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-B010-2013-0017-EA, dated May 6, 2014) for a proposed action to address resource issues in the Chamberlain-Wales Creek watersheds in Powell County. The projects in the proposed action would create desirable vegetation conditions for current and future management; improve wildlife habitat; decrease the risk of severe wildfire; and result in some timber harvest.

The underlying need for the proposal would be met while accomplishing the following objectives:

Vegetation Management Objectives (Fire, Forestry, Wildlife Habitat)

- Restore remnant western larch stands with timber harvest and prescribed fire to facilitate regeneration.
- Create multi-story forest stand structure with timber harvest and prescribed fire to enhance habitat quality for snowshoe hare and Canada lynx.
- Improve forest resiliency, diversity, and health by using pre-commercial thinning to shift tree species arrangement, composition, and density to within the historical range of variability (desired condition).
- Enhance summer/winter wildlife habitat with pre-commercial thinning to promote/maintain the ecological integrity of ponderosa pine and associated vegetation communities along the Blackfoot river.
- Plant site-adapted conifer species to: (1) Improve tree stocking on recently acquired lands; and (2) Create multi-story vegetation structure in single-story lodgepole pine stands to benefit a variety of wildlife species such as the Canada lynx.
- Mimic and facilitate natural disturbance processes using prescribed fire within and outside of the Wales Creek Wilderness Study Area to: (1) Create a mosaic of vegetation patches within continuous lodgepole pine forest; (2) Improve wildfire management and decrease the risk of unnatural wildfire severity; and (3) Create a variety of vegetation structure in forest types to improve quality of wildlife habitat and availability.
- Restore lower elevation ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir savannah types from encroachment using prescribed fire.

The Chamberlain-Wales Creek project area includes the Chamberlain Creek, Wales Creek, Pearson Creek, Frazier Creek, and Bear Creek watersheds and vicinity. The project area lies just south of the Blackfoot River about seven miles southwest of Ovando, MT. The boundary encompasses 61,840 acres, of which 20,570 acres are BLM Public Lands. The project area includes the Wales Creek Wilderness Study Area; is used recreationally particularly for hunting; and supports several terrestrial and aquatic special status species (Federally listed and BLM

designated sensitive).

This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) pertains to decisions for proposed timber harvest (and associated temporary road construction and rehabilitation), precommercial thinning, prescribed burning and helispot establishment as described in the May 6, 2014, version of the EA. A No Action alternative and Proposed Action alternative were analyzed in the EA.

PLAN CONFORMANCE AND CONSISTENCY

The proposed action has been reviewed and found to be in conformance with the 1986 *Record of Decision issued for the Garnet Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement*, as amended (Garnet RMP/EIS). BLM administered lands are designated as Management Areas (MA), with each MA having specific management goals and guidelines. The Proposed Action complies with these goals and guidelines.

The vegetation treatments conform to MA direction and goals in Appendix A. The road treatments conform to the BMPs and goals in Appendix B. Although the use of prescribed burning in the WSA is not specifically mentioned in the plan, it is consistent with its objectives, goals, and decisions as they relate to Management Area 8 of the RMP. Under Management Guideline 7, fire management and control actions are to be consistent with the BLM Wilderness Management Policy referenced in BLM Manual 6330 - Management of BLM Wilderness Study Areas, Section 1.6-D-2c.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT DETERMINATION

Based upon a review of the EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that the project 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 and effects do not exceed those effects described in the Garnet RMP/FEIS. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not needed. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described below.

Context

The projects are site-specific actions directly involving approximately 2.5 miles of temporary roads and approximately 5,000 acres of BLM administered land in the Chamberlain-Wales planning area, seven miles southeast of Ovando, MT. In and of itself, the project does not have international, national, regional, or statewide importance.

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:

1. Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse.

The proposed action would affect resources as described in Section 4.0: *Environmental Impacts* of the EA. The proposed projects are unlikely to have significant adverse impacts on these resources because of the design features described in section 2.3 of the EA. The design features are project specific and would reduce the risk or eliminate adverse impacts to affected resources to within RMP/EIS guidelines and standards. The project would have a number of beneficial effects to vegetative communities and wildlife habitat described in chapter 4 of the EA.

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

Effects of the projects to public health and human safety would not be significant because the projects occur in a forested area away from urban and residential areas and the majority of the project area is closed year round to motorized public use.

3. 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.

Section 1.8 of the EA identifies issues for the project. Table 3-1 in the EA summarizes the following determinations made for each of the resources identified related to the issues: not present; present but not affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required; or present with potential for impact.

Chapter 4 of the EA analyzed in detail the issues in section 1.8 and those resource elements that were given a determination of present with potential for impact (PI). None of these resources would be significantly impacted because of the design features that would be implemented during project activities.

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

The proposed projects are not unique or unusual. The BLM has experience implementing similar actions in similar areas without scientifically controversial, highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks.

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

The effects associated with the project do not have uncertain, unique, or unknown risks, because the BLM has experience implementing similar actions in similar areas without these risks. Project Design Features (EA section 2.3) would minimize risks associated with the projects.

6. 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 proposed action would not establish a precedent for future actions, nor would it represent a decision in principle about a further consideration for the following reasons: (1) The project is within the scope of proposed activities documented in the Garnet RMP; (2) The BLM has experience implementing similar actions in similar areas so this decision would thus not set a precedent for future actions or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

7. 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 project effects in the context of past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions on lands of all ownerships in the cumulative impacts analysis area for each resource or issue. Significant cumulative effects are not anticipated. A complete disclosure of the cumulative effects of the projects is discussed in section 4.4 of the EA.

8. 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.

There are no known districts, highways, or structures listed in or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places within the Chamberlain Watershed EA area at this time. There are sites eligible for the National Register of Historic Places located within the Chamberlain Watershed EA area but are not located in the defined proposed project areas. Class III Cultural Resource Inventories would take place prior to project implementation and re-design, avoidance and/or other mitigation measures would be applied to reduce or eliminate adverse effects to cultural resources.

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 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.

Vegetation treatments have been designed based on the ecology and habitat requirements of the grizzly bear and the Canada lynx. Design features in the proposed action reduce impacts and risks to special status species.

The BLM consulted with staff from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the Rocky Mountain Research Station (RMRS) to assist with project design as related to federally

listed species (grizzly bear and Canada lynx).

The BLM has determined that implementation of the proposed federal action "may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect" the grizzly bear, Canada lynx, and Canada lynx critical habitat. The proposed action is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the wolverine (candidate). There would be no effect to bull trout or designated critical habitat. These determinations are based on the best current and scientific information available. Based on these determinations, section 7 ESA Consultation for the grizzly bear, Canada lynx and Canada lynx critical habitat was initiated on November 6, 2013. The BLM received concurrence from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in a memorandum dated December 20, 2013, thus completing consultation. The BLM has complied with the Endangered Species Act with this project.

The BLM has also determined that the project would not likely jeopardize the continued existence of the federally proposed wolverine.

Effects of the proposed action on other BLM sensitive species are discussed in Sections 4.3.2 and 4.4.2 of the EA. These potential effects would not be significant.

10. **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 proposed action has been designed to follow federal, state, and local laws.

John W. Thompson
Authorized Officer

May 7, 2014
Date