



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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Finding of No Significant Impact

Upper Aurora Canyon Sagebrush Habitat Restoration/Improvement Project (DOI-BLM-CAC-070-2009-52-EA)

I have reviewed environmental assessment DOI-BLM-CAC-070-2009-52-EA which includes the identification and explanation of the environmental effects that would result from implementation of the proposed Upper Aurora Canyon Sagebrush Habitat Restoration/Improvement Project. Based on my review of the environmental analysis, other supporting documents incorporated by reference, and recommendations from BLM staff specialists; I have determined that implementation of the proposed action, as designed, does not constitute a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment. I have also determined that the proposed action conforms to, and is consistent with, the overall guidance and management direction provided by the Bishop Resource Management Plan (RMP), approved March 25, 1993. The Bishop RMP has been reviewed, and the proposed action conforms to the land use plan terms and conditions as required by 43 CFR 1610.5.

None of the environmental effects identified in the environmental analysis meet the definition of significance either in context or intensity as outlined in 40 CFR 1508.27. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required and will not be prepared.

This finding is based on my consideration of both the context and the intensity of the impacts described in the environmental assessment as summarized below:

Context

The proposed action is a site-specific project designed to improve habitat conditions for Greater Sage-Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) in upper Aurora Canyon located just southwest of the Big Flat lek and fall/wintering area in the northern portion of the Bodie Population Management Unit as defined in *Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Plan for Nevada and Eastern California*. The proposed action includes several project implementation stipulations designed specifically to minimize and effectively eliminate the potential for any inadvertent adverse environmental effects that could result from the proposed project. The

proposed project would improve habitat conditions for sage-grouse and other sagebrush associated species on approximately 573 acres; however, less than 5 percent of the overall project area would be directly affected by project implementation. None of the direct, indirect or cumulative effects identified in the environmental analysis are considered significant at either the local, state-wide, regional, national or international scale.

Intensity

1. *Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.*

Implementation of the proposed project would improve habitat conditions for Greater Sage-Grouse within the Bi-state distinct population segment; a BLM designated sensitive wildlife species and candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Implementation of the proposed project would also improve habitat conditions for other sagebrush associated wildlife and plant species within the project area and may have a positive effect on recreation and social economic values due to increased opportunities for wildlife viewing and hunting.

The proposed project would have negligible effects on air quality, global climate change, soils, invasive non-native plant species, visual resources and pinyon-juniper associated wildlife species. None of the adverse environmental effects associated with the proposed project are considered significant, even when evaluated independent of the beneficial effects that would result from project implementation.

2. *The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.*

Implementation of the proposed project may reduce the potential for a high intensity wildfire within the immediate project vicinity. No aspect of the proposed project has been identified as having the potential to measurably affect public health or safety.

3. *Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.*

The proposed project areas are not located within or immediately adjacent to any park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or other ecologically critical areas including any designated area of critical environmental concern or wilderness; or any designated wilderness study area or eligible wild and scenic river study segment.

4. *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.*

None of the anticipated environmental effects that have been identified are considered scientifically controversial. The expansion of pinyon-juniper into sagebrush habitats in the Great Basin is well documented and the associated negative effects on sage-grouse habitat are widely accepted by wildlife biologists, plant ecologists and land managers.

5. ***The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.***

The proposed project is not unique or unusual. There are no predicted effects on the human environment that are considered to be either highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. Local expertise and experience with the implementation of similar projects minimizes the chance of highly uncertain effects or effects which involve unique or unknown risks. Proposed project activities are considered routine in nature, employ standard practices and protective measures, and their effects are generally well known.

6. ***The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.***

Any similar future project proposal must be evaluated through the appropriate site specific environmental analysis and decision making process consistent with current laws, regulations and policies. Implementation of the proposed project would not set a precedent for future actions that may have significant effects, nor does it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

7. ***Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.***

Both the individual and cumulative effects of the proposed project were considered in the environmental analysis. No individually significant or cumulatively significant impacts were identified.

8. ***The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.***

A Class III intensive cultural resources survey of the proposed project areas has been completed and the proposed project includes design features specifically developed to avoid any adverse effect on cultural resources. The proposed project would not adversely affect any cultural resources listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor would it cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

9. ***The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.***

No threatened or endangered species are known or likely to occur within the proposed project areas and there is no designated critical habitat for any listed species within or immediately adjacent to the proposed project areas. The proposed project would have no effect on any threatened or endangered species, nor would it result in the destruction or adverse modification of any designated critical habitat for any listed species.

10. ***Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.***

The proposed project is consistent with all applicable federal, state and local laws, land management plans, policies and programs imposed for the protection of the environment. Implementation of the proposed project would not violate any known federal, state, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

Bernadette Lovato

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9/01/2010

Date