Documentation of Land Use Plan Conformance and NEPA Adequacy (DNA)
U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management
Grand Junction Field Office, Colorado
Molina Habitat Treatments
DOI-BLM-CO-130-2012-0006-DNA

A. Purpose and Need:

Prescribed fire and mechanical treatments produce early seral stages needed to improve wildfire condition class and improve wildlife habitat. This vegetation treatments would also reduce hazardous fuels loading lessening the potential of catastrophic wildland fires that could impact adjacent private land.

Sagebrush habitats are vital for wintering mule deer and elk that rely on sagebrush during the winter as the snow depth increases and the availability of forbs and grasses decreases. Deer and elk also rely on migration corridors into their wintering areas that are uninhibited by dense vegetation and human-related developments and fences. Sagebrush is extensive in its range throughout the western U.S., however, sagebrush ecosystems have become degraded since livestock grazing and fire suppression were introduced during Euro-American settlement. Many areas throughout the region that contain critical winter habitat for mule deer and elk have been influenced over the past several decades by the encroachment and expansion of pinyon-juniper and Gamble oak vegetation into historic sagebrush and grassland ecosystems. Other issues have been the continued development of housing subdivisions and oil and gas activities which have caused further habitat loss and fragmentation of migration corridors.

The Molina Habitat Restoration Initiative (MHRI) is a partnership initiated by the Colorado Mule Deer Association and the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW), involving multiple partners from private, federal, state, non-profit, and corporate organizations. The project area encompasses private, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) lands. The project has been initiated to improve habitat conditions, using a variety of habitat treatment methods, throughout the project area, and attempt to draw deer and elk off of private ranch lands where they are impacting rancher's crops. This action is needed because many areas of sagebrush and grassland habitat in the project area have varying degrees of pinyon-juniper and encroachment and an expansion of dense Gambel oak occurring. Active removal of encroaching pinyon-juniper will help maintain open and healthy sagebrush shrublands that will be available and desirable for wildlife habitat. Removal of oakbrush in patches will provide migration corridors that allow wildlife to move into the area.

As many mountain shrub species mature they become less palatable to wildlife especially for big game species. These species often become very dense in late seral stages reducing their availability for big game species. Late seral stage vegetation is less valuable as critical wintering habitat for deer and elk that. Early seral stages will improve the ability of BLM lands to hold big game during the winter. Vegetation treatments that produce early seral stages on BLM lands should help to keep deer and elk off the adjacent private lands. Much of BLM owned lands within this area are dominated by late seral stages of pinyon/juniper and mountain shrub. Any grass/forb/shrub meadows within these areas are slowly decreasing in size as they are encroached upon by pinyon/juniper and mountain shrub vegetation types. This has resulted in

a decrease in the quantity and quality of winter range for both deer and elk. It is expected that this proposed action also would help reduce big game damage to adjacent lands by providing higher quality habitat on BLM lands.

As a result of fire suppression the age class structure of vegetation over the landscape has shifted toward the late successional stage. Historically, the area would have a variety of age classes in a mosaic pattern over the landscape. Each of these age classes would represent the period of time since the last disturbance. Each age class provides an important habitat niche for wildlife depending on species. Lack of disturbance has decreased the diversity of age classes. Current conditions on the landscape show a lack of early successional age classes.

B. Proposed Action:

The proposed action is to improve wildlife habitat and reduce hazardous fuels on public lands managed by the BLM. Both Prescribed fire and mechanical treatments would be used as a standalone, follow up, or maintenance tool. Mechanical treatments would involve use of a fecon mulcher in areas where slope and terrain would allow for machinery to work.

Prescribed burns would create mosaic openings of younger, less fire prone stands throughout the oak brush. Larger dead woody material on the ground would be consumed by the fire, live small diameter stemmed oakbrush will then sprout closer to the ground, which would make the browse more palatable and available to big game.

The Proposed Action would be implemented over the course of several years and has already begun on private lands within the project area. Treatments within the project area would consist of a mixture of mechanical, chemical, and prescribed burn treatments. Mechanical treatments include removing pinyon-juniper trees and oakbrush, while creating a mosaic pattern which maintains cover for deer and elk and restoration of ponds on private lands. Chemical treatment of invasive plant species would also occur in areas where non-native species are prevalent in accordance with the BLM approved weed management plan on BLM lands.

Mechanical treatments would be implemented by using a Fecon mulcher mounted on a 225 Link-belt track hoe or similar machinery (Figure 1). The Fecon mulcher was selected over the use of hydro-axe or rollerchop equipment based on its ability to work an area without much soil disturbance. The Fecon mulcher leaves behind mulch which facilitates the growth of new ground cover, by maintaining soil moisture and providing protection to establishing vegetation. Vegetation treatments would be completed in a mosaic pattern to more closely mimic natural habitat conditions and provide cover for wildlife (Figure 2). Areas to be treated under this DNA would be the Beehive area, north of the Canal, and the BLM lands adjacent to the Forest Service Nick Mountain burn (Figure 3). A total of 1330 acres will be authorized for treatment under this DNA. Cultural resource surveys are currently underway for a portion of that area. Any Culturally significant areas would be omitted from the treatment area. In addition areas with special status plant species will not be treated.

The primary objectives of the project are as follows:
- Improve the habitat for deer and elk habitat by creating early seral vegetation and increasing the diversity of age classes

-Reduce the hazardous fuel conditions on public lands to decrease the threat of catastrophic wildland fire moving from public land to private lands.

-Protect migratory birds during the nesting season by only implementing the proposed action between the dates of July 15 to May 15.

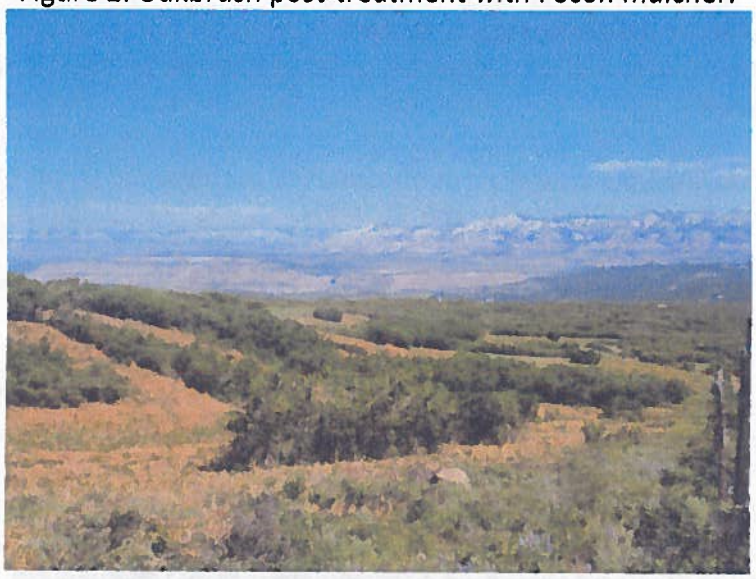
-Avoid impacting elk and mule deer wintering activities in winter concentration areas and severe winter range by restricting project activities from December 1 to May 1.

-Protect significant cultural properties by excluding them from treatment.

-Protect Special Status Plants by excluding occupied areas from treatment, or utilizing other avoidance measures to minimize impacts.

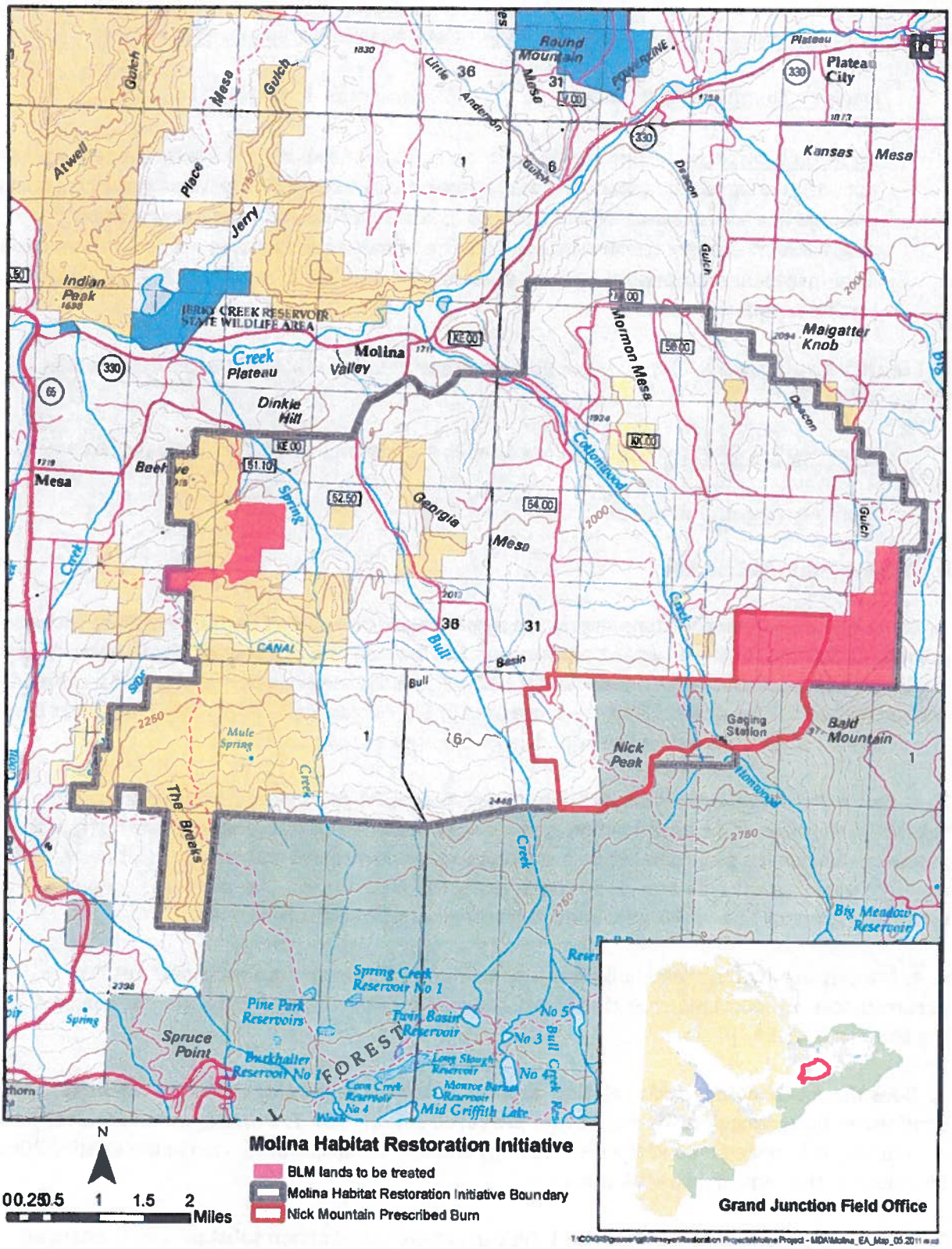
Figure 1. Photo of the Fecon mulcher mounted on a track hoe.

Figure 2. Oakbrush post-treatment with Fecon mulcher.



The MHRI also includes a prescribed burn on Nick Mountain on BLM, USFS, and private land. The environmental assessment for the prescribed burn has been completed for the USFS land. On BLM land, treatments within the Nick Mountain Prescribed Burn area could take place using prescribed fire or mechanical treatments, depending on timing, burning conditions, and site specific conditions. The BLM land east of the Nick Mountain Burn Unit and the Beehive area would be mechanically treated (See Figure 3). There is a small bench in the northwestern corner of the Nick Mountain Unit containing a stand of Dalmatian toadflax. This patch of toadflax has been treated in previous years (2002 and 2004) and currently supports a population of toadflax weevil, which has been keeping the toadflax contained and less viable. Treatments in that area would have to either be avoided, or done in close coordination with the Palisade Insectary who is monitoring the weevil activity in that area. Monitoring of vegetation before and after project treatment implementation would occur through coordination with the CSU Extension.

Figure 3: Project location



Land Use Plan (LUP) Conformance

LUP Name: Grand Junction Resource Area RMP Date Approved: January 1987

Decision Number/Page: Chapter 2, Page 42, Paragraph 1; WM-5-2-14, and FM-4-2-32

Decision Language: Under all alternatives, habitat of the major wildlife species would be actively managed using standard management practices; Wildlife Management: Actively manage the areas shown on Map 10 and listed in Table 11 placing management emphasis on the key species shown, and Fire Management: Assign levels to areas based upon protection of resource values present, and manage or suppress fires as prescribed by the assigned levels.

D. Identify applicable NEPA documents and other related documents that cover the proposed action.

Name of Document: Plateau Valley Area Fuels Treatment, CO-130-2005-038-EA

Date Approved: June 20th, 2005

E. NEPA Adequacy Criteria

1. Is the current proposed action largely the same action (or a part of the same action) that was previously analyzed? Is the current proposed action located at a site specifically analyzed in an existing document? The current proposed action will use the same type of mechanical treatments and prescribed fire treatments that were analyzed in the Plateau Valley Area Fuels Treatments EA. The proposed action falls within the boundary of the area analyzed in that EA.

2. Is the range of alternatives analyzed in the existing NEPA document(s) appropriate with respect to the current proposed action, given current environmental concerns, interests, and resource values? The proposed action area has the same environmental concerns, interests, and resource values as the area analyzed in the existing NEPA document. The proposed action falls within the range of alternatives provided in the original NEPA document.

3. Is the existing analysis valid in light of any new information or circumstances? Yes. No circumstances or information has changed that would result in impacts that were not analyzed in the existing 2005 EA.

4. Does the methodology and analytical approach used in the existing NEPA document(s) continue to be appropriate for the current proposed action? Yes. The area is within the analysis area for the referenced EA and the methodology and analytical approach used in the existing 2005 EA would be the same if a new EA was written.

5. Are the direct and indirect impacts of the current proposed action substantially unchanged from those identified in the existing NEPA document(s)? Does the existing NEPA document analyze site-specific impacts related to the current proposed action? Yes. The direct and indirect impacts of the proposed action are the same as those identified in the existing NEPA document,

because the proposed action is the same as the action in the preferred alternative of the referenced EA and the resources and resource concerns are the same.

6. Are the cumulative impacts that would result from implementation of the current proposed action substantially unchanged from those analyzed in the existing NEPA document(s) Yes. This action combined with the actions analyzed in the existing EA would contribute to landscape-scale improvements to wildlife habitat and hazardous fuels reduction . Cumulative impacts in the area are limited and would remain the same as those analyzed in the referenced EA.

7. Are the public involvement and interagency review associated with existing NEPA document(s) adequate for the current proposed action? This proposed action is consistent with the actions of the existing 2005 EA, in which scoping and a public meeting was held.

F. Interdisciplinary Analysis: Team members conducting or participating in the NEPA analysis and preparation of this worksheet.

Name	Title	Review Complete
Heidi Plank	Wildlife Biologist/Special Status Species	10/24/11
Anna Lincoln	Ecologist/Special Status Species	11/25/11
Alissa Leavitt-Reynolds	Archaeologist/ Cultural/ Heritage Resources Native American Religious Concerns	10/26/11
Nathan Dieterich	Hydrologist/ Soils	10/24/11

REMARKS:

Cultural Resources:
Affected Environment: A records search of the general project area, and a Class III field inventory of the Area of Potential Effect, as defined in the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), was conducted by JGMS Inc., a Colorado BLM permitted cultural resource contracting firm (reference GJFO CRIR 18511-01). Inventory did not occur in steep slopes areas or areas where vegetation cover was 100%. The project inventory and evaluation is in compliance with the NHPA, the Colorado State Protocol Agreement, and other federal law, regulation, policy, and guidelines regarding cultural resources.

Historic properties recommended as eligible or potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places will be avoided by incorporating the following mitigation in the proposed action: 1) as described in the guidelines for the proposed action; 2) included in timber areas left as part of the mosaic for wildlife habitat; 3) if fuel reduction parameters require the removal of trees within the boundary of eligible historic properties the trees will be hand cut and hand removed from the site area which will have a negligible disturbance to the surface and subsurface; and 4) no sites with architectural structures will be disturbed. Excluding sites that have wooden architectural features, (e.g. brush fences, cabins, wickiups, tree platforms) historic properties recommended as eligible or potentially eligible for the NRHP will not be adversely affected by

broadcast burning. Mitigation 3 and 4 above will be incorporated into the prescribed burning alternative where required fire breaks are within eligible site boundaries or where burn piles are proposed.

Standard stipulations also should be included in the Statement of Work for the contract for the project implementation and discussed with the implementation contractor at the pre-work meeting:

All persons in the area who are associated with this project shall be informed that any person who, without a permit, injures, destroys, excavates, appropriates or removes any historic or prehistoric ruin, artifact, object of antiquity, Native American remains, Native American cultural item, or archaeological resources on public lands is subject to arrest and penalty of law (16 USC 433, 16 USC 470, 18 USC 641, 18 USC 1170, and 18 USC 1361). Strict adherence to the confidentiality of information concerning the nature and location of archeological resources would be required of the proponent and all of their subcontractors (Archaeological Resource Protection Act, 16 U.S.C. 470hh)

Inadvertent Discovery: The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) [16 USC 470s., 36 CFR 800.13], as amended, requires that if newly discovered historic or archaeological materials or other cultural resources are identified during the Proposed Action implementation, work in that area must stop and the BLM Authorized Officer (AO) must be notified immediately. Within five working days the AO will determine the actions that will ensure in place preservation is not necessary).

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) [25 USC 3001 et seq., 43 CFR 10.4] requires that if inadvertent discovery of Native American Human Remains or Objects of Cultural Patrimony occurs, any activity must cease in the area of discovery, a reasonable effort made to protect the item(s) discovered, and immediate notice be made to the BLM Authorized Officer, as well as the appropriate Native American group(s) (IV.C.2). Notice may be followed by a 30-day delay (NAGPRA Section 3(d)).

The BLM will relocate activities to avoid the expense of mitigation and delays associated with new discovery described above. This may change the final acres of the implementation and require bilateral agreement of the implementation contract. The BLM authorized officer will provide technical and procedural guidelines for redesign of the project area. Upon verification from the BLM authorized officer that the required mitigation has been completed, the operator will be allowed to resume implementation.

Native American Religious Concerns:

Affected Environment: American Indian religious concerns are legislatively considered under several acts and Executive Orders, namely the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 (PL 95-341), the Native American Graves Environmental Assessment Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (PL 101-601), and Executive Order 13007 (1996; Indian Sacred Sites).

In summary, these require, in concert with other provisions such as those found in the NHPA and ARPA, that the federal government carefully and proactively take into consideration traditional and religious Native American culture and life and ensure, to the degree possible, that access to sacred sites, the treatment of human remains, the possession of sacred items, the conduct of traditional religious practices, and the preservation of important cultural properties are considered and not unduly infringed upon. In some cases, these concerns are directly related to "historic properties" and "archaeological resources". In some cases elements of the landscape without archaeological or other human material remains may be involved. Identification of these concerns is normally completed during the land use planning efforts, reference to existing studies, or via direct consultation.

General annual project consultation has been conducted with tribes who traditionally used the GJFO area, the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah & Ouray Reservation. Concerns identified included eradication of sage, impacts to medicinal plants, and general modern intervention in the natural processes.

The Ute have a generalized concept of spiritual significance that is not easily transferred to Western models or definitions. As such the BLM recognizes that they have identified sites that are of concern because of their association with Ute occupation of the area as part of their traditional lands. No traditional cultural properties, natural resources, or properties of a type previously identified as being of interest to local tribes, were found during the cultural resources inventory of the project area or identified by consultation. There is no other known evidence that suggests that the project area holds special significance for Native Americans. No additional Native American Indian consultation was conducted for the specific proposed project

Special Status Species:
Based on historic records and recent surveys in the Beehive area, surveys for T&E and BLM-sensitive plant species will be necessary prior to project implementation. The Beehive area is known to support the Special status plant DeBeque milkvetch. Survey results may require project modification to ensure avoidance or minimization of impacts to the milkvetch. Surveys would not be required at the Bald Mountain location, as the area is not known to support or contain suitable habitat for any Special Status plant Species.

Special status wildlife are not known to be present, nor are they expected to occur in the project area. The area to be included in the Nick Mountain burn has previously been included in the Cottonwood Lakes Lynx Analysis unit, however recent refinement of the mapping in this area has resulted in the area on BLM lands being excluded from the Lynx analysis unit. Small portions of the area on BLM lands contain habitat that is suitable for Lynx, however these habitat types occur in small pockets insufficient to support Lynx.

Water quality/ Hydrology/Soils:

Environmental impacts described in CO-130-2005-038-EA are valid and sufficiently mitigated through design features built into the proposed action. Additionally, treatments utilizing heavy equipment should not occur when soils are saturated to a depth of three inches or more. No perennial streams exist on BLM within the project area. However, ephemeral drainages should

be protected from any impacts associated with operation of heavy equipment (e.g. bank shearing, de-stabilization of existing drainage patterns, etc...). In the areas closest to ephemeral drainages it is recommended to utilize alternative methods for treating vegetation (e.g. hand crews). With successful implementation of the proposed action, long term benefits to soil, water, and air resources are anticipated to result.

Wildlife:

To avoid impacting nesting migratory birds vegetation manipulation will not occur from May 15 to July 15 annually. The project takes place within currently mapped critical and severe winter range, however the intent is to improve habitat conditions. Actions occurring in critical winter months (from December 1 to May 1 annually), will be conducted in coordination with Colorado Parks and Wildlife and BLM biologists to ensure impacts to wintering deer and elk are avoided or minimized. Some portions of the Beehive area are known to support nesting raptors. Habitat treatment areas are intended to be constructed in a mosaic pattern and large trees likely to support nesting raptors will be avoided when treatment areas are laid out on the ground in conjunction with the GJFO wildlife biologist.

Wastes, Hazardous or Solid:
Restrict fueling and maintenance in or adjacent to drainages and a requirement to report and clean up any fuel or oil spills.

Table 1– Potentially Impacted Resources

Resources	Not Present On Location	No Impact	Potentially Impacted	Mitigation necessary	Comments included in DNA text	BLM Evaluator Initial & Date
PHYSICAL RESOURCES						
Air and Climate	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	HLP 11/16/11
Geological	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	DSG 7-6-11
Mineral Resources	☐	☒	☒	☒	☐	JESC 6/30/11
Soils	☐	☐	☒	☒	☒	ND 10/24/11
Water (surface & subsurface, floodplains)	☐	☐	☒	☒	☒	ND 10/24/11
BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES						
Invasive, Non-native Species	☐	☐	☒	☒	☐	MT 10/24/11
Sensitive Species	☐	☐	☒	☐	☒	KEM 5/18/11
Threatened or Endangered Species	☐	☐	☒	☐	☒	KEM 5/18/11
Vegetation, Forestry	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	SC 10/25/11
Wetlands/Riparian Zones	☐	☐	☒	☐	☒	CARS 6/10/11
Wildlife	☐	☐	☒	☐	☒	KEM 5/18/11
Cultural or Historical	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	ALR 10/26/11
Paleontological	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	DSG 7-6-11
Tribal & American Indian Religious Concerns	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	ALR 10/26/11
Visual Resources	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	CPP 7/22/11
Social	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	KEM 5/18/11
Economic	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	KEM 5/18/11
Environmental Justice	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	KEM 5/18/11
Transportation and Access	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	HLP 11/16/11
Wastes, Hazardous or Solid	☐	☐	☒	☒	☐	AEK 7/5/2011

Table 1- Potentially Impacted Resources

Resources	Not Present On Location	No Impact	Potentially Impacted	Mitigation necessary	Comments included in DNA text	BLM Evaluator Initial & Date
LAND RESOURCES						
Prime or Unique Farmlands	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	KEM 5/18/11
Recreation	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	CPP 7/22/11
Special Designations (ACEC, SMAs etc.)	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	CPP 7/22/11
Wild and Scenic Rivers	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	CPP 7/22/11
Wilderness and Wild Lands	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	CPP 7/22/11
Range Management	☐	☒	☒	☐	☐	SC 10/25/11
Wild Horse and Burros	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	JD 11/16/11
Land Tenure, ROW, Other Uses	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	RBL 11/14/11

NAME OF PREPARER: Heidi Plank, Lathan Johnson

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR: Collin Ewing

DATE: 12/13/11

Conclusion

__X__ Based on the review documented above, I conclude that this proposal conforms to the applicable land use plan and that the NEPA documentation fully covers the proposed action and constitutes BLM's compliance with the requirements of NEPA.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:

Catherine Robertson

Grand Junction Field Manager

DATE SIGNED: 12/15/11

The signed Conclusion on this Worksheet is part of an interim step in the BLM's internal decision process and does not constitute an appealable decision.