

# Environment Assessment

## Canyon Creek Fence

DOI-BLM-WY-R010-2011-0038-EA



Worldland Field Office, Wind River/Bighorn Basin District, Wyoming

**BLM**

March, 2011



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.

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**Canyon Creek Fence**  
**(DOI-BLM-WY-R010-2011-0038-EA)**

**Location:** Township 47 North, Range 87 West, Section 20W ½ 6<sup>th</sup> Principal Meridian. Washakie County, Wyoming.

**Applicant/Address:** *BLM Worland Field Office*  
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**CHAPTER 1**  
**INTRODUCTION AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION**

**INTRODUCTION**

The BLM proposes to construct a fence along the upgraded access route and parking area in the Canyon Creek area. The fence will be constructed as a 3-wire, wood pole top fence along the access route, and a buck and pole fence around the parking area. The 3-wire fence is anticipated to be contracted, and the buck and pole fence will be constructed in-house.

The dimensions of the 3-wire fence are as follows:

- The 3-wire fence will be approximately 1,160 feet long
- Post and wire will be 40" from ground;
- 2<sup>nd</sup> wire will be 28" from ground;
- 3<sup>rd</sup> wire will be a smooth wire 18" from ground

The buck and pole fence will be approximately 395 feet and will encompass the parking area, and tie off into the slope located north of the parking area. Additional wire fencing will be extended up from the buck and pole fence up the slope to tie into existing fencing. As illustrated in Appendix A, a wire gate will be installed along the pole top wire fence so as to mitigate for livestock found within the access route area. A walk-thru gate will be constructed at the parking area to access the easement foot trail.

**PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION**

The fence construction along the road supplements EA# DOI-BLM-WY-R010-2009-0064-EA, Canyon Creek Road and Access Area, pages 8 and 10, "Boulders or bollards will be used to border the parking area." The fence will be used to encourage use to remain on the access route and in the parking area so as to mitigate for weed control, soil erosion, and to maintain the visual and recreational settings. The fence will also be used to prevent unauthorized use within the BLM-administered public lands surrounding the parking area and the remainder of the recreation area.

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

The proposed action conforms to the Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan for the Washakie Resource Area dated 9/2/1988, which is under revision and consolidation into the Bighorn Basin Resource Management Plan (expected completion in 2012.) The decisions in the Washakie Resource Management Plan provide general management direction and allocation of uses and resources on the public lands in the area. The proposed action falls within alternatives analyzed in the Draft Bighorn Basin RMP revision.

The proposed action is in conformance with the Washakie RA LUP, even though it is not specifically provided for, because it is clearly consistent with the following LUP objectives, terms, and conditions:

The above Resource Management Plan specifically states, “To enhance and expand opportunities for recreation while intensively managing areas with high recreation value,” as well as, “To provide forage for livestock grazing, to reduce conflicts between livestock grazing and other resources uses, and to improve ecological range condition”.

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

This EA complies with the Council on Environmental Quality’s Regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508) for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) and the Department of the Interior’s Regulations (43 CFR Part 46) on Implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Regulatory Decisions: The Proposed Action is in conformance with Title 43 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Sub Chapter H Recreation Programs Part 8000, and 43 CFR 8360, Visitor Services.

## **CHAPTER 2 DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This EA focuses on the Proposed Action, Alternative 2, buck and pole the entire length of the access route and the parking area, and the no action. The No Action alternative is considered and analyzed to provide a baseline for comparison of the impacts of the proposed action.

### **PROPOSED ACTION**

The BLM proposes to construct a 1,555 foot long fence along the upgraded access route and parking area in the Canyon Creek area. 1,160 feet of the fence will be constructed as a 3-wire, wood pole top fence along the access route, and a buck and pole fence around the parking area. The 3-wire fence is anticipated to be contracted, and the buck and pole fence will be constructed in-house.

The dimensions of the 3-wire fence are as follows:

- The 3-wire fence will be approximately 1,160 feet long
- Post and wire will be 40” from ground;
- 2<sup>nd</sup> wire will be 28” from top post
- 3<sup>rd</sup> wire will be a smooth wire 18” from ground

The buck and pole fence will be approximately 395 feet and will encompass the parking area, and tie off into the slope located north of the parking area. Additional wire fencing will be extended up from the buck and pole fence up the slope to tie into existing fencing. As illustrated in Appendix A, a wire gate will be installed along the pole top wire fence so as to mitigate for livestock found within the access route area. A walk-thru gate will be constructed at the parking area to access the easement foot trail.

Fencing equipment (i.e., trucks used onsite to haul fencing equipment) should be thoroughly cleaned before being moved to the site to prevent noxious weed seed introduction. Following fence construction and during normal maintenance activities, the area would be monitored for noxious weed infestations and promptly treated if they are found

### **Alternative Two – Buck and pole fence design**

The BLM will construct a 1,555 foot buck and pole fence. The fence will be constructed along the upgraded road and will encompass the parking area. A gate will be constructed in the fence section (see Appendix A) to allow retrieval of livestock trapped within the parking area, and a walk-through gate constructed in the buck and pole fence section to allow users to access the Canyon Creek access trail.

## **NO ACTION**

Under the no action alternative, the BLM will not construct a fence along the Canyon Creek access route and the parking area. The BLM will implement EA # DOI-BLM-WY-R010-2009-0064-EA, Canyon Creek Road and Access Area, and border the parking area with boulders or bollards.

## **CHAPTER 3 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT**

### **INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL SETTING**

The project area is located in Washakie County, Wyoming, Township 47 North, Range 87 West, Section 20, 6th principal meridian, near the town of Ten Sleep.

The physical character of the site is typified by a steep walled canyon with a perennial stream running through it. On both sides of the canyon are high mesas with sandstone outcrops. A review of potential Wild and Scenic Rivers in the Washakie Resource Area, which is BLM-administered public lands between the Bighorn River east to the Bighorn Mountains, was completed by Jonas Consulting in 2002. Canyon Creek was identified as eligible for Wild and Scenic River status with a tentative classification as scenic, but did not meet suitability factors.

Canyon Creek is a perennial trout stream that is a tributary to Ten Sleep Creek and the Nowood River. Because of the natural resources, dominantly the fishing opportunities, wildlife, scenic qualities, and abundant recreational opportunities, the Canyon Creek area has been growing in popularity.

The site is accessed from U.S. Highway 16, three miles east of Ten Sleep by following State Highway 436, three miles south to the mouth of Canyon Creek Canyon.

The Canyon Creek subdivision is located immediately upstream from the mouth of Canyon Creek Canyon that contains: residential housing with more houses probably being built in the future, a common pasture area, and a private golf course. Another low density housing development is being built near the junction of US highway 16 and State highway 436.

The nearby population centers are Ten Sleep and Worland, Wyoming. Ten Sleep is approximately 6 miles west of the site. The 2007 census recorded Ten Sleep's population as 311 as of July, 2006. Worland is approximately 36 miles to the west. The 2007 census recorded Worland's population as 4,902 as of July, 2006.

Public land is accessible from State Highway 436. Physical access is by a 0.3 mile vehicle route across public land and a trail easement across approximately 0.2 mile of private land.

### **Livestock**

The project area is a small parcel of public land that is not designated as a livestock grazing allotment or a stock driveway. Historically the area was adjudicated as part of the Rim Allotment #00186 which was later separated by private land sales. The Rim allotment's physical boundaries are now located on the west side of Rome Hill Road. For reasons of lack of fencing, frequent unauthorized grazing occurred on the public parcel from neighboring private land owners and various livestock operators using the adjacent stock driveway.

### **Noxious Weeds**

The area within the canyon is seriously impacted by the presence of noxious weeds. A large infestation of Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense* (L.) Scop.) occurs just inside the mouth of the canyon. Both houndstongue (*Cynoglossum officinale* L.) and cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum* L.) are prevalent throughout the canyon but most abundant near the mouth of the canyon. Musk thistle (*Cirsium vulgare* (Savi) Ten.) is also present throughout the canyon. The thistles have spiny leaves that poke and scratch and houndstongue has a seed that readily attaches to anything that comes in contact with it. Left untreated the weeds present in the canyon will continue to increase in density and will

affect adjacent un-infested lands and reduce the quality of the native vegetative communities. Monitoring and chemical applications within the project area will continue according to the Bighorn Basin Weed Management Plan.

## Recreation

Recreational activities are dominantly non-motorized use such as fishing, hunting, camping, hiking, horseback riding, sightseeing, rockhounding, and wildlife watching. The area is located within the West Slope Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA), where recreation management is the primary focus for the area. Goals and objectives for the area include enhancing and expanding recreational opportunities and acquiring access for recreational use. The area's outstanding scenic qualities, exceptional fishing and hiking opportunities, and proximity to Ten Sleep as well as on the fringes of the Canyon Creek Subdivisions attract local visitors to the area to enjoy such resources and opportunities, which makes this area popular for such non-motorized recreation.

## VEGETATION

A vegetation survey of Canyon Creek was done in July, 2006. The following taxa were found to occur there:

- boxelder (*Acer negundo* L. var. *interius* (Britt.) Sarg.)
- common yarrow (*Achillea millefolium* L.)
- Columbia needlegrass (*Achnatherum nelsonii* (Scribn.) Barkworth ssp. *nelsonii*)
- textile onion (*Allium textile* A. Nels. & J.F. Macbr.)
- rosy pussytoes (*Antennaria rosea* Greene)
- tarragon (*Artemisia dracunculus* L.)
- Wyoming big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata* Nutt. ssp. *wyomingensis* Beetle & Young)
- showy milkweed (*Asclepias speciosa* Torr.)
- Plains milkvetch (*Astragalus gilviflorus* Sheldon)
- blue grama (*Bouteloua gracilis* (Willd. ex Kunth) Lag. ex Griffiths)
- cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum* L.)
- bluebell bellflower (*Campanula rotundifolia* L.)
- Nebraska sedge (*Carex nebrascensis* Dewey)
- northwestern Indian paintbrush (*Castilleja angustifolia* (Nutt.) G. Don)
- fireweed (*Chamerion angustifolium* (L.) Holub ssp. *angustifolium*)
- orchardgrass (*Dactylis glomerata* L.)
- western tansymustard (*Descurainia pinnata* (Walt.) Britt.)
- thickspike wheatgrass (*Elymus macrourus* (Turcz.) Tzvelev)
- Rocky Mountain willowherb (*Epilobium saximontanum* Hausskn.)
- Horsetail (*Equisetum arvense* L.)
- Shortstem buckwheat (*Eriogonum brevicaulis* Nutt.)
- Northern bedstraw (*Galium boreale* L.)
- Pleated gentian (*Gentiana affinis* Griseb.)
- American licorice (*Glycyrrhiza lepidota* Pursh)

## Wildlife Habitat

The area provides habitat for a variety of species of wildlife including mule deer, sage grouse, Hungarian partridge, chukars, raptors (including kestrels), song birds, reptiles, and small mammals such as coyotes, mountain lion, bobcat, rabbits, and rodents. The area does not contain any critical wildlife habitat or threatened or endangered species.

Canyon Creek is a Class 3 stream which is important trout waters with fisheries of regional importance. The stream is primarily a brown trout fishery, which is the least vulnerable trout to being caught by most anglers. Rainbow trout are also present. Other non-game fish in canyon creek are longnose dace, mountain whitefish, and longnose

sucker. The fish found in Canyon Creek are resident fish and not spawners migrating from other streams. The fisheries on public land are buffered from over harvest by adjacent private lands that provide a source of fish to repopulate the stream segment.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS**

#### **DIRECT AND INDIRECT IMPACTS**

#### **PROPOSED ACTION**

##### **Livestock**

Completion of this project will not impact livestock grazing since it is not within any allotment boundaries or designated as a stock driveway. The addition of the fence will help prevent unauthorized grazing from neighboring private properties as well as prevent any problems or conflicts livestock may cause the general public that use the area. Impacts would not be significant.

##### **Noxious Weeds**

Direct impacts would be associated with soil disturbance, in that there is a possibility that noxious weed seed may be introduced or spread to areas that are presently weed free. Indirect impacts may be observed from the transport of noxious weeds from areas outside of the project area into the Canyon Creek area or, conversely, noxious weed seed transported from the project area to other areas. Visual evidence of this occurrence would be the establishment of weeds one year following fence construction resulting in an increased density of the weeds. Impacts would not be significant.

##### **Recreation**

The proposed action may go unnoticed to the casual observer. The fence design mirrors the existing designs found on the surrounding public and private land parcels. Direct impacts would be the presence of an additional fence, which may slightly alter the recreational settings to a more front country setting. However, the fence will follow the similar linear routes as that of the access route and the upgraded parking area. There will be no impacts to recreation from the proposed action.

##### **Vegetation**

Direct impacts would be the removal of vegetation before and during the fence construction which would be kept to the minimum necessary to construct the fence. Weed treatment and seeding with native plant seed would occur on disturbed areas following fence construction. Some impact to the vegetation can be expected from increased human activity such as trail compaction and trampling around the fencing area and surrounding sites. Impacts would not be significant.

Seeding success would be monitored, and the need to reseed assessed after the first full growing season.

##### **Wildlife Habitat**

Preventing livestock access and other unauthorized uses within the recreation site would decrease habitat degradation that is occurring around the area. Over time, vegetation will likely re-establish in the degraded areas and will provide cover and foraging habitat for wildlife. Installation of the fence may cause some localized disturbance to wildlife that is in the area during these activities.

The fence will not bisect migrating corridors or impede migrating habits from big game accessing through the area. The proposed fence will be constructed according to WGFD wildlife friendly fence specifications. The fence will

be monitored for wildlife movement and will be monitored as necessary to allow wildlife to move freely throughout the area. Impacts would not be significant.

## **ALTERNATIVE B**

### **Livestock**

Same as Proposed Action.

### **Noxious Weeds**

Same as the proposed action.

### **Recreation**

Impacts under Alternative B will be the same as those analyzed under the preferred alternative. Physical natural recreational settings under alternative B may be altered to a higher degree under this alternative due to the more obtrusiveness of the buck and pole fence design. Impacts would not be significant.

### **Vegetation**

Impacts to vegetation would be the same as those in the proposed alternative.

### **Wildlife Habitat**

Impacts to wildlife may be to a higher degree compared to those analyzed in the proposed action. The buck and pole fence design may be less wildlife friendly, possibly restricting their movements, impeding migration corridors, or fragmenting habitat, as well as introducing additional risks in the form of injury or death to big game animals attempting to cross over the fence. Impacts would not be significant.

## **NO ACTION**

### **Livestock**

There will be no impacts to livestock grazing since it is not within any allotment boundaries or designated as a stock driveway. However the un-allotted portions of public lands will remain open and unauthorized livestock grazing will continue to occur.

### **Noxious Weeds**

Because of the continual human activity at the site, the potential for the spread of noxious weeds would still exist. Disturbed areas associated with past recreational activities may still be present, and the opportunity for noxious weeds to be introduced and/or spread by livestock grazing on neighboring lands, vehicular travel, waterways, wildlife movements, and other human influences would still exist within the project area. The project area would continue to be monitored for the presence of noxious weeds, as per the Bighorn Basin Weed Management Plan, and treatment methods for any existing or new noxious weed infestations located would be evaluated on a site specific basis. Impacts would not be significant.

### **Recreation**

There may be an increase in conflicts between recreational visitors and the surrounding private landowners, such as trespassing to private lands from the access road. There will be no fence to influence users to remain within the recreation area, which may influence potential conflicts. The potential for off-road motorized use may increase without the fence along the access route or the parking area. Off-road use will impact the natural resource recreational settings by increasing rutting, soil disturbances, soil erosion, and increase the potential for the spread of noxious weeds. Unauthorized use from the surrounding private lands may occur within the recreation area, which may increase conflicts, and interfere with recreationists' desired goals, experiences, and beneficial outcomes.

Conversely, the conflicts such as livestock harassment from recreation users may increase within the recreation area. Impacts would not be significant.

### **Vegetation**

There will be no impacts to vegetation under the no action alternative.

### **Wildlife Habitat**

The no action alternative would result in no change from the current status for wildlife resources. There would be no affect to threatened and endangered species and no impacts to habitat for these species. Recreational use of the area would likely continue and increase over time. Grazing would also continue to occur in the allotment adjacent to the proposed project. There would continue to be disturbance to wildlife and habitat degradation from recreational activities and grazing that would continue to occur within the recreation area. Impacts would not be significant.

## **CUMULATIVE IMPACTS**

The naturalness of the Canyon Creek area immediately surrounding the parking area and the access route will be minimally impacted by the proposed action. The combination of the contrasting elements of the parking area, access route, and the fence against the natural surrounding elements may alter the naturalness and solitude. Most of these impacts have already occurred because of the historic use of the site and the lack of a clear access route into the area and an undefined parking area.

The proposed alternative will keep the level of unauthorized uses and potential trespass issues to a minimum. The addition of a fence along the access route and parking area may invite additional visitors to the area, which may increase in visits through time. Such visits will include both consumptive uses (such as hunting, rock collecting, and fishing) and non-consumptive uses (such as sightseeing, wildlife watching, and hiking). Impacts related to increase of use may include degradation of solitude and naturalness, a decrease in quality of fishing without mitigation (such as size limits and creel limits), user conflicts, resource degradation including fish and wildlife and cultural resources, and spread of noxious and invasive weeds.

The addition of fencing may continue to alter the physical resource recreation settings to more front country type of settings, which may interfere with the desired settings of the recreational visitors to the area.

Fencing will further fragment wildlife habitat, and introduce additional potential hazards to wildlife.

More linear elements within the landscape will contrast against the natural elements. Fencing, roads and facilities, may ultimately conflict with visual resource management Class III objectives and require more stringent VRM mitigations. These cumulative impacts may be observed under the preferred alternative and alternative 2. The no action alternative would not result in an accumulation of these effects.

## **CHAPTER 5 PERSONS, GROUPS, AND AGENCIES CONSULTED**

Past consultation with the Wyoming Game and Fish and interested publics was conducted for recreation development projects within the Canyon Creek area. Such projects included an access trail, public easement acquisition, and access road and parking area upgrades. Due to the scale of the proposed action, as well as the coordinated efforts from past projects within the same project area, the BLM has determined that additional public scoping, comment period, or consultation is not necessary. The State Historic Preservation Office and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was consulted during preparation of this EA. Please refer to Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1. List of Persons, Agencies and Organizations Consulted**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Purpose &amp; Authorities for Consultation or Coordination</b>	<b>Findings &amp; Conclusions</b>
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (US FWS)	Information on Consultation, under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (16 USC 1531)	No consultation required in the project location.
Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)	Consultation for federal undertakings, as required by Section 106 (36CFR800) and fulfilled through the Wyoming State Protocol Agreement between the BLM and SHPO.	Documentation of the undertaking was sent to SHPO on 3/16/2011. The project area has been previously surveyed at the Class III level (BLM project #1599018N)

## List of Preparers

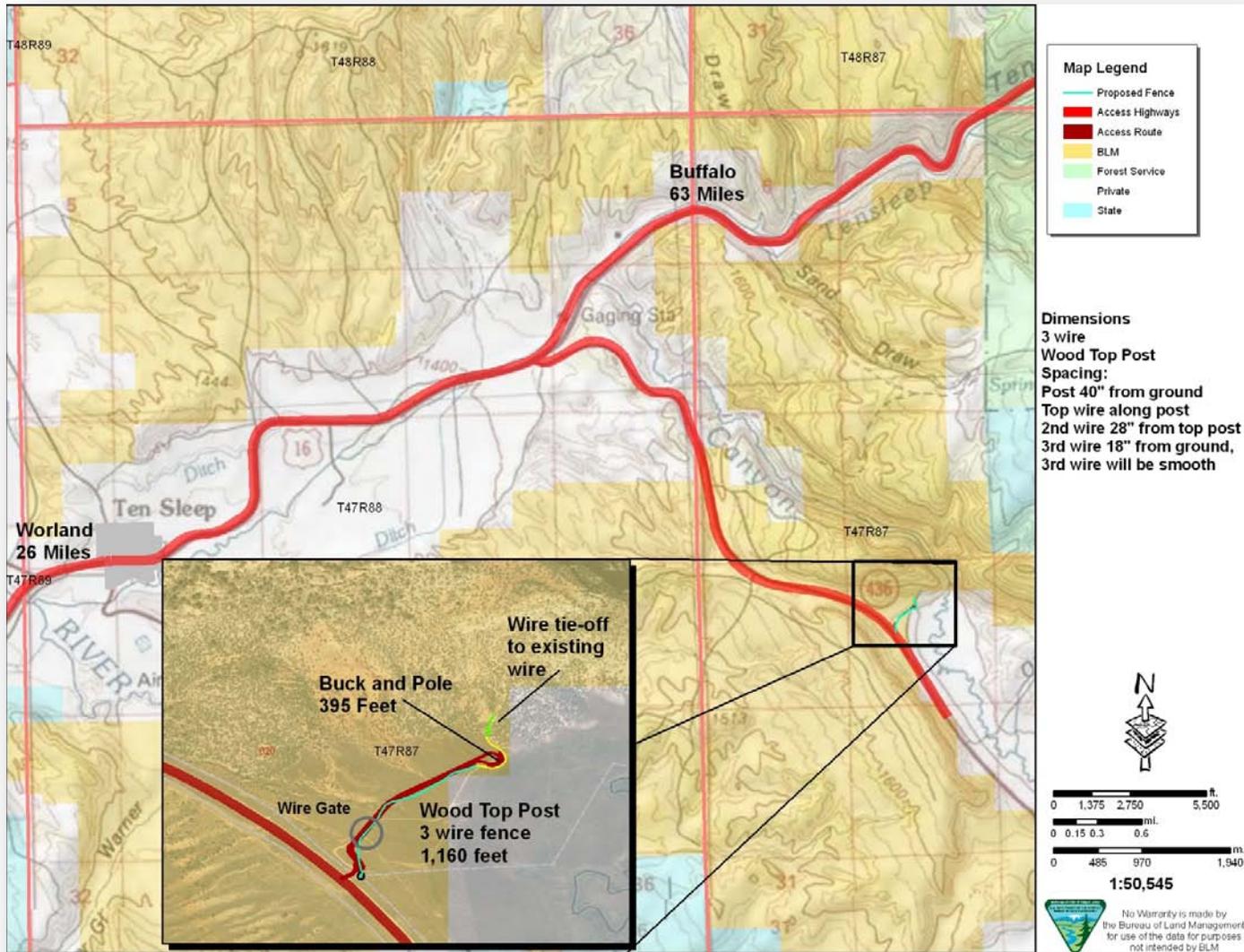
BLM staff who contributed analysis in the body of this EA are listed below.

**Table 5.2. List of Preparers**

### BLM Preparers

<b>Name</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Responsible for the Following Section(s) of this Document</b>
<b>Paul Rau</b>	<b>Outdoor Recreation Planner</b>	<b>Project lead, Recreation, Visual Resource Management, Lands with Wilderness Characteristics</b>
<b>Marit Bovee</b>	<b>Archeologist</b>	<b>Cultural Resources</b>
<b>Mike Peck</b>	<b>Range Specialist</b>	<b>Range/Livestock</b>
<b>CJ Grimes</b>	<b>Weeds Specialist</b>	<b>Invasive Species/Noxious Weeds</b>
<b>Eve Warren</b>	<b>Vegetation Planner</b>	<b>Vegetation</b>
<b>Jared Dalebout</b>	<b>Hydrologist</b>	<b>Water Resources/Riparian</b>
<b>Ted Igleheart</b>	<b>Wildlife Biologist</b>	<b>Wildlife Habitat</b>

## APPENDIX A – Map of Proposed Project



No Warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management for use of the data for purposes not intended by BLM