

Finding of No Significant Impact

Missoula Field Office

INTRODUCTION

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Missoula Field Office, has conducted an environmental analysis (#DOI-BLM-MT-B010-2014-0007-EA) for a proposed wild horse ecosanctuary to be located on private lands near the town of Drummond in Granite County, Montana.

Based upon a review of the Rural Sustainability Organization Wild Horse Ecosanctuary Environmental Assessment (#DOI-BLM-MT-B010-2014-0007-EA or ‘the EA’), I have determined that the proposed action is not a major federal action and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity as defined in 40 CFR 1508.27. As this project would occur on private lands, environmental effects disclosed for BLM-administered lands in the Garnet Resource Management Plan Environmental Impact Statement do not apply. This project is consistent with the Garnet Resource Management Plan. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not needed. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the alternatives as described below.

CONTEXT

The action involves potentially placing excess wild horses from the BLM’s wild horse and burro program onto approximately 15,000 acres of private lands to provide a humane, quality life in an ecosanctuary setting. The ecosanctuary would be located on private lands in Granite County, Montana. Alternative A is the Proposed Action and would entail the placement of up to 325 horses in the ecosanctuary. Alternative B was designed to address the issues generated based on scoping the proposed action and would entail placement of approximately 97 wild horses in the ecosanctuary. Alternative C is the No Action alternative under which these private lands would continue to be used as landowners otherwise choose.

INTENSITY

The following discussion is organized around the Ten Significance Criteria described in 40 CFR 1508.27. The following have been considered in evaluating intensity for this proposal.

Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse.

Chapters 4 and 5 of the EA discuss the direct, indirect and cumulative effects (beneficial and adverse) expected with implementation of the alternatives. None of the environmental effects discussed in detail in the EA are considered to be adversely significant.

The degree to which the selected alternative will affect public health or safety.

There are no known public health or safety issues associated with the alternatives.

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

There are no prime farm lands as defined by 7 CFR 657.5, caves designated under 43 CFR 73, wild and scenic rivers (either designated or suitable), designated wilderness or wilderness study areas or areas of critical environmental concern (ACEC) designated under 43 CFR 1610.7-2 that are in the project area addressed in the EA. Cultural resources have been addressed in the EA. In addition, the project would occur on private lands, over which the BLM would have no direct management authority.

The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

The types of proposed management activities and associated effects of the proposed action are routine in nature and would not be scientifically controversial.

The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

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

The 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 actions considered in the NEPA alternatives were considered by the interdisciplinary team within the context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. Significant cumulative effects are not expected. A complete analysis of the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the alternatives is described in Chapters 4 and 5 of the EA.

Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts – which include connected actions regardless of land ownership.

The interdisciplinary team evaluated the possible actions, including the connected action, in the context of past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions. Significant cumulative effects are not expected. Disclosure of the effects of the project is contained in Chapters 4 and 5 of the EA.

The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

No districts, sites, highways, structures or other objects that are listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places would be adversely affected by implementing any of the alternatives. In addition, the implementation of the project would not cause the loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.

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 of 1973, or the degree to which the action may adversely affect: 1) a proposed to be listed endangered or threatened species or its habitat, or 2) a species on BLM's sensitive species list.

Chapters 4 and 5 of the EA discuss the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to special status species. The project would have “no effect” on bull trout, Canada lynx, or Canada lynx critical habitat. The project would not jeopardize the continued existence of wolverine, a federal candidate species. For section 7 ESA consultation, the BLM made an effects determination of “May Affect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect” grizzly bear populations with this project. The proposed Limestone Ridge ecosanctuary unit is located north of I-90 and is located within grizzly bear habitat. Design features to properly dispose of livestock carcasses to eliminate the potential to attract bears; and to contact the BLM with any grizzly bear conflicts will be included as part of the project design. Implementation of the project is not expected to result in any adverse significant impacts to the grizzly bear or its habitat.

Section 7 ESA consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for project effects on grizzly bear was initiated on June 23, 2014.

Whether the action threatens a violation of a federal, state, local, or tribal law, regulation or policy imposed for the protection of the environment, where non-federal requirements are consistent with federal requirements.

The project does not violate any known Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment and it is consistent with applicable land management plans, policies, and programs.

Timothy J. La Marr, Acting Field Manager

Date