

Stumpjumper Motorcycle Club Special Recreation Permit
EA #OR134-02-EA-011
Wenatchee Field Office, Spokane District BLM

Introduction

The Stumpjumper Motorcycle Club has applied to the Bureau of Land Management Wenatchee Field Office for a Special Recreation Permit (SRP) for use of public land BLM manages in Kittitas County. The land for the proposed activity is located east of Ellensburg, south of the old Vantage Highway (T17N, R21E, S14)(see map). The motorcycle event being proposed would occur predominately on private land, but would cross one parcel of BLM land, as shown on the attached map. The event is proposed for 2 days (April 13-14, 2002).

The proposed race has been held several times in the past in this same area, with some encroachments on BLM-administered land. To ensure proper authorization for use of BLM lands, the Stumpjumper Motorcycle Club applied in the spring of 2001 for an SRP to cross BLM lands for this event in April of 2001. Due to the short timeframe between receipt of the application and the event, BLM postponed a decision to allow for botanical and archaeological clearance and consultation work and to prepare an environmental assessment. The BLM has since completed the needed clearances and consultation.

Need for Proposed Action

The special recreational permit for the motorcycle event is proposed by the applicant to fulfill recreational pursuits of a segment of the public. The SRP process is a means for organizations to request authorization for their recreational activity and for the BLM to consider and grant such use where determined appropriate. The SRP process is also a means to provide guidance for applicants to protect resources on the proposed site while conducting their activity.

The SRP process is needed to provide adequate analysis of the proposed event, considering its expected level of participation.

Description of the Alternatives

Two alternatives were considered: Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) and Alternative 2 (Reject the Special Recreation Permit application). Both alternatives are described below.

Alternative 1 (Proposed Action): The proposed action is to issue a Special Recreation Permit for a motorcycle event at the location described above in the Introduction. The Stumpjumper Motorcycle Club would use three existing dirt trails located on the BLM parcel. These three trails total approximately 3 miles and are part of a larger course that crosses private, BLM and State lands. These trails are identified on the attached map. Approximately 800 to 1,200 riders are expected to ride this course for a poker run, and approximately 300 to 400 riders would race the course later that weekend.

Specific Required Stipulations:

- All riders will follow a designated and flagged course and use existing trails only.
- Spotters will be used along the course to keep riders on the designated route.
- No spectators will be allowed along the course.
- No staging or camping will be done on the BLM parcel.
- After the events are completed, all flagging and other litter will be removed from the area.

- The area will be reseeded and graded, if necessary, as determined by a BLM official.
- All motorcycles will be licensed or registered and be required to have approved spark arresters.
- State and county OHV and fire restrictions will be observed.
- First aid kits, fire extinguishers, shovels and pulaskis will be required.
- Any additional ground- disturbing activity resulting from the event will be monitored by a BLM Archaeologist. If historically significant cultural materials are identified in the area of potential effect, additional consultation with the Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation and Native American Tribes would be initiated.
- No vegetative collection will be permitted.

Alternative 2 (Reject the Special Recreation Permit application): The BLM would deny the proposed Special Recreation Permit.

Affected Environment

Water Resources and Fisheries: No water or fisheries resources are located on the subject land.

Vegetation/Special Status Species: BLM lands in the south half of Section 14 of Township 17 North, Range 21 East were surveyed for special status plants and high quality plant communities during the spring and summer of 2001. A complete survey of the parcel was done. The shallow soils seem to provide suitable habitat for Hoover's Tauschia (*Tauschia hooveri*), a Federal Species of Concern known to be in the area, but no populations were found.

There are motorcycle trails traversing through populations of Simpson's ball cactus (*Pediocactus simpsonii* var. *robustior*). The cactus is found on much of the shallow soiled areas of the parcel. Simpson's ball cactus is a Review group 1 species, defined as taxa for which more field work is needed to assess their rarity and the degree to which they are threatened. No other special status plant species were found.

Although not high quality, the plant communities are in good condition and not particularly weedy. There are a few localized diffuse knapweed (*Centaurea diffusa*) infestations along margins of motorcycle trails. There are also populations of burdock (*Articum minus*) and common teasel (*Dipsacus sylvestrus*) along trails in gully bottoms.

Recreation: Because this BLM parcel is isolated, unsigned, and difficult to access, public use has been very low. This BLM parcel is surrounded by private land, with several sections of State land nearby. The old Vantage highway runs through the center of the BLM parcel, providing the only public access. Based on site visits, recreation use of the location is very low and consists of off-highway vehicle (OHV) traffic (mainly originating on private or state land) and some hunting. OHV motorcycle riding events and scattered casual use have been occurring at and near this site for a long time. This parcel is designated as Open to off-highway vehicles in the Spokane District Resource Management Plan (1987).

The BLM parcel appears to have three main OHV trails on it, which altogether total approximately 3 miles. In a few places, the trails split, but then rejoin soon after. The hillclimbs out of the low draws at either end of the BLM property are steep and wide, and in other places they are a braided maze up to 40 feet wide. The rest of the trails onsite range from 6 feet wide to

only 1 foot wide and probably average 5 feet in width, resulting in approximately 55,755 square feet of bare soil within the BLM portion of Section 14. Overall use appears low.

Cultural and Paleontological Resources

Consultation with the Yakama Indian Nation identified concern for potential impacts to Native American cultural values. However, cultural and paleontological resource surveys did not locate any archaeological or historic properties in the area of potential effect. No traditional cultural properties or sacred sites have been identified in the project area.

Wildlife Habitat

This area provides a variety of habitats. Willow, rose, big sage, and basin wild rye are found along the drainage bottoms. Uplands with deep soil are dominated by big sagebrush-bluebunch wheatgrass. Uplands with shallow soils are dominated by stiff sage-Sandberg's bluegrass. Perennial forbs are relatively abundant. These habitats appear lightly grazed by cattle, but are generally in good condition. The habitat is relatively high quality and likely supports many shrub-steppe wildlife species.

Species observed on April 1, 2002 were American robin, dark-eyed junco and sage thrasher. Also seen were signs of elk, mule deer, coyote, badger, cottontail and jackrabbit.

An adult sage grouse and five chicks were reported in Section 11, within 0.5 mile of Section 14, in 1989 (WDFW data). There is an historic sage grouse lek near Whiskey Dick Mountain, approximately 4.4 miles northwest of Section 14. Section 14 provides suitable winter and nesting habitat for sage grouse. Although the area is currently unoccupied by sage grouse, it is potentially important to grouse because it provides habitat to a corridor between the two remaining but disjunct Washington populations of grouse.

Potential Environmental Impacts

Alternative 1 (Proposed Action)

Vegetation (Including Special Status Species), Soil, and Air: Restricting motorcyclists for the proposed motorcycle event to stay on existing trails should preclude further habitat disturbance and any direct adverse effects to native plants. Motorcycle use would have potential to spread weeds onto BLM lands and neighboring lands. New weed species could be introduced and existing weed populations could expand to the point of outcompeting native vegetation. Limiting motorcycle racers to existing motorcycle trails would avoid creating new trails and subsequent denuding areas of vegetation. Increased erosion could result in loss of native vegetation on slopes and drainage bottoms. The presence of a large number of event participants would increase the possibility of cactii being collected.

The noise, dust and exhaust created by this OHV event would be of short duration. By holding this event in the spring, the ground should still be firm, minimizing erosion and resource damage. Fire danger is also greatly reduced at this time of the year. OHV use along existing roads and trails is not expected to escalate damage to vegetation above its present impacted condition. Limiting the event to existing roads and trails would minimize vegetative, soil and wildlife disturbance in comparison to lands not previously used. However, additional soil disturbance adjacent to existing roads and trails due to passing, and concentrated numbers of participants

could occur. Special event stipulations relating to fire, litter control, course flagging and restoration would help limit impacts.

Wildlife Habitat: The noise, dust, and presence of many people at the OHV event would displace wildlife in the immediate vicinity of the race course, at a minimum for the 2-day duration of the event. The degree of disturbance and displacement could be affected by previous experience with OHVs in the area. Some species habituate to noise and human activity and respond less with repeated exposure to specific disturbances. These individuals would be more likely to remain in the area during the event or return soon after its conclusion. Other species become sensitized after learning the consequences of a disturbance and these individuals would be more likely to abandon the area.

Although the effects of disturbance on many species of shrub-steppe wildlife are poorly understood, the responses of a few are known. The incubation period is a particularly sensitive time for many species, but because the OHV event would occur in April many birds would not yet be nesting. Brewer's sparrows and sage thrasher, for example, do not nest until May and June, but early nesting species such as sage sparrows could be adversely affected. Whether early nesters could have become habituated or sensitized to OHV activity earlier this year is unknown. There are currently no known sage grouse in the area so this species would not be directly affected by the event.

Increases in weed distribution and abundance would cause an incremental loss or degradation of existing native plant communities and wildlife habitat. Noxious weeds would diminish forage quantity and quality; degrade breeding, nesting, and rearing habitat for many shrub-steppe wildlife; and inhibit or create physical barriers to animal movement. Organized OHV use of the area could also encourage recreational OHV riding throughout the summer, which would further the spread of weeds and increase the risk of wild fire. Proposed reclamation activities following the race, annual weed treatments, and restrictions on timing and extent of future OHV activities would reduce these effects.

Cultural Resources: Although the event would not likely affect historically significant cultural properties, the event could negatively affect Native American resource values in the project area.

Alternative 2 (Reject Special Recreation Permit Application): If BLM does not authorize the SRP application, the motorcycle event would still occur, but be rerouted around BLM onto private land. There would be potential for the activity participants to trespass onto BLM lands and to incur damage to resources. Overtime, unregulated use in the expected numbers proposed in the motorcycle race could result in OHV trails over an extended area.

Other Considerations

Socio-Economic: The increased traffic in the area, possible traffic congestion, and noise of the event could inconvenience local residents for the 2-day duration of the event. This would most likely only affect residents nearest the travel routes to the course. Other recreational users of this area would likely avoid the event area and relocate to another area during the event.

Portions of the trail are adjacent to electrical power lines that are very low (15-feet off the ground), which could present a potential safety hazard for event participants.

Economically, the motorcycle event would provide revenue for various businesses in the surrounding communities, including gasoline service stations, motels, and grocery stores.

Environmental Justice: There would be no disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority or low-income populations as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

Other Factors: The following resources were considered in this analysis, but determined to be either not present or not expected to be impacted: prime or unique farmlands, special areas, wilderness, wastes (hazardous or solid), floodplain and wild and scenic rivers. The proposed action would not adversely impact energy and minerals resources or their development.

Cumulative Effects

The success of these events and other similar events in this area could result in increasing numbers of OHV enthusiasts over time. Unregulated casual use and impacts would continue to occur on this portion of BLM land and could increase use on other BLM parcels in the area as well. Overall motorized use in this area would increase over time as other areas are closed to OHV use or restricted due to resource conflicts. Use would also increase due to this area's proximity to growing populated areas of Ellensburg, Yakima and other nearby communities. BLM parcels in the area should be monitored regularly to determine if resource damage is occurring, and if so, developing an activity/recreation management plan would be appropriate.

Coordination with other Agencies, Groups and Individuals

The EA was prepared using an interdisciplinary team, with input from the following resource specialists:

- Kevin Kane - Botanist- Wenatchee Resource Area
- Richard Bailey - Archaeologist, Spokane District
- Diane Priebe - Recreation Planner, Wenatchee Resource Area
- Neal Hedges - Wildlife Biologist, Wenatchee Resource Area
- John Musser - Wildlife Biologist, Wenatchee Resource Area
- Kathy Helm - Planning and Environmental Coordinator, Spokane District
- Dana Peterson - Range Management Specialist, Wenatchee Resource Area

Consultation:

Colville Confederated Tribes

Yakama Indian Nation

Washington Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation