

**U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management**

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**Environmental Assessment ID-230-2008-EA-56  
January 2009**

**PRE-DECISIONAL**

**Sun Valley Trail Right-of-Way**

*Location: City of Sun Valley, Blaine County, Idaho*

*Applicant/Address: Sun Valley Company  
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Sun Valley, ID 83353*

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Sun Valley Company (Applicant) has applied to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for a right-of-way (ROW) grant to relocate/realign two portions (Areas A and B) of a non-motorized bicycle and pedestrian trail across public land located in Sun Valley, Blaine County, Idaho. The existing trail is currently located entirely upon the Applicant's private property. The Applicant has worked with the International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) to inventory the trail and determine what, if any, modifications may be necessary to decrease the level of erosion on and around the trail; thus increasing the sustainability of the trail. IMBA determined that there were a couple areas of the existing alignment of the trail that are attributing to heavy erosion due to their location in regards to the natural contours of the landscape. IMBA and the Applicant have worked together on identifying a proposed relocation/realignment that would allow for these segments of the trail to be modified; thus more sustainable. The Applicant has also submitted a preliminary plat application to the City of Sun Valley for a proposed development on their adjacent private property known as the White Clouds Development within the Gun Club Land Use Planning Area (LUPA). See attached Sun Valley Zoning and Parcel Map (2004, Figure 1). The development application includes a new neighborhood of 30 single-family residential lots (1-2 acres each), 24.34 acres for multi-family housing, and 40 acres of recreation open space on the west side of Trail Creek Road. The application also includes a Nordic ski trail, bike and hiking trail, golf clubhouse/Nordic center and the addition of a new 9-hole golf course, practice range, golf maintenance and storage facilities. Sun Valley Company has also requested the rezoning of an area on the east side of Trail Creek Road to allow for the future subdivision request of about 27.8 acres for multi-family housing. The trail involved with the proposed action has been identified within the preliminary plat application to be recorded as a public access easement; with maintenance being the responsibility of various trail and volunteer groups within the project area. See attached project location map (Figure 2).

#### **PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION**

Sun Valley has filed an application for a ROW grant to construct, operate, and maintain approximately 861 feet of a non-motorized bicycle and pedestrian trail with a tread width of 35 to 42 inches wide across public land described as follows:

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The underlying need for the proposed action is for the continued provision of a non-motorized bicycle and pedestrian trail in the project area that is located and constructed in a way that will increase the sustainability of the trail and reduce the amount of erosion and vegetation damage in the project area. The entire trail, including the portions on both the public land private land, would be recorded as a public access trail open to the public for year round use, with skiing and snowshoeing in the winter. As undeveloped land on the valley floor disappears due to development of the adjacent neighborhoods, residents continue to seek nearby recreation in the hillside lands that border the City of Sun Valley.

BLM is proposing to grant a ROW that would authorize the Applicant to relocate/realign a bicycle and pedestrian trail across public land because the activity is an allowable use of public

land within BLM's ROW program under authority of Title V of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) and the regulations at 43 CFR 2800. Additionally, recreation is recognized as an appropriate use of public lands in the Sun Valley Management Framework Plan (MFP) that provides management direction for the project area. BLM will consider approval of the ROW application in a manner that avoids or reduces impacts on resources and activities as identified in the Sun Valley MFP, Sun Valley Analysis Unit, and prevents unnecessary or undue degradation of the public lands.

### **CONFORMANCE WITH BLM LAND USE PLAN(S)**

The Proposed and No Action alternatives described in Chapter 2 are in conformance with the Sun Valley MFP approved in December 1981. They conform to Sun Valley Analysis Unit Lands Decision #3 (p. SV-2), which states:

Road and trail rights-of-way, both private and public may be allowed when consistent with local planning and zoning ordinances and consistent with the general management criteria within this area and environmental impacts are minimal.

Rationale for the aforementioned decision states that the Sun Valley area has a rapidly growing population, which brings the requirement for additional roads and trails. These additional road and trail rights-of-way across public lands may be less damaging to the total environment than the alternatives would be. The general management philosophy for this area, as stated in the Sun Valley MFP (p. SV-1), is that the area will be managed for recreation, local government needs, and open space. Other uses include intensive recreation development, watershed protection, and livestock grazing.

### **RELATIONSHIPS TO STATUTES, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PLANS**

ROW's are allowable on BLM managed lands per Title V of the FLPMA and the BLM regulations at 43 CFR 2800.

The Blaine County Comprehensive Plan identifies the following as part of their goals: protect the health and lifestyles of Blaine County's residents and visitors; protect the natural, environmental and scenic qualities in Blaine County; preserve and enhance the recreational opportunities available for residents and visitors of Blaine County; cooperate with the Blaine County Recreation District and other local, state and federal agencies to ensure recreation, parks and open space needs of residents are met. Blaine County desires to balance the need of both 1) preserving and enhancing the rural atmosphere and character of agricultural, residential, and recreational uses and 2) respecting private property rights. It is desirable to accomplish this by identifying and acquiring through purchase or donation lands designated as open space and acquiring legal access across private property to adjacent public lands. Since 2005, Blaine County and the BLM have been working collaboratively in developing a recreation and travel plan to guide summer and winter recreational opportunities within the Wood River Valley. On January 29, 2008, the Blaine County Commissioners formally accepted the final report of the Blaine County Cooperative Conservation Recreation and Travel Plan (October 2007). At this time, Blaine County also submitted to the BLM a recommendation to adopt the outcome of this planning effort to create quality trails and recreational areas for all users, manage motorized vehicles on designated routes, and give special management attention to wintering wildlife. The proposed project area is located within the Undeveloped Hillside zone. The niche of this zone is

to provide an unspoiled connection to wide open spaces/landscapes for residents and visitors to the Wood River Valley.

It is the goal of the City of Sun Valley to provide for an integrated transportation system that promotes a recreationally-active community, encourages non-motorized transportation, and reduces congestion and air pollution. Two objectives within this goal are: 1) anticipate and plan for a balanced, integrated transportation and parking system for residents, visitors, and commuters on an on-going basis, and 2) encourage the use and expansion of public paths and trails. An identified action item to aid in achieving the first objective is to require development applications to include transportation studies, proposed mitigation, expansion service, and infrastructure plans when new development or redevelopment is expected to significantly increase traffic, parking, trail, and/or transit demands. Plans should maximize pedestrian and bicycle-oriented travel; encourage and design for mass transit travel; and minimize increased vehicular traffic and parking on city streets and within the region. There are several action items identified for the achievement of the second objective. They're listed as follows: a) in conjunction with the Sun Valley Community Trails Group or a similar organization, identify and obtain permanent access easements, land grants, conservation easements or other opportunities, where appropriate, for recreational trailheads, trails, and/or parking across open space lands. Obtain easements, whenever possible, at the time of development approvals; b) encourage the establishment and maintenance of a system of dedicated recreational trailheads and trails throughout the City that 1) connect existing neighborhoods, parking, open spaces, and other natural areas and 2) provide trail linkages to neighboring communities, the bike path, parking, transit services, and federally managed lands; c) develop standards, policies, and educational programs designed to address potential impacts and to increase awareness of user impacts on open space trails.

The Proposed and No Action alternatives described below are in conformance with BLM's regulations, the Blaine County Comprehensive Plan, and the City of Sun Valley Comprehensive Plan, by proposing a trail ROW that is allowable by regulation and aids in meeting the recreational goals of the area.

## **CHAPTER 2 DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES**

### **PROPOSED ACTION**

The BLM would issue a ROW grant authorizing the Applicant to construct, operate, and maintain, two portions (Areas A and B) of a non-motorized bicycle and pedestrian trail across public lands. The trail ROW across public land would be approximately 10 feet wide and a total of 861 feet long. (See Figure 3). The existing trail is currently located on the Applicant's private property. The Applicant worked with IMBA to determine ways to make the trail more sustainable in regards to soil erosion.

The trail currently exists wholly on the Applicant's private property. The trail, including the relocated/realigned segments would begin on the Applicant's private property, cross a portion of public land (Area A), then again cross the Applicant's private property to another area where it would again cross a portion of public land (Area B), then back onto the Applicant's private property (See Figure 2). Specifically, the trail would start just off the northwest side Trail Creek Road and meander west along the north side of the proposed White Cloud Development subdivision lot lines on private property as it currently does; then jog up onto public land (Area

A) for a short distance; then drop back down onto private and continue in a westerly direction north of the proposed lot lines to another area where it would again cross public land (Area B) and drop back down on the private property. The trail would then continue as it currently exists to the western edge of the subdivision then south where it crosses into the City of Ketchum and Big Wood Subdivision. The portions that would cross public land are located on the northern subdivision boundary.

Area A would include relocating/realigning a trail segment uphill of its current location in an eroded portion of the drainage. Area A would include approximately 335 feet of new trail construction on public land; about 15 feet of new construction on private property; and about 385 feet of rehabilitated trail on private property.

Area B would include relocating/realigning a trail segment that would allow for the removal of a switchback. The relocated/realigned trail segment would be located north of the existing alignment and would be constructed so that a switchback is not necessary and also retaining an approximate seven percent grade. Area B would include about 450 feet of new construction on public land; about 125 feet on private property; and about 655 feet of rehabilitated trail on private property.

A mini excavator would be utilized to create the tread surface in the areas being relocated/realigned by sheering off a thin layer of topsoil, leveling humps, and filling in holes. Hand tools would then be used to work with natural vegetation patterns to "feather" or meander the edges of the clearing work so as not to have such a severe appearance. The tread surface of the trail would be between 35–42 inches wide with additional width for shoulders on each side for a total ROW width of 10 feet. No surface materials would be brought in for the trail tread. Vegetation removal would be necessary.

The rehabilitated portions of the trail would include breaking up the old compacted soil in the trail tread, scarifying the soil so that new plants can establish themselves, construction of water bars and check dams, placement of rocks to prohibit access, partial recontouring, and reseeding with native plants. Seeding would be done using a broadcast method. Signs would be installed temporarily on the rehabilitated areas encouraging users to stay on the relocated/realigned portions of the trail.

The trail would continue to be a connector trail from the City of Sun Valley to the City of Ketchum and would allow legal access to the adjacent hillsides and public land. The improved bicycle and pedestrian trail within the White Clouds Development will also be tied to the bus terminus at the Village Core. The trail, including the portions on both the public and private lands, has been identified within the preliminary plat application to be recorded as a public access easement; with maintenance being the responsibility of various trail and volunteer groups within the project area. This would allow the trail to be included within the interconnected system of parks, recreational facilities, trails, green spaces and natural lands.

## **NO ACTION**

Under the No Action alternative the ROW application to relocate/realign portions of a bicycle and pedestrian trail onto public lands would be denied and a ROW grant would not be issued to the Applicant.

## CHAPTER 3 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The affected environment of the project area was described by an interdisciplinary team as documented in the Interdisciplinary Team Analysis Record Checklist (Checklist). A copy of this document is located in the project file. The checklist indicates which resources of concern are either not present in the project area or would not be impacted to a degree that requires detailed analysis. Supplemental Authorities are those elements that are subject to the requirements specified in statute, regulation, or executive order, and may be considered in EA's (BLM H-1790-1, Appendix 1). Supplemental Authorities are included in the Checklist. Resources which are affected are described in Chapter 3 and impacts on these resources are analyzed in Chapter 4.

### GENERAL SETTING

The project area is a parcel of public land located north of the proposed White Clouds Development on the northern edge of Sun Valley, Blaine County, Idaho, approximately ¼ - ½ mile northwest of Trail Creek Road. The project area is within the area of impact for Sun Valley. The population of Sun Valley, as per the Idaho Commerce and Labor, was 1,453 in 2004. Sun Valley, along with the rest of Blaine County, has received an increased level of economic and population growth within the last two decades; consequently, with the influx of population and residential development in Blaine County the recreational use of the areas have greatly increased. The public lands, as well as private lands are experiencing unauthorized road and trail construction due to the impacts and demand for public access and recreational opportunities. Though many of the recreational facilities have been developed by private enterprise, recreation on public lands surrounding the Wood River Valley attracts many people to the area. Access to public lands and to rivers and streams is critical to the continued recreational enjoyment and desirability of Blaine County.

This project area is within the Lake Creek grazing allotment which allows for sheep use during the period from May 20 through October 31. The Lake Creek Allotment encompasses approximately 1,825 acres of land. The following table summarizes the current grazing use authorizations for this allotment.

**Table 3.1 - Current Grazing Authorizations**

<b>Current Permittee</b>	<b>Type of Livestock</b>	<b>Active AUMs</b>	<b>Suspended AUMs</b>	<b>Total AUMs</b>
Flat Top Grazing Association	Sheep	174	43	217

*AUMs = Animal Unit Months, the equivalent of forage consumed by one cow and one half calf or five sheep for one month.*

### RESOURCES/ISSUES BROUGHT FORWARD FOR ANALYSIS

During the analysis process, the interdisciplinary team considered several resources and supplemental authorities. The interdisciplinary team has determined that the following resources are not present in the project area and would not be affected: Cultural Resources; Environmental Justice; Farmlands (prime or unique); Floodplains; Native American Religious Concerns; Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Plant Species; Hazardous or Solid Wastes; Wild and Scenic Rivers; Wilderness; Woodland/Forestry; Geology/Mineral Resources/Energy Production; Paleontology; Water Rights; and Wilderness Characteristics.

Several resources were determined to be present in or near the project area but identified as not being affected by the Proposed or No Action alternatives to a degree that requires detailed analysis. Air Quality - There will be no quantifiable dust or other air quality impacts associated with the Proposed or No Action alternatives. Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) - The Sun Peak ACEC is just less than a quarter of a mile north of Area A of the project. It is not anticipated that the proposed action will impact the ACEC as the trail runs in a more of an east-west alignment away from the ACEC. Invasive, Non-Native Species – A stipulation would be attached to the ROW, if granted, stating that the Holder of the ROW would be responsible for control of noxious weed species that result or would result from the improvements authorized by the ROW. Should any state-listed noxious weeds become located in the proposed right-of-way during the term of the grant, the Holder would be responsible for control. Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Animal Species – A Special Status Animal Clearance worksheet was completed on February 11, 2008, that determined the Proposed Action would not adversely impact any threatened, endangered or candidate status animal species or their habitat. Water Quality - There are no 303(d) listed streams in the area that would be affected by the project. Wetland/Riparian Zones - There are wetlands and riparian zones present in the Lake Creek Allotment, however, the project site is not located near any of them. Vegetation including Special Status Plant Species other than Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Candidate or Listed Species – A Special Status Plant Clearance worksheet was completed on August 1, 2008 that determined the Proposed Action would not adversely impact any special status plants or their habitat. Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines - The Lake Creek Allotment is currently meeting all Rangeland Health Standards and this action does not have the potential to impact the rangeland resources in the area. Livestock Grazing - This project is located within the Lake Creek Allotment and sheep are permitted to graze on the allotment during the spring and fall months. This action does not have the potential to impact the trailing of the sheep to and from the allotment.

Recreation - The project falls within an Extensive Recreation Management Area (ERMA). Within ERMA's BLM recreation management actions are limited to only those of a custodial nature allowing for recreational activities to take place while reacting to visitor health and safety, use and user conflicts and resource protection. Activities that occur or may occur within the project area primarily include mountain biking and hiking. This project enables the trail to more closely match the existing trail design characteristics and associated experiences. Therefore the mountain biking and hiking activities would still be allowed to occur with no additional impacts to visitor health and safety, use or user conflict or recreation resource protection. Visual Resources - This area falls within a VRM Inventory Class III area. The objective of this class is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be moderate. Management activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Changes should repeat the basic elements found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape. Erosion associated with the existing trail is contributing to an increasing visual contrast with the characteristic environment. The proposed improvements and realignment will reduce future erosion. This will help bring the project area closer to reflecting the original characteristic environment. Therefore, this project meets the Class III objective for VRM. Lands/Access - The trail, whether relocated or not, would continue to provide public non-motorized access to the adjacent hillsides and public land. Fuels/Fire Management - Construction of the proposed trail would have no impact on the current fuels and fire management of the area. Socio-Economic - The proposed action is not anticipated to impact the Socio-economics in the area, as the trail currently exists and the proposed action does not change the beginning or ending destinations of the trail. Therefore, these resources are not discussed further in the following analysis.

The following resources have been brought forward for detailed analysis: Fish and Wildlife including Special Status Species other than FWS Candidate or Listed Species and Soils. These resource issues are discussed in the following sections.

## **FISH AND WILDLIFE INCLUDING SPECIAL STATUS SPECIES OTHER THAN FWS CANDIDATE OR LISTED SPECIES**

Appendix A contains the Federally Listed and BLM Sensitive Animal Species that may occur in the Shoshone Field Office. Appendix A was reviewed to determine which of these species are potentially affected by this trail proposal. Greater Sage-grouse, Pygmy Rabbit, Bald Eagle, and Canada Lynx are all BLM Sensitive Species (Type 2) that could potentially utilize the project area. The project area has not been classified as sage-grouse habitat. The majority of the area is too steep for breeding and brood-rearing activities and there are no recorded leks within the project area. A 2003 study (Rachlow and Svancara) prioritized Pygmy Rabbit habitat potential within the project area, and it categorized it as having a mid-high potential. However, the Conservation Data Center currently does not report any active burrow systems in the project area and it is likely too steep to attract rabbits. Bald Eagles pass over and through the area and are likely to spend time along the major drainages. It's unlikely that Canada Lynx will occur in the area due to the proximity of residential and commercial development, and the lack of suitable forested habitat.

Three species of Passerine songbirds (Brewer's sparrow, sage sparrow, and loggerhead shrike) are shrubsteppe obligate species that rely on relatively large and continuous areas of sagebrush with native perennial grass/forb understory for successful breeding. All three of these songbirds' utilize habitat types present in and around the project area.

## **SOILS**

The soils in the project area are comprised primarily of a Friedman-Elksel-Winridge complex with 30-60 percent slopes and a small amount of a Vitale-Povey association which also has 30-60 percent slopes. These types of soils are very cobbled and gravelly, well drained loams that are typically found on mountain slopes. These soils tend to have a high erosion factor when not compacted or surfaced.

# **CHAPTER 4 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS**

The potential impacts or effects of the Proposed and No Action alternatives are discussed in this section. The intent is to provide the scientific and analytical basis for comparison of the effects of each alternative. It is assumed that the changes in levels of use on other resources would continue at current rates. This section will mirror the resources identified and presented in Chapter 3.

## **DIRECT AND INDIRECT IMPACTS**

## **PROPOSED ACTION**



## **FISH AND WILDLIFE INCLUDING SPECIAL STATUS SPECIES OTHER THAN FWS CANDIDATE OR LISTED SPECIES**

Implementation of the Proposed Action would result in the removal of existing habitat in order to construct the trail tread (35-42 inches wide) for the relocated/realigned trail segments. However, habitat would still remain on both sides of the proposed trail segments and would be increased with the rehabilitation of the old trail segments. It can be anticipated that there would be some minor, short-term displacement of wildlife as construction work is conducted. It is also noted that the Proposed Action would increase human activity in the area on a year-round basis as the trail is expected to be used for mountain biking, hiking, Nordic skiing, and snowshoeing.

Different animals respond differently to the presence of trail users. Most wildlife species readily adapt or become “habituated” to consistent and non-threatening recreation activities. Those species that do not become habituated, display avoidance or displacement behaviors. Avoidance behavior is generally an innate response that is magnified by visitor behaviors perceived as threatening, such as, loud sounds, off-trail travel, travel in the direction of wildlife and sudden movements” (Marion and Wimpey 2007).

The proposed trail ROW segments are relatively small incursions onto public land, and are located in areas likely utilized by recreationists already as the project area is located in close proximity to residential and commercial/recreational development. These linear trail segments would not introduce new edges to the vegetation or changes in vegetation types. Therefore bird species like the Sage and Brewer’s Sparrow that are affected by changes in vegetation borders would not be directly or indirectly affected. Any effects to the BLM Sensitive wildlife species that may make use of the project area are not expected to be consequential to the survival of these wildlife species.

A full clearance Special Status Animal Species Assessment was completed on February 11, 2008. It was determined that this project will not adversely impact any special status animal species or their habitat.

## **SOILS**

Direct and indirect impacts of the Proposed Action to soils include soil compaction, displacement, erosion, and subsequent loss of productivity. During construction vegetation and soil would be removed to allow for the construction of the trail tread (35-42 inches wide). A mini excavator would be utilized to create the trail tread surface by sheering off a thin layer of topsoil, leveling humps, and filling in holes. Hand tools would then be used to work with natural vegetation patterns to "feather" or meander the edges of the clearing work so as not to have such a severe appearance. The tread surface of the trail would be between 35 – 42 inches wide with additional width for shoulders on each side for a total ROW width of 10 feet.

Once the trail tread is defined underlying soils would be compacted. This compaction would occur during initial construction and secondarily through recreational use. It should be expected that “soil compaction within the tread will steadily rise while compaction of trailside soils would remain constant. Soil impacts occur predominately during the first year of use with minor changes thereafter” (Bjorkman 1996). “Compacted soils are denser and less permeable to water, which increases water runoff. However, compacted soils also resist erosion and soil displacement and provide durable treads that support traffic. From this perspective, soil

compaction is considered beneficial, and it is an unavoidable form of trail impact” (Marion and Wimpey 2007).

After the trail segments are constructed “trail users can push soil laterally, causing displacement and development of ruts, berms, or cupped treads. Soil displacement is particularly evident when soils are damp or loose and when users are moving at higher rates of speed, turning, braking or other movements that create more lateral force. Soil can also be caught in footwear or tire treads, flicked to the side or carried some distance and dropped. Regardless of the mechanism, soil is generally displaced from the tread center to the sides, elevating in-slopes or berms and compounding drainage problems” (Marion and Wimpey 2007).

Implementation of the Proposed Action would allow for Area A of the trail to be relocated onto public land in an area that would be uphill from a deep channel that has been created by intermittent spring runoff within the floor of the drainage. The runoff has eroded the existing trail tread and created ruts. The new relocation/realignment would allow for the trail segment to be located in an area that would cause less erosion as it would cross the drainage in an area that would include for grade reversals; thus decreasing the potential for erosion. Currently, the trail segment leading into the switchbacks in Area B is an average of approximately seven percent; which is a sustainable grade given the soils and the proposed users. However, the area is currently showing signs of soil erosion and adjacent vegetation damage caused by trail users’ shortcutting the switchbacks. If the switchback was kept on private property and moved closer to the boundary, trail grades would be about twelve percent; which given the fact that the trail is designed to be available for use by beginner mountain bicyclists, is not sustainable. The steeper grades into the switchbacks will induce beginner mountain bicyclists to skid and erode the trail tread. The location on public land will allow the trail to retain the approximate seven percent grades, and reduce erosion.

Rehabilitation of the existing trail segment location would also aid in decreasing the amount of erosion in the area. Area A would include approximately 335 feet of new trail construction on public land; about 15 feet of new construction on private property; and about 385 feet of rehabilitated trail on private property. The relocation for Area B would result in the relocation of a couple switchbacks onto public land that would allow for the trail to have a buffer between the proposed developments and to maintain grades that would allow for all levels of mountain bicyclists to reduce skidding in the area. Area B would include about 450 feet of new construction on public land; about 125 feet on private property; and about 655 feet of rehabilitated trail on private property.

The rehabilitated portions of the trail would include breaking up the old compacted soil in the trail tread, scarifying the soil so that new plants can establish themselves, partial recontouring, and reseeding with native plants. Seeding would be done using a broadcast method. Signs would be installed temporarily on the rehabilitated areas encouraging users to stay on the relocated/realigned portions of the trail.

## **NO ACTION**

## **FISH AND WILDLIFE INCLUDING SPECIAL STATUS SPECIES OTHER THAN FWS CANDIDATE OR LISTED SPECIES**

It is unlikely that disturbance and/or impacts associated with the No Action alternative on wildlife in the area would exceed the current level, as a right-of-way grant would not be issued

for the relocation/realignment of the trail onto public lands. However, wildlife would continue to be displaced and avoid areas where non-motorized recreationists impact their habitat. It can be anticipated that the existing trail would still be used on a year-round basis for mountain biking, hiking, Nordic skiing, and snowshoeing. There would not be any new construction or rehabilitation; users are expected to continue to create re-routes around areas that appear unstable or rough. These user-created re-routes would result in removing small amounts of vegetation adjacent to or near the existing trail.

## **SOILS**

Implementation of the No Action alternative would deny the Applicant's ROW application and would not authorize the trail portions to be relocated/realigned onto public lands. In Area A the trail currently crosses the Applicant's private property through a deep channel located within the floor of the drainage. The existing trail tread has been eroded by the intermittent spring runoff and currently has ruts within the surface. The area shows signs of current changes; which suggests a high rate of erosion. This unstable surface somewhat deters recreationists from staying on the trail tread as it is unstable and rough. Recreationists tend to re-route around areas that appear unstable, thus, impacting the areas directly adjacent to the trail. Eventually, the soils would be compacted and the trail re-routed unintentionally and in an area adjacent or near the existing trail that is likely to result in additional erosion.

Currently, the trail segment leading into the switchbacks in Area B is an average of approximately seven percent; which is a sustainable grade given the soils and the proposed users. However, the area is currently showing signs of soil erosion and adjacent vegetation damage caused by trail user's shortcutting the switchbacks. If the switchbacks were left as is the rate of erosion and vegetation damage would continue. However, if the switchbacks were moved closer to the boundary (but kept on private property) resulting trail grades would be about twelve percent; which given the fact that the trail is designed to be available for use by beginner mountain bicyclists, is not sustainable. The steeper grades into the switchbacks will induce beginner mountain bicyclists to skid and erode the trail tread.

If the No Action alternative is implemented then the current rate of erosion and vegetation damage would continue and may possibly increase if the switchbacks in Area B were moved closer to the boundary on private property.

## **CUMULATIVE IMPACTS**

The effects analyzed in the cumulative effects section apply to both the Proposed and No Action alternatives. Due to the small scale of the project, it is anticipated that the cumulative effects on affected resources would be similar and are presented together for the Proposed and No Actions.

"Cumulative impacts" are those impacts resulting from the incremental impact of an action when added to other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable actions. These impacts can result from individually minor but collectively important actions taking place over a period of time.

This section analyzes resource management and development actions planned to occur.

The Blaine County communities within the Wood River Valley (Bellevue, Hailey, Ketchum and Sun Valley) have such a tremendous recreational diversity and array of recreational opportunities that thousands of visitors are drawn to Blaine County each year, generating millions of dollars in

tax revenue and creating thousands of jobs. Recreational opportunities and the quality of the environment have also attracted permanent, part-time, and second home residents to the area. The Blaine County area, including the City of Sun Valley, has experienced considerable population growth and community expansion over the past several decades. These trends continue today and are expected to continue for the foreseeable future. Growth and development has resulted in an increase in the number of commercial facilities and residential homes present. Land parcels that are currently undeveloped retain an open space character, however, continued growth and demand for land will likely result in diminished open space values.

According to the 2000 United States census the population of Sun Valley was 1,427. Of the 2,339 housing units in Sun Valley, 594, or 25%, were identified as occupied, and the remaining housing units were identified as seasonal/occasional use. The population density was 144.6 people per square mile. In July 2003, Blaine County had a year-round resident population of approximately 20,791, up from 18,991 in 2000 – reflecting an 8.7% increase.<sup>1</sup> The population of Blaine County increased about 11% between 2000 and 2005 and is expected to grow at a similar rate in the next 10 years. Population estimates from Idaho Power project the population to increase fewer than 10% between 2005 and 2010 and again between 2010 and 2015. Since the 2000 Census, it is estimated that Blaine County has added about 2,587 persons, 1,270 households and roughly 1,989 housing units.<sup>2</sup>

Sun Valley Company, the Applicant, is currently the largest landowner and main developer within the City of Sun Valley. Their White Clouds Development is currently the only major development being presented to Sun Valley at this time, other than single family housing unit requests and tear-down and rebuild requests. The last major development was about three years ago with the Elkhorn Springs Development. The majority of the new development within the Wood River Valley is occurring within the neighboring communities of Ketchum and Hailey.

Since 2005, Blaine County and BLM have been working collaboratively in developing a recreation and travel plan to guide summer and winter recreational opportunities within the Wood River Valley. On January 29, 2008 the Blaine County Commissioners formally accepted the final report of the Blaine County Cooperative Conservation Recreation and Travel Plan (October 2007). At this time, Blaine County also submitted to the BLM a recommendation to adopt the outcome of this planning effort to create quality trails and recreational areas for all users, manage motorized vehicles on designated routes and give special management attention to wintering wildlife. The proposed project area is located within the Undeveloped Hillside zone. The niche of this zone is to provide an unspoiled connection to wide open spaces/landscapes for residents and visitors to the Wood River Valley.

The prior use of the Applicant's adjacent private property was historically a shooting range until 2007 when the range was moved further north up the Trail Creek drainage to allow for the proposed White Clouds Development. Per the 2005 Sun Valley Comprehensive Plan Update, 210 units of multi-family housing are planned for the west side of Trail Creek Road and 155 units for the east side. These development plans incorporate the last private land in the project area. The BLM has also received a ROW application from the Sun Valley Water and Sewer District Company to access and construct a water storage facility of not less than 500,000 gallons and associated water pipeline on public land north of Area A of the trail relocation areas. This application is being processed concurrently with the Applicant's ROW application.

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<sup>1</sup> Sawtooth Board of Realtors, 2005 and U.S. Department of HUD, 2005

<sup>2</sup> 2006 Blaine County Needs Assessment (Rees Consulting, Inc. / RRC Associates, Inc.)

Based on the past and present development of the Wood River Valley demand for recreational opportunities has increased over time; therefore, future development will continue to bring with it an increasing amount of demand for recreational opportunities.

### **FISH AND WILDLIFE INCLUDING SPECIAL STATUS SPECIES OTHER THAN FWS CANDIDATE OR LISTED SPECIES**

As the urban sprawl of development in the general area continues, as expected, wildlife such as the Canada Lynx and Bald Eagle would continue to be discouraged from utilizing the project area. Development activities on the adjacent private lands and increased use of the trail would result in increased human activity in and adjacent to wildlife habitat located within the general area; especially since access to the area was previously hindered by the shooting range located on the adjacent private property. Also, as native vegetation is converted to home sites and landscaping there may be cumulative impacts on species that are potentially influenced by increased edge effects, such as sparrows (Gaines, 2003). However, it is anticipated that any effects to the BLM Sensitive wildlife species that may make use of the general area are not expected to be consequential to the survival of these wildlife species.

Because of the proximity of the area to Sun Valley, the cumulative effects for both the proposed action and no action alternatives are expected to be the same. Wildlife species that readily adapt or become “habituated” to consistent and non-threatening activities would continue to use the general area. Those species that do not become habituated would continue to display avoidance or displacement behaviors.

### **SOILS**

The soils within the area have not had a lot of previous disturbance due to the prior use of the adjacent private property being a shooting range with restricted access to the area. However, since the relocation of the shooting range, use of the existing trail has greatly increased. The relocation of the trail areas in the Proposed Action would allow for the trail to become more sustainable thus causing less erosion and vegetation damage on and around the trail. Allowing the trail to remain as is, would only contribute to the erosion that is currently occurring in the project area.

Future disturbance would primarily be caused by the development and construction activities associated with the proposed White Clouds Development within the area. The development and loss of open space may cause outdoor enthusiasts to create inappropriate trails on adjacent hillsides; thus increasing the potential for erosion. The building envelopes within the White Clouds Development have been created to promote sensitively-scaled structures, providing the least impact upon the land as possible, siting the building on the most developable portion of each lot and maximizing views. These envelopes are also intended to minimize vegetation removal, potential erosion outside of the envelopes and impacts of neighboring properties on each other.

Developing a trail network that connects neighboring communities, as well as the public transportation system would likely increase the use of the trails. As the use increases, it becomes more important to protect the soils from erosion and vegetation from damage. If the trail was left as is eventually the trail surface could become so shortcutted and full of sidetracks that the entire trail tread could double in size and become even more damaging to the area. As development

continues in the area these trail networks would become in higher demand. A trail that is placed in areas that allow for a decrease in erosion rates and allows for protection of the adjacent vegetation would in the end allow for a more sustainable trail.

## CHAPTER 5 CONSULTATION AND PREPARATION

### PERSONS, GROUPS, AND AGENCIES CONSULTED

During preparation of the EA, the public was notified of the proposed action by posting on the Idaho BLM Internet on November 28, 2007. No one has contacted the BLM in response to the notice. The process used to involve the interested parties included sending a letter notifying them that BLM was in receipt of a ROW application and was requesting comment. BLM only received a verbal comment from the City of Sun Valley that they were in support of the Proposed Action.

**Table 5.1 - List of Persons, Agencies and Organizations Consulted**

Name	Purpose & Authorities for Consultation or Coordination	Response
Blaine County Planning and Zoning	Local Government	No Response
City of Sun Valley	Local Government	Verbal Response
Idaho Fish & Game	State Government	No Response
Flat Top Grazing Association	Permittee	No Response

### LIST OF PREPARERS

BLM staff specialists who determined the affected resources for this document are listed in the Checklist; which is located in the project file. Those who contributed further analysis in the body of this EA are listed below.

**Table 5.2 - List of Preparers/Reviewers**

Name	Title	Initials	Date
Bonnie Claridge	Wildlife Biologist	BC	12/5/2008
Lisa Cresswell	NEPA Coordinator	LC	12/9/2008
Katherine Farrell	District Planning & Environmental Coordinator	KF	12/17/2008
Tara Hagen	Realty Specialist	TH	12/3/2008

### REFERENCES

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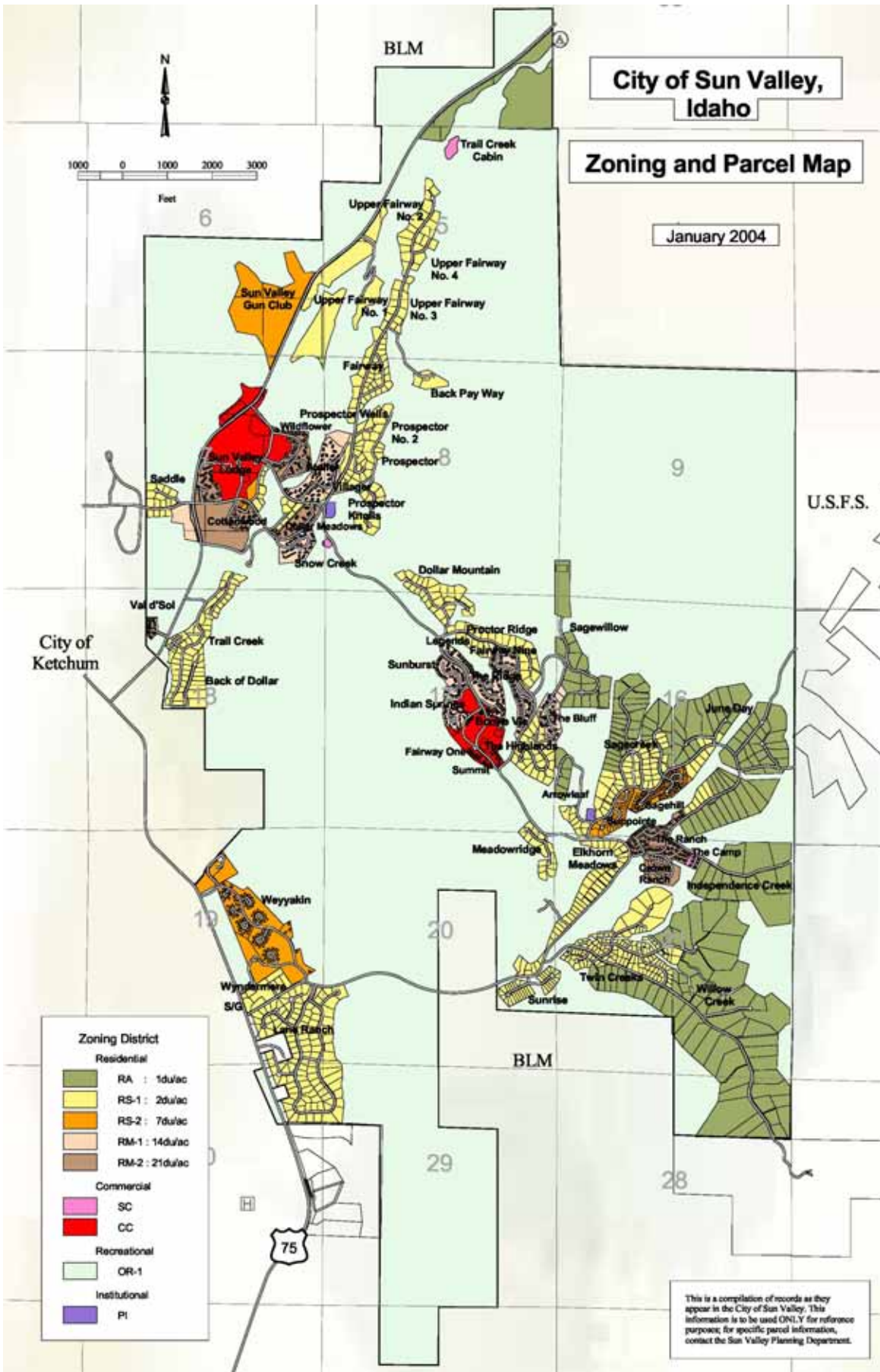
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U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Final Shoshone Grazing Environmental Statement (1979).

## **FIGURES/APPENDIXES**

- Figure 1 – Sun Valley Planning & Zoning Parcel Map (2004)
- Figure 2 – Project Location Map
- Figure 3 – Proposed Action Area A Site Map
- Figure 4 – Proposed Action Area B Site Map
- Appendix A - Federally Listed and BLM Sensitive Animal Species

**FIGURE 1**  
**SUN VALLEY PLANNING & ZONING PARCEL MAP**





**FIGURE 2  
PROJECT LOCATION MAP**

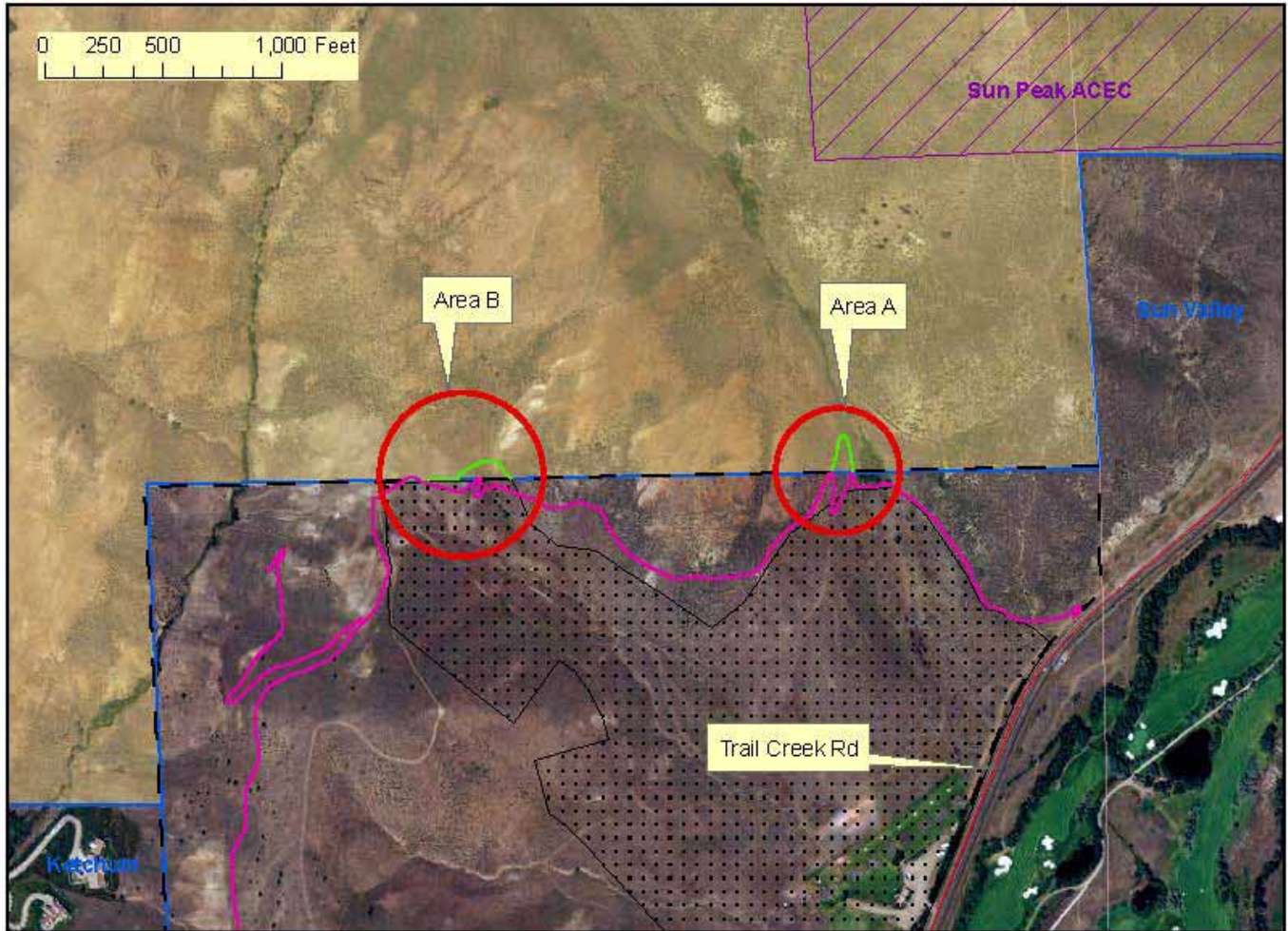
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Sun Valley Trail Right-of-Way  
Pre-Decisional (January, 2009)

**IDI-35991  
Sun Valley Company - Trail Right-of-Way**

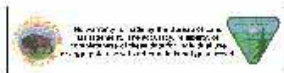
T. 4 N., R. 18 E.  
Section 6  
Boise Meridian, Blaine County, Idaho

Area A  
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10' wide

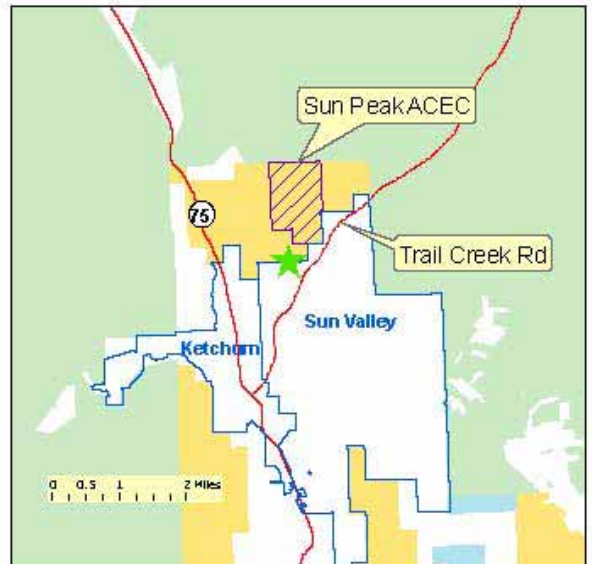
Area B  
525.76' long  
10' wide



- Bureau of Land Management
- Private
- State of Idaho
- Forest Service
- Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- City Boundaries
- Section Lines
- Primary Road
- Light Duty Road
- IDI35991 - Proposed Right-of-Way
- Proposed White Clouds Development Area
- Proposed Single-Family neighborhood



**U.S. Department of Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
State of Idaho  
Twin Falls District  
Shoshone Field Office**

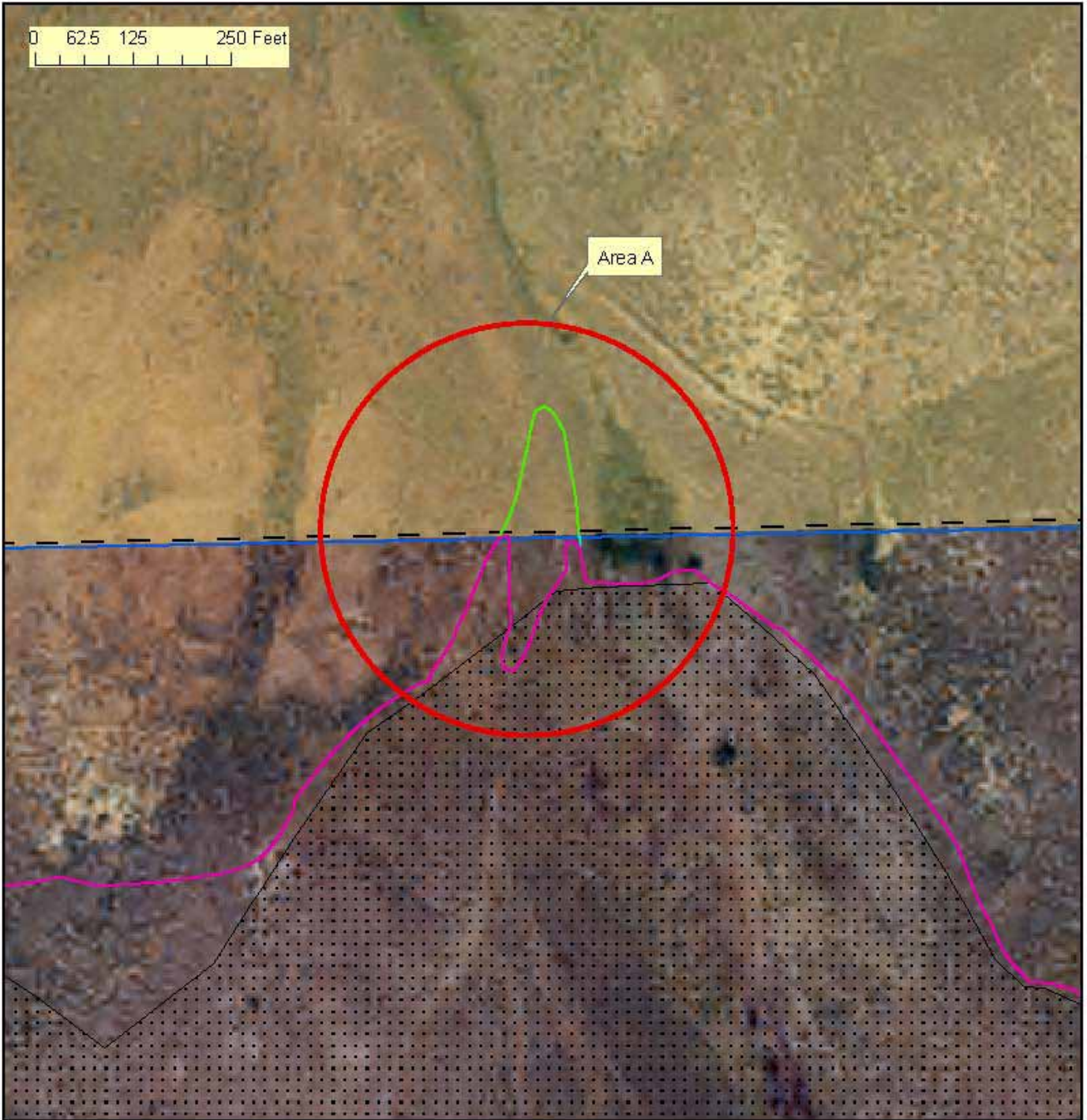


TH 12/02/08

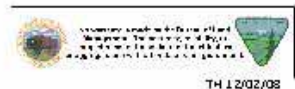
**FIGURE 3  
PROPOSED ACTION AREA A SITE MAP**

U.S. Department of Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
State of Idaho  
Twin Falls District  
Shoshone Field Office

**IDI-35991  
Sun Valley Company - Trail Right-of-Way  
Area A - 335.13' long, 10' wide**



- |  |                 |  |
|--|-----------------|--|
| Bureau of Land Management              | City Boundaries | IDI35991 - Relocation on Public Land   |
| Private                                | Section Lines   | Relocation on Private Property         |
| State of Idaho                         | Primary Road    | Proposed White Clouds Development Area |
| Forest Service                         | Light Duty Road | Proposed Single-Family neighborhood    |
| Area of Critical Environmental Concern |                 |  |

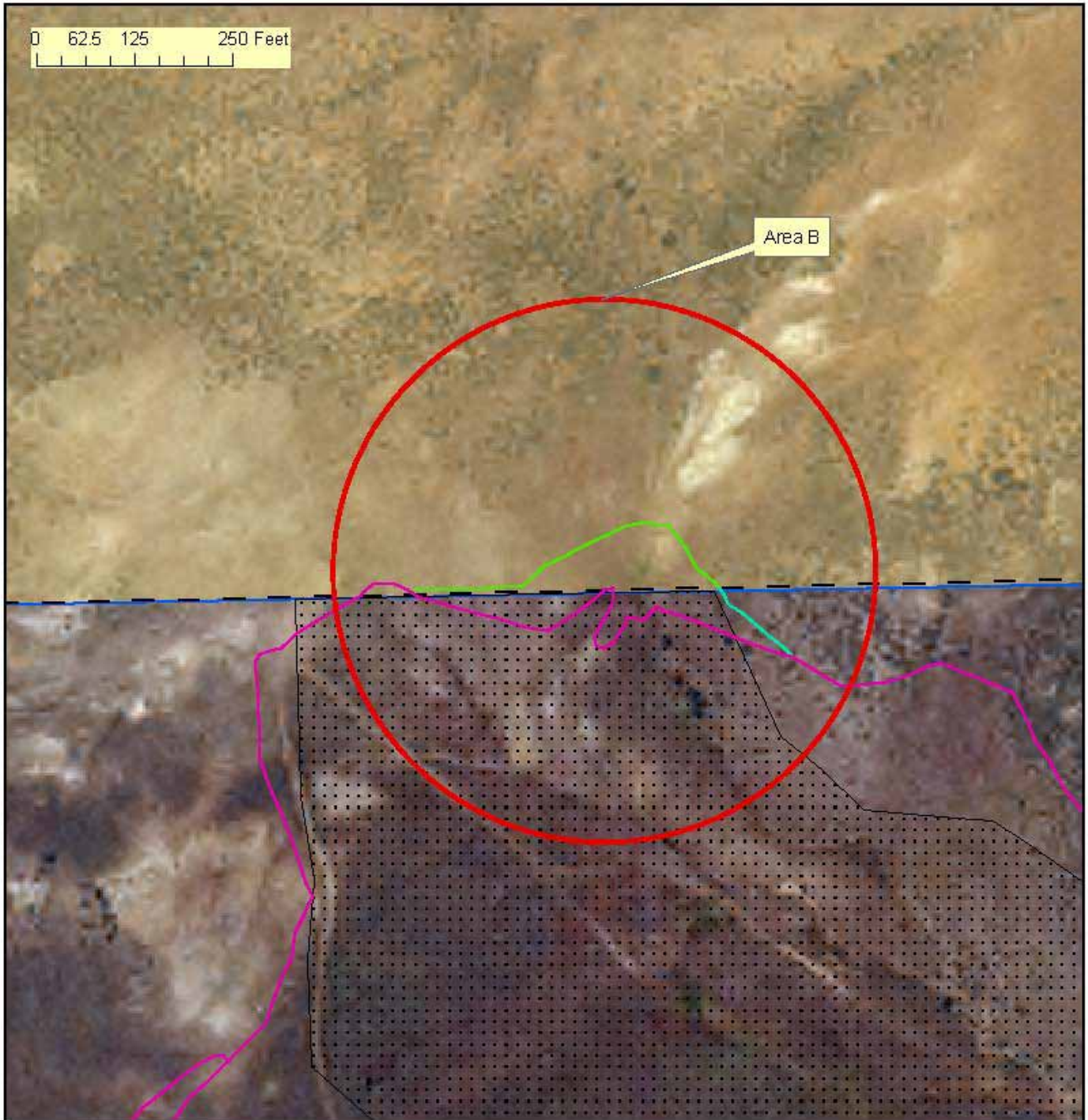


**FIGURE 4  
PROPOSED ACTION AREA B SITE MAP**

ID 230 2008 EA 56  
Sun Valley Trail Right-of-Way  
Pre-Decisional (January, 2009)

U.S. Department of Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
State of Idaho  
Twin Falls District  
Shoshone Field Office

**IDI-35991  
Sun Valley Company - Trail Right-of-Way  
Area B - 525.76' long, 10' wide**



- Bureau of Land Management
- Private
- State of Idaho
- Forest Service
- Area of Critical Environmental Concern

- City Boundaries
- Section Lines
- Primary Road
- Light Duty Road
- IDI35991 - Proposed Relocation on Public Land
- Relocation on Private Property
- Proposed White Clouds Development Area
- Proposed Single Family neighborhood

BLM Bureau of Land Management U.S. Department of the Interior  
ID Department of Lands

TH 12/02/08

APPENDIX A  
 FEDERALLY LISTED AND BLM SENSITIVE ANIMAL SPECIES

ID 230 2008 EA 56  
 Sun Valley Trail Right-of-Way  
 Pre-Decisional (January, 2009)

<b>Federally Listed and BLM Sensitive Animal Species that may occur in the Shoshone Field Office</b>		
<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Scientific Name</b>	<b>General Habitat Use</b>
<b>Type 1-Threatened (T), Endangered (E), or Proposed (P)</b>		
Grey Wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>	Forest, Sagebrush, Riparian
Canada Lynx	<i>Lynx canadensis</i>	Forest
<b>Type 2-Rangewide/Globally Imperiled Species</b>		
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	Forest, Sagebrush, Riparian
Greater Sage-grouse	<i>Centrocercus urophasianus</i>	Sagebrush, Riparian
Pygmy Rabbit	<i>Brachylagus idahoensis</i>	Sagebrush
Boreal Toad	<i>Bufo boreas boreas</i>	Riparian
Northern Leopard Frog	<i>Rana pipiens</i>	Riparian
<b>Type 3-Regional/State Imperiled Species</b>		
Townsend's Big-eared Bat	<i>Plecotus townsendii</i>	Sagebrush, Grassland, Cave
Fringed Myotis	<i>Myotis thysanodes</i>	Sagebrush, Grassland, Cave
Fisher	<i>Martes pennanti</i>	Forest, Riparian
Wolverine	<i>Gulo gulo luscus</i>	Forest, Riparian
Prairie Falcon	<i>Falco mexicanus</i>	Sagebrush, Grassland
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus anatum</i>	Riparian, Sagebrush
Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	Forest, Grassland, Sagebrush, Riparian
Ferruginous Hawk	<i>Buteo regalis</i>	Forest, Grassland, Sagebrush, Riparian
Mountain Quail	<i>Oreotyx pictus</i>	Forest, Grassland, Sagebrush, Riparian
Flammulated Owl	<i>Otus flammeolus</i>	Forest, Grassland, Sagebrush, Riparian
Lewis' Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes lewis</i>	Riparian
Willow Flycatcher	<i>Empidonax trailii</i>	Forest, Riparian
Grasshopper Sparrow	<i>Ammodramus savannarum</i>	Grassland, Sagebrush
Loggerhead Shrike	<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	Sagebrush
Brewer's Sparrow	<i>Spizella breweri</i>	Sagebrush
Sage Sparrow	<i>Amphispiza belli</i>	Sagebrush
Common Garter Snake	<i>Sonora semiannulata</i>	Forest, Riparian
Western Toad	<i>Bufo boreas</i>	Forest, Riparian
<b>Type 4-Idaho Peripheral Species</b>		
California Myotis	<i>Myotis californicus</i>	Sagebrush, Grassland, Cave
White-faced Ibis	<i>Plegadis chihi</i>	Grassland, Riparian
Virginia's Warbler	<i>Vermivora virginiae</i>	Forest, Grassland, Sagebrush, Riparian
Black-throated Sparrow	<i>Amphispiza bilineata</i>	Grassland, Sagebrush, Riparian
<b>Type 1-Threatened, Endangered, and Proposed Species</b> -These species are listed by the Fish and Wildlife Service or National Marine Fisheries Service as threatened or endangered, or they are proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act.		
<b>Type 2- Range-wide/Globally Imperiled Species</b> -These are species designated as FWS candidate or are ranked by the Natural Heritage program network as globally rare to critically imperiled.		
<b>Type 3-Regional/State Imperiled Species</b> -These are species that are in danger of becoming extirpated from Idaho in the foreseeable future if factors contributing to their decline, or habitat degradation or loss, continue.		
<b>Type 4-Peripheral Species</b> -These are species that are in danger of becoming extirpated from Idaho and (a) may be local endemics with currently low threat levels or (b) peripheral, rare species in Idaho.		