

**U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management**

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**Categorical Exclusion  
RGFO 2014 Aspen Salvage**

**08/15/14**

**PREPARING OFFICE**

U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management





# **Categorical Exclusion**

## **RGFO 2014 Aspen Salvage**

**DOI-BLM-CO-F020-2014-0070-CX**

**Prepared by**  
**U.S. Department of the Interior**  
**Bureau of Land Management**  
**Royal Gorge Field Office**  
**Canon City, CO**

**08/15/14**

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# Chapter 1.

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## A. Background

Quaking Aspen is an extremely shade intolerant and short lived species, with the upper stems beginning to naturally die around 200 years of age. Aspen-dominated sites are considered to be high in biodiversity – second only to riparian areas on western sites. Aspen is considered a keystone species, and aspen communities are critical for maintaining biodiversity in western landscapes. Sudden Aspen Decline (SAD) became a concern with forest managers around 2003–2004 due the vast acres of dying aspen throughout Colorado. The reasons for the large scale aspen decline is a combination of factors including: conifer encroachment, the age of most aspen stands, the lack of disturbance, drought, insects and disease.

**BLM Office:**Royal Gorge Field Office

**Proposed Action Title/Type:** RGFO 2014 Aspen Salvage

**Location of Proposed Action:** T.15S, R.73W., Sec.34, 6th PM; T.50N., R.11E., Sec.10, NMPM; T.51N., R.11E., Sec.34, 35, NMPM

**Description of Proposed Action:** The proposed action is to salvage dead and dying aspen on 51 acres in both Park and Fremont counties through commercial fuelwood sales. Live large diameter spruce or Douglas-fir may be removed from the treatment where the aspen root system appears to be alive. This treatment will provide a reduction in competition which may result in a new flush of aspen sprouting. All small trees less than 5” DBH will be considered protected reserves.

Existing roads shall be the main access route to facilitate the forest product removal. No new permanent roads will be created by the project. All temporary roads created for access and forest product removal will be closed upon completion of the treatment. Road closures will be accomplished with natural surrounding materials such as large rocks or logs, tank traps, buck and rail fences where appropriate, and will be posted as closed to vehicle access.

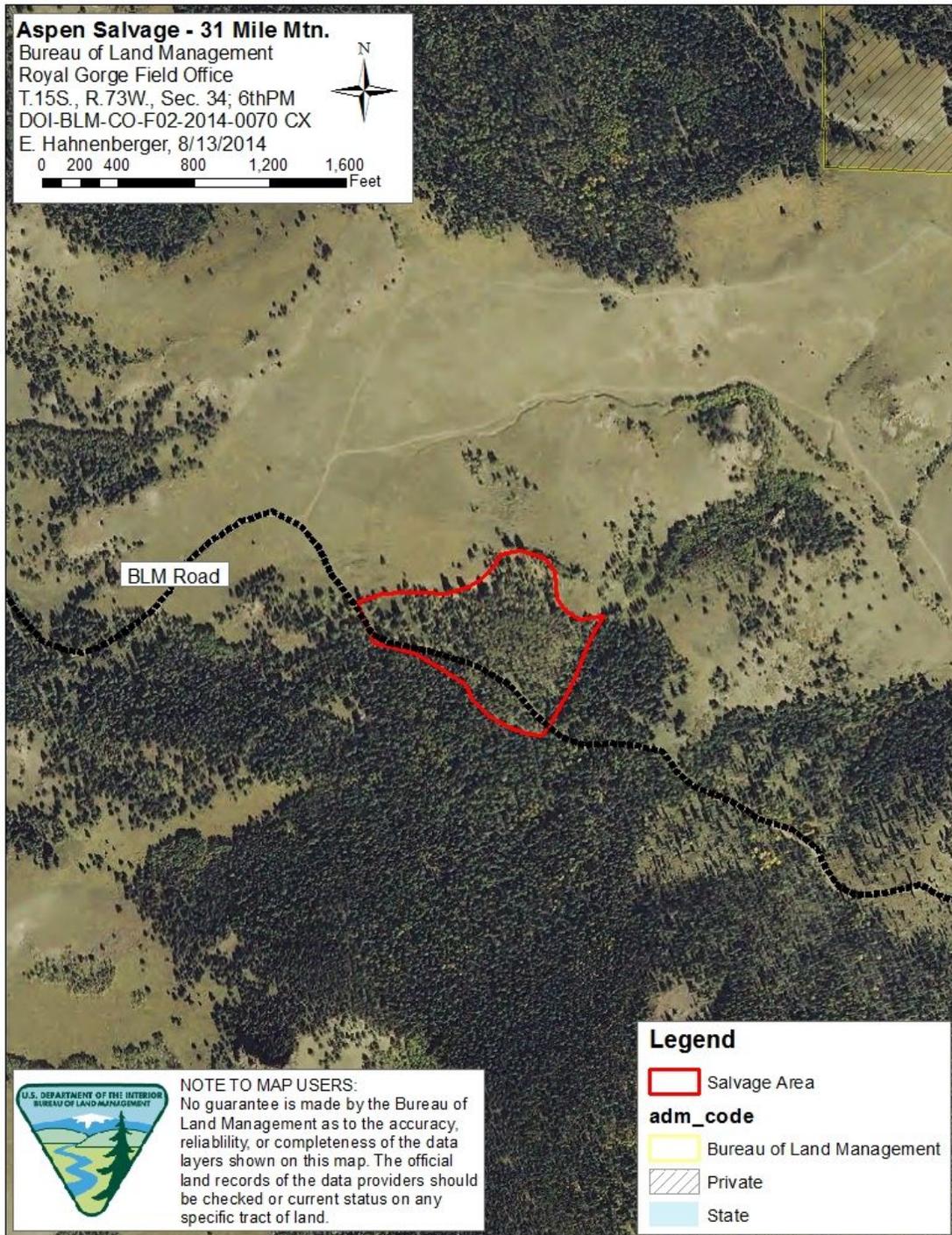
Mechanical treatments are likely to include chainsaws, feller-bunchers, skidders, log loaders, pick-ups, trailers and/or similar equipment. The machines used in mechanical treatments are typically limited to slopes of less than 35%. Slopes throughout all units are around 20% or less. The utilization of trees has the potential to create local jobs and support the local economy.

The 31 Mile Mountain unit will require access through private lands. It will be up to the local Guffy firewood harvester to work out the access agreement with the subdivision. Past attempts by the BLM to access the area have been unsuccessful with the subdivision. This stand of aspen is dying due to cytoprosa canker. This disease transferred from tree to tree by the poplar bore and it plugs up the pipes which transfer water from the root to the leaves.

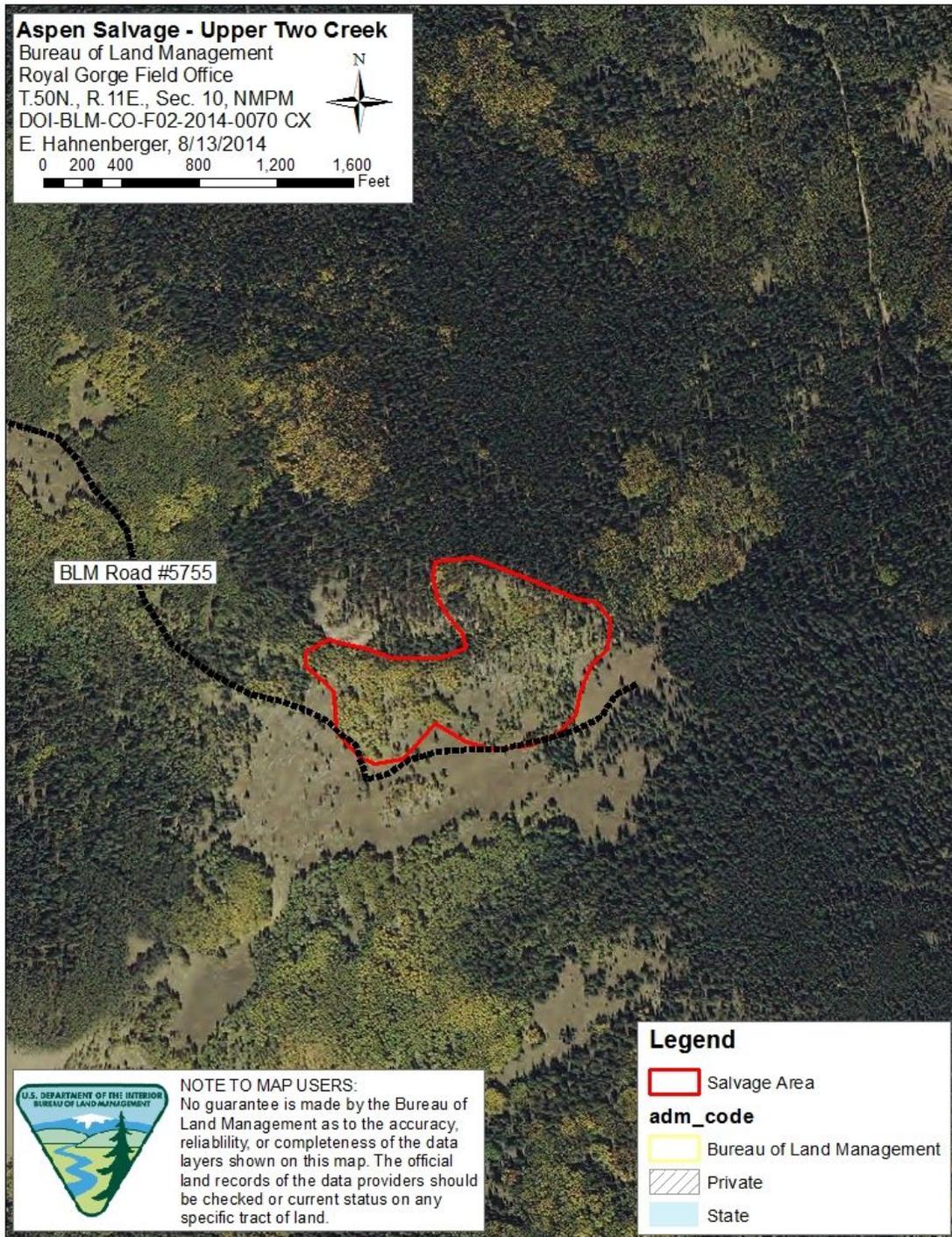
In the Rock Creek unit a majority of the large trees, greater than 5” DBH, are dead and the remaining live trees show signs of serious health decline. It is believed these trees are dying due to drought and conifer encroachment. The Upper Two Creek unit appears to be dying due to drought and the age of the trees.

### **Figure 1.1. Conifer Encroachment and Subsequent Aspen Mortality in Rock Creek Area 2014**

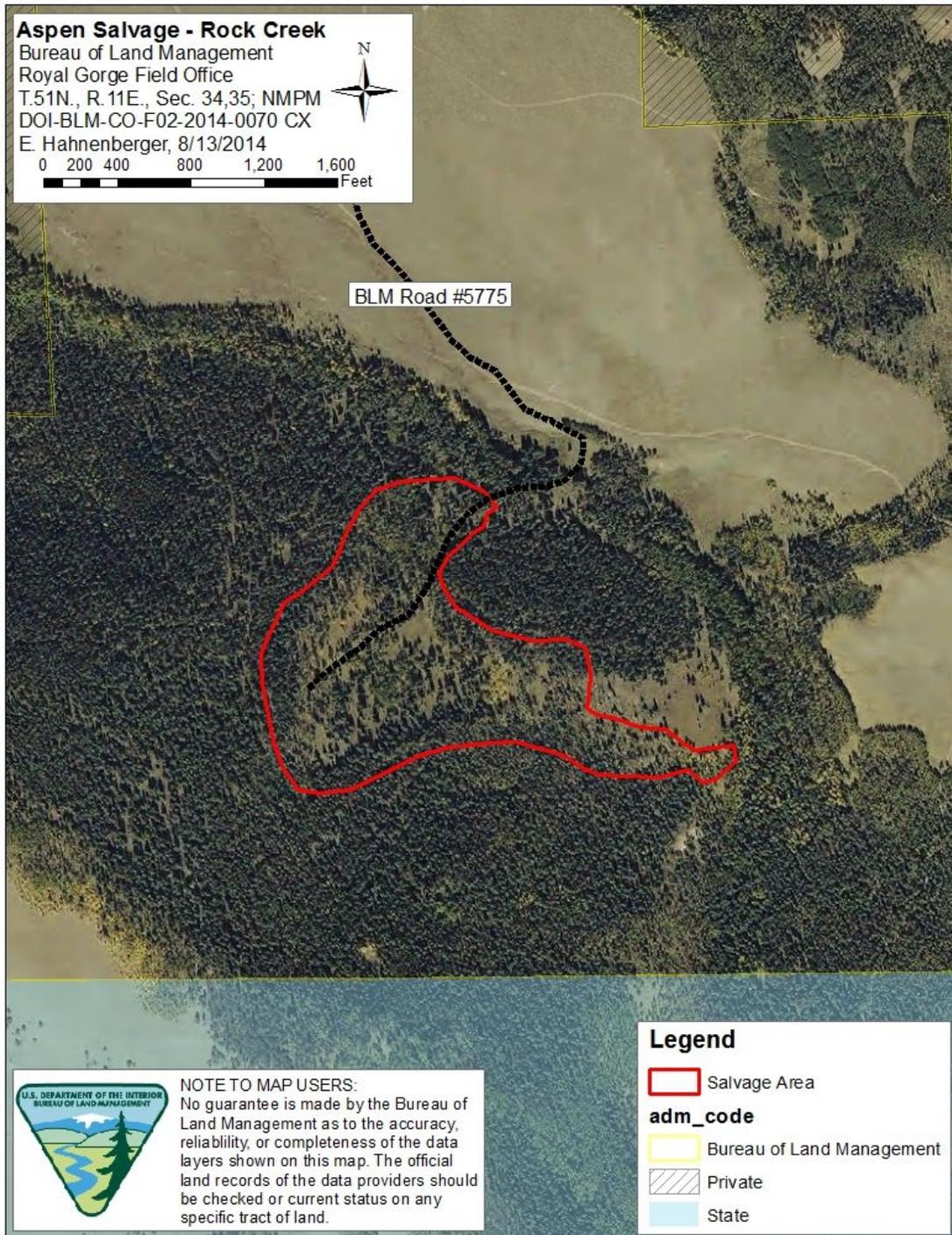




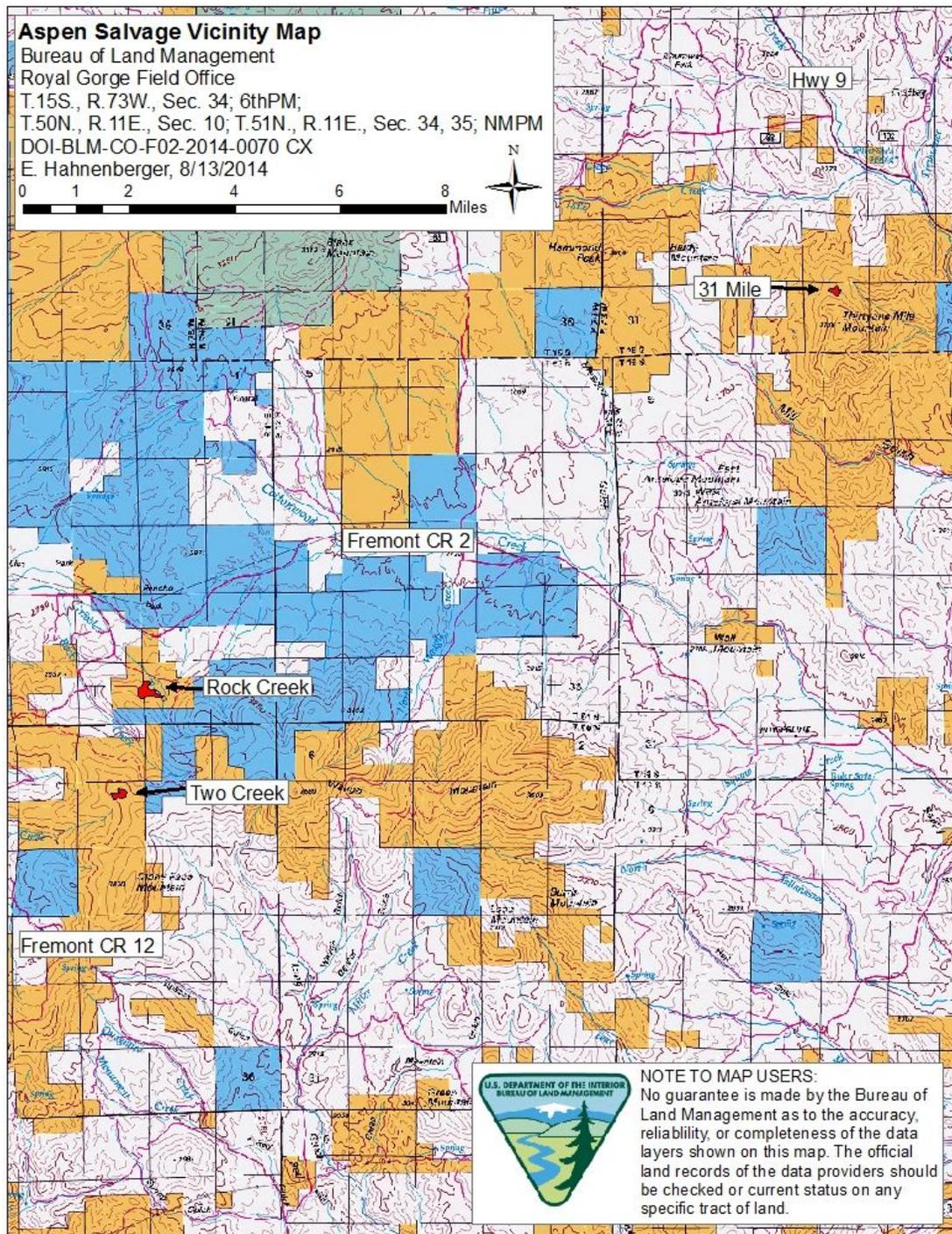
Map 1.1. Aspen Salvage Project Map: 31 Mile Mountain



**Map 1.2. Aspen Salvage Project Map: Upper Two Creek**



Map 1.3. Aspen Salvage Project Map: Rock Creek



**Map 1.4. Aspen Salvage Vicinity Map**

## B. Land Use Plan Conformance

**Land Use Plan Name:**

*Chapter 1  
 B. Land Use Plan Conformance*

08/15/14

Name of Plan: Royal Gorge Resource Management Plan

Date Approved: 05/13/96

Decision Number: 6–1, 6–12, 6–13; 3–1, 3–13, 3–14

Decision Language: Vegetation management will be as follows: vegetation will be managed to accomplish other BLM initiatives i.e., riparian, wildlife, etc.; management of forest lands will be for enhancement of other values. Productive forested lands will be managed for sustained yield. A portion of the forested lands will be available for intensive management.

## C. Compliance with NEPA:

The Proposed Action is categorically excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with 516 DM 2, Appendix 1, or 516 DM 11.9,

This categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment. The proposed action has been reviewed, and none of the extraordinary circumstances described in 516 DM 2 apply.

I considered:

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION REVIEW: This proposed action is listed as a Categorical Exclusion in DOI Departmental Manual Part 516 Chapter 11.9 (C8). None of the following exceptions in 516 DM 2, Appendix 2, apply.

**Table 1.1. Exclusion Criteria**

<b>Exclusion Criteria</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
1. Have significant impacts on public health or safety.		X
2. Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation, or refuge lands; wilderness areas; lands with wilderness characteristics; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands; floodplains; national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas.		X
3. Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources.		X
4. Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.		X
5. Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.		X
6. Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.		X
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
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
9. Violate a Federal law, or a State, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.		X
10. Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations.		X

<b>Exclusion Criteria</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
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.		X
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.		X

**Table 1.2. Interdisciplinary Team Review**

<b>INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM REVIEW</b>			
<b>NAME</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY</b>	<b>Initials/date</b>
Matt Rustand	Wildlife Biologist	Terrestrial Wildlife, T&E, Migratory Birds	MR, 8/19/2014
Jeff Williams	Range Management Spec.	Range, Vegetation, Farmland	JW, 9/29/14
Chris Cloninger	Range Management Spec.	Range, Vegetation, Farmland	N/A
John Lamman	Range Management Spec.	Range, Vegetation, Farmland, Weeds	JL, 8/15/14
Dave Gilbert	Fisheries Biologist	Aquatic Wildlife, Riparian/Wetlands	DG, 9/22/2014
Stephanie Carter	Geologist	Minerals, Paleontology, Waste Hazardous or Solid	NA
Melissa Smeins	Geologist	Minerals, Paleontology	MJS, 9/12/2014
John Smeins	Hydrologist	Hydrology, Water Quality/Rights, Soils	JS, 8/25/14
Ty Webb	Fire Management Officer	Air Quality	TW, 8/15/14
Jeff Covington	Cadastral Surveyor	Cadastral Survey	JC, 8/28/14
Kalem Lenard	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Recreation, Wilderness, LWCs, Visual, ACEC, W&S Rivers,	KL, 8/15/2014
John Nahomenuk	River Manager	Recreation, Wilderness, LWCs, Visual, ACEC, W&S Rivers	N/A
Ken Reed	Forester	Forestry	8/12/14
Monica Weimer	Archaeologist	Cultural, Native American	N/A
Michael Troyer	Archaeologist	Cultural, Native American	MDT, 9/23/14
Greg Valladares	Realty Specialist	Realty	GDV 09/25/14
Steve Cunningham	Law Enforcement Ranger	Law Enforcement	N/A
Ty Webb	Fire Management Officer	Fire	TW, 8/15/14

**REMARKS:**

Cadastral Services: The 1/4 section corner of sections 34 and 35, T. 51 N., R. 11 E., falls within the project area and needs to be located and protected. BLM records indicate that this corner is an 1880 original stone corner.

Cultural Resources: No historic properties were found in the area of potential effect [see report CR-RG-15-034 (N)]. Therefore, the proposed undertaking will have no effect on any historic properties (those eligible for the NRHP).

Native American Religious Concerns: No possible traditional cultural properties were located during the cultural resources inventory (see above). There is no other known evidence that suggests the project area holds special significance for Native Americans.

**Threatened and Endangered Species:** There are no records of any federally listed or BLM sensitive species within or near the project area. The Proposed Action will not result in impacts to TES species.

**Migratory Birds:** To be in compliance with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) and the Memorandum of Understanding between BLM and USFWS required by Executive Order 13186, BLM must avoid actions, where possible, that result in a “take” of migratory birds. Pursuant to BLM Instruction Memorandum 2008-050, to reduce impacts to Birds of Conservation Concern (BCC), no habitat disturbance (removal of vegetation such as timber, brush, or grass) is allowed during the periods of May 15 - July 15, the breeding and brood rearing season for most Colorado migratory birds. The provision will not apply to completion activities in disturbed areas that were initiated prior to May 15 and continue into the 60-day period.

An exception to this timing limitation will be granted if nesting surveys conducted no more than one week prior to vegetation-disturbing activities indicate no nesting within 30 meters (100 feet) of the area to be disturbed. Surveys shall be conducted by a qualified breeding bird surveyor between sunrise and 10:00 a.m. under favorable conditions.

**Minerals:** The federal minerals in the proposed project area are open to mineral location, therefore requiring coordination between surface uses as applicable. If there are unpatented mining claims that are active in the proposed project location, any associated claim markers encountered during project implementation cannot be disturbed (reference CO-2012-013). However, as of September 12, 2014, there are no active claims in these areas.

**Wastes, Hazardous or Solid:** If the project involves oil or fuel usage, transfer or storage, an adequate spill kit and shovels are required to be onsite during project implementation. The project proponent will be responsible for adhering to all applicable local, State and Federal regulations in the event of a spill, which includes following the proper notification procedures in BLM’s Spill Contingency Plan.

## **D. Approval and Contact Information**

**COMPLIANCE PLAN** (optional):

**NAME OF PREPARER:** Ken Reed

**SUPERVISORY REVIEW:** Melissa K.S. Garcia

**NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR:** /s/ Martin Weimer

**DATE:** 10/1/14

**DECISION AND RATIONALE:** I have reviewed this Categorical Exclusion 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 10 criteria listed above and have determined that it does not represent an exception and is, therefore, categorically excluded from further environmental analysis.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:

/s/ Jay Raiford for

Keith E. Berger, Field Manager

DATE SIGNED: 10/3/14