

Environmental Assessment

for

New Fork-East Fork Confluence Boat Ramp Improvement Project

Prepared by

Cara Farr, Rangeland Management Specialist

Bureau of Land Management

Pinedale Field Office

Pinedale, Wyoming

WY-100-EA10-279



The BLM manages more land – 253 million acres – than any other Federal agency. This land, known as the National System of Public Lands, is primarily located in 12 Western States, including Alaska. The Bureau, with a budget of about \$1 billion, also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The BLM's multiple-use mission is to sustain the health and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. The Bureau accomplishes this by managing such activities as outdoor recreation, livestock grazing, mineral development, and energy production, and by conserving natural, historical, cultural, and other resources on public lands.

BLM/WY/PL-10/024+1220

WY-100-EA10-279

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The New Fork-East Fork Confluence Boat Ramp Improvement Project, WY-100-EA10-279, is a recreation site improvement project. The New Fork-East Fork Confluence boat ramp is located in Sublette County approximately 4.5 miles south-southwest of Boulder, WY. The legal location of the project is T31 R108 S 4 and 5. This EA was prepared by the Pinedale Field Office (PFO), Pinedale Wyoming.

1.1 Background

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposes to upgrade the existing river access to reduce resource problems and improve boating access for river floating and fishing. Anglers are currently using this site near the confluence of the New Fork and East Fork Rivers to launch and retrieve boats. The site is a convenient take-out point for floaters coming down from the Boulder Bridge. It is also a good place to put in for those going down to the “Gas Wells” area, or the bridge on Highway 351.

Sublette County Road and Bridge has used the location in the past for water hauling when they work on the South Boulder Road 23-106 (CR 106). The Sublette County Road and Bridge is partnering with the BLM in the improvement of this location in order to continue the use of the site as a water haul location when they work on CR 106.

1.2 Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The purpose of this project is the improvement of the river access at the New Fork-East Fork Confluence for boating, fishing, and resource protection.

Existing conditions in the analysis area present opportunities for improvements. The following need for the proposed action was identified:

1. There is a **need** to develop the existing river access site to prevent future resource damage, continue access at this location for recreationists using the river, and to bring the site into compliance with the Pinedale Resource Management Plan (RMP).

The goals and objectives are to:

1. Improve river access at this location.
2. Prevent future soil and streambank degradation.

Decision to be Made:

There are 2 decisions to be made:

First determine whether impacts of the action alternatives are significant. If the impacts are significant, a NOI (notice of intent) to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be prepared. If the impacts are not significant, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) will be prepared. If a FONSI is prepared, the second decision is to determine whether to authorize an alternative through a Decision Record (DR).

1.3 Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, Plans or Other Environmental Analyses

Name of Plan/s: Pinedale RMP

Date Approved: November 26, 2008

Regulations at 1610.5-3 require actions to be in conformance with the approved land use plan. The Proposed Action is in conformance with the Pinedale RMP. RMP decisions pertaining to this proposal include:

Page 2-25 to 2-29: Recreation and Visitor Services Management

Goal

Provide substantial personal, community, economic, and environmental benefits to local residents and visitors through recreational uses of the public lands.

Objective

Maintain or enhance the health and viability of recreation-dependent natural resources and settings within the planning area.

Action

Recreation facilities will be developed, where needed, to accommodate anticipated recreation uses, use levels and to provide for adequate public health and safety and resource protection.

Green and New Fork Rivers Special Recreation Management Area (SMRA) Objective

Manage each zone to provide opportunities for the public to achieve targeted, high-quality recreation activities and experiences that produce significant benefits to the visiting public.

Page 2-34: Soils Management

Goal

Prevent or mitigate impacts on soil stability, productivity, and water infiltration to prevent accelerated erosion and chemical degradation of the soil resource, and provide for optimal plant growth.

Objective

Prevent, reclaim, or mitigate impacts of erosion and chemical degradation from past surface disturbing and other activities within 5 years of RMP implementation.

Action

Disturbed areas will be reclaimed to achieve natural erosion rates and soil productivity to the extent practicable.

Page 2-37 and 2-39: Vegetation Management

Goal

Maintain and/or enhance native vegetation community health, composition, and diversity in conformance with Wyoming Standards for Rangeland Health. Reclaim disturbed areas to desired plant communities.

Objective

Ensure disturbed areas are reclaimed to the original site plant composition and productivity over the long term.

Page 2-40 Visual Resources Management (VRM)

Goal

Manage public lands in accordance with VRM objectives. Minimize the impacts on visual resources.

Objective

Manage the public lands in a manner that protects the quality of the scenic values of those lands.

Actions

Projects of all types within established VRM class areas are required to conform to the objectives and characteristics of the VRM classification.

VRM Class II areas will be managed to retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Management activities may be seen but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Any changes must repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.

Page 2-41 to 2-42: Watershed and Water Quality Management

Goals

Maintain or reestablish proper watershed, wetland, riparian, and stream channel functions to support natural or desired surface water flow regimes and meet state water quality standards and the Wyoming Standards for Rangeland Health.

Prevent, minimize, and/or remediate contributions of nonpoint source pollution from federal lands to all receiving waters.

Objectives

Control water runoff from developed sites and maintain soil erosion at appropriate rates for natural conditions.

Meet the Wyoming Standards for Rangeland Health and maintain or enhance wetland and riparian vegetation to achieve Proper Functioning Condition (PFC).

Actions

Sources of stream degradation that occur on public lands will be prevented, minimized, and/or remediated in cooperation with Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (WDEQ) and authorized land users.

Riparian areas will be maintained or improved to enhance forage conditions, provide wildlife habitat, and improve stream water quality.

Page 2-45 to 2-53: Wildlife and Fish Habitat Management

Goal

Maintain or enhance aquatic and wildlife habitat.

Maintain functioning big game habitats and migration corridors that allow free movement and use of habitats.

Sustain the sagebrush biome on a landscape scale to provide the amount, continuity, and quality of habitat necessary to maintain viable populations of sage-grouse and other sagebrush obligate species.

Objectives

Maintain sufficient undisturbed or minimally disturbed habitats to maintain persistent, well-distributed, self-sustaining, and productive populations of all native and desirable non-native fish (e.g., brook, brown, and rainbow trout) and wildlife species within the planning area.

Maintain sufficient undisturbed or minimally disturbed greater sage-grouse source habitats to maintain persistent, well-distributed, self-sustaining, productive populations of sage-grouse within the planning area.

Maintain and enhance big game habitats to support big game populations at Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) planning objective levels.

Maintain sufficient, undisturbed, or minimally disturbed sensitive species habitats to ensure persistent, well-distributed, self-sustaining, and productive populations of sensitive species within the planning area.

Maintain raptor habitats and territories within the planning area to ensure long-term species sustainability and widely distributed functioning habitats in accordance with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA).

Provide suitable habitat to ensure long-term species sustainability and widely distributed functioning habitats to support the Conservation Agreement and Strategy (CAS) for Colorado River Cutthroat Trout (CRCT) in the States of Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming; the "Three Species" CAS; and to support all other sensitive fish species.

Actions

No surface disturbing or disruptive activities are permitted in big game crucial winter ranges from November 15 to April 30.

Permitted activities potentially affecting the habitat of Special Status Species will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Surveys for Special Status Species will be conducted on BLM-administered public lands and mineral estate before any federal project or federal activity is approved.

Other Sensitive Species: If surveys conducted within areas not subject to timing limitations identify sensitive species' life-cycle activities, surface disturbing activities will be delayed until wildlife activity is completed.

Pygmy rabbits: Surveys identifying pygmy rabbit burrows require avoidance of the burrow by 50 feet. Pipeline crossings and surface disturbing activities through ephemeral drainages and in basin, Wyoming, and big sagebrush communities will be minimized.

Projects in CRCT and other sensitive fish species habitats will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Projects could be approved if no impacts on CRCT or other sensitive fish species are caused, or if impacts can be satisfactorily mitigated.

Projects that could impact habitats of roundtail chubs, flannelmouth suckers, and bluehead suckers (the "Three Species" designated in the CAS) will be designed to avoid or mitigate impacts to these or other sensitive fish species. Specific dates for avoidance of instream activities to protect spawning, redds, and fry vary by species, stream, and elevation and will be determined case by case and in coordination with the WGFD.

Prior to initiating surface disturbing activities within potential raptor habitat, surveys will be conducted for nesting, roosting, and foraging activity within a 1-mile radius of the proposed activity.

The following seasonal restrictions for activities near active raptor nest, roosting sites, and foraging areas will be imposed:

- February 1 through July 31, within one-half mile of all active raptor nests
- April 1 through August 15, within one-half mile of burrowing owl nesting habitat
- February 1 through July 31, within 1 mile of all active ferruginous hawk nests
- February 1 through August 15, within 1 mile of bald eagle nests.

Surface occupancy (permanent structures) is prohibited within 1,000 feet of an active raptor nest, within 1,400 feet of an active ferruginous hawk nest, or within 2,600 feet of an active bald eagle nest.

RMP Record of Decision (ROD) Appendix 18 Pages 18-16 to 18-26

Activities and habitat alterations that may disturb bald eagles will be restricted within suitable habitats that occur within bald eagle buffer zones:

- Zone 1 (within one-half mile February 1 to August 15) is intended to protect active and alternative nests. For active nests, minimal human activity levels are allowed during the period of first occupancy to 2 weeks after fledging.
- Zone 2 (within one-half to 1 mile from the nest) is intended to protect bald eagle primary use areas and permits light human activity levels.
- Zone 3 is designated to protect foraging/concentration areas year-round. Zone 3 would include one of two larger areas, depending on habitat types: a) 2.5 miles extending in all directions from the nest or b) one-half mile from the bank of all streams within 2.5 miles of the nest. Site-specific habitat types and foraging areas will be evaluated to determine which Zone 3 buffer applies. Zone delineation depends on habitat types. Exceptions may be made after consultation with United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Minimal human activity levels— Essentially no human activity with the following exceptions:

- Existing patterns of ranching and agricultural activities.
- Nesting surveys and banding by biologists experienced with eagles.
- River traffic by boats that continue travel at the rate of the main current and at a frequency which results in no boat traffic for at least 30 percent of the daylight hours (fishing from boats with such movement rates and frequency is acceptable).

Light human activity levels— This level allows for day use and low impact activities, such as boating, fishing, and hiking but at low densities and frequencies. Excluded activities include extended use and activities such as heavy construction, timber harvest, seismic exploration, blasting, concentrated use associated with recreation centers (e.g., picnic areas, boat landings), permanent housing, and helicopters or jets within one-half mile of the ground.

Moderate human activity levels— Low impact (light) activity levels are included, but intensity of such activities is not limited. A limited number of recreation centers designed to avoid eagle conflicts may be considered. Other activities, such as construction, seismic exploration, blasting, and timber harvest, should also be designed to specifically avoid disturbance. Designing projects or land uses to avoid eagle conflicts requires sufficient data to formulate a site-specific management plan.

Projects with the potential to disturb bald eagles should be implemented in the least amount of time and during periods least likely to affect the bald eagle.

Other Authorities

This Environmental Assessment (EA) fulfills the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 requirement for site-specific analysis. The Proposed Action is in accordance with 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1610.5-3(a); Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976, as amended; Taylor Grazing Act of 1934; Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1983, as amended; The Clean Air Act as amended; Clean Water Act of 1977; National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), as amended; MBTA of 1918, as amended; and the Wyoming Standards for Healthy Rangelands and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing, August 12, 1997.

1.4 Scoping, Public Involvement and Issues

The BLM decision-making process is conducted in accordance with the requirements of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing NEPA, and the United States Department of Interior (USDI) and BLM policies and procedures implementing NEPA. NEPA and the associated regulatory and policy framework require federal agencies to involve the interested public in their decision-making.

On August 6, 2009, a scoping package was mailed to 60 individuals and organizations. The scoping package described the proposed action. Eight (8) responses were received and analyzed (Appendix A). No issues were identified through the scoping process because there were no disputes raised with the specific proposed action or its effects.

This EA has been developed in consultation and coordination with state and local agency personnel, other affected parties, and interested members of the public-at-large.

2.0 PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

2.1 Alternative 1 – No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative is not to take the action.

This alternative makes no changes to the project area.

This site is undeveloped. It currently consists of several two-track roads, an area that is devoid of vegetation that is used for parking, and an eroding bank that is used for launching boats. The site currently does not comply with the RMP and would continue in noncompliance with this alternative.

2.2 Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

The proposed action includes hardening the parking area, turn around and boat ramp with gravel, upgrading the road, reclaiming degraded habitat, placing rock barriers, planting trees and installing a comfort station. In addition, the Sublette County Road and Bridge department is applying for a Right of Way (ROW) to install a dry hydrant at the site for extracting water from the New Fork River. The hydrant will have a locking mechanism that will only allow for County use and back flow preventer to prevent water from flowing back into the river. The County would use the hydrant for a total of 48 days per year from April 1 through October 31. The use by the County would consist of water hauling trucks accessing the dry hydrant and using a diesel pump to extract water from the New Fork River during daylight hours. Trucks can haul 4000 gallons

per load and each fill would take anywhere from 5 to 20 minutes (depending on the power capacity of the pump).

The original proposal was modified to exclude the bank full bench in response to WGFD scoping comments and to include dry hydrant installation for Sublette County Road and Bridge water use. The proposed action includes the following actions (Map 1):

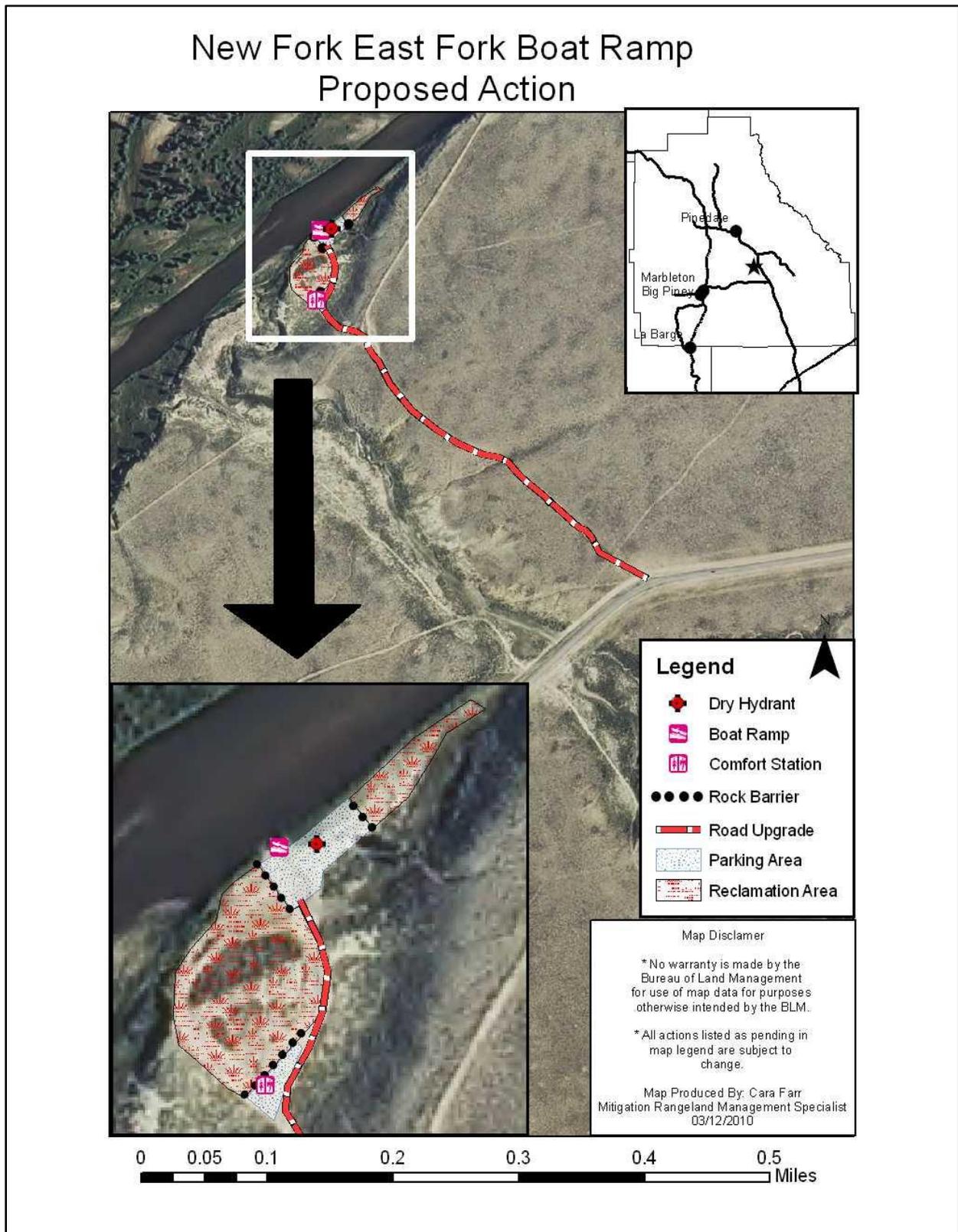
1. Reclaim 29,500 square feet of degraded habitat
2. Harden with gravel 12,100 square feet for parking, turn around, and boat ramp
3. Refurbish 425 feet of road within the boat ramp area
4. Build 360 feet of rock barriers
5. Install signs at CR 106, the parking area, and the boat ramp
6. Install Comfort Station
7. Upgrade 1,690 feet of road from the CR 106 to the ramp area (Class 2 Resource Road)
8. Plant trees
9. Install a dry hydrant for county water use (lockable with back-flow preventor)

2.3 Alternative 3 – Bald Eagle Action

The Proposed Action was modified to reduce impacts to nesting Bald Eagles by removing the Comfort Station and dry hydrant. The Bald Eagle action includes the following actions:

1. Reclaim 29,500 square feet of degraded habitat
2. Harden with gravel 12,100 square feet for parking, turn around, and boat ramp
3. Refurbish 425 feet of road within the boat ramp area
4. Build 360 feet of rock barriers
5. Install signs at CR 106, the parking area, and the boat ramp
6. Upgrade 1,690 feet of road from the CR 106 to the ramp area (Class 2 Resource Road)
7. Plant trees

Map 1. Alternative 2 – Proposed Action



2.4 Project Design Features

Project design features are elements of the project that are applied in Alternatives 2 and 3. These features were developed to reduce or avoid negative environmental effects of the action alternatives on resources:

- **Wildlife Resources**

- Timing Stipulations for entire project
 - No surface disturbing or disruptive activities are permitted in big game crucial winter ranges from November 15 to April 30.
 - The following seasonal restrictions for activities near active raptor nest, roosting sites, and foraging areas will be imposed:
 - February 1 through July 31, within one-half mile of all active raptor nests
 - April 1 through August 15, within one-half mile of burrowing owl nesting habitat
 - February 1 through July 31, within 1 mile of all active ferruginous hawk nests
 - February 1 through August 15, within 1 mile of bald eagle nests.
 - Surface-disturbing or disruptive activities will be prohibited within one-half mile of identified habitat during the period of April 15 to August 15 for the protection of nesting western yellow-billed cuckoos.
- Surface occupancy (permanent structures) is prohibited within 1,000 feet of an active raptor nest, within 1,400 feet of an active ferruginous hawk nest, or within 2,000 feet of an active bald eagle nest.
- Prior to initiating surface disturbing activities within potential raptor habitat, surveys will be conducted for nesting, roosting, and foraging activity within a 1-mile radius of the proposed activity.
- Projects in CRCT and other sensitive fish species habitats will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Projects could be approved if no impacts on CRCT or other sensitive fish species are caused, or if impacts can be satisfactorily mitigated.
- Projects that could impact habitats of roundtail chubs, flannelmouth suckers, and bluehead suckers (the “Three Species” designated in the CAS) will be designed to avoid or mitigate impacts to these or other sensitive fish species. Specific dates for avoidance of instream activities to protect spawning, redds, and fry vary by species, stream, and elevation and will be determined case by case and in coordination with the WGFD.
- Permitted activities potentially affecting the habitat of Special Status Species will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- Surveys for Special Status Species will be conducted on BLM-administered public lands and mineral estate before any federal project or federal activity is approved.
- Other Sensitive Species: If surveys conducted within areas not subject to timing limitations identify sensitive species’ life-cycle activities, surface disturbing activities will be delayed until wildlife activity is completed.

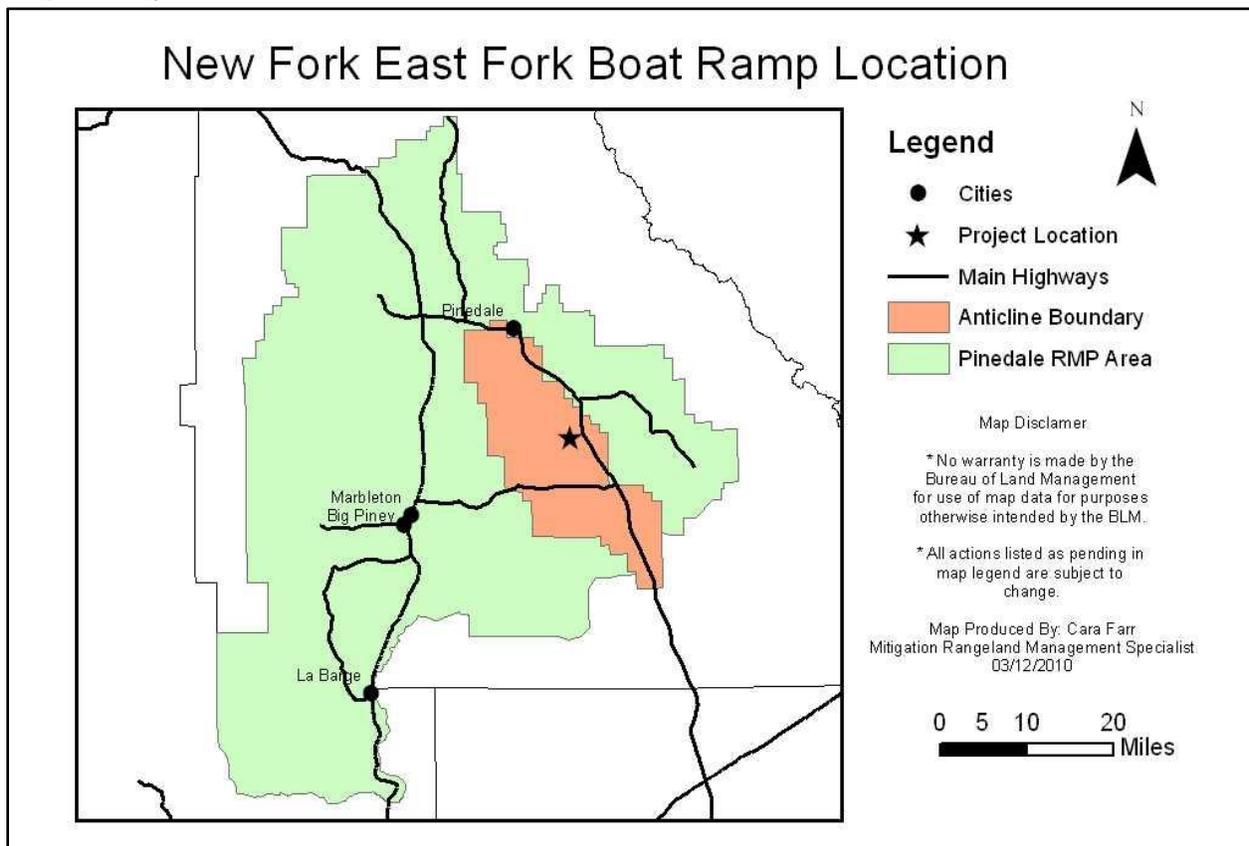
- Pygmy rabbits: Surveys identifying pygmy rabbit burrows require avoidance of the burrow by 50 feet. Pipeline crossings and surface disturbing activities through ephemeral drainages and in basin, Wyoming, and big sagebrush communities will be minimized.
- A Section 7 consultation is required for water depletion of the Colorado River system.
- **Watershed Resources**
 - Wyoming Stormwater Best Management Practices (BMP) will be incorporated for soil and water protection.
- **Recreation and Visual Resources**
 - Dry hydrant facilities will be painted a shale green color.

3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

3.1 Introduction

The Project site is located within the Pinedale RMP and the Pinedale Anticline Project Area (PAPA) (Map 2). This analysis tiers to the Pinedale RMP Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and the PAPA Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS).

Map 2. Project Location in relation to the PAPA and Pinedale RMP Area



The New Fork-East Fork Confluence river access is located on the New Fork River about 200 yards below the confluence of the East Fork River in Sublette County, Wyoming. In 1964, the BLM Recreation Resource Inventory identified this area of public land as possessing good

recreation opportunities. The inventory recommended the site for development because of the variety of available natural resources.

This site is currently undeveloped consisting of several two-track roads, an area that is devoid of vegetation used for parking, and an eroding bank used for launching boats. Vehicles and trailers with low clearance cannot gain access to the site and the boat launching area can be problematic for any vehicle. The primitive roads and parking area are passable during good weather, but become extremely soft when wet. Anglers trying to access the river when the roads are wet often become stuck and have dug multiple ruts while trying to get free. In addition, the road surfaces tend to channel water further leading to the formation of ruts. After the depth of the ruts become excessive, people pioneer new roads leading to additional erosion problems. Currently, five roads branch off from the main road and terminate at the same point at the river's edge.

Sublette County Road and Bridge has historically used the proposed New Fork-East Fork Confluence river access location to haul water starting in the late 1970's. They have used this site several times each year from April thru October to haul water for the maintenance of CR 106.

The following are not present or will not be impacted and will not be further analyzed:

Air Quality

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)

Environmental Justice

Prime or Unique Farmlands

Hazardous or Solid Wastes

Native American Religious Concerns

Paleontology

Wilderness Values

3.2 Wildlife

Specific information regarding wildlife can be found in the Wildlife Resource report (Appendix B).

Big Game

The project area provides crucial winter range and transitional ranges for big game species including pronghorn antelope, mule deer and moose as designated by the WGFD. There are no elk seasonal habitats identified by the WGFD within the boat ramp project area.

Raptors

Documented raptor nests in the area are located along the riparian areas of the New Fork and East Fork River corridors. Common raptors that have been documented in the area include red-tailed hawk, bald eagle, golden eagle, Swainson's hawk, osprey, Cooper's

hawk, sharp-shinned hawk, American kestrel, prairie falcon, short-eared owl and great-horned owl. According to BLM records, there are several raptor nests, historic and recently active, documented within 1-mile of the project area: 2 Swainson's hawk nests, 9 red-tailed hawk nests, 2 American kestrel nests, 2 bald eagle nests (discussed more below) and one common raven nest.

Fisheries

The New Fork River provides habitat for several game and nongame fish species as identified by WGFD. The WGFD conducts fish sampling surveys annually in several segments of the Green and New Fork Rivers including a segment of the New Fork River downstream from the confluence with the East Fork River. Sampling results are summarized in Annual Fisheries Reports by the WGFD (SEIS).

Introduced species of game fish documented in this segment include: Snake River cutthroat trout, brown trout, rainbow trout, lake trout, and Kokanee salmon. Mountain whitefish, a native game fish species, is also found in this segment of the New Fork River. Native nongame species identified include: speckled dace, mountain sucker, mottled sculpin, and flannelmouth sucker. Exotic nongame species that have been documented in this segment of river include: white sucker, Utah sucker, hybrids of white and Utah sucker with flannelmouth sucker, red shiner and Utah chub (Cavalli 2009, pers. comm.).

Federally Threatened, Endangered Species and Candidate Species

Federally threatened, endangered and candidate species that may occur within the PFO are listed in Table 1.

Colorado River Fish Species

The four federally endangered Colorado Fish species include the bonytail (*Gila elegans*), Colorado pikeminnow (*Ptychocheilus lucius*), humpback chub (*Gila cypha*), and razorback sucker (*Xyrauchen texanus*). Federal agency actions resulting in water depletions to the Colorado River system may affect these endangered species and their designated critical habitats and requires formal consultation with the USFWS.

Greater sage-grouse

Greater sage-grouse are dependent on sagebrush habitats year-round. The general distribution of greater sage-grouse is associated with the distribution of sagebrush (*Artemisia* spp.), and in particular, big sagebrush (*A. tridentata*). Greater sage-grouse require open areas within the sagebrush community for leks where they perform courtship rituals. These strutting grounds (lek sites) are considered "traditional" or "historic" because the birds return to them annually. After nesting, the hens move to brood areas that support forb understory or succulent vegetation (i.e., riparian areas or irrigated fields) and large populations of insects in late spring and late summer. The sage-grouse diet consists almost entirely of sagebrush during late fall and winter (FEIS).

Table 1. Threatened, Endangered and Candidate Species that may occur within the PFO and occurrence in the project area. .

SPECIES	STATUS	HABITAT	OCCURRENCE IN PROJECT AREA
Black-footed ferret (<i>Mustela nigripes</i>)	Endangered	Prairie dog towns	Does not occur
Canada lynx (<i>Lynx canadensis</i>)	Threatened	Montane forests	Does not occur
Colorado River Fish Species	Endangered	Yampa, Green and Colorado River systems downstream of Wyoming	Occurs downstream
Gray wolf (<i>Canis lupus</i>)	Nonessential/experimental populations	Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem	Does not occur
Greater sage-grouse (<i>Centrocercus urophasianus</i>)	Candidate	Basin prairie shrub, mountain foothill shrub	Present
Grizzly bear (<i>Ursus arctos horribilis</i>)	Threatened	Montane forests	Does not occur
Kendall Warm Springs dace (<i>Rhinichthys osculus thermalis</i>)	Endangered	Kendall Warm Springs, Sublette County	Does not occur
Yellow-billed cuckoo (<i>Coccyzus americanus</i>)	Candidate	Riparian areas west of Continental Divide	May occur

Greater sage-grouse breeding, nesting, brood-rearing and foraging habitats are present within the project site in the upland sagebrush habitat and riparian areas. There is one unoccupied/abandoned lek located within 2-miles of the project area. Two occupied and one unoccupied/abandoned sage-grouse leks are located within 4-miles of the project area (WGFD 2009). According to BLM records, several nest locations and signs of nesting evidence have been documented within 4-miles of the project area. The project area is located outside of the Governor’s Designated Sage-grouse Core Areas (State of Wyoming Executive Department Executive Order [EO] 2008-2).

Yellow-billed cuckoo

The yellow-billed cuckoo prefers large tracts of deciduous riparian woodlands with dense, scrubby undergrowth. It frequently uses willow thickets for nesting and forages among large cottonwoods. In Wyoming, the western subspecies of the yellow-billed cuckoo is considered

uncommon and is found primarily along waterways in the lower Green River Basin. Yellow-billed cuckoos have not been documented in the upper Green River Basin (FEIS).

There is no yellow-billed cuckoo habitat in the immediate project vicinity as the existing area of disturbance is primarily devoid of vegetation. Riparian habitats upstream and downstream of the project area contain deciduous riparian woodlands with stands of cottonwoods and willows. Grazing occurs on private lands within the riparian areas and the amount of scrubby undergrowth that could provide suitable habitat for yellow-billed cuckoo is limited.

Wyoming BLM Sensitive Species

Wyoming BLM sensitive species that may occur within the PFO are listed in Table 2.

Pygmy rabbit

Dense sagebrush and relatively deep, loose soils are important characteristics of pygmy rabbit habitat. Pygmy rabbit habitat is present in the upland sagebrush steppe habitat. Pygmy rabbit habitat is not present in the parking/boat ramp area as this area contains alkaline soils and salt tolerant vegetation. In recent pygmy rabbit surveys conducted for the PAPA wildlife monitoring in 2009, inactive pygmy rabbit burrows were found within 1-mile of the project area in the upland sagebrush habitat.

Bald eagle

The bald eagle was listed as an endangered species in 1967 and subsequently reclassified as threatened in 1995. The USFWS removed (delisted) the bald eagle in the lower 48 states of the United States from the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife by final rule dated July 9, 2007, effective August 8, 2007.

Bald eagles generally occur in areas with open water and near concentrations of winter ungulates, waterfowl, and/or fish. Nesting habitat is defined as any mature stand of conifer or cottonwood trees in association with rivers, streams, reservoirs, lakes, or any significant body of water. Although their main food item is fish, additional food items may include ducks, coots, rabbits, carrion, and small rodents. Bald eagles are sensitive to various human activities. Responses to human disturbance vary and may include short-term, temporal, or spatial avoidance of the disturbance, to total reproductive failure and abandonment of breeding areas (FEIS).

Wintering bald eagles regularly occur in western Wyoming, generally from November 1 through April 15 and may occur during any time of year along the Green and New Fork River corridors. Migratory bald eagles have been observed during April and November generally throughout the Green River Basin which is also potential bald eagle nesting and roosting habitat. During February 2005, the BLM conducted a winter ground survey of bald eagles in the PFO Administrative Area. A total of 54 eagles were counted, most of them along the Green River and its tributaries, although 10 eagles were documented along the New Fork River between Boulder and its confluence with the Green River. Most bald eagle observations during surveys were associated with forest-dominated riparian cover. During

the February 2006 survey, eight bald eagles were documented along the New Fork River. In winter 2007, 16 bald eagles were observed in the vicinity of the PAPA along the New Fork River and Green River (SEIS). Wintering bald eagles have been observed at the Fontenelle Reservoir, near Pinedale, west of Daniel and southwest of Boulder (FEIS).

Table 2. BLM Wyoming Sensitive Species that May Occur within the PFO and occurrence in the project area.

SENSITIVE SPECIES COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	HABITAT	OCCURRENCE IN PROJECT AREA
Mammals			
Idaho pocket gopher	<i>Thomomys idahoensis</i>	Shallow stony soils	Does not occur
Long-eared myotis	<i>Myotis evotis</i>	Conifer and deciduous forests, caves and mines	Does not occur
Pygmy rabbit	<i>Brachylagus idahoensis</i>	Prairie-basin shrub and riparian shrub	May occur
White-tailed prairie dog	<i>Cynomys leucurus</i>	Basin prairie shrub, grasslands	Does not occur
Birds			
Bald eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	Areas with open water and near concentrations of winter ungulates, waterfowl, and/or fish	Present
Brewer's sparrow	<i>Spizella breweri</i>	Basin prairie shrub	May occur
Burrowing owl	<i>Athene cunicularia</i>	Grasslands, basin prairie shrub	Does not occur
Ferruginous hawk	<i>Buteo regalis</i>	Basin prairie shrub, grassland, rock outcrops	May occur
Loggerhead shrike	<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	Basin prairie shrub, mountain foothill shrub	May occur
Long-billed curlew	<i>Numenius americanus</i>	Grasslands, plains, foothills, wet meadows	May occur
Mountain plover	<i>Charadrius montanus</i>	Grasslands, basin prairie shrub	Does not occur
Northern goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	Conifer and deciduous forest	Does not occur
Peregrine falcon	<i>Falco peregrines</i>	Tall cliffs	Does not occur
Sage sparrow	<i>Amphispiza belli</i>	Basin prairie shrub, mountain foothill shrub	May occur
Sage thrasher	<i>Oreoscoptes montanus</i>	Basin prairie shrub, mountain foothill shrub	May occur

SENSITIVE SPECIES COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	HABITAT	OCCURRENCE IN PROJECT AREA
Trumpeter swan	<i>Cygnus buccinator</i>	Open woodlands, streamside willow and alder groves	May occur
White-faced ibis	<i>Plegadis chihi</i>	Marshes, wet meadows	May occur
Fish			
Bluehead sucker	<i>Catostomus discobolus</i>	Bear, Snake and Green river drainages, all waters	Does not occur
Flannelmouth sucker	<i>Catostomus latipinnis</i>	Colorado River drainage, large rivers, streams and lakes	Present
Roundtail chub	<i>Gila robusta</i>	Colorado River drainage, large rivers, streams and lakes	Does not occur
Northern leatherside chub	<i>Lepidomeda copei</i>	Bear, Snake and Green River drainages, clear, cool streams and pools	Does not occur
Hornyhead Chub	<i>Nocomis biguttatus</i>	Lower Laramie and North Laramie River Watersheds	Does not occur
Colorado River cutthroat trout	<i>Oncorhynchus clarki spp.</i>	Colorado River drainage, clear mountain streams	Does not occur
Fine-spotted Snake River cutthroat trout	<i>Oncorhynchus clarki spp.</i>	Snake River Drainage, clear, fast water	Does not occur
Yellowstone cutthroat trout	<i>Oncorhynchus clarki bouvieri</i>	Yellowstone Drainage, small mountain streams and large rivers	Does not occur
Amphibians			
Boreal toad (Northern Rocky Mountain population)	<i>Bufo boreas boreas</i>	Pond margins, wet meadows, riparian areas	May occur
Northern leopard frog	<i>Rana pipiens</i>	Beaver ponds, permanent water in plains and foothills	May occur
Spotted frog	<i>Ranus pretiosa (lutiventris)</i>	Ponds, sloughs, small streams	Unlikely

There are two bald eagle nests within 1-mile of the boat ramp project area. The nest to the east of the project area is located approximately 0.60 miles away and the nest to the west is located approximately 0.45 miles away. BLM records indicate this bald eagle nesting territory has been known to be active for the past 7 years. The nest located to the east of the project area has been active for 5 of the last 7 years while the alternate nest

location to the west of the project area has been active for 2 out of the last 7 years. Bald eagle winter roosting habitat is not present in the proposed project area. Suitable roosting habitat is located in the deciduous riparian woodlands upstream and downstream of the project area although there are no BLM records of bald eagles roosting within 1-mile of the project area. During 2009-2010 winter roost surveys conducted for the PAPA wildlife monitoring effort, no bald eagles were observed within 1-mile of the project area.

Ferruginous hawk

Ferruginous hawks construct their big, bulky nests on the ground, occasionally in lone trees or on rock ledges. They nest only in areas with abundant prey, typically small rodents. During winter, ferruginous hawks are often found around colonies of prairie dogs, which make up much of their winter diet (FEIS).

There are no known ferruginous hawk nests within 1-mile of the project area and no suitable nesting habitat within 1-mile of the project area. Ferruginous hawks may use the upland sagebrush habitat for foraging on small rodents.

Loggerhead shrike

The loggerhead shrike generally prefers open country with shrubs and low trees for nesting and spiny shrubs for impaling prey items (FEIS). The project area contains suitable foraging and potential nesting habitat for loggerhead shrikes.

Long-billed curlew

The long-billed curlew is North America's largest shorebird. Long-billed curlews are ground nesters and typically nest in prairie and grassy meadows near water but occasionally choose dry upland sites. Long-billed curlews have been found throughout the northern half of the PFO and near Fontenelle Reservoir (FEIS). The project area may contain suitable habitat for the long-billed curlew.

Sagebrush Obligate Songbirds

The Brewer's sparrow, sage sparrow and sage thrasher are sagebrush obligate songbirds that depend on sagebrush habitats for nesting and foraging (FEIS). The upland sagebrush steppe habitat in the project area provides suitable habitat for sagebrush obligate songbirds.

Trumpeter swan

Trumpeter swans are found in Wyoming in the extreme eastern and western regions in lakes, ponds, marshes, and other wetlands areas. This species summers southwest of Boulder and winters in the southeast region if open water persists. Trumpeter swans have been observed in the PFO and have been periodically released on public land in the New Fork Potholes area. Currently the native reproducing population has been more successful at producing cygnets than the historic Snake River breeding population (FEIS). The project area does not contain suitable nesting habitat for trumpeter swans but swans may use the river corridor during migration and winter if open water persists.

White-faced ibis

The white-faced ibis breeding habitat is shallow freshwater marshland, especially where islands of vegetation are available. It also makes extensive use of agricultural lands, frequenting flooded pastures, fields, irrigated areas, and even damp meadows for foraging and during migration. Suitable habitat for the white-faced ibis may be present along the riparian areas of the New Fork and East Fork Rivers.

Sensitive Fish Species

See fisheries discussion on page 13.

Sensitive Amphibian Species

Boreal toads can be found breeding in wet meadows, ponds, marshes, and other shallow water in spring. In summer, this species uses upland montane sites usually within 300 to 1,500 feet of the breeding ponds. Northern leopard frogs are found in permanent ponds, swamps, marshes and slow moving streams throughout forest, open and urban areas. Boreal toads have been documented downstream of the confluence of the Middle and South Sawmill Creeks near LaBarge with confirmation of breeding. Northern leopard frogs have been observed in the central and east central regions of the PFO but evidence of breeding was not confirmed (FEIS).

The upland sagebrush habitat where the access road is located does not provide suitable habitat for amphibians. The lower portion of the project area located in the floodplain of the New Fork River may provide habitat for amphibians in the spring during spring runoff when there is more moisture in the area. The wet areas along the bank of the New Fork River likely provide suitable habitat for amphibians from spring into the fall.

3.3 Watershed and Rangeland Resources

Watershed

Surface Hydrology

The New Fork River originates in the Wind River Mountain Range north and east of the project and cuts across the PAPA to join the Green River. The New Fork River is fed mostly by snowmelt with runoff rising from April to peak flow in June. Groundwater feeds baseflow in streams from October through March during which time there is little precipitation except for headwater snowpack accumulation. There are several reservoirs on New Fork tributaries that provide flood control, supply water to irrigation, and are recreational and fish and wildlife resources. (SEIS)

The New Fork River has high quality water above the PAPA, with total dissolved solids (TDS) typically less than 100 mg/L in headwaters. Salinity in the New Fork River actually decreases along the northeast flank of the PAPA due to dilution by very low TDS streams entering from the east. In the New Fork River from Boulder to the Green River, salinity increases downstream are due to contributions from irrigation return flow, groundwater discharge, and runoff from salty soils in the lower reaches (SEIS). The project site is currently contributing sediment and potentially salinity to the New Fork River.

The waters of the New Fork River and tributaries are WDEQ designated Class 2AB, which means that they support game fish populations at least seasonally, and the supply and water quality is suitable for supporting drinking water use. Class 2AB waters are also protected for nongame fisheries, fish consumption, aquatic life other than fish, primary contact recreation, wildlife, industry, agriculture and scenic value uses. Neither the New Fork River nor any of its tributaries are included in Wyoming's Section 303(d) 2008 list of impaired waters (US EPA, 2008). The Sublette County Conservation District (SCCD) monitors water in the streams of the New Fork basin quarterly. The samples are collected in March (estimated spring runoff peak), July (peak flow), and the first week in September and November. Biological samples are taken in the latter two periods. One sampling location is located immediately downstream of the project site. (SEIS)

The current condition of the site is not in compliance with the RMP due to sedimentation and there is a need to bring it into compliance:

Page 2-41 to 2-42: Watershed and Water Quality Management

Goals

Prevent, minimize, and/or remediate contributions of nonpoint source pollution from federal lands to all receiving waters.

Objectives

Control water runoff from developed sites and maintain soil erosion at appropriate rates for natural conditions.

Actions

Sources of stream degradation that occur on public lands will be prevented, minimized, and/or remediated in cooperation with WDEQ and authorized land users.

Soils

Soils coinciding with the PAPA were classified into four broad groups, based primarily on differences in geologic origin (i.e., parent material and topographic or geomorphic position). The groups include: 1) terrace soils; 2) soils on pediment, alluvial fans and low terraces; 3) upland soils; and 4) alluvial soils on flood plains. The soils of the project area consist of two of these groups: flood plain and wetland soils and upland soils. Sensitive soil characteristics within these soil groups include areas that are subject to flooding and soils with high water tables. (SEIS)

The soils of the site consist of three map units: Havermom-Tismid-Giarch complex, 0 to 4 percent slopes, Ryark-Hawkstone-Cotha complex, 0 to 2 percent slopes, and Bluerim-Cryluha-Rock River complex, 2 to 15 percent slopes. The Havermom-Tismid-Giarch complex is located on the bench and the other two complexes are located on the uplands. The frost free season for these soils lasts approximately 60 to 120 days.

The river access site is located in the Havermom-Tismid-Giarch complex. This map unit is characterized by deep to very deep, moderately to well drained, fine sandy to sandy, highly alkaline and sodic soils on floodplains and terraces. These soils are formed from alluvial material in cold climates with mean annual temperatures about 42 degrees Fahrenheit and less than 12 inches of precipitation per year.

The access road crosses the Ryark-Hawkstone-Cotha complex and the Bluerim-Cryluha-Rock River complex. These map units are characterized by moderately deep to very deep, well drained to somewhat excessively well drained, sandy loam to sandy soils on relic terraces and rolling uplands. These soils are formed from alluvial and residual material in cold climates with mean annual temperatures about 40 degrees Fahrenheit and less than 12 inches of precipitation per year.

The site is an undeveloped river access site for the New Fork River. There are no defined parking areas or driving routes on site. The boat launch is a severely eroded location in the river bank. There are several areas on the site that are devoid of vegetation due to the severe compaction and erosion. The current condition of the site is not in compliance with the RMP due to highly compacted and eroding soils and there is a need to bring it into compliance:

RMP Page 2-34: Soils Management

Goal

Prevent or mitigate impacts on soil stability, productivity, and water infiltration to prevent accelerated erosion and chemical degradation of the soil resource, and provide for optimal plant growth.

Objective

Prevent, reclaim, or mitigate impacts of erosion and chemical degradation from past surface disturbing and other activities within 5 years of RMP implementation.

Action

Disturbed areas will be reclaimed to achieve natural erosion rates and soil productivity to the extent practicable.

Vegetation

Shrub Communities

The vegetation in the river access site consists of a greasewood shrub community. The primary ecological site for the project is the Saline lowland, drained (SLdr) 7 to 9 inches precipitation ecological site. These are saline to alkaline sites that commonly have greasewood/Gardner's saltbush communities. The biotic integrity of this plant community is not intact. The amount of bare ground puts the watershed at risk for increased runoff. The heavy use of the area has resulted in the variance from the Historic Climax Plant Community (HCPC). There are areas of disturbance at the project site that are devoid of vegetation.

The access road for the project is surrounded by big sagebrush communities. The ecological sites along the road are Loamy (Ly) 7 to 9 inches and Sandy (Sy) 7 to 9 inches. Both sites are in big sage/grass communities.

Wetlands and Riparian Communities

Wetlands have three essential characteristics: 1) hydrophytic vegetation; 2) hydric soils; and 3) wetland hydrology. There is potentially one small (<0.1 acre) wetland located near the project site. This wetland will be avoided. There are no anticipated effects to wetlands from the proposed action and will not be discussed further.

Riparian areas adjacent to the New Fork Rivers, usually contain willow and cottonwood communities, wet meadows and irrigated fields that are all likely to exhibit wetland characteristics. There are riparian communities upstream, downstream and across the river from the project site. There are no anticipated effects to riparian communities from the proposed action and will not be discussed further.

Threatened and Endangered Plants

Ute Ladies'-tresses Orchid.

Ute ladies'-tresses orchid (*Spiranthes diluvialis*) was listed as threatened in 1992. In Wyoming, Ute ladies'-tresses orchid have been located on old oxbows or flood plain terraces associated with small streams on sites that remain moist (meadow plant communities) throughout the summer, either due to seasonal flooding or sub-irrigation (Fertig, 2000). All four of the known populations in Wyoming occur in the eastern half of the state. Searches were conducted in western Wyoming (Jackson Hole, National Elk Refuge, and Green River Basin) during the 1990s (Fertig, 2000). Given the elevation ranges and precipitation regimes associated with site occurrence, the species' presence within the PAPA is unlikely (SEIS). There are no known occurrences of the Ute ladies'-tresses orchid within the project area. There is no habitat in the project area fitting the requirements of the plant. There are no anticipated effects to the Ute ladies'-tresses orchid from the proposed action and this species will not be discussed further.

Blowout Penstemon

Blowout penstemon (*Penstemon haydenii*) was declared an endangered species in 1987. In Wyoming, blowout penstemon is found on sandy blowouts and sand dunes in the early stages of plant development (Heidel et al., 2007). There are no known records of blowout penstemon in or near the project area. There is no habitat in the project area fitting the requirements of the plant. There are no anticipated effects to the blowout penstemon from the proposed action and this species will not be discussed further.

BLM Sensitive Plants

The BLM has indicated that the following special status plant species may occur within the Pinedale Resource Area and, based on their habitat associations, are likely to occur in the PAPA: large-fruited bladderpod, Beaver Rim phlox, and tufted twinpod. Meadow pussytoes, Trelease's racemose milkvetch, Cedar Rim thistle, and Big Piney milkvetch could occur if

suitable habitats are present (SEIS). No suitable habitat is present for these species at the project site. There are no known occurrences of the BLM sensitive plants within the project area. There are no anticipated effects to these plants from the proposed action and these species will not be discussed further.

Invasive, Non-native Species.

Many invasive plant species are classified as noxious weeds, are aggressive, and have the ability to dominate many sites with dramatic impacts to native plant communities. Noxious weeds are defined in EO 13112 as those “species whose introduction does or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health.” Weeds are often able to establish in areas following surface disturbance and are primarily present along roads, areas of oil and gas development, and in heavily grazed areas. According to the Wyoming Cooperative Agricultural Pest Survey (CAPS), there are 24 state-designated noxious weeds and four county-declared weeds in Sublette County. Current management includes annual monitoring and treatment of identified infestations (SEIS). There are no documented invasive, non-native or noxious weeds at the project site.

Grazing

There is no grazing at the river access site. The access road crosses one grazing allotment, the Fremont Butte Common Allotment. The allotment consists of 22384 acres (21015 BLM, 800 State, 569 Private) with 2568 animal unit months (AUMs) (2410 BLM, 92 State, 66 Private) on six permits. The grazing period for the allotment runs from May 1st to July 5th. There are no anticipated effects to grazing from the proposed action and grazing will not be discussed further.

3.4 Cultural Resources

The proposed New Fork-East Fork Confluence project area is located within a cultural sub region designated in the Pinedale RMP as “River-related” (FEIS). This area is known to contain dense concentrations of significant cultural resources primarily associated with prehistoric use of the river corridors and associated riverine resources. The proposed project could potentially adversely impact National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) eligible historic properties. A Class III inventory of the proposed project area was required to assess the project’s potential to impact cultural resources. The project will be redesigned to avoid any NRHP significant cultural resources within the proposed project area.

3.5 Recreation and Visual Resources

Recreation

Currently this site is managed as a river access site within the Green and New Fork Rivers SMRA. The primary recreation activities and values for the site are fishing, river floating, hunting, wildlife watching and scenery.

Site Description

This river access is accessible year-round, but the site is most frequently visited during the summer months. Area rivers and lakes typically ice over during the winter and snow blocks

vehicle access to the site from January through March. The site is accessed via a quarter-mile two track dirt road off of CR 106. This dirt road passes through a livestock fence and continues for a short distance down a steep slope to the river access site. The recreational setting is comprised of good river scenery with vertical river bluffs and floodplain riparian vegetation dominated by willows, grasses, shrubs and cottonwood trees. The visitor to the site can expect to hear sounds generated by moving water, wind, and bird life. Biting insects are common during the summer. A user created parking area, small information kiosk and information sign comprise the sites existing built features. Some resource protection signing regarding nuisance aquatic species is displayed by the WGFD. There is evidence of informally constructed campfire rings. The boat ramp was created by people backing vehicles down and over the river bank to launch or retrieve watercraft. The steep dirt road, parking area and boat ramp are heavily rutted by vehicles and during wet periods nearly impassable to all but high clearance 4wd vehicles.

The site is not a designated facility managed within BLM's Facility Management System. Therefore, this informal recreation site receives no managerial oversight or funding for maintenance.

Visitor Use Estimate and Trends

Over the years, public use of the site and river corridor has increased. Accurate visitor use data is not available. Casual observations of the site and personal communications with users and staff of regional management agencies indicate site visitation for river access has increased substantially, especially during the last 20 years. Public use at this site for all recreation activities is roughly estimated to be about 2,000 visits per year. Regional development, population increases and the general trend towards increased public interest in fishing have contributed to the popularity of this river access. In Wyoming, public access to rivers outside of National Forest Boundaries and National Parks is limited. In the upper Green River basin, river accesses are generally few and spatially discordant in location; therefore, visitors tend to concentrate use at the few available locations. WGFD, the United States Department of Agriculture – Forest Service (USDA FS) and the BLM manage the majority of river and lake accesses in Southwest Wyoming. Access for river related activities is expected to increase as the population of Sublette County expands and outdoor leisure activities are sought. The BLM is considering opportunities to improve human and resource conditions related to public use at other sites within the New Fork River corridor.

Public Access and Site Use

Brown trout is the most sought after game fish, although seasonal appearances of Kokanee salmon attract anglers to both the New Fork and East Fork Rivers. When river flow levels decline during late summer and early fall, boating becomes difficult. Area recreational uses then shift towards hunting for big game such as antelope, moose and deer. Although not as popular, waterfowl hunting occurs while migratory birds frequent the flyway. Sage-grouse are commonly hunted on the adjacent upland sagebrush covered benches.

The peak river floating season is June through mid-August. Fisher people regularly visit the site to launch or take out. The most commonly used watercraft are drift boats, and in lesser numbers, rafts and canoes. Most boaters float the segment of river from Boulder, Wyoming to the New Fork-East Fork Confluence river access (7.2 miles). Boaters less frequently launch at the New Fork-East Fork Confluence river access and float downstream to either the Gas Wells river access (4.4 miles) or further downstream to the New Fork River Campground (13 miles). Both of these river accesses are managed by the BLM. The majority of the river is bordered by private lands, but numerous public lands and some Wyoming State Lands intersect the New Fork River. These lands provide boaters a place to stop to fish the shoreline, camp, hunt and walk through stands of cottonwoods and willows.

Other than the above mentioned river access sites and a historical interpretive panel located on CR 106, no other existing or potential recreation sites exist within a 15 mile radius of the area.

Area visitors and private and commercial fish guides generally take care not to leave trash or drive off road. However, litter and less frequently human waste are evident. On occasion, long term camping occurs. Typically these situations result in off road travel and resource damage when attempting to locate a suitable camp site.

Visual Resources

The Visual Resource Management Objective for this area of the Pinedale Field Office is VRM Class II.

RMP Page 2-40: Visual Resource Management

Class II Objective:

The objective of this class is to retain the existing character of the landscape.

The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Management activities may be seen, but should not attract the attention of the casual observer.

Any changes must repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.

The scenic quality of the river corridor is high. The general setting is natural with few human created intrusions. The landscape depicts a variety of color with water, vegetation and topography. The river access sits on an open, low bench several feet above the rivers mid-summer water level. The river is bounded on the west side by a slightly lower and broad terrace dominated by riparian vegetation. On the east side, an upland sagebrush covered terrace that steeply slopes down to the river where the river access is located. Upstream a short distance of the river access, nearly vertical bluffs rise immediately from the river. Soil colors are predominately light tan and moderately contrast with the various shades of green vegetation. As vegetation loses moisture during late summer, the green color of grasses and shrubs tends to blend with the tan colored soils.

The road, parking area, kiosk and boat ramp are noticeable to the casual observer within the immediate area from the river, riparian and the upland areas. Vehicle ruts and the exposed highly erodible soils contrast with the less disturbed surroundings. The soils exposed by the parking area and loop road are visually discordant with the characteristic landscape.

Within the river corridor ownership is varied. Fluid mineral development, rural ranching and some residential development is evident within the upland and riparian areas for some segments of the New Fork River corridor. The majority of human created visual intrusions are located about 4 miles downstream of the project location. Generally, these features are painted with earth tone colors and are screened from the river floater's view.

4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

4.1 Direct and Indirect Effects

4.1.1 Wildlife

Specific information regarding wildlife can be found in the Wildlife Specialist Report (Appendix B).

Alternative 1 – No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Effects

In the No Action alternative, recreational use of the area would likely continue and may increase over time even without the proposed improvements as people continue to use the primitive boat ramp. Continued and potential increased human use of the area would result in some localized disturbance to wildlife in the area. Increased human presence can result in habitat or water quality degradation and wildlife disturbance including dispersal or avoidance. In this alternative, the existing eroding river bank and parking area would not be repaired and habitat degradation would continue to occur with human use of the area. These areas would continue to erode and contribute sediment to the New Fork River system. The current condition of the project area is out of compliance with the 2008 RMP in regards to the fishery, specifically:

RMP Page 2-52: Wildlife and Fish Habitat Management Management Objectives

Provide suitable habitat to ensure long-term species sustainability and widely distributed functioning habitats to support the CAS for CRCT in the States of Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming; the "Three Species" CAS; and to support all other sensitive fish species.

Active erosion can result in increased stream flow and sediment and nutrient loads to local channels. Sedimentation impacts fisheries by reducing habitat complexity, resulting in a lower diversity of prey organisms. Increased turbidity would also result from increased sediment input, decreasing light penetration and inhibiting visual predation by fish. Stream bank instability can alter flow and destroy pool-riffle formations necessary for fish survival. Increased nutrient loading of streams could also impact fisheries by increasing primary production above natural levels, which would degrade habitat and decrease oxygen levels (FEIS).

Summary of Impacts Common to Alternatives 2 and 3

Direct and Indirect Effects

There will be a small loss of upland sagebrush habitat and greasewood habitat due to the disturbance associated with improving the existing access road, boat ramp and parking area. All disturbances will occur within the existing road alignment and parking/boat ramp area but some widening may occur in places. Reclamation will occur in disturbed areas following project completion.

For wildlife in general, the proposed action may result in more human use and activity at the project site and would cause some localized disturbance to wildlife in the area. Increased human presence can result in habitat or water quality degradation and wildlife disturbance including dispersal or avoidance. Primary human seasonal use of the project site will typically occur from April through October when the New Fork River is most accessible.

Big Game

The existing boat ramp and parking area has been used for several years by recreationists so some level of human disturbance has been occurring in the area. The potential increase in human use at the project site may result in decreased use by big game in the area during the spring, summer and fall months when recreationists will be accessing the New Fork River.

Raptors

The existing boat ramp and parking area has been used for several years by recreationists so some level of human disturbance has been occurring in the area during raptor nesting season. All raptor nest locations located within 1-mile of the project area are located within the forested riparian areas along the New Fork River. Most nests are likely shielded visually from the project site and human activity by branches and leaves during the growing season. The potential increase of human use and activity at the project site from April through October could affect some nests of some raptor species by decreasing habitat quality and effectiveness.

Fisheries

Improving the existing boat ramp and parking area will decrease the erosion and sedimentation into the New Fork River and may improve the quality of fisheries habitat in the New Fork River. The fishery may be affected by increased human use (i.e. fishing) in this localized area but should not be affected for the overall watershed.

Greater sage-grouse

The surface disturbance associated with the project should not affect the overall functionality and quality of sage-grouse habitat in the project area. Studies have demonstrated that the quality and effectiveness of sagebrush habitat decreases near disturbances such as roads (FEIS). All surface disturbance associated with this project will occur along an existing access road and an existing parking/boat ramp area.

The existing boat ramp and parking area has been used for several years by recreationists so some level of human disturbance has been occurring in the area. The potential increase in

human activity and use at the project site would likely result in decreased use by sage-grouse in the area during the spring, summer and fall months when recreationists will be accessing the New Fork River.

Sensitive Species

Pygmy rabbits

The surface disturbance that will occur within the sagebrush upland habitat along the existing access road should not affect the overall functionality and quality of pygmy rabbit habitat in the project area. The existing boat ramp and parking area has been used for several years by recreationists so some level of human disturbance has been occurring in the area. The potential increase in human activity and use at the project site may result in decreased use by pygmy rabbit in the area.

Bald eagle

The small amount of surface disturbance to sagebrush and greasewood habitats associated with the project should not affect the overall quality of bald eagle habitat in the project area.

The existing boat ramp and parking area has been used for several years by recreationists so some level of human disturbance has been occurring in the area during eagle nesting season. Increased human use and activity levels at the project site during bald eagle nesting season could affect bald eagle nests by decreasing habitat quality and effectiveness. Both bald eagle nest locations that are within 1-mile of the project area are located within the forested riparian habitats along the New Fork River. The nests are shielded visually from the project site and human activity by tree branches and leaves. Neither nest can be seen from the boat ramp area.

The potential increase of human use and activity at the project site from April through October would not exceed light activity levels as defined in the RMP. The proposed improvement to the boat ramp area is designed to be used for ingress and egress from the New Fork River and is not designed for extended periods of use such as picnicking or camping. Recreational use of the boat ramp access may increase due to the proposed improvement however the type of recreational use should not change.

Ferruginous hawk, loggerhead shrike, long-billed curlew, trumpeter swan, white-faced ibis and sagebrush obligate songbirds

The surface disturbance associated with the project should not affect the overall functionality and quality of habitat for sensitive avian species in the project area. All surface disturbance associated with this project will occur along an existing access road and within the existing parking/boat ramp area.

The existing access has been used for several years by recreationists so some level of human disturbance has been occurring in the area. The potential increase in human activity and use at the project site may result in decreased use by sensitive avian species in the area during the spring, summer and fall months when recreationists will be accessing the New Fork River.

Sensitive Fish Species

See fisheries discussion on page 27.

Sensitive Amphibian Species

Improving the existing boat ramp and parking area will decrease the erosion and sedimentation into the New Fork River and may improve the quality of aquatic habitat in the New Fork River. Amphibians may be affected during project construction and could show some reduction in seasonal use with the proposed action due to the potential increase in human activity at the site.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Effects

The proposed comfort station at the parking area may provide an opportunity for users to recreate in the area longer and result in more human activity and longer durations of activity. The comfort station may also provide an opportunity for increased use by non-recreational users at any time of year depending on accessibility. The access road to the boat ramp is located on CR 106 which has heavy industrial use. The proposed comfort station would not be visible from CR 106 due to its proposed location on a lower elevation bench. It is likely that recreational users would be the primary users of the comfort station. A possibility exists that non-recreational users could discover the existence of the comfort station and utilize it as well. Out of convenience, individuals accessing the PAPA could use the comfort station on their way to and from the gas field.

The dry hydrant would result in non-recreational use by the County from April through October. Increased use by non-recreational users would add an additional level of human disturbance to the project area and would result in more human use and activity at the project site potentially year round. This additional human activity would result in an increased disturbance to all wildlife in the area which could result in dispersal or avoidance of the area by wildlife.

Colorado River Fish Species

The proposed project would result in an average annual water depletion of 0.011 acre-feet from the Colorado River system. This results in a “May Affect, Likely to Adversely Affect” determination for the downstream federally endangered Colorado River fish species and requires formal Section 7 consultation with the USFWS.

Big Game

The potential increase in human use at the project site may result in decreased use by big game in the area during the spring, summer and fall months when the County will be accessing the New Fork River. The potential increase in human use at the project site during the winter may affect the habitat quality and function for big game in general, and in particular moose crucial winter range which may result in decreased use of the area by moose during the winter months.

Raptors

The County has been using this site to haul water since the late 1970's so some level of human disturbance has been occurring in the area during raptor nesting season. The non-recreational human use and activity at the project site from April through October when the County will be

accessing the New Fork River could affect some nests of raptor species by decreasing habitat quality and effectiveness.

The proposed comfort station may result in additional human activity from both recreational and non-recreational users on a year round basis. The comfort station may also encourage users to recreate or remain in the area longer. This additional level of human use to the area during raptor nesting season could affect raptor nests by decreasing habitat quality and effectiveness.

Bald eagle

The proposed comfort station and dry hydrant do not comply with the 2008 RMP. Specifically:

*RMP Page 2-53: Wildlife and Fish Habitat Management
Actions in Traditional Leasing Areas*

Surface occupancy (permanent structures) is prohibited within 2,600 feet of an active bald eagle nest.

The proposed comfort station may result in additional human activity from both recreational and non-recreational users on a year round basis. The comfort station may also encourage users to recreate or remain in the area longer. This additional level of human use to the area during bald eagle nesting season could affect bald eagle nests by decreasing habitat quality and effectiveness. Human activity in the area during the winter could decrease the habitat quality and function of winter roosting habitat in the area.

The County has been using this site to haul water since the late 1970's so some level of human disturbance has been occurring in the area during bald eagle nesting season. The proposed dry hydrant would result in non-recreational human activity from April through October, a portion of which is during bald eagle nesting season. The County would use the hydrant for a total of 48 days per year from April 1 through October 31. The use by the County would consist of water hauling trucks accessing the dry hydrant and using a diesel pump to extract water from the New Fork River during daylight hours. Trucks can haul 4000 gallons per load and each fill would take anywhere from 5 to 20 minutes (depending on the power capacity of the pump). This non-recreational use at the project site during bald eagle nesting season could affect bald eagle nests by decreasing habitat quality and effectiveness.

Alternative 3 – Bald eagle Action

Direct and Indirect Effects

For wildlife in general, this alternative would result in the least amount of human use and activity at the project site by eliminating the comfort station and the dry hydrant. Non-recreational use of the area would be minimal with Alternative 3 so there would not be an additional level of human use as discussed in Alternative 2. Other impacts that would occur with Alternative 3 were discussed in the "Summary of Impacts Common to Alternatives 2 and 3" section starting on page 27.

4.1.2 Watershed and Rangeland Resources

Alternative 1 – No Action

Direct and Indirect Effects

Watershed

The continuation of the current situation will result in additional soil degradation. Soil erosion will continue due to the lack of vegetation and soil compaction. Recreationists trying to access the river during wet periods will become stuck and form new ruts trying to get free. New routes will be pioneered when current routes become impassable. The lack of action will result in continued and enlarged areas of soil compaction leading to increased erosion. With increased erosion, sedimentation will continue and increase in the New Fork River. The site will remain out of compliance with the RMP.

Vegetation

The continuation of the current situation will result in additional areas devoid of vegetation and degradation of riparian communities. The areas devoid of vegetation will enlarge with the pioneering of new routes and increased soil degradation. The site will remain out of compliance with the RMP.

The continuation of current weed management activities (early detection, rapid response, plus continuous monitoring) will ensure impacts from non-native invasive species are minimized.

Alternatives 2 and 3 – Proposed Action and Bald Eagle Action

Direct and Indirect Effects

Watershed

Rates of erosion and sediment transport in the New Fork Watershed are currently low, because relatively gentle slopes predominate, and runoff from much of the watershed occurs only during large storm events. With the road and parking lot reconstruction, compaction, loss of surface water infiltration, and loss of overall long-term soil productivity are to be expected. Road reconstruction would cause new soil disturbance and the potential for sediment to enter the stream channels and ditches in the short term.

Road reconstruction would be a positive impact to the soil resource by addressing existing problem areas, which would decrease the amount of sediment being generated by use of the road surface. Existing areas of active erosion on road banks and road surfaces would be eliminated or reduced by the applications of surface gravel. Although the reconstruction of roads would result in short term impacts to the soil resource, overall, these activities would have a long-term positive impact on the soil resource. The roadbed would be made more stable reducing the risk of rutting and tires sinking into the subgrade of the road during vehicular use and decreasing sediment production from road surface erosion. The short-term increase in erosion will cause a short-term increase in sedimentation to the New Fork River. However, the long-term decrease in erosion will result in a long term decrease in sedimentation to the river.

During reclamation, there would be some accelerated erosion and loss of soil material during activities. Impacts from erosion would be greatest after initial soil disturbance and would

decrease naturally due to natural stabilization through particle aggregation and vegetation establishment. Reclamation would greatly reduce sediment yield.

Vegetation

The reconstruction of the road and parking lot is to occur within areas currently devoid of vegetation. There will be little to no effects to vegetation from this portion of the project.

There will be approximately 0.7 acres of current disturbance reclaimed to the native greasewood-saltbush community. There will be a period of transition from the reclamation to full community recovery. Grasses could require 3 to 5 years for successful re-establishment in arid environments. Shrub components may require more than 20 years for recovery to pre-disturbance levels after reseeding and reclamation. The long-term effect of the project will be the total area devoid of vegetation will decrease with the alternative.

During the initial short-term development of the infrastructure and reclamation associated with this alternative, the incidence of invasive, non-native plant species may increase in those areas disturbed. However, the continuation of current weed management activities (early detection, rapid response, plus continuous monitoring) will ensure impacts are minimized.

4.1.3 Cultural Resources

Alternative 1 – No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Effects

Cultural resource sites may be disturbed because the area is currently experiencing surface erosion and damage due to unrestricted vehicular use during wet and muddy conditions. Although no historic properties are located within the current proposed project area, there are known historic properties that are located directly adjacent to the project area. Additional erosion due to unrestricted vehicular use of the area may impact these resources.

Alternatives 2 and 3 – Proposed Action and Bald Eagle Action

Direct and Indirect Effects

A Class III inventory was conducted and associated report compiled to assess and evaluate the proposed undertaking's effect on cultural resources in the project's Area of Potential Effect (APE) (Schweitzer 2010). That report details the specifics of the background research, cultural resources inventory and the proposed project's potential effects to cultural resources and is summarized as follows. A total of 24 acres for the proposed New Fork-East Fork Confluence boat ramp improvement project was inventoried for cultural resources at a Class III level. BLM PFO recorded one new site (48SU6940) within the inventoried area, but outside the proposed project APE. This site was a single hearth feature that was excavated to preclude its natural destruction due to erosion. An additional historic road (48SU5409-The Big Piney to New Fork Wagon Road) crosses the existing access road to the boat launch area. This resource is currently determined as not eligible for inclusion to the NRHP with State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) concurrence. In addition, the integrity of site 48SU5409, a long linear historic feature, where it crosses the project area has been compromised in regards to its setting, feeling, association due to existing modern developments, primarily, CR 106 and nearby

developments associated with natural gas operations in the immediate area. The Class III inventory revealed no cultural resources within the existing area of disturbance of the current boat launch area. The proposed boat ramp redevelopment will stay within the existing area of disturbance and, as currently proposed, will result in no effects to significant cultural resources.

4.1.4 Recreation and Visual Resources

Alternative 1 – No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Effects

Recreation

The recreational setting would continue to deteriorate from erosion and trampling of vegetation. Unintended misuse of the area would continue until the road, parking area and boat ramp becomes defined by design and construction. A risk to public health and safety is evident and may increase as the existing boat ramp and parking area become further rutted. The incidence of human waste and trash would likely increase as the public grows accustomed to the deteriorating conditions and the appearance of neglect. The continued absence of adequate natural resource protection and area use information would increase opportunities to cause harm to sensitive species and important recreation dependent resources.

The water drawing operations contributes to the sites rutted conditions and inefficient use of the site as a river access. Although the tank truck operators try not to impede the public's recreational use of the site for boat launching and parking, this can occur.

Visual Resources

The direct impacts of unmanaged visitor use would degrade the landscapes visual qualities. Contrast in color, line form and texture of the characteristic landscape would increase.

Alternatives 2 – Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Effects

Recreation

Implementing the proposed action would benefit the public and natural resources. Improvement of the road, parking area, boat ramp, user information and the installation of a rest room would enhance the visitor's recreational experience and generate personal, environmental and economic benefits. The public could safely access the New Fork-East Fork Confluence river access during periods of wet and muddy conditions. Better management of the site would reduce the risk of personal accidents and damage to property.

The BLM and partners would incur long term costs to provide for regular maintenance and law enforcement services.

Visitor use may increase as a result of better access and improved resource conditions. The visitor experience of those seeking complete solitude may be marginally degraded.

Providing adequate parking and water drawing facilities for authorized water hauling operations would reduce visitor conflicts and improve efficient use of the site. Adverse impacts to recreation dependent resources would also be reduced.

Visual Resources

Implementing the proposed action would overall reduce contrast with soils and vegetation as surface disturbance is reduced and reclamation is achieved. The restroom would introduce new vertical lines and form to the landscape. With proper placement and coloration, this facility would blend in with the characteristic landscape. The VRM Class II management objective would be achieved as the existing visual conditions would be improved and contrasts lessened.

Alternatives 3 – Bald Eagle Action

Direct and Indirect Effects

The affects would be similar to the proposed action; however opportunities for the presence of human created waste may increase as use increases. Area aesthetics and impacts to water quality may diminish.

Maintenance costs associated with the restroom would not occur but increased monitoring and site maintenance may become necessary.

4.2 Cumulative Effects

The project is located within the PAPA. Cumulative effects associated with the PAPA were analyzed in the SEIS.

The cumulative effects (CE) time frame is ten years prior to the project and ten years into the future. The CE analysis area for vegetation, soils and cultural is the project footprint. The cumulative effects (CE) analysis area for wildlife, surface hydrology, and visual and recreational resources is expanded beyond the project footprint.

The proposed boat ramp improvement will have minimal impacts to wildlife when compared to other activities and developments that are occurring on private lands and public lands in the surrounding areas.

The cumulative effects for the project include the PAPA well field disturbance (approximately 10,000) and the non-well field disturbance in the New Fork River - Alkali Creek watershed with resulting erosion and sedimentation.

As there are no NRHP eligible historic properties located within the current proposed project APE, there will be no cumulative effects from the redevelopment and reclamation of the New Fork-East Fork Confluence boat ramp associated with this proposed project. Restricting vehicular use of the area to the existing development will result in a benefit to adjacent cultural resources that may be at risk due to off-highway vehicles (OHV) erosional impacts.

Cumulative effects upon visitor experiences and natural resources within the river corridor may be lessened as the public becomes more aware of BLM and WGFD regulations and resource

concerns. Better dispersal of use would occur by making this access more available to the public. Visitors would have additional river access options and may choose to reduce use at other river accesses by selecting this alternative site. The mitigation of existing visual intrusions associated with the site would reduce overall cumulative effects within the river corridor.

5.0 TRIBES, INDIVIDUALS, ORGANIZATIONS, or AGENCIES CONSULTED

The BLM consulted the following individuals, Federal, State, and local agencies, and non-BLM persons during the development of this environmental assessment:

FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENCIES:

Jonah Interagency Office, United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) Region 8, Wyoming Department of Agriculture, Wyoming Landscape Conservation Initiative, SCCD, USFWS, WDEQ, WGFD, State of Wyoming- Governor's Office, Wyoming Office of State Lands and Investments, Sublette County Commissioners, Sublette County Extension Office, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Sublette County Road and Bridge, Sublette County Weed and Pest

OTHERS:

Western Watersheds Project, neighboring landowners, and affected and interested public.

6.0 LIST OF PREPARERS

Cara Farr, Interdisciplinary Team Leader / Rangeland Management Specialist
Martin Hudson, Recreation Specialist
Theresa Gulbrandson, Wildlife Biologist
Robert Schweitzer, Cultural Resources Specialist

6.1 List of Reviewers

Kellie Roadifer, Planning and Environmental Coordinator

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Appendices

**Appendix A.
Public Comments Received During Public Scoping**

**Appendix B.
Wildlife Specialist Report**

**Appendix C.
Site Photos**

**Appendix A.
Public Comments Received During Public Scoping**

Comment	BLM Interpretation	BLM Response
"An improperly designed and implemented bank full bench could be more detrimental than beneficial to the aquatic system. We recommend that the BLM consult a geomorphologist/hydrologist to aid in the design and implementation of the proposed bank full bench."	An improperly designed and implemented bank full bench could be more detrimental than beneficial to the aquatic system.	The bank full bench element of the proposed action was removed in response to this comment (see EA pages 7 through 9).
"Sounds like a much needed project. I endorse it completely."	Project support	We appreciate your support. Thank you.
"upgrading the so-called access at the confluence with the East Fork would be a great idea! . . . Even though this will probably result in added traffic and pressure on the river, I think it is time we got some decent access."	Project support	We appreciate your support. Thank you.
"Any improvement to the ramp would be greatly appreciated!!! . . . The plans per your mailer look to be right on target"	Project support	We appreciate your support. Thank you.
"We strongly support this project and commend the BLM for their willingness to improve aquatic habitat and provide a usable boat access area on the New Fork River."	Project support	We appreciate your support. Thank you.
"I like the idea of the proposed improvements that you have out lined in the letter that you sent me."	Project support	We appreciate your support. Thank you.
"The Weed and Pest supports reclaiming the area."	Project support	We appreciate your support. Thank you.
"Adding signage stating to outfitters this is a permitted ramp would be nice too!"	Signage needed	This will be addressed during implementation with signage design.

Comment	BLM Interpretation	BLM Response
<p>"The only suggestion that I would have as a person that does the shuttles for the fishermen , is that some how you were able to mark the launch site/take out site so that day users and overnight campers don't block the access to the river, as happens at the other sites the BLM has fixed. . . When they block the area it makes it difficult to not only park the fishing rigs, but makes it hard for the guides to load and unload their boats. So if there were separate areas for each, this would not only make it safer, but also more enjoyable for all to use."</p>	Signage needed	This will be addressed during implementation with signage design.
<p>"One of the sites the district has established to monitor the effects of the PA on the New Fork River is located at the site where the BLM proposes to improve the boat access for the New Fork River. If at all possible the district would like to ensure that the integrity of the sampling site is maintained."</p>	The SCCD would like to ensure the integrity of this riffle remains intact	This will be addressed during implementation. The SCCD will be notified prior to any groundwork.
<p>"The SCCD would like to ensure the integrity of this riffle remains intact despite the proposed activity scheduled to occur. . . The district would like to request that prior to on the ground implementation the district be notified of any work dates."</p>	The SCCD would like to ensure the integrity of this riffle remains intact	This will be addressed during implementation. The SCCD will be notified prior to any groundwork.
<p>"the 'Gas Wells' take-out area is awful! The river continues to erode into the curve and there is a steep drop-off from the roadway to the river. . . It certainly would be nice to have decent access to the river. Please consider this upgrade as well."</p>	Upgrade needed at the "Gas Wells" boat access.	This is outside the scope of this project and will need to be addressed separately.

Appendix B.

Wildlife Specialist Report – New Fork East Fork Boat Ramp JIO Project

THERESA M. GULBRANDSON

03/18/10

Alternative I – No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative is not to take the action.

This alternative makes no changes to the project area.

Alternative II – Proposed Action

The original proposal was modified to exclude the bank full bench in response to Wyoming Game and Fish and to include a dry hydrant installation for Sublette County Road and Bridge water use. The proposed action includes the following actions:

Reclaim 29,500 square feet of degraded habitat

Harden with gravel 12,100 square feet for parking, turn around, and boat ramp

Refurbish 425 feet of road within the boat ramp area

Build 360 feet of rock barriers

Install signs at the county road, parking area, and boat ramp

Install Comfort Station

Upgrade 1,690 feet of road from the Boulder South Road to the ramp area (Class 2 Resource Road)

Plant trees

Install a dry hydrant for county water use (lockable with back-flow preventer)

Alternative III – Bald Eagle Action

The Proposed Action was modified to reduce impacts to nesting Bald Eagles by removing the Comfort Station and dry hydrant. The modified action includes the following actions:

Reclaim 29,500 square feet of degraded habitat

Harden with gravel 12,100 square feet for parking, turn around, and boat ramp

Refurbish 425 feet of road within the boat ramp area

Build 360 feet of rock barriers

Install signs at the county road, parking area, and boat ramp

Upgrade 1,690 feet of road from the Boulder South Road to the ramp area (Class 2 Resource Road)

Plant trees

Current Condition

The New Fork East Fork boat ramp is an existing “undeveloped” site located adjacent to the New Fork River. The existing parking/boat ramp site currently consists of several two-track roads and an area that is devoid of vegetation. There is an area that is used for parking and the existing bank along the New Fork River serves as a primitive boat ramp. The river bank is steep in this area and has been “knocked down” by users using the area to launch and retrieve boats. The existing approach and river bank are

sparsely vegetated and erosion in these areas is contributing sediment to the New Fork River. Elevation of the project site ranges approximately from 6200 feet up to 6990 feet.

The immediate area that is currently being used as the boat ramp and parking area is located within the flood plain of the New Fork River and consists of alkaline soils. Salt tolerant plants including greasewood are located along the perimeter of the existing disturbed parking area. A few small willows are found scattered along the banks of the New Fork River near the current boat launch area. The majority of the access road is located on an upland bench dominated by sagebrush steppe habitat before it drops down into the flood plain of the New Fork River where the current primitive river access is located. The surrounding area along the floodplains of the New Fork and East Fork rivers consists of forested riparian habitats. See attached photos in project proposal for further current condition description.

The proposed action for improving the river access area includes hardening the parking area, turn around and boat ramp with gravel, upgrading the road, reclaiming degraded habitat, placing rock barriers, planting trees and installing a comfort station. In addition, the Sublette County Road and Bridge department is applying for a Right of Way to install a dry hydrant at the site for extracting water from the New Fork River. The hydrant will have a locking mechanism that will only allow for County use and back flow preventer to prevent water from flowing back into the river. The County would use the hydrant for a total of 48 days per year from April 1 through October 31. The use by the County would consist of water hauling trucks accessing the dry hydrant and using a diesel pump to extract water from the New Fork River during daylight hours. Trucks can haul 4000 gallons per load and each fill would take anywhere from 5 to 20 minutes (depending on the power capacity of the pump).

The County has been using this site to haul water since the late 1970's several times each year from April through October for maintenance of the South Boulder Road. In the past few years they have been using the site less frequently due to their ability to get water from Anticline Disposal. In addition, a portion of South Boulder Road has been topped with ground up asphalt and has required less maintenance.

The proposed project is located within the Pinedale Anticline Project Area (PAPA) east of the core development area. Oil and gas development is primarily located to the west of the project area. Impacts associated with development of the PAPA were addressed in the PAPA Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) and this analysis tiers to the SEIS. The Project site is also located within the Pinedale Field Office (PFO) Resource Management Plan (RMP) in a "traditional leasing area". This analysis tiers to the RMP Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). These documents are included in the analysis by reference.

Overall management goals and objectives for wildlife and fish habitat management as identified in the 2008 RMP that pertain to this project area are as follows:

RMP Page 2-45: Wildlife and Fish Habitat Management

Management Goal

Maintain or enhance aquatic and wildlife habitat.

Maintain functioning big game habitats and migration corridors that allow free movement and use of habitats.

Sustain the sagebrush biome on a landscape scale to provide the amount, continuity, and quality of habitat necessary to maintain viable populations of sage-grouse and other sagebrush obligate species.

Management Objectives

Maintain sufficient undisturbed or minimally disturbed habitats to maintain persistent, well-distributed, self-sustaining, and productive populations of all native and desirable non-native fish (e.g., brook, brown, and rainbow trout) and wildlife species within the planning area.

Species specific management goals and objectives included in the 2008 RMP are discussed below in the appropriate sections.

Big Game

RMP Page 2-47: Wildlife and Fish Habitat Management

Management Objectives

Maintain and enhance big game habitats to support big game populations at WGFD planning objective levels.

The project area provides crucial winter range and transitional ranges for big game species including pronghorn antelope, mule deer and moose as designated by the WGFD. There are no elk seasonal habitats identified by the WGFD within the boat ramp project area.

Pronghorn

The project area is located within WGFD designated spring, summer and fall ranges for pronghorn. WGFD has designated crucial winter range for pronghorn to the north and south of the project area. An ongoing study has shown that pronghorn utilize habitat along the New Fork River extensively during the winter months. Winter ranges in the PAPA are occupied by pronghorn that migrate from distant summer ranges in Grand Teton National Park and the Bridger-Teton National Forest. Pronghorn cross the New Fork River approximately 5 miles to the west of the project area on their way to and from crucial winter ranges (SEIS).

Mule deer

Mule deer from the Sublette Herd unit summer in mountainous terrain surrounding the PAPA and migrate 60-100 miles to winter ranges in the PAPA and the Wind River Front (SEIS). The project area is located within WGFD designated spring, summer and fall range for mule deer. Crucial winter range and winter year long range is located to the north of the project area and winter range is located to the west and east of the project area.

Moose

Within the PFO moose can be found along willow-covered riparian communities and on aspen-conifer foothills throughout the year. The riparian areas along the New Fork and East Fork rivers provide year long and crucial winter range habitat for moose. A portion of the project site is located within WGFD designated moose crucial winter range including the boat ramp/parking area and a portion of the access road. These areas are sparsely vegetated and use of the area by moose is limited. Moose likely move through the project area on their way to more suitable riparian habitats upstream and downstream of the project area.

Raptors

RMP Page 2-52: Wildlife and Fish Habitat Management

Management Objectives

Maintain raptor habitats and territories within the planning area to ensure long-term species sustainability and widely distributed functioning habitats in accordance with the MBTA.

Raptor nesting may take place in various habitats throughout the PFO, but often nest site selection depends on prey availability, habitat quality, and the level of raptor populations and competition. Nesting raptors typically exhibit fidelity to a nesting territory and may be present for years. Tolerance levels to disturbance can be species specific and responses of nesting raptors to human disturbances are generally determined by the type, duration, magnitude, noise level, and timing of activity relative to nesting phenology (FEIS).

Documented raptor nests in the area are located along the riparian areas of the New Fork and East Fork River corridors. Common raptors that have been documented in the area include red-tailed hawk, bald eagle, golden eagle, Swainson's hawk, osprey, Cooper's hawk, sharp-shinned hawk, American kestrel, prairie falcon, short-eared owl and great-horned owl. According to BLM records, there are several raptor nests, historic and recently active, documented within 1-mile of the project area: 2 Swainson's hawk nests, 9 red-tailed hawk nests, 2 American kestrel nests, 2 bald eagle nests (discussed more below) and one common raven nest.

Fisheries

RMP Page 2-52: Wildlife and Fish Habitat Management

Management Objectives

Provide suitable habitat to ensure long-term species sustainability and widely distributed functioning habitats to support the Conservation Agreement and Strategy (CAS) for Colorado River Cutthroat Trout (CRCT) in the States of Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming; the "Three Species" CAS; and to support all other sensitive fish species.

The New Fork River provides habitat for several game and nongame fish species as identified by WGFD. The WGFD conducts fish sampling surveys annually in several segments of the Green and New Fork Rivers including a segment of the New Fork River downstream from the confluence with the East Fork River. Sampling results are summarized in Annual Fisheries Reports by the WGFD (SEIS).

Introduced species of game fish documented in this segment include: Snake River cutthroat trout, brown trout, rainbow trout, lake trout, and Kokanee salmon. Mountain whitefish, a native game fish species, is also found in this segment of the New Fork River. Native nongame species identified include: speckled dace, mountain sucker, mottled sculpin, and flannelmouth sucker. Exotic nongame species that have been documented in this segment of river include: white sucker, Utah sucker, hybrids of white and Utah sucker with flannelmouth sucker, red shiner and Utah chub (Cavalli 2009, pers. comm.).

Federally Threatened, Endangered Species and Candidate Species

Federally threatened, endangered and candidate species that may occur within the PFO are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Threatened, Endangered and Candidate Species that may occur within the PFO and occurrence in the project area.

SPECIES	STATUS	HABITAT	OCCURRENCE IN PROJECT AREA
Black-footed ferret (Mustela nigripes)	Endangered	Prairie dog towns	Does not occur
Canada lynx (Lynx canadensis)	Threatened	Montane forests	Does not occur
Colorado River Fish Species	Endangered	Yampa, Green and Colorado River systems downstream of Wyoming	Occurs downstream
Gray wolf (Canis lupus)	Nonessential/experimental populations	Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem	Does not occur
Greater sage-grouse (Centrocercus urophasianus)	Candidate	Basin prairie shrub, mountain foothill shrub	Present
Grizzly bear (Ursus arctos horribilis)	Threatened	Montane forests	Does not occur
Kendall Warm Springs dace (Rhinichthys osculus thermalis)	Endangered	Kendall Warm Springs, Sublette County	Does not occur
Yellow-billed cuckoo (Coccyzus americanus)	Candidate	Riparian areas west of Continental Divide	May occur

Colorado River Fish Species

The four federally endangered Colorado Fish species include the bonytail (Gila elegans), Colorado pikeminnow (Ptychocheilus lucius), humpback chub (Gila cypha), and razorback sucker (Xyrauchen texanus). Federal agency actions resulting in water depletions to the Colorado River system may affect

these endangered species and their designated critical habitats and requires formal consultation with the USFWS.

Greater sage-grouse

RMP Page 2-46: Wildlife and Fish Habitat Management

Management Objectives

Maintain sufficient undisturbed or minimally disturbed greater sage-grouse source habitats to maintain persistent, well-distributed, self-sustaining, productive populations of sage-grouse within the planning area.

Greater sage-grouse are dependent on sagebrush habitats year-round. The general distribution of greater sage-grouse is associated with the distribution of sagebrush (*Artemisia* spp.), and in particular, big sagebrush (*A. tridentata*). Greater sage-grouse require open areas within the sagebrush community for leks where they perform courtship rituals. These strutting grounds (lek sites) are considered “traditional” or “historic” because the birds return to them annually. After nesting, the hens move to brood areas that support forb understory or succulent vegetation (i.e., riparian areas or irrigated fields) and large populations of insects in late spring and late summer. The sage-grouse diet consists almost entirely of sagebrush during late fall and winter (FEIS).

Greater sage-grouse breeding, nesting, brood-rearing and foraging habitats are present within the project site in the upland sagebrush habitat and riparian areas. There is one unoccupied/abandoned lek located within 2-miles of the project area. Two occupied and one unoccupied/abandoned sage-grouse leks are located within 4-miles of the project area (WGFD 2009). According to BLM records, several nest locations and signs of nesting evidence have been documented within 4-miles of the project area. Sage-grouse winter concentration areas are located approximately 2-miles to the north. The project area is located outside of the Governor’s Designated Sage-grouse Core Areas (State of Wyoming Executive Department Executive Order 2008-2).

Yellow-billed cuckoo

The yellow-billed cuckoo prefers large tracts of deciduous riparian woodlands with dense, scrubby undergrowth. It frequently uses willow thickets for nesting and forages among large cottonwoods. In Wyoming, the western subspecies of the yellow-billed cuckoo is considered uncommon and is found primarily along waterways in the lower Green River Basin. Yellow-billed cuckoos have not been documented in the upper Green River Basin (FEIS).

There is no yellow-billed cuckoo habitat in the immediate project vicinity as the existing area of disturbance is primarily devoid of vegetation. Riparian habitats upstream and downstream of the project area contain deciduous riparian woodlands with stands of cottonwoods and willows. Grazing occurs within the riparian areas and the amount of scrubby undergrowth that could provide suitable habitat for yellow-billed cuckoo is limited.

Wyoming BLM Sensitive Species

RMP Page 2-49: Wildlife and Fish Habitat Management

Management Objectives

Maintain sufficient, undisturbed, or minimally disturbed sensitive species habitats to ensure persistent, well-distributed, self-sustaining, and productive populations of sensitive species within the planning area.

Wyoming BLM sensitive species that may occur within the PFO are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. BLM Wyoming Sensitive Species that May Occur within the PFO and occurrence in the project area.

SENSITIVE SPECIES COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	HABITAT	OCCURRENCE IN PROJECT AREA
Mammals			
Idaho pocket gopher	Thomomys idahoensis	Shallow stony soils	Does not occur
Long-eared myotis	Myotis evotis	Conifer and deciduous forests, caves and mines	Does not occur
Pygmy rabbit	Brachylagus idahoensis	Prairie-basin shrub and riparian shrub	May occur
White-tailed prairie dog	Cynomys leucurus	Basin prairie shrub, grasslands	Does not occur
Birds			
Bald eagle	Haliaeetus leucocephalus	Areas with open water and near concentrations of winter ungulates, waterfowl, and/or fish	Present
Brewer's sparrow	Spizella breweri	Basin prairie shrub	May occur
Burrowing owl	Athene cucularia	Grasslands, basin prairie shrub	Does not occur
Ferruginous hawk	Buteo regalis	Basin prairie shrub, grassland, rock outcrops	May occur
Loggerhead shrike	Lanius ludovicianus	Basin prairie shrub, mountain foothill shrub	May occur
Long-billed curlew	Numenius americanus	Grasslands, plains, foothills, wet meadows	May occur
Mountain plover	Charadrius montanus	Grasslands, basin prairie shrub	Does not occur
Northern goshawk	Accipiter gentilis	Conifer and deciduous forest	Does not occur

Peregrine falcon	Falco peregrines	Tall cliffs	Does not occur
Sage sparrow	Amphispiza belli	Basin prairie shrub, mountain foothill shrub	May occur
Sage thrasher	Oreoscoptes montanus	Basin prairie shrub, mountain foothill shrub	May occur
Trumpeter swan	Cygnus buccinator	Open woodlands, streamside willow and alder groves	May occur
White-faced ibis	Plegadis chihi	Marshes, wet meadows	May occur
Fish			
Bluehead sucker	Catostomus discobolus	Bear, Snake and Green river drainages, all waters	Does not occur
Flannelmouth sucker	Catostomus latipinnis	Colorado River drainage, large rivers, streams and lakes	Present
Roundtail chub	Gila robusta	Colorado River drainage, large rivers, streams and lakes	Does not occur
Northern leatherside chub	Lepidomeda copei	Bear, Snake and Green River drainages, clear, cool streams and pools	Does not occur
Hornyhead Chub	Nocomis biguttatus	Lower Laramie and North Laramie River Watersheds	Does not occur
Colorado River cutthroat trout	Oncorhynchus clarki spp.	Colorado River drainage, clear mountain streams	Does not occur
Fine-spotted Snake River cutthroat trout	Oncorhynchus clarki spp.	Snake River Drainage, clear, fast water	Does not occur
Yellowstone cutthroat trout	Oncorhynchus clarki bouvieri	Yellowstone Drainage, small mountain streams and large rivers	Does not occur
Amphibians			
Boreal toad (Northern Rocky Mountain population)	Bufo boreas boreas	Pond margins, wet meadows, riparian areas	May occur
Northern leopard frog	Rana pipiens	Beaver ponds, permanent water in plains and foothills	May occur

Spotted frog	Ranus pretiosa (lutiventris)	Ponds, sloughs, small streams	Unlikely
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Pygmy rabbit

Dense sagebrush and relatively deep, loose soils are important characteristics of pygmy rabbit habitat. Pygmy rabbit habitat is present in the upland sagebrush steppe habitat. Pygmy rabbit habitat is not present in the parking/boat ramp area as this area contains alkaline soils and salt tolerant vegetation. In recent pygmy rabbit surveys conducted for the PAPA wildlife monitoring in 2009, inactive pygmy rabbit burrows were found within 1-mile of the project area in the upland sagebrush habitat.

Bald eagle

The bald eagle was listed as an endangered species in 1967 and subsequently reclassified as threatened in 1995. The USFWS removed (delisted) the bald eagle in the lower 48 states of the United States from the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife by final rule dated July 9, 2007, effective August 8, 2007.

Bald eagles generally occur in areas with open water and near concentrations of winter ungulates, waterfowl, and/or fish. Nesting habitat is defined as any mature stand of conifer or cottonwood trees in association with rivers, streams, reservoirs, lakes, or any significant body of water. Although their main food item is fish, additional food items may include ducks, coots, rabbits, carrion, and small rodents. Bald eagles are sensitive to various human activities. Responses to human disturbance vary and may include short-term, temporal, or spatial avoidance of the disturbance, to total reproductive failure and abandonment of breeding areas (FEIS).

Wintering bald eagles regularly occur in western Wyoming, generally from November 1 through April 15 and may occur during any time of year along the Green and New Fork River corridors. Migratory bald eagles have been observed during April and November generally throughout the Green River Basin which is also potential bald eagle nesting and roosting habitat. During February 2005, the BLM conducted a winter ground survey of bald eagles in the PFO Administrative Area. A total of 54 eagles were counted, most of them along the Green River and its tributaries, although 10 eagles were documented along the New Fork River between Boulder and its confluence with the Green River. Most bald eagle observations during surveys were associated with forest-dominated riparian cover. During the February 2006 survey, eight bald eagles were documented along the New Fork River. In winter 2007, 16 bald eagles were observed in the vicinity of the PAPA along the New Fork River and Green River (SEIS). Wintering bald eagles have been observed at the Fontenelle Reservoir, near Pinedale, west of Daniel and southwest of Boulder (FEIS).

There are two bald eagle nests within 1-mile of the boat ramp project area. The nest to the east of the project area is located approximately 0.60 miles away and the nest to the west is located approximately 0.45 miles away. BLM records indicate this bald eagle nesting territory has been known to be active for the past 7 years. The nest located to the east of the project area has been active for 5 of the last 7 years while the alternate nest location to the west of the project area has been active for 2 out of the last 7

years. Bald eagle winter roosting habitat is not present in the proposed project area. Suitable roosting habitat is located in the deciduous riparian woodlands upstream and downstream of the project area although there are no BLM records of bald eagles roosting within 1-mile of the project area. During 2009-2010 winter roost surveys conducted for the PAPA wildlife monitoring effort, no bald eagles were observed within 1-mile of the project area.

Ferruginous hawk

Ferruginous hawks construct their big, bulky nests on the ground or occasionally in lone trees or on rock ledges. They nest only in areas with abundant prey, typically small rodents. During winter, ferruginous hawks are often found around colonies of prairie dogs, which make up much of their winter diet (FEIS).

There are no known ferruginous hawk nests within 1-mile of the project area and no suitable nesting habitat within 1-mile of the project area. Ferruginous hawks may use the upland sagebrush habitat for foraging on small rodents such as ground squirrels.

Loggerhead shrike

The loggerhead shrike generally prefers open country with shrubs and low trees for nesting and spiny shrubs for impaling prey items (FEIS). The project area contains suitable foraging and potential nesting habitat for loggerhead shrikes.

Long-billed curlew

The long-billed curlew is North America's largest shorebird. Long-billed curlews are ground nesters and typically nest in prairie and grassy meadows near water but occasionally choose dry upland sites. Long-billed curlews have been found throughout the northern half of the PFO and near Fontenelle Reservoir (FEIS). The project area may contain suitable habitat for the long-billed curlew.

Sagebrush Obligate Songbirds

The Brewer's sparrow, sage sparrow and sage thrasher are sagebrush obligate songbirds that depend on sagebrush habitats for nesting and foraging (FEIS). The upland sagebrush steppe habitat in the project area provides suitable habitat for sagebrush obligate songbirds.

Trumpeter swan

Trumpeter swans are found in Wyoming in the extreme eastern and western regions in lakes, ponds, marshes, and other wetlands areas. This species summers southwest of Boulder and winters in the southeast region if open water persists. Trumpeter swans have been observed in the PFO and have been periodically released on public land in the New Fork Potholes area. Currently the native reproducing population has been more successful at producing cygnets than the historic Snake River breeding population (FEIS). The project area does not contain suitable nesting habitat for trumpeter swans but swans may use the river corridor during migration and winter if open water persists.

White-faced ibis

The white-faced ibis breeding habitat is shallow freshwater marshland, especially where islands of vegetation are available. It also makes extensive use of agricultural lands, frequenting flooded pastures, fields, irrigated areas, and even damp meadows for foraging and during migration. Suitable habitat for the white-faced ibis may be present along the riparian areas of the New Fork and East Fork Rivers.

Sensitive Fish Species

See fisheries discussion above.

Sensitive Amphibian Species

Boreal toads can be found breeding in wet meadows, ponds, marshes, and other shallow water in spring. In summer, this species uses upland montane sites usually within 300 to 1,500 feet of the breeding ponds. Northern leopard frogs are found in permanent ponds, swamps, marshes and slow moving streams throughout forest, open and urban areas. Boreal toads have been documented downstream of the confluence of the Middle and South Sawmill Creeks near LaBarge with confirmation of breeding. Northern leopard frogs have been observed in the central and east central regions of the PFO but evidence of breeding was not confirmed (FEIS).

The upland sagebrush habitat where the access road is located does not provide suitable habitat for amphibians. The lower portion of the project area located in the floodplain of the New Fork River may provide habitat for amphibians in the spring during spring runoff when there is more moisture in the area. The wet areas along the bank of the New Fork River likely provide suitable habitat for amphibians from spring into the fall.

Effects

Alternative 1 – No Action

Direct and Indirect Effects

In the No Action alternative, recreational use of the area would likely continue and may increase over time even without the proposed improvements as people continue to use the primitive boat ramp. Continued and potential increased human use of the area would result in some localized disturbance to wildlife in the area. Increased human presence can result in habitat or water quality degradation and wildlife disturbance including dispersal or avoidance. In this alternative, the existing eroding river bank and parking area would not be repaired and habitat degradation would continue to occur with human use of the area. These areas would continue to erode and contribute sediment to the New Fork River system. The current condition of the project area is out of compliance with the 2008 RMP in regards to the fishery, specifically:

RMP Page 2-52: Wildlife and Fish Habitat Management

Management Objectives

Provide suitable habitat to ensure long-term species sustainability and widely distributed functioning habitats to support the Conservation Agreement and Strategy (CAS) for Colorado River Cutthroat Trout

(CRCT) in the States of Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming; the “Three Species” CAS; and to support all other sensitive fish species.

Active erosion can result in increased stream flow and sediment and nutrient loads to local channels. Sedimentation impacts fisheries by reducing habitat complexity, resulting in a lower diversity of prey organisms. Increased turbidity would also result from increased sediment input, decreasing light penetration and inhibiting visual predation by fish. Stream bank instability can alter flow and destroy pool-riffle formations necessary for fish survival. Increased nutrient loading of streams could also impact fisheries by increasing primary production above natural levels, which would degrade habitat and decrease oxygen levels (FEIS).

Cumulative Effects

The quality and functionality of wildlife habitats in the project area would continue to be impacted by oil and gas development within the PAPA. Impacts associated with oil and gas development in the PAPA were discussed in the SEIS.

Summary of Impacts

Common to Alternatives 2 and 3

Direct and Indirect Effects

There will be a small loss of upland sagebrush habitat and greasewood habitat due to the disturbance associated with improving the existing access road, boat ramp and parking area. All disturbances will occur within the existing road alignment and parking/boat ramp area but some widening may occur in places. Reclamation will occur in disturbed areas following project completion.

For wildlife in general, the proposed action may result in more human use and activity at the project site and would cause some localized disturbance to wildlife in the area. Increased human presence can result in habitat or water quality degradation and wildlife disturbance including dispersal or avoidance. Primary human seasonal use of the project site will typically occur from April through October when the New Fork River is most accessible.

Big Game

The surface disturbance associated with the project should not affect the overall functionality and quality of big game habitat in the project area. The disturbance will temporarily reduce the amount of foraging habitat available for big game until the reclaimed areas recover and vegetation becomes established. The portion of the project that is located within moose crucial winter range includes the parking/boat ramp area and a portion of the access road. These areas are currently disturbed and primarily devoid of vegetation due to the current recreational use. The habitat quality and function of the moose crucial winter range will not be impacted by implementation of the proposed project.

The existing boat ramp and parking area has been used for several years by recreationists so some level of human disturbance has been occurring in the area. The potential increase in human use at the project

site may result in decreased use by big game in the area during the spring, summer and fall months when recreationists will be accessing the New Fork River.

Project construction will be restricted by timing stipulations for big game crucial winter range habitat as directed in the RMP:

RMP Page 2-45: Wildlife and Fish Habitat Management

Actions in Traditional Leasing Areas

No surface disturbing or disruptive activities are permitted in big game crucial winter ranges from November 15 to April 30.

Raptors

Responses of nesting raptors to human disturbance typically are determined by the type, duration, magnitude, noise level, and timing of activity relative to nesting phenology. Evidence suggests that some falcons, ospreys, and owls are generally more tolerant of human-induced disturbance and human environments; golden eagles, turkey vultures, northern harriers, Cooper's hawks, northern goshawks, and sharp-shinned hawks appear much less tolerant; and buteos exhibit a wide range of acceptance levels; however, some speculate that ferruginous hawks should be considered the raptor most sensitive to human disturbance (FEIS). A clear line of sight is an important factor in a raptor's response to a particular disturbance and impacts to nesting raptors are often reduced when the nest is shielded visually from such activities (Richardson and Miller 1997).

The existing boat ramp and parking area has been used for several years by recreationists so some level of human disturbance has been occurring in the area during raptor nesting season. All raptor nest locations located within 1-mile of the project area are located within the forested riparian areas along the New Fork River. Most nests are likely shielded visually from the project site and human activity by branches and leaves during the growing season. The potential increase of human use and activity at the project site from April through October could affect some nests of some raptor species by decreasing habitat quality and effectiveness.

Project construction will be restricted by timing stipulations for raptor nests as directed in the RMP:

RMP Page 2-53: Wildlife and Fish Habitat Management

Actions in Traditional Leasing Areas

Prior to initiating surface disturbing activities within potential raptor habitat, surveys will be conducted for nesting, roosting, and foraging activity within a 1-mile radius of the proposed activity.

The following seasonal restrictions for activities near active raptor nest, roosting sites, and foraging areas will be imposed:

- February 1 through July 31, within one-half mile of all active raptor nests
- April 1 through August 15, within one-half mile of burrowing owl nesting habitat
- February 1 through July 31, within 1 mile of all active ferruginous hawk nests
- February 1 through August 15, within 1 mile of bald eagle nests.

Surface occupancy (permanent structures) is prohibited within 1,000 feet of an active raptor nest, within 1,400 feet of an active ferruginous hawk nest, or within 2,600 feet of an active bald eagle nest.

Fisheries

Improving the existing boat ramp and parking area will decrease the erosion and sedimentation into the New Fork River and may improve the quality of fisheries habitat in the New Fork River. The fishery may be affected by increased human use (i.e. fishing) in this localized area but should not be affected for the overall watershed.

RMP Page 2-52: Wildlife and Fish Habitat Management

Actions in Traditional Leasing Areas

Projects in CRCT and other sensitive fish species habitats will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Projects could be approved if no impacts on CRCT or other sensitive fish species are caused, or if impacts can be satisfactorily mitigated.

Projects that could impact habitats of roundtail chubs, flannelmouth suckers, and bluehead suckers (the “Three Species” designated in the CAS) will be designed to avoid or mitigate impacts to these or other sensitive fish species. Specific dates for avoidance of instream activities to protect spawning, redds, and fry vary by species, stream, and elevation and will be determined case by case and in coordination with the WGFD.

Sensitive Species

Project construction will be restricted by the following action items for sensitive species as directed in the RMP:

RMP Page 2-50: Wildlife and Fish Habitat Management

Actions in Traditional Leasing Areas

Permitted activities potentially affecting the habitat of Special Status Species will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Surveys for Special Status Species will be conducted on BLM-administered public lands and mineral estate before any federal project or federal activity is approved.

Other Sensitive Species: If surveys conducted within areas not subject to timing limitations identify sensitive species’ life-cycle activities, surface disturbing activities will be delayed until wildlife activity is completed.

Pygmy rabbits

The surface disturbance that will occur within the sagebrush upland habitat along the existing access road should not affect the overall functionality and quality of pygmy rabbit habitat in the project area.

The existing boat ramp and parking area has been used for several years by recreationists so some level of human disturbance has been occurring in the area. The potential increase in human activity and use at the project site may result in decreased use by pygmy rabbit in the area.

Project construction will be restricted by the following action item for pygmy rabbits as directed in the RMP:

Pygmy rabbits: Surveys identifying pygmy rabbit burrows require avoidance of the burrow by 50 feet. Pipeline crossings and surface disturbing activities through ephemeral drainages and in basin, Wyoming, and big sagebrush communities will be minimized.

Bald eagle

The small amount of surface disturbance to sagebrush and greasewood habitats associated with the project should not affect the overall quality of bald eagle habitat in the project area.

The existing boat ramp and parking area has been used for several years by recreationists so some level of human disturbance has been occurring in the area during eagle nesting season. Increased human use and activity levels at the project site during bald eagle nesting season could affect bald eagle nests by decreasing habitat quality and effectiveness. Both bald eagle nest locations that are within 1-mile of the project area are located within the forested riparian habitats along the New Fork River and are shielded visually from the project site and human activity by tree branches and leaves. Neither nest can be seen from the boat ramp area.

The potential increase of human use and activity at the project site from April through October would not exceed light activity levels as defined in the RMP (see below). The proposed improvement to the boat ramp area is designed to be used for ingress and egress from the New Fork River and is not designed for extended periods of use such as picnicking or camping. Recreational use of the boat ramp access may increase due to the proposed improvement however the type of recreational use should not change.

Project construction will be restricted by timing stipulations for bald eagle nests as directed in the RMP:

RMP Page 2-53: Wildlife and Fish Habitat Management

Actions in Traditional Leasing Areas

Prior to initiating surface disturbing activities within potential raptor habitat, surveys will be conducted for nesting, roosting, and foraging activity within a 1-mile radius of the proposed activity.

The following seasonal restrictions for activities near active raptor nest, roosting sites, and foraging areas will be imposed:

- February 1 through August 15, within 1 mile of bald eagle nests.
- Surface occupancy (permanent structures) is prohibited within 2,600 feet of an active bald eagle nest.

Conservation measures for bald eagle habitat as identified in the RMP include:

Activities and habitat alterations that may disturb bald eagles will be restricted within suitable habitats that occur within bald eagle buffer zones (see Appendix D of 2008 RMP ROD for detailed descriptions):

Zone 1 (within one-half mile February 1 to August 15) is intended to protect active and alternative nests. For active nests, minimal human activity levels are allowed during the period of first occupancy to 2 weeks after fledging.

Zone 2 (within one-half to 1 mile from the nest) is intended to protect bald eagle primary use areas and permits light human activity levels.

Zone 3 is designated to protect foraging/concentration areas year-round. Zone 3 would include one of two larger areas, depending on habitat types: a) 2.5 miles extending in all directions from the nest or b) one-half mile from the bank of all streams within 2.5 miles of the nest. Site-specific habitat types and foraging areas will be evaluated to determine which Zone 3 buffer applies. Zone delineation depends on habitat types. Exceptions may be made after consultation with USFWS.

Minimal human activity levels—(Min) Essentially no human activity with the following exceptions:
Existing patterns of ranching and agricultural activities.

Nesting surveys and banding by biologists experienced with eagles.

River traffic by boats that continue travel at the rate of the main current and at a frequency which results in no boat traffic for at least 30 percent of the daylight hours (fishing from boats with such movement rates and frequency is acceptable).

Light human activity levels—(L) This level allows for day use and low impact activities, such as boating, fishing, and hiking but at low densities and frequencies. Excluded activities include extended use and activities such as heavy construction, timber harvest, seismic exploration, blasting, concentrated use associated with recreation centers (e.g., picnic areas, boat landings), permanent housing, and helicopters or jets within one-half mile of the ground.

Moderate human activity levels—(Mod) Low impact (light) activity levels are included, but intensity of such activities is not limited. A limited number of recreation centers designed to avoid eagle conflicts may be considered. Other activities, such as construction, seismic exploration, blasting, and timber harvest, should also be designed to specifically avoid disturbance. Designing projects or land uses to avoid eagle conflicts requires sufficient data to formulate a site-specific management plan.

Projects with the potential to disturb bald eagles should be implemented in the least amount of time and during periods least likely to affect the bald eagle.

Ferruginous hawk, loggerhead shrike, long-billed curlew, trumpeter swan, white-faced ibis and sagebrush obligate songbirds

The surface disturbance associated with the project should not affect the overall functionality and quality of habitat for sensitive avian species in the project area. All surface disturbance associated with this project will occur along an existing access road and within the existing parking/boat ramp area.

The existing access has been used for several years by recreationists so some level of human disturbance has been occurring in the area. The potential increase in human activity and use at the project site may

result in decreased use by sensitive avian species in the area during the spring, summer and fall months when recreationists will be accessing the New Fork River.

Sensitive Fish Species

See fisheries discussion above.

Sensitive Amphibian Species

Improving the existing boat ramp and parking area will decrease the erosion and sedimentation into the New Fork River and may improve the quality of aquatic habitat in the New Fork River. Amphibians may be affected during project construction and could show some reduction in seasonal use with the proposed action due to the potential increase in human activity at the site.

Cumulative Effects

The project is located within the PAPA. Cumulative effects associated with the PAPA were analyzed in the SEIS. The proposed boat ramp improvement will have minimal impacts to wildlife when compared to other activities and developments that are occurring on private lands and public lands in the surrounding areas.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Effects

The proposed comfort station at the parking area may provide an opportunity for users to recreate in the area longer and result in more human activity and longer durations of activity. The comfort station may also provide an opportunity for increased use by non-recreational users at any time of year depending on accessibility. The access road to the boat ramp is located on a County road that has heavy industrial use. The proposed comfort station would not be visible from the County road due to its proposed location on a lower elevation bench. It is likely that recreational users would be the primary users of the comfort station. A possibility exists that non-recreational users could discover the existence of the comfort station and utilize it as well. Out of convenience, individuals accessing the PAPA could use the comfort station on their way to and from the gas field. The dry hydrant would result in non-recreational use by the County from April through October. Increased use by non-recreational users would add an additional level of human disturbance to the project area and would result in more human use and activity at the project site potentially year round. This additional human activity would result in an increased disturbance to all wildlife in the area which could result in dispersal or avoidance of the area by wildlife.

Big Game

The potential increase in human use at the project site may result in decreased use by big game in the area during the spring, summer and fall months when the County will be accessing the New Fork River. The potential increase in human use at the project site during the winter may affect the habitat quality and function for big game in general, and in particular moose crucial winter range which may result in decreased use of the area by moose during the winter months.

Raptors

The County has been using this site to haul water since the late 1970's so some level of human disturbance has been occurring in the area during raptor nesting season. The non-recreational human use and activity at the project site from April through October when the County will be accessing the New Fork River could affect some nests of some raptor species by decreasing habitat quality and effectiveness. The proposed comfort station may result in additional human activity from both recreational and non-recreational users on a year round basis. The comfort station may also encourage users to recreate or remain in the area longer. This additional level of human use to the area during raptor nesting season could affect raptor nests by decreasing habitat quality and effectiveness.

Bald eagle

The proposed comfort station and dry hydrant do not comply with the 2008 RMP. Specifically:

RMP Page 2-53: Wildlife and Fish Habitat Management

Actions in Traditional Leasing Areas

Surface occupancy (permanent structures) is prohibited within 2,600 feet of an active bald eagle nest.

The proposed comfort station may result in additional human activity from both recreational and non-recreational users on a year round basis. The comfort station may also encourage users to recreate or remain in the area longer. This additional level of human use to the area during bald eagle nesting season could affect bald eagle nests by decreasing habitat quality and effectiveness. Human activity in the area during the winter could decrease the habitat quality and function of winter roosting habitat in the area.

The County has been using this site to haul water since the late 1970's so some level of human disturbance has been occurring in the area during bald eagle nesting season. The proposed dry hydrant would result in non-recreational human activity from April through October, a portion of which is during bald eagle nesting season. The County would use the hydrant for a total of 48 days per year from April 1 through October 31. The use by the County would consist of water hauling trucks accessing the dry hydrant and using a diesel pump to extract water from the New Fork River during daylight hours. Trucks can haul 4000 gallons per load and each fill would take anywhere from 5 to 20 minutes (depending on the power capacity of the pump). This non-recreational use at the project site during bald eagle nesting season could affect bald eagle nests by decreasing habitat quality and effectiveness.

Alternative 3 – Bald Eagle Action

Direct and Indirect Effects

For wildlife in general, this alternative would result in the least amount of human use and activity at the project site by eliminating the comfort station and the dry hydrant. Non-recreational use of the area would be minimal with Alternative 3 so there would not be an additional level of human use as discussed in Alternative 2. Other impacts that would occur with Alternative 3 were discussed in the "Summary of Impacts Common to Alternatives 2 and 3" section above.

Beneficial and Adverse Impacts Related to Significant Issues.

For wildlife in general, the proposed action will result in a small amount of habitat disturbance. The improved boat ramp access area may result in more human use and activity at the project site. The proposed comfort station and dry hydrant would result in more non-recreational use at the project site. Primary recreational use of the project site will typically occur from April through October when the New Fork River is most accessible. County use of the project site would also occur from April through October. Additional human use could occur year round depending on accessibility to the comfort station. This increased recreational and non-recreational use could cause some localized disturbance to wildlife in the area and may result in decreased wildlife use of the area.

The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Colorado River Fish Species

The proposed project would result in an average annual water depletion of 0.011 acre-feet from the Colorado River system. This results in a “May Affect, Likely to Adversely Affect” determination for the downstream federally endangered Colorado River fish species and requires formal Section 7 consultation with the USFWS.

Greater sage-grouse

The surface disturbance associated with the project should not affect the overall functionality and quality of sage-grouse habitat in the project area. Studies have demonstrated that the quality and effectiveness of sagebrush habitat decreases near disturbances such as roads (FEIS). All surface disturbance associated with this project will occur along an existing access road and an existing parking/boat ramp area.

The existing boat ramp and parking area has been used for several years by recreationists so some level of human disturbance has been occurring in the area. The potential increase in human activity and use at the project site would likely result in decreased use by sage-grouse in the area during the spring, summer and fall months when recreationists and the County will be accessing the New Fork River.

The project area is located outside of the Governor’s Designated Sage-grouse Core Areas (State of Wyoming Executive Department Executive Order 2008-2). There are no occupied or undetermined leks within 2-miles of the project area and the project does not occur within identified sage-grouse winter concentration areas. No sage-grouse timing stipulations will be applied to the project. However, timing stipulations for other species that will be applied to project construction overlap with the sage-grouse nesting and early brood-rearing seasonal period (see “Summary of Timing Stipulations” below).

Yellow-billed cuckoo

Suitable habitat for the yellow-billed cuckoo is not present in the immediate project area and is likely not present in the surrounding forested riparian areas. The proposed project would have no effect on yellow-billed cuckoo.

The following conservation recommendation identified in the 2008 RMP will be applied to project construction:

Surface-disturbing or disruptive activities will be prohibited within one-half mile of identified habitat during the period of April 15 to August 15 for the protection of nesting western yellow-billed cuckoos.

Wildlife Mitigation Measures and Design Features

- Summary of Timing Stipulations for construction of proposed project
- No surface disturbing or disruptive activities are permitted in big game crucial winter ranges from November 15 to April 30.
- Prior to initiating surface disturbing activities within potential raptor habitat, surveys will be conducted for nesting, roosting, and foraging activity within a 1-mile radius of the proposed activity.
- The following seasonal restrictions for activities near active raptor nest, roosting sites, and foraging areas will be imposed:
 - February 1 through July 31, within one-half mile of all active raptor nests
 - April 1 through August 15, within one-half mile of burrowing owl nesting habitat
 - February 1 through July 31, within 1 mile of all active ferruginous hawk nests
 - February 1 through August 15, within 1 mile of bald eagle nests.
- Surface occupancy (permanent structures) is prohibited within 1,000 feet of an active raptor nest, within 1,400 feet of an active ferruginous hawk nest, or within 2,600 feet of an active bald eagle nest.
- Projects in CRCT and other sensitive fish species habitats will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Projects could be approved if no impacts on CRCT or other sensitive fish species are caused, or if impacts can be satisfactorily mitigated.
- Projects that could impact habitats of roundtail chubs, flannelmouth suckers, and bluehead suckers (the “Three Species” designated in the CAS) will be designed to avoid or mitigate impacts to these or other sensitive fish species. Specific dates for avoidance of instream activities to protect spawning, redds, and fry vary by species, stream, and elevation and will be determined case by case and in coordination with the WGFD.
- Permitted activities potentially affecting the habitat of Special Status Species will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- Surveys for Special Status Species will be conducted on BLM-administered public lands and mineral estate before any federal project or federal activity is approved.
- Other Sensitive Species: If surveys conducted within areas not subject to timing limitations identify sensitive species’ life-cycle activities, surface disturbing activities will be delayed until wildlife activity is completed.
- Pygmy rabbits: Surveys identifying pygmy rabbit burrows require avoidance of the burrow by 50 feet. Pipeline crossings and surface disturbing activities through ephemeral drainages and in basin, Wyoming, and big sagebrush communities will be minimized.
- Surface-disturbing or disruptive activities will be prohibited within one-half mile of identified habitat during the period of April 15 to August 15 for the protection of nesting western yellow-billed cuckoos.
- A Section 7 consultation is required for water depletion of the Colorado River system.

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Appendix C.

Site Photos



Figure 1. Photo shows multiple access roads and large area devoid of vegetation where vehicles often become stuck. The vehicle shown is sitting at the top of the bank that is currently used for launching boats.



Figure 2. Photo shows a vehicle parked at the top of the primitive boat ramp. Note the steep slope and the ruts dug by spinning tires. These factors cause erosion of fine sediments, which are deposited in the New Fork River.



Figure 3. Photo shows multiple ruts and access roads leading to the boat ramp area. Vehicles often get stuck in this area, and the damage they have caused is leading to excessive erosion.
