

United States Department of the Interior  
 Bureau of Land Management  
 Tuscarora Field Office  
 Elko, Nevada

**Decision Memorandum  
 Smith Ranch Fire Cheatgrass Treatment  
 (1742-HRK3; BLM-NV-E020-2013-0031-DNA)**

**Description of the Proposed Action and Purpose and Need for Action**

The Bureau of Land Management, Elko District is proposing to conduct an aerial application of chemical treatment with 4 oz./acre of Imazapic on up to 534 acres to impede the invasion of cheatgrass within the boundaries of the 2013 Smith Ranch Fire. The application of Imazapic would take place as early as the fall of 2014.

The Smith Ranch Fire was sparked by lightning on July 19, 2013. The fire burned approximately 2,047 acres within Greater Sage-Grouse (GSG) Preliminary Priority Habitat (PPH), of which 479 acres occur on lands administered by the BLM. The remaining 55 acres of the burn on BLM is located within Preliminary General Habitat (PGH). During the fall and winter of 2013 Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation (ESR) treatments were implemented which included 165 acres of drill seeding, and 534 acres of aerial seeding, see table below for seed mix species and rates:

**Smith Ranch Drill Seeding**

Species	Scientific Name	PLS Lbs./Acre
Thickspike Wheatgrass	<i>Elymus lanceolatus</i>	1.5
Bottlebrush Squirreltail	<i>Elymus elymoides</i>	1.0
Snake River Wheatgrass	<i>Elymus wawawaiensis</i>	2.0
Sherman Big Bluegrass	<i>Poa secunda ssp. ampla</i>	0.5
Lewis Flax	<i>Linum lewisii var. lewisii</i>	0.5
Arrowleaf Balsamroot	<i>Balsamorhiza sagittata</i>	0.3
Antelope Bitterbrush	<i>Purshia tridentata</i>	2.0
<b>Total Rate</b>		<b>7.8</b>

**Smith Ranch Aerial Low Elevation**

Species	Scientific Name	PLS Lbs./Acre
Wyoming Big Sagebrush	<i>Artemisia tridentata wyomingensis</i>	0.2
Basin Big Sagebrush	<i>Artemisia tridentata tridentata</i>	0.1
Western Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	0.1
<b>Total Rate</b>		<b>0.4</b>

**Smith Ranch Aerial High Elevation**

Species	Scientific Name	PLS Lbs./Acre
Mountain Big Sagebrush	<i>Artemisia tridentata vaseyana</i>	0.2
Western Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	0.1
<b>Total Rate</b>		<b>0.3</b>

Initial monitoring and observations show that the seeding treatments have been successful in establishing; however there is a large presence of cheatgrass that occupies the site which has the potential of out-competing the Smith Ranch ESR seeding treatments. Left unchecked, cheatgrass is likely to overtake any existing perennial vegetation (seeded and unseeded), leading to more frequent and larger fires, leading to further loss of GSG habitat. The area burned by the Smith Ranch Fire is currently under a Livestock Grazing Closure Decision issued on 1/22/2014. The area will remain closed until the objectives outlined in the decision are met.

In addition to the many other management objectives and/or standards that apply to GSG and/or sagebrush (*Artemisia* spp.) habitats, both the Wells and Elko RMP's require that alterations of sagebrush areas would be in accordance with the 1977 *Western States Sage-Grouse Guidelines* (Braun et al. 1977), as amended, and as future studies might dictate. In 2000 the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) finalized an update of the 1977 guidelines (Connelly et al. 2000). The BLM, U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service signed a memorandum of agreement to consider these guidelines in their respective planning efforts, utilizing local expertise and quantitative data. In accordance with the existing Land Use Plans and the 2000 Memorandum of Agreement, the BLM considers the WAFWA guidelines in all sage grouse and/or sagebrush habitat enhancement projects that occur on public lands and/or are federally funded.

The proposed action is consistent with the following recommendations from the 2000 WAFWA Guidelines:

*Consider pre-emergent herbicides to retard cheatgrass germination in areas prone to cheatgrass invasion.*

**Resource Management Goal:** Reduce cheatgrass infestations on the 2013 Smith Ranch Fire to promote the establishment of the past ESR seeding treatments leading to improved ecological conditions, rangeland health, wildlife habitat, soil protection, and reducing the fire hazard associated with a cheatgrass dominated community.

**Resource Management Objectives (Short Term):** Reduce the canopy cover of cheatgrass on approximately 534 acres within the Smith Ranch Fire area by at least 75% or greater within one year. Promote/maintain existing ESR seeding treatments to have at least three seeded species/m<sup>2</sup> within three years after project implementation.

**Resource Management Objectives (Long Term):** Increase the percent composition by weight (lbs/acre) of perennial grasses, forbs, to a minimum of 75% of the ecological site potential and increase the percent composition (lbs/acres) of shrubs to a minimum of 50% of the ecological site potential within 10 years following project implementation.

A Pesticide Use Proposal (PUP) would be completed and authorized prior to completing the treatment and a Pesticide Report (PAR) would be completed after the treatment. Standards and guidelines for storage facilities, posting and handling, accountability and transportation as outlined in BLM Handbook 9011 (Pesticide Storage, Transportation, Spills and Disposal) Section II would be followed. There would be fundamental adherence to items listed in the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) provided for the herbicide.

Application rates and procedures would follow directions as listed on the herbicide specimen label for cheatgrass. The proposed application rate of Imazapic would be 4 ounces total herbicide solution per acre. A 100 foot buffer for aerial herbicide application will be established around riparian areas.

The proposed treatment would comply with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act – Interim Management Guidance (Instruction Memorandum 2008-050) or the most current policy at the time of implementation.

All equipment would be washed prior to entering the proposed project area and prior to exiting the area to minimize the transport of noxious and invasive weeds.

Prior to implementation a notice would be placed in the local newspaper to inform the public of the treatment. Signs would be placed around the project area during the application of the chemical to inform the public. BLM representatives would be present on the project site during treatment application to inform the public of what is occurring.

The proposed project area is currently closed to livestock grazing due to the Smith Ranch Fire and is scheduled to be closed until resource objectives have been met as outlined in the Closure Decision.

### Monitoring

Post-treatment monitoring studies would be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed treatments or to determine if additional treatments are needed, and to determine the time frame for re-opening lands for grazing. The monitoring results would be documented in the project file at the BLM, Elko District Office.

### **Plan Conformance**

The proposed action conforms to the 1985 Elko Resource Management Plan (RMP), as it was amended for fire management on September 29, 2004. The decision was composed of 4 components:

(1) *“Follow general guidance of this FMA and other guiding documents to protect and maximize the safety of fire operational personnel and the public, achieve resource management objectives and improve the long-term management of fire.”*, (2) *“Use prescribed burning, mechanical, chemical and biological (including grazing) treatments to reduce wildfire fuel hazards. Annual target acreage levels to reduce hazardous fuels are 24,000 to 60,000 acres.”*, (3) *“Responses to wildfires should be maximized in most areas and still provide the flexibility and range of options available to managers to appropriately use fire to meet long-term resource management objectives.”*, and (4) *“Conduct fire rehabilitation activities to emulate historic or pre-fire ecosystem structure, functioning, diversity and to restore a healthy stable ecosystem.”*, each of which is applicable to this action.

The decision for fire rehabilitation from the Approved Fire Management Amendment, page 20, is to *“Conduct fire rehabilitation activities to emulate historic or pre-fire ecosystem structure, functioning, diversity and/or to restore a healthy stable ecosystem.”* The proposed action is consistent with resource objectives of the plan, see below;

## Emergency Fire Rehabilitation

1. Evaluate all wildfires as soon as possible to determine if reseeding is necessary to recover ecological processes and achieve habitat objectives appropriate for the biological needs of sage grouse and prevent the invasion of noxious weeds or other exotic invasive species.
2. Assure that long-term wildfire rehabilitation objectives are consistent with the potential natural vegetation community.
3. Align long-term objectives for seedings with the habitat needs of sage grouse. Seedings should include an appropriate mix of grasses, forbs, and shrubs, including sagebrush, that will recover the ecological processes and habitat features of the potential natural vegetation. Emphasize native plant species when these species are adapted to the site, are available in sufficient quantities, and are economically and biologically feasible.
4. Reseed all burned lands occurring in sage grouse habitat within 1 year unless natural recovery of the native plant community is expected.

The proposed action is further consistent with other Federal, State and local laws, regulations and plans to the maximum extent possible.

In 2001, Congress funded the National Fire Plan to reduce hazardous fuels and restore forest and rangeland. BLM authority for the project is from the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) subpart 4190, Effect of Wildfire Management Decisions:

**4190.1 (a)** – “Notwithstanding the provisions of 43 CFR 4.21 (a) 1, when BLM determines that vegetation, soil, or other resources on the public lands are at substantial risk of wildfire due to drought, fuels buildup, or other reasons, or at immediate risk of erosion or other damage due to wildfire, BLM may make a rangeland wildfire management decision effective immediately or on a date established in the decision. Wildfire management includes but is not limited to:

- 1) *Fuel reduction or fuel treatment such as prescribed burns and mechanical, chemical, and biological thinning methods (with or without removal of thinned materials).*
- 2) *Projects to stabilize and rehabilitate lands affected by wildfire.*

The proposed action is further consistent with other Federal, state, local and tribal laws, regulations, policies and plans to the maximum extent possible. The closure of the burned area to livestock grazing is in conformance with 43 CFR subparts 4110.3-2(a), and 4110.3-3(a). Noxious weed treatments were not identified as an issue in the development of the Elko RMP, and were not specifically addressed in the document. However, weed management is clearly consistent with the terms, conditions, and decisions of the RMP as previously documented in the FY2000 Normal Fire Rehabilitation Plan Environmental Assessment (BLM/EK/PL-2000-037). The Elko Field Office Noxious Weed Strategy Plan (September 2004) outlines the priority factors for weed treatments. Only herbicides on the list of approved herbicides for use on BLM lands will be used.



## **Administrative Review or Appeal**

This decision is subject to administrative appeal. Within 30 days of receipt of this decision, parties who are adversely affected and believe it is incorrect have the right to appeal to the Department of the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with regulations at 43 CFR 4.4. Appellants must follow procedures outlined in the form, "Information on Taking Appeals to the Board of Land Appeals." An appeal should be in writing and specify the reasons, clearly and concisely, as to why the decision is in error. Appellants are requested to supply this office with a copy of the Statement of Reasons.

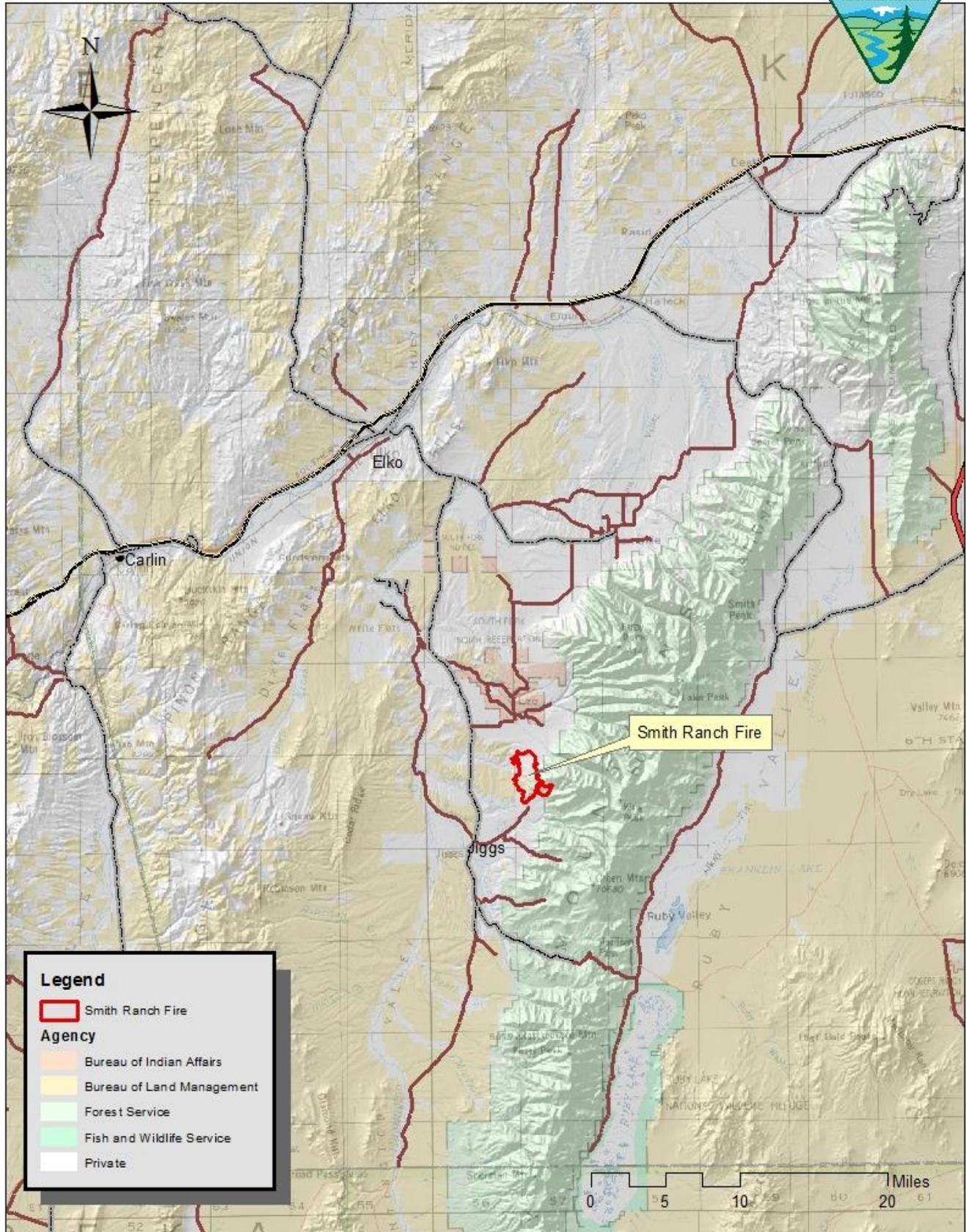
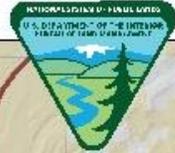
Also within 30 days of receipt of this decision, appellants have a right to file a petition for stay (suspension) of the decision together with an appeal, in accordance with the regulations at 43 CFR 4.21. The petition must be served upon the same parties identified in items 2, 3, and 4 of the attached form. The appellant has the burden of proof to demonstrate that a stay should be granted.

## **Contact**

For additional information, contact Tom Warren, Rehabilitation Manager, at the BLM Elko District Office, 3900 E. Idaho St., Elko NV 89801; telephone 775-753-0355.

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# Smith Ranch Fire Cheatgrass Treatment Area Map



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# Smith Ranch Fire Cheatgrass Treatment Map

