

**United States Department of Interior
Bureau of Land Management, Bruneau Field Office**

**Upper Castle Creek Juniper Hand Cut
Environmental Assessment ID120-2007-EA-3274**

Decision Record

Proposed Action: Hand cut expanding seral juniper on 33,000 acres of designated key and conifer encroachment sage-grouse habitat within the Bruneau Field Office.

Decision: It is my decision to authorize the cutting of seral juniper as described in the Proposed Action of Environmental Assessment ID120-2007-EA-3274.

Rationale for Decision: The purpose of the action is to maintain existing habitat for sage-grouse and other sagebrush obligate species whose habitats are threatened by juniper expansion, and to maintain the scenic vistas of the mountain mahogany savanna.

Compliance with applicable land use plan: The current Land Use Plan for the area is the 1983 Bruneau Management Framework Plan (MFP). This action is in compliance with the MFP which states the following actions:

- WL-4.4: Manage 520,000 acres of sage-grouse range in the BPU to improve nesting, brood rearing, and winter habitats.
- VRM-1: Manage all public lands to protect visual qualities, provide for enhancement consistent with management policies, and rehabilitate lands which presently do not meet the visual quality standards of surrounding lands.
- VRM-1.6: Designate a ½-mile corridor (south of CMU line) on each side of.... Mud Flat Road as a travel influence zone, where activities will preserve or enhance the scenic quality.
- FP-1: Utilize trees that must be cleared for other purposes.

Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, and Other Requirements:

This action is consistent with the objectives of the 2006 Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho which include:

Overall Habitat Objectives:

- Maintain, enhance, or restore sage-grouse habitat, and continuity of habitats, at multiple spatial scales.
- Manage Idaho's landscape to foster a dynamic sagebrush ecosystem that includes a diverse species composition of sagebrush, grasses, and forbs; and incorporates structural characteristics that promote rangeland health in general, and sage-grouse habitat requirements in particular.

Mid-scale habitat sub-objectives:

- Manage sagebrush so that it is well distributed on the landscape, as ecological site conditions allow. Emphasis should be placed on maintaining or restoring large contiguous core areas or blocks of sagebrush that have the necessary species and age diversity of sagebrush and

herbaceous components to produce sustainable sage-grouse habitat. The primary long-term objective is to ensure adequate areas within each SGPA suitable for meeting all seasonal habitat needs of sage-grouse and the sage-grouse population and distribution goals of this Plan.

Fine-scale sub-objectives:

- Projects will contribute to the maintenance, restoration, or rehabilitation of sage-grouse habitats.

This action is also consistent with:

The 2005 Intermountain West Joint Venture's *Coordinated Implementation Plan for Bird Conservation in Idaho* (Sallabanks et al.2005). In this plan, statewide goals include:

- Sagebrush/salt desert shrub habitats (page 17): "Protect, maintain, enhance and/or restore a dynamic shrub/steppe ecosystem that includes no net loss of sagebrush/salt-desert shrub habitat. Fragmented and degraded habitat should be restored to a more healthy condition with a distribution matching historical pattern; restored areas should be linked to those currently existing wherever possible."
- Juniper/pinion pine/mountain mahogany habitats (page 23): "Protect, maintain, enhance and/or restore historical juniper woodland habitat, limit further expansion into adjacent grasslands, shrublands, aspen, and riparian areas, and restore encroached habitats by removing juniper woodlands through active management."

Findings of the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project which found that the exclusion of fire is resulting in unmanaged conifer expansion throughout much of the Intermountain West and the Columbia Basin. Specifically: (1) Juniper is increasing on dry grasslands and cool shrublands, reducing herbaceous understory and biodiversity, (2) Ladder and ground fuels have increased, resulting in high severity fires, and (3) Aspen has decreased in distribution.

Idaho BLM Instructional Memorandum (IM) No. ID-2002-031 which prioritizes treatments on Idaho BLM public lands to include: (1) sagebrush steppe protection, (2) sagebrush steppe restoration, (3) aspen protection, and (4) aspen restoration.

Public Involvement: On December 13, 2006 a scoping letter was sent to all interested publics of record which presented a purpose and need for the proposed action, project objectives, a proposed action, and potential issues associated with the proposed action. BLM received two comment letters. Relevant comments were dealt with in a number of ways. They were either: 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) were considered concerns which BLM responded to. On March 21, 2007 the proposed action was presented to the Owyhee County Sage-Grouse Working Group. On May 29, 2007 a pre-decisional EA was sent to all interested publics of record.

Tribal Consultation: Coordination with the Shoshone Paiute Tribes occurred during the monthly Wings and Roots Coordination Meetings. The Tribes were provided a draft of the EA on April 19, and a pre-decisional EA on May 17. They provided comments to BLM on June 21. Comments were addressed by BLM and the final EA was provided to them on August 16. Copies of the pre-decisional and final EA were also sent to the Shoshone Bannock Tribes.

Appeal:

This decision may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations at 43 CFR, Part 4. If an appeal is made, your appeal must be filed with the Bureau of Land Management at the following address: *Mitchell Jaurena, Bruneau Field Manager, Bruneau Field Office, 3948 Development Ave, Boise, ID 83705.*

Your appeal must be filed within thirty (30) days from receipt of this decision. The appellant has the burden of showing that the decision appealed from is in error.

If you wish to file a petition pursuant to regulation 43 CFR 4.21 (as amended at 58 FR 4942, January 19, 1993) for a stay of the decision during the time that your appeal is being reviewed by the Board, the petition for stay must accompany your notice of appeal. Copies of the notice of appeal and petition for a stay must also be submitted to: *Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of Hearings and Appeals, 4015 Wilson Boulevard, Arlington, VA, 22203.*

A copy must also be sent to the office of the Solicitor at the same time the original documents are filed with the above office: *Office of the Solicitor, Boise Field Solicitors Office, University Plaza, 960 Broadway Ave., Suite 400, Boise, ID, 83706.*

If you request a stay, you have the burden of proof to demonstrate that a stay should be granted. A petition for a stay is required to show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

1. The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied.
2. The likelihood of the appellants success on the merits.
3. The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted.
4. Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

The Office of Hearings and Appeals regulations do not provide for electronic filing of appeals, therefore they will not be accepted.



Mitchell A. Jaurena
Bruneau Field Office Manager

17 Aug 2007
Date