



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Winnemucca Field Office
5100 East Winnemucca Boulevard
Winnemucca, Nevada 89445
<http://www.nv.blm.gov>



In Reply Refer To:
8560 /8142

(NOPA-NV-025-06-03)

MAR 28 2006

NOTICE OF PROPOSED ACTION LANDS IN WILDERNESS

STATE: Nevada

COUNTY: Humboldt

FIELD OFFICE: Black Rock Desert High Rock Canyon
Emigrant Trails NCA
5100 East Winnemucca Blvd.
Winnemucca, Nevada 89445

WILDERNESS AREA: Black Rock Desert (N74461)
South Jackson Mountains (N74469)

PROPOSED ACTION: Issuance of two separate Field Authorizations to Universities to conduct test excavations of prehistoric cultural sites.

RECEIVED

MAR 31 2006

DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
BUDGET AND PLANNING DIVISION

Background

The Black Rock Desert region contains important prehistoric cultural sites and is of particular interest to archeologists because of the potential for discovering archaeological remains of Paleoindian groups. This potential is partially due to the well preserved presence of Pleistocene Lake Lahontan features in the Black Rock region. Both of the proposed test excavations (Elephant Mountain and Handprint Cave) are located along or near the ancient shoreline of Lake Lahontan. Some of the early archaeological information concerning Paleoindians in the Great Basin has occurred in the region, and two Early Man projectile point types have been identified and named based on this work (The Parman Point Series and the Black Rock Concave Base point).

Elephant Mountain Cave was illegally looted in the early 1980s. Radiocarbon dates from some of the recovered artifacts that were stolen from the cave indicate an occupation dating back to 9-10,000 years. Handprint Cave was previously tested in 1987. A total of eight square meters were excavated at that time. Results of the 1987 test excavations indicate that the site was most

heavily occupied during the period 5,000 to 3,000 years ago. Two early, stemmed projectile points and a 10,000 year old radiocarbon date hint at an earlier occupation.

Due to the early radiocarbon dates and the potential for obtaining knowledge about the early Holocene human colonization of the Great Basin, further test excavation is being proposed for both sites.

Description of Proposed Action

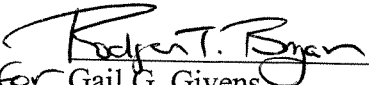
The University of Wyoming is proposing test excavations in Elephant Mountain Cave and the University of Nevada Reno, Sundance Archaeological Research Fund is proposing test excavations in Hand Print Cave. Both of the caves are within designated wilderness.

The University of Wyoming is proposing to clean the side walls of the looter's pit, record its stratigraphy, and excavate a unit in the bottom of the looter's pit to determine if the cave deposits go any deeper. This work is the beginning phase of the necessary repair and restoration to the site that the BLM is required to conduct.

The test excavations in both sites would consist of opening up one to four square meters, and digging as deep as possible. Excavation will be done using shovels, trowels, brushes, dental picks, and other hand tools. Material removed from the units would be passed through 1/8 inch hardware cloth to separate artifacts from sediment. Light would be provided in the caves using battery operated lanterns or Colman gas lanterns. All materials would be transported to and from the sites by horse or foot. Excavation units would be lined with plastic and backfilled with the sediment removed from the unit and restored to their natural condition. The field work is anticipated to last 10 days.

All artifacts would be collected, as well as some sediment and ecological samples. The collected materials would be transported back to the Universities leading the excavation for analysis. After analysis, materials excavated from Elephant Mountain Cave would be curated at the Nevada State Museum, and the materials from Hand Print Cave will be curated at the University of Nevada Reno.

A "Minimum Requirement/Minimum Tool" analysis and appropriate NEPA documentation will be conducted for the proposals. Send comments on the proposed activity to Gail Givens, Field Manager at the address above within the NOPA comment period of March 30- April 30, 2006.


for Gail G. Givens,
Field Manager

3/28/06
Date