UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Klamath Falls Resource Area

Finding of No Significant Impact
Kerwin Ranch Meadow Restoration
EA OR-014-03-01

Background:

The Interdisciplinary Team for the Klamath Falls Resource Area, Lakeview District, Bureau of Land Management has completed an Environmental Assessment (EA) and analyzed a proposal to restore a seasonal wet meadow. The proposed project area is located along Topsy Road in the Klamath River Canyon. The project will contribute to meeting the goals of restoring watershed processes, improving wildlife habitat, and implementing the Klamath Falls Resource Area Resource Management Plan.

The proposed action is to restore the meadow by reducing impacts caused by the condition of the road and vehicle traffic. This would be accomplished by improving and rerouting portions of the road and blocking vehicle traffic from the meadow. The proposed activities would occur on US Timberlands and BLM-administered land.

The issues addressed in the EA concern potential impacts to natural resources and human uses in the vicinity of the project area. The design features of the Proposed Action and alternatives are described in the attached Kerwin Ranch Meadow Restoration EA.

Determination:

The anticipated environmental effects contained in this EA are based on research, professional judgement, and experience of the Interdisciplinary (ID) team and Klamath Falls Resource Area staff. Based on the information within the Environmental Assessment, it is my determination that none of the alternatives analyzed constitute a significant impact affecting the quality of the human environment greater than those addressed in the:

- Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (April 1994), also known as the Northwest Forest Plan (NFP).

Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement, or a supplement to the existing RMP or Environmental Impact Statement, is not necessary and will not be prepared.

[Signature]
Jon Baby
Acting Field Manager, Klamath Falls Resource Area

4/9/03
Date
RESOURCE AREA: Klamath Falls

FY & EA #: OR-014-03-01

ACTION/TITLE: Kerwin Ranch Meadow Restoration

LOCATION: Klamath Falls Resource Area

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Mike Turaski
Klamath Falls Resource Area, BLM
2795 Anderson Avenue, Bldg. 25
Klamath Falls, OR 97603
541-883-6916

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT AND RESPONDENT’S PERSONAL PRIVACY INTERESTS: The Bureau of Land Management is soliciting comments on this Environmental Assessment. Comments, including names and street addresses of respondents, will be available for public review at the above address during regular business hours. Individual respondents may request confidentiality. If you wish to withhold your name or street address from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your written comment. Such requests will be honored to the extent allowed by law. All submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be made available for public inspection in their entirety.
Environmental Assessment No. OR-014-03-01

for

Kerwin Ranch Meadow Restoration

Klamath Falls Resource Area – Lakeview District
Klamath Falls, Oregon
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Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The BLM proposes to implement a suite of actions designed to restore a seasonal wet meadow. This Environmental Analysis will describe the alternatives considered, the affected environment, and potential environmental consequences; and will be used by decision makers to determine whether and how the project should proceed.

1.2 Need for Action

A seasonal wet meadow has been adversely impacted by vehicle traffic. Off highway vehicle (OHV) users drive through the meadow recreationally. Poor conditions on the adjacent Topsy Road (due in part to the design and location of the road) cause drivers to seek routes through the meadow, compounding damage caused by OHV users. As a result of these impacts, soils in the meadow are compacted and rutted, and development of the wetland vegetation community is impaired. In addition, the vehicle ruts, mud, and disturbance to the meadow vegetation appear unsightly and unnatural, and are a visual resource management concern.

1.3 Location

The project would occur on BLM-administered land located in Township 41S, Range 6E, Section 9, as well as on a portion of Topsy Road that traverses both US Timberlands and BLM-administered land (Figure 1). The project area is within the Upper Klamath River Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

1.4 Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plans

The proposed treatments are in conformance with the following Plans and Environmental Review Documents:

- Final Klamath Falls Resource Area Management Plan and EIS (KFRA FEIS) (1994),
- Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (also known as the Northwest Forest Plan) (1994),
- Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement on Management Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of Northern Spotted Owl (FSEIS) (1994),
- Vegetation Treatment on BLM Lands in Thirteen Western States FEIS and ROD (1991),
- Supplement to the Northwest Area Noxious Weed Control Program FEIS and ROD (1987),
- Rangeland Reform ‘94 FEIS and ROD (1995),
• Edge Creek Allotment Rangeland Health Standards Assessment (September 2000), and
• Draft Klamath River Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (*currently unreleased*)

2 Alternatives

The BLM is considering restoring the wet meadow through a combination of “passive” measures (road realignment, road drainage improvement, construction of a vehicle exclosure) and “active” measures (recontouring margins of the meadow that have been impacted by roads, filling existing ruts, placing woody material in ruts and roadbeds). Passive measures are those that focus on halting activities that cause degradation or prevent recovery, while active measures attempt to manipulate physical and biological conditions in order to recover degraded areas.

2.1 Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative)

The BLM would attempt to restore the wet meadow primarily by implementing only passive restoration measures (Figure 2):

• Realigning approximately 120 meters of road by obliterating (recontouring, scattering woody material, and planting vegetation) a road segment in a depressional area adjacent to the meadow and constructing a new road segment in a midslope position further from the meadow.

• Raising the road grade and improving road drainage along approximately 700 meters of Topsy Road (including portions of road on US Timberlands property). Cross-drain culverts and “water dips” would be installed along this segment of road.

• Constructing approximately 400 meters of fence or other vehicle barriers (logs, boulders, etc.) along the southern margin of the meadow and the BLM property line. The fence would be connected to an existing range allotment boundary fence.

• Decommissioning (blocking and permanently closing) approximately 250 meters of dirt road within the meadow.

• Placing large woody debris within the meadow to discourage vehicle traffic, slow the movement of water in ruts, and accelerate soil recovery. Conifers cut from the realigned road right-of-way and understory oaks thinned from the margins of the meadow would be used.

• Installing signs to explain the restoration project and mark areas that are closed to vehicle traffic.

• Dispersing native grass seed in disturbed areas and plant native shrubs and trees along the meadow edge.

2.2 Alternative 2

The BLM would attempt to restore the wet meadow utilizing a more extensive mix of active and passive restoration measures, including (*asterisks indicate active measures unique to Alternative 2*):
- Realigning approximately 120 meters of road by obliterating (recontouring, scattering woody material, and planting vegetation) a road segment in a depressional area adjacent to the meadow and constructing a new road segment in a midslope position further from the meadow.

- Raising the road grade and improving road drainage along approximately 700 meters of Topsy Road (including portions of road on US Timberlands property). Cross-drain culverts and “water dips” would be installed along this segment of road.

- Constructing approximately 400 meters of fence or other vehicle barriers along the southern margin of the meadow and the BLM property line. The fence would be connected to an existing range allotment boundary fence.

- (*) Obliterating (ripping, scattering woody material, and planting vegetation) approximately 250 meters of dirt road within the meadow.

- (*) Filling existing ruts in the meadow with imported topsoil.

- Placing large woody debris within the meadow to discourage vehicle traffic, slow the movement of water in ruts, and accelerate soil recovery. Conifers cut from the realigned road right-of-way and understory oaks thinned from the margins of the meadow would be used.

- Installing signs to explain the restoration project and mark areas that are closed to vehicle traffic.

- Dispersing native grass seed in disturbed areas and plant native shrubs and trees along the meadow edge.

2.3 Alternative 3 (No Action)

The BLM would not pursue passive or active restoration of the wet meadow at this time, nor would the BLM realign or improve portions of the Topsy Road that are in the vicinity of the meadow.

2.4 Alternative 4 (Dropped From Consideration)

Alternative 4 would involve installation of a seasonal closure of Topsy Road to vehicle traffic. This alternative was dropped from consideration because the BLM does not have jurisdiction of the road and because the road is an important north-south access route for private landowners, recreationists, and land managers.

3 Affected Environment

The following discussion provides a description of environmental features and resource values within the proposed project area.

3.1 General Environment

The wet meadow is located in the vicinity of the historic Kerwin Ranch, adjacent to the Topsy Road between Frain Ranch and the Oregon-California state line. The seven acre wet meadow occupies a low-lying, low relief area on the eastern edge of a larger dry meadow that adjoins oak woodlands and mixed
conifer forests. Ephemeral stream channels drain into the wet meadow from the east and south, and an intermittent channel flows north from the wet meadow to the Klamath River. The current vegetation is considered early successional and contains many species associated with disturbance. The dominant grasses in the meadow are rye brome (*Bromus secalinus*) and bulbous bluegrass (*Poa bulbosa*), both of which are non-native and typical of disturbed, upland habitats. Common sedges and rushes include *Carex fracta* and *Juncus tenuis*, which are early-successional species associated with wet sites.

3.2 Current Condition of the Wet Meadow

The hydrology of the wet meadow has been affected by the condition and location of nearby roads and by vehicle traffic in the wet meadow. Runoff from the ephemeral streams flows onto Topsy Road during winter and spring. This water flows down Topsy Road and pools in the road (Figure 3). As a result, drivers are forced to travel through the wet meadow during wet periods. During drier periods, subsurface water drains from the meadow into portions of Topsy Road that are lower than the wet meadow. This reduces the extent and duration of soil saturation in the wetland. The condition of the road is such that even when water is not pooled, vehicles must detour through the meadow around portions of the road.

Vehicle traffic in the wet meadow (during dry periods as well wet periods) causes compaction and rutting of wetland soils (Figure 4), as well as disturbance to wetland vegetation. The impacts of traffic accentuate and aggravate the effects associated with the location and condition of Topsy Road. As a result of soil conditions and the lack of vegetation in impacted areas, portions of the wet meadow are susceptible to wind erosion.

3.3 Ownership and Administrative Boundaries

A property line separating BLM-administered land from private industrial timber land (owned by US Timberlands) runs north to south through the wet meadow. Approximately 60% of the wet meadow occurs on BLM-administered land (Figure 2). The project area is located within the Upper Klamath River Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) and is just outside the ¼ mile Wild and Scenic River corridor. The project area is in the Edge Creek grazing allotment (#0102). The area is not within an established wild horse herd management area (HMA), but does receive some occasional use from horses drifting out of the neighboring Gavin Peak HMA, which is administered by the Klamath National Forest.

3.4 Cultural Resources

A more thorough discussion of cultural resources in the vicinity of the proposed project area can be found in the project files of the team lead and the KFRA archaeologist.

Numerous prehistoric sites are known to exist in the upper Klamath River Canyon. The variety of known sites present within the canyon demonstrates intense prehistoric use of the area by Native Americans. Traditional use by Native Americans of the upper Klamath River Canyon began before contact with Euro-americans and continues into the present. Today, members of the Klamath Tribes and the Shasta Nation use the canyon for spiritual purposes, hunting, fishing, gathering, and other cultural activities.

Historical use of the canyon began in the mid-1800’s. The predominant use of the canyon was as a transportation route for freight and mail between Yreka, CA and Linkville, OR (Klamath Falls). Ranching and logging in the canyon were also important in the development of the canyon. A prominent
historical landmark of the canyon is a stagecoach freight road known as Topsy Road, which parallels the river for 11.4 miles on the south and east side of the river.

3.5 Resources Not Affected

The following resources are not present or would not be impacted by any of the alternatives: prime and unique farmlands, mining claims, paleontological resources, wilderness, roadless areas, research natural areas, Native American religious sites, rural interface areas, or hazardous materials.

4 Environmental Consequences

4.1 Hydrology and Water Quality

Implementing either Alternative 1 or 2 would reduce the effects of Topsy Road on hydrologic processes in the project area. Runoff from the road into the meadow would be reduced, diversion of ephemeral streamflows by the road would be reduced, and drainage of the meadow area by low-lying portions of the road would be eliminated. Under the No Action alternative, the effects of the Topsy Road on hydrologic processes would continue and, over time, would likely be aggravated.

Alternatives 1 and 2 would both address the causes of meadow rutting and compaction and eliminate drainage of the local water table by low-lying portions of Topsy Road. Recovery of desired soil properties and patterns of soil saturation would occur more quickly under Alternative 2, as a result of importing large woody debris and topsoil to the meadow. Under Alternative 1, the height of existing ruts in the meadow would be gradually reduced (at a much slower rate than under Alternative 2) by freeze-thaw soil processes and, to a lesser degree, redistribution of material by flowing water.

The treatments proposed in Alternatives 1 and 2 would reduce the delivery of road-generated sediment to the meadow. Because the relief within the meadow is gentle, it is likely that most sediment delivered to the meadow is stored (and is not transported to Rock Creek or the Klamath River), and that none of the alternatives would substantially affect water quality.

4.2 Soils

Alternatives 1 and 2 would both reduce detrimental impacts associated with the location of Topsy Road and vehicle traffic through the meadow, although Alternative 2 would do so more quickly.

The timing and pattern of soil saturation would be partly restored as a result of eliminating the impacts of the road on water table elevations and reducing the extent and depth of ruts within the meadow. Prolonged and/or more extensive soil saturation would result in reduced oxidation of organic matter and eventually, increased organic matter and infiltration rates within the meadow. Assuming no further damage to the meadow occurred, natural processes (such as freeze/thaw and root development) that gradually “break up” compacted soils would occur regardless of management action, although root development would be accelerated by implementation of Alternative 2, more so than Alternative 1.

Reduced disturbance within the meadow would result in increased ground cover and soil cohesion. Because of this, wind erosion of exposed areas would be reduced under both Alternatives 1 and 2.
Ongoing impacts of Topsy Road and vehicle traffic (No Action Alternative) would cause continued rutting and compaction within the meadow. The timing and pattern of soil saturation would continue to be affected by these impacts.

4.3 Wildlife

There are no managed sensitive wildlife sites within a mile of the project area, and implementation of any of the three alternatives is expected to have no impact on Threatened, Endangered or other special status species.

As proposed in Alternatives 1 and 2, restoration of the meadow’s hydrology and vegetation is expected to have a positive impact on wildlife by improving habitat for many species utilizing the meadow. The addition of large woody debris to the meadow would increase cover for small mammals, herptiles, turkeys and other game birds. Reseeding and restoring meadow vegetation as described under both alternatives would also increase forage for game species such as deer and elk, game birds, migratory landbirds and small mammals. The resulting increase in small mammal populations expected under both alternatives would in turn benefit raptors and other predators that use the meadow to hunt.

Noise and activity associated with road improvement and realignment activities would have a temporary negative impact on wildlife in the immediate area during the construction period. It is expected that these negative effects would be offset by diverting traffic away from the meadow’s interior and edge, and by overall habitat improvement within the meadow.

Under the No Action alternative, the existing pattern of habitat degradation would have continuing negative effects on current and future populations of wildlife utilizing the meadow.

4.4 Survey and Manage Species

Pre-disturbance surveys are currently required in high priority habitat for three terrestrial mollusks, Deroceras hesperium (evening fieldslug), Monadenia chaceana (Siskiyou sideband), and Pristoloma articum crateris (Crater Lake Tightcoil), and several aquatic mollusks (2001 Annual Species Review). The analysis area contains high priority habitat for these species, and surveys will be conducted prior to project implementation (see Section 5).

With the restoration of the hydrology of the wet meadow and the reduction of physical disturbance from vehicular traffic within the meadow, conditions will be restored which may offer the opportunity for these special status species to become established within this site. If additional populations of these species are established, then the project would have positive effects on their conservation.

Although a population of the mountain lady slipper orchid (Cypripedium montanum), a Category C (manage high priority sites) species, occurs within the Klamath Canyon, a botanical survey did not detect any populations within the project area and no impacts to this species are expected as a result of project implementation.

Survey and Manage species and their categories are listed in Table 1-1 of the 2001 Annual Species Review, released June 13, 2002. Refer to the 1994 Northwest Forest Plan, the 2001 ROD, and the 2001 Annual Species Review for further information on Survey and Manage species and Survey Protocols.
4.5 Botany and Vegetation

Under Alternatives 1 and 2, conditions which support the establishment of species typical of late successional wet meadows would be restored.

Several special status species are associated with wet meadow habitats within the Klamath Canyon. A botanical survey of the project area did not detect any populations of special status plant species within the project area. Therefore, no negative effects to these species are expected from project activities. Under Alternatives 1 and 2, conditions which may offer the opportunity for these special status species to become established within this site would be restored. If additional populations of these species are established, then the project would have positive effects on their conservation.

4.6 Noxious Weeds

A botanical survey did not detect any target noxious weed populations within the project area. Therefore, project activities would not facilitate the spread of any existing noxious weed populations.

Alternatives that produce more intense or more extensive ground disturbance would create conditions under which noxious weeds would have a competitive advantage relative to other plant species. Thus Alternative 2 would have a slightly higher probability than Alternative 1 to facilitate the establishment and/or spread of noxious weed species, at least in the short term. However, both alternatives would reduce the potential for the establishment and spread of noxious weeds in the long term by reducing the physical disturbance within the meadow and allowing it to revegetate with native, wetland species.

Weed prevention measures (see Section 5 - Project Design Features) will reduce the potential for management activities to result in the establishment or spread of noxious weeds. The consequences of incorporating these project design features into the proposed project would be to reduce the probability of spreading noxious weed seeds into and/or beyond the project area. Reasonable cleaning of the construction equipment involved in operations would likely remove most of the noxious weed seed from the machinery. It is assumed that cleaning the equipment will not remove 100% of the noxious weed seed, but the inclusion of the proposed design features into project operations would be consistent with Bureau Manual policy and Executive Order, would have a high probability of preventing, controlling, or reducing the spread of noxious weeds on BLM lands, and would prove to be a prudent step to take in reducing the need for costly weed control actions in the future.

4.7 Cultural Resources

Alternative 1 calls for passive restoration measures within the meadow in which the rutted road would be decommissioned primarily through fenceline construction. This alternative will not affect cultural resources.

Alternative 2 calls for active restoration, including obliteration of 250 meters of dirt road within the meadow and filling in the existing ruts with imported topsoil. Both of these actions would have adverse affects on cultural resources. Additional field and laboratory work would be required under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act if Alternative 2 is implemented.

Both Alternative 1 and 2 propose realignment of about 120 meters of historic Topsy Road as well as improving the road for about 700 meters. Cross-drains and culverts are also proposed. The road would
not be substantially widened in either of these alternatives (i.e., it would remain a one-lane road). None of these proposed measures will adversely impact the historic integrity of Topsy Road.

The No Action alternative would allow vehicles to continue to drive through the meadow. This activity would continue to adversely affect cultural resources located within the meadow.

4.8 Livestock Grazing and Wildhorse Populations

None of the alternatives would have significant short or long-term impacts to either livestock or wild horse grazing. Fencing of the meadow under Alternatives 1 and 2 would result in a small loss of available forage to both classes of grazing animal. However, the excluded area would be insignificant in comparison to the 40,000-acre total allotment size (public and private). The proposed fencing could pose some hazard to the wild horses due to unfamiliarity, though flagging for the first year would diminish the potential problem. In the long term, the improvement of the meadow conditions could enhance the forage quality and quantity in the area slightly – and could be made available if the fence were removed at some point for use by cattle and/or horses.

4.9 Special Areas

The actions proposed in Alternatives 1 and 2 are consistent with current management direction for the Upper Klamath River ACEC, which can be found within the KFRA RMP/ROD (pages 41 to 42). The proposed actions are also consistent with actions proposed in the Draft Klamath River Management Plan/EIS, which is still in development.

4.10 Recreation and Visual Resources

Closing the wet meadow to vehicle traffic and relocating the roadbed will improve access for the general public to and from the Frain Ranch area, an area frequented by visitors seeking a more primitive recreation experience. Topsy Road is one of two primary access roads to the Upper Klamath Wild and Scenic River. The relocated road around the wet meadow would eliminate one of the main problem areas for public access to the canyon during wet periods.

Conversely, closing the wet meadow to OHV travel will displace a small percentage of OHV users that seek the thrill of “mud bogging.” Eliminating OHV use in the meadow is consistent with the KFRA RMP/EIS (page 52), as it will enhance protection of natural resources. Those visitors seeking an area to test their 4-wheel drive skills or for OHV play could seek out other nearby meadows and muddy roads for this activity. Some OHV enthusiasts may attempt to access the meadow after restoration is completed. Fences may be cut and other barriers may be moved to gain access to the meadow. Additional law enforcement and management patrols, as well as additional maintenance, may be required if such vandalism becomes problematic.

By relocating the road and restoring the meadow to a more natural appearing landscape, sightseeing will be enhanced and visual resource management will be improved.
5 Project Design Features

Soils
1. The use of mechanical equipment will be restricted to dry conditions to minimize soil compaction and soil disturbance, per the Klamath Falls Resource Area (KFRA) RMP/FEIS, Appendix F, pp. 23-24.
2. Best Management Practices guidelines identified in the KFRA RMP/FEIS, Appendix F, on the use of mechanical equipment will be followed.

Survey and Manage Species
1. Pre-disturbance surveys will be done according to current Survey Protocol in the project area.
2. Survey and Manage sites found in the project area will become Managed Known Sites.
3. Known sites will be managed according to current Management Recommendations and the Klamath Falls Management Zone Team.

Botany and Noxious Weeds
1. Required botanical surveys will be completed prior to any ground disturbance. All sites located will be managed to minimize detrimental impacts.
2. All vehicles and equipment (including chainsaws) will be cleaned off prior to operating on BLM lands. Removal of all dirt, grease, and plant parts that may carry noxious weed seeds or vegetative parts is required and may be accomplished with a pressure hose.
3. Noxious weeds in the immediate area of operations shall be mowed to ground level prior to the start of project activities.
4. All equipment and vehicles operating off of main roads shall be cleaned off prior to leaving the job site when the job site has noxious weed populations present. Removal of all dirt, grease, and plant parts that may carry noxious weed seeds or vegetative parts is required and may be accomplished with a pressure hose.
5. Road graders used for road construction or maintenance would grade towards any known noxious weed infestations. If no good turn-around area exists within one-half mile that would allow the operator to grade towards the noxious weed infestation, then the operator would leave the material that is being moved within the boundaries of the noxious weed infestation.

Cultural Resources
1. All cultural resources will be marked in the field prior to the start of the project and all project activities shall avoid disturbance to these resources. If project activities result in the discovery of new cultural resources, all ground disturbing activities shall cease and the KFRA Archeologist shall be notified. Resumption of activities in that area will be allowed only after all mitigation fieldwork has been conducted.
Grazing & Wild Horses

1. The proposed fencing under Alternatives 1 and 2 would need to be “highlighted” (made more visible) with bright plastic flagging for the first full year in place. This would entail the placement of a 1-2 foot section of flagging every 10-12’ for the entire length of the fence.

2. Fence construction would follow standard fencing design for a 4-wire fence as per the pertinent BLM technical references and manuals.

6 Coordination

In preparing this document, the following entities were contacted:

US Timberlands
Klamath County Public Works Department
State Historic Preservation Office
Klamath Tribes
Figure 1. General location map.
Figure 2. Proposed project features (Alternative 1) (USGS Chicken Hills Quadrangle).
Figure 3. Low-lying portions of Topsy Road impact hydrologic processes and impair vehicle traffic.

Figure 4. Vehicle traffic through the wet meadow causes rutting, soil compaction, and loss of vegetation.
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<td>Botanical</td>
<td>JW 3/5/03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T&amp;E, BA &amp; or Consultation</td>
<td>3/10/03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-O-W Permits</td>
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</table>

*This document will not sit on your desk for more than 8 hours. Please check on calendar to make sure that the next person will be available to review the document.*

**Some resource areas may not apply for all projects. If so, just mark “N/A” in “Review Priority” column.*