

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management**

**Finding of No Significant Impact
Environmental Assessment
DOI-BLM-CO-S010-2014-0004**

June, 2014

Rabbit Mountain Fuels Treatment Project

Location:

La Plata County, CO
Township 35N, Range 7W, Sections 19, 29, 31, 32, 33
Township 34N, Range 7W, Sections 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

Project Proponent:

***USDI BLM
Tres Rios Field Office***

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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
Environmental Assessment
DOI-BLM-CO-S010-2014-0004
Rabbit Mountain Fuels Treatment Project

INTRODUCTION:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has conducted an Environmental Assessment (EA) (DOI-BLM-CO-SO10-2014-0004) for a proposed action to address hazardous fuels reduction in an approximately 800 acre target area in La Plata County. The project will reduce hazardous fuels in the Rabbit Mountain Area, northwest of Bayfield, CO.

The 2,200 acre project area is located on BLM land in all or parts of the following legal locations: Township 35N, Range 7W, Sections 19, 29, 31, 32, 33, and Township 34N, Range 7W, Sections 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. The EA considered the Proposed Action with design features and a No Action Alternative; no other alternatives were needed to respond to alternative uses of resources.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:

I have reviewed the EA for the Rabbit Mountain Fuels Treatment Project (DOI-BLM-CO-S010-2014-0004) (April, 2013). After consideration of the environmental effects as described in the EA, I have determined that the Proposed Action (Selected Alternative), with the project design features (EA at section 2.2.1), will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

I have also considered the Council on Environmental Quality's criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), with regard to context and intensity of impacts described in the EA:

Context: The Selected Alternative is a site-specific action directly involving approximately 800 targeted acres of BLM administered land that by itself does not have international, national, regional, or state-wide importance. The vegetation types are ponderosa pine/Gambel oak, mountain shrub alliance, and pinyon/juniper woodland. A lack of wildland fire in the project area has resulted in a fire regime condition class (FRCC) of FRCC II or FRCC III project area wide. Previous mechanical treatments in 2005-2008 have moved the stands partially toward a more appropriate FRCC and the proposed prescribed burning and minor mechanical treatments will move the project area closer to FRCC I, indicating that the vegetation structure and fire regimes would be closer to historical values following treatment than they are currently. The project area is approximately 2,200 acres, with approximately 800 acres targeted for treatment. Treatments will occur beginning 2014 and will continue until implemented as conditions allow.

Intensity: The following discussion is organized around the Ten Significance Criteria described in 40 CFR 1508.27.

The following have been considered in evaluating intensity for this proposal:

1. Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse.

The EA analyzed effects to resources that may be both beneficial and adverse. Measures to reduce impacts to all affected resources were incorporated in the design of the Selected Alternative. None of the environmental effects discussed in detail in the EA and associated appendices are considered significant (EA at Chapter 4).

2. The degree to which the selected alternative will affect public health or safety.

The Selected Alternative, including its design features (EA at Section 2.2.1) is not expected to significantly impact public health and safety. Design features such as, “The BLM will obtain a Smoke Permit from the State of Colorado, Environmental Health Department, Air Pollution Control Division, prior to burning would reduce effects to public health. The BLM will abide by the ‘standards and conditions’ of the permit, including the maximum daily burn acreage, wind direction, dispersion index, and daily ignition cutoff time”, would be followed as part of the Selected Alternative (EA at 2.2.1).

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

Impacts to historic and cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, and ecologically critical areas were all considered when designing the Selected Alternative. The proposed action will not have a significant impact on historic and cultural resources. The following components of the Human Environment and Resource Issues are not affected because they are not present in the project area; areas of critical environmental concern, park lands, prime and unique farm lands as defined by 7 CFR 657.5, caves designated under 43 CFR 37, wetlands, wilderness, wilderness study areas, lands with wilderness characteristics, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

There is no scientific controversy over the nature of the impacts that would result from the implementation of this project. An interested public scoping letter was mailed to interested publics on January 31, 2014. The letter was sent to groups or individuals who have expressed an interest in participating in habitat improvement and hazardous fuels reduction projects as well as State and Federal wildlife agencies. The project proposal was also posted on the Tres Rios NEPA website on January 31, 2014. Two comment letters were received during the public scoping period (January 31 2014 – February 28, 2014). Comment letters were received from two governmental agencies (Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and the Upper Pine Fire Protection District). As a result of internal and external scoping, preliminary issues and concerns were addressed in the EA. Effects resulting from the proposed treatments are not likely to be highly controversial.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The project is not unique or unusual. The BLM has experience implementing similar actions in the Tres Rios Field Office area. Specifically, over the past fifteen years, 8,553 acres have been mechanically treated, and 2,877 acres have been treated with prescribed fire. The environmental effects to the human environment are analyzed in the EA. Monitoring of objectives is incorporated into the Proposed Action (EA at 2.2). There are no predicted effects on the human environment that are considered to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The effects considered in the Selected Alternative were considered by the interdisciplinary team within the context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. Significant cumulative effects are not predicted (see analysis, EA at Section 4.3). A complete analysis of the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the Selected Alternative is described in Chapter 4 of the EA. While post treatment monitoring data from this project may be used to determine appropriate actions in future

similar projects, those projects will be subject to compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and an independent decision making process.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

The interdisciplinary team evaluated the possible effects in context of past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions. Significant cumulative effects are not predicted. A complete disclosure of the effects of the project is contained in Chapter 4 of the EA. As standard procedure, future projects will be subject to their own cumulative impact analysis and reviewed on a site-specific basis.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

The project will not impact districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor will it cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Design features to reduce impacts to wildlife and fisheries have been incorporated into the proposal as part of the Selected Alternative (EA at 2.2.1).

There are no Threatened, Endangered, and Candidate plant species present in the project area.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of a Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The project does not violate any known federal, state, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. State, local, and tribal interests were given the opportunity to participate in the environmental analysis process. In addition, the project is consistent with applicable land management plans, policies, and programs (EA at 1.3 and 1.4).



Connie Clementson
Field Manager
Tres Rios Field Office



Date