

Determination of NEPA Adequacy (DNA)

U.S. Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management

Royal Gorge Field Office

3028 E. Main

Cañon City, CO 81212

OFFICE: Royal Gorge Field Office, LLCOF02000

PROJECT NUMBER: DOI-BLM-CO-F02-2014-003 DNA

PROPOSED ACTION TITLE/TYPE: Falls Gulch Wildlife Habitat Improvement

LOCATION/LEGAL DESCRIPTION: Fremont County, T. 47N, R. 11E, Sec. 11 and 12

APPLICANT: Colorado Parks and Wildlife and Bureau of Land Management

A. Description of the Proposed Action and any applicable mitigation measures

The Falls Gulch Wildlife Habitat Improvement project is being tiered to the Western Fremont County Fuels Planning CO-200-2005-0021 EA, closely following the specifications brought forth and analyzed in that document. This project is a cooperative effort between the Bureau of Land Management, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and the Habitat Partnership Program. Other partners supporting the project include the Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep Society.

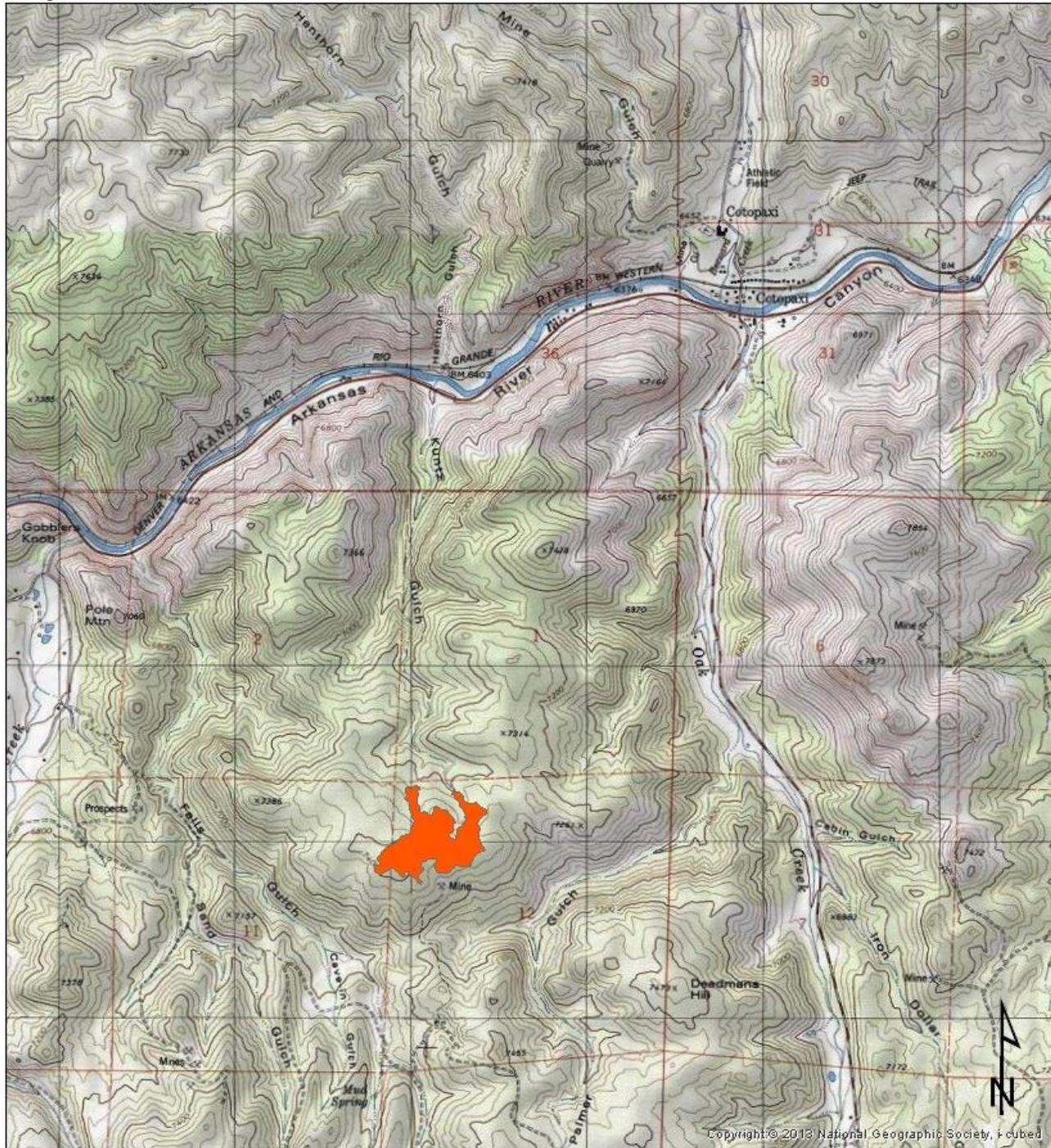
Colorado's forests are disturbance driven; they are dependent upon change for maintenance and renewal. Fires, insect and disease outbreaks, and forest management can add diversity and resiliency to forest stands or bring about entirely new forests from old ones. Historically, fires have occurred naturally throughout the Rocky Mountain West and have played an important ecological role in maintaining the function and pattern of the vegetation on the landscape. Fires have played a role in reducing natural fuel build-ups, along with maintaining forest health and wildlife habitats. During the settlement of the area most of the larger trees were removed for railroad transportation, building infrastructure, and to provide heat, creating a relatively even-aged forest throughout the planning area. Over time fire suppression and grazing have interrupted the natural frequency and intensity of fires, allowing forests to become over-populated with smaller trees

The proposed action is to hand thin, with chainsaws, approximately 42 acres of piñon-juniper woodland utilizing inmate labor. The project site was selected by the Bureau of Land Management and Colorado Parks and Wildlife (Figure 1 and 2). This project is designed to improve wildlife habitat on public lands by creating a vegetative disturbance in the piñon-juniper forest. Goals of the project are to increase mule deer and elk browse and forage, increase microfauna (small mammals, migratory birds, etc.) richness by creating diversity in forest structure, improve forest health by increasing plant species diversity and basal cover of understory vegetation, and reduce forest fuels.

Tree density will be reduced from approximately 250-300 stems per acre to approximately 40-75 stems per acre. A representation of all trees sizes or ages shall be left throughout the proposed thinning area. A tree must be larger than 6 inches to be counted as a leave tree. Patch cuts may be up to one acre in size while non-treated areas will be left throughout the project area. The treatment will be designed to appear natural. A diversity of age classes and species will be present after each area is treated. The inmate crew will be supervised by BLM or CPW personnel to ensure the following criteria are followed:

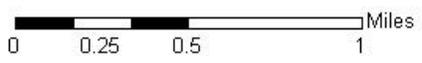
1. All cut trees will be lopped and scattered with chainsaws with a depth not exceeding 18" of ground surface.
2. Stump heights cannot exceed 6 inches in height and all live branches will be severed from the stump.
3. If slash exceeds a depth of 18 inches, slash piles will be created and would not exceed 10 feet in diameter by 10 feet in height and a minimum of 6 feet in diameter by 6 feet in height. These piles shall be located where they can be burned effectively in suitable weather and not threaten the crown of reserve vegetation.
4. Projects would be designed to blend with topography and existing vegetation patterns and use both to screen the project as much as possible. Repeat the elements of form, line, color, and texture of the existing landscape.
5. All Ponderosa Pine, Douglas-fir, and White Fir species will not be cut.
6. If on site moisture (rain/snow/hail/etc.) wets the ground to the point that ruts 4 inches deep or greater are being formed or precipitation events exceed 0.5 inch in 1 hour or 1" in 24 hours, the COR may require a halt to traffic until the roads dry enough so that damage by vehicles does not occur. Immediate notification shall be by telephone or facsimile machine followed by instructions in writing. Any damage to roads caused by the contractor will be repaired by the contractor to the satisfaction of the project inspector or COR.
7. Locate, flag, and protect any property survey monuments including brass cap monuments, bearing trees, fences, or other infrastructure that may exist in this project area. Determine public/private boundaries of the treatment areas prior to project implementation. Unpatented claim monuments are private property and should not be disturbed. As of January 3, 2011, one unpatented mining claim exists within the project boundary.
8. No off road travel is authorized.
9. Work would be avoided from May 15th thru July 15th to avoid the taking of migratory birds.
10. When possible, work in pinyon pine/juniper forest type would take place between September 1st and April 1st to avoid the Ips bark beetle flight period, therefore avoiding increased beetle activity within and adjacent to treatment areas. Work may cease if an outbreak were to occur in the area.
11. Surveys would be conducted to locate any possible occurrence of Royal Gorge stickleaf, Brandegees wild buckwheat, dwarf milkweed, and golden blazing star. If any are found the occurrences would be avoided.
12. Wildlife trees (primarily snags) greater than 8" DBH will be protected from damage and will be left standing for wildlife use.

Figure 1. Falls gulch habitat improvement project overview, Bureau of Land Management-Royal Gorge Field Office, 2013.



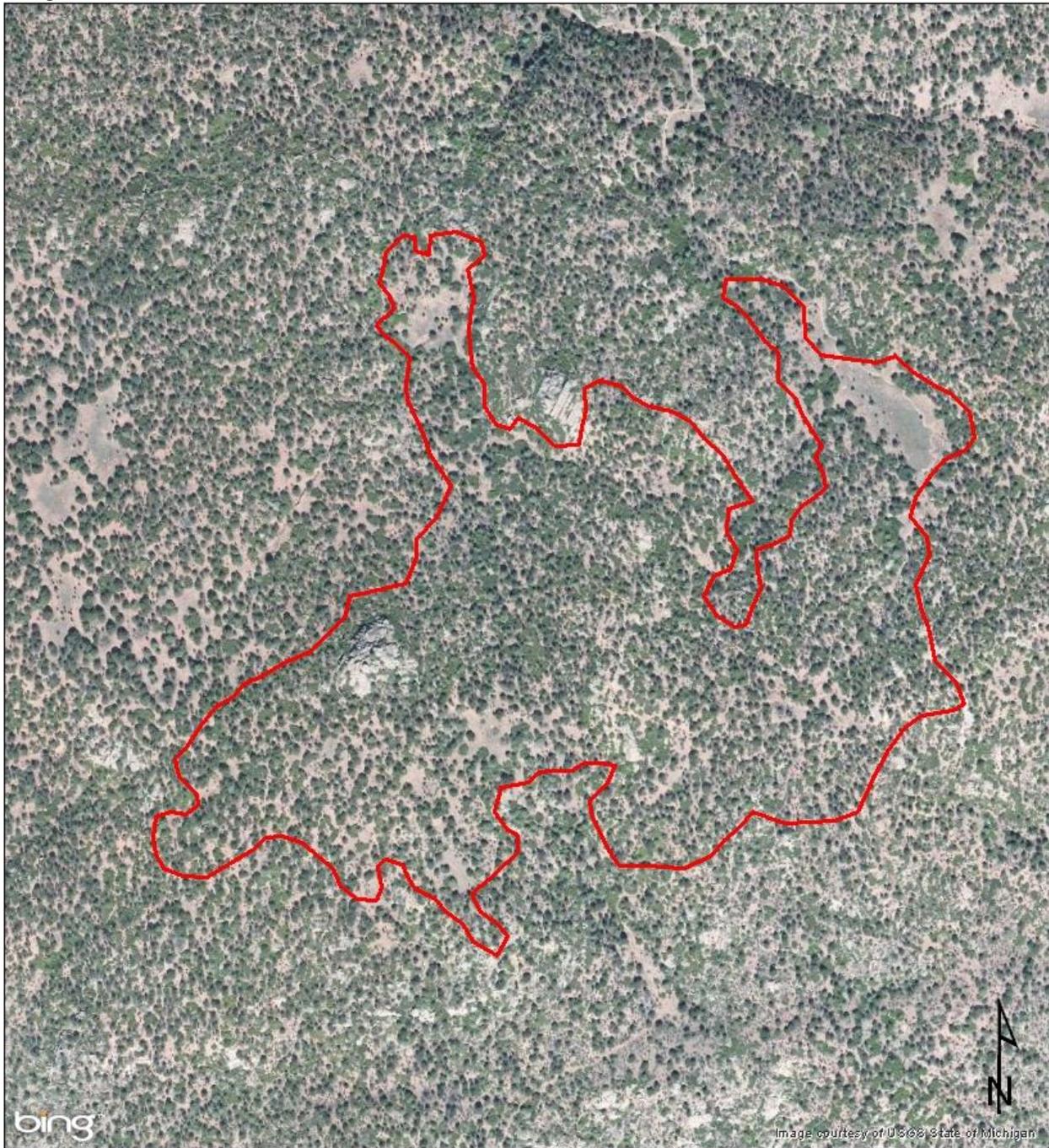
Falls Gulch Overview Map
T.49 N, R.11 E, Section 11 and 12
DOI-BLM-F02-2014-003 DNA

 Falls_Gulch_Phase_2



NOTE TO MAP USERS
 No warrantee is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of the data layers shown on this map. The official land records of the data providers should be checked or current status on any specific tract of land.

Figure 2. Falls gulch habitat improvement project view, Bureau of Land Management-Royal Gorge Field Office, 2013.



Falls Gulch Project Map
T.49 N, R.11 E, Section 11 and 12
DOI-BLM-F02-2014-003 DNA

 Falls_Gulch_Phase_2

 Miles
0 0.035 0.07 0.14

NOTE TO MAP USERS
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B. Land Use Plan (LUP) Conformance

LUP Name: Royal Gorge Resource Management Plan	Date Approved: 5/13/1996
Other Document:	Date Approved
Other Document	Date Approved

The proposed action is in conformance with the applicable LUP because it is specifically provided for in the following LUP decisions:

2-1: Vegetation management will be managed to accomplish other BLM initiatives distributed through cooperative efforts such as HPP projects.

2-14: A portion of the forested lands will be available for intensive management.

C-39: Continue with land treatments as a management practice. Complete NEPA documentation on each project as needed.

The proposed action is in conformance with the LUP, even though it is not specifically provided for, because it is clearly consistent with the following LUP decisions (objectives, terms, and conditions):

C. Identify applicable National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents and other related documents that cover the proposed action.

List by name and date all applicable NEPA documents that cover the proposed action.

Fuels Management - Western Fremont County Fuels Planning CO-200-2005-0021EA
09/21/05

List by name and date other documentation relevant to the proposed action (e.g., biological assessment, biological opinion, watershed assessment, allotment evaluation, and monitoring report).

D. NEPA Adequacy Criteria

1. Is the new proposed action a feature of, or essentially similar to, an alternative analyzed in the existing NEPA document(s)? Is the project within the same analysis area, or if the project location is different, are the geographic and resource conditions sufficiently similar to those analyzed in the existing NEPA document(s)? If there are differences, can you explain why they are not substantial?

Yes. The proposed action (method and location) has been identified within the existing EA. Falls gulch is within the planning unit and hand thinning, lop and scatter, construction of piles, and pile burning have been recognized as a potential treatment methods. The proposed action also fulfills the goal of creating a mosaic of vegetation succession throughout the landscape.

2. Is the range of alternatives analyzed in the existing NEPA document(s) appropriate with respect to the new proposed action, given current environmental concerns, interests, and

resource values?

The existing EA was conducted in 2005 and no new environmental concerns, interests, or resource values have changed since the analysis. The Proposed Alternative provided for a range of vegetation treatments aimed at habitat enhancement and reducing the chance of wildfire at the wildland urban interface. The EA included a No Action Alternative that was analyzed in the document, where the vegetative community would remain unaltered.

3. Is the existing analysis valid in light of any new information or circumstances (such as, rangeland health standard assessment, recent endangered species listings, updated lists of BLM-sensitive species)? Can you reasonably conclude that new information and new circumstances would not substantially change the analysis of the new proposed action?

The existing EA was conducted in 2005 and there are no known new issues, listings, or circumstances that would change the analysis of the new proposed action.

4. Are the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects that would result from implementation of the new proposed action similar (both quantitatively and qualitatively) to those analyzed in the existing NEPA document?

The existing EA specifically analyzed this type of vegetation treatment within the treatment area. The direct, indirect, and cumulative effects that would result from implementation of this action are the same (both quantitatively and qualitatively) to those analyzed in the existing NEPA document.

5. Are the public involvement and interagency review associated with existing NEPA document(s) adequate for the current proposed action?

The public and interagency scoping conducted for the existing NEPA was adequate for the new proposed action.

E. Persons/Agencies /BLM Staff Consulted

INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM REVIEW			
NAME	TITLE	AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY	Initials/date
Matt Rustand	Wildlife Biologist	Terrestrial Wildlife, T&E, Migratory Birds	MR, 12/17/2013
Jeff Williams	Range Management Spec.	Range, Vegetation, Farmland	JW, 1/23/14
Chris Cloninger	Range Management Spec.	Range, Vegetation, Farmland	-----
John Lamman	Range Management Spec.	Weeds	JL, 12/26/2013
Dave Gilbert	Fisheries Biologist	Aquatic Wildlife, Riparian/Wetlands	DG, 12/24/13
Stephanie Carter	Geologist	Minerals, Paleontology, Waste Hazardous or Solid	-----
Melissa Smeins	Geologist	Minerals, Paleontology	MJS, 1/02/2014
John Smeins	Hydrologist	Hydrology, Water Quality/Rights, Soils	JS, 12/18/2013
Ty Webb	Prescribed Fire Specialist	Air Quality	TW, 1/23/14
Jeff Covington	Cadastral Surveyor	Cadastral Survey	JC, 1/23/14

Kalem Lenard	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Recreation, Wilderness, LWCs, Visual, ACEC, W&S Rivers	KL, 1/7/2014
John Nahomenuk	River Manager	Recreation, Wilderness, LWCs, Visual, ACEC, W&S Rivers	-----
Ken Reed	Forester	Forestry	KR, 1/23/14
Monica Weimer	Archaeologist	Cultural, Native American	-----
Michael Troyer	Archaeologist	Cultural, Native American	MDT 11/12/13
Greg Valladares	Realty Specialist	Realty	GDV 01/23/14
Dennis Page	Fire Management Officer (Acting)	Fire Management	DWP 02/10/14
Steve Cunningham	Law Enforcement Ranger	Law Enforcement	SC, 3/4/2014

REMARKS:

Cadastral: The section corner of section 1, 2, 11 and 12 needs to be located and protected. This corner is an original survey corner from 1881. The GCDB point reliability for this corner is +/- 350 ft.

Cultural Resources: No historic properties were found in the area of potential effect [see report CR-RG-14-063 (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.

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.

MITIGATION: None.

CONCLUSION

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Based on the review documented above, I conclude that this proposal conforms to the applicable land use plan and that the NEPA documentation fully covers the proposed action and constitutes BLM's compliance with the requirements of the NEPA.

SIGNATURE OF PROJECT LEAD: Matt Rustand

SIGNATURE OF NEPA COORDINATOR: /s/ Martin Weimer

SIGNATURE OF NEPA SUPERVISOR: Melissa K.S. Garcia

SIGNATURE OF THE RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL: /s/ Melissa K. S. Garcia
for Keith E. Berger, Field Manager

DATE: 3/10/14

Note: The signed Conclusion on this Worksheet is part of an interim step in the BLM's internal decision process and does not constitute an appealable decision. However, the lease, permit, or other authorization based on this DNA is subject to protest or appeal under 43 CFR Part 4 and the program-specific regulations.