

Prineville District
Categorical Exclusion
Review and Approval

Name of Proposed Action: Playa Habitat Rehabilitation

CE Number: OR-056-08-136

Project or Serial Number: N/A

Location of Proposed Action: South of Highway 20 in the Brothers and Hampton area, Oregon. See Appendix A.

Purpose of and Need for Action:

The purpose of the action is to re-establish conditions of rangeland health and functioning, as described in 43 CFR 4180.1 (Fundamentals of Rangeland Health) on BLM-administered lands in the area south of Highway 20 near Brothers and Hampton.

Currently, western juniper has expanded from its historically occupied, rim rocks and upper elevation flats out into the area's lower elevation slopes, desert floor and dry lakebed and ponded clay sites. Post-settlement juniper thinning in these areas is needed in order to accomplish the following, all of which relate to rangeland health:

1. Reduce risk for juniper competition with sagebrush (particularly early-flowering sagebrush), a species of significant importance to local sage-grouse populations.
2. Reduce juniper seed production and dispersal – thereby reducing risks for accelerated juniper expansion into other sagebrush steppe sites.
3. Reduce perches for those species which prey on sage grouse.
4. Maintain vegetation appropriate for the area's soils, climate and landform – as described in NRCS site descriptions.
5. Build and maintain site resiliency to disturbance.
6. Establish sage-grouse habitat connectivity between upper elevations and the lower desert floor.

The Prineville BLM District's "Juniper Reference List" (2008 version) provides a listing of documents – each of which identify the situations and/or needs for post-settlement juniper reduction - at a variety of spatial scales, including that associated with this project.

Description of the Proposed Action:

Relative to juniper occupation, three broad kinds of sites are interspersed within this project area:

1. Old-Growth Juniper (Normally, Table Land Ecological Site)
2. Sagebrush-Steppe (including Pumice 8-10, and Pumice 10-12, Ponded Clay, Lakebed, Dry Lakebed 10-12, and Pumice Claypan 9-12 Ecological Sites)
(These are the areas into which post-settlement juniper is most actively encroaching).
3. Ponderosa pine forests.

Commencing summer, 2008, not more than 1,000 acres of post-settlement juniper would be cut, lopped and scattered via chainsaw across the project area. Specifically targeted would be those sagebrush-steppe sites described above, with an emphasis on treating playa Ecological Sites. Appendix B lists the operating procedures that would be adhered to during the course of this project.

Plan Conformance:

The above project has been reviewed and found to be in conformance with the following, which govern management within the project area:

1. *Brothers/LaPine Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan, 1989.* On Page 81 of this Plan (Millican Allotment) is listed the intent to control juniper on 3000 acres of rangeland.

Categorical Exclusion Reference

The following Bureau action normally does not require the preparation of an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS): 516 Departmental Manual 11, dated 8/14/07, Section 11.9.D (Rangeland Management): “Vegetation management activities...such as cutting. Shall not exceed 4,500 acres per prescribed fire project and 1000 acres for other vegetation management activities”.

Categorical Exclusion Documentation – List of Extraordinary Circumstances

Extraordinary circumstances do not exist for the proposed action within the categorical exclusion. The list of extraordinary circumstances is provided for in 516 Department Manual 2, Appendix 2 (5/27/2004). The proposed categorical exclusion action will:

CE EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES	YES	NO
2.1 Have significant impacts on public health or safety.		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.2 Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique 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.		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.3 Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA Section 102(2)(E)].		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.4 Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.5 Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.6 Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.7 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.		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

2.8 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.		RM 7/7 X J.N. 7-9-08
2.9 Violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.		✓
2.10 Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898).		✓
2.11 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).		✓
2.12 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).		✓

Documentation of Recommended Mitigation:

Item Number	Can Be Mitigated	Cannot Be Mitigated	Mitigation Measures
(None)			

Summary of Findings:

The proposed action would not create adverse environmental impacts or require the preparation of an EA or EIS under 516 DM 2, Appendix 1 or 516 DM 6, Appendix 5. The proposed action has been reviewed against the criteria for an exception to a categorical exclusion listed in 516 DM 2.3 A(3), or the additional criteria listed in Instruction Memorandum No. 99-178, the Lacey Act, as amended; the Federal Noxious Weed Act of 1974; the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended; EO 13112 on Invasive Species; EO 12898 on Environmental Justice; Clean Water Act of 1987; Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments to the Clean Water Act of 1996; EO 12088 on federal compliance with pollution control standards, as amended; EO 12589 on Superfund compliance; and EO dated July 14, 1982 on intergovernmental review of federal programs. In addition, this CE complies with IM 2002-053 on the Preparation of Statement(s) of Adverse Energy Impact.

Recommendation:

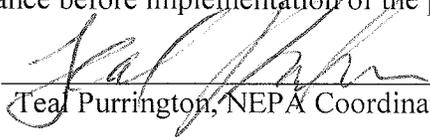
That the proposed action be approved.

Prepared by William Dean
William Dean, Wildlife Biologist

3/14/08
Date

CE Determination:

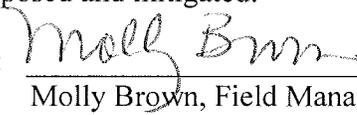
The proposed action and any specified mitigation measure(s) has been determined to meet the criteria for a CE and does not fall under any of the CE exceptions. No additional environmental analysis required. All cultural, T&E plant, and T&E wildlife specialists will provide clearance before implementation of the proposed project.

Reviewed by 
Teal Purrington, NEPA Coordinator

3/14/08
Date

Approval:

Based on a review of the proposal and field office staff recommendations, I approve of the project as proposed and mitigated:

Approved by: 
Molly Brown, Field Manager

3/14/08
Date

Appendix B Project Operating Procedures

Vegetation

1. No old growth, culturally significant, or dead or dead-topped juniper would be cut.
2. Normally, live trees less than 18 inches diameter at breast height (DBH) would be cut. Exceptions to this could include trees less than 18 inches DBH displaying old growth characteristics or other attributes.
3. In the event of catastrophic (i.e., wildfire) alterations of existing juniper cover, planned mechanical thinning would be reduced as required to meet project objectives and mitigation requirements.
4. Contractors or other project entities would be given a noxious weed information pamphlet; be required to ensure their vehicle and equipment were checked for weed matter prior to entering the project area; and be requested to report any weed discoveries in their work areas. Any weed sighting information would be forwarded to the Rangeland Management specialist.
5. Cutting activities would not proceed until such time as botanical clearances were completed. Any recommendations therein would be followed. For example, if a rare plant was found, and determined to require protection, then the affected area would be excluded from project activities.

Soils/Watershed

1. Surface disturbance would be held to a minimum, and as necessary, blended in with surrounding soil surfaces. Emphasis would be placed on avoiding repeated entry of vehicles or equipment on sites where this activity previously occurred.
2. Slash would be applied to new vehicle tracks and other vehicle/equipment activity areas created during thinning activities.
4. Cutting activities would be scheduled to minimize compaction and rutting to road surfaces.

Wildlife

1. No dead or dying trees would be felled.
2. No trees showing obvious signs of wildlife habitation would be felled.
3. High juniper cover would be retained in key habitats. These areas typically lie against rock outcrops; are key wildlife movement corridors; or have other values critical for wildlife. These specific areas would be identified when clearances are completed.
4. Key openings where perches are desirable would have juniper trees left to provide for snag recruitment, structural diversity, and/or other purposes.
5. Should the wildlife situation change (such as new species found to be present or the status of a species changes), then additional operational restrictions may be applied.
6. Cutting activities would not proceed until such time as wildlife clearances were obtained. Any recommendations therein would be followed.
7. A BLM Wildlife Biologist would be notified if pygmy rabbits (or their burrows), ferruginous hawks, sage grouse or goshawk nests or individual birds, are discovered prior to or during treatment activities. The biologist would determine appropriate measures necessary for species; and treatment activities adjusted accordingly.
8. Treatment activities would commence no earlier than July 15, 2008.

Cultural Resources

1. Cutting activities would not commence until such time as clearances were completed. Any recommendations therein would be followed.
2. Cultural resource inventory methods would, in accordance with OR BLM/SHPO Protocol, be focused on identifying archaeological sites deemed most at risk from project activities.
3. All significant cultural resources determined to be at risk from project activities would be protected from damage or disturbance.
4. Trees with particular historical significance (survey trees, blaze trees, juniper structures, etc.) would be retained.

Recreation/Visuals/Aesthetics

1. BLM contracts/cooperator agreements would include a provision for stump heights no greater than 10 inches.
2. All vegetation manipulation actions would be consistent with the BLM's Visual Resource Management criteria.
3. Treatments would be designed to achieve a "mottled" appearance through the following actions:
 - Feathering treatment area edges by leaving scattered, dispersed trees of varying heights and densities.
 - Cutting areas could attract attention, but they would repeat the form, line, color and texture of the landscape.
 - Using irregular thinning unit boundaries, dispersing trees and slash, and retaining a variety of tree ages in order to promote a mottled appearance.
 - Retaining sufficient trees on all topographic crests (such as ridge tops of basalt rim lips), and other areas (such as road cuts or old mining escarpments) necessary to maintain visual values and scenic quality.

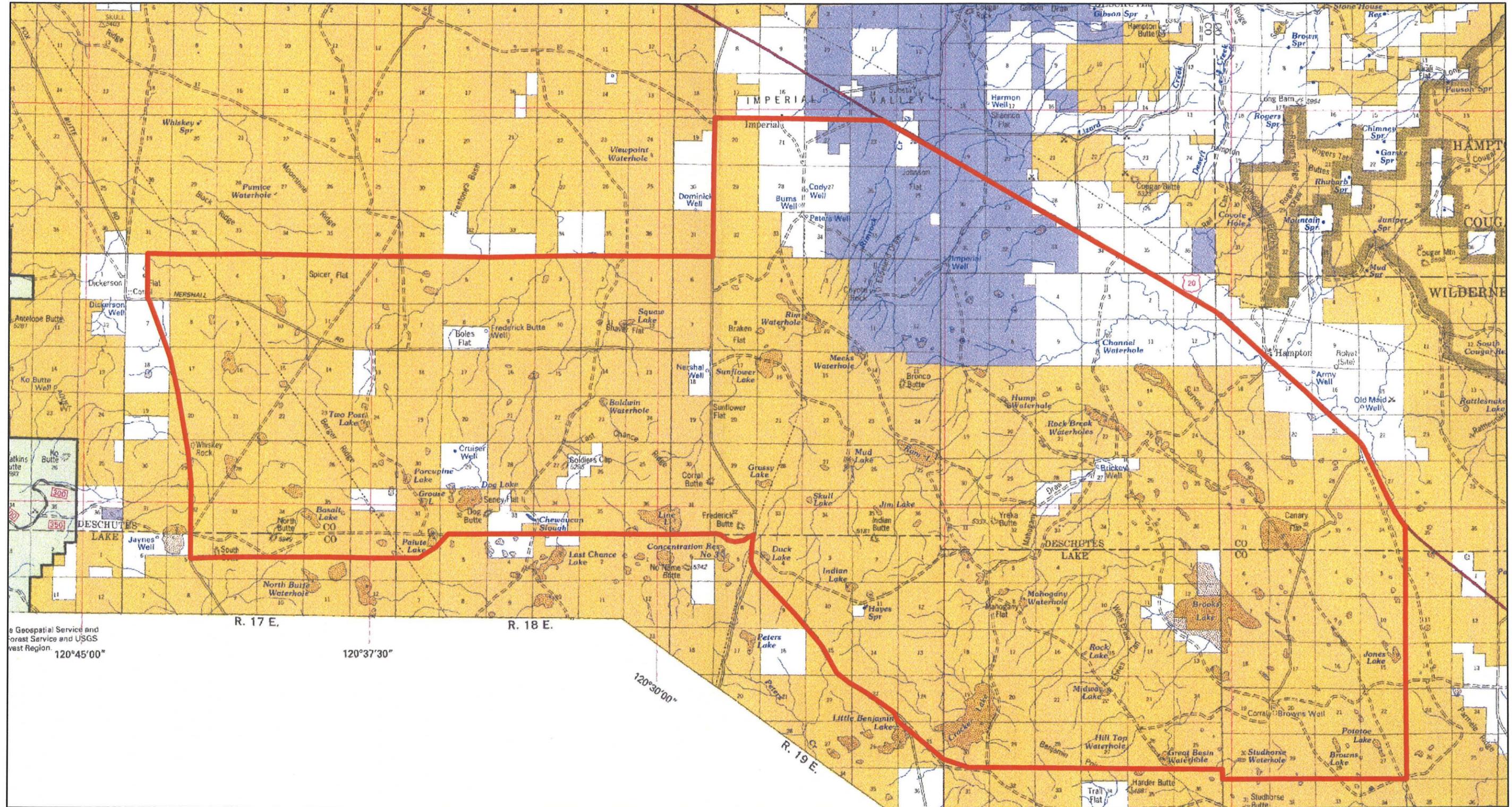
4. Access to existing camping and related recreation sites would be retained. Existing primitive routes would not be closed due to juniper thinning. BP

Structures/Facilities/Private Lands/Livestock Grazing/Other Uses

1. Trees with paint, signs, blazes, or fences attached to them would not be cut
2. Trees near any facility (such as fences and roads) would be directionally felled to avoid damaging or interfering with the function of these facilities.
3. To minimize private land owner gate, access and other impacts, the BLM would minimize the number of contractors requiring private land access to prosecute their work.
4. The Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management (p. 15 of the S & G's) would continue to govern livestock grazing management. This would include such year-long and seasonal rest from livestock grazing – as required to meet these guidelines and the project objectives.

Playa Habitat Rehabilitation Boundary Prineville District, BLM

Appendix A - Project Area Map



Geospatial Service and
Forest Service and USGS
West Region
120°45'00"

R. 17 E.

R. 18 E.

120°37'30"

120°30'00"

R. 19 E.

 Habitat Rehabilitation Boundary Line



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