

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

EA Number: OR-056-01-010
Project Number: 737210
Title: Rickard Road/ Hwy 20 Area Road Closure And Fence
BLM Office: Prineville District
Resource Area: Deschutes

I. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The primary purpose of this project is to reduce road densities to benefit wildlife, preserve the natural character of the area, reduce illegal dumping and minimize management costs of repeated clean-ups.

This site has been used as an illegal dumping area for many years. Survey work completed in early summer of 2000 documented over 10 separate dumpsites within a 390 acre area containing approximately 5.75 miles of roads and pullouts. The contents of these dumpsites included construction debris, dead animals, household garbage, tires, and appliances. The project area was cleaned up by Bureau of Land Management (BLM) staff and volunteers during September, 2000.

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1 (Proposed Action)

The BLM proposes to close approximately 3 miles of roads within the project area by ripping the roadbeds using heavy equipment. Another 2.75 miles of roads would be half-tracked (half of the roadbed would be ripped), to create trails (see attached project area map). The roadbeds would be reseeded with native grass species. A three wire high-tensile fence with five horse/pedestrian gates, would be constructed along the west side of Highway 20, the north side of Rickard Road and along the section line between sections 14 and 15, and along the section line between sections 11 and 14, to block future motor vehicle access. Two parking areas would be available, one at the north end of the project area and one at the south end.

Alternative 2 (No-Action)

No road closure or rehabilitation would take place at the site. The area would continue to be used for illegal dumping, requiring ongoing clean-ups. The continued use of the area for dumping would impact additional undisturbed areas by compacting soils and destroying vegetation. The existing concentrated network of roads would continue to spread.

III. DESCRIPTION OF THE EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

General Location

The proposed project area is located on the north side of Rickard Road, west of Highway 20 and east of private lands (See map). The project site is located in Deschutes County, approximately nine (9) miles southeast of Bend. The legal description of the proposed project is Township 18 South, Range 13 East, Section 14, west of Highway 20.

The BLM managed lands in the project area are within the Skeleton Fire Emergency Road Closure (map attached) and are used in a variety of ways. These uses include several forms of recreation such as off-highway vehicle, hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, target shooting and hunting, as well as illegal household and construction debris dumping.

Soils

The soils at the immediate project site are classified as Gosney - Rock outcrop - Deskamp complex, with 0 to 15 percent slopes. Both soils are excessively well drained, with soil depths averaging 20 inches and bedrock at depths from 10 to 40 inches. Management considerations are that care be taken to protect soils from wind erosion. Re-establishment of native vegetation is very slow if vegetation is removed or damaged. The depth of the soils and low annual precipitation limit the choice of species to drought tolerant native varieties.

Vegetation

In the relatively undisturbed areas the overstory vegetation is western juniper (*Juniperus occidentalis*) with the understory consisting of big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*) and rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus spp.*). The grass and forbe layer is comprised of cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), Idaho fescue (*Festuca idahoensis*), bottlebrush squirreltail (*Sitanion hystrix*), several needlegrasses (*Stipa spp.*) and various members of the buckwheat family (*Eriogonum spp.*). Many large areas have been denuded of vegetation due to off road

vehicle use, dumping and overuse by target shooters.

Wildlife

No threatened or endangered wildlife species are known to occur within the project area. A deer winter range occurs within two miles of the project area. The project area is used by deer, elk, and antelope to some extent throughout the year. Water is sparse in the project area. Due to the proximity of the project area to Highway 20 and the City of Bend, poaching is a concern. The northern edge of the lynx corridor is one (1) mile south of the project area (see attached Biological Evaluation).

Old juniper trees within the project area have excellent potential for cavity nesting species, and bat roosting. Habitat for ground and shrub nesting birds is being degraded by the increase in user created roads and subsequent reduction of vegetative condition. The project area has the potential to be used by foraging hawks, owls, and bats. No known raptor nests exist in the project area.

Cultural Resources

The physical setting of the proposed project area is situated within the High Lava Plains physiographic province. As such, the terrain consists largely of an arid rolling plain, with shallow, sandy soils, punctuated by occasional low basalt outcrops and flows. Although it is possible that other sources of water may have been available in the past during periods of more effective moisture, currently, the Deschutes River, located approximately 11.5 miles due west, offers the nearest perennial source of water to the project area.

Vegetation consists of elements of the shrub-steppe province dominated by big sagebrush and stands of western juniper. Rabbitbrush often occurs with the big sagebrush. In view of those considerations, it is unlikely that cultural resource sites would exist in the project area when applying current modeling for prehistoric and historic land use and settlement patterns.

Despite those considerations, a cultural resource survey was completed within the proposed project area in November of 2000. Although one isolated find was documented, no prehistoric or historic sites were discovered during the course of that survey. Currently, a Cultural Resources Survey Report is being prepared for submission to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).

Recreation

The area is used for a variety of recreational activities including target shooting, motorcycle and all-terrain vehicle use, and horseback riding. Recreational use appears to be mainly from local area residents and activities occur year round. Public land in this area has been used for illegal dumping and target shooting for many years.

A network of user created roads exists in the area. The project area is within the Skeleton Fire Emergency Road Closure. However, the many access points from both Highway 20 and Rickard Road have precluded effective enforcement of the closure.

Visual

Some portions of the project area are visible from both Highway 20 and Rickard Road. Juniper trees block much of the view from these two roads. There are currently nine different entry/exit points in less than two miles along Highway 20 and Rickard Road. Some of the dumpsites on the south end of the proposed project area are visible from Rickard Road. The project area is not natural appearing, consisting of a maze of roads with many pull-outs and disturbed areas where garbage piles once were.

IV. IMPACTS

The following impacts are described considering the application of mitigation measures and monitoring as prescribed in the Brothers/La Pine RMP as well as those identified specifically for this project.

Soils & Vegetation

Alternative 1 (Proposed Action)

Construction of 3.7 miles of three wire high-tensile fence with posts spaced at 20 feet and wire spacing of 18", 28" and 38" from the ground. No juniper trees will be felled but, will be incorporated into the fence using eye bolts. The fence construction would result in some compaction of soils and damage to vegetation(see attached special status plant survey waiver). However, the overall impacts would be less than the no-action, as the number of entries by motorized vehicles would be reduced. Some shrubs and herbaceous vegetation would be damaged by vehicles used to deliver materials to the area, but would likely recover by the following growing season. After the fence construction, vegetation improvement would be expected in all areas. Three walk through gates and two horse gates would be installed in the fenceline (See attached map). 15,085 feet of roads would be ripped using heavy equipment and then seeded with native grass seed. An additional 2.75 miles of roads would be half-tracked for use as trails and seeded with native grass seed. It is not likely that the vegetation adjacent to these roads would be disturbed.

Alternative 2 (No Action)

Vegetation and soils would continue to be impacted each time vehicles leave the existing roads. Regeneration of trees, shrubs, grasses and forbes would be hindered in locations covered by garbage and by repeated vehicle access.

Wildlife

Alternative 1 (Proposed Action)

Some human disturbance to wildlife might occur during fence construction and heavy equipment operation. However, because entry of motorized vehicles would be halted, long-term disturbance would be reduced from the no-action. Improvements in vegetative condition, as discussed under "Soils and Vegetation", would also be expected to improve habitat for small mammals and a variety of other wildlife species. Construction of the new fence would create an additional obstacle that deer and elk would have to negotiate, but this would be partially mitigated by constructing the fence to wildlife specifications.

Alternative 2 (No Action)

Human disturbance to wildlife would continue due to ongoing off-highway vehicle use, dumping and target shooting.

No impacts to Threatened & Endangered animal species would occur under any alternative.

Recreation

Alternative 1 (Proposed Action)

Motorized vehicle access to the project area on public lands would be blocked. Motorists wishing access to public lands in the area would have to go to access points further south along Highway 20. Creation of pedestrian/non-motorized access would be facilitated by installing five gates in the fenceline and two parking areas (see attached map), offering local residents a choice as to which trails they use (horseback riding, walking or bicycling) to reach public lands.

Alternative 2 (No Action)

Motorized vehicle access to public lands in the project area would remain resulting in

continued illegal garbage dumping and degradation of the vegetation and soils.

Visual

Alternative 1 (Proposed Action)

Approximately 3.7 miles of new fence would be constructed along the north side of Rickard Road, along the west side of Highway 20, and along the lines between sections 11 & 14 and 14 & 15. The fence would be constructed with green metal T-posts to minimize visual impacts. Since motorized vehicle traffic would no longer have access to the area, soil erosion would decrease and vegetation would increase.

Alternative 2 (No Action)

Garbage would continue to be dumped along the roads. New user created roads would damage more natural resources and further degrade scenic values.

Mitigation Measures, Residual Impacts, and Cumulative Impacts

Mitigation would occur as detailed above in the Soil and Vegetation, Wildlife, Visual and Threatened, Endangered and Special Status Plants or Animals sections and as described below.

Should Threatened, Endangered or Special Status Plant or Animal species be found prior to or during project implementation, the project would either be implemented as proposed, modified or dropped from further consideration based on the level of importance of the species involved. Individual sites would be identified on the ground with flagging and/or paint and would be excluded from the project area or the season of implementation would be considered. In the event of discovery of any Threatened, Endangered or Special Status plant or animal species by BLM personnel or the public during project implementation, the newly discovered site would also be flagged on the ground and mapped for exclusion from the project area or the season of project implementation would be altered.

Any human remains, cultural and/or paleontological resources (historic or prehistoric or vertebrate fossil site or object) that are discovered as a result of project implementation shall immediately be reported by telephone to the authorized officer. All project activities in the immediate area of such discovery shall be suspended until written notification is issued by the authorized officer. An evaluation of the discovery will be made by the authorized officer, in consultation with a qualified cultural resources specialist, to determine appropriate actions to prevent the loss of significant cultural or scientific values.

V. NO IMPACT ITEMS

The following critical elements were considered, but will not be addressed because they would either not be affected or do not exist in the project area:

1. Agricultural Lands, Prime or Unique
2. Air Quality
3. Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
4. Environmental Justice
5. Floodplains
6. Livestock Management and Forage
7. Native American Religious Concerns
8. Paleontological Resources
9. Riparian/Wetlands
10. Wastes, Hazardous or Solid
11. Water Quality
12. Wild and Scenic Rivers
13. Wilderness

VI. PERSONS/AGENCIES CONSULTED

Persons and Agencies Consulted

Dave Fiore

Dan and Joyce Fouts

Mike Hollibaugh

Quinn and Myra Hollibaugh

Gary Judd, Deschutes County Road Department

Mark Rees

Peter Russell, Oregon Department of Transportation

Preparers (BLM)

JoAnne Armson, Natural Resource Technician

Steve Castillo, Forester

Greg Currie, Recreation Planner

Ron Gregory, Archaeologist

Ron Halvorson, Botanist

Michelle McSwain, Hydrologist

Phil Paterno, Realty Specialist

Teal Purrington, Rangeland Management Specialist

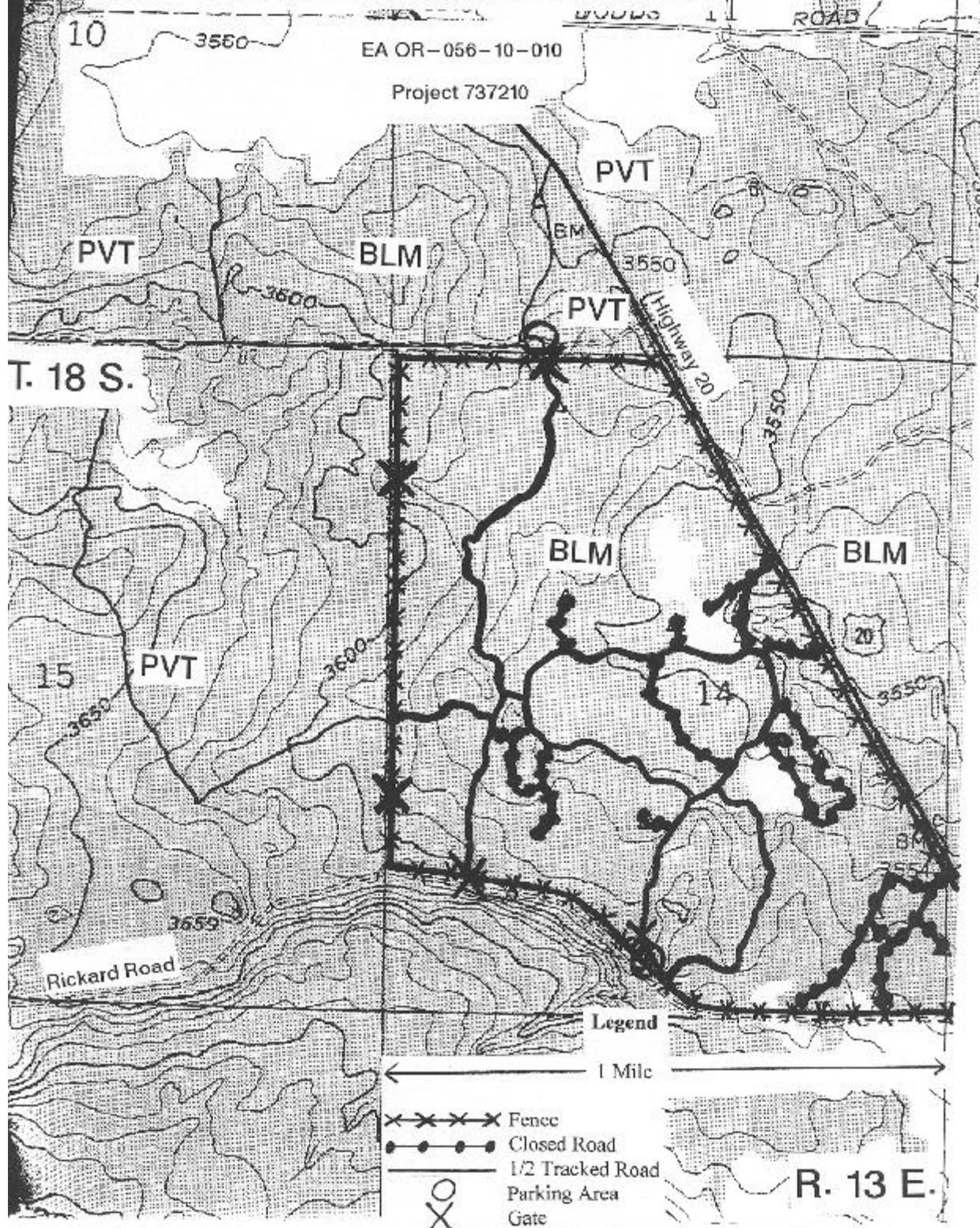
Paul Schmidt, Wildlife Biologist

NEPA Requirements met:

/s/ JC Hanf
J. C. Hanf, Acting Assistant Field Office ManagerDa

12/05/00

RICKARD ROAD/HIGHWAY 20 AREA ROAD CLOSURE & FENCE



BIOLOGICAL EVALUATION for LISTED, PROPOSED, AND SPECIAL STATUS SPECIES

for

Rickard Road / Hwy.20 Road Closure and Fence EA #. OR 056 01 010

Project Location: Prineville District BLM, Deschutes Resource Area, Lower Dry River Watershed, T18S, R13E, S14

Project Description: The preferred alternative is to rip and seed 5 ½ miles of road and construct a fence 2 ½ miles long within the Lower Dry River Watershed.

Summary of Conclusions of Effects of Listed and Special Status Species

	Wildlife	Listing	Alt. 1	Alt. 2
1	Northern bald eagle	threatened	NE	NE
2	Canada Lynx	threatened	NE	NE
3	Washington Ground Squirrel	federal candidate	NE	NE
4	Oregon Spotted Frog	federal candidate	NE	NE
5	Northern Goshawk	sensitive	NI	NI
6	Ferruginous Hawk	sensitive	NI	NI
7	Yellow Rail	sensitive	NI	NI
8	American Perigrine Falcon	sensitive	NI	NI
9	Flammulated Owl (BM)	sensitive	NI	NI
10	White-headed Woodpecker	sensitive	NI	NI
11	Black-backed Woodpecker (BM)	sensitive	NI	NI
12	Three-Toed Woodpecker (BM)	sensitive	NI	NI
13	Pygmy Nuthatch (BM)	sensitive	NI	NI
14	Burrowing Owl	sensitive	NI	NI
15	Streaked Horned Lark	sensitive	NI	NI
16	Yellow-Billed Cuckoo	sensitive	NI	NI
17	Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse	sensitive	NI	NI
18	Townsend's Big-eared Bat	sensitive	NI	NI
19	Fisher	sensitive	NI	NI
20	Upland Sandpiper	sensitive	NI	NI
21	Arctic Peregrine Falcon	sensitive	NI	NI
22	Northern Pygmy owl (BM)	sensitive	NI	NI
23	Painted Turtle	sensitive	NI	NI
24	Western Pond Turtle	sensitive	NI	NI
25	Northern Leopard Frog	sensitive	NI	NI
26	Cope's Giant Salamander	assessment	NI	NI
27	Tricolored Blackbird (HP)	assessment	NI	NI
28	Western Sage Grouse	assessment	NI	NI
29	Pygmy Rabbit	assessment	NI	NI
30	Brazilian Free-Tailed Bat	assessment	NI	NI
31	Spotted Bat	assessment	NI	NI

(BM) = Blue Mountains Area only (HP) = High Lava Plains Area only

Determination for Federally Listed & Proposed Species

- NE** No Effect
- NLAA** May Effect - Not Likely to Adversely Affect
- LAA** May Effect - Likely to Adversely Affect viability
- BE** Beneficial Effect

the
or

Determination for Special Status Species

- NI** No Impact
- MIIH** May Impact Individuals or Habitat, but will not likely to contribute to a trend towards federal listing or loss of the population or species.
- WIFV*** Will Impact Individuals or habitat with a consequence that action may contribute to a trend towards federal listing cause a loss of viability to the population or species.
- BI** Beneficial Impact

*Trigger for a Significant Action As Defined In NEPA

** Note: Rationale For Conclusion Of Effects Is Contained In The NEPA Document.

Check List for Biological Assessment Review - Project Title

Project Design Criteria	Alt. 1	Alt. 2
BALD EAGLE		
CRITERIA I		
a ● ¹	C	C
b ● ¹	C	C
b ● ²	C	C
b ● ³	C	C
b ● ⁴	C	C
c ● ¹	C	C
c ● ²	C	C
c ● ³	C	C
c ● ⁴	C	C
c ● ⁵	C	C
c ● ⁶	C	C
c ● ⁷	C	C
CRITERIA II		
a ● ¹	C	C
CANADA LYNX		
CRITERIA I		
a 1	C	C
a 2	C	C
a 3	C	C
a 4	C	C
e 1	C	C
e 2	C	C
e 3	C	C
e 4	C	C
e 5	C	C
CRITERIA II		
a 1	C	C
a 3	C	C
a 4	C	C
a 5	C	C
a 6	C	C
a 7	C	C
a 8	C	C
b 1 i	C	C
b 1 ii	C	C
b 1 iii	C	C
b 1 iv	C	C
b 2	C	C
b 3	C	C
b 4	C	C
b 5	C	C
a 6	C	C

C = Project is **Consistent** with specified PDC

N/NLAA = **Not consistent** with specified PDC but a finding of Not Likely to Adversely Effect was reached
(see Analysis of Significance of Effects section of this report)

N = **Not Consistent** with specified PDC

PROCESS AND RATIONAL

PRE-FIELD REVIEW:

The following threatened or sensitive species were considered but do not have potential habitat in the project areas: (Habitat probability indices and survey records are on file at the Prineville District Office)

Washington Ground Squirrel, Oregon Spotted Frog, Northern Goshawk, Upland Sandpiper, Yellow Rail, Arctic Peregrine Falcon, Northern Pygmy Owl, Flammulated Owl, White-headed Woodpecker, Black-backed Woodpecker, Three-toed Woodpecker, Pygmy Nuthatch, Burrowing Owl, Fisher, Painted Turtle, Western Pond Turtle, Northern Leopard Frog, Cope's Giant Salamander, Tricolored Blackbird, Pygmy Rabbit, Spotted Bat, Peregrine Falcon

The following threatened or sensitive species have potential habitat and will be discussed in detail:

Brazilian Free-Tailed Bat (*Tadarida brasiliensis*): Assessment (BLM OR & WA)

Ferruginous Hawk (*Buteo regalis*): Sensitive (BLM OR & WA)

Northern Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*): Threatened (USFWS), Threatened (BLM OR & WA), Threatened (State of Oregon)

Townsend's big eared bat (*Plecotus townsendii townsendii*): Sensitive (BLM OR & WA), Category II (USFWS)

FIELD RECONNAISSANCE:

Brazilian Free-Tailed Bat: No surveys have been completed. These bats have been observed south of the project area on the Deschutes National Forest.

Ferruginous Hawk: No surveys have been completed. The Badlands Wilderness Study Area (WSA) is immediately east of the project area. The potential for both nesting and roosting habitat exists.

Northern Bald Eagle: Prineville Reservoir has been surveyed for the past 10 years by Oregon Eagle Foundation. Two documented nest sites exist within 1 mile of the reservoir. Both of these nests are greater than 10 miles from the project area. Incidental sightings have not occurred within the project area.

Townsend's big eared bats: No surveys have been completed. The Badlands Wilderness Study Area (WSA) is immediately east of the project area. This area has lava flows that create numerous deep cracks and caves with potential to be used as maternity roosts and hibernacula.

ANALYSIS OF SIGNIFICANCE OF EFFECTS

The project area contains no habitat designated "critical" or "essential" for Federally listed species.

Northern Bald Eagle

For The Action Alternative a determination of NO EFFECT was reached because:

- 1.) The planning area is not being used as reproductive habitat
- 2.) No known winter roosts exist in the planning area
- 3.) The Ochoco Mountains are above the targeted number of reproducing bald eagle pairs specified in the bald eagle recovery plan for Oregon.
- 4.) Project design elements are consistent with all Criteria I and II in the 2000 Programmatic BA.

Applicable PDCs:

Rational: The project activities will be outside of critical nesting areas and the KLA for the Canadian lynx.

Coordination with Level 1 team or others: None

PROCESS AND RATIONAL

Ferruginous Hawk

For The Action Alternative a determination of NO IMPACT was reached because:

- 1.) No, known nests exist in the planning area; all trees identified with nests will be protected from disturbance.

2.) Road closures are expected to enhance revegetation which should increase small mammal and upland bird populations which should enhance foraging opportunities

3.) Impacts are not expected to cause a trend toward listing due to the relative small scale of this project, overall affects will result in enhance habitat.

Townsend's big eared bats

For Action Alternative a determination of **NO IMPACT** was reached because:

- 1.) No known maternity roosts or hibernacula exist in the project area
- 2.) The highest probability day roost sites exist in the Badlands area outside the project area
- 3.) Foraging quality would not be reduced due to vegetative changes
- 4.) Foraging would not be disrupted due to the bat's nocturnal nature

Brazilian Free-Tailed Bat

For Action Alternative a determination of **NO IMPACT** was reached because:

- 1.) No known maternity roosts or hibernacula exist in the project area
- 2.) The highest probability day roost sites exist in the Badlands area outside the project area
- 3.) Foraging quality would not be reduced due to vegetative changes
- 4.) Foraging would not be disrupted due to the bat's nocturnal nature

RECOMMENDATIONS:

I recommend no additional restrictions for TE&S species at this time, if new species warrent consideration or species occurrence data is updated additional evaluation will be necessary.

RECOMMENDED MONITORING:

Road Closures: Periodic inspections of the fence and gates for effectiveness of reducing human distrubance.

Document prepared by: _____

Date: _____

Paul Schmidt
Wildlife Biologist

Finding of No Significant Impact

Rickard Road/Hwy 20 Road Closure and Fence

E.A.: OR-056-10-010

Project: 737210

Prineville District Bureau of Land Management

Deschutes Resource Area

3050 NE Third Street, Prineville, Oregon

Summary of Proposed Action and Alternatives

An interdisciplinary team of resource specialists at the Prineville District BLM has analyzed a proposal to rip and seed 3 miles of road, to half-track and seed 2.75 miles of road and to construct 3.7 miles of three wire high-tensile fence with five horse/pedestrian/non-motorized vehicle gates.

Under the no-action alternative, the project would not be accomplished.

FONSI Determination

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I have reviewed this environmental assessment including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant impacts. I have determined that the proposed action, with the mitigation measures described, will not have any significant impacts on the human environment and that an EIS is not required. I have determined that the proposed project is in conformance with the approved land use plan. My reasons for this determination are:

- ▶ There would be no significant irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources .
- ▶ There were no identified impacts or issues related to public health or safety.
- ▶ Cultural resources would not be expected to be impacted (SHPO).
- ▶ There would be no impacts to Threatened, Endangered or Special Status plants (Waiver #01016) or to Threatened & Endangered animals within the project area.
- ▶ The proposed action is not part of any other action having potential for cumulatively significant impacts to the important or relevant resource values for the area involved.
- ▶ The area is not within a Wild or Scenic River boundary or Wilderness Study Area, so no impacts to those resources would occur.

The proposed action and alternative are consistent with the Brothers/La Pine Resource Management Plan (approved 1989). “New fences will be constructed to allow wildlife passage and existing fences will be modified as appropriate. Protective fences will be constructed in

riparian areas, and other habitat improvement projects will be implemented where necessary to stabilize and/or improve unsatisfactory or declining wildlife habitat condition. Disturbed areas...will be reseeded with a mixture of grasses forbs, and shrubs to meet site specific needs or habitat requirements (page 97).” “Most fences are three or four-wire strands strung between steel posts with intermediate wire stays. Fence lines are not bladed or scraped. All fences are designed to mitigate wildlife movement problems (page 87).”

Approved: _____
Robert Towne
Deschutes Resource Area Field Manager

Date _____