



File Code: 1950

Date: March 9, 2012

Dear Interested Party:

The Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest is proposing to permit the construction of a water diversion structure and irrigation pipeline on Pratt Creek to restore irrigation water to the PX Ranch. The construction of the pipeline will replace an existing irrigation ditch that is no longer functioning.

The project area is approximately 57 miles north-northwest of Elko on the central portion of the Independence Mountains in Elko County, Nevada in T41N, R54E, Section 5 (see enclosed maps). The project area runs along and crosses FS Road 158, access to the site can be gained off NV-225.

The Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest is working with Ellison Ranching Company (owner of PX Ranch), Nevada Department of Wildlife, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to incorporate a fish screen into the construction of the irrigation diversion to prevent fish entrainment and loss. This project is part of a Lahontan Cutthroat Trout (LCT) restoration plan on Pratt Creek, a tributary to the North Fork Humboldt River. The final goal of the restoration plan will result in the restoration of approximately 5 miles of historic LCT stream habitat with protection and passage around the PX Ranch diversion.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of and need for the diversion structure and pipeline is to provide the applicant access to their water for irrigation use on private land.

Project Description

The current diversion structure, which is no longer functional, allowed flow to enter a diversion ditch that went to a reservoir on the PX Ranch. The proposed action would involve the construction of a new diversion structure that would include a fish screen that would prevent fish entrainment and loss, while still allowing fish passage downstream of the diversion structure. This action will also include replacing the existing diversion ditch with a pipeline. The proposed pipeline, which is approximately 1.5 miles in length, will be buried. The proposed diversion with fish screen would need to supply water during the season of use (4-15 to 8-15) as permitted under the applicant's state water right.

The pipeline would follow the general alignment of the original diversion ditch, with slight modification from the original location to protect archeological resources. Due to the historic nature of the current diversion structure it will not be removed. The new diversion structure will be constructed about 50 yards upstream and the pipeline will traverse north of the original structure and join the original alignment on the north side of the road (see enclosed maps).



Preliminary Issues and Concerns

No issues or concerns have been identified upon initial review of the project. A cultural resource survey has been completed. This cultural survey identified the old diversion structure as historic and the site of the new diversion was moved upstream as a mitigation. The fish and wildlife surveys have also been completed and no threatened or endangered species were identified within the project area. The plant survey has yet to be completed but no adverse effects from this project are anticipated.

Due to lack of listed species or other identified issues associated with this project I expect that this project can be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement. This project falls under the following category: Approval, modification, or continuation of minor special uses of National Forest System lands that require less than five contiguous acres of land [36CFR 220.6(e)(3)] in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). As part of the environmental analysis we are inviting public comment on the project at this time.

How to Participate

Send written comments to the Mountain City Ranger District: 2035 Last Chance Road, Elko, NV 89801, attention District Ranger. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to:

comments-intermtn-humboldt-toiyabe-mtn-city@fs.fed.us

For those submitting hand-delivered or oral comments the office telephone number is 775-738-5171 and the office is located at 2035 Last Chance Road, Elko, office business hours are 7:30 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

Please be aware that names and other personal information submitted may be released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act. Your comments would be most helpful to us if provided by April 16, 2012. If you have questions or need further information please contact Rachel Van Horne, Fisheries Biologist, at 775-355-5344. We appreciate your interest in this project.

Sincerely,

/s/ Kathryn W. Fuell
KATHRYN W. FUELL
District Ranger

Enclosure: Project Map