

STATE DIRECTOR'S PROTEST ANALYSIS

PLAN: CLEAR CREEK MANAGEMENT AREA (CCMA)

Protest No.: PP-CA-ClearCreek-05-03

Post marked:

Individual &/or Organization: Moore Smith Buxton & Turcke

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State Office Evaluation Results:

- a) After review of all planning record, the protesting party has standing through participation in the planning process.
- b) Although not all of the issues/comments were raised during the planning process, we are providing responses to all issues/comments raised in the protest.
- c) Although some of the issues/comments raised may not be germane, we are providing responses to all issues/comments raised in the protest.

List of Issues/Comments Raised:

State Office Detailed Analysis of Identified Issues/Comments:

Issue/Comment 1:

- (a) "The Amendment fails to meet the requirements of section 7(a)(1) of the ESA and may additionally lead to violations of the 'non-jeopardy' and 'take' provisions of the ESA. Specifically, the Amendment would lead to "excessively concentrated travel in limited areas of the CCMA, as opposed to travel dispersed within a broader area."
- (b) The BLM "should at least analyze, if not adopt, alternatives to the Proposed Action which allow for a trail/barren network well beyond that considered which will reasonably address visitor demand for the CCMA"

Response:

- (a) Not protestable. Not previously raised by protesting party. Plan was developed in consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife service, who determined in a Biological Opinion that the Proposed Action would result in no-jeopardy to species listed under the ESA.
- (b) Protestable. See response to Issue 3.

Issue/Comment 2: The proposed action represents “the agency’s final and most comprehensive analysis of project-level, or site-specific, decision making on individual routes. The Amendment lacks sufficient analysis and/or procedures to support this level of site-specific action.”

Response: Not protestable. As discussed in the “Dear Reader” letter at the front of the Final Environmental Impact Statement, proposed decisions on specific routes are implementation decisions. These decisions are not protestable, but are appealable to the Interior Board of Land Appeals upon adoption.

Issue/Comment 3:

- (a) BLM did not address “a proposed ‘Alternative E’ which would have addressed species and resource protection issues while better addressing visitor satisfaction and safety issues.”
- (b) BLM assumes “that all routes which eventually cross private property must be closed back to the nearest intersection with a route designated ‘open’ for travel. There is no legal requirement to manage in this fashion...”
- (c) BLM “failed to consider alternatives that would close, relocate, or limit use of the historical camping and staging areas, which direct and concentrate use within areas like Clear Creek Canyon that present the most significant and complex resource protection issues.”

Response:

- (a) Partially protestable. As stated in Appendix J, page 73 of the Final EIS, the alternative developed by the Recreational Groups was reviewed and considered. Proposed decisions on individually routes are not protestable; however, it should be noted that an additional 24 miles of routes were added to the Proposed Action, many of which were submitted in comments on the Draft EIS by the Recreational groups. The “Stopping and Parking” action proposed by the Recreational groups was included in the Proposed Action (2005 FEIS, p. 2-7). Camping is outside the scope of the project. The proposal for the boundary of the San Benito Mountains Research Natural Area submitted by the Recreational groups was analyzed in Alternative B of the 2004 Draft EIS. The proposal for barren designations submitted by the Recreational groups was within the range of alternatives analyzed in the 2004 Draft EIS.
- (b) Not protestable. As discussed in the “Dear Reader” letter at the front of the Final Environmental Impact Statement, proposed decisions on specific routes are implementation decisions. These decisions are not protestable, but are appealable to the Interior Board of Land Appeals upon adoption.
- (c) Not protestable. Outside the scope of the project. Camping and staging were addressed in the 1995 FEIS and 1999 ROD.

Issue/Comment 4: “The cumulative impacts analysis is deficient” in that it does not “adequately discuss the impact of restricting vehicle access on numerous issues,

including (1) socioeconomics; (2) visitor recreation experience and safety; (3) satisfaction of, demand for vehicle-based recreation; and (4) unjustified resource impacts resulting from concentrated use at the few remaining areas and/or routes designated for vehicle travel.”

Response: Not protestable. Issue not previously raised in planning process. The cumulative impacts for the reduction of routes occurred in 1995. The proposed decisions establish route selection criteria and then select the routes available for motorized recreation as established and analyzed in 1995 and 1999.

Issue/Comment 5: ”The disclosure and analysis of socioeconomic impacts is deficient.” BLM “must ‘articulate a satisfactory explanation for [the] action including a rational connection between the facts found and the choice made....’”

Response: Protestable. This issue was responded to in the Final EIS, Appendix K, page 35: “Page 3-48 of the DEIS describes the social and economic conditions in the region surrounding CCMA, and page 4-54 presents an evaluation of the impacts to social and economic conditions as required by 40 CFR 1502.22.” An analysis of the existing social and economic conditions and impacts from the Proposed Action are also included in the Final EIS (pages 3-42 through 3-44, pages 4-28 through 4-31, and page 4-40). Protesting party has not raised any specific information not included in the original analysis, nor provided any reason why the existing analysis and information are incorrect.

Issue/Comment 6:

- (a) ”The agency has not conducted any meaningful effort at evaluating recreational demand.”
- (b) “The interdisciplinary team lacks members with necessary off-highway vehicle planning background, leading to inadequate and illogical conclusions. For example, one or more play areas supposedly surround ‘closed’ areas such as mine sites or private property.”
- (c) “The proposed route network is “inadequate for recreation demand.” The “proposed 100 miles or less of single-track trail is wholly inadequate for recreation demand. This proposed mileage will not allow for reasonable conduct of historically-approved events...and... might lead to unjustified impacts due to concentration of travel.”
- (d) BLM “has improperly failed to consider authorizing travel on routes crossing private property, regardless of the existence of historical use along established rights-of-way.”

Response:

- (a) Protestable
- (b) Partially protestable. The criteria used to designate barren areas as open or closed are in Appendix B of the Draft and Final EISes. Protesting party raises no specific reason or information to suggest why this method should be changed.

- (c) Not protestable. As discussed in the “Dear Reader” letter at the front of the Final Environmental Impact Statement, proposed decisions on specific routes are implementation decisions. These decisions are not protestable, but are appealable to the Interior Board of Land Appeals upon adoption.
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Issue/Comment 7: “BLM should clarify that undesignated routes may be available for permitted use.”

Response: Not a protest issue; request for clarification. Pursuant to 43 CFR 8340.0-5(h), “*Closed area* means an area where off-road vehicle use is prohibited. Use of off-road vehicles in closed areas may be allowed for certain reasons; however, such use shall be made only with the approval of the authorized officer.” Also, designations for OHVs do not apply to “any vehicle whose use is expressly authorized by the authorized officer, or otherwise officially approved (43 CFR 8340.0-5(a)(3).”

By regulation, closed routes and areas may be authorized for use, after appropriate environmental review, by the BLM Field Manager. Permittees may be required to post a bond to ensure that corrective maintenance activities take place following the authorized use.

Issue/Comment 8: “The amendment improperly suggests routes must be signed to be available for travel” because it is “not necessary, will result in unjustified practical complications, and presents opportunities for abuse.” People may “remove signs or interfere in the political and administrative processes leading to proper signage.... [T]he onus on understanding the management prescriptions and facts necessary for compliance (such as one’s physical location) is on the user. Agencies enforcing similar requirements, such as hunting or fishing regulations, do not attempt to post signs on every tree outlining applicable season, bay limit and harvest rules.... The amendment must clarify that general public travel is authorized only on designated routes and in designated areas, but should avoid any specific requirements.”

Response: Not protestable. As discussed in the “Dear Reader” letter at the front of the Final Environmental Impact Statement, proposed decisions on specific route designations are implementation decisions. These decisions are not protestable, but are appealable to the Interior Board of Land Appeals upon adoption. The proposed decision raised is related to the implementation of specific route designations.

Issue/Comment 9: “The Recreational Groups support aggressive and effective enforcement of reasonable and properly-implemented travel restriction... The Amendment does not specifically address enforcement issues.”

Response: Not protestable. Law Enforcement staffing levels are outside the scope of the planning process.

Issue/Comment 10: “There is no reasonable basis for ‘asbestos’ - related closures.”

Response: Not protestable. This issue is outside the scope of this FEIS and will be addressed in a separate planning process after release of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Final Risk Assessment, anticipated in 2006 (cite page in FEIS).

Issue/Comment 11: “The proposed “wet season” closure procedure is too inflexible” as the “prescriptions fail to properly address the unique characteristics of the CCMA.”

Response: Not protestable. Modifications to closure criteria are not being considered in this planning process.

Issue/Comment 12: “The agency has not properly disclosed expansion of the San Benito Mountain Natural Area” as it “was not previously disclosed and has not been subject to necessary public input.”

Response: Protestable. Discussed in the Draft EIS and Final EIS as part of the purpose and need and analyzed in throughout both documents. The 1995 CCMA FEIS and corresponding 1999 Record of Decision addressed the expansion of the RNA. This planning effort establishes the specific boundaries of the 4082 acre area.