

**Odessa Craters Recreation Improvements  
EAOR135-EA-02-004  
Border Resource Area, Spokane District**

**Introduction**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposes recreational improvements at Cache and Odessa Craters, located within 5 miles north of the city of Odessa and some 80 miles west of Spokane (see map). The Cache and Odessa Craters are located on approximately **775** acres of public land in Lincoln County, Washington, within the Upper Crab Creek Management Area of the Border Resource Area, Spokane BLM District.

This area contains unique geological features representative of the lasting effects of ancient volcanic flows and ice-age cataclysmic flood events that created a landscape of exceptional natural beauty. The craters are composed of basalt and form circular features. Concentric rings radiating from the centers of the craters are common to these geologic structures. In three of the craters, small water bodies have formed in the central portion. With its close proximity to the city of Odessa and other BLM recreation sites, this unique geologic area can be easily accessed for recreation and educational purposes.

**Need for Proposed Action**

Presently, there is a motorized access trail to Cache Crater. This access trail is located off a blind curve along State Highway 21, posing a public safety risk to visitors. In the past, trash dumping and trespass onto private land has occurred off this access trail. Access to the other craters is limited due to the current size, location, and visibility of the pullouts. There is one gravel pullout along the north side of Coffeepot Road that provides foot access to Wild Garden Crater only. Wetlands and small seasonal tributaries into Lake Creek limit foot access to the other craters on this parcel (Amphitheater and Rock Rose). There are currently no established trails leading to the craters. Cache Crater and the Odessa Craters continue to have low public use, due to lack of trails, parking areas, and directional signing.

Improved parking areas are needed to increase available parking and to provide safe turn around areas off Highway 21. Signs would increase public awareness and encourage stewardship. Improved trail access would improve opportunities for hiking and interpretive education, as well as provide wheelchair access into a scenic area.

**Description of the Alternatives**

Two alternatives were considered: Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) and Alternative 2 (No Action). A description of each alternative is provided below.

**Alternative 1 (Proposed Action):** The BLM proposes to construct two parking areas (each with six to eight car capacity), construct or install recreational improvements or safety barriers, develop interpretive materials, post or install interpretive material and information signing, and sign a total of 1.7 miles of non-motorized trails at two separate sites in the Odessa Craters area (see map).

The terrain leading to Cache Crater makes this site suitable for handicapped access. A barrier-free trail, totaling about 0.2 miles, would be constructed from the parking area to the western edge of Cache Crater. A rock wall would be constructed at Cache Crater overlook to discourage visitors from going beyond this point. One bench would be installed alongside the trail approximately 50 feet north of, and overlooking Cache Crater. Interpretive signs highlighting the area's natural resources would be installed near the crater in the future. A pole fence with an accessible pass area would be constructed around the perimeter of the west parking area. The current motorized access trail to Cache Crater would be fenced, closed, and revegetated. All construction and sign installation at this site would follow guidelines for accessibility according to the American Disabilities Act and meet BLM safety standards.

A 1.5-mile non-motorized primitive loop trail, would begin at the east parking area and lead through Rock Rose, Wild Garden, and Amphitheater Craters. Fiberglass posts with "Trail" stickers would be installed intermittently to mark the trail route. Some trail clearing could be completed to make this primitive foot trail more visible. The wire fence surrounding the east side parking area would be reconstructed and a pass gate with spring-loaded hinges would be installed. All construction and sign installation at this site would meet BLM safety standards.

### Project Design Features

Appropriate resource inventories (including cultural, botanical and wildlife) will be conducted prior to implementing specific projects. The installation of signs, rock wall, and bench along the rim of Cache (Amy's) Crater will be coordinated with the BLM District Archaeologist.

If historically significant cultural properties cannot be avoided, consultation will be conducted with the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, and in some cases the Advisory Council of Historic Preservation. If cultural materials are inadvertently discovered during implementation of the project, work in the area of these materials will be stopped and the District Archaeologist and affected tribes will be notified for appropriate action.

If any wildlife species that are sensitive to noise or disturbances are found, project activities would be modified to avoid disturbance.

The trail will be routed to avoid special status plant species.

To mitigate for noxious weeds, disturbed ground will be seeded with an appropriate seed mix and monitored for noxious weed invasion and treated as needed.

**Alternative 2 (No Action):** The Odessa Craters area would remain in its current condition.

### **Affected Environment and Environmental Impacts**

#### ***Soils***

The primary soil at the proposed recreation site is Roloff-Bakeoven-Rock outcrop complex, 0 to 15 percent slopes. This soil complex is moderately deep to very shallow and well drained. It has moderate to moderately slow permeability, low to very low available water capacity, slow to rapid runoff and slight to high erosion hazard.

Impacts from Alternative 1: Some soil compaction would occur with trail construction, with subsequent reduction of soil productivity and plant vigor. These effects would create the desired condition for maintaining a recreational trail. Closing and revegetating the presently existing motorized access trails would improve soil stability and productivity in those areas.

Impacts from Alternative 2: Disturbance and subsequent loss of soil productivity and plant vigor would continue on existing motorized access roads.

### **Water Resources**

Several shallow wetlands and wet meadows are within the project area.

Impacts from Alternative 1: No water resources would be affected by implementing the Proposed Action.

Impacts from Alternative 2: No impacts are expected.

### **Vegetation**

Several shrub-steppe communities occur within the project area. Big sagebrush/Idaho fescue and big sagebrush/bluebunch wheatgrass are the most common. Shallow rocky soils support a stiff sagebrush/Sandberg's bluegrass community. Minor plant communities include threetip sagebrush/Idaho fescue on north-facing slopes with moderate soil depth, and northern buckwheat/Thurber's needlegrass on south-facing gravelly slopes. Uplands are generally in good condition; soil crusts and a diversity of forb species are present. Several species of cultural significance to Native American tribes are present, including serviceberry, choke cherry, golden currant, wax currant, rose, bitterroot, yampah, Canby's lomatium or "white camas," Coeur d'Alene lomatium, and bigseed lomatium.

*Invasive Non-Native Species Including Noxious Weeds:* Scattered noxious weed species (diffuse knapweed and Canada thistle) are known to occupy the proposed project area. Noxious weed control including herbicide and mechanical/manual treatments have been analyzed and approved for the proposed project area in Spokane District Noxious Weed Control Environmental Assessments Nos. 93-OR-130-764482 (93-10) and 94-OR-130-764534 (94-23). Existing weed populations are small and manageable, and in-house weed treatments are ongoing.

*Special Status Species:* No Federally listed or proposed plant species occur within the project area. One Bureau Sensitive species, Washington polemonium (*Polemonium pectinatum*), occurs near the Rock Rose crater.

Impacts from Alternative 1: Trail clearing and use would trample existing vegetation along the immediate location of the trails, but would have minimal effect on vegetation in the remainder of the project area. Vegetation on the trails could be replaced by non-native species, including weedy species, but ongoing weed control measures would minimize such effects. Trail development would make the area more accessible for such uses as root digging by native American groups. This could have impacts on local populations of culturally important plants, but the increase in accessible sites for root digging would be expected to spread the impacts more evenly and reduce the amount of impact on individual sites for these plant species.

Site disturbance in development and installation of the recreational improvements and foot traffic

related to increased recreational use could introduce and spread noxious weeds. However, placement of weed-block fabric and implementing present ongoing weed treatments would curtail weed populations

Impacts to Special Status species would be avoided by routing the trail away from the existing population of Washington polemonium.

Impacts from Alternative 2: Noxious weeds would continue to become established at their present rate. Populations would be controlled implementing present ongoing weed treatments. No additional impacts to vegetation would occur beyond those presently occurring from the current low amount of public use and the existing grazing lease.

### ***Wildlife***

No federally listed or proposed wildlife species occur within the project area. One Bureau Tracking Species, Merriam's shrew, has been documented to occur in the project area. Several Species of Concern (including burrowing owls, sage grouse, sage thrasher, Swainson's hawk, Ferruginous hawk, and white-tailed jackrabbit) have been documented to occur within 5 miles of the project area.

Impacts from Alternative 1: Concentrating visitors along the trail may potentially cause wildlife to avoid the immediate vicinity of the trail, yet use of a trail would alleviate potential impacts or disturbance from dispersed recreational activity currently occurring in the area. The low amount of impacts associated with the project would likely not affect dispersal behavior, breeding or nesting activity for the wildlife using this area.

Impacts from Alternative 2: No impacts to wildlife beyond those currently resulting from the low amount of dispersed recreational activity would occur.

### ***Recreation***

Existing improvements include an approximately 0.25 mile motorized access trail for Cache Crater located off a blind curve along Highway 21 (which presents a safety hazard), a graveled pullout with a pass gate that provides parking for two vehicles along the north side of Coffeepot Road.

Odessa Craters currently has low public use due to lack of trails, parking areas, and directional signing. The primary recreation uses in this area are occasional hunting and hiking.

Impacts from Alternative 1: Installing these improvements would improve public safety and access into the area. Signs would increase public awareness and encourage stewardship. Improved trail access would promote hiking, education, and wheelchair access into a scenic area.

Impacts from Alternative 2: Under this alternative, the vehicle access to Cache Crater would remain a potential safety hazard. Trash dumping and trespass onto private land off this access trail could also continue to occur. Access to Odessa Craters would remain unimproved. The Odessa Craters area would continue to have low public use due to lack of trails, parking areas, and directional signing.

### ***Cultural and Paleontological Resources***

The project is located in a border area between lands traditionally used by Spokane peoples and those used by the Columbia or Sinkiuse groups. Use of the nearby Odessa area by Sanpoil people has also been recorded. These peoples, like other Columbia Plateau groups employed a settlement and subsistence pattern characterized by residence in semipermanent houses during the winter, and travel to various resource procurement areas in order to take advantage of anadromous fish runs and the seasonal availability of such staple foods as roots, berries, and game. A native trail passing down the nearby Lake Creek valley was noted by surveyors in the 1870s. The dry lithosols of this area produce many edible roots still gathered by native people in the spring. Euro-American settlement in the area began during the 1870s with the advent of free-range cattle ranching, but settlement was sparse until the 1890s when railroad connections with the east and middle West were completed. This brought an influx of new settlers and provided transportation to markets for their crops. This encouraged dry land wheat farming and the development of the present land use and settlement pattern.

There is one known rock feature site in the project area. A Class III Cultural Resources survey of the proposed project area conducted in May of 2000 did not locate any previously unknown cultural sites in the project area (Cultural Resources Survey Report 130000201). There are no known paleontological resources in this area. The geological character of the area as part of the Channeled Scablands, consisting largely of bare or nearly basalt bedrock, makes the presence of paleontological resources unlikely.

*Impacts from Alternative 1:* Increased public access to the area immediately surrounding Cache (Amy's) Crater may result in disturbance of the known rock feature located there.

*Impacts from Alternative 2:* This alternative would have no effect on the known cultural site located in the project area and would not disturb possible subsurface material. Effects on both cultural and paleontological resources would be unchanged from existing conditions.

### ***Socio-economic***

#### *Impacts from Alternative 1 (Proposed Action)*

The proposed improvements could increase visitation into the city of Odessa. The city of Odessa's Economic Development Commission would promote this trail to encourage recreational users to the area.

#### *Impacts from Alternative 2 (No Action)*

Visitation to the Odessa area may not increase.

### ***Other Resource Values Considered in the Analysis***

*Grazing Use:* There is an active grazing allotment (lease 360563) for the area surrounding the Odessa Craters. The area surrounding Cache Crater is currently in non-use status.

Under Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) installing gates with spring-loading features would prevent gates from being inadvertently left open, maintaining the capability to manage livestock use on this allotment. Under Alternative 2, there would be no impact with grazing management.

Environmental Justice: There would be no disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority or low-income populations as a result of implementing the Proposed Alternative. Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) would provide improved access to the Odessa and Cache Craters area. This action would also benefit recreationists with physical limitations by providing wheelchair access for viewing unique geological features, wildlife, and wildflowers at Cache Crater.

Alternative 2 (No Action), however, would not provide disabled access at the Cache Crater recreation site.

Energy and Mineral Resources: Neither alternative would have any adverse impacts on present or future development of energy and mineral resources.

#### Other Elements Considered

- Air quality
- Wild and scenic rivers
- Prime/unique farmlands
- Floodplain
- Wastes (Hazardous or Solid)
- Special area designations (including Areas of Critical Environmental Concern)
- Wilderness

Air quality and/or floodplain would not be affected, and none of the other elements listed above occur on the allotment.

#### ***Cumulative Impacts***

Impacts from Alternative 1: The proposed improvements could attract higher numbers of hikers into this area.

Impacts from Alternative 2: Vehicle access to Cache Crater would remain a potential safety hazard. Trash dumping and vehicle trespass onto private land off this access trail may also occur.

#### **Coordination with Other Agencies, Groups and Individuals**

The proposed project was coordinated with the following BLM specialists on the Spokane Interdisciplinary Team:

- Barb Benner, Botanist, Border Resource Area
- Rich Bailey, District Archaeologist, Spokane District
- Madilane Perry, Archaeologist, Spokane District
- Kathy Helm, District Planner & Environmental Coordinator, Spokane District
- Richard McComas, Natural Resource Specialist, Border Resource Area
- Robert Troiano, District Weed Specialist, Spokane District
- Joyce L. Whitney, Wildlife Biologist, Border Resource Area

The proposed project was coordinated with the following Washington State Department of Transportation (DOT) specialists.

- Bob Hopkins - Access Permits
- Dave Burkey - Directional Signs

**Other Contacts**

- Representatives from the City of Odessa's Public Development Authority.

**Consultation**

In an attempt to identify traditional cultural properties, sacred sites, or other areas of tribal concern within the project area, the BLM initiated consultation with the Colville Confederated Tribes and the Spokane Tribe of Indians through letters dated March 27, 2000. The Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation and the Lincoln County Historical Society were also notified of the proposed action through letters of the same date

In a follow-up telephone call to Colville Confederated Tribes' employee Guy Moura, Mr. Moura stated that the Colville Confederated Tribes recommended the project area be surveyed for cultural resources, burials, and religious sites prior to construction. The Spokane Tribe of Indians, in a letter dated April 4, 2000, said that their only concern was possible disturbance of traditional food plants during construction activities.