

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DOCUMENTATION

CX No. DOI-BLM-ID-B020-2014-0009-CX

A. BACKGROUND

BLM Office: Bruneau Field Office

Lease/Serial/Case File No.: DOI-BLM-ID-B020-2014-0009-CX

Proposed Action Title/Type: Hutch Springs Wood Project

Location of Proposed Action:

The source of wood is located NW, NE ¼ of Section 29, Township 8 South, Range 1 West. The application area is located NW, NE ¼ of Section 27, Township 9 South, Range 1 East.

1. Description of Proposed Action:

Background: The Hutch Springs complex supports a matrix of wet meadows surrounded by sagebrush steppe. Surface water may collect in these ephemeral wetlands for brief periods each year during spring runoff and following major storm events, but subsurface flows maintain the wetland vegetation throughout the year. A variety of wildlife including sage grouse, mule deer, raptors, and antelope utilize the area. Livestock grazing typically occurs in the summer. Livestock and wildlife utilize the area's palatable vegetation late into the growing season. Recent assessments of the area noted better wetland conditions (i.e., less bare ground and more abundant wetland vegetation) coincided with areas of dead and down large woody debris. Observers speculate that better wetland conditions in areas strewn with woody debris may be the result of an aversion by ungulates to traverse those areas.

Proposal: The objective of this project is to test the speculation that large wood is somehow promoting wetland condition at Hutch Springs. Large wood would be strewn in a small wet area (>0.1 acres). The material would be construed to decrease an ungulate's ability to negotiate the terrain, reducing trampling potential. Felled juniper logs in the area provide the source of wood. All juniper wood selected for this project will be free of berries and leaves. The treated wet area will be compared to adjacent untreated areas for differences in condition at the end of each grazing season. Imported debris would be removed after three growing seasons. No live trees would be cut for this project and no new roads would be created.

B. LAND USE PLAN CONFORMANCE

This proposed Action is subject to the following land use plan: Bruneau Management Framework Plan

Date Plan Approved: March 18, 1983

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) (objectives, terms, and conditions):

- Objective FP-1: Utilize trees that must be cleared for other purposes
- Objective RM-1: Increase forage vigor, density, and production.
- Objective WL-4: Manage upland game and waterfowl habitats...to increase populations of these highly desirable species.
- WL-4.3: Manage springs, seeps, meadows, and adjacent upland areas as key wildlife habitats for upland game by controlling livestock grazing, protecting springheads and wet areas, and developing only those springs that are capable of providing adequate water for both wildlife and livestock.
- Objective WL-6: Manage all meadows and riparian habitat in the BPU to achieve a maximum diversity of vegetative species, to provide for a maximum diversity and optimum abundance of wildlife species.

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 11.9 X(X)

Category Description:

This categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances that would introduce potential 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. .

The following list of Extraordinary Circumstances (516 DM 2, Appendix 2) was considered:

1. Have significant impacts on public health or safety.

Yes No

This project would not affect public health or safety.

Specialist Signature/Date: /s/ *Kavi Koleini*, Ecologist 8/15/14

2. Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation, or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order 11990); floodplains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; or ecologically significant or critical areas, or is not in compliance with the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act.

Yes No

The proposed action comprises placement of non-seed bearing portions of juniper trees in a wetland less than 0.1 acres in size. The activity would occur during August or September. Consequently, no migratory birds would be nesting in the area so only temporary displacement of a few individuals is possible. Furthermore, ecologically important areas would not be negatively impacted by the wood placement, whereas benefits to wetlands via protection from disturbance by cows are anticipated. This site is not located in a wilderness area or adjacent to a wild scenic river. No impacts on natural resources, unique geographic

characteristics, historic or cultural resources, recreation areas, or drinking water aquifers are expected.

Specialist Signature/Date: /s/ *Bruce C. Schoeberl*, Wildlife Biologist 8/15/14

3. Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA Section 102(2)(E)].

Yes No

The effects of this project are not anticipated to be controversial.

Specialist Signature/Date: /s/ *Kavi Koleini*, Ecologist 8/15/14

4. Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.

Yes No

These types of projects have been implemented elsewhere in the region. The outcome of those projects has been reviewed and the effects of this project are not expected to be controversial.

Specialist Signature/Date: /s/ *Kavi Koleini*, Ecologist 8/15/14

5. Establish a precedent for future actions or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.

Yes No

This project would not establish a precedent or represent decisions regarding future actions with potentially significant impacts to the environment.

Specialist Signature/Date: /s/ *Kavi Koleini*, Ecologist 8/15/14

6. Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant, but cumulatively significant environmental effects.

Yes No

I have considered the cumulative effects of this project on soils and vegetation and expect them to be insignificant.

Specialist Signature/Date: /s/ *Kavi Koleini*, Ecologist 8/15/14

7. Have significant impacts on properties listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by either the bureau or office.

Yes No

There are no sites in the area of potential effect (APE) for the current proposal. However, sites do exist in the vicinity of the proposal but they are well outside the APE.

No mitigation measures are needed at this time to protect cultural values. If the project proposal should change, the impacts of the new project proposal must be considered for effects to cultural resources. There will be no historic properties affected by the project. I recommend that the Hutch Springs Wood Project be implemented as planned.

Specialist Signature/Date: /s/ *Lois Palmgren*, Archaeologist 8/15/14

8. Have significant impacts on species listed or proposed to be listed on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or on designated Critical Habitat for these species.

Yes No

Plants Specialist Signature/Date: /s/ *Holly Beck*, Botanist 8/29/14

The project would occur during August or September after any bird nesting season and would occur over such a small area (<0.1 acres) that it would not impact habitat that is limiting for any wildlife species. See the Special Status Animal Clearance Worksheet for more detailed analyses.

Wildlife Specialist Signature/Date: /s/ *Bruce C. Schoeberl*, Wildlife Biologist 8/15/14

No fish species designated as threatened, endangered, or proposed for listing or their critical habitat are known to occur in the wetland area.

Aquatics Specialist Signature/Date: /s/ *Kavi Koleini*, Ecologist 8/15/14

9. Violate a Federal, State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

Yes No

Specialist Signature/Date: /s/ *Kavi Koleini*, Ecologist 8/15/14

10. Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898).

Yes No

No people, low income or otherwise, reside near the proposed project area. Low income or minority visitors to the area would not be affected any differently by the proposed activity than any other visitor.

Specialist Signature/Date: /s/ *Kavi Koleini*, Ecologist 8/15/14

11. Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (Executive Order 13007).

Yes No

This project would not limit access to public land.

Specialist Signature/Date: /s/ *Kavi Koleini*, Ecologist 8/15/14

12. Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and Executive Order 13112).

Yes No

The proposed project would not contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area, or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of species. No ground-disturbing activities would take place.

Specialist Signature/Date: /s/ *Kavi Koleini*, Ecologist 8/15/14

D: SIGNATURE

I certify that none of the Departmental exceptions (Extraordinary Circumstances) listed in the above Part II (516 DM 2, Appendix 2) apply to this action; therefore, this categorical exclusion is appropriate for this situation.

Authorizing Official: /s/ *Tanya M. Thrift* 8/20/14

Tanya M. Thrift
Field Manager
Bruneau Field Office

Prepared By/Contact Person: Kavi Koleini, ecologist (208) 384-3337