



United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DOCUMENTATION
(DOI-BLM-CA-C070-2016-0004-CX)

A. Background

BLM Office: Bishop Field Office

Lease/Serial/Case File Number: N/A

NEPA Document Number: DOI-BLM-CA-C070-2016-0004-CX

Applicant: Bishop Field Office Staff

Project Title: Green Creek Burn Area Habitat Rehabilitation

Project Location: Mount Diablo Base & Meridian, California
T. 4N, R 25E, Section 33 (Map 1)

Project Description and Rationale, including any Stipulations

The proposed action would implement post-fire re-vegetation treatments to augment natural re-vegetation within the 27 acres of BLM-managed public lands burned by the Green Creek Fire during September 2015. The Green Creek Fire burned intensely, consuming nearly all the mature sagebrush and bitterbrush vegetation. The proposed treatments would work toward re-establishing the native plant community of the burn area.

The purpose of the proposed rehabilitation activities is to enhance the natural vegetation regrowth within the burned area. These activities are needed due to the loss of vegetation caused by the fire and the possibility of natural recovery of native vegetation being impeded by colonization of cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) or other non-native plant species. Reducing the chance of colonization by cheatgrass and restoring native plant species would improve the quality of the burned area habitat for sagebrush obligate wildlife species such as the greater sage-grouse.

Rehabilitation Treatments

- **Ground Seeding.** Up to the entirety (approximately 27 acres), excluding areas with cultural resources, of the burned area would be seeded with native seed that is appropriate for the site. Species likely to be seeded include, but are not limited to: big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*), Indian ricegrass (*Stipa hymenoides*), bottlebrush squirreltail (*Elymus elymoides*) and/or other native species appropriate for the site.

Seeding would be conducted by hand broadcasting the seed onto the soil surface and hand raking the seed into the soil; and/or dispersing seed with a UTV/ATV mounted seed spreader and using a small harrow to work seed into the soil; or the seed would be spread and allowed to work into the soil naturally.

- Hand raking would use metal rakes and/or McLeod's to rake the soil surface. Seed would be spread into the raked area and removed soil would be raked back over the seed. Soil surface disturbance would generally not exceed 2 inches.
- UTV /ATV seeding would occur by driving a UTV/ATV with a seed dispenser mounted to it through the burn area. The UTV/ATV would also drag a metal harrow over the soil to work the seed into the soil. Soil surface disturbance would generally not exceed 2 inches.

Work may occur anytime favorable seeding or planting conditions exist, except during the times prohibited in the stipulations, below.

- **Seedling planting.** Locally collected species such as bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*) and/or sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), would be propagated and grown at an off-site facility. Seedlings would be planted into the burn area at a density of approximately 300 to 600 seedlings per acre. It is anticipated that less than half of the 27 acre burned area would be planted with seedlings. Vexar mesh tubing may be placed around seedlings to protect them from herbivory.

Out-planting would generally occur during the fall or early winter months but may also occur in the spring if favorable weather conditions exist. Planting would be done by placing seedlings into holes approximately 4- 6 inches in diameter and up to 12 inches deep. Holes would be dug using a shovel, Pulaski, auger (hand or motorized) or similar hand-held device.

Stipulations

1. No cultural properties will be negatively affected by this project. All cultural sites located within the proposed units will be field verified and Standard Resource Protection Measures (SRPM) applied commensurate to project activity, on a site specific basis to ensure a Finding of No Adverse Effect.

2. Standard Protection Measures will be monitored for effectiveness during project implementation.
3. If un-identified artifacts are discovered during implementation, all project work will cease in the vicinity of the site, and the project director and archaeologist will be notified.
4. All seeding and planting associated with the proposed treatments would utilize native seed and plants that are adapted to the project area.
5. Vehicular access would be restricted to existing roads. Cross-country travel with a UTV or ATV would only be permitted during seeding and planting activities.
6. Treatments associated with proposed action would not include; chaining, the use of pesticides or herbicides or the conversion of timber type or non-forest to forest land.
7. If project activities would take place during migratory bird nesting season (March 15 to July 30), a nesting bird survey would be conducted at least one week before the onset of project activities to determine the presence or absence of nesting birds. If nesting birds are observed, work activities would be avoided within 100 feet of active nests until it has been determined that the young have left the nest.
8. Based on Area-wide direction in the RMP (page 17), stating “Seasonal Protection within 2 miles of an active sage-grouse lek from 5/1 to 6/30”, no project activities will occur between May 1st and June 30th.
9. Motorized tools would not be used for treatments from 3/1 to 5/1 to limit noise disturbance to lekking sage-grouse.

B. Land Use Plan Conformance

The proposed action is subject to the Bishop Resource Management Plan (RMP), approved March 25, 1993 (DOI BLM, 1993). The proposed action has been reviewed and is in conformance with the plan. While some of the activities of the proposed action are not specifically provided for in the RMP, they are clearly consistent with the RMP which states:

- Manage candidate species, sensitive species and other species of management concern in a manner to avoid the need for listing as state or federal endangered or threatened (Standard Operating Procedures, RMP, p. 12).
- Manage sagebrush-bitterbrush areas within 2 miles of sage-grouse leks to meet desired plant community goals (Area Wide RMP Decisions, RMP, p. 17).

C. Compliance with NEPA

The proposed action is excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with 516 DM 11.9 C (3):

Seeding or reforestation of timber sales or burn areas where no chaining is done, no pesticides are used, and there is no conversion of timber type or conversion of non-forest to forest land. Specific reforestation activities covered include: seeding and seedling plantings, shading, tubing (browse protection), paper mulching, bud caps, ravel protection, application of non-toxic big game repellent, spot scalping, rodent trapping, fertilization of seed trees, fence construction around out-planting sites, and collection of pollen, scions and cones.

This categorical exclusion is appropriate for this proposed action because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment. The proposed action has been reviewed, and none of the extraordinary circumstances described in 43 CFR 46.215 apply (see attached).

D. Signature

for  Date: 11/16/2015
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E. Contact Person

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F. Decision Record and Administrative Remedies

A separate Decision Record for the proposed action will be issued based on the analysis provided in this Categorical Exclusion Documentation and the attached Review of Extraordinary Circumstances. This Decision Record will include a description of Administrative Remedies applicable to the proposed action.

Green Creek Burn Area Habitat Rehabilitation

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Proposed action would occur within the perimeter of the Green Creek Fire.

