

**U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
Royal Gorge Field Office  
3028 E. Main Street  
Canon City, CO 81212**

## **CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION**

NUMBER: DOI-BLM-CO-F02-2014-0026 CX

CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER (optional):

PROJECT NAME: East Peak Timber Sale

PLANNING UNIT: Royal Gorge Field Office

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: T.30S., R.67W., Sec 9 & 10, 6th PM

APPLICANT: BLM

### DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION

Historically, the forests of the Rocky Mountain West were known to be less dense, consisting of larger and older trees than the forests of present times. There were dense stands of trees, but these were intermixed in a mosaic pattern of diverse forest age classes and openings. Whereas, the forests of today are characterized as even-aged stands with little age class diversity and many are overstocked with too many trees per acre. During the settlement of the Huerfano River drainage most of the larger trees were removed for infrastructure and energy, thereby altering the natural processes. Consequently, most of the old growth trees are gone and the older/larger trees seen today were probably too small to be utilized at settlement times. These facts serve as a historical reminder of how different the forests of today are compared to those prior to settlement.

Prior to European settlement of the Huerfano River drainage, wildfires played an important ecological role in maintaining the function and pattern of the vegetation on the landscape throughout the Rocky Mountains. Wildfires reduced natural fuel accumulations, maintained forest health by clearing smaller understory trees, recycled nutrients, maintained meadows and parks, improved wildlife habitats, and assured a diversity of forest age classes by creating early seral habitat for young tree establishment. The past 100 years of wildfire suppression, cattle grazing, timber harvests and the recent urbanization of the West have interrupted the natural frequency and intensity of wildfires. As a result the forests have become overstocked with numerous small diameter trees, most less than 100 years old. As these smaller trees compete with the larger trees for moisture, during drought periods, the larger trees become stressed, subjecting

them to increased risk of bark beetle attack. These small diameter trees also provide a ladder for wildfire to move into the forest crown, a prescription for a catastrophic crown fire. Crown fires are the most destructive and difficult to control and pose the greatest catastrophic risk to growing human populations and threaten private property adjacent to these forests. Therefore, given the human induced changes to the forest and the current state of the forests in Colorado, namely the lack of recent disturbance, these forests are in desperate need of multiple silvicultural treatments, designed to mimic the effects of long lost processes, such as fire.

The East Peak Wildfire burned approximately 12,060 acres of forested lands southwest of Walsenberg, Colorado. There is currently 800 acres of on-going salvage on private lands. There are two 40 acre isolated BLM parcels within the wildfire area. Estimates are 60-70% large tree mortality on these BLM parcels and live trees have severe crown scorch. All green tree removal will be based on the percent of crown scorch and diameter which determines each tree's potential for survival. There are numerous damaged trees in this area and damaged trees are typically stressed. Bark beetles prefer trees that are stressed, so it's highly likely that bark beetle activity in this area is likely to increase in FY14.

The Proposed Action is to mechanically salvage dead trees and thin green trees severely scorched on 42 acres of ponderosa pine forests in 2 units using conventional logging equipment through a commercial timber sale (See project map). This sale shall be named East Peak Salvage Timber Sale and it will be a negotiated sale with the sawmill working on adjacent private lands. This sale is likely to be a two year sale due to the quantity of timber and size of the proposal.

Existing BLM and county roads shall be utilized for the forest product removal. The existing BLM roads shall be maintained and improved to facilitate the forest product removal. All temporary roads created to remove forest products shall be closed to motor vehicles upon completion of the timber harvest. Trees are likely to be harvested by a commercial logging company. The work is likely to be performed with chainsaws, skidders, tractors, pickup trucks, trailers, log loaders and/or log hauling trucks.

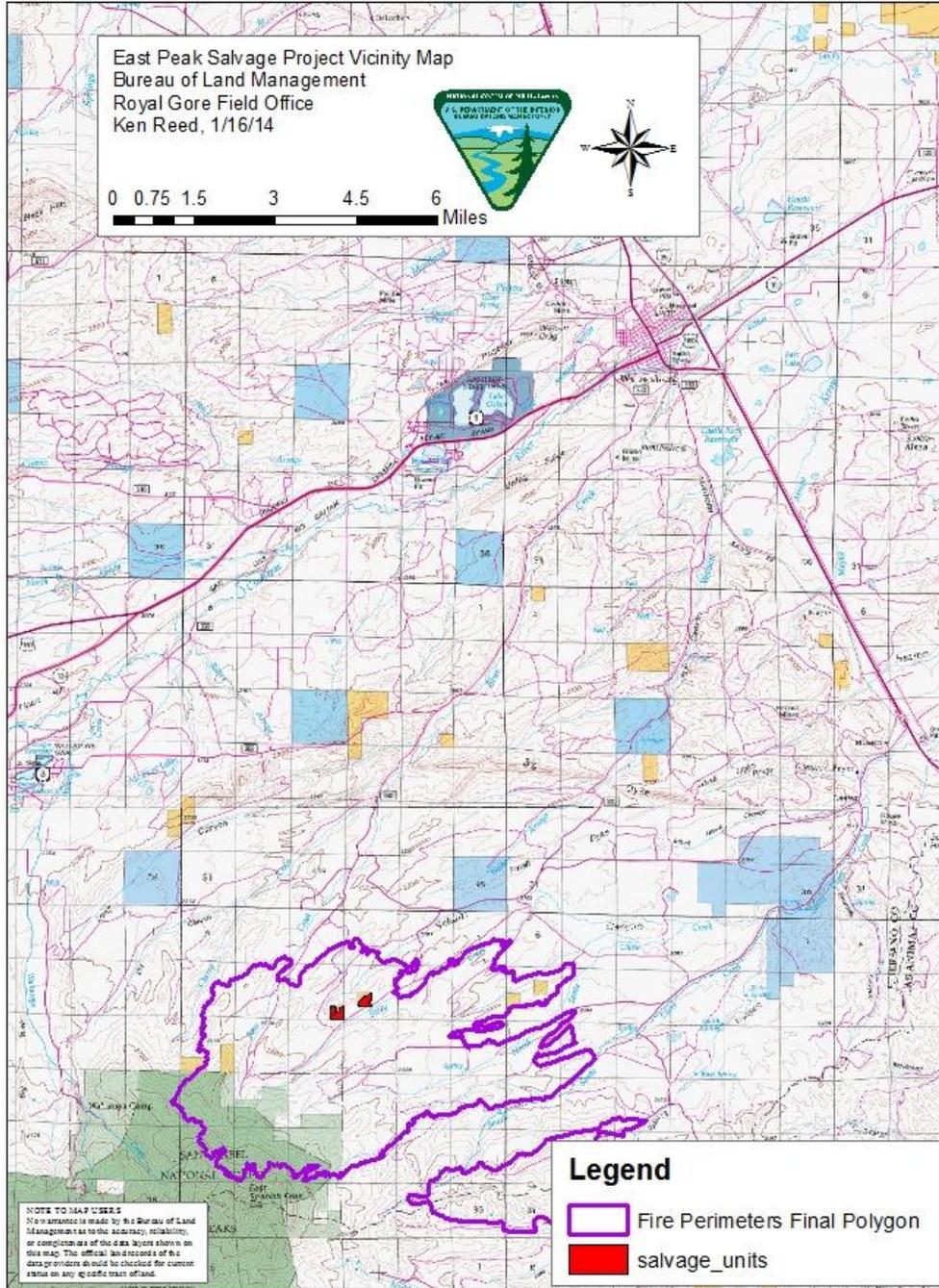
## CURRENT EXISTING CONDITION



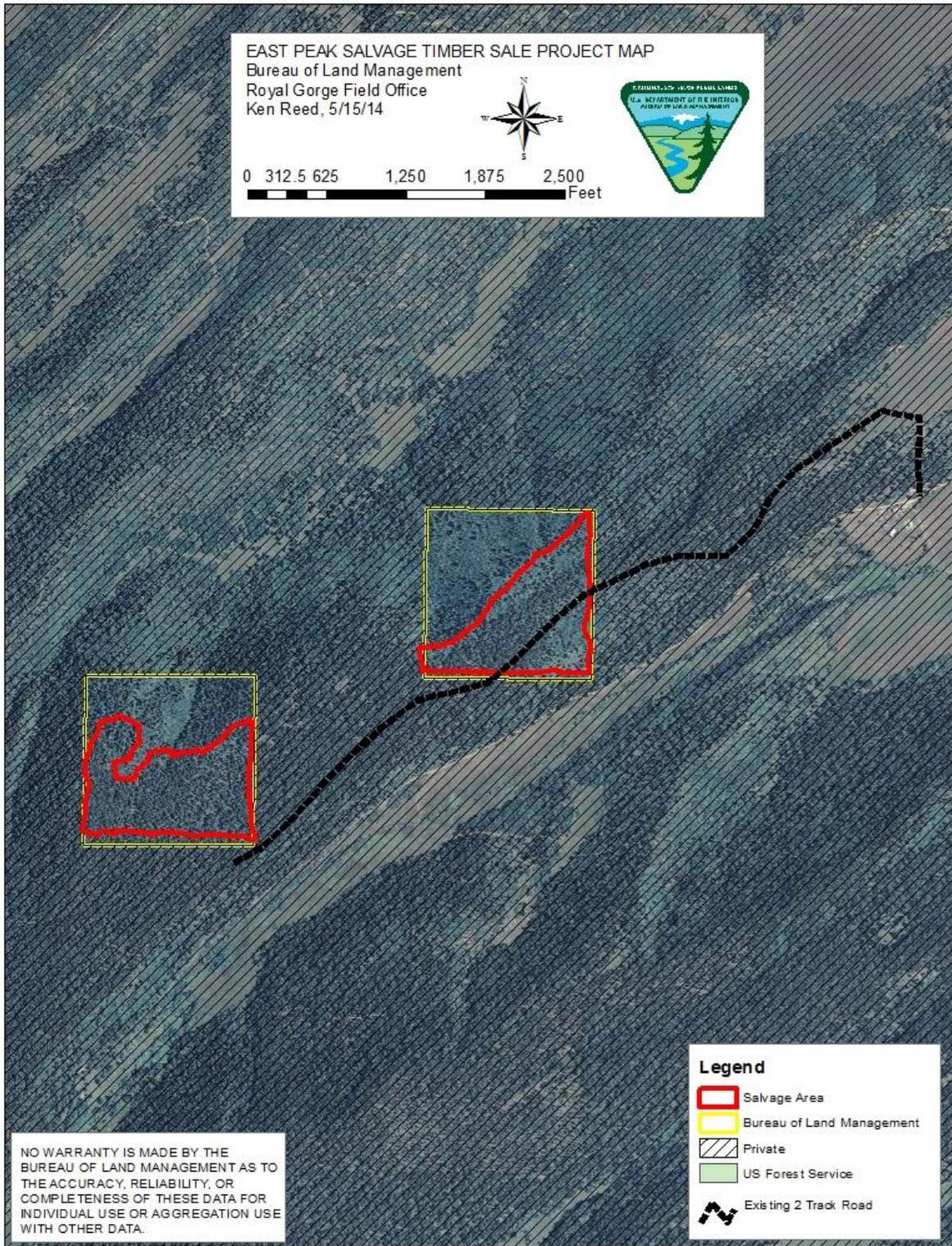
The slash created from the activity shall be lopped and scattered to restore quick ground cover. The BLM forester will work with the adjacent landowner for access.

All known improvements will be protected or repaired if damaged, including but not limited to fences, gates, watering facilities, property corners, etc. This parcel is currently not permitted for livestock grazing.

# Vicinity Map



# Project Map



PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW:

Name of Plan: Royal Gorge Resource Management Plan

Date Approved: 5/13/1996

Decision Number: 10-1, 10-12, 10-13

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

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.

Exclusion Criteria	YES	NO
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
11. Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect		X

the physical integrity of such sacred sites.		
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

<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, 1/31/14
Jeff Williams	Range Management Spec.	Range, Vegetation, Farmland	NA
Chris Cloninger	Range Management Spec.	Range, Vegetation, Farmland	NA
John Lamman	Range Management Spec.	Range, Vegetation, Farmland, Weeds	JL, 02/03/2014
Dave Gilbert	Fisheries Biologist	Aquatic Wildlife, Riparian/Wetlands	DG 1/31/14
Stephanie Carter	Geologist	Minerals, Paleontology, Waste Hazardous or Solid	-----
Melissa Smeins	Geologist	Minerals, Paleontology	MJS, 2/11/2014
John Smeins	Hydrologist	Hydrology, Water Quality/Rights, Soils	JS 2/3/14
Ty Webb	Prescribed Fire Specialist	Air Quality	TW, 4/15/14
Jeff Covington	Cadastral Surveyor	Cadastral Survey	JC, 3/3/14
Kalem Lenard	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Recreation, Wilderness, LWCs, Visual, ACEC, W&S Rivers,	KL, 2/3/2014
John Nahomenuk	River Manager	Recreation, Wilderness, LWCs, Visual, ACEC, W&S Rivers	NA
Ken Reed	Forester	Forestry	KR, 1/28/14
Monica Weimer	Archaeologist	Cultural, Native American	NA
Michael Troyer	Archaeologist	Cultural, Native American	MDT 4/10/14
Greg Valladares	Realty Specialist	Realty	GDV 04/09/2014
Steve Cunningham	Law Enforcement Ranger	Law Enforcement	NA
Dennis Page	Fire Management Officer (Acting)	Fire Management	DWP, 2/10/14

**REMARKS:**

Cadastral: Township was originally surveyed in 1874. The GCDB point reliability is +/- 330 ft. There is a 2013 private survey in the area that Cadastral will be checking for adequacy of the boundaries.

**Cultural Resources:** No historic properties were found in the area of potential effect [see report CR-RG-14-091 (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.

Current research states that 10-14 snag trees per acre with a >10inch DBH or the next largest should be retained in a clumped distribution to provide foraging and cavity nesting habitat for migratory birds (Eklund et al. 2009, Haagard and Gaines 2001, Saab et al. 2009). However, the salvageable acres represent a small percentage of the snags created from the fire due to slope, access, and land status. Therefore, 5-7 snags per acre in a clumped distribution will be sufficient to provide foraging and nesting habitat for migratory birds.

**Lands with Wilderness Characteristics:** Inventories for wilderness characteristics were updated in 2013. It was determined that the project area does not possess wilderness characteristics.

**Geologic and Mineral Resources:** The federal minerals in the proposed project area are open to mineral location, therefore requiring coordination between surface uses as applicable. As of February 11, 2014 there are no unpatented mining claims within the proposed project boundary, however, if any claim markers are encountered during project implementation they cannot be disturbed.

**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.

REFERENCES:

Eklund, A., M. G. Wing, and J. Sessions. 2009. Evaluating economic and wildlife habitat considerations for snag retention policies in burned landscapes. *Western Journal of Applied Forestry* 24: 67-75.

Haagard, M., and W. L. Gaines. 2001. Effects of stand-replacement fire and salvage logging on a cavity-nesting bird community in eastern Cascades, Washington. *Northwest Science* 75: 387-396.

Saab, V. A., R. E. Russell, and J. G. Dudley. 2009. Nest-site selection by cavity-nesting birds in relation to postfire salvage logging. *Forest Ecology and Management* 257: 151-159.

COMPLIANCE PLAN (optional):

NAME OF PREPARER: Ken Reed

SUPERVISORY REVIEW: Melissa K.S. Garcia

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR: /s/ Martin Weimer

DATE: 6/5/14

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 THE RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL:                    /s/ Keith E. Berger  
Keith E. Berger, Field Manager

DATE: 6/6/14