



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Butte Field Office
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Butte, Montana 59701-9701
www.blm.gov/mt

In Reply Refer To:
4160 MTB(070)

AUG 31 2012

DECISION RECORD

Upper Big Hole East Landscape Restoration Project DOI-BLM-MT-B070-2011-55-EA

BACKGROUND

The Upper Big Hole East Landscape Restoration Project was developed to address land health issues and implement restoration projects to: (1) reduce the density of trees in Douglas-fir and lodgepole pine forests to restore or increase stand vigor and understory diversity; (2) reduce conifers from sagebrush/grassland meadows to restore and/or maintain current and historic sagebrush/grassland habitats; (3) reduce conifers in aspen and riparian habitats to restore and/or maintain aspen stands and increase the vigor and diversity of riparian vegetation; (4) restore instream habitat for fish and other aquatic dependent species; (5) reduce the risk from wildland fire in the wildland-urban interface; (6) reassess three roads for public access; (7) issue grazing permits and improve livestock grazing management; and (8) close unsafe abandoned mines.

The public was involved and interested throughout the development of this EA. Public comments helped to define issues and develop alternatives for accomplishing management goals and objectives. Public participation in this project started in 2011 via public scoping notice sent to all residents within the project area, in addition to a press release requesting public input during scoping. A scoping letter explaining the project and requesting public comments was mailed to approximately 350 federal agencies, local, state and county government Cooperators and tribes. A press release was issued in the Montana Standard on August 30, 2011. The Butte Field Office received 16 responses providing comments on the proposal. Comments were addressed by modifying the proposed action and refining project design features, creating alternatives to the proposed action, incorporating the comment into the analysis, or explaining why the comments do not warrant further agency response. All comments received as well as the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) responses to comments are included in the Administrative Record for the project.

In addition to scoping notices and requests for comments during planning, the Butte Field Office also gave a presentation at the Big Hole Watershed Committee meeting, where many members of the community within the project area were present. On May 23, 2012, the environmental assessment was released to the public for a 30-day comment period and an open house was held at the Wise River Community Center to provide further opportunities for the public to ask questions, view maps, and provide comments.

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DECISION AND SUMMARY OF THE SELECTED ALTERNATIVE

It is my decision to authorize the riparian vegetation treatments, and travel route designations, as described in Alternative B, including corresponding design features, of the Upper Big Hole East Landscape Restoration Project.

Riparian treatments are designed to enhance existing riparian vegetation in 240 acres of existing riparian areas within the project area. Riparian restoration will include the removal of conifers to reduce competition and overtopping of aspen, willows and other shade intolerant species and/or planting of riparian species. Both temporary and permanent exclosures will be built as a method of comparing differences in vegetation within and outside of treatment areas.

Travel route designations on 1.11 miles of existing, but not previously inventoried, routes will be implemented as analyzed in Alternative B. New route designations on existing routes in the Jimmie New Area will designate 2.83 miles as open with seasonal restrictions to comply with elk calving road density requirements, while at the same time providing public access.

Also included in Alternative B are fuels treatments in the wildland urban interface, forest restoration projects, range permit renewals and range improvement projects that are included in separate decision that also include protest and appeal provisions.

RATIONALE

My decision is based on Land Health Evaluation and Assessment Reports, impacts disclosed in the Upper Big Hole East Landscape Restoration Project EA (DOI-BLM-MT-070-2011-0055-EA), site specific monitoring and assessments in the related allotment files, other detailed resource reports, first-hand knowledge of my staff, and review of public comments. I have reviewed the alternatives analyzed in detail to determine if they were responsive to the purpose and need for this proposal and the issues relevant to it. I also reviewed the alternatives that were considered, but not analyzed in detail, to help me decide if the analysis had considered a reasonable range of alternatives. I find that the alternatives considered address the key issues and provide a reasonable range to consider.

Selecting Alternative B (the proposed action), will improve land health by restoring and diversifying habitats on BLM lands within the project area through a variety of vegetation treatments. The action outlined in this decision is in conformance with the Butte Field Office Resource Management Plan, the Pioneer Landscape Analysis, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, and BLM policies and Federal regulations.

The environmental analysis has determined that the riparian treatments and travel route designations in the Upper Big Hole East Landscape Restoration project area, along with the design features and decision described above, will improve land health (by restoring the composition of riparian and upland areas while promoting diversity and vigor in the ecosystem);

restore critical wildlife habitat (riparian areas and upland sites) and promote motorized and non-motorized public access within the project area.

Modifications listed in the above decision (design features included in Chapter 2 of the EA) are incorporated to clarify treatment designations and to allow for greater flexibility to implement the project in varying environmental conditions.

In response to two BLM outreach efforts conducted for the Upper Big Hole East Landscape Project, sixteen written comments were received during project scoping and eight written comments during the 30-day comment period when the EA was posted on the Butte Field Office external website. The BLM welcomes and appreciates any input and interest expressed in the management of the public's land. These comments were considered during development of the environmental assessment and in the decision making process. The completed EA is available on the Butte Field Office website:

http://www.blm.gov/mt/st/en/fo/butte_field_office/upperbigholeeastlandscapeproject.html

APPEAL PROCESS

The decisions on riparian vegetation treatments, and travel route designations may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations contained in 43 CFR Part 4. Public notification of this decision will be considered to have occurred on upon posting to the BLM website or delivery of the decision via mail service.. Within 30 days of receipt of this decision, a notice of appeal must be filed and received in the office of the authorized officer at Bureau of Land Management, Butte Field Office, 106 North Parkmont, Butte, Montana 59701. 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, Office of Hearings and Appeals, U.S. Department of the Interior, 801 North Quincy St., Suite 300, Arlington, VA 22203 within 30 days after the notice of appeal is filed with the authorized officer.

The appellant has the burden of showing that the decision appealed from is in error.

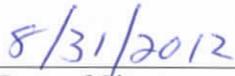
This decision becomes effective upon the expiration of the time allowed for filing an appeal unless a petition for a stay is timely filed together with a *Notice of Appeal* (43 CFR 4.21).

If you wish to file a petition for stay pursuant to 43 CFR Part 4.21(b), the petition for stay should accompany your notice of appeal and shall show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

- (1) The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied,
- (2) The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits,
- (3) The likelihood of irreparable harm to the appellant or resources if the stay is not granted, and
- (4) Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

If a petition for stay is submitted with the notice of appeal, a copy of the notice of appeal and petition for stay must be served on each party named in the decision from which the appeal is taken, and with the IBLA at the same time it is filed with the authorized officer.


Authorized Officer


Date of Signature

cc: Western Watersheds Project
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