

Finding of No Significant Impact
Upper Castle Creek Juniper Hand Cut
Environmental Assessment ID120-2007-EA-3274

I have reviewed the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (CEQ) for significance (40 CFR 1508.27) and have determined the actions analyzed in EA # ID120-2007-EA-3274 would not constitute a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment; therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. This finding was made by considering both the context and intensity of the potential effects, as described in the above EA, using the following factors defining significance:

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The Proposed Action will have beneficial impacts and minimal direct or indirect adverse impacts to vegetation, soils/watershed, migratory birds and special status wildlife species, visual resources, and cultural resources (Sections 3.1 – 3.7. EA # ID120-2007-EA-3274). The Proposed Action will directly enhance the shrub/steppe, mahogany, aspen, and riparian communities threatened by juniper expansion and will maintain their respective habitats for sage-grouse and other sage-brush obligate species.

2. The degree to which the Proposed Action affects public health or safety.

No major effects on public health and safety were identified in the EA.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

No major effects on any unique characteristics are identified in the EA. of the area, cultural or historical resources, parklands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas were identified in the EA. (“Consideration of Critical Elements,” Page i ID120-2007-EA-3274).

Some artifactual material could be displaced from cross country ATV driving, dropping trees, lop and scattering juniper, and hand dragging trees and branches across cultural sites. Pile burning could damage artifacts beneath a pile burn. Staging and camping areas present ground disturbing impacts that could alter the context of cultural sites such as compaction of soils, displacement and breakage of artifactual material resulting in reduced integrity of cultural deposits.

These effects would be minimized by conducting cultural inventories prior to project implementation. Any significant sites located during inventories would be avoided by ground disturbing project impacts or those impacts would be mitigated to an acceptable level.

4. *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.*

The analysis did not identify any controversy or substantial disagreement concerning effects on the quality of the human environment. The objectives for the action emanate directly from the 2006 Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-Grouse in Idaho. The plan was developed collaboratively by the Idaho Sage-grouse Advisory Committee, which is a diverse assemblage of agency, agricultural, conservation, and sportsman interests. The Plan identifies goals and objectives designed to maintain, improve and increase sage-grouse habitat and populations in Idaho (EA Section 1.2, page 4-5). It also describes 19 threats to sage-grouse in the state, and conservation measures designed to reduce, eliminate or mitigate those threats.

A scoping letter containing a draft purpose and need, proposed action, project objectives and preliminary issues associate with the proposed action was sent to all interested public on December 13, 2006. BLM received two public comment letters which expressed concerns about the effects of management actions on various resource values. These comments were: 1) incorporated into the *Project Design and Standard Operating Procedures*; 2) used as *Other Alternatives Considered*; 3) used as issues to be addressed in the effects analysis; or 4) considered beyond the scope of the proposed action. Substantive comments and my response to them are found at the end of the EA, Section 5.3, pages 34-40.

The proposed action was presented to the Owyhee County Sage-Grouse Working Group on March 21, 2007 and was well received by them.

5. *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment is highly uncertain or involves unique or unknown risks.*

The analysis did not identify any uncertain or unique or unknown risks. The Boise District BLM has conducted similar juniper cuts in the recent past and is well aware of the associated effects.

6. *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*

The action is a common and has been implemented in the past projects throughout portions of the Owyhee Plateau. Please see section 3.7.1. page 19-23 for a discussion of past similar treatments.

7. *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*

The analysis identified that this action does not result in any known significant cumulative or secondary effects within the 34,000 acre project area which is contained in the 221,610 juniper Eastern Expansion Zone. This area and the more juniper dominated areas of the Owyhee Sage-grouse Planning Area contain approximately 1.1 million acres. Within this larger area, this action together with past and future cutting treatments, prescribed fires, wildfires, and Standards and Guidelines assessments, determinations and subsequent

decisions will help maintain shrub steppe habitat for sage-grouse and other sage-brush obligate species within the 1.1 million acre Owyhee Sage-grouse Planning Area. At a larger scale within the 9.7 million acre Owyhee Uplands, the cumulative effects would only be a slight slowing in the rate of juniper expansion. The difference between the action and no-action would be barely detectable at this scale.

8. *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

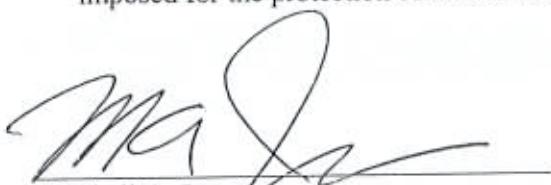
The analysis showed that the alternatives would not result in significant adverse effects to cultural or historical resources.

9. *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.*

No endangered or threatened species are known in this area.

10. *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

The action does not threaten a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.



Mitchell A. Jaurona
Bruneau Field Manager

17 Aug 2007
Date