

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

DECISION RECORD  
AND  
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
FOR  
CYCLE OREGON STEENS TOUR  
EA OR-027-01-035

INTRODUCTION:

The Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area (CMPA) was designated on October 30, 2000, through passage of the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Act of 2000 (Act). Prior to the passage of the Act, most of the affected public land was known as the Steens Mountain Recreation Lands. The Act also designated the Steens Mountain Wilderness. One of the purposes of the Act is to "maintain the cultural, economic, and social health of the Steens Mountain area in Harney County, Oregon" (Sec 1 (1) ). One of the objectives of the Act is to "promote grazing, recreation, historic and other uses that are sustainable" (Sec 102 (b) (1)).

The Steens Mountain Back Country Byway (Loop Road) is a focal point for much of the recreation use on Steens Mountain. Driving for pleasure, sightseeing, and nature study are activities most visitors enjoy along the Byway. Many visitors stop at the scenic overlooks near the top of the mountain. Four campgrounds are located adjacent to the road, and backpacking, horseback riding, and fishing activities occur in other areas of the mountain. Due to heavy snowfall in the winter months, recreation use is mainly concentrated during the spring, summer, and fall, except for some permitted winter activities.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTION:

The proposed action would allow Cycle Oregon to conduct an interpretive tour and self-guided hike on Steens Mountain for its participants. Tours would be conducted using 8 to 12 45-passenger buses, which would bring groups to the Kiger and East Rim Overlooks at scheduled times throughout September 11 and 12, 2001. Buses would park along the Loop Road rather than at the actual overlooks. Those participants wishing to hike would follow the existing road from the East Rim Overlook to the Steens Summit and back. The decision to be made is whether or not to allow this activity. The no action alternative is not to allow this activity.

## DECISION:

As a result of the environmental analysis presented in the Environmental Assessment (EA), it is my decision to approve the proposed action with associated mitigating measures. The rationale for the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) supports this decision. The proposed action, coupled with the mitigation measures detailed in the EA and FONSI, has led to my decision that all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm and to protect wilderness values have been adopted. The decision is consistent with the Andrews Management Framework Plan (MFP) (1982) and is issued under 43 CFR 8372. A cooperative agreement identifying specific cosponsorship responsibilities, consistent with this Decision Record, will also be implemented.

All resources have been evaluated for cumulative impacts. It has been determined that cumulative impacts would be negligible for all resources.

## FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts detailed in EA OR-027-01-035, I have determined that the impacts of the activity described in the proposed action, when coupled with the mitigation measures presented and detailed in the EA, are not significant. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

### Rationale:

The activities described in the proposed action, incorporated with the management constraints as described in the Wilderness Act, subsequent laws, and the Act, will, as best can be determined, prevent unnecessary and undue degradation of public land. The purpose and objective stated above would be met by allowing for the recreational opportunity and recognizing that the Cycle Oregon event brings an economic benefit to the county. Resources determined to be potentially impacted were analyzed in the EA specific to the proposed action. Among the latter resources were Air Quality, Wilderness, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Special Status Species—Flora, Recreation, Vegetation, Visual Resources, Wildlife, and Soils. Impacts to these resources are considered nonsignificant (based on the definition in 40 CFR 1508.27) for the following reasons:

**Air Quality:** While impacts to air quality could occur from vehicle dust and diesel fumes, this would be temporary in nature and would only last as long as the event.

**Wilderness:** Since the majority of the wilderness area would be viewed from the transportation route and most of the foot travel would take place outside of wilderness, there would be no significant impact to wilderness values. Facilities such as toilets would be temporary in nature and would be placed outside of wilderness. New social trails could be added from visitors dispersing into wilderness from the overlook areas, but information flyers given to participants, flagging of approved areas in which to walk, and monitoring of the activity by Cycle Oregon and BLM staff would mitigate these impacts. Short-term impacts to solitude could be experienced by other visitors. Opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation would continue.

**Areas of Critical Environmental Concern:** Since most of the proposed action takes place on existing trails and roads, there would be no significant impact to the relevant and important values for which the two ACECs within the affected area were established. As described in the attached EA, Cycle Oregon would restrict participants to certain areas. Information flyers given to participants, flagging of approved areas in which to walk, and monitoring of the activity by Cycle Oregon and BLM staff would mitigate impacts to scenic quality and special plant communities.

**Special Status Species–Flora:** Special Status plants exist in the areas affected by the proposed action. As described in the attached EA, Cycle Oregon would restrict participants to certain areas so as to avoid any rare or sensitive plant communities. Some trampling could still occur, but information flyers given to participants, flagging of approved areas in which to walk, allowing a maximum of 45 participants at each overlook, and monitoring of the activity by Cycle Oregon and BLM staff would mitigate these impacts.

**Recreation:** Impacts to recreation would be temporary in nature and would include congestion along portions of the Back Country Byway and possible displacement of visitors due to large groups at overlooks and along the existing roads. Hunters could be temporarily impacted if the large group caused deer, elk or bighorn sheep to change their normal patterns. However, the developed overlooks and the Back Country Byway are normally places where large numbers of visitors congregate, and displacement of animals is expected to be minimal.

**Vegetation:** Impacts to vegetation would mainly be restricted to areas around overlooks and immediately adjacent to the Byway from the East Rim Overlook to the Steens Summit. Most plants would be in the dormant stage, and the vegetation around Kiger and East Rim Overlooks are normally heavily impacted as a result of seasonal visitor use. Additional impacts could occur as a result of a large group of sightseers. These impacts are similar to those that would occur over time from regular visitor use, but would occur at a more rapid rate from this event. Information flyers given to participants, flagging of approved areas in which to walk, allowing a maximum of 45 participants at each overlook, and monitoring of the activity by Cycle Oregon and BLM staff would help to mitigate these impacts.

**Visual Resources:** The tour route falls within a VRM Class II area and is adjacent to a Class I area. In VRM Class II, the level of landscape change should be low and should not attract the attention of a casual observer. Impacts to visual resources would occur where portable toilets were located and where buses would park. These would be temporary in nature and would not permanently affect the visual resources.

**Wildlife:** Impacts to wildlife could consist of disruption of elk, deer, and bighorn sheep patterns due to the presence of a large group. As described in the attached EA, the developed overlooks are commonly visited by unrelated groups of people during the summer months, and deer, elk, and sheep may already be dispersed from hunting activities.

Soils: Soil disturbance from a large tour is likely to occur. These impacts are similar to those that would occur over time from regular visitor use, but would occur at a more rapid rate from this event. Information flyers given to participants, flagging of approved areas in which to walk, and monitoring of the activity by Cycle Oregon and BLM staff would help to mitigate these impacts.

#### Mitigation Measures/Monitoring:

Air Quality: Cycle Oregon would be required to water down the North Steens Mountain Back Country Byway to the road junction below the Kiger Overlook during the tour as necessary to prevent dust. Water would be obtained from the well at the Frenchglen Guard Station. Areas of particular concern that would be watered more frequently would be sections of road that pass near campgrounds. As proposed by Cycle Oregon, buses would not idle in parking lots. Buses would be required to not exceed a speed limit of 35 miles per hour below the Kiger Gorge turnoff and 25 miles per hour above that point.

Vegetation/Areas of Critical Environmental Concern/Special Status Species Flora/Soils: Cycle Oregon participants would be monitored during the event by tour coordinators and the BLM to prevent, as much as possible, creation of new trails at the overlooks. As per Cycle Oregon's proposal, participants would be briefed on the necessity of remaining on existing trails and avoiding sensitive areas. In addition to the toilets at Kiger Gorge, Cycle Oregon would place two toilets at the road junction below the East Rim and two toilets at the Wildhorse Lake Overlook parking area.

Recreation: Participants undertaking the hike to the Steens Summit/Wildhorse Lake Overlook area would be strongly encouraged to break into smaller walking groups to facilitate traffic flow and to prevent unnecessary off-road hiking. Buses would be required to park below the East Rim at the road junction and in the road right of way before the Kiger turnoff, not at the actual parking lots. BLM may adjust the bus schedule so that no more than three buses are parked at the East Rim Road junction at any time. Only one parked bus would be allowed at the Kiger Overlook junction at one time. Participants would not be allowed to hike down to Wildhorse Lake due to resource concerns from such a large group.

Monitoring: Activities would be monitored by tour leaders and by BLM staff to ensure that participants remain on existing trails and roads.

These decisions may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations contained in 43 CFR, Part 4 and the enclosed Form 1842-1. If an appeal is taken, your notice of appeal must be filed in this office (at the above address) within 30 days from receipt of this decision. The appellant has the burden of showing that the decision appealed from is in error.

If you wish to file a petition pursuant to regulation 43 CFR 4.21 (58 FR 4939, January 19,1993) or 43 CFR 2804.1 for a stay of the effectiveness of this decision during the time that your appeal is being reviewed by the Board, the petition for a stay must accompany your notice of appeal. A petition for a stay is required to show sufficient justification based on the standards listed below. Copies of the note of appeal and petition for a stay must also be submitted to each party named in this decision and to the Interior Board of Land Appeals and to the appropriate office of the Solicitor (see 43 CFR 4.413) at the same time the original documents are filed with this office. If you request a stay, you have the burden of proof to demonstrate a stay should be granted.

Standards for Obtaining a Stay

Except as otherwise provided by law or other pertinent regulation, a petition for a stay of a decision pending appeal shall show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

1. The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied;
2. The likelihood of the appellant's success of the merits;
3. The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted;
4. Whether or not the public interest favors granting the stay.

Signature on File

9/5/2001

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Miles R. Brown  
Andrews Resource Area Field Manager

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Date