ELY DISTRICT
CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION (CX) REVIEW
AND APPROVAL

Team Leader Cody Coombs Date June 22, 2007

Name of Proposed Action Sacramento Pass Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project

CX Number: CX-NV-040-07-0009 Project or Serial Number: JD26

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION REFERENCE

516 Departmental Manual 1.12—Hazardous fuels reduction activities using prescribed fire not to exceed 4,500 acres, and mechanical methods for crushing, piling, thinning, pruning, cutting, chipping, mulching, and mowing not to exceed 1,000 acres. Such activities shall be limited to areas (1) in wildland-urban interface and (2) Condition Classes 2 or 3 in Fire Regime Groups I, II, or III, outside of the wildland-urban interface; Shall be identified through a collaborative framework as described in "A Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment 10-year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan;" Shall be conducted consistent with agency and Departmental procedures and applicable land and resource management plans; Shall not be conducted in wilderness areas or impair the suitability of wilderness study areas for preservation as wilderness; Shall not include the use of herbicides or pesticides or the construction of new permanent roads or other new permanent infrastructure; and may include the sale of vegetative materials if the primary purpose of the activity is hazardous fuels reduction.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

The proposed action is to conduct a vegetation thinning project over approximately 500 acres of public land in the Wildlife Urban Interface (WUI) near Sacramento Pass. The treatment is planned to take place within pinyon-juniper and sagebrush vegetation directly to the south and east of US highway 50 (Map 1). Tree density would be reduced to approximately 20 to 25 trees per acre. This would result in a tree being left approximately every 42 to 47 feet. Trees left would consist of the larger mature trees greater than 12 inches in diameter at root collar. The smaller saplings and immature trees would be targeted for removal. Manual (chainsaw) and/or mechanical methods (bull hog, feller buncher, or similar piece of equipment that masticates trees) could be used to reduce the tree density.

If chainsaws were used all or a portion of the felled trees would be consolidated into piles and removed later through prescribed burning. Stumps from felled trees would stand no higher than six inches above the ground. Some slash consisting mainly of smaller branches with a diameter of two inches or less would be left to degrade naturally.

Removal of slash/biomass created if mechanical methods are used would depend on the type of equipment used. If a masticating type of equipment is used, the residue created would be left on site to degrade naturally. If equipment is used that cuts the trees whole, all or a portion of the trees could be piled and disposed of through prescribed burning or usable tree portions could be hauled off site for biomass utilization while unusable portions would be left to degrade naturally or later burned. If slash piles are created they would be removed as soon as possible through the use of prescribed fire. This would reduce the likelihood of the piles becoming infested with insects. The burning would likely occur when there is snow on the ground or after a precipitation event to prevent extreme soil heating.

Pre-treatment inventory data would be collected prior to implementing treatments to compare with post-treatment conditions. The area would also be monitored within at least the first and third growing season following treatments to determine if objectives have been met. Inventory and monitoring data would be collected using BLM approved methods. A monitoring plan for the project area would be developed prior to conducting treatments.

Vegetation cover and live fuel loading data would be collected in all vegetation types. These data would be collected at plots that would be either established randomly or by choosing areas that represent the typical vegetative conditions. Photo plots would also be established in addition to data collection plots.

After thinning is complete, post-treatment effects would be documented at the monitoring points with photos. Post-treatment monitoring would be conducted at the plots established during the pre-treatment inventory. The same data collected at the plots prior to the treatment would be collected beginning the first growing season after the treatment to determine if objectives have been met and for comparison to non-treated plots.

Areas identified as having limited seed banks as a result of low understory species density, or areas with high cheatgrass would be seeded using certified weed-free seed. These areas would be identified after collecting pre-treatment inventory data. If mechanical equipment is used that results in skidding of trees, these areas would be seeded and scarified and/or covered up through back dragging. Seed would be broadcasted aerially or with an all terrain vehicle (ATV).

Treatments identified above could be implemented in future years as maintenance treatments to maintain original project objectives.

The project resource goals are:

1. Reduce the risk of wildfire damage to privately owned property within the vicinity of the project by reducing the wildfire fuel loading within the area.

2. Reduce the threat of stand replacing fire within pinyon\juniper forestland ecological sites, and mountain brush/sagebrush ecological sites by creating openings in the project area disrupting the continuity of the trees, while protecting areas of mountain

brush/sagebrush sites within the project area.

The project resource objectives are:

Short Term (immediately post treatment)

1. Reduce pinyon and juniper tree density to 20 to 25 trees per acre within approximately 500-acre area near Sacramento Pass.

Long Term (five to ten years post treatment)

1. Reduce the risk of wildfire to the private property and improvements near Sacramento Pass;

2. Improve understory composition of desirable perennial species by 25% within a 500 acre area near Sacramento Pass;

3. Obtain Fire Regime Condition Class 1 within the project area.

Standard Operating Procedures to be Implemented

All treatment actions would comply with the *Ely District Policy Management Actions for the Conservation of Migratory Birds* (Instruction Memorandum NV-040-2001-02).

A sensitive species survey would be performed for any species that could have potential habitat within the project area. Any populations found would be avoided.

A cultural survey of the treatment area would be conducted and appropriate site documentation would be completed prior to thinning. Eligible cultural resources would be avoided or impacts would be mitigated as necessary before the treatment commences.

No new roads or trails would be created. Some off-road travel could occur to facilitate access to treatment sites. Off-road travel would be limited to that necessary to safely and practically achieve resource objectives.

The Ely District Noxious Weed Prevention Schedule and Policy would be adhered to during project treatments. Recommendations contained in the Weed Risk Assessment for the project would be followed.

Equipment would not be allowed to operate when the ground is unsuitable (i.e. excessively muddy or when saturated with moisture) or in terrain too steep to minimize ground impacts.

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Letters describing the project objectives and intent to complete this project were mailed to individuals and groups who have expressed interest in participating in hazardous fuels reduction projects as well as state and federal wildlife agencies. On December 22nd, 2006 a notice was put into the local news paper to notify and gather input from the public. During the scoping period of December 14, 2006 through January 12, 2007, comments were received from the Division of State Lands and the Paiute Indian Tribe both in support of the project. A Tribal Coordination meeting was held on January 17, 2007, and there were no issues brought forward pertaining to the project.

The specialists listed in Table 2 below were involved in reviewing the proposed action for impacts and the screening questions for Categorical Exclusions.

Table 2. Specialists involved in reviewing the proposed action for exceptions to National Environmental Policy Act Categorical Exclusions

NAME	**RESOURCE ASSIGNED**
Craig Hoover	Rangeland Resources/Livestock Grazing
Kurt Braun	Cultural Resources
Paul Podborny	Wildlife, Fisheries, Forestry, Threatened/Endangered/Sensitive Species
Bonnie Waggoner	Noxious and Invasive Weeds
Kari Harrison	Soils Management
Elvis Wall	Native American Religious Concerns and Coordination
Doris Metcalf	Land Uses and Realty
Dave Jeppeson	Wilderness Values, VRM, Recreation
Cody Coombs and Nicholas Brunson	Fire and Fuels Management

SCREENING FOR EXCEPTIONS TO CATEGORICAL EXCLUSIONS

The following exceptions apply to actions being considered as categorically excluded. Environmental documents must be prepared if any of these exceptions apply. Place an "X" in appropriate box. Would the proposed action:	**Yes**	**No**
1. have significant adverse effects on public health or safety?		X
2. have adverse effects on such unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources, park, recreation or refuge lands, wilderness areas, wild or scenic rivers, sole or principal drinking water aquifers, prime farmlands, wetlands, floodplains, or ecologically significant or critical areas, including those listed on the Department's National Register of Natural Landmarks?		X
3. have highly controversial environmental effects?		X
4. have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks?		X
5. establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects?		X
6. be directly related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects?		X
7. have adverse effects on properties listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places?		X
8. have adverse effects on species listed or proposed to be listed on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have adverse effects on designated Critical Habitat for these species?		X
9. require compliance with Executive Order 11988 (Floodplain Management), Executive Order 11990 (Protection of Wetlands), or the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act?		X
10. threaten to violate a Federal, State, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment?		X

FINDINGS

Based on review of the proposal and the ten exceptions listed above, this action qualifies as a categorical exclusion and an environmental analysis is not required. The proposed action is in conformance with current BLM Land Use Plans.

Approving Official: _____ Date: _____

Tye Petersen
Fire Management Officer