

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

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

NUMBER: DOI-BLM-CO-110-2014-0118-CX

CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER:

PROJECT NAME: Rio Blanco Mineral Materials Test Pits

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: Sixth Principal Meridian
T. 2 N., R. 100 W.,
sec. 7, lot 8;
sec. 18, lot 5;
T. 2 N., R. 101 W.,
sec. 12, SE1/4;
sec. 13, NE1/4NE1/4;

APPLICANT: Rio Blanco County

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION:

Background/Introduction: Rio Blanco County (RBC) operates seven gravel pits throughout the county under the BLM's mineral material free use permits. The material is used for the maintenance, upgrading, and construction of county roads. The Quinn Draw Pit (Figures 1 and 2) is nearing the end of the available material and RBC's West Johnson Draw, west of Rangely, is also reaching its limit of available material. RBC is exploring new areas that have the potential for a gravel pit to ensure RBC continues to have the necessary resources for county road operations. Test pits are dug in an area of interest to determine if the amount of deposited material would be adequate for the operation of a gravel pit.

Proposed Action: RBC is proposing to dig 25 test pits to determine the viability of two areas for future gravel pit locations (Figures 1 and 2). Maximum size of test pits would be approximately 10 feet long, 4 feet wide (40 square feet) and 18 feet deep, they will be kept to a minimum as necessary for adequate sampling. Total pit disturbance including temporary storage area of pit material would be less than 0.2 acres. Material removed from the pit would be replaced and compacted in the same order as it came out of the test holes. Pits would be refilled as soon as the thickness of the deposit is determined and before equipment leaves the site.

Access to the proposed locations would be existing roads and two- tracks. RBC plans to use all rubber-tired equipment to minimize the footprint. Equipment expected to be used is a rubber-tired backhoe and pickups.

RBC is hoping to complete the test holes before winter; the exact date is dependent upon approval and weather. A maximum of two days is the estimated time frame for completion of the test pits.

Reclamation would be completed as soon as testing and sampling is complete. Disturbed areas would be reseeded with area specific seed mixture as soon as possible depending upon weather, moisture, and time of year.

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW: The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with (43 CFR 1610.5-3, BLM 1601.08) the following plan:

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

Date Approved: July 1, 1997

Decision Number/Page: Page 2-8

Decision Language: "Facilitate the orderly and environmentally sound development of mineral material resources."

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION REVIEW: The Proposed Action qualifies as a categorical exclusion under 516 DM 11.9, Number F-9: "*Digging of exploratory trenches for mineral materials, except in riparian areas.*"

The Proposed Action has been reviewed with the list of extraordinary circumstances (43 CFR 46.215) described in the table below.

Extraordinary Circumstance	YES	NO
a) Have significant adverse effects on public health and safety.		X
b) Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation, or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands; floodplains; national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas.		X
c) Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources.		X
d) Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.		X
e) Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.		X
f) Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.		X

Extraordinary Circumstance	YES	NO
g) Have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places as determined by the bureau.		X
h) Have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have adverse effects on designated Critical Habitat for these species.		X
i) Violate a Federal law, or a State, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.		X
j) Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations.		X
k) Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites.		X
l) Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species.		X

INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW:

The Proposed Action was presented to, and reviewed by, the White River Field Office interdisciplinary team on 8/26/2014. A complete list of resource specialists who participated in this review is available upon request from the White River Field Office. The table below lists resource specialists who provided additional remarks concerning cultural resources and special status species.

Name	Title	Resource	Date
Brian Yaquinto	Archaeologist	Cultural Resources, Native American Religious Concerns	9/22/2014
Ed Hollowed	Wildlife Biologist	Special Status Wildlife Species	9/18/2014
Justina Thorsen	Ecologist	Special Status Plant Species	9/9/2014

REMARKS:

Cultural Resources: Within the determined area of potential effect (APE) 30 of the 70 acres had been previously surveyed for cultural resources at the Class III intensity leaving 40 new acres of Class III inventory required. Inventory of the project area resulted in the discovery and recordation of one new site. The site was determined field eligible and will not be impacted by the proposed undertaking. As a result, no historic properties will be affected by this project.

Public outreach conducted for this NEPA analysis will also be used to satisfy the public involvement requirements with Section 106 of the Nation Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA) requirements 36 CFR [800.2(d)(3)].

Native American Religious Concerns: No Native American religious concerns are known in the area, and none have been noted by Northern Ute Tribal authorities. Should recommended inventories or future consultations with Tribal authorities reveal the existence of such sensitive properties, appropriate mitigation and/or protection measures may be undertaken

Special Status Wildlife Species: The project area consists of sagebrush terraces extending south from the White River valley. These habitats are variously designated as sage-grouse general habitat (westernmost parcel) and big game severe winter range (both). Both parcels support nesting functions of BLM-sensitive Brewer's sparrow. There is no riverine habitat capable of supporting bald eagle or yellow-billed cuckoo within several miles of the project locale.

Both parcels are well suited for the support of big game severe winter range functions, being relatively isolated from existing corridors of human-caused disturbance and representing efficiently exploited sage-steppe forage types owing to their close association with topographic and woodland security cover. The proposed sampling activity would have no substantive influence on forage resources, but if conducted during the key period of occupation (December through April), would contribute cumulatively to behavioral and energetic impacts imposed, especially, on local populations of deer.

Although the lower terraces in this area are identified as sage-grouse general habitat, sagebrush ranges that were associated with nearby leks in Boise Creek, Hammond Draw, and Hatch Flat are thought to have been abandoned for over a decade. Although these habitats remain important in the context of recovery, there is little likelihood that they would be recolonized by sage-grouse in the foreseeable future.

Brewer's sparrow are one of the most common and well-distributed migratory birds nesting in sagebrush habitats throughout the WRFO. Higher quality habitat may support nesting densities of 0.5 - 1 per acre. Sampling work would involve disturbances to small, dispersed points within respective stands of sagebrush. Total habitat disturbance, including that needed for spoil stockpiling, would amount to about 0.1 acre in each of the two sampling areas and would have no subsequent influence on habitat utility or suitability. However, excavation and overland equipment travel between sites could be expected to disrupt a substantial proportion of nesting attempts across the 30 acres of sampling area if conducted coincident with the core nesting season of May 15 to July 15.

Special Status Plant Species: There is no known habitat occupied or suitable for special status plants within the project area. There are no special status plant species issues or concerns associated with the Proposed Action.

REFERENCES CITED:

MITIGATION:

1. Sampling work would not be allowed on either site during the core migratory bird nesting season of May 15 through July 15.

2. Sampling work would not be allowed on either site during the big game severe winter range period of December 1 through April 30.

COMPLIANCE PLAN: On-going compliance inspections and monitoring will be conducted by the BLM White River Field Office staff after construction. Specific mitigation developed in this document will be followed. The operator will be notified of compliance related issues in writing, and depending on the nature of the issue(s), will be provided 30 days to resolve such issues.

NAME OF PREPARER: Paul Daggett

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR: Heather Sauls

COMPLIANCE WITH NEPA

The Proposed Action is categorically excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with 516 DM 11.9, Number F-9. This categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment. The Proposed Action has been reviewed, and none of the extraordinary circumstances described in 43 CFR 46.215 apply.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:



Field Manager

DATE SIGNED: 10/08/2014

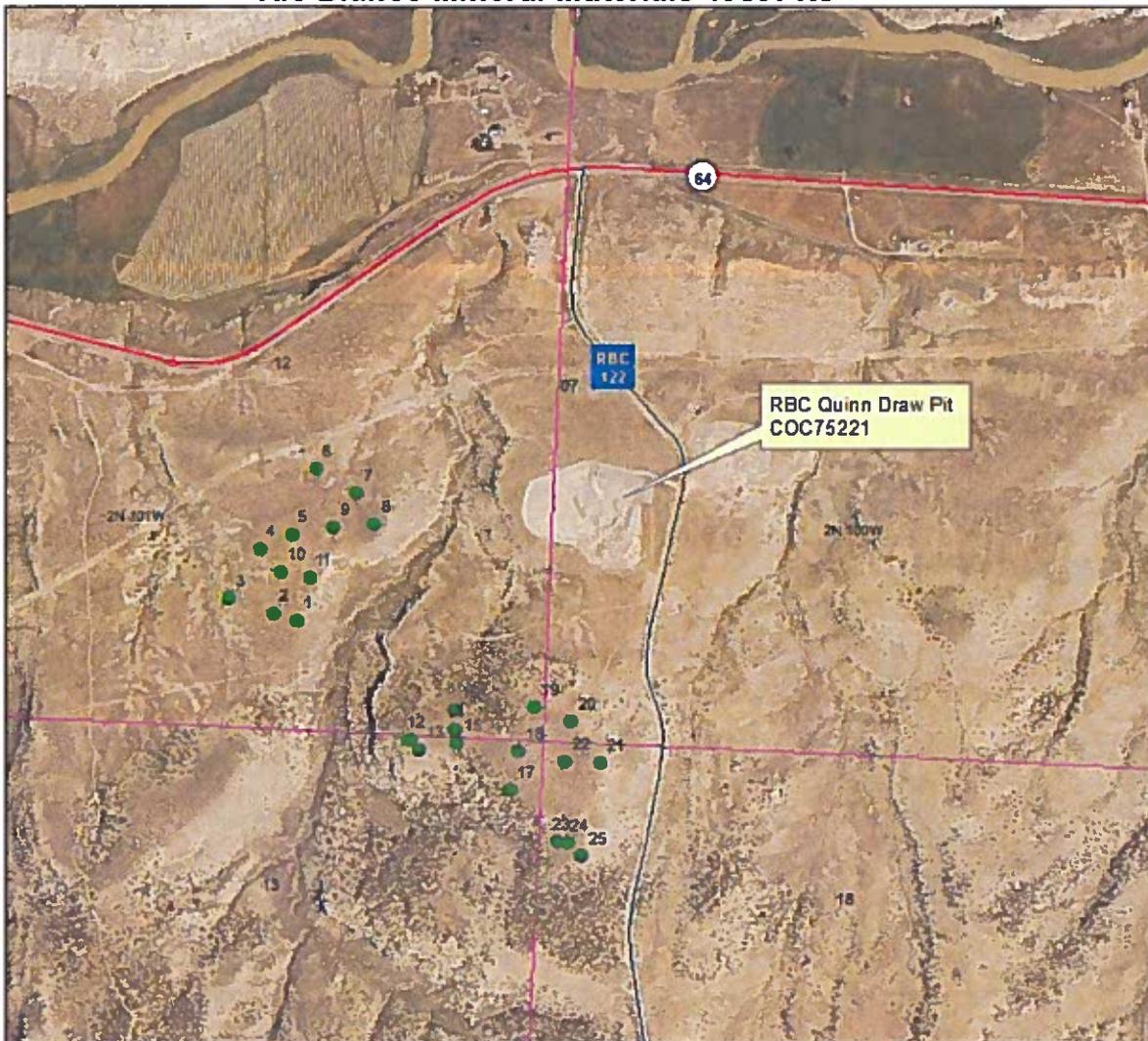
ATTACHMENTS:

Figure 1: General Location Map – Aerial Photo

Figure 2: General Location Map – Topographic

Figure 1: General Location Map – Aerial Photo

DOI-BLM-CO-110-2014-0118-CX
Rio Blanco Mineral Materials Test Pits



T. 2 N., R. 100 W., 6th P.M.
Sections 7 & 18
T. 2 N., R. 101 W., 6th P.M.
Sections 12 & 13

8/25/2014



● RBC Test Holes



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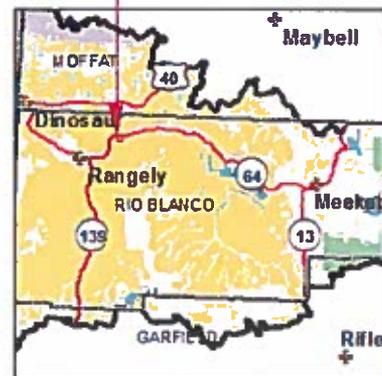
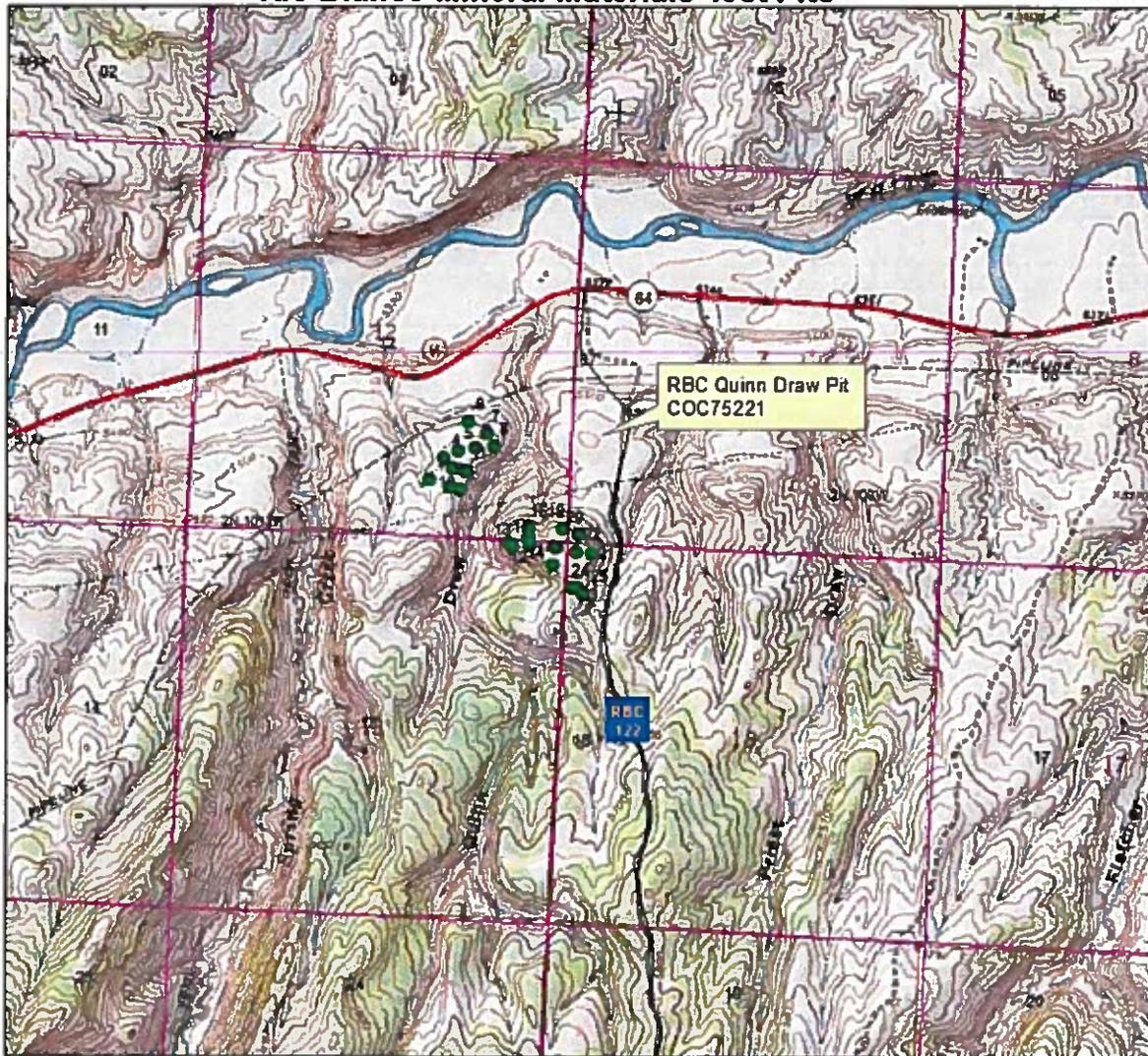


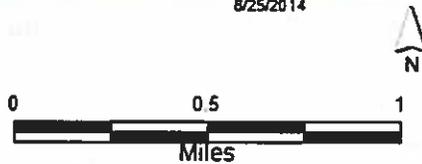
Figure 2: General Location Map – Topographic

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Rio Blanco Mineral Materials Test Pits



T. 2 N., R. 100 W., 6th P.M.
Sections 7 & 18
T. 2 N., R. 101 W., 6th P.M.
Sections 12 & 13

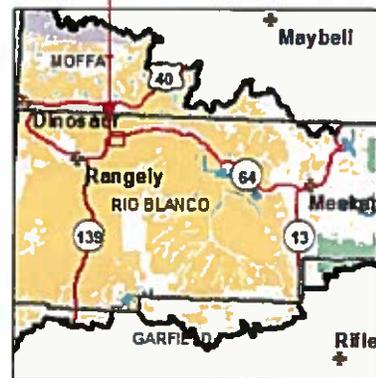
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DECISION RECORD

PROJECT NAME: Rio Blanco Mineral Materials Test Pits

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION NUMBER: DOI-BLM-CO-N05-2014-0118-CX

DECISION

It is my decision to implement the Proposed Action, as mitigated in DOI-BLM-CO-N05-2014-0118-CX, authorizing the disturbance of less than 0.2 acres for the purpose of excavating 25 test pits to determine the amount of in-place mineral materials in order to evaluate the potential for future gravel pits.

Mitigation Measures

1. Sampling work is not allowed on either site during the core migratory bird nesting season of May 15 through July 15.
2. Sampling work is not allowed on either site during the big game severe winter range period of December 1 through April 30.

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.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A copy of the completed Categorical Exclusion will be posted on the WRFO website.

RATIONALE

The Proposed Action is categorically excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with 516 DM 11.9, Number F-9. This categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment. The Proposed Action has been reviewed, and none of the extraordinary circumstances described in 43 CFR 46.215 apply.

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:

Kent T. Walter

Field Manager

DATE SIGNED:

10/08/2014
