



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Boise District Office

3948 Development Avenue

Boise, Idaho 83705

<http://www.id.blm.gov/offices/lsrcd>



March 2, 2010

In Reply Refer To: Silver City Road Enhancement Environmental Assessment (EA)

Dear Interested Public:

The Owyhee District Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is soliciting comments on a draft environmental assessment (EA) for road enhancements on 8.7 miles of the Silver City Road between State Highway-78 and Silver City (see attached scoping summary and map).

An informational meeting will be held to present details about the project and answer any questions the public may have. This meeting will occur on March 15th, 2010 at 6:00 pm at the Owyhee County Historical Museum and Library (17085 Basey St. Murphy Id.), and is open to the public.

Electronic copies of the detailed project description and the attached scoping/information package can be found at: https://www.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/nepa/nepa_register.do and on the Environmental Conservation Services website at www.ecs-services.com. Hard copies of these documents are also available upon request. Written comments on the proposal will be accepted through April 2nd, 2010 and will be taken into consideration prior to development of the draft EA. Comment submittal may be written or electronic. Submittal information is found on page 6 of the attached document. For further information on the project or to request copies of the detailed project description, please contact Kelley Moore, BLM Realty Specialists at (208) 384-3339.

Sincerely,

Buddy Green
Owyhee Field Manager

SCOPING/INFORMATION PACKAGE
Silver City Road Enhancements
Owyhee Field Office

This information package summarizes a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to grant a right of way (ROW) for road enhancements on Silver City Road (Road) in accordance with the Owyhee Resource Management Plan (RMP). Federal actions must be analyzed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations to determine potential environmental consequences.

The purpose of this report is to inform interested and affected parties of the proposal and to solicit comments to assist with the NEPA review of the proposal. Analysis of the proposal is ongoing, and will be documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA) with an estimated completion date of May 30, 2010. Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential environmental issues related to the proposed action and to identify alternatives to the proposed action that meet the purpose of and need for the project.

Purpose and Need for Action

The Silver City Road between the historic town of Silver City and State Highway (SH) 78 was constructed as a secondary access point to the Silver City area. The Road is important to Silver City residents (seasonal and year-round), as well as numerous recreational users and mining, timber, and grazing operations. Based on Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) data, current use averages 65 trips per day on an annual basis, with the road closed to the general public between November (normally) and Memorial Day weekend. Long-term increases in road use have primarily been associated with regional population increases and use of the area for recreation (1999 Owyhee Resource Management Plan), but increases in commodity prices for gold and silver are also a factor for increased use.

Based on increased prices for gold and silver combined with the inefficient historic mining operations in the area, Silver Falcon LLC is developing a milling facility that will process unused materials from the historic mining operations in the area around Silver City. The process will require the transportation of raw materials by semi-trailers or other commercial-sized vehicles from the mine to the milling site, which is located off of Silver City Road approximately 8.5 miles southwest of the Silver City Road/SH-78 junction, via the Silver City Road. The transportation of materials would add approximately 40 daily trips, Monday through Thursday only, while the road is open.

While the existing road already accommodates commercial sized vehicles (buses, semi-trailers, dump trucks, etc.) , and has been updated and maintained over the years, the current road design and construction associated with drainage, line of sight, road width, and surface integrity would be considered inadequate by current transportation standards. As a result, there are a number of impacts to wildlife and water quality associated with erosion and runoff, as well as potential impacts to public health and safety.

Based on the expected increase in use of the Silver City Road, combined with the existing deficiencies and impacts to natural resources and public health/ safety, there is a clear need to:

incorporate current best management practices (BMP) associated with road design and drainage; increase road width and line of site at key blind corners; and increase road surface stability at specific locations. The purpose of the proposed project is to address the identified road deficiencies and reduce the adverse impacts to natural resources, while increasing public health and safety associated with increased use of the road.

Existing Condition

The existing Silver City Road is one of only two primary access routes to and from Silver City. The Road supports approximately 65 trips per day on average, primarily passenger trucks and cars; however, it has and continues to be used by larger and heavier commercial vehicles to transport people, livestock, equipment, etc. to and from Silver City and the surrounding area. Primary uses and the basis for the local and somewhat regional economy in the area include: recreation (active and passive), livestock grazing, timber harvest, mining, and residential homes associated with Silver City.

Within the 8.7 mile section associated with the project area (Map 1), there are three primary vegetative communities (Sagebrush/grass steppe, juniper/ mahogany, and Douglas-fir), as well as the riparian community (Scotch Bob Creek) that parallels the road and the intersection of Sinker Creek. Streams directly adjacent to or intersecting the roadway are all meeting Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) water quality standards or have not been assessed. However, these are tributaries to the lower portion of Sinker Creek which is not currently meeting 305 (b) water quality standards due to sediment and temperature.

Based on habitat type and regional records, the BLM, USFWS, and IDFG have identified that following special status plant species could be present: eatonella (*Eatonella nivea*), rigid threadbush (*Nemacladus rigidus*), white-margined wax plant (*Glyptopleura marginata*), stiff milkvetch (*Astragalus conjunctus*), and least phacelia (*Phacelia minutissima*). However, there are no site-specific records, such as past rare plant surveys or GPS points, for any of these species found within the project area. Site surveys would be conducted prior to any disturbance.

Wildlife species found in the area are those commonly associated with each or a combination of all three vegetative community types, including fish and amphibian species associated with the adjacent streams. The roadway is also adjacent to a critical winter habitat area for mule deer. Special status wildlife species potentially occurring in the area include the: redband trout, piñon mouse, pygmy rabbit, greater sage-grouse, California bighorn sheep, prairie falcon, northern goshawk, ferruginous hawk, loggerhead shrike, sage sparrow, Brewer's sparrow, Great Basin black-collared lizard, longnose snake, western ground snake, western toad, and Woodhouse's toad. There were no site specific records, such as past site surveys or GPS points, only regional habitat descriptions and potential presence based on habitat type. Site surveys would be conducted prior to any disturbance.

Proposed Action

Representatives from Silver Falcon LLC have developed a road enhancement and annual maintenance plan to address the identified road issues and made application to the BLM for a right-of-way (ROW) under the provisions set forth in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). The ROW would grant them access across BLM lands to access their mine claims via the Silver City Road. The proposed road plan would incorporate current best management practices (BMP), increase road surface stability, and increase road width and line of site at key corners on approximately 8.7 miles of the Road between Silver City and SH-78 (Map 1).

The proposed project would: re-grade and enhance the road surface stability with crushed rock on approximately one total mile of road, which would be broken up into multiple locations over the entire distance; widen 16 corners through slope cuts or corner fills; and replace three damaged or insufficient culverts (Table 1, Map 1). Construction would take approximately four weeks and beginning after the decision has been signed in early June. Proposed road closures associated with construction activity would limit access via this route between 8 AM and 6 PM Monday through Thursday, with a daily one-hour (noon to 1 PM) opening. Copies of the detailed project description and scoping summary can be found on the BLM website at https://www.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/nepa/nepa_register.do and on the Environmental Conservation Service website at www.ecs-services.com under the Silver City EA Link.

Table 1. Project Summary by Individual Site.

Site	Proposed Action	Proposed ROW Length (ft)	Proposed ROW Width (ft.)
1	Widen the roadway driving surface by 12 feet (ft). Enlarge borrow ditch. Road would be kept in-sloped to use the existing drainage facilities. Due to the rocky condition of the material, the cut slopes would be kept steep, 1:1 to minimize disturbance. Sites 1-6 similar only change is cut slope.	245	80
2	12 ft of new driving surface, 4 ft borrow ditch. Cut slope 1:1, 30 ft cut, 30 ft of slope disturbance	386	65
3	12 ft of new driving surface, 4 ft borrow ditch. Cut slope 1:1, 20 ft cut, 20 ft of slope disturbance.	224	55
4	12 ft of new driving surface, 4 ft borrow ditch. Cut slope 2:1, 25 ft cut, 50 ft of slope disturbance.	480	85
5	12 ft of new driving surface, 4 ft borrow ditch. Cut slope 1:1, 30 ft cut, 30 ft of slope disturbance.	201	65
6	12 ft of new driving surface, 4 ft borrow ditch. Cut slope 1:1, 30 ft cut, 30 ft of slope disturbance.	265	65
7	Extend the culverts in both directions. Widen the roadway 15 ft. This is also the point where the material on the roadway is unsuitable for all weather driving. Use the crushed material from the corner widening to improve the driving surface. Starting at this point (43 degrees 2' 15.533N, - 116 degrees 39' 51.311W), upstream approx. 2,000 ft and downstream approx. 3,280 ft. Material would be placed 1 ft thick and the width of the existing driving surface.	258	40

Site	Proposed Action	Proposed ROW Length (ft)	Proposed ROW Width (ft.)
8	Widen the roadway 15 ft. Deepen the upstream borrow ditch. After the overburden is removed, there is likely rock. The slope can be kept steep 1:1 to reduce disturbance. Material would be loaded and hauled to corner #7 for sub-grade material.	261	55
9	Widen driving surface by 15 ft. Enlarge borrow ditch. Road would be kept in-sloped to prevent sediment from entering the creek and use existing drainage structures. Due to the existing solid rock conditions, the slopes would be kept steep 1:1 to avoid disturbance.	262	75
10	Same as 9.	654	75
11	Widen driving surface by 15 ft wide. Enlarge borrow ditch, borrow ditch is almost none existent due to the rock. Road would be kept in-sloped to use the existing drainage facilities and prevent erosion. Fill is 6 ft deep at a 2:1 slope.	151	75
12	Widen driving surface by 15 ft wide. Enlarge borrow ditch, borrow ditch is almost none existent due to the rock. Road would be kept in-sloped to use the existing drainage facilities and prevent erosion. Fill is 8 ft deep at a 2:1 slope.	384	85
13	Material would be cut from the right side of the road. This material would not be sufficient for the needed fill. Additional fill material would be imported from turn 14. Area to be filled would be grubbed, leveled and compacted. The rock on the left side of the road would be left undisturbed. Widen road by 15 ft. Cut slope 1:1, 5ft cut, 20ft of disturbance. 15 ft flat area fill with a 2:1 fill slope, 12 ft deep.	230	55
14	Widen driving surface by 15ft. Enlarge borrow ditch. Road would be in-sloped to prevent the existing fill from washing away. Material excavated would be hauled to corner 13 and used for fill. Cut slope 1:1, 30 ft cut, 30 ft of slope disturbance.	173	65
15*	Widen driving surface by 15 ft. Enlarge almost nonexistent borrow ditch. In-slope road to prevent wash outs and use existing catch basins. Material would be used for fill on Corner 16. Cut slope 1:1, 25 ft cut, 25 ft of slope disturbance.	270	60
16*	Widen driving surface by 20 ft, 4 ft borrow ditch, 4 ft catch basin. Cut slope 1:1, 20 ft cut, 20 ft of slope disturbance. New culvert would be installed to expand driving surface to left side. Slope is steep, 100 ft of 24-inch culvert to replace old culvert. 20ft fill at a 2:1 slope.		
* Sites 15 and 16 are considered one site based proximity to each other, but two different project components.			
<i>Note: Project lengths were measured along the center line for the entire distance of the disturbance, and project width is measured from the furthest point of disturbance to the center line.</i>			

Preliminary Issues

Based on the fact that there is an existing roadway that currently allows for the type of vehicles and proposed uses identified by Silver Falcon LLC, and the overall footprint of the project area would be restricted, the preliminary issues identified during internal scoping were limited to potential impacts related to soil disturbance, cultural significance of Silver City and the Silver City Road, special status plant and wildlife species, traffic coordination and public safety, use of BMPs and long-term maintenance actions, and potential impacts to existing uses. Specifically identified were potential issues associated with:

- Soil disturbance - Potential impacts to water quality and wildlife during and after construction activities that could increase the amount of sedimentation into the adjacent streams or increase establishment or spread of invasive or noxious weed species.
- Cultural Impacts - Potential impacts to un-documented cultural resources as well as the importance of the Silver City Road as a historic aspect of the region.
- Special Status Species (SSS) - Potential impacts to SSS associated with soil disturbing activities and reduction of vegetation relative to water quality, loss of forage and cover, impacts to nesting birds, vehicle-related mortality, construction activity and noise, and disturbance caused by increased traffic volume.
- Traffic Coordination and Public Safety - Potential impacts related to road closures during construction, increased use of the road by commercial vehicles, public safety relative to increased line of sight and wider roadways.
- Use of BMPs and Road Maintenance - Effectiveness of BMPs and maintenance activities to reduce soil erosion and drainage issues during and after road construction activities.
- Impacts to Existing Users - Identify potential impacts to solitude, economic stability, and safety associated with transportation, wildfire protection/ evacuation, and emergency medical services (EMS), as well as potential impacts to active and passive recreation, livestock, mining, and timber operations.

Preliminary Alternative Development

Three alternatives have been identified. Under Alternative A, the No-action alternative, there would be no road enhancements, but the proposed uses by Silver Falcon LLC associated with the road could continue with the issuance of a BLM ROW. Alternative B is the proposed alternative described above. Alternative C was considered but not analyzed in detail. This alternative looked at extending the paved portion from SH-78 all the way to Silver City. However, this alternative would not comply with the Owyhee County Comprehensive Plan (Owyhee County 2002).

Decision to be Made

The BLM is conducting an Environmental Assessment (EA) to determine if issuing a ROW and completion of the project would result in significant impacts. If no significant impacts are recognized, BLM could issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and provide a ROW grant, authorizing Silver Falcon LLC to conduct the identified road enhancements and use the road under the provisions of the FLPMA and stipulations the BLM deems necessary.

Public Input Needed

A copy of the full project description can be downloaded from the BLM website (https://www.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/nepa/nepa_register.do) or the Silver City EA link on the ECS website (www.ecs-services.com). Comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, preliminary issues, and alternatives. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received by April 2, 2010 and are directly relevant to the proposal and project area. The BLM will not reject public feedback outside established public involvement timeframes; however, these comments may be considered secondary to comments received in a timely manner and may only be assessed to determine if they identify concerns that would substantially alter the assumptions, proposal, design, or development of the EA. The public will be notified and have a subsequent 30 day comment period to address the draft EA when it is completed.

Public scoping comments sent electronically should be sent to silvercityea@ecs-services.com with the title of this project in the subject line. Please identify whether you are submitting comments as an individual or as the designated spokesperson on behalf of an organization. Issues that are outside the scope of the proposal will not be addressed at this planning level.

Please send any written comments to:

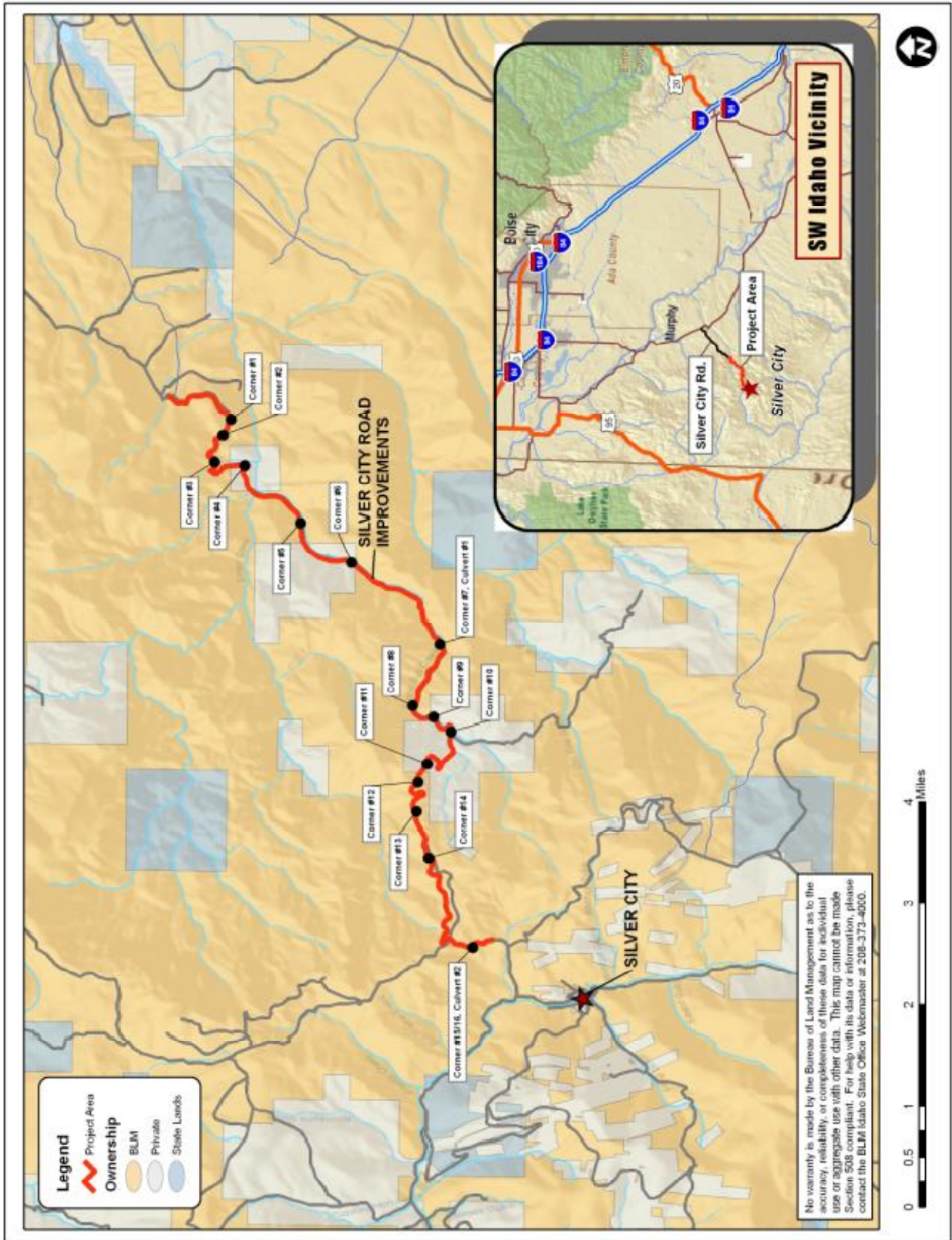
Environmental Conservation Services Inc.

Attn: Silver City EA

4900 N. Rosepoint Way, Suite C

Boise, Idaho 83713

Electronic comments should be sent to silvercityea@ecs-services.com or go to the Silver City EA link on the ECS website (www.ecs-services.com).



Map 1. Project Area.