

2.0 - PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

This chapter provides detailed descriptions of the two alternatives for the Seep Ridge Road Paving Project EA. The alternatives assessed in detail in this EA are as follows:

- Alternative A - Proposed Action
- Alternative B - No Action

2.1 ALTERNATIVE A – PROPOSED ACTION

Uintah County proposes to amend its existing ROW UTU-69125-35 to reconstruct and upgrade the Seep Ridge Road as follows:

- Expand the existing ROW width from 66 feet to 150 feet.
- Redesign and reconstruct the existing road to bring it into compliance with current federal (AASHTO Green Book) and Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) highway standards.
- Upgrade the existing native road base to an all-weather bituminous surface pavement.
- Obliterate, reclaim and install barriers on existing road segments that would be abandoned due to new route realignment.

Upgrade and paving activities of the Seep Ridge Road would begin at a point on the historic Uintah and Ouray Indian Reservation Boundary (located in the SE1/4SE1/4 section 3, T10S, R20E, SLM), and continue in a southerly direction, ending at Uintah County’s southern boundary line (located in the SW1/4SW1/4 section 36, T15S, R24E, SLM) (refer to Exhibit 1 in Appendix G).

The total length of the proposed ROW would involve approximately 44.5 miles, of which approximately 69 percent would involve federal lands; 29 percent would involve State of Utah lands, administered by Utah’s School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA); and, 2 percent would involve private lands. Table 2-1.1 provides a comparison between the existing and the proposed dimensions for the Seep Ridge Road.

Table 2-1-1. Comparison Between Existing and Proposed Dimensions for the Seep Ridge Road

	Existing ROW	Proposed ROW
Length	45.4 miles	44.5 miles
Width	66 feet	150 feet
Total Acres	362.8	809.5
Disturbance Acres*	142.9	702.0
Percent of Total Acres	39	89

*Includes the running road surface

Specifically, the following lands would be involved:

Bureau of Land Management

- T10S, R20E, sections 11 and 12
- T11S, R21E, sections 6, 7, 17, 18, 20, 21 and 33
- T12S, R21E, sections 4, 9, 10, 15, 22, 23, 25 and 26

T12S, R22E, sections 30 and 31
T13S, R22E, sections, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 14, 23 and 26
T14S, R22E, sections 11, 14, 23, 24 and 25
T14S, R23E, sections 30 and 31
T15S, R23E, sections 4, 5, 8, 9, and 22

State of Utah

T10S, R20E, sections 13, 24, 25 and 36
T11S, R21E, section 32
T13S, R22E, section 26 and 35
T14S, R22E, section 2
T14S, R23E, section 32
T15S, R23E, sections 16, 21, 22, 26, 27 and 36

Private

T13S, R22E, section 35
T14S, R22E, section 11

The county would obtain amended ROW grants from SITLA for those portions of the Seep Ridge Road crossing state lands. The county would also secure easements and surface use agreements from private land owners for those portions of the road crossing private lands.

2.1.1 CONSTRUCTION ELEMENTS

Upon receipt of needed authorizations, construction activities would begin in the summer of 2009 and could continue for up to 6 years, or until the project is complete.

The county, and its contractors or subcontractors, would adhere to established federal and state road design and construction standards. To ensure public safety and the protection of the surface resources – reconstruction and upgrades would be accomplished to the appropriate standards. Construction design elements would include the following:

- The posted existing speed limit is 35 miles per hour (mph). Design speed would be 55 miles per hour (mph). The proposed posted speed limits would be as follows:
 - 35 mph during construction activities
 - 35-45 mph while the road’s surface is graveled
 - 55 mph after the entire roadway is paved
- The county would install speed limit signs along the length of the Seep Ridge Road. Enforcement of these speeds would be carried out through public education and county law enforcement.
- Maximum grades would not exceed 8 percent; pitch grades for lengths not to exceed 300 feet could be allowed to exceed 8 percent in some cases.
- An estimated 16 culverts would need to be installed along the proposed roadway. These culverts would be sized in accordance with accepted engineering practices, special environmental concerns, and applicable practices adopted under authority of the Federal Clean Water Act. The minimum size for any culvert would be 18 inches and would be designed to accommodate a 100-year storm event. Culverts would be laid on natural ground or at the original elevation of any

drainage crossed. The outlet of all culverts would be at least 1 foot beyond the toe of any slope. Rip-rap or rock would armor the outlet ends of the culvert to prevent soil erosion or to trap sediment.

- Identified segments of the road would involve climbing lanes, i.e., a third lane needed to facilitate slower, heavier traffic. Current AASHTO design criteria state a climbing lane is appropriate if a combination of grade and length of grade reduces the expected speed by 10 miles per hour (mph) or greater for a typical heavy truck. An estimated 27 climbing lanes, involving 14.7 miles of the roadway would be involved. . These segments of the road would involve an estimated total of approximately 147.5 acres. (Refer to Appendix B for engineer’s typical drawings of the proposed road improvements.)
- Minimize impacts to Cottonwood Wash’s 100-year floodplain by adhering to the design standards for culverts, drainage, and storm water standards as set out in this section.
- Ditch grades would be no less than 0.5 percent to provide positive drainage and to avoid siltation.
- Drainage of the inside ditch and sidehill runoff would be provided.
- Water turn outs would be rock armored.
- In areas where steep slopes occur, proper road design and appropriate erosion control measures (e.g. stabilization barriers, water bars, silt fences, etc.) would be implemented to prevent down slope erosion. Design standards for these structures would be based on the following: Utah Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (UPDES) program; National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Region 8 EPA; and, BLM/USFS 2007 Gold Book.
- Appendix B provides engineers’ typical road cross section and design drawings.

2.1.2 OTHER PROJECT ELEMENTS

All staging areas would be located on state lands along the Seep Ridge Road and within the proposed ROW. Staging areas would accommodate stockpiled materials, equipment and vehicle parking and batch sites for processing of the paving material. To the extent reasonable, excavated cut and fill material will be used on site. Any additional needed mineral materials (gravel, sand, etc.) would be acquired from private, county, or state sources. No mineral materials would be acquired from federal lands. Any material delivered to these sites would be properly stored.

During periods of extreme wildfire conditions (i.e., prolonged dry periods with high temperatures, presence of dried or “flash fuels”), extreme caution would be used in performing reconstruction and/or upgrade activities. Woody debris, created by reconstruction activities, would be either removed from the site or mulched and redistributed over the disturbed area during the reclamation activities.

Sanitary facilities would be onsite at all times during construction and installation. Sewage would be placed in portable chemical toilets. The toilets would be pumped or replaced regularly utilizing a licensed contractor. Toilet contents would be delivered to an approved wastewater treatment facility in accordance with state and county regulations.

All refuse (e.g. trash and other solid waste, including cans, paper, etc.) generated during the reconstruction and upgrade activities would be contained in enclosed receptacles, removed from the location promptly, and hauled to an authorized disposal site. No potentially adverse materials or substances would be left onsite.

All project-related activities involving hazardous materials would be conducted in a manner that minimizes potential environmental impacts. Current Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) for all chemicals, compounds, and/or substances that are used in the course of construction and upgrade operations would be maintained on-site by the project supervisor.

No chemicals subject to reporting under SARA Title III (hazardous material) in an amount greater than 10,000 pounds would be used, produced, stored, transported, or disposed of in association with the Proposed Action. Furthermore, no extremely hazardous substances, as defined in 40 CFR 355, in threshold planning quantities, would be used, produced, stored, transported, or disposed of in association with the Proposed Action. Any spills of potential hazardous substances would be reported immediately to the appropriate surface managing agency (SMA) and regulatory authorities, and would be promptly cleaned up and removed to an approved disposal site.

Water would be used to control fugitive dust created during reconstruction and upgrade operations. The water would be secured by Uintah County from existing Water Right No. 41-3523. Information on this water right is outlined in Table 2.1-2.

Table 2.1-2. Source of Water for the Seep Ridge Road Paving Project

Owner	Utah Division of Water Resources Permit No.	Source	Permitted Amount (Acre-Feet)	State of Permit (Active or Expired)	Date
Uintah Water Conservancy District	41-3523	Green River	33,560	Active	8/07/1958

Utah Division of Water Rights. 2009

Construction of the proposed improvements to the road would require approximately 424 acre-feet of water over the 6-year period (or approximately 71 acre-feet per year). In accordance with the 1987 Recovery Implementation Program for Endangered Fish Species in the Upper Colorado River Basin (USFWS 1987), this water right is a historic depletion (permitted prior to January 1988).

2.1.3 RECLAMATION

Reclamation would be completed as set out in the Reclamation Plan (refer to Appendix C).

2.1.4 MAINTENANCE AND OPERATION

On completion of the Proposed Action, the county would conduct regular inspections of the road and the ROW and complete needed repair and maintenance actions as scheduled or identified. As is the current practice, the Seep Ridge Road would be maintained and kept open year-round.

Upon completion of the proposed improvements to the road, the county would initiate a 5-year study to acquire baseline traffic volumes and accident data. The county would then continue to regularly monitor usage and traffic patterns on the Seep Ridge Road. If monitoring reveals at least a 25 percent increase in the number of animal:vehicle collisions over the established baseline, the county would reconsider the need to fence the ROW.

2.1.5 BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND APPLICANT-COMMITTED PROTECTION MEASURES

The actions described below would be implemented to reduce the potential environmental impacts of the Proposed Action. These Best Management Practices (BMPs) and applicant-committed protection measures are based upon guidelines developed by the BLM in consultation with the county and the appropriate SMA.

2.1.5.1 Cultural Resources

- A Class III cultural resources survey was conducted by an SMA-approved archaeologist during the months of March and April 2009. The area of potential effects (APE) for the new road improvements and construction of new road segments, as it applies to cultural resource impacts, consists of a 300 foot wide corridor extending 150 feet on both sides of the edge of the proposed road. This corridor was surveyed by archaeological technicians walking 45 feet apart in order to identify previously unrecorded cultural resources. In addition, previously recorded cultural resources within the APE were revisited during the survey. Prior to the cultural resource survey, a literature review was performed in order to collect information on previously recorded cultural resources in and around the APE. The literature review area extended 1,200 feet on both sides of the 300 foot corridor APE.
- Cultural resource sites determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places would be avoided by any surface disturbing activities associated with reconstruction operations where possible. Sites eligible for the National Register of Historic Places that cannot be avoided will be monitored during construction. Additionally, areas identified as having a high probability of encountering potentially significant subsurface archaeological materials and any eligible sites that are not directly impacted by construction but are within the 300 feet of the cultural resource APE would require a qualified archaeologist to monitor surface disturbance activities.
- In the event of discovery of cultural materials during the excavation and construction operations, disturbance actions would immediately cease at that location and the appropriate SMA would be notified. Specific mitigation would be developed by the SMA in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer, and would be implemented before construction work is resumed.
- The county would inform their employees, contractors and subcontractors about relevant federal regulations intended to protect cultural resources.

2.1.5.2 Paleontological Resources

- If paleontological resources are uncovered during ground-disturbing activities, the county would suspend all operations that would further disturb such materials and would immediately contact the appropriate SMA. A determination would be made by the SMA's authorized officer as to what mitigation may be necessary for the discovered paleontological material before construction can resume at that location.

2.1.5.3 Soils

- No construction activities would be performed during periods when the soil is too wet to adequately support construction equipment. If such equipment creates ruts in excess of 3 inches deep in a straight line of travel, the soil would be deemed too wet to adequately support the equipment, and construction activities would cease until drier or frozen soil conditions exist.
- As stated in Section 2.1.1, the county would adhere to established federal and state road design and construction standards and implement BMPs that would minimize impacts to soil and water resources. These BMPs include proper grade, culvert size and placement, ditch grades, drainages, installation of water turn outs and storm water standards under current National Pollutant

Discharge Elimination System, specifically installation of stabilization barriers, water bars, silt fences, etc.)

2.1.5.4 Invasive Plants/Noxious Weeds

- Per the Weed Control Plan (refer to Appendix C), conduct a pre-construction noxious weed inventory along the entire ROW. The result of this inventory would include GPS location and associated field notes indicating the type and size of each infestation. This data would be formulated into a report and submitted to the appropriate SMA.
- Preparation of a Pesticide Use Proposal would be completed as required by the VFO Approved RMP. Control of invasive plants and noxious weeds on state and private lands would be consistent with direction from the appropriate SMA.
- All disturbed surface areas would be monitored annually for the presence of noxious weeds. If monitoring showed the presence of noxious weeds, the county would be responsible for treating these areas. Control measures would be conducted before seed set annually. Monitoring and treatment would be conducted annually until reclamation and weed ratification was deemed successful by the appropriate SMA.
- All vehicles and equipment coming from outside the Basin associated with the Proposed Action would be power washed to remove seed and plant materials before entering the Project Area.

2.1.5.5 Fish and Wildlife, Including Special Status Species Other than USFWS Candidate or Listed Species (e.g., Migratory Birds)

- Prior to any new surface-disturbing reconstruction activities between January 1 and August 31, all areas on BLM lands within 1.0 mile of the proposed surface disturbance would be surveyed for the presence of raptor nests. If occupied raptor nests are found, new surface disturbance related construction would not occur within the species-specific protective radius of the active nest during the species-specific nesting season, as set out in Attachment 2 the *Best Management Practices for Raptors and Their Associated Habitats in Utah* (BLM 2008, Appendix A).
- The road would be regularly inspected to remove wildlife carrion from the Seep Ridge Road, shoulders and ROW area to reduce the likelihood of vehicle collisions with carrion-feeding raptors and scavengers.

2.1.5.6 Livestock Grazing

- Where reconstruction activities cross existing livestock fences or would involve existing cattleguards, the following would be implemented:
 - All fences would be braced before being cut and a temporary gate would be installed. All fences would be restored to functional condition or replaced with like fencing immediately after project completion in that area to assure livestock do not trespass onto adjacent grazing allotments.
 - If the roadway project is determined to interfere with livestock operations, the county would work cooperatively with the appropriate SMA and the affected livestock operator to negotiate a resolution to the situation.
 - Upgrade to expand 3 existing cattleguards to 40 foot widths. Locations for these cattleguards are: SE/4SW/4 section 31, T12S, R22E; NE/4NE/4 section 23, T14S, R22 E; and NE/4NE/4 section 27, T15S, R23E.

- If the reconstruction activities would destroy or reduce the functionality of existing animal watering ponds/reservoirs (i.e., disrupt water from entering into the catchment ponds from either the drainage and/or apron area) within the immediate vicinity of the ROW, such structures would be replaced or restored to functional condition as determined appropriate by the SMA. Specifically, in coordination with the livestock operators and the appropriate SMA, the following specific actions would be completed:
 - Maintain up to 12 existing watering ponds/reservoirs that would be affected by the proposed upgrades. Site-specific maintenance activities on these sites would be determined by the appropriate SMA. No new surface disturbance would be associated with these maintenance activities.
 - Construct 1 new reservoir outside of the proposed ROW in the Sand Wash Allotment in section 26, T15S, R23E. The county would construct the new watering pond/reservoir to current construction standards set out in BLM Manual 9100. Estimated new surface disturbance associated with the new watering pond/reservoir would involve about 2 acres.
- Move the Monument Ridge Pasture Corral (currently located at the junction of the Seep Ridge and Monument Ridge Roads in the NW1/4NW1/4 section 26, T15S, R23E) approximately 350 feet east to a site outside the proposed ROW. The existing corral would be dismantled. The new corral would have the same dimensions as the current corral and would be built to current construction standards set out in BLM Manual 9100. Approximately 2 acres of new surface disturbance would be involved with this relocation.
- The county would install warning signs and would post advisory lowered speeds of 40 mph along the road to warn of free-roaming livestock and areas of concentrated wildlife use/travel.

2.1.5.7 Lands/Access

- Flag persons and signs will warn the public of any travel delays due to construction. Detours, if needed, would be appropriately marked and the general public notified in advance via public announcements of any closures of the Seep Ridge Road.
- The county acknowledges the existing authorizations for surface and possible buried pipelines located within the existing Seep Ridge Road ROW. If construction activities would affect the placement of any of these lines, the grantor would be consulted before any surface disturbance is initiated that could compromise the integrity of the pipeline. The county would work with the authorized operator to minimize disruptions to ongoing pipeline operations and ensure the continued functionality of the pipeline(s).
- All roads intersecting with the Seep Ridge Road would be restructured to provide safe access for heavy trucks and or vehicles pulling trailers. Intersections of the area’s major roads with the Seep Ridge Road would be further enhanced by building to grade and installing paved “aprons” sufficient to allow safe and proper travel by slow-moving, low-slung vehicles and trailers.

2.1.5.8 Recreation

- The county would move the existing Buck Canyon kiosk (located at the head of Buck Canyon in the SE1/4SW1/4 section 30, T12S, R22E). The Buck Canyon kiosk site includes both an information kiosk and a self-contained rest room. These facilities need to be moved to allow for realignment of the proposed road. These structures would be relocated within the proposed expanded ROW, in close proximity to their current location, and involve approximately 1 acre.

- As with livestock grazing, the county would install warning signs and would post an advisory lowered speed limit of 40 mph along the road warning of areas of concentrated OHV use and recreational activity in the vicinity of existing recreation sites and known areas of dispersed camping.

2.1.6 SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

The dimensions of the Project Area would be 44.5 miles in length and 150 feet in width, involving 809.1 acres. All surface disturbing activities would be limited to these dimensions, i.e., no disturbance would occur outside the 150-foot width. Of the 44.5 miles, approximately 29.8 miles would accommodate 2 lanes of traffic and the remaining 14.7 miles would be increased to 3 lanes to provide climbing lanes for slow moving traffic. The total running surface of the proposed road would involve 150.84 acres (86.69 and 64.15 acres respectively for the 2- and 3-lanes). Thus, approximately 658.26 acres would be involved in areas of cut and fill and construction activities to provide ditches, shoulders, erosion control structures, etc. For the purposes of this EA, the Project Area includes the total 809.1 acres associated with the ROW; the proposed relocation of the Monument Ridge Pasture Corral and the construction of 1 watering ponds/reservoirs on federal lands, the estimated Project Area for the Proposed Action would involve a total of 813 acres. Table 2-1.3 provides a summary of the surface ownership, project dimensions and estimated surface disturbance associated with the Proposed Action.

Table 2-1-3. Summary of the Proposed Action’s Project Dimensions and Estimated Surface Disturbance, by Surface Ownership

	Federal	State	Private	Total
Overall Dimensions				
Road (in miles)	30.5	12.7	1.3	44.5
Percent of Project	68.4	28.7	2.9	100
ROW Area (150’ width)	550.0	234.1	25.0	809.1
Applicant-Committed Measures				
Watering Ponds	2	0	0	0
Relocation of Corral	2	0	0	0
Estimated Total Acres of Surface Disturbance	554.0	234.1	25.0	813.1

*Assumed this figure could include areas of cut and fill outside the proposed 150-ft ROW.

2.2 ALTERNATIVE A – NO ACTION

Under the No Action Alternative, the application for an amendment to the county’s existing ROW UTU - 69125-35 would be denied, and the county would not be authorized to complete upgrades to the Seep Ridge Road outside of the existing 66-foot ROW width. The county would continue to complete needed maintenance to the existing native material roadway, ensuring the road remains open year-round. Water would be used during maintenance activities to control and/or eliminate fugitive dust. As with the Proposed Action water needed for such activities would be acquired from a Historic Depletion Source. The water right would be secured by Uintah County from a water right obtained in 1958 by the Uintah Conservancy District. Annual maintenance activities could require approximately 40 acre-feet of water per year. It is unlikely that the county would pave the existing roadway under its current ROW authorization because paving the existing roadway would not correct those road segments needing to be upgraded to current safety design standards.

2.3 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED, BUT ELIMINATED FROM FURTHER CONSIDERATION

Three alternatives were initially considered but eliminated from further consideration. These alternatives were:

2.3.1 AN ALTERNATIVE TO INCLUDE THE ADDITION OF A 10-FOOT ATV/MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAIL WITHIN THE EXPANDED ROW OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

- The trail was not identified as a key element of the county’s need for the Proposed Action.
- The ATV/mountain bike trail created more safety concerns and heightened possible conflicts between the ATV and the mountain bike users of the trail.

2.3.2 AN ALTERNATIVE TO PLACE ALL-WEATHER BITUMINOUS PAVEMENT FROM THE NORTHERN TERMINUS TO THE INTERSECTION OF THE SEEP RIDGE ROAD WITH BUCK CANYON

- This alternative did not completely meet the need of the proposal as it did not resolve all the safety concerns portions of the Seep Ridge Road south of Buck Canyon.
- This alternative did not factor in the expected increase in oil and gas traffic in the Book Cliffs area.

2.3.3 AN ALTERNATIVE TO FENCE THE ENTIRE ROW TO EXCLUDE LIVESTOCK AND/OR WILDLIFE

- Segments of comparable paved, 2-lane highways in the Uintah Basin, portions of U.S. Highway 191 in Indian Canyon and portions of Colorado Highway 139 in Douglas Pass are unfenced.
- Although accident records are kept for this road, no animal/vehicle collisions data are known. This absence of data would be corrected by the county’s proposed 5-year study (refer to Section 2.1.4). They have identified criteria under which fencing the ROW would be considered.