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-N05-2014-0035-EA

PROJECT NAME:

Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area New Fence Construction Projects

LOCATION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION (by Fence Section):

State Highway 64:	Township 2 North, Range 97 West, Sections 18 – 20 Township 2 North, Range 98 West, Section 13
Rio Blanco County Road 5:	Township 1 North, Range 97 West, Sections 2, 11, 14, 15
Main Barcus Creek Area:	Township 1 North, Range 99 West, Section 26
Tommy's Draw Area:	Township 3 South, Range 100 West, Sections 9 – 11 and 14 – 16

Project Area:
In general, the project area is the HMA boundary (although the fence sections do not necessarily follow the boundary but are located as close as possible to the boundary with the proposed fences to be located where the fences will be effective and result in the least impacts to other resources). The project area does not include fencing located within the interior of the designated HMA boundary. The perimeter of the designated boundary is estimated at 137 miles and is located approximately 20 miles west and south of Meeker, Colorado within the BLM's Northwest District of Colorado. The HMA encompasses approximately 190,130 acres of federal, state, and private lands. The analysis area is located within all or portions of the Yellow Creek, Square S, Greasewood Gulch, and Cathedral Creek Grazing Allotments.

BACKGROUND

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), White River Field Office (WRFO) is proposing to construction four new sections of fence that will improve management of wild horses within the Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area (HMA) and to address resource concerns associated with wild horses gaining access to areas outside of the designated HMA boundary. The HMA boundary consists of a 137 mile perimeter of which consists of adequately fenced sections. At this time, the WRFO proposes to fix four sections of fence that no longer adequately keep wild horses from the ability to travel from inside to outside the HMA because: 1) portions of it have never been fenced, 2) an existing fence has been damaged or destroyed so

that it is no longer functional, or 3) there are not effective topographic barriers to deter wild horses from leaving the HMA.

In addition to concerns about other natural resource conflicts (e.g., listed plant species and riparian areas), there are also concerns about the welfare of people and the wild horses. Along State Highway 64 and Rio Blanco County Road 5, wild horses have been injured or killed by vehicles. Vehicle collisions with wild horses also pose a risk to human health and safety.

Additional Background Information:
During the 2012 and 2013 field seasons, WRFO staff started conducting field reconnaissance of the HMA boundary for functionality, as well as for verification of fence location to aid in updating grazing allotment boundary mapping which also included the use of aerial photography and spot checking locations. The field reconnaissance also included checking other associated fencing associated with the HMA.

Approximately 40 miles remain of the 137 mile perimeter in order for the WRFO staff to complete the field reconnaissance of the current fencing situation that exists as the Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area boundary. WRFO staff will continue to check the remaining sections of the perimeter during the next several field seasons. There may be additional sections of the HMA requiring a form of fence construction consisting of either repairs or new construction with any new sections identified there will be separate analysis done under a separate National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document.

FINDING OF NO SIGNFICANT IMPACT

I have reviewed the Environmental Assessment (EA), DOI-BLM-CO-N05-2014-0035-EA, Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area New Fence Construction Projects. Based on the interdisciplinary analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the attached environmental assessment, and considering the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) significance criteria in 40 CFR 1508.27, I have determined that the impacts associated with the implementation of the Proposed Action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required as per Section 102 (2) (C) of NEPA.

Context

The proposed project areas are site-specific actions directly involving the BLM administered public lands that do not in and of itself have international, national, regional, or state-wide importance. The proposed project areas are located in an area various locations within or adjacent to the Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area boundary. The Proposed Action is the installation of four sections of fence line in specific locations within the analysis area. The BLM proposes to initiate the fence line construction starting approximately August 15 or later after all necessary analysis is completed, once the decision becomes final, and when the funds get appropriated to the project.

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 Proposed Action is expected to meet the BLM's objectives for wild horse management of maintaining a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple use relationship consistent with other resource needs. This EA considers both beneficial and adverse impacts of the proposed fence sections, as well as other alternatives, and the impacts that may result under each alternative. The Proposed Action is expected to address both the human and wild horse safety concerns as well as reduce the number of wild horses that gain access to areas outside of the Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area. The Proposed Action utilizes a common means of wild horse management throughout Colorado and other states.

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

With successful construction of fences along State Highway 64 and Rio Blanco County Road 5 there would be a positive impact to public health and safety in that wild horses would have limited access to the public highway transportation system versus the current open range occurrences that happen with frequent occurrences on both of those heavily used public road ways. The potential effect on public health and safety would also protect the health and safety of the wild horses.

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 wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas present, no park lands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, or Wilderness Study Areas within the project areas. The Proposed Action has no potential to affect unique characteristics such as historic or cultural resources. Archaeological site clearances will be conducted along the potential placement location of the fence line prior to the construction of the fence. If cultural resources are discovered in an area, a new location would be identified for the placement of the fence line.

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

Wild horse management has occurred since 1971. The White River ROD/RMP recognizes wild horse management in the Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area for 135-235 wild horses. The Proposed Action will continue to aid in that management by keeping wild horses off of heavily utilized public road ways as well as keeping the wild horse herd within the boundary of the Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area. Thus, the Proposed Action is similar to what has been recommended for wild horse management and is not expected to generate controversy.

The effects of the Proposed Action on the quality of the human environment are not considered to be highly controversial, and are well known and understood. This is demonstrated through the effects analysis in the EA. Portions of the public view that wild horses should be able to able to utilize any public lands and advocate removal of livestock. However, the effects of wild horse

management on the quality of the human environment are documented though the many years of management of wild horses, and are not highly controversial. Along with wild horses the specific areas are currently being utilized by wildlife and livestock.

5. Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risk.
The Proposed Action has no known effects on the human environment which are considered highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks, as demonstrated through the effects analysis in the EA.

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 action is compatible with future considerations of actions required to improve wild horse management in conjunction with meeting the objectives for habitat within the Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.
The Proposed Action is not related to other actions with individually significant, but cumulatively significant impacts. Future projects occurring within the proposed project areas would be evaluated through the appropriate NEPA process and analyzed under a site-specific NEPA document.

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.
The Proposed Action has no potential to adversely affect properties listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, and would not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. A cultural resource inventory would be completed prior to constructing any of the proposed fence sections. Proposed fence lines will be cleared to determine the presence of sites that are unclassified, eligible, or potentially eligible sites for listing. Archaeological site clearances and avoidance measures would ensure that loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources does not occur.

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.
The Proposed Action would have no effect on any threatened or endangered species or habitat determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act. No listed, proposed, or candidate animal species are known to make appreciable use of the project areas, and there are no known listed, proposed, or candidate plant species within the proposed project fence lines.

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

The Proposed Action would not violate or threaten to violate any Federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. The Proposed Action is in conformance with all applicable regulations in Title 43 of the Code of Federal Regulations. The Proposed Action would not violate the Migratory Bird Treaty Act or the Endangered Species Act. All practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm and unnecessary and undue degradation of the public lands and their resources are incorporated into the Proposed Action.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL: _____

Field Manager

DATE SIGNED: _____