



United States Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management
1803 West Highway 160
Monte Vista, CO 81144



In Reply Refer to:
9211
(CO500)GT

February 9, 2005

Memorandum

To: State Director (931)

From: Center Manager/Forest Supervisor, San Luis Valley Public Lands Center

Subject: Approval of Plan Amendment

Attached, you will find my recommendation for approval of an amendment to the San Luis Valley Resource Management Plan of 1991. This amendment will incorporate the recently completed Fire Management Plan into the RMP.

Attached to this memorandum are: Environmental Assessment CO-210-2002-0013 EA; the FONSI/ Decision Record; and a copy of the letter to the Governor.

The Fire Management Plan defines a strategy for managing and prioritizing wildland fire and prescribing vegetation treatments for fuel hazard reduction and resource benefit. Public lands will be managed under one of four fire management types and twenty two fire management units for the purposes of wildland fire and prescribed vegetation management. The EA and the FMP also serve as a programmatic analysis for fuel hazard reduction and vegetation treatments to benefit resources. This will give general direction to guide vegetation treatments and help coordinate treatments where possible.

Very few public comments were received on the Fire Management Plan, with all being in support of the plan. No protests were received by the Washington Office. No inconsistencies with the state and local plans, programs and policies were identified. The Governor's Consistency Review concluded on January 28, 2005. Coordination was completed with Alamosa, Conejos, Costilla, Rio Grande, and Saguache Counties. Interagency coordination was completed with the Rio Grande National Forest.

FONSI

CO-210-2002-0013 EA

The environmental assessment, analyzing the environmental effects of the proposed action, has been reviewed. The approved mitigation measures result in a finding of no significant impact on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary to further analyze the environmental effects of the proposed action.

DECISION RECORD

CO-210-2002-0013 EA

DECISION:

It is my decision to approve the San Luis Valley Fire and Fuels Management Plan (FMP) and amend the San Luis Valley Resource Management Plan (RMP) of 1991.

SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE DECISION:

The EA and FMP define a strategy for managing and prioritizing wildland fire and prescribing vegetation treatments for fuel hazard reduction and resource benefit. Public lands will be managed under one of four fire management types and twenty two fire management units for the purposes of wildland fire and prescribed vegetation management. The EA and FMP also serve as a programmatic analysis for fuel hazard reduction vegetation treatments and vegetation treatments to benefit resources. This will give general direction to guide vegetation treatments and help coordinate vegetation treatments where possible.

RATIONALE FOR DECISION:

The FMP was based upon the best available science and completed to comply with the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (2001 Federal Fire Policy). The Policy directed BLM Field Offices to have an approved FMP for every area with burnable vegetation. The amendment to the RMP brings the San Luis Valley Resource Management Plan in compliance with Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy.

The following benefits are anticipated to occur from implementing the FMP:

Human Health and Social Benefits:

- Firefighter and public safety is maintained as first priority in every fire management activity.
- A long-term strategy for fuel reduction and vegetation treatments will better protect firefighters, human lives and property.
- It incorporates public health and environmental quality considerations.

Environmental Benefits:

- It will improve public land health, as defined by the *Colorado Standards for Public Land Health*.
- It will reduce environmental impacts (i.e., excessive soil erosion, degraded water quality, damage to wildlife habitat) from catastrophic wildland fires.
- It recognizes areas where wildland fire can be used as an essential ecological process and an agent of natural change under preset conditions.
- It supports other resource management activities and their implementation.
- Special status species and their habitat will benefit from upfront consideration in wildland fire planning and prescriptive vegetation management.

Economic Benefits

- Proactive vegetation treatments are also presumed to lower costs to taxpayers over the long-term. Suppressing large or catastrophic wildland fires imposes significant costs for mobilizing firefighters and fire suppression equipment, including fire engines, aircraft, and associated fuels and supplies.

MITIGATION MEASURES:

Wildland fire suppression and prescribed vegetation treatments can have detrimental social, economic and environmental impacts. The FMP and EA (pages 21, 31, 39, 46, 47, 56, 63, 68, 80, 82, and 84) outline measures and guidelines to reduce the negative affects of implementing the FMP.

COORDINATION:

Federal, State, local, and interagency coordination were essential in the development of the FMP and will be fundamental in the application of the FMP. The FMP was coordinated across ownership and jurisdictional boundaries to create a coordinated, interagency effort that specifies appropriate management actions for wildland fires and prescriptive vegetation treatments.

The FMP was completed with the assistance of the Colorado State Forest Service, Alamosa, Conejos, Costilla, Rio Grande, and Saguache Counties, The Nature Conservancy, local Volunteer Fire Departments, Colorado Division of Wildlife, US Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Colorado Air Pollution Control Division.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT:

A Notice of Intent to amend the RMP was published in the Federal Register on May 8, 2002 (Volume 67, Number 89, Page 30959).

Public workshops were held in Saguache on June 10, 2002 and Alamosa on June 13, 2002. The open houses provided ideas and suggestions that helped create a draft FMP. The Del Norte, LaJara, and Saguache Field Managers then asked for comments on the draft FMP via a formal comment period that ran from May 11, 2002 through June 24, 2002. The 60-day Governor's

consistency review and the 30-day protest period occurred from December 2004 to January 2005.

PROTEST OPPORTUNITIES:

Any person who participated in the planning process and has an interest that is or may be adversely affected by the amendment of a resource management plan may protest such amendment. A protest may raise only those issues that were submitted for the record during the planning process. New issues may not be brought into the record at the protest state.

The protest shall be in writing and shall be filed with the Director, at the following address:

For regular mail:

Director (210)
Bureau of Land Management
Attn: Brenda Williams, Protest Coordinator
P.O. Box 66538
Washington, D.C., 20035

For overnight (FedEx) mail:

Director (210)
Bureau of Land Management
Attn: Brenda Williams, Protest Coordinator
1620 L Street, N.W., Suite 1075
Washington, D.C., 20036

For an amendment, the protest must be filed within 30 days of the publication of the notice of its effective date. The effective date is .

The protest shall contain: 1) the name, mailing address, telephone number, and interest of the person filing the protest; 2) a statement of the issue or issues being protested; 3) a statement of the part or parts of the amendment being protested; 4) a copy of all documents addressing the issue or issues that were submitted during the planning process by the protesting party or an indication of the date the issue or issues were discussed for the record; and 5) a concise statement explaining why the State Director's decision is believed to be wrong. *This is the critical part of your protest.* Take care to document all relevant facts. As much as possible, reference or cite the planning documents, environmental analysis documents, or available planning records (i.e., meeting minutes or summaries, correspondence, etc.). A protest that merely expresses disagreement with the Colorado BLM State Director's proposed decision, without any data, will not provide us with the benefit of your information or insight. In this case, the Director's review will be based on the existing analysis and supporting data.

The Director will promptly render a decision on the protest. The decision will be in writing and will set forth the reasons for the decision. The decision of the Director will be the final decision of the Department of the Interior.

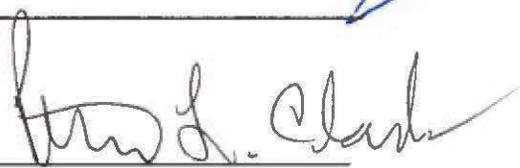
The project file is available for public review at the SLV Public Lands Center, 1803 W Hwy 160, Monte Vista, CO. Please direct questions about this decision record/FONSI to Jim Rhett, Associate Center Manager, San Luis Valley Public Lands Center, (719)852-6200, Brian Garcia-Fuels, San Luis Valley Public Lands Center, (719) 852-6255, or Glenda Torres, San Luis Valley Public Lands Center, (719) 852-6203.

NAME OF PREPARER: Brian Garcia, Glenda Torres and Neal Beetch

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR: Mark Swinney 

DATE SIGNED: 2/28/05

SIGNATURE OF RECOMMENDING OFFICIAL:



Peter L. Clark
Center Manager
San Luis Valley Public Land Center

DATE SIGNED:

3/1/05

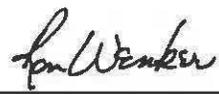
ATTACHMENTS:

1. San Luis Valley Fire and Fuels Management Plan, September 2004
2. Environmental Assessment Record CO-210-2002-0013 EA

APPROVAL

It is my decision to approve the amendment for the San Luis Valley Fire and Fuels Management Plan to the San Luis Valley RMP, as described in the Associate Center Manager's recommendation and analyzed in Environmental Assessment CO-210-2002-0013EA.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:



Ron Wenker, State Director

DATE SIGNED:

3/21/05