

Royal Gorge Field Office Fire and Fuels Management Planning

DOI-BLM-CO-F00200-2014-0047 EA

Since the original Royal Gorge Fire Management plan and NEPA were completed (2001-2002), federal fire policy has changed to give managers a more flexible approach and a broader view of fire management. This change in policy allows managers to go away from the current management under the A, B, C, and D polygons where each fire is categorized and managed in the way each category allows, but instead it allows managers to assess the area and ecological conditions, and consider where fire effects can be beneficial over the landscape.

The proposed action will give fire and fuels managers guidance to facilitate the management of wildland fires, fuels, and prescribed fire, and vegetation treatment projects not only for firefighter and public safety, but also to protect key ecological and human values, property, and to manage costs to the local unit. This management is consistent with resource objectives identified in the Royal Gorge Resource Management Plan, the Northeast Resource Management Plan, and other plans that have been developed by other BLM programs and local communities in the planning area. The proposed action is to improve ecological conditions to foster more resilient and productive landscapes by improving or maintaining vegetation conditions when appropriate for the site and situation, while still protecting resource values at risk.

Proposed action for BLM lands within the Royal Gorge RMP planning area:

With this proposed action, naturally ignited wildfires in the planning area covered by the 1996 RGFO RMP could potentially be managed for resource benefits. Each wildfire will be evaluated on a case by case basis to measure potential benefits versus potential risks. Other considerations for managed fire include fire intensity level, acreage of public/private land that could be impacted, level of public use, proximity to private residences, communities, and private inholdings and other values at risk, historic fire regimes and current condition class, unique biological, cultural, historical, or archaeological resources, and the potential for non-native species establishment. Managed fires will have a buffer on BLM administered land that borders private lands for a width of ½ mile where all fires will be suppressed unless a cooperative management agreement exists between BLM and the private land owner(s) that would allow the management of fires under a strategy other than full suppression.

The use of resource advisors will be essential to adequately implement the proposed action. The use of resource advisors would allow management decisions to be made with full use of available information and resource expertise while allowing suppression activities to continue without subjecting firefighters and the public to increased risk or excessive cost.

There may be some instances where full suppression or modified suppression tactics, or other response to wildland fire procedures are the only management option due to proximity to values at risk, and firefighter safety. Response to wildland fire procedures includes any specific fire suppression actions suitable to meet fire management objectives. Response to wildland fire

procedures included as part of the Proposed Action Alternative may include one or more of the following actions:

- Monitor from a Distance: Fire situations where inactive fire behavior and low threats require only periodic monitoring.
- Monitor On-site: Fire situations that require the physical placement of monitors on the fire site to track the fire's spread, intensity, and/or characteristics.
- Confinement: Actions taken when fires are not likely to have resource benefits, but threats from the fire do not require costly deployment of large numbers of suppression resources.
- Monitor plus Contingency: Fires are monitored but contingency actions are prepared to ensure adequate preparation for possible undesirable developments.
- Monitor plus Mitigation: Fires are monitored, yet pose real, but not necessarily immediate, threats. These fires are monitored, but plans are developed and implemented to delay, direct, check fire spread, or contain fire, and to ensure public safety.
- Initial Attack: Initially, suppress wildland fires to protect people or resource values at risk.
- Suppress Large Fires: A combination of tactics such as direct attack, indirect attack, and confinement by natural barriers are utilized to accomplish protection objectives.
- Control and Extinguish: Actions taken using direct attack. Sufficient resources are assigned to achieve control of the fire minimizing acres burned.

In the aftermath of catastrophic wildland fires, emergency stabilization and post-fire rehabilitation (ESR) work would take place to improve lands that are unlikely to recover naturally from the effects of wildfires. Emergency stabilization treatments are essential to protecting lives and properties downstream of burned areas. ESR activities may include obliteration of fire lines, erosion control, seeding and other administrative activities (closures & signs). ESR is only implemented after a wildland fire suppression event. ESR would be designed and implemented using an IDT approach, utilizing resource and fire staff to develop site-specific ESR plans. The short-term ESR objective would be to stabilize soils, reduce potential impacts on values at risk (cultural, watershed, fish and wildlife, and any adjacent private holdings), and prevent the establishment of nonnative invasive species. Long-term objectives include further stabilization of sites to assist in the re-establishment of the vegetative community that existed prior to the disturbance.

In some instances in the RGFO planning area, prescribed fire, mechanical fuels treatments, biological and chemical treatments may be necessary to alter fuel conditions and arrangement in a way to improve vegetation conditions and to reduce the severity and intensity of a wildfire. These treatments could be used to reduce fuels, to convert vegetation condition classes from a condition class 3 to a condition class 2 or 1, or from a condition class 2 to a condition class 1. These treatments can also be used to maintain past treatment areas that have achieved condition class 1 status.

Prescribed burning activities usually occur during the spring and fall season between Feb 1 and May 15 and September 1-November 30. Pile burning to remove activity slash from mechanical treatments is usually implemented during the winter months, typically November through February when there is adequate snow cover on the ground. These are the typical windows for

these activities, but there may be cases where these activities could take place outside of these windows if weather, fuel moisture, and other conditions exist. Fire management staff would initiate prescribed fire projects and burn plans with the input from resource specialists. Prescribed burn bosses would be required to evaluate and assess the results of the effectiveness of the burn.

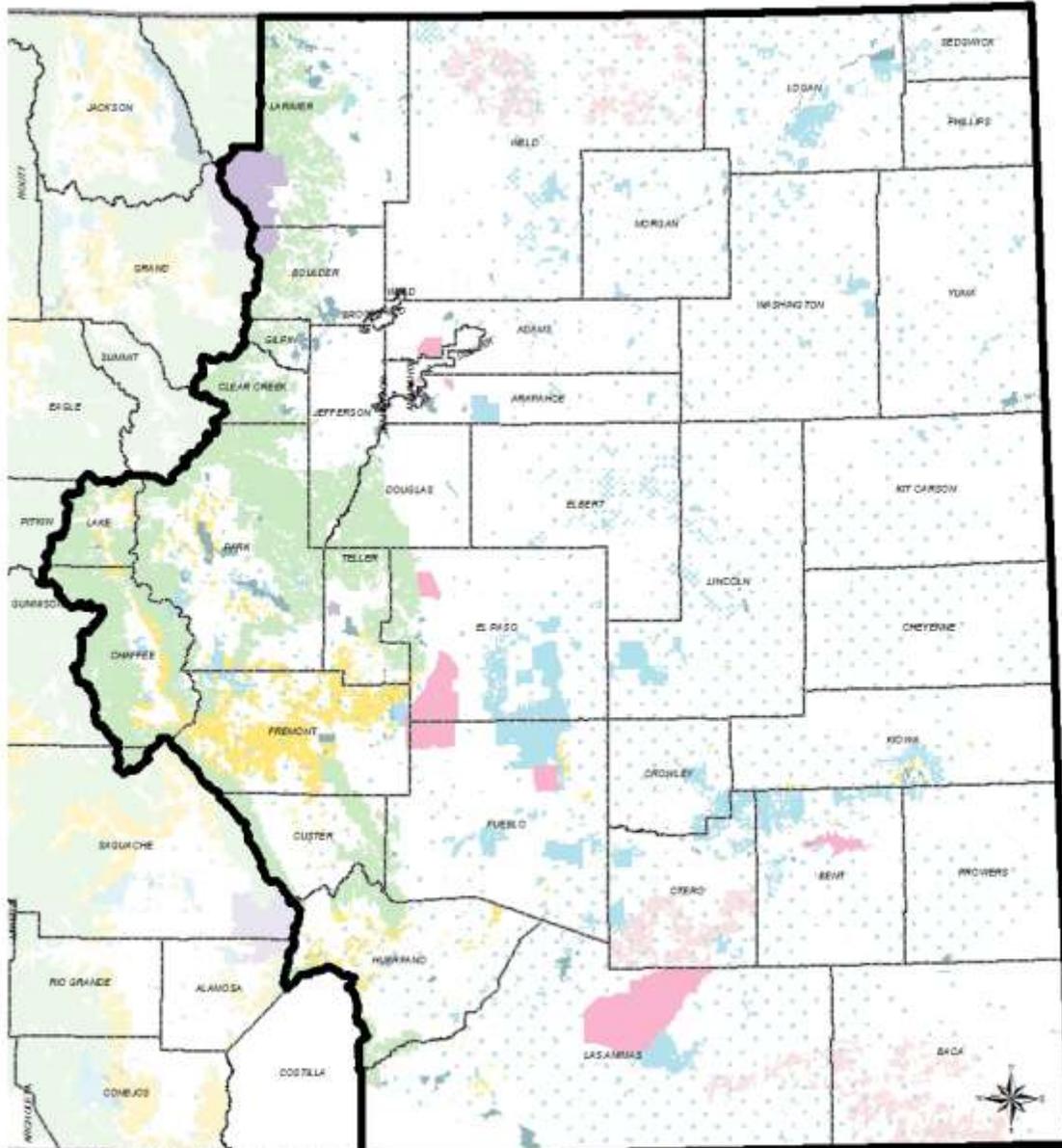
Non-fire fuel treatments (mechanical, biological, seeding and chemical) may be considered to achieve desired vegetative and ecological conditions and to reduce hazardous fuels. Suitability of specific areas would be determined through an interdisciplinary process and NEPA requirements must be followed. Non-fire fuel treatments may include hand thinning, hand piling, mastication, mowing, disking, chipping, and bullhog thinning, and other conventional logging methods. Seeding can be a component of prescribed fire and non-fire fuel treatments mechanical, biological, and chemical. As technology advances, other methods may be utilized. Some non-fire fuel treatments would be used in conjunction with prescribed fire. Seeding may follow prescribed and non-fire management actions. The purpose of seeding would be to promote the re-establishment of grasses and forbs, and prevention or reduction of the establishment of invasive or undesired species. These treatments may also alter fuel conditions to provide the option to manage a fire where alternate or minimal, or in some cases no suppression actions will be needed.

Proposed action for BLM lands within the Northeast RMP planning area:

Wildfires occurring within the Northeast RMP planning area would not be managed for resource benefits. For the most part, these areas are small, scattered parcels of BLM land that would not be conducive to managed fire due to the land ownership patterns. The main focus in these areas would be mechanical, chemical, or biological vegetation treatments on parcels that have been identified to allow for vegetation treatments in the Northeast RMP. Due to the small acreage of land within the BLM parcels, priority would be given to project areas that could be implemented in a cooperative effort with adjacent land owners. These vegetation treatments would be more effective at reducing the risk and spread of catastrophic wildfire if they are larger and more continuous areas.



Royal Gorge Field Office Fire and Fuels Management Analysis Area



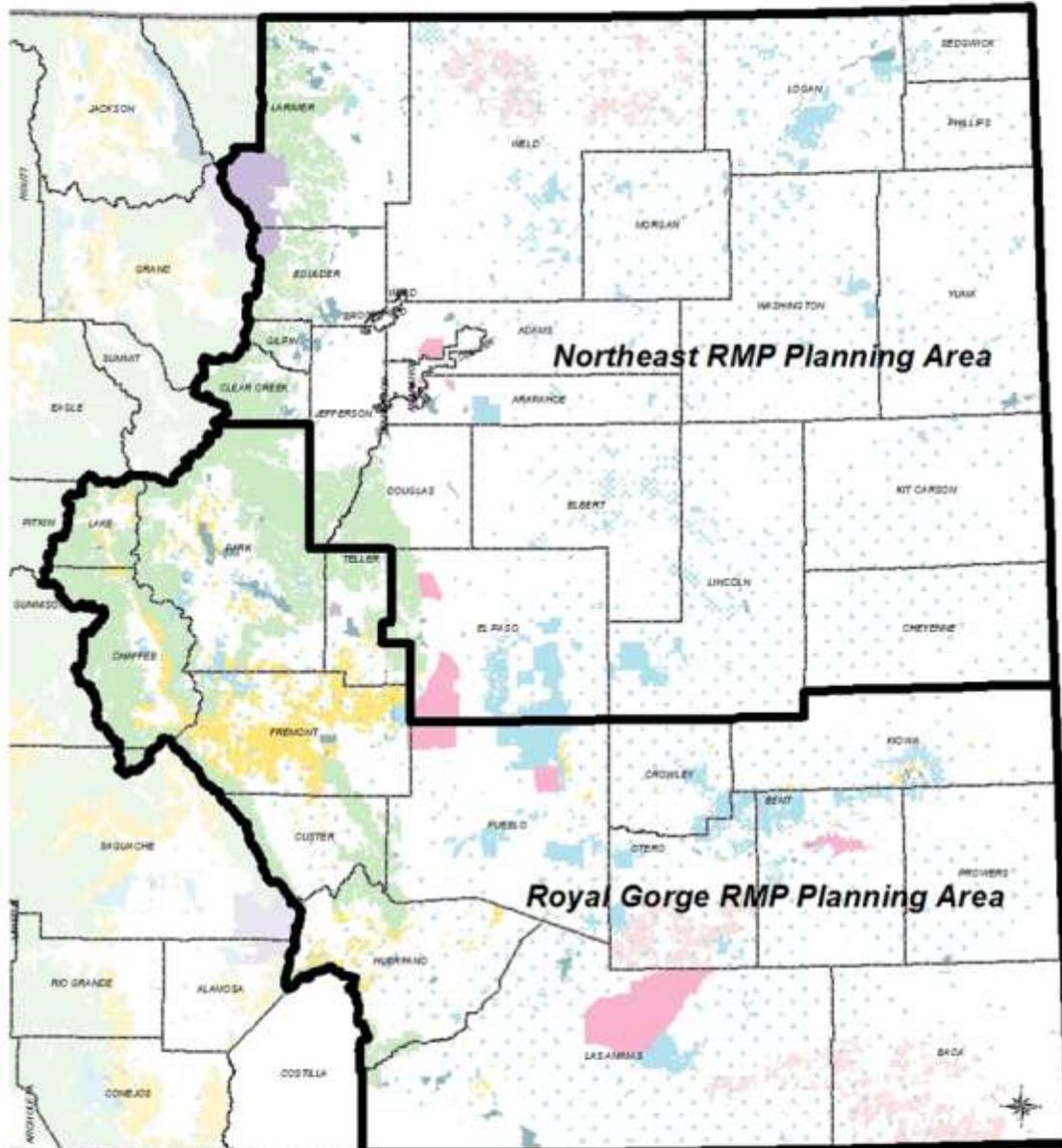
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|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|
| Field Office Boundary | Private | National Park Service |
| BLM | US Forest Service | State, County, City; Areas |
| State | DOD | Bankhead-Jones Land Use Lands |

Map Created By:
S. Torres
8/22/2014





Royal Gorge Field Office Land Use Planning Areas



Map Created By:
G. TORRE
11/20/11