

USDI, Bureau of Land Management
Burns District
28910 Hwy 20 West
Hines, OR 97738

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
and
Decision Record
for

Pickett Rim Bighorn Sheep Transplant Environmental Assessment
OR-07-026-001

INTRODUCTION

The attached Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed to analyze the impacts of implementing the proposed action of releasing California bighorn sheep, a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Special Status Species (SSS), into identified historical habitat on Pickett Rim near Frenchglen, Oregon, about 60 miles south of Burns, Oregon.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) has proposed to release 30 California bighorn sheep into unoccupied historic habitat on Pickett Rim in support of "Oregon's Bighorn Sheep and Rocky Mountain Goat Management Plan" (2003) which lists this site as a high priority transplant area. Although there are other sites within Harney County identified for transplant of bighorn sheep, this is the only area at present, with no concerns of interactions between bighorn sheep and domestic sheep or access restrictions for monitoring of bighorn sheep movements.

The purpose of the release is to restore bighorn sheep into identified historic habitat.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTION

1. The proposed action calls for the ODFW to release approximately 30 California bighorn sheep onto Pickett Rim, just west of Frenchglen, Oregon. The bighorn sheep would be trapped out of the John Day River Basin and transported in horse trailers to the release site.
2. The proposed release site is T. 32 S., R. 32 E., Section 3. Alternative sites would be in T. 31 S., R. 32 E., Section 34, or T. 32 S., R. 32 E., Section 9. Vehicles pulling the trailers would use existing two-track roads to access the release site.
3. Alternative release sites would be used if access to the proposed release site is impassible due to weather and soil conditions.
4. The proposed project would occur in December 2006.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

This proposal is in conformance with the various Federal laws, regulations and executive orders and with the Andrews Management Unit Record of Decision/Resource Management Plan (RMP) (2005) on Page 34, Objective 5, which states: "Maintain, restore or improve bighorn sheep habitat and allow for maintenance or further expansion of bighorn sheep populations as defined by the ODFW in *Oregon's Bighorn Sheep Management Plan*." On Page 38, the decision states: "The BLM will coordinate with the ODFW on population management of bighorn sheep. Transplants, reintroductions and natural expansion of bighorn sheep are allowed." Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the EA and all other information, I have determined that the proposed action and alternatives analyzed do not constitute a major Federal action that would significantly impact the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not necessary and will not be prepared.

Rationale:

This determination is based on the following: The following critical elements of the human environment are not known to be present in the project area or affected by enacting either alternative: SSS - Flora, Flood Plains, Air Quality, Prime or Unique Farmlands, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Cultural Resources, American Indian Traditional Practices, Paleontological Resources, Hazardous Materials, Wilderness Study Areas, Wilderness, Migratory Birds, Water Quality, Wetlands/Riparian Zones, Noxious Weeds, or Environmental Justice concerns. All potentially impacted resources were analyzed in the EA specific to the proposed action. The following resources were analyzed in the EA: SSS (Fauna), Soils, Vegetation and Rangelands/Grazing Management. Impacts to these resources are considered nonsignificant (based on the definition of significance in 40 CFR 1508.27 for the following reasons:

Special Status Species- Fauna

Bighorn sheep would be restored to unoccupied habitat on Pickett Rim. Populations would be allowed to expand into suitable habitat along the rim. No other SSS would be affected by this alternative.

Vegetation

There would be some effect on existing vegetation as a result of vehicles and trailers turning around to leave the release site. During the first few months, vehicle tracks would be noticeable. After rain or snow has fallen, tracks would become unnoticeable. Vegetation that was run over would most likely respond favorably the following year.

Soils

There would be impacts to soils in the area of the release where vehicles would turn around to exit the site. Impacts would probably not be noticeable the following year. If soils are saturated at the time of the release, alternative sites would be used, and there would be no impacts to soils.

Rangelands/Grazing Management

There would be no effect on existing grazing management as a result of enactment of the proposed action since there is little dietary overlap between cattle and bighorn sheep.

DECISION RECORD

DECISION: Having considered the range of alternatives and associated impacts and based on the analysis in the Pickett Rim Bighorn Sheep Transplant EA, it is my decision to implement the proposed action which restores bighorn sheep, a native species of wildlife and a BLM SSS, into identified historic habitat.

Rationale for Decision: I have selected the proposed action for the following reasons:

The proposed action would restore bighorn sheep into identified historic habitat.

Based on past experience, there is a high likelihood for success.

It includes coordination with the ODFW.

It conforms to the Andrews Management Unit RMP (August 2005) and supports the ODFW's "Oregon's Bighorn Sheep and Rocky Mountain Goat Management Plan" (2003).

It is in compliance with the various Federal laws, regulations and executive orders dealing with heritage resources. In addition, the proposed action is in conformance with State, local and tribal land use plans, laws and regulations.

It is in compliance with Federal laws that mandate management of public land resources (Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976).

I have also considered alternatives to the proposed action including:

Alternative 1 - No Action: The no action alternative which would not allow the release of bighorn sheep onto Pickett Rim.

This decision may be appealed to the Interior Board of Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with regulations contained in 43 CFR, Part 4 and Form 1842-1. If an appeal is filed, your notice of appeal must be filed in the Burns District Office, 28910 Hwy 20 West, Hines, Oregon 97738 by December 1, 2006. The appellant has the burden of showing that the decision appealed is in error.

If you wish to file a petition, pursuant to regulations 43 CFR 4.21, for a stay of the effectiveness of this decision during the time that your appeal is being reviewed by the Board, the petition for stay must accompany your notice of appeal. A petition for stay is required to show sufficient justification based on the standards listed below. Copies of the notice 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 that 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 on 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.

Karla Bird
Andrews/Steens Resource Area Field Manager

Date