

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-110-2013-0005-EA

**CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER:** N/A

**PROJECT NAME:** Crossroads Park

**LEGAL DESCRIPTION:** T 1 N, R 97 W, sec. 17, 18, 20

**APPLICANT:** Bureau of Land Management

**PURPOSE & NEED FOR THE ACTION:** The purpose of the Proposed Action is an effort to slow mid successional pinyon/juniper encroachment into sagebrush disclimax parks, reduce fuel loading, and maintain the production and availability of mule deer severe winter range. The proposed project will reduce current fuel loading and future hazardous fuel build up within the target area. This area is classified as Fire Regime Condition Class (FRCC) II, as it has been moderately altered from historic ranges of fire intervals due to human intervention. Full fire suppression will continue to alter the natural fire return interval, thus creating a homogenous stand of pinyon/juniper. Prescribed fire or mechanical vegetation treatments are often used to restore historical fire regimes to prevent losing key ecosystem components. The need for the Proposed Action is to respond to a Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) requirement that the public lands be managed in a manner that will protect the quality of historical and ecological values.

**Decision to be Made:** The BLM will decide whether to approve the proposed vegetation treatment, and if so, under what conditions.

### **SCOPING, PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AND ISSUES:**

**Scoping:** Scoping was the primary mechanism used by the BLM to initially identify issues. Internal scoping was initiated when the project was presented to the White River Field Office (WRFO) interdisciplinary team on 10/23/2012. External scoping was conducted by posting this project on the WRFO's on-line National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) register on 10/24/2012.

**Issues:** No issues were identified during public scoping.

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

**Background/Introduction:** Rio Blanco County (RBC) is among the top three counties in Colorado for wildfire risk (Neuenschwander et al. 2000). In the past twelve years there have been 23 fires within two miles of the proposed target area, each less than an acre in size. During that same time period, there were four larger fires ranging in size from 20 to 80 acres, also within 2 miles of the project area. All fires were suppressed aggressively using both direct and indirect attack methods of containment. In accordance with agency standards, all hazardous fuels reduction treatment projects will support resource management objectives as identified in their agency specific Resource Management Plans.

**Proposed Action:** The BLM is proposing this vegetation treatment to reduce fuel loading and reduce pinyon-juniper encroachment into sagebrush disclimax parks. The 190 acre treatment (see Figure 1) would target the removal of encroaching pinyon/juniper. No trees larger than approximately four inch diameter at the stump will be cut in order to prevent an excess of slash and to retain larger trees along small drainages. Trees will be hand thinned using chainsaws. The remaining slash will be lopped and scattered to a depth of no greater than 18 inches. Tree boles within 50 feet of the road will be carried to the roadside for firewood gathering. The stumps will be cut down to a height of four inches or less. The project is expected to begin in summer and be completed by fall of 2013.

### **Design Features:**

1. Snags will be retained for wildlife habitat.
2. An approximate 25 foot buffer around the project perimeter will not be cut as to match existing vegetation openings in the surrounding environment, to blend in with existing vegetation, and to avoid visual angular features of the treatment.
3. 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 the BLM.
4. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(g), the BLM project lead will notify the Authorized Officer (AO), 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 proponent must stop activities in the vicinity of the discovery and protect it for 30 days or until notified to proceed by the AO.
5. The BLM project lead is 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 proponent must immediately contact the WRFO Archaeologist.

6. The BLM project lead is 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 BLM project lead must immediately contact the WRFO Paleontology Coordinator.
7. To avoid impacts to big game no activity is allowed from December 1<sup>st</sup> through April 30<sup>th</sup>.
8. To avoid impacts to nesting migratory birds no activity is allowed from May 15<sup>th</sup> through July 15<sup>th</sup>.
9. The BLM or agent acting on behalf of the BLM would complete all fueling of equipment outside of any drainage.
10. Report all spills of fuels, lubricants, etc. to the WRFO Hazardous Materials Coordinator within 24 hours.
11. Vehicle use off existing roads and trails will not occur.
12. Treatments will not occur when surface soils are saturated to 3 inches or vehicles create ruts in soils during normal operations.
13. Fuel reduction crews should lop and scatter branches evenly throughout the treatment area as thick pilings will reduce sunlight and limit germination of current native plant species.
14. Avoid white shale slopes that could potentially be suitable habitat for the twinpod and bladderpod.
15. If any archaeological materials are discovered as a result of operations under this authorization, activity in the vicinity of the discovery will cease, and the BLM WRFO Archaeologist will be notified immediately. Work may not resume at that location until approved by the Authorizing Official (AO). The applicant will make every effort to protect the site from further impacts including looting, erosion, or other human or natural damage until BLM determines a treatment approach, and the treatment is completed. Unless previously determined in treatment plans or agreements, BLM will evaluate the cultural resources and, in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), select the appropriate mitigation option within 48 hours of the discovery. The applicant, under guidance of the BLM, will implement the mitigation in a timely manner. The process will be fully documented in reports, site forms, maps, drawings, and photographs. The BLM will forward documentation to SHPO for review and concurrence.

**No Action Alternative:** No vegetation removal associated with this proposal would occur under this alternative. The fire regime and condition class would likely increase over time as the sage park transitions to pinyon-juniper woodlands.

**ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT CARRIED FORWARD:**

- 1) The use of a hydro ax or fecon head type of masticator was considered, but eliminated from further analysis. Due to the small diameter trees and low stems per acre this alternative is cost prohibitive. Mastication would require a considerable amount of off road travel in order to reach the targeted species. This off road travel would crush non targeted species and cause unnecessary erosion.
- 2) Prescribed fire on a broadcast scale was considered but eliminated from further analysis due to inability to target only pinyon-juniper within a small sage park. Loss of sagebrush would impact mule deer severe winter range.

**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 (White River ROD/RMP).

Date Approved: July 1, 1997

Decision Language Number/Page: Page 2-12: "Specific goals for the pinyon-juniper woodland plant community are: 3) Reduce pinyon-juniper tree components where pinyon or juniper has dominated or is invading other ecological sites."

**AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT & ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES**

**Standards for Public Land Health:** In January 1997, the Colorado BLM approved the Standards for Public Land Health. These standards cover upland soils, riparian systems, plant and animal communities, special status 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 (EA). These findings are located in specific elements listed below.

**Cumulative Effects Analysis Assumptions:** Cumulative effects are defined in the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR 1508.7) as "...the impact on the environment that results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-Federal) or person undertakes such other actions." Table 1 lists the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions within the area that might be affected by the Proposed Action; for this project the area considered was the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) 5<sup>th</sup> Level Watershed.

However, the geographic scope used for analysis may vary for each cumulative effects issue and is described in the Affected Environment section for each resource.

**Table 1. Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Actions**

Action Description	STATUS		
	Past	Present	Future
Livestock Grazing	X	X	X
Wild Horse Gathers	X	X	X
Recreation	X	X	X
Invasive Weed Inventory and Treatments	X	X	X
Range Improvement Projects : Water Developments Fences & Cattleguards	X	X	X
Wildfire and Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation	X	X	X
Oil and Gas Development: Well Pads Access Roads Pipelines Gas Plants Facilities	X	X	X
Power Lines	X	X	X
Oil Shale			
Seismic	X	X	X
Vegetation Treatments	X	X	X

**Affected Resources:**

The CEQ Regulations state that NEPA documents “must concentrate on the issues that are truly significant to the action in question, rather than amassing needless detail” (40 CFR 1500.1(b)). While many issues may arise during scoping, not all of the issues raised warrant analysis in an environmental assessment (EA). Issues will be analyzed if: 1) an analysis of the issue is necessary to make a reasoned choice between alternatives, or 2) if the issue is associated with a significant direct, indirect, or cumulative impact, or where analysis is necessary to determine the significance of the impacts. Table 2 lists the resources considered and the determination as to whether they require additional analysis.

**Table 2. Resources and Determination of Need for Further Analysis**

Determination <sup>1</sup>	Resource	Rationale for Determination
<b>Physical Resources</b>		
NI	Air Quality	This project will require the use of vehicles and chainsaws to effect the vegetation treatment, emissions from internal combustion engines are minor, will occur over a short time period and are typical of casual use in rural areas, and therefore impacts to Air Quality are not expected.
NI	Geology and Minerals	The proposed 190 acre hazardous fuels reduction treatment project would have no impacts on the geologic or mineral resources within

<b>Determination<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Resource</b>	<b>Rationale for Determination</b>
		the project area.
PI	Soil Resources*	See discussion below.
PI	Surface and Ground Water Quality*	See discussion below.
<b>Biological Resources</b>		
NP	Wetlands and Riparian Zones*	There are no systems that support wetland or riparian zones that would have the potential to be influenced by the Proposed Action. The project area is separated from the nearest perennial waterways, Yellow Creek and Piceance Creek, by approximately 1.7 miles and 0.7 miles, respectively, of ephemeral channel. There will also be no ground disturbance which will prevent sedimentation from reaching any riparian or wetland zones.
PI	Vegetation*	See discussion below.
PI	Invasive, Non-native Species	See discussion below.
PI	Special Status Animal Species*	See discussion below.
PI	Special Status Plant Species*	See discussion below.
NI	Migratory Birds	A variety of migratory bird species fulfill reproductive functions in the project area's sagebrush and woodland communities from mid-May through mid-July. Birds associated with the project site are widely distributed and common throughout the Resource Area in extensive suitable habitats. The project area is not inhabited by any species that are narrowly endemic or highly specialized, although a number of birds of conservation concern are known to use the habitats that encompass the project area. Timing of the Proposed Action is specified to occur outside the migratory bird nesting season of May 15 through July 15 which would limit disruptions to nesting birds. The removal of pinyon/juniper regeneration that generally possess attributes less favorable for nest site selection (e.g., poorly developed sub canopy, lack of cavities, simple small-diameter branching) is expected to improve nesting habitat for migratory birds. Any subsequent years nest site selection would be done in the face of this disturbance and there should be no significant long term impacts on nesting success.
NP	Aquatic Wildlife*	There are no systems that support aquatic wildlife or provide habitat for aquatic species that would have the potential to be influenced by the Proposed Action. The nearest system which supports higher order aquatic vertebrate species is Yellow Creek and Piceance Creek, which are separated by approximately 1.7 miles and 0.7 miles of ephemeral channel, respectively.
NI	Terrestrial Wildlife*	The project area's sagebrush and pinyon/juniper communities are mapped as big game severe winter range. Timing of the Proposed Action is specified to occur outside the big game severe winter range timing limitation of December 1 through April 30 which would limit effects to mule deer and elk. Non-game wildlife using this area are typical and widely distributed in extensive, like habitats across the Resource Area and northwest Colorado, and there are no narrowly

<b>Determination<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Resource</b>	<b>Rationale for Determination</b>
		endemic or highly specialized species known to inhabit those lands potentially influenced by this action. Timing of the Proposed Action will occur in the late summer/early fall outside of raptor nesting time frames (typically February 15 through August 15). Further, the activities associated with the Proposed Action and removal of trees fewer than 6 feet in height would have no conceivable influence on woodland raptors. There are no rock outcrops that provide adequate nest sites for cliff nesting species such as golden eagle and red-tailed hawk. The Proposed Action is not expected to have any effective influence on the abundance or distribution of big game or nongame populations at any landscape scale. An important aspect of this project for big game would be the maintenance of strong herbaceous development in contrast to the slow decline in herbaceous availability that would attend woodland advance.
NI	Wild Horses	Only a small portion of the Project Area will be located within the Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area (HMA) and would be a benefit to wild horses. However, wild horses do exist in this area known as the Crossroads which is outside the HMA.
<b>Heritage Resources and the Human Environment</b>		
NP	Cultural Resources	The Area of Potential Effect for the Proposed Action was inventoried at the Class III level (Wolfe 2013). No cultural properties were located.
NI	Paleontological Resources	The proposed project is in an area generally mapped as the Uintah Formation classified as a Potential Fossil Yield Classification 4/5 formation. However, since no excavation or other ground disturbance is anticipated there are no anticipated impacts to fossil resources.
NP	Native American Religious Concerns	Native American Consultation letters were sent to the Eastern Shoshone, Southern Ute, Uintah and Ouray Reservation Ute, and Ute Mountain Ute Indian tribes on June 7, 2013. No responses were received specifically regarding the present undertaking. No Native American concerns are known in the project area.
PI	Visual Resources	See discussion below.
NI	Hazardous or Solid Wastes	No listed or extremely hazardous materials in excess of threshold quantities are proposed for use in this project. While commercial preparations of fuels and lubricants proposed for use may contain some hazardous constituents, they would be in small quantities and would be stored, used, disposed, and transported in a manner consistent with applicable laws, and the generation of hazardous wastes would not be anticipated. Solid wastes would be disposed of properly.
PI	Fire Management	See discussion below.
NI	Social and Economic Conditions	There would not be any substantial changes to local social or economic conditions.
NP	Environmental Justice	According to recent Census Bureau statistics (2000), there are no minority or low income populations within the WRFO.
NP	Lands with Wilderness Characteristics	There are no lands with wilderness characteristics located in the proposed project area.
<b>Resource Uses</b>		
PI	Forest Management	See discussion below.

Determination <sup>1</sup>	Resource	Rationale for Determination
PI	Rangeland Management	See discussion below.
NI	Floodplains, Hydrology, and Water Rights	The 190 acre fuel treatments would not occur in floodplains, the placement of slash on the ground and removal of trees is not likely to change hillslope hydrology and no actions will impact water rights.
NI	Realty Authorizations	There are existing rights-of-way for oil and gas pipelines and roads. There are no anticipated impacts to existing rights-of-way as a result of the Proposed Action.
PI	Recreation	See discussion below.
PI	Access and Transportation	See discussion below.
NP	Prime and Unique Farmlands	There are no Prime and Unique Farmlands within the project area.
<b>Special Designations</b>		
NP	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern	The nearest ACEC is Duck Creek which is 4.4 miles to the southwest of the Proposed Action. There will be no known impacts from the Proposed Action.
NP	Wilderness	There are no wilderness areas or wilderness study areas located in or near the proposed project area.
NP	Wild and Scenic Rivers	There are no Wild and Scenic Rivers in the WRFO.
NP	Scenic Byways	There are no Scenic Byways within the project area.

<sup>1</sup> NP = Not present in the area impacted by the Proposed Action or Alternatives. NI = Present, but not affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required. PI = Present with potential for impact analyzed in detail in the EA.  
 \* Public Land Health Standard

**SOILS**

*Affected Environment:* The classification of soils within the proposed treatment areas are shown in Table 3. There are no fragile soils and lands prone to landslides within the proposed treatment units.

**Table 3. Soil Classifications in Treatment Polygons**

Soil Classification	Erosion Rating	Rutting Hazard	Acres
Forelle loam, 3 to 8 percent slopes	Moderate	Severe	84
Piceance fine sandy loam, 5 to 15 percent slopes	Severe	Severe	76
Rentsac channery loam, 5 to 50 percent slopes	Severe	Slight	30

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:*

Direct and Indirect Effects: Hand thinning with chainsaws for this vegetation treatment will disturb soils. The Proposed Action does not include the use of heavy equipment and there is no proposed use of vehicles off existing roads. Direct impacts would be from foot traffic to do the chainsaw work and dragging of brush, boles and limbs. Impacts from soil disturbance are likely to be greatest in the Piceance fine sandy loam soils due to the severe erosion and rutting hazard ratings. The Piceance soils are on the upper end of the treatment polygon bisected by

County Road 20. The proximity to the road is likely to reduce direct impacts to soils in this polygon. Indirect impacts to soils are unlikely since chainsaw work will be done by hand, therefore indirect impacts to surrounding soils is unlikely.

**Cumulative Effects:** Oil and gas development activities near the location have disturbed soils, resulted in changes in surface runoff, created some localized erosion and decreased the productivity and stability of soils in some locations. This action is not likely to add to or reduce overall cumulative effects in this area.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:*

**Direct and Indirect Effects:** No direct impacts to soils would occur. Indirect impacts may occur due to an increasing risk to wildfire causing wildfire impacts to soils. If a wildfire occurred in this untreated area, it is likely to decrease soil stability in the burned areas for 1 to 2 years after such a fire occurred.

**Cumulative Effects:** Same as those described for the Action Alternative.

**Mitigation:** None.

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

**SURFACE & GROUND WATER QUALITY**

**Affected Environment:** Water quality classifications of surface waters that may be impacted are includes in Table 4.

**Table 4. Water Quality Classification Table (WQCC 2013)**

Segment	Segment Name	Use Protected	Protected Beneficial Uses			
			Aquatic Life	Recreation	Agriculture	Water Supply
16	Tributaries to Piceance Creek	No	Warm 2	Primary Contact Recreation	Yes	No
13b	Tributaries to Yellow Creek	No	Warm 2	Non-Primary Contact Recreation	Yes	No

Segment 16 and 13b of the White River describes tributaries to Piceance Creek and Yellow Creek which are protected for warm water aquatic life (Warm 2). The warm designation means the classification standards would be protective of aquatic life normally found in waters where the summer weekly average temperatures frequently exceed 20 °C. The warm 2 designation means that it has been determined that these waters are not capable of sustaining a wide variety

of warm water biota. This segment also has standards that are protective of recreation and agriculture, but not water supply.

There are no surface waters listed on the Colorado List of Impaired waters or on the Monitoring and Evaluation List (WQCC 2012) within the treatment areas. The mainstem of Yellow Creek below Barcus Creek is listed for iron and aquatic life. The mainstem of Piceance Creek downstream of the treatment areas is provisionally listed for aquatic life. The surface waters in these allotments are dominated by groundwater inputs. Contact springs are common in the area and are often the result of upper bedrock aquifers consisting of fractured sandstones and shale. These contact zones can occur in the ridges between surface water drainages and may be manifested as springs and seeps above the valley floor in outcrop areas.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:*

Direct and Indirect Effects: Since no indirect impacts to soils are expected (See Soils Section) it is unlikely the proposed vegetation treatment will have any impact on surface water quality. The Proposed Action is unlikely to impact the listing of impaired surface waters or change the current listings on Yellow or Piceance Creek. Although there are some cumulative and indirect impacts from the potential to increase sediment loading to surface waters, the impacts of the Proposed Action are likely to be indistinguishable from other factors.

Cumulative Effects: Oil and gas development is expected in the Mesaverde Gas Play Area and expected to have 2-3 drilling well pads per square mile. Oil and gas development typically includes surface disturbance for well pads, pipelines, roads and support facilities. Dispersed recreation also occurs on public lands including off-highway vehicle use, hunting and other activities. Impacts other than oil and gas development, dispersed recreation and grazing are not expected in the analysis area. In general, the Proposed Action and other activities would increase sediment and salt loading to Piceance Creek but are not likely to exceed State standards for water quality.

*Environmental Consequences of No Action Alternative:*

Direct and Indirect Effects: No fuel treatments would take place; therefore, there would be no direct or indirect impacts on surface or groundwater quality. Depending on a fire's severity, there is the possibility for surface water quality impacts and they could potentially impact the aquatic life qualities downstream.

Cumulative Effects: Cumulative impacts would be similar in nature to those described for the Proposed Action.

*Mitigation:* None.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard #5 for Water Quality:* The Proposed Action is not likely to impact the listing of water bodies listed on Colorado's section 303(d) or cause the exceedance of the Colorado water quality standards.

## VEGETATION

*Affected Environment:* The principle ecological site in the treatment area is rolling loam surrounded by mostly pinyon/juniper. In addition to the encroaching pinyon and juniper, vegetation in the proposed treatment polygons is dominated by primarily big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata* ssp. *tridentata* and *wyomingensis*) with a well-developed and diverse perennial grass and forb understory. Under the surrounding pinyon/juniper woodland canopy adjacent to but outside of the treatment areas the understory is limited to scattered grasses and forbs (western wheatgrass, bluebunch wheatgrass, needle-and-thread, and various forbs).

### *Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:*

Direct and Indirect Effects: Implementation of the proposed treatment will result in removal of encroaching pinyon and juniper trees. Hand removal using chainsaws will cause no disturbance to the existing established sagebrush and herbaceous vegetation. Reduced competition for available resources (moisture and nutrients) may allow for slight increases in the herbaceous component and minor additional sagebrush establishment. Scattering slash throughout the existing plant community will provide favorable microclimates and provide protection for establishment of grass and sagebrush seedlings.

Cumulative Effects: This treatment in association with other development activities would slow pinyon/juniper encroachment into sagebrush parks but due to the small scale of the project any cumulative benefit is minor.

### *Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:*

Direct and Indirect Effects: Presently the sagebrush parks associated with the treatment areas could be considered to have a moderate level of encroachment of pinyon and juniper. That is, pinyon and juniper trees have invaded the big sagebrush type but they have not reached sufficient density and height to dominate the site. No action would allow the invasion process to continue so in the long term, the treatment areas would be dominated in both structure and composition by pinyon and juniper trees, absent from some other disturbance such as the occurrence of a wildfire event.

Cumulative Effects: Pinyon/juniper encroachment is an on-going process. Other development activities in the general area would continue resulting in some removal of pinyon/juniper that is otherwise encroaching into sagebrush parks. Due to the small scale of the project not implementing this project would have minimal effect.

*Mitigation:* None.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard #3 for Plant and Animal Communities:* Vegetation in the proposed project area currently meets the Standard but with continued pinyon juniper type conversion that trend can be expected to decline over time in the absence of a disturbance such as fire. Successful implementation of this project will result in maintenance of these sagebrush parks over a longer term and the standard would continue to be met with an upward or stable trend.

## INVASIVE, NON-NATIVE SPECIES

*Affected Environment:* The treatment areas are located primarily in a rolling loam ecological site surrounded by pinyon/juniper sites vegetated as described in the Vegetation section above. In terms of noxious weeds, there are no particular infestations associated with the treatment areas. There are scattered occurrences of cheatgrass, an undesirable invasive annual grass, mostly associated with disturbances such as roadways.

### *Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:*

Direct and Indirect Effects: Implementation of the Proposed Action will create minimal, if any, soil disturbance and will not disturb any vegetation other than the target trees. Thus there will be minimal opportunity for noxious weed establishment. Existing native vegetation should compete with cheatgrass and result in minimal, if any, negative effects to the associated plant communities. The design feature of monitoring treatment areas for noxious/invasive weed infestations for a minimum of three years post tree removal and treatment of any weed infestations identified will fully mitigate the minimal opportunity for weed establishment.

Cumulative Effects: Other development activities in the general area would continue resulting in opportunities for spread of noxious and invasive weeds. Due to the small scale of this project and low potential of noxious weed establishment there would be no measurable effect associated with implementation of this project.

### *Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:*

Direct and Indirect Effects: There would be no change from the present situation of a scattered presence of cheatgrass. Monitoring of the proposed treatment areas for establishment of noxious/invasive weeds would not occur.

Cumulative Effects: Cumulative effects would be similar to those described for the Proposed Action. Due to the small scale of this project there would be no measurable effect associated with not implementing this project.

*Mitigation:* None.

## SPECIAL STATUS ANIMAL SPECIES

*Affected Environment:* The project area is primarily located in a sagebrush park with pinyon/juniper encroaching from the surrounding ridge lines. There are no threatened or endangered species that are known to inhabit or derive important use from the project area. There are several additional BLM sensitive species that are known to inhabit or may be indirectly influenced by the Proposed Action, including Brewer's sparrow, northern goshawk, bald eagle, Townsend's big-eared bat, big free-tailed bat and fringed myotis.

Brewer's sparrows are common and widely distributed in virtually all big sagebrush, greasewood, saltbush, and mixed brush communities throughout the planning area. These birds

are typically one of the most common members of these avian communities and breeding densities generally range between 10-40 pairs per 100 acres. Typical of most migratory passerines in this area, nesting activities normally take place between mid-May and mid-July.

Although the distribution of bats in the WRFO is incompletely understood, recent acoustic surveys in along the lower White River have documented the localized presence of Townsend's big-eared and big free-tailed bats along this perennial waterway. These species are typically associated with relatively extensive riparian communities when foraging. Riparian communities are available along the White River which is approximately 3.5 miles north of the project area. These bats typically use caves, mines, bridges, and unoccupied buildings for night, nursery, and hibernation roosts, but in western Colorado, single or small groups of bats use rock crevices and tree cavities. Birthing and rearing of young for these bats occur in May and June, and young are capable of flight by the end of July. The big free-tailed bat is not known to breed in Colorado.

The White River corridor, which is located approximately 3.5 miles north of the project area, provides both nesting habitat and winter roost areas for bald eagle. Population numbers are greatest during the late fall and winter months, when bald eagles make regular foraging use of open upland communities along the river and its larger tributaries.

The WRFO has no records of goshawk nesting in the immediate vicinity of the project area, the nearest being approximately 6.5 miles from the Proposed Action. Based on the BLM's experience, goshawks nest at low densities throughout the WRFO in mature pinyon/juniper woodlands above 6,500 ft. and Douglas-fir and aspen stands. Goshawks establish breeding territories as early as March and begin nesting by the end of April. Nestlings are normally fledged and independent of the nest stand by mid-August. An influx of migrant goshawks appears to elevate densities in this Resource Area during the winter months.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:*

Direct and Indirect Effects: Nest habitat suitability and foraging by Brewer's sparrow in the project area is potentially limited by the encroaching pinyon/juniper habitat. Removal of encroaching woodlands by mechanical means would result in the improvement of sagebrush density and understory for foraging in a short period of time.

Rock outcrops and mature components of PJ which may provide temporary daytime roosts for small numbers of bats are limited in the immediate vicinity of the project area. There are no underground mines or known caves or unoccupied buildings in the vicinity of the project area. Mechanical removal of the encroaching pinyon/juniper woodlands would have no effect on bat species.

Bald eagle foraging use is dispersed and opportunistic across the entire White River Resource Area. Although nesting and roosting areas are within 3.5 miles of the project area the minimally invasive and short term nature of the project is not anticipated to have any conceivable influence on local bald eagle populations.

The nearest known goshawk nest is 6.5 miles from the project area and the extensive aspen and pinyon/juniper woodlands that are needed to support nesting activities of these birds are not

located within the vicinity of the project area. The removal of low density and relatively young pinyon/juniper would have no influence on goshawks.

Cumulative Effects: The mechanical removal of low density young age class pinyon/juniper woodlands in an area with little development will not have any cumulative impact of any special status species.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:*

Direct and Indirect Effects: Directly, failure to implement the Proposed Action would allow progressive successional advancement of an increasing tree component to the landscape. Indirectly, the No Action Alternative would forego the opportunity to add incrementally to the extent and distribution of suitable Brewer's sparrow habitat throughout the resource area.

Cumulative Effects: Failure to implement the Proposed Action would result in the cumulative loss of sagebrush and increase in pinyon-juniper woodland habitat. Sagebrush parks provided nesting and foraging areas for several special status species that occur in the resource management area.

*Mitigation:* None.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard #4 for Special Status Species:* The project area is generally meeting the Land Health Standards for special status species at a landscape scale. Neither the Proposed nor No Action Alternative is expected to detract from the continued meeting of these standards.

## **SPECIAL STATUS PLANT SPECIES**

*Affected Environment:* There are no known special status plant species known to occur within the project area. However, the Proposed Action falls on top of the Thirteen Mile Creek Tongue of the Green River Formation. Two federally listed species have been known to occur on this geologic outcrop: Dudley Bluffs twinpod (*Physaria obcordata*) and Dudley Bluffs bladderpod (*Physaria congesta*). The special status plant species are badland or rock outcrop soil associates, and are considered "oil shale endemics" or edaphic (soil-related) endemic species. The bladderpod grows on barren white shale outcrops on tongues of the Green River Formation where it has been exposed along down-cut drainages or windswept ridges. It often grows on level surfaces at the points of ridges or in pinyon-juniper savannah areas where outcrops of the white shale geology has been exposed. The twinpod also grows on barren white shale outcrops on tongues of the Green River Formation where it is exposed along down-cut drainages, sometimes occurring below, or interspersed with the bladderpod habitats. The nearest known twinpod population occurs 1,400 meters (4,593 feet) east of the Proposed Action and the nearest known bladderpod population is 3,400 meters (11,155 feet) northeast of the Proposed Action.

The Proposed Action also falls within 26 acres of the Rentsac channery loam which has been known to support two sensitive plants species: debris milkvetch (*Astragalus detritali*) and

narrow-stem gilia (*Aliciella stenothyrsa*). However, these species have never been documented within 8 miles of the project area.

**Table 5. Special Status Plant Species with the potential to occur in the Project Area**

Species	Status <sup>1</sup>	Habitat Description	Potential to Occur in the Proposed Project Area
<i>Physaria congesta</i> (Dudley Bluffs bladderpod)	T	Barren, white shale outcrops of the Green River and Uinta Formations (6,000-6,700 ft.).	Few barren, white shale outcrops occur on areas disturbed by the project.
<i>Physaria obcordata</i> (Dudley Bluffs twinpod)	T	Barren white shale outcrops and steep slopes of the Parachute Creek Member of the Green River Formation (5,900-7,500 ft.).	This species is known to occur in the vicinity of proposed project activities. The action is adjacent overlaps some Green River-derived soils.
<i>Aliciella stenothyrsa</i> ( <i>Gilia stenothyrsa</i> ) (Narrow-stem gilia)	S	Grassland, sagebrush, mountain mahogany or pinyon/juniper; silty to gravelly loam soils of the Green River formation (6,200 -8,600 ft.)	This species has the potential to occur in the vicinity of the proposed project activities. The action occurs over Rentsac channery loam.
<i>Astragalus detritalis</i> (Debris milkvetch)	S	Pinyon/juniper and mixed desert shrub, often on rocky soils ranging from sandy clays to sandy loams. Also alluvial terraces with cobbles (5,400-7,200 ft.)	This species has the potential to occur in the vicinity of the proposed project activities. The action occurs over Rentsac channery loam.

<sup>1</sup> T = Threatened, S = Sensitive

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:*

**Direct and Indirect Effects:** There should be no conceivable direct impacts to either of the federally listed *Physaria* species because of the distance of the Proposed Action to the nearest known population. Fuel reduction efforts may potentially remove pollinator habitat and nesting sites causing indirect impacts to the species. However, the removal of thick overgrowth may allow for a more biologically diverse understory which will assist in expanding pollinator habitat. A reduction in fuel loading may also lessen the intensity of a potential fire in the area which would increase the likelihood that the current seedbank would be preserved.

**Cumulative Effects:** Cumulative ground and vegetation disturbance may provide a potential increase of a non-native or exotic plant species in the project area. Habitat of the Dudley Bluff species is limited to specific geologic formations and any invasions of non-native species could potentially negatively impact suitable habitat.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:*

**Direct and Indirect Effects:** The No Action Alternative would allow continued pinyon-juniper encroachment into sagebrush disclimax parks. Thick overstory vegetation prevents establishment of diverse understory growth including special status plant species.

**Cumulative Effects:** If the project area remains untreated, the increased pinyon-juniper encroachment will continue to cause greater fragmentation of current special status plant species populations.

*Mitigation:* None.

**Finding on the Public Land Health Standard #4 for Special Status Species:** The proposed and no-action alternatives are not expected to affect populations or habitats of plants associated with the Endangered Species Act or BLM sensitive species and, as such, should have no influence on the status of applicable Land Health Standards.

## **VISUAL RESOURCES**

**Affected Environment:** Visual resources are the visible physical features of a landscape that convey scenic value. Scenic values in the BLM White River Resource Area have been classified according to the Visual Resource Management (VRM) system into four Visual Resource Management Classes (I-IV), and VRM objectives were established in the 1997 White River ROD/RMP. VRM Class I is the most restrictive with VRM Class IV being the least restrictive. The Proposed Action is located within a VRM Class III area. The objective of the VRM III classification is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape could be moderate. Management activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Changes should repeat the basic elements found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.

The proposed project area consists of moderate to gently rolling slopes with dry drainages and draws. This area is along or in proximity to the top of the drainage divide between Yellow Creek and Piceance Creek. This divide is made up of a low angle flat ridge with gentle slopes and rolling hills. Vegetation consists of stands of pinyon/juniper trees along the slopes where topography changes with scattered pinyon/juniper trees encroaching into the sagebrush areas. The sage brush areas proposed for treatment are along the mostly flat to gentle terrain with sparse to mixed pinyon/juniper throughout. Vegetation provides the dominant visual elements to the landscape of color and texture. Buff to tan exposed soils, lighter green colored sage brush areas, and dark green colored pinyon/juniper stands provide color contrasts to the area.

The key observation points (KOPs) from where the Proposed Action may be visible to the casual observer include Rio Blanco County (RBC) Roads 20 (Yellow Creek), RBC Road 88 (Barcus), and RBC Road 83 (Bar D Mesa). These are native surface routes with low speeds of travel. There is also a dispersed camping area near the junction of these roads, referred to as the Crossroads camping area, which receives a low amount of use year round except during fall hunting seasons where it receives a moderate to high amount of use from September through November. This camping area and road junction is located near the northern portion of the Proposed Action.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:*

Direct and Indirect Effects: By thinning a total of 190 acres to remove pinyon/juniper, the visual elements of color and texture will be weakly impacted. The irregular border of the proposed vegetation treatment polygons blends with the topography and vegetation. By placing an approximate twenty five foot buffer around the project perimeter that will be cut to match existing vegetation openings in the surrounding environment, to blend in with existing vegetation, and to avoid visual angular features of the treatment, the impact to the texture and line visual elements will be greatly reduced. Also, by lopping and scattering slash to heights less than 18 inches and cutting stumps to 4 inches or less, the Proposed Action should not detract attention after 1-2 growing seasons from any of the key observation points. Overall, the Proposed Action should meet or exceed the Visual Resource Management III objectives.

Cumulative Effects: Combined with existing impacts to visual resources in the project area, which include range improvements and fences, the existing road system, dispersed recreation camping sites, and oil and gas operations, the proposed action and included applicant committed measures would meet or exceed the Visual Resource Management III objectives.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:*

Direct and Indirect Effects: By not treating vegetation in this area, there would be no effect to visual resources.

Cumulative Effects: None identified as a result of the Proposed Action.

*Mitigation:* None.

## **FIRE MANAGEMENT**

*Affected Environment:* The Proposed Action is within the C6 Lower Piceance Basin (67 acres) and B6 Yellow Creek (122 acres) fire management polygons. Both polygons have a fire management objective of promoting a vegetation mosaic representing natural distributions of plant communities of varying successional stages. The target area is sagebrush/grass and pinyon/juniper vegetation stratum which is classified as a fire regime condition class (FRCC) III, vegetation strata that experiences infrequent (>35 year fire return intervals) fire return intervals that remove > 75 percent of the vegetation. The target area has missed approximately one fire return interval, and is rated as a FRCC II due to heavier fuel loading, associated with pinyon/juniper type conversion of sagebrush communities, and departure from fire frequency.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:*

Direct and Indirect Effects: In the event of a wildfire, the Proposed Action will result in less fire intensities, post treatment, due to the removal of pinyon/juniper and a healthier distribution of sagebrush. The treated areas will be dominated by grasses and forbs, and if they should burn, the intensities would be much lower than under the current situation. Suppression activities would be safer, more effective, and less costly than in the current situation with the heavier more continuous fuels. Post treatment the target area would move from a FRCC of III to a FRCC of I and II. This would resemble the vegetation type and structure of the potential

natural vegetation pre-settlement with a natural mix of age classes and varying levels of canopy closure. A natural mix of age classes is one of the fire management objectives of the Northwest Colorado Program Area Fire Management Plan.

Cumulative Effects: This treatment combined with the energy related vegetation treatments, both past and future, aids in reducing the FRCC along the divide between Piceance Creek and Yellow Creek. While future oil and gas infrastructure may temporarily inhibit the use of wildfire for resource benefit while in the construction phase, once in place pipeline and power line rights of way may create areas of opportunity to manage wildfires.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:*

Direct and Indirect Effects: There will be no change from the current condition. The Crossroads area would likely progress to an FRCC IV. Pinyon/juniper encroachment would continue to reduce sagebrush communities. A wildfire impacting the area would likely be more difficult to control and thus more expensive.

Cumulative Effects: Vegetation treatments, both mechanical and prescribed fire, enhance the BLM's ability to manage fire across the landscape. This ability allows the agency to protect resources it deems a priority. Without these fuel bed transitions, it may be increasingly difficult to both allow fire to play a natural role within this polygon and protect natural resources.

*Mitigation:* None.

## **FOREST MANAGEMENT**

*Affected Environment:* The Proposed Action is located within both productive and dry exposure stand classes of pinyon/juniper woodlands 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 on north and east aspects. Growth rates are higher in these areas due to soil features which allow for effective use of precipitation. Dry exposure types occur when slopes and soil features do not allow for the retention of precipitation. The growth rates within these areas are low and most generally the trees present are mature, but young trees can be present.

These habitat types are further broken down based on the age class of the stand. In this case the affected stands are mature and young. Mature pinyon/juniper trees on productive exposure establish themselves as the dominant plant community on the site. Young pinyon/juniper trees are a component of the plant community or encroach into sagebrush communities in the absence of reproduction through time and will eventually establish as the dominant plant community. Mature stands are valuable locally as a source of fire wood. Encroachment sites of young pinyon/juniper trees are valuable for Christmas tree harvest and posts for fence construction.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:*

Direct and Indirect Effects: Approximately 190 acres of predominately young pinyon/juniper stands would be affected by the Proposed Action. Removal of pinyon/juniper

encroachment would affect the woodland base and deny woodland products to the general public in this area, woodland products pertain to pinyon Christmas trees and juniper fence posts. By removing encroaching trees and creating a mosaic/edge effect to the environment it will help decrease fuel loads, further protecting the remaining mature woodlands from a stand replacing wildfire.

**Cumulative Effects:** Hand thinning of pinyon/juniper would set back pinyon/juniper woodland establishment from between 50 and 70 years, and development of mature woodlands by 200 to 300 years if there are no follow-up treatments.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:*

**Direct and Indirect Effects:** Under this alternative there would be no hand thinning of pinyon/juniper woodlands. Christmas trees and fence posts would still be available for the public to use.

**Cumulative Effects:** The proposed area for pinyon/juniper removal would develop into mature stands over a period of 150 to 250 years. The area would increase in cover and density causing sagebrush to be smothered out over a period of time. With the increase to cover and density the area could potentially burn in a stand replacing wildfire with the likely loss of the current surrounding mature pinyon/juniper stands.

*Mitigation:* None.

**RANGELAND MANAGEMENT**

**Affected Environment:** The Proposed Action occurs almost entirely within the Alkali pasture of the Square S Allotment (#06027) with smaller amounts (30 to 40 acres) of the treatment area extending into the Lower Yellow Creek pasture of this allotment and 10 to 15 acres in Pasture 4 of the Yellow Creek Allotment (#06030). The Square S allotment is permitted to both the LOV Ranch and the Mantle Ranch for a total of 3,522 AUMs. The Yellow Creek allotment is permitted to the Burke Brothers for a total of 2,157 AUMs. An AUM is the amount of forage required to sustain a cow and her calf for a one month period. Permitted use in the affected pastures is described in Table 6:

**Table 6.** Permitted Grazing Use

Allotment Name (Pasture)	Livestock Number	Livestock Kind	Begin Date	End Date	%PL	Type of Use	AUM's
Square S (Alkali)	190	Cattle	4/15	6/15	66	Active	255
Square S (Lower Yellow Creek)	500	Cattle	5/16	6/10	96	Active	410
Yellow Creek (Pasture 4)	240	Cattle	5/1	5/15	100	Active	118
	340		5/16	6/30			514

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:*

Direct and Indirect Effects: The Proposed Action will have minimal, if any, direct effect on livestock grazing. Removal of the encroaching trees may result in an insignificant increase in forage production. The proposed fall treatment period would occur when livestock are not present and even if they were, at the most, livestock would likely avoid the immediate area during treatment due to the noise and activity.

Cumulative Effects: This treatment in association with other development activities would slow pinyon/juniper encroachment into sagebrush parks but due to the small scale of the project any cumulative benefit of a potential forage increase is minor.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:*

Direct and Indirect Effects: There would be no change from the current situation. Over the years as encroachment and tree density continued to increase, there would eventually be an associated decrease in forage production in the sagebrush parks.

Cumulative Effects: Pinyon/juniper encroachment is an on-going process. Other development activities in the general area would continue resulting in some removal of pinyon/juniper that is otherwise encroaching into sagebrush parks. Due to the small scale of the project not implementing this project would have minimal effect on forage production available for livestock.

*Mitigation:* None.

## **RECREATION**

*Affected Environment:* The proposed project area is located within the White River Extensive Recreation Management Area (ERMA) on BLM lands administered by the WRFO. The WRFO manages the ERMA to provide for unstructured recreation activities, and a diversity of outdoor recreation opportunities, including hunting, dispersed camping, hiking, horseback riding, wildlife viewing, and off-highway vehicle (OHV) use are to be maintained and protected. There are no Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMAs) identified within WRFO lands.

On BLM-administered lands, the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) is a classification system and a prescriptive tool used for recreation planning and management. The proposed project area is located in a 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 and low interaction between users (but evidence of other users may be present). SPM recreational experience is characterized by a high probability of isolation from the sights and sounds of humans within a setting that offers challenge and risk.

Current recreational use in proximity to the Proposed Action includes a low amount of recreational driving and OHV use and associated dispersed camping in the spring and summer months. There is also a dispersed camping area near the junction of Rio Blanco County Roads 20, 88, and 83, referred to as the Crossroads camping area, which receives a low amount of use

year round except during fall hunting seasons where it receives a moderate to high amount of use from September through November. This camping area and road junction is located near the northern portion of the Proposed Action. There is a moderate amount of hunting traffic and other associated dispersed camping during the fall months. The Proposed Action is located in Colorado Parks and Wildlife's Game Management Unit (GMU) 22. There is one valid Special Recreation Permit (SRP) for commercially guided big game hunting and 12 SRPs for commercially guiding mountain lion hunting that overlap with the project area.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:*

Direct and Indirect Effects: Because the vegetation treatment is expected to take place during the summer and fall months in a relatively small area (190 acres), it is expected to have very little impact on recreational activities, opportunities, or visitors to this area. If this project is implemented during the fall hunting seasons there may be localized impacts to hunting experiences directly adjacent to the project work. This project is expected to be completed in one season and therefore impacts would be relatively short in duration. Also, there are abundant hunting opportunities on public lands outside the proposed project area. The reduction of hazardous fuels should improve visitor safety in this area. The proposed project's objectives of retaining valuable forage species for wildlife, and the creation of mosaic and edge effects for improved wildlife habitat, should have a beneficial long-term effect on the primary recreational use of this area, which is big game hunting. Considering the Proposed Action and associated activities, the ROS class of SPM will be met and retained.

Cumulative Effects: Combined with other impacts to recreational opportunities and settings in this area, the Proposed Action may have a small to unnoticeable incremental impact.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:*

Direct and Indirect Effects: By not treating vegetation in the Crossroads area, visitor safety would not be improved as fueling loading and wildfire hazards would continue to not be addresses. These would overall be negative impacts to recreational opportunities and settings, such as safe settings to recreate in and opportunities to successfully hunt big game species. There should be no other negative effects to any other recreational activities, opportunities, and settings.

Cumulative Effects: Long term effects of not treating vegetation in this area could result in continued fuel loading and increase risk of wildlife spread. Long term effects of not maintaining mule deer winter range could eventually negatively affect deer populations.

*Mitigation:* None.

## **ACCESS AND TRANSPORTATION**

*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 Proposed Action is from State Highway 64 from the north to Rio

Blanco County (RBC) Road 5 (Piceance Creek). Then travel south to RBC Road 20 (Yellow Creek). RBC Road 20 intersects with RBC Roads 88 (Barcus) and RBC Road 83 (Bar D Mesa) at area referred to locally as the “Crossroads”. RBC Road 20 (Yellow Creek), RBC Roads 88 (Barcus), and RBC Road 83 (Bar D Mesa) are native surface roads near the proposed project area with low speed traffic that consists of a low amount of use from area ranchers, oil and gas operators, recreationalists, and administrative traffic year round. There is an increase in traffic during the fall hunting seasons.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:*

Direct and Indirect Effects: As a result of the Proposed Action, there may be a slight to very slight increase in traffic on local roads during the project work. There are no traffic delays or restrictions proposed or expected and therefore normal traffic flows will not be impacted by the Proposed Action. Access to this general area will not be restricted. However, in specific areas where the vegetation is actively being treated the public will not be able to enter in order to protect public safety. Vehicle use off existing roads and trails will not occur.

Cumulative Effects: Combined with other traffic and public access in the project areas, the implementation of the Proposed Action may have a small to unnoticeable incremental impact to traffic flow.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:*

Direct and Indirect Effects: By not treating vegetation in this area, there would be no increase in traffic or any change to access to public lands.

Cumulative Effects: None identified as a result of this alternative.

*Mitigation:* None.

**REFERENCES CITED:**

CDPHE Water Quality Control Commission (WQCC)

2012 Colorado Department Of Public Health And Environment, Water Quality Control Commission, Regulation No. 93 Colorado's Section 303(D) List of Impaired Waters and Monitoring and Evaluation List, Effective March 30, 2012. (Accessed 5/24/2013)

CDPHE Water Quality Control Commission (WQCC)

2013 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, 2013. (Accessed 5/24/2013)

Tweto, Ogden

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

Wolfe, Michael

2013 Class III Cultural Resource Inventory of the Crossroads Park Hazardous Fuels Project, in Rio Blanco County, Co. SHPO # RB.LM.NR2357 (WRFO #13-10-05). Manuscript on file at BLM-WRFO in Meeker, Colorado.

**TRIBES, INDIVIDUALS, ORGANIZATIONS, OR AGENCIES CONSULTED:**

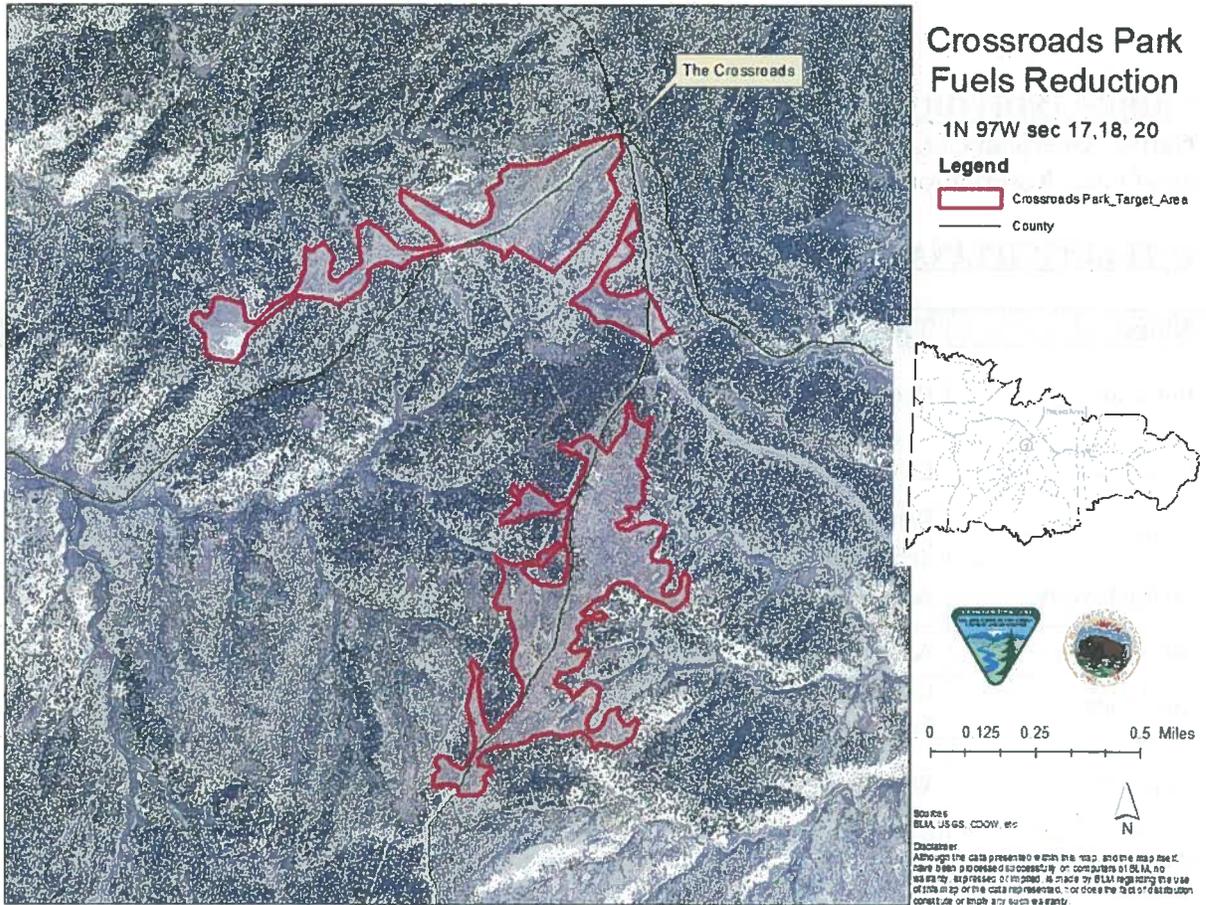
Native American Consultation letters were sent to the Eastern Shoshone, Southern Ute, Uintah and Ouray Reservation Ute, and Ute Mountain Ute Indian tribes on June 7, 2013.

**INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW:**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Area of Responsibility</b>	<b>Date Signed</b>
Bob Lange	Hydrologist	Air Quality; Surface and Ground Water Quality; Floodplains, Hydrology, and Water Rights; Soils	08/07/2013
Baili Foster	Ecologist Intern	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern; Special Status Plant Species	02/01/2013
Heather Woodruff	Rangeland Management Specialist	Forest Management	06/18/2013
Michael Wolfe	Archaeologist	Cultural Resources; Native American Religious Concerns	07/10/2013
Michael Selle	Archaeologist	Paleontological Resources	11/21/2012
Mary Taylor	Rangeland Management Specialist	Invasive, Non-Native Species; Vegetation; Rangeland Management	08/06/2013
Laura Dixon	Wildlife Biologist	Migratory Birds; Special Status Animal Species; Terrestrial and Aquatic Wildlife; Wetlands and Riparian Zones	07/16/2013
Kyle Frary	Natural Resource Specialist	Hazardous or Solid Wastes	07/18/2013
Aaron Grimes	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Wilderness; Visual Resources; Access and Transportation; Recreation,	06/24/2013
Scott Nilson	Fuels Specialist	Fire Management	06/11/2013
Paul Daggett	Mining Engineer	Geology and Minerals	06/12/2013
Stacey Burke	Realty Specialist	Realty	07/16/2013
Melissa J. Kindall	Range Technician	Wild Horse Management	06/07/2013
Kyle Frary	Fuels Specialist	Project Lead – Document Preparer	08/13/2013
Heather Sauls	Planning & Environmental Coordinator	NEPA Compliance	08/13/2013

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Figure 1: Map of the Project



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

**Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)  
DOI-BLM-CO-110-2013-0005-EA**

**BACKGROUND**

The BLM is proposing this vegetation treatment to reduce fuel loading and reduce pinyon-juniper encroachment into sagebrush disclimax parks. The proposal is to treat a total of 190 acres of vegetation near the Crossroads using chainsaws to lop and scatter pinyon-juniper trees no larger than four inches at the base.

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the attached environmental assessment, and considering the significance criteria in 40 CFR 1508.27, I have determined that the Proposed Action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. An environmental impact statement is therefore not required.

**Context**

The project is a site-specific action directly involving BLM administered public lands that do not in and of itself have international, national, regional, or state-wide importance.

**Intensity**

The following discussion is organized around the 10 Significance Criteria described at 40 CFR 1508.27. The following have been considered in evaluating intensity for this Proposed Action:

**1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.**

The benefit of the reduction of hazardous fuels and reducing pinyon-juniper encroachment is high. The adverse effects of fuels reduction may potentially remove pollinator habitat and nesting sites causing indirect impacts to certain species.

**2. The degree to which the Proposed Action affects public health or safety.**

There would be no impact to public health and safety.

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

There are no significant historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas nearby.

**4. Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.**

The saw work poses a very low effect on the human environment. The project is not controversial. The hazardous fuels reduction program is in wide use in the WRFO and across the nation, for the protection of resources.

**5. Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risk.**

No highly uncertain or unknown risks to the human environment were identified during analysis of the Proposed Action.

**6. 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 Proposed Action neither establishes a precedent for future BLM actions with significant effects nor represents a decision in principle about a future consideration. The process for fuels treatments is outlined in the 1997 WRFO RMP (page 2-12).

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

The Proposed Action is not related to any other actions that are currently being considered.

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

No cultural resources were located in the project area.

**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 (ESA) of 1973.**

There are no listed species present within the project area.

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

Neither the Proposed Action nor impacts associated with it violate any laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

**SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:**



Field Manager

**DATE SIGNED:**

08/20/13

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

**DECISION RECORD**

**PROJECT NAME:** Crossroads Park

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT NUMBER:** DOI-BLM-CO-110-2013-0005-EA

**DECISION**

It is my decision to implement the Proposed Action as mitigated in DOI-BLM-CO-110-2013-0005-EA, authorizing the hazardous fuels reduction project around the Crossroads.

**Mitigation Measures**

Design features that minimize impacts from the project have been incorporated into the Proposed Action.

**COMPLIANCE WITH LAWS & CONFORMANCE WITH THE LAND USE PLAN**

This decision is in compliance with the Endangered Species Act and the National Historic Preservation Act. It is also in conformance with the 1997 White River Record of Decision/Approved Resource Management Plan.

**ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

The Proposed Action was analyzed in DOI-BLM-CO-110-2013-0005-EA and it was found to have no significant impacts, thus an EIS is not required.

**PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

External scoping was conducted by posting this project on the WRFO's on-line National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) register on 10/24/2012. No comments or inquiries were received.

**RATIONALE**

Analysis of the Proposed Action has concluded that there are no significant negative impacts and that it meets Colorado Standards for Public Land Health. Reducing fuel loads helps implement decisions from both the RMP and FMP regarding the management of wildfires.

**ADMINISTRATIVE REMEDIES**

Any appeal of this decision must follow the procedures set forth in 43 CFR Part 4. Within 30 days of the decision, a Notice of Appeal must be filed in the office of the Authorized Officer at White River Field Office, 220 East Market St., Meeker, CO 81641 with copies sent to the Regional Solicitor, Rocky Mountain Region, 755 Parfet St., Suite 151, Lakewood, CO 80215, and to the Department of the Interior, Board of Land Appeals, 801 North Quincy St., MS300-QC, Arlington, VA, 22203. If a statement of reasons for the appeal is not included with the

notice, it must be filed with the Interior Board of Land Appeals at the above address within 30 days after the Notice of Appeal is filed with the Authorized Officer.

**SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:**



Field Manager

**DATE SIGNED:**

08/20/13