

Finding Of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

DOI-BLM-CO-200-2012-0069 EA

Based on review of the EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that the project 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 from any alternative assessed or evaluated meet the definition of significance in context or intensity, as defined by 43 CFR 1508.27. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described below:

RATIONALE:

Context: The proposed action was selected for the Cache Creek Placer Area Management Plan and Environmental Assessment as it best addresses the purpose and need of the document. Staff monitoring and observations over the course of several years identified that impacts to water quality, riparian habitat and fisheries were being caused by recreational placer related activities. Staff also observed that people participating in this activity were creating public hazards within the area including overhangs that could potentially collapse, digging deep holes with potential for entrapment, and undercutting the root systems of large trees.

The BLM acquired the 2,160 acre Cache Creek parcel that lies just west of the small town of Granite, in 2000, to help protect critical elk and riparian habitat, of which the parcel had high values, and provide access for recreation. A field visit to the Cache Creek parcel was conducted with CPW and BLM staff when recreational placer activities were first proposed. The site identified in the proposed action was examined to determine the best placement for this activity. The identified area, while located within elk winter and calving habitat, has become the preferred location for this activity. As use increased in this type of recreation activity impacts to riparian habitat also increased along with the number of user created hazards and complaints. This resulted in the exploration of management alternatives that would alleviate these issues.

It is recognized that Cache Creek is now identified as a unique opportunity for people wishing to participate in hobby level placering and as a result has regional if not national significance for this group of people. The parcel also plays a regional role in providing crucial elk habitat and riparian habitat while impacts to water quality affect the Arkansas River downstream of the confluence. The proposed action takes this significance and the context of the site into account by facilitating the recreation activity through a permit system while putting measures into place to reduce impacts to resources which the parcel was originally purchased to help protect.

Intensity:

I have considered the potential intensity/severity of the impacts anticipated from the Cache Creek Placer Area Management Plan decision relative to each of the ten areas suggested for consideration by the CEQ. With regard to each:

Impacts that may be beneficial and adverse:

The environmental assessment identifies that the proposed action will have beneficial impacts for a number of resources including soils, water quality, vegetation, wetlands/riparian habitat, aquatic wildlife, terrestrial wildlife, migratory birds, cultural resources, lands/realty resources, and law enforcement. These benefits are associated with managing recreation use under a permit system that incorporates terms and conditions to restrict the area where the activity can occur and how people participate in the activity. The document identifies that the proposed action may have beneficial and adverse impacts depending upon the individual. While the proposed action was developed in conjunction with related organizations and businesses to improve conditions for recreation it is also acknowledged that some individuals may see the increase in rules and restrictions as an adverse impact that would take away from their experience.

Public health and safety:

The document anticipates an improvement to public health and safety. Under the terms and conditions of the permit identified in the proposed action restrictions would reduce the number of hazards created at the site. There would be a reduction in the number of undercut trees and other hazards such as overhangs and deep vertical holes that are currently being created by the public.

Unique characteristics of the geographic area:

The EA evaluated the area of the proposed action and determined that no unique geographic characteristics such as: wild and scenic rivers, prime or unique farmlands, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, designated wilderness areas, wilderness study areas or Lands with Wilderness Characteristics; were present.

Degree to which effects are likely to be highly controversial:

The proposed action includes a number of changes in recreation management at the site. There is some disagreement on how affective these changes will be in reducing impacts to resources. To address this disagreement the proposed action includes a number of adaptive management strategies based on monitoring and thresholds to adjust management if needed.

Degree to which effects are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks:

The anticipated effects of the proposed action are not highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

Consideration of whether the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant impacts:

This decision is like one of many that have previously been made and will continue to be made by BLM responsible officials regarding the management of recreation on public lands. While the recreation situation of Cache Creek is somewhat unique, the management strategy outlined is used fairly often in other situations. River management is an excellent example of this where permits combined with terms and conditions are utilized to protect resources and provide recreation opportunities. The decision is within the scope of the Resource Management Plan and is not expected to establish a precedent for future actions. The decision does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. The adaptive management technique that the

proposal provides, if successful, could provide a foundation for similar approaches to similar management situations in the future.

Consideration of whether the action is related to other actions with cumulatively significant impacts:

It was identified that there is potential for cumulative impacts to this recreation activity and areas where this activity occurs as a result of displaced users unhappy with the change in management of the site. This impact is not anticipated to be significant and the cumulative impacts from other alternatives are anticipated to be higher.

Scientific, cultural or historical resources, including those listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places:

The project occurs within an enormous historic placer mining site. The proposed action to limit and control recreational mineral collection activities within the parcel would provide the benefit of preventing damage to other parts of the site that may be adversely affected.

Threatened and endangered species and their critical habitat:

The project area is known to contain or has potential to contain habitat for Canada lynx, Northern goshawks, and boreal toads. The document identifies that the proposed action would likely have no effect to Canada lynx due to lack of suitable habitat within the project area. The BLM does not have any records of goshawks nesting in the vicinity of the project area and therefore concludes the effects to goshawks would be minimal. The document also finds that there are no boreal toads found within the action area and the proposed action would eliminate the continued sedimentation into the watershed, improving potential toad habitat from its current state.

Any effects that threaten a violation of Federal, State or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment: The proposed action conforms with the provisions of NEPA (U.S.C. 4321-4346) and FLPMA (43 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.) and is compliant with the Clean Water Act and The Clean Air Act, the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) and the Endangered Species Act.

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DATE: 9/30/15

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:


Keith E. Berger, Field Manager

DATE SIGNED: 2/2/16