

OPTIONAL EA, FONSI and DR FORM

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

EA NUMBER: OR-030-00-016

BLM Office: **Vale District, Jordan Resource Area**

Proposed Action Title/Type: **Birch Creek Ranch Water Storage Tank Replacement**

Location of Proposed Action: **T.27S., R.43 E., Sec. 18 E½**

Applicant (if any): N/A

Conformance With Applicable Land Use Plan

This proposed action is subject to the following land use plan:

NAME OF PLAN

DATE APPROVED

Main, West Little and North Fork Owyhee National Wild and Scenic Rivers Management Plan and Environmental Assessment

September 1993

This plan has been reviewed to determine if the proposed action conforms with the land use plan terms and conditions as required by CFR 1610.5.

REMARKS: The Vale BLM District manages the Birch Creek and Morrison Ranches as historic cultural properties bordering the Owyhee Wild and Scenic River in southeast Oregon. Isolated from normal rural/urban conveniences such as running water, electricity, and telephone lines, the ranch is dependent upon well-water, solar power and diesel generators, and satellite phone or radio communications for maintenance of caretaker living quarters approaching normal livability standards.

NEED FOR PROPOSED ACTION: The existing Birch Creek Ranch water tank is an aging, metal tank with a petroleum-based lining intended to act as a rust inhibitor. Due to natural aging processes, this lining appears to be sloughing off and contaminating the water in the tank. Exposed portions of the metal tank are also being decomposed by iron bacteria. This situation is unacceptable since the tank is intended to serve as a source of potable water for the caretaker's cabin at the Birch Creek Historic Ranch. The tank replacement project would remove this out-dated structure and replace it with two adjacent plastic tanks in order to increase storage capacity and eliminate water contamination within the tanks.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION: The proposed tank replacement project would involve driving a backhoe approximately 200 feet up a 10-20% slope, excavating and lifting out the existing metal tank, excavating an additional 15 feet length along an existing old road cut-bank, and placing the two plastic tanks underground and in-line with each other. The new tanks would be backfilled and connected to the existing buried pipeline which connects downslope to the caretaker's house. All excavating would occur within the bounds of an existing cutbank which served at one time as a road grade. Travel of the backhoe from the current Birch Creek Ranch road, uphill to the water tank site would cross a previously disturbed slope now covered with sagebrush and a few common forb and grass species. A field exam by BLM resource specialists revealed no obvious cultural sites/artifacts, and no sign of threatened or endangered flora or fauna.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS:

Critical Element	Affected	
	Yes	No
Air Quality	x	
ACECs		x
Cultural Resources		x
Farmlands, Prime/Unique		x
Floodplains		x
Nat. Amer. Rel. Concerns		x

Critical Element	Affected	
	Yes	No
T&E Species		x
Wastes, Hazardous/Solid		x
Water Quality		x
Wetlands/Riparian Zones		x
Wild & Scenic Rivers	x	
Wilderness		x

DESCRIPTION OF IMPACTS: Cross-country travel of the backhoe would result in noticeable damage to low-lying vegetation for the width of the machine and over a distance of about 200 feet. Minor soil disturbance would also occur along this path, from tire action upon the ground. Backhoe operations would create some noise and dust intrusions for the few hours required to complete the excavation and tank replacement. A brief and minor increase in stream turbidity may result from soil particles traveling downslope into Birch Creek drainage during excavation and backfilling operations.

DESCRIPTION OF MITIGATION MEASURES AND RESIDUAL IMPACTS: An existing irrigation ditch located at mid-slope between the water tank and the Birch Creek channel should intercept most soil particles sliding downhill during earth-moving activities. The existing profile of the cut-bank in which the tank is buried also allows a fair amount of level or nearly level ground upon which soil can be piled during excavation. BLM staff conducting the tank replacement project would be instructed to stop work and contact the Jordan Archeologist if buried cultural materials are encountered. Operations would also be restricted to ensure adequate protection from inadvertent wildfire ignition, either by waiting for current fire restrictions to be lifted, or by maintaining adequate tools, personnel and water sources to immediately extinguish ignitions. Cross-country travel of the backhoe would be routed to minimize disturbance to vegetation and soil resources as much as possible.

Persons/Agencies Consulted: Vern Pritchard, Vale BLM District Engineer
Marnie Wilson, Jordan Resource Area Archeologist
Jean Findley, Vale BLM T&E Species Specialist

Preparer: Tom Christensen, Jordan Resource Area Outdoor Recreation Planner
Date: August 22, 2000

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I have reviewed this environmental assessment including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant environmental impacts. I have determined that the proposed action with the mitigation measures described below 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.

Authorized Official: _____
(Signature)

Date: _____

DECISION RECORD

It is my decision to implement the proposal as described in EA #OR-030-00-016 with the mitigation measures identified below.

MITIGATION MEASURES/REMARKS:

Restrict project activities to minimize chances for wildfire ignition. Halt activities and contact BLM archeologist if cultural materials are unearthed. Direct upslope travel of backhoe to minimize damage and disturbance to existing vegetation and soil surface.

Authorized Official: _____
(Signature)

Date: _____