



File Code: 1950

Date: October 4, 2023

Greetings,

The Black Hills National Forest, Northern Hills Ranger District, is considering two separate wildlife habitat improvement projects. Each of these projects is independent from one another; they are presented together here in the interest of efficiency. Additional information on each proposal can be found in the attached scoping notices and maps.

I am writing to inform you of these proposals and to solicit your comments on them. My preliminary assessment is that each of these proposals fall within a category of actions listed in regulations at 36 CFR 220.6 that are excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS), and that no known extraordinary circumstances exist that would preclude the use of a categorical exclusion. Specifically, both proposals fall under 36 CFR 220.6(e)(6): "*Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than 1 mile of low standard road construction.*"

Projects of this nature require the issuance of a decision memo but are not subject to objection. While the decision made on these projects is final, all public comments on the proposed actions will be considered prior to making a decision. To make the best use of any comments, we request that you submit them within 30 days of the date of this letter.

Comments can be submitted via email (comments-rocky-mountain-black-hills-northern-hills@usda.gov), by mail to 2014 N. Main St., Spearfish, SD 57783, by telephone (605-642-4622), or fax (605-642-4156). Any questions regarding these projects can be directed to myself at the phone number listed above or to the individual project contacts identified in the attached scoping notices. If submitting comments by email, please include the project name(s) in the subject line. Office hours are Monday through Friday, generally between 8:00 AM and 4:30 PM Mountain time.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

LOU CONROY

Acting District Ranger

Enclosure: Scoping Notice (2), Map (2)





Boundary Gulch Horned Lizard Habitat Improvement Scoping Notice

**Black Hills National Forest
Northern Hills Ranger District
Lawrence County, South Dakota
T6N, R1E, Section 30**

Purpose of and Need for Action

Short-horned lizards prefer areas with loose soils for burrowing, both to escape the heat of the day and for over-wintering. Areas with minimal canopy cover are preferred as these spots are important for basking and thermoregulation. At the Boundary Gulch short-horned lizard site, pine seedlings and saplings are beginning to encroach and shade these areas. Moreover, excessive pine duff from these trees will make it difficult for short-horned lizards to burrow in the soft substrate. Cattle grazing in the area have maintained open patches of soil and kept understory thatch to a minimum, however a small patch of St. John's Wort is encroaching the site that needs to be removed.

Proposed Action

To maintain lizard habitat, a non-commercial pine (less than 9 inches diameter at breast height) will be thinned to a 16 foot by 16 foot spacing. Commercial pine (greater than 9 inches diameter at breast height) will be retained. No large, mechanized equipment will be used; work will be completed with hand crews only.

Thinning of non-commercial pine will be conducted in the early summer, after lizards egress from their over-wintering sites. Since short-horned lizards overwinter by burrowing several inches down into sand and in cutbanks, it is possible that treating prior to egress could endanger lizards underground by damaging delicate over-wintering sites. Work also needs to be completed prior to August when short horned lizards are born as the juveniles are small and can be difficult to see. During project implementation, monitoring and surveying will be conducted to minimize risk to the lizards. St. John's Wort will be removed by hand-pulling, which can be completed at any point during the summer, and will be conducted over multiple years as necessary. The total project area is approximately 2.4 acres.

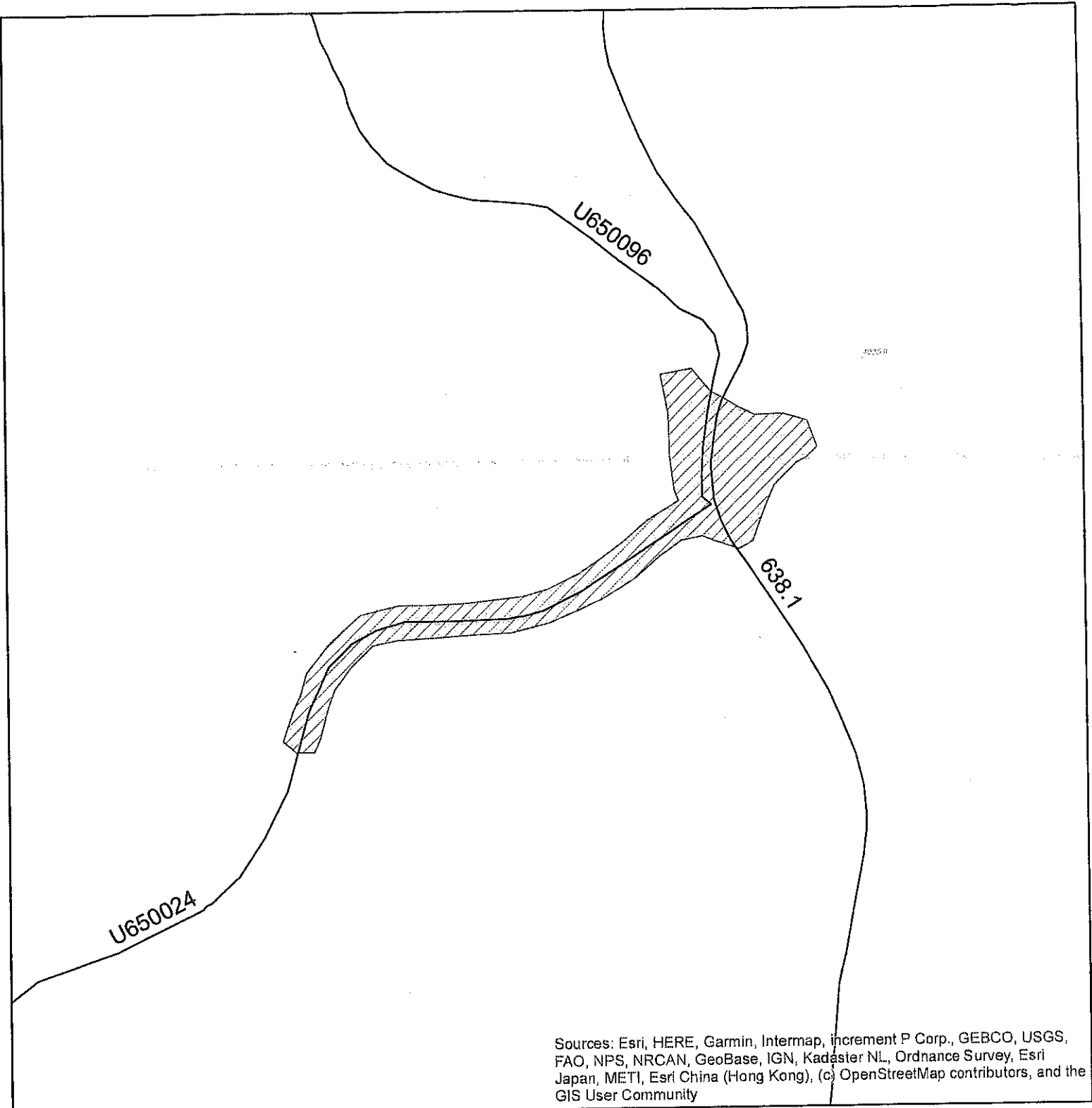
National Environmental Policy Act Compliance

Projects of this nature may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) per provisions at 36 CFR 220.6 provided no extraordinary circumstances exist. Specifically, "*Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than 1 mile of low standard road construction*" may be categorically excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS under 36 CFR 220.6(e)(6). A decision memo is required, but categorically excluded projects are not subject to objection.

Based on the input received during the project scoping period and review by agency resource specialists the responsible official, the Northern Hills District Ranger, will determine whether to authorize this activity.

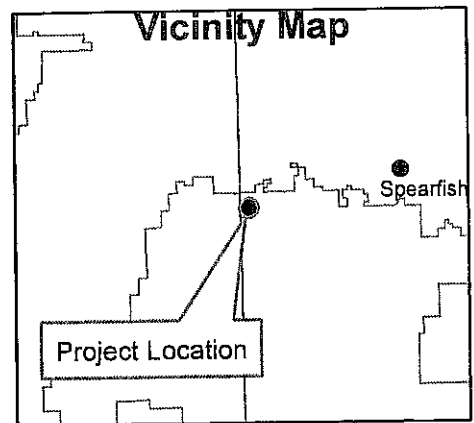
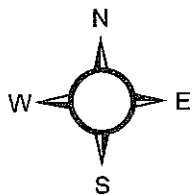
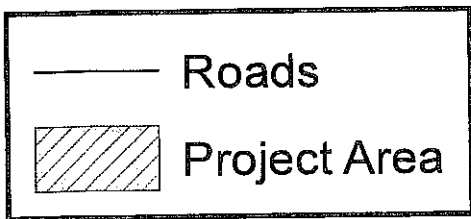
Contact Information

For more information about this project please contact Amy Hammesfahr (Wildlife Biologist) at (605) 443-3048.



Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, Intermap, increment P Corp., GEBCO, USGS, FAO, NPS, NRCAN, GeoBase, IGN, Kadaster NL, Ordnance Survey, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

Boundary Gulch Horned Lizard Habitat Improvement



Red Bat Pond Dam Restoration Scoping Notice

Black Hills National Forest
Northern Hills Ranger District
Lawrence County, South Dakota
T5N, R4E, Section 9

Purpose of and Need for Action

Red Bat Pond is a spring-fed pond that was originally created by the development of an earthen dam. In 2003, the dam was repaired by installing a wood frame dam with a spillway built into the wooden structure. The earthen dam was modified in 2020 and, since then, has developed a leak that prevents it from holding water at the desired level. The pond provides habitat for a variety of wildlife species, including Region 2 sensitive species and federally listed Endangered and Proposed Endangered species.

Proposed Action

The existing dam would be reinforced by cutting a two-foot-wide trench into the dam and filling the trench with bentonite. A four-inch-deep layer of bentonite would also be placed on the floor of the pond. The existing culvert that maintains the maximum water level and allows overflow to escape from the pond would be removed, resealed, and reset. In addition, riprap would be placed on the emergency spillway to prevent it from becoming vegetated. To allow machinery to access the dam, a temporary access road approximately 0.25 mile long would be installed. The access road would cross the creek downstream from the dam, and a temporary culvert would be installed in the creek to allow equipment to cross.

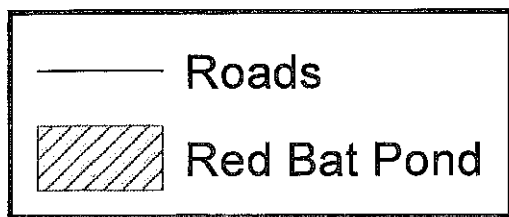
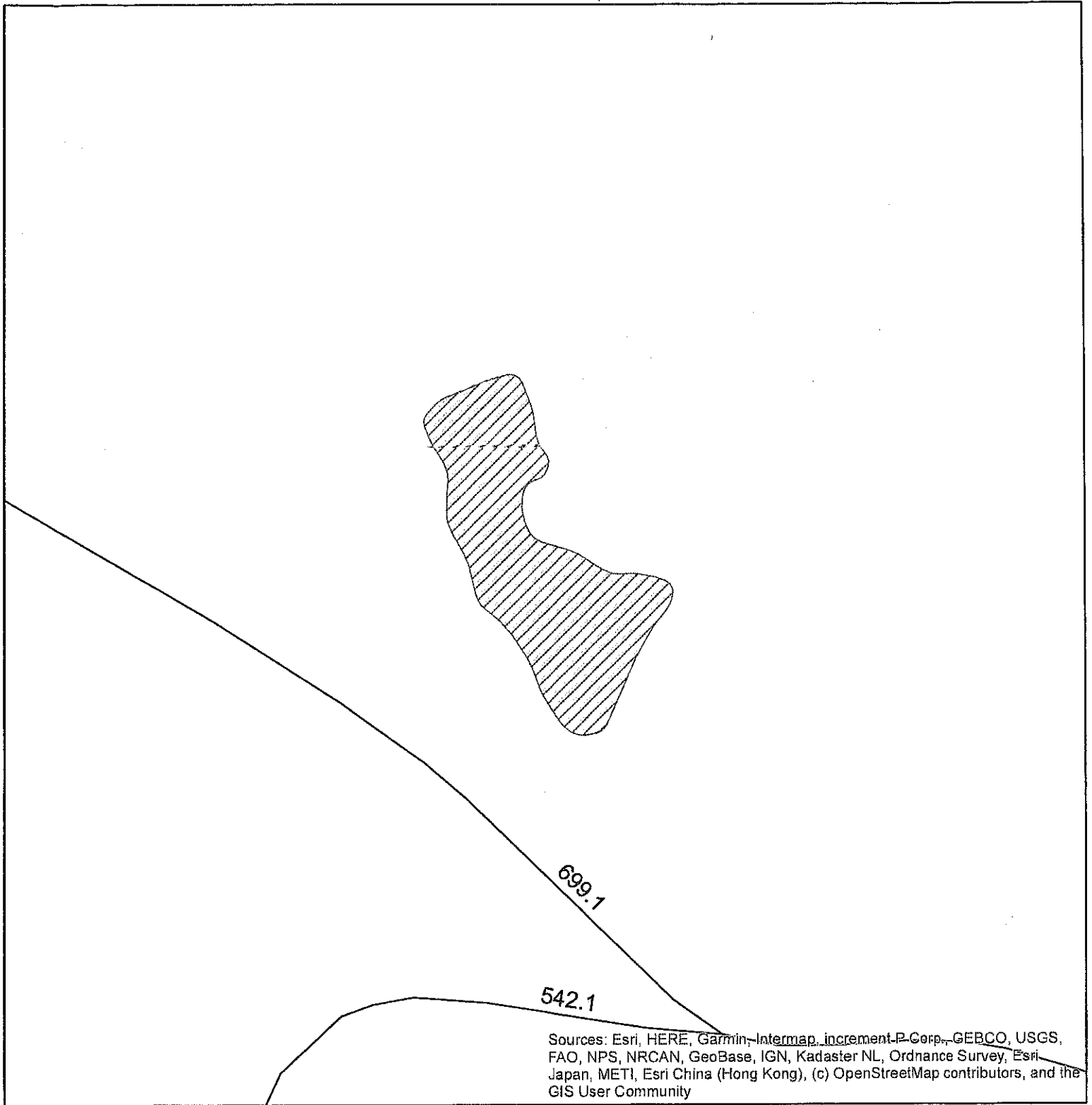
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Red Bat Pond Restoration

