

**U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
Colorado River Valley Field Office  
2300 River Frontage Road  
Silt, Colorado 81652**

## **DOCUMENTATION OF LAND USE PLAN CONFORMANCE AND NEPA ADEQUACY**

NEPA NUMBER: DOI-BLM-CO-N040-2012-0108-DNA

PROJECT NAME: Samson Mesa Habitat Improvement

PLANNING UNIT: Mesa County

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: Township 8 South, Range 96 West, sections 20 and 17 (see Figure 1)

APPLICANT: Bureau of Land Management

ISSUES AND CONCERNS: Sagebrush steppe—composed of sagebrush mixed with secondary shrub species with an understory of grasses and forbs (broadleaf herbaceous plants)—is a key component of big game winter range. Healthy sagebrush stands consist of mixed age classes of shrubs with annual leaf and seed production as well as evidence of regeneration. Healthy sagebrush communities contain a diverse understory of native perennial herbaceous species. Impediments to long-term maintenance of healthy sagebrush communities include encroachment and competition by trees expanding from nearby pinyon-juniper stands and invasion by noxious weeds and other undesirable non-native plants.

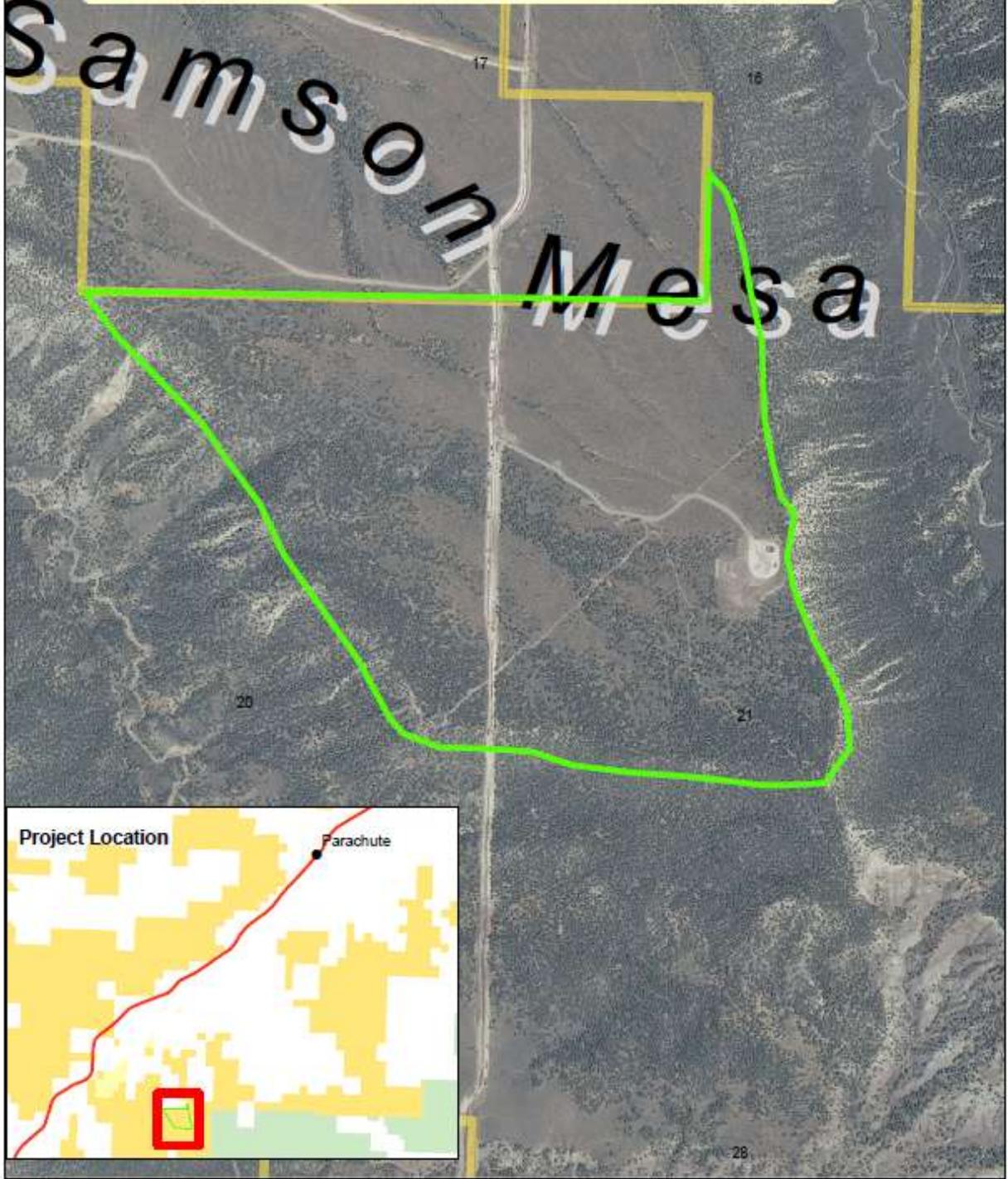
Habitat treatments to be conducted under this document include removal of encroaching pinyons and junipers, and spraying the cheatgrass that is found in the understory. These treatments would be followed by reseeding or interseeding with native perennial grasses and forbs selected on the basis of forage quality, reliability in habitat restoration applications, and potential for long-term suppression of invasive species.

Removal and thinning of encroaching pinyon and juniper trees in conjunction with understory treatments can be an important habitat management tool benefiting a variety of native wildlife, especially wild ungulates such as mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) and elk (*Cervus elaphus*) and upland gamebirds such as wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*).

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION:

This project consists of a variety of treatments and a total of 230 acres to be treated and is located approximately 9 miles south southwest of Parachute, Mesa County, Colorado. Mechanical treatment involves the use of vehicles such as wheeled tractors, tracked dozers, or specially designed vehicles with attached implements designed to cut, chop, or mulch existing vegetation such as a hydro-axe. Hydro-axing is effective for removing coarse, woody vegetation. This equipment can mulch or lop and scatter plant debris, eliminating the need for post-treatment removal. This method is appropriate where a high level of control and precision is needed. The hydro-axe would be used to remove approximately 230 acres of encroaching pinyon and juniper trees that are 6 inches in diameter at breast height (dbh) and smaller.

# Samson Mesa Habitat Improvement



## Legend

-  Samson Treatment Boundary
-  Bureau of Land Management
-  Private
-  US Forest Service



No Warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregation with other data.



Following the hydro-axing operation, cheatgrass would be sprayed using a BLM-approved herbicide in accordance with the CRVFO (GSFO) *Integrated Weed Management Plan and Programmatic Environmental Assessment*, DOI-BLM-CO-N040-2009-0078-EA (June 19, 2009). Herbicide application would take place in the fall prior to cheatgrass germination for two consecutive years to deplete the seedbank of this invasive non-native annual grass.

Rangeland seed drills, which consist of a series of furrow openers, seed metering devices, seed hoppers, and seed covering devices, are either towed by or mounted on a tractor. The seed drill opens a furrow in the seedbed, deposits a measured amount of seed into the furrow, and closes the furrow to cover the seed. Approximately 230 acres would be seeded with a BLM approved mix of native grasses and forbs following the herbicide application to remove cheatgrass.

Resource surveys, including those for cultural resources, were completed relative to the 2008 Orchard GAP/EA approval. The boundary of the proposed action has been modified to conform to the area of previous cultural surveys in the project vicinity. The modified boundary also reflects 100 meter buffers around two eligible archaeological sites where ground disturbing activity will be restricted. Mechanical thinning (such as hydro-axing) will be excluded from the buffer around the two sites, but spraying of herbicide for cheatgrass removal and the hand thinning of pinyon and juniper under 6" in diameter will be allowed. These two types of activities have been determined as having no effect to historic properties. Rangeland seed drills would also be excluded from the buffer zones around the two archaeological sites.

Additionally, a new raptor nest survey was completed in June 2012. No new raptor nests were located at the time of the survey. Rare plant surveys were conducted in portions of the project area in May/June 2011 for the Orchard Horizontal Clustered Plan of Development and in April 2012 for the Sunnyside Pipeline. The remainder of the project areas was surveyed on September 7, 2012. No rare plant occurrences or potential habitat were found during these surveys.

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):

#### Land Use Plan and Amendments

- Glenwood Springs Resource Management Plan, Approved 1984 (Revised 1988)
- Oil and Gas Plan Amendment to the Glenwood Springs RMP, Approved 1991
- Oil & Gas Leasing & Development, Record of Decision and RMP Amendment, Approved 1999

#### Determination

\_\_\_\_\_ The proposed action is in conformance with the LUP because it is specifically provided for in the following LUP decision(s):

X\_\_\_\_\_ The proposed action is in conformance with the LUP, even though it is not specifically provided for, because it is clearly consistent with the following LUP decisions (objectives, terms, and conditions): "...to improve existing wildlife habitat conditions, and to increase wildlife species diversity" (1984 RMP, page 18) and "BLM will require reasonable mitigation of the impacts on wildlife habitat that are attributable to both past and proposed oil and gas development within the GAP area..." (1999 RMP Amendment, page 15).

Habitat treatments such as those incorporated into the proposed action are for the specific purpose of mitigating unavoidable direct and indirect impacts on wildlife from oil and gas activities in big game winter range by and improving existing wildlife conditions. Therefore, the proposed action is in conformance with the current land use plan, as amended, even though it is not specifically provided for.

REVIEW OF EXISTING NEPA DOCUMENTS: Below is listed the existing NEPA document that covers the proposed action.

- DOI-BLM-CO-N040-2009-0078-EA. Integrated Weed Management Plan and Programmatic Environmental Assessment. BLM Glenwood Springs Field Office, Colorado. 2009.
- DOI-BLM-CO-N040-2012-0034-EA. Programmatic Environmental Assessment of the Proposed Wildlife Habitat Mitigation Plan for Oil and Gas Exploration and Development. BLM Colorado River Valley Field Office, Colorado. 2012.

REVIEW OF OTHER RELEVANT DOCUMENTS: The following additional documents are relevant to the proposed action:

- Final Environmental Impact Statement: Vegetation Treatment on BLM Lands in Thirteen Western States. Prepared for the BLM Washington Office by the BLM Wyoming State Office, Cheyenne. 1991.
- Final Programmatic Environmental Report (PER): Vegetation treatments on BLM lands in 17 Western States. Reno, Nevada.
- Land Health Assessment, Battlement Mesa Area, April-May 2000. BLM Glenwood Springs Field Office, Colorado. January 8, 2001.
- Fire Management Plan for Wildland Fire Management and Prescriptive Vegetation Treatment. BLM Glenwood Springs Field Office, Colorado. 2002.

EVALUATION OF NEPA ADEQUACY CRITERIA:

1. Is the new proposed action a feature of, or essentially similar to, an alternative analyzed in the existing NEPA document(s)? Is the project within the same analysis area, or if the project location is different, are the geographic and resource conditions sufficiently similar to those analyzed in the existing NEPA document(s)? If there are differences, can you explain why they are not substantial?

Documentation of answer and explanation: Yes. The current proposed action was analyzed in CRVFO's *Programmatic Environmental Assessment: Wildlife Habitat Mitigation Plan for Oil and Gas Exploration and Development*, DOI-BLM-CO-N040-2012-0034-EA (March 29, 2012).

2. Is the range of alternatives analyzed in the existing NEPA document(s) appropriate with respect to the new proposed action, given current environmental concerns, interests, and resource values?

Documentation of answer and explanation: Yes. The existing NEPA document analyzed the proposed action and one alternative. No unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources were identified through public scoping; therefore, other alternatives were not analyzed. The same applies to the current proposed action given current concerns, interests, and resource values.

3. Is the existing analysis valid in light of any new information or circumstances (such as, rangeland health standard assessment, recent endangered species listings, and updated lists of BLM-sensitive species)? Can you reasonably conclude that new information and new circumstances would not substantially change the analysis of the new proposed action?

Documentation of answer and explanation: Yes to both. In 2000, a formal land health assessment determined that the allotment was meeting all applicable land health standards. New information does not substantially change the analysis of the new proposed action. In 2012, it was determined that implementation of the programmatic wildlife habitat mitigation plan analyzed in the existing EA would result in orderly, effective, and environmentally sound identification and treatment of areas in

need of restoration on BLM lands within the CRVFO area. Since then, habitat treatments to prevent further degradation improve overall habitat quality and continue to be a priority.

- Are the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects that would result from implementation of the new proposed action similar (both quantitatively and qualitatively) to those analyzed in the existing NEPA document?

Documentation of answer and explanation: Yes. The current proposed action is the same as what was analyzed in the existing NEPA document. The direct, indirect and cumulative impacts would be the same as those identified in the existing NEPA document. The environmental assessment thoroughly reviewed the many specific environmental impacts including vegetation, water resources, air quality, wildlife, cultural, threatened and endangered species, wilderness, and riparian resources.

- Are the public involvement and interagency review associated with the existing NEPA document(s) adequate for the current proposed action?

Documentation of answer and explanation: Yes. For the existing NEPA document, the CRVFO made the proposed action available for public review and comment for 30 days by posting on the BLM website, posting announcements in two local newspapers (the Glenwood Springs *Post Independent* and Rifle *Citizen Telegram*), and notifying selected interested parties by a letter sent via regular mail.

**INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW:** The following individuals participated in the review of the proposed action and provided input to this DNA.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>
Sylvia Ringer	Wildlife Biologist	Project Lead, Migratory Birds, Aquatic Wildlife, Terrestrial Wildlife, Special Status Fish and Wildlife
Allen Crockett, Ph.D.	Supervisory NRS/Phys. Sci.	Technical Review, NEPA Review
Judy Perkins, Ph.D.	Botanist	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Vegetation, Special Status Plants
Isaac Pittman	Rangeland Management Specialist	Grazing Management
John Brogan	Archaeologist	Cultural Resources, Native American Concerns
Kimberly Miller	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Wild and Scenic Rivers, Wilderness, Recreation
Rusty Stark	Fuels Specialist	Burn Plan, Prescribed Burning
Shauna Kocman, Ph.D.	Hydrologist	Air Quality, Water Quality, Soils

**REMARKS:** The vegetation treatments described in this DNA would be funded using contributions from Encana Oil and Gas (USA) Inc. specifically intended to support wildlife mitigation in conjunction with the Orchard Master Development Plan (EA #CO140-2008-0032) .

**MITIGATION:** Mitigation measures approved in the existing NEPA document (DOI-BLM-CO-N040-20012-0034-EA) would be incorporated and implemented into the proposed action.

**NAME OF PREPARER:** Sylvia Ringer, Wildlife Biologist

**DATE:** 10/01/12

## CONCLUSION

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Based on the NEPA review documented above, I conclude that the proposed action conforms to the land use plan as amended and that the NEPA documentation previously prepared fully covers the proposed action and constitutes BLM's compliance with the requirements of NEPA.

SIGNATURE OF RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL:



Supervisory Natural Resource Specialist

DATE SIGNED:

Oct 4, 2012

Note: 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.