

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Upper Snake Sagebrush Steppe Restoration Project

EA# DOI-BLM-ID-I010-2015-0012-EA

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

I have reviewed the Environmental Assessment, EA# DOI-BLM-ID-I010-2015-0012-EA, including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant environmental impacts. I have determined that the decision to implement the Proposed Action for the Camas Butte, Deadman Native, Fred Butte, Hells Half Acre, Jefferson, Mesa, Table Butte, Table Legs Butte, Twin Buttes and West Cedar Butte treatment units and implement Alternative B for the Stage Road treatment unit will not have any significant impacts on the human environment and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

Implementing regulations for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (40CFR 1508.27) provide criteria for determining the significance of effects. ‘Significant’, as used in NEPA, requires consideration of both context and intensity. The bold and italicized text are repeated from 40CFR 1508.27 for completeness and an explanation follows for relevance to the decision.

(a) Context. This requirement means that the significance of an action must be 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 locale rather than in the world as a whole. Both short- and long-term effects are relevant (40 CFR 1508.27):

This project is a site-specific action that by itself does not have international, national, region-wide, or statewide importance. The analysis has shown that the project significance is local in nature and that the vegetative treatments will have no significant impact on existing resource values.

(b) Intensity. This requirement refers to the severity of impact. Responsible officials must bear in mind that more than one agency may make decisions about partial aspects of a major action. The following are considered in evaluating intensity (40 CFR 1508.27).

(1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The selected elements from within the Proposed Action and Alternative B will protect and expand vital Greater Sage-grouse habitat by reducing/removing cheatgrass, increasing perennial bunchgrasses and native forbs, and increasing sagebrush cover in areas previously disturbed by wildfire and other past disturbances.

The implementation of the selected elements from within the Proposed Action and Alternative B would also be associated with short-term adverse impacts including the production of exhaust emissions and fugitive dust, the displacement of migratory birds, sage-grouse, and other wildlife species due to equipment noise and general human

presence, an increase in erosion potential associated with the reduction of existing annual vegetative cover and equipment use, and the possible spread of noxious weeds. Impacts would be minimized through the use of design criteria, Best Management Practices (BMPs) as described and analyzed in the EA.

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

There are no significant effects of the selected elements within the Proposed Action and Alternative B on public health or safety.

(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.

No significant effects would occur to unique geographic characteristics of the area, cultural or historical resources, park lands, or prime farmlands.

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

During the scoping process, concerns were expressed with regard to the potential environmental effects of implementing the Proposed Action and alternatives as presented. In response to those concerns, BLM addressed impacts on the quality of the human environment within the EA, as well as established design features within the EA.

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

There are no predicted effects on the human environment that are considered to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. The BLM has experience implementing similar fuels reduction projects in similar areas and understands the environmental consequences of these actions. The environmental effects to the human environment are fully analyzed in the EA with a high degree of certainty.

(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.

The implementation of this proposed decision would not trigger other actions, nor is it a part of a larger action envisioned for the project area or elsewhere. The USFO has conducted numerous fuels reduction and habitat improvement projects and nothing in the analysis indicates that this proposal is appreciably different and is therefore not precedent setting. Any future fuels reduction or habitat improvement proposals would be subject to a separate and independent environmental analysis as mandated under NEPA.

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

The cumulative analysis presented in the EA disclosed that the environmental impacts associated with the implementation of the selected elements from within the Proposed Action and Alternative B would not result in significant cumulative impacts when considered in light of impacts associated with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

- (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.*

The standard BLM stipulation covering cultural resources would be included and would provide protection for any cultural resources identified in the project area. The BLM archaeologist would consult with the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) regarding the NRHP (National Register of Historic Places) status of any cultural resources identified, including findings of effect. The BLM would avoid NRHP-eligible historic properties during project implementation, mitigating any potential adverse impacts.

- (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.*

The impacts analysis presented in the EA disclosed that the environmental impacts associated with the implementation of the selected elements from within the Proposed Action and Alternative B would not result in significant impacts on endangered or threatened species such as the Greater Sage-grouse.

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

The analysis in the EA shows that the alternatives are consistent with Federal, State, and local laws or requirements imposed for protection of the environment.

I have determined that implementing Proposed Action for the Camas Butte, Deadman Native, Fred Butte, Hells Half Acre, Jefferson, Mesa, Table Butte, Table Legs Butte, Twin Buttes and West Cedar Butte treatment units and implementing Alternative B for the Stage Road treatment unit does not constitute a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment in either context or intensity. I have made this determination after considering both positive and negative effects, as well as the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of this action and reasonably foreseeable future actions. I have found that the context of the environmental impacts of this decision is limited to the local area and I have also determined that the severity of these impacts is not significant.

Approved by:

/s/ Glen Guenther, Upper Snake Field Office Manager (Acting)

Dated: 6/26/2015