

## **Shanker Bend Road Repair and Realignment Environmental Assessment EA#OR134-FY02-006**

### **Introduction**

Shanker Bend Road, a natural surface, switched backed, with spot gravel road, has an unsafe road junction with Loomis-Oroville County Road, as well as a steep grade (over 10%) on unstable erosive soils. The BLM is proposing road repair to eliminate the unsafe road junction and steep erosive road section.

The project site is located in Okanogan County, approximately six miles west of the town of Oroville in north-central Washington, near the Canadian border (see attached map).

Over the years, the Shanker Bend Road leading to the uplands has received erosion damage and two complete washouts. Because of these conditions, road users have developed an alternate route that bypasses the 0.5-mile section of Shanker Bend road that is impassable. This alternate road section intersects with the County road at a very unsafe blind corner, is steep (over 10% grade), and is on erosive soils. The alternate route does not control erosion or meet safety standards.

The subject road provides access to public lands for public lands management, fire access, public and mining access, and range lease administration. The Border Patrol also accesses border points via this road.

### **Purpose and Need**

The purpose of the proposed project is to provide a usable and safe access road to public lands, to eliminate a hazardous road junction, and to reduce erosion.

A safe access road is needed to facilitate management of the public lands by BLM employees for lease management and administrative needs, as well as to provide safe access for weed control operations, public access, and rancher and mining access.

### **Description of Alternatives**

#### **Alternative 1 - Proposed Action**

The proposed action is to close the section of road that developed over the years and to reopen the original Shanker Bend road that has become impassable. The section to be closed would be accomplished by installing water control structures such as drain dips, water bars, and out sloping and then seeding the disturbed areas with an approved grass seed mixture.

The 0.5-mile section to be reopened would intersect with the existing BLM access at an old barrow pit road junction with the County road. This reopened section is 0.1 mile west of the existing junction to be closed. Reopening would require traversing the edge of the barrow pit to the point where it connects with the portion of the Shanker Bend road that had been closed. This route would continue, using the

original Shanker Bend road, which has two switchbacks that provide a more acceptable grade for driving and for erosion control. The project would involve installing two culverts, and rebuilding and grading the road. Water control devices, such as water bars and drain dips, would be constructed to prevent surface erosion.

### Project Design Features

An intensive BLM class III cultural resources inventory will be conducted in the area of potential effect prior to project implementation. If historically significant resources, traditional cultural properties or sacred areas are identified, the project will be redesigned to avoid them. If the sites cannot be avoided, consultation with Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (OAHP), consulting tribes and interested public will be conducted.

If significant paleontological resources are located prior to or during project implementation, the project will be redesigned to avoid the resource. If the resource cannot be avoided, the locality will be evaluated and mitigation will be conducted. If any cultural or paleontological resources are encountered during project implementation, the disturbing activity will be halted and a BLM archaeologist will be notified for appropriate action.

If any wildlife species that are sensitive to noise or disturbances are found, project activities would be modified to avoid disturbance.

To mitigate for noxious weeds, disturbed ground will be seeded with an appropriate seed mix and monitored for noxious weed invasion and treated as needed.

### **Other Alternatives Considered But Not Analyzed in Detail**

Two other alternatives (road closure, and repair of the currently used road) were considered but are not analyzed in detail because they are not deemed acceptable alternatives for the following reasons:

This road provides access to the public lands and is needed for public lands management, fire access, mining access, range lease administration, recreation, and access by the Border Patrol to the U.S.–Canada border.

Repairing the existing 0.35-mile section of road intersecting with the county road and Shanker Bend Road does not incorporate enough switchbacks for an acceptable road grade of less than 10%. It is also located on erosive soil at a steep grade, and has an unsafe junction with the County road. Eliminating the junction would also eliminate one junction with the county road since it will intersect with another BLM road accessing the county road.

### **Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences**

#### **Vegetation/Plant Communities, Including Special Status Plant Species**

The specific project area has not been surveyed for special status plants, however, the area immediately adjacent to the site has been field inventoried with negative results. The plant community is disturbed and has weedy big sagebrush/bluebunch wheatgrass (*Artemisia tridentata/Agropyron spicatum*), with big sagebrush and cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) dominant. There are not many perennial grasses. Due to the disturbed and weedy nature of the plant community, there is a low likelihood of any special status plant being present. In the exceptional case that a special status plant is there, it would not likely be one of the more rare species and if the population were lost it would not imperil the continued existence of the species.

### **Riparian/Water Resources/Fisheries**

The project area is located north of the county road and north of Miners flat and is approximately 0.15 mile from the Similkameen River, a Class 3 fish-bearing river. There are no riparian areas within the project area. Enloe dam is approximately 2.65 flow of the river miles below the project site and the Canadian Border is approximately 16.45 flow of the river miles above the project site. Enloe dam, a barrier to upstream fish passage, is constructed on a site that according to Native American History is a place in the river that does not allow fish to pass up stream.

Upstream from the Enloe Dam are rainbow trout, mountain whitefish, and suckers. Above the Canadian border are two species of fish proposed for listing under the new Canadian Species At Risk Act (SARA). No likely effect is expected on upstream species or habitat. Downstream from the Enloe dam are naturally spawning steelhead, rainbow trout, and Chinook salmon. Douglas County PUD operates and maintains a remote satellite hatchery facility in the Similkameen River near the confluence with the Okanogan River. This is approximately 3 miles downstream of the Enloe Dam. This satellite hatchery rears and releases juvenile salmonids into the Similkameen.

The proposed road repair and realignment in Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) would reduce surface erosion and minimize potential for sedimentation to be deposited into the Similkameen River. There would be no negative effect to the fish, water, or fisheries habitat in the Similkameen River.

### **Terrestrial Wildlife Habitat**

Wildlife species observed in the adjacent sage-steppe habitats include mule deer, chukar, and white-tailed jackrabbits. Golden eagles occur in the area and may nest nearby, but surveys conducted by a wildlife biologist in March 2002 did not locate any active nests.

No species of wildlife sensitive to human noise disturbance have been observed in the area. Any such species using habitat in the vicinity for denning or nesting could be disturbed by the proposed project. Other types of soils disturbance are confined primarily to previously disturbed habitat areas along the existing road corridor. Due to the small size and location of the affected area, as well as the measures to protect habitat of any sensitive species if any are located during project implementation, the proposed action should have no discernible effects on wildlife species.

## **Cultural Resources, Native American Values, and Paleontological Resources**

The project is located within the former Moses Columbia Indian Reservation, an area of important archaeological and Native American resource values. Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, numerous properties associated with mineral exploration, extraction and processing have been located in the Similkameen River valley. Evidence of mineral exploration and development has been identified near the project area.

Paleontological resources are not known to occur in the project area.

Cultural resources would not likely be adversely affected by the proposed action, considering a cultural survey and consultation will be conducted prior to project implementation and also project design features are included to protect significant cultural resources located during project implementation.

### **Recreation**

The upland area accessed by the subject road is used by the public for hunting, sightseeing, horseback riding, hiking, and off-highway vehicle (OHV) activities. Off-highway vehicle use is limited to designated roads and trails in this area.

Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) would provide better and safer public access to the uplands. Intersecting the proposed route with the county road would eliminate the safety hazards of the blind corner and negate the need to construct a new junction.

### **Other Resource Values or Elements Considered**

Environmental justice impacts were considered. No disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority or low-income populations are expected to result from implementation of any of the alternatives addressed in this EA.

The proposed action would not adversely impact energy and minerals resources or their development.

The following elements either do not occur on the project area or would not be impacted:

- Air quality
- Wild and scenic rivers
- Prime/unique farmlands
- Special area designations
- Wilderness
- Hazardous/solid materials
- Invasive plants

### **Coordination and Consultation**

The proposed project was coordinated with the following BLM specialists:

- Kevin Kane - Botanist, Wenatchee Resource Area

- Richard Bailey - Archaeologist, Spokane District
- Dana Peterson - Range Management Specialist, Wenatchee Resource Area
- Diane Priebe - Recreation Planner, Wenatchee Resource Area
- Jim Rees - Wildlife Biologist, Wenatchee Resource Area
- Joe Kelly - Fisheries Biologist, Spokane District- Wenatchee Resource Area
- Brent Cunderla - Geologist, Wenatchee Resource Area
- Kathy Helm - Planning and Environmental Coordinator, Spokane District

Consultation has been initiated with the following:

- Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation
- Yakima Nation
- Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation
- Okanogan County Historical Society

The EA will be placed on the Spokane District Webpage at [www.or.blm.gov/spokane](http://www.or.blm.gov/spokane) for public review with a 2-week comment period, to end April 2. In addition, a copy of the EA will be sent to the Okanogan County Department of Public Works for their information.