

**Environmental Assessment for United
Mining Corporation Sandstone Agreement**

EA #02-071

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Lower Snake River District
Owyhee Field Office**

**3948 Development Avenue
Boise, ID 83705-5339**

Chapter I. PURPOSE AND NEED

A. Introduction

On March 4, 2002, United States Magistrate Judge Mikel H. Williams issued a Court-ordered Settlement Agreement to resolve long-standing litigation between the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the United Mining Corporation (UMC) over the company's claims to mine landscaping materials from scenic and geologically significant rock formations occurring along the Big Wood River in south-central Idaho. The Settlement Agreement was signed by the Idaho BLM State Director and UMC. The Agreement invalidates United Mining's claims along the Big Wood River in exchange for providing United Mining an exclusive right to remove sandstone from other unpatented mining claims the company holds in southwest Idaho.

The Settlement Agreement requires the BLM to complete NEPA documentation on the site where the sandstone boulders are to be removed. The BLM's Lower Snake River District Office has prepared this environmental assessment (EA) to address the proposed removal of sandstone rock by UMC from lands administered by the BLM, Lower Snake River District, Owyhee Field Office. This EA describes how mining would occur on the UMC claims and analyzes the physical, biological, and social impacts of the proposed action and alternatives.

B. Background

Throughout the 1990's Boise and the surrounding area has experienced a rapid period of growth and new home construction. Sandstone blocks of various sizes are frequently used as decorative landscape material in the greater Boise area. Sandstone is a highly desirable landscape rock due to its unique texture, appearance, and color. Some of the most desirable sandstone is found along the Owyhee Front south of Boise on lands administered by the BLM. United Mining has previously been authorized by the BLM to remove sandstone from a portion of the area covered by the Settlement Agreement under a mineral materials sale.

C. Purpose and Need

The purpose of the proposed action is to provide UMC with surface sandstone from BLM administered lands located in portions of Sections 7, 8, 17, and 21 of Township 2 North, Range 5 West, B.M., Owyhee County, Idaho (Figures 1 and 2). The sandstone is to be sold and used by UMC as landscape rock.

D. Project Area Location

The proposed sandstone removal area is located on two separate tracts of public lands. The larger tract, referred to as the "HD Claims", is located approximately seven miles south of Homedale, Idaho and the smaller tract, referred to as the "Poison Creek Claims", is on the south side of Flattop Butte (Figure 2). A legal description of the claims is given below:

HD Claims T. 2 N., R.5 W., B. M. - (Incorporates prior Materials Sale Contract No. IDI-32916.)

<u>Claim Name</u>	<u>IMC Number</u>	<u>Legal Description</u>
HD-1	172783	N $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 8
HD-2	172784	S $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 8
HD-3	172785	N $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 8
HD-4	172786	S $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 8
HD-5	172787	E $\frac{1}{2}$ N $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 7
HD-7	172789	N $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 8
HD-8	172790	S $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 8
HD-9	172791	N $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 8
HD-10	172792	E $\frac{1}{2}$ S $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 8
HD-11	172793	S $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 8
HD-12	172794	N $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 17

Poison Creek Claims T.2 N., R.5 W., B. M. (adjacent on the south to UMC's Idaho State Lease No. 8823 in Section 16.)

Poison Creek I	158986	E $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 21
Poison Creek II	158987	W $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 21
Poison Creek III	163908	E $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 21

The total approximate acreage of above defined lands is 260 acres, all of which is administered by the BLM.

E. Conformance Statement

This EA complies with the NEPA requirement to assess the potential effects of the proposed activity on the physical, biological, and social resources within the affected area.

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) states that "public land use is planned for and managed on the basis of multiple-use and sustained yield." The proposed sandstone removal by UMC is in conformance with the Owyhee Resource Management Plan (ORMP) dated December 30, 1999. Objective MMAT 1 states that the BLM will "provide opportunities for the use of common variety minerals obtained from the public lands." The Materials Act of July 31, 1947 as amended (30 USC 601) and the Mining and Mineral Policy Act of 1970 declares that it is the continuing policy of the federal government to foster and encourage private enterprise in the development of domestic mineral resources. The FLPMA, Section 102 emphasizes that the Mining and Minerals Policy Act of 1970 is to be implemented and directs that the public lands be managed in a manner that acknowledges the Nation's need for domestic sources of minerals and other resources. Management Action 1 within Objective MMAT 1 of the ORMP states that the BLM will "provide for mineral material needs through negotiated sales, free use permits and community pits."

F. Issues

Issues that have been raised by staff and addressed in this EA are:

- Visual Degradation
- Road Deterioration
- Revegetation Requirements
- Erosion
- Noxious Weeds
- Wildlife Disturbance
- Livestock Disturbance
- Gates Being Left Open
- Vibration from truck traffic

Chapter 2. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

A. Alternative Development Process

No alternative management actions other than the no action alternative were developed. A site visit was conducted on September 10, 2002 to examine the mining plan and determine mitigation measures.

B. Description of Alternatives

1. **Alternative 1** is the "Proposed Action" and involves removing sandstone rock from lands administered by the BLM. This alternative is based on information submitted by the applicant and incorporates mitigation measures developed by the BLM to reduce environmental impacts.

a. General

The settlement agreement allows United Mining eight years to remove sandstone from the HD claims and three years from the Poison Creek claims once the environmental assessment is complete and the operating plan has been approved (Figure 2). Removal of sandstone would be from the surface only.

For the HD claims, initial operations would occur in two areas; (a) the west ridge and (b) the east ridge (figure 3.) On the west ridge operations would be extended beyond the area covered by the prior mineral materials sale to include adjoining sandstone outcrops on the north and east. On the east ridge operations would begin along the sandstone outcrops and slopes at the top of and on the west side of the ridge.

For the Poison Creek claims, initial operations would occur simultaneously from rock outcrops on the top of the ledge and from the rock-strewn slope below the ledge. Rock removal at this site would be completed by removing rock from lesser outcrops on the ledge and from rubble piles below the ledge.

b. Access

HD Claims

New and existing roads on BLM land would be used to access sandstone outcrops. The roads, trails, and landings previously prepared for operations under Mineral Materials Sale Contract IDI-32916 would continue to be utilized (Figure 3). One new road would be required on the east side of the "west" ridge. Also, one new road would be needed along the top and west side of the "east" ridge (Figure 3). Access to isolated outcrops and steep slopes would be by crane to minimize surface disturbance. Local conditions would dictate the number, extent, and exact location of loader access spurs, skid trails, and crane pads. Several short spurs would be required for crane access along the upper edges of the east and west ridge.

Poison Creek Claims

Existing roads are available across BLM, State and private lands for access to the top of Flat Top Butte (Figure 3). A new road on a preexisting vehicle track would be used to access the west and south side of Flat Top Butte. The new road would be accessed from the main BLM access road. Several short spurs would be needed to access the sandstone outcrop immediately below the butte. Local conditions would dictate the exact number, extent, and location of loader access spurs, skid trails, and crane pads. Existing flat areas, where available, may be used for equipment turnaround areas and for rock landings.

c. Method of Operations

Overview

Production of the sandstone deposits would be market-driven. As such, demand for rock would determine stone size, shape, and color, as well as the precise location for removal. In the beginning, production would focus on areas that would most economically yield the required types of sandstone. Scattered and outlying stone in "secondary" areas would be removed when stone in the primary removal areas is depleted.

Removal of sandstone would generally proceed from the tops of the ridges where there are high concentrations of rock,

then proceed to the slopes below that contain scattered rock deposits. As primary stone sources are depleted, production would shift to secondary stone sources in outlying areas.

Operation Details

Serviceable roads would be improved by surface scraping with a dozer blade or loader bucket and/or tracking with equipment. New access roads located on steep terrain would require dozer cutting of the inside edge 2 ft. to 5 ft. high. Local access to specific production areas would be provided by new access spurs and loader/skid trails. Their exact location would be determined by local conditions such as stone distribution, slope, proximity to main access roads, etc.

Stone would be removed by a variety of methods, including hand removal, removal by front-end loader/buckets, loaders equipped with forks and chain-skidding for short distances down slope. Truck mounted cranes would be utilized for large stone, both along the upper ledges and from the scattered rock on the slopes below. Haulage equipment would include 4-wheel-drive trucks with or without trailers, 6-ton payload flatbed trucks, and 24-ton tractor-trailer (semi) haul rigs.

Depth of Excavation

Only surface exposed sandstone would be removed. There would be no quarry or "pit" type excavation required. The outermost, semi-detached surface stone would be removed leaving a "divot" 1-2 ft. below the soil surface. More deeply buried stones are not merchantable due to color consideration and would be left in place.

Water

No water would be used to extract the stone. A small, ephemeral drainage gully would be crossed by the new roads at the bottom of the east side of the "west" ridge adjacent to the existing access road in the northwest corner of HD-8 (Figure 2). A 12" culvert would be placed in the drainage to allow storm runoff to flow beneath the road.

Surface Disturbance

UMC and the BLM has agreed that no more than 10 acres of unreclaimed land would be active at a time. UMC estimates that new disturbance required for access roads to the sandstone outcrops would total approximately 17,500 lineal feet x 12 ft. average width (4.8 acres). Of the 4.8 acres, about 50% would be utilized during the first few years of operation. During year one of operation, it is anticipated that roughly 3,000 ft. of local access load spurs, skid trails, and crane access pads would be required, averaging 12 ft. wide (0.8 acres). Up to 16 landing areas would be utilized at a time, possibly totaling 3 acres. Thus, UMC estimates that total annual disturbance required to commercialize the resource would be 6 to 7 acres.

Reclamation

Side hill roadcuts would be rough-graded back to the original contour. Spur roads, landings, and all other "work areas" would be re-contoured to fit in with the surrounding landscape. Major access roads would not be reclaimed until commercial stone serviced by the roads has been removed. Small access skid loader trails and crane pads would be reclaimed on an annual basis (most likely in the late fall). At the end of operations, all remaining disturbance would be reseeded and reclaimed.

The operator has committed to re-seed disturbed areas in a timely fashion during the course of operations and upon closure, using BLM and/or Idaho Department of Lands recommended seed mixes. Re-seeding would be done on an annual basis to ensure that no more than 10 acres of unreclaimed disturbed land would exist at a time. The following seed mix, developed by the BLM for loamy 8-10" range sites, would be used by UMC for reclamation:

Siberian Wheatgrass VAVILOV	3 lbs./acre
Russian Wildrye BOZOISKY	3 lbs./acre
Big Bluegrass SHERMAN	1 lbs./acre
Fourwing Saltbush	2 lbs./acre
<u>Alfalfa LADAK</u>	<u>0.2 lbs./acre</u>
Total	9.2 lbs./acre

Since noxious weed are a problem in the area, UMC would be required to control these plants, specifically Russian knapweed, Scotch thistle, and tamarix, during and after mining activity.

Mitigation

Sandstone removal activities would directly impact habitat for the Mojave black-collared lizard. As such, several mitigation measures will be employed under the proposed action. First, UMC and the BLM would help facilitate continued research at the site. Cooperative agreements would be made to allow data collection and rock removal to occur with minimal negative interactions and impacts on the population. Second, UMC would remove rock during the lizard's active period (late spring through early fall) when they have a better chance of relocating if their habitat becomes unsuitable. If rock that provides winter retreat were removed, the lizard would perish. Third, enough rock would be left behind or replaced in sufficient quantity to leave viable habitat for the the lizard. Ongoing research would be used to determine the quantity, size and distribution of rock necessary for lizard habitat. Several approaches are being considered to achieve habitat preservation and a combination of these approaches may be used in different places. These include: 1) leaving up to 25% of the rock in place. Rock to be left would be marked by the BLM. 2) Restoring up to 25% of original rock cover by distributing less marketable rock evenly over designated sites in the area of rock removal. 3) Choosing key habitat areas that would be left largely intact.

Under the proposed action, the level of impact to the Poison Creek Stage Station is considered to be an adverse effect. Recommendations to lessen or mitigate impacts to the Poison Creek Stage Station include: 1) Restricting sandstone haul truck speed to 2 miles/hour for ¼ mile on either side of the sandstone structure. 2) Briefing UMC and its employees regarding the significance of the Poison Creek stage station and the importance of protecting cultural resources in the area of the sandstone removal agreement. 3) Recording the Poison Creek stage station for the Historic American Buildings survey - Level III documentation that includes 4 to 6 large format black and white photographs of the exterior of the building.

2. Alternative 2 is the "No Action" and Denial of Proposed Plan of Operation Alternative. No action in this case, is defined as taking no action to approve the proposed plan of operations as submitted or as modified. Regulation contained within 43 CFR 3809 requires the proposed plan of operations to be analyzed and a decision

made in the context of the requirement to prevent undue and unnecessary degradation. Under alternative 2, the proposed plan of operations would cause unnecessary and undue degradation to physical, biological, or social resources and the project would not be authorized.

Under Alternative 2, existing management of the site would occur as specified by the ORMP guidelines dated December 30, 1999. Existing mining permits (Materials Sale Contract No. IDI-32916 and Idaho State Lease No. 8823) would be allowed to continue and eventually expire. No new roads would be constructed and surface disturbance would be limited to what has already occurred on existing mineral material sales and leases.

Chapter 3. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND RESOURCE DESCRIPTIONS

A. Physical Factors

1. Soil

Several types of soils dominate the area on the claims where the proposed action is to occur. The Tindahay loamy fine sand is found on side slopes below rock ledges. This soil has slow to medium runoff potential, slight water erosion hazard, and high erosion potential by wind. The Veta gravelly loam is found in the swales. This soil is well drained, deep, and has slow to medium runoff potential, slight erosion hazard by water, and moderate erosion hazard by wind. The Willhill stony loam is located on side slopes and is coarser than the Tindahay side slope soil. This soil is well drained, has slow to rapid runoff, slight to moderate water erosion potential, and moderate wind erosion hazard.

2. Water

No perennial streams exist on the site. The gullies and draws within the permit area are intermittent and flow primarily after storms and during spring runoff.

3. Air

Air quality at the site is good. Sources of air pollution include road dust, trailing livestock, farming, and naturally occurring wind on dry soil.

B. Biological Factors

1. Vegetation

The project area is generally highly disturbed and is in a deteriorated ecological condition. Species diversity is poor. There is evidence of high levels of historic livestock grazing. The area has burned in the past and has probably burned repeatedly from wildfire. The area is largely dominated by undesirable invasive plant species such as the annual grasses *Bromus tectorum* and *Eremopyron triticeum*, and is co-dominated by the native perennial bunchgrass *Poa sandbergii*. Shrub cover is generally less than one percent and is comprised mostly of *Atriplex confertifolia*, with traces of *Gutierrezia*, *Chrysothamnus*, *Artemisia tridentata wyomingensis*, and *Sarcobatus*. Some small *Artemisia arbuscula* stands occur along rocky ridges.

The area formerly supported greasewood stands along the drainage ways and lowest elevations, and salt-desert shrub communities in most of the remaining areas. Wyoming sage stands with a few low sage inclusions probably occurred as small areas along the steeper side slopes and rocky tops and ridges. In these areas, good representations of *Agropyron spicatum* are still found in areas providing protection from wildfire and grazing within and among the rocks. There are also some *Stipa* plants in these protected microsites.

There are two noxious weeds known to occur in the permit area or on immediately adjacent state or private land. Scotch thistle (*Onopordum acanthium*) and Russian knapweed (*Acroptilon repens*) have the potential to infest disturbed communities in the area. Another invasive species known from the area is salt cedar (*Tamarix ramosissima*), and while not a noxious weed, has potential to expand in the mining area.

Steve Popovich conducted a special status plant inventory on June 26-28, 2002 over the entire permit area. Habitat for special status plants was found inside the permit area. The rock outcroppings are habitat for Simpson's hedgehog cactus (*Pediocactus simpsonii*), a BLM sensitive species, however, no plants were found. Appropriate habitat for five other BLM sensitive plants was found in the permit area: Cusick's false yarrow (*Chaenactis cusickii*), smooth mentzelia (*Mentzelia mollis*), Greeley's wavewing

(*Cymopterus acaulis* var. *greeleyorum*), Packard's lomatium (*Lomatium packardiae*), and Malheur prince's plume (*Stanleya confertiflora*). *Chaenactis* and *Mentzelia* are small, annual plants that occur on bare volcanic ash soils in saltbush and Wyoming sage communities. *Cymopterus*, a diminutive perennial, is identifiable only in March to April and occurs in similar habitats. The inventory was conducted too late to accurately confirm the presence or absence of those plants. *Stanleya*, an annual or biennial, is also found on ashy soil in this vegetation type; this plant probably would have been observable during the inventory, though drought conditions may have kept it in dormancy. *Lomatium packardiae* occurs on heavy clay or volcanic ash soils; a large, long-lived perennial, it would have been identifiable. At any rate, small patches of appropriate habitat were found at the extreme southern edges of both the HD and Poison Cr. claim areas. The habitat is in marginal condition and the probability of these plants occurring is low. The habitat patches are located away from sandstone rock outcrops and access routes. Habitat for federally listed or proposed plant species does not occur in the permit area.

2. Wildlife

Both the HD claims and the Poison Creek claims contain rock outcrop and sagebrush shrubland areas that provide seasonal or yearlong habitat for a variety of animal species. The rock outcrops provide habitat for several species of reptiles, including the Mojave Black-collared Lizard, a sensitive species. This is the species most likely to be affected by the proposed sandstone removal.

A professor from Northwest Nazarene College is currently studying the Mojave black-collared lizards. Use of rocks, daytime movements and nocturnal activities have been documented on the site using radio collars and florescent pigment dusting.

In Idaho, Mojave black-collared lizards are found only in the southwest portion of the state, along the Snake River Plain and surrounding Owyhee foothills where there are appropriate rocky outcrops. A critical component of their habitat is the sandstone rocks and small boulders found within the project area. They use rocks of various sizes

to hide under, as hunting lookouts, for basking, and for nesting.

In general, the shrub habitat surrounding the rock outcrops is severely degraded and not good quality wildlife habitat. Special status animal species, State of Idaho "Species of Special Concern," or Bureau of Land Management "Sensitive Species" known or occurring within the vicinity of the proposed project site are: Prairie falcon (*Falco mexicanus*), Ferruginous hawk (*Buteo regalis*), Northern harrier (*Circus cyaneus*), Loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*), Brewer's sparrow (*Spizella breweri*), Sage sparrow (*Spizella belli*), Yuma myotis (*Myotis yumanensis*), Long-eared myotis (*Myotis evotis*), Fringed myotis (*Myotis thysanodes*), Western small-footed myotis (*Myotis ciliolabrum*), Western pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus herperus*), Western toad (*Bufo boreas*), Mojave black-collared lizard (*Crotaphytus bicinctores*), Western ground snake (*Sonora semiannulata*), and Longnose snake (*Rhinocheilus lecontei*). The permit area also contains seasonal or yearlong habitat for mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), pronghorn (*Antilocapra americana*), California quail (*Callipepla californica*), and chukar (*Alectoris chukar*).

C. Social Factors

1. Cultural Resources

A Class III cultural resource inventory was conducted to locate, identify, and evaluate cultural resources in the area of potential effect in accordance with 36 CFR 800. No significant cultural resources were located in areas of direct impacts, where rock would be collected. The Poison Creek Stage Station (ca 1880s), a historic property listed on the National Register of Historic Places (1978) is located on private land along the access road to the Poison Creek Claims project area. The original wood structure burned in 1912 and the current structure was erected in its place in 1913-1916 using sandstone quarried on site. One of the associated outbuildings, a barn, burned in the 2002 Trimby Creek fire. Vandals have removed a considerable amount of stone from the structure compromising the structural integrity of the stage stop. Other sites in the vicinity of the proposal, but outside the area of potential effect, include a rock alignment, rock shelters, and lithic scatters.

2. Recreation and Visual Resource Management

The project area is located adjacent to the Jump Creek Special Recreation Management area. The affected mining claims lie within a semi-primitive motorized recreation classification. The area is used for off-highway motorized vehicle (OHMV) use year-round and for hunting in the fall. Sightseeing, horseback riding, mountain biking, rock hounding, and camping also occur. The mining claims lie within a sensitive visual resource area where substantial modifications of the landscape may occur provided every attempt is made to mitigate impacts to visual resources through design or reclamation procedures.

3. Livestock

The proposed action is located within the Graveyard Point (#0568) grazing allotment, which contains 97 permitted AUMs. Thirty-two AUMs have been suspended due the Trimble Creek wildfire that burned in July 2002. The current season of use is May 1 through June 15. Due to the fire, which consumed 25% of the allotment, approximately 500 acres of T. 2N, R. 5W, Sections 17, 20, and 21 will be temporarily fenced and excluded from livestock grazing. Furthermore, approximately 640 acres will be excluded from grazing on the western end of the allotment and will remain unfenced due to a lack of water.

Chapter 4. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

ALTERNATIVE 1 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Physical Factors

1. Soil

Surface scraping of new roads and loosening of soil by machinery may increase erosion potential. Roads would be maintained to mitigate the loss of soil due to powdering. Some increased water erosion would occur due to soil disturbance.

2. Water

No impacts to water resources are anticipated in the area. Culverts would be placed in strategic sites to allow stormwater runoff.

3. Air

Air quality should remain good even though there would be increased dust from vehicle and machinery activity on the dirt-surfaced roads. Sandstone removal and hauling occur on an intermittent basis and would have limited, short term impacts.

B. Biological Factors

1. Vegetation

Impacts to plant communities would be restricted to roadways and vehicle tracks leading to sandstone deposits. No sensitive plant species or otherwise noteworthy plant communities were observed. Thus, no mitigation measures to protect rare plants or their habitat are recommended. Since the area is already highly disturbed and in deteriorated ecological condition, mining activities would not cause undue harm to valuable plant communities. Habitat for sensitive plants occurs as very small local areas along the extreme southern edges of both the HD and Poison Creek claims and would not be impacted by project activities. This area is outside the known range of any "Proposed" or "Endangered" plants, and is considered by the BLM to not contain habitat for slickspot peppergrass. The salt desert shrub communities are not conducive to supporting the plant.

Mining activities may adversely affect the retention of native desirable bunchgrasses *Agropyron spicatum*, *Stipa thurberiana*, and *Stipa comata*, which are currently afforded safe sites between the sandstone rocks. It is possible that removal of sandstone blocks may cause mortality of these bunchgrasses and may open their protected microsites to weeds, grazing, and fire vulnerabilities. Since these grasses are being lost over much of their historic range, it is desirable to maintain them as much as possible.

To mitigate vegetation loss, the disturbed areas would be rehabilitated by seeding with vegetation that is competitive, drought tolerant, and valuable as forage for both wildlife and livestock.

2. Wildlife

Total removal of sandstone at the site would eliminate the habitat of the Mojave black-collared lizard and other species using the rocks. The proposed mitigation measures are intended to leave enough rock so that the lizards would still have viable habitat. The mitigation was developed in consultation with the researcher studying the lizards, which thought it would be possible to take some rock and still maintain lizard habitat.

The loss of this habitat for the black-collared lizard would not doom the lizard in Idaho, however, the accumulation of such losses over time would hurt a species with such limited distribution in the State. For this reason, mitigation measures have been included in the proposed action that should protect and maintain local populations of the Mojave black-collared lizard. Because it is uncertain how the lizard population would respond, the continued research at this site is an important component that will help in the future management of similar projects.

C. Social Factors

1. Cultural Resources

Since cultural resources were not located in the area covered by the agreement, there will be no known direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to cultural resources in areas where sandstone to be removed. Along access roads to the Poison Creek claims, the indirect and cumulative impacts of tractor-trailer trucks hauling rock and heavy equipment would include vibration and compaction of sub-surface archeological resources, which would compromise the integrity of an already fragile historic property, the Poison Creek Stage Station. The mitigation measures recommended in the proposed action should reduce the adverse effects of truck traffic to an acceptable level.

2. Recreation and Visual Resource Management

Mining activities would have little impact on recreation values in the project area. Since access is currently through private property and there are no through roads to BLM property in the Owyhee mountains southwest of the area, public use of the area is minimized. There is adequate

potential for OHMV use of the area since many of the roads and tracks would be maintained by UMC for access to sandstone outcrops. Mining activities may negatively affect the aesthetic resources of the project area through new road construction. However, maintaining disturbed acreage below 10 acres at any given time and minimizing activity on east facing slopes should mitigate visual impacts.

3. Livestock

The proposed action would directly impact livestock distribution in the southeast corner of the allotment near Flattop Butte. The only perennial upland water source available for livestock and wildlife is located in T. 2 N., R. 5 W., Section 21. It is a spring, which is to be developed by 2004 for livestock and wildlife. Currently the design would be to have the trough located just south of the two-track road located south of the proposed action near Flattop Butte. The trough would be located within 200-300 yards of the area to be mined. Once developed, mining activities (loaders and trucks hauling rock) would displace cattle, keeping them from utilizing the water trough and forage in the southeast corner of the allotment. However, this disturbance would be short term, and cattle would eventually begin using the spring and forage near the mining operation.

Another possible impact is the potential for the gate located near Flattop Butte to be left open during the May-June use period. All gates into and out of the allotment need to be left closed to prevent cattle from moving onto county roads where vehicle traffic is common. If livestock from the Graveyard Point allotment were found in an area not authorized for livestock grazing, the grazing permittee would be considered in trespass, according to 43 CFR 4140 and 4150 of the Federal Grazing Regulations, and would be subject to a trespass fee. UMC must be responsible for keeping access gates closed during the May-June grazing period. Cattle guards must be installed where gates cannot be closed.

Due to the Trimbley Creek wildfire that consumed 25% of the Graveyard Point allotment in July 2002, a temporary 3-wire barbed fence will be constructed before livestock turnout in May 2003. This will eliminate livestock from the burn area near Flattop Butte. Although this fence is temporary

and is scheduled to be removed by autumn 2004, further rest from livestock grazing may be required. This fence alone will directly impact livestock distribution near Flattop Butte. When heavy equipment is used adjacent to the rehabilitation fence, livestock would be displaced in the vicinity of Flattop Butte. Thus, it is expected that forage utilization in the southeast corner of the allotment would initially be reduced. However, once the cattle become accustomed to mining activity, it is anticipated that forage utilization and livestock movement would return to pre-mining levels.

D. Cumulative Impacts

In addition to the proposed sandstone removal lease encompassing HD claims 1-12 and Poison Creek claims I-III, there are two adjoining sandstone leases. Mineral Materials Sale Contract No. IDI-32916. Is adjacent to the HD claims. Idaho State Lease No. 8823 in Section 16 lies just north of the Poison Creek claims. These leases are near completion. As such, impacts caused by both mining and hauling at these operations would be both infrequent, of short duration, and minimal.

ALTERNATIVE 2 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Physical Factors

1. Soil

The soil resource would be maintained under existing management of the site. No new roads would be constructed and natural erosion would occur from wind, water, and other climatic factors. Some surface disturbance would continue due to activity to and from existing mineral leases in the area.

2. Water

No impacts to water resources are anticipated. Since no perennial streams exist in the site, draws and coulees would be active only after storms and during spring runoff.

3. Air

Air quality would remain good and there would be no new vehicle and machinery activity to increase dust along roadways.

B. Biological Factors

1. Vegetation

No new surface disturbance would occur under the "No Action" alternative. Therefore, no rehabilitation of the site would be required. Reclamation and reseeding activities would only take place on the area burned by the Trimby Creek fire. Habitat for existing plants, including bunchgrass communities, would be maintained to the extent possible under existing grazing management prescriptions. Livestock would continue to graze and current utilization of grasses and shrubs by livestock and wildlife would be maintained.

2. Wildlife

No adverse impacts on the habitat of special status species and other wildlife suspected of occurring on or immediately adjacent to the project site will occur. Under current management, mining activities on existing claims, recreation (including OHMV use), and other human activity allowed in the area would affect wildlife to the same extent as in the past.

C. Social Factors

1. Cultural Resources

Under the "No Action" alternative, indirect and cumulative impacts to the Poison Creek stage station from vibration and compaction would be considerably less than the proposed actions. Operations would continue under the current plan for rock sales in the vicinity.

2. Recreation and Visual Resource Management

Under the "No Action" alternative, no new significant impacts to recreation and visual resources would be expected to occur. Recreation and visual resources would

be maintained under the Owyhee Resource Management Plan (ORMP) guidelines dated December 30, 1999.

3. Livestock

Livestock would be managed under the existing grazing management plan for the Graveyard Point Allotment. Since no new mining would take place, cattle distribution would not be impacted by vehicular traffic and normal human activity in the area

D. Cumulative Impacts

The existing leases, Materials Sale Contract No. IDI-32916 and Idaho State Lease No. 8823, in conjunction with expected demands of the area for recreation, wildlife viewing, and normal human activity, will maintain the site as specified in the ORMP. Cumulative impacts caused by mining and hauling on existing claims would be both infrequent, of short duration, and minimal.

Chapter 5. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

A. Public Involvement Process

Public meeting to be held in Marsing, ID on October 8, 2002 at 7pm in the Marsing Community Center. Copies of the EA are available at the public libraries in Marsing and Homedale, Idaho.

B. List of Agencies, Organizations, and Individuals Consulted

Bureau of Land Management
Owyhee Field Office
3948 Development Avenue
Boise, ID 83705

Bob Mallis - Sandstone Removal Project Coordinator
Valerie Geertson - Botanist
Lois Palmgren - Archeology Technician
Sharon Paris - Planning and Environmental Coordinator
Helen Ulmschneider - Ecologist
Jake Vialpando - Rangeland Management Specialist
Judi Zuckert - Outdoor Recreation Planner

John O. Cossel, Jr. - Professor
Biology Department
School of Health and Sciences
Northwest Nazarene University
623 Holly Street
Nampa, Idaho 83686

Jeff Smith - President
United Mining Corporation
6733 W. State Street
Boise, ID 83703

State Historic Preservation Office
210 Main Street
Boise, Idaho 83702

Owyhee County Commission

Shoshone-Paiute Tribes

C. Preparer
North Wind Environmental, Inc.
545 Shoup Avenue, Suite 200
Idaho Falls, ID 83405



Figure 1. Location of project area.

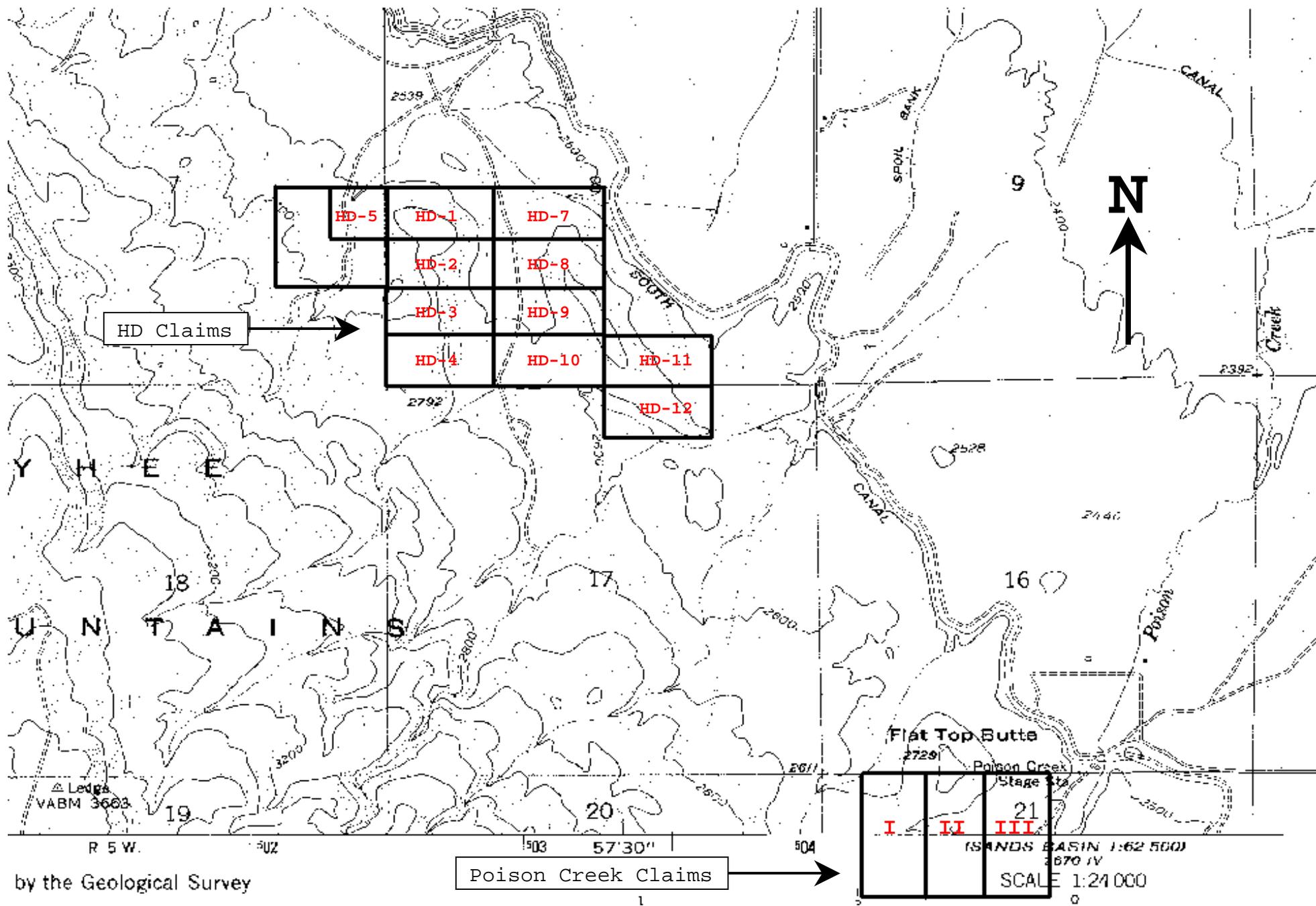


Figure 2. USGS topographic map showing location of proposed permit areas (Homedale 1958 Quad).

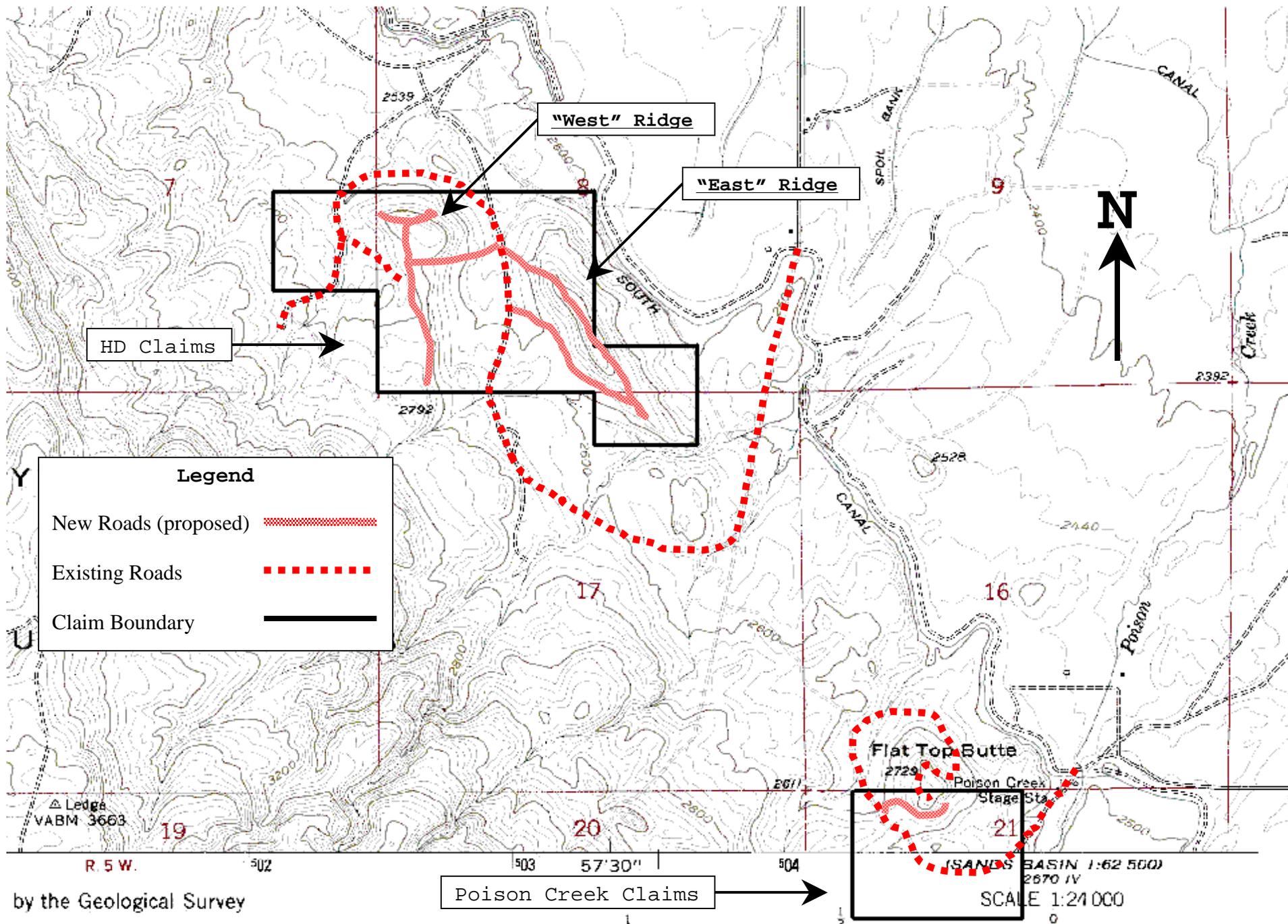


Figure 3. Map of project area showing proposed new and existing roads.