

Categorical Exclusion Documentation

A. Background

BLM Office: Prineville Field Office

NEPA Log #: DOI - BLM - OR – P040 - 2015 - 0010 - CX

Proposed Action Title: Gable and Nelson Creek Juniper Treatment

Location: The project area is located one to four air miles west of Mitchell, Oregon, in T11S R21E, Sections 28, 32, 33, and 35, and T12S R 21E, Sections 1, 3, and 4 W.M. (see Map). The project area lies south of State Highway 26 and covers approximately 300 feet on each side of Gable Creek, Nelson Creek, and their tributaries.

Description of the Proposed Action: The BLM would have individuals with chain saws lop and scatter juniper along 5.5 miles of stream banks and across 332 acres within the Gable Creek and Nelson Creek drainages (see Map). The cut trees would be eight inches or less in diameter at breast height (dbh) while retaining trees with old growth characteristics. Old growth juniper trees that would not be cut are juniper trees with two or more of the following characteristics:

- Trees that do not have the typical “cone” shape of younger trees. Instead, they have large spreading, irregular shaped crowns that are often rounded or flat topped;
- Bark with thick, fibrous well developed vertical furrows;
- Dead branches or tops, bark missing, often with abundant yellow or light green lichen;
- Large horizontal lower limbs, often twisted;
- Decay and/or hollow areas on main trunk; and/or
- Leader growth in the upper ¼ of the tree usually less than (<) 1 inch.

There is a need to lop and scatter small juniper in the project area because invasion of juniper has resulted in reduced watershed cover. The soils in the project area are at risk of excess erosion in a high intensity rainfall event. Juniper trees are reinvading areas where juniper trees were lopped and scattered 10 to 30 years ago to restore watershed cover. Lopping and scattering small juniper will create persistent litter and open spaces for perennial bunch grass establishment. Persistent litter and deep-rooted bunchgrasses will protect the soils from excess erosion during a high intensity rainfall event.

Project Design Features:

Botany/Invasive Plants

All vehicle use would be limited to designated roads.

Minimize soil disturbance as much as possible.

If possible, note any weed species present and their location(s), to assist with treatment.

As yellow starthistle has been mapped within the project area in Sections 28 and 32, along Gable and Weddle Creeks, beginning in 2003:

- Care should be taken to avoid populations to limit its spread.
- Report any sightings to Botany staff.

As other noxious weeds may occur in the project area:

- Take care where vehicles are parked and where staff is working/walking (i.e. do not park in a patch of cheatgrass);
- Take care to check personnel, tools, and vehicles for plant parts before leaving the site, and wash vehicles if necessary;

Cultural

Individual trees would be cut and pulled away from sensitive cultural areas where historic period structural remains occur.

Any new cultural discoveries identified during implementation would be brought to the project lead and archaeologist to assess and determine the best treatment method.

Recreation

Individuals operating chainsaws would not operate their chainsaws if any recreationists are within 200 feet.

Wildlife

Nest and cavity trees would not be cut.

B. Land Use Plan Conformance

Land Use Plan Name: Two Rivers Resource Management Plan

Date approved (ROD): June 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: "Manage upland vegetation to achieve maximum wildlife habitat diversity." – page 10

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 2, Appendix 4, C.1. Forestry: "Pre-commercial thinning and brush control using small mechanical devices."

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

There is no potential for significant impacts because this area does not contain wilderness characteristics (2007 inventory), and project design features ensure no impact to cultural or natural resources in the area.

Authorizing official: H.F. "Chip" Faver 5-11-15
H.F. "Chip" Faver Date
Field Manager, Central Oregon Resource Area

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this review, contact: Guy Chamness, Fuels Specialist, Prineville Field Office, 3050 NE 3rd Street, Prineville, OR 97754, telephone (541)-416-6719 gchamnes@blm.gov.

| CX EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES DOCUMENTATION | | YES | NO |
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| The proposed action would: | | | |
| 2.1 | Have significant impacts on public health or safety. | | X |
| Rationale: There are no impacts on public health and safety because the project is one mile away from populated areas and in an area with light recreational use. A project design feature has also been created under Recreation to provide for public 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); floodplains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas. | | X |
| Rationale: There are no unique geographic characteristics in the project area. There would not be an impact to cultural resources. Previous survey has identified sensitive areas where trees would be cut and pulled away from historic period structural remains and the same treatment would be applied to any new discoveries. | | | |
| 2.3 | Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA Section 102(2)(E)]. | | X |
| Rationale: The effects of lopping and scattering juniper with eight inch diameter or less dbh are well documented and broadly accepted in the scientific literature. | | | |
| 2.4 | Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks. | | X |
| Rationale: Lopping and scattering small juniper is a common watershed improvement project and the project area does not contain any features that would cause the effects from the proposal to be unique or unknown. | | | |
| 2.5 | Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects. | | X |
| Rationale: This project is independent of any other on-going, proposed, or future decisions regarding juniper management. Additionally, if approved, the only activities implemented would be those described in this Proposed Action. | | | |
| 2.6 | Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects. | | X |
| Rationale: The effects of lopping and scattering eight inch or less dbh juniper would be short term, local effects to breeding birds nesting in nearby trees and recreationists may notice juniper limbs on the landscape. Thus, the potential temporal and geographic scope for cumulative effects is limited to the time it would take to perform the lopping and scattering of juniper in the 332 acre project area. In light of the limited temporal and geographic scope for cumulative effects, there are no other current or reasonably foreseeable actions that would have effects to the areas affected by this proposal, including Gable and Nelson Creek. | | | |
| 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 |

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| Rationale: The project would not have impacts to properties eligible for listing on the National Register of Historical Places. Treatments have been designed to avoid negative impacts to qualities that make these resources eligible. | | |
| 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 |
| Rationale: There is ESA listed steelhead in Gable and Nelson creek. The project would have a positive effect on this specie by reducing juniper encroachment on the streams, which is out competing the hardwoods and thus reducing stream shading and large wood recruitment. There are no other Endangered or Threatened Species or designated Critical Habitat for these species in the project area. | | |
| 2.9 | Violate a federal law, or a state, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. | X |
| Rationale: The project conforms to the Two River RMP and all applicable federal, state, local, and tribal laws. | | |
| 2.10 | Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898). | X |
| Rationale: The project would have no effect on low income or minority populations because there are no low income or minority populations in or bordering the project area. | | |
| 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 |
| Rationale: There are no known sacred sites in the project area and there would be no change in access. | | |
| 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: This project would not contribute to the spread of noxious weeds or non-invasive species because motorized vehicle use would be limited to designated routes. Also, refer to project design features for botany/invasive plants listed above. | | |

