



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT



Idaho Falls District
Upper Snake Field Office
1405 Hollipark Drive
Idaho Falls, Idaho 83401-2100

In Reply Refer To:

9210

May 5, 2014

NOTICE OF FIELD MANAGER'S DECISION

Decision

After careful consideration, it is my decision to implement the Proposed Action outlined in the Programmatic Environmental Assessment of the Upper Snake Habitat Restoration Planting Project (EA# DOI-BLM-ID-I010-2013-0013-EA).

Under this decision, the following elements of the Proposed Action would be approved:

Hand and machine plant tree, shrub and riparian herbaceous species important for a variety of wildlife species and essential to maintaining overall ecological health. Trees and shrubs would be planted in areas within the Upper Snake Field Office where those species once naturally occurred, but are currently lacking in cover due to past impacts. Treatment areas would be prioritized based on current habitat conditions, management goals and objectives, the sites proximity to important wildlife habitat, as well as the sites potential for natural reestablishment. High priority areas would include, but are not limited to, big game winter range, riparian areas, and habitats known to be occupied by threatened, endangered or sensitive species, e.g., Greater sage-grouse and pygmy rabbits. Occasionally, trees and shrubs would be planted in habitats already containing tree and shrub species, with the intent of increasing diversity or increasing the densities of existing species. Only those species native to eastern Idaho and known to have existed previously on the site or within the sub watershed would be considered for planting. Existing conditions and ecological site information would be used to determine suitable vegetation species.

Up to 150,000 upland shrubs and 10,000 willows (or other riparian shrub/tree) would be planted annually either early in the spring or late in the fall. Individual plantings would vary from approximately two acres for sites that are hand planted up to approximately 50 acres for machine planted sites. Riparian herbaceous vegetation would be planted in the spring or early summer to allow for the establishment of roots before freezing takes place.

Areas that may be susceptible to grazing impacts from domestic livestock or ground disturbance from unauthorized OHV use may be temporarily fenced to reduce impacts on seedlings. Temporary fences construction would consist of two or three strand electric wire with reflective markers placed on the top wire to reduce collision potential of avian species. Additionally, the use of protective Tubex shields would be used around individual plants if wildlife herbivory is identified as a concern.

Rational

The implementation of the Proposed Action would increase available habitat for migratory birds and wildlife as well as enhance riparian, fisheries, and water quality. It would also increase available shrub cover in degraded areas that are not meeting BLM standards in critical Greater Sage-Grouse habitat.

Land Use Plan Conformance

The activities identified under the Proposed Action are in conformance with the following landscape-level objectives and management actions set forth in the Record of Decision for the Big Desert Management Framework Plan (USDI-BLM 1981), Little Lost Birch Creek Management Framework Plan (USDI-BLM 1981), Big Lost Management Framework Plan (USDI-BLM 1983), and Medicine Lodge Resource Management Plan (USDI-BLM 1985) through the following decisions and objectives:

Little Lost Birch Creek MFP (USDI-BLM 1981)

- WL 1.11 Maintain a 35-40% native shrub cover composition on 171,000 acres of antelope winter range.

Big Lost MFP (USDI-BLM 1983)

- WL 1: Institute proper management of wildlife habitat to provide or improve opportunity for wildlife species to complete life cycle processes. This will be accomplished by allocating forage, placing constraints on conflicting activities and developing projects to enhance or expand habitat range.
- WS 1: Reduce erosion and prevent soil loss on public lands.
- WS 1.2: Increase soil vegetative cover by increasing range condition class to good condition on soils with existing management problems on clay subsoils.

Big Desert MFP (USDI-BLM 1981)

- W-2: Restore and maintain vegetation cover in the stock trail drive area west of Springfield to protect or enhance productive capability of the soil resource.

- W-2.1: Stabilize erosion areas, within watersheds, with native vegetation.
- W-4.4 Seeding areas in poor range condition
- WL-4: Maintain and enhance sage grouse habitat to support an increase in the sage grouse population. This is to be accomplished through water development, vegetation manipulation and harassment reduction.
- WL-5 Improve upland game bird habitat by developing water, maintain existing cover in unique habitats and by cover plantings.
- WL-10 Enhance wildlife species habitat through the development of management plans and water sources; and to the degree possible by reseeding all disturbed areas with a mixture of native grasses, forbs, and shrubs.

Medicine Lodge RMP (USDI-BLM 1985)

- Whenever possible, management activities in habitat for threatened, endangered or sensitive species will be designated to benefit those species through habitat improvement.
- Maintain and perpetuate the cottonwood-riparian ecosystem.

These plans were amended by the *Fire, Fuels and Related Vegetation Management Direction Amendment (FDMA) Record of Decision* (USDI BLM 2008). The purpose of the amendments was to incorporate fire, fuels, and related vegetation management direction that is consistent with the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy including the decision to "...maintain, or restore vegetation that would support special status species (SSS) habitat and healthy, diverse, and sustainable vegetative communities" (USDI BLM 2008).

The FMDA sets objectives and management actions which state:

Objective 1 - Make progress towards Desired Future Conditions (DFC) in the Low-elevation Shrub, Perennial Grass, Invasive Annual Grass, Mid-elevation shrub, Mountain Shrub and Juniper Vegetation types.

Management Actions:

- Use chemical, mechanical, seeding, and prescribed fire treatments as appropriate to achieve DFC.
- In Perennial Grass, Invasive Annual Grass, and Juniper-invaded cover types, restore sagebrush steppe with an aggressive sagebrush seeding effort, using the appropriate sagebrush subspecies for the treatment area.

Objective 2 - Maintain, protect, and expand sage-grouse source habitats.

Management Actions:

- Treat areas within source habitats that have low resiliency (i.e., areas characterized by low species diversity, undesirable composition, and dead or decadent sagebrush).

Objective 3 – Treat sage-grouse key and restoration habitats to expand source habitats. Improve and maintain sage-grouse restoration (R1-3) and key habitats.

Management Actions:

- Conduct vegetation treatments in restoration and key habitat to reduce risk of wildland fire and reconnect restoration and key habitats.
- Treat areas of restoration and key habitats that have low resiliency characterized by low species diversity.
- Threatened, Endangered, and Candidate Species:
- Fuels management and vegetation treatments that may occur within the Little Lost River drainage would be conducted according to standards and guidelines developed for bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas on BLM lands within the geographic range of bull trout (US Fish and Wildlife Service 1999a 2002).
- Ground disturbing activities other than tree and shrub plantings will not occur within 300 feet of all water bodies and springs containing the listed Northern Leopard Frogs, Western Toads, and Bull Trout.

In addition to meeting the objectives for the project area and conforming to current management direction, this alternative meets the purpose and need for action as presented in the EA. Moreover, the analysis presented in the EA and the accompanying Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) make clear that the implementation of this alternative with associated design criteria and management restrictions identified in the EA would not result in significant impacts to the human environment and therefore an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

Authority

Authority under which this decision is being issued is found in Title 43 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Subpart 4.410 – Appeals to the Board of Land Appeals.

Appeal Procedures

Any person/party whose interest is adversely affected by the final decision may file an appeal in accordance with 43 CFR 4.410, 4.411, 4.412, and 4.413 in person or in writing to Jeremy Casterson, Upper Snake Field Office Manager, at 1405 Hollipark Dr., Idaho Falls, Idaho 83401 within 30 days after receipt of such decision. The notice of appeal, if filed must include a statement of reasons for the appeal, a statement of standing if required by 43 CFR 4.412(b), and any arguments the appellant wishes to make. The person/party must also serve a copy of the appeal on the Office of the Solicitor, Boise Field Solicitors Office, University Plaza, 960 Broadway Ave., Suite 400, Boise Idaho, 83706 and person(s) named [43 CFR 4.421(h)] in the ***Copies sent to:*** section of this decision. The Interior Board of Land Appeals must decide an appeal of this decision within 60 days after all pleadings have been filed, and within 180 days after the appeal was filed as contained in 43 CFR 4.416.

Should you wish to file a petition for a stay, see 43 CFR 4.471 (a) and (b). In accordance with 43 CFR 4.471(c), a petition for a stay must 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 appellant's success on the merits.
3. The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted, and
4. Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

As noted above, the petition for stay must be filed in the office of the authorized officer and serviced in accordance with 43 CFR 4.471. Any person named in the decision that receives a copy of a petition for a stay and/or an appeal see 43 CFR 4.472(b) for procedures to follow if you wish to respond.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact Ben Dyer at (208) 524-7500.

Approved by:

/s/ Jeremy Casterson, Upper Snake Field Office Manager

Dated: 5/5/2014

Copies sent to:

Natural Resource Conservation Service, 9173 W. Barnes Dr. Ste. C, Boise, ID 83709
Idaho Department of Lands, 3563 E. Ririe Hwy, Idaho Falls, ID 83401
Idaho Conservation League, 710 N. 6th St., Boise, ID 83702
Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Attn: Steve Schmidt, 4279 Commerce Circle, Idaho Falls, ID 83404
Greater Yellowstone Collation, Attn: Andrea Santarsiere, P.O. Box 505, Victor, ID 83455
Western Watersheds Project, P.O. Box 1770 Hailey, ID 83333/ 126 S. Main St, Ste. B2
Idaho State Dept. of Agriculture, 2270 Old Penitentiary Rd., Boise, ID 83712
U.S. Department of Energy – INL, Attn: Jack Depperschmidt, 1955 Fremont Ave, Idaho Falls, ID 83402
Chairman, Land Use Policy Committee, Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, Attn: Land Use Director, P.O. Box 306 Pima Dr., Fort Hall, ID 83203
Northwest Band of Shoshone Nation, 505 Pershing, Ste. 200, Pocatello, ID 83201
Chairman, Tribal Business Council, Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, C/o Chairman, P.O. Box306 Pima Dr., Fort Hall, ID 83203