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(PNR)CAE

February 13, 1976

Memorandum

To: Files

From: Regional Director, Pacific Northwest Region

Subject: Environmental analysis for proposed sheep fencing project at Craters of the Moon National Monument

We have reviewed the proposed sheep fencing project and conclude that an environmental assessment will not be necessary.

For many years now, Craters of the Moon National Monument has had stock trespass problems along its northern boundaries. Past records and conversations with local ranchers seem to indicate that efforts on both the part of the National Park Service and other law enforcement agencies have accomplished little along the lines of curbing the animal trespass. Part of the problem also may have stemmed from the fact that minimum effort was put forth by the Monument staff to discuss the situation with the main violator and try to come to an agreement that would solve the problem and yet avoid a win or lose situation for one or the other of the parties involved.

One of the primary reasons for sheep trespass has been the lack of a shepherd with the animals during their time on the range that borders the Monument. However, a recent directive from the U.S. magistrate in Pocatello to the violator should help correct the above situation this coming season. Sheep, by nature, will seek a high ridge at night to bed down, and for years they have been using a ridge within the Monument for their bedding ground. As long as there is a carry-over of ewes from the previous year, the habit of using the traditional bedding grounds will continue. It would require a shepherd around the clock to control them as, on moonlit nights, sheep may graze all evening.

The problem is not so much that the sheep are bedding down on the ridges as this is fairly rocky, unproductive land as far as stock feed

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goes. The major impact on the Monument's resources occurs when the sheep start their early morning feeding down the mountain slope toward the Little Cottonwood Canyon. It is here that they pose a strong threat to the quality of the Monument's water supply and the forage that the local wildlife depend upon.

The northern unit of the Monument was originally included within its boundaries primarily, if not solely, to obtain a source of drinking water for the Monument's needs. Geologically speaking, there is little, if any, natural phenomena that would qualify for inclusion within the National Monument. However, the lack of domestic livestock grazing over the past 50 years within the core of this northern unit has provided a vegetative covering that supports a sizeable mule deer population. This herd has attracted considerable hunting pressure along the Monument boundaries during the fall season and provides its share of law enforcement problems.

Two basic alternatives were considered to resolve the problem: (1) to request the Bureau of Land management to revoke the rancher's grazing privileges on lands adjacent to the Monument, and (2) to construct a sheep fence along the ridgelines of the northern boundary in the northern unit of the Monument.

Alternative (1) would, in essence, either force the local rancher out of the sheep raising business or require him to provide a 24-hour watch on his sheep to prevent trespass. Providing the 24-hour watch would be a costly measure that the rancher could hardly afford.

Alternative (2) would allow the rancher to continue his sheep-raising activities without fear of Monument trespass, and it would reduce the chance that the springs within the Monument (source of public drinking water) would become contaminated by domestic stock. In addition, there would be more food available for Monument wildlife due to elimination of the sheep trespass grazing.

The fenceline would commence on the ridgeline just northeast of Peak 7676 and climb the ridge to Peak 7688 where it would then head generally southeast until it reached the Monument boundary at Peak 6607. Its length would be in the neighborhood of one and one-half miles. As mentioned earlier, the route would lie along rocky ridgelines where little or no vegetation exists. The fence would consist of five strands of barbed wire supported on metal posts six feet apart with three metal stays between each post. Wood posts and rock cribs would provide additional support at corners, fence jags, and midsections of the fenceline.

There exists a state law regarding fencing that will impede game travel (deer, antelope, etc.). Standards require that passways be available for the game animals. The Idaho State Fish and Game Department, which was contacted by phone, stated that they would not require any game passageways due to the short length of the fenceline and by reason that antelope migration routes do not run through that portion of the Monument. However, the height of the fence must not exceed 42 inches. If, in the future, it is learned that the fence does indeed impede game travel, alterations could be made to correct the situation, such as gates or drop wire sections being incorporated into the structure.

There are no sites on, or eligible for, the "National Register of Historic Places" in the project area. An archeological survey of the Monument was completed in 1966, and no significant archeological sites or properties were located.

Construction of the fence line along the ridge is not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment and does not involve controversy. Therefore, no environmental assessment will be prepared, and we will proceed with the project.

Russell E. Dickenson

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