

**U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
White River Field Office  
220 E Market St  
Meeker, CO 81641**

## **ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

**NUMBER:** DOI-BLM-CO-110-2011-068-EA

**PROJECT NAME:** Threemile Powerline Hazardous Fuels Reduction

**LEGAL DESCRIPTION:** 1N 94W Sec. 3,4,5,8

**APPLICANT:** Bureau of Land Management- White River Field Office

### **DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES:**

***Background/Introduction:*** Rio Blanco County (RBC) is among the top three highest counties in Colorado for probability of wildfire (Neuenschwander et al. 2000). As part of an emergency preparedness review, RBC evaluated risk of wildland fire through geographic information system analysis (RBC 2003, Strategic Emergency/Disaster Management Program, Revision B). This analysis involved overlaying fuels with community features, such as homes, oil and gas wells, roads, industrial facilities, electrical lines, and wildlife habitat. The analysis revealed that electrical transmission lines that service mining, industrial, and oil and gas facilities had the most significant exposure to risk of wildland fire hazard in the county. Therefore, the county identified power line protection as a high priority in their Strategic Wildland Fire Management Program (RBC 2003, Rio Blanco County, Colorado Strategic Wildland Fire Hazard Management Program).

In and around the project area west of Meeker, Colorado, wildfire fuels have built up to levels of concern around a high-power electric line (see Attachment 1). This 138KV powerline was constructed in 1963 using double wooden pole structures for support. Dense vegetation adjacent to the transmission line has grown in over the past 50 years. This has created an elevated risk of damage to the lines in the event of wildfire. The pole structures are also at risk due to continuous adjacent fuels and the re-growth of vegetation in direct proximity of the structures. Post-construction reclamation actions, including right-of-way maintenance documented in 1987, along the powerline produced accumulations of remnant slash near the pole structures that could provide a link to the adjacent fuels and increase the risk of fire damage.

**Description of Proposed Action:** The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) White River Field Office (WRFO), in collaboration with Tri State, is proposing vegetative treatments to help protect an important power transmission line by reducing hazardous fuels, creating defensible space, and improving fire suppression options. The proposal is to treat 100 acres of vegetation in segments under and adjacent to the power transmission line using mechanical treatment to reduce the potential loss of the powerline by wildfire.

This treatment will protect two and a half miles of electric transmission line, targeting 10 double wooden pole structures which support the 138KV line. The treatment will utilize heavy machinery to remove and/or thin 100 acres of pinyon pine, juniper, sagebrush, and various mountain shrubs.

### **Thinning Methods:**

The BLM or a contractor will utilize large heavy equipment such as the Hydro-ax, Fecon Flail, Fecon Bull Hog, or heavy-duty mower in accessible areas over portions of the powerline and will mechanically treat approximately 100 acres of vegetation. These machines are essentially large rubber tired tractor (similar to a skidder) equipped with various cutting and mowing devices on the front end of the hydraulic arms. The “hydro-ax” is equipped with a 6 ft. – 8 ft. hydraulic powered mowing head (two-bladed) attached to the front arms (similar to a front end loader). The flail and bull hog are equipped with a rotating drum with multiple carbide cutting tips instead of the large two-bladed mower attachment. These machines are capable of shredding trees up to 12 inches in diameter and 15 ft. tall as well as mowing brush like a conventional brush beater. It generally leaves small branches and pieces of wood from pencil size up to bowling ball size. The mulch is evenly scattered across the surface and the tires or tracks distribute the weight of the equipment. This treatment creates minimal surface disturbance. Grasses and forbs are relatively undisturbed and remain viable, which protects the soil from erosion. To protect soil and water quality, operations would not be allowed in muddy conditions. A heavy-duty mower pulled behind a rubber-tired tractor could be used in flat to gently rolling sagebrush areas. Brush would be mowed to a height of three to four inches with islands or strips of untreated vegetation left for more natural visual appearance. Operations would not be conducted in muddy conditions.

### **Design Features of the Proposed Action:**

1. All units will be created to match existing vegetation openings in the surrounding environment and to blend in with existing vegetation to avoid visual angular features of the treatment. Established units of treatment will be designated with pink flagging.
2. For pinyon/juniper thinning within each unit, a canopy spacing of approximately 25-30 feet will be achieved, depending on slope. The largest and oldest trees will be left standing. Where practical, an even mix of pinyon and juniper will be left. Also, a mix of hard and soft snags will be left to provide adequate wildlife habitat.
3. Mechanical treatment will be limited to slopes of 20 percent or less. The operators will avoid headwalls, unstable slopes, seeps, and old landslides areas as identified in the field by the Soil/Water/Air specialist at the WRFO using flagging during vegetation treatments.
4. Mechanical equipment must be washed prior to entering the project area to prevent the spread and/or introduction of noxious weeds.

5. The treated areas would be monitored for noxious/invasive weed infestations for a minimum of three years post treatment. Any infestations identified will be suppressed / eradicated by BLM in accordance with the WRFO's Integrated Weed Management Plan (DOI-BLM-CO-110-2010-005-EA).
6. Mechanical treatment operations will not be conducted when soils or road surfaces become saturated to a depth of three inches.
7. Mechanical treatments are to start no sooner than August 2011 and run through December 2011.
8. Access for WRFO specialists and all contract operations are to be coordinated with adjacent landowners and use travel routes depicted on the transportation map (Attachment 2).
9. The contractor completing the Proposed Action on lands administered by the BLM will notify Craig Interagency Dispatch (970-826-5037) in the event of any fire.
  - a) The reporting party will inform the dispatch center of fire location, size, status, smoke color, aspect, fuel type, and provide their contact information.
  - b) The reporting party, or a representative of, should remain nearby, in a safe location, in order to make contact with incoming fire resources to expedite actions taken towards an appropriate management response.
  - c) Contractors will not engage in any fire suppression activities outside the approved project area. Accidental ignitions caused by welding, cutting, grinding, etc. will be suppressed by the applicant only if employee safety is not endangered and if the fire can be safely contained using hand tools and portable hand pumps. If chemical fire extinguishers are used the applicant must notify incoming fire resources on extinguisher type and the location of use.
  - d) Natural ignitions caused by lightning will be managed by Federal fire personnel. If a natural ignition occurs within the approved project area, the fire may be initially contained by the applicant only if employee safety is not endangered.
  - e) The use of heavy equipment for fire suppression is prohibited, unless authorized by the Field Office Manager.

**No Action Alternative:** No hazardous fuel reduction activities would occur under this alternative. The BLM's ability to protect the power line from wildland fire will not be enhanced. Firefighter and public safety would not be enhanced should a fire start in the area that requires suppression actions.

**ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT CARRIED FORWARD:**

1.) **Prescribed fire** on a broadcast scale was considered but eliminated from further analysis because risk to fire personnel working near the line is prohibitive and even brief interruptions of power through the line are economically infeasible.

2.) A **chemical treatment** (herbicide) method was considered but eliminated from further analysis because the resulting dead plant remains would still present a hazardous (although reduced) fuel situation. Application of chemical treatments would not meet the objective of thinning the pinyon-juniper canopy and is cost prohibitive. Additionally, results of selective chemical treatment (using herbicide on selected sites) can be visually unappealing.

**PURPOSE & NEED FOR THE ACTION:** The purpose of the Proposed Action is to reduce wildfire hazards for protection of the key electrical transmission line that provides power to the town of Meeker and a coal mine. In addition to powerline protection, the Proposed Action is needed to reduce the safety risk to fire firefighters working near the powerline by thinning the existing fuels. Fire and dense smoke are conductors of electricity. Electrical current can be transmitted through flame lengths and dense smoke. This is highly dangerous for firefighters who may have to suppress wildfire in and around the high voltage powerline. It could also result in the creation of new or spot fires when electric current arcs through dense smoke down into trees and other surrounding vegetation.

Decision to be Made: The BLM will decide whether or not to approve the mechanical treatment of 100 acres and, if so, under what conditions.

**PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW:** The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3):

Name of Plan: White River Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan (ROD/RMP).

Date Approved: July 1, 1997

Decision Language:

Page 2-55: “Manage fire to protect public health, safety and property”

Page 2-12: “Reduce the pinyon juniper tree component where pinyon or juniper has dominated or is invading other ecological sites.”

Name of Plan: White River Fire Management Plan, CO-110-1999-099-EA

Date Approved: June 29, 1999

Decision Language:

Page 14: “Protect oil and gas facilities in the Wilson Creek Oil Field and major powerlines crossing the unit when threatened by public land fires.”

## **AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT / ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES / MITIGATION MEASURES**

**STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC LAND HEALTH:** In January 1997, Colorado BLM approved the Standards for Public Land Health. These standards cover upland soils, riparian systems, plant and animal communities, threatened and endangered species, and water quality. Standards describe conditions needed to sustain public land health and relate to all uses of the public lands. Because a standard exists for these five categories, a finding must be made for each of them in an environmental analysis. These findings are located in specific elements listed below:

## **NATURAL, BIOLOGICAL, AND CULTURAL RESOURCES**

### **AIR QUALITY**

*Affected Environment:* Based on a review of designated non-attainment areas for criteria pollutants, published by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA 2010), the Proposed Action is an attainment area for national and state air quality standards. The Proposed Action is also located outside a 10-mile radius of any special designation airsheds or non-attainment areas. Non-attainment areas are areas designated by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as having air pollution levels that persistently exceed the national ambient air quality (NAAQ) standards. Projects that could impact special designation areas and non-attainment areas may require special consideration from the air quality regulatory agencies of Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) and the EPA. The closest special designation areas are Dinosaur National Monument which is located northwest of the project area (designated Class II airshed with Prevention of Significant Deterioration (PSD) with thresholds for sulfur oxides and visibility), and the Mount Zirkel and Flat Tops Wilderness Areas located to east and the north of the Propose Action (designated Class I areas). General conformity regulations require that federal activities do not cause or contribute to a new violation of NAAQ standards; that actions do not cause additional or worsen existing violations of the NAAQ standards; and that attainment of these standards is not delayed by federal actions in non-attainment areas.

The Proposed Action is in the White River Basin where industrial facilities include coal mines, soda ash mines, oil shale research and development, and natural gas processing and compression plants. Due to these industrial uses in the White River and in the nearby Unita and Yampa River Basins; increased population; power plants; oil and gas development in this region; and emissions of air pollutants due to exhaust emissions, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), nitrogen oxides (NOx), and dust (particulate matter) are likely to increase into the future. However, overall air quality conditions in the White River Basin are likely to continue to be in attainment of NAAQ standards due to effective atmospheric dispersion and limited transport of air pollutants from outside the area.

The Proposed Action is located in the Western Counties monitoring region and the 2010 CDPHE monitoring assessment for this area showed there were 11 particulate monitors in this area (CDPHE, 2010) (not including two BLM sponsored sites established in 2010). Regional air quality parameters including particulates are being measured at monitoring sites located at

Meeker, Rangely, Dinosaur, and Ripple Creek Pass near the Flat Tops Wilderness Area. The majority of dust pollution in Colorado is from miscellaneous fugitive dust sources (CDPHE, 2009). Fugitive dust emissions are those not caught by a capture system and are often due to earth moving equipment, vehicles, and windblown disturbances.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Vegetation treatment using heavy equipment is expected to cause increases in fugitive dust and inhalable particulate matter, specifically for particulate matter (PM) 10 microns ( $\mu\text{m}$ ) or less in diameter ( $\text{PM}_{10}$ ) and particles 2.5  $\mu\text{m}$  or less in diameter ( $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ ). Some of this material will be generated during the hydromowing due to the shredding and aerosolizing particles of woody material in trees and brush. Fugitive dust emissions during vegetation treatments would cause low, short-term impacts to local air quality.

Heavy equipment will increase the following criteria pollutants: carbon monoxide, VOCs, ozone, nitrogen dioxide, and sulfur dioxide would also occur due to combustion of fossil fuels. Non-criteria pollutants such as carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide (greenhouse gasses), air toxics (e.g. benzene), total suspended particulates (TSP), and increased impacts to non-criteria air quality parameters such as visibility and atmospheric deposition may also increase (no NAAQ standards have been set for non-criteria pollutants). Even with these increased pollutants the Propose Action is unlikely to result in an exceedance of NAAQ or Colorado ambient air quality (CAAQ) standards, and is likely to comply with applicable PSD increments and other significant impact thresholds.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* No impacts to air quality would result from the No Action Alternative.

*Mitigation:* None.

## SOILS

*Affected Environment:* The classifications of soils that may be impacted by the project are shown in Table 1. There are fragile soils and lands prone to landslides on Federal lands within the proposed treatment units. Units 1-4 may have small sections of fragile soils and Unit 5 has 53 acres of soils that may be prone to landslides.

**Table 1: Soil Classifications within 30 Meters of the Project**

<b>Soil Classification</b>	<b>Range Site Description</b>	<b>Potentially Impacted Acres</b>
Havre loam, 0-4 percent slopes	Foothill Swale	2
Patent loam, 3-8 percent slopes	Rolling Loam	20
Blazon, moist-Rentsac Complex, 6-65 percent slopes	Pinyon-Juniper Woodland	28
Jerry-Thornburgh-Rhone complex, 8-65 percent slopes	Brushy Loam/Brushy Loam	52
Zoltay clay loam, 8-15 percent slope	Deep Loam	26

Shawa loam, 3-8 percent slopes	Deep Loam	10
Rentsac-Moyerson-RockOutcrop, complex, 5-65 percent slopes	PJ Woodlands/Clayey Slopes	17

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Mechanically treating this vegetation will disturb soils due to vegetation clearing and heavy equipment use. The understory on treated vegetation will be left intact but may have some damage from equipment tires. However, the loss of the overstory in areas could increase exposure of soils to rainfall. The Proposed Action does not include the use of heavy equipment on slopes greater than 20 percent. By definition fragile soils are on slopes greater than 35 percent, therefore these soils should not be impacted by this project. Soils that are prone to landslides are included in Treatment Unit 5, and comprise about half of the unit. The Proposed Action would avoid headwalls, unstable slopes, seeps, and old landslides areas. These may be difficult to identify in the field and therefore the Soil/Water/Air program lead at the WRFO will go to the field before the treatment and flag areas to avoid. With avoidance of these unstable soils and steep slopes, fragile soils and soils with landslide potential should be protected from direct impacts. Indirect impacts to soils are unlikely since heavy equipment is rubber tired and is not expected to cause compaction of soils. This equipment is likely to damage vegetation, but damage is expected to be short-term and similar to natural disturbances, therefore indirect impacts to surrounding soils is unlikely.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* No impacts to soils would occur.

*Mitigation:* Equipment operators will avoid headwalls, unstable slopes, seeps, and old landslides areas as identified in the field (using flagging) by the WRFO Soil/Water/Air specialist.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for upland soils:* With mitigation this action is unlikely to reduce the productivity of soils impacted by surface disturbing activities.

## **WASTES, HAZARDOUS OR SOLID**

*Affected Environment:* There are no known hazardous wastes on the subject lands. No hazardous materials are known to have been stored or disposed of and there are no known solid waste dump sites in the proposed vegetation management units.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action (Proposed Action):* No listed or extremely hazardous materials are proposed for use in the Proposed Action. The project could result in contamination of surface and subsurface soils due to unintentional leaks or spills from the heavy equipment used for the vegetation treatments and may affect the productivity of soils. Typically contaminated soils would be removed and disposed of in a permitted facility.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* No impacts have been identified.

*Mitigation:* None.

**WATER QUALITY, SURFACE AND GROUND** (includes a finding on Standard 5)

*Affected Environment:* This project is in the headwaters of an unnamed ephemeral tributary to the White River. Table 2 describes water segments that may be impacted by this project.

**Table 2: Water Quality Classification Table\***

Segment	Segment Name	Use Protected	Protected Beneficial Uses			
			Aquatic Life	Recreation	Water Supply	Agriculture
9b	Tributaries to the White River From Flag Creek to Piceance Creek	No	Cold 2	Not Primary Contact Use Recreation	No	Yes
7	Mainstem of The White River from Miller Creek to Piceance Creek	No	Cold 1	Primary Contact Recreation	Yes	Yes

\* Colorado Department Of Public Health And Environment, Water Quality Control Commission, Regulation No. 37 Classifications and Numeric Standards For Lower Colorado River Basin, Effective June 30, 2011

Segment 7 is protected for cold water aquatic life (Cold 1). The cold water designation is protective of aquatic life, including trout, normally found in waters where the summer weekly average temperature does not frequently exceed 20 °C. These waters typically have high numerical standards and are applied where the physical habitat, water flows or levels, and water quality conditions exist. Segment 9b is protected for coldwater aquatic life (Cold 2). The Cold 2 designation means that it has been determined that these waters are not capable of sustaining a wide variety of cold water biota. These segments also have standards that are protective of recreation and agriculture and segment 7 is protected for drinking water supplies. The project is in the headwaters of ephemeral tributaries to the White River and a very small portion to Sulphur Creek, which drains into the White River.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Vegetation removal will disturb soils and reduce canopy cover on soils. Potential impacts due to the removal of canopy cover and surface disturbance can include increased runoff associated with storm events and increased sediment/salt loads in surface waters down gradient of disturbed areas. Sediment can be deposited and stored in minor drainages where it would be moved into White River during heavy convection storms. Changes to water quality are unlikely to be measurable and this project is not likely to change or exceed standards for the current stream segment classifications.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* No impacts identified.

*Mitigation:* None.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for water quality:* It is unlikely that vegetation treatments would result in an exceedence of state water quality standards.

## **WETLANDS AND RIPARIAN ZONES** (includes a finding on Standard 2)

*Affected Environment:* The nearest BLM-administered reach supporting riparian vegetation is Threemile Gulch, located adjacent to Unit 3 and Unit 4 of the project area. This system starts at a spring/seep area at T1N R94W Section 4 NWSW and flows westward where it joins Strawberry creek near Rio Blanco County (RBC) road 7. The channel is a fairly straight and low gradient (~0.8 percent grade) riparian system confined within a large historic downcut (10-15 feet) channel. Woody vegetation including Gambel oak (*Quercus gambelii*), serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*), skunkbrush sumac (*Rhus aromatica*) and some roses (*Rosa woodsii*) dominate the spring site. The channel below the spring supports predominantly herbaceous riparian obligates (sedges and rushes). The stream bed is composed predominantly of fine-grained silts and clays. The upper banks are vegetated with facultative rhizomatous grasses (*Agropyron smithii*), dense basin big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata* spp.), and greasewood (*Sarcobatus vermiculata*). The BLM has not conducted a riparian assessment of this system; however general field assessments show that the steep narrow downcut channel limits livestock access to the actual riparian system except at a few distinct crossing points.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* The proposed vegetation treatments will not disturb soils or root masses of vegetation. This treatment should not increase sediment movement in the upper portion of this small watershed. Adjacent to treatment Unit 3 and Unit 4, existing vegetation between the project site and the Threemile Gulch riparian channel should filter out and prevent excessive sediment from reaching the system. This project would have no conceivable influence on the BLM-administered wetlands or riparian habitat.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no action authorized that would have any direct or indirect influence on this downstream riparian community.

*Mitigation:* None.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for riparian systems:* The Proposed Action would have no conceivable potential for influencing riparian attributes addressed in the Standards.

## **VEGETATION** (includes a finding on Standard 3)

*Affected Environment:* Approximately two-thirds of the proposed project area is in a brushy loam ecological site; the remainder is a deep loam site. Vegetation in the area is predominantly sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), pinyon (*Pinus edulis*), juniper (*Juniperus* spp.), gambel oak, serviceberry, snowberry (*Symphoricarpos* spp.) and low rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus* spp.). The herbaceous understory here is a healthy mix of native perennial grasses including wheatgrasses (*Pascopyrum smithii*, *Pseudoroegneria spicata*), Junegrass (*Koeleria macrantha*), bluegrasses (*Poa secunda*, *Poa fendleriana*), Stipas (*Stipa columbiana*, *S. comata*, *S. lettermanii*), and elk sedge (*Carex geyeri*). These sites are in a healthy mid-seral condition

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* The primary impact of the Proposed Action upon vegetation will be from physical destruction of woody vegetation. Most of the oaks, serviceberry, snowberry and rabbit-brush will resprout. Sagebrush, juniper, and pinyon will reestablish from seed over time. The fall/early winter treatment will have minimal effect on herbaceous species because they are dormant at this time of year. Dust deposits on vegetation will likely be removed by precipitation throughout the winter and spring minimizing impairment of plant function or reduced palatability by herbivores.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There will be no change from the present situation. The plant communities will remain in a healthy mid-seral condition. As they progress toward a late seral stage, the density of woody plants will increase and conversely herbaceous cover will decline.

*Mitigation:* None.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities* (partial, see also Wildlife, Aquatic and Wildlife, Terrestrial): Upland plant communities in the project area currently meet the Standard and are expected to continue doing so under the Proposed Action.

## **INVASIVE, NON-NATIVE SPECIES**

*Affected Environment:* There are no noxious weeds known to occur within the actual treatment polygons. There are spotty occurrences of cheatgrass (*Bromus spp.*) adjacent to the upper treatment polygon at the un-reclaimed well pad and access road near the head of Threemile Gulch and in the uplands adjacent to the lower end of Threemile Gulch below the treatment area. There are also a few scattered bull thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*) and musk thistle (*Carduus natans*) and a small infestation of leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula*) near the spring toward the lower end of the project area. These weeds are outside of the treatment areas.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Implementation of the Proposed Action will create minimal new earthen disturbance as equipment works and moves through the project area. All of the disturbance will occur in healthy native plant communities. The areas that are disturbed by equipment should re-vegetate naturally from existing seed sources. The presence of noxious weeds near the lower treatment areas creates a low level of risk for their spread. Monitoring the treated area for occurrences of noxious weeds will minimize the chance of any new noxious weed occurrences in the area. There is minimal likelihood of long term negative impact from this project.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There will be no change from the present situation. The noxious weeds present will likely persist unless treated.

*Mitigation:* None.

**THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND SENSITIVE PLANT SPECIES** (includes a finding on Standard 4)

*Affected Environment:* There are no plant species listed, proposed, or candidate to the Endangered Species Act, or plants considered sensitive by the BLM, that are known to inhabit areas potentially influenced by the Proposed Action.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* The Proposed Action would have no influence on special status species or associated habitats.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no action authorized that would have the potential to influence special status species or associated habitats.

*Mitigation:* None.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Threatened & Endangered species:* The Proposed Action and No Action Alternatives would have no influence on populations or habitats of plants associated with the Endangered Species Act or the BLM sensitive species, and would have no influence on the status of applicable land health standards.

**THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND SENSITIVE ANIMAL SPECIES** (includes a finding on Standard 4)

*Affected Environment:* There are no animals listed, proposed, or candidate to the Endangered Species Act that inhabit or derive important benefit from the project area. The Brewer's sparrow, a sagebrush-associated migratory bird, is the only BLM-sensitive species known to regularly inhabit the project area. This species is common and widespread in all big sagebrush habitats available in the WRFO and northwest Colorado. Brewer's sparrow return to this area by mid-May to nest; primary breeding activities are normally complete (young fledged) by mid-July.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* The Proposed Action is scheduled to take place between August and December 2011. This timeframe would potentially involve few, if any, late renesting attempts by Brewer's sparrow.

The Proposed Action would remove basin and Wyoming big sagebrush as nest substrate for Brewer's sparrow on approximately 73 acres of bottomland habitat. Based on average nest densities in this area, it is likely that this acreage supports between one and two dozen nesting pair. Although representing a localized reduction in the availability of nest habitat, the periodic removal and rejuvenation of sagebrush canopies (historically by fire) is a natural event and process. It is reasonable to assume that in the case where extensive stands of basin big sagebrush subtend and abut bottomland stands of Wyoming big sagebrush, fire probably recurred on 30-50 year intervals, and considering current conditions in the Strawberry Creek valley (e.g., fire suppression for protection of electrical infrastructure and rural residential housing), the extent and distribution of this habitat is well within its natural range of variability in a singular and

cumulative sense. In a similar context, the proposed treatments will remove up to 20 acres of pinyon and juniper growth that is gradually encroaching into former sagebrush-dominated bottomlands. Brewer's sparrow nesting densities decline in response to increasing tree expression and, in the long term as sagebrush begins to reestablish mature canopies on these treatments over the next one or two decades, the local availability of suitable nesting habitat would be slightly more extensive than at present (e.g., 10-15 percent).

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no action authorized that would modify the extent or distribution of sagebrush habitat as nesting habitat for Brewer's sparrow. In the longer term, pinyon-juniper expression on these sites would increase in areal extent and canopy density and incrementally suppress the availability of habitat suited for nesting use by this species.

*Mitigation:* None.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Threatened & Endangered species:* The project area currently meets the land health standard. The Proposed Action is consistent with natural patterns of perturbation in sagebrush fire-disclimax communities and as such is compatible with continued meeting of the standard, albeit in an earlier successional state.

## **MIGRATORY BIRDS**

*Affected Environment:* A number of migratory birds nest in the habitats encompassed by the project area, primarily from mid-May through mid-July. Although sagebrush bottomlands dominate the treatment sites, minor acreages include pinyon-juniper woodland (about 20 acres) and deciduous shrubland (~15 acres, serviceberry and oakbrush-dominated). The woodlands are represented primarily (~90 percent) by variable-aged regeneration extending into sagebrush-dominated bottomlands. Woodlands of this nature do not support full complements of pinyon-juniper associates and their avian communities are typically comprised of low densities of more common and generalized woodland species (e.g., black-throated gray warbler, chipping sparrow). The same probably holds true for the mountain shrub type, since the stands slated for treatment are relatively discontinuous, xeric, and are situated on the lower elevation margin of this community where species such as house wren and Virginia's warbler would be expected.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* See *Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Animal* section above for discussion of Brewer's sparrow. The influences discussed for this species would be identical to those experienced by other sagebrush-associated migratory birds that nest in these habitats. Mechanical treatments of sagebrush typically leave young sagebrush regeneration intact, which accelerates the appearance and reestablishment of more mature sagebrush canopies. It is expected that sagebrush suitable for nesting by sagebrush-associated species would redevelop in one or two decades.

The proposed treatment would have no measurable influence on the abundance, composition, or distribution of bird communities associated with the remaining habitats in the project area. Pinyon-juniper habitats that are gradually expanding into fire-disclimax shrublands are properly

and ecologically short-lived and, in this instance, are of no consequence to local or regional bird populations. Deciduous shrub communities treated in this manner generally regain mature stature in 5-10 years and the proposed treatment represents a small-scale and short-term modification of nesting habitat.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no action authorized that would modify migratory bird nesting habitat. See also the discussion in the *Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Animal* section for the discussion of Brewer's sparrow. The influences discussed for this species would be identical to those experienced by other sagebrush-associated migratory birds that nest in these habitats.

*Mitigation:* None.

### **WILDLIFE, AQUATIC** (includes a finding on Standard 3)

*Affected Environment:* There are no aquatic habitats potentially influenced by these vegetation treatments. The nearest perennial system capable of supporting vertebrate aquatic life (e.g., amphibians, such as chorus frog) is Strawberry Creek, ~0.75 mile downstream of the treatments. The White River and its aquatic community is located another 5.5 valley miles downstream.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* None.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* None.

*Mitigation:* None.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities* (partial, see also *Vegetation and Wildlife, Terrestrial*): The Proposed Action would have no conceivable influence on any aquatic community and would, therefore, have no influence on the status of the land health standard.

### **WILDLIFE, TERRESTRIAL** (includes a finding on Standard 3)

*Affected Environment:* The proposed treatments would take place on ranges categorized as severe winter range and winter concentration areas for both deer and elk. These important winter use areas are occupied principally from October through May, though their most important functions are generally realized after early January as winter weather conditions become increasingly severe. These areas, by merit of their elevation, topography, and forage resources, probably serve equally in helping to reduce winter energetic demands of big game during the winter and providing a source of herbaceous forage that initiates nutritional recovery in spring. The Proposed Action is located in a large, relatively isolated parcel of public land that has no public means of vehicular access.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* The Proposed Action would result in minor shifts in local big game forage resources, including a reduction of upland sagebrush browse on an estimated 30 acres of upland sagebrush (basin big sagebrush is not normally used by big game), an initial short-term reduction (about 1 year) and a subsequent increase in the availability of deciduous browse on about 15 acres and, depending on livestock use, a potential increase in herbaceous forage across the entire project area for 10+ years. As discussed in the *Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Animal* section, this small scale treatment is considered consistent with normal ecological processes and would have no substantive or prolonged influence on big game habitat utility or patterns of big game use.

The actual process of vegetation treatment would be disruptive to wintering big game on a local scale and, consistent with RMP-approved resource measures, activity associated with the treatments should not extend beyond 1 January.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no action authorized that would have potential to modify big game habitat or disrupt wintering big game.

*Mitigation:* Operations associated with the proposed vegetation treatments would not be allowed to take place on these big game severe winter ranges from 1 January through 30 April.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities* (partial, see also Vegetation and Wildlife, Aquatic): The project area currently meets the land health standard. The Proposed Action is consistent with natural patterns of perturbation in sagebrush fire-disclimax communities and as such is compatible with continued meeting of the standard, albeit in an earlier successional state.

## **CULTURAL RESOURCES**

*Affected Environment:* The original project proposal was the treatment of five units, 108 acres total, of vegetation in segments under and adjacent to the Threemile power transmission line using mechanical treatment. The project was proposed overlapping with 5RB298, a previously recorded archaeological site which has been determined eligible to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The proposed project area was covered by a Class III, 100 percent pedestrian survey (Bowen 2011). Site 5RB298 was rerecorded in the field, and the project design was altered to avoid adversely impacting the site. The project will proceed as planned on 100 acres, all outside of site 5RB298, as no other cultural resources were located during the survey. A buffer around the site has been flagged by the WRFO Archaeologist and the fire crew.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* The BLM in consultation with the Colorado State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) has determined that the proposed project will have no adverse effect to any cultural resources potentially eligible to the NRHP if the identified mitigation is followed.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* As there would be no treatment, there would be no impacts to cultural resources.

*Mitigation:* The project boundary has been reflagged to avoid site 5RB298. No mechanical treatment will occur in site 5RB298. Vegetation can be cleared by hand around the existing power poles in the site, and dispersed.

All vehicular traffic must stay on existing roads when driving through the flagged boundary around site 5RB298, to access the project units.

The BLM Project Lead and any contractors are responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing archaeological sites or for collecting artifacts. If archaeological materials are discovered as a result of operations under this authorization, the applicant must immediately contact the appropriate BLM representative.

Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(g), the BLM Project Lead and any contractors must notify the authorized officer, by telephone and written confirmation, immediately upon the discovery of human remains, funerary items, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony. Further, pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(c) and (d), the applicant must stop activities in the vicinity of the discovery and protect it for 30 days or until notified to proceed by the AO.

## **PALEONTOLOGY**

*Affected Environment:* The proposed project area is located in an area generally mapped as Williams Fork and Fort Union Formations (Tweto 1979) which the BLM has classified as Potential Fossil Yield Classification (PFYC) 5 and 3 formations, respectively. The PFYC 5 formations are highly fossiliferous units that consistently and predictably produce significant fossils in this area. The PFYC 3 are sedimentary units where fossil content varies or is unknown.

According to Armstrong and Wolney (1989), the Williams Fork Formation consists of mammals (multituberculates, eutherians, and marsupials), dinosaurs, reptiles (turtles, crocodylians), fish (sharks, Amiidae, and Lepisosteidae), invertebrates (mollusks, gastropoda, and pelecypoda), and plants (including Auracaria and other conifers, Debya and Ficus leaf impressions, palms, wood, and possible flower or fruit capsules). The Fort Union Formation is composed of shale, sandstone, and local coal beds. Fossils found in it include mammals, reptiles including redeposited dinosaurs, amphibians, fish, invertebrates, a variety of mollusks including pelecypods and gastropods, plants, and pollen (Armstrong and Wolney 1989).

*Environmental Consequences of Alternative A:* The entire proposed project area was recently covered by an archaeological survey in which no paleontological resources were located (Bowen 2011). The proposed project should have no affect to significant fossil resources.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* As there would be no treatment, there would be no impacts to fossil resources.

*Mitigation:* The BLM Project Lead and any contractors are responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project operations that they will be subject to prosecution for disturbing or collecting vertebrate fossils, collecting large amounts of petrified wood (over 25lbs./day, up to 250lbs./year), or collecting fossils for commercial purposes on public lands. If any paleontological resources are discovered as a result of operations under this authorization, the applicant must immediately contact the appropriate BLM representative.

**ELEMENTS NOT PRESENT OR NOT AFFECTED:**

No flood plains, wild horses, or prime and unique farmlands exist within the area affected by the Proposed Action. There are no environmental justice concerns associated with the Proposed Action. No Native American religious concerns are known in the area, and none have been noted by tribal authorities. Should future consultations with Tribal authorities reveal the existence of such sensitive properties, appropriate mitigation and/or protection measures may be undertaken.

**OTHER ELEMENTS:** For the following elements, only those brought forward for analysis will be addressed further.

<b>Other Element</b>	<b>NA or Not Present</b>	<b>Applicable or Present, Not Brought Forward for Analysis</b>	<b>Applicable &amp; Present and Brought Forward for Analysis</b>
Visual Resources			X
Fire Management			X
Forest Management			X
Hydrology/Water Rights		X	
Rangeland Management			X
Realty Authorizations			X
Wild Horses	X		
Recreation			X
Access and Transportation			X
Geology and Minerals	X		
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern	X		
Wilderness	X		
Wild and Scenic Rivers	X		
Cadastral	X		
Socio-Economics	X		
Law Enforcement	X		

## VISUAL RESOURCES

*Affected Environment:* The Proposed Action is located in an area with a VRM II classification. The objective of this class is to retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Management activities may be seen, but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Any changes to the visual character must repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape. Given the adjacency of this project to the Town of Meeker, residents may be especially sensitive to any changes to the visual landscape.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Any fuels treatment intended to thin existing vegetation will naturally present a change to the visual character of an area beyond that which currently exists. The proposed modifications to vegetation will have a major, although temporary, impact on the visual character of the area. Measures included in the Proposed Action to be taken in association with the thinning methods will help to reduce the overall contrast with the surrounding landscape. These include matching treated units with existing vegetation openings, blending existing vegetation to avoid angular features of the treatment, not cutting the largest and old trees in the treatment areas, leaving a mix of hard and soft snags for wildlife habitat, and leaving a representative mix of pinyon and juniper. These measures will help to blend the affected area with the surrounding areas by creating similar lines, textures, forms and colors. By utilizing these measures and methods a casual observer would be able to see some modification to the character of the landscape, but the change would not dominate their attention. The level of change to the characteristic landscape is anticipated to diminish with time as native vegetation begins to reemerge and overall should be low, thus the standards of the VRM II classification would be retained.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* As there would be no treatment, there would be no impacts.

*Mitigation:* The thinning methods and measures included as design features of the Proposed Action.

## FIRE MANAGEMENT

*Affected Environment:* The Proposed Action is located within both the B9 Meeker East and the C9 Danforth Hills Fire Management polygons. The vegetation for the B9 Meeker East polygon is primarily privately owned agricultural and rangeland, with isolated/intermingled federal parcels with fuel types consistent with the C9 Danforth Hills polygon which is a mix of mountain shrub, mountain big sagebrush, aspen, and pinyon/juniper (PJ) woodlands. Resource management objectives within the B9 polygon are to protect private land and structures when threatened by public land fires and manage the BLM lands adjoining National Forest Lands or Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPAW) lands consistent with fire management goals on those adjoining lands. Within the C9 polygon, resource management objectives are to manage naturally ignited fires of up to 200 acres in size throughout the unit to promote a vegetative

mosaic and to protect oil and gas facilities in the Wilson Creek Oil Field and major powerlines crossing the unit when threatened by public land fires.

Fires in the area of the proposed power line route are historically lightning caused and typically range in size from 0.1 to 5 acres. Large fire history directly within the project area includes two Black Diamond fires, one in 1990 (180 acres) and one in 2001 (101 acres).

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Existing PJ canopy, sagebrush, and gambel oak will require mastication in order to change current fuel conditions. Alteration of existing vegetation and soil disturbance could provide an opportunity for noxious weeds and cheatgrass to establish or expand in the area, which would increase the amount of flashy fuels and the potential for large fire spread.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no clearing of the trees and brush, thus no increase in dead fuel loading susceptible to fire. However, retaining the present fuel condition near the powerlines and pole structures would not decrease the current potential for uncontrollable crown fires and the high hazard to firefighters will remain.

*Mitigation:* None.

## **FOREST MANAGEMENT**

*Affected Environment:* The Proposed Action is located within varying stand classes of pinyon/juniper woodland as defined by a survey performed by White River Field Office personnel from 2003-2005. Productive exposure types occur on primarily lower gradient slopes and north and east aspects. Growth rates are higher in these areas due to soil features which allow for effective use of precipitation. This habitat type is further broken down based on the age class of the stand. In this case the affected stands are both mature and young. Mature pinyon/juniper trees on productive exposure establish themselves as the dominant plant community on the site. Mature stands are valuable locally as a source of fire wood and posts for fence construction.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Due to the nature of the Proposed Action, the actual impact to the woody vegetation would be through physically destructing the material during the mastication process. The impacts to the stand would be long-term until woodlands were able to regenerate successfully. Removal of mature and middle-aged pinyon and juniper trees would reduce the potential for outbreak of woodland diseases and pest infestations. Acceptance of mitigation measures outlined for fire management would reduce the build-up of cleared woody material from the Project Area, reducing the likelihood of slash contributing to possible large fire events.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no removal of the pinyon and juniper woodlands around the powerline structures.

*Mitigation:* None.

## RANGELAND MANAGEMENT

*Affected Environment:* The proposed project occurs in the Lion Canyon pasture of the Smith/Crawford allotment 06625. The Smith/Crawford allotment is used by David Smith Ranches LLC and Ken and Gayle Rogers for their livestock operations. Table 3 below outlines the permitted use in this area. Livestock are permitted to graze in this pasture every year from May 15 through June 30 and again, in a different part of the pasture, from October 1 through October 31. The use periods, use areas, and operator vary on an even/odd year basis but livestock can be expected to be present in the general project area during the permitted use periods. There is a long term trend monitoring plot within the project area along its southern edge at T1N R94W Sec 4 SE.

**Table 3: Permitted Livestock Use Periods**

Permitted Livestock Use Periods in Area of Proposed Action								
Allotment Name	Pasture Name	Use Year	Livestock		Date		PL per ce nt	BLM AUMs scheduled
		Even or odd	#	Kind	On	Off		
Smith / Crawford 06625	Lion Canyon	Even (Smith)	40	C	5/15	6/30	90	37
	Lion Canyon	Odd (Smith)	50	C	10/1	10/31	90	56
	Lion Canyon	Even (Rogers)	40	C	10/1	10/31	90	46
	Lion Canyon	Odd (Rogers)	50	C	5/15	6/30	90	70

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Implementation of this project will have no immediate influence on forage production. In the years following the treatment it is likely that the herbaceous component of these plant communities will improve slightly. Removal of the woody vegetation simulates a disturbance that in effect temporarily sets the site back to a healthy early seral (herbaceous) state. Any airborne dust that coats vegetation within and adjacent to the project area will make it less palatable until adequate precipitation occurs to rinse the vegetation clean (see Vegetation section). If this project occurs after October 31 there will be no effect on livestock grazing. If it occurs prior to that date, livestock will likely avoid the project area during the treatment period; however, effects will be minimal. The long term trend transect has been located and marked off with flagging to help assure that it is avoided by equipment to allow for its continued utility as a monitoring site.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There will be no change from the present situation.

*Mitigation:* Assure that equipment operators are made aware of the long term trend site so they avoid it.

## RECREATION

*Affected Environment:* The Proposed Action occurs within the White River Extensive Recreation Management Area (ERMA). The BLM manages the ERMA to provide for unstructured recreation activities such as hunting, dispersed camping, hiking, horseback riding, wildlife viewing and off-highway vehicle use.

The project area falls within the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) class of Semi-Primitive Motorized (SPM). The SPM physical and social recreation setting is typically characterized by a natural appearing environment with few administrative controls, low interaction between users but evidence of other users may be present. The SPM recreation experience is characterized by a high probability of isolation from the sights and sounds of humans that offers an environment that offers challenge and risk.

Due to steep terrain and difficult topography, there is currently little public recreational use of the project area. The majority of recreational use occurs in the fall by big games hunters accessing the area via adjacent private lands.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Although the project area will remain open to recreational use during thinning activities, the public will most likely not recreate in the vicinity of the operations due to noise and safety concerns that could potentially diminish their recreational experience. If the Proposed Action coincides with hunting seasons (September through November) it could potentially disrupt the experience sought by those recreationists. After thinning operations are complete, the recreation setting will be similar to pre-action conditions.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no loss of dispersed recreation potential and no impact to hunting recreationists.

*Mitigation:* In the interest of safety, the project proponent will post signage alerting recreationists of the presence of heavy machinery and ongoing thinning operations in the area.

## ACCESS AND TRANSPORTAION

*Affected Environment:* The Proposed Action occurs within an area of the field office designated as open seasonally. The area is closed to off road cross-country travel from October 1 through April 30 of each year; travel is limited to existing roads, trails and ways only during this period. Primary access to the project site is via County Road 11 (Sulphur Creek Road). County Road 11 is a paved road and primary users are local residents.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Only a minor increase in traffic on County Road 11 is expected as trucks and heavy machinery are transported to the project area. No activities from the Proposed Action are expected to restrict public access to BLM lands or otherwise disrupt the flow of traffic on any associated local roads.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* As there would be no project, there would be no associated impacts.

*Mitigation:* None.

## **REALTY AUTHORIZATIONS**

*Affected Environment:* There are four rights-of-way within the area of the Proposed Action. Public Service Company (Public Service) of Colorado and Tri-State Generation and Transmission (Tri-State) right-of-way (ROW) COC23562 is for the Craig to Rifle power line. Public Service ROW COC23293 is for a natural gas pipeline, and Qwest Corporation ROW COC52067 is for a telephone cable. The Proposed Action will reduce hazardous fuels under and adjacent to Tri-State's Meeker to Hayden power line ROW COC0112682.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* The Proposed Action is in collaboration with Tri-State and will treat vegetation within ROW COC0112682. To avoid impacts to existing facilities, there will also need to be coordination with Public Service and Qwest.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* None.

*Mitigation:* All activities shall comply with all applicable local, state, and federal laws, statutes, regulations, standards, and implementation plans. This includes acquiring all required state and/or local permits, effectively coordinating with existing facility ROW holders, and implementing all applicable mitigation measures required by each permit.

**CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY:** The BLM has treated, and will continue to treat, areas of heavy fuels throughout the White River Resource Area in accordance with the White River Fire Management Plan. Conducting mechanical treatments is used to achieve hazard fuel reductions in locations where the use of prescribed fire is not feasible. Treating various areas of heavy fuels will reduce the potential for catastrophic wildfire by transforming a running crown fire back to the surface, where suppression efforts can be more effective. The completion of hazardous fuels reduction activities diminishes the potential of wildfire damage to industrial facilities and allows fire to assume its natural role within the ecosystem.

## **REFERENCES CITED:**

Armstrong, Harley, and David Wolny  
1989 *Paleontological Resources of Northwest Colorado: A Regional Analysis*. Museum of Western Colorado, Grand Junction, Colorado.

Bowen, Kristin

2011 Class III Inventory for the Threemile Powerline Hazardous Fuels Reduction, Rio Blanco County, CO. Bureau of Land Management, White River Field Office, Meeker, Colorado.

CDPHE. Air Pollution Control Division (APCD)

2009 Colorado Air Quality Data Report – 2009. Available online at: <http://www.colorado.gov/airquality/>. Accessed January 8, 2010.

CDPHE. Air Pollution Control Division (APCD)

2010 Colorado 5 Year Monitoring Network Assessment. Available online at: <http://www.colorado.gov/airquality/>. Accessed May 13, 2011.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

2010 Currently Designated Non-Attainment Areas for all Criteria Pollutants.

Tweto, Ogden

1979 Geologic Map of Colorado. United States Geologic Survey, Department of the Interior, Reston, Virginia.

**PERSONS / AGENCIES CONSULTED:**

Tribes were notified on 3/11/2011 as part of the WRFO 2011 annual letter listing Proposed Actions to occur in our field office area, and at this time no concerns have been identified. Consultation with the Colorado State Historic Preservation Office was completed on 6/15/2011.

**INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW:** The Proposed Action was presented to the White River Field Office interdisciplinary team on 3/8/2011.

Name	Title	Area of Responsibility	Date Signed
Bob Lange	Hydrologist	Air Quality, Wastes (Hazardous or Solids), Water Quality (Surface and Ground), Hydrology and Water Rights, and Soils	07/26/2011
Mary Taylor	Rangeland Management Specialist	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Threatened and Endangered Plant Species	07/26/2011
Kristin Bowen	Archaeologist	Cultural Resources, Paleontological Resources	06/24/2011
Mary Taylor	Rangeland Management Specialist	Invasive, Non-Native Species, Vegetation, Rangeland Management, Wetlands and Riparian Zones	07/26/2011
Ed Hollowed	Wildlife Biologist	Migratory Birds, Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Animal	07/6/2011

<b>Name</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Area of Responsibility</b>	<b>Date Signed</b>
		Species, Terrestrial and Aquatic Wildlife	
Bob Lange	Natural Resource Specialist/HazMat Coordinator	Wastes, Hazardous or Solid	07/26/2011
Chad Schneckenburger	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Wilderness, Access and Transportation, Recreation,	07/26/2011
Jim Michels	Supervisory Natural Resource Specialist / Forester	Forest Management	06/22/2011
Garner Harris	Zone Fire Management Officer	Fire Management	05/20/2011
Paul Daggett	Mining Engineer	Geology and Minerals	06/24/2011
Stacey Burke	Realty Specialist	Realty Authorizations	07/11/2011
Chad Schneckenburger	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Visual Resources	07/26/2011
Melissa J. Kindall	Range Technician	Wild Horses	07/27/2011

## **Finding of No Significant Impact/Decision Record (FONSI/DR)**

**DOI-BLM-CO-110-2011-0068-EA**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)/RATIONALE:** The environmental assessment and analysis of the environmental effects of the Proposed Action have been reviewed. The approved mitigation measures (listed below) result in a Finding of No Significant Impact on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary to further analyze the environmental effects of the Proposed Action.

**DECISION/RATIONALE:** It is my decision to implement the Proposed Action to reduce the risk of a large-scale wildfire event that could incur extensive suppression costs, endanger fire suppression personnel, and damage critical electrical transmission lines.

### **MITIGATION MEASURES:**

1. Equipment operators will avoid headwalls, unstable slopes, seeps, and old landslides areas as identified in the field (using flagging) by the WRFO Soil/Water/Air specialist.
2. Operations associated with the proposed vegetation treatments would not be allowed to take place on big game severe winter ranges from 1 January through 30 April.
3. The project boundary has been reflagged to avoid site 5RB298. No mechanical treatment will occur in site 5RB298. Vegetation can be cleared by hand around the existing power poles in the site, and dispersed.
4. All vehicular traffic must stay on existing roads when driving through the flagged boundary around site 5RB298, to access the project units.
5. The BLM Project Lead and any contractors are responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing archaeological sites or for collecting artifacts. If archaeological materials are discovered as a result of operations under this authorization, the applicant must immediately contact the appropriate BLM representative.
6. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(g), the BLM Project Lead and any contractors must notify the authorized officer, by telephone and written confirmation, immediately upon the discovery of human remains, funerary items, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony. Further, pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(c) and (d), the applicant must stop activities in the vicinity of the discovery and protect it for 30 days or until notified to proceed by the AO.

7. The BLM Project Lead and any contractors are responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project operations that they will be subject to prosecution for disturbing or collecting vertebrate fossils, collecting large amounts of petrified wood (over 25lbs./day, up to 250lbs./year), or collecting fossils for commercial purposes on public lands. If any paleontological resources are discovered as a result of operations under this authorization, the applicant must immediately contact the appropriate BLM representative.
8. Assure that equipment operators are made aware of the long term trend site so they avoid it.
9. In the interest of safety, the project proponent will post signage alerting recreationists of the presence of heavy machinery and ongoing thinning operations in the area.
10. All activities shall comply with all applicable local, state, and federal laws, statutes, regulations, standards, and implementation plans. This includes acquiring all required state and/or local permits, effectively coordinating with existing facility ROW holders, and implementing all applicable mitigation measures required by each permit.

**COMPLIANCE/MONITORING:** The contracting officer's technical representative (COTR) shall inspect equipment prior to entering the project area and will periodically check on the contractor to ensure that all applicable mitigation measures are being implemented. The treated areas will also be monitored for weed infestations for a minimum of three years post treatment.

**NAME OF PREPARER:** Garner Harris – Zone Fire Management Officer

**NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR:** Heather Sauls

**SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:** \_\_\_\_\_



Field Manager

**DATE SIGNED:**

08/03/2011

**ATTACHMENTS:**

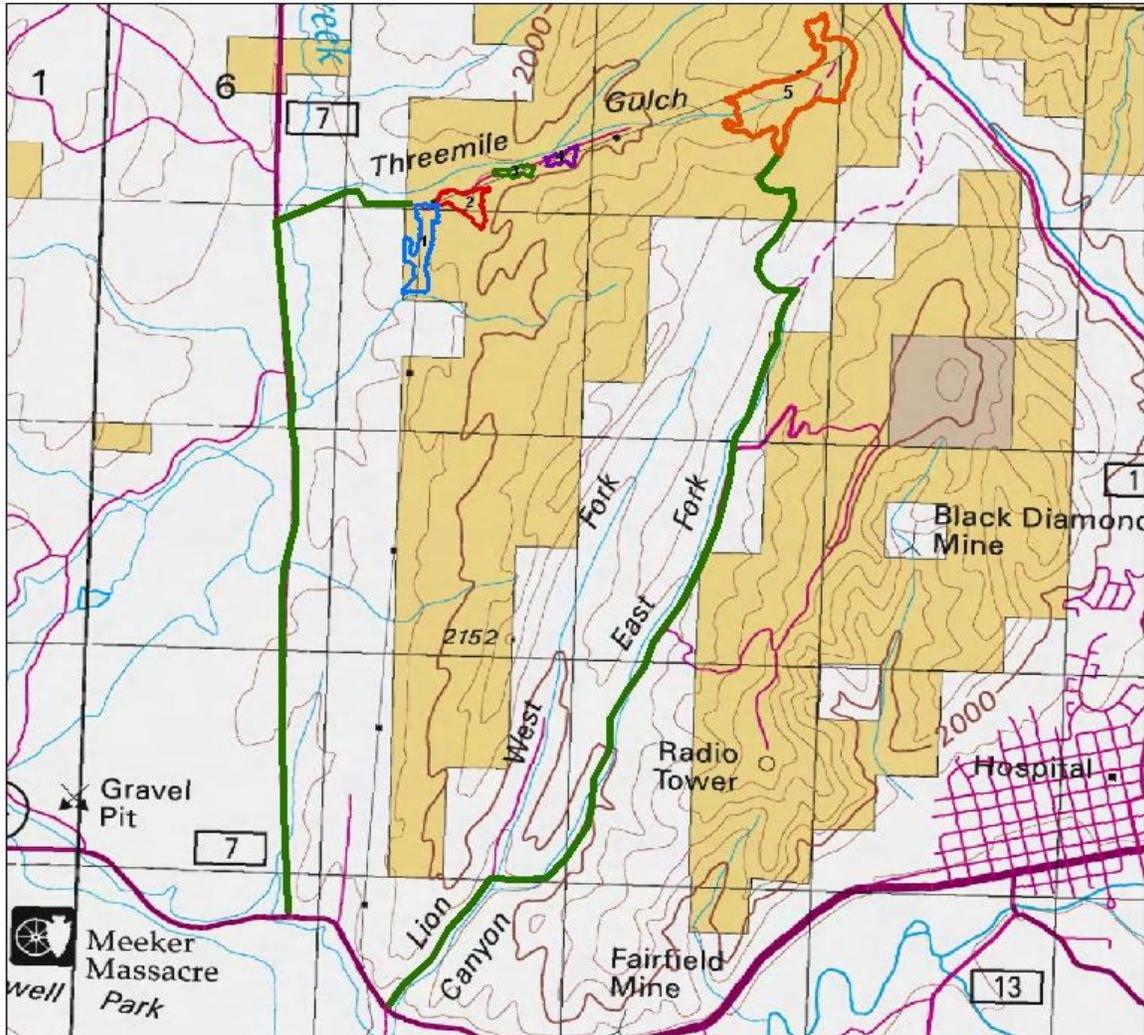
Attachment 1: Access Map

Attachment 2: Project Map

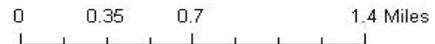
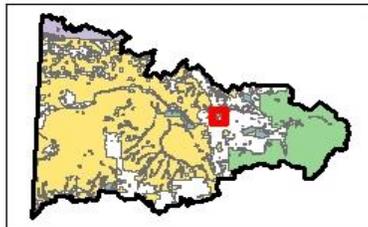
Attachment 1: Access Map



# Threemile Powerline Hazardous Fuels Reduction 1N 94W S4



- Legend**
- Access\_Unit1-4
  - Access\_Unit5



Sources:  
BLM, USGS, CDOW, etc.

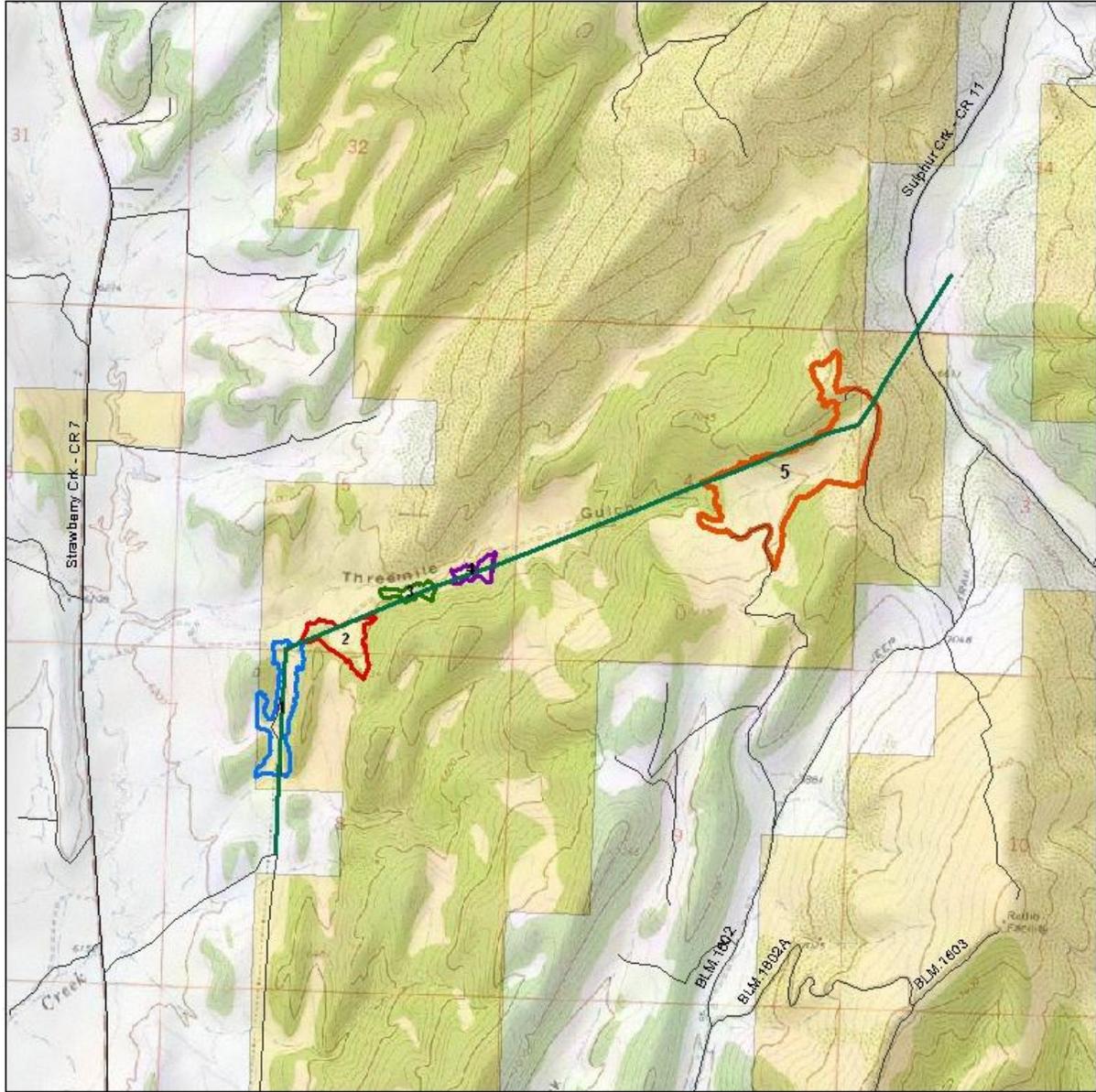
Disclaimer:  
Although the data presented within this map, and the map file if it has been processed in a computer by BLM, no warranty, expressed or implied, is made by BLM regarding the use of this map or the data represented, nor does the fact of distribution constitute or imply any such warranty.



Attachement 2: Project Map

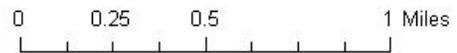
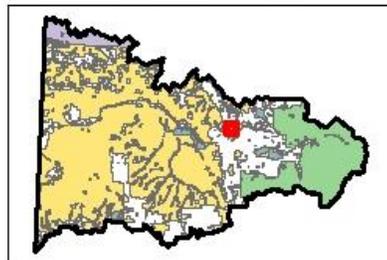


# Threemile Powerline Hazardous Fuels Reduction 1N 94W S4



**Legend**

- Powerline
- Unit 1
- Unit 2
- Unit 3
- Unit 4
- Unit 5



Sources:  
BLM, USGS, CDOW, etc.

Disclaimer:  
Although the data presented on this map, and the map itself, have been processed successfully on computers of BLM, no warranty, expressed or implied, is made by BLM regarding the use of this map or the data represented, nor does the reproduction constitute or imply any such warranty.

