



United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Gunnison Field Office
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Dear Interested Party:

ROAD BEAVER CREEK WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PROJECT

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is seeking input from the public regarding a proposal to conduct a variety of forest and fire management, fisheries and riparian management and travel management activities near Cebolla Creek and Road Beaver Creek southeast of Powderhorn, CO. In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (40 CFR 1501.7), the BLM is seeking public participation and input. Send written comments to: Brian Brown, Gunnison Field Office, 650 S 11th St., Gunnison, CO 81230; or e-mail your comments to: brbrown@blm.gov. Comments and inquiries can also be made by phone at (970) 642-4945. All comments must be received or postmarked by January 9, 2012 in order to be considered in the development of this project.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The Road Beaver Creek project area lies approximately three miles southeast of the community of Powderhorn, Colorado, within Management Unit 13, which is managed for the improvement and maintenance of ecologic conditions (p2-34 of the GRA ROD). This project area has been identified as a priority area for multiple land management activities, including commercial forest harvest, forest health, range improvement and enhancement of the native Colorado cutthroat and brook trout fish populations. This project area includes approximately 15,328 total acres, of which 12,180 acres are managed by the BLM and 3,195 acres are private ownership. The project area was defined using road systems, topographic features and administrative boundaries (see attached map). Approximate acreage for the major cover types present on BLM lands are as follows:

Sagebrush grassland	3,585 acres
Douglas-fir	3,625 acres
Ponderosa pine	1,795 acres
Lodgepole pine	1,528 acres
Aspen	1,434 acres
Riparian	152 acres
Spruce/fir	61 acres

PURPOSE AND NEED

This project incorporates multiple objectives including: forest and fire management, stream and riparian management and travel management.

Forest and Fire Management

The history of suppressing all wildland fires has often resulted in a large buildup of natural fuels and reduced ecosystem diversity. Current stand structure over much of the project area is highly susceptible to insect and disease infestations and large, high severity fires. Management actions would be designed to decrease this susceptibility by increasing stand diversity and decreasing stand density.

Fisheries and Riparian Management

Within a 4 mile reach of Road Beaver Creek, BLM Road 3052 impacts the aquatic habitat and passage of Colorado River cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki pleuriticus*). BLM Road 3052, which has a native surface and inadequate drainage, is located within 30 feet of Road Beaver Creek. The road is the number one chronic source of sediment to Road Beaver Creek. In addition, Road Beaver Creek and North Road Beaver Creek have seven fish passage barriers, which includes 4 culverts and three native surface fords. Six barriers restrict the current fish population of Colorado cutthroats within Road Beaver Creek, while the culvert on North Beaver Creek impedes brook trout.

The aquatic habitat of Road Beaver Creek, which supports Colorado River cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki pleuriticus*), is being impacted for 10 days annually by 100 cattle. The cattle congregate in two water gaps to find shade and water, as they leave the upper elevations to lower elevations. Disturbance of stream banks and the channel bottom results in erosion and sedimentation of Road Beaver Creek at both water gaps.

Travel Management

In 2010 the BLM approved the Record of Decision for the Gunnison Basin Federal Lands Travel Management Plan (ROD). This decision, utilizing public input determined whether travel routes should be kept open or closed to travel. Within the project area, travel management decisions would be implemented. Implementation would reduce unsustainable route density, reduce erosion and benefit multiple resources. Travel route inventories completed after the 2010 ROD have demonstrated the need to amend some route designations within the proposed project area.

PROPOSED ACTION

Forest and Fire Management:

Pre-commercial Thinning

Overstocked regenerated lodgepole pine, a result of timber sale harvesting and wildfire would be thinned to promote long term stand health. Poorly formed and low vigor trees would be thinned from the stand increasing sunlight and nutrient uptake for the remaining trees. Thinning techniques may include hand crews and/or heavy equipment on slopes less than 35%.

Commercial Timber Harvest

Timber harvesting would be utilized to reduce the homogeneity of existing stands. Harvesting would be limited to slopes 35% and less. Existing roads would be primarily utilized with the possibility of constructing temporary spur roads that would not exceed ¼ of a mile. All temporary roads would be obliterated upon project completion. In lodgepole stands all merchantable material would be harvested mimicking a stand replacing fire. In mixed conifer stands, trees of all diameters would be removed mimicking a moderate severity fire. Slash generated from harvest operations may be scattered, piled for burning, masticated or reduced with prescribed fire. These actions are consistent with standards for soil and water, riparian and fishery resources for GRA RMP ROD (page 2-12).

Conifer Removal in Aspen Stands

Within relatively healthy and young aspen stands, conifers would be removed where they have become a significant competitor to aspen. Conifers would be removed using the same methods described above for pre-commercial thinning.

Wildland Urban Interface

Areas adjacent to private property and infrastructure would be thinned to reduce the likelihood of crown dominated wildfire. Thinning techniques may include hand crews and/or heavy equipment on slopes less than 35%. Thinning debris may be scattered, chipped or piled for burning.

Prescribed Fire

Broadcast burning would occur in all cover types present within the project area including conifer forests, aspen forests and sagebrush. The reintroduction of fire is an effective tool for reducing fuel loads and restoring fire adapted ecosystems. Topographic features such as ridges, existing roads, firelines and fuel breaks will be used to determine prescribed fire unit locations. Within forest types, prescribed fire may be a standalone treatment or may be a follow up to mechanical treatment. Prescribed fire would emphasize the reduction of ground and ladder fuels and the retention of larger more fire tolerant trees. Prescribed fire would also be used as a tool to stimulate aspen regeneration. Slash piles and thinning debris may also be disposed of by prescribed fire.

Stream and Riparian Management:

Fish Passage

Four miles of fish habitat within Road Beaver Creek will be restored by reducing sedimentation of the stream by improving four crossings for aquatic passage and improving drainage along four miles of BLM road 3052. The fords will be hardened with riprap and diversion prevention dips (DPDs) will be installed at each ford. The current 15-inch PVC pipe culvert at North Beaver Creek and another of the same size along an unnamed drainage will be sized and installed according to site specific best management practices to allow aquatic passage and the movement of debris and sediment. Three culverts that cross Road Beaver Creek will be replaced to allow passage of Colorado cutthroat trout. These actions are consistent with standards for soil and water, riparian and fishery resources for GRA RMP ROD (page 2-2 and 2-6).

Grazing Management

The BLM intends to improve two water gaps used for the Park Creek Allotment on Road Beaver Creek. Two riparian fences will be relocated out of the riparian area and onto the uplands. In order to provide water to the cattle, two water tanks will be installed in the uplands. Water will be diverted from the stream to the tanks using site specific best management practices. These actions are consistent with standards for soil and water, riparian, and fishery resources for GRA RMP ROD (page 2-2 and 2-6).

Travel Management

Open Routes

Open routes within the Road Beaver Creek Watershed Management Project would be maintained utilizing personnel with hand tools and heavy equipment. Maintenance would include: improving and constructing water diversion structures, blading road surfaces, clearing vegetation along routes and other common maintenance procedures. Signs indicating the open routes may also be utilized.

Closed Routes

Routes determined to be closed by the Record of Decision for the Gunnison Basin Federal Lands Travel Management Plan would be closed utilizing personnel with hand tools and heavy equipment. Closure of routes may include: ripping the road surface, placing barricades, re-vegetating, constructing water diversion structures and other common closure methods. Signs indicating the closed route may also be utilized.

Changing Designation

Utilizing site specific road inventory information, the designation of some open routes may be changed to closed and some closed routes may be changed to open. The maintenance of open routes and the closure of closed routes may utilize the above mentioned techniques.

When


Based on the pace of work over the past six years, treatments would be completed by 2022.

No Action Alternative

As required under the National Environmental Policy Act (40 CFR 1502.14) Federal agencies must consider a No Action Alternative. Under this alternative no action would be taken to manage the resources differently in the Road Beaver Creek Watershed Management Project area.

Your comments on this project are encouraged and appreciated.

Sincerely,



Brian St. George
Field Office Manager

12/13/11

Date