough locations would be situated far enough away from rare plant sites to prevent increased livestock impacts.

The pipeline route disturbance would be re-seeded both naturally and through

manual seeding of crested wheatgrass.

Preform construction activities between July 15th and May 1st to reduce disturbance to nesting birds and install escape ramps to water troughs to prevent birds from drowning.

VI. CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Proposed Action: In considering the proposed action with those activities that have previously occurred at or in the vicinity of the project site or those activities that may occur in the reasonably foreseeable future, no cumulative effects were identified or anticipated.

Alternative A-No Action: There would be no cumulative impacts associated with this alternative.

VI. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

A. Participating Staff

Rudy Hefter, Supervisory Natural Resource Specialist
Bill Andersen, Range Management Specialist
Nora Taylor, Botanist
Fred Taylor, Wildlife Biologist
Brian McCabe, Archaeologist
Gary Foulkes, Environmental Planner

B. Persons, Groups, and Agencies that will be or have been Consulted

Larry Maxwell, Maxwell Cattle Co.
Allan Otley, Riddle Ranches Inc.