

U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
Little Snake Field Office  
455 Emerson Street  
Craig, CO 81625-1129

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

**EA-NUMBER:** CO-100-2008-030 EA

Note: The analysis in this document tiers off of the Emerald Mountain Land Exchange Environmental Assessment/Plan Amendment (EA CO-100-2006-089), prepared for the Bureau of Land Management by Western Ecological Resource, Inc., which may be viewed at the Little Snake Field Office, Craig, Colorado.

**CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER/LEASE NUMBER:** COC70988

**PROJECT NAME:** Emerald Mountain Withdrawal

**LEGAL DESCRIPTION:**

T.6N., R.85W.,

Sec. 13, SE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ , excepting and excluding the west 100 feet thereof and the north 100 feet thereof; Sec. 15, S $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ , S $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ , and SE $\frac{1}{4}$ ; Sec. 21, that portion of the S $\frac{1}{2}$ N $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ , S $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$  and E $\frac{1}{2}$ S $\frac{1}{4}$  lying North and East of the centerline of the Cow Creek Road (County Road No. 45) excepting the traverse and right-of-way, whether an easement or in fee, for County Road No. 45;

Sec. 22;

Sec. 23, W $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ , W $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ , SE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ , SW $\frac{1}{4}$ , S $\frac{1}{2}$ N $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ , and S $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ ;

Sec. 24, E $\frac{1}{2}$ E $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ , E $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ , S $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ , SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ , NW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ , S $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ , W $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ , and NE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ ;

Secs. 25 and 26;

Secs. 27, 34, and 35, those portions lying north and east of the centerline of the Cow Creek Road (County Road No. 45);

*Excepting therefrom* a parcel of land containing 123.78 acres located in secs. 23 and 24 of T.6N., R.85W. of the 6th P.M., Routt County, Colorado, described as follows: Beginning at a point on the North side of an existing road (top of ridge) and on the North line of the said NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$  of sec. 23 from which the Northwest corner of said sec. 23 bears N89°13'23"W 164.58 feet; Thence East along the North line of the said NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$  of sec. 23 to the Northwest corner of the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$  of sec. 23 and the Northwest corner of a parcel of land which is described at Reception Number 610794 (State of Colorado Patent No. 8350) of the Routt County Clerk

and Recorders Records; Thence South along the West line of the said NE<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>W<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> of sec. 23 and along the West line said Reception Number 610794; Thence East along the South line of the said NE<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>NW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> of sec. 23 and along a South line said Reception Number 610794; Thence South along the West line of the said NE<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>SE<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>NW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> of sec. 23 and along a West line said Reception Number 610794; Thence East along the South line of the said NE<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>SE<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>NW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> of sec. 23 and along a South line said Reception Number 610794; Thence South along the West line of the said NE<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> of sec. 23 and along a West line said Reception Number 610794; Thence South along the West line of the said N<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>N<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>SE<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> of sec. 23 and along a West line said Reception Number 610794; Thence East along the South line of the said N<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>N<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>SE<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> of sec. 23 and along the South line said Reception Number 610794; Thence East along the South line of the said N<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>NW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>SW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> of sec. 24 and along the South line said Reception Number 610794; Thence North along the East line of the said N<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>NW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>SW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> of sec. 24 and along an East line said Reception Number 610794; Thence East along the South line of the said W<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>SE<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>NW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> of sec. 24 and along a South line said Reception Number 610794; Thence North along the East line of the said W<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>SE<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>NW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> of sec. 24 and along an East line said Reception Number 610794 to the VOR Boundary Line (State Lease No. S-40743); Thence along the VOR Boundary Line S12°50'23.83" E 299.28 feet; Thence S33°42'23.83" E 22.93 feet to the said North side of an existing road (top of ridge); Thence along the North side of an existing road (top of ridge) the following 110 calls:

Thence S50°53'23.53" W 74.77 feet; Thence S30°01'24.53" W 154.66 feet; Thence S28°31'23.53" W 87.10 feet; Thence S69°35'25.43" W 81.43 feet; Thence S85°40'22.03" W 60.86 feet; Thence S49°17'22.43" W 58.86 feet; Thence S41°56'25.93" W 134.03 feet; Thence S37°38'21.83" W 87.73 feet; Thence S15°35'23.03" W 79.00 feet; Thence S49°46'22.13" W 108.55 feet; Thence S12°48'21.33" W 74.61 feet; Thence S38°47'23.43" W 88.97 feet; Thence N85°43'23.33" W 115.46 feet; Thence N31°26'25.23" W 73.54 feet; Thence N14°56'22.03" W 104.21 feet; Thence N56°36'24.83" W 84.47 feet; Thence N86°58'23.23" W 25.88 feet; Thence N54°51'23.23" W 72.09 feet; Thence S85°51'21.23" W 105.33 feet; Thence S61°17'24.33" W 268.38 feet; Thence S40°58'25.23" W 112.92 feet; Thence S52°06'21.33" W 122.46 feet; Thence S60°18'24.83" W 136.16 feet; Thence S76°44'22.93" W 99.18 feet; Thence S86°42'22.63" W 66.02 feet; Thence S68°09'22.73" W 71.14 feet; Thence S72°42'23.33" W 86.80 feet; Thence S76°38'23.43" W 74.19 feet; Thence S58°25'20.53" W 104.46 feet; Thence S83°56'22.23" W 58.42 feet; Thence N64°17'25.53" W 154.26 feet; Thence S84°05'21.53" W 114.25 feet; Thence S88°58'21.93" W 132.72 feet; Thence S68°36'22.03" W 53.92 feet; Thence S76°57'20.93" W 103.67 feet; Thence N82°43'25.03" W 152.63 feet; Thence S65°04'25.93" W 131.51 feet; Thence S81°58'23.03" W 50.01 feet; Thence N66°22'24.43" W 103.89 feet; Thence N67°36'20.43" W 142.14 feet; Thence N81°15'21.83" W 101.71 feet; Thence N88°03'20.83" W 91.61 feet; Thence N85°51'21.03" W 83.84 feet; Thence S63°07'25.33" W 96.98 feet; Thence S87°19'25.53" W 52.62 feet; Thence N81°02'22.13" W 52.60 feet; Thence S72°58'22.83" W 102.27 feet; Thence N85°45'25.83" W 46.89 feet; Thence N76°50'22.63" W 121.49 feet; Thence N66°37'24.63" W 82.62 feet; Thence N70°03'22.73" W 102.49 feet; Thence N86°09'24.83" W 144.29 feet; Thence N61°19'21.13" W 54.13 feet; Thence N77°29'22.13" W 236.46 feet; Thence N65°54'23.03" W 63.61 feet; Thence N51°07'22.13" W 64.32 feet; Thence N39°08'22.33" W 177.57 feet; Thence N63°13'23.23" W 88.53 feet; Thence N35°43'22.73" W 75.59 feet; Thence N66°17'20.63" W 108.99 feet; Thence N57°14'20.23" W 58.33 feet; Thence

N82°432223 W 85.03 feet; Thence N37°252093 W 44.39 feet; Thence N24°092533 W 38.91 feet; Thence N47°562523 W 94.25 feet; Thence N41°562573 W 110.76 feet; Thence N25°132063 W 129.66 feet; Thence N41°272243 W 64.04 feet; Thence N11°222343 W 70.79 feet; Thence N41°162243 W 120.61 feet; Thence N59°172373 W 98.64 feet; Thence N62°592303 W 23.50 feet; Thence N32°412093 W 75.57 feet; Thence N41°542293 W 85.05 feet; Thence N29°452203 W 96.36 feet; Thence N04°542343 W 105.47 feet; Thence N17°022343 W 104.53 feet; Thence N42°242333 W 42.32 feet; Thence N73°512483 W 148.88 feet; Thence N66°362393 W 31.71 feet; Thence N45°562303 W 110.06 feet; Thence N37°302183 W 78.07 feet; Thence N29°312073 W 97.61 feet; Thence N39°242563 W 140.33 feet; Thence N31°392343 W 136.12 feet; Thence N41°492433 W 89.75 feet; Thence N68°542223 W 109.23 feet; Thence N51°312113 W 70.02 feet; Thence N15°082013 W 15.17 feet; Thence N15°272123 E 108.56 feet; Thence N21°372523 E 105.46 feet; Thence N06°442533 E 107.26 feet; Thence N03°032353 E 68.31 feet; Thence N21°052163 E 93.84 feet; Thence N00°262243 E 65.96 feet; Thence N09°162033 E 57.58 feet; Thence N18°372133 W 72.17 feet; Thence N37°532143 W 124.39 feet; Thence N61°432363 W 89.58 feet; Thence N50°422333 W 86.54 feet; Thence N53°382513 W 83.66 feet; Thence N37°162483 W 46.09 feet; Thence N17°282583 W 56.27 feet; Thence N06°242063 W 44.49 feet; Thence N16°532313 W 106.95 feet; Thence N05°022103 W 224.13 feet; Thence N14°402373 W 82.61 feet; Thence N28°192203 W 76.69 feet; Thence N11°152243 W 69.14 feet; Thence N00°552113 W 21.10 feet to the Point of Beginning.

6<sup>th</sup> PM, Routt County, Colorado

All bearings shown hereon are based upon the North line of the NE1/4 of said Sec. 24 as being N89°242023 W. The areas described aggregate 4,138.52 acres, more or less, in Routt County according to U.S. Government Survey and James B. Ackerman, R.L.S. #16394, of Emerald Mountain Surveys, Inc., Steamboat Springs, Colorado 80477.

**APPLICANT:** Bureau of Land Management

**PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW:** The proposed action is subject to the following plan:

Name of Plans: Emerald Mountain Land Exchange Plan Amendment and Decision Record

Date Approved: October 4, 2006

LUP Name: Little Snake Resource Area, Resource Management Plan (RMP)/EIS and Record of Decision (ROD)

Date Approved: April 26, 1989

Final RMP/EIS: September, 1986

Results: The proposed action has been reviewed for conformance with this plan and plan amendment (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3). The proposed action is in conformance with the objectives for this management unit.

**NEED FOR PROPOSED ACTION:** The purpose of the proposed action is to protect scenic, recreation, water quality and wildlife habitat values by withdrawing the described lands acquired in the Emerald Mountain Land Exchange from settlement, sale, location or entry under the general land laws, including the mining laws, mineral and geothermal leasing laws.

**PUBLIC SCOPING PROCESS:** The NEPA log is posted on the Little Snake Field Office web site before proposed actions are authorized.

**DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES:** The proposed action is to withdraw the Emerald Mountain acquired lands from sale, settlement, location or entry under the general land laws, including the mining laws, mineral and geothermal leasing laws for a period of 20 years. Withdrawal of the lands is considered particularly crucial to prevent the filing of fraudulent mining claims that could be used for temporary residential purposes.

**NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE:** The “No Action” alternative is that the Emerald Mountain lands would not be withdrawn from settlement, sale, location or entry under the general land laws, including the mining laws, mineral and geothermal leasing laws. The lands would then be open under the general land laws upon the expiration of the 2-year segregation in May, 2009. However, since the proposed action is consistent with the Emerald Mountain Land Exchange EA/Plan Amendment and Decision Record, the “No Action” alternative will not be analyzed further in this EA.

## **AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT/ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES/MITIGATION MEASURES**

### **CRITICAL RESOURCES**

A critical resource present, but not relevant to the proposed action, is Air Quality. Critical resources not present include Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), Sensitive Plant Species, Threatened & Endangered Plant Species, Prime and Unique Farmlands and Wild and Scenic Rivers. These resources are not analyzed in this document.

### **CULTURAL RESOURCES**

Affected Environment: Cultural resources in northwestern Colorado, range from late Paleo-Indian to Historic. For a general understanding of the cultural resources in this area of Colorado, see *An Overview of Prehistoric Cultural Resources, Little Snake Resource Area, Northwestern Colorado*, Bureau of Land Management Colorado, Cultural Resources Series, Number 20, *An Isolated Empire, A History of Northwestern Colorado*, Bureau of Land Management Colorado, Cultural Resource Series, Number 2 and *Colorado Prehistory: A Context for the Northern Colorado River Basin*, Colorado Council of Professional Archaeologists.

Specifically on the area around Emerald Mountain, the known cultural resources and historic use are related to homesteading, mining, recreation, and ranching. Numerous homesteads were filed during late 1800s to 1932. Three known unrecorded cultural resources on Emerald Mountain adjacent to the BLM parcels are the stone quarry, onyx quarry, and the Emerald Mountain Ski Lift and Runs from 1947-48. Otherwise, the BLM lands on Emerald Mountain were historically used for grazing purposes from the early 1900's.

There has been little reported about evidence of prehistoric occupation of the lands on Emerald Mountain. There have been very few, if any, reports of arrowhead finds on the Emerald Mountain lands. The acquisition of the Emerald Mountain lands does not add greatly to our knowledge of the history or prehistory of the area. There are no recorded sites on the Emerald Mountain lands. There are a few known unrecorded sites, as noted above, and little else is currently known about cultural resources. (Stanko, Jim - Historical Information on the Emerald Mountain State Land, 2005, M.S. thesis on file, Little Snake Field Office, Craig, Colorado)

One Class III survey has occurred on the BLM lands on Emerald Mountain:

Morris, Robyn Watkins  
2007 Class III Survey for Emerald Mountain Ridgeview Trail, Routt County, Colorado  
(BLM#10.29.07)

Environmental Consequences: The proposed action would have beneficial impacts to cultural resources, known and unknown, by protection of the acquired lands from settlement, sale, location or entry under the general land laws.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**

Affected Environment: As required by Executive Order 12898, "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations," federal agencies are asked to consider the composition of an affected area to determine whether minority populations, low-income populations, or Native American tribes are affected by actions proposed by that agency and whether there would be disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on these populations.

Environmental Consequences: The proposed action would not have an adverse impact on minorities, low-income, or Native American populations. No sacred sites have been identified within the planning area, and consultation with all affected Native American tribes was initiated early on in the planning process. There would be no adverse human health impact and no adverse impacts to minority populations, low-income populations, or Native Americans.

## **FLOOD PLAINS**

Affected Environment: The Emerald Mountain acquired lands are bordered by an 18,558-foot long segment of Cow Creek, a north flowing tributary of the Yampa River. Cow Creek is about 5-10 feet wide and has developed a variable floodplain 20-100 feet wide.

Environmental Consequences: The proposed action would have beneficial impacts to the flood plain of Cow Creek by protection of the acquired lands from settlement, sale, location or entry under the general land laws. All future actions would comply with the provisions of Executive Orders 11988 and 11990 of May 24, 1977 (42 FR 26951; 26961)

### **INVASIVE, NONNATIVE SPECIES**

Affected Environment: No large, dense stands of state-listed noxious weeds were mapped on the Emerald Mountain parcel. However, long-term grazing has resulted in an abundance of weeds in many areas. In particular, the noxious weeds Canada thistle, houndstongue and tarweed are common in areas with heavy livestock use. Specifically, these three species are present along most of the ephemeral and perennial drainages, in moist soils at the margins of wetlands and stock ponds, in agricultural grasslands and in sagebrush shrublands.

Environmental Consequences: The proposed action would have no impact to invasive, non-native species.

### **MIGRATORY BIRDS**

Affected Environment: The Emerald Mountain acquired lands were surveyed by ecologists from Western Ecological Resource and Habitat Concepts in the spring, summer and fall of 2003 and in the fall of 2004. The parcel does not provide suitable nesting habitat for the northern harrier, golden eagle, peregrine falcon, prairie falcon, solitary sandpiper, marbled godwit, Wilson's phalarope, burrowing owl or short-eared owl. The parcel does not have any unique feature that would attract these species.

The parcel provides suitable nesting habitat for Lewis's woodpecker, Williamson's sapsucker, Virginia's warbler, black-throated gray warbler and sage sparrow. These species were not observed during the field reviews of the parcel. These species are presumed to be present in suitable habitats in the absence of further long-term surveys.

Environmental Consequences: The proposed action would have beneficial impact to migratory birds and to habitat suitable for migratory birds by protection of the acquired lands from settlement, sale, location or entry under the general land laws.

### **NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS CONCERNS**

The BLM notified the following Native American groups of the proposed Emerald Mountain Land Exchange project in September, 2004: Southern Ute Tribe, Ute Mountain Ute Tribal Council, Colorado Commission of Indian Affairs and the Uintah and Ouray Tribal Council. No concerns regarding traditional or religious cultural properties or places were identified that would have affected the proposed action.

## **T&E SPECIES – ANIMALS**

Affected Environment: Federally listed and candidate species were addressed in a Biological Assessment (BA) prepared in 2005 in accordance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (as amended) and the Interagency Cooperation Regulation (50 CFR 402) to address the effects of the land exchange on federally threatened, endangered and candidate species. This section summarizes the results of the BA as prepared by Western Ecological Resource, Inc.

Four endangered fish, the Mexican spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*) and the black-footed ferret were excluded from analysis. The four endangered fish were not evaluated in the BA, because there is no habitat on the parcel and because no water depletions would have occurred because of the land exchange.

The parcel was surveyed by ecologists from Western Ecological Resource in the spring, summer and fall of 2003 and in the fall of 2004. The vegetation types were characterized by species dominance and structural diversity, the range condition was assessed and any weed populations were described. Aquatic, riparian and wetland communities were specifically noted and described. In addition, wildlife species present were noted, signs of wildlife use were recorded and any unique habitat features were described. Finally, the suitability of habitats to support federally listed or candidate species was assessed.

No federally listed or candidate species (Boreal Toad, Yellow-Billed Cuckoo, Bald Eagle or Canada Lynx) were observed during the field surveys. The low elevation of the acquired lands and general lack of forest overstory virtually eliminates chances of successful boreal toad reproduction. However, the willow understory along Cow Creek has marginal suitability for yellow-billed cuckoo habitat and the lower reaches of Cow Creek have limited potential for individual bald eagle roosting. The acquired lands would not serve as suitable resident/reproduction sites for the Canada lynx.

Environmental Consequences: The proposed action would have no impact to threatened and endangered listed or candidate animal species.

## **WASTES, HAZARDOUS OR SOLID**

Affected Environment: In accordance with Section 120(h) of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Liability and Compensation Act (CERCLA) of 1980, an Initial Assessment report was prepared for the Emerald Mountain parcel. To determine if there is any indication that hazardous materials have been stored for a period of one year or more, released or disposed of, a search of government records was conducted, in addition to site reconnaissance visits. The following Environmental Protection Agency databases were surveyed via the internet:

- Permit Compliance System (PCS) for NPDES Water Discharge Facilities

- Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensation and Liability System (CERCLIS)
- National Priorities List (NPL)
- Treatment Storage and Disposal Facilities (TSDF)
- Toxic Release Inventory (TRI) Facilities
- Resource Conservation and recovery Systems (RCRIS)
- Facility Index System (FINDS)
- Aerometric Information Retrieval System (AIRS)

In addition, the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment's Colorado Storage Tank Information System (COSTIS) database was searched for information regarding registered underground storage tanks. Aerial photography was used in conjunction with site reconnaissance visits to identify any notable or questionable features which were subsequently examined in the field.

The acquired lands have been used for livestock grazing and contain numerous stock ponds and two corrals. The parcel is crossed by three high voltage transmission lines. In addition, a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) aircraft beacon is located on the property.

The search of government records and site reconnaissance revealed no Recognized Environmental Conditions or indication of the presence of hazardous materials. The FAA was contacted regarding the aircraft beacon, and it was determined that there are no underground tanks associated with this facility, which uses solar power. No evidence of hazardous materials, petroleum products or environmental liability was discovered on the Emerald Mountain parcel. No further inquiry is needed to assess Recognized Environmental Conditions.

Environmental Consequences: The Initial Assessment for the acquired lands (Kraus, 2003) indicates that there are no Recognized Environmental Conditions which would warrant further inquiry. The proposed action would have no impact to hazardous or solid wastes, as none are known to exist.

## **WATER QUALITY - GROUND**

Affected Environment: The Emerald Mountain acquired lands are underlain by the Dakota-Glen Canyon and the Mesa Verde aquifers.

Environmental Consequences: The proposed action would have no impact to ground water quality, as the Dakota-Glen Canyon aquifer is not used as a water source due to its depth and the Mesa Verde aquifer is not of regional importance in Routt County.

## **WATER QUALITY/HYDROLOGY – SURFACE**

Affected Environment: The Emerald Mountain acquired lands are bordered by 18,558 linear feet of Cow Creek and contain six stock watering ponds. In addition, there is surface water in old

beaver ponds along an ephemeral drainage and around a spring and a seep. With regard to water quality, Cow Creek is not listed as impaired by the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment (2004), under Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act.

Environmental Consequences: The proposed action would have beneficial impact to surface water quality by protection of the acquired lands from settlement, sale, location or entry under the general land laws.

## **WETLANDS/RIPARIAN ZONES**

Affected Environment: The Emerald Mountain acquired lands contain 38 wetland-riparian areas with a total of 108.44 acres. There are about 26.22 acres of potentially jurisdictional wetlands and about 8.99 acres of potentially jurisdictional aquatic habitat. (See Tables 6.9-2 and 6.9-3 in EA CO-100-2006-089). The riparian-wetland habitats on Emerald Mountain are described below.

The wetland and riparian habitats of Emerald Mountain occur along Cow Creek and the various ephemeral drainages. Most of the ephemeral drainages on Emerald Mountain have been degraded by livestock grazing and contain a high proportion of agricultural species and weeds. These drainages are dominated by reedtop, an introduced but widely naturalized agricultural species. Other species present include meadow barley (*Hordeum brachyantherum*), Nebraska sedge, Kentucky bluegrass and timothy, as well as the forbs white Dutch clover (*rifolium repens*), goldenglow, Canada goldenrod, field mint (*Mentha arvensis*) and occasionally false hellebore. Abundant weeds include tarweed, curly dock (*Rumex crispus*), houndstongue and Canada thistle. Erosion and incised channels due to overgrazing occur in many areas.

Wetland seeps or drainages that occur in aspen or fir forests commonly contain alder, bush honeysuckle, goldenglow, American speedwell, northern willowherb, arrowleaf groundsel, largeleaf avens, monkshood and smallfruit bulrush (*Scirpus microcarpus*). Scattered alders and willows may also occur.

Forested and scrub-shrub riparian habitats occur mainly Cow Creek, however some forested riparian areas also occur along the lower portions of the larger ephemeral drainages just east and west of Cow Creek or in the northern portion of the parcel. In general, mature narrowleaf cottonwood form a continuous band along these watercourses with an understory of silver sagebrush Wood's rose, snowberry and numerous pasture grasses and weeds. In heavily grazed areas, vegetative cover is reduced and pasture grasses and weeds are the dominant herbaceous vegetation. The northern portion of Cow Creek, which has perennial flows, supports a dense scrub-shrub riparian wetland area consisting of a sandbar willow shrubland and young narrowleaf cottonwoods. Other shrubs in this area include Booth's willow and hawthorn. The understory includes reedtop, field mint and curly dock, with small patches of Nebraska sedge and smallfruit bulrush. Other species present include Canada goldenrod, leafy bracted aster, northern willowherb and stinging nettle. Portions of this northern area of Cow Creek are deeply incised and braided.

Environmental Consequences: The proposed action would have beneficial impacts to wetland and riparian areas through protection of the acquired lands from settlement, sale, location or entry under the general land laws.

## **WSAs, WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS**

The Emerald Mountain acquired lands do not contain roadless or wilderness characteristics. While the lands are being managed predominantly as a Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) for non-motorized and non-mechanized recreation access and use, the area contains several roads that provide access to electric utility line rights-of-way that cross the SRMA.

## **NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS**

Non-critical resources not present or not relevant to the proposed action and thus not evaluated in this Environmental Assessment include Forest Resources and Wild Horses/Burros.

## **MINERALS – FLUID & SOLID**

Affected Environment: A Mineral Potential Report (Conrath, 2005) was prepared for the Emerald Mountain acquired lands to determine the presence of minerals. Specific mineral commodities addressed in the report include coal, oil and gas, geothermal energy, gold, base metals, uranium, fluor spar and sand and gravel. The mineral potential in the report is a prediction of the likelihood of the occurrence of these resources. Mineral potential includes both exploitable and potentially exploitable occurrences.

The oil and gas potential was determined to be low and there is no potential for other leasable minerals such as geothermal and coal. Saleable and locatable minerals also have no potential, except for clays and shales, which have low potential.

The Mineral Potential Report recommended that the mineral estate should be withdrawn from mineral entry and leasing to prevent speculative leasing as well as fraudulent mining claims that could be used for surface occupancy.

Environmental Consequences: The proposed action would have little to no impact to fluid and solid minerals resources, as there is low to no potential for leasable, saleable and locatable minerals on the acquired lands.

## **REALTY AUTHORIZATIONS**

Affected Environment: The acquired lands contain ten easements, including roads, electric transmission lines, a fiber optic communications line and an air navigation site.

Environmental Consequences: The proposed action would have no impact to existing realty authorizations.

## **RECREATION/TRAVEL MANAGEMENT**

Affected Environment: The acquired lands are managed as a Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) for non-motorized and non-mechanized recreation access and use. Phase 1 of the recreation Area Management Plan (RAMP) implements trail and trailhead development and creation of access portals for foot, horse and bicycle traffic.

Environmental Consequences: The proposed action would have beneficial impacts to recreation opportunities and travel management through protection of the acquired lands from settlement, sale, location or entry under the general land laws.

## **SOCIOECONOMICS**

Affected Environment: The service sector in Routt County, which includes tourism related employment, provides the most jobs, followed by wholesale and retail trade and construction. Recreational use of the acquired lands would generate some local retail revenue; however, no studies of the economic impact have occurred.

Environmental Consequences: The proposed action would have little to no impact to socioeconomics.

## **SOILS**

Affected Environment: Soils on the Emerald Mountain acquired lands formed primarily in colluviums and residuum derived from sandstone or shale; however, a few soils formed in mixed alluvium or in colluviums and residuum derived from metamorphic and igneous rocks. Dominant soils include Agricyolls, Haplocryolls, Haplocryalfs, Cryepts and Cryorthents.

Environmental Consequences: The proposed action would have beneficial impacts to soils through protection of the acquired lands from settlement, sale, location or entry under the general land laws.

## **UPLAND VEGETATION**

Affected Environment: Vegetation types on the Emerald Mountain acquired lands include agricultural grassland, sagebrush shrubland, oak shrubland, serviceberry shrubland, snowberry shrubland, aspen forest, lodgepole pine forest, subalpine fir forest and wetland/riparian habitats.

Environmental Consequences: The proposed action would have beneficial impacts to upland vegetation through protection of the acquired lands from settlement, sale, location or entry under the general land laws.

## **VISUAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

Affected Environment: Visual Resource Management classification for the acquired lands is Class II, which allows for low levels of landscape change that does not attract the attention of

casual observers. Any changes to the landscape must repeat the basic elements of form, line, color and texture found in the predominant features of the landscape.

Environmental Consequences: The proposed action would have beneficial impacts to visual resource management through protection of the acquired lands from settlement, sale, location or entry under the general land laws.

### **WILDLIFE, AQUATIC**

Affected Environment: The Emerald Mountain acquired lands include 18,558 linear feet of Cow Creek, six stock ponds and at least one beaver pond. Species diversity and abundance varies within these habitats and is influenced by water quality, temperature and size. Cow Creek is a small stream and likely dominated by brook trout, but may also include rainbow trout and brown trout. Amphibians likely to be found include tiger salamanders, western chorus frogs and northern leopard frogs.

Environmental Consequences: The proposed action would have beneficial impacts to aquatic wildlife and essential habitat through protection of the acquired lands from settlement, sale, location or entry under the general land laws.

### **WILDLIFE, TERRESTRIAL**

Affected Environment: The Emerald Mountain acquired lands are classified as overall habitat for black bear. The lands are classified as elk winter range and over half of the land base is classified as severe winter range and winter concentration area. Most of the land base is mapped as elk production area. The entire land base is mapped as mule deer summer range.

Environmental Consequences: The proposed action would have beneficial impacts to terrestrial wildlife and essential habitat through protection of the acquired lands from settlement, sale, location or entry under the general land laws.

**CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY:** Withdrawal of the Emerald Mountain acquired lands for a period of 20 years would have overall cumulative beneficial impacts of improved land management through the protection of scenic, recreation, water quality and wildlife habitat values. The Emerald Mountain acquired lands constitute an important source of open space, wildlife habitat and outdoor recreation for Steamboat Springs and Routt County.

**PERSONS/AGENCIES CONSULTED:** Uintah and Ouray Tribal Council, Colorado Native American Commission, Colorado State Historic Preservation Office.

### **CONTRIBUTORS**

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- Jerry Powell, Wildlife Specialties
- David Buscher, Buscher Soil & Environmental
- Western Land Group, Inc.
- Emerald Mountain Partnership

○ **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)**  
**EA CO-100-2008-030**

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the EA and all other available information, I have determined that the proposal and the alternatives analyzed do not constitute a major Federal action that would adversely impact the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an EIS is unnecessary and will not be prepared. This determination is based on the following factors:

1. Beneficial, adverse, direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts have been disclosed in the EA. Analysis indicated no significant impacts on society as a whole, the affected region, the affected interests or the locality. The physical and biological effects are limited to the Little Snake Resource Area and adjacent land.
2. Public health and safety would not be adversely impacted. There are no known or anticipated concerns with project waste or hazardous materials.
3. There would be no adverse impacts to regional or local air quality, prime or unique farmlands, known paleontological resources on public land within the area, wetlands, floodplain, areas with unique characteristics, ecologically critical areas or designated Areas of Critical Environmental Concern.
4. There are no highly controversial effects on the environment.
5. There are no effects that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risk. Sufficient information on risk is available based on information in the EA and other past actions of a similar nature.
6. This alternative does not set a precedent for other actions that may be implemented in the future to meet the goals and objectives of adopted Federal, State or local natural resource related plans, policies or programs.
7. No cumulative impacts related to other actions that would have a significant adverse impact were identified or are anticipated.
8. Based on previous and ongoing cultural surveys and through mitigation by avoidance, no adverse impacts to cultural resources were identified or anticipated. There are no known American Indian religious concerns or persons or groups who might be disproportionately and adversely affected as anticipated by the Environmental Justice Policy.
9. No adverse impacts to any threatened or endangered species or their habitat that was determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act were identified. If, at a future time, there could be the potential for adverse impacts, treatments would be modified or mitigated not to have an adverse effect or new analysis would be conducted.

10. This alternative is in compliance with relevant Federal, State, and local laws, regulations, and requirements for the protection of the environment.

**DECISION AND RATIONALE:** I have determined that withdrawal of the Emerald Mountain acquired lands is in conformance with the approved land use plan amendment. It is my decision to proceed with the proposed 20-year withdrawal. To this effect, no conflicts were found and the action does not result in any undue or unnecessary environmental degradation. The action is consistent with the Emerald Mountain Land Exchange Plan Amendment and is consistent with the regulations concerning withdrawals under 43 CFR 2300.

**SIGNATURE OF PREPARER:**

**DATE SIGNED:**

**SIGNATURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEWER:**

**DATE SIGNED:**

**SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:**

**DATE SIGNED:**