

Pah Rah Grazing Allotment Fuels & Herbicide Treatment

Decision Record

DOI-BLM-NV-C020-2012-0048-EA

May 2013



Introduction

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Sierra Front Field Office has prepared the *Pah Rah Grazing Allotment Final Environmental Assessment* (EA) (DOI-BLM-NV-C020-2012-0048-EA). The Proposed Action includes two elements that are addressed in this Decision. A *separate decision-making process* is underway for the livestock grazing component of this final EA. The BLM has also signed a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) which is hereby incorporated by reference.

The Proposed Action includes a vegetative treatment to remove juniper (*Juniperus osteosperma*) trees on up to 500 acres. Removal of the trees would improve greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) habitat characteristics and modify fire behavior by reducing fire intensity and spotting potential.

Since the 1860's, many bunchgrass and sagebrush-bunchgrass communities, which dominated the Intermountain West, have shifted to pinyon (*Pinus ducampopinus*) and juniper woodland or introduced annual-dominated communities (West 1984, Miller et al. 1994). Studies conclude that barring some major environmental change or management action, loss of understory species would occur and decreased fire frequency would continue until trees dominate most of the sites favorable to their expansion. This tree dominance then jeopardizes the historic woodland sites because under the right conditions, a crown fire could result in a stand replacement wildfire with catastrophic consequences because of the continuous tree canopy. Studies further show that in pinyon-juniper communities that are overstocked, the ability of the understory to respond after a fire is dramatically reduced and potentially opens the site to the invasion by exotics. Any treatments or rehabilitation of these areas could be difficult and costly.

In order to address the presence of salt cedar (*Tamarisk ramosissima*), the Proposed Action includes herbicide application to remove the invasive tree from Tamarisk Spring. Wind, water and animals can transport this invasive species to other riparian areas. Salt cedar is well documented for its exploitation of water resources and adverse effects to native vegetation.

Public Involvement

The BLM provided the public and interested parties on the project mailing list with an opportunity to comment on the draft EA from March 26 to April 25, 2013. Notification was provided to six organizations or agencies on the project mailing list, and to the Nevada State Clearinghouse. All documents were posted on the Carson City District NEPA webpage and in ePlanning (a "NEPA" register). The draft EA, maps, Allotment Evaluation, and Standards and Guidelines (S&Gs) Determination were available on-line. The BLM received two comments on the draft EA, but neither pertained to the fuels and herbicide treatment. No substantive changes to the fuels and herbicide treatment components of the draft EA were made.

Land Use Conformance

The fuels and herbicide treatment described in the Proposed Action are in conformance with the Carson City Consolidated Resource Management Plan (2001) as described below:

- FIR-2: "Restore fire as an integral part of the ecosystem; improve the diversity of vegetation and to reduce fire hazard fuels."

- LSG-8: “Application of herbicides...would be in accordance with procedures established in Bureau Manual 9222...to ensure non-impairment of other than target species.”

Authority

Implementation of the Proposed Action is under the authority of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976.

Rationale

Fuels Treatment.

Under the Proposed Action, the BLM would remove juniper trees on up to 500 acres in order to improve greater sage-grouse habitat characteristics and modify fire behavior by reducing fire intensity and spotting potential. Juniper trees would be lopped and scattered on site with hand tools and small mechanized tools. Hand treatments would be utilized to promote healthy, productive, and diverse habitats in the sagebrush and riparian communities.

Depending on BLM funding, staff availability and workload priorities, the fuels treatment may be completed in one effort that would take approximately one month to complete, or in phases that may take multiple years to complete. Implementation may begin in 2013 or 2014.

This project would manage the treatment area in Phase 1 woodland development. Trees are present but shrubs and grasses are the dominant vegetation that influences ecological processes on the site. The total treatment area would be up to 500 acres. Stump height would be less than six inches and slash height would not exceed two feet in depth. Treatment area edges would be irregular in shape.

The treatment area would require periodic maintenance to remain effective for fire behavior modification and enhanced greater sage-grouse habitat characteristics. Monitoring would be conducted periodically to assess changes in fuel loads and habitat characteristics in the treatment area. When fuel loads increase to unacceptable levels or habitat characteristics are degraded to an unacceptable level, maintenance actions would be initiated.

Monitoring would be conducted throughout the treatment area both during and after implementation. Monitoring would consist of surveys to:

- Ensure that the initial fuel treatment objectives are met;
- Evaluate fuel load recovery;
- Evaluate the need to remove conifers that were passed over the first time;
- Evaluate habitat characteristics; and
- Identify invasive species for subsequent treatment.

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no fuels treatment and hazardous fuel conditions would continue to accumulate beyond levels representative of the natural (historic) fire regime. Resource impacts from wildfires that may occur would be greater than under the natural fire regime. Habitat values would continue to decline as the perennial, herbaceous understory would further be reduced in the long-term.

Herbicide Application.

The Proposed Action includes the application of an approved herbicide at one location in the Allotment (Tamarisk Spring) for the removal of a salt cedar tree. The single tree, approximately four inches in diameter, would be cut, then the stump and bark would be treated with an approved herbicide. Re-application of the herbicide may be required based on monitoring if the first application is unsuccessful or the invasive plant has spread at the site.

Under the No Action Alternative, no action would be taken to remove a salt cedar tree from one site in the Allotment. Without its removal, salt cedar seed may be transported by wind, water, and animals into different springs and segments of Perry Creek. Animals such as horses could also transport salt cedar seed into areas outside the Allotment.

Decision

It is my Decision to implement the fuels and herbicide treatment included in the *Pah Rah Grazing Allotment Final Environmental Assessment* (EA) (DOI-BLM-NV-C020-2012-0048-EA). This Decision authorizes the removal of juniper trees on up to 500 acres within the Allotment. Furthermore, the removal of salt cedar, an invasive plant species at Tamarisk Spring, is authorized.



Leon Thomas
Field Manager
Sierra Front Field Office

5-3-13

Date

APPEAL PROCEDURES

This decision may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with 43 CFR Part 4. If you appeal, your appeal must also be filed with the Bureau of Land Management at the following address:

Leon Thomas
Field Manager
BLM, Sierra Front Field Office
5665 Morgan Mill Road
Carson City, NV 89701

Your appeal must be filed within thirty (30) days from receipt or issuance of this decision. The appellant has the burden of showing that the decision appealed from is in error.

If you wish to file a petition pursuant to regulation 43 CFR 4.21 (58 FR 4942, January 19, 1993) for a stay (suspension) of the decision during the time that your appeal is being reviewed by the Board, the petition for stay must accompany your notice of appeal. Copies of the notice of appeal and petition for a stay must also be submitted to:

Board of Land Appeals
Dockets Attorney
801 N. Quincy Street, Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22203

A copy must also be sent to the appropriate Office of the Solicitor at the same time the original documents are filed with the above office.

U.S. Department of the Interior
Office of the Regional Solicitor
Pacific Southwest Region
2800 Cottage Way, Room E-1712
Sacramento, CA 95825

If you request a stay, you have the burden of proof to demonstrate that a stay should be granted. A petition for a stay is required to show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

1. The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied.
2. The likelihood of the appellants' success on the merits.
3. The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted.
4. Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

The Office of Hearings and Appeals regulations do not provide for electronic filing of appeals. Electronically filed appeals will therefore not be accepted.