

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Twin Falls District
Jarbidge Field Office (FO)
2536 Kimberly Road
Twin Falls, ID 83301**

**Worksheet
Determination of NEPA Adequacy (DNA)**

NEPA No. DOI-BLM-ID-T010-2012-0013-DNA

BLM Office: Jarbidge Field Office

Lease/Serial/Case File No.: N/A

Proposed Action Title/Type: Fall 2012 Coonskin Sagebrush Planting Project

Location of Proposed Action: The proposed project area is located in Owyhee County, about 25 miles southwest of Castleford, Idaho; T12S R11E S25, 26, 35 and T13S, R11E, S1, 2, 10, 11, 14, 15, 21, and 22 (Maps 1 and 2). The proposed project area is located in the Coonskin Butte pasture of the Cedar Butte Devil Creek allotment and the Old Pipeline and Black Butte pastures of the Grassy Hills AMP allotment (Map 1).

A. Description of the Proposed Action:

The proposed action is to hand plant approximately 50,000 Wyoming big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata* ssp. *wyomingensis*) seedlings over an area about 4,500 acres in size in early November, 2012. The objective of the proposed action is to re-establish sagebrush cover in areas east and south of Coonskin Butte burned by the 2007 Murphy Complex Fire. Under the post-fire Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation (ESR) plan (ID-2010-2007-DNA-3554), the currently proposed project area was drill seeded with native grasses and native and non-native forbs, and aerially Wyoming big sagebrush seeded in strips. In addition, sagebrush was mechanically planted in spring 2008 in the northern portion of the Old Pipeline pasture, just north of the Old Pipeline proposed treatment area. Aerially seeded and mechanically planted areas now have sagebrush 12-18 inches in height that are or soon will be reproductive. Gaps between aerially seeded strips are fully or partially lacking sagebrush. Sagebrush seed disperses a few feet from mother plants, resulting in slow, stepwise spread away from occupied areas. Natural recruitment within treated areas has been observed. This supplemental planting is proposed to enhance and accelerate recovery of these shrub communities and habitat for sage-grouse, other sagebrush-obligate wildlife, and special status plants, including slickspot peppergrass (*Lepidium papilliferum*). Location of the proposed project is intended to enhance connectivity between existing key sage-grouse habitats.

The 2007 Murphy Complex Fire reduced or removed shrubs over much of the southern half of the Jarbidge Field Office, resulting in a landscape-scale reduction in key sage-grouse habitat. The proposed project area is within Sage-grouse Preliminary Priority Habitat and is currently classified as R1 restoration habitat (Map 2). R1 habitat is defined as areas dominated by

perennial grass but lacking a shrub overstory. The proposed project area is near key habitat to the west. The proposed project area is also within identified potential habitat for slickspot peppergrass and contains scattered slickspot microsites. Slickspot peppergrass plants were not detected during inventories of the general area in 2006 (BLM GIS data) or planting project planning in spring 2012.

Containerized Wyoming big sagebrush seedlings would be hand-planted in early November 2012. Holes would be dug using hand tools such as planting bars, resulting in a disturbance area of about 2-3 inches diameter. Shrub seedlings would be planted into areas between strips of sagebrush seedlings resulting from ESR treatments. Shrub seedlings would not be planted in areas with obvious existing populations of invasive plants (primarily cheatgrass, *Bromus tectorum*) or noxious weeds to reduce potential for competition or unintentional herbicide treatment.

The identified planting area is about 4,500 acres. Shrub seedlings would be planted in patches of about 200-500 plants. Patches would generally be oriented in a north-south arrangement to facilitate natural dispersal of seed by wind. Shrub seedlings would be spaced no closer than 3 feet from each other, and placed at least 3 feet from existing, live mature or seedling shrubs. Shrubs could be placed less than 3 feet from dead sagebrush for sun and wind protection and to access soil nutrients and mycorrhizal fungi that are associated with areas under sagebrush canopies.

Vehicles would be restricted to existing roads. Planting would not occur within 0.25 mile of livestock water or supplement locations, within 50 feet any two-track road or fenceline, or during saturated soil conditions. Planting would not occur within 300 feet of main graveled roads to reduce potential accumulation of fuels along these main travel routes. Planting would not occur in slickspot microsites. Under agreement between the Bureau and the State Historic Preservation Officer, cultural resource inventory is not required for compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act for hand planting projects. However, the Jarbidge Field Office Archeologist would be notified immediately should artifacts be found during implementation of the planting project. Fuels program specialists would be on-site the first day of planting to provide guidance to the contractor regarding planting restrictions.

B. Land Use Plan (LUP) Conformance

Land Use Plan Name: Jarbidge Resource Management Plan (RMP)

Date Approved/Amended: March 23, 1987

The proposed action is located in Multiple Use Area 12 (West Devil Creek). The proposed action is in conformance with the Jarbidge RMP because it is specifically provided for in the following LUP objectives and resource management guidelines:

- 1) Improve lands in poor ecological condition (p. II-47).
- 2) Manage big game habitat to support mule deer and antelope (p. II-48).
- 3) Improve sage grouse habitat (p. II-48).

- 4) Vegetative manipulation projects will be designed to minimize impacts and improve wildlife habitat by including a variety of palatable shrubs, forbs, and grass (p. II-82).
- 5) Manage all ecological sites on mule deer, pronghorn, elk, bighorn sheep, and sage-grouse habitat currently in fair or poor ecological condition, for good ecological condition (p. II-83).
- 6) Protect and enhance endangered, threatened and sensitive species habitats in order to maintain or enhance existing and potential populations within the planning area (p. II-83).
- 7) Manage all wildlife habitat within the resource area to provide a diversity of vegetation and habitats (p. II-83).

C. Identify the applicable National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document(s) and other related documents that cover the proposed action.

1. The applicable NEPA document is the Jarbidge Field Office (JFO) Programmatic Shrub Planting EA (EA # ID-210-2008-EA-359) and Decision Record signed February 2, 2012. The JFO Programmatic Shrub Planting EA analyzed the effects of hand and mechanically planting shrub seedlings to mitigate loss of upland and riparian habitats due to recent and historic fire.
2. The proposed action is consistent with the existing Endangered Species Act (ESA) Section 7 consultation for slickspot peppergrass. Specifically, the concurrence memorandum for Programmatic Shrub Planting – Jarbidge Field Office – Elmore, Owyhee, and Twin Falls Counties, Idaho and Elko County, Nevada (01EIFW00-2012-I-0084), dated January 27, 2012, stated that planting shrubs utilizing hand planting methods and design features included in the proposed action is not likely to adversely affect slickspot peppergrass (Concurrence Memorandum, p. 5). In addition, the concurrence memorandum states that shrub plantings would have long-term beneficial effects for slickspot peppergrass and its habitat by accelerating native shrub reestablishment and decreasing habitat fragmentation (Concurrence Memorandum, p. 6).
3. The proposed action directly addresses conservation measures identified in the 2006 Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho that recommend planting sagebrush as part of restoration or burned area rehabilitation treatments (pp. 4-19 through 4-20) and re-establishing sagebrush in seeded perennial grasslands (pp. 4-85 through 4-87). The Proposed Action is also consistent with current Bureau policy (Instruction Memorandum No. 2012-043) for enhancement and restoration of sage-grouse habitat, specifically:
 - Coordinate, plan, design, and implement vegetation treatments (e.g. pinyon/juniper removal, fuels treatments, green stripping) and associated effectiveness monitoring between Resources, Fuels Management, Emergency Stabilization, and Burned Area Rehabilitation programs to:
 - Promote the maintenance of large intact sagebrush communities;
 - Limit the expansion or dominance of invasive species, including cheatgrass;
 - Maintain or improve soil site stability, hydrologic function, and biological integrity; and

- Enhance the native plant community, including the native shrub reference state in the *State and Transition Model*, with appropriate shrub, grass, and forb composition identified in the applicable ecological site description (ESD) where available.
- Pursue a long-term objective to maintain resilient native plant communities. Choose native plant species outlined in the ESDs, where available, to revegetate sites (IM 2012-043, p. 3).

D. NEPA Adequacy Criteria

1. Is the new proposed action a feature of, or essentially similar to, an alternative analyzed in the existing NEPA document(s)? Is the project within the same analysis area, or if the project location is different, are the geographic and resource conditions sufficiently similar to those analyzed in the existing NEPA document(s)? If there are differences, can you explain why they are not substantial?

Yes. The type of activities described in proposed action were described and analyzed in the JFO Programmatic Shrub Planting EA. The location of the proposed action is within the geographic context of the Programmatic EA. The proposed action also includes design features contained within the Programmatic EA to reduce or eliminate potential for impacts to sensitive resources.

2. Is the range of alternatives analyzed in the existing NEPA document(s) appropriate with respect to the current proposed action, given current environmental concerns, interests, resource values, and circumstances?

Yes. The JFO Programmatic Shrub Planting EA considered two alternatives: the Proposed Action, which included planting upland shrubs utilizing hand and mechanical methods, and the No Action Alternative to not plant shrubs. Seeding of shrubs was considered as a method of establishment, but was not analyzed in detail because it would require reduction in cover and competition from existing vegetation, creating a need for additional treatment methods, including prescribed fire and possible chemical treatment. This was determined to be inconsistent with the purpose of the action to re-establish shrubs in areas of the Jarbidge Field Office that were historically occupied by shrub communities and are currently dominated by desirable herbaceous plant communities. The current proposed action is consistent with this purpose and the need to address the substantial loss of shrub communities due to frequent and large fires in the JFO.

3. Is the existing analysis valid in light of any new information or circumstances (such as rangeland health standard assessment, recent endangered species listings, or updated lists of BLM-sensitive species)? Can you reasonably conclude that new information and new circumstances would not substantially change the analysis of the new proposed action?

Yes. The analysis contained in the JFO Programmatic Shrub Planting EA is still valid. No new information or changed circumstances were identified that would cause the BLM to consider a new or revised proposed action. The most recent list of Endangered Species Act listed, proposed and candidate species and BLM sensitive species for the Jarbidge Field Office was reviewed. The proposed project would improve habitat for sagebrush-dependent special status species,

including sage-grouse, a candidate species, and slickspot peppergrass, which was listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in December, 2009. The area does not contain known populations of slickspot peppergrass, but does contain slickspot microsites within an area that has been identified as potential habitat for the species. The prohibition for planting in slickspot microsites, the use of hand planting methods, and limiting vehicle use to existing roads would eliminate impacts to slickspot peppergrass habitat. These conservation measures are consistent with the existing ESA Section 7 consultation for the JFO Programmatic Shrub Planting EA.

4. Are the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects that would result from implementation of the new proposed action similar (both quantitatively and qualitatively) to those analyzed in the existing NEPA document?

Yes. The JFO Programmatic Shrub Planting EA adequately analyzed the environmental effects that would result from implementation of the new proposed action. The analysis in the existing NEPA document continues to be current and accurate.

5. Are the public involvement and interagency review associated with existing NEPA document(s) adequate for the current proposed action?

Yes. Development of the JFO Programmatic Shrub Planting EA included posting of the project on the Idaho NEPA Register in March, 2008, and sending scoping letters to 18 members of the interested public on April 5, 2010. One comment was received via email on April 14, 2010, in response to scoping efforts. There was concern over lack of detailed information regarding where the shrubs would be planted, potential impacts of livestock grazing, and the spread of noxious weeds due to mechanical planting. These issues were addressed in the design features incorporated into the Programmatic EA, the Decision Record for the Programmatic EA, and the current proposed action. In addition, the project was introduced at the March 24, 2011, Wings and Roots Meeting between the Twin Falls District and the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes. Comments were received at the April 28, 2011, meeting. The Tribes supported the shrub planting proposal because it would restore native shrubs. Consultation was concluded on April 28, 2011.

E. Persons/Agencies/BLM Staff Consulted

Resource/Title	Name	Agency Represented
Botanist	Thomas Stewart	BLM
Cultural Resources/Archeologist	Jeff Ross	BLM
Fire Use Specialist	Erik Valdez	BLM
Rangeland Management Specialist	Dan Strickler	BLM
Recreation Management Specialist	Max Yingst	BLM
Wildlife Biologist	Jim Klott	BLM
Wildlife Biologist	Brad Lowe Mark Fleming	IDFG

CONCLUSION

Based on the review documented above, I conclude that this proposal conforms to the 1987 Jarbidge Resource Management Plan and that the existing NEPA documentation fully covers the proposed action and constitute BLM's compliance with the requirements of NEPA.

/s/ Julie Hilty
Julie Hilty, Project Lead

6/1/2012
Date

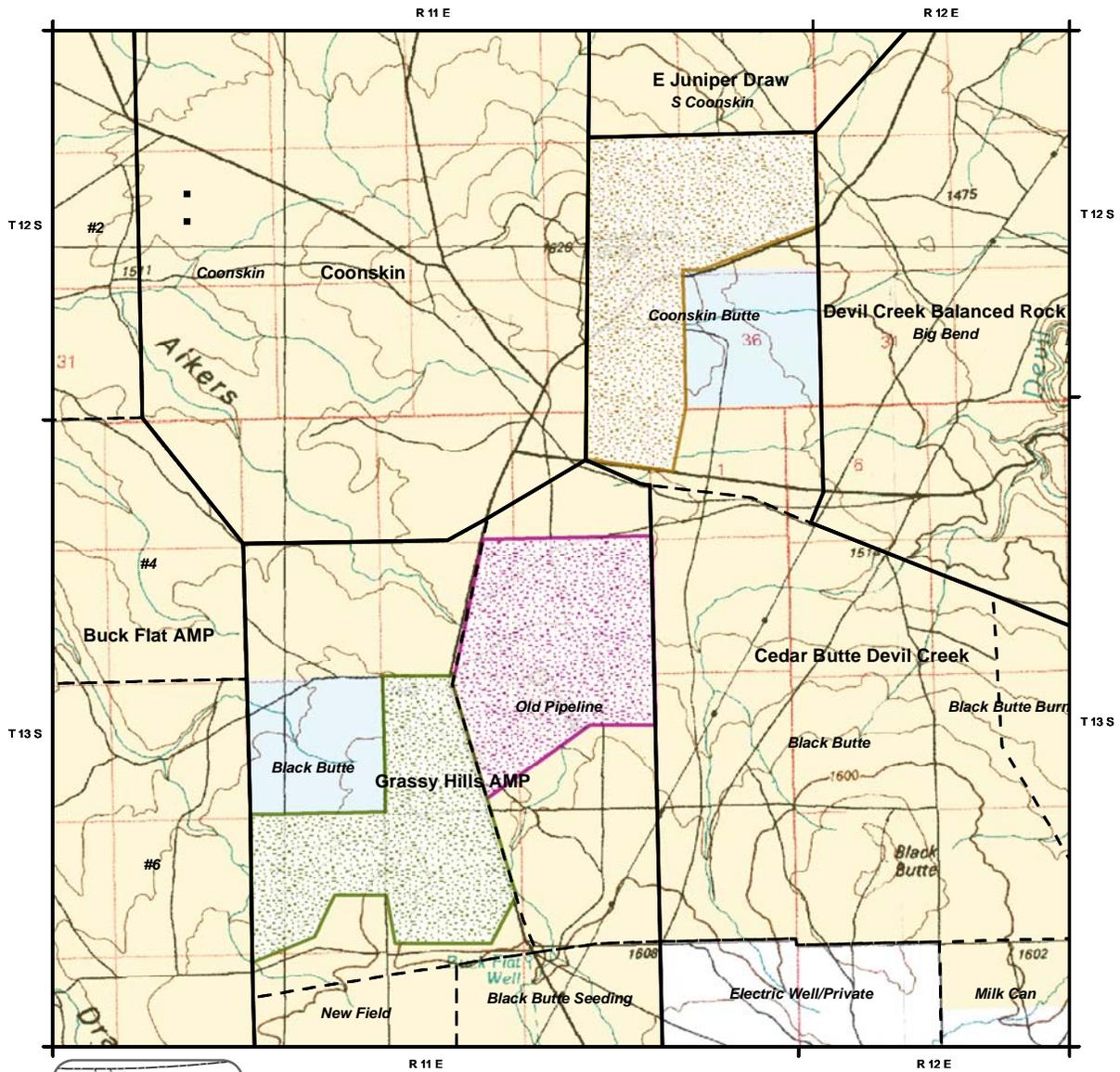
/s/ Barbara Bassler
Barbara Bassler, NEPA Coordinator

6/1/2012
Date

/s/ Codie Martin, Acting
Brian Davis, Field Office Manager

6/1/2012
Date

Map 1. Proposed Fall 2012 Coonskin Sagebrush Planting Areas



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Twin Falls District, Idaho

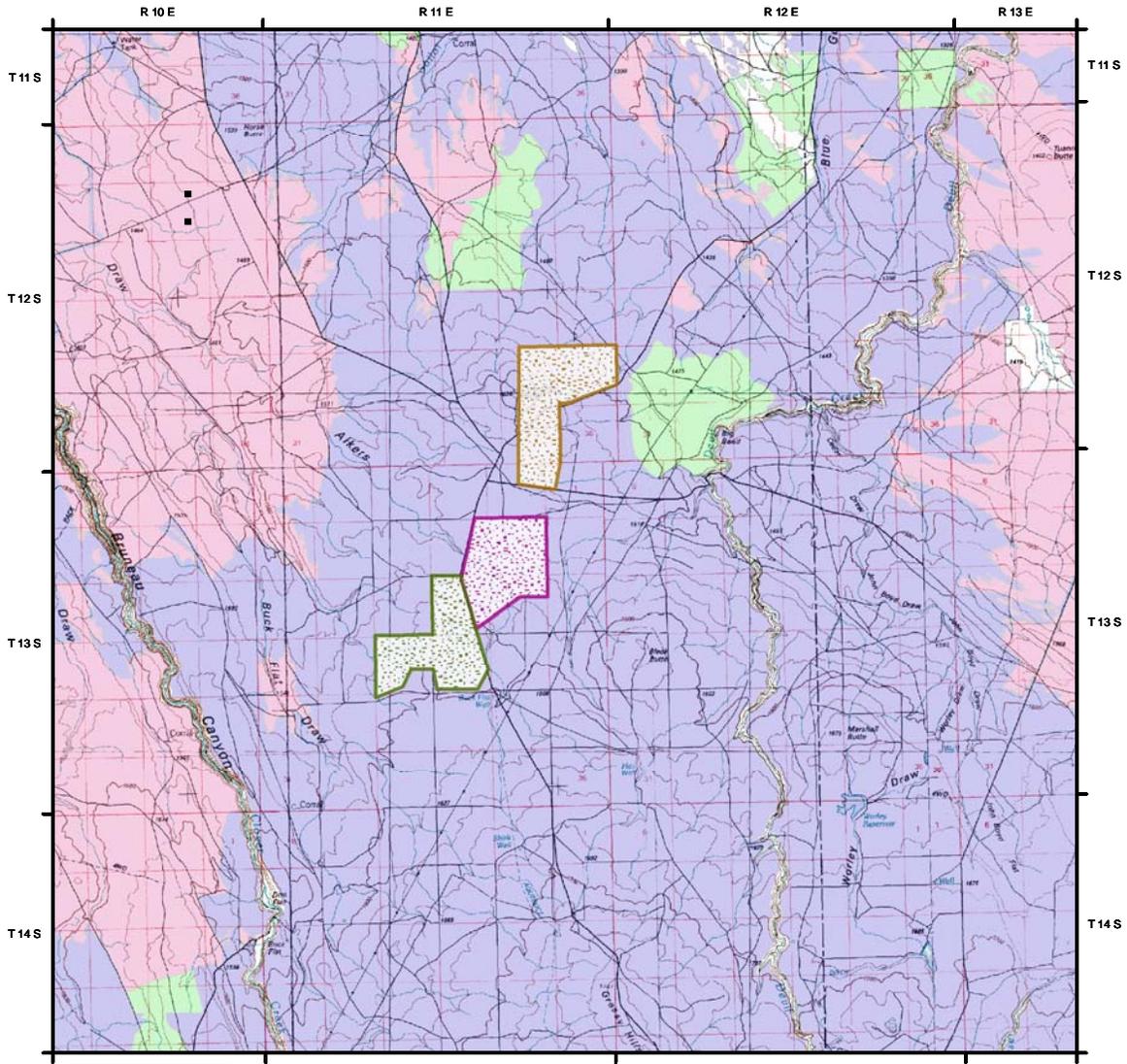
-  Range Allotment
-  Pasture
-  Coonskin Butte Treatment Area (1,645 acres)
-  Black Butte Treatment Area (1,453 acres)
-  Old Pipeline Treatment Area (1,386 acres)



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Map Created on: May 9, 2012
Data Displayed in NAD_1983_UTM_Zone_11N Projection
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Author: jhly

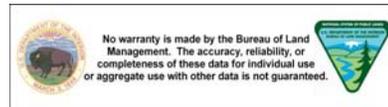
Map 2. Proposed Fall 2012 Coonskin Sagebrush Planting Areas and Sage-grouse Habitat



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-  Coonskin Butte Treatment Area (1,645 acres)
-  Black Butte Treatment Area (1,453 acres)
-  Old Pipeline Treatment Area (1,386 acres)
- Sage-grouse Habitat**
-  Key
-  Restoration habitat - perennial
-  Restoration habitat - annual

0 1 2 3 4 Miles



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Data Displayed in NAD_1983_UTM_Zone_11N Projection
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Author: jhilty