

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management**

**Environmental Assessment
for the Pine Ridge Fire Emergency Closure**

Grand Junction Field Office
2815 H Road
Grand Junction, Colorado 81506

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.1 IDENTIFYING INFORMATION

BACKGROUND: The Pine Ridge Fire started on BLM lands approximately 13 miles East of Grand Junction along the Colorado River on June 27, 2012. These public lands are administered by the Northwest District, Grand Junction Field Office. The fire burned approximately 14,000 acres. Topography of the area in which the fire occurred is defined by four major canyons that can be described as steep rocky cliffs, between the major canyons are large ridge tops with slight to moderate slopes. The area receives 8-10 inches of precipitation annually on average. The fire predominately burned through foothill juniper, salt desert overflow, rolling loam, alkaline slope, piñon/juniper and mountain piñon range sites with small inclusions of riverbottom, deep loam and salt flat range sites. The primary vegetation burned in these various range sites included piñon pine, juniper, Wyoming and Basin big sagebrush, mixed perennial native grasses along with areas of cheat grass and other exotic species. Much of the soils in the burned area have very high to high run-off potential and consist primarily of the Redcreek-Rentsac complex; Travessilla-Rock outcrop complex; Torrithorents, warm-Rock outcrop complex; Barx loam; Bunkwater very fine sandy loam; and cameo fine sandy loam.

With existing drought conditions, low relative humidity, and strong winds the fire burned with high intensity, and had rapid rates of spread with its largest progression occurring on June 28th when the fire made a run of approximately 10,000 acres. The affected area experienced moderate fire severity with isolated pockets of high severity. During the fire I-70 as well as the Union Pacific railroad was closed due to safety concerns caused by the fire. The Pine Ridge fire burned large portions of vegetation within the perimeter, causing high amounts of plant mortality, leaving behind large areas of bare ground in highly erodible soils (see attachment: Soil Survey Map). Much of the burned area had cheat grass before the fire which puts the area at risk for a major expansion of cheatgrass post fire due to the loss of native perennial plants. A colonization of cheatgrass throughout the burned area would increase the likelihood of a future fire and put the railroad, I-70, multiple urban areas and endangered or sensitive species' habitat at an increased risk if native plants are not reestablished.

Because of topography in the burned area and the threat of large amounts of overland flow moving ash, sediment and debris during rain events down to the Colorado River, there is concern that the Union Pacific Railroad and municipal and irrigation water supplies will be damaged by high flow events. The railroad crosses the four canyons impacted by the fire and both freight and Amtrak trains use the route heavily. The railroad trestles could fail or the railroad tracks could get inundated and impassible if excessive amounts of water, sediment and debris flowed down the canyons. Also of concern is the availability of water to the community of Clifton, which pulls its municipal water supply directly from the river, and multiple irrigation districts with intakes directly downriver from the fire. The Ute Water District also has a water right on the Colorado River for municipal supply that is not regularly used but in dry years may potentially be used. On July 7, 2012, three days after fire containment, a storm occurred over the fire perimeter causing soil loss and overland flow. Ash, sediment and debris from the fire reached the Colorado River. The storm caused an increase in sediment loading in the river downstream of the

fire. Following the storm, the Clifton Water Facility was unable to treat their customer's water as the sediment load exceeded the water district's capabilities. Sediment, ash and debris flowing out to the river from the burned area could cause major safety issues as well as financial and logistical strains on the railroad and municipal and irrigation water supplies in the area impacted by the fire.

On July 11th 2012, the BLM issued an emergency closure order, closing the fire perimeter to public use. This action was taken in accordance with DOI and BLM NEPA guidance for emergency actions. The GJFO has contacted WO-210 who has contacted OEPC to discuss alternative arrangements for the closure to this point. This Proposed Action in this EA will analyze issuing a Federal Register Notice to formalize the closure under 43 CFR 8364.1. When complete, this EA will eliminate the need for alternative arrangements for NEPA for this closure.

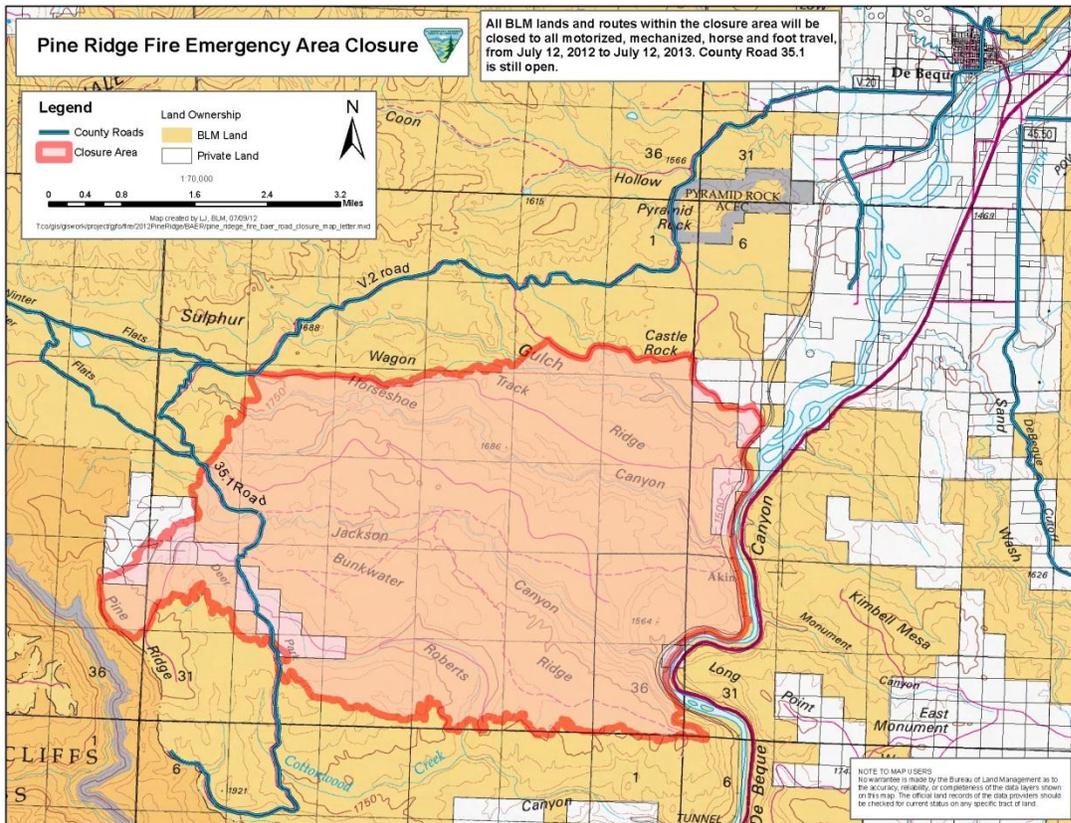
PROJECT NAME: Pine Ridge Fire Emergency Closure

PLANNING UNIT: Grand Junction Field Office

1.2 PROJECT LOCATION AND LEGAL DESCRIPTION

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: 6th Principal Meridian, Township 9 South, Range 97 West, Sections 18, 19 and 30, 6th Principal Meridian, Township 9 South, Range 98 West, Sections 13-36, 6th Principal Meridian, Township 9 South, Range 99 West, Sections 25 and 36, 6th Principal Meridian, Township 10 South, Range 98 West, Sections 1-3.

The boundaries of the affected public lands are located at: Northern boundary located at BLM Road 7729A, Western boundary located approximately 8 miles west of DeBeque, Colorado, Eastern boundary located at Interstate 70 and the Colorado River, Southern boundary located at Cottonwood Creek.



1.3 PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose is to ensure emergency stabilization efforts are completed safely and successfully. The closure is needed to ensure public safety, land health, and resource integrity during emergency stabilization efforts.

1.4 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1.4.1 Public Scoping: Scoping, by posting this project on the Grand Junction Field Office NEPA website, was used by the BLM to invite public involvement. A news release was issued on July 10, 2012. A public meeting was held in DeBeque on July 11th to discuss the closure. Several individuals expressed concern that their recreational access would be impacted.

The BLM has also discussed the closure with other agencies such as U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), and Mesa County Sheriff’s Office. Of those agencies, only CPW expressed concern because recreational hunting access would be limited by the closure.

1.4.2 Internal Scoping: Maps of the closure and description of the proposed action were distributed to the GJFO Interdisciplinary Team (IDT).

1.4.3 Issues Identified

Based on the internal and external scoping comments, the following issue was identified:

1. How will the closure affect recreational use?

This issue will be analyzed in the EA under the recreation section (3.5.2)

1.5 DECISION TO BE MADE

The BLM will decide whether to implement the proposed Pine Ridge Fire Emergency Closure project based on the analysis contained in this Environmental Assessment (EA). The BLM may choose to: a) implement the closure through publication of a Federal Register Notice as proposed, b) implement the closure with modifications/mitigation, or d) not implement the closure through publication of a Federal Register Notice at this time.

CHAPTER 2 - PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide information on the Proposed Action and Alternatives. This chapter will analyze effects of the proposed action on resources, focusing on the issue identified in scoping.

2.2 ALTERNATIVES ANALYZED IN DETAIL

2.2.1 Proposed Action

The BLM proposes to issue a Federal Register Notice for an emergency closure of the Pine Ridge fire area (approximately 14,000 acres) including the following information: Pursuant to 43 CFR 8364.1 BLM is giving notice that public lands near Grand Junction, Colorado as described below are closed to all entry, effective immediately, and remaining in effect until July 12, 2013. This closure affects public lands within the perimeter of the Pine Ridge Fire, administered by the BLM through the Grand Junction Field Office, and is specific to BLM lands and routes only. County Road 35 1/10 to include both sides of the Right-of-Way would remain open. Access to private lands within the Mustang Ranch would not be affected by this closure. Due to the severe intensity with which the Pine Ridge Fire burned, the natural resources in the area have suffered significant impact. This closure is necessary to ensure public safety, land health, and resource integrity during emergency stabilization efforts. Soil erosion prevention, re-seeding operations, and damage surveying programs are among the necessary activities required for successful stabilization and rehabilitation of the burn area.

Affected Area: The boundaries of the affected public lands are located at: Northern boundary located at BLM road 7729A, Western boundary located approximately 8 miles west of DeBeque, Colorado, Eastern boundary located at Interstate 70 and the Colorado River, Southern boundary located at Cottonwood Creek.

6th Principal Meridian, Township 9 South, Range 97 West, Sections 18, 19 and 30, 6th Principal Meridian, Township 9 South, Range 98 West, Sections 13-36, 6th Principal Meridian, Township

9 South, Range 99 West, Sections 25 and 36, 6th Principal Meridian, Township 10 South, Range 98 West, Sections 1-3. BLM lands within these sections are closed.

Prohibitions:

1. You must not enter the described closure areas by any means of transportation, to include foot traffic.

Supplemental Information: Under 43 CFR 8364, the following are exempt from the provisions of this order:

- a. Any Federal, State or local officer, or member of an organized rescue or fire fighting force engaged in fire, emergency, or law enforcement activities, or public utility or Railroad employees engaged in emergency repairs;
- b. BLM employees, contractors, or agents engaged in official duties;
- c. Individuals operating within the scope of their official and legitimate governmental duties:

Exceptions Request: Authorized permittees and/or private landowners may submit a Written request to the Grand Junction Field Office Manager for consideration. If an exception is granted, permitted party must carry Written approval signed by the BLM Authorized Officer, Grand Junction Field Office when entering the closure area.

Addresses: Additional maps of the closure area may be obtained from the Grand Junction Field Office located at 2815 H Road, Grand Junction, Colorado 81506, Phone 970-244-3000, or on the web at <http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/fo/gjfo.html>. The areas affected by this closure order will be posted with appropriate regulatory signs and/or physical barriers.

2.2.2 No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the BLM would not issue a Federal Register Notice, and would rescind the closure order that has been issued. Access to the fire area would not be limited.

2.4 PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW: The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3):

January 1987 Grand Junction RMP/ROD

2-20 Recreation Resource Management Objective - To protect resources, meet legal requirements for visitor health and safety, and mitigate resource user conflicts.

This closure is necessary to protect resources and visitor safety.

2-22 Off Road Vehicle Management - Rationale - Much of the resource area was designated limited to existing roads to stop indiscriminate cross-country vehicle travel that typically damages range values, wildlife habitat, scenic values, cultural values, forestry values, recreational opportunities for other users, sensitive plant and animal habitat, soils, and watershed values. The land designated open to unrestricted vehicle use, including cross-country travel, was left open because vehicle use does not conflict significantly with other uses on this land.

This area was left open in the RMP, but because indiscriminate off road travel would conflict with other resources during fire rehabilitation, a temporary closure is consistent with the intent of the RMP

2-38 Emphasis Area CC – Transportation- Close roads that no longer serve their primary purpose and that have relatively little value to multiple use management to protect wildlife. (The highest priority for closure will be roads in critical areas having a good chance of success in closure.)

During emergency rehabilitation, the roads have relatively little value to multiple use management and closure will help rehabilitate wildlife habitat.

2-38 Emphasis Area CC - Fire -Manage portions of this emphasis area ...(2) to minimize potential soil erosion following severe wildfires on steep slopes, protect tall conifers, cultural resource structures.

This closure is necessary to minimize soil erosion and protect cultural resources

2.5 LAND HEALTH STANDARDS

In January 1997, the Colorado State Office of the BLM approved the Standards for Public Land Health and amended all RMPs in the State. Standards describe the conditions needed to sustain public land health and apply to all uses of public lands.

Standard 1: Upland soils exhibit infiltration and permeability rates that are appropriate to soil type, climate, land form, and geologic processes.

Standard 2: Riparian systems associated with both running and standing water function properly and have the ability to recover from major disturbance such as fire, severe grazing, or 100-year floods.

Standard 3: Healthy, productive plant and animal communities of native and other desirable species are maintained at viable population levels commensurate with the species and habitat's potential.

Standard 4: Special status, threatened and endangered species (federal and state), and other plants and animals officially designated by the BLM, and their habitats are maintained or enhanced by sustaining healthy, native plant and animal communities.

Standard 5: The water quality of all water bodies, including ground water where applicable, located on or influenced by BLM lands will achieve or exceed the Water Quality Standards established by the State of Colorado.

Because standards exist for each of these five categories, a finding must be made for each of them in an environmental analysis. These findings are located in Chapter 3 of this document.

CHAPTER 3 - AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND EFFECTS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This section provides a description of the human and natural environmental resources that could be affected by the Proposed Action and presents comparative analyses of the direct, indirect and cumulative effects on the affected environment stemming from the implementation of the actions under the Proposed Action and other alternatives analyzed.

This EA draws upon information compiled in the Grand Junction Resource Area RMP (BLM 1987)

An interdisciplinary Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) team consisting mostly of local resources was put together on July 9, 2012 to advise on rehabilitation efforts and to write the final Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation (ESR) Plan. The initial ESR Plan was submitted on July 10, 2012.

On July 11th 2012, the BLM issued an emergency closure order, closing the fire perimeter to public use. This action was taken in accordance with DOI and BLM NEPA guidance for emergency actions. The GJFO has contacted Washington Office-210 who has contacted the Office of Environmental Policy and Compliance (OEPC) to discuss alternative arrangements for the closure to this point. The Proposed Action in this EA will analyze issuing a Federal Register Notice to formalize the closure under 43 CFR 8364.1. When complete, this EA would eliminate the need for alternative arrangements for NEPA for this closure.

3.1.1 Elements Not Affected

The following elements, identified as not being present or not affected will not be brought forward for additional analysis:

Air Quality and Climate Change – the closure would not affect air quality except that dust from vehicles will not occur as a result of closure.

Rangeland Management/Livestock grazing – This closure would not affect livestock grazing, however the area is also closed to livestock grazing for a minimum of two years depending on monitoring. The effects of closing burned areas to grazing were analyzed in the Normal Fire Year Rehabilitation Plan and Environmental Assessment (CO-130-2005-79-EA) June, 2005

Farmlands, Prime and Unique – There are no prime and unique farmlands near the closure area

Wild and Scenic Rivers – The closure area is adjacent to sections of the Colorado River identified as eligible for inclusion into the NWSRS, however the closure would not impact the river segments.

Wilderness and WSAs– there are no Wilderness or WSAs affected. The Little Bookcliffs WSA is adjacent but is unaffected by the closure because it is not easily accessible to displaced recreationists

Geologic, Paleontological and Mineral Resources – are not affected by closing public land

Fire and Fuels - are not affected by closing public land

Visual Resource - are not affected by closing public land

Hazardous Wastes - are not affected by closing public land

Land Tenure, Rights of Way and other Uses – The closure does not affect these uses, users can get an exception to the closure.

Water Quality – The closure would not affect water, except that it is designed to aid in rehabilitation and the recovery of land health in order to protect water quality

Wildlife, Vegetation, Wetlands/Riparian, Threatened and Endangered Species – The closure does not affect these resources except that it may aid in the recovery of these resources within the action area

Tribal and Native American Religious Concerns – Tribal concerns are not impacted by the closure, tribal members can get a waiver to the closure . Protection of resources important to the tribes is analyzed under the cultural resources section.

3.1.2 Past, Present, Reasonably Foreseeable Actions

NEPA requires federal agencies to consider the cumulative effects of proposals under their review. Cumulative effects are defined in the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations 40 CFR §1508.7 as “...the impact on the environment that results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions regardless of what agency...or person undertakes such other actions.” The CEQ states that the “cumulative effects analyses should be conducted on the scale of human communities, landscapes, watersheds, or airsheds” using the concept of “project impact zone” or more simply put, the area that might be affected by the proposed action. The area that may be affected by this project includes the Pine Ridge Fire area and surrounding lands used for recreation. To assess past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions that may occur within the affected area a review of GJFO NEPA log and our field office GIS data was completed. The following list includes all past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions known to the BLM that may occur within the affected area:

- Natural Gas exploration, including pipelines, roads, pads, and wells.
- Railroad
- Residential and agricultural development
- Livestock Grazing
- Recreation – OHV, foot, horse, hunting
- Travel/transportation, county and BLM roads
- Wildland Fire – the Pine Ridge Fire and other past fires
- Vegetation treatments, rollerchopping, chaining, plow/seeding, herbicides

- Stock pond and erosion control dam construction
- Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation

3.2 PHYSICAL RESOURCES

3.2.1 Soils (includes a finding on Standard 1)

Current Conditions: The affected area experienced moderate fire severity with isolated pockets of high severity. The Pine Ridge fire burned large portions of vegetation within the perimeter, causing high amounts of plant mortality, leaving behind large areas of bare ground in highly erodible soils. Soils in the closure area are now very exposed and at risk for erosion. Land health assessment prior to the fire is no longer valid.

No Action

Direct and Indirect Effects: Under No action, use by recreationists, especially those travelling cross country on OHVs could accelerate erosion. This may impact recovery of Land Health standard 1.

Cumulative Effects: Past Present and reasonably foreseeable actions in combination with No Action would likely slightly limit soil Land Health standards from being met in the affected area.

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Effects: Under the proposed action, the area would be closed, which would not allow OHV use to accelerate erosion, land health may recover faster than under No Action. Areas surrounding the burn area may receive more use as a result of the closure, however the use would likely be dispersed and therefore no significant effects are expected in any one area.

Cumulative Effects: Past Present and reasonably foreseeable actions in combination with No Action would likely allow progression toward Land Health standards in the affected area.

3.3 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

3.3.1 Invasive, Non-native Species

Current Conditions: The majority of the burn site (and closure area) has had all vegetation removed by the fire, making it susceptible new invasions of weedy species.

No Action

Direct and Indirect Effects: Under No Action, recreational use of the area could introduce weed seeds and limit the successfulness of reestablishment of native species, A colonization of cheatgrass throughout the burned area would increase the likelihood of a

future fire and put the railroad, I-70, multiple urban areas and endangered or sensitive species' habitat at an increased risk if native plants are not reestablished.

Cumulative Effects: No action, in combination with the past present and reasonably foreseeable affects may cause an increase in invasive species in the project area leading to increased fire return intervals.

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Effects: Under the proposed action, treatments may be more successful because they would be less affected by recreational travel. This would limit the invasion of invasive species.

Cumulative Effects: The proposed action may serve to help the fire rehabilitation effort succeed in stemming invasion of noxious weeds caused by the past present, and reasonably foreseeable actions.

3.4 HERITAGE RESOURCES AND HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

3.4.1 Cultural Resources

Current Conditions: The burned area is rich in cultural resources. Approximately twenty-two percent of the closure area has had cultural surveys that have recorded and evaluated isolated finds and archaeological sites that exist within the fire perimeter. The area is known for sites attributed to historic Ute occupation and is still very important to the present day Ute Indian Tribe. Cultural resources in the burned area are currently exposed and vulnerable to erosion or vandalism (unauthorized collection) until vegetation is reestablished.

No Action

Direct and Indirect Effects: With no closure, the public would be allowed to access exposed cultural resources. This would likely result in vandalism of sites. OHV use in the fire area may also limit successfulness of rehabilitation efforts and allow for invasion of cheatgrass. An invasion of cheatgrass post fire would cause an increase of fire frequency in the area and make the cultural resources that have not been burned over more vulnerable to future damage.

Cumulative Effects: No closure, in combination with the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions may allow for unevaluated destruction of cultural resources.

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Effects: The closure is expected protect many cultural resources from vandalism (unauthorized collection) and damage that can occur from off-road vehicle travel. Off-road vehicle travel can also accelerate erosion and can further

damage unrecorded cultural resources. In addition, it is designed to aid in recovery of native vegetation to avoid cheatgrass infestations that would increase fire frequency. Therefore under the proposed closure, future damage to cultural resources is less likely.

Cumulative Effects: While the effects of past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions on cultural resources would remain, the closure would help to limit further destruction of cultural resources.

3.4.2 Social, Economic, Environmental Justice

Current Conditions: The social effects of the closure are limited to impacts to recreationists. This is analyzed under the Recreation section. The requirements for environmental justice review were established by Executive Order 12898 (February 11, 1994). That order declared that each federal agency is to identify “disproportionately high and adverse human health or environment effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low income populations.”

According to Census 2010, the only minority population of note in the impact area is the Hispanic community of Mesa County. Persons describing themselves as Hispanic or Latino represented 13.3 percent of the population, considerably less than the Colorado state figure for the same group (20.7 percent). Blacks, American Indians, Asians and Pacific Islanders each accounted for around 1 percent of the population, below the comparable state figure in all cases. The census counted 11.8 percent of the Mesa County population as living in families with incomes below the poverty line, compared to 12.6 percent for the entire state.

Both minority and low income populations are dispersed throughout the county. Therefore, no minority or low-income populations would suffer disproportionately high and adverse effects as a result of implementation of the Proposed Action.

No Action

Under No action, there would be no closure, so there would be no economic effects.

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Effects: under the proposed closure, there may be a reduction on recreation use near DeBeque. This could limit economic contributions to the local economy from recreationists coming from outside the area. These impacts are expected to be very minor, since the vast majority of the area remains open to recreation use, therefore, no one would suffer significant adverse effects as a result of implementation of the Proposed Action.

Cumulative Effects: Past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions have allowed for some economic contribution from recreation to the local economy. In combination with the proposed closure, the opportunities for those contributions would still exist, but would be slightly less.

3.4.3 Transportation/Access

Current Conditions: Several county roads and BLM routes exist in the closure area. The area is open to cross country travel in the current Resource management plan.

No Action

Under no action, travel would not be impacted because there would be no closure.

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Effects: Under the proposed closure, travel and transportation would be impacted. All roads would be closed except county road 35 1/10. Private land owners and federal, state and local agencies conducting business would continue to have access. Fluid minerals lessees, and other people with valid BLM permits could be granted access if requested. However they would be required to reduce their use to the minimum necessary, and get approval of that in writing, and carry their waiver paper when in the area.

Recreationists would be the most impacted by access issues. These impacts are analyzed in the Recreation section of this EA.

Cumulative Effects: The closure, in combination with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions would limit access in a small area of the field office. The effects of this limitation are minimized by the abundant access to public lands in the surrounding area.

3.4.4 Public Health and Safety

Current Conditions: Portions of the fire area are unsafe for public use. Flash flooding and mud slides are possible during rain events. Firefighters have reported being trapped in the burned area by storms making roads impassable. Road washouts have become common. Burned trees can fall on people.

No Action

Under no action, the public could be endangered by flash floods, mud slides, falling trees, or stranded on public lands by washed out roads

Cumulative Effects: Lack of a closure, in combination with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions could allow for unsafe use of public lands in the field office.

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Effects: Under the proposed closure, these safety concerns would be minimized because the public would not have access to the burned area until rehabilitation actions have taken place.

Cumulative Effects: The closure, in combination with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions allow for safe use of public lands in the field office.

3.5 LAND RESOURCES

3.5.1 Recreation

Current Conditions: The fire area has been used for OHV and mountain bike riding, horseback use and hunting. The closure area is not within any designated recreation management areas and it contains no developed recreation sites. The closure area is within Colorado Parks and Wildlife Game Management Unit 31 which has been popular for big game and mountain lion hunting. There are no commercial big game guides/outfitters holding Special Recreation Permits (SRP) in the closure area. The following four mountain lion hunting outfitters/guides hold SRPs with operating areas that overlap the burned area: Alamo Outfitters, Backcountry Outfitters, Cat Track Outfitters, and Mark Davies Outfitters.

No Action

Direct and Indirect Effects: Under No Action, these uses could continue to occur. Use would likely be less than pre-fire conditions because the area would be less attractive to recreationists due to changes in the landscape setting character resulting from the fire.

Cumulative Effects: Past present and reasonably foreseeable actions in the area make the area a semi-popular recreation area; after rehabilitation, it will likely be a good hunting area and use will continue.

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Effects: Under the proposed closure, recreation use would not be allowed. During the closure, recreationists who have historically used the area, or recreationists who would have used the area, would not be able to experience those recreation activities and settings, or experience the beneficial outcomes of those experiences. The direct impact of the fire would be short-term (one year) but the impact of the fire itself will have a longer term effect on recreation opportunities and experiences in the burned area. In the long term, recreation opportunities would likely benefit from the closure since restoration efforts would be more efficient and effective if use is limited during the initial restoration efforts. Recreational use displaced by the closure would likely result in slight increases in recreational use of adjacent public lands. Permitted mountain lion guides/outfitters would be directly affected by the closure if they were in pursuit of a lion that entered the closed area. Post-use permit reports indicate that the burned area is infrequently used by BLM permitted outfitters. Attempts to contact SRP holders for specific information regarding the effects of this closure to their operations were unsuccessful.

Cumulative Effects: Past present and reasonably foreseeable actions in the area make the area a semi popular recreation area; after rehabilitation, it will likely be a good

hunting area and use will continue. Temporary closure would not have a long term effect on recreation use in combination with the other actions in the area.

3.5.2 Special Designations (ACECs, SMAs etc.)

Current Conditions: The closure area is adjacent to the Pyramid Rock ACEC, South Shale Ridge proposed ACEC and Colorado River Riparian proposed ACEC.

No Action

Direct and Indirect Effects: Under No Action, some additional recreational use is expected to occur in areas surrounding the burned area, including in the South Shale Ridge and Pyramid Rock areas because the burned area will be less attractive to recreationists. These impacts are expected to be well dispersed throughout the DeBeque area, and will likely have little impact on the ACEC's relevant and important values. No additional use is expected within the Pyramid Rock area because it is fenced from OHV use and does not attract much foot travel. No additional use is expected in the Colorado River because it is mostly inaccessible to public use except by boat.

Cumulative Effects: No action, when combined with the past present and reasonably foreseeable actions, will likely result in immeasurable increases in impacts to identified relevant and important values.

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Effects: Under the proposed closure action, some additional recreational use is expected to occur in areas surrounding the burned area, including in the South Shale Ridge and Pyramid Rock areas because the burned area will be unavailable to recreationists. These impacts are expected to be well dispersed throughout the DeBeque area, and will likely have little impact on the ACEC's relevant and important values. No additional use is expected within the Pyramid Rock area because it is fenced from OHV use and does not attract much foot travel. No additional use is expected in the Colorado River because it is mostly inaccessible to public use except by boat.

Cumulative Effects: The closure, when combined with the past present and reasonably foreseeable actions, will likely result in immeasurable increases in impacts to identified relevant and important values.

3.5.3 Land with Wilderness Characteristics

Current Conditions: The closure area is adjacent to the South Shale Ridge area found to have wilderness characteristics.

No Action

Direct and Indirect Effects: Under No Action, some additional recreational use is expected to occur in areas surrounding the burned area, including in the South Shale Ridge because the burned area will be less attractive to recreationists. These impacts are

expected to be well dispersed throughout the DeBeque area, and will likely have little impact on the wilderness characteristics.

Cumulative Effects: No action, when combined with the past present and reasonably foreseeable actions, will likely result in minimal increases in impacts to identified wilderness characteristics.

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Effects: Under the proposed closure action, some additional recreational use is expected to occur in areas surrounding the burned area, including in the South Shale Ridge area because the burned area will be unavailable to recreationists. These impacts are expected to be well dispersed throughout the DeBeque area, and will likely have little impact on the wilderness characteristics.

Cumulative Effects: The closure, when combined with the past present and reasonably foreseeable actions, will likely result in minimal increases in impacts to wilderness characteristics.

3.5.8 Wild Horse and Burro

Current Conditions: The closure area is adjacent to the Little Bookcliffs wild horse range.

No Action

Direct and Indirect Effects: Under No Action, some additional recreational use is expected to occur in areas surrounding the burned area, because the burned area will be less attractive to recreationists. These impacts are expected to be well dispersed throughout the DeBeque area, and will likely have little impact on the Wild Horse Range.

Cumulative Effects: No action, when combined with the past present and reasonably foreseeable actions, will likely result in immeasurable increases in impacts to wild horse range.

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Effects: Under the proposed closure action, some additional recreational use is expected to occur in areas surrounding the burned area because the burned area will be unavailable to recreationists. These impacts are expected to be well dispersed throughout the DeBeque area, and will likely have little impact on the horse range.

Cumulative Effects: The closure, when combined with the past present and reasonably foreseeable actions, will likely result in immeasurable increases in impacts to wild horse range.

CHAPTER 4 - CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

4.1 LIST OF PREPARERS AND PARTICIPANTS

INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW

NAME	TITLE	AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY
Christina Stark	Riparian Coordinator/Project Manager	Riparian and Wetlands
Julia Christiansen	Natural Resource Specialist	Surface Management and Permitting for Oil & Gas
Aline LaForge	Archaeologist	Cultural Resources, Native American Religious Concerns
Michelle Bailey Chris Pipkin	Outdoor Recreation Supervisor Outdoor Recreation Planner	Access, Transportation, Recreation, VRM, Wilderness, ACECs
Jacob Martin	Range Management Specialist	Range, Forestry
Jim Dollerschell	Range Management Specialist	Range, Wild Horse & Burro Act
David Scott Gerwe	Geologist	Geology, Paleontology
Alan Kraus	Hazardous Materials Specialist	Hazardous Materials
Robin Lacy	Realty Specialist	Land Tenure/Status, Realty Authorizations
Heidi Plank	Wildlife Biologist	T&E Species, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Terrestrial & Aquatic Wildlife
Anna Lincoln	Ecologist	Land Health Assessment, Range Ecology, Special Status Plant Species
Collin Ewing	Environmental Coordinator	Environmental Justice, Prime & Unique Farmlands, Environmental Coordinator
Nate Dieterich	Hydrologist	Soils, Air Quality, Water Quality, Hydrology, Water Rights
Mark Taber	Range Management Specialist	Weed Coordinator, Invasive, Non-Native Species
Lathan Johnson	Fire Ecologist Natural Resource Specialist	Fire Ecology, Fuels Management

4.2 TRIBES, INDIVIDUALS, ORGANIZATIONS, OR AGENCIES CONSULTED

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

U.S. Geological Survey

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Mesa County Sheriff's Office

Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation

Ute Mountain Ute

Southern Ute Tribe

State Historic Preservation Officer

CHAPTER 5 - REFERENCES

Bureau of Land Management (BLM). 1985. Draft Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement. Grand Junction Field Office. Grand Junction, Colorado.

Bureau of Land Management. 1987. Grand Junction Resource Area Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision. Grand Junction District. Grand Junction, Colorado.

Bureau of Land Management. 1988. H-1790-1 National Environmental Policy Handbook. Washington, D.C.

Bureau of Land Management. 2004. Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision for the Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area and Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness. Grand Junction Field Office. Grand Junction, Colorado.

**UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
GRAND JUNCTION FIELD OFFICE
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**Project Name
DOI-BLM-CO-130 2012-0048-EA**

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the attached environmental assessment, and considering the significance criteria in 40 CFR 1508.27, I have determined that the Proposed Action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. An environmental impact statement is therefore not required.

BACKGROUND

The Pine Ridge Fire started on BLM lands approximately 13 miles East of Grand Junction along the Colorado River on June 27, 2012. It burned approximately 14,000 acres of public lands administered by the Northwest District, Grand Junction Field Office.

With existing drought conditions, low relative humidity, and strong winds the fire burned with high intensity, and had rapid rates of spread with its largest progression occurring on June 28th when the fire made a run of approximately 10,000 acres. The affected area experienced moderate fire severity with isolated pockets of high severity. During the fire I-70 as well as the Union Pacific railroad was closed due to safety concerns caused by the fire. The Pine Ridge fire burned large portions of vegetation within the perimeter, causing high amounts of plant mortality, leaving behind large areas of bare ground in highly erodible soils(see attachment: Soil Survey Map). Much of the burned area had cheat grass before the fire which puts the area at risk for a major expansion of cheatgrass post fire due to the loss of native perennial plants. A colonization of cheatgrass throughout the burned area would increase the likelihood of a future fire and put the railroad, I-70, multiple urban areas and endangered or sensitive species' habitat at an increased risk if native plants are not reestablished.

On July 11th 2012, the BLM issued an emergency closure order, closing the fire perimeter to public use. This action was taken in accordance with DOI and BLM NEPA guidance for emergency actions. The GJFO has contacted WO-210 who has contacted OEPC to discuss alternative arrangements for the closure to this point. This Proposed Action in this EA will analyze issuing a Federal Register Notice to formalize the closure under 43 CFR 8364.1. When complete, this EA will eliminate the need for alternative arrangements for NEPA for this closure.

The Bureau of Land Management prepared an Environmental Assessment which analyzed the effects of an emergency closure of 14,000 acres near DeBeque, Colorado. The EA considered a range of alternatives from 14,000 to 0 acres.

Intensity

I have considered the potential intensity/severity of the impacts anticipated from the Pine Ridge Fire Emergency closure relative to each of the ten areas suggested for consideration by the CEQ. With regard to each:

1. *Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.* This project would likely have short term negative impacts to recreation and access; however these impacts are not significant. This project would have a long term net benefit for nearly every other resource managed in the area.

2. *The degree to which the proposed action affects public health and safety.* The proposed action is expected to improve public health and safety by not allowing the public in the burned area until rehabilitation actions have been completed.

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

There are no significant impacts to riparian vegetation, parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, or wild and scenic rivers within the project area. The closure is designed to avoid impacts to cultural and historic resources and municipal water supplies.

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

The impacts of a closure are generally well known and documented in the academic and practicing communities. Therefore the environmental effects are not likely to be controversial.

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

Closing public lands does not pose any unique or unknown risks.

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.*

This decision is like one of many that have previously been made and will continue to be made by BLM responsible officials regarding emergency closure of public lands. The decision is within the scope of the Resource Management Plan and is not expected to establish a precedent for future actions. The decision does not 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.*

There are no significant cumulative effects on the environment, either when combined with the effects created by past and concurrent projects, or when combined with the effects from natural changes taking place in the environment or from reasonably foreseeable future projects.

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. There would be no adverse impacts to the above resources. The project is designed to avoid impacts to cultural and historic 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 impacts are expected to endangered or threatened species or their designated critical habitats.

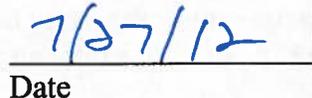
10. *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.* This decision complies with other Federal, State, or local laws and requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

On the basis of the information contained in the EA, and all other information available to me, it is my determination that: 1) the implementation of the Proposed Action or alternatives will not have significant environmental impacts beyond those already addressed in the "Grand Junction Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan," (January 1987) (2) the Proposed Action is in conformance with the Resource Management Plan; and (3) the Proposed Action does not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement or a supplement to the existing environmental impact statement is not necessary and will not be prepared.

This finding is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR '1508.27), both with regard to the context and to the intensity of the impacts described in the EA.





Date

Field Manager
Grand Junction Field Office

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
GRAND JUNCTION FIELD OFFICE

DECISION RECORD

Project Name

DOI-BLM-CO-130-2012-0048-EA

DECISION: It is my decision to issue a Federal Register Notice for an emergency closure of the Pine Ridge fire area (approximately 14,000 acres) as described in the EA.

Scoping was initiated by posting this project on the Grand Junction Field Office NEPA website, and used by the BLM to invite public involvement. A news release was issued July 10, 2012. A public meeting was held in DeBeque on July 11th to discuss the closure. Several individuals expressed concern that their recreational access would be impacted. This issue was analyzed in the EA.

The BLM has also discussed the closure with other agencies such as U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and Mesa County Sheriff's Office. Of those agencies, only CPW expressed concern because recreational hunting access would be limited by the closure. This issue was analyzed in the EA.

This office completed an Environmental Assessment and reached a Finding of No Significant Impact.

RATIONALE: This closure is necessary to ensure public safety, land health, and resource integrity during emergency stabilization efforts. Soil erosion prevention, re-seeding operations, and damage surveying programs are among the necessary activities required for successful stabilization and rehabilitation of the burn area.

MITIGATION MEASURES\MONITORING

No mitigation measures have been identified for this action.

PROTEST/APPEALS: This decision shall take effect immediately upon the date it is signed by the Authorized Officer, and shall remain in effect while any appeal is pending unless the Interior Board of Land Appeals issues a stay (43 CFR 2801.10(b)). Any appeal of this decision must follow the procedures set forth in 43 CFR Part 4. Within 30 days of the decision, a notice of appeal must be filed in the office of the Authorized Officer at Grand Junction Field Office, 2815 H Road, Grand Junction, Colorado, 81506. If a statement of reasons for the appeal is not included with the notice, it must be filed with the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of Hearings and Appeals, U.S. Department of the Interior, 801 North Quincy St., Suite 300, Arlington, VA 22203 within 30 days after the notice of appeal is filed with the Authorized Officer.

DATE:

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:

Catherine Reun
Grand Junction Field Manager

DATE SIGNED: 7/27/12

ATTACHMENTS: Closure Map

