DECISION RECORD

EA LOG No. OR-010-2002-03

Project Name: Abert Rim Guzzler Replacement

Applicant: Lakeview BLM

Address: 1301 South G Street
Lakeview, OR 97630

County: Lake

BLM Office: Lakeview District

Phone: (541) - 947-2177

Decision:

To replace three wildlife guzzlers, remove one, and close approximately 3/4 of a mile of road, along the face of Abert Rim, as described under Alternative 1 of EA OR-010-2002-03 and shown on maps enclosed in the EA. Road closures will be accomplished through the BLM's road closure authority under 43 CFR 8364 and announced in Federal Register and local newspaper notices. The closures will remain in effect until a final decision is made in the Lakeview Resource Management Plan. Guzzlers will be of a design that can easily be concealed from view. All activities will be consistent with Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), High Desert Management Framework Plan (1983), as amended (1996), Oregon Wilderness FEIS and ROD (1989 and 1991), and Wilderness Interim Management Policy (1995).

Rationale:

Implementation of Alternative 1 will allow for greater availability of high quality water for wildlife within the project area at a safe distance from U.S. Highway 395. Implementation of this project will also allow for reduced visibility of the guzzlers within the WSA, thereby enhancing wilderness values while at the same time meeting the needs of wildlife.

Closing two roads (approximately 3/4 of a mile total) will benefit both wildlife and wilderness values by reducing the amount of disturbance to wildlife using the area and wilderness recreation. Access to an existing dispersed camping area located along the northern edge of Lake Abert (T 33 S., R. 22 E., Sec. 20, wm) will not be restricted. Two other alternatives were considered. One considered removing three guzzlers from within the WSA and replacing a fourth that lies outside the WSA. A second alternative considered continuing with the existing management or no action.

Scott R. Florence

Scott Florence, Field Manager
Lakeview Resource Area

4/26/02
Date

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)
for
Abert Rim Guzzler Replacement

Environmental Assessment Number OR-2002-03
Lakeview District. Bureau of Land Management

Summary of Actions and Alternatives

The Bureau of Land Management proposes to remove or replace four wildlife guzzlers along the face of Abert Rim 30 miles north of Lakeview, Oregon. Three of the guzzlers lie within the Abert Rim Wilderness Study Area (WSA) and all four lie within the Lake Abert Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The purpose of the project is to provide a stable, clean water source for wildlife (specifically bighorn sheep) away from US Highway 395 in a manner that reduces the impacts to wilderness and ACEC values. The current guzzlers are visible from many points within the WSA as well as US Highway 395. This impacts the wilderness values of the WSA. Two of the four guzzlers do not function properly. One was destroyed by wildfire in August 2000 and one has leaking tanks. The other two guzzlers are constructed in a style that provides poor water quality and are not wildlife friendly.

Three alternatives were analyzed under this Environmental Assessment (EA). The Proposed Action (Alternative 1), would be to remove one guzzler and rehabilitate the area surrounding it and replace three others with a more wildlife friendly design that is concealed from view and less impacting to wilderness values. The Proposed Action would also close and rehabilitate 3/4 of a mile of road accessing two of the guzzlers. Under the No Action Alternative (Alternative 2), no change would occur in current management. The guzzlers would continue to be highly visible. Two guzzlers would not function properly and the other two would continue to provide poor quality water. Under Alternative 3, the three guzzlers inside the WSA would be removed and 3/4 of a mile of road would be closed and rehabilitated. A fourth guzzler that lies adjacent to the WSA would be replaced with a more wildlife friendly design.

There are no Research Natural Areas, prime and unique farmlands, flood plains, solid or hazardous waste areas, aquatic resources, wetlands or riparian areas, wild or scenic rivers, lands, energy or minerals concern, areas of religious concern, livestock grazing or wild horses within the project area. There would be no impact to low income or minority populations. No adverse or beneficial significant impact is anticipated to fisheries, lands, energy resources, minerals, or grazing. Impacts to other resource values are discussed within the EA.

On the basis of the analysis contained in the attached EA and all other available information, it is my determination that none of the alternatives analyzed constitute a major federal action that would adversely impact the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is unnecessary and will not be prepared.

Scott R. Florence

3/4/02

Scott R. Florence,
Field Manager
Lakeview Resource Area

Date

Environmental Assessment
for
Abert Rim Guzzler Replacement
EA No. OR-010-2002-03

SECTION 1. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

Introduction

This Environmental Assessment (EA) analyzes the effects of modifying and repairing four wildlife guzzlers along the west side of Abert Rim. Three of these lie within and one adjacent to the Abert Rim Wilderness Study Area (WSA) 30 miles north of Lakeview, Oregon (Appendix - A, Map 1). All four guzzlers are also within the Lake Abert Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The BLM is responsible for land management and use such that biological. physical, and cultural resources are protected or improved over time (Taylor Grazing act of 1934, Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), and Public Range Lands Improvement Act of 1978). This proposed action is in conformance with the following land use plans: High Desert Management Framework Plan (MFP), as amended (1982, and 1996), Lakeview Grazing Management FEIS and ROD (1982), Oregon Wilderness FEIS and ROD (1989 and 1991), and Wilderness Interim Management Policy (1995).

This EA will cover the following described legal locations: Township 33 South, Range 22 East, Sections 29 and 31. Township 34 South, Range 21 East, Section 13. Township 35 South, Range 21 East, Section 11.

Background

In the mid-1800's, bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*) were one of the most abundant big game species in Oregon. Between 1.5 and 2 million animals roamed the mountains and desert rims. By the 1940's bighorn sheep had been extirpated from Oregon. It is not clear how many bighorn sheep once inhabited Abert Rim or exactly when they were extirpated, but what is clear is that they were once a common sight and probably numbered in the hundreds along the length of the rim. Bighorn sheep reintroduction in Oregon began on Hart Mountain in 1954. Since that time, sheep have been transplanted to much of their former range. Over this time, modifications have been made to sheep habitat. Highways have been constructed, western juniper has expanded, and springs that were available in the past have dried up. These modifications have changed the way bighorns use the landscape in some areas.

Bighorn sheep were reintroduced on Abert Rim from 1974-1977. The first few years after reintroduction, water sources for the sheep were from small seeps and springs along the upper edges of the rim and along the edges of Lake Abert at the bottom of the slope. Many of the small seeps and springs along the upper slope were not dependable during late summer and during dry

years and sheep had to depend on water sources at the bottom of the slope near Lake Abert. This meant that sheep would not disperse along the length of the rim and it was necessary for sheep to cross US Highway 395 that runs the length of Abert Rim near its lower slope to find water. The original intent of the reintroductions was to have sheep populations scattered from Abert Rim to Hart Mountain with populations on several small rims in between. This would allow better movements of sheep from one area to another and would facilitate flow of genetic information between populations. Currently, there are about 100 - 120 animals dispersed in some areas of the rim.

In an effort to get sheep to disperse into more areas of Abert Rim where dependable water was unavailable and to keep them on the upper slopes of the rim, three wildlife guzzlers (P10, P11, and P12) were installed below the rim in 1983. The intent of this project was to improve habitat for sheep by providing water not accessible to livestock and reduce the danger inherent in the sheep crossing Highway 395 to obtain water from the springs along Lake Abert. A fourth guzzler (P13) existed near Juniper Creek prior to the reintroduction efforts. This guzzler was installed prior to FLPMA and consisted of buried steel water tanks, a small drinking basin, and an apron (water collection roof) constructed from metal roofing on an elevated wooden frame. Over time, the steel tanks in P13 have become rusted and the tanks no longer hold water.

Guzzlers P10, P11 and P12 were a relatively new design called a saucer guzzler. After a few years of use, it was determined that these types of guzzlers, although low maintenance, create water quality problems, have high evaporation rates, and don't get used as often by bighorn sheep due to the shape and design of the drinking basin. In addition, guzzler P12 was destroyed by wildfire in August, 2000.

Because the intent of the guzzlers was to keep sheep on the rim and away from US Highway 395, the guzzlers need to be located east of the highway. Except for a few small private parcels, the WSA extends from the highway right-of-way to the east up and over the top of the rim. Therefore, there are no other alternative locations outside of the WSA which would meet the objectives of the guzzlers.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the proposed action is to provide a stable, clean water source for wildlife (specifically bighorn sheep) away from US Highway 395 in a manner that minimizes the impacts to wilderness and ACEC values. This need is supported by goals 5 and 8 of the High Desert Management Framework Plans (MFPs), as amended in 1996 (pages 25 & 26). To achieve these goals, guzzler P11 would be removed and guzzlers P10, P12 and P13

Saucer Guzzler P10

would be replaced with a design that is less visible by visitors and more wildlife friendly. The proposed design would better meet the Nonimpairment Standard of the Wilderness Interim Management Policy (IMP) guidelines by being of a more concealed and attracting less attention. The existing guzzlers are highly visible from many points within the WSA and also from the highway. The existing saucer type guzzlers (P10, P11 and P12) consist of a large round trough about 18-24 inches deep and about 16 feet in diameter, buried to ground level, with a fiberglass dome situated over the top (see photo above). The dome catches rain and snow and directs it into the tank where it is stored until animals come to drink. The saucer type guzzlers require animals to place their head down into the tank in a way that obstructs their vision of the surrounding area. This is an unnatural thing for some wildlife species to do and consequently, the guzzlers don't get used as much as intended.

Water quality is another concern. Because the saucer design keeps the water in a ground level tank open to the sunlight, and the storage area is an open system that small animals can enter, the water is very susceptible to algae growth and contamination from accidental drownings by small mammals and birds. Consequently, water quality is very poor and risk of disease is high. The proposed replacement guzzlers use a closed system storage tank that is buried so sunlight can't promote algae growth and the system is closed so small animals can't enter and the water can't circulate from the drinking trough back into the tank.

Because guzzlers P10, P11 and P13 exist within the Abert Rim WSA, wilderness values are also of great concern. The existing guzzlers are highly visible from several high points in the WSA and also somewhat visible from US Highway. 395. The objectives of the original project were not fully met. By replacing these guzzlers with a less visible, more efficient design, these objectives would be better met while preserving wilderness values. The proposed system utilizes an above ground or semi-buried tanks and ground aprons for collection of water. These systems can be concealed to the point that they can only be detected from close distances (see photos below).

Guzzler Apron Concealed By Rocks

Guzzler Tank Concealed with Rocks

SECTION 2. PROPOSED ACTION / ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1 - Proposed Action

The Lakeview District, Bureau of Land Management, in cooperation with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Foundation of North American Wild Sheep, is proposing to remove guzzler P11 and replace guzzlers P10, P12 and P13 with a design that is more suitable for both wildlife and preserving wilderness values. In addition, approximately 3/4 mile of existing roads lying within the WSA near guzzlers P10 and P13 would be blocked with boulders and brush and would be re-seeded with native grass (see map). This would be accomplished using heavy equipment to place the boulders and break up a short section of roadbed. Hand tools would be used to break up any additional roadbed and spread brush and grass seed along the road. This action would lower disturbance to wildlife and enhance wilderness values. Public access off US Highway 395 to a small campsite near guzzler P10 would not be blocked.

Guzzler P11 would be removed entirely. The area around P11 would be reclaimed and re-seeded as needed to restore the area to its natural condition and reduce the risk of weed invasion. Guzzlers P10, P12 and P13 would be removed and replaced with another more wilderness friendly design. Each of these guzzlers will have 1800 gallon water storage tanks and 900 square feet ($Ft.^2$) water collection aprons. If possible, the new tanks would be partially buried in the holes created by removing the existing tanks. The apron of the new guzzler would be placed on the ground a short distance above the new tank and piping would connect the two. A small drinking basin of either concrete and native stone or a metal one dug into the ground and placed a short distance down slope from the new guzzler with piping connecting it to the tank. Both the apron and the drinking basin would be located within 300 feet of the tank. Both the tank and apron would be concealed with local native rock collected by hand. The shape of the apron would be modified (not perfectly square or rectangular) in order to break up its outline. The total disturbance area created from the guzzler removal and replacements would be approximately 0.10 acres (4300 $Ft.^2$). The total disturbance area created from blocking and rehabilitating the road would be approximately 0.72 acres (31,000 $Ft.^2$).

Access to guzzlers P10 and P13 would be on existing ways (see map). A backhoe would be used to remove the existing guzzler tanks at P10 and P13. The backhoe would only be allowed on existing ways; no cross-country travel would be authorized. Disturbance from the backhoe would be kept to a minimum, and any "finish" work would be done with hand tools. Access to guzzlers P11 and P12 would be on foot. Workers would park outside the WSA and walk to the sites. No heavy machinery or power equipment would be used during construction or removal of guzzlers P11 and P12. Items that are too heavy to be packed to and from guzzlers P11 and P12 would be removed or delivered by helicopter sling loads. These items include existing guzzler tanks, new guzzler tanks and apron components. It is anticipated that total helicopter time within the WSA would not exceed 30 minutes throughout the project, and landing within the WSA would not be needed.

No heavy equipment would be used for any future maintenance at any of these sites. All

remaining work would be accomplished using hand labor. This would include smoothing of the catchment site, burying of water lines, concealing the water tank and collection apron with rocks and installing the drinking pond. Most of the cost of this project and virtually all of the labor would be donated by various private volunteers and wildlife organizations. All work would be supervised by BLM employees. This portion of the WSA has no active livestock grazing and no fences would be needed. Access to all three guzzler sites for future maintenance needs would be on foot.

Alternative 2 - No Action

Under this alternative, no change in current management activities would occur. The four existing guzzlers would remain. Guzzler P12 was destroyed by fire in August 2000 and would not be replaced. The leaking water tanks on guzzler P13 would not be fixed and would not function. Guzzlers P10 and P11 would continue to operate. Some maintenance would be allowed, but major reconstruction would not be allowed. Total area impacted from original construction was 0.03 acres (1300 $Ft.^2$).

Alternative 3 - Removal of Wildlife Guzzlers within WSA.

This alternative analyzes the effects of removing the guzzlers P10, P11 and P13 that are inside the Abert Rim WSA boundary. The sites would be rehabilitated and re-seeded. All removal would be accomplished by hand with the aid of helicopter sling loads as needed to remove heavy objects. No heavy machinery or power equipment would be allowed off of existing ways within the WSA. Roads to guzzler P10 and P13 would be blocked as described in Alternative 1. This would disturb approximately 0.72 acres (31,000 $Ft.^2$). Guzzler P12 is outside the WSA boundary and would be replaced using the methods described in Alternative 1 above. The total disturbance area created from the replacement of guzzler P12 would be approximately 0.09 acres (4000 $Ft.^2$).

SECTION 3. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Vegetation and Soils

General Vegetation

The project area is dominated by Abert Rim, a high west facing fault scarp rising over 2,000 feet above Lake Abert. The upper slopes of the rim are dominated by high cliffs, talus slopes and rocky boulder fields. Vegetation on the upper slopes is sparse, with perennial and annual grasses being the most common. The lower slopes of the rim are dominated by loam soils with a heavy stone and cobble component. Vegetation on the lower slopes is dominated by salt desert shrub, mostly greasewood (*Sarcobatus vermiculatus*) and saltbrush (*Atriplex confertifolia*), along the base of the rim and big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*) a little farther up the slope. Much of the

area is covered with patches of cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), but perennial bunch grasses like bluebunch wheatgrass (*Pseudoroegneria spicata*), Sandberg bluegrass (*Poa secunda*) and Great Basin wildrye (*Leymus cinereus*) are common throughout much of the rim. Mediterranean sage (*Salvia aethiopis*), a noxious weed, is also common on many parts of the rim. A wildfire burned 3,000 acres in 1985 south of guzzler P13. Another fire burned 10,000 acres on and above the rim in 2000. This fire destroyed guzzler P12. Both of these areas are recovering naturally and both are composed of a mix of cheatgrass and other native bunch grasses.

Threatened, Endangered & Sensitive Plants

There are no Threatened, Endangered, or Bureau sensitive plants in the area of the proposed action.

Noxious Weeds

Mediterranean sage (*Salvia aethiopis*) exists within the project area. Medusahead rye (*Elymus caput-medusae*) is not known to occur at the guzzler sites, but is expected to occur within the project area and is known to occur at a site approximately 10 miles away.

Wildlife and Fish

Abert Rim supports a wide diversity of terrestrial wildlife including resident, migratory, and sensitive species. Numerous species of birds nest along the cliffs of the rim including golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), prairie falcon (*Falco mexicanus*), American kestrel (*Falco sparverius*), red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*), turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*), great horned owl (*Bubo virginianus*), cliff swallows (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*), canyon wrens (*Catherpes mexicanus*), and rock wrens (*Salpinctes obsoletus*). Several species of ground and shrub nesters include greater sage grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), chukar (*Alectoris chuckar*), sage thrasher (*Oreoscoptes montanus*), loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicanus*), sage sparrow (*Amphispiza belli*), Brewer's sparrow (*Spizella breweri*), western meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*), horned lark (*Eremophila alpestris*), green-tailed towhee (*Pipilo chlorurus*), Brewer's blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*), brown-headed cowbird (*Molothrus ater*), black-billed magpie (*Pica pica*), and scrub jays (*Aphelocoma californica*).

Several species of mammals inhabit the rim. Some of these are pika (*Ochotona princeps*), black-tailed jackrabbits (*Lepus californicus*), Nuttall's cottontail (*Sylvilagus nuttallii*), coyote (*Canis lantrans*), bobcat (*Felis rufus*), cougar (*Felis concolor*), badger (*Taxidea taxus*), long tailed weasel (*Mustela frenata*), mule deer (*Odocoilus hemionus*) and bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*). Several species of small mammals also inhabit the rim. These include several species of ground squirrels (*Spermophilus* spp.), voles (*Microtus* spp.), deer mice (*Peromyscus spp.*), kangaroo rats (*Dipodomys* spp.), and jumping mice (*Zapus* spp.).

No significant aquatic wildlife exists along the face of Abert Rim. Several species of shorebirds,

ducks and geese use the shoreline of Lake Abert as a migratory feeding area. Salinity of Lake Abert is too extreme for fish, but does have populations of alkali fly (*Ephydra hians*) and brine shrimp (*Artemia* spp.), that the many species of birds feed on during migration.

Recreation / Wilderness Values

Visual Resources Management

Abert Rim is managed as VRM Class I because of: Class A scenery, high sensitivity level, location within the foreground-middleground zone, and because the rim is located within a wilderness study area (WSA) which is managed as VRM Class I. The objective of VRM Class I is to preserve the character of the landscape and provide for natural ecological changes. However, it does not preclude limited management activity. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be very low and must not attract attention. Guzzlers P11 and P 12 are visible from Highway 395, as is the vehicle "way" leading up to saucer #1.

Wilderness Study Areas

Overall, the Abert Rim WSA is in a natural condition. The topography and vegetation help mask any signs of human activity and any unnatural features are generally small, scattered, and not visible from a great distance. The portion of the WSA below the rim is presently impacted by several very short vehicle "ways" widely dispersed along the WSA boundary, and by wildlife guzzlers P10, P11 and P13. Outside sights and sounds of Highway 395 and several mineral material storage areas within the highway right-of-way also affect the perceived natural conditions of this portion of the WSA. Special features noted in the Oregon Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement in the project area include the fault scarp of Abert Rim, high scenic qualities, high archeological values, California bighorn sheep, crucial deer winter range, and important nesting area for various raptors.

Recreation

Opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined types of recreation are abundant in the WSA. Hiking, hunting, photography, and wildlife observation opportunities are excellent along the face of Abert Rim. A Watchable Wildlife site, state historical marker and several surfaced pull-offs along Highway 395 provide recreational access to this part of the WSA. The short vehicle ways off the highway receive some use from four-wheel-drive vehicles and other off-highway vehicles (OHVs). Because guzzlers P11 and P12 are visible from the highway, they are visited out of curiosity. However, recreational use of the area is fairly low, and mostly limited to the lower slope of the rim adjacent to the highway.

Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)

The High Desert Plan Amendment and Final Environmental Impact Statement that designated the Lake Abert ACEC was signed in 1996. The entire project area lies within the Lake Abert ACEC. This ACEC was noted for it's important resources such as aquatic ecology, cultural resources, visual resources and wildlife values.

Range Administration

The area along the face of Abert Rim is excluded from grazing.

Cultural Resources

Significant cultural resources exist along Lake Abert and Abert Rim. The area is part of a National Register District on the National Register of Historic Sites and Places. Extensive survey and excavation work has been conducted along the Highway 395 right-of-way. Occupation of the area by Native Americans covers a 10,000 year time period. No specific cultural resource site locations have been identified at the four guzzler locations.

SECTION 4. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Introduction

The following elements are either not present or would not be significantly affected by any of the alternatives being considered. They are: Research Natural Areas, prime and unique farmlands, flood plains, solid or hazardous waste, drinking and ground water quality, wetlands or riparian areas, wild or scenic rivers, lands & minerals, aquatic communities, livestock grazing or wild horses. There would be no impact to low income or minority populations.

ALTERNATIVE 1 Proposed Action

Vegetation and Soils

General Vegetation

Impacts to vegetation and soils would be limited to the disturbance "footprint" of the guzzler itself and an area a few feet surrounding the guzzler. This would be limited to 0.10 acres or 4,300 $Ft.^2$ for the guzzler replacements and 0.73 acres or 32,000 $Ft.^2$ for the road blocking and rehabilitating. Although individual plants would be killed, the proposed action would have no significant impact to the vegetative community. Some limited soil movement would occur when removing and replacing the guzzler tanks and aprons. Also, some small rocks would be moved and placed on top of the apron and tanks to help conceal them. This would create some soil disturbance, but no lasting impacts like erosion or soil loss would occur from the proposed action. Removal of 3/4 mile of road surface would reduce the impacts from vegetation trampling and soil erosion due to vehicle use.

Threatened, Endangered & Sensitive Plants

At present, there are no Threatened, Endangered, or Bureau sensitive plants in the area of the proposed action. No impacts to these species are expected to occur.

Noxious Weeds

The introduction of noxious weeds and undesirable plants will be minimized by cleaning vehicles and equipment prior to entering the work area. Minimizing ground disturbance during the project would decrease the likelihood that weeds would have a place to become established.

Wildlife and Fish

A small amount of wildlife habitat would be lost by the placement of the guzzlers, but the limited size of the project would make that amount insignificant. Some disturbance would occur during installation, but this would also have minimal impacts to wildlife. The increase in availability and quality of water would significantly benefit most species of wildlife from small birds and mammals to larger species like bighorn sheep. This would increase available habitat for bighorn sheep and allow an increase in population and distribution along the face of the rim. Small mammal and bird populations would be aided in the late summer and early fall months when water on the face of the rim is currently unavailable. As populations of small mammals and rabbits increase, the prey base for raptors would increase and nesting activities on Abert Rim may increase. The closure of ½ mile of road near guzzler P10 and 1/4 mile of road near guzzler P13 would benefit bighorn sheep by reducing the disturbance level of motor vehicles in this part of the rim, thereby increasing habitat effectiveness. There would be no effects to any Threatened, Endangered, or Sensitive species.

Recreation / Wilderness Values

Visual Resources Management

The objectives of Class I would be met by the proposed action. The level of change to the characteristic landscape would be low and would not attract attention. Replacing guzzlers P10, P11 and P12 with less obtrusive ones and removing one completely would actually diminish the level of visual contrast compared to Alternative 2. Installation of the new guzzlers would cause vegetation and soil disturbance which would be somewhat visible in the short term, but over the long-term would become less visible. Although the proposed action disturbs a larger area, the less visible, more efficient guzzler design comes closer to meeting the objectives of Class I than what currently exists.

Wilderness Study Areas

Opportunities for solitude would be restricted for approximately 10 days during removal and construction activities, which would include the use of a helicopter, vehicles, and people using hand tools. However, naturalness would be preserved and enhanced over the long-term, as the more visible saucers are removed and replaced with the more natural appearing guzzlers which would be less obtrusive on the landscape. The vehicle "ways" leading to two of the guzzlers would also be closed to vehicles after the guzzler installation, covered with brush and rock, and allowed to return to a more natural condition. Because the new guzzler design is more sheep friendly, the opportunity to view bighorn sheep, a special feature of the WSA, would be improved. Even though the proposed action would result in more initial ground disturbance, the end result would improve the overall wilderness quality of this portion of the WSA, and would be substantially unnoticeable.

The proposed action does not meet the non-impairment criteria because the guzzlers are not considered temporary installations. However, the removal of one and replacement of guzzlers P10 and P13 meets the exception of clearly protecting and enhancing the area's wilderness values, primarily the special features of high scenic quality and bighorn sheep. Guzzler P13 also meets the exception of being a grandfathered facility. If the area were designated wilderness, none of the guzzlers would require future maintenance involving motorized vehicles.

Recreation

Because the new guzzlers would not be as visible from the highway, they would not be visited as often as in Alternative 2. Closing the vehicle "ways" would preclude vehicle access, but still allow access on foot. Because the new design would enhance use by bighorn sheep, the opportunity for highway travelers to view bighorn sheep would be improved.

Cultural Resources

The locations of all four guzzlers were surveyed for cultural resources when they were initially constructed. No cultural resources were located and no impacts to cultural resources are expected.

ALTERNATIVE2 - No Action

Vegetation and Soils

General Vegetation

No new impacts to vegetation or soils would occur. Vegetation impacted from the previous placement of guzzlers would continue. This would be approximately 0.03 acres or 1300 $Ft.^2$.

Threatened, Endangered & Sensitive Plants

At present, there are no Threatened, Endangered, or Bureau sensitive plants in the area of the proposed action. No impacts to these species are expected to occur.

Noxious Weeds

No new sources of noxious weeds would be introduced. No new impacts would occur.

Wildlife and Fish

Under the current situation, small birds and mammals would benefit only from guzzlers P10 and P11. Guzzlers P12 and P13 are currently broken and would not benefit wildlife. Bighorn sheep would not be dispersed along the rim and would be concentrated in a few areas where water is available. Water availability could force sheep onto the lower slopes of Abert Rim and across US Highway 395. These negative impacts would probably not threaten the existence of bighorn sheep in the Abert Rim WSA, but the population would probably not reach its full historic potential. The closure of 3/4 mile of road would not occur and disturbance to bighorn sheep by motor vehicles would continue. There would be no effects to any Threatened, Endangered, or Sensitive species.

Recreation / Wilderness Values

Visual Resources Management

Although no new disturbance would take place, two of the guzzlers would continue to be visible from the highway. Painting them a natural color to blend with the landscape only helps for a short period of time, and would need to be done repeatedly. Continued vehicle use on the "way" would still occur, preventing vegetation from growing up to obscure the existing guzzlers from view. Objectives from VRM Class I would still be met, but not improved upon.

Wilderness Study Areas

Opportunities for solitude would remain the same, since no construction activities would take place. No additional surface disturbance would occur under this alternative; however, two of the guzzlers would remain visible from the highway. The non-impairment criteria are met under this alternative.

Recreation

Visibility of the existing saucer guzzlers from Highway 395 would continue to promote human visitation and thereby deter sheep from using them. Vehicle access on the "ways" to two guzzlers would continue to be allowed. Because the sheep are reluctant to put their head down into the current guzzlers, the chances of viewing bighorn sheep would continue to be low.

Cultural Resources

The locations of all four guzzlers were surveyed for cultural resources when they were initially constructed. No cultural resources were located and no impacts to cultural resources are expected.

ALTERNATIVE 3 - Removal of Wildlife Guzzlers within WSA.

Vegetation and Soils

General Vegetation

Existing vegetation impacted from the previous placement of guzzlers would remain impacted in the short term, but both natural and artificial reseeding would help the sites to recover. Some soil displacement would occur by pulling in the berms and filling in the holes left after the existing guzzler tanks are removed. This is expected to be minimal and no long-term impacts like erosion or soil loss would occur.

Threatened, Endangered & Sensitive Plants

At present, there are no Threatened, Endangered, or Bureau sensitive plants in the area of the proposed action. No impacts to these species are expected to occur.

Noxious Weeds

The introduction of noxious weeds and undesirable plants will be minimized by cleaning vehicles and equipment prior to entering the work area. Minimizing ground disturbance during the project would decrease the likelihood that weeds would have a place to become established.

Wildlife and Fish

Under this alternative, small birds and mammals would receive benefits only from natural water. All of these species would continue to exist on the rim, but probably in lower densities and in scattered pockets. The raptor populations that prey on many of these species would have less of a prey base and would decrease or move on. Fewer nesting raptors along Abert Rim could decrease wilderness values. Impacts from disturbance from removing these guzzlers would be minimal. Likewise, bighorn sheep would receive no benefit if guzzlers were removed. Bighorn sheep would not be dispersed along the rim and would be concentrated in a few areas where water is available. Water availability could force sheep onto the lower slopes of Abert Rim, across US Highway 395 in search of water. These negative impacts would probably not threaten the existence of bighorn sheep in the Abert Rim WSA, but the population would probably not

reach its full historic potential. Long-term goals set in the Oregon Bighorn Sheep Management Plan would not be met. There would be no significant negative impacts to any Threatened, Endangered, or Sensitive species.

Recreation / Wilderness Values

Visual Resources Management

Removing guzzlers P10, P11 and P13 from the WSA, rehabilitating the sites, and closing the vehicle routes which lead to the sites would meet the objectives of Class I VRM. The level of change to the characteristic landscape would be low and would not attract attention. Replacing guzzler P12 with the less obtrusive design would actually diminish the level of visual contrast that currently exists with the guzzler. Replacing this guzzler would cause minimal vegetation and soil disturbance, but this would not be visible from the highway.

Wilderness Study Areas

Opportunities for solitude would be restricted for approximately 10 days during removal activities, which would include the use of a helicopter, vehicles, and people using hand tools. However, naturalness would be preserved and enhanced over the long-term, as the most visible saucers would be removed, and the vehicle routes closed and rehabilitated. The proposed action would result in slightly more ground disturbance, but would be substantially unnoticeable compared to this alternative. However, removing the guzzlers would negatively impact the population levels and distribution of sheep along the rim, and could result in sheep attempting to cross US Highway 395 in search of water. Since the presence of bighorn sheep is one of the special features of this WSA.

This alternative meets the non-impairment criteria because the three guzzlers within the WSA would be removed and the sites rehabilitated, thus removing unnatural features from the WSA and enhancing scenic quality. On the other hand, this alternative would not protect or enhance the distribution of bighorn sheep.

Recreation

Because the guzzlers would be removed, the sites would not be visited out of curiosity like they are presently. Two "ways" would be closed to vehicles, but would remain available for foot and horse traffic. Because the removal of most of the guzzlers would reduce distribution of the sheep along the face of the rim, there would be less opportunity for visitors to observe sheep.

Cultural Resources

The locations of all four guzzlers were surveyed for cultural resources when they were initially constructed. No cultural resources were located and no impacts to cultural resources are expected.

Secondary, Indirect, and Cumulative Impacts

No secondary, indirect or cumulative impacts are expected to occur from any of the proposed alternatives listed above.

SECTION 5. CONSULTATION AND PUBLIC INPUT

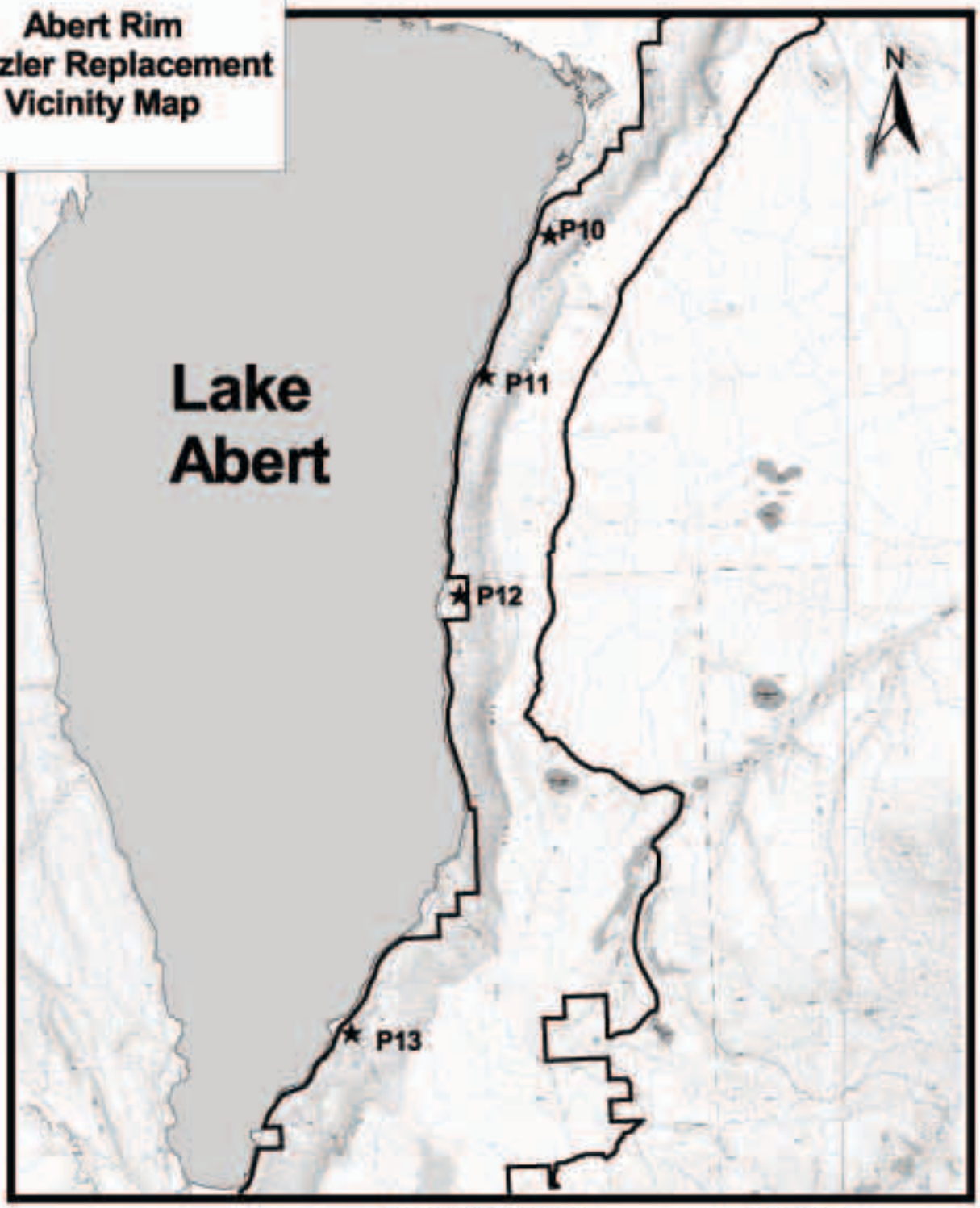
Public / Interagency Involvement

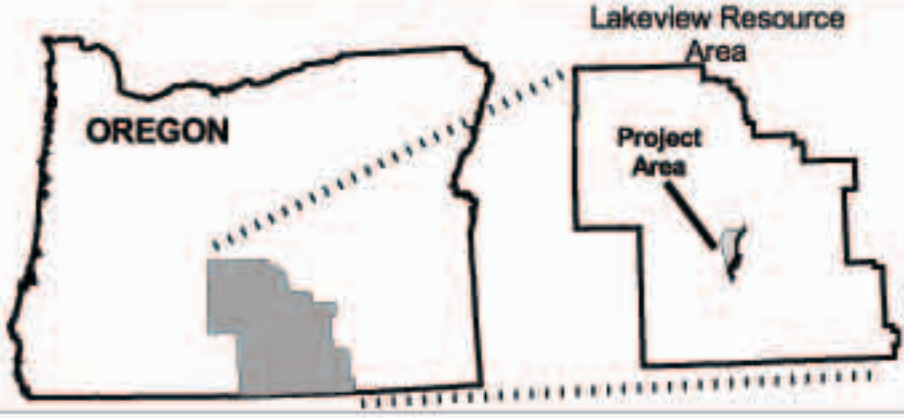
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Foundation of North American Wild Sheep
Oregon Hunters Association

SECTION 6. PARTICIPATING INTERDISCIPLINARY STAFF

Heidi Albertson	Rangeland Management Specialist
Bill Cannon	Archaeologist
Todd Forbes	Wildlife Biologist
Dan Hollenkamp	Recreation Planner
Bob Hopper	Supervisory Rangeland Management Specialist
Lucile Housley	Botanist
Trish Lindaman	Recreation Technician
Barbara Machado	Hydrologist
Erin McConnell	Noxious Weeds
Paul Whitman	Planning and Environmental Coordinator

Abert Rim Guzzler Replacement Vicinity Map





LEGEND

- Lake Abert
- Abert Rim WSA
- ★ Guzzler Location