

Finding of No Significant Impact
High Desert Shrub Steppe Restoration Project
NEPA Register Number DOI-BLM-OR-P000-2008-0157-EA
US Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management
Prineville Field Office, Oregon

Introduction

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has completed an Environmental Assessment (EA No. DOI-BLM-OR-P040-2008-0157-EA) that analyzes the effects of two action alternatives to maintain or improve sage-grouse habitat suitability by vegetation management on public land around Millican, Brothers, Hampton and Paulina. The alternatives both propose a combination of cutting juniper, prescribe burning rangeland, transplanting or seeding grasses, forbs (herbs) or shrubs, and mowing or crushing shrubs. Actions would occur on up to 13,600 acres per year within the 616,600 acre project area. The EA is incorporated by reference in this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations state that the significance of impacts must be determined in terms of both context and intensity (40 CFR 1508.27).

Context

The Proposed Action would occur in the central Oregon high desert and would have local impacts on affected interests, lands, and resources similar to and within the scope of those described and considered in the Upper Deschutes Proposed Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement (Upper Deschutes PRMP/FEIS) September 2005, and the Brothers / La Pine RMP/FEIS, September 1988. The actions described represent anticipated program implementation within the scope and context of the RMPs. The treatment of up to 13,600 acres annually would not have international, national, regional, or state-wide importance not previously considered in the NEPA analysis for these RMPs.

Intensity

I have considered the potential intensity and severity of the impacts anticipated from implementation of a Decision on this EA relative to each of the ten areas suggested for consideration by the CEQ. With regard to each:

1. Would any of the alternatives have significant beneficial or adverse impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(1))? No.

Rationale: The proposed action would impact resources as described in the EA. Mitigations to reduce impacts to the ground were incorporated in the design of the proposed action. These project design features are outlined in Chapter 2 Alternatives and Appendix B of the EA. None of the environmental effects discussed in detail in the EA are considered significant, nor do the effects exceed those described in the Upper Deschutes RMP/EIS or Brothers / La Pine RMP/EIS.

2. Would any of the alternatives have significant adverse impacts on public health and safety (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(2))? No.

Rationale:

- a. The proposed action is designed to improve sage-grouse habitat by cutting, burning or mowing young juniper trees and thinning high densities of shrubs within 616,600 acres of BLM administered lands in the central Oregon high desert. There are no known effects to public health or safety.
- b. The amount of down woody material in the project area will not dramatically increase the fire risk to the area. The primary carrier of fire in this area is the fine fuels which already exist in the existing grass and shrubs. Additional woody material added by thinning activities would be treated to reduce fuel loadings where necessary (e.g., in wildland urban interfaces). See Appendix B in the EA.

3. Would any of the alternatives have significant adverse impacts on unique geographic characteristics (cultural or historic resources, park lands, prime and unique farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, designated wilderness or wilderness study areas, or ecologically critical areas (ACECs, RNAs, significant caves)) (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(3))? No.

Rationale: A cultural resource clearance will be completed prior to any restoration activities. Any recommendations therein will be followed. Any resource of concern identified to be at risk from the project activities will be protected from damage or disturbance. There are no effects on park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

4. Would any of the alternatives have highly controversial effects (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(4))? No.

Rationale: There are no effects which are expected to be highly controversial.

5. Would any of the alternatives have highly uncertain effects or involve unique or unknown risks (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(5))? No.

Rationale: There are no unique or unusual risks. The BLM has implemented similar actions in similar areas. The environmental effects are fully analyzed in the EA. There are no predicted effects on the environment that are considered to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

- 6. Would any of the alternatives establish a precedent for future actions with significant impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(6)? No.**

Rationale: Similar restoration projects have occurred numerous times for many years throughout BLM. There is no evidence that this action has potentially significant environmental effects. This management activity does not commit the BLM to pursuing further actions, and as such would not establish a precedent or decision for future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.

- 7. Are any of the alternatives related to other actions with potentially significant cumulative impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(7)? No.**

Rationale: The actions considered in the proposed action were considered by the interdisciplinary team within the context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. Significant cumulative effects are not predicted. An analysis of the effects of the proposed action is described in the EA.

- 8. Would any of the alternatives have significant adverse impacts on scientific, cultural, or historic resources, including those listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Resources (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(8)? No.**

Rationale: The project will not adversely affect scientific, cultural, or historic resources, including those eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. An analysis of the effects of alternatives is described in the EA.

- 9. Would any of the alternatives have significant adverse impacts on threatened or endangered species or their critical habitat (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(9)? No.**

Rationale: Mitigations to reduce impacts to special status species have been incorporated into the design of the proposed action. These project design features are outlined in Appendix B of the EA. Both a wildlife and botanical clearance will be completed prior to any restoration activities. Any recommendations therein will be followed. Any resource of concern identified to be at risk from the project activities will be protected from damage or disturbance.

- 10. Would any of the alternatives have effects that threaten to violate Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(10)? No.**

Rationale: The project does not violate any known Federal, State, Local or Tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. State, local, and tribal interests were given the opportunity to participate in the environmental analysis process.

Finding

On the basis of the information contained in the EA, the consideration of intensity factors described above, all other information available to me, it is my determination that: (1)

implementation of the alternatives would not have significant environmental impacts beyond those already addressed in the Upper Deschutes Proposed Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement September 2005, and the Brothers / La Pine RMP/FEIS, September 1988; (2) neither alternative would constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an EIS or a supplement to the existing EIS is not necessary and will not be prepared.

Deborah Henderson-Norton
Prineville District Manager

Date

NOTE: This is a draft FONSI, available for public comment. A signed FONSI will accompany the Decision Record.