

United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Cottonwood Field Office
1 Butte Drive, Cottonwood, Idaho 83522

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS

Hazard Creek Fuels Project
DOI-BLM-ID-C020-2014-0008-EA

Finding

Based upon review of the environmental assessment (EA), I have determined that the Hazard Creek Fuels Project will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Therefore, preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required. As described and analyzed in the EA, no environmental effects meet the definition of significance as defined by regulations to implement NEPA found at 40 CFR 1508.27. This finding is based on my consideration of both the context and intensity of the project, as described below.

Context. This means that the significance of an action was analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human, national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. For instance, in the case of a site-specific action, significance would usually depend upon the effects in the local rather than in the world as a whole. Both short-and-long-term effects are relevant.

Intensity. This requirement refers to the severity of impact. The following factors are considered in evaluating intensity.

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The project has been planned to achieve desired hazardous fuel conditions. Proposed road maintenance activities would provide access for fuels treatment and fire management activities, as well as improve drainage of existing roads and reduce erosion and sediment. The adverse effects of mechanical thinning and prescribed burning are localized and short-term in nature (EA Section 7). Soil erosion from proposed activities is expected to remain on-site, with implementation of watershed protection measures to avoid or reduce impairing water quality (EA Section 7.5) and fisheries habitat (EA Section 7.6). Short term disturbance to wildlife is expected during mechanical thinning and burning (EA Section 7.9). Long-term and beneficial effects are the reduced risk of a stand-replacing wildfire and increased probability of keeping a wildfire from entering private property; improved road conditions and drainage and decreased erosion on BLM roads; and less future cost associated with wildfire management.

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

Goals and objectives of the plan include protection of people and structures, and increase firefighter safety by reducing the risk factors surrounding high risk communities in the WUI of Idaho County (Idaho County 2009). The purpose of this project is to reduce the hazard and potential for stand-replacement fire in the wildland-urban interface (WUI)

Prescribed burning, mechanical treatments, and road repair have historically occurred on public lands in the area without creating significant public safety or health problems. BLM specialists

will monitor implementation to ensure occupational and public health and safety requirements are met. This includes implementing prescribed burns in a manner that reduces production of smoke that may pose a health risk to local residents (Section 7.4).

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.

There are no historic sites, park lands, prime farmlands, or ecologically critical areas within the affected area (EA Section 5.3). There would be no adverse effects to rivers within the project area that have been determined as preliminary suitable for Wild and Scenic River designation (EA Section 7.14). Adverse effects to wetlands or riparian areas within the affected area would be avoided or minimized with implementation of proposed project design features (EA Sections 7.5 and 7.6).

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

The effects of the project are limited to the Hazard Creek Fuels project area and local residents in the wildland-urban interface. Based upon reports and discussions with professional resource specialists and coordination with other agencies, there is agreement about the effects and conclusions identified in the analysis. The effects of this project do not represent a controversial impact upon the quality of the human environment, provided the environmental design and monitoring measures outlined in the EA (Section 6.1) are implemented.

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

The BLM has a long history of implementing activities as proposed on other areas, and on similar soil and vegetation types. The direct and indirect effects as disclosed in the EA are not highly uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk. The technical analyses conducted to determine impacts to the affected resources are supportable with use of accepted techniques, reliable data and professional judgment.

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.

As described in Section 4.0, the proposed actions conform to direction from the BLM Cottonwood RMP to reduce hazardous fuels and achieve desired forest habitat conditions, is designed to include applicable measures to mitigate (avoid or reduce) negative impacts on affected resource values, and includes monitoring and evaluation.

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

Other past, present and foreseeable actions are described and cumulative effects on affected resources are analyzed in Section 7 of the EA. The project includes measures to reduce potential impacts to aquatic and riparian habitat and conserve special status fish, wildlife and plant species. Changes to forest vegetation and wildlife habitat are not expected to contribute cumulative impacts when considered with impacts of other activities in the watershed. The impacts of the proposed action on all resources would generally result in improvement over the future conditions if the project is not implemented.

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 or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

An intensive cultural resource inventory was conducted for the proposed project area and no properties listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register were found.

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

Viable populations of species would be maintained as required by the ESA and BLM Special Status Species policy (BLM MS 6840). For ESA-listed fish species, the EA includes an analysis for ESA-listed fish (Section 7.6), and incorporates information from a biological assessment (BA) that BLM submitted pursuant to Section 7 of the ESA to the US Fish and Wildlife Service for bull trout, and the National Marine Fisheries Service for sockeye salmon, fall Chinook salmon, spring/summer Chinook salmon and steelhead trout and their designated critical habitat. In addition, the BA for spring/summer Chinook salmon included an analysis for essential fish habitat pursuant to the Magnuson-Stevens Act, which is defined as “those waters and substrate necessary for fish for spawning, breeding, feeding, or growth to maturity.” The proposed treatments were concluded to have a determination of *may affect - not likely to adversely affect spring/summer Chinook salmon, steelhead trout, bull trout, and designated critical habitat*. A *no effect* determination was concluded for sockeye salmon and fall Chinook salmon. Project design and monitoring measures have been incorporated into all treatment activities to avoid or minimize potential for adverse effects occurring from erosion/sediment and mass wasting events.

A “*no effect*” determination is concluded for all ESA-listed wildlife species, as analyzed in Section 7.9 of the EA. For BLM-sensitive species, the analysis concludes that the project “*may impact individuals or habitat but is not likely to cause a trend toward federal listing or reduce viability for the population or species.*”

Special status plants are analyzed in Section 7.8 of the EA. The project area has been surveyed and no ESA listed plant populations have been found, so the project would have no effect on the threatened MacFarlane’s four- o’clock and Spalding catchfly or candidate Whitebark pine. The BLM sensitive species, broad-fruit mariposa lily and Palouse thistle populations may grow where prescribed burns are proposed, and puzzling halimolobos a BLM watch-list species grows in areas and along roads used for timber harvest and burning. Although individuals may be impacted by the project, implementation would not cause a trend toward federal listing of the species.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

As described in the EA, the BLM has planned the project to incorporate applicable Federal, State and local requirements and best management practices to ensure management activities do not violate any law, and that the project meets objectives to maintain or improve forest vegetation/habitat, soil, water, riparian and aquatic resources (Sections 7.2, 7.5 and 7.6). In addition to protection imposed under the ESA as discussed for factor 9, this includes meeting requirements of the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Idaho State Water Quality Standards, Idaho

Forest Practices Act, and Idaho Stream Channel Protection Act. Burning activities would comply with air quality requirements and implement the EPA and Idaho Department of Environmental Quality permit procedures outlined in the North Idaho Smoke Management Memorandum of Agreement (EA Section 7.4). The project area occurs in the Hazard Creek watershed which flows into the Little Salmon River. Hazard Creek is not on the 303(d) list, however, it does flow into a segment of the Little Salmon River that is on the 303(d) list. Project implementation will have no adverse effects on beneficial uses or adversely impact water quality conditions in Hazard Creek or the Little Salmon River. An in-depth discussion of effects on aquatic resources is included in the EA Section 7.5 (Water Resources), and as discussed for factor 9, the analysis in EA Section 7.6 (Fisheries, Aquatic Habitats, and Special Status Species).

Signature

/s/

3/23/15

Will Runnoe
Field Manager

Date