



## United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
Southern Nevada District Office  
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Las Vegas, NV 89130  
<http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/fo/lvfo.1.html>

APR 08 2011

In Reply Refer To:  
(NVS00520) 1210

**NOTIFICATION OF PROPOSED ACTION**  
**LANDS OF THE NATIONAL WILDERNESS PRESERVATION SYSTEM**  
**NORTH MCCULLOUGH WILDERNESS**

Dear Interested Party:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is required to inform all affected or interested persons or organizations about any proposed action or unauthorized activity occurring within BLM Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas. The following information is a proposal from the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) to upgrade the Poppy (McCullough #2) wildlife water development currently within North McCullough Wilderness with new tanks, pipelines, and drinker. Environmental and minimum activity/minimum tool analysis will be conducted for the proposed action and alternatives.

**Background**

In 1980, the Cooperative Action Plan between NDOW and BLM identified the North McCulloughs as a priority range for wildlife water developments to enhance bighorn sheep habitat. The McCullough Range was found to be one of only two decreasing populations of desert bighorn sheep in Nevada and providing yearlong water was seen as a method to eliminate the primary limiting factor and potentially reverse a downward population trend. At that time, the project site was located in what was then the North McCullough Mountains Wilderness Study Area (WSA). BLM Interim Management Policy and Guidelines for Lands Under Wilderness Review (IMP) "specifically allows new wildlife water developments to be constructed if they are substantially unnoticeable and if once installed, maintenance would not require motor vehicles should the area be designated as wilderness."<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the IMP also "permits permanent installations to maintain or improve conditions for wildlife, if the benefitting species enhance wilderness values."<sup>2</sup> Desert bighorn sheep had been identified a special feature of the wilderness values of the North McCullough Mountains WSA. As a result, the Poppy (McCullough #2) wildlife water development was constructed in 1985 through a cooperative effort between the

<sup>1</sup> Environmental Assessment for the McCullough Slickrock Water Catchment No. 2 4917 (BLM; May 8, 1995)

<sup>2</sup> Environmental Assessment for the McCullough Slickrock Water Catchment No. 2 4917 (BLM; May 8, 1995)

NDOW, Fraternity of Bighorn Sheep, and BLM. In 2002, a portion of North McCullough Mountains WSA was added as a unit of the National Wilderness Preservation System and named North McCullough Wilderness. The Poppy wildlife water development has persisted in what is now North McCullough Wilderness.

In the ensuing 26 years since construction of Poppy, the McCulloughs-Highlands desert bighorn sheep population has increased to healthy, stable levels and water availability limits the full use of the habitat, including that within North McCullough Wilderness. Due to increased human use of and development surrounding the area, there is an increasing need to provide reliable water sources to wildlife in the area, particularly desert bighorn sheep. It has been known since the early 1990's that the water storage capacity at Poppy was insufficient to accommodate wildlife through the year. In the lower Mojave Desert areas, a minimum of 7,000 gallons is standard for such projects. The Poppy project has gone dry in 1995, 1996, 2002, 2007, 2008, and 2009. Water has been hauled to Poppy by helicopter in 2002 when the area was a WSA, and 2009 after the area was designated as Wilderness. Furthermore, there has been extreme variability in annual rainfall in recent years and due to habitat fragmentation, bighorn sheep in this area no longer have the ability to move freely to adjacent mountain ranges to follow irregular "green-up" patterns, as occurred in the past.

Since original construction of Poppy, some plumbing parts replacements have been made. However, many plumbing parts are original and need to be replaced. The NDOW is seriously concerned about the corrosion and failure of plumbing on large volume water projects of the same age as Poppy (+15 years). The Poppy water storage tanks have fewer ultraviolet inhibitors in the resins of its tanks, compared with current products and the tanks have reached the projected life of this product. The older wildlife water development projects, such as Poppy, utilize a floatvalve. Most problems with wildlife water developments of this type relate to the float system which regulates the water level in the wildlife drinker. The proposed upgrade would eliminate the need for a floatvalve.

### **Location**

North McCullough Wilderness

- SE¼, NE¼, SW¼, Sec. 2, Township 24 S., Range 61 E., MDM

### **Proposed Action**

The following is a description of the proposed action as submitted by the NDOW:

- Install four, low flat tanks (1,800 gallons each) in place of the current three tanks.
- For the proposed upgrade, the current tank area footprint would be increased from 280 square feet to 610 square feet.
  - This is necessitated largely by the newer tank design. Although the disturbed area would be larger, the lower height of the tanks, the visual aspect of the tanks would be only slightly increased overall.
  - Much of the visual concerns can be ameliorated by a camouflage design and use of paint colors to blend the project into the environment.

- Some removal of creosote will be necessary around the existing tanks, however, every attempt will be made to establish creosote around the new tanks to provide a similar type of visual screening as currently exists.
- (Note) – There is usually sufficient runoff from the tanks and tank pad to promote increased vigor in plants surrounding most tank pads.
- Install a new cross-leveling drinker with a buried pipeline.
- Remove the existing tanks, floatbox, and drinker.
- Replace the two existing pipelines from the dam to the tanks and rebury the lines.



**Proposed Upgrade of Poppy Wildlife Water Development**

The work plan would be to fly the volunteers, tanks, tools, and materials from a base area outside the wilderness in to the project area within North McCullough Wilderness during a weekend in the winter and early spring months. The base area would be at either (665,525mE / 3,968,721mN) or (665,090mE / 3,967,607mN), both outside the wilderness and at previously disturbed locations.

- To accomplish the work over the proposed two weekends, it would be necessary to use motorized equipments, which is directly mentioned in the Clark County Conservation of Public Land and Natural Resources Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-282). That equipment may include, but would not be limited to the following motorized vehicles and mechanized equipment:
  - Eurocopter AS-350 or equivalent helicopter
  - 5000 Watt Generator
  - Various Saws and Drills
  - 2" Water Pump (also known as a trash pump)

- Electric Cement Mixer
- Spray Paint
- Materials
  - Due to the size and number of the tanks, pipe, cement, etc.
- Volunteer access to the project site
  - The NDOW proposed to use a helicopter to fly volunteers to the site.
  - An option for construction would be to have the crew hike in to the site.
    - The 1.8 mile hike is sufficiently long and difficult, due to the crumbly volcanic rock, that some of the younger and senior members of the regular volunteer group will be precluded from participating.
    - A minimum of forty volunteers are anticipated for the work and multiple trips in and out of the project area by hiking would leave noticeable impacts.
    - Use of the helicopter allows most members of the work crew to begin work earlier, accomplish more, and stay on site longer if they do not have to walk in and out. In plain-speak, the more people we can get there and the longer time we work the site, the sooner we will be done.
    - Many volunteers bring their own, specialized tools to accomplish certain tasks. Their ability to carry those tools on a hike would limit some aspects of construction.
- On site activity
  - Water would be pumped from the old tanks with a gas-powered pump into two of the four new tanks for temporary storage.
  - The three old tanks would be removed from the existing pad.
  - The new tank pad would be constructed.
    - As much as possible, any new rock and dirt to build the pad will come from the wash just to the south of the tanks.
    - Since the old, 6-foot-tall tanks were buried 2.5 to 3 feet, the rock and dirt on the downhill side will have to be removed and pulled forward to form much of the new tank pad. Care will need to be taken to avoid damaging the old tanks and plumbing in the process until as much of the water is salvaged as possible.
    - Since upgrades and retrofitting projects is usually more difficult than building new project, the tank pad work may take two weekends.
  - The old drinker and floatbox will be removed with old cement incorporated in the tank pad or new drinker reinforcement.
  - The two empty new tanks will be placed on the tank pad and water will be pumped into those tanks and the last two tanks will be placed on the pad.
  - The new tanks will be plumbed together and the drinker will be cemented in place between 30 to 50 feet north of the tanks on the same elevation.
  - The old pipeline from the dam to the tanks will be replaced.
  - The tanks and pipeline will be painted and most of the pipeline will be buried.
    - The initial color of the tanks will be slightly darker than the surrounding environment, but within two years the paint will oxidize to an acceptable shade and conformation of colors. Some additional painting may be necessary.

Please submit comments, with "Poppy Upgrade" in the subject line, to the District Manager for consideration and use in evaluating and processing the proposed action at the address below. Alternately, comments may be sent to [lvwilderness@nv.blm.gov](mailto:lvwilderness@nv.blm.gov). All comments must be received by the closing date of this comment period on May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Environmental and minimum activity/minimum tool analysis will be conducted for these activities. A draft of the proposed action and alternative(s) is anticipated by September 2011. A final decision on the proposed action is expected for November 2011, with implementation beginning in January 2012. If you have any questions regarding this notification please contact Sendi Kalcic, Wilderness Specialist at 702-515-5297.

Sincerely,



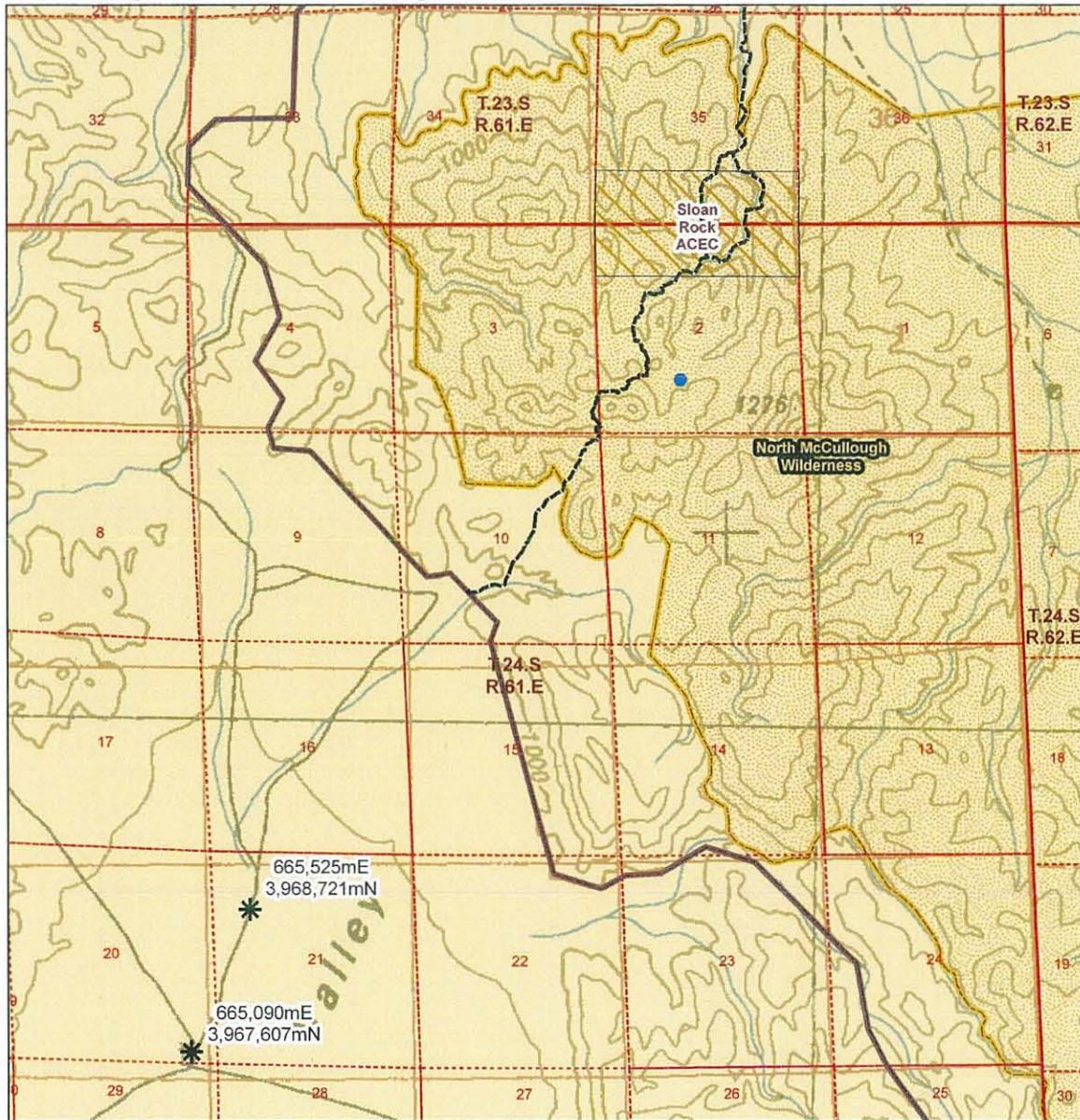
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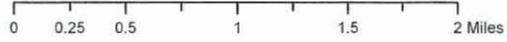
Enclosure:

Figure 1. Location of Poppy (McCullough #2) Wildlife Water Development

# Upgrade of Poppy Wildlife Water Development



- Poppy Wildlife Water Development
- \* Proposed Base Area
- Designated Trail
- Designated Wilderness
- Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area Boundary
- Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- Section Line
- Township Line
- Bureau of Land Management



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Figure 1. Location of Poppy (McCullough #2) Wildlife Water Development