



BLM News Release

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BLM and Southeast Oregon Resource Advisory Council (RAC) Host Discussion Regarding Future Management of Birch Creek Ranch

The Vale District, Bureau of Land Management, is teaming up with a working subgroup of the Southeast Oregon Resource Advisory Council (RAC) to host a public open house regarding current and future management issues regarding the Birch Creek Historic District, located on the banks of the Main Owyhee Wild and Scenic River. The meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 25, from 7:00 PM until approximately 9:00 PM, at the Lions Den meeting hall in Jordan Valley, Oregon. BLM will present an orientation slide show to familiarize attendees with the Birch Creek and Morrison Ranches (collectively known as the Birch Creek Historic District), acquired by BLM in 1988. Following the slide show, BLM and the RAC sub-committee will discuss current management of the site, and invite the public to share ideas and suggestions regarding future use of the site facilities and grounds.

As a federally designated wild river, the Owyhee has a variety of “outstandingly remarkable values” (ORVs). BLM must “protect and enhance” these ORVs (which include recreation, scenic, geologic, cultural and wildlife values), as mandated by the Wild and Scenic Rivers (WSR) Act of 1968. The 300-acre ranch complex is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a “Historic Rural Landscape”. As such, the integrity of historic landscape elements such as certain buildings, corrals, irrigation ditches, etc., which are indicative of early Basque settlement, must be maintained and protected. Finally, the historic site lies between two Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). Under terms of BLM’s Interim Management Policy (IMP) for lands under wilderness review, the agency must manage these lands in a manner so as not to impair the suitability of such areas for preservation as wilderness.

Vale BLM currently manages the Birch Creek properties according to guidelines contained primarily in three documents: 1) the Main, West Little and North Fork Owyhee National Wild and Scenic Rivers Management Plan; 2) the National Register of Historic Places listing for the Birch Creek Historic District; and 3) the Southeast Oregon Proposed Resource

Management Plan (SEORMP) and EIS. These plans address a variety of management actions covering several issues – e.g., road access, historic preservation, public rental of lodging facilities, grazing, development of restrooms and camping areas, etc. While the river plan and WSA, WSR and National Historic Preservation Act constraints preclude BLM from making major modifications to the Birch Creek site, there are opportunities for public input regarding such issues as: seasonal carrying capacity, overnight camping, day visits, use of facilities by service or educational institutions, renovation of historic structures, road maintenance, etc. For this reason, BLM and the RAC subcommittee hope to garner public comments at the Jordan Valley Lions Den the evening of February 25th. Any questions can be addressed to Tom Christensen, Vale District BLM, at 541-473-3144.

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