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

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

NUMBER: CO-120-2011-0031-CX

PROJECT NAME: Grouse Mountain Sanitation Salvage/Hazard Tree Removal

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: T. 2 N., R. 78 W., 6th P.M., Sections 19, 20, 30;
T. 2 N., R. 79 W., 6th P.M., Sections 13, 24.

APPLICANT: BLM

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION: The Grouse Mountain Analysis area encompasses approximately 2,500 acres of public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The analysis area is located about 13 miles northeast of Kremmling, Colorado. Past forest management activities have occurred via timber sales, primarily in the mid 1970's, on approximately 532 acres within the analysis area. The Grouse Mountain sanitation salvage/hazard tree removal project includes approximately 242 acres of BLM administered public land within the analysis area. These forested stands are comprised of mainly lodgepole pine. Other tree species including Engelmann spruce, aspen, Douglas fir and subalpine fir, are present throughout the area. The majority of lodgepole pine stands in northern Colorado have been decimated by the Mountain Pine Beetle (MPB). A recent timber cruise provided data supporting findings of 90-95 percent mortality in the mature, greater than seven inch DBH (diameter at breast height) lodgepole pine stands in the Grouse Mountain analysis area.

The analysis area includes the Grouse Mountain communication site and several infrastructure buildings surrounding the perimeter of the radio towers. Union Pacific Railroad owns and operates the microwave radio towers at the site. Mountain Parks Electric maintains the powerlines that provide electricity to the tower site. As dead trees begin to fall, they pose a threat to public safety which would increase as tree failure begins to accelerate. Falling trees would also block roads that provide access to the tower site, damage overhead powerlines and fences along adjacent property boundaries. Falling trees may increase the risk of fire hazards by coming in direct contact with the powerlines. Although the actual radio towers reside on U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land, several miles of powerlines and roads on BLM administered lands provide access and electricity to the communication towers.

An analysis of the area has determined the need to salvage dead and dying lodgepole pine trees. The BLM is proposing to use mechanical treatments to harvest dead, currently infested and

beetle/disease susceptible trees, as well as wind-throw potential trees on approximately 242 acres. The salvage units were designed to incorporate hazard trees along the travel corridors. A commercial sale would be advertised to the public that includes several salvage units beyond the travel corridors where feasible. The other units, mainly hazard tree removal along travel corridors, may be completed through sales, force account, stewardship, or by other means. Mechanical treatment would facilitate natural regeneration of these stands. Trees that would likely be wind-thrown, if left standing after harvest, would be cut as well, (mostly large subalpine fir >9 inch DBH).

The adjacent US forest has implemented forest management treatments on their lands to salvage dead timber, reduce hazardous fuels, and promote healthy regeneration of lodgepole pine. The primary purpose of this project is to remove dead and dying trees to reduce the buildup of hazardous fuels on public lands and mitigate the potential public safety hazard of falling trees around the Grouse Mountain communication site and roads that provide access to the towers. Removing roadside hazard trees would provide for routine maintenance access to the towers by keeping the roads clear of debris from falling trees. Where feasible, hazard trees would be cut and removed near or adjacent to access roads, property boundaries, powerlines, and other infrastructure. The majority of the trees being removed would be dead lodgepole pine, however there are other tree species that may be selected for removal due to disease or poor form, or have a chance of falling into the road corridor. These tree species may include but are not limited to Douglas-fir, aspen, subalpine fir, and Engelmann spruce. The proposed action would also promote regeneration in the harvest units; and improve forest health and vigor in areas with younger regeneration.

All live and dead lodgepole pine trees that are five inches DBH or greater would be cut. Groups of other species, and lodgepole pine less than five inches DBH, would be retained where feasible. Smaller diameter lodgepole pine (1-4 inch DBH) may be cut to remove damaged, dead, diseased, or beetle-hit trees, or to reduce stand densities. Sound cull logs and larger diameter tops would be offered for sale as biomass or decked onsite to be disposed of at a later date. Slash material remaining after harvest operations would be lopped and scattered, broadcast burned, or piled for later burning by the BLM. Some slash may be left onsite to provide soil protection; the depth of the slash would not exceed 24 inches.

Access would be provided via Corral Creek County Road 21. This county road provides public access to the project area, and is maintained on a regular basis. These public roads provide access to adjacent U.S. Forest Service lands. The Grouse Mountain area is a popular recreation destination for hunters. Portions of the Fox Loop road (BLM 2758) would also provide access to some of the roadside hazard tree units. The existing roads may need to be improved and maintained. To facilitate harvest, it is estimated that a limited amount (less than 0.5 miles) of temporary road may be constructed to decrease skidding distances or provide access to landings adjacent to the main roads. Temporary road locations would be approved by the BLM prior to development. After harvest operations, temporary roads would be outsloped, and roads and landings would be scarified, as necessary. Temporary roads, landings and, as necessary, major skid trails, would be seeded with a BLM approved mixture of forbs and grasses by the purchaser. Temporary roads, or portions thereof, would also be slashed in.

Post harvest treatments may include a release and weed/thinning treatment (i.e. felling of residual undesirable trees), and noxious weed control. The BLM would monitor disturbed areas

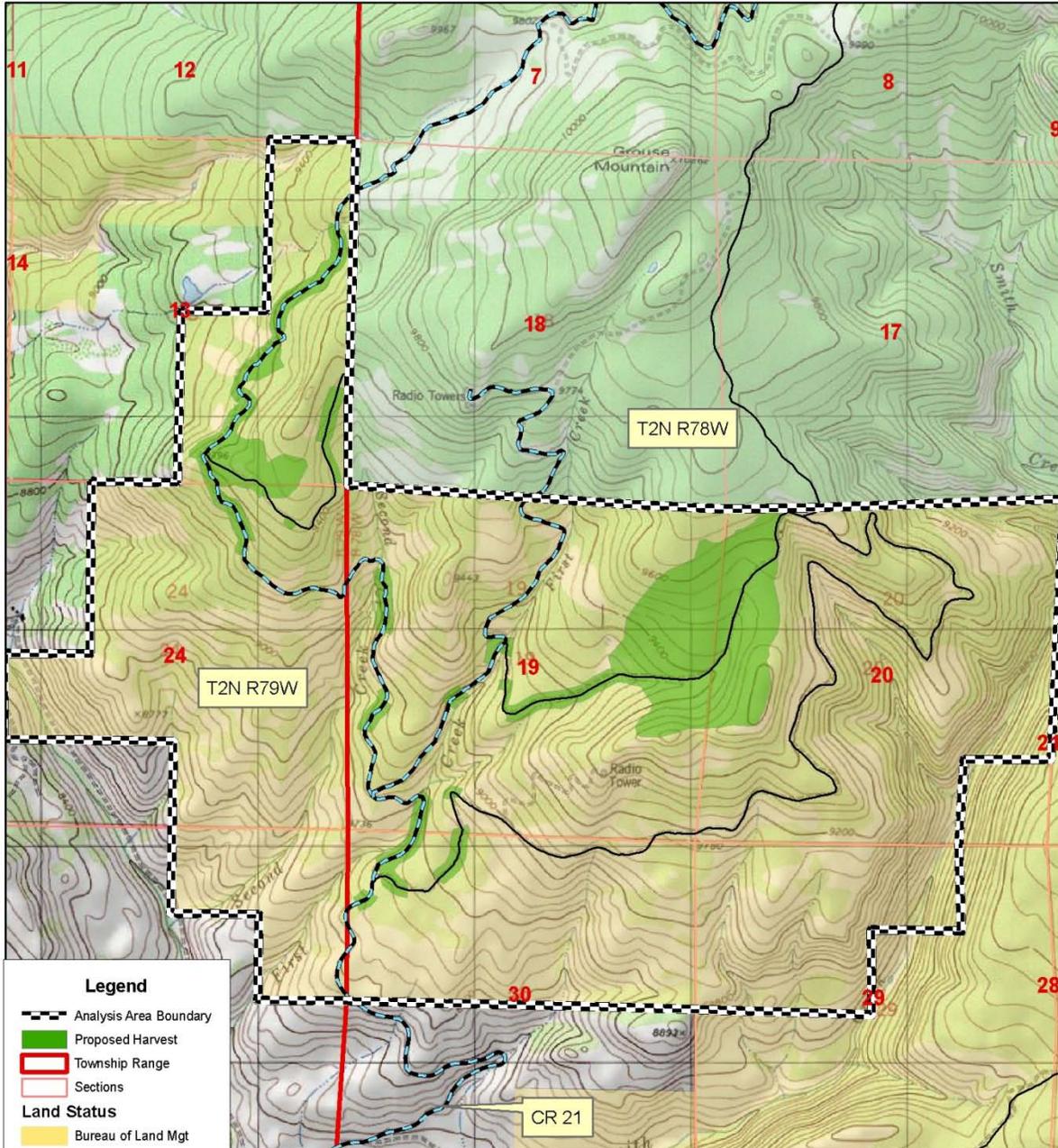
for noxious weeds for two growing seasons after project completion. If noxious weed control is found necessary, actions would be coordinated by the BLM.

Design Features of the Proposed Action:

- Vegetative buffers for wetland and riparian areas would be required to protect wetland vegetation and to reduce sediment deposition in the wetlands. No vehicles or large equipment would operate within the buffer. Limited surface disturbance would be allowed within the buffers:
 - -50 foot buffer for small drainages (intermittent and ephemeral)
 - -100 foot buffer for perennial streams.
- Fences and other improvements damaged from the timber salvage operation would be fixed by the contractor.
- No mechanical equipment would be allowed to travel in a wetland or riparian area. If areas must be crossed, best management practices would be required to reduce alteration of the hydrology or vegetation.
- Survey monuments (brass cap monuments, bearing trees, mineral claim posts, etc.) would be located, flagged and protected.
- If an active goshawk nest is located within a timber sale unit, a 1/8th mile buffer around the nest site would be required.
- Harvesting operations would be limited to winter and after-the –thaw dry summer periods.
- Temporary road construction/reconstruction would not occur during periods of wet or frozen soils.
- If significant fossils are discovered during the preliminary inventory or during monitoring, a professional Paleontologist would be hired by BLM to complete a professional inventory and/or complete any needed mitigation.
- The project area would be signed and a news release issued notifying the public of the project two weeks before operations commence.
- Temporary road locations would be approved by the BLM prior to development. After harvest operations, temporary roads would be outsloped, and roads and landings would be scarified, as necessary. Temporary roads, or portions thereof, would also be slashed in.
- When possible the project would occur outside the big game hunting seasons between August 15 and December 15.
- Outfitters with valid Special Recreation Permits within the project area would be notified of when the project will commence.



Grouse Mountain Project Area



Legend

- Analysis Area Boundary
- Proposed Harvest
- Township Range
- Sections

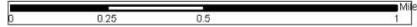
Land Status

- Bureau of Land Mgt
- Division of Wildlife
- US Forest Service
- Private
- State

Roads

- County Road
- Light Duty Road

1:24,000



Acreage
Proposed harvest
TOTAL = 242 acres

Maps: Parshall & Corral Peak 24k
BLM, Kremmling FO-Tom A. - May/4/2011
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grouse_mtn_EA_working.mxd

No Warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the Accuracy, Reliability, or Completeness of this Data for Individual Use or Aggregate Use with Other Data.

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: II-6, page 10

Decision Language: *“To manage all productive forest land that is suitable for producing a variety of forest products on a sustained yield basis. This action will create a healthy forest environment through continued forest management practices.”*

The Proposed Action was designed in conformance with bureau standards and incorporates the Colorado BLM Standards for Public Land Health.

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION REVIEW: The Proposed Action qualifies as a categorical exclusion under 516 DM 11, Number: 11.9 (C)(9), *“Commercial and non-commercial sanitation harvest of trees to control insects or disease not to exceed 250 acres, requiring no more than 0.5 miles of temporary road construction.”* None of the following extraordinary circumstances in 516 DM 2, Appendix 2, apply.

Extraordinary Circumstances	Yes	No
2.1 Have significant impacts on public health or safety		X
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.		X
2.3 Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA section 102(2)(E)].		X
2.4 Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.		X
2.5 Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.		X
2.6 Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.		X
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.		X

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.		X
2.9 Violate a Federal Law, or a State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.		X
2.10 Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898).		X
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).		X
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).		X

INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW:

Name	Title	Area of Responsibility	Date Review Completed
Cynthia Landing	Rangeland Management Specialist	Vegetation and Range Mgt	06/10/2011
Megan McGuire	Wildlife Biologist	T&E Species and Wildlife	6/13/2011
Bill B. Wyatt	Archaeologist	Cultural Resources	6/14/2011
Bill B. Wyatt	Archaeologist	Tribal Consultation	6/14/2011
Bill B. Wyatt	Archaeologist	Paleontology	6/14/2011
Paula Belcher	Hydrologist	Soil, Water, Air, and Riparian	6/10/2011
John Monkouski	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Recreation, Transportation and Access	6/14/2011

REMARKS:

Vegetation and Range Management: These units exist on active livestock grazing allotments, on which cattle may be present from 6-28/11-10. Inform the contractor of possible livestock presence to prevent any conflicts.

Threatened and Endangered Species: Threatened, endangered and candidate species, which could inhabit the proposed project area, were addressed in a Biological Assessment (BA), which is on file in the Kremmling Field Office. This BA determined the proposed project “may affect but is not likely to adversely affect” Canada lynx, a federally threatened species. In summary, the project occurs in marginal habitat for lynx, it’s located on the periphery of the species range, and few, if any, impacts would be expected. In addition, the project would be beneficial to lynx by improving the overall health of the forest.

COMPLIANCE PLAN: Contract administration would occur per contract regulations. Post harvest treatments may include a release and weed/thinning treatment (i.e. felling of residual undesirable trees), and noxious weed control. The BLM would monitor disturbed areas for noxious weeds for two growing seasons after project completion.

NAME OF PREPARER: Tom Adamson, Forester

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR: Susan Cassel

DATE: 6/14/2011

DECISION AND RATIONALE: I have reviewed this CER and have decided to implement the proposed action.

This action is listed in the Department Manual as an action that may be categorically excluded. I have evaluated the action relative to the 12 criteria listed above and have determined that it does not represent an extraordinary circumstance and is, therefore, categorically excluded from further environmental analysis.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL: /s/ Susan Cassel

DATE SIGNED: 6/14/11