

**United States Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management**

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**Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-UT-G010-2009-0141-EA**

**April 12, 2010**

**McCook Ridge Hazardous Fuel Reduction**

*Location:*

Uintah County, Utah

**Township 14 South, Range 24 East, Sections 28, 32 & 33**

**Township 13 South, Range 24 East, Sections 4-6, and 8; SLBM.**

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared to analyze the McCook Ridge Hazardous Fuel Reduction project. The EA is an analysis of potential impacts that could result with the implementation of a proposed action or no action alternative. The EA assists the BLM in project planning and ensuring compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and in making a determination as to whether any “significant” impacts could result from the analyzed actions. “Significance” is defined by NEPA and is found in regulation 40 CFR 1508.27. An EA provides evidence for determining whether to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or a statement of “Finding of No Significant Impact” (FONSI). A Decision Record (DR), which includes a FONSI statement, is a document that briefly presents the reasons why implementation of the selected alternative will not result in “significant” environmental impacts (effects) beyond those already addressed in the Vernal Resource Management Plan (2008). This document provides the environmental assessment for the McCook Ridge Hazardous Fuel Reduction project.

### **PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION**

The purpose of the McCook Ridge Hazardous Fuel Reduction project is to reduce the buildup of hazardous fuels that have accumulated over the last several decades in order to prevent the potential for large catastrophic fire events, to restore natural fire regimes, and to maintain areas that provide for important ecological functions and habitat for keystone species. In addition, the proposed action is needed to maintain important sagebrush habitat for a variety of wildlife species in the project area.

### **CONFORMANCE WITH BLM LAND USE PLAN(S)**

The alternatives considered in this EA are in conformance with the Vernal Resource Management Plan Record of Decision (2008). The specific citations are listed below:

Page 78 in section Fire-4 reads: *Hazardous fuel reduction activities will be implemented primarily through the use of prescribed fire and managed wildland fire. In some cases, chemical and/or mechanical treatments will be used in conjunction with fire. Where social and/or resource constraints preclude the use of fire, mechanical and/or chemical treatments will be used.*

### **RELATIONSHIPS TO STATUTES, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PLANS**

Uintah County’s General Land Use Plan, as amended in 2007 relative to public land concerns: All alternatives considered in detail in the EA would be consistent with the County’s general planning objectives which state:

- To insure that public lands are managed for multiple use and sustained yield and to prevent waste of natural resources.
- To support the wise use, conservation and protection of public lands and its resources including well-planned management prescriptions.
- Management of forage resources directly affect water quality and water supplies.
- The proper management and allocation of forage on public lands is critical to the viability of the Basin's agricultural, recreation and tourism industry.

#### Federal Statutes and Regulations.

- Protection Act of September 20, 1922 (42 Stat. 857; U.S.C. 594).
- Taylor Grazing Act of June 28, 1934 (48 Stat. 1269; U.S.C. 315).
- Reciprocal Fire Protection Act of May 27, 1955(69 Stat. 66; 42 U.S.C. 1856, 1856a).
- Economy Act of June 30, 1932 (47 Stat. 417; 31 U.S.C. 686).
- The Federal Land Management and Policy Act of 1976 (FLPMA) (Public Law 94-579; 43 U.S.C. 1701).
- Disaster Relief Act, Section 417 (Public Law 93-288).
- 2001 Annual Appropriations Acts for the Department of the Interior.
- United States Department of the Interior Manual (910 DM 1.3).
- 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy.
- 2001 Updated Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy Update).
- 1998 Departmental Manual 620 Chapter 1, Wildland Fire Management General Policy and Procedures.
- 1998 BLM Handbook 9214, "Prescribed Fire Management" describes authority and policy for prescribed fire use on public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management.
- September 2000, "Managing the Impacts of Wildfires on Communities and the Environment."

- October 2000, National Cohesive Strategy goal is to coordinate an aggressive, collaborative approach to reduce the threat of wildland fire to communities and to restore and maintain land health.
- August 2001, “Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment -10 Year Comprehensive Strategy” provides a foundation for wildland agencies to work closely with all levels of government, tribes, conservation, and commodity groups and community-based restoration groups to reduce wildland fire risk to communities and the environment,

## **2.0 DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING PROPOSED ACTION:**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This EA focuses on the Proposed Action and No Action Alternatives. The No Action Alternative is considered and analyzed to provide a baseline for comparison of the impacts of the proposed action.

### **2.2 Proposed Action**

The proposed action involves the reduction of approximately 521 acres of hazardous fuels through use of the bullhog mastication device. The bullhog methodology involves the chipping of the trees with a reciprocating drum mounted on a rubber tired front end loader machine. The mastication treatment results in bark, sawdust, and wooden chips being left on the ground after treatment is completed.

In the project area, the P –J trees have increased in overall density and encroached into the sagebrush habitat type, increasing the overall fuel loads. The vegetation in the project area is comprised of sagebrush that has been encroached by Pinyon-Juniper trees. The sagebrush vegetative type has been designated as a Fire Regime Group III (Fire return interval 35-100 years). The project area has also been designated as being in a Class II Condition Class. The increased amount of P-J trees has resulted in a change in the Fire Regime Condition Class from a Class I to a Class II Condition Class. (Vernal Fire Management Plan, 2005) The departure from a Class I Condition Class to a Class II Condition Class indicates that at least one cycle of the natural fire regime fire interval has been missed due to historic fire suppression efforts. The change from a Class I to Class II has resulted in an increase of the hazardous fuel loads in the project area.

No new access roads would be needed to access the project area and access would be via existing roads and trails. No treatment work would be allowed during times of saturated soil conditions, which exist when ruts greater than 4” in depth are created by the bullhog machine in a straight line movement. No project work would be completed in or within 300 feet of any drainage.

The mastication area still has an adequate understory vegetation to protect the soil from erosion, following removal of the P-J trees. Therefore, reseeding this area after treatment would not be required. The project has been designed to provide for the optimum amount of edge effect in

order to increase the habitat values for wildlife, and to maintain the natural openings where the sagebrush habitat is located.

Treatment work is expected to occur after August 15, 2010. However, if treatment activities occur between May 1 and August 1, then a migratory bird survey would be conducted by a qualified wildlife biologist to determine if there are migratory bird species of concern, as listed by the Partners in Flight Species of Concern for the Colorado Plateau. Nesting trees occupied by any of these species would be avoided, with a 50 meter buffer of no disturbance around each identified nesting tree/shrub, during the nesting period.

Due to the potential for weed invasion within the project area, standard weed prevention measures would be followed. These include: conducting a pre-project weed inventory; washing equipment prior to entering the project area, and annual monitoring of the project area to detect and/or treat weed infestations.

No chemicals subject to SARA Title III in amounts greater than 10,000 pounds would be used. No extremely hazardous substances as defined in 40 CFR 355 in threshold planning quantities would be used.

### **2.3 No Action**

Under this alternative, no hazardous fuel reduction actions would be taken. Current resource conditions and trends would continue.

### **2.4 Alternatives Considered, but Eliminated from Further Analysis: Prescribed Fire:**

The project contains a moderate amount of cheatgrass within the understory. The use of prescribed fire would result in an expansion of the cheatgrass species which typically responds favorably to fire. The expansion of cheatgrass from fire would result in an increased amount of the highly flammable fuel bed, which would increase the overall hazardous fuel loading. Thus this alternative was not considered since it would not meet the purpose and need of reducing hazardous fuel loads. In the project area, the Wyoming sagebrush habitat provides crucial elk winter and summer range, and crucial mule deer summer range, in addition to providing habitat for a host of sagebrush obligate non game species. The loss of this habitat type combined with the ongoing loss of habitat loss from the active energy development in the area would result in even more loss of this important habitat type. This alternative was not considered, because it would not maintain sagebrush habitat for wildlife species.

### **Hand Treatments**

The use of hand treatments (chainsaws) to achieve the hazardous fuel reduction objective was considered but eliminated. This treatment would encompass the use of chainsaws to cut down the trees and leave them where they lie. Presently, it is estimated that the density of P-J trees ranges from 100 and 250 stems/acre. With that density of trees, manually cutting the trees down and leaving them on the ground would result in a large amount of woody slash lying on the ground. This would have the effect of substantially increasing the overall amount of hazardous

fuel loads on the surface as the slash dries out. This alternative was not considered because it would not reduce the accumulation of hazardous fuels.

### **3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT:**

#### **3.1 Introduction:**

This chapter presents the potentially affected existing environment (i.e., the physical, biological, social, and economic values) of the project area as identified by the interdisciplinary team analysis and as presented in Chapter 1 of this assessment. This chapter provides the baseline for comparison of impacts/consequences described in Chapter 4.

#### **3.2 General Setting:**

The project area is located in the Bookcliffs area, approximately 65 miles south of Vernal, Utah. The project area occurs on a fairly large topographical plateau. The vegetation in the area consists of Pinyon-Juniper, Wyoming sagebrush, cheatgrass, larkspur, needle & thread grass, Indian rice grass, and western wheatgrass.

#### **3.3 Resources Brought Forward for Analysis:**

During the analysis conducted by the interdisciplinary team, it was found that the following aspects of the environment could potentially be affected by the proposed action.

##### **3.3.1 Vegetation/Fuels and Fire Management:**

The project area vegetation is comprised of Pinyon-Juniper, Wyoming sagebrush, larkspur, cheatgrass, poa, and western wheatgrass. The mixed Pinyon-Juniper/sagebrush vegetative type has been designated as Fire Regime Group III where the historic natural fire interval is between 35-100 years. The project area has also been designated as being in a Class II Condition Class. The Condition Class II designation indicates that the area has gone at least one fire interval period between fire events, due to historic fire suppression efforts. Due to this alteration in the fire regime and corresponding change in the Fire Condition Class there has been a corresponding increase in the overall fuel loadings.

##### **3.3.2 Wildlife and Special Status Species**

###### **Migratory Birds**

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), was implemented for the protection of migratory birds. Unless permitted by regulations, the MBTA makes it unlawful to pursue, hunt, kill, capture, possess, buy, sell, purchase, or barter any migratory bird, including the feathers or other parts, nests, eggs, or migratory bird products. In addition to the MBTA, Executive Order 13186 sets forth the responsibilities of Federal agencies to further implement the provisions of the MBTA by integrating bird conservation principles and practices into agency activities and by ensuring that Federal actions evaluate the effects of actions and agency plans on migratory birds.

The Utah Partners In Flight (UPIF) has prioritized migratory birds that are considered “most in need of conservation action, or at least need to be carefully monitored throughout their range within Utah.” These are also the species “that will be most positively influenced by management as well as those species with the greatest immediate threats” according to UPIF (Parrish et al. 2002). In addition, The Utah Steering Committee has identified approximately 542,967 acres of Bird Habitat Conservation Area’s (BHCA) within the VPA (USC 2005). BHCA’s are intended to display areas where bird habitat conservation projects may take place, predicated on concurrence, collaboration, and cooperation with all landowners involved; however, the BHCA’s have no official status.

Numerous species may migrate through, or nest within the project area. This section identifies migratory birds that may inhabit the project area such as BHCA’s or those that are classified, as High-Priority birds by Partners in Flight\*, according to the habitat types found within the project area: *Sagebrush-Steppe*;horned lark, sage sparrow, sage thrasher\*, Brewer’s sparrow\*, western kingbird, Say’s phoebe, prairie falcon, green-tailed towhee\*, and Swainson’s hawk. *Pinyon-Juniper Woodlands*;black-chinned hummingbird\*, gray flycatcher\*, gray vireo\*, Lewis’ woodpecker, Clark’s nutcracker, pinyon jay, western scrub jay, black-throated gray warbler, bushtit, juniper titmouse\*, northern shrike, Virginia’s warbler\*, broad-tailed hummingbird\*, mountain bluebird\*, and Say’s phoebe.

### **Greater Sage-grouse (BLM Sensitive, Federal Candidate)**

The greater sage-grouse is a BLM sensitive species, and a federal candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act. These birds inhabit sagebrush plains, foothills, and mountain valleys. Sagebrush is the predominant plant of quality habitat. Factors involved in the decline in both the distribution and abundance of greater sage-grouse include permanent loss, degradation, and fragmentation of sagebrush-steppe habitat throughout the western states including Utah (Heath et al.1996, Braun 1998). Documented severe populations declines (approximately 80%) occurred from the mid-1960s to mid-1980s. Research and conservation efforts in the last 20 years have help stabilize and recover many populations. Populations appear to have taken a slight positive turn in recent years. Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR 2009) identifies brood habitat within the project area. There are no known leks within 2 miles of the project area.

### **Raptors**

Some of the more visible birds in and near the project area include golden eagles, red-tailed hawks, Cooper’s hawks, Swainson’s hawks, great horned owls, and ravens. The BLM raptor database was reviewed and no known raptor nests were identified within the project area. Habitats in and around the project area provide diverse breeding and foraging habitat for raptors. These habitats include rocky outcrops, pinyon-juniper woodlands and sagebrush shrub lands.

### **Big Game**

Mule deer and Rocky Mountain elk are the primary big game species found within the project area. Use typically occurs from spring to winter, when elk and deer utilize the project area for foraging, thermal cover and escape cover. Both species have an extremely variable diet and therefore live in a variety of habitats. They consume a combination of grasses, forbs, and shrubs.

Food consumption is also related to the season of use. During winter, elk move to lower elevations where they are found most often on south facing slopes, primarily in pinyon-juniper woodlands. Deer typically move down to lower elevation foothill areas.

Crucial elk and deer winter habitat has been designated within the project area. The project area has also been designated as a migration route for mule deer. These designations were made in the Vernal Field Office RMP.

Other wildlife species that are likely to occur in the project area include black bear, mountain lion, coyote, and bobcat, as well as a large variety of small mammals. Many of these species are habitat generalists, meaning they are not tightly restricted to specific habitat types. These species have not shown negative impacts by bull hog operations; therefore, they will not be discussed further in this document.

### **3.2.3 Invasive Plants and Noxious Weeds**

No weeds are currently mapped within the project area, but black henbane, musk thistle and Russian knapweed all occur in the general area.

### **3.2.4 Non-WSA Areas with Wilderness Characteristics**

Approximately 51 acres are located within an area (Bitter Creek, 33,487 acres) that was found to have wilderness characteristics in 2007 by a BLM interdisciplinary team, but was not carried forward in the Vernal RMP (2008) as a Natural Area. To date approximately three treatment projects totaling 606 acres of bullhog mastication treatment have been completed in the Bitter Creek unit.

## **4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS:**

### **4.1 Introduction:**

This Chapter analyzes the direct and indirect impacts that the proposed action and the no action alternative have on the resources identified in Chapter 1 and explained in Chapter 3. It also analyzes the cumulative impacts expected from other land use activities and recognizes actions that could take place in the reasonably foreseeable future.

### **4.2 Alternative A – Proposed Action**

#### **4.2.1 Vegetation/Fuels and Fire Management:**

Under this alternative, there would be 521 acres of fuel reduction activities. Encroaching Pinyon-Juniper trees would be removed across the 521 acre project and there would be a minor

amount of shrub loss from being crushed by the bull hog machine. The shrubs, grasses, and forbs are expected to increase in overall vigor and productivity as the competition with the Pinyon-Juniper trees for light, nutrients and water is drastically reduced. The treatment is expected to reduce the fuel loadings to the extent that the Condition Class would be reduced from a Class II to a Class I condition.

#### **4.2.2 Wildlife and Special Status Species**

##### **Migratory Birds**

Migratory bird species may be present during the breeding/nesting season from May 1- August 1. If bull hog operations were to take place during the breeding/nesting season, individual bird species could be impacted. Impacts may include; destruction of nests, eggs, and nesting habitat, fragmentation of habitat, reduction of habitat patch size, human presence during the breeding/nesting season can cause nest abandonment. The mastication would result in a long term loss of 521 acres of pinyon-juniper trees. There would also be a minor amount of shrub loss from being crushed by the bull hog machine. Nesting species associated with those habitat types would most likely move to adjacent areas to nest.

Project activities are planned to occur after August 1. However, if treatment activities occur between May 1 and August 1, then a migratory bird survey would be conducted by a qualified wildlife biologist to determine if there are migratory bird species of concern, see proposed action. Also, the proposed HFR project targets younger pinyon-juniper trees that are not older, mature stands of pinyon-junipers which are favored by most pinyon-juniper bird species. Although there may be some short-term direct impacts to pinyon-juniper bird species, the long term benefit of the HFR project would benefit sagebrush/grassland bird species, several of which are currently identified as BLM State Sensitive Species.

##### **Greater Sage-grouse**

The UDWR as designated the project area as potential brood rearing habitat. Sage-grouse habitat use and requirements change through the annual flow of the seasons and life functions. Early brood-rearing (May-July) generally occurs relatively close to nest sites. As herbaceous plants mature and dry, hens move their broods to late brood-rearing (July-September) habitats which consist of more succulent vegetation.

Direct impacts (mortality of individual grouse from bullhog vehicles) to sage grouse are not anticipated as these activities will not be conducted within sage grouse nesting , or early brood-rearing seasons from March 1- June 15. Indirect impacts could include temporary displacement (flushing) from foraging/cover areas.

Treatment of encroachment or invasion sites can successfully return this area into a grassland/shrubland community, thus enhancing and promoting the return of sagebrush and other perennial understory species which will benefit sage grouse.

##### **Raptors**

Impacts would be the same as the migratory bird section. If treatment activities occur between May 1 - August 1, then a raptor survey would be conducted by a qualified wildlife biologist.

## **Big Game**

Bullhog mastication would take place in the fall. One of the major problems facing big game populations in Utah is that many of the crucial ranges are in late successional plant community stages that are dominated by mature stands of pinyon-juniper or other conifer trees. Tree-dominated habitats offer a place to retreat from severe weather, but offer little in the way of forage. That is why it is important to maintain mosaic patterns of habitat that can provide forage, cover, and water. Both deer and elk can be found within the project area during the summer and winter months. An increase in human presence during the spring and winter months could cause short term impacts (increased stress, increased energy expenditure, displacement during calving and fawning) to big game species.

No treatment activities will be allowed from December 1 - April 30, during the elk and deer wintering time period, and from April 15 - May 31 within the mule deer migration corridor. Treatment of encroachment or invasion sites can successfully return this area into a grassland/shrubland community, thus enhancing and promoting the return of sagebrush and other perennial understory species which will benefit big game habitat.

### **4.2.3 Invasive Plants and Noxious Weeds**

Due to the use of heavy equipment in the project area, soils could be disturbed as a result of the proposed action. Weed species are often opportunistic and can more easily establish after soil surface disturbances, and there would be a potential for weed encroachment following surface disturbance.

*Mitigation: The following management plan will be followed in order to prevent the establishment of weeds within the project area as a result of the proposed action.*

#### **Weed Management Plan:**

1. A pre-project weed inventory would be conducted to determine the presence of noxious weeds. If weeds were found, they would be: a) mapped and reported; 2) removed or treated prior to surface disturbance; 3) and removed or treated prior to seed set when possible.
2. All equipment would be power-washed prior to entering the project area.
3. All vehicles and equipment would be power-washed after driving through a noxious weed infestation.
4. Staging areas would be located in weed free sites.
5. Annual monitoring of the project area for weed establishment would occur.
6. Annual treatments of weeds would be conducted under the authority of existing Vernal Field Office Pesticide Use Proposals, and following existing policy (Vernal Field Office Surface Disturbing Weed Policy 2009).

#### **4.2.4 Non-WSA Lands with Wilderness Characteristics**

Under this alternative there would be approximately 51 acres of mastication treatment within the Bitter Creek unit. The mastication treatment is expected to result in leaving piles of woody matter composed of 1-2 inch chips. The piles would be less than one foot high, and resemble compost type piles. The piles would be scattered, diffuse, and isolated enough that the average observer would not perceive the woody matter as a substantial impact to naturalness. The mastication treatment would not leave behind any man made structures, and since there would be no mastication work during times of saturated soil conditions, there would be a minimal amount of tire tracks across the project area. Those tracks that are made will likely be erased within one to two years following treatment. The project boundaries follow the natural sage brush openings and there would be no residual long term sharp contrasts or straight edge effects left upon the landscape in the project area.

As noted in Chapter 3, several previous mastication projects totaling 606 acres have been conducted in this area of wilderness characteristics. These projects have not been found to have degraded the quality of the relevant values that comprise the wilderness characteristics, and based on this evidence the proposed action is not expected to degrade these characteristics either.

#### **4.3 Alternative B – No Action:**

Under the No Action Alternative, current resource trends would continue.

##### **4.3.1 Vegetation/Fuels and Fire Management**

Under this alternative, there would be no removal of the Pinyon-Juniper trees across the project area. Over time the Pinyon-Juniper trees would eventually out compete the shrubs, grasses, and forbs for water, nutrients, and light, resulting in the loss of the sagebrush habitat type in the project area. Over time, the fuel loading would continue to increase, eventually shifting the project area from the existing Condition Class II to a Condition Class III situation. Eventually, an unplanned fire would occur, and since the fuel loadings would have increased, the severity of the fire event is also expected to be greater. Since the increased amount of Pinyon-Juniper density would have correspondingly decreased the amount of understory plants, the loss of trees from an unplanned fire event would most likely result in increased soil erosion due to the lack of ground cover remaining following the fire event. In addition, due to the moderate amount of cheatgrass present within the understory an unplanned fire event would most likely

##### **4.3.2 Wildlife and Special Animal Status Species**

Under this alternative, there would be no removal of Pinyon-Juniper trees within the sagebrush. Encroachment by Pinyon-Juniper into sagebrush habitats is detrimental to sagebrush-dependent species because it results in the loss or fragmentation of sagebrush habitat. Over time the Pinyon-Juniper trees will out compete the shrubs, grasses, and forbs, resulting in the loss of the sagebrush habitat type. The decline of the sagebrush type habitat including the understory would result in a loss of forage for wildlife species.

### **4.3.3 Invasive Plants and Noxious Weeds**

Under this alternative, no treatments would occur and existing resource conditions and trends would occur. Other ongoing land use activities such as livestock grazing, energy development and ATV use could potentially spread noxious and invasive weeds within the project area.

### **4.3.4 Non-WSA Lands with Wilderness Characteristics**

Under this alternative, existing resource conditions would continue. The wilderness characteristics within the project area would remain and would not be diminished over time as the Pinyon-Juniper trees increase, and the sagebrush habitat declines in scope and quality. Any unplanned fire that would occur would also not diminish the wilderness characteristics

## **4.4 Cumulative Impacts Analysis:**

“Cumulative impacts” are those impacts resulting from the incremental impact of an action when added to other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable actions regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions.

### **Fire and Fuels:**

The Cumulative Impact area for Fire and Fuels is the Vernal Field Office. The Bureau of Land Management has been directed by Congress (2001 Updated Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy) to implement actions designed to reduce decades of accumulation of hazardous fuels on public lands. In the future in the Vernal Field Office, hazardous fuel reductions activities will most likely increase through the use of mechanical, prescribed fire, and wildland fire use to manage the vegetative resource. With the increased hazardous fuel reductions, the Field Office landscape will eventually be composed of different age classes of vegetation.

### **Vegetation:**

The Cumulative Impact area for vegetation is the Vernal Field Office. Since 2004, The Vernal Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management has been involved with the Utah Partners for Conservation and Development to take actions to restore declining habitat conditions in the sage steppe habitat type. Approximately 50,000 acres have been treated to date, and continued actions by this group are expected to continue to occur in the future through the use of mechanical, prescribed fire, chemical applications, and wildland fire use to manage the vegetative resource. Field Office Weed Monitoring and Control program would continue to treat weed infestation areas.

### **Wildlife:**

The Cumulative Impact area for wildlife is the Vernal Field Office Area. Due to a precipitous decline in deer numbers in the early 1990s deer hunting has been limited and/or closed. Conversely, elk numbers have risen substantially in the same time span. Presently, the Bookcliffs is open to limited entry permits for both deer and elk. Since present deer and elk

numbers are below the established herd management objective numbers, deer and elk numbers will continue to increase in the future, until herd objective numbers are realized. As herd numbers increase, then the continued need for vigorous and productive vegetative types will increase.

**Non-WSA Lands with Wilderness Characteristics:**

The Cumulative Impact Area is the area comprised by the Bitter Creek wilderness characteristics unit. Past actions include the three bullhog mastication projects totaling 606 acres. These previous vegetative manipulation projects have not diminished the relevant values of the Bitter Creek wilderness characteristic unit, therefore, the proposed action is not expected to directly or indirectly impact the relevant values of this unit. Because no direct or indirect impacts to wilderness characteristics would occur under either the Proposed Action or the No Action alternatives, no cumulative impacts would occur under the either alternative.

**5.0 CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION**

**5.1 Introduction**

During preparation of the EA, public involvement consisted of posting the proposal on the Utah BLM Environmental Notification Bulletin Board (ENBB) on March 8, 2010. Issues or impacts identified through the interdisciplinary team analysis process are described in Appendix B.

**5.2 Persons, Groups, and Agencies Consulted**

State Historical Preservation Office  
 Alameda Ranches  
 Utah Division of Wildlife Resources  
 Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance

**5.3 List of Preparers**

Steven Strong	Team Lead	Soils, Fire Management, Floodplains, Riparian, Water Quality.
Dusty Carpenter	Range Management Specialist	Impact analysis for Livestock grazing and Rangeland Health Standards
Jason West	Wild and Scenic Rivers, Wilderness, Recreation, Visual Resources, Natural Areas	Impact analysis for Wild and Scenic Rivers, Wilderness, Recreation, Visual Resources, Natural Areas
Jessie Salix	Invasive, No-native Species, Threatened Endangered or Candidate sensitive Species Plant, Vegetation including Special Status plant Species	Impact analysis for Invasive, No-native Species, Threatened Endangered or Candidate sensitive Species Plant, Vegetation including Special Status plant Species

Kathie Davies	Cultural Resources and Paleontology	Impact Analysis for Cultural Resources and Paleontology
Stephanie Howard	Environmental Planning Coordinator	Impact analysis for Air Quality, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Environmental Justice, Farmlands (Prime and Unique)
Dixie Sadlier	Threatened Endangered or Candidate sensitive Animal Species Fish and Wildlife including Special Status Species	Impact analysis for Threatened Endangered or Candidate sensitive Species Animal, , Fish and Wildlife including Special Status Species

## 6.0 REFERENCES

Braun, C. E., 1998. Sage grouse declines in western North America: what are the problems? Proceedings of the Western Association of State Fish and Wildlife Agencies 78:139-156

Heath, B. R., Straw, S Anderson and J. Lawson. 1996. Proceedings of sage grouse workshop. Pinedale, Wy. USA.

Parrish, J.R., F.P. Howe, and R.E. Norvell. 2002. Utah Partners In Flight Avian Conservation Strategy Version 2.0. Utah Partners in Flight Program, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources. 1594 West North Temple, Salt Lake City, Utah 84116. UDWR Publication Number 02-27. i-xiv 302 pp.

Utah Division of Wildlife Resources. Approved September 2009. Utah Greater Sage-grouse Management Plan. State of Utah Department of Natural Resources, Division of Wildlife Resources, Salt Lake City, Utah.

U.S. Bureau of Land Management, 2008. Record of Decision for the Vernal Field Office Resource Management Plan. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Vernal Utah.

U.S. Bureau of Land Management, 2009, Fire Management Plan.

Utah Steering Committee (USC). 2005. Coordinated Implementation Plan for Bird Conservation in Utah. Intermountain West Joint Venture.

## APPENDICES

### INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM ANALYSIS RECORD CHECKLIST

**Project Title:** McCook Ridge Fuel Reduction

**NEPA Log Number:** DOI-BLM-UT-G010-2010-0177-EA

**File/Serial Number:**

**Project Lead:** Steven Strong

**DETERMINATION OF STAFF: (Choose one of the following abbreviated options for the left column)**

NP = not present in the area impacted by the proposed or alternative actions

NI = present, but not affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required

PI = present with potential for significant impact analyzed in detail in the EA; or identified in a DNA as requiring further analysis

NC = (DNAs only) actions and impacts not changed from those disclosed in the existing NEPA documents cited in Section C of the DNA form.

Determination	Resource	Rationale for Determination*	Signature	Date
NI	Air Quality	Air quality impacts from the projected levels of emission are expected to be negligible. Minimum quantities of dust emissions are anticipated because the volume of traffic from this proposal would be less than one or two vehicles per day during the project, and the project is estimated to take 10 days to complete.	Steven Strong	02/05/2010
NP	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern	A review of the Field Office GIS layer files indicates that there are no ACECs present within the project area	Jason West	2/05/2010
NP	BLM natural areas	None Present as per GIS and RMP review	Jason West	2/05/2010
NI	Cultural Resources	The project area was previously disturbed by the 1966 chaining treatment. The use of a rubber tired tractor to implement the mastication is not expected to result in increased disturbance to any remaining eligible sites.	Kathie Davies	02/05/2010
NI	Greenhouse Gas Emissions	There are currently no "credible scientific" methods to predict the potential climate change impacts from project specific GHG emissions (40 CFR 1502.22 Incomplete or Unavailable Information).	Steven Strong	1/20/2010
NP	Environmental Justice	No minority or economically disadvantaged communities or populations are present which could be affected by the proposed action or alternatives.	Steven Strong	02/05/2010
NP	Farmlands (Prime or Unique)	All prime or unique farm lands in the Uintah Basin must be irrigated to be considered under this designation, among other factors. No irrigated lands are located in the proposed action area; therefore this resource will not be carried forward for analysis.	Mark Wimmer	04/08/10
NP	Floodplains	A review of the Field Office GIS layer files indicates that there are no flood plains located in the project area.	Steven Strong	02/05/2010
PI	Fuels / Fire Management	Project is designed to reduce hazardous fuel loads	Steven Strong	02/05/2010

<b>Determination</b>	<b>Resource</b>	<b>Rationale for Determination*</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
NI	Geology / Mineral Resources / Energy Production	The project area is leased for fluid minerals, but there are no ongoing energy related activities occurring in the project area.	Steven Strong	02/05/2010
PI	Invasive Plants / Noxious Weeds	The use of a masticating machine has the potential to cause surface disturbance. Surface disturbing activities present the potential for weed establishment.	Jessie Salix	2/05/2010
NI	Hydrologic Conditions	The proposed action is designed to increase ground cover, which would improve Hydrologic conditions.	Steven Strong	02/05/2010
NI	Lands / Access	The proposed project does not involve treating any access routes or existing ROWs, and there is currently existing access to the project area.	Steven Strong	02/05/2010
NI	Livestock Grazing	The proposed project will not directly impact livestock operations; as the pasture will be available for use and no rest will be required. The overall ecology of the project area may benefit from long term indirect impacts.	Dusty Carpenter	02/05/2010
NP	Native American Religious Concerns	Based on consultation of previous projects, there are no known areas or sites that are considered by the tribe to be considered traditional cultural properties.	Kathie Davies	02/05/2010
NI	Paleontology	No subsurface disturbance would occur that could impact Paleontology resources	Steven Strong	02/05/2010
NI	Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines	To date there has been no formal rangeland health assessment done on this allotment. The proposed action is designed to improve the vegetative condition by removing competition with P-J trees. There is expected to be a long term increase in vegetative ground cover and a reduction in soil erosion	Dusty Carpenter	02/05/2010
NI	Socio-economics	Due to the small scale project size, socioeconomics are not expected to be measurably impacted by this proposed project.	Steven Strong	02/05/2010
NI	Recreation	Minor amount of recreational use. Timing will not impact hunting season use. OHV use limited to designated routes only.	Jason West	2/05/2010
NI	Soils	Project is designed to improve long term vegetative cover which would reduce soil erosion potential, and there would be no surface disturbing actions during saturated soil conditions.	Steven Strong	02/05/2010
PI	Special Status Animal Species other than USFWS candidate or listed species e.g. Migratory birds.	Project is designed to remove Pinyon-Juniper. Possible impacts to sagebrush-steppe, and tree nesters.	Dixie Sadlier	02/22/2010
NP	Special Status Plant Species other than USFWS candidate or listed species	Review of office files show no special status plant species present within the project area.	Jessie Salix	2/05/2010
PI	Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Animal Species	Review of office files show no T&E species present within the project area. See Wildlife Appendix. Treatment of encroachment or invasion sites can successfully return this area into a grassland/shrubland community, thus enhancing and promoting the return of sagebrush and other perennial understory species which will benefit sage grouse.	Dixie Sadlier	02/22/2010
NP	Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Plant Species	Review of office files show no threatened, endangered or candidate plant species present within the project area.	Jessie Salix	2/05/2010
PI	Vegetation	There would be a loss of encroaching P-J trees across 521 acres.	Steven Strong	02/05/2010
NI	Visual Resources	Class III has been identified. The proposed project is within class III objectives. Class III objectives state: The objective of this class is to partially retain the existing character of the	Jason West	2/05/2010

Determination	Resource	Rationale for Determination*	Signature	Date
		landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be moderate. Management activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Changes should repeat the basic elements found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.		
NI	Wastes (hazardous or solid)	<i>Hazardous Waste:</i> No chemicals subject to reporting under SARA Title III in an amount equal to or greater than 10,000 pounds will be used, produced, stored, transported, or disposed of annually in association with the project. Furthermore, no extremely hazardous substances, as defined in 40 CFR 355, in threshold planning quantities, will be used, produced, stored, transported, or disposed of in association with the project. <i>Solid Wastes:</i> Trash would be confined in a covered container and hauled to an approved landfill. Burning of waste or oil would not be done. Human waste would be contained and be disposed of at an approved sewage treatment facility.	Steven Strong	02/05/2010
NI	Water Quality (surface / ground)	A site reconnaissance showed that there are no surface waters present in the project area, and no subsurface disturbances that would impact ground water.	Steven Strong	02/05/2010
NP	Wetlands / Riparian Zones	A review of the Field Office GIS layer files indicates that there are no Wetlands/Riparian areas within the project area.	Steven Strong	02/05/2010
NP	Wild and Scenic Rivers	VFO GIS layers indicate that there are no Wild and Scenic Rivers present within the Vernal Field Office Boundary	Jason West	2/05/2010
NP	Wild Horses and Burros	VFO GIS layers indicate that there are no Wild horse and Burro areas present within the project area.	Steven Strong	02/05/2010
NP	Wilderness	VFO GIS layers indicate that there are no Wilderness areas present within the Vernal Field Office Boundary.	Jason West	2/05/2010
PI	Non Wilderness Areas with Wilderness Characteristics	Approximately 51 acres of the project are within the Bitter Creek Wilderness Characteristics unit.	Jason West	04/06/2010
NI	Waters of the U.S.	Site visit indicated that there are no live waters or ephemeral drainages in project area	Steven Strong	02/05/2010
NP	Woodland / Forestry	VFO GIS layers indicate that there are no commercial woodlands present within the project area	Steven Strong	02/05/2010

**FINAL REVIEW:**

Reviewer Title	Signature	Date	Comments
NEPA / Environmental Coordinator			
Authorized Officer			