

**Decision Memorandum on Action and for Application of:
Departmental Categorical Exclusion 1.12**

Huffman Prescribed Burn

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Grand Junction/ Glenwood Springs Field Office
Garfield County, Colorado**

Number: CO-140-08-065-CX

Legal Description: T4S, R92W, Sections 1 NW 1/4, 2 NE 1/4

Description of the Proposed Action and the Purpose and Need for the Action

Need For Proposed Action:

The project site is located on BLM administered land north of Rifle Gap Reservoir. The legal description for the project is Township 4 South, Range 92 West, sections 1 NW 1/4, and 2 NE 1/4. This parcel is adjacent to Forest Service administered land on the north, and private land on the west, east and south. Rifle Mountain Park is approximately 1 mile west of the proposed project location. Huffman Gulch runs north and south through the eastern half of the unit. This project would be a collaborative effort with the U.S. Forest Service to treat vegetation with prescribed fire. The project site vegetation is mostly Gambel Oak with some grasses and mountain brush. The elevation of the project area is between 7,600 feet and 8,500 feet. The oakbrush in the area is decadent, over mature, and in need of treatment

The Bureau of Land Management is proposing to use prescribed fire to reduce the density and continuity of oak brush and mountain shrubs on public lands in the Huffman Gulch area. This project will also improve habitat for big game species and promote regeneration of gambel oak and mountain shrub species. The project would also reduce the threat of a catastrophic wildfire in the area, promote regeneration of mountain brush, provide forage for big game animals, and enhance firefighter and public safety in the event of a wildfire.

Proposed Action:

The proposed action would treat approximately 100 acres of B.L.M. administered land with prescribed fire. The legal description for the project is Township 4 South, Range 92 West, sections 1 NW 1/4, and 2 NE 1/4. The prescribed burn would follow a burn plan and be in conjunction with the White River National Forest.

The prescribed burn would treat unit 1 of the U.S.F.S. Rifle Burn Blocks: Coulter Mesa project. Unit 1 is a total of 2,078 acres of U.S. Forest Service land and 100 acres of B.L.M. land, for an overall total of 2,178 acres treated.

The proposal is to burn approximately 100 acres over a 1-4 year period on BLM administered lands and approximately 2,078 acres on U.S.F.S. lands. The U.S. Forest Service will provide a separate Categorical Exclusion to provide for NEPA adequacy for the Forest Service administered land.

The preferred method of initiating fire is aerial ignition in the springtime using a helicopter. The helicopter is equipped with an aerial ignition device called a Plastic Sphere Dispenser (PSD) or a Heli Torch that can ignite ground fuels in a short time over large acreage. The ignition pattern and density of application is determined on site during the burn by the burn boss. This method of ignition will cover a large area quickly and it can pinpoint desirable pockets of burnable vegetation. This ignition method can also pinpoint natural advantage points to help direct the prescribed fire into fuel breaks and snow banks. Hand firing using drip torches and fusees can be used to supplement the aerial ignition. Hand firing may also be used as the primary ignition method depending on availability of the helicopter and to take advantage of prescription windows. Prescription windows are timeframes that meet the burn plan requirements that can vary in length from one day to a week or more. Hand firing requires more labor and resources on the ground than aerial ignition. Any fire and fire line improvements would stay out of any riparian area and streambeds.

Springtime is the preferred time frame to take advantage of good nighttime humidity recovery combined with the remaining snow banks which will help limit fire spread and reduce fire intensities. This will aid in the protection of desired vegetation and in control of the prescribed fire. Burning can be accomplished in the fall if the area meets the required prescription for ignition and control.

With either firing method or time of season, the intent is to apply fire in such a way as to create a mosaic with varying burn intensities including areas of unburned vegetation. Fire would be controlled utilizing natural fuel breaks, existing roads and trails, ignition patterns, and select weather conditions. There could be portions of hand line construction needed to complete this project. Hand line locations will be determined by the Burn Boss and constructed by fire crews before the prescribed fire is initiated.

Individual prescribed fire plans are required for all prescribed burns. These plans describe exactly how and under what conditions prescribed burning will occur in order to meet the objectives determined. Prescribed fires are set only when humidity, temperature, winds and fuel conditions are within pre-determined ranges specified by a Burn Plan. The BLM is required to meet all state and local air quality permit stipulations when they conduct prescribed burns.

Plan Conformance

The Proposed Action is consistent with the Glenwood Springs Resource Management Plan, 1991 and the Fire Management Plan, 2004 as required by appropriate Federal, State, or local statutes having a bearing on the decision. The Proposed Action was designed in conformance with all

bureau standards and incorporates appropriate guidelines for specific required and desired conditions relevant to project activities.

Decision Number/Page: The proposed action is within Fire Management Unit C-140-01 West of Glenwood Springs – Rifle Gap Reservoir Area. The fire management Objectives, Strategies (including Prescriptive Vegetative Treatments) and the Priority Ranking are in Appendix B, pages 40-43 of the Fire Management Plan for Wildland Fire Management and Prescriptive Vegetation Treatment Guidance 2002 and revised 09/2004. Also within the Fire Management Plan, Chapter III page 10 discusses Fuels Treatment Prioritization.

Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act

The Proposed Action is categorically excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with 516 DM 2, Appendix 1, 1.12. The application of this categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects which may significantly affect the environment. None of the exceptions apply. These extraordinary circumstances are contained in 516 DM 2, Appendix 2.

Persons and Agencies Consulted

Lathan Johnson, Central Zone Assistant Fire Management Officer
 Cheryl Harrison, Archeologist, GSFO
 John Seeman, U.S.F.S. Fuels Specialist
 Desa Ausmus, Wildlife Biologist, GSFO

Categorical Exclusions: Extraordinary Circumstances

Extraordinary circumstances exist for individual actions within CXs which may:

	YES	NO
2.1 Have significant impacts on public health or safety.	_____	<u>X</u>
2.2 Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order 11990); floodplains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas.	_____	<u>X</u>
2.3 Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve		

unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA Section 102(2)(E)].	_____	<u>X</u>
2.4 Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.	_____	<u>X</u>
2.5 Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.	_____	<u>X</u>
2.6 Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.	_____	<u>X</u>
2.7 Have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by either the bureau or office.	_____	<u>X</u>
2.8 Have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated Critical Habitat for these species.	_____	<u>X</u>
2.9 Violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.	_____	<u>X</u>
2.10 Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898).	_____	<u>X</u>
2.11 Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (Executive Order 13007).	_____	<u>X</u>
2.12 Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and Executive Order 13112).	_____	<u>X</u>

Remarks

Cultural Resources/Native American Religious Concerns: A cultural resource inventory (GSFO# 1102-1) was conducted in the Huffman Gulch valley, the only part of the burn area that is not on a 30% slope. No historic properties or areas of Native American concern were identified. A standard Education/Discovery/NAGPRA Stipulation for cultural resource protection would be attached to the permit. The importance of this stipulation should be stressed to permittee informing them of their responsibilities to protect and report any cultural resources encountered

Education/Discovery/NAGPRA Stipulation

The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) requires that if newly discovered cultural resources are identified during project implementation, work in that area must stop and the agency Authorized Officer notified immediately (36 CFR 800.13). The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), requires that if inadvertent discovery of Native American Remains or Objects occurs, activity must cease in the area of discovery, a reasonable effort made to protect the item(s) discovered, and

immediate notice 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)). Further actions also require compliance under the provisions of NHPA and the Archaeological Resource Protection Act.

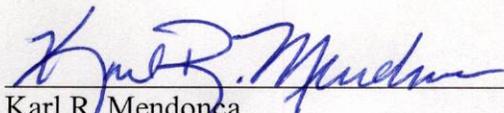
The proposed project is located in the Bowen Isolated allotment. The allotment is mostly private land but includes the small parcel of BLM in Huffman Gulch. A grazing permit is issued to Stuart Dykstra for 200 cattle from 6/16 to 9/30.

Threatened and Endangered Species: The proposed action would have 'no effect' to any federally listed species. The project area is mapped as "other" lynx habitat. "Other" habitat is defined as sagebrush or pure aspen within 500 meters of winter foraging habitat (spruce-fir dominated). The site is mapped as "other" habitat due to its proximity to mapped winter foraging habitat located within 500 meters to the east on BLM lands.

Although the proposed action is located in "other" lynx habitat, vegetation at the site is a mixed mountain shrub community, consisting primarily of oakbrush. This vegetation type is very marginal for lynx and is not considered lynx habitat. Given the project site does not provide suitable habitat for lynx, the proposed action would have "No Effect" to Canada lynx.

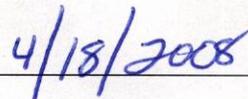
Decision and Rational on Action

I have decided to implement the Huffman Prescribed Fire Plan. These actions meet the need for action. In addition, I have reviewed the plan conformance statement and have determined that the proposed action is in conformance with the approved land use plan and that no further environmental analysis is required.



 Karl R. Mendonca
 Supervisory Natural Resource Specialist

Date



Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is not subject to administrative appeal.

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this decision, contact:

Ody Anderson

OR

Angie Foster

Fuels Management Specialist

BLM Fuels Program Manager

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