DECISION RECORD

Animas City Mountain Mechanical Fuels Reduction
CO-800-2007-0048 EA

INTRODUCTION: The Animas City Mountain Mechanical Fuels Reduction is located North of Durango in Township 35 North, Range 9 West, Sections 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, N.M.P.M., La Plata County, Colorado (See attached map). This project responds to the hazard fuels reduction goals and objectives of the La Plata County Community Action Plan, the San Juan/San Miguel Resource Management Plan, and the National Fire Plan. The project will treat the area in a manner that will result in a forest and fuel structure more closely resembling historic conditions. The project is designed to reduce the risk of wildfire to these public lands and adjacent private property, while mitigating adverse effects.

The Animas City Mountain Mechanical Fuels Reduction Environmental Assessment (CO-800-2007-0048 EA), will be available for review for a period of time at the following web address: *http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/fo/cfo/nepa_documents.html*

Please direct questions about the EA, this Decision Record, or the Finding of No Significant Impact to Shawna Legarza, Project Lead, at (970) 884-1427 or via e-mail to *slegarza@fs.fed.us*.

DECISION: It is my decision to authorize the **Preferred Alternative IV- Mini-mower and Hand Thinning**, to mow/mulch, hand thin and pile vegetation on approximately 830 acres on BLM land, as described in the accompanying Environmental Assessment. A small mower mounted on a piece of equipment such as a skid steer (Bobcat) will be utilized to treat the majority of the mountain. Mitigation corridors adjacent to trails will be hand thinned; outside of the trail corridors, vegetation too large for the mini mower to handle will also be treated by hand. Slash from this hand treatment will be disposed of by limbing and chipping with the mini-mower or hand piling and burning.

My decision includes the following Design Criteria (EA pages12-20):

Design Criteria for All Units:

The action is to mechanically thin ponderosa pine, Gambel oak, piñon pine and juniper trees in order to break up the horizontal and vertical continuity of the forest vegetation. Thinning of ponderosa pine trees will be limited to younger trees that do not have pre-settlement structure such as age >150 years, yellowbark characteristics, diameter >18", or flattened tops. Thinning will be geared toward retaining or creating clumps of trees that will move the overall stand structure towards being un-even aged. A diversity of Gambel oak, specifically larger Gambel oak clones with stems greater than 6" in diameter, will be left in place, where possible, to benefit wildlife and enhance forest diversity. Snags in the project analysis area will be targeted for retention for wildlife habitat, unless they pose safety hazards.

All equipment brought into the project area will be cleaned and inspected prior to operating. Post treatment of noxious weeds will be administered once the project is completed. Infestations of noxious weeds will be inventoried, treated, and monitored within the project area for a minimum of three years after the project is complete.

Machinery, including ATVs and chainsaws, will not be operated prior to 7am or after 6pm to reduce noise impacts to adjacent neighbors.

Wildlife Design Criteria (all units)

Leave islands should provide for a diversity of shrub sizes, with the largest oak (with diameter at root collar (DRC) greater than 6", or largest DRC of oak available in the unit) as a priority to focus placement of islands. Treatment will result in a mosaic of islands of oak varying in size from ½ to 10 acres in size. Where possible, avoid treatment of oak whose average DRC is greater than 6". In treated areas, maintain at least 40%-50% of the oak/shrublands as untreated.

Implementation of thinning activities (including use of any motorized equipment) will not occur during the big game winter range closure. This closure may be put into effect anytime between December 1 and April 15, depending on the severity of the winter. This closure is determined through coordination with the CDOW, with the closure implemented when 16" of snow is measured at Cemetery Flats in the Junction Creek drainage. At 16" of snow depth in the higher elevations, elk are known to leave the higher elevations and rely on Animas City Mountain for winter range.

Protect and/or maintain as many snags as possible. No snags greater than 16" diameter breast height (dbh) are to be cut, unless required under OSHA safety standards. Protect snags 9 -16" dbh, to the extent possible, during mechanical and burning operations. Protect all pre-settlement trees, and wherever possible, all trees with cavities, spiked tops, broken tops, lightning scars or "wolfy" trees with spreading crowns. When possible, treat vegetation around snags that do not pose a safety threat, so that they are more likely to be retained during fire. Where possible, retain snags in clumps to increase use by wildlife.

Personnel involved in project planning, layout and administration are to be trained in identification of northern goshawk species and nests. A ¼ mile minimal disturbance activity zone will be established around active nests from March 1 to August 15th to protect nesting goshawks. Mechanical treatments will be implemented outside of the March 1 to August 15 seasonal restriction in active nest stands. Include clause providing for protection of sensitive species into contracts.

Prohibit disruptive management activities within 300 feet of any occupied raptor nest during the period of March 1- August 15. If an active raptor nest is discovered during layout or implementation (including burning), operations within 600 feet of the nest will cease until the status of the nest and species of raptor is identified by the wildlife biologist and appropriate mitigations can be designed and implemented.

Protect at least one turkey roost clump per 20 acres within units where the following conditions exist: (1) roost tree clumps are at least 1/10th acre in size, and (2) they have a minimum of six pine trees that are 16 inches dbh or greater in size.

Protect at least one Abert's squirrel nest-tree clump (.1acres) per six acres within all treatment units. A "nest tree clump" is defined as a group of pine trees (9-22 inches dbh) with interlocking canopies. Basal area should average 180-220 sq. feet per acre. Trees having Abert's squirrel nests are a priority for placement of nest-tree clumps. It is recommended that squirrel clumps be designated on the ground by the wildlife biologist.

Recreation Design Criteria (all units)

Retain the long-term recreational experience of the non-motorized trail system, ensuring public safety during the project implementation.

Trail and area closures will be staggered during project implementation so that all areas/trails are not closed at the same time, allowing users alternate areas in which to recreate.

Informational signs will be posted at all trailheads describing the nature of the project and warning trail users of the danger of the project activities.

Develop press releases for public information as to when, where, and how the project will be occurring.

Scenery Design Criteria (all units)

Retain "legacy", or pre-settlement trees (large scenic trees), including legacy junipers.

Within trail corridors, stumps will be cut as close to the ground as possible with a maximum height of 4", angled away from primary viewers.

Vary treatment edges, where needed, to avoid obvious linear contrast between treated and untreated areas.

Burn piles are to be located at least 40 feet from edges of trails and the trail.

Cultural Resources Design Criteria (all units)

If subsurface cultural resources are unearthed during operations, activity in the vicinity of the cultural resource will cease and a BLM representative notified immediately. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4 the holder of this authorization must notify the authorized officer, by telephone, with written confirmation, immediately upon the discovery of human remains, funerary items, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony. Further, the operator must stop activities in the vicinity of the discovery and protect it for 30 days or until notified to proceed by the authorized officer.

The operator is responsible for informing all persons associated with this project that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing Native American Indian shrines, historic and prehistoric archaeology sites, or for collecting artifacts of any kind, including historic items and/or arrowheads and pottery fragments from Federal land.

Design Criteria for Unit 1:

This unit of approximately 733 acres is located on the top of Animas City Mountain. Dominant vegetation here consists of some pre-settlement and mostly second-growth ponderosa pine, Gambel oak and encroaching juniper. The east side of the mountain top exhibits significantly more piñon pine and juniper forest, as well as other mixed mountain brush, than the west side. The stand density of ponderosa pine is more open on the upper portion of the mountain but is relatively dense toward the bottom. A limited number of small diameter (2-7 inches) ponderosa pine trees will be removed in order to meet the fuels reduction objectives and for forest restoration reasons. Most of the proposed work is to remove juniper trees that are serving as ladder fuels, or are invading grassy openings. Gambel oak will be treated under existing ponderosa pine stands, but clumps will be retained in openings, especially clones with larger diameter stems.

All action alternatives require use of the trail by ATVs/UTVs or pack stock to transport equipment, chainsaw fuel, and personnel into Unit 1. At the conclusion of the project, the trail prism will be rehabilitated by replacing large rocks and returning the trail to a condition similar to what it was prior to the project. The main trail and other trails on Animas City Mountain will remain closed to public motorized use both during and after the project.

Wildlife Design Criteria (Unit 1)

Leave three approximately 10-acre leave islands in Unit 1 (See Map 3, p.4). These islands will maintain vegetative diversity in the units and areas of dense cover, and will be designated on the ground as no treatment areas prior to implementation.

Provide for a variety of densities in ponderosa pine across the unit to enhance cover and forage for big game, while still meeting fuels objectives. In addition to the leave islands, above, provide several untreated patches that are 1 to 10 acres in size and have 40 square feet/acre of basal area and, where possible, are adjacent to dense cover patches (USDA 2003). Designate these areas on the ground prior to implementation.

Create openings in the oak by treating areas that are ¼ to 3 acres in size. Focus on enlarging existing openings, or areas where oak is decadent or frost killed, depending on the time of year this situation is evident. In the north end of Unit 1, create irregular openings that comprise no more than 30% of the small oak present. Openings should be approximately 1 acre in size. These openings will provide forage and future diversity of age class in the oak.

Dependent on funding, install a guzzler on the southeastern hill slope, where a water catchment was historically present below Unit 1. This oak brush area is heavily used by elk. Historically, a water catchment was present. The guzzler will be located in oak shrubs and will not be visible from Animas City Mountain trails.

Peregrine falcon surveys are required at the beginning of each operating season to verify whether or not falcons are nesting on the mountain's cliff complexes. These surveys will be conducted by BLM wildlife staff. The Resource Management Plan prohibits disturbance within ½ mile of peregrine nest cliffs from March 1 through August 1. If surveys determine peregrine falcons are nesting on a cliff complex, a ½ mile buffer will be applied from the edge of the cliff complex from March 1 through August 1, as required by the RMP. No helicopter flights, mower operations, motorized travel (including ATV's/UTV's), and chainsaw use will be permitted within this buffer zone during this timing restriction to protect nesting peregrines. Helicopter flight routes will be adjusted to prevent noise and visual disruption to nesting falcons. If surveys document that no peregrines are nesting on a cliff complex, unrestricted flight, mower and mechanical operations may be permitted within the protected area for the duration of the operating season.

Water Resource Design Criteria (Unit 1)

Avoid soil disturbing actions during periods of heavy rain or wet soils. Equipment will not be allowed to operate when soils are saturated such that ruts 4 or more inches deep and 10 or more feet long are created. In the event larger ruts are created, they will be rehabilitated by filling them in, providing drainage, and seeding as necessary (*FSH 2509.25, 13.1.1.b, and 14.1.1.b*).

Pile burning will be done in seasons when soil and duff are moist; decreasing the potential for greater erosion (*FSH 2509.25, 14.1.1.c*).

A stormwater permit will be obtained from the City of Durango prior to use of the trail segment crossing city-owned land.

Best Management Practices (BMPs) will be used for temporary control of sediment during implementation and until vegetation stabilizes after the project. BMPs could include such practices as straw bales, excelsior wattles, or other types of sediment retention structures.

Fuel containment dikes/basins are required around each fuel storage area. In the event of a fuel spill, BLM hazardous waste containment and disposal policies will be followed, and all contaminated soil will be removed from the mountain.

Cultural Resource Design Criteria (Unit 1)

Protect National Register eligible site 5LP7144 by re-establishing the recreation trail outside of the site boundary. Rehabilitate the portion of the detoured trail currently within site boundary, under the supervision of a BLM-approved archeologist.

Cultural resource leave areas are to be avoided by all project implementation activities, including slash piling/pile burning.

Prescriptions for Unit 1 Sub-Units (see attached map)
Unit 1A preliminary Rx

Because of the numerous dense thickets in this stand, thinning of small trees in the understory will be utilized to reduce the threat of extensive torching and passive crown fire in the event of a wildfire. Reduce the average Basal Area from 80-150 to 50-60 sq. ft./acre (a measure of the cross-sectional area of all tree stems in an acre) which, because of the small tree size, will still leave a large number of trees. Thin the clumps of small trees, targeting diseased and dwarf mistletoe infected trees first. Concentrate treatment on removal of juniper from beneath larger and healthier pine, especially the limited number of yellow barks (large old pine trees). Retain large oak, and remove the heavily clubbed smaller oak to stimulate sprouting and reduce fuel continuity.

Unit 1B preliminary Rx

In this unit, there will be occasional removal of diseased pine trees and a few ladder fuel trees from beneath larger trees. The source of the most probable damage to the stand in the event of a fire is the large amount of juniper ladder fuels growing beneath the larger pine. Treatment should target removal of the juniper ladder fuels. Focus removal on those beneath pre-settlement trees, larger second growth trees, or those growing amidst healthy young pine. A few junipers that are open-grown and pose little threat to other trees will be retained.

Unit 1C preliminary Rx

The relatively light pine density in this subunit reduces the need for much thinning. Treatment will be accomplished through light hand thinning (with scattering of slash) or careful mowing and removal of encroaching junipers. A portion of the open ponderosa pine forest will be left untreated in scattered patches. Much of the oak in this unit is small and short, and the larger oak found here is also heavily top-killed. On the west side of the unit, there is also a fair amount of mixed shrub. Mowing some of Gambel oak and brush in this unit will help stimulate browse production.

Unit 1D preliminary Rx

In this unit, remove occasional ladder fuel trees from beneath larger trees. The source of the most probable damage to the stand in the event of a wildfire is the large amount of juniper ladder fuels growing beneath the larger pine. Treatment should target removal of the juniper ladder fuels. Focus removal on those beneath pre-settlement trees, larger, second growth trees, or those growing amidst healthy young pine. A few junipers that are open-grown and pose little threat to other trees will be retained.

Unit 1E & 1F preliminary Rx

Due to the larger, denser oak cover in this subunit, a mosaic of treated openings and untreated clumps is desirable to reduce fire intensity and spread rates. This subunit contains the largest oak found on the mountain, with diameter breast height ranging from 4-8" and removal of oak will be limited to less than 50%, leaving the largest and best, and treating the smaller, decadent clones. The removal of encroaching juniper and some light pine thinning is also needed to restore the stand composition and structure, as well as, reduce the probability of catastrophic fire behavior.

Unit 1G preliminary Rx- Recreation/Scenery Design Criteria along trail corridors

Vegetative treatment within a 200-foot-wide corridor along the trails (foreground within approx. 100 feet each side) will be designed to maintain a quality recreation experience while allowing a reduced treatment for fuels management and forest restoration objectives.

Vegetation removal within these trail corridors will be done with hand tools such as chainsaws.

Juniper will be treated by removing all trees less than 6" DRC within 35 feet of the trails.
From 35-100 feet on either side of trails, all juniper 6-10" DRC will also be removed. Also, within this area, juniper over 10" DRC will be removed in selected areas if considered ladder fuel under ponderosa. Large junipers will be retained if not considered ladder fuels or if identified as "legacy trees".

Juniper trees to be removed within the trail corridors will be identified with timber marking paint. This will provide for better control over which trees are removed than simply a narrative description. This paint will be placed on the side away from the trail so that it is not easily seen from the trail.

Ponderosa pine and Gambel oak will not be treated within the trail corridors in Unit 1G.

Hand thinning with chain saws will involve cutting boles at 4" maximum stump heights, hand-dragging the trees and slash about 40 feet away from the trail. Slash will be disposed of by piling and burning.

Minimize changes to the existing trail network on Animas City Mountain. Impacted trails will be restored to a condition similar to what it was prior to project implementation.

Design Criteria for Unit 2:

This 27-acre area is located near CR 204 and borders the new Dalla Mountain Park. It is characterized by large boulders scattered throughout the area along with Gambel oak and small amounts of ponderosa pine, piñon pine and juniper trees. Because of the amount of rock here, utilization of large equipment is not practical. Some selective hand-thinning of Gambel oak and juniper trees will be conducted with hand crews.

The recreational bouldering areas will be identified as a separate treatment area, to include all bouldering sites and a 50 foot buffer around each site. Within this buffer area the following treatment may occur:

- Remove juniper 6" DRC and smaller unless they are identified by recreation staff as an important site attribute.
- Remove small amounts of dead oak limited to entirely dead stems. Number of stems removed is limited to meet Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class II: *Change visible but does not attract attention.*
- All cut material will be removed for disposal outside of the bouldering area.

Treatments in the remainder of the unit will remove juniper and Gambel oak ladder fuels from beneath the remaining yellowbark pine, and the largest and/or best of the other age classes, with the objective of trying to protect some of the most important pine in the stand in the event of a wildfire. The majority of junipers that have become established since European settlement will be removed. The continuity of the dense Gambel oak understory will be broken up, where possible, concentrating treatments in areas of smaller material and expanding upon existing openings. No more than 50% of existing oak cover will be treated. Slash from vegetative treatments will either be hand piled and burned or hand fed into a chipper with chips spread evenly across the ground.

Design Criteria for Unit 3:

This approximately 73-acre area is located above CR 204 east of the Sailing Hawks subdivision. The dominant vegetation here is ponderosa pine and Gambel oak with a small amount of juniper, aspen and other mixed mountain brush species. The site has numerous large, pre-settlement ponderosa pine trees with a few areas of thick second growth pine intermixed. Because of the number of large rocks on the site and difficulty with access, larger machinery will not be an option here. Hand-thinning with chainsaws of selected trees and brush with a slash treatment of piling/burning, chipping or lop and scatter will be utilized. For the most part, this area has a very desirable vegetative structure both ecologically and from a fuel hazard standpoint. Any work that will be done here will be of low intensity and will be done to enhance the more natural conditions that already exist.

The treatment prescription will be accomplished through thinning of the small trees in the understory to reduce the threat of extensive torching and passive crown fire in the event of a wildfire. The resulting slash will be chipped or piled for burning. Treatment will concentrate on removal of post settlement trees in excess of those needed to provide adequate replacement trees for the existing pre-settlement yellowbark trees, and to provide for age and size class diversity. Treatment of Gambel oak and juniper will concentrate on removal of ladder fuels and reduction of shrub layer height and continuity.

RATIONALE: This action will have long-term benefits of protecting natural resources and adjacent private property, which will outweigh any short-term negative impacts.

Potential negative impacts are addressed through the implementation of Design Criteria, which minimize impacts to visuals, noise, recreation, wildlife, watershed, and cultural resources.

This decision responds to initial public concerns by eliminating re-construction of the main trail which accesses the top of the mountain. In order to accomplish this, the decision also includes provision for the possible use of a helicopter to sling equipment and supplies to the mountain.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT: The public has been involved in the planning process since scoping began in early 2007. Several public meetings and field trips were held during May and June, 2007. The scoping period was extended due to the amount of public interest; scoping responses were received from about 70 sources. A pre-decisional draft EA was released for a public comment period in August and September, 2008, and an open house was held during this time. About seven public comments were received, along with extensive exposure in the press. At this point in time, the BLM put the project on hold while they explored alternative access routes and implementation options. A second version of the Pre-Decisional EA was released for a second public comment period in April, 2010; this version of the EA altered the preferred alternative to address the primary public concern regarding impacts to the main trail. No public comments were received during this second comment period.

COMPLIANCE WITH LAWS, REGULATION, AND POLICY: This decision is in compliance with implementation of the San Juan/San Miguel Resource Management Plan (1985).

This decision is in compliance with other major laws to minimize environmental impacts to public lands, including: Endangered Species Act of 1973 (P.L. 94-325); Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, as amended (16 U.S.C. 703-712); Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1948 (Clean Water Act), as amended (33 U.S.C. Chap. 26); Clean Air Act of 1963, as amended (P.L. 88-206); Federal Noxious Weed Act of 1974, as amended (P.L. 93-629, 7 U.S.C. 2801 *et seq*); National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended (P.L. 89-665); Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act of 1974 (P.L. 86-253); Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979, as amended (P.L. 96-95); and Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-601).

APPEAL OPPORTUNTIES:
Within 30 days of this decision, you have the right of appeal to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations at 43CFR 4.400. An appeal must be filed in writing, with the Field Office Manager, Columbine Public Lands Office, 367 S. Pearl Street, PO Box 439, Bayfield, CO 81122. Appeal and stay procedures are outlined on BLM form CO-050-1840-191.

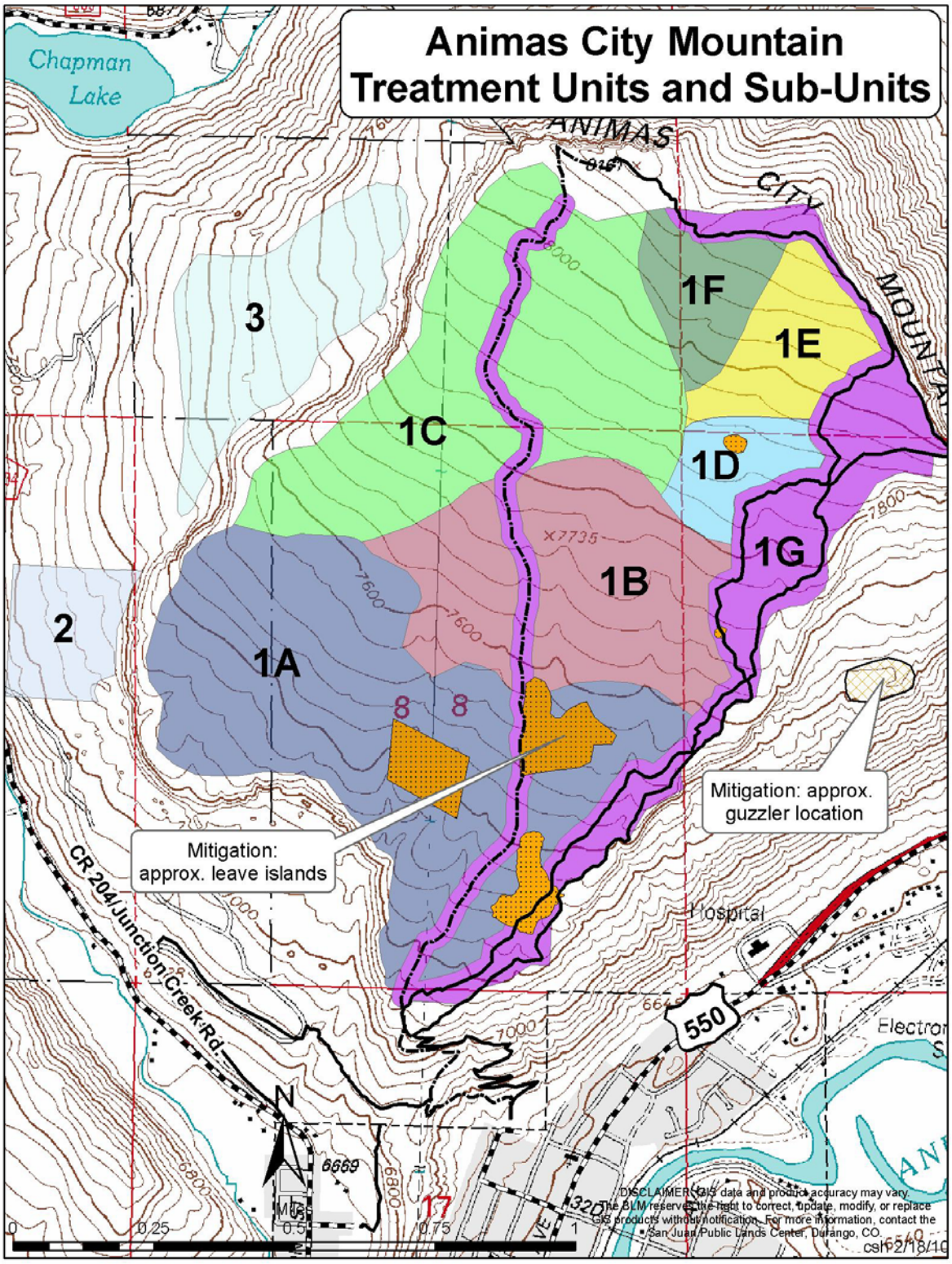
Implementation Date
Pursuant to 36 CFR 4.21, if no appeal is filed within the 30 day time period, implementation of this decision may occur immediately at the close of the appeal-filing period. If an appeal is received along with a request for stay of decision, the decision does not go into effect for an addition 45 days, or until the Office of Hearings and Appeals denies the petition, whichever is first.

Communications received in response to this notice, including personal identifying information, will be considered part of the public record for this proposed action and will be available for public inspection.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:

/s/ Matt Janowiak June 7, 2010

MATT JANOWIAK Date
District Ranger/Field Office Manager


Animas City Mountain
Treatment Units and Sub-Units
Chapman Lake
ANIMAS
CITY
MOUNTA
3
1F
1E
1C
1D
1G
1B
2
1A
8
8
Mitigation: approx. guzzler location
Mitigation: approx. leave islands
CR 204/Junction Creek Rd
Hospital
550
N
6669
17
320
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