UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Twin Falls District
Shoshone Field Office
400 West F Street
Shoshone, ID 83352

Categorical Exclusion Documentation Format When Using Categorical Exclusions Not Established by Statute

NEPA No. DOI-BLM-ID-T030-2014-0004-CX

A. Background

BLM Office: Shoshone Field Office. Lease/Serial/Case File No.: N/A

Proposed Action Title/Type: Response of select big sagebrush plants to fertilization treatments within occupied pygmy rabbit (*Brachylagus idahoensis*) habitat. Analysis of individual plant response to increased plant available nitrogen levels will be measured as well as any change in pygmy rabbit foraging behavior. A small, self-contained weather station will be located in the general study area to measure and record local climatic information. The climatic information will assist in analyzing the physiological response of big sagebrush to increases in ambient plant available nitrogen in the soil.

Location of Proposed Action: Portions of Blaine, Camas and Lincoln Counties, Idaho. Refer to Map 1 for the location of the pygmy rabbit habitat study area.

Description of Proposed Action: Idaho BLM and Boise State University (BSU) have entered into an Assistance Agreement to allow BSU faculty and students to conduct habitat studies involving a local, remnant population of pygmy rabbit. The BSU investigators are proposing to apply nitrogen fertilizer to individual sagebrush plants and measure responses in crude protein, plant defensive chemistry and pygmy rabbit foraging behavior. Urea fertilizer, at 46% nitrogen content, is proposed to be applied at a 1 meter radius around selected plants. Fertilizer would be spread mechanically at a rate equivalent to 45 pounds per acre. A pilot study in January 2014 will fertilize up to a maximum of 10 individual plants on BLM-managed public land in the Wedge Butte study site in southern Blaine County, Idaho. It is anticipated that additional studies involving nitrogen fertilization treatments of 20 to 25 individual sagebrush plants will be performed in an expanded study area shown on Map 1 for up to four subsequent years.

A small automated weather station will be located in the habitat study area. The weather station is designed to be self-contained requiring no external power source.

B. Land Use Plan Conformance

Land Use Plan Name: Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills Management Framework Plan.

Date Approved/Amended: August 2, 1976.

_____ The proposed action is in conformance with the applicable LUP because it is specifically provided for in the following LUP decision(s): [*Insert relevant objectives, goals, decisions from the LUP with page citations*].

__X__The proposed action is in conformance with the LUP, even though it is not specifically provided for, because it is clearly consistent with the following LUP decision(s):

WL-12: Manage for a maximum diversity of vegetative species in order to meet the habitat requirements for a variety of wildlife species.

WL-12.2: To insure that all wildlife habitat needs are met, any and all land treatment projects should be coordinated with the wildlife program. Considerations to keep in mind for such projects are: forage requirements, availability, quality, succulence, and cover and water availability.

C. Compliance with NEPA:
The Proposed Action is categorically excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with 516 DM 2, Appendix 1, 1.6 "Nondestructive data collection, inventory (including field, aerial, and satellite surveying and mapping), study, research, and monitoring activities."

This categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment. The proposed action has been reviewed, and none of the extraordinary circumstances described in 516 DM 2 apply.

I considered the proposed request to annually apply nitrogen fertilizer around no more than 25 individual big sagebrush plants on public land in the existing and expanded pygmy rabbit habitat study areas. I have also considered the temporary installation of a small climatic recording device in the subject study area. My review of the information and response contained in the consideration of extraordinary circumstances to grant a categorical exclusion for the proposed project has found that the proposal is not expected to result in environmental impacts that would warrant additional, more extensive environmental analysis.

D. Signature
Authorizing Official: Elizabeth Maclean Date: 1/27/14

Name: Elizabeth A. Maclean
Title: Field Manager, Shoshone Field Office

Contact Person
For additional information concerning this CX review, contact Gary Wright, Wildlife Biologist, by phone at (208) 732-7255 or at the mailing address for the Shoshone Field Office listed above.