



# United States Department of the Interior

## BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT



Idaho Falls District  
Upper Snake Field Office  
1405 Hollipark Drive  
Idaho Falls, Idaho 83401-2100

In Reply Refer To:

9210

February 18, 2015

### **NOTICE OF FIELD MANAGER'S DECISION**

#### **Decision**

After careful consideration, it is my decision to implement the Proposed Action outlined in the Cedar Butte Sagebrush Restoration and Habitat Improvement Project Environmental Assessment (DOI-BLM-ID-I010-2015-0003-EA).

Under this decision, the following elements of the Proposed Action would be approved:

- Implementation of this decision would result in the selective thinning of juniper from approximately 1,660 acres categorized as historic Utah Juniper (*Juniperus osteosperma*) woodlands and the removal of encroaching juniper from approximately 3,550 acres categorized as sagebrush steppe habitat within the Upper Snake Field Office. A total of 5,210 acres would be treated over a 10-year period. The design criteria presented in the EA would apply to the elements discussed below.

Juniper thinning treatments would selectively thin or remove encroaching Utah juniper from within the 16 treatment units except where protected for unique characteristics (such as late-seral, nest trees, cultural concerns or erosion concerns). Within the historic juniper woodlands, treatments would selectively thin young junipers that have encroached into the sagebrush islands located within the interior of the stands. Treatments would focus on maintaining the irregularly shaped sagebrush openings and creating more edge habitat between the two plant communities. Within the sagebrush steppe, where juniper encroachment is categorized as Phase I (Grasses and shrubs are dominant over junipers), treatments would focus on removing all encroaching junipers. The overall objective of the project is to decrease the juniper competition and increase the availability of water and nutrients so as to maintain and, where possible, improve the distribution and composition of native sagebrush steppe vegetation.

## Design Features

- Mechanical mastication work would occur during the late fall or early winter to reduce the chance of incidental fire ignition, to reduce fugitive dust emissions, to avoid peak native vegetative growing times, and to avoid impacts to migratory birds and sage-grouse. Chemical treatments would occur throughout the summer when optimal vegetation growth stage applications are most effective.
- Prior to surface-disturbing activities, all mechanical equipment and vehicles would be cleaned of all vegetation (stems, leaves, seeds, and all other vegetative parts) in order to minimize the transport and spread of invasive plants seeds.
- The use of certified weed-free seed mixes would be required to prevent the introduction of invasive plants.
- As funding allows, the treatment areas would be monitored for the presence of noxious weed species prior to and following implementation. Any weeds that are identified would be treated in accordance with the *Upper Snake-Pocatello Integrated Weeds Control Programmatic Environmental Assessment*.
- Trees displaying late-seral characteristics would not be cut. These characteristics include; crown shapes with flattened, rounded or uneven tops; branch structure having large branches near the base; dead branches with bark missing and/or covered by a light green lichen; bark thick, fibrous with well-developed vertical furrows; and leader growth in the upper quarter of the tree usually <1 inch.
- Raptor nest surveys would be conducted prior to treatment. If a nest is determined to be occupied, it would be avoided by up to 1 mile depending on the species.
- Treatments would only occur between July 15 and January 30 so as to minimize impacts to sage-grouse, migratory birds and other wildlife species.
- Treatments would be restricted in mule deer winter range during the late winter (February 1 – May 1).
- A Class III cultural inventory would be completed prior to the implementation of activities that may have an effect on cultural resources. All eligible or potentially eligible archaeological sites would be flagged prior to any ground-disturbing activities to avoid adverse effects. Sites that are located in areas proposed for treatment would be avoided.

- Should any sensitive plants be identified within the project area, sites would be flagged prior to any ground-disturbing activities to avoid adverse effects. Sites that are located in areas proposed for treatment would be avoided.
- Existing juniper snags would remain on site at a density of no more than two snags per acre, when available, for wildlife benefit.

## **Rational**

The implementation of the Proposed Action would reduce the juniper population that currently sparsely populates the sagebrush steppe within the project area and is creating a risk to species diversity/composition, wildlife habitat and overall ecosystem health. The proposed treatment would be designed to maintain and/or improve the health of both the sagebrush steppe and woodland (juniper) vegetation cover types present in the project area. Under the Proposed Action the following objectives, which have been identified for the project, would be met:

- Protect and promote healthy sagebrush steppe ecosystems by reducing the density of encroaching junipers that out compete understory vegetation and increase the landscapes susceptibility to large-scale erosion and uncharacteristic fire.
- Improve the health, vigor, and acreage of the native sagebrush steppe vegetation and promote natural regeneration of this vegetation.
- Maintain or improve wildlife habitat by providing multiple successional stages of more diverse vegetative communities.

## **Land Use Plan Conformance**

The activities proposed under the Proposed Action are consistent with the objectives, goals, and intent of the *Fire, Fuels, and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan Amendment (FMDA) Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision*, which amended the *Big Desert Management Framework Plan*. The FMDA provides the overall fire and fuels management direction for BLM-administered lands within the project area.

The FMDA identifies mechanical, chemical, and seeding, as options for treatment and states that landscape-level projects and treatments should be developed in conjunction with community participation and the development of stakeholder partnerships where practical and appropriate.

Direction in the FMDA emphasizes the conservation and restoration of sagebrush steppe. The plan adopts the goals and priorities set in the Cohesive Strategy and the 10-year Comprehensive Strategy. These goals include: improving fire prevention and suppression; reducing hazardous fuels; and restoring fire-adapted ecosystems.

Specific goals identified in the FMDA that are applicable to this alternative include:

*Objective 1 - Make Progress toward Desired Future Conditions (DFC) in the Low-elevation Shrub, Perennial Grass, Invasive Annual Grass, Mid-elevation Shrub, Mountain Scrub, and Juniper vegetation types.*

*Management actions:*

- Use chemical, mechanical, seeding, and prescribed fire treatments as appropriate to achieve DFC.
- In perennial grass, invasive annual grass, and juniper-invaded cover types, restore sagebrush steppe with an aggressive sagebrush seeding effort, using the appropriate sagebrush subspecies for the treatment.
- Strategically place treatments on a landscape scale to prevent fire from spreading into important sagebrush steppe habitat or WUI.

*Objective 2 – Maintain, protect, and expand sage-grouse source habitats.*

*Management actions:*

- Conduct vegetation treatments in areas that pose a wildland fire risk to source habitats.
- Treat areas within source habitats that have a low resiliency (i.e., areas characterized by low species diversity, undesirable composition, and dead or decadent sagebrush).

*Objective 3 – Treat sage-grouse key and restoration habitats to expand source habitats. Improve and maintain sage-grouse restoration and key habitats.*

*Management actions:*

- Conduct vegetative treatments in restoration and key habitats to reduce risk of wildland fire and reconnect restoration and key habitats.
- Treat areas of restoration and key habitats that have low resiliency characterized by low species diversity.

In addition to meeting the objectives for the project area and conforming to current management direction, this alternative meets the purpose and need for action as presented in the EA.

Moreover, the analysis presented in the EA and the accompanying Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) make clear that the implementation of this alternative with associated design criteria and management restrictions identified in the EA would not result in significant impacts to the human environment and therefore an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

### **Authority**

Authority under which this decision is being issued is found in Title 43 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Subpart 4.410 – Appeals to the Board of Land Appeals.

### **Appeal Procedures**

Any person/party whose interest is adversely affected by the final decision may file an appeal in accordance with 43 CFR 4.410, 4.411, 4.412, and 4.413 in person or in writing to Jeremy Casterson, Upper Snake Field Office Manager, at 1405 Hollipark Dr., Idaho Falls, Idaho 83401 within 30 days after receipt of such decision. The notice of appeal, if filed must include a statement of reasons for the appeal, a statement of standing if required by 43 CFR 4.412(b), and any arguments the appellant wishes to make. The person/party must also serve a copy of the appeal on the Office of the Solicitor, Boise Field Solicitors Office, University Plaza, 960 Broadway Ave., Suite 400, Boise Idaho, 83706 and person(s) named [43 CFR 4.421(h)] in the *Copies sent to:* section of this decision. The Interior Board of Land Appeals must decide an appeal of this decision within 60 days after all pleadings have been filed, and within 180 days after the appeal was filed as contained in 43 CFR 4.416.

Should you wish to file a petition for a stay, see 43 CFR 4.471 (a) and (b). In accordance with 43 CFR 4.471(c), a petition for a stay must show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

1. The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied.
2. The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits.
3. The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted, and
4. Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

As noted above, the petition for stay must be filed in the office of the authorized officer and serviced in accordance with 43 CFR 4.471. Any person named in the decision that receives a copy of a petition for a stay and/or an appeal see 43 CFR 4.472(b) for procedures to follow if you wish to respond.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact either Ben Dyer at (208) 524-7500 or myself at (208) 524-7500.

Approved by:

/s/ Jeremy Casterson, Upper Snake Field Office Manager

Dated: 2/18/2015

Copies sent to:

Natural Resource Conservation Service	9173 W. Barnes Dr. Ste. C, Boise, ID 83709
Idaho Department of Lands	3563 E. Ririe Hwy, Idaho Falls, ID 83401
Idaho Conservation League	710 N. 6th St., Boise, ID 83702
Idaho Department of Fish and Game	Attn: Steve Schmidt, 4279 Commerce Circle, Idaho Falls, ID 83404
Greater Yellowstone Collation	60 E. Little Ave. Ste. 201, Driggs, ID 83422
Western Watersheds Project	126 S. Main St, Ste. B2
Wildlands Defense	P.O. Box 125 Boise, ID 83701
Idaho State Dept. of Agriculture	2270 Old Penitentiary Rd., Boise, ID 83712
U.S. Department of Energy - INL	Attn: Jack Depperschmidt, 1955 Fremont Ave, Idaho Falls, ID 83402
Chairman, Land Use Policy Committee, Shoshone-Bannock Tribes	Attn: Land Use Director, P.O. Box 306 Pima Dr., Fort Hall, ID 83203
Northwest Band of Shoshone Nation	505 Pershing, Ste. 200, Pocatello, ID 83201
Chairman, Tribal Business Council, Shoshone-Bannock Tribes	C/o Chairman, P.O. Box 306 Pima Dr., Fort Hall, ID 83203
Cedar Butte Livestock LLC	588 N. 600 E., Firth, ID 83236