

United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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NOTICE OF PROPOSED ACTION LANDS IN WILDERNESS

DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
BUDGET AND PLANNING DIVISION

STATE: Nevada

COUNTY: Humboldt

FIELD OFFICE: Winnemucca District Office
5100 East Winnemucca Blvd.
Winnemucca, Nevada 89445

WILDERNESS AREAS: Black Rock Desert Wilderness (N74461)

PROPOSED ACTION: The University of Nevada, Reno and the University of Wyoming applied jointly to the Winnemucca District of the Bureau of Land Management to conduct archaeological test excavations at Elephant Mountain Cave in the Black Rock Desert Wilderness. The Black Rock Field Office applied for and received Challenge Cost Share funding for the project which has a stipulation for matching funds from the recipients. The cave contains ancient deposits (one artifact is dated between 9,000 and 10,000 years old). The University of Nevada is investigating the oldest prehistoric occupations in the northern Great Basin and this rare site has potential to provide data relevant to their research. The field portion of the work will include archaeological excavation, sediment screening, and collection of artifacts. Native American consultation on the proposed project is underway. An environmental assessment and Minimum Tool Analysis have been prepared.

Background

With the passage of the Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon-Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area Act 2000 (NCA Act) and the Wilderness Act of 1964, Wilderness Areas are to be managed to preserve and protect their wilderness character and to provide for their use and enjoyment by the American people, in such a manner that will leave it unpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness, and will allow for recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation and historical use. Section .32 of Manual 8560 (Management of Designated Wilderness Areas) which describes management of specific activities in Wilderness and cultural resources in particular, states that scientific uses of cultural resources are permissible as long as they are not inconsistent with wilderness preservation.

Elephant Mountain Cave was extensively looted in the 1980s (before designation); at that time, most of the cave deposits were disturbed and many of the artifacts were stolen. The perpetrator was apprehended

and some of the artifacts were recovered, including the skeletal remains of two children and many rare perishable items. Charcoal samples and some sagebrush sandals were tested and the results indicated that the cultural deposits in the cave were quite old; one of the sandals was dated at more than 9,000 years. The limited intact deposits are also of great scientific interest, but remain vulnerable to erosion and additional looting.

Description of Proposed Action

The test excavations would involve a small number of graduate and undergraduate students from the University of Nevada, Reno and would last no more than 10 days. The excavations would focus on areas where there may be remaining intact deposits and on the apron in front of the cave where the looter's discarded backdirt was piled. No more than 10 square meters of area would be excavated, probably much less. The excavated materials will be passed through a 1/8 in. mesh screen and any artifactual material will be collected. At the end of the excavation, excavation units will be backfilled, the surface re-contoured and roof fall removed in the course of excavation may be replaced over the excavated areas.

Impacts of scientific activities: The primary disturbances would be excavation units in the cave and in the backdirt piles left by the looter. As described above these units will be refilled at the end of the excavation and re-contoured. All impacts to wilderness values will be minimal and temporary.

Camping and Logistics: The study would be conducted by hiking to the site from the west wilderness boundary road, leaving the vehicles parked along the boundary road. A camp would be established outside the wilderness, possibly at a nearby ranch where water will be available. All trash will be removed at the end of the excavation.

Environmental Setting

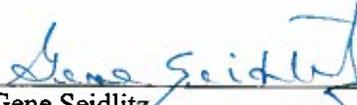
The site is in the Black Rock Desert Wilderness. The project area is situated in the west side of the Winnemucca District, Black Rock Field Office in Humboldt County.

Base maps (1:100,000) include, Jackson Mountains 1995

Minimum Tool Analysis was prepared for the proposal.

It is estimated that the activity would take 10 days to complete and would start in July, 2010.

Send comments on the project to Gene Seidlitz, Winnemucca District Manager at the address above within the comment period of May, 2010 thru June 15, 2010.


Gene Seidlitz
Winnemucca District Manager

5/19/2010
Date