

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

**Determination of NEPA Adequacy
DOI-BLM-CO-SO50-2012-0030 DNA**

June 2012

**North Rim Integrated Vegetation Management Plan
FY 2012 Implementation**

Location: Gunnison Sage-grouse Area of Critical Environmental Concern

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Uncompahgre Field Office
2465 South Townsend Avenue
Montrose, CO 81401
Phone: (970) 240-5300**



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NUMBER: DOI-BLM-CO-S050-2012-0030 EA

PROPOSED ACTION TITLE: North Rim Integrated Vegetation Management Plan FY 2012 Implementation

LOCATION/LEGAL DESCRIPTION: New Mexico Principle Meridian

T51N R8W Sec. 28,29,32,33,34
T50N R8W Sec. 3,4

APPLICANT: USDOJ, Bureau of Land Management, Uncompahgre Field Office

Background: The proposed action would occur within the Gunnison sage-grouse ACEC. The ACEC was designated to specifically manage for a declining population of Gunnison sage-grouse which occur on the north rim of the Gunnison Gorge in the Crawford area.

It is believed that the decline in the Crawford area sage-grouse population reflects a larger decline in the health of the natural landscape in this area. Past management activities including fire suppression and selective livestock grazing appear to have created conditions suitable for establishment of young piñon and juniper trees which are slowly encroaching into sagebrush areas on the landscape. The proposed action is designed specifically to address declines in habitat suitability; expand the suitable extent of sage-grouse habitat by substantially reducing the PJ component in former sagebrush communities and preempt the progressive conversion of this former sagebrush disclimax to a piñon/juniper woodland site.

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

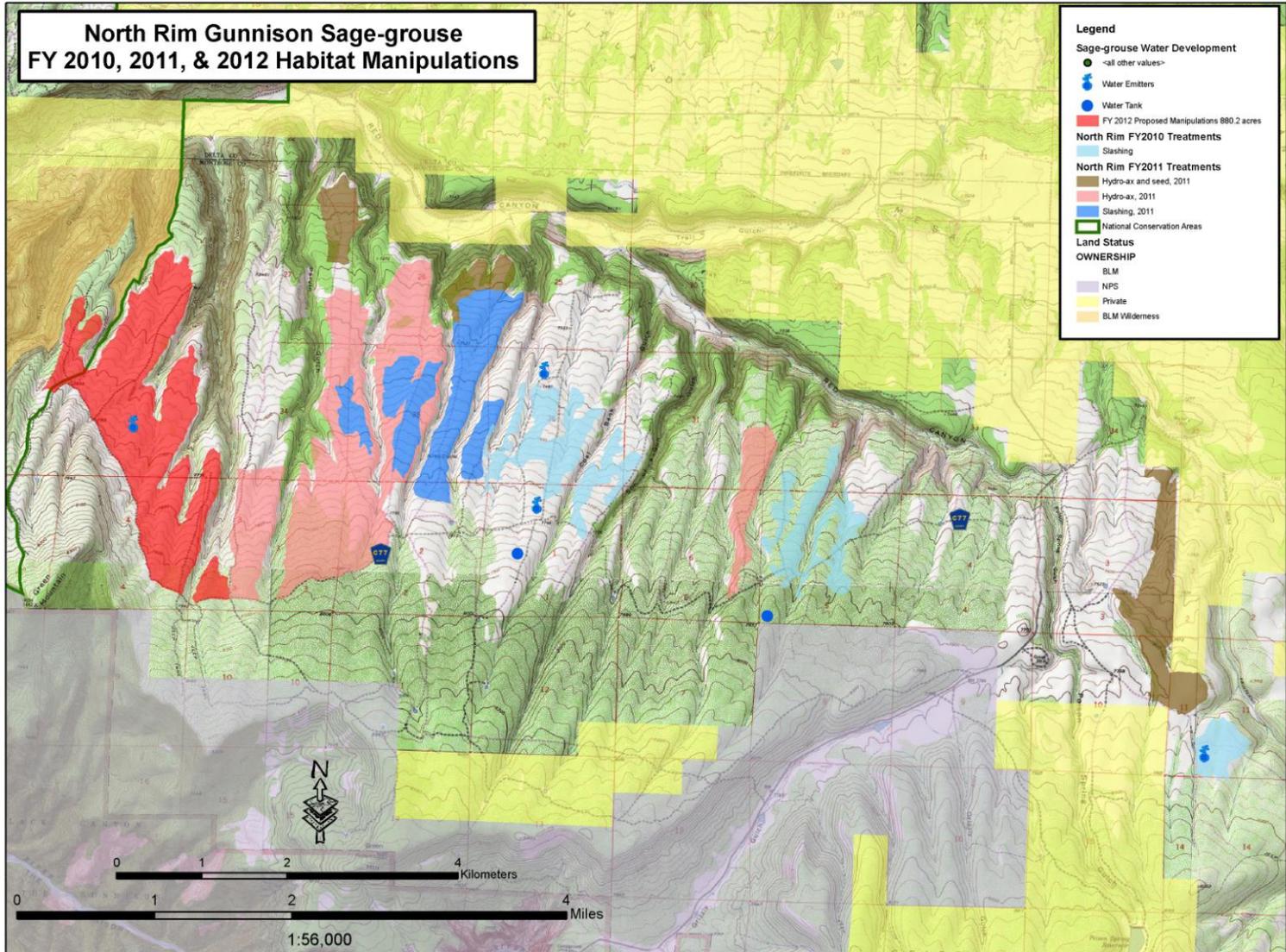
The proposed action is to continue to implement the North Rim Integrated Vegetation Management Plan; specifically 880.2 acres (see map) of young piñon juniper woodland would be hydro-axed and seeded with native grasses and forbs described in Table 1 to increase herbaceous ground cover and to promote accelerated sagebrush community development. The existing sagebrush and mountain shrub community would be avoided to the greatest extent practicable. The site identified has deep soil and is formerly a sagebrush community that now through

succession can be equally considered a young piñon juniper stand. These sites still exhibit woody and herbaceous plant characteristics of sagebrush communities.

Table 1 Proposed Seed Mix for Project

Code	Common	Cultivar	Genus	species	Lbs PLS/acre
ELEL5	BOTTLEBRUSH SQUIRRELTAIL	State Bridge	ELYMUS	elymoides	2.5
ACHY	INDIAN RICEGRASS	rimrock	ACHNATHERUM	hymenoides	3
POSE	SANDBURG BLUEGRASS	UP	POA	secunda	0.5
PECY	BLUESTEM PENSTEMON	UP	PENSTEMON	cyanocaulis	0.25
	NORTHERN (UTAH)				
HEBO	SWEETVETCH	TIMP	HEDYSARUM	boreale	0.3
LILEL2	LEWIS FLAX	Maple Grove	LINUM	lewisii spp. Lewesii	0.5
SEMU	Mult-lobed groundsel	UP	Senecio	multilobata	0.25
ACLA	WESTERN YARROW	UP	Achillea	millefolium	0.25
Total PLS #/acre					7.55

- All project activities would occur well after the nesting and brood rearing season to ensure all young of the year bird species potentially occurring within the project area could effectively move and avoid operating equipment. Project dates as planned would be August 15- October 31 2012. In light of the ongoing drought project dates may be delayed further to ensure that equipment does not potentially cause a wildland fire.
- Seeding activities would occur between November 15 and December 31 2012.
- All heavy equipment would be power washed before entering public lands. This includes all lowboys hauling heavy equipment.
- Treatment areas would be inventoried for noxious and invasive weeds prior to treatment.
- All noxious and invasive weeds would be treated before and after treatment has occurred.



B. Land Use Plan (LUP) Conformance

Name of Plan: Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area Resource Management Plan
Date Approved: November 5, 2004

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

Decision Number/Page: VEG-C-17& SSS-C-1 (2-17& 2-19), SMA-C-3& SMA-C-4 (2-26 & 2-27)

Decision Language: BLM will continue to manage habitat for special status species, including listed species, BLM sensitive species, rare endemic species, and other species of special concern.

Public lands in Management Unit 4 (22,200 acres) will be designated and managed as the Gunnison Sage-Grouse ACEC/IBA. Management and protection of the Gunnison sage grouse and its habitat will be emphasized in this management unit.

This RMP adopts and incorporates the Gunnison Sage-Grouse Conservation Plan, Crawford Area, Colorado (Crawford Sage-Grouse Partnership 1998), as part of the management Objectives and direction for Management Unit 4.

Conformance with other documents:

Name of Document: Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement: Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides on Bureau of Land Management Lands in 17 Western States, and Programmatic Environmental Report: Vegetation Treatments on Bureau of Land Management Lands in 17 Western States

Date Approved: September, 2007

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

Name of Document: North Rim Integrated Vegetation Management Plan, Environmental Assessment number DOI-BLM-CO-S050-2011-0007 EA

Date Approved: July, 2011

From the EA page 9 specific language:

Sagebrush Restoration Emphasis Area

The focus of this area is to enhance habitat for Gunnison sage grouse; restore an appropriate mix of vegetation types and seral stages; and improve ecosystem health. The Sagebrush Restoration Emphasis Area covers approximately 4,400 acres of BLM land.

Vegetation Treatment Objectives:

Treat up to 60-80% (2,600-3,500 acres) of the total acreage over the next 10 years with prescribed fire and mechanical treatments to restore and/or maintain sagebrush habitats.

- 1) Reset aging sagebrush habitats to early seral and seed with an appropriate grass/forb/ seed mix so that over the long term (40-60 years) healthy, vigorous sagebrush habitats dominate the area.
- 2) Where sagebrush is present in healthy age classes maintain these areas in early-mid and mid seral stages by removing encroaching pinyon and juniper and by interseeding with grasses and forbs.

Use the following criteria to determine whether to treat an area:

- Treat deep soiled sites that were formerly sagebrush that now through succession can be equally considered young piñon juniper stands. These sites must still exhibit herbaceous plant characteristics of sagebrush communities;
- mature sagebrush communities with piñon and juniper encroachment; or
- sagebrush stands where >50% of the plants are decadent, and recruitment is low or absent.

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?

The proposed action is in direct conformance as stated above. The project falls within the sagebrush restoration emphasis area established in the North Rim Integrated Vegetation Management Plan EA. The project as proposed conforms to the criteria established in the EA for sagebrush restoration.

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?

Yes, the alternatives analyzed were appropriate given that the new proposed action is essentially a continuation of the proposed action analyzed in the subject EA.

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?

Yes, the existing analysis is valid given that upon completion of similar projects completed in FY 2011 radio and GPS collared birds were observed moving back into the treated areas and have essentially remained in the treatments since completion, suggesting the efficacy of the activity and validity of the analysis. Similar results are expected for the proposed action. The table below further supports the validity as the EA provided for a range of 2500-3500 acres of sagebrush restoration within the emphasis area. To date 1396.5 acres of the emphasis area has been completed in accordance with the EA and with the proposed action 2276.7 acres of the emphasis area would be completed. The proposed action combined with the projects implemented in 2011 would still be 300+ acres below the low range desired future condition described for the sagebrush restoration emphasis area.

Table 2 Acres treated under the plan in 2011.

Emphasis Area	Acres
Big Game	6.9
Sage Restoration	1396.5
Sage-grouse	309.7
WUI	383.6

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?

Yes, all direct, indirect, and cumulative effects are expected to be similar. Additionally, a greater expanse of more suitable habitat for sage-grouse is expected to develop as a result of the proposed action. Based on tracking of the birds inhabiting the area it would appear that the birds favor less tree covered habitats in the North Rim area thus the proposed action is expected to have a net cumulative positive effect for sage-grouse and other sage obligate species as additional habitat is expected to be made available to exploit and fulfill life processes while avoiding predators.

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

Yes, scoping for the subject EA revealed no written comments in opposition to the project. Colorado Parks and Wildlife, the Crawford Sage-grouse working group, and US Geological Survey have reviewed the proposed action and subject EA and are in strong support for the project.

E. Persons/Agencies /BLM Staff Consulted

<u>Name</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Resource/Agency Represented</u>
Nate Seward	Terrestrial Biologist	Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Doug Homan	Coordinator	Crawford Sage-grouse Working Group
Doug Orin	Researcher	USGS

The following are agencies/entities that were consulted for the EA:

- Black Canyon Audubon Society
- Black Canyon Land Trust
- Colorado Division of Wildlife
- Colorado State University – Extension Service
- Crawford Gunnison Sage-Grouse Working Group
- Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture –Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests, Paonia Ranger District
- Grazing Permittees
- Local Private Landowners
- National Park Service –Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park and Curecanti National Recreation Area
- Natural Resources Conservation Service, Delta Conservation District
- U.S. Geological Survey
- Western Area Power Administration
- Interested Members of the Public
- Uncompahgre Plateau Project

REMARKS:

Cultural Resources: Most of the Cultural Resource inventory for the integrated project has been completed and the remaining acreage is scheduled for inventory in early August 2012. All recommendations for CR avoidance will be followed and no further work is required.

Native American Religious Concerns: There are none known for this area. If the remaining inventory discovers any such Sacred sites and/or Traditional Cultural Properties, consultation with the appropriate tribes will be implemented and the sites will be avoided.

Threatened and Endangered Species: With the exception for Gunnison sage-grouse no federally listed or BLM sensitive species are known to inhabit or derive important use of the proposed project area.

MITIGATION: Mitigation for sensitive species has been incorporated into the proposed action.

Conclusion

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.

Name of Project Lead: Ken Holsinger

Signature of NEPA Coordinator Bruce Krickbaum Date 8/17/2012

Signature of the Responsible Official /s/ Barbara Sharrow

Barbara Sharrow
Field Manager, Uncompahgre Field Office

Date 8/20/2012

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.