

DECISION RECORD
Park Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Thinning
Categorical Exclusion (CX), WY-070-CX12-202
Buffalo Field Office, Bureau of Land Management

DECISION: The BLM approves the proposal to preventatively treat woody fuels in a wildland urban interface (WUI) area of northern Campbell County per the description in CX worksheet, WY-070-CX12-202, incorporated here by reference. The approval for this project is for the life of the project which may last, but is not limited to, 5 years from this approval.

Compliance. This decision complies with:

- Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) (43 USC 1701)
- National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) (42 USC 4321)
- Endangered Species Act of 1974 (16 USC 1531)
- Migratory Bird Treaty Act (16 USC 703 et seq.).
- Clean Air Act (42 USC 7401 et seq.).
- Buffalo and Powder River Basin (PRB) Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) Record of Decision (ROD), 1985, 2003
- Buffalo Resource Management Plan (RMP) 1985, Amendments 2001, 2003, 2011
- Interior Department Order 3310 (Wild Lands policy, 2010)
- Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides in 17 Western States, Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS); Record of Decision (ROD), BLM, 2007.
- Invasive Species Management, WY-070-EA09-099, BFO, 2010.
- Fortification Creek Habitat Improvement Project, WY-070-EA11, BFO, 2011
- BLM Manual 6840, Special Status Species Management (SSS), 2008.
- BLM Wyoming Sensitive Species Policy and List, Mar 2010.

A summary of the details of the approval follows. The CX worksheet includes the project description, including site-specific mitigation measures. Treatments will involve cutting and piling of small diameter trees up to 7 inches DBH (diameter at breast height) and lopping and piling sound logs and debris. In areas along public access routes, the BLM or contractor will segregate larger material for public firewood gathering. Project development included cooperation with the Wyoming State Forestry Division, and adjacent landowners.

THE FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI). The Department of Interior and Bureau of Land Management affirmed there was no significant impact of a like-structured project when they created this CX and its limiting parameters. Thus a FONSI and an EIS is not required.

DECISION RATIONALE. The approval of this project is because:

1. Mitigation measures will reduce environmental impacts while meeting the project's purpose and need.
2. The proposed treatments will not result in any undue or unnecessary environmental degradation. There are no conflicts anticipated or demonstrated with current uses. No extraordinary circumstances apply to this project.
3. The project area is not within Greater Sage-Grouse (GSG) Preliminary Priority Habitat (PPH) or in suitable GSG habitat. Disruptive activity would be restricted on or within one quarter (0.25) mile radius of the perimeter of occupied or undetermined GSG leks with adherence to seasonal restrictions in nesting/early brood-rearing habitat and/or winter concentration areas.

4. The project will support the long-term conservation of the special status species, Greater Sage-Grouse by selectively removing conifers in woodlands that are adjacent to PGH.
5. The project is clearly lacking in wilderness characteristics because the treatment units are situated in isolated BLM parcels that do not exceed 80 acres; or are adjacent to or within .25 miles of improved roads with public access. See FLPMA, Section 201.
6. Project work should be conducted after July 31, or a wildlife biologist must be present before work begins to survey for nests. A 100 foot buffer should be maintained from any located nests. If an undocumented raptor nest is located during project construction or operation, the Buffalo Field Office (307-684-1100) shall be notified within 24 hours.
7. Prior to conducting any skid-steer activity on BLM or cooperator property within the planning unit, the Buffalo Field Office archaeology staff will conduct an appropriate level of cultural resource inventory. Special stipulations to protect or avoid significant cultural, historic, or paleontological sites will be applied to the proposed activities.
8. The area will be monitored for the presence of noxious or invasive weeds for two years after slash piles have been burned. BLM will implement appropriate treatments as necessary to control weeds, and within the framework of Buffalo Field Office's Pesticide Use Proposal and weed treatment Environmental Assessment.
9. Underneath the PRECorp power line on BLM lands, care will be taken to avoid damage to the structures. Any large trees which threaten the structures will be avoided during thinning operations and PRE Corp will be contacted for assistance. Piles will be positioned at least 100 feet from the centerline, and the burn plan for these piles will specify appropriate wind direction and weather so that pile burning near the power line will prevent heat damage to the conductors and lines.
10. Approval of this project conforms to the terms and the conditions of the 1985 Buffalo RMP (BLM 1985) and subsequent updates (BLM 2001) and amendments (BLM 2003, 2011). This project complies with the breadth and constraints of CX C.5. Appendix 4, BLM Handbook and subsequent policy. The proposal noted in the CX worksheet is within the parameters for CX, DOI 516 M+DM11.9(4), (5) and BLM Instruction Memorandums 2008-099 and 2009-199.
11. This project approval is applicable on BLM-surface land as depicted on **Map 2 – Site Map**, attached to the CX worksheet. The project plan is on file in the BLM Buffalo Field Office.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW AND APPEAL. The decision to implement this forest management project thinning and piling may be protested under 43 CFR 5003 - Administrative Remedies. As outlined in 43 CFR 5003.3 (a) and (b), protests of a forest management decision may be made within 15 days of the publication date of the decision notice and shall contain a written statement of reasons for protesting the decision. In accordance with the regulations, this notice constitutes the decision document for the purpose of protests, which must be filed by close of business (4:15 p.m.), no later than 15 days after publication of notice of this decision, with the Field Office Manager at the Buffalo Field Office, or by mail to the Bureau of Land Management, Buffalo Field Office, 1425 Fort Street, Buffalo WY 82834. As interpreted by BLM, the regulations do not authorize acceptance of the BLM of protests in any form other than a signed, paper document that is delivered to the physical address of the BLM office within the 15-day period. Therefore, e-mail, verbal, or facsimile protests will not be accepted.

Field Manager: Juan M. D. Date: 2/15/13

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management**

Categorical Exclusion Not Established by Statute

DOI-BLM-WY-070-CX12-202

***Project Title:* Park Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Thinning**

Location: Northern Campbell County
Near the junction of Collins Road and Horse Creek Road
T55N, R72W; portions of Sections 21, 28, 29, 32, and 31;
44.719 x -105.534 (NAD83)

Applicant/Address: n/a

Project Contact

Name: Jennifer Walker

Title: Fire Ecologist

Office Address: Buffalo Field Office
1425 Fort St.
Buffalo, WY 82834

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U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management
Buffalo Field Office, 1425 Fort Street
Buffalo, Wyoming 82834 (307) 684-1100



CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION REVIEW AND APPROVAL

A. Background

Case File No.: n/a

Description of Proposed Action:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Buffalo Field Office (BFO) proposes thinning and piling treatments in ponderosa pine stands near ranch homes and developments in a high fire occurrence area of northern Campbell County. The project area is located near the junction of Collins Road and Horse Creek Road. Refer to attached **Map 1 – Vicinity in Section E**. The treatments total 162 acres on BLM and private lands within or adjacent to ponderosa pine woodlands. Refer to attached **Map 2 - Site Map**.

The treatments will be done by hand (chainsaw) with possible aid of a rubber-tracked skid-steer, and will selectively remove trees up to 7 inches DBH (diameter at breast height). Up to 20 trees per acre that are less than 5 inches DBH may be left to enhance uneven aged stand structure; except underneath the power line where all trees less than 7 inches DBH will be removed as a preemptive fire suppression measure. The freshly cut material as well as existing clusters of downed material that is greater than 3 inches in diameter will be piled and burned. Slash pile size will range from 5 feet in diameter and 5 feet tall to 10 feet in diameter and 7 feet tall. In Unit 4 (**Map 2 – Site Map**) where the work area is accessible to the public, logs greater than 5 inches in diameter may be segregated and made available for firewood or sold as poles. It is likely that treatments will require two years to complete and pile burning would occur in the third or fourth year.

Forest Structure and Fire Behavior

Thinning and pile burning in this area will improve the ponderosa stands' resistance to large, stand-replacing fires which have become a common occurrence in the vicinity during the last decade. Refer to attached **Map 3 – Fire History**. Treatments should moderate future fire behavior and enhance safety for firefighters and local residents, as well as providing more options for wildfire suppression strategies. In addition, the pine stand's resistance to drought and bark beetle outbreaks will likely improve as a result of the treatments.

Current forest structure and associated stand-replacement fire behavior are reflected in the tree data and the fire regime condition class (FRCC) assessment for the area:

- For the pine woodland stratum, the FRCC assessment estimates that closed canopy structures, along with the early seral class, are over-represented. The woodlands occupy about 560 acres of the planning area in which about 140 acres (~ 25%) are currently open-structured. Based on the LANDFIRE model for these woodlands, about 490 acres (~ 85%) should be open-structured. The thinning treatments will target the woodlands, creating more open-structured stands on 162 acres. The FRCC assessment currently rates the woodland stratum at a condition class 3 (CC3), mostly because of the current structure of the woodlands but also because of changes in fire severity, where canopy-replacing fire has become prevalent. The estimated effects of the treatments will change the FRCC vegetation structure rating to a CC2.
- Within the proposed thinning units the current basal area (BA) of larger trees (greater than 6 inches DBH) is about 120, ranging from 240 on steeper north-facing slopes to 20 in savanna-like areas. Although a BA of 120 in ponderosa pine is acceptable for most forest health and fuels objectives, a BA of 240 is quite high and increases the risk of forest health issues and high severity fire. Trees per acre (TPA) average about 700, ranging from 300 to 1,000. Trees less than 6 inches DBH range from 120 to 700 TPA. By selectively removing trees less than 7 inches DBH the resulting BA would average about 85, ranging from 20 to 140; and the resulting TPA would drop to 250, where 70 TPA

would be less than 6 inches DBH. The BA in the savanna-like sites would remain unchanged at 20 to 40, but most of the understory trees in those areas would be removed.

Wildlife

The project landscape does not include Greater Sage-Grouse (GSG) core, connectivity, or focus areas (aka Preliminary Priority Habitat – PPH) and the project is not in suitable GSG habitat. For big game, the planning area does not include crucial winter range; however mule deer, pronghorn, and whitetail deer use the area yearlong. During preliminary surveys one raptor nest was found. If work is to occur between February 1 and July 31 a survey between April 15 and June 15 would be necessary. Several migratory bird species were observed during the preliminary survey. It is recommended that the project work be conducted after July 31 or a wildlife biologist be present before work begins to survey for nests. A 100 foot buffer should be maintained from any located nests.

Range Management

The treatment units are within the Spring Creek allotment and adjacent to the Tyree Place allotment. Rest from livestock grazing may be necessary following pile burning if new concerns arise that require action, such as weed infestations. Reduction in pine canopy cover may result in increased forage production at the project site.

Invasive Plant Management

There are no known noxious weeds in the treatment units, but cheatgrass occurs along existing roads and in lighter densities on some southerly aspects. Rush skeletonweed occurs on BLM lands along the road to the north of Unit 4 and may be treated regardless of this proposed action to meet rangeland health requirements.

A recent study supports the general awareness that cheatgrass infestations in semi-arid regions contribute to the increased frequency and severity of wildfire; Balch 2013. Slash pile sites and firewood decks will be monitored for establishment of weeds for two years following burning/removal. If weed densities reach threshold levels determined by resource specialists, BLM will implement treatments as necessary to control them.

Cultural Concerns

Based on proposed hand thinning and pile burning activities, a reconnaissance inventory was conducted to locate any historic properties that may be impacted by the treatments, and no such properties were located. If work is done without the aid of the skid-steer, the BLM has determined that the project as proposed may proceed with no effects to historic properties; however in areas where the skid-steer may be used further inventory will be required prior to treatment implementation. Refer to pertinent design features, stipulations or mitigation in Section D.

Air

Air quality will be temporarily affected during pile burning, which is estimated to require a maximum of 6 days, in which about 30 acres could be accomplished per day. Estimates of slash pile biomass suggest that any given day of pile burning will likely create less than 2 tons PM₁₀. It is unlikely that 6 burn days will occur consecutively.

Realty

There is a Powder River Energy Corporation (PRECorp) ROW and overhead 3 phase power line on BLM lands in the two northern treatment units (**Map 2 - Site Map**). There are no known large trees threatening the structure, but if any are found during operations they will be avoided and PRE Corp will be contacted for assistance. Several older slash piles are currently located under the power line and will be burned if possible or may be relocated and burned as part of the proposed treatments. New piles will be positioned at least 100 feet from the centerline so that they may be burned without complications. The burn plan for

these piles will carefully consider appropriate wind direction and weather so that pile burning near the power line will prevent heat damage to the conductors and lines.

Oil and Gas Developments

There is Fee and Federal mineral oil and gas development on private lands near the treatment units. One of the nearby pads is adjacent to dense woodlands and would be threatened by high severity wildfire from the north or east. The thinning treatments would reduce that risk, at least from one direction. The pile burning will not effect or have any impacts to the oil and gas infrastructure in the surrounding area.

B. Land Use Plan (LUP) Conformance (*sequentially number all that apply*)

(This CX worksheet tiers from and incorporates by reference the analysis and order, below.)

	Buffalo and Powder River Basin (PRB) Final Environmental Impact Statements (FEISes) Records of Decision (RODs), 1985, 2003
1	Buffalo Resource Management Plan RMP) 1985
2	Buffalo RMP Amendments 2001, 2003, 2011
	Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides in 17 Western States, Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS); Record of Decision (ROD), BLM, 2007
3	Invasive Species Management, WY-070-EA09-099, Oct 2010 (the ‘Weed’ EA)
4	Fortification Creek Habitat Improvement Project, WY-070-EA11, July, 2011 (the ‘Cheatgrass’ EA)
	Department of Interior Order 3310 (Dec 2010)

Specific LUP Conformance:

	The proposed action conforms to the LUP(s) selected above because it is specifically provided for in the following LUP decisions:
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Or

X	The proposed action conforms to the LUP(s), even though it is not specifically provided for, because it is clearly consistent with the following LUP decision(s) (objectives, terms, or conditions)
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Plan Number <i>(from above)</i>	Page No. <i>(from plan)</i>	Language (<i>Include language from the applicable plans, add or delete rows as necessary</i>):
1	pp. 9-10	The 1985 RMP allows: FOM-2: thinning to enhance growing conditions on forest lands FOM-3: the sale of minor forest products (posts, poles, and fuelwood)

Plan Number <i>(from above)</i> Page No. <i>(from plan)</i>	Language <i>(Include language from the applicable plans, add or delete rows as necessary):</i>
<p style="text-align: center;">2 pp. 5-8</p>	<p>For forestry and fire management, the objectives of the 2001 Approved Resource Management Plan for BFO are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain and enhance the health, productivity, and biological diversity of forest and woodland ecosystems. • Restore the natural role of fire in the ecosystem; and to cost effectively protect life, property, and resource values from wildfire.
<p style="text-align: center;">3 pp. 11-16, 44</p>	<p>This EA tiers from and incorporates by reference the Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision (2007) but is specific to invasive species management in the Buffalo Field Office. Treatment methods, timing, and mitigation measures are described in the plan. If weed infestations require action as a result of the Park WUI proposed treatments, a further NEPA assessment will tier to Invasive Species Management, WY-070-EA09-099 (Oct 2010) and to the ‘cheatgrass’ EA below.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">4 pp. 6</p>	<p>This EA also tiers from and incorporates by reference the Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision (2007) but is specific to controlling cheatgrass in the Buffalo Field Office and specifically in the Fortification Creek Planning Area. If weed infestations require action as a result of the Park WUI proposed treatments, a further NEPA assessment will tier to Fortification Creek Habitat Improvement Project, WY-070-EA11 (July, 2011) and to the ‘weed’ EA above.</p>

C. Compliance with NEPA:

The proposed action is categorically excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with (select one):

43 CFR 46.210

516 DM 11.9

Appropriate CX number and text, or paraphrase of the text:

<p>C. Forestry (4) Pre-commercial thinning and brush control using small mechanical devices. and (5) Disposal of small amounts of miscellaneous vegetation products outside established harvest areas, such as Christmas trees, wildings, floral products (ferns, boughs, etc.), cones, seeds, and personal use firewood.</p>

This CX is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment. The proposed action has been reviewed, and none of the extraordinary circumstances described in 43 CFR Part 46.215 apply.

Explanation of why there is no potential for significant impacts:

None of the extraordinary circumstances apply, though additional explanation follows:

There are no significant impacts on public health or safety; however firefighter and public safety will be enhanced should wildfire occur in these areas after treatments are complete.

The project does not occur in Greater Sage-Grouse core or connectivity habitat (PPH); or in other sensitive, threatened or endangered species' habitat. Refer to Section D. Pertinent design features, stipulations or mitigation, which outlines seasonal constraints for disruptive activities.

Though invasive plant species occur on lands within or adjacent to the project sites, this project will not significantly contribute to or impact the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area. See further comments in Section D, pertinent design features and mitigation measures which address invasive plant management.

This project activity and area is clearly lacking in wilderness characteristics because it is smaller than 5,000 contiguous acres, and /or offers no opportunities for outstanding solitude or primitive recreation because:

The project units are situated in isolated BLM parcels that do not exceed 600 acres; or are adjacent to or within .25 miles of improved roads with public access.

D: Signature

I considered this review and determined that the proposed action described in this CX worksheet conforms to the land use plan and is categorically excluded from further environmental analysis. It is my decision to approve the proposed action.

Pertinent design features, stipulations or mitigation (*if applicable*):

The project area is not within Greater Sage-Grouse (GSG) Preliminary Priority Habitat (PPH) or in suitable GSG habitat. Disruptive activity would be restricted on or within one quarter (0.25) mile radius of the perimeter of occupied or undetermined GSG leks with adherence to seasonal restrictions in nesting/early brood-rearing habitat and/or winter concentration areas.

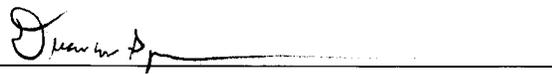
Project work should be conducted after July 31, or a wildlife biologist must be present before work begins to survey for nests. A 100 foot buffer should be maintained from any located nests. If an undocumented raptor nest is located during project construction or operation, the Buffalo Field Office (307-684-1100) shall be notified within 24 hours.

If work is done entirely by hand, the BLM has determined that the project as proposed may proceed with no effects to historic properties. However in areas where the skid-steer may be used, further inventory will be required prior to treatment implementation.

The area, especially slash pile sites and firewood decks, will be monitored for establishment of weeds for two years following burning/removal. If weed densities reach threshold levels determined by resource specialists, BLM will implement treatments as necessary to control them. Prior to applying any chemical weed control measures on public lands, BLM will include the treatment site(s) in the Buffalo Field Office's Pesticide Use Proposal and weed treatment Environmental Assessment(s).

Underneath the PRECorp power line on BLM lands, care will be taken to avoid damage to the structures. Any large trees which threaten the structures will be avoided during thinning operations and PRE Corp will be contacted for assistance. Piles will be positioned at least 100 feet from the centerline, and the burn plan for these piles will specify appropriate wind direction and weather so that pile burning near the power line will prevent heat damage to the conductors and lines.

Authorizing
Official:



Date:

2/12/13

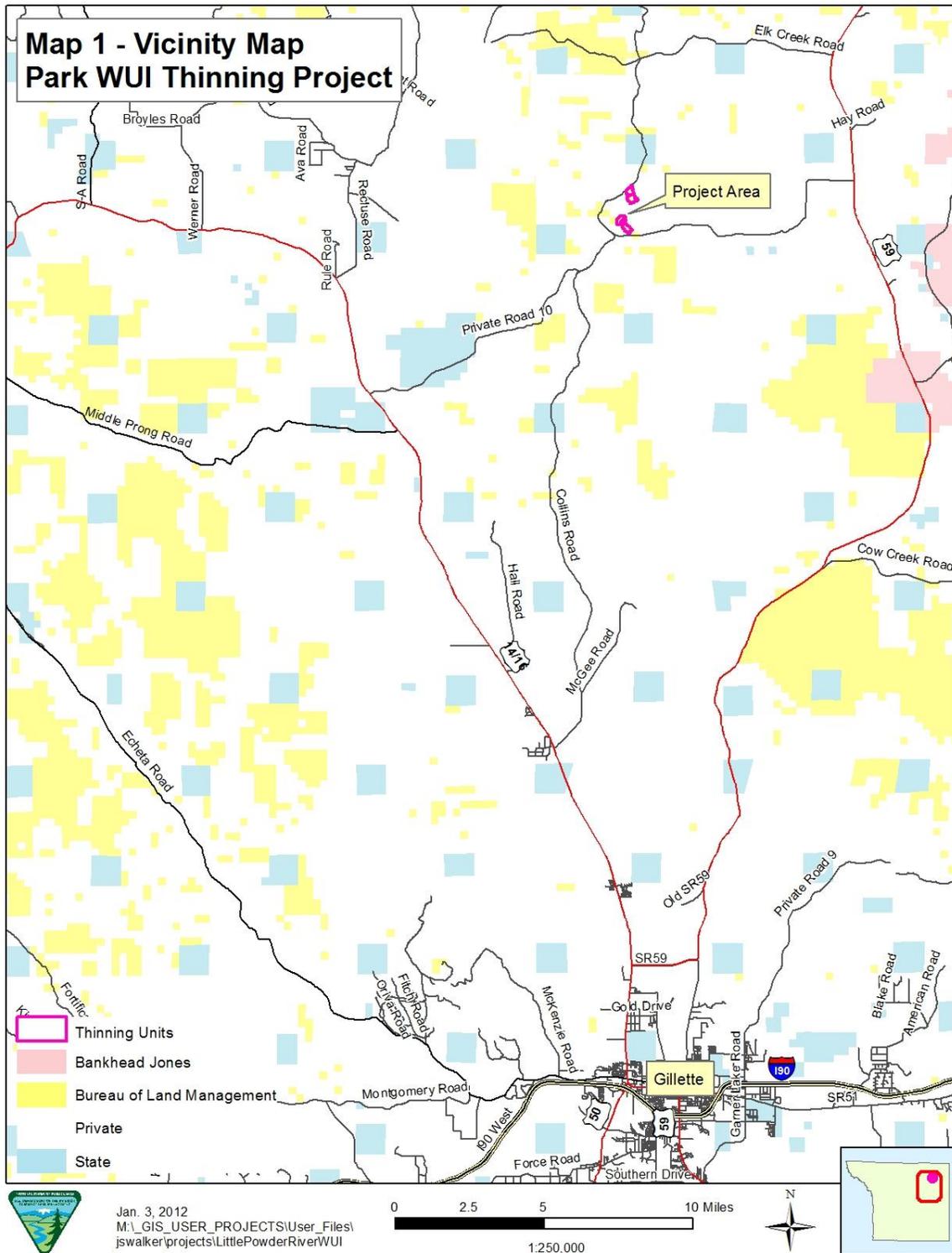
Note: A separate decision document must be prepared for the action covered by the CX.

Reference.

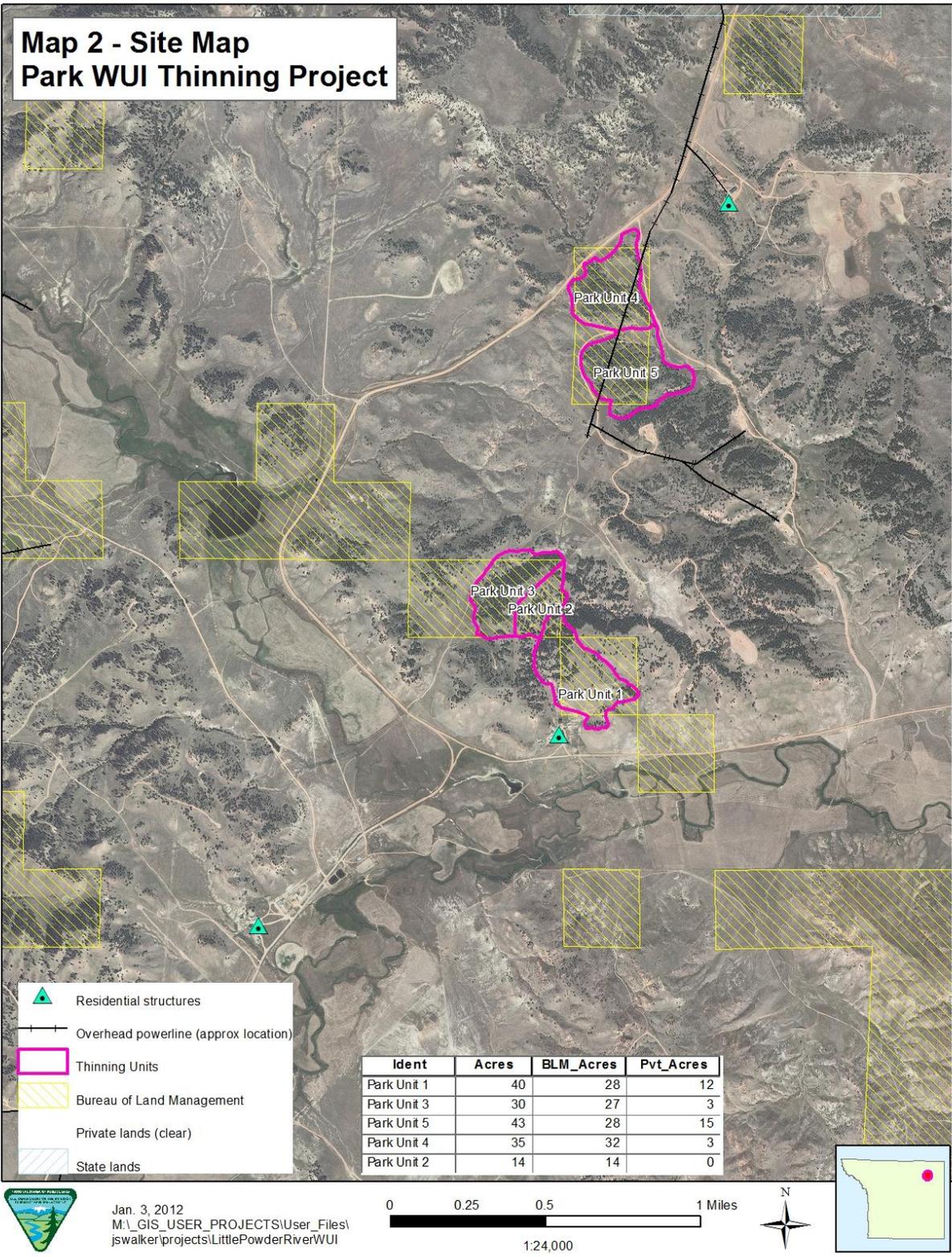
Balch, J.K., B.A. Bradley C.M D'Antonio, and J. Gomez-Dans. 2013. Introduced Annual Grass Increases Annual Fire Activity Across the Arid West (1980-2009). *Global Change Biology*. 19-1, pp 173-183. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gcb.12046/abstract>

E. Attachments (below and following pages)

- Map 1 – Vicinity**
- Map 2 – Site Map**
- Map 3 – Fire History**



Map 2 - Site Map Park WUI Thinning Project

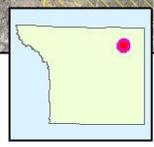
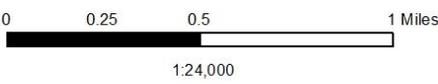


- Residential structures
- Overhead powerline (approx location)
- Thinning Units
- Bureau of Land Management
- Private lands (clear)
- State lands

Ident	Acres	BLM_Acres	Pvt_Acres
Park Unit 1	40	28	12
Park Unit 3	30	27	3
Park Unit 5	43	28	15
Park Unit 4	35	32	3
Park Unit 2	14	14	0



Jan. 3, 2012
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Map 3 - Fire History Park WUI Thinning Project

