FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT and DECISION RECORD
FOR
Bluebird Fuels Treatment
Environmental Assessment
EA-NV-030-08-027

INTRODUCTION

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Carson City District, has conducted an environmental assessment (EA), EA-NV-030-08-027, to evaluate environmental impacts of a 246 acre fuels treatment project on BLM administered lands in the Fish Springs area east of Gardnerville, Nevada. The project is directly adjacent to private land containing numerous primary residences and associated outbuildings. The project is part of a nation-wide initiative to protect communities that are considered at high risk from wildfire damage. Fish Springs is included on the list of at risk communities found in Federal Register Volume 66, Number 160, August 17, 2001 and has been assigned a High Hazard category in the Douglas County Wildfire Risk/Hazard Assessment Project (2005).

The primary purpose of the project is to help protect homes in the area from wildfire damage, provide a safer access/evacuation route and provide fire fighters a safer area in which to conduct fire suppression operations. The proposed project would reduce the amount and continuity of fuel within the treatment area in order to reduce fire intensity.

The EA considered two alternatives: The Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative. The Proposed Action is the preferred alternative for the action. The EA, EA-NV-030-08-027 is incorporated by reference in this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

PLAN CONFORMANCE AND CONSISTENCY

The Proposed Action has been reviewed for conformance with the Carson City District Office Consolidated Resource Management Plan (2001) and the Carson City District Office Fire Management Plan (2004). The Proposed Action is found to be consistent with the plans and policies of applicable local, county, State, Tribal, and Federal agencies and governments.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT DETERMINATION

Based on the effects discussed in the Bluebird Fuels Treatment EA, it has been determined that the Proposed Action alternative is not a major federal action and would 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. Therefore an environmental impact statement is not needed. This finding is based on the following discussion. The finding of no significant impact (FONSI) is based, in part, on the consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the context and to the intensity of the effects described in the EA.

Context:

The selected alternative is a site specific action of treating 246 acres of BLM administered lands within the Carson City District, Douglas County, Nevada. The discussion of the significance criteria that follows applies to the intended action and is within the context of local importance. Chapter III of the EA details the effects of the selected alternative. None of the effects identified, including direct, indirect and cumulative effects are considered to be significant.

Intensity:
The following discussion is organized around the ten criteria for Significance described under 40 CFR §1508.27 (b).

1) *Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.*
Both potential beneficial and adverse effects were considered in the EA. Implementing the selected alternative would treat fuels within the wildland urban interface, reduce hazardous fuels and create defensible space for fire suppression efforts. Life and property and resource values will be protected by actions resulting from this decision.

Both beneficial and adverse effects have been considered when making a determination of significance. While there will be beneficial effects, this action does not rely on those effects to balance potentially adverse environmental effects. Potential adverse effects have been substantially or fully reduced through project design.

2) *The degree to which the selected alternative will affect public health or safety:*
The project will reduce the risk of large, high severity wildland fire on 246 acres. No aspect of the project has been identified as having the potential to substantially and adversely affect public health or safety. These efforts to reduce the risk of high severity wildland fire will improve firefighter and public safety.

The effects are not significant because the project will have a beneficial effect and not an adverse effect on public health and safety within the project area including the residential areas by reducing current and expected risks of a large wildland fire through the reduction of existing fuels. The potential for severe wildland fire, with consequent loss of property, resource, social, and recreational values will be reduced by project implementation.

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.*
There are no park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers or ecologically critical areas within the project area. There is potential for cultural sites and a plant species proposed for Federal listing within the project area but prior to implementation a survey will be completed to determine if the resources of concern are present.

The survey will identify and protect the resources of concern in the project area. Design criteria, such as designating avoidance areas, will maintain their integrity and prevent adverse effects and the decision will improve their protection and defensibility in the event of wildland fire.

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

Based on our review of public comments and the project analysis, we do not find any highly controversial effects to the human environment. There is no scientific controversy over the effects of the proposal and local support exists for the project.

The effects of this project are similar in nature to those of other vegetation treatment and fuels treatment projects that have been implemented. Public comments suggested concern about the project's effects, but the effects are not highly controversial. The effects from the selected alternative are not significant because they are not highly controversial.

5) *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.*
Similar projects conducted by the District and other BLM offices have exhibited the desired change in vegetation composition, structure and fuel loading. The analysis is based on our best use of available data and our previous experience with this type of fuels treatment project. The level of risk associated with the implementation and results of this project are recognized and acceptable.

Vegetation and fuels treatments have been implemented for many years in the vegetation types typical of the project area and effects from those projects have been documented. These types of treatments have not shown any unique or unknown risks to the human environment. The effects from the selected alternative are not significant because they are not uncertain and do not involve unique or unknown risks.

6) *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or presents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*
The treatment proposed has been occurring for over a decade on Federal lands. This action does not set any precedent for future actions.

There has been no indication that a precedent for future actions with significant effects will be established by implementation of the selected alternative.

7) *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*
Cumulative effects were analyzed in the EA. Due to implementation of design criteria, it is not likely that the selected alternative, when considered with past, present, or future actions, will cause short or long-term adverse cumulative effects to any resources within the project area.

The effects from the selected alternative are not significant because the project is not expected to result in cumulative effects when considered in combination with other past actions or reasonably foreseeable future actions. Due to the addition of design criteria and the difference in location of the other similar ongoing activities no adverse cumulative effects are anticipated.

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 is potential for cultural sites within the project area but prior to implementation a survey will be completed to determine if sites of concern are present.

The survey will identify and protect sites of concern in the project area. Design criteria, such as designating avoidance areas, will maintain their integrity and prevent adverse effects and the decision will improve their protection and defensibility in the event of wildland fire.

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 ESA of 1973.*

The project areas fall within potential habitat for *Ivesia webberi* a plant species proposed for federal listing. A survey would be completed to determine if any of the potential plant species of concern are present.

Based on the survey results, avoidance areas would be established to avoid impacting any plant occurrences. There are no known federally listed animal species or habitats within the proposed project area.

10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*
The project and associated design criteria conforms to Federal, State and local laws for the protection of the environmental and meets disclosure requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act. The Proposed Action alternative is consistent with the Carson City District Office Consolidated Resource Management Plan (2001) and the Carson City District Office Fire Management Plan (2004).

The effects from the selected alternative are not significant because the action does not threaten a violation of Federal, State, or local laws.

DECISION

It is my decision to implement the Proposed Action, thinning of trees, brush and grass through mechanical mastication in two discontinuous treatment areas on up to 246 acres in a manner that creates an area where wildfire would burn with reduced intensity. The project is presented in detail in the Proposed Action of the Bluebird Fuels Treatment Environmental Assessment EA-NV-030-08-027.

Rational for the Decision:

The proposed action is consistent with provisions found in the Carson City Field Office Consolidated Resource Management Plan (2001), and the Carson City Field Office Fire Management Plan (2004).

The BLM, the East Fork Fire and Paramedic Districts, the Nevada Fire Safe Council and local residents are concerned that in the event of an intense wildfire, residential areas would be difficult to defend, property damage could be substantial, access/evacuation could be dangerous, and the lives of the public and firefighters could be at risk.

The proposed action responds to the primary purposes identified in the environmental assessment.

1. The proposed action will help protect homes in the area from wildfire damage.
2. The proposed action will provide a safer access/evacuation route and provide fire fighters a safer area in which to conduct fire suppression operations.

Mitigation:

Eligible cultural resources or plant species proposed for federal listing discovered prior to or during implementation of the project will be avoided. As always respect for all cultural resources would be maintained especially in the case of human remains that may be inadvertently discovered in the process of conducting the proposed project.

Monitoring and Compliance:

Monitoring will be conducted throughout the project area both during and after project implementation. Monitoring will consist of periodic surveys to:

1. Ensure that the initial fuel treatment objectives are met,
2. Evaluate fuel load recovery,
3. Identify invasive species for subsequent treatment,
5. Ensure that motorized vehicle use is restricted to existing roads and trails in treated areas.
6. During implementation of the proposed action the treatment area will be monitored for the presence of cultural resources.

Public Involvement:

Scoping letters were mailed out on March 11, 2008. Letters were sent to: 74 residents living in the area, the East Fork Fire and Paramedic Districts, and the Nevada Fire Safe Council.

A well attended public meeting was held March 20, 2008 at the Fish Springs volunteer fire station to provide an opportunity for local residents and representatives from the East Fork Fire and Paramedic Districts and the Nevada Fire Safe Council to share their concerns about wildfire, discuss strategies to reduce wildfire risk to private and public property and discuss the Bluebird Fuels Treatment Project proposal.

A follow up meeting with a group of residents was held May 30, 2008 on the proposed project site to further discuss and refine the proposed action.

There is some demand for fuel wood in the nearby communities, but there is also a large potential supply of fuel wood available on public land in the nearby surrounding area. While there could be some minor loss of salvaged firewood that the community could use in this project, to take the additional steps to manage that use would slow down the very urgent action needed to reduce the imminent threat that wildfire now poses to natural resources and community safety. Comments from initial scoping in the community were opposed to opening the project area to public woodcutting so close to private residences, and fuel wood harvest has not been identified as a viable alternative for further consideration.

On June 23, 2008 a letter of consultation was sent to the Chair of the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California requesting their comments and concerns, if any, regarding the proposed action.

Scoping letters, including information where the preliminary environmental assessment could be found online for review, were mailed out on July 21, 2008 to 64 residents living in the area, the East Fork Fire and Paramedic Districts, and the Nevada Fire Safe Council.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities:

The decision to implement the Proposed Action may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals by following the guidance and procedures found in the Code of Federal Regulations(43 CFR Part 4; Subparts A, B, and E) and on Form 1842-1.

Contact Person:
For additional information concerning this decision, contact:

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8/22/08
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