

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**

Twin Falls District  
Jarbidge Field Office  
2536 Kimberly Road  
Twin Falls, Idaho 83301

**Finding of No Significant Impact**

**Jarbidge Fuel Breaks Project  
NEPA No. DOI-BLM-ID-T010-2011-0006-EA**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:**

I have reviewed the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations for significance (40 CFR 1508.27) and have determined that the actions analyzed in the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Jarbidge Fuel Breaks Project (DOI-BLM-ID-T010-2011-0006-EA) would not constitute a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment; therefore an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. This finding was made by considering both the context and intensity of the potential effects, as described in the above EA, using the following factors defining significance:

1. *The activities described in the proposed action do not include any significant beneficial or adverse impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(1)).*

The EA includes a description of the expected environmental consequences of construction and maintenance of vegetated and unvegetated fuel breaks. Fuel break treatments would occur along existing travel routes or adjacent to cultivated fields for a maximum of 193 miles and 12,636 acres on BLM-managed lands. The linear fuel break treatment areas would comprise less than 2% of the 796,740 acres of public lands contained in the project area, which defines the area anticipated to be directly and indirectly affected by the project (EA, p. 2). In addition, treatments would be implemented at a rate of about 1,000 to 2,000 acres (0.1% to 0.25% of the project area) annually over a period of 5 to 10 years. Therefore, impacts from vegetation removal by prescribed fire, mechanical, or chemical means; soil surface disturbance for seedbed preparation or seed burial; establishment of native and non-native vegetation; and maintenance treatments utilizing mechanical and chemical tools would be incremental in nature and would not occur on all treatment segments at once.

Long-term impacts within treatment areas resulting from modified vegetation or a greater width of bare soil adjacent to existing travel routes and cultivated fields are detailed in Chapter 3 – Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences – of the EA. The scale of these impacts is small relative to the project area and remaining available habitat, and no new fragmentation to special status plant, wildlife (including special status species), or wild horse habitats would occur. The impact of treatments would be small compared to

effects of wildfires that burned 788, 217 acres of the project area (45% of BLM lands) two or more times between 2003 and 2012 (EA, p. 2).

Following fuel break implementation, impacts from wildfire are expected to be less than in the last decade (EA, Chapter 3). However, this beneficial effect is not likely to be significant due to uncertainty regarding future ignition locations and burning conditions. Wildfire will undoubtedly continue to be an important factor within the landscape of the project area. However, established fuel breaks would be a tool to potentially reduce the size and severity of wildfires by providing safe anchor points and modifying fuels to decrease surface rate of spread, fire line intensity, and flame length. These fuel breaks would also increase firefighter and public safety during wildfire incidents by reducing fuels adjacent to ingress and egress routes.

2. *The activities included in the proposed action would not significantly affect public health or safety (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(2)).*

The analysis contained in the EA did not determine that the proposed action or alternatives have any appreciable negative effects on public health or safety. Chapter 2 – Proposed Action and Alternatives – of the EA describes design features of the proposed action and alternatives that were included to ensure public health and safety. A prescribed fire burn plan would be developed prior to implementation to describe burning parameters and address safety and smoke management. All herbicides prescribed for use were approved in the *Record of Decision for the 2007 Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides on BLM Lands in the 17 Western States Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement*. All herbicide label instructions would be followed for storage, mixing, application, and disposal. In addition, Standard Operating Procedures contained in Table B-2 (Appendix B) of the *Record of Decision for the 2007 Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides on BLM Lands in the 17 Western States Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement* would be followed. Actions that reduce risk as well as wind-borne smoke, ash, and dust associated with large, repeated wildfires would have beneficial effects to public health and safety (EA, pp. 65-68).

3. *The proposed activities would not significantly affect any unique characteristics (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(3)) of the geographic area such as prime and unique farmlands, caves, wild and scenic rivers, designated wilderness areas, wilderness study areas, or areas of critical concern.*

The project area does not contain any lands with unique characteristics and they will not be affected by enacting the pertinent elements of the proposed action and alternatives. Portions of the project area are bounded by Bruneau-Jarbidge Rivers Wilderness on the west and the Salmon Falls Creek Canyon Area of Critical Environmental Concern/Lower Salmon Falls Creek Wilderness Study Area on the east. However, these areas are remote from treatment locations and would not be adversely affected by the proposed action or alternatives.

4. *The activities described in the proposed action do not involve effects on the human environment that are likely to be highly controversial (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(4)).*

The activities described in Chapter 2 – Proposed Action and Alternatives – of the EA, including prescribed burning; disking; broadcast and drill seeding; mowing, cutting, or mastication of shrubs; and herbicide use, have been used in the Jarbidge Field Office and adjacent BLM field offices in the Twin Falls and Boise districts for at least 20 years to implement fuels reduction and vegetation restoration treatments, as well as post-fire stabilization and rehabilitation treatments. Proposed plant materials have been successfully used in the Jarbidge Field Office, primarily as part of post-fire stabilization and rehabilitation treatments. Forage kochia (*Kochia prostrata*) was used in post-fire and green-strip (vegetated fuel break) mixed species seed mixes in the late 1980s through the mid-1990s (EA, p. 44).

Comments received during the public scoping process expressed concern regarding the degree to which forage kochia might be invasive into native plant communities or habitat for slickspot peppergrass. Strong evidence exists that forage kochia establishes well in slickspot microsites, but information is mixed regarding forage kochia's ability to invade intact plant communities in the absence of disturbance (EA, pp. 52-53). Concerns regarding the potential for forage kochia spread were addressed in the design of the proposed action and formulation of alternatives.

The proposed action includes the use of forage kochia in 200-foot-wide fuel breaks. The treatment areas do not contain known occupied habitat for slickspot peppergrass (*Lepidium papilliferum*), a plant proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, as amended. The nearest treatment areas are about 5 air miles and 8 road miles from occupied habitat. In addition, prevailing winds in the Jarbidge Field Office tend to be from the west and treatment areas are downwind of the occupied habitat (EA, p. 89). To address the potential for forage kochia to be spread by road-related activities, 50-foot-wide vegetated buffers would be placed between the road and the forage kochia fuel break. To address the potential for forage kochia to spread into native plant communities, a 25-foot-wide buffer would be placed on the outer edge of the fuel break, between the fuel break and any native plant community (EA, p. 22-27). Monitoring coupled with chemical and mechanical control measures are included to further reduce spread potential (EA, pp. 29-30). A Conference Opinion received as a result of section 7 consultation under the ESA concluded that implementation of the proposed action will not jeopardize the survival and recovery of slickspot peppergrass (see #9 below).

5. *The activities described in the proposed action do not involve effects that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(5)).*

As described above, the implementation and maintenance activities described in the EA have been used in the Jarbidge Field Office and adjacent BLM field offices in the Twin Falls and Boise districts for at least 20 years to implement fuels reduction and vegetation restoration treatments, as well as post-fire stabilization and rehabilitation treatments. The analysis did not identify any significant effects on the human environment which are

highly uncertain or involve unknown risks as a result of this action. Inaction would likely result in greater risk to firefighters, the public, and natural resources within the project area. And while the impacts of climate change are somewhat speculative, it is possible that climate warming could result in longer periods during which fire can occur. This means that the threat of frequent and potentially large fires is likely to continue for the foreseeable future (EA, p. 2).

6. *My decision to implement these activities does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(6)).*

The Jarbidge Fuel Breaks Project represents a site-specific project that does not set precedence for future actions or present a decision in principle about future considerations. Any similarly proposed future project must be individually evaluated on its own merits.

7. *The effects of treatments described for the proposed action and alternatives including prescribed burning; disking; broadcast and drill seeding; mowing, cutting, or mastication of shrubs; and herbicide use would not be significant, individually or cumulatively, when considered with the effects of other actions (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(7)).*

This EA considered potential cumulative impacts of the proposed action and alternatives (see the Cumulative Effects section for each resource analysis in Chapter 3 – Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences). These analyses concluded that implementation will not result in significant cumulative effects on biological, cultural, or social resources, even when considered in relation to other actions.

8. *I have determined that the activities described in the proposed action will not adversely affect or cause loss or destruction of scientific, cultural, or historical resources, including those listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(8)).*

All acres proposed for treatment have been inventoried for the presence of cultural resources (EA, pp. 31). The determination of significance and effect was submitted to the Idaho State Historic Preservation Officer on June 31, 2012. Consultation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act was completed on August 3, 2012 (EA, p. 130).

Based on inventories and the analysis in the EA, the proposed action and alternatives would not result in loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, Native-American, or historical resources (EA, pp. 132-133). The previously known and newly found sites that are listed, eligible, or may be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places would be protected from loss or destruction through marking prior to implementation and avoidance. No ground-disturbing activities would occur within 0.25 mile of the Oregon National Historic Trail or contributing segments of the National Register listed Toana Freight Wagon Road unless physical and visual impacts to the trails can be avoided. This would include using seeding methods that do not establish vegetation in visible rows. Visible traces of the Oregon Trail and Toana Road would not be disturbed (EA, pp. 31-32).

9. *The proposed activities are not likely to adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(9)).*

The EA identifies that there are no known ESA listed threatened or endangered species in the project area (EA, pp. 82, 102). While the project area does not contain known populations of slickspot peppergrass, it does contain potential habitat for the species (EA, pp. 82-84). On August 26, 2014, the BLM submitted a Biological Assessment (BA) to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) analyzing potential impacts of the proposed action on slickspot peppergrass occupied, proposed critical, and potential habitat. The BA was accompanied by a request for formal consultation on the determination under section 7 of the ESA that the proposed project may affect, and is likely to adversely affect potential habitat for the species. The BLM also determined that the project would have no effect on proposed critical habitat for slickspot peppergrass. The USFWS acknowledged this determination.

The USFWS issued a Conference Opinion on October 24, 2014, concluding that the project will not jeopardize the survival and recovery of slickspot peppergrass and that the numbers, distribution, and reproduction of slickspot peppergrass in the action area (if present); in the element occurrences (populations) and Management Areas of the Owyhee Plateau physiographic region, and for the species rangewide, will not be significantly changed as a result of the action (Conference Opinion, pp. 56-57).

10. *The proposed activities will not threaten any violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(10)).*

The proposed action and alternatives analyzed in the EA were developed in conformance with the Jarbidge Field Office RMP and in accordance with all applicable Federal, State, and local laws and regulations for the protection of the environment.

**APPROVED:**

/s/ Jesse German

Jesse German  
Field Manager, Acting  
Jarbidge Field Office

1/9/2015

Date