

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
White River Field Office
220 E Market St
Meeker, CO 81641**

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

Temporary Access and Staging Area for the Black Diamond Mine Fire Excavation Abatement Project

DOI-BLM-CO-N05-2015-0038-EA

Background

The Colorado Division of Reclamation, Mining, and Safety (DRMS), as part of their Abandoned Mine Land Program, identified coal seam fires throughout the state and is working on abatement of these coal seam fires. One of DRMS's proposals is the Black Diamond Mine Fire Abatement project located on an isolated private parcel surrounded by the BLM managed lands (Figures 1 and 2) approximately one mile northwest of Meeker, Colorado. Their proposed project would require access through BLM managed lands. Records indicate the mine was in operation from 1916 until 1930 when the mine fire was discovered. The burning coal seam has two main surface expression in the vicinity of collapsed mine entries and has been responsible for fire starts in the past. Previous attempts to surface seal the fire have been unsuccessful.

DRMS is proposing to excavate the mine entries, quench all burning materials, and seal the portals to reduce/eliminate the surface expression of the fire. The excavated areas would be on private land and graded following dig/quench operations. Hydrologic controls would be constructed, and the site would be re-vegetated. The temporary access road would be re-contoured and reseed upon completion of the project. Commencement of the project is expected to be the first of September 2015 and completed by the end of October 2015. The project would directly involve six acres of which three acres would be available as a staging area for water storage to quench the coal and associated construction equipment, materials, and trailer. No vegetation removal would occur within the staging area. The remaining three acres (two acres on BLM and one acre on private lands) are associated with the construction of the temporary access would be a short term disturbance.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based upon a review of the EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that the Proposed Action will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment,

individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity, as defined at 40 CFR 1508.27 and do not exceed those effects as described in the White River Resource Area Proposed Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (1996). Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described below.

Context

The project is a site-specific action directly involving BLM administered public lands that do not in and of itself have international, national, regional, or state-wide importance.

No vegetation removal would occur within the staging area. The remaining three acres associated with the construction of the temporary access would be a short term disturbance. There would be no long term ground disturbance of BLM lands. There is currently no public vehicular access to the site of the burning coal seam. Public use of nearby lands is mostly limited to four miles of a constructed mountain biking and hiking trail system which comes within 0.4 miles of the burning seam. Temporary access would be routed along approximately 0.50 miles of yet to be constructed Trail 1 of the Meeker Master Trails Plan. Reclamation efforts would be made to maintain the proper grade and alignment for this portion of Trail 1. Duration of the project is expected to be approximately two months. No significant negative effects were identified in the analysis of the impacts associated with the project.

Intensity

The following discussion is organized around the 10 Significance Criteria described at 40 CFR 1508.27. The following have been considered in evaluating intensity for this Proposed Action:

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

Construction of the access would have short term adverse impacts to soil, hydrology, vegetation, and recreation. These short term impacts would likely be remediated within two months to three years of project commencement. Beneficial impacts include the following:

- Reduction/elimination of wildfire starts caused by the surface expression the burning coal seam;
- Reduction/elimination emissions of greenhouse gases including carbon dioxide and methane as well as mercury, carbon monoxide, and other toxic substances;
- Reduction in the construction cost of approximately 0.5 miles of Trail 1 of the Meeker Master Trails Plan.

2. The degree to which the Proposed Action affects public health or safety.

The Proposed Action would improve public health and safety by reducing/eliminating the surface expression of the coal seam fire; removing a potential source of wild fire ignition in near proximity of a populated area; and by reducing/eliminating emissions of greenhouse gases including carbon dioxide and methane as well as mercury, carbon monoxide, and other toxic substances. Temporary access would not be available to the general public during project and would be re-contoured and reclaimed upon completion of the two month project.

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.

Cultural resource inventories of the area yielded no historic properties in the project area that would be adversely affected by the proposed action. There are no park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas that are in the project area.

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

No comments or concerns have been received regarding possible effects on the quality of the human environment during scoping. It is likely the quality of human environment would improve with the reduction/elimination the surface expression of the coal seam.

5. Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risk.

No highly uncertain or unknown risks to the human environment were identified during analysis of the Proposed Action.

6. 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.

The Proposed Action neither establishes a precedent for future BLM actions with significant effects nor represents a decision in principle about a future consideration. The objective of fire management in the 1997 White River ROD/RMP includes the protection of public health, safety, and property.

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

The Proposed Action would occur in association with the development of the Meeker Master Trails Plan. Combination of these projects is not considered a significant impact to any resource or the human environment

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed on the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

The Proposed Action would not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures or objects listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Cultural resource inventories of the area yielded no historic properties in the project area that would be adversely affected by the proposed action. There would be no impact to paleontological resources with the BLM required mitigation measures for the project.

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

There are no threatened or endangered animal species that are known to inhabit or derive important use from the project area. There are no special status plant species or plant species

habitat present in the vicinity of the proposed action. Water used for the quenching operations would result in the depletion of an estimated 0.34 acre-feet of water from within the Colorado River Basin and would fall under BLM Colorado's Programmatic Biological Assessment (PBA) for water depleting activities (excluding fluid minerals development) on BLM lands in the Colorado River basin in Colorado (BLM 2008).

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

Neither the Proposed Action nor impacts associated with it violate any laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Signature of Authorized Official

Field Manager

Date