FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
FOR
Toiyabe West Wildlife Habitat Enhancement Project
DOI-BLM-NV-B010-2013-0020-EA

I have reviewed Environmental Assessment (EA) # DOI-BLM-NV-B010-2013-0020-EA dated October 29, 2013. After consideration of the environmental effects of the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM's) preferred alternative (proposed action) described in the EA and supporting documentation, I have determined that the proposed action with the project design specifications identified in the EA is not a major federal action and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity as described in 40 CFR 1508.27. Therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

I have determined the proposed action is in conformance with the approved Shoshone-Eureka Resource Management Plan and is consistent with the plans and policies of neighboring local, county, state, tribal and federal agencies and governments. This finding and conclusion is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ's) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the context and the intensity of impacts described in the EA.

Context:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Mount Lewis Field Office (MLFO) proposes to thin (reduce the density of) or substantially remove pinyon and juniper trees from as much as 6,000 acres of important wildlife habitat on the western slope of the Toiyabe Mountain Range (see enclosed map). The proposed project area is located in central Nevada, approximately 20 miles north of the town of Austin, and lies within the Austin grazing allotment. Trees would be thinned by crews on foot using chainsaws, over a period of several years as time and resources allow.

This project is needed to enhance habitat for wildlife, particularly habitat for greater sage-grouse, because pinyon and juniper trees have increased both in distribution and in density at the expense of shrubs, grasses and forbs in the project area.

Intensity:

1) *Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.*

The EA considered both beneficial and adverse impacts of the proposed action. The proposed action would help to maintain and facilitate a diverse natural plant community in good ecological condition, exhibiting strong soil/slope stabilizing characteristics. Reducing pinyon and juniper dominance is expected to sustain and stimulate herbaceous plant vigor and/or recovery, improve water infiltration capacity, and reduce soil erosion potential. Conifer competition with shrubs grasses and forbs would be reduced, reserving and propagating these species, which are especially important for wildlife. Potential

adverse impacts of the proposed action include possible compaction of soils and disturbance to non-target vegetation, possible temporary disturbance to wildlife and recreational users, possible introduction of non-native species and noxious weeds. These impacts, which are discussed in Chapter III of the EA would be minimized by the design features of the proposed action and by standard migratory bird and special status species avoidance measures.

Impacts of the no action alternative include continued pinyon and juniper encroachment into high-value wildlife habitat, exclusion by dominance, of other plant species (grasses, shrubs and forbs) from the community and further degradation of wildlife habitat and range resources.

The environmental impacts disclosed above and discussed in detail in Chapter III of the EA are minimized by the design features outlined in Chapter II and are considered temporary, therefore they are not considered significant.

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

Implementation of the proposed action would not result in potentially substantial or adverse impacts to public health and safety.

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 proposed project area includes ecologically important geographic areas, described in Chapter III of the EA, hence the need for the project. While the proposed project area also contains culturally significant resources (also described in Chapter III of the EA), the proposed project would not be expected to impact those resources with implementation of the design features and environmental protection measures of the project as described in the EA.

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

The proposed action is not expected to be controversial. The BLM has been coordinating with livestock permittees, Nevada Department of Wildlife, tribal governments and other interested publics. On January 30, 2013 a consultation, coordination and cooperation (CCC) letter was mailed to the interested publics for a 15-day comment period. A single comment letter was received. This letter expressed general support for BLM efforts to manage greater sage-grouse habitats, but also expressed concern that sound forestry management practices be employed in the selection of treatment sites and in implementation of the proposed project. These comments and concerns were carefully considered throughout the development of the EA, which was made available for a 30-day public comment period on November 1, 2013. No other comments were received relative to either the CCC letter or the EA.

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

There are no known effects of the proposed action identified in the EA that are considered uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

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 proposed project would not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision about future consideration. Any projects proposed in the future would be analyzed on its own merits in a site-specific environmental analysis.

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

Reasonably foreseeable future actions, and the cumulative impacts of those actions, were analyzed in Chapter IV of the EA, with the conclusion that those actions, combined with the proposed action, did not result in cumulatively significant impacts. In addition, for any actions that might be proposed in the future, further environmental analysis, including assessment of cumulative impacts, would be required prior to surface disturbing activities.

8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

The proposed action is not expected to adversely affect any districts, sites, highways, structures or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the NRHP. No loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources would occur with implementation of the design features and environmental protection measures of the proposed action.

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

No federally listed threatened, endangered, proposed or recently delisted plant or animal species inhabits the proposed project area. In March, 2010 however, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determined that the greater sage-grouse warrants range-wide listing under the Endangered Species Act, but that listing is precluded by higher listing priorities (i.e. other species in greater need of protection). As a result, the greater sage-grouse has now become a candidate species and will receive annual status review to determine if its priority for listing has changed. The greater sage-grouse is the primary intended beneficiary of the proposed project. As discussed in Chapter III of the EA, many special

status species would benefit from the proposed action. No special status plant or animal would be negatively impacted by the proposed project.

10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

The proposed action would not violate or threaten to violate any federal, state, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

AUTHORIZED OFFICER'S SIGNATURE

Michael Vermeys acting for:

12/20/13
Date

Christopher J. Cook
Field Manager
Mount Lewis Field Office