FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
SNAKE RIVER BIRDS OF PREY NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA & BRUNEAU FIELD OFFICE CENTER GRAZING ALLOTMENT FENCELINE PRESCRIBED FIRE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
FOUR RIVERS FIELD OFFICE
DOI-BLM-ID-B010-2010-0016-EA

I have reviewed the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (CEQ) for significance (40 CFR 1508.27) and have determined the actions analyzed in ID-B010-2010-0016-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) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The environmental assessment (EA) considered both beneficial and adverse impacts of the proposed action. The proposed action would actively reduce hazardous fuel buildup on 998 miles of fence located across the Birds of Prey National Conservation Area (BOP NCA) and the Center Grazing Allotment of the Bruneau Field Office using prescribed fire and project design guidelines identified in the document. Prescribed burning activities would occur over multiple years. The reduction of hazardous fuels across the landscape would lower wildland fire risk, which in turn would create a safer environment for firefighting personnel conducting fire suppression operations during the summer months, reduce the probability of wildland fire threatening the general public, and help protect natural resource values at risk (EA, pg. 4-6). The impacts of the proposed action will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment because the scale of the Birds of Prey NCA Fenceline Prescribed Fire Project is very small when considered in relation to the Great Basin Ecosystem (135 million acres) of which the NCA is a part and the effects of the proposed action are known and are not highly controversial.

While the majority of project impacts would be beneficial, some localized detrimental impacts could occur including decreased air quality for short periods of time, the consumption or scorching of cultural artifacts with unknown locations, minimal loss of perennial vegetation and soil crusts where prescribed fire occurs/project equipment operates, invasion of noxious weeds in those areas where perennial vegetation is lost, and minimal wildlife mortality. These detrimental impacts would be spread out over multiple years and do not outweigh the considerable positive impacts of the project.

2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health of safety.

The analysis did not find the Proposed Action to have any appreciable negative effects on public health or safety. The proposed action would help to reduce the risk of large and hard to control wildland fires over time and therefore would have beneficial effects to public and firefighter safety by reducing fire intensity and rate of spread as well as high concentration long duration impacts from smoke. Along those frequently traveled transportation corridors such as Simco

Road and Swan Falls Road, the proposed action will have considerable beneficial effects to public safety by reducing the chance of vehicle accidents caused by tumbleweeds on the road and obscured visibility.

3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

The Birds of Prey National Conservation Area is considered an ecologically critical area for several species of North American raptors and their prey as well as the threatened plant species slickspot peppergrass (*Lepidium papilliferum*). In addition, the Guffey Butte – Black Butte Archaeological District as well as various scattered cultural sites occurs within the project area. Wetlands are present in areas adjacent to the Snake and Bruneau Rivers.

Active management of hazardous fuels on fencelines would benefit ecological processes, plant, and animal species associated with the project area by reducing the risk of future large severe wildland fires. Project design features built into the proposed action will eliminate and/or minimize localized negative impacts to resources (EA, pg. 4-6). The Proposed Action is designed to exclude burning within the Snake River Canyon, the Bruneau River Canyon, and the Guffey Butte – Black Butte Archaeological District, therefore no impacts to the District and to wetlands adjacent to the Snake and Bruneau Rivers during prescribed burning activities would occur.

4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

The public scoping process indicated general support for the proposed action and did not identify any major controversy or disagreement concerning the effects on the quality of the human environment. However, some of the public did voice concerns regarding the further loss of perennial vegetation and spread of noxious and invasive weeds associated with the Proposed Action alternative. The No Action alternative environmental analysis indicates that by not being proactive and reducing hazardous fuels on fencelines, the risk of further perennial vegetation loss to wildland fire and noxious/invasive weed domination is far greater than the risk associated with the proposed action.

5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

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 a variety of additional risks and impacts as wildfire size and rates, noxious/invasive weed dominance, soil erosion and loss, and loss of habitat (plant and wildlife) would all increase.

6) The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The actions and practices analyzed in the EA are normal practices that have been successfully implemented within the NCA as well as elsewhere in the Boise District and Great Basin. This EA does not set a precedent for future actions that have significant effects. Fencelines that occur

within either potential or occupied slickspot peppergrass habitat will not be included in implementation activities until formal consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service is complete. The project design features identified in the proposed action are in accordance with decisions and direction established in the land use plans, statutes, and regulations outlined in sections 1.4 and 1.5 of the EA. (EA, pgs. 2-4)

7) Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

This EA considered potential cumulative impacts of the Proposed Action and concluded that implementation would not result in significant cumulative effects on biological, cultural, or social resources, even when considered in relation to other actions. (EA, pgs. 22-26)

8) The degree to which the action may adversely affect properties listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

Based on the analysis in the EA, the proposed action would not result in unacceptable loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, prehistoric, or historical resources. Known sites would be protected from loss or destruction through identified mitigation actions (i.e. avoidance). The Proposed Action alternative is designed to exclude burning within the Guffey Butte – Black Butte Archaeological District; therefore no impacts to this area from prescribed burning activities would occur (EA, page 8).

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

The EA identified the occurrence of the Bruneau hot springsnail (endangered), bull trout (threatened), and slickspot peppergrass (threatened) within or adjacent to the project area. While Bruneau hot springsnails can be found in the Bruneau River and Hot Creek, and bull trout can be found in the Bruneau River, no fencelines proposed for burning occur within 150 feet of either waterbody and therefore negative impacts to either species would not occur (EA, pages 18-19). Fencelines that fall within either potential or occupied slickspot peppergrass habitat will not be included in implementation activities until formal consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service is complete. In the event that changes to the EA are necessary to address concerns raised by the USFWS, an amendment to the EA may occur prior to the issuance of the decision for fences in slickspot peppergrass habitat.

10) Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, and local laws or requirements imposed for protection of the environment.

The proposed actions analyzed in the EA were developed in accordance with all applicable Federal, State, and local laws/regulations for the protection of the environment. The EA discloses the potential effects of the proposed actions on all critical and non-critical elements, and it was determined that the proposed actions will not adversely affect any of them.

/s/ *Patricia S. Roller* 3/31/11

Patricia S. Roller Date

Morley Nelson Birds of Prey NCA Manager

/s/ *Arnold L. Pike* 3/31/11

Arnold Pike Date

Bruneau Field Office Manager