

OPTIONAL EA, FONSI and DR FORM

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

EA NUMBER: OR-030-02-34

BLM Office: Vale District, Jordan Resource Area

Proposed Action Title/Type: **Morrison Ranch Well Power Generator Installation**

Location of Proposed Action: **T.27S., R.43E., Sec. 7 SE 1/4**

Applicant (if any): N/A

Conformance With Applicable Land Use Plan-

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

NAME OF PLAN

DATE APPROVED

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

September 1993
March 1983

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 living standards. While the Birch Creek facility currently has a well for potable water, there has been no well or other potable source at the Morrison facility, nearly one mile downriver from Birch Creek, until the recent (early 2002) drilling of one. Now that there is a well available at Morrison, a suitable power source is needed to power an electric pump. In addition, the generator could be used to power small electrical equipment, provide emergency power if needed, augment fire protection capability, and possibly power lights inside the living quarters.

NEED FOR PROPOSED ACTION: The Morrison Ranch property is open year-round to the general public (as road conditions permit) and receives several hundred visitors each year. Currently, BLM maintains several outbuildings at the ranch, including three that will eventually be open to the public as fee-based overnight lodging quarters. Even while those buildings are not currently available for habitation, there is continual demand for potable water for visitors' camping/day-use needs at Morrison Ranch. Due to distance between Birch Creek and Morrison Ranches, and the narrow and extremely rocky topography of that stretch of river canyon, any attempt to pipe potable water downstream from Birch Creek to Morrison would have been cost-prohibitive and would have required several hundred yards of trenching, rock-blasting, and disruption of the existing road access between the two ranches. Therefore, BLM contracted the drilling of a separate water well at the Morrison Ranch in early 2002. With a producing well in place, there is now a need to install a power source for the electric well pump.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION: The proposed project includes installing a propane-powered, liquid cooled generator mounted on a base within the confines of the Morrison Ranch tool shed. The tool shed is one of the original structures at the ranch, and is currently being used as a storage area, with the interior unavailable for public viewing. The building has a large sliding wooden door and a window on the east side, a small window (approximately 18" x 24") on the west side, and a lean-to on the north side. The lean-to extends approximately 14 feet to the west, leaving an additional 5 feet of the tool shed exposed. (See attached drawing and photos.)

The generator would provide power to an electric pump that supplies potable water to nearby living quarters. All of the electrical panels, boxes, conduit and propane lines/fittings would be attached to the inside walls of the tool shed building. The electric conduit would run along the inside of the building, under the building's shallow foundation, into a trench, and terminate at the new well. Once the trench is covered, the conduit outside of the building would not be visible. The propane gas line would be routed

in a similar manner, running under the foundation and through a trench to the existing propane tank. (For approximate locations, see the attached drawing and photos.) No conduit, electrical or gas components would be visible from outside the tool shed; however, some components of the generator system must vent to the exterior of the building and would be visible to visitors walking around the tool shed. These components are comprised of an intake fan, radiator exhaust ductwork, and emissions exhaust pipe. All feasible efforts would be made to conceal these components from view.

The air intake fan would be mounted in the window frame on the west side, retaining the existing framework. By utilizing wooden louvers to cover the window area, the fan should not be visible. The radiator exhaust ductwork would be routed through the north wall of the tool shed and terminate in the northwest corner, behind the tool shed. By constructing wooden louvers over this opening, the ductwork should also be hidden from view. The emissions exhaust pipe would be routed through the north wall of the tool shed, into the attached lean-to and then through the southwest wall of the lean-to, to the outside. By locating the pipe in the upper southwest corner of the lean-to, it should be hidden from view of the main road. The pipe would then terminate behind the lean-to. All components visible from the outside of the tool shed would be painted to match existing surroundings, or hidden by wooden louvers. The louvers would be constructed to match the surrounding building and building practices of the era, further aiding in blending all new components with the historic building.

By taking the above precautions, and continuing to shield the tool shed interior from public viewing, installing the power generator should not detract from the historic nature of the immediate surroundings. Passers-by would not be able to easily detect building modifications, and they would benefit from the ready availability of potable water and an emergency power source.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS:						
Critical Element	Affected			Critical Element	Affected	
	Yes	No			Yes	No
Air Quality		x		T&E Species		x
ACECs		x		Wastes, Hazardous/Solid		x
Cultural Resources	x			Water Quality		x
Farmlands, Prime/Unique		x		Wetlands/Riparian Zones		x
Floodplains		x		Wild & Scenic Rivers	x	
Invasive, Nonnative Species		x		Environmental Justice		x
Nat. Amer. Rel. Concerns		x		Wilderness		x

DESCRIPTION OF IMPACTS:

The proposed project would directly impact the Morrison Ranch tool shed, which is one of the contributing features of the designated historic landscape. The tool shed’s structural integrity would not be compromised, but there would be a slight modification of the visual features of the building.

The proposed project would occur within the federally-designated Wild and Scenic River corridor for the Owyhee River. However, the immediate surrounding area already contains numerous outbuildings, fencelines, fuel storage tanks, irrigation lines and risers, etc., which impact outstandingly remarkable values for which the river was designated. Post-construction phase for this project will leave only minor visual evidence of modern man-made structures or facilities. Siting and design features of the project have been planned to blend in with existing structures and disturbance as much as possible.

During the installation phase of the generator project, there would be short-term disruption to visitors’ peace and solitude due to typical construction noises. These impacts should only last for a day or two.

Over the longer term, there would be brief generator noise whenever it runs. This disruption would be controlled by the onsite ranch caretaker, and would be typically limited to a few minutes during any given day. Length of time for the generator to run would be directly dependent upon well-water needs at the Morrison facilities. When there are no water demands for sinks, toilets, etc., there would be no need to run the generator.

Adverse impacts to wildlife habitat and wildlife habitat security would be very localized during the installation and operating phases of this action. These impacts would not be expected to require mitigation actions beyond those described.

Bald eagles wintering in the vicinity of the proposed action would not be affected by the additional disturbance introduced to the Birch Creek property. As such, there will be no need to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act.

There would be no adverse affects to the historic properties. Mitigation measures proposed below would maintain the structural integrity and associated visual aesthetics.

Positive impacts include providing a reliable and convenient power source and a potable water system for the visiting public at the Morrison Ranch. Providing potable water could stimulate a slight increase in visitation, but likely not of sufficient magnitude to create adverse effects on the Wild and Scenic River corridor or its outstandingly remarkable values (recreation, scenic, wildlife, geologic, and cultural).

DESCRIPTION OF MITIGATION MEASURES AND RESIDUAL IMPACTS:

Careful design and siting of the generator installation will minimize visual impacts and structural modifications to the historic tool shed. Noise associated with periodic use of the generator will be minimized by prudent and judicious operations by the site caretaker. Since site operations at the Birch Creek and Morrison Ranches typically involve noise from mowers, tractors, weed-trimmers, chainsaws, irrigation sprinklers, etc., the additional infrequent generator noise should create minimal impacts to visitor experiences.

PERSONS/AGENCIES CONSULTED: BLM, Jordan Resource Area, Malheur Resource Area, and Vale District staffs; State Historic Preservation Office

Preparer(s): Tom Christensen, Outdoor Recreation Planner
Date: September 18, 2002

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.

Mitigation measures/Remarks:

The proposed action contains measures to offset impacts. The mitigation measures have been formulated into stipulations and incorporated by reference into this decision.

Authorized Official: s/ Jerry Taylor, Jordan Resource Area Manager
(Signature)

Date: October 7, 2002

DECISION RECORD

It is my decision to implement the proposal as described in EA #OR-030-02-034 with the mitigation measures identified below.

MITIGATION MEASURES/REMARKS:

Design features (louvered windows, similar wood framing techniques and colors, etc.) and careful siting of associated project components will minimize visual impacts and structural modifications to the historic tool shed. Noise impacts will be minimized by prudent and judicious generator operations by the historic site caretaker, once installation is complete and functional.

Authorized Official: s/Jerry Taylor, Jordan Resource Area Manager Date: November 15, 2002
(Signature)