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**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Kremmling Field Office
P.O. Box 68
Kremmling, CO 80459**

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NUMBER: DOI-BLM-CO-120-2010-0011-EA

PROJECT NAME: Indian Creek Sage Brush Treatment

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: T. 5 N., R. 81 W., Sec. 2, 11, 14, 15

KREMMLING FIELD OFFICE, KREMMLING, COLORADO

APPLICANT: BLM

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE ACTION:

The objective and purpose of proposed project is to improve forage for livestock, Rocky Mountain elk, mule deer, and other wildlife species that graze within sagebrush vegetation by mowing 100-150 acres of sagebrush. Currently, the sagebrush over story is even aged, old and or decedent. By mowing the sagebrush there would be an increase in young sagebrush, grasses and forbs. This increase would improve forage for mule deer, livestock and elk. The project would also help implement the Indian Creek livestock grazing system and help improve water quality within Indian and Grizzly Creeks by improved livestock distribution.

Background/Introduction/Issues and Concerns: This project is part of larger project that included the construction of a spring located on BLM lands (Iron Clad spring) a private spring (Vans Springs), the construction of a pasture fence on BLM lands (Indian Creek fence) and the development of a grazing allotment plan for BLM livestock allotment 07115 (Indian Creek). These projects were developed to improve livestock distribution, riparian habitat along Indian Creek and wildlife habitat. These projects were all completed in 2009 and were addressed in environmental assessments DOI-BLM-CO-120-2009-0008-EA and DOI-BLM-CO-120-2009-0017 EA

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES:

Proposed Action: The Owl Mountain Partnership, BLM and the North Park Habitat Partnership program would like to contract with Terry Pryor to treat approximately 100-150 acres of sagebrush using a brush beater (See project map below). The treatment will be conducted to improve wildlife habitat while providing additional forage for livestock. The treatment would

result in vegetation removed in several patches of 5-10 acres. In between treatments there would be untreated stands of sagebrush. This method would increase the productivity of young sagebrush, grasses and forbs, and allow native species to be more competitive with invasive plants while still allowing for stands of large sagebrush. The brush beater would remain about 4-8 inches off the ground, so minimal surface disturbance is to be expected. The proposed treatment would occur in the fall of 2010.

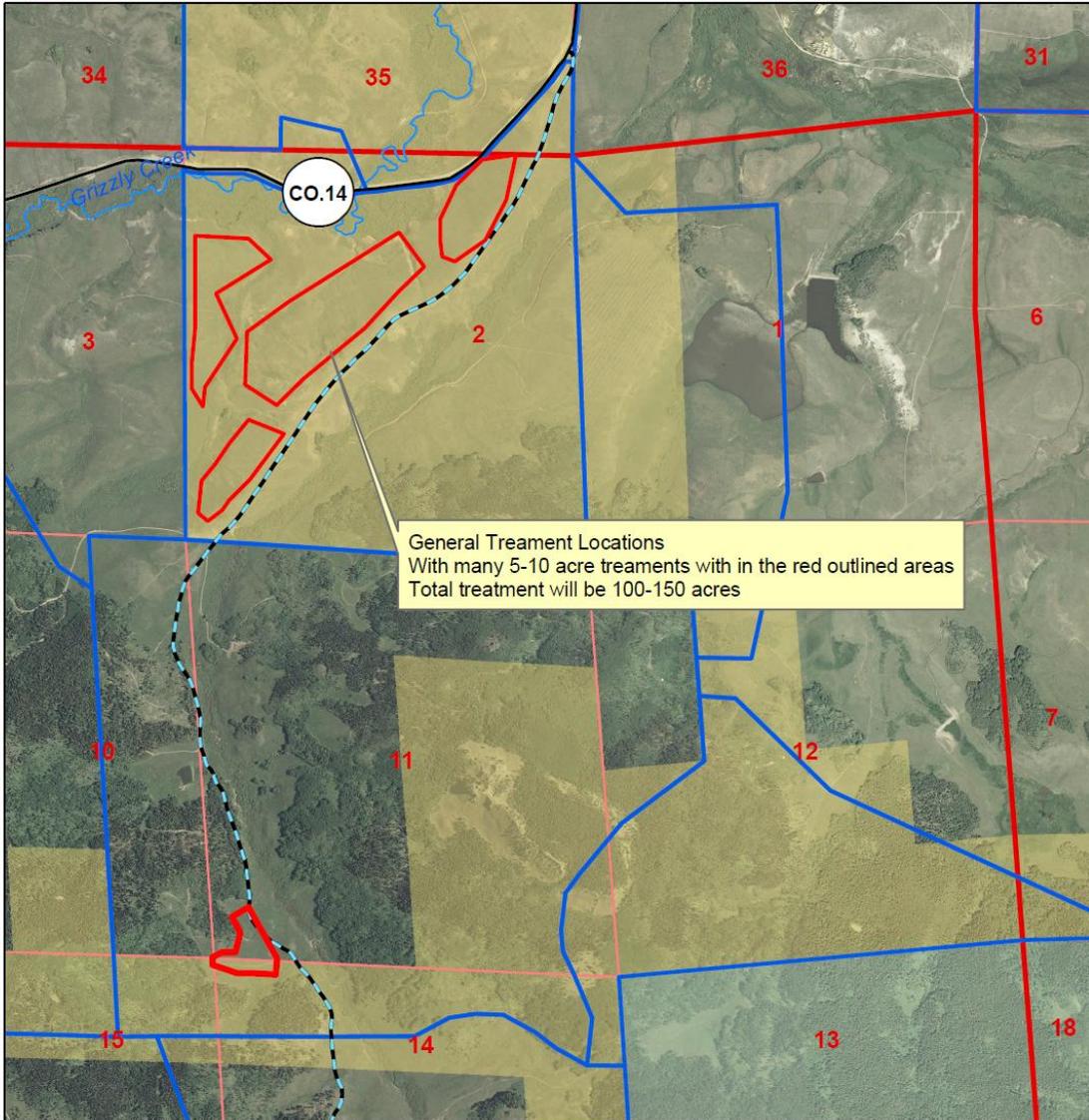
Due to concerns over visual resources BLM range staff and visual staff toured the project area to lay out the treatment and look at potential issues. It was determined to try and keep the majority of the treatments hidden from view along HWY 14. However, it was noted that over time the contrast would be less visible as the treated sagebrush regenerated and may even improve the visual resources of the area. To make sure visual resources are met a pre-treatment site visit with the contractor would occur. In addition, flagging of the treatment locations before starting the project and periodic visits during treatments would also occur to ensure that visual resources concerns are met.

Design Features of the Proposed Action:

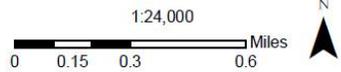
- The treatment would only occur during dry soil conditions to prevent rutting/soil compaction due to wet soils.
- Livestock use would be allowed in the treatment area and the allotment after the treatment. This would be permitted because livestock would not be grazing in the majority of the treatment area until the fall of 2011.
- To reduce visual impacts, there would be several treatment blocks with irregular shapes that repeat other lines found in the natural landscape (vegetation/landform).
- If invasive, non-native species become established or spread as a result of the Proposed Action, the BLM and the Jackson County weed program would work together with the permittee on control strategies



Indian Creek Sagebrush Treatment



General Treatment Locations
 With many 5-10 acre treatments with in the red outlined areas
 Total treatment will be 100-150 acres



Reference Map
NW Colorado



Legend

- County Roads
- Major Roads
- allotment_mfo polygon
- Reservoirs
- Major Streams
- Bureau of Land Mgt
- Division of Wildlife
- National Park
- US Forest Service
- National Wildlife Refuge
- Private
- State
- State Forest

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NAME - DATE
 FILE LOCATION

No Action Alternative: The No Action Alternative is to not implement the vegetation treatment. This alternative would result in habitat conditions for deer, elk, sage-grouse, and other sagebrush dependent species remaining as they currently exist. This would also reduce the ability to effectively implement the Indian Creek livestock grazing plan resulting in reduced forage for livestock and poor livestock distribution.

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):

Name of Plan: Kremmling Resource Management Plan (RMP), Record of Decision (ROD)

Date Approved: December 19, 1984; Updated February 1999

Decision Number/Page: Livestock Grazing, pages 6 through 8, as revised.

Decision Language: Investing in cost-effective range improvements (primarily through public investment) to implement grazing systems and meet the specific objectives of AMP's.

Decision Number/Page: Decision 4.b. 6 page 7 .a., page 8

Decision Language: Under *Livestock Grazing and Management* the ROD calls for investing in cost effective range improvements...to implement grazing systems and meet specific objectives of AMPs...allow for approximately 45,200 acres of land treatment (brush control and reseeding)..

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT / ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES / MITIGATION MEASURES:

MIGRATORY BIRDS

Affected Environment: A variety of migratory bird species, primarily birds of prey and songbirds, use the proposed project area. Surveys conducted in 1994 by the Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas Partnership recorded many species in the area including Swainson's hawks, red-tailed hawks, golden eagles, green-tailed towhee, mountain and western bluebirds, sage thrasher, horned lark, western kingbirds, American kestrels, and common nighthawks in the sagebrush habitat common to the allotment.

Environmental Consequences: The proposed treatment would improve habitat conditions for migratory birds using the treatment area. The proposed treatment would provide for grass and forb production by reducing sagebrush occurring in the treatment area. The expected increase in grass and forb productivity would provide additional high quality forage, cover, and nesting habitat. Young sagebrush plants would return to the treated areas over time

and would also provide high quality cover and nesting habitat, adding diversity to the existing monotypic age class of sagebrush which currently exists in the project area.

The No Action alternative would result in the continued limited productivity of vegetation within the project area. Understory grasses and forbs would not be able to flourish due to the continued dominance of sagebrush on these sites. Food, cover, and nesting habitat for migratory birds would be limited in the future due to the low productivity of grasses and forbs in the sagebrush understory and overabundance of mature sagebrush.

VEGETATION (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: The Proposed Action is located in an area that has a mixture of big sagebrush with an understory of grasses and forbs. The big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*) is dense with a height 1'–3', in most places. Most of the understory vegetation is native grasses and forbs with little bare ground.

Environmental Consequences: The Proposed Action would create a beneficial disturbance to the vegetation in the project area. The purpose of the brush beater is to improve the health of the sagebrush, open the dense sagebrush stands, and allow for the expansion and improved vigor of the understory species of grasses and forbs. The expected increase in grass and forb productivity would provide additional high quality forage for wildlife and livestock. Young sagebrush plants would return to the treated areas over time and would also provide high quality food and cover, adding diversity to the existing monotypic age class of sagebrush which currently exists in the areas proposed for treatment. . Since the current understory consists of a good stand of desirable species, there should be no need to seed the area following treatment.

Under the No Action Alternative, present vegetative conditions would remain. Sagebrush would remain dense and continue to mature. This would also result in reduced grass and forb production.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Wildlife, Aquatic and Wildlife, Terrestrial): In 2006, the area was assessed for the Colorado Standards for Public Land Health. During the assessment it was determined that the allotment where the Proposed Action would occur is in compliance with the standard

WILDLIFE, TERRESTRIAL (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: The allotment provides habitat for a variety of upland wildlife. Mule deer, pronghorn antelope, moose and Rocky Mountain elk occupy the area at different times of the year, while badgers, coyotes, red foxes, white-tailed jackrabbits, and a variety of small rodents live in the allotment on a year-long basis. Pronghorn antelope, mule deer and elk primarily use the allotment during the summer. Moose concentrate along Indian Creek throughout the year.

Environmental Consequences: The proposed treatment would improve habitat conditions for terrestrial wildlife using the treatment area. The treatment would provide for grass and forb production by reducing sagebrush occurring in the treatment area. The expected increase in grass and forb productivity would provide additional high quality forage for deer, elk, and

pronghorn during the seasons they inhabit the area, especially winter, and would provide more cover for small mammals. Young sagebrush plants would return to the treated areas over time and would also provide high quality food and cover, adding diversity to the existing monotypic age class of sagebrush which currently exists on the area proposed for treatment.

The No Action alternative would result in the continued limited productivity of vegetation in the project area. Understory grasses and forbs would not be able to flourish due to the continued dominance of sagebrush. Wildlife food and cover would be limited in the future due to the low productivity of grasses and forbs in the sagebrush understory. Winter forage for elk would continue to be less than optimum on the area proposed for treatment.

Mitigation: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Vegetation and Wildlife, Aquatic): In 2006, the area was assessed for the Colorado Standards for Public Land Health. During the assessment it was determined that the allotment where the proposed action would occur is in compliance with the standard.

VISUAL RESOURCES:

Affected Environment: The Proposed Action is within an area inventoried as visual resource inventory (VRI) Class II. Since the 1984 Resource Management Plan (RMP) did not designate Visual Resource Management (VRM) classes, the BLM manages visual resources to protect the VRI by applying management class objectives to the inventory. Objectives for VRM Class II are to retain the existing character of the landscape. Changes to the landscape should be low and should not attract attention. The visual landscape in the project area consists of sage hills and riparian bottom lands in the foreground and low rocky, timbered hills in the middle-ground/background.

Environmental Consequences: The design feature of ensuring all treatment areas use irregular shapes that repeat lines in the landscape would result in a low level of contrast in the landscape (see attached contrast rating worksheet). There would be a short-term impact following the treatment where the edges of the treated areas would contrast with the untreated areas. Over time the contrast would be less visible as the treated sagebrush regenerated. The proposed action could improve the visual resources of the area. Currently, the area is dominated by sagebrush, resulting in little diversity in the vegetation layer. The proposed action would create openings in the sagebrush where grasses and forbs would become visible. The result would be a more complex and appealing landscape.

No Action Alternative:

The changes to the existing vegetation layer would not occur under this alternative. As a result, there would be no change to visual resources under this alternative

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY:

Geographic Scope of the Cumulative Analysis:

For the purpose of this EA, the general geographic boundary for cumulative impact analysis is allotment 07115 which is grazed by the Van Valkenburgs. This land is found within the Indian Creek drainage area south of Walden, Colorado.

Past Present and Reasonably Foreseeable Action:

Before 2010 the vegetation health of sagebrush is generally described as even-aged old and decadent. This resulted in poor habitat for wildlife and also resulted in reduced forage for livestock.

When considered with present actions, the proposed sagebrush treatment will improve migratory bird habitat, vegetation production and health, wildlife habitat and visual resources within the project area. The proposed treatment will also help implement livestock grazing plan and improve riparian vegetation. This project along with the existing springs and pasture fence would also help implement the livestock grazing plan for allotment 07115 (Indian Creek). . . The No Action Alternative would reduce the ability to improve the overall land health within the allotment. This would result in poor habitat for migratory birds, wildlife and livestock forage. It would also reduce the ability to fully implement the livestock grazing management plan and improve riparian health.

When considering future action, wildlife and livestock grazing is anticipated to continue within this allotment. However, further projects to improve habitat for wildlife or livestock are not anticipated within this allotment.

PERSONS / AGENCIES CONSULTED: See Appendix 2 for the Tribal consultation list. Bill Van Valkenburg (permittee), Owl Mountain Partnership committee members, North Park Habitat Partnership committee members, and the Colorado Division of Wildlife were consulted. There was strong support for this project.

INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW: See IDT-RRC in Appendix 1.

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DOI-BLM-CO-120-2010-0011-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.

DECISION RECORD

DECISION: It is my decision to authorize the Proposed Action as described in the attached EA. This decision is contingent on meeting all mitigation measures and monitoring requirements listed below.

RATIONALE: The Proposed Action was chosen because the Indian Creek sagebrush treatment will improve livestock distribution in the allotment and thus will improve vegetation that will benefit wildlife and livestock grazing.

MITIGATION MEASURES: None

COMPLIANCE/MONITORING:

- Prior to treatment and after treatment, photos, and if needed monitoring, would be made in the sagebrush stands.
- The BLM would monitor the project area for the establishment or spread of invasive, non-native species after the project is completed.
- To reduce visual impacts, there would be several treatment blocks with irregular shapes that repeat other lines found in the natural landscape (vegetation/landform).

NAME OF PREPARER: Peter Torma

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR: Susan Cassel

DATE: 6/1/2010

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL: /s/ David Stout

DATE SIGNED: 7/27/2010

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 – Interdisciplinary Team Analysis Review Record and Checklist

Appendix 2 – Native American Tribal List

Appendix 1

INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM ANALYSIS REVIEW RECORD AND CHECKLIST:

Project Title: Indian Creek Sage Brush Treatment
Project Leader: Peter Torma
Date Proposal Received: (Only for external proposals)
Date Submitted for Comment: 11/15/2009
Due Date for Comments: 5/1/2010

Need for a field Exam: (If so, schedule a date/time)

Scoping Needs/Interested or Affected Publics: (Identify public scoping needs)

Consultation/Permit Requirements:

Consultation	Date Initiated	Date Completed	Responsible Specialist/ Contractor	Comments
Cultural/Archeological Clearance/SHPO	2/1/2010	2/22/2010	B. Wyatt	Cultural Reports CR-10-16 and CR-10-25 located no new or previously recorded sites. The project is a no effect, there are no historic properties that would be affected.
Native American	3-26-2010	4-27-2010	B. Wyatt	To date no American Indian Tribe has identified any area of traditional cultural concern in the area of the proposed action.
T&E Species/FWS	N/A	N/A	MM	
Permits Needed (i.e. Air or Water)	N/A	N/A	PB	

(NP) = Not Present
(NI) = Resource/Use Present but Not Impacted
(PI) = Potentially Impacted and Brought Forward for Analysis.

NP NI PI	Discipline/Name	Date Review Comp.	Initials	Review Comments (required for Critical Element NIs, and for elements that require a finding but are not carried forward for analysis.)
CRITICAL ELEMENTS				
NI	Air Quality Belcher	2/01/10	PB	The Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative would not impact air quality. During the brush treatment, depending on weather and soil conditions at the time, dust could be created. The amount of dust would not be significant and would not persist after the treatment.
NP	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern McGuire	3/26/10	MM	There are no Areas of Critical Environmental Concern in the proximity of the proposed project area.
NI	Cultural Resources Wyatt	2/22/2010	BBW	Cultural Report CR-10-16 located no new or

					previously recorded sites. The project is a no effect, there are no historic properties that would be affected.
NP	Environmental Justice	Cassel	12/16/09	SC	According to the most recent Census Bureau statistics (2000), there are no minority or low income communities within the Kremmling Planning Area.
NP	Farmlands, Prime and Unique	Belcher	2/01/10	PB	There are no farmlands, prime or unique, in the proximity of the proposed project area.
NI	Floodplains	Belcher	2/01/10	PB	The Grizzly Creek floodplain would not have an increased flood hazard or function differently due to the Proposed Action or the No Action Alternative.
NP	Invasive, Non-native Species	Johnson Torma Hughes	02/2/10	ZH	There are no known invasive, non-native species (noxious weeds) growing in the project area. Since soil or vegetation disturbing activities provide an avenue for the establishment or expansion of invasive, non-native species, the BLM would monitor the project area as specified in the Proposed Action
PI	Migratory Birds	McGuire	3/26/10	MM	See analysis.
NI	Native American Religious Concerns	Wyatt	5/20/2010	BBW	To date no American Indian Tribe has identified any area of traditional cultural concern in the area of the proposed action.
NP	T/E, and Sensitive Species (Finding on Standard 4)	McGuire	3/26/10	MM	A list of threatened, endangered, and candidate species which could inhabit the proposed project area was received from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on March 12, 2010. Analysis of this list indicated that no threatened, endangered, or candidate species reside in the proposed project area. In addition, there are no BLM sensitive species present.
NP	Wastes, Hazardous and Solid	Hodgson	5/25/2010	KH	There are no quantities of wastes, hazardous or solid, located on BLM-administered lands in the proposed project area, and there would be no wastes generated as a result of the Proposed Action or No Action alternative.
NI	Water Quality, Surface and Ground (Finding on Standard 5)	Belcher	5/25/10	PB	The Proposed Action would not disturb the ground surface. Treated vegetation would also remain on the ground surface, providing additional soil protection and runoff detention. There are no expected direct water quality impacts.
NI	Wetlands & Riparian Zones (Finding on Standard 2)	Belcher	5/25/10	PB	Treatments are located in the uplands and would not directly impact wetland areas.
NP	Wild and Scenic Rivers	Windsor	6/28/10	AW	There are no eligible Wild and Scenic River segments in the proposed project area.
NP	Wilderness	Monkouski	5/13/2010	JJM	There is no designated Wilderness or Wilderness Study Areas in the proximity of the proposed project area.
NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS (A finding must be made for these elements)					
NI	Soils (Finding on Standard 1)	Belcher	5/25/10	PB	Proposed Action with design features would not disturb the ground surface or impact soils.
PI	Vegetation (Finding on Standard 3)	Johnson Torma	12/21/09	PT	See vegetation section
NI	Wildlife, Aquatic		3/26/10	MM	Grizzly Creek and Indian Creek are located

	(Finding on Standard 3)	McGuire			near the project area, but no aquatic wildlife are expected to be impacted by the proposed project.
PI	Wildlife, Terrestrial (Finding on Standard 3)	McGuire	3/26/10	MM	See analysis.
OTHER NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS					
NI	Access/Transportation	Monkouski	5/13/2010	JJM	The current designation is "Open" within the 1984 Resource Management Plan. Motorized Off Road Vehicles can be used for cross country travel unless in conflict with CFR9268.3 vii. No person shall operate an off road vehicle on public lands: (D) "In a manner causing, or likely to cause significant, undue damage to or disturbance of the soil, wildlife, wildlife habitat, improvements, cultural or vegetative resources or other authorized uses of the public lands. Currently, there are no use restrictions for mechanized or non-motorized travel in the area. The proposed action would have no impacts to Access or Transportation.
NP	Forest Management	K. Belcher	4/2/10	KB	No forest resources present.
NI	Geology and Minerals	Hodgson	5/20/2010	KH	No impacts.
NI	Fire	Wyatt	2/22/2010	BBW	The operator will carry in his vehicle and on the tractor a shovel and ABC fire rated extinguisher.
NI	Hydrology/Water Rights	Belcher	2/01/10	PB	See the Water Quality and Wetland Sections for all Hydrology issues. No water rights would be impacted by the No Action or Proposed Action alternatives.
NI	Paleontology	Rupp	11/13/09	FGR	There would be no impact to paleontological resources as a result of implementing the proposed action.
NI	Noise	Monkouski	5/13/2010	JJM	Under the proposed action there would be a short term increase in noise levels during the project implementation. There are no residences or developments within the immediate area of the proposed action. No Impacts.
NI	Range Management	Johnson Torma	12/21/09	PT	Under the proposed action there would be a short term increase in vegetation for livestock. Under the no action alternative the vegetation would not be treated and would not increase the vegetation for livestock
NI	Lands/ Realty Authorizations	Cassel	7/21/2010	SC	There are no leases or permits in the proposed project area. There are ROWs to Jackson County for JCR 53 (COC-63415), Mountain Parks (COC-49110), Centurytel of Eagle (COC-50021, COC-66131, COC-56807) and Meyring Livestock (COC-29987). No ROW would be affected by the proposed action or the no action alternative.
NI	Recreation	Monkouski Windsor	5/13/2010	JJM	Recreational uses in the general area include hunting, hiking, wildlife viewing; and snowmobiling. There are no recreation activity plans or other special recreation designations for the area. The proposed action would have

				no impacts to the recreation resource.
NI	Socio-Economics Cassel	12/16/09	SC	There would be no impacts to socio-economics of the area by the proposed action or the no action alternative.
NI	Visual Resources Windsor	6/28/10	AW	See analysis
	Cumulative Impact Summary			
FINAL REVIEW				
	P&E Coordinator MCassel			

Visual Contrast Rating Worksheet:

Form 8400-4

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
VISUAL CONTRAST RATING WORKSHEET

Date: 6/28/2010

District/ Field Office: Kremmling Field Office

Resource Area:

Activity (program): Range

SECTION A. PROJECT INFORMATION

1. Project Name Indian Creek Sagebrush Treatment	4. Location Township <u>5N</u>	5. Location Sketch
2. Key Observation Point Hwy 14 adjacent to the proposed project	Range <u>82W</u>	
3. VRM Class II	Section <u>2, 11, 14, 15</u>	

SECTION B. CHARACTERISTIC LANDSCAPE DESCRIPTION

	1. LAND/WATER	2. VEGETATION	3. STRUCTURES
FORM	Rolling hills	Patchy forms from different vegetation types	N/A
LINE	Undulating ridgelines, angled drainages	Irregular lines between riparian, sagebrush and timber (aspen and conifer)	N/A
COLOR	N/A	Green riparian vegetation, gray sagebrush, green/brown grass and forbes, green aspen, black timber	N/A
TEX-TURE	Smooth	Coarse sagebrush	N/A

SECTION C. PROPOSED ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

	1. LAND/WATER	2. VEGETATION	3. STRUCTURES
FORM	N/A	Patchy, irregular shapes	N/A
LINE	N/A	Irregular lines between treated and untreated areas	N/A
COLOR	N/A	Gray sagebrush intermixed with green/brown grasses and forbes	N/A
TEX-TURE	N/A	Coarse sagebrush and smooth grasses	

SECTION D. CONTRAST RATING SHORT TERM LONG TERM

1. DEGREE OF CONTRAST		FEATURES												2. Does project design meet visual resource management objectives? <u> </u> X <u> </u> Yes <u> </u> No (Explain on reverses side)				
		LAND/WATER BODY (1)				VEGETATION (2)				STRUCTURES (3)								
		STRONG	MODERATE	WEAK	NONE	STRONG	MODERATE	WEAK	NONE	STRONG	MODERATE	WEAK	NONE					
ELEMENTS	FORM				X					X								X
	LINE				X					X								X
	COLOR				X					X								X
	TEXTURE				X					X								X
														3. Additional mitigating measures recommended <u> </u> Yes <u> </u> X <u> </u> No (Explain on reverses side)				
														Evaluator's Names Andy Windsor				
														Date 6/28/10				

Appendix 2

NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBES CONTACTED:

Ivan Posey, Chairman
Shoshone Business Council
Shoshone Tribe
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Ernest House, Sr., Chairman
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