

# United States Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management

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**Finding of No Significant Impact  
Environmental Assessment  
DOI-BLM-CO-S010-2012-0026-EA**

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**July, 2013**

## **West Dolores Rim Hazardous Fuels Reduction**

***Location:*** Dolores and San Miguel Counties, Colorado

*Township 43 N, Range 19 W, sec. 36;*

*Township 43 N, Range 18 W, sec. 28, 29, 31- 33;*

*Township 42 N, Range 18 W, sec. 5- 11, 15- 18, 21, 22, 26-28, 33- 35;*

*Township 42 N, Range 19 W, sec. 12;*

*Township 41 N, Range 18 W, sec. 2, 3, 11, 14-16, 21, 22, 24, 26, 27, 35, 36;*

*Township 41 N, Range 17 W, sec. 19, 30-32;*

*Township 40 N, Range 17 W, sec. 4- 9;*

*Township 40 N, Range 18 W, 1, 2, 12*

***Applicant/Address:*** *Tres Rios Field Office, BLM, 29211 Highway 184, Dolores, CO*

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Tres Rios Field Office  
29211 Highway 184  
Dolores, Colorado, 81323  
970-882-7296 (phone)  
970-882-6841 (fax)



**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**  
**Environmental Assessment**  
***DOI-BLM-CO-S010-2012-0026***  
***West Dolores Rim Hazardous Fuels Reduction***

**INTRODUCTION:**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has conducted an Environmental Assessment (EA) (DOI-BLM-CO-SO10-2012-0026-EA) for a proposed action to address hazardous fuels reduction in an approximate 15,000 target acre area in Dolores and San Miguel Counties. The project will reduce hazardous fuels along the western rim of the Dolores River Canyon.

The 25,967 acre project area is located on BLM land in all or parts of Townships (T) and Ranges (R) T40N R17W, T40N R18W, T41N R 17W, T41N R18W, T42N R18W, T42N R19W, T43N R19W, T43N R18W. The EA considered the Proposed Action with design features and 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 West Dolores Rim Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project (DOI-BLM-CO-S010-2012-00026-EA)(June, 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 15,000 targeted acres of BLM administered land that by itself does not have international, national, regional, or state-wide importance. The vegetation types are mountain shrub alliance, pinyon/juniper woodland, sagebrush steppe, and ponderosa pine forest. 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. The treatments will move the project area toward FRCC I, indicating that the vegetation structure and fire regimes would be closer to historical values than they are currently. The project area is approximately 26,000 acres, with approximately 15,000 acres targeted for treatment. Treatments will not exceed 1,500 acres per year. This is a maximum of 6% of the project area in any calendar year.

**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, “Smoke production will occur from prescribed fire treatments, but neither will exceed Colorado or National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS), would be followed as part of the Selected Alternative (EA at 2.2.1.8).

**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 historic and cultural resources of the area have been inventoried and potential impacts to sites eligible and potentially eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places are mitigated in the design of the proposed action. 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. External scoping was done through the Schedule of Proposed Action (January 11, 2012), and a scoping letter sent to interested parties (January 25, 2013). Five comment letters were received during the public scoping period (January 25 2013 – February 25, 2013). Comment letters were received from three governmental agencies (State, County, and Town), and two organizations. As a result of internal and external scoping, preliminary issues and concerns were addressed in the EA. A comment period was offered between May 31 and June 18, 2013. During the comment period, five letters were received from one individual, one organization, one Native American tribe, and two government agencies, and are addressed in Table 5.3.1 of 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 same 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 is incorporated into the Selected Alternative (EA at 12). 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 4.4). 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 adversely affect 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. Cultural inventories have been completed for the proposed action, and 35 cultural resources were found which were recommended as eligible or potentially eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Identified cultural and historic properties will be avoided prior to treatment to prevent adverse impacts.

**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 as part of the Selected Alternative (EA at 13). There is potential nesting habitat for Mexican spotted owls within the Dolores River canyon which is adjacent to the proposed project area. Though there is no mapped critical habitat for the Mexican spotted owl in the analysis area, the project area is within the “Colorado Plateau Ecological Management Unit” as defined by the revised 2012 Mexican spotted owl recovery plan (USDI FWS 2012) (EA at 29). The following design feature as part of the Selected Alternative would be applied:

Mexican Spotted Owls - A survey for presence of MSO will be conducted if treatment is within ½ mile of canyon rims. If surveys are completed, projects activities can occur for a period of 5 years before additional surveys will be required. If Mexican spotted owl surveys

are not possible, implementation in units with 0.5 miles of the canyon rim would be conducted outside of the breeding season March 1 – August 31.

The project area contains proposed critical habitat for the Gunnison Sage Grouse (EA at 29). The following design features are included as part of the Selected Alternative (EA at 13) and would reduce effects to sage-grouse.

All activities, except foot and horse traffic, should be limited to established roads and trails in areas of known winter concentration (RCP) December 1 to March 15.

Management activities should not contribute to noise levels and surface disturbing activities that create excessive noise (>34 decibels) within 4.0 miles of an active lek from should be avoided from March 1 to June 30. Any necessary equipment should produce minimal noise; all compressors, vehicles, and other sources of noise should be equipped with effective mufflers or noise suppression devices.

Any sagebrush removal or vegetation treatment is prohibited within 0.60 miles of an active lek unless implemented to maintain or enhance the lek (RCP).

Sagebrush treatment is not discouraged but will be planned to achieve the habitat objectives outlined in the RCP.

Limit activities, motorized or non-motorized, between sunset the evening before to 2 hours after sunrise the next morning.

Any treatments should be small in size. Sagebrush loss, removal, treatments, or other surface-disturbing activities should not exceed 10% of the delineated winter habitat.

Treatments should be irregular in shape and not distributed predictably or systematically on the landscape. Treatments in the shape of rows or strips will not occur.

This environmental assessment is a landscape level document and will cover actions in the proposed area for many years. Because of this, the Tres Rios Field office would seek official consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Section 7, Endangered Species Act) if and when the Gunnison sage grouse is officially listed as a threatened or endangered species. A Biological Assessment (BA) would be created and submitted to the Fish and Wildlife service at that time.

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. Furthermore, twenty six Native American tribes with potential cultural affiliations in the project area were consulted on the project under the National Historic Preservation Act and the American Indian Religious Freedom Act. Comments were received from four tribes, and are discussed in Table 5.3.1 and Table 5.4.1 in the EA. In addition, the project is consistent with applicable land management plans, policies, and programs (EA at 6-7).

Connie Clementson

7.26.13

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Connie Clementson  
Field Manager  
Tres Rios Field Office.

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Date