**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-CON02000-2012-045-EA

**CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER**:

**PROJECT NAME**: Colorado River Sandbar Project at Junction Butte Wetland

**LEGAL DESCRIPTION**: T. 1 N., R. 80 W., Sec. 16, 6th P.M.

**APPLICANT**: BLM

**PURPOSE & NEED FOR THE ACTION**: The Junction Butte Wetland provides important habitat for waterfowl, the BLM Sensitive Northern Leopard frog, and big game. The purpose of the proposed project is to help facilitate water management within the wetland. The project is needed to reduce big game conflicts with private landowners, provide high quality habitat for wildlife, and to provide hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities to the public.

**DECISION TO BE MADE:** The BLM will decide whether to implement the proposed action, which is to remove material from the sandbar next to the inlet pump at the Junction Butte Wetland based on the analysis contained in this Environmental Assessment (EA). The BLM may choose to implement the proposed action, implement the proposed action with modifications/mitigation, or implement an alternative to the proposed action.

**SCOPING, PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AND ISSUES**:

**Scoping:** Scoping was the primary mechanism used by the BLM to initially identify issues. Internal scoping was initiated when the project was presented to the Kremmling Field Office interdisciplinary team on 7/30/2012. External scoping was conducted by posting this project on the KFO's on-line National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) register on 7/30/2012.

**Issues:** No issues were identified during public scoping.

**DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES**:

**Background/Introduction**: The Junction Butte Wetland is series of natural and manmade depressions that covers approximately 125 acres. The area is intersected by a series of irrigation

ditches that deliver water pumped from the Colorado River and the KB Ditch to the meadows and shallow depressions in the wetland. Since the BLM acquired the property in 1999, it has improved the water distribution system to facilitate the management of the hay meadow as wetland habitat. It is a critical area for a variety of wildlife, particularly waterbirds, amphibians, Mule deer, and Rocky Mountain Elk. In order to reach management objectives for the wetland, the BLM uses a variety of vegetation management techniques such as water management, manual and mechanical treatments, prescribed fire, and herbicides. Annual maintenance is performed to keep the area functioning as wetland.

Currently, there is a large sandbar blocking the inlet to the pump. In years with low water, such as in 2012, the pump is not able to operate. With no water being supplied to the wetland, BLM is not meeting its objectives to manage the area for wildlife, waterfowl, and amphibians and provide quality recreational opportunities.

**Proposed Action**: The proposed action is to remove material from a sandbar that blocks water from reaching the inlet to the pump that supplies water to the Junction Butte Wetland. An excavator would be walked down the access road and down a gently sloping portion of the streambank to the sandbar. The excavator would dig a trench through the sandbar, placing the excavated material below the high water line on the southern extent of the sandbar. The excavator would construct a trench approximately three feet wide and three feet deep, removing less than 80 yards of material. The trench would allow the Colorado River water to flow to the pump's inlet during periods of low flow when the sandbar is exposed. The project is expected to take place in September of 2012 during low flows.

Design Features:

- All eligible sites within the project area would be protected. Historic structures, though not eligible, would be avoided.

- All construction equipment must be clean prior to entering the project area.

- In-channel work would be avoided during spring spawning periods of April 1 to August 1, and fall spawning periods from October 1 to November 30, in order to protect redds (egg masses) in the gravel and emerging fry of fish populations.

- Excavated material will not be placed on riparian vegetation along the streambank.

- Disturbance of the active (currently wet) stream bottom will be minimized to reduce impacts to water quality. The excavator will remain on the sandbar as much as possible.

- If work must extend into the active channel, an upstream coffer dam will be used to divert the river away from the disturbance. (This is not anticipated).

- The electric fence would be disconnected just upstream from the irrigation pump, creating a gate for the equipment to access the streambank and river. The fence would be reconnected after the work is completed.

**No Action Alternative:** Material from the sandbar in front of the pump inlet would not be removed, thus no water would be supplied to the wetland when the Colorado River has low flows. As a result, vegetation vigor and age class diversity would gradually degrade, there would be no habitat for waterfowl and amphibians, and there would be reduced recreational activities for the public.

**ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT CARRIED FORWARD**: None.

**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: Record of Decision for the Kremmling Resource Management Plan

Date Approved: 1984 and updated in 1999

Decision Number/Page: Wildlife Habitat Management, Including Threatened and Endangered Species pages 8 and 9.

Decision Language: "Manage public land habitat to support optimum wildlife population levels as determined by the Colorado Division of Wildlife's Strategic Plan."

"Emphasis will be placed on intensively managing critical and important wildlife habitats, including….3,000 acres of wetlands…"

## AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT & ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

**Standards for Public Land Health**: In January 1997, the Colorado BLM approved the Standards for Public Land Health. These standards cover upland soils, riparian systems, plant and animal communities, special status species, and water quality. Standards describe conditions needed to sustain public land health and relate to all uses of the public lands. Because a standard exists for these five categories, a finding must be made for each of them in an environmental analysis (EA). These findings are located in specific elements listed below.

**Cumulative Effects Analysis Assumptions**: Cumulative effects are defined in the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR 1508.7) as "...the impact on the environment that results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-Federal) or person undertakes such other actions." Table 1 lists the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions within the area that might be affected by the Proposed Action; for this project the area considered was the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) 5th Level Watershed. However, the geographic scope used for analysis may vary for each cumulative effects issue and is described in the Affected Environment section for each resource.

**Table 1.** Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Actions

| Action Description | STATUS | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Past | Present | Future |
| Livestock Grazing | X | | X |

| Action Description | STATUS | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Past | Present | Future |
| Recreation | X | X | X |
| Invasive Weed Inventory and Treatments | X | X | X |
| Spring or Water Developments | X | X | X |
| Power Lines | X | X | X |
| Vegetation Treatments | X | X | X |

**Affected Resources:**

The CEQ Regulations state that NEPA documents "must concentrate on the issues that are truly significant to the action in question, rather than amassing needless detail" (40 CFR 1500.1(b)). While many issues may arise during scoping, not all of the issues raised warrant analysis in an environmental assessment (EA). Issues will be analyzed if: 1) an analysis of the issue is necessary to make a reasoned choice between alternatives, or 2) if the issue is associated with a significant direct, indirect, or cumulative impact, or where analysis is necessary to determine the significance of the impacts. Table 2 lists the resources considered and the determination as to whether they require additional analysis.

**Table 2.** Resources and Determination of Need for Further Analysis

| Determination[1] | Resource | Rationale for Determination |
|---|---|---|
| **Physical Resources** | | |
| NI | Air Quality | The Proposed Action would result in only a small amount of fugitive dust and equipment emissions that would occur only during the sandbar removal. The short duration of time and the amount of emissions would not impact air quality. The No Action Alternative would not impact air quality. |
| NI | Geology and Minerals | Geology and minerals would not be impacted by the Proposed project, or the No Action Alternative. |
| NI | Soil Resources* | The Proposed Action would have little impact to upland soils due to the dispersed weight of the machine and the short distance of bank it will travel. Under the No Action Alternative, the upland soils that have been historically irrigated by the pumped water would remain dry. Existing ground cover would decrease, and weed invasion could increase. In the long-term, there could be reduced nutrient cycling from the less dense vegetative cover (resulting in less litter) lessening overall soil health. |
| PI | Surface and Ground Water Quality* | See discussion. |
| **Biological Resources** | | |
| NI | Wetlands and Riparian Zones* | The Proposed Action will result in no measurable impacts to the riparian vegetation. The excavator will not make repeated trips up and down the streambank, and excavated material will not be placed on riparian or wetland vegetation, but will remain in the channel. The excavator walking down and up the gently sloped, vegetated, dry streambank will not remove vegetation or compact the soils. Under the No Action Alternative, irrigation of the property will be greatly reduced unless another action can restore the use of the pump. The decrease in the irrigated acreage will result in less wetland habitat, as the area would revert to an upland area. |

| Determination[1] | Resource | Rationale for Determination |
|---|---|---|
| NI | Vegetation* | No direct, indirect or cumulative impacts will occur due to the proposed or no action alternatives. |
| NI | Invasive, Non-native Species | No direct, indirect or cumulative impacts will occur due to the proposed or no action alternatives. |
| PI | Special Status Plant and Animal Species* | No T/E species present. BLM Sensitive species such as the Northern leopard frog, would not be impacted by the Proposed Action. However, the No Action Alternative, may affect these amphibians. See discussion. |
| PI | Migratory Birds | See discussion. |
| PI | Aquatic Wildlife* | Impacts to fish in the Colorado River would be avoided through implementation of the design features. However, the No Action Alternative may affect amphibians and waterfowl. See discussion. |
| PI | Terrestrial Wildlife* | See discussion. |
| **Heritage Resources and the Human Environment** | | |
| NP | Cultural Resources | The project is a no effect, there are no historic properties present. |
| NP | Paleontological Resources | The project would not affect fossil resources, there are no fossil resources present. |
| NP | Native American Religious Concerns | Because the project involved work in the Colorado River and would not affect any known resources, tribal consultation was not done. |
| NP | Visual Resources | Class II VRM. There would be very little change to VRM Classification based on the Proposed Action or No Action Alternative. Sand bars change naturally each year with water levels. Very short term change while construction is completed. |
| NP | Hazardous or Solid Wastes | 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 | Fire Management | There would be no impact to fire management as a result of the Proposed project or the No Action Alternative. |
| NI | Social and Economic Conditions | There would not be any substantial changes to local social or economic conditions. |
| NP | Environmental Justice | According to the most recent Economic Census Bureau statistics (2009), there are minority and low income communities within the Kremmling Planning Area. There would be no direct impacts to these populations. |
| **Resource Uses** | | |
| NP | Forest Management | There are no forest resources present in the project area. |
| NP | Rangeland Management | The project area is not in a livestock grazing allotment. Therefore, yearly, scheduled livestock grazing does not occur in the project area. |
| PI | Floodplains, Hydrology, and Water Rights | See discussion. |
| NI | Realty Authorizations | There are no realty authorizations within the proposed action area. |
| NI | Recreation | There would be very little impact to recreation. Sand bars naturally change with water levels. Some recreationist may be displaced up or downstream to a new sand bar. |

| Determination[1] | Resource | Rationale for Determination |
|---|---|---|
| NI | Access and Transportation | There would be no impacts to Access and Transportation as a result of the Proposed Action or No Action Alternative. |
| NI | Prime and Unique Farmlands | There are no farmlands, prime or unique, in the proximity of the proposed project area. The project area could be considered 'farmlands of state or local importance'. The BLM's management for waterfowl habitat, however, does not preclude the area's return to agricultural production, and the Proposed Action would be a recognized agricultural practice. The No Action alternative would reduce the amount of forage production on the property, but once irrigation resumed, the agricultural value of the land would be restored. |
| **Special Designations** | | |
| NP | Areas of Critical Environmental Concern | There are no ACECs within the project area. |
| NP | Wilderness and Lands with Wilderness Characteristics | There are no Wilderness or Lands with Wilderness Characteristics within the project area. |
| NP | Wild and Scenic Rivers | There are no Wild and Scenic Rivers in the KFO. |
| NP | Scenic Byways | There are no Scenic Byways within the project area. |

[1] NP = Not present in the area impacted by the Proposed Action or Alternatives. NI = Present, but not affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required. PI = Present with potential for impact analyzed in detail in the EA.
* Public Land Health Standard

## SURFACE & GROUND WATER QUALITY

*Affected Environment*: The Proposed Action is located along a public segment of the Upper Colorado River. This segment of the river is primarily used for irrigation, and is classified by the state for class 1 coldwater aquatic life, existing recreation, water supply, and agriculture. The river segment is included in the state's 303(d) List for water quality impairment due to stream temperatures exceeding the maximum weekly average temperature (MWAT) for trout species and for Manganese. The state has rated this impairment as having a high priority to develop TMDLs (total maximum daily load) to alleviate the problem. The Kremmling Field Office has installed a temperature sensor just downstream from the irrigation pump, at the Highway 9 bridge. The river temperatures are primarily affected by streamflow, air temperature, and stream shading. Temperature exceedances generally occur during the hottest time of the year, in late July. In 2012, the temperatures were warm, but the daily maximum was not exceeded at the Highway 9 site. The warmest BLM recorded single temperature was 20.7 C (state standard is 21.2 C). The highest MWAT was right at the state standard's limit of 17.0 on July 14$^{th}$, and the median MWAT for June-August was 15.6 C. Manganese is a more recent inclusion in the 303(d) List and the probable source has not been identified. It would most likely be from a geologic source, and it may be that the acceptable limits have been lowered due to the town of Kremmling now supplementing their water supply with Colorado River water downstream of the site.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:*

Direct and Indirect Effects: The Proposed Action will disturb a small area immediately around the sandbar and pump intake. The Army Corps of Engineers have determined the project to be exempt under the irrigation exemption for Section 404 of the Federal Clean Water Act.

The river is currently at a low discharge (550-650 cfs) and the upstream portion of the sandbar will keep the flowing river away from most of the excavation. It is only the last few feet of the trench that will near the current river's edge. Some increase in the sediment load may occur during the excavation of this portion of the trench. The increase would occur only during the actual work, and would not persist as soon as the excavator moves on. Some of the disturbed sediment would be immediately re-deposited on a downstream portion of the sandbar, due to the direction of flow, the rest would remain as suspended sediment until it is deposited on a downstream bar. The excavated material would be deposited along the high water line within the river channel. The material will remain dry until the river's water line comes up approximately two feet (roughly an additional 300 cfs.), giving the material time to settle and compact over winter. Some of this excavated material may then be transported downstream and some will remain on the sandbar. Although increased sediments can cause stream temperatures to also increase, the expected amount of disturbance is not expected to result in any measurable increase. The river's maximum daily stream temperatures are currently below 16 C, with good nighttime recovery, which reduces the MWAT. The Proposed Action does not affect ground water quality, as there is no shallow groundwater on the irrigated parcel.

Cumulative Effects: Even under low flow conditions, the expected amount of sediment that could be disturbed from the Proposed Action would be quickly diluted. The material is primarily fairly coarse sand and gravels and would be quickly re-deposited. Finer material could remain as suspended sediment in the river, but in a river of 500 cfs discharge, would not be a measurable increase. Excavated material deposited along the bank would be expected to remain in place or deposited further down on the same sandbar. The total volume of excavated material is still a small portion of the material that the river carries during a 800 cfs or more flow.

Aerial photographs appear to indicate that a trench has been constructed in the past to allow the pump to work during low flows. It is considered a temporary action to allow for the continued irrigation of the Junction Butte wetlands until a more permanent solution can be found. Depending on the actual river flows, the trench may quickly fill back in or be maintained for some years.

Operating the pump removes up to 13 cfs from the river, which cumulatively adds to the diversions depleting this segment of the river. The BLM typically pumps from mid-May to early September, with little irrigation occurring in late July to end of August, which is when the stream temperatures are generally their highest. The BLM has the flexibility to decrease or stop their diversion without an economic loss to a crop. If monitoring indicates their 13 cfs adversely affects the river's temperature, during periods of high temperatures, pumping rates could be decreased.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:*

Direct and Indirect Effects: Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no disturbance of the sandbar or the stream. There would be no impact to surface or ground water quality.

Cumulative Effects: There would be no cumulative effects to water quality.

*Mitigation*: None.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard #5 for Water Quality*: Although a formal interdisciplinary team has not assessed the project area for land health standards, the river segment is considered impaired by the state of Colorado for stream temperatures and Manganese. Due to the short construction time and small area of disturbance, the Proposed Action is not expected to effect the stream's temperatures or the manganese concentrations. The Proposed Action does not affect the area's ability to meet the Standard. Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no impacts to water quality or the area's ability to meet the Standard.

**SPECIAL STATUS PLANT and ANIMAL SPECIES**

*Affected Environment*: No threatened or endangered species occur within the project area. The Junction Butte Wetlands provides habitat for the BLM Sensitive Northern Leopard frog. Monitoring indicates that this area is largest population of Northern Leopard frogs in Grand County.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:*
Direct and Indirect Effects: Continuing to maintain the Junction Butte Wetland would provide beneficial long-term impacts for Northern Leopard frogs by improving wetland vegetation and providing habitat for breeding and rearing young.

Cumulative Effects: No cumulative, irreversible, or irretrievable impacts are expected to occur as a result of the Proposed Action.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:*
Direct and Indirect Effects: If the No Action Alternative is implemented, the wetland would not be maintained and there would be less habitat for Northern Leopard frogs. Declines in the population would likely occur. Direct, indirect, and potentially irretrievable impacts include the loss of important habitat for Northern Leopard frogs and potentially the loss of the largest population occurrence in Grand County.

Cumulative Effects: No cumulative or irreversible impacts are expected to occur as a result of the No Action Alternative.

*Mitigation*: None.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard #4 for Special Status Species*: No analysis has been conducted; however, the proposed project would help the the area meet Standard 4 for BLM Sensitive species. The No Action Alternative would likely degrade and reduce habitat for Special Status Species, therefore, negatively impacting Standard 4 for this area.

**MIGRATORY BIRDS**

*Affected Environment*: The proposed project would occur in habitat occupied by a variety of migratory birds including Yellow Warbler, Western Wood-Pewee, Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Dusky Flycatcher, Hermit Thrush, Veery, Violet-green Swallow, and Warbling Vireo. Red-

tailed hawks, Great-horned Owls, and Swainson's hawks also use the riparian area adjacent to Junction Butte as hunting habitat.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:*
Direct and Indirect Effects: Continuing to maintain the Junction Butte Wetland would provide beneficial long-term impacts for migratory birds by improving wetland vegetation and providing additional feeding and nesting habitat.

Cumulative Effects: No cumulative, irreversible, or irretrievable impacts are expected to occur as a result of the Proposed Action.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:*
Direct and Indirect Effects: If the No Action Alternative is implemented, the wetland would not be maintained and overall vegetation diversity and health would not improve. Direct, indirect, and potentially irretrievable impacts include the continued loss of feeding and nesting habitat for migratory birds.

Cumulative Effects: No cumulative or irreversible impacts are expected to occur as a result of the No Action Alternative.

*Mitigation*: None.

**AQUATIC WILDLIFE**

*Affected Environment*: The proposed project is located in an area used by a variety of aquatic wildlife including chorus frogs and several species of waterfowl. These species use the wetland vegetation for breeding and nesting, and open water habitat for foraging.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:*
Direct and Indirect Effects: Implementation of the Proposed Action would be beneficial to aquatic wildlife since it would maintain the wetland and open water habitat. It would maintain forage, nesting, and breeding habitat for both amphibians and waterfowl.

Cumulative Effects: No cumulative, irreversible, or irretrievable impacts are expected to occur as a result of the Proposed Action.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:*
Direct and Indirect Effects: If the No Action Alternative is implemented, the wetland would not be maintained and habitat for aquatic wildlife would be lost. Direct, indirect, and potentially irretrievable impacts include the continued loss of feeding and breeding habitat for aquatic wildlife.

Cumulative Effects: No cumulative or irreversible impacts are expected to occur as a result of the No Action Alternative.

*Mitigation*: None.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard #3 for Plant and Animal Communities:* The project area is not part of a livestock grazing allotment. Therefore, the area has not been assessed for compliance with the Standards for Public Land Health in Colorado. However, the proposed project would help the area meet Standard 3 for plant and animal communities. The No Action Alternative would likely degrade and reduce habitat for aquatic wildlife, therefore, negatively impacting Standard 3 for this area.

**TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE**

*Affected Environment*: The proposed project would occur in an area used by a variety of terrestrial wildlife including mule deer, Rocky Mountain elk, porcupine and a variety of other small mammals. The proposed project would be located adjacent to wetland vegetation that is used as foraging habitat for those species listed above.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:*
Direct and Indirect Effects: Implementation of the Proposed Action would be beneficial to terrestrial wildlife since it would maintain the wetland habitat. It would maintain quality forage, particularly in the winter months for many species.

Cumulative Effects: No cumulative, irreversible, or irretrievable impacts are expected to occur as a result of the Proposed Action.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:*
Direct and Indirect Effects: If the No Action Alternative is implemented, the wetland would not be maintained and habitat for terrestrial wildlife would be reduced. Direct, indirect, and potentially irretrievable impacts include reduced forage. Reduced forage would result in higher big game conflicts on private lands and a reduced chance of survival over the winter months.

Cumulative Effects: No cumulative or irreversible impacts are expected to occur as a result of the No Action Alternative.

*Mitigation*: None.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard #3 for Plant and Animal Communities:* The project area is not part of a livestock grazing allotment. Therefore, the area has not been assessed for compliance with the Standards for Public Land Health in Colorado. However, the proposed project would help the area meet Standard 3 for plant and animal communities. The No Action Alternative would likely degrade and reduce habitat for terrestrial wildlife, therefore, negatively impacting Standard 3 for this area.

**FLOODPLAINS, HYDROLOGY, AND WATER RIGHTS**

*Affected Environment*: The Junction Butte Wetlands are located in the historic floodplain of the upper Colorado River. Due to the upstream transbasin diversions, floods no longer inundate

the entire area. During very high flows, the areas immediately adjacent to the river and the western portion of the property still floods.

The irrigated parcel does not have any naturally occurring wetlands due to a high water table or groundwater. The property was historically flood irrigated but due to decreased flows from the Colorado Big Thompson project, in 1947 pumps were installed to be able to continue irrigation. The parcel is primarily underlain by river gravels, sands, and cobbles, and tends to drain relatively quickly, necessitating irrigation to fill the natural depressions and to support wetland vegetation.

The BLM acquired the water rights with the property. The Thompson Pump No. 2 was originally decreed in water case W1709 in 1952, with an appropriation date of January 1, 1900, for 13.84 cfs conditional. In case 80CW258, 10 cfs was made absolute, and the remaining 3.84 cfs was made absolute in case 84CW199. The priority of this water right is 449$^{th}$ and the BLM may only operate their pump when this water right is in priority.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:*

Direct and Indirect Effects: The Proposed Action would trench a small channel into an existing sandbar, to bring water from the Colorado River to the Thompson Pump No. 2's intake. This would not alter the function of the floodplain or alter the hydrology of the river. It is expected that over time, depending on the river's flows, the trench will be filled in naturally by the river. The Proposed Action would allow the BLM to exercise their water right under the Colorado prior appropriation system. There would be no injury to senior water right holders. Due to the small amount of excavated material deposited on the southern edge of the sandbar, there would not be any measurable changes to the hydrology of the river, nor does it affect the flood hazard.

Cumulative Effects: The Proposed Action would allow the BLM to continue to irrigate a historic hay meadow and provide benefits to wetlands, wildlife, and recreational uses. The trench would result in a small, short term, disturbance to the river. BLM 's pumping is an additive depletion to the Upper Colorado River, which has numerous diversions, and in some years, falls short of even meeting the minimum instream flow of 150 cfs determined for this river segment. During the 2002 drought, streamflow models estimate that there were 104 days (May-Sept.) that the instream flow was short 27-71 cfs.

In a water rights report prepared by Rapid Engineering, the operation of the Thompson No. 2 Pump was assessed, including the consumptive use of the irrigated hay meadow. Much of the pump water seeps through the soils and returns to the river. The amount of water not returned to the river is a small percentage of the diverted water. Using a Glover analysis, the river depletion as a result of the pumping is 1.2 cfs (June) or less. The BLM has the flexibility to decrease depletions during times of drought without economic loss, but overall, its diversions do not deplete much water from the stream and provides important wetland habitat.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:*

Direct and Indirect Effects: Under the No Action Alternative, the sandbar would continue to be shaped by the streamflows. High flows could reduce the size of the bar or add to it, depending on upstream conditions.

The BLM would not be able to exercise a valuable water right on the Colorado River as it has been historically used.

Cumulative Effects: If this segment experiences subsequent years of low flows, leaving the sandbar exposed, then perennial vegetation will be established on the sandbar. The sandbar would then eventually become the active streambank, narrowing the channel.

The BLM's investment in upgrading the irrigation system, repairing the pump, and fencing the wetland would be a "loss" until another alternative could be developed and funded to use the irrigation system.

*Mitigation*: None

**REFERENCES CITED:** None

**TRIBES, INDIVIDUALS, ORGANIZATIONS, OR AGENCIES CONSULTED:**

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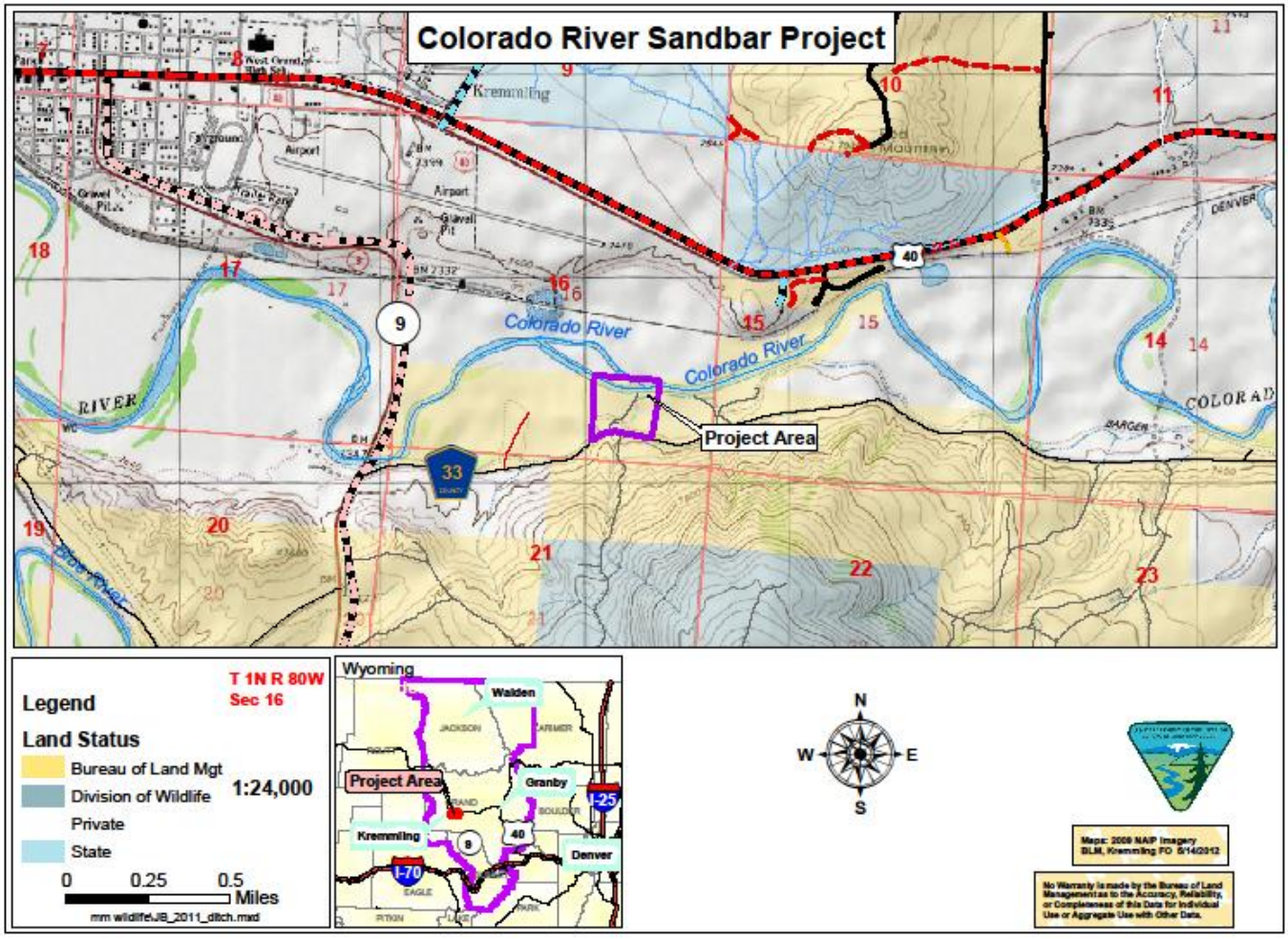
**INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW:**

| Name | Title | Area of Responsibility | Date Signed |
|---|---|---|---|
| Paula Belcher | Hydrologist | Air Quality; Surface and Ground Water Quality; Floodplains, Hydrology, and Water Rights; Soils, Farmlands, Prime and Unique | 09/06/2012 |
| Bill Wyatt | Archaeologist | Cultural Resources; Native American Religious Concerns; Paleontological Resources | 09/06/2012 |
| Zach Hughes | Natural Resource Specialist | Weed Coordinator, Invasive, Non-Native Species | 08/01/2012 |
| Cynthia Landing | Rangeland Management Specialist | Vegetation; Rangeland Management | 07/25/2012 |
| Megan McGuire | Wildlife Biologist | Migratory Birds; Special Status Plant and Animal Species; Terrestrial and Aquatic Wildlife; Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. | 7/26/2012 |
| Kelly Elliot | Natural Resource Specialist | Hazardous or Solid Wastes; Geology and Minerals | 07/26/12 |
| Kevin Thompson | Fuels Specialist | Fire Ecology, Fuels Management | 07/24/2012 |
| John Monkouski | Outdoor Recreation Planner | Transportation, Recreation, Access, Wilderness, Wilderness Characteristics | 08/20/12 |
| Hannah Schechter | Outdoor Recreation Planner | Visual Resources; Recreation, Wild and Scenic River | 08/20/12 |
| Ken Belcher | Forester | Forest Management | 07/24/2012 |
| Annie Sperandio | Realty Specialist | Land Tenure/Status, Realty Authorizations | 07/25/2012 |
| Megan McGuire | Wildlife Biologist | Project Lead – Document Preparer | 09/06/2012 |
| Susan Cassel | Associate FO Manager | Environmental Justice, Social Economics, P&E Coordinator | XX/XX/XXX |

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Figure 1 and 2: Maps of the Project Area.


Colorado River Sandbar Project
Project Area
Colorado River
Kremmling
Airport
Gravel Pit
Trailer Park
Legend
T 1N R 80W
Sec 16
Land Status
Bureau of Land Mgt
Division of Wildlife
Private
State
1:24,000
0 0.25 0.5 Miles
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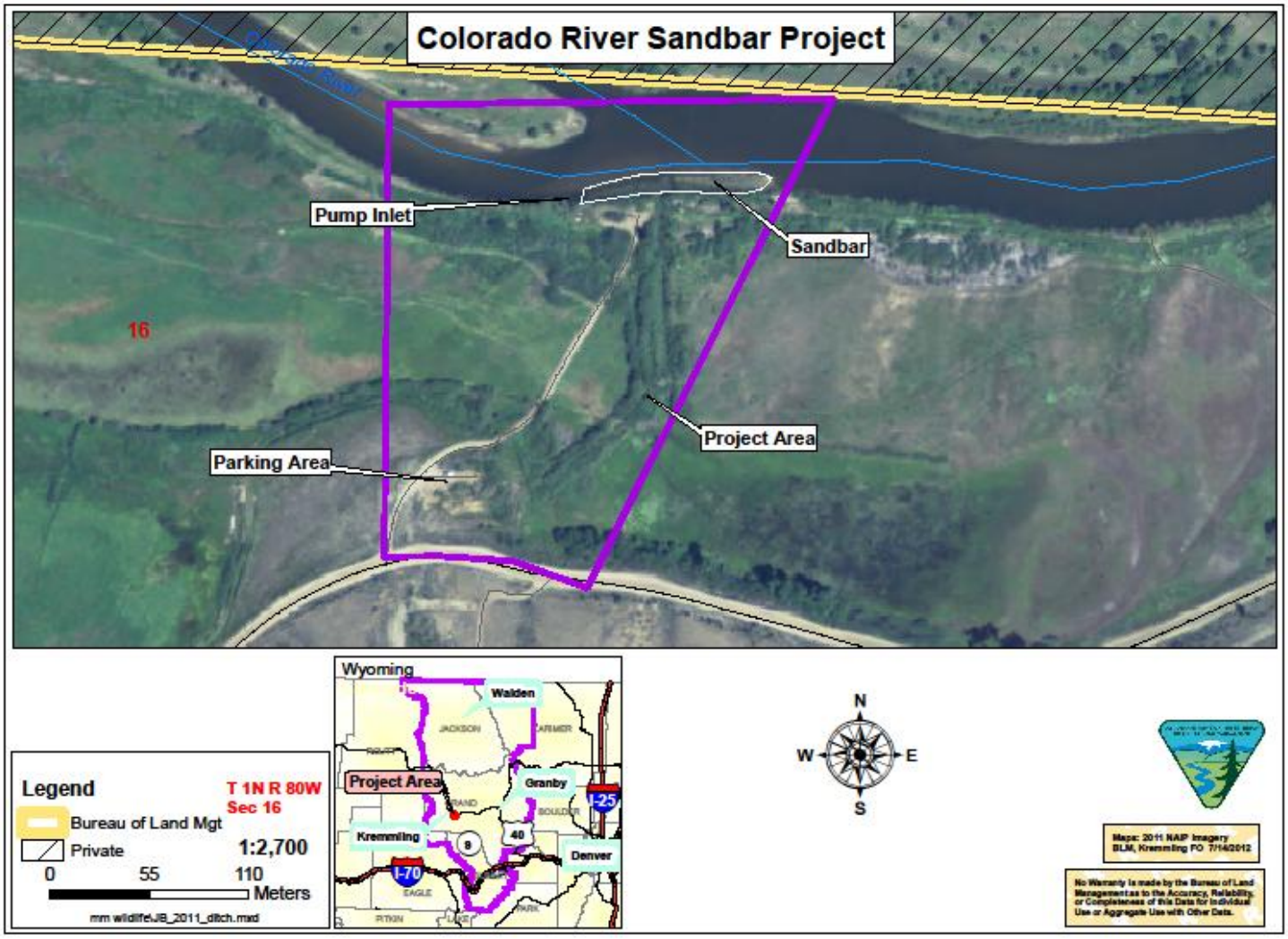
Maps: 2009 NAIP Imagery
BLM, Kremmling FO 5/14/2012
No Warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the Accuracy, Reliability, or Completeness of this Data for Individual Use or Aggregate Use with Other Data.


Colorado River Sandbar Project
Pump Inlet
Sandbar
16
Project Area
Parking Area
Wyoming
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BLM, Kremmling FO 7/14/2012

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

# Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

**DOI-BLM-CON02000-2012-0045-EA**

## BACKGROUND

The Junction Butte Wetland is series of natural depressions that cover approximately 125 acres. The area is intersected by a series of irrigation ditches that deliver water pumped from the Colorado River and the KB Ditch to the meadows and shallow depressions in the wetland. Since the BLM acquired the property in 1999, it has improved the water distribution system to facilitate the management of the hay meadow as wetland habitat. In order to reach management objectives for the wetland, the BLM uses a variety of vegetation management techniques such as water management, manual and mechanical treatments, prescribed fire, and herbicides. Annual maintenance is performed to keep the area functioning as wetland.

Currently, there is a large sandbar blocking the inlet to the pump that supplies water to the Junction Butte Wetland. In years with low water, such as in 2012, the pump is not able to operate. With no water being supplied to the wetland, BLM is not meeting its objectives to manage the area for wildlife, waterfowl, and amphibians and provide quality recreational opportunities.

## FINDING OF NO SIGNFICANT IMPACT

Based upon a review of the EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that the Proposed Action is not a major federal action and will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity, as defined at 40 CFR 1508.27 and do not exceed those effects as described in the "Record of Decision for the Kremmling Resource Management Plan," updated in 1999. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described below.

### Context

The project is a site-specific action directly involving BLM administered public lands that do not in and of itself have international, national, regional, or state-wide importance.

### Intensity

The following discussion is organized around the 10 Significance Criteria described at 40 CFR 1508.27. The following have been considered in evaluating intensity for this Proposed Action:

**1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.**

This project may have minor short-term impacts to floodplains, hydrology, and water rights, surface and ground water quality, and wildlife; however these impacts are not significant.

**2. The degree to which the Proposed Action affects public health or safety.**
There would be no impact to public health and safety.

**3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.**
There are no significant impacts to riparian vegetation, parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, historic, cultural, or wild and scenic rivers within the project area. There are no municipal water supplies in the project area.

**4. Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.**
The effects of the proposed action on the quality of the human environment are not considered highly controversial.

**5. Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risk.**
No highly uncertain or unknown risks to the human environment were identified during analysis of the Proposed Action.

**6. Degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.**
The Proposed Action neither establishes a precedent for future BLM actions with significant effects nor represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

**7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.**
The proposed action is not related to other past, present or reasonable foreseeable actions likely to result in any significant impacts. The cumulative impacts of other activities and any other reasonable foreseeable activities in the same area are not likely to result in cumulatively significant impacts.

**8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed on the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.**
The ground-disturbing activities associated with the proposed action would not directly adversely affect any sites eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

**9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973.**
The project would not adversely affect any sensitive, threatened, endangered species or those proposed for listing.

**10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.**
Neither the Proposed Action nor impacts associated with it violate any laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

**SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL**: _____
Field Manager

**DATE SIGNED**:

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

# DECISION RECORD

**PROJECT NAME:** Colorado River Sandbar Removal at Junction Butte Wetland

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT NUMBER:** DOI-BLM-LLCON02000-2011-0045-EA

## DECISION

It is my decision to implement the Proposed Action, as mitigated in DOI-BLM-CO-2012-0045-EA, authorizing the removal of material from a sandbar that blocks water from reaching the inlet to the pump that supplies water to the Junction Butte Wetland. An excavator would be walked down the access road and down a gently sloping portion of the streambank to the sandbar. The excavator would dig a trench through the sandbar, placing the excavated material below the high water line on the southern extent of the sandbar. The excavator would construct a trench approximately three feet wide and three feet deep, removing less than 80 yards of material. The trench would allow the Colorado River water to flow to the pump's inlet during periods of low flow when the sandbar is exposed.

**Mitigation Measures: None**

## COMPLIANCE WITH LAWS & CONFORMANCE WITH THE LAND USE PLAN

This decision is in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act. It is also in conformance with the Record of Decision for the Kremmling Resource Management Plan," updated in 1999.

## ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The Proposed Action was analyzed in DOI-BLM-CO-2012-0045-EA and it was found to have no significant impacts, thus an EIS is not required.

## PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

External scoping was conducted by posting this project on the KFO's on-line National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) register on 7/30/2012. No issues were identified during public scoping.

## RATIONALE

Analysis of the Proposed Action has concluded that there are no significant negative impacts and that it meets Colorado Standards for Public Land Health.

## ADMINISTRATIVE REMEDIES

None.

**SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL**: _____

Field Manager

**DATE SIGNED**: