

**ELY DISTRICT
CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION (CX) REVIEW
AND APPROVAL**

Team Leader Kyle Teel Date August 24, 2007

Name of Proposed Action Winz Creek Wildland Urban Interface Project

CX Number: CX-NV-040-07-057 Project or Serial Number: JD60

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION REFERENCE

516 Departmental Manual 1.12—Hazardous fuels reduction activities using prescribed fire not to exceed 4,500 acres, and mechanical methods for crushing, piling, thinning, pruning, cutting, chipping, mulching, and mowing not to exceed 1,000 acres. Such activities shall be limited to areas (1) in wildland-urban interface and (2) Condition Classes 2 or 3 in Fire Regime Groups I, II, or III, outside of the wildland-urban interface; Shall be identified through a collaborative framework as described in “A Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment 10-year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan;” Shall be conducted consistent with agency and Departmental procedures and applicable land and resource management plans; Shall not be conducted in wilderness areas or impair the suitability of wilderness study areas for preservation as wilderness; Shall not include the use of herbicides or pesticides or the construction of new permanent roads or other new permanent infrastructure; and may include the sale of vegetative materials if the primary purpose of the activity is hazardous fuels reduction.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

The need for the project is to reduce the risk of wildfire to private property and homes in the vicinity of Winz Creek on the west side of the Wilson Creek Range. Within recent years, several wildfires have occurred within the vicinity of the homes and private property in this area emphasizing the need for fuels reduction projects.

The proposed project area is located approximately 25 miles north of Pioche, NV (Map 1). To meet the need for the proposal, the BLM would conduct fuels reduction through the use of mechanical, manual and/or prescribed fire methods on approximately 550 acres public land within the wildland-urban interface (WUI) following existing roads/trails that occur along the south, east and west sides of the private property (Map 2).

Project Description

Using mechanical (i.e., bull hog, feller buncher, or similar piece of equipment that masticates trees) and/or manual (handcrew with chainsaws) methods, a buffer up to 500 feet wide would be created along an existing road/trail that occurs along the south, east and west sides of the private property. Within these buffers, tree density would be reduced to 20-25 trees per acre resulting in a tree being left approximately every 41 to 46 feet. Trees left in both buffer areas would consist of the larger mature trees greater than 12 inches in diameter at root collar. The smaller saplings, immature trees and dead trees (without obvious cavity nesting) would be targeted for removal. Project implementation could occur year round.

Disposal of slash/biomass created from reducing tree densities would depend on the method used. If chainsaws were used, all or a portion of the felled trees would be consolidated into piles and removed later through prescribed burning. In areas readily accessible by the public, the large trunk portion could be cut up and left for individuals with firewood permits. Small amounts of slash, consisting mainly of smaller branches would be left to degrade naturally. Removal of slash/biomass created if mechanical methods are used would depend on the type of mechanical equipment used. If a masticating type of equipment is used, the residue created would be left on site to degrade naturally. If equipment is used that cuts the trees whole, all or a portion of the trees could be piled and disposed of through prescribed burning or usable tree portions would be hauled off site for biomass utilization while unusable portions would be left to degrade naturally or later burned. Possible offsite biomass utilization could include firewood, mulch, and/or chips. Slash/biomass removal would occur in conjunction with tree density reduction operations except when slash piles are disposed of through prescribed fire. This would occur during late fall to early spring when there is snow on the ground or after a precipitation event to prevent extreme soil heating.

Mowing of brush would occur along the west side in areas with low tree densities and higher brush densities. Brush would be mowed in a mosaic pattern within a buffer up to 500 feet wide. Mowing would occur with a mower towed behind a tractor or other similar piece of equipment.

Pre-treatment inventory data would be collected prior to implementing treatments to compare with post-treatment conditions. The area would also be monitored the first and third growing season following treatments to determine if objectives have been met. Inventory and monitoring data would be collected using BLM approved methods.

The project areas would be seeded using certified weed-free seed to reduce the potential for erosion and cheatgrass invasion. If mechanical equipment is used that results in skidding of trees these areas would be reseeded and scarified and/or covered up through back dragging. Seed would be applied using aerial seeding methods, with an all terrain vehicle (ATV), aurally, and/or hand seeders.

When necessary, maintenance activities consisting of treatments as proposed above would be implemented to maintain original project objectives.

The project objectives are:

Short Term (Immediately Post Treatment)

1. Reduce pinyon and juniper tree density to 20 – 25 trees per acre within a buffer up to 500 feet wide along the south, east and west sides of the private property in the vicinity of Winz Creek.
2. Reduce shrub density by 75 percent within a buffer up to 500 feet buffer along the western side of the project area.

Long Term (Five to Ten Years Post Treatment)

1. Reduce the risk of wild fire to the private property and improvements on the private property in the vicinity of Winz Creek along the west side of the Wilson Creek Range.
2. Obtain Fire Regime and Condition Class 1 within the project area.

The following Standard Operating Procedures are Common to all Projects

For projects that involve the use of prescribed fire, a burn plan would be prepared and a smoke permit would be acquired from the State of Nevada prior to burning.

All treatment actions would comply with the *Ely District Policy Management Actions for the Conservation of Migratory Birds* (Instruction Memorandum NV-040-2001-02).

A cultural survey of the treatment area would be conducted and appropriate site documentation would be completed prior to project implementation. National Register eligible cultural resources would be avoided or impacts would be mitigated as necessary before treatments are implemented.

No permanent new roads or trails would be created. Some off-road travel could occur to facilitate operations. Off-road travel would be limited to that necessary to safely and practically achieve resource objectives.

The Ely District Noxious Weed Prevention Schedule and Policy would be adhered to during project treatments. Recommendations contained in the Weed Risk Assessment for the project would be followed.

Equipment would not be allowed to operate when the ground is unsuitable (i.e. excessively muddy or when saturated with moisture) or in terrain too steep to minimize ground impacts.

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

On December 6, 2006, a letter indicating the Bureau's intent on initiating the planning process and our general thoughts on the project was mailed to property owners and individuals/groups who have expressed interest in participating in hazardous fuels reduction projects as well as state, county and federal agencies.

Comments in the form of a letter was received from one organization that express no objections pertaining to the proposed project.

The specialists listed in Table 1 below were involved in reviewing the proposed action for impacts and the screening questions (Table 2) for Categorical Exclusions.

Table 1. Specialist involved in reviewing the proposed action for exceptions to National Environmental Policy Act Categorical Exclusions

NAME	RESOURCE ASSIGNED
Kyle Teel	Fire and Fuels Management
Shirley Johnson	Range Management and Invasive, Non-Native Species, Noxious Weeds
Ben Noyes	Wild Horses & Burros
Kurt Braun	Archeology/Historic/Paleontological
Kalem Lenard	Wilderness Values, Recreation, VRM
Alicia Styles	Wildlife, Migratory Birds, Special Status Animal & Plants
Brenda Linnell	Lands
Elvis Wall	Native American Religious Concerns

Table 2. SCREENING FOR EXCEPTIONS TO CATEGORICAL EXCLUSIONS

The following exceptions apply to actions being considered as categorically excluded. Environmental documents must be prepared if any of these exceptions apply. Place an "X" in appropriate box. Would the proposed action:	Yes	No
1. Have significant adverse effects on public health or safety?		X
2. Have adverse effects on such unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources, park, recreation or refuge lands, wilderness areas, wild or scenic rivers, sole or principal drinking water aquifers, prime farmlands, wetlands, floodplains, or ecologically significant or critical areas, including those listed on the Department's National Register of Natural Landmarks?		X
3. Have highly controversial environmental effects?		X
4. Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks?		X
5. Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects?		X
6. Be directly related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects?		X
7. Have adverse effects on properties listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places?		X
8. Have adverse effects on species listed or proposed to be listed on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have adverse effects on designated Critical Habitat for these species?		X
9. Require compliance with Executive Order 11988 (Floodplain Management), Executive Order 11990 (Protection of Wetlands), or the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act?		X
10. Threaten to violate a Federal, State, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment?		X

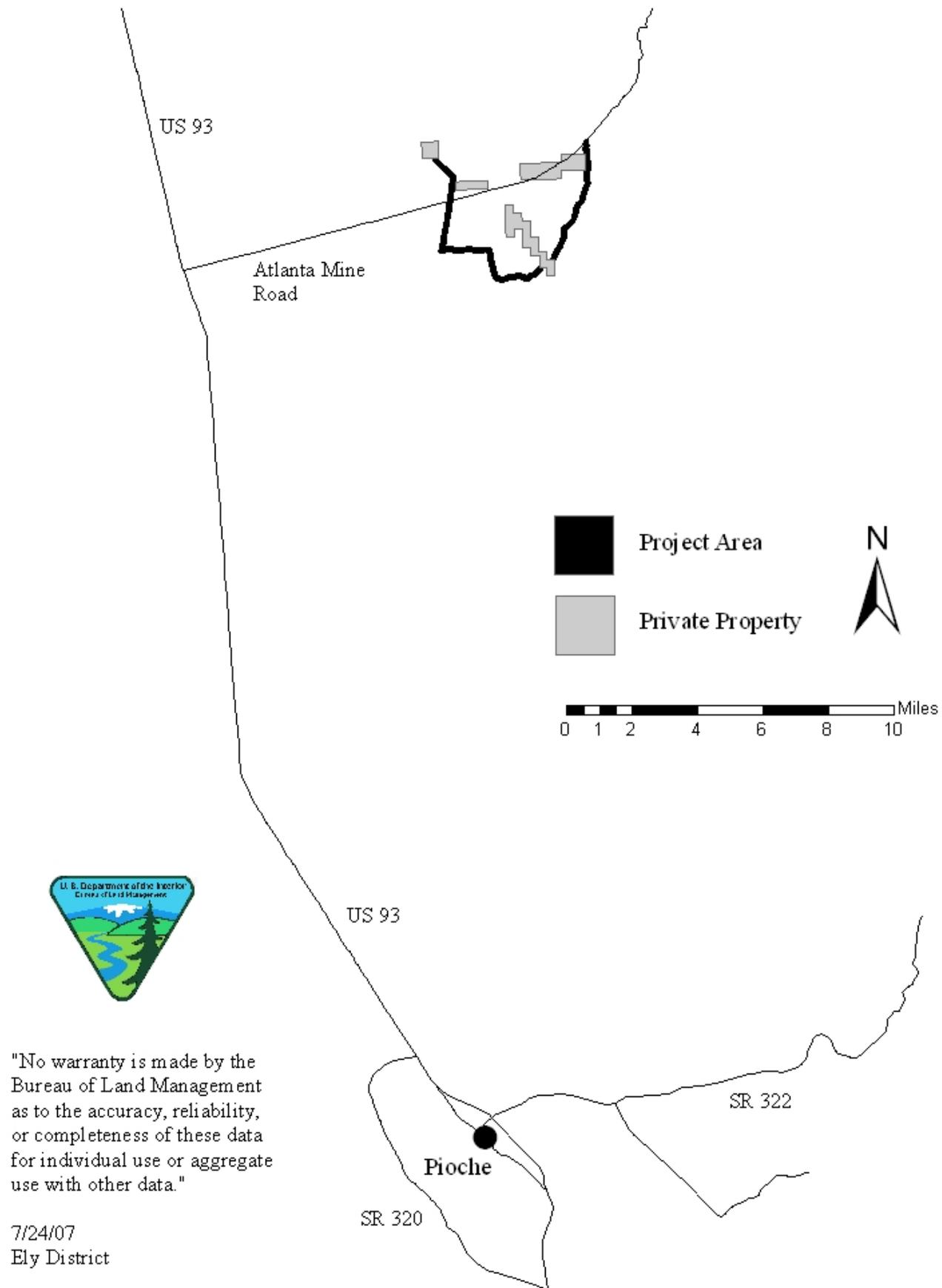
FINDINGS

Based on review of the proposal and the ten exceptions listed above, this action qualifies as a categorical exclusion and an environmental analysis is not required. The proposed action is in conformance with current BLM Land Use Plans.

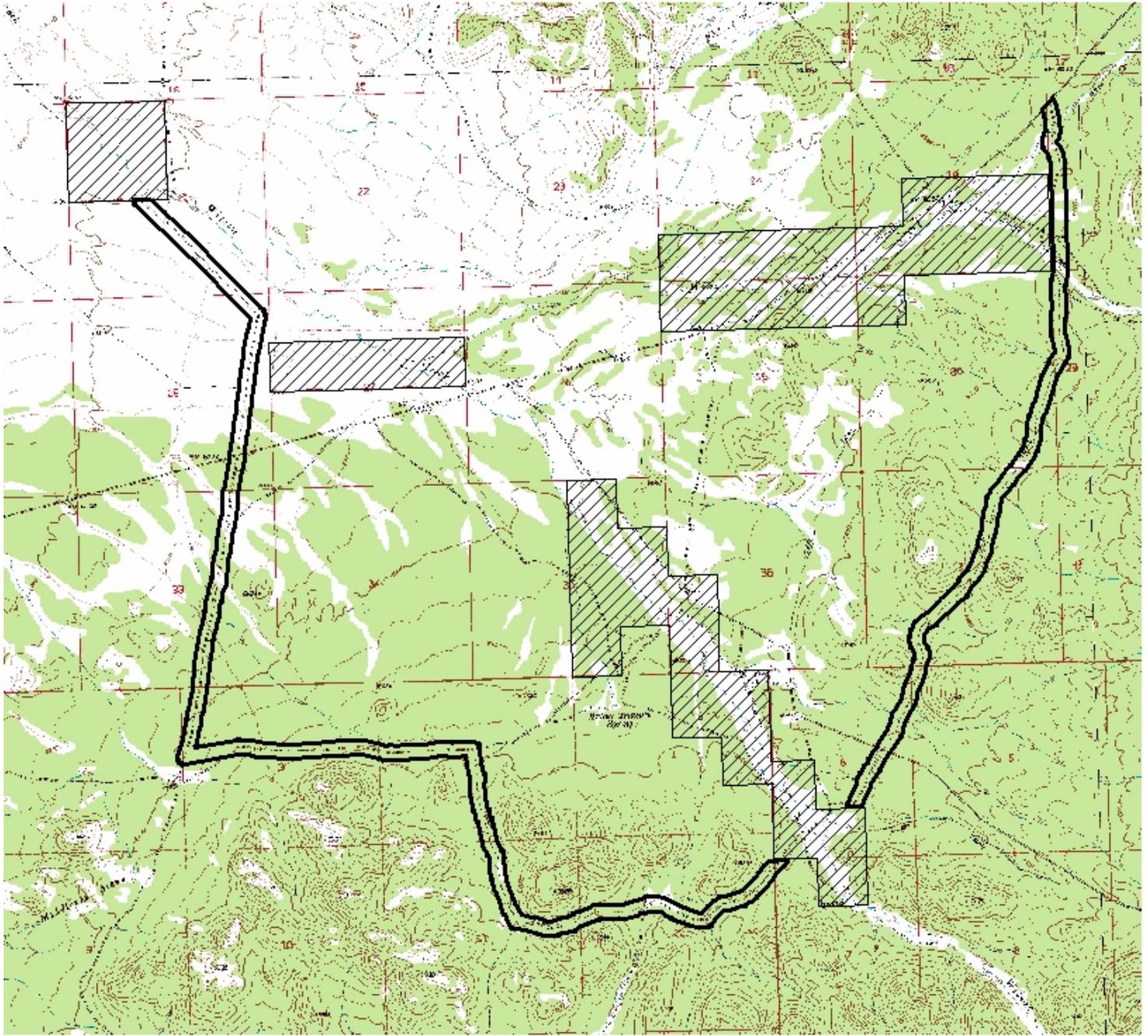
Approving Official: _____ Date: _____

Tye Petersen
Fire Management Officer

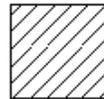
Map 1: General location of the Winz Creek Wildland Urban Interface Project.



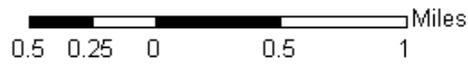
Map 2: Winz Creek Wildland Urban Interface Project.



Project Area



Private Property



"No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregate use with other data."

8/9/07
Ely District