

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Uncompahgre Field Office
2465 South Townsend Avenue
Montrose, CO 81401**

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NUMBER: CO-150-2008-10 EA

PROJECT NAME: Lower Horsefly Mechanical Treatment on Government Springs --
Spring/Dry Cr Implementation

PLANNING UNIT: Uncompahgre Field Office-Uncompahgre Basin

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: T47N R9W Sec 16, 20, 21

APPLICANT: BLM

BACKGROUND

The Dry Creek / Spring Creek Vegetation Management Strategy is a joint vegetation management strategy within the Spring Creek and Dry Creek watersheds for lands managed by the Uncompahgre National Forest and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) west of Montrose, CO, in Montrose and Ouray Counties. The strategy discusses vegetation management on 131,316 acres of public lands (federal) within the Spring Creek and Dry Creek watersheds.

The Spring Creek and Dry Creek watersheds are within the Uncompahgre Project (UP) area. The Uncompahgre Project is an interagency effort consisting of the Public Lands Partnership, Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW), U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and Western Area Power Administration (WAPA). The overarching goal of the Uncompahgre Plateau Project is to improve land health and habitat quality of the Uncompahgre Plateau. The Spring Creek/Dry Creek Vegetation Management Strategy contributes to the goals and objectives of the Uncompahgre Project as well as BLM and Forest Service resource management goals.

The Dry Creek / Spring Creek Vegetation Management Strategy was developed because vegetation structure, age, condition and spatial patterns within the Dry Creek and Spring Creek watersheds appears to be out of balance with the historic range of variability (HRV) and the habitat needs of many native wildlife species. Additionally, the current vegetation pattern, both natural and human induced, heightens the risk of uncontrollable wildfire, the spread of insects and tree disease, mule deer decline, and Gunnison sage grouse decline.

To date approximately 40% of the treatments identified within the Spring Creek/Dry Creek Strategy

have been implemented. The Lower Horsefly treatments now being proposed are a collection of two treatments identified in the strategy. The proposed action falls within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) / High Elevation PJ/Shrub Spring Creek mosaic driver and the WUI/ Low Elevation PJ/Shrub Spring Creek mosaic driver. The high elevation mosaic driver identified approximately 1400 acres of early seral treatment and 600 acres of early mid-seral treatment, and the low elevation mosaic driver identified approximately 1100 acres of early seral treatment and 1300 acres of early mid-seral treatment within the strategy. The Lower Horsefly treatments proposed will develop 246 acres of early seral vegetation mosaic and 158 acres of early-mid seral vegetation mosaic as identified in the Spring Creek/ Dry Creek Vegetation Management Strategy and analyzed for environmental impacts under environmental assessment (EA) #CO-150-2003-0042.

In 2003, guidance and management direction for Birds of Conservation Concern that are covered under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act were not as clear or concise as now. Considering current guidance, the EA for the Spring Creek/ Dry Creek Vegetation Management Strategy did not adequately address or mitigate impacts to Birds of Conservation Concern. This EA tiers to the Spring Creek/ Dry Creek Vegetation Management Strategy environmental assessment while also adequately analyzing and mitigating the impacts to Birds of Conservation Concern that are covered under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Proposed Action: The proposed action is for the continued implementation of the Spring Creek-Dry Creek Vegetation Management Strategy and Environmental Assessment. Specifically, the proposal is to treat by Lawson Aerator* or similar equipment an area of approximately 405 acres within four large 1960s-era chainings in the Horsefly area along Government Springs Road (see maps). The chaining areas are primarily open early mid-seral piñon-juniper woodland with the stand age < 40 years old. Trees are generally described as having Christmas tree form with lower limbs touching the ground and tree heights ranging from 6-15 feet and bole diameters at ground height of 3-6 inches. Since the chaining area is the primary treatment area, no trees greater than about 40 years in age will be impacted by implementing the proposed action.

*A *Lawson Aerator* is a tractor with two cylindrical drums equipped with a series of intermittent blades. The angle of the two drums can be oriented at varying angles to achieve the desired effect, or percentage of vegetation chopped.

In order to accomplish this, several discrete actions would occur:

1. For the three chainings which lay in Sections 20-21 an area of 206 acres (60% of these three chainings) would be treated to create early seral vegetation. The equipment would be adjusted to maximize reduction of existing piñon/juniper and nonnative grasses (crested wheatgrass). This area would be seeded at that time with a mix of native grasses and primarily native forbs. The objective for this action, as identified in the Spring Creek/Dry Creek Strategy, is to reduce non-natives, to create small (<5 acre) patches of early seral vegetation across 60% of the old chaining, and to avoid treating older stages of vegetation.

2. 69 acres (20% of these three old chaining) would be treated to create more natural, better condition early-mid seral vegetation. Objectives are to remove the young trees, reduce the nonnative grasses and promote and enhance the growth of shrubs and forbs. The equipment would be set to reduce damage to existing shrubs and herbaceous vegetation while removing the piñon juniper, and a seed mix consisting primarily of native shrubs and forbs would be applied.
3. 40 acres (25%) of the chaining in Section 16 would be treated to create early seral vegetation with the same treatment as proposed in the first action, however the objective from the strategy is to reduce non-natives, improve conditions, create 3-5 acre patches of early seral on 25% of the area and avoid more mature patches of existing vegetation.
4. 89 acres (55%) of the chaining in section 16 would be treated to create better condition early-mid seral vegetation. Objectives are to remove the young trees, reduce the nonnative grasses and promote and enhance the growth of shrubs and forbs. The equipment would be set to reduce damage existing shrubs and herbaceous vegetation, and a different seed mix will be applied, and a seed mix consisting primarily of native shrubs and forbs would be applied.

The following are Design Features of the Proposed Action:

- All National Register and National Register eligible properties will be avoided by the project, and no mitigation is required. Previously un-surveyed portions of the project area will be examined for cultural resource presence before any treatment activities are conducted, and any historic properties discovered during this inventory will be avoided. No further work is recommended.
- Seasonal restrictions (WO IM 2008-050) from ground disturbing activities will be in effect between May 15 and July 15 to minimize/avoid impacts to nesting migratory birds.
- All piñon-juniper in the mature age class will be avoided during the implementation of the proposed action.
- To manage for Gray flycatcher: Maintain tree patches >2.5 acres and less than .5 miles apart.
- Equipment shall not be operated when the ground is muddy or the soil moisture is high enough for equipment to leave ruts over 1.5 inches in height. When/if such conditions are encountered project implementation will cease until conditions are dry enough to facilitate continuation without negatively impacting soil resources.
- All equipment will be power washed and debris free prior to entering public land to reduce the spread of noxious weeds in the area.

- Prior to project implementation all known weed infestations shall be treated to lessen the chance of infestation expansion.
- Inventory for and treat known or newly established weed infestations post project implementation.
- All weed management will be conducted using materials and methods approved for use on BLM lands.
- Fueling operations will not take place in any drainage. Any spills of fuel or lubricants shall be reported to the BLM upon which the determination will be made as to whether a cleanup is required. Report spills to Alan Kraus (BLM) at: 970-640-3943.
- The grazing permittee will be given a map of the treated area and will be shown the area so no miscommunications of treatment area will occur.
- To ensure the establishment of seeded species the treatment areas would be rested from livestock grazing for a minimum of two growing seasons. Additional deferment may be necessary based on climactic trends, which could affect establishment of vegetation.
- To ensure a minimum of two growing seasons rest from livestock grazing, vacant allotments (Sims Mesa, Government Spring, Chaffee, Tinkler) would be utilized by the permittee to offset potential economic hardship endured by the permittee. If the use of these vacant allotments is not possible then treatments would be scheduled over a three to four year period to defer this hardship.

No Action Alternative: No vegetation management will take place. The chaining area would continue to progress towards a climax piñon juniper woodland with a stand that lacks age and size class diversity. Native understory herbaceous vegetation would continue to decline, the non-native grass species would continue to be dominant species and valuable browse species would not be enhanced for wintering big game.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT CARRIED FORWARD: No other alternatives are being considered.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE ACTION:

The purpose for the proposed action is to change vegetation age classes and vegetation conditions in specific amounts and patterns on BLM lands in the Lower Horsefly area of the Dry Creek and Spring Creek watersheds so that they meet, or will be on track to meet vegetation mosaic objectives. “Vegetation Mosaic” is the term used to describe the pattern and amounts of vegetation age classes across a landscape. There are 10 vegetation mosaic objectives on BLM lands, each specific to a major vegetation or habitat type, and each designed to promote one of the following: 1) optimal habitat for at-risk species (Gunnison Sage Grouse), 2) optimal fuels

arrangement to prevent spread of wildfire into areas with residences or power transmission lines, and 3) natural ecosystem function. Only one objective applies to each part of the landscape; where each objective applies is determined by the vegetation type, habitat type or presence of wildland-urban interface. The Lower Horsefly area has the second objective.

The proposed action will specifically address the reduction of standing fuels to prevent spread of wildfire into areas with residences and enhancement of natural ecosystem function.

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW: The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3):

Name of Plan: Uncompahgre Basin Resource Management Plan

Date Approved: July, 1989

Decision Language:

Uncompahgre Basin Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision: Page 13, Management Unit #1 states, “The management unit will be managed to improve vegetation conditions and forage availability for livestock grazing. Land treatment projects and other facilities designed to improve livestock forage and distribution will be developed”. It goes on to say that “Non-conflicting wildlife management ... projects will be incorporated into new and existing Allotment Management Plans”. And finally, “Woodland harvest will be managed for increased forage production and will be compatible with AMPs”.

Language for Management Unit #3 (Page 15) states: “existing wildlife habitat projects will be maintained and new projects developed if they will not decrease the woodland base.”

Name of Document: Spring Creek/Dry Creek Vegetation Management Strategy and Environmental Assessment, CO-150-2003-0042-EA. This EA tiers to CO-150-2003-0042-EA.

Date Approved: October 1, 2003.

STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC LAND HEALTH: In January 1997, Colorado Bureau of Land Management (BLM) approved the Standards for Public Land Health. These standards cover upland soils, riparian systems, plant and animal communities, threatened and endangered species, and water quality. Standards describe conditions needed to sustain public land health and relate to all uses of the public lands. Because a standard exists for these five categories, a finding must be made for each of them in an environmental analysis. These findings are located in specific elements listed below:

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT / ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES:

INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM ANALYSIS RECORD CHECKLIST

DETERMINATION OF STAFF:		
Determination	Resource	Rationale for Determination*
Natural, Biological and Cultural Resources		
NI	Air Quality	Air Quality was sufficiently addressed in EA 150-2003-0042-EA, Spring Creek/Dry Creek Vegetation Management Strategy
NP	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern	There are no ACECs present within proximity to the proposed action.
PI	Cultural Resources	Brought forward for analysis.
PI	Invasive, Non-native Species	Brought forward for analysis.
PI	Migratory Birds	Brought forward for analysis.
NP	Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Animal and Plant Species	There are no species listed, proposed, or candidate to the Endangered Species Act, nor species considered sensitive by the BLM, that are known to inhabit areas potentially influenced by the proposed action. These conclusions are based on the no effect determination made in EA 150-2003-0042-EA, Spring Creek/Dry Creek Vegetation Management Strategy and lack of suitable or functional habitat for: bald eagle (<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>); Peregrine falcon (<i>Falco peregrinus, anatum</i>); Gunnison sage grouse (<i>Centrocercus minimus</i>); Mexican spotted owl, and the four endangered Colorado River fish; the pikeminnow (<i>Ptychocheilus lucius</i>), the bonytail chub (<i>Gila elegans</i>), the razorback sucker, and the humpback chub (<i>Gila cypha</i>).
NI	Wastes (hazardous or solid)	Hazardous and solid wastes were sufficiently addressed in EA 150-2003-0042-EA, Spring Creek/Dry Creek Vegetation Management Strategy
NI	Water Quality (Surface/Ground)	Water Quality was sufficiently addressed in EA 150-2003-0042-EA, Spring Creek/Dry Creek Vegetation Management Strategy
NP	Wetlands/Riparian Zones	Wetlands/Riparian Zones were sufficiently addressed in EA 150-2003-0042-EA, Spring Creek/Dry Creek Vegetation Management Strategy
NP	Wilderness	There are no wilderness areas or wilderness study areas within proximity to the proposed action
No Impact	Soils	Soils were sufficiently addressed in EA 150-2003-0042-EA, Spring Creek/Dry Creek Vegetation Management Strategy
No Impact	Vegetation	Vegetation was sufficiently addressed in EA 150-2003-0042-EA, Spring Creek/Dry Creek Vegetation Management Strategy
No Impact	Wildlife, Aquatic	sufficiently addressed in EA 150-2003-0042-EA, Spring Creek/Dry Creek Vegetation Management Strategy
No Impact	Wildlife, Terrestrial	sufficiently addressed in EA 150-2003-0042-EA, Spring Creek/Dry Creek Vegetation Management Strategy

NP = not present in the area impacted by the proposed or alternative actions

NI = present, but not affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required

PI = present with potential for impact analyzed in detail in the EA

CRITICAL ELEMENTS NOT PRESENT OR NOT AFFECTED: No flood plains, prime and unique farmlands, or Wild and Scenic Rivers exist within the area affected by the proposed action. There are also no Native American religious or environmental justice concerns associated with the proposed action.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Affected Environment: The majority of the project area is situated on land surfaces disturbed by previous mechanical vegetation treatments and is exempt from further inventory under the provisions of 43 CFR 8110.23. Inventories conducted in 1979 for a re-seeding effort (Fike 1979) recorded several non-eligible sites within the boundaries of the current project, however, the only known eligible sites in the area are outside the APE of the proposed action.

For the project as it is presently constituted, some 20 acres lie outside of previously inventoried areas. This portion is situated on the northern and north-eastern periphery of the project. Cultural inventory of those areas would be conducted prior to any potentially ground disturbing activities.

Environmental Consequences: There are no known National Register or otherwise eligible properties situated within the APE of the project. Known sites in the project would be avoided by any of the proposed vegetation treatment activities.

Mitigation: See Design Features

INVASIVE, NON-NATIVE SPECIES

Affected Environment: A noxious and invasive weed inventory completed in the summer of 2007 within the project area revealed several infestations of common mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*), Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), and a small single infestation of Russian knapweed (*Acroptilon repens*) in the western portion of the chaining in section 20. The two chainings in section 21 have individual infestations of common mullein and Canada thistle as well. The public and private lands around the project area also have small infestations of Russian knapweed, Bull thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*), and Musk thistle (*Carduus nutans*). There are also isolated pockets of cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) adjacent to the two track routes that traverse all of the chainings proposed for treatment.

Environmental Consequences: Soil disturbances such as those that are anticipated by a Lawson Aerator are subject to invasion by invasive, non-native plants due to the removal and kill of existing vegetation such as piñon, juniper, and crested wheatgrass. Invasive species that have been mapped within the project area would be treated prior to project implementation to help limit the additional spread of noxious and invasive species. Design aspects of the proposed action should result in very few, and short term, increases to weed populations in the project area. A native seed mix would be applied concurrently with the use of the Lawson Aerator, which once established would compete with establishing weeds. Prior to full establishment (2-3 years) of the native seed, disturbed soil could potentially be colonized by Canada thistle, Bull thistle, Musk thistle, mullein, and Russian knapweed. With the exception of Russian knapweed and Canada thistle all of the invasive species present in and around the project area can be effectively outcompeted by establishing a healthy, diverse, and productive vegetation

community. If these plants should become established, they would be treated, as part of the proposed action. Monitoring for invasive species would occur concurrently with treatment effectiveness monitoring by field office staff. Where invasive species become established treatment would most likely take the form of herbicide application, using herbicides and methods approved for use on BLM lands.

Mitigation: See Design Features

MIGRATORY BIRDS

Affected Environment: The project areas contain habitats that are frequented by a variety of migratory bird species. For the purposes of this analysis, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service List of Birds of Conservation Concern was used as a tool to complete this analysis (USFWS 2002, Table 16, pg 39 BCR 16 [Southern Rockies/Colorado Plateau]). The table below contains the bird species used for this analysis, their status (resident, breeding, wintering or not present) within the Uncompahgre Field Office, and whether they are expected within the project area.

<i>Common Name</i>	<i>Scientific Name</i>	<i>Range within UFO¹</i>	<i>May be Present</i>
Northern Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	Resident	
Swainson's Hawk	<i>Buteo swainsoni</i>	Breeding	✓
Ferruginous Hawk	<i>Buteo regalis</i>	Winter	✓
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	Resident	✓
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Breeding	✓
Prairie Falcon	<i>Falco mexicanus</i>	Resident	✓
[Gunnison Sage-Grouse]	<i>Centrocercus minimus</i>	Resident	
Snowy Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	--	
Mountain Plover	<i>Charadrius montanus</i>	--	
Solitary Sandpiper	<i>Tringa solitaria</i>	Migration	
Marbled Godwit	<i>Limosa fedoa</i>	Migration	
Wilson's Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus tricolor</i>	Breeding	✓
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	<i>Coccyzus americanus</i>	--	
Flammulated Owl	<i>Otus flammeolus</i>	Breeding	
Burrowing Owl	<i>Athene cunicularia</i>	Breeding	✓
Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>	Winter	✓
Black Swift	<i>Crypseloides niger</i>	Breeding	✓
Lewis's Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes lewis</i>	Resident	✓
Williamson's Sapsucker	<i>Sphyrapicus thyroideus</i>	Breeding	✓
Gray Vireo	<i>Vireo vicinior</i>	Breeding	
Pinyon Jay	<i>Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus</i>	Resident	✓
Bendire's Thrasher	<i>Toxostoma bendirei</i>	--	
Crissal Thrasher	<i>Toxostoma crissale</i>	--	
Sprague's Pipit	<i>Anthus spragueii</i>	--	
Virginia's Warbler	<i>Vermivora virginiae</i>	Breeding	

Black-throated Gray Warbler	<i>Dendroica nigrescens</i>	Breeding	✓
Grace's Warbler	<i>Dendroica graciae</i>	Breeding	
Sage Sparrow	<i>Amphispiza belli</i>	Breeding	
Chestnut-collared Longspur	<i>Calcarius ornatus</i>	Migration	✓

¹ from Alderfer 2006

Of the species on the above list that are expected within the Field Office, several raptors, woodpeckers and songbirds may be present due to suitable habitat, but there are no documented nest sites within the project area. Ferruginous hawk and short-eared owls may only use the area in the winter. Habitat for the yellow-billed cuckoo is not found within the project area. Habitat for the Gunnison sage grouse is present within the area, but the population appears to be extirpated. The other migratory bird species may use the area for foraging and/or nesting habitat.

Environmental Consequences: On page 17 of CO150-2003-42 EA, “The impact on other Birds of Conservation Concern that are covered under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act would be minimized through implementing most treatments outside the nesting season.” Additional guidance (IM2008-050) further clarifies that seasonal restriction from ground disturbing activities will be in effect between May 15 and July 15 to minimize/avoid impacts to nesting migratory birds. Perch sites, nest sites and habitats supporting prey and food species may be reduced for some bird species, but may increase habitats for other bird species. Short-term displacement of individuals may occur due to these changes in habitats. It is possible individual wintering birds may be affected by the removal of vegetation that provides hiding and thermal cover; however, vegetation removal activities in any given area are expected to be short-term. Long term, vegetation diversity and condition should increase. Shrub understory and herbaceous vegetation should increase after the reduction of competition from the overstory. Thinning the overstory would improve understory vegetation, resulting in improved availability of food and shelter for some species.

Mitigation: See design Features

No Action Alternative – Under the No Action Alternative, no impacts are expected to migratory birds and associated habitat would remain in its current condition.

OTHER NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS: For the following elements, only those brought forward for analysis will be addressed further.

Non-Critical Element	NA or Not Present	Applicable or Present, No Impact	Applicable & Present and Brought Forward for Analysis
Access and Transportation	X		
Cadastral Survey	X		
Fire Management		X	
Forest Management		X	

Non-Critical Element	NA or Not Present	Applicable or Present, No Impact	Applicable & Present and Brought Forward for Analysis
Geology and Minerals	X		
Hydrology/Water Rights	X		
Law Enforcement		X	
Noise		X	
Paleontology		X	
Rangeland Management			X
Realty Authorizations	X		
Recreation		X	
Socio-Economics	X		
Visual Resources		X	

Those elements identified as “Applicable or Present, No Impact” have been determined to have been sufficiently addressed in EA 150-2003-0042-EA, Spring Creek/Dry Creek Vegetation Management Strategy.

RANGELAND MANAGEMENT

Affected Environment: The action proposed is entirely located within the Lower Horsefly allotment. The allotment is grazed with sheep for 31 days in the winter and 15 days in the spring. Grazing areas vary between winter and spring so as not to graze the same area in a year.

Environmental Consequences: Completing all treatment areas within one season would put undo economic pressure on the BLM permittee. Both treatments would be rested from domestic grazing for a period of two growing seasons which would take the treatment areas out of domestic livestock grazing and displace the permittee. Use of the Chaffee, Tinkler, Sims Mesa and Government Springs allotments would allow for the permittee to continue domestic livestock grazing while the Lower Horsefly allotment is rested post treatment for establishment of desired vegetation. Even though the allotment and vegetation treatments would be rested from domestic grazing, wildlife would still continue to graze/browse the area, possibly compromising the establishment of the seeding.

Mitigation: See Design Features

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY:

The proposed project area has been altered and impacted in part by long-term fire suppression, past management practices, and historic livestock grazing. The general geographic area has also been impacted by the construction of roads, urban and rural development, and by recreation opportunities.

Several concerns with the current ecologic state of the Spring Creek and Dry Creek watersheds were expressed and analyzed in detail under the Spring Creek/Dry Creek Vegetation Management Strategy. Most concerns are based on vegetative conditions, which influence many other resources such as soil, water quality, and wildlife habitat including the Gunnison sage grouse and mule deer winter range. Other concerns, such as hazardous fuels in and outside of the wildland urban interface are also rooted in the vegetative condition.

The cumulative impacts are determined to be beneficial as a whole. In the short term, there would be some minor negative impacts. Short-term impacts would be minimized because of the percentage limits, BMPs, and design features established by the Spring Cr/Dry Cr Plan. Long-term (5 years and over), conditions are expected to improve beyond current.

The proposed action limits the amount of land that can be treated to 10% of the overall project area. The limit ensures that not too much of an area is treated at a time. This helps to maintain ecologic function, limit water surface runoff, and maintain forage for wildlife and livestock until additional forage is established within the treatment areas. The proposed action also sets aside land for maturation, which is in keeping with the desired seral stages expressed in the mosaic objectives.

The Lower Horsefly project was identified in the Spring Creek / Dry Creek Vegetation Management Strategy and is necessary to meet vegetation management objectives identified within the strategy. Short-term impacts would be minimized by the design features incorporated with the proposed action, and the BMPs and design features established by the Spring Creek/Dry Creek Strategy. Long-term (5 years and over), as desirable vegetation establishes and matures conditions are expected to improve beyond current as the treated areas would help to function as small part of a more healthy and diverse landscape. The Lower Horsefly project would have positive effects to improve habitat on mule deer winter range, reduce conflicts between livestock and big game wildlife, and change the vegetative pattern to meet the mosaic objectives stated in the strategy.

INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Area of Responsibility</u>
Ken Holsinger	Fuels Specialist	Invasive/Non-native Species
Melissa Siders	Biological Staff Supervisor	Migratory Bird Species
Alan Kraus	Hazmat Specialist	Hazardous/Solid Wastes
Lynae Rogers	Rangeland Management Specialist	Range Management

FONSI CO-150-2008-10 EA

Environmental Assessment CO-150-2008-09 EA analyzing the environmental effects of the proposed action has been reviewed. The approved mitigation measures result in a Finding of No Significant Impact on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary to further analyze the environmental effects of the proposed action.

DECISION RECORD

DECISION: It is my decision to implement the proposed action, as described in CO-150-2008-10 EA. The proposed action is for the continued implementation of the Spring Creek-Dry Creek Vegetation Management Strategy and Environmental Assessment. Specifically, the proposal is to treat by Lawson Aerator or similar equipment an area of approximately 405 acres within four large old chainings in the Horsefly area along Government Springs Road.

In order to accomplish this several discrete actions would occur:

1. For the three chainings which lay in Sections 20-21 an area of 206 acres (60% of these three chainings) would be treated to create early seral vegetation. The equipment would be adjusted to maximize reduction of existing piñon/juniper and nonnative grasses (crested wheatgrass). This area would be seeded at that time with a mix of native grasses and primarily native forbs. The objective for this action, as identified in the Spring Creek/Dry Creek Strategy, is to reduce non-natives, to create small (<5 acre) patches of early seral vegetation across 60% of the old chaining, and to avoid treating older stages of vegetation.
2. 69 acres (20% of these three old chaining) would be treated to create more natural, better condition early-mid seral vegetation. Objectives are to remove the young trees, reduce the nonnative grasses and promote and enhance the growth of shrubs and forbs. The equipment would be set to reduce damage to existing shrubs and herbaceous vegetation while removing the piñon juniper, and a seed mix consisting primarily of native shrubs and forbs would be applied.
3. 40 acres (25%) of the chaining in Section 16 would be treated to create early seral vegetation with the same treatment as proposed in the first action, however the objective from the strategy is to reduce non-natives, improve conditions, create 3-5 acre patches of early seral on 25% of the area and avoid more mature patches of existing vegetation.
4. 89 acres (55%) of the chaining in section 16 would be treated to create better condition early-mid seral vegetation. Objectives are to remove the young trees, reduce the nonnative grasses and promote and enhance the growth of shrubs and forbs. The equipment would be set to reduce damage existing shrubs and herbaceous vegetation,

and a different seed mix will be applied, and a seed mix consisting primarily of native shrubs and forbs would be applied.

RATIONALE: The proposed action serves to improve the ecologic condition, improve the vegetative mosaic, improve wildlife habitat, and reduce hazardous wildland fuels within the Spring Creek and Dry Creek watersheds. The decision to allow the proposed action does not result in any undue or unnecessary environmental degradation and is in conformance with the Uncompahgre Basin RMP approved July 1989.

MITIGATION MEASURES: Follow the Design Features shown in the Proposed Action, which are:

- All National Register and National Register eligible properties will be avoided by the project, and no mitigation is required. Previously un-surveyed portions of the project area will be examined for cultural resource presence before any treatment activities are conducted, and any historic properties discovered during this inventory will be avoided. No further work is recommended.
- Seasonal restrictions (WO IM 2008-050) from ground disturbing activities will be in effect between May 15 and July 15 to minimize/avoid impacts to nesting migratory birds.
- All piñon-juniper in the mature age class will be avoided during the implementation of the proposed action.
- To manage for Gray flycatcher: Maintain tree patches >2.5 acres and less than .5 miles apart.
- Equipment shall not be operated when the ground is muddy or the soil moisture is high enough for equipment to leave ruts over 1.5 inches in height. When/if such conditions are encountered project implementation will cease until conditions are dry enough to facilitate continuation without negatively impacting soil resources.
- All equipment will be power washed and debris free prior to entering public land to reduce the spread of noxious weeds in the area.
- Prior to project implementation all known weed infestations shall be treated to lessen the chance of infestation expansion.
- Inventory for and treat known or newly established weed infestations post project implementation.
- All weed management will be conducted using materials and methods approved for use on BLM lands.
- Fueling operations will not take place in any drainage. Any spills of fuel or lubricants shall

be reported to the BLM upon which the determination will be made as to whether a cleanup is required. Report spills to Alan Kraus (BLM) at: 970-640-3943.

- The grazing permittee will be given a map of the treated area and will be shown the area so no miscommunications of treatment area will occur.
- To ensure the establishment of seeded species the treatment areas would be rested from livestock grazing for a minimum of two growing seasons. Additional deferment may be necessary based on climactic trends, which could affect establishment of vegetation.
- To ensure a minimum of two growing seasons rest from livestock grazing, vacant allotments (Sims Mesa, Government Spring, Chaffee, Tinkler) would be utilized by the permittee to offset potential economic hardship endured by the permittee. If the use of these vacant allotments is not possible then treatments would be scheduled over a three to four year period to defer this hardship.

COMPLIANCE/MONITORING: The Uncompahgre Field Office fuels specialist will write specifications for the contract, and will inspect the work of the contractor to ensure compliance with this approved action.

The Uncompahgre Field Office ecologist and/or fuels specialist will monitor the sites to determine the level of success and need for future action.

NAME OF PREPARER: Ken Holsinger

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR: Bruce Krickbaum

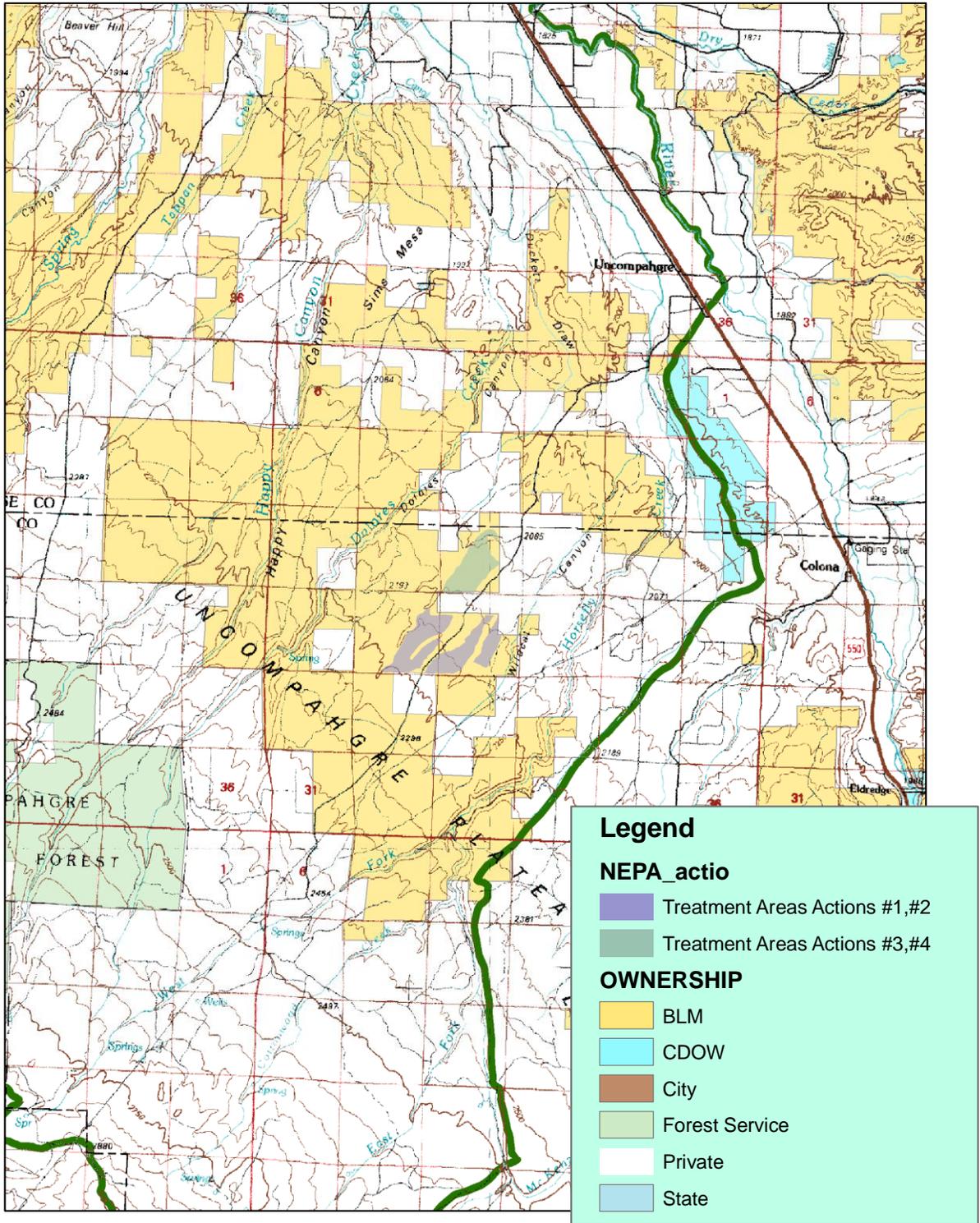
DATE: 2/27/2009

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL: /s/ Dave Kauffman, for
Barbara Sharrow
Field Manager
Uncompahgre Field Office

DATE SIGNED: 3/2/2009

ATTACHMENTS: Maps

Proposed Lower Horsefly Vegetation Treatments



Proposed Lower Horsefly Vegetation Treatments

