

Categorical Exclusion Documentation

A. Background

BLM Office: Prineville Field Office

NEPA Log #: DOI - BLM - OR – P060 - 2012 - 0036 - cx

Project/Lease/Serial/Case File #:

Proposed Action Title: Razorback Aspen Treatment

Location: The project is located 11.68 miles southeast of Maupin, Oregon and 2.5 miles south of the Criterion North Trailhead. The project area lies to the west of The Dalles-California Highway 197 and east of the Deschutes River. The treatment area(s) are located in the center of Section 25 of Township 6, Range 8, W.M.

Background: The purpose of the action is to protect, re-establish, and invigorate existing Quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) stands on BLM administered lands within the Razorback Fire area. Because quaking aspen are shade intolerant, density and patch size of aspen stands and other riparian species in the project area have declined due to conifer encroachment. In the project area, this is especially true with regards to juniper encroachment in riparian areas where aspen historically thrived.

By removing conifer competition from the aspen stands and creating a grazing barrier, aspen suckers would be protected from large herbivores such as elk, deer, and livestock. The need for action is due to western juniper and ponderosa pine encroaching upon important plant communities (such as aspen) impacting biodiversity, hydrologic cycles, fauna and nutrient cycling.

Description of the Proposed Action: The Proposed Action is to build a wildlife enclosure around Unit 1 in the project area. The remaining units are to be thinned (cut) all western juniper and ponderosa pine immediately adjacent to (within 50') identified aspen stands and to thin western juniper and ponderosa pine within existing aspen stands.

In the Unit 1 area (see attached map), a temporary wildlife enclosure fence would be built around a 0.25 acre aspen stand, to prevent elk, deer and livestock from grazing on young aspen trees. This enclosure fence shall be 10ft in height and be constructed of woven poly mesh. An administrative use waiver would be granted to use motor vehicles to access Unit 1 when soil conditions are dry. Small junipers (<10" Diameter Breast Height) within the aspen stands would be felled and larger trees within the stand would be girdled to retain a more natural visual appearance. There would be no permanent or temporary road construction associated with this project.

In Units 2 and 3, juniper trees would be directionally felled on the perimeter of Units 2 and 3 and specifically arranged to provide a barrier around the aspen stands in these two units. This barrier would provide for the protection of young aspen from grazing animals such as elk, deer,

and livestock. The two treatment areas would encompass 5 acres (see attached map). The felling would be done by the use of hand tools (axe, Pulaski) and chainsaws. Small juniper and pine (<10" DBH) within the aspen stands would be felled and larger juniper within the stand would be girdled to retain a more natural visual appearance.

Project Design Features: The following specific project design features would be incorporated into the Proposed Action:

1. All snags and trees with nesting cavities or stick nests would remain uncut.
2. No trees with obvious signs of wildlife habitation would be felled.
3. Western juniper with old growth characteristics would remain uncut.
4. Any trees with markings denoting landmarks, survey markers, monitoring plots, or cultural significance would be left uncut.
5. Ponderosa pine within the treatment area under 10" DBH would be felled. Trees would be directionally felled to provide a barrier to exclude or limit grazing animal traffic. Some trees may not be completely removed from the stump to provide support for barrier. Slash and boles from other fell trees may be moved by hand to provide the structure for the slash barrier.
6. When trees under 10 " DBH are felled within the aspen stand, these trees would be arranged to provide for the protection of new aspen shoots as well as existing young aspen. Juniper and other trees over a 10" DBH within aspen stands would be girdled. Slash barrier would be a minimum of 3 feet high and a maximum of 10 feet high.
7. Junipers and other trees within the aspen stands would be girdled, to retain a more natural visual appearance.
8. Long term monitoring would occur every 3-5 years, to evaluate the growth trend of the aspen trees in Units 1, 2, and 3. Eventually, the aspen enclosure fence in Unit 1 will be removed, providing that aspen stand can sustain new growth without being affected by wildlife or livestock. Junipers that were hinge cut in Units 2 and 3 will eventually have the juniper bases flush cut and trees burned, to restore a natural appearing landscape on these public lands having wilderness characteristics.

B. Land Use Plan Conformance

Land Use Plan Name: Two Rivers RMP

Date Approved (ROD): 1986

The proposed action is in conformance with the above plan, even though it is not specifically provided for, because it is clearly consistent with the following land use plan decisions, objectives, terms, or conditions:

Pg. 11: "Vegetation will be managed through grazing management and range/wildlife habitat development to provide maximum wildlife habitat diversity (ecological condition of high mid seral to low late seral stage) and to provide sufficient forage to meet big game management objectives of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife."

Pg. 17: "Management actions within riparian areas will include measures to protect or restore natural functions, as defined by Executive Orders 11988 and 11990. Management techniques will be used to minimize degradation of stream banks and the loss of riparian vegetation."

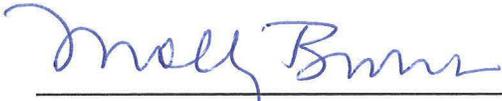
C. Compliance with NEPA

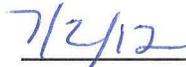
The Proposed Action is categorically excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with 516 DM 11.9C (Forestry). C.4("Pre-commercial thinning and brush control using small mechanical devices."). The construction of a slash barrier is covered under 516 DM 11.9.J.9 (Other), "Construction of small protective enclosures, including those to protect reservoirs and springs and those to protect small study areas."

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 extraordinary circumstances described in 516 DM 2 apply. See attached CX Extraordinary Circumstances Documentation checklist.

D. Signature

Authorizing Official:


 Molly Brown, Field Manager, Deschutes Resource Area


 Date

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this review, contact: John Cody Montgomery, Supervisory Range Tech. Prineville Field Office, 3050 NE 3rd Street, Prineville, OR 97754, telephone (541) 749-8120. E-mail Jcmontgo@blm.gov.

CX EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES DOCUMENTATION The proposed categorical exclusion action will:	YES	NO
2.1 Have significant impacts on public health or safety.		X
Rationale: All proposed activities follow established Occupational Safety and Health Administration rules concerning health and safety.		
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);		X

<p>this area does have some wilderness characteristics, this action is not expected to impacts the wilderness qualities of the area. The lands associated with the proposed action does not have park, refuge, national monuments, national natural landmarks, principal drinking water aquifers, prime farmlands, wetlands, and ecologically significant or critical areas.</p>		
2.3	Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA Section 102(2)(E)].	X
<p>Rationale: The proposed action does not have any controversial environmental effects or unresolved conflicts with alternative uses of available resources. This project area is very small and relatively low impact and would pose no controversial environmental effect.</p>		
2.4	Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.	X
<p>Rationale: The proposed action does not pose any significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks. This project is small and has very little environmental risk potential.</p>		
2.5	Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.	X
<p>Rationale: The proposed action will not establish a precedent for future action with potentially significant environmental effects.</p>		
2.6	Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.	X
<p>Rationale: Similar past actions to the proposed action did not result in significant direct, indirect or cumulative environmental effects.</p>		
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.	X
<p>Rationale: No historic properties or cultural resources have been identified in the proposed project area and there would be no impact to cultural resources or historic properties.</p>		
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.	X
<p>Rationale: This project shall not adversely impact listed or threatened species or their habitat. The area shall be surveyed for listed and sensitive species prior to the beginning of work.</p>		
2.9	Violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.	X
<p>Rationale: The proposed action conforms to the direction given for the management of public lands in the Code of Federal Regulations, which complies with all applicable laws.</p>		
2.10	Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898).	X
<p>Rationale: Proposed action has no adverse effect on low income or minority populations.</p>		
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).	X
<p>Rationale: The proposed action would not change or limit access to ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal Lands or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of sacred</p>		

sites. Sacred sites have not been identified.

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).

X

Rationale: The proposed action would not measurably change the rate of introduction, continued existence or spread of noxious weeds or invasive species.

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
PRINEVILLE DISTRICT, DESCHUTES RIVER RESOURCE AREA
Decision Record**

Decision:

It is my decision to authorize the implementation of the proposed action as described in the attached categorical exclusion documentation - DOI - BLM - OR - P060 - 2012 - 0036 - CX.

Land Use Plan Conformance:

The proposed action is in conformance with the 1986 Two Rivers ROD and RMP.

Decision Rationale:

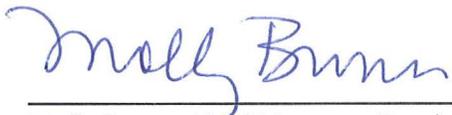
The proposed action has been reviewed by Resource Area Staff. Based on the NEPA Categorical Exclusion Review, I have determined that the proposed action involves no significant impact to the human environment and no further analysis is required.

Administrative Remedies:

Notice of the decision to be made on the action described in this categorical exclusion will be posted on the District internet website. The action is subject to appeal to the Interior Board of Land Appeals under 43 CFR Part 4.

This project will be implemented in the summer of 2012.

Authorizing Official:



Molly Brown, Field Manager, Deschutes Resource Area



Date