

**Categorical Exclusion 516 DM 11.9, C (9)  
Sweeny Hill Vegetation Management**

**CE Number: ID-420-2008-CE-380**

US Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
Cottonwood Field Office  
Cottonwood, ID

### **Purpose and Need for the Action**

The purpose of this project is to manage and restore vegetation and reduce hazardous fuels. The project is needed to improve the ability to suppress a wildfire, and retard the movement of a wildfire across the landscape. This project implements intensive forest management decisions from the Chief Joseph management framework plan.

Objectives of the project are to:

- Remove insect and disease affected trees and those in close proximity to infestation centers.
- Create a healthier forest by increasing the vigor of remaining trees.
- Reduce the risk of high-intensity wildland fire to life, property and natural resources in the Elk City and surrounding WUI area.
- Implement fuels reduction activities in response to collaboration efforts with local residents, landowners, and the Idaho County Wildland Fire Mitigation Plan.
- Recover economic value of material removed through vegetation and fuels management. Improve the safety of firefighters, residents and forest visitors using the transportation system.
- Contribute to the economic and social well being of the area.

### **Background**

There are private homes adjacent to the National System of Public Lands in many different locations that could be adversely affected if a major fire was to occur on public lands. The project is within the wildland urban interface (WUI) as described in the County Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) for Elk City. The local residents have requested the BLM to take action to reduce the fire danger from federal lands adjacent to homes for several years.

#### **Common Stand Conditions**

- Stands are comprised of multi-storied mixed conifers, dominated by grand fir with lesser amounts of Douglas-fir, lodgepole pine, and scattered western larch and ponderosa pine.
- Understory canopy layer of conifers is dense in some areas.
- Grand fir has a high incidence of Indian paint fungus and a minor degree of Scolytus beetle killing tops.
- There is root disease in pockets infecting Douglas-fir and grand fir.
- Mountain pine beetle is impacting a large portion of the lodgepole pine.

LOCATION OF PROPOSED ACTION:

Township 29 North, Range 08 East, North ½ NE ¼ Section 21 – Sweeny Hill Unit

Township 29 North, Range 08 East, west ½ Section 21 – Buffalo Gulch Transportation Corridor Unit

**Description of the Proposed Action**

**TABLE 1 - Treatments by Unit**

UNIT	ACRES	TOTAL HARVEST	HARVEST ACRES IN RHCA*	UNDERSTORY REMOVAL ONLY**	MODIFIED TREATMENT IN RHCA***
<b>Sweeny Hill</b>					
16A	6.87	6.87	0	0	0
16B	41.96	41.96	0	0	0
16C	13.45	13.45	1.73	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>62.28</b>	<b>62.28</b>	<b>1.73</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Buffalo Gulch</b>					
1	2.40	0	0	2.30	0.10
2	3.86	0	0	3.27	0.59
3	5.02	3.99	0.89	0.16	0.87
4	5.93	5.50	0.79	0	0.43
5	5.83	5.63	0.33	0	0.20
6	4.08	0	0	3.61	0.47
7	1.42	0	0	0.89	0.53
<b>Total</b>	<b>28.54</b>	<b>15.12</b>	<b>2.01</b>	<b>10.23</b>	<b>3.19</b>
<b>TOTAL ACRES</b>	<b>90.82</b>	<b>77.4</b>	<b>3.74</b>	<b>10.23</b>	<b>3.19</b>

\* Harvest occurs 100-150 feet from perennial, non-fish bearing or 150-300 feet from perennial fish-bearing streams. All harvested acres will also have understory removal activities.

\*\* Cultural resource present, understory removal only. A total of 3.7 acres occur in RHCA (Units 2,6 and 7)

\*\*\* Modified understory treatments occur within 25-50 feet of intermittent; 50-100 feet of perennial non-fish bearing; or 50-150 feet of perennial non-fish bearing streams

The following actions will be implemented to meet the above objectives:

Sweeny Hill Area (62 acres) (See attached map)

- 1) The proposed action is to remove insect and disease affected trees and those in close proximity to infestation centers, reduce ladder fuels and canopy closure, by thinning existing mixed conifer stands.
  - Thin stands over 8" dbh to approximately 50% of current density (leaving approximately 80 ft<sup>2</sup> basal area) while removing brush and non-merchantable trees (< 8" dbh).
  - Remove trees in poor health and those surrounding root rot pockets, any resulting openings will be planted to larch, ponderosa pine, white pine and Engelmann spruce.
  - Three snags or large snag recruit trees will be left per acre on a unit basis.
  - Any material that is merchantable for saw logs, house logs, or biomass may be removed as part of a stewardship project or a small timber sale.
  - Mechanized felling of larger material may be used in both units 16A and 16B, otherwise felling and pruning will be completed by hand crews.
  - Ground skidding of material will be used in these same units. Where skidding occurs, equipment will be limited to operating on designated skid trails.
  
- 2) In areas of primarily lodgepole pine, the overstory and down fuels will be removed and healthy Douglas-fir or larch saplings will be retained and thinned. Other saplings will be cut and piled for burning to prepare a seed bed for replanting with larch and ponderosa pine.
  - Unit 16A (7 acres), in the southeast corner, is primarily lodgepole pine and will be reserved for small timber sales since it contains material suitable for house logs. Several private parties have requested access to small quantities of this type of material. The understory will be thinned as the merchantable material is removed.
  
- 3) Areas of primarily mixed conifer stands (Units 16B - 40.9 acres, and 16C - 13.5 acres) will be implemented as a stewardship contract to support some of the restoration work desired in this area at a later date. The contractor will be responsible for all slash work, reforestation and restoration work associated with this contract with the exception of the burning operations.
  
- 4) Approximately 1900 feet of temporary road will be built (see attached map) to serve the harvesting and burning activities. This road will cross approximately 255 feet of RHCA (16E) and will require installation of a 24 inch by 30 foot culvert during a no flow period.
  - After timber harvest activities are completed, the temporary road will be decommissioned, which will include deep ripping, seeding, mulching and placement of large woody debris on the road surface.
  - Deposits will be collected from all operators to ensure the roads are effectively decommissioned once all sale activities have been completed.
  
- 5) A site specific analysis was done on 12.3 acres to evaluate the effects of the temporary road and harvesting activities on water quality and the RHCAs. The final project only involves 10.23 of these acres in order to reduce potential impact on RHCAs.
  - The treatment area is dissected by one intermittent non fish-bearing stream and no harvesting activities are planned the RHCA except for a temporary road crossing which has received a site specific analysis.

- A strip above the existing road (1.7 acres) in Unit 16C is within the 300 foot RHCA of Buffalo Gulch Creek for about 550 feet however at least 150 feet of untreated area will remain between the road and the stream. Harvesting in this area will not adversely affect the RHCA but will improve stand health in accordance with the riparian management objectives.
- No treatment will occur within 50 feet of springs or seeps located within treatment area.

Buffalo Gulch Transportation Corridor - Buffalo Gulch Road (RD 2515) (29 Acres) (See attached map)

- 1) The proposed action for this portion of the project will create a fuel break up within 200 feet of the east side of RDS 2515 and along the private property boundary (see attached map) on approximately 28 acres. The proposed action is to thin and prune the area to a residual spacing of approximately 12 feet between tree crowns. This may be accomplished by combination of sanitation/salvage and thinning the overstory and understory to retain residual trees that are predominantly healthy, well formed, and free of insect and disease. Pruning of ladder fuels will also be done.
- 2) In addition, larger overstory trees that present a roadside hazard may also be removed. These hazards may include; dead or dying, spiked tops, heavy lean, severe fork(s) and /or insect and disease problems.
- 3) All unit access would occur from existing roads. Mechanized felling and skidding of larger material may be accomplished only outside of RHCAs and where historical mining ditches are not present, otherwise felling and pruning will be completed by hand crews. Where skidding occurs, equipment will be limited to operating on designated skid trails.
- 4) All biomass resulting from project implementation would be available as products. This includes, but is not limited to sawlogs, posts/poles, firewood, or chips.
- 5) A combination of mastication, lopping, piling and burning would be used to dispose of natural and activity fuels that are not marketed.

Buffalo Gulch Transportation Corridor project design measures are as follows:

A. Treatment actions will include:

- 1) Overstory removal of diseased grand fir, insect infested lodgepole pine, and Douglas-fir within 150 of root rot pockets ( Units 3, 4, 5):
  - Target stand conditions are 60-80 square feet of basal area.
  - A minimum of three snags per acre will be left standing.
- 2) Understory removal of trees up to six inches DBH within the treatment area: (Units 1 through 7)
  - Pruning of limbs on residual trees up to 8-12 feet in height, while retaining at least 50% of the crown in the sapling and pole sized trees.

- Slashing of all brush within the treatment area.
- 3) All hazardous fuels, natural and slash, will be lopped, piled, and burned or masticated.
- B. Some treatments will occur within streamside RHCAs.
1. No treatment will occur within 50 feet of perennial fish-bearing stream (Buffalo Gulch Creek).
    - 50-150 feet from the stream bank:
      - a. Thin trees up to 4 inch DBH.
      - b. Slash brush and prune limbs as described in A.
      - c. Hand pile and burn all activity fuels and approximately 50% of existing large diameter material on the ground, leaving a minimum of 15-20 tons per acre.
      - d. Any large diameter material on the ground that extends into the 50 foot no treatment zone will be left in place.
    - 150-300 feet from perennial fish-bearing streams, treatments will be as described in A.
  2. No treatment will occur within 50 feet of perennial non fish-bearing streams.
    - 50-100 feet from the stream bank:
      - a. Thin trees up to 4 inch DBH.
      - b. Slash brush and prune limbs as described in A.
      - c. Hand pile and burn all activity fuels and approximately 50% of existing large diameter material on the ground, leaving a minimum of 15-20 tons per acre.
      - d. Any large diameter material on the ground that extends into the 50 foot no treatment zone will be left in place.
    - 100-150 feet from perennial non fish-bearing streams, treatments will be as described in A.
  3. No treatment will occur within 25 feet of intermittent streams.
    - 25-50 feet from stream bank:
      - a. Thin trees up to 4 inch DBH.
      - b. Slash brush and prune limbs as described in A.
      - c. Hand pile and burn all activity fuels and approximately 50% of existing large diameter material on the ground, leaving a minimum of 15-20 tons per acre.
      - d. Any large diameter material on the ground that extends into the 25 foot no treatment zone will be left in place.
    - 50-100 feet from the stream bank, treatments will be as described in A.

### **Plan Conformance**

The Proposed Action is in conformance with the Chief Joseph Management Framework Plan (MFP), the Cottonwood Field Office Proposed Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (PRMP/ FEIS). The project is also consistent with the 2005 Idaho County Fire Mitigation Plan (updated 2007). The Proposed Action was designed to

accomplish goals and objectives of the MFP, PRMP/ FEIS, the National Fire Plan, the 10-year Comprehensive Strategy, and the Healthy Forest Initiative.

**Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act:**

The Proposed Action is categorically excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with 516 DM 11.9, C (9).

Treatments within RHCAs have been designed to maintain or support achievement of PACFISH Riparian Management Objectives. Project implementation is expected to have no adverse impacts to special status fish (Endangered Species Act-listed and BLM Sensitive species) from effects attributed to erosion/sediment, stream shading, or large woody debris recruitment on streams within the project area. Negligible potential exists for adverse effects to water quality (i.e., sediment, temperature) will occur and project implementation will not impair achievement of the South Fork Clearwater River Total Maximum Daily Load targets for the South Fork Clearwater River and other streams within the project area. Any areas where soil/vegetation disturbance may result in potential erosion will be seeded, and mulched as necessary and have selected placement of woody debris to stabilize the site. The small size of the project and the design features incorporated into it are not expected to create any undesirable cumulative effects on water quality.

This categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment. The proposed action has been reviewed and none of the exceptions described in 43 CFR 46.215 apply.

**Signature**

Authorizing Official: /s/ Stephanie Connolly  
(Signature)  
Stephanie Connolly  
Cottonwood Field Manager

4/2/2009  
Date

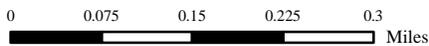
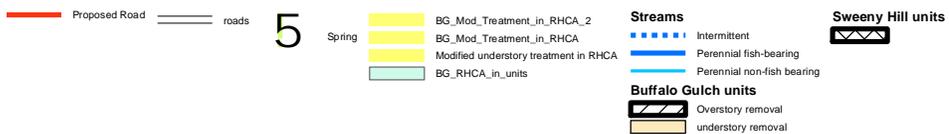
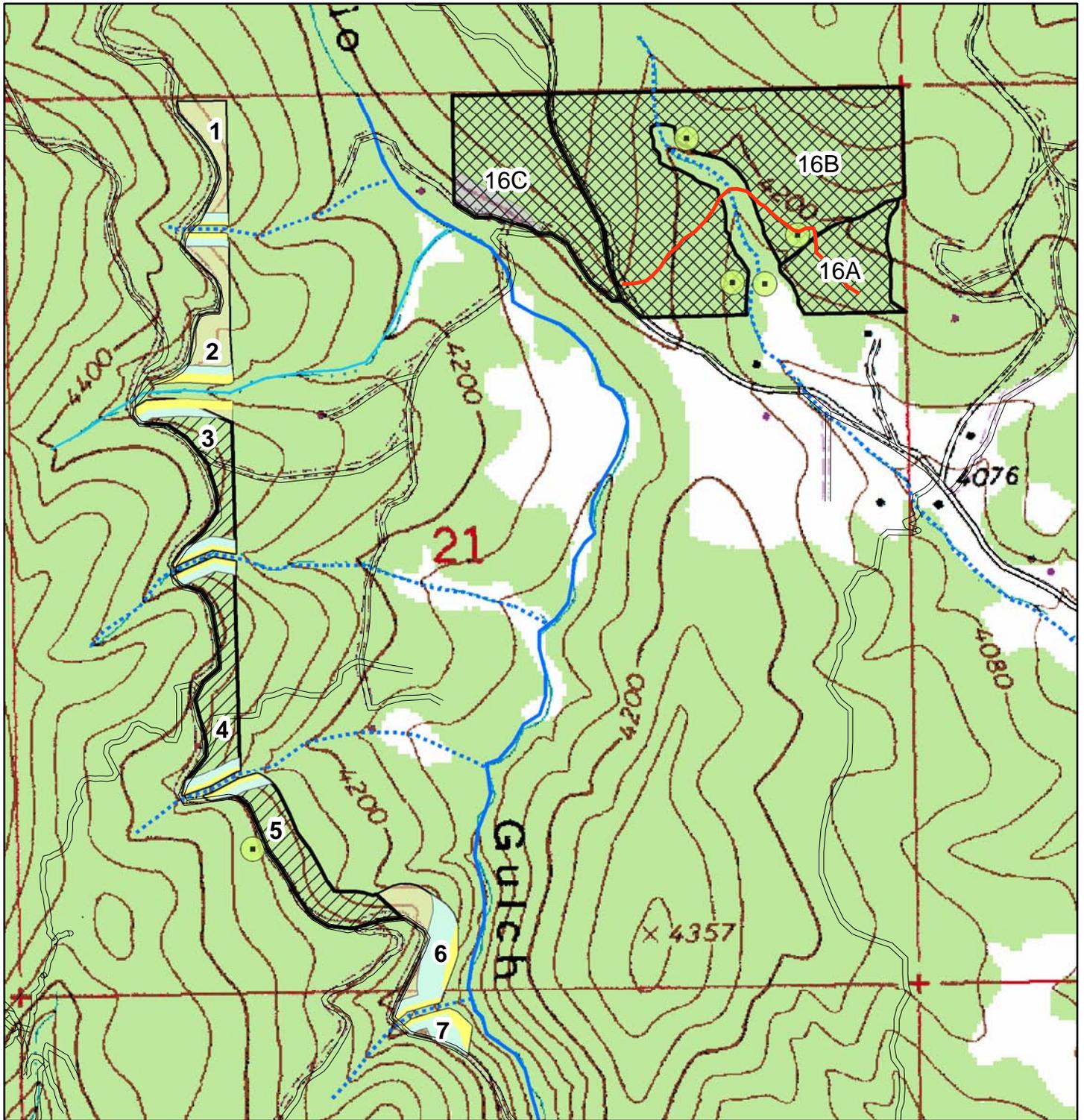
**Contact Person**

For additional information concerning this decision, contact Kristen Sanders, Fire Ecologist, or Eric Geisler, Forester, Cottonwood Field Office, 1 Butte Drive, Cottonwood, ID 83530, (208) 962-3245.

Attachments:

- Extraordinary Circumstances List
- Map

# Sweeny Hill Vegetation Management Project



1 inch = 833 feet  
Data Displayed in NAD 1983 UTM Zone 11N



1 = 10,000



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
COTTONWOOD FIELD OFFICE**

**Sweeny Hill Buffalo Gulch  
Decision Record**

**Proposed Action:** Sweeny Hill Buffalo Gulch

**Categorical Exclusion Number:** ID-420-2008-CE-380

**Location of Action:** T 29 N, R 08 E, N ½ NE ¼ Section 21 – Sweeny Hill Unit

T 29 N, R 08 E, W ½ Section 21 – Buffalo Gulch Transportation Corridor Unit

**I. Decision**

I have decided to implement salvage harvest and thinning activities on 80 acres of mixed conifer stands in the wildland-urban interface (see attached map and Categorical Exclusion). These actions meet the need for action. I have reviewed the plan conformance statement and have determined that the proposed action is in conformance with the approved land use plan and that no further environmental analysis is required.

**II. Purpose and Need for the Action**

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- Contribute to the economic and social well being of the area.

**III. Rationale**

The decision is in conformance with the Chief Joseph Management Framework Plan (MFP). The project is also consistent with the 2005 Idaho County Fire Mitigation Plan (updated 2007). By removing insect and disease affected trees and reducing ladder fuels and canopy closure, this project will retard the movement of a wildfire across the landscape and facilitate the ability for ground crews to suppress a wildfire in the Buffalo Creek drainage.

**TABLE 1 - Treatments by Unit**

<b>UNIT</b>	<b>ACRES</b>	<b>HARVEST</b>	<b>HARVEST ACRES IN RHCA*</b>	<b>UNDERSTORY REMOVAL ONLY**</b>	<b>MODIFIED TREATMENT RHCA***</b>
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/s/ Stephanie Connolly  
Stephanie Connolly  
Cottonwood Field Manager

4/2/2009  
Date

**IV. Administrative Review Procedures**

This is a forest management decision and is subject to protest by the public. In accordance with the Forest Management Regulations under 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Subpart 5003 – Administrative Remedies, protests may be filed with the authorized officer, Stephanie Connolly, within 15-days of publication of the notice of decision in a local newspaper. The publication date of the notice of decision in the newspaper of record is the *exclusive* means for calculating the time to file a protest. Protestants should not rely on date or timeframe information provided by any other source.

43 CFR 5003.3 (b) states that: “Protests shall be filed with the Authorized Officer and shall contain a written statement of reasons for protesting the decision.” This precludes the acceptance of electronic mail or facsimile protests. Only written and signed hard copies of protests that are delivered to the following address will be accepted:

Stephanie Connolly, Field Manager  
Cottonwood Field Office  
1 Butte Drive  
Cottonwood, Idaho 83522

The protest must clearly and concisely state which portion or element of the decision is being protested and the reasons why the decision is believed to be in error. Protests received more than 15 days after the publication of the notice of decision are not timely filed and shall not be considered.

Upon timely filing of a protest, the authorized officer shall reconsider the project decision to be implemented in light of the statement of reasons for the protest and other pertinent information available. The authorized officer shall, at the conclusion of the review, serve the protest decision in

writing to the protesting party(ies). Upon denial of a protest, the authorized officer may proceed with the implementation of the decision.

If no protest is received by close of business within 15 days after publication of the notice of decision, this decision will become final.

**Contact Person**

For additional information concerning this decision, contact Kristen Sanders, Fire Ecologist, or Eric Geisler, Forester, Cottonwood Field Office, 1 Butte Drive, Cottonwood, ID 83530, (208) 962-3245.

Attachments:

- Categorical Exclusion
- Extraordinary Circumstances List
- Map

## Categorical Exclusion Evaluation and Documentation of Extraordinary Circumstances

**SWEENEY HILL**  
**#D-420-2008-CE-380 516 DM 11.9 (C-9)**

Extraordinary circumstances do not exist for the proposed action described within the categorical exclusion. The extraordinary circumstances were evaluated and those findings are documented in the following form.

The proposed categorical exclusion action will:	Yes	No
Have significant impacts on public health or safety.		X
Have significant impacts on such natural resources and geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order 11990); floodplains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas.		X
Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources (NEPA section 102(2)(E)).		X
Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.		X
Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.		X
Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulative significant environmental effects.		X
Have significant impacts on properties listed or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by either the bureau or office.		X
Have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated Critical Habitat for these species.		X
Violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.		X
Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898).		X
Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (Executive Order 13007).		X
Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and Executive Order 13112).		X