FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Swamp Lake/Flagstaff Bench Well and Pipeline
EA-OR-010-2003-06

The Bureau of Land Management, Lakeview Resource Area, has analyzed a proposal and several alternatives to provide additional water sources in the Warner Lakes Allotment (#0523), Swamp Lake and Flagstaff Bench Pastures. The proposed action is considered the preferred alternative because it would provide reliable water during dry years. Other alternatives considered are either not economically feasible or would not meet management objectives.

The proposed project is in conformance with the goals and objectives of the following plans:
1) Warner Lakes Plan Amendment for Wetlands and Associated Uplands - Plan Amendment and Environmental Assessment for the Warner Lakes Management Framework Plan and Decision Record (1989)
2) Warner Wetlands Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) Management Plan and Decision Record (1990)
3) Warner Wetlands Allotment Management Plan (1990)
4) Warner Wetlands Habitat Management Plan (1990)
5) Recommended Versions of Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management (1997)
6) Integrated Noxious Weed Control Program EA#OR-013-03-01 (1994)
7) Proposed management direction in the Lakeview Proposed Resource Area Management Plan/ Final Environmental Impact Statement (2003)

The following resource values or issues either are not present in the project area or would not be significantly impacted by any of the alternatives considered: floodplains, water quality, threatened or endangered plants, fisheries, wilderness, visual quality, air quality, cultural and historic resources, paleontology, prime or unique farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, forests, land tenure, minerals or energy, wild horses, minority or low-income populations, or hazardous wastes. The potential impacts on other resource values/issues are discussed in the attached environmental assessment.

On the basis of the analysis contained in the attached EA and all other available information, it is my determination that none of the alternatives analyzed constitutes a major federal action that would adversely impact the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is unnecessary and will not be prepared.

Thomas E. Rasmussen, Manager
Lakeview Resource Area

8/11/03
Date

Attachment, as stated

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Swamp Lake Well/Pipeline
EA-OR-010-2003-06

I. INTRODUCTION

Purpose of and Need for Action

The Lakeview Resource Area in the Lakeview District is proposing to implement a water improvement project in the Warner Lakes grazing allotment (# 523). The Warner Lakes Allotment is located 15 miles northeast of Plush, Oregon (Map 1). The purpose of the Swamp Lake-Flagstaff Bench pipeline is to provide a reliable water source throughout the winter grazing period.

The only water source on public land in the Swamp Lake Pasture is a small playa that frequently dries up by the livestock are turned out in winter. In the Flagstaff Bench pasture, the water gap into Flagstaff Lake requires constant maintenance (due to lake movement from wet/dry conditions) to ensure cattle do not have access to the core wetland area of the Warner Wetlands ACEC. The core wetland area has been established to provide important nesting and migratory wetland wildlife habitat

A water well already exists in the center of the Warner Wetlands ACEC. The pipeline is needed to provide a reliable water source, reduce fence maintenance, and lower the chance of damage to the core wetland (exclusion) portion of the Warner Wetlands ACEC by preventing access by livestock seeking water.

Conformance with Land Use Plans, Laws, Regulation and Policy

This proposed action is in conformance with the following plans and environmental analyses:

1) Warner Lakes Plan Amendment for Wetlands and Associated Uplands - Plan Amendment and Environmental Assessment for the Warner Lakes Management Framework Plan and Decision Record (1989)
2) Warner Wetlands Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) Management Plan and Decision Record (1990)
3) Warner Wetlands Allotment Management Plan (1990)
4) Warner Wetlands Habitat Management Plan (1990)
5) Recommended Versions of Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management (1997)
6) Integrated Noxious Weed Control Program EA#OR-013-03-01 (1994)
7) Proposed management direction in the Lakeview Proposed Resource Area Management Plan/ Final Environmental Impact Statement (2003)

II. ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

Alternative A - New Pipeline and Water Troughs (Preferred Plan)

The existing well would be equipped with a pump, solar panels, a storage tank, and a generator. A pipeline would be constructed from the well to water troughs located in the Flagstaff Bench and Swamp Lake pastures of the Warner Lakes Allotment (#523; Map 1). The pipeline would be buried 3 feet to reduce the chance of freezing during the winter months. The pipeline to the Flagstaff Bench pasture would require crossing County Rd. 3-11 at T35S., R25E., Section 9 SW ¼. The project would impact an area 1/2 mile in length and 10 feet in width in the Flagstaff Bench and Swamp Lake pastures. Most of this area is adjacent to an existing fence line that has previously been disturbed. The placement of troughs in both pastures would impact an area of ca.200 sq. feet in each pasture. The permittee would be responsible for pipeline maintenance and trough replacement. An engineer for the BLM would design the system.

Alternative B - Haul Water to the Swamp Lake Pasture

This alternative would consist of placing tanks in the Swamp Lake pasture and allowing the permittee to haul water. Initial disturbance would include and area ca. 200 square feet. The troughs would be placed along the fence that parallels County Rd. 3-11, in the Swamp Lake pasture T35S., R25E., Section 8 NE/SE. Water for the Flagstaff Bench Pasture would be provided by continuing use of the water gap.

Alternative C - No Action

No improvements would be made at these sites. Management would continue under existing plans.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The Warner Wetlands area has rolling terrain, but little variability in elevation. It is a complex mosaic of lakes, channels, dunes, sloughs, and potholes. The elevation in the project area ranges from 4470 feet to 4611feet. Average annual precipitation is ca. 5.23 inches per year. Average monthly temperatures range from 31.62 in December and 70.04 in July. These figures are based on weather data collected at the Adel weather Station from 1983 through 2002. Although precipitation and temperature are recorded every hour, data gaps exist.

Use in the area is largely related to wildlife habitat, hunting, fishing and other forms of recreation. Livestock grazing is permitted in the area, although the total AUMs available were reduced as a result of the Warner Lakes ACEC management direction.

Wildlife

The areas where the proposed project would occur lie within the northwest portion of the Great Basin Region. Pronghorn antelope are year round residents with occasional mule deer presence. Various raptor species use the area year round and nests have been sighted on nearby Hart

Mountain. Sage grouse leks are known in two areas, and it is possible more are present but none are known from the project area. There is one known burrowing owl burrow. Other species associated with this area include small mammals, amphibians and reptiles common to the high-desert/shrub-steppe.

Vegetation

The shrub component of the native range includes greasewood (*Sarcobatus vermiculatus*) and low sagebrush (*Artemisia arbuscula*). The grass component includes: bottle brush squirreltail (*Sitanion hystrix*), saltgrass (*Distichlis stricta*), basin wildrye *(Elymus cinereus*) and Sandberg bluegrass (Poa secunda). Commonly found forbes include: Milkvetch (*Astragalus* spp.) and lupine (*Lupinus* spp.)

There are no known sites of special status plants in the vicinity of these projects. A special status plant survey was conducted and no plants were found.

Soils

The soils are generally shallow and rocky on the hills and ridges with shallow to moderately deep loams on the slopes and drainage bottoms.

Cultural and Historic Resources

A cultural resource survey was conducted in the summer of 2001 and no cultural resources were located.

Range/Grazing

The pastures included in this project area are tied to base property owned by the Nature Conservancy. Currently, temporary non-renewable (TNR) grazing is authorized annually and is being used to evaluate the change in grazing season to winter use and an increase from 88 to 304 AUMs. Year 2002 was the third year of TNR grazing. Permit changes would be implemented during the 2004 grazing season.

Weeds

Both white top (*Cardaria draba*) and salt cedar (*Tamarix ramosissima*) are present in the allotment, however neither species are present in the project area.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Introduction

The following resource values or issues either are not present in the project area or would not be significantly impacted by any of the alternatives considered: threatened or endangered plants, water quality, fisheries, wilderness, visual quality, air quality, cultural and historic resources, paleontology, prime or unique farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, forests, land tenure, minerals or energy, wild horses, minority or low-income populations, or hazardous wastes. These resource values/issues are not discussed further in this document.

Wildlife

Alternative A – Preferred Alternative

The addition of a reliable water source during the fall/winter months would not impact threatened, endangered or sensitive wildlife species. Small burrowing mammals would be affected during the installation of the pipeline if burrows exist where excavation occurs. The effect would be short term and minimal considering the small acreage in relation to the vast acreage of similar habitat in the Warner basin. Vegetative habitat would be impacted in and around the location of the new watering troughs.

Alternative B - Haul Water to the Swamp Lake Pasture

The effects would be similar to the preferred alternative, except the minor habitat disturbance associated with pipeline construction would not occur.

Alternative C - No Action

During low water years fence maintenance would increase in an effort to restrict livestock to authorized areas. Some livestock would continue to gain access into the core wetland area. Impacts may occur to wildlife habitat due to livestock grazing, however, any vegetation removed would have an opportunity to regrow in the spring prior to nesting by waterfowl and shore birds.

Vegetation

Alternative A - Preferred Alternative

Short- term impacts would occur in the area of excavation. These areas are expected to revegetate naturally over time. In the long-term, vegetation would be permanently removed in the immediate vicinity around the new water troughs due to livestock concentration. Across the pastures as a whole, the additional water sources would improve livestock distribution and decrease impacts to vegetation in vicinity of existing water sources. Livestock would be less likely to move out of the pastures into the core wetland area of the ACEC in search of water.

Alternative B- Haul Water to the Swamp Lake Pasture

Impacts would similar to the preferred alternative in the vicinity of the troughs and across the pastures as a whole.

Alternative C - No Action

Livestock would continue to move out of the Flagstaff Bench pasture into the core wetland portion of the ACEC in search of water during low water conditions in Flagstaff Lake. This would continue to impact vegetation within the core wetland area.

Soils

Alternative A - Preferred Alternative

Short-term impacts would occur to soils during construction. Construction would occur in the fall during dry soil conditions to reduce soil compaction. In the long-term, impacts would occur in the immediate vicinity of the water troughs due to livestock concentration, trampling, loss of vegetative cover, and compaction.

Alternative B - Haul Water to the Swamp Lake Pasture

Impacts would be similar to the preferred alternative, except the soil disturbance associated with pipeline construction would not occur.

Alternative C - No Action

Impacts would continue to occur in vicinity of existing water sources.

Range/Grazing

Alternative A- Preferred Alternative

The preferred alternative would provide additional water improving livestock distribution and

positively impacting vegetation in vicinity of existing water sources. Livestock would be less likely to move out of the pasture into the core wetland area of the ACEC in search of water. The livestock permittee could make full use of the permitted use for the two pastures. Fence maintenance needs may decrease over time.

Alternative B - Haul Water to the Swamp Lake Pasture

Constant attention would be necessary to insure water availability. Livestock stocking rates would be limited to the amount of water that could be hauled. Hauling water may not be economically feasible.

Alternative C - No Action

This alterative would not provide for a sustained livestock operation in years when no water is available.

Weeds

There would be no impacts under any of the alternatives because noxious weeds are not present in the project area. The two action alternatives could increase the risk of noxious weed invasion from outside areas from increased vehicle traffic and vegetation/soil disturbances during project implementation. Preventative measures (such as vehicle cleaning) would be employed during and after construction in accordance with the programmatic noxious weed control plan (1994). If any weeds were inadvertently introduced into the project area or found during future surveys, they would be treated in accordance with the weed plan.

V. CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Alternative A - Preferred Alternative

Impacts would occur during the construction phase and would include soil compaction from equipment. Additional impacts would occur around new water sources (troughs) in the form soil compaction and trampling of existing vegetation by livestock. As a secondary impact, areas disturbed by installation of the project would revegetate slowly because of prior disturbance through installation of an existing fence. There would be short- term indirect impacts to small burrowing mammals during project installation. Wildlife would benefit indirectly from water being available during drought conditions by not having to travel greater distances to find water.

Alternative B - Haul Water to the Swamp Lake Pasture

Soil compaction and trampling of vegetation would occur around the temporary water troughs when utilized. Secondary impacts would occur from hauling water on the access road to the troughs. Wildlife would benefit indirectly from water being available during drought conditions by not having to travel greater distances to find water.

Alternative C - No Action:

No additional impacts are anticipated under this alternative.

VI. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

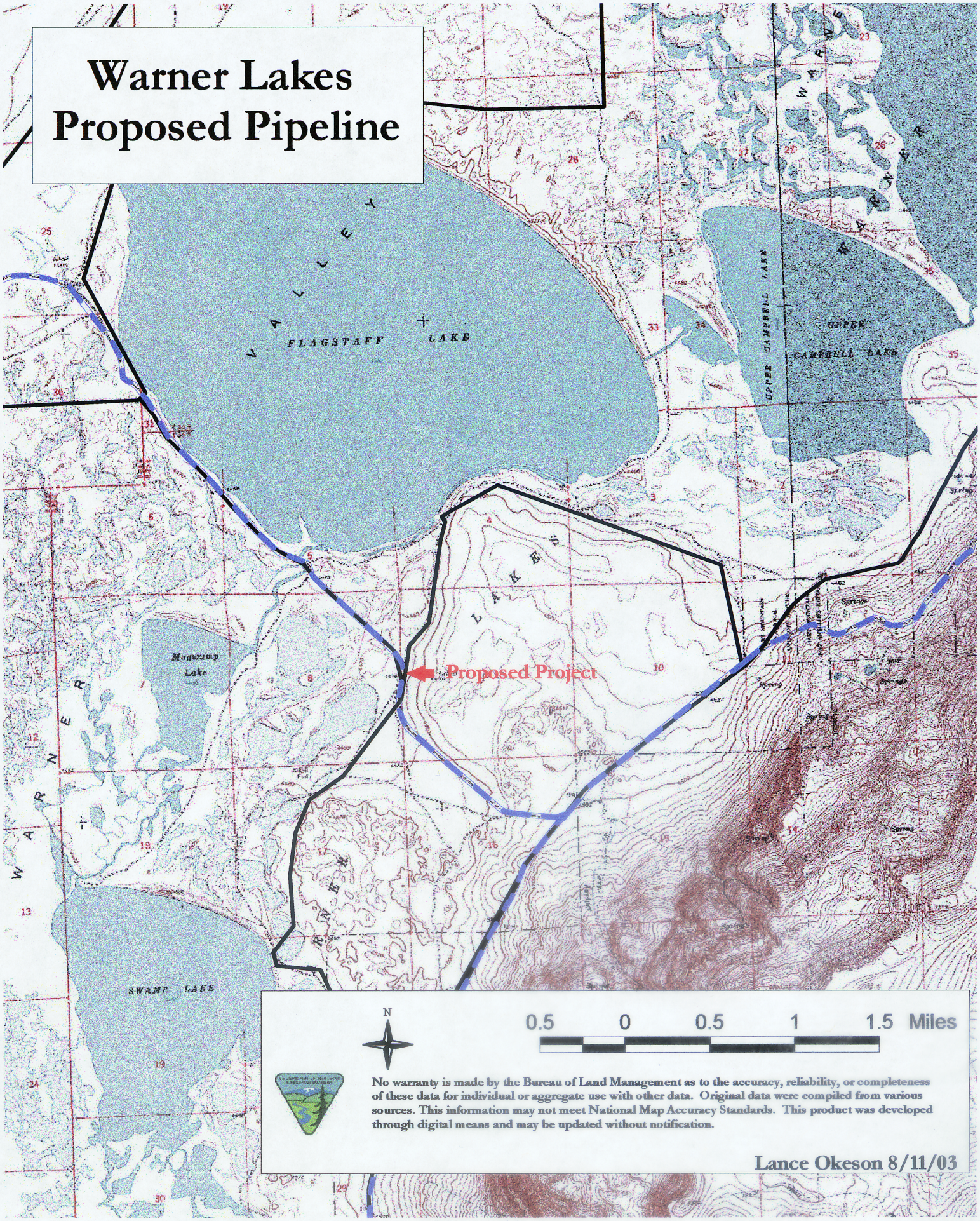
Participating Staff

Supervisory Rangeland Management Specialist	Robert Hopper
Supervisory Natural Resources Specialist	Ken Kestner
Range Management Specialist	Lance Okeson
Range Technician	Jayna Counts
Botanist	Lucile Housley
Wildlife Biologist	Vern Stofleth
Archaeologist	Bill Cannon
Weed Specialist	Erin McConnell
Environmental Planner	Paul Whitman

Persons, Groups, and Agencies that will be or have been consulted

Steve Butrick, Nature Conservancy
Danny Cron, permittee

Warner Lakes Proposed Pipeline



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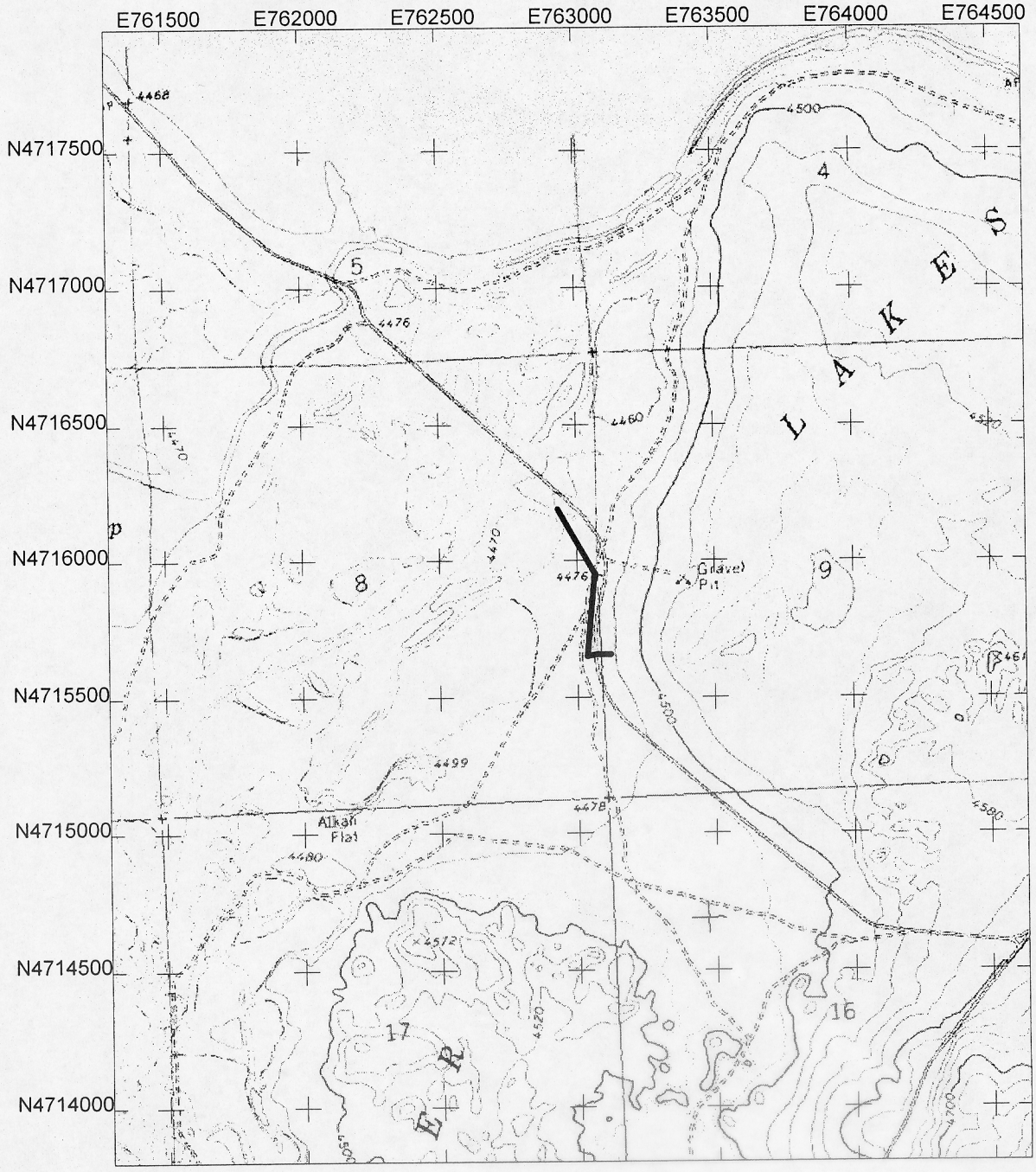
Lance Okeson 8/11/03



Swamp Pipeline

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