

HIGHWAY 395 FENCE
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
EA OR-025-01-03

Bureau of Land Management
Burns District Office
HC 74-12533 Hwy 20 West
Hines, OR 97738

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I. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSAL

This project is located approximately 4 miles south of the junction of U.S. Highway 395 and U.S. Highway 20 (Riley, Oregon) and about 25 miles west of Burns, Oregon. There is currently no fence on the west side of the South Pasture of the Cluster Allotment #7017 which is paralleled by U.S. Highway 395. Cattle authorized to graze in the South Pasture occasionally get on the highway causing a public safety concern.

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVE

A. Description of the Proposed Action

The proposed action is to construct 3.5 miles of 3-strand wire fence along the east side of Highway 395, just outside the highway right-of-way (200 feet from center line in T. 24 S., R. 27 E., Section 18, and 50 feet from center line in T. 24 S., R. 26 E., Sections 24, 25, and 26 and T. 24 S., R. 27 E., Section 19). The fence would be constructed of steel posts and wire. It would have a smooth wire 16 to 18 inches aboveground surface on the bottom then two strands of barbed wire on top, with the top wire being no more than 42 inches from ground surface and a spacing of 12 inches between the top and middle wires. This type of fence is the standard for deer and antelope range. No blading of the soil surface would be done along the proposed fenceline, but brush may be removed by hand.

Cultural and botanical inventories would be completed prior to fence construction. It is expected that no cultural or botanical resources would be negatively affected by constructing the fence.

No changes to the grazing system or livestock kind or numbers would result from the construction of the fence. Utilization patterns in the pasture would remain the same as before the project was constructed. The only change would be that public safety is increased as livestock are restricted from the highway corridor.

B. Alternative (No Action Alternative)

The no action alternative would leave the highway corridor unfenced leaving with it the possibility of livestock-vehicle collisions. There would be no improvement to public safety.

III. DESCRIPTION OF THE AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

This project would be located approximately 25 miles west of Burns, Oregon, and approximately 4 miles south of the town of Riley, Oregon. The project would be constructed along 3.5 miles of U.S. Highway 395.

The following resources are not found in the project area: threatened or endangered species, riparian, wilderness, Wild and Scenic Rivers, floodplains and prime or unique farmlands.

The vegetation on the site is native to the area and is a mixture of big sagebrush, low sagebrush, and an occasional juniper as the overstory with bluebunch wheatgrass, Indian ricegrass, Thurber needlegrass, and bottlebrush squirreltail grass in the understory. There are no known Special Status plant sites in the project area.

Soils are primarily shallow, poorly drained loams with some of the lower elevation soils being deep, well-drained sandy loams.

Animals that may be found on the site include mule deer, pronghorn antelope, coyote, black-tailed jackrabbit, badger, and various reptiles to mention a few.

The proposed project is within a Visual Resource Management Class II and III where projects of this type are allowed to be constructed.

The site is within the Cluster grazing allotment #7017 where management is directed under the Cluster Allotment Management Plan. Cattle are authorized to use the South Pasture in the spring and summer every other year. The remaining years the pasture is rested from livestock use.

No changes to access or recreation would occur if the proposed fence is constructed.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The following critical elements of the human environment are not present or will not be affected by the proposed action or alternative: Air quality, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, prime or unique farmlands, floodplains, Threatened or Endangered species, wastes (hazardous or solid), water quality (drinking or ground), wetlands or riparian zones, Wild and Scenic Rivers or Wilderness.

A. Proposed Action

1. Anticipated Impacts

Some short-term soil surface and vegetation disturbances would occur during the actual construction of the proposed fence. Activities such as driving and walking along the fenceline and manual removal of some sagebrush to allow for building the fence during construction of the project would occur. These impacts are expected to be minimal and the area should fully recover in a relatively short period of time.

The possibility of the introduction of noxious weeds to the construction site is considered to be minimal to none. Soil and vegetation disturbance would be held to the minimum necessary for the project to be completed.

After initial construction of the fence, livestock may trail along the new fenceline. Presently, few livestock spend significant time along the highway so impacts are expected to be minimal.

Mule deer and pronghorn antelope movements through the area may be hindered shortly after construction of the fence. Design features allowing for safe mule deer and pronghorn antelope movement would be incorporated into the design features of the project to minimize the impact.

Public safety would be improved along 3.5 miles of U.S. Highway 395 following fence construction. Livestock would no longer have access to the highway while authorized to graze in the South Pasture of the Cluster Allotment.

Cultural resources would be avoided or mitigated by the proposed action.

No impacts to minorities, American Indian groups or economically disadvantaged groups would occur (E.O. 12898).

2. Cumulative Impacts

There are no known cumulative impacts, either positive or negative, that would occur if the fence is constructed.

B. Alternative (No Action Alternative)

1. Anticipated Impacts

The no action alternative would leave the area in its present condition. Livestock would continue to have access to the highway corridor and would continue to be a public safety concern.

2. Cumulative Impacts

There are no known cumulative impacts, either positive or negative, that would occur if the fence was not constructed.

V. PERSONS AND AGENCIES CONSULTED

Bob deBraga (Denny Land and Livestock)
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Oregon Department of Transportation

VI. PARTICIPATING STAFF

Rudy Hefter, Supervisory Natural Resource Specialist
Brian McCabe, Archaeologist
Skip Renschler, Realty Specialist
Willie Street, Range Management Specialist
Fred Taylor, Wildlife Biologist
Nora Taylor, Botanist