

**U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management (BLM)**

Twin Falls District  
Jarbidge Field Office  
2536 Kimberly Road  
Twin Falls, ID 83301

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

**NEPA No. DOI-BLM-ID-T010-2014-0009-DNA**

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

**Proposed Action Title/Type:** Mud Flat Hill Bitterbrush Planting Project

**Location of Proposed Action:** The proposed project area is located on Mud Flat Hill, about 3 miles east of Three Creek, Idaho, and covers portions of the following: T15S R11E Section 25; T15S R12E Sections 30-32; T16S R12E Sections 5 and 6. The proposed project area is located in the #3 pasture of the L Grassy/Deadwood Allotment and the Mud Flat Pasture of the S Deadwood Allotment.

**Applicant (if any):** N/A.

**A. Description of the Proposed Action**

The proposed action is to hand plant about 30,000 antelope bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*) seedlings over an area about 900 acres in size in spring and fall, beginning in April 2014 (Map 1). Idaho Department of Fish and Game volunteers would plant about 130 acres on the north side of the Three Creek highway in April 2014. The area south of the highway would be planted using contracted labor in fall 2014.

The objective of the proposed action is to re-establish bitterbrush cover in areas burned by the 2007 Murphy Complex Fire that are currently dominated by native perennial grasses, including bluebunch wheatgrass (*Pseudoroegneria spicata*) and Idaho fescue (*Festuca idahoensis*). This planting is proposed to enhance and accelerate recovery of brood-rearing habitat for sage-grouse, a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), as well as crucial mule deer winter range.

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 sage-grouse habitat and shrubs for mule deer browse. The proposed project area is within Sage-grouse Preliminary Priority Habitat and is currently classified as R1 restoration habitat. R1 habitat is defined as areas dominated by perennial grass but lacking a shrub overstory. The proposed project area is also

within crucial mule deer winter range. Identified planting locations occur on the Loamy 13"-16" Mountain Big Sagebrush/Bluebunch Wheatgrass-Idaho Fescue ecological site.

Bare-root or containerized antelope bitterbrush seedlings would be hand-planted in early spring and mid- to late fall. 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 in patches of about 100-1,000 plants throughout the proposed planting areas. 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, including rabbitbrush (*Ericameria nauseosa* or *Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus*). Shrubs could be placed less than 3 feet from dead shrub skeletons for sun and wind protection and to access soil nutrients and mycorrhizal fungi that are associated with areas under shrub canopies. 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.

Full-size vehicles would be restricted to existing roads. Limited temporary use of off-road vehicles such as all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) could be used to access remote planting locations. Limited use would be implemented in a manner such that tracks to and from planting locations would have low visibility and impacts to soils and vegetation would be minimal or negligible. This would include locating staging areas on rocky or otherwise hardened areas and using different routes for ingress and egress. Temporary travel corridors would be identified prior to implementation for specific planting locations.

Spring planting activities would not occur until after 9 a.m. to reduce potential disturbance to sage-grouse. Planting would not occur within 300 feet of a major travel route, 50 feet of any two-track road or fenceline, or during muddy or saturated soil conditions. 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 will identify avoidance areas prior to planting activities and would be notified immediately should artifacts be found during implementation of the planting project. Fuels program specialists would be on-site to insure implementation of 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 15 (Jarbidge Foothills). The proposed action is in conformance with the Jarbidge RMP, even though it is not specifically provided for, because it is clearly consistent with the following LUP decisions (objectives):

- Improve lands in poor ecological condition (p. II-56).
- Manage big game habitat for mule deer, antelope, and bighorn sheep. Protect crucial big game winter habitat (p. II-56).

In addition, the proposed action addresses the following RMP Resource Management Guidelines:

- Terrestrial Wildlife (pp. II-83 – II-84):
  - 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.
  - Manage all wildlife habitat within the resource area to provide a diversity of vegetation and habitats.
  - Improve forage condition by establishing seedings or plantings of bitterbrush, four-wind saltbrush or other palatable shrub species on crucial mule deer winter range that presently has less than 30% palatable shrub composition by weight of the shrub component.

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

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 mechanical planting of shrub seedlings to mitigate loss of upland and riparian habitats due to recent and historic fire.

#### Other relevant documents

The proposed action is 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.

## **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 are within the scope of those 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. The impacts of limited, temporary, off-road travel to access planting locations would be considerably less than those described for mechanical planting, which was analyzed in the Programmatic EA. Design features for staging, ingress, and egress are included and impacts to soils and existing vegetation are anticipated to be minimal to negligible. Allowing this access would provide better dispersal of shrub patches within the proposed project area.

**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 existing vegetation cover, creating a need for additional treatment methods, including prescribed fire and possible chemical treatment.

The currently proposed project is consistent with the purpose and the need described in the Programmatic EA and Bureau policy regarding sage-grouse habitat restoration. The project location was identified in coordination with Idaho Department of Fish and Game to address both sage-grouse and big game habitat concerns.

**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 lists of ESA listed, proposed and candidate species (<http://www.fws.gov/idaho/species/T&E/IdahoSpeciesUpdate102213.pdf>, accessed March 7, 2014) and BLM sensitive species ([http://www.blm.gov/style/medialib/blm/id/wildlife/sensitive\\_species.Par.71825.File.dat/Sensitive\\_Species\\_list\\_for\\_WEBSITE\\_508.pdf](http://www.blm.gov/style/medialib/blm/id/wildlife/sensitive_species.Par.71825.File.dat/Sensitive_Species_list_for_WEBSITE_508.pdf), accessed March 7, 2014) were reviewed. The BLM

sensitive species list does not include sage-grouse as a Type 1 (candidate) species; however the updated status of the species was considered in project planning. The proposed action would improve brood-rearing habitat for sage-grouse, as well as crucial mule-deer winter range.

**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 current proposed action. The analysis in the existing NEPA document continues to be current and accurate. Impacts from the proposed action are anticipated to be similar to or less than those described in the Programmatic EA.

**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 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.

The Bureau initiated tribal consultation at the March 24, 2011, Wings and Roots meeting between the Twin Falls District and the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes. Comments were received from the Tribes 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.

In addition, a Biological Assessment analyzing the potential impacts to ESA-listed species was submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on January 10, 2012. Concurrence for the determination that the proposed programmatic action is not likely to adversely affect ESA-listed species was received on January 27, 2012.

### E. Persons/Agencies/BLM Staff Consulted

| Title                             | Name           | Agency Represented                |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Archeologist                      | Jeff Ross      | BLM, Jarbidge Field Office        |
| Fire Use Specialist               | Erik Valdez    | BLM, Twin Falls District          |
| Rangeland Management Specialist   | Dan Strickler  | BLM, Jarbidge Field Office        |
| Recreation Management Specialist  | Max Yingst     | BLM, Jarbidge Field Office        |
| Wildlife Biologist                | Jim Klott      | BLM, Jarbidge Field Office        |
| Wildlife Biologist                | Michael Haney  | BLM, Jarbidge Field Office        |
| Botanist                          | Thomas Stewart | BLM, Jarbidge Field Office        |
| Regional Wildlife Habitat Manager | Mark Fleming   | Idaho Department of Fish and Game |

### CONCLUSION

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

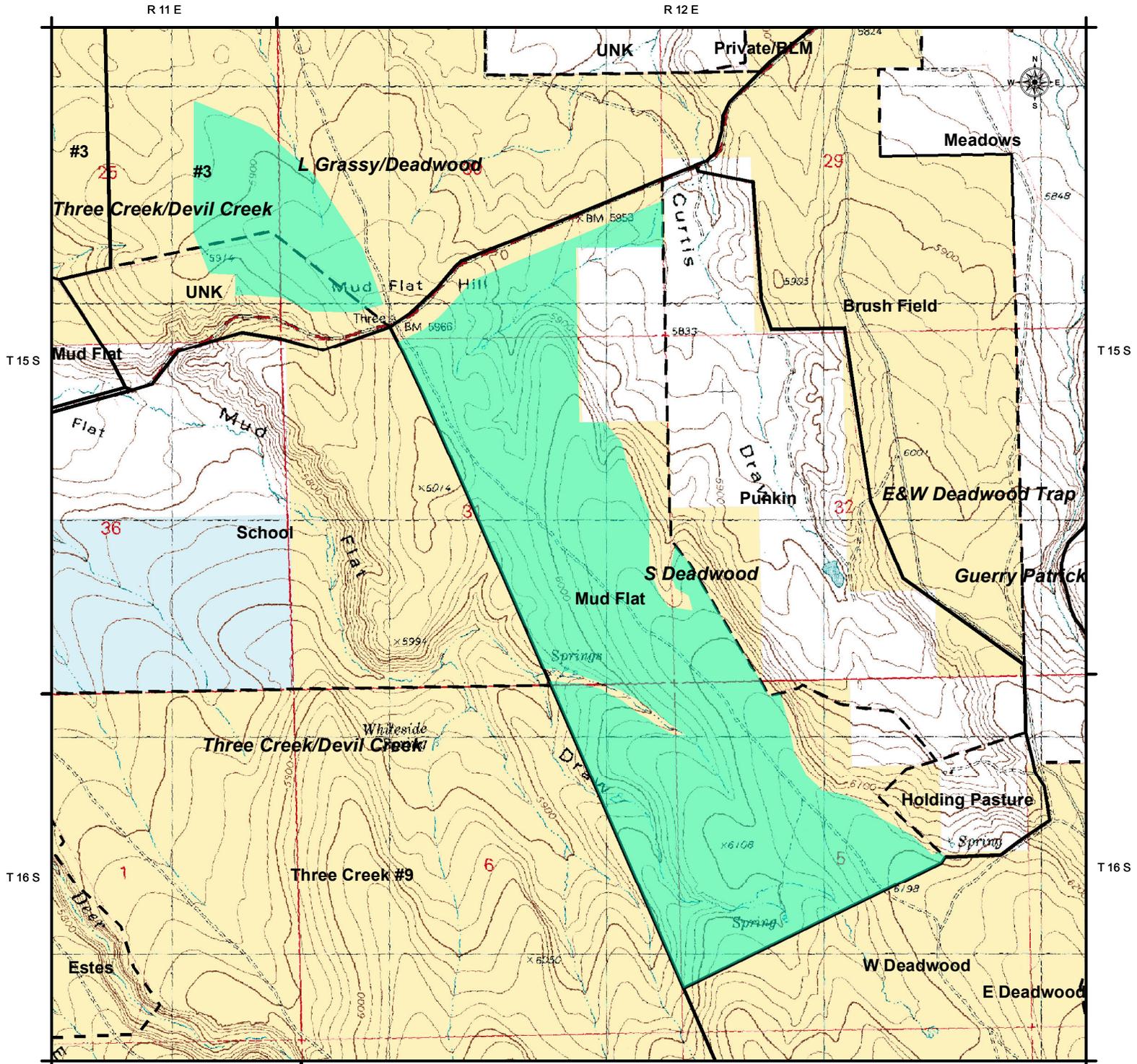
/s/ Julie Hilty 3/10/2014  
Julie Hilty, Project Lead Date

/s/ Krystle Wengreen 3/10/2014  
Krystle Wengreen, NEPA Coordinator Date

/s/ Brian W. Davis 3/10/2014  
Brian W. Davis, Field Office Manager Date

**Note:** The signed Conclusion on this Worksheet is part of an interim step in the BLM's internal decision process and does not constitute an appealable decision. However, the lease, permit, or other authorization based on this DNA is subject to protest or appeal under 43 CFR Part 4 and the program-specific regulations.

# Map 1. Mud Flat Hill Bitterbrush Planting Area



-  Range Allotment
-  Pasture
- Shrub Planting Locations**
-  Antelope bitterbrush
- Land Ownership**
-  Bureau of Land Management
-  Private; other
-  State



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US Dept. of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
Twin Falls District, Idaho

Map Created on: March 7, 2014  
Map Created by: Twin Falls District Fuels Program  
Datum: NAD 1983  
Projection: UTM Zone 11N