

# Worksheet

## Determination of NEPA Adequacy (DNA)

U.S Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management

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### A. Background

**BLM Office:** Prineville District Office

**NEPA Log #:** DOI-BLM-OR-P000-2015-0011-DNA

**Location:** See the attached map with Township, Range, and Section included.

**Proposed Action Title:** 2015 Sage-Grouse Habitat Improvement Juniper Thinning DNA

**Description of the Proposed Action:** The BLM is proposing to cut down young juniper on up to 63,081 acres, some of which would be lopped and scattered. In the thinning units, all juniper trees with a diameter at breast height equal to or less than 12 inches that do not have a nest, cavity, or old growth characteristics (i.e. juniper trees with physical characteristics including rounded tops or spreading canopies, dead branches covered with fruticose lichen, and bark with deep furrows), would be cut down. Large diameter juniper trees and dense pockets would not be cut. There would not be any activity (e.g. juniper cutting) associated with this project from March 1 to June 15 within one mile of an active sage-grouse lek to ensure that the sage-grouse are not disturbed during their reproductive period. Chainsaws would be the only method used to cut juniper trees. Vehicle use associated with this project would be restricted to existing roads. Juniper trees would be cut in such a way that they would fall away from fence lines and any other structure. Implementation is expected to occur over a 3 – 5 year period depending on funding.

Additional stipulations that would be followed during this proposed action include:

- Project activity would not be allowed from December 1 to April 1 within ½ mile of bald and golden eagle winter roost sites, or from January 1 through August 31 within ¼ to ½ mile of raptor nests (specific distance is dependent on species, see page 47 in Upper Deschutes RMP).
- Trees with paint, signs, blazes, or fences attached to them would not be cut.
- Any new discoveries of cultural or paleontological resources during implementation would temporarily stop project activities until a Prineville BLM District specialist has completed an assessment and coordinated with the State Historic Preservation Office, if required.
- Project activity would not be allowed from March 1 to July 31 within ¼ mile of Ferruginous hawk, Swainson's hawk, and/or Prairie Falcon nesting areas.
- Juniper trees would not be felled on Pygmy Rabbit burrows or trails. Additionally project activity would not occur within ¼ mile of Burrowing Owl burrows from March 1 to July 31.
- If juniper densities are great enough that, when felled, they would alter vegetative conditions in wetted areas, the juniper would be drug, by hand, up to 50 feet from the wetted area.

- Care would be taken where vehicles are parked and where staff are working/walking (i.e. vehicles would not be parked in a patch of cheatgrass) in order to prevent the spread of invasive or noxious weeds.
- Care would be taken to check personnel, tools, and vehicles for plant parts before leaving the site, and wash vehicles if necessary in order to prevent the spread of invasive or noxious weeds.
- Soil disturbance would be minimized as much as possible.
- Weed species present and their location(s) would be noted and reported to a BLM Prineville District botanist to assist with treatment.

The following additional stipulations would apply in units identified in the Sage-grouse Playa Management Environmental Assessment (Section C) as containing wilderness characteristics:

- Juniper thinning would be limited to areas outside of old growth juniper woodlands (i.e. areas with six or more old growth trees per acre).
- Juniper cutting would not occur within 5.1 miles of the perimeter of an active lek before 10 am during the breeding season (March 1 – June 30).
- Cut trees would be directionally felled away from old growth juniper trees.
- Thinning units would have irregular boundaries, trees and slash dispersed, and a variety of tree ages retained in order to promote a mottled appearance. Juniper would be cut six inches or less from the ground.
- Juniper cover would be retained in key areas, such as along rock outcrops; in wildlife movement corridors; or areas that have other values important for wildlife.
- Juniper would not be cut in the Benjamin Area of Critical Environmental Concern / Research Natural Area.
- Vehicles would not be allowed off road within ¼ mile of pygmy rabbit burrows.
- Treatments would be designed to mimic patterns found in the characteristic landscape as well as to improve long distance scenic view opportunities. These objectives would be met by completing VRM contrast rating worksheets to meet or exceed VRM standards.
- All branches from cut trees would be below four feet, except in areas where there are already perches.
- A 300 foot untreated buffer would be left around existing motorized travel routes.

## **B. Land Use Plan Conformance**

Land Use Plan Name: Brothers/LaPine Resource Management Plan

Date approved (ROD): July 5, 1989

The proposed action is in conformance with the applicable plan, even though it is not specifically provided for, because it is clearly consistent with the following land use plan decisions (objectives, terms, conditions):

- Page 12, objective, "Provide optimum habitat diversity for game and non-game wildlife species."

### **C. Identify applicable National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents and related documents that cover the proposed action**

The following NEPA documents cover the proposed action:

High Desert Shrub Steppe Restoration Environmental Assessment (HDSSREA), April 2011.

Sage-grouse Playa Management Environmental Assessment (SGPMEA), June 2013.

The following other documentation is relevant to the proposed action:

Biological Evaluation for Listed, Proposed, and Special Status Wildlife Species, May 4, 2015; Special Status Plants Survey Report, April 15, 2015; and Section 106 compliance accomplished through further evaluation and the 2015 Protocol for Managing Cultural Resources on Lands Administered by the BLM in Oregon, Appendix E. The proposed action, as designed, would not create new ground disturbance and, in general, would not adversely affect historic properties and sensitive cultural resources.

### **D. NEPA Adequacy Criteria**

1. Is the new proposed action a feature of, or essentially similar to, an alternative analyzed in the existing NEPA document(s)? Is the project within the same analysis area, or if the project location is different, are the geographic and resource conditions sufficiently similar to those analyzed in the existing NEPA document(s)? If there are differences, can you explain why they are not substantial?

Yes, the proposed action is essentially similar to alternatives analyzed in the HDSSREA and the SGPMEA and within the same analysis areas.

The proposed action to cut juniper in lands without wilderness characteristics with chainsaws was analyzed in the HDSSREA under Alternative 2, pages 13-20, and includes design features from this EA, pages 30-39.

The proposed action to cut juniper in lands with wilderness characteristics with chainsaws was analyzed in the SGPMEA on pages 67-70. Project design features to minimize effects to wilderness characteristics are found within pages 13-15 from this EA.

Yearly implementation levels are expected to exceed the annual 10,200 acres analyzed in the HDSSREA. Targeted acres have very low density juniper that are small in stature. The intent of limiting treatments to 10,200 acres was to limit habitat change on a local scale. Treatment units are currently not dominated by juniper thus after treatment they would continue to function as shrub dominated sites. Treatments would simply stop the future juniper expansion and conversion of these sites. Treatments are also identified throughout the HDSSREA analysis area and not concentrated in any one location. The HDSSREA analyzed total treatment in area of up to 13,600 acres which included treatment types that would be more disturbing than those proposed here. Thus the effects of cutting acres over 10,200 acres would be the same or less than those analyzed in the HDSSREA.

A portion (< 100 ac.) of the proposed juniper thinning is outside of the project area in the HDSSREA, the proposed project is located in occupied sage-grouse habitat, which was what the HDSSREA's project area was created from, HDSSREA on page 8. Furthermore the geographic and resource conditions of the portion of the proposal that are not within the delineated project area of the HDSSREA are similar to those analyzed in the HDSSREA.

In conclusion, the proposed actions are: essentially similar to an alternative analyzed in the HDSSREA; similar to an alternative analyzed in the SGPMEA; and the proposed geographic area is either within the analysis areas analyzed in the HDSSREA and SGPMEA or within a geographic area with similar geographic and resource conditions as the analysis area of the HDSSREA.

2. Is the range of alternatives analyzed in the existing NEPA document(s) appropriate with respect to the new proposed action, given current environmental concerns, interests, and resource values?

Yes. Two of the alternatives considered in the HDSSREA were a no action alternative (Alt. 1) and an alternative that considered "cut[ing], mow[ing], or crush[ing] young juniper and/or shrubs on 10,200 acres annually [and] pil[ing] and scatter[ing] the downed vegetation including juniper limbs." (Page 8, HDSSREA, Alternative 2) The proposed juniper thinning for lands without wilderness characteristics includes actions and stipulations for how those actions are to be performed that were analyzed in the HDSSREA, thus the effects to lands not containing wilderness characteristics from the proposal fall within the range of effects of Alternatives 1 and 2 analyzed in the HDSSREA.

The SGPMEA analyzed multiple alternatives, two of which were a no action alternative (Alt. 1) and an alternative that considered "mow[ing] shrubs, small trees and other vegetation on 890 acres on 12 playas dominated by silver sagebrush, and mechanically thin juniper on 45,589 acres." (Page 17, SGPMEA, Alternative 3) The proposed juniper thinning for lands with wilderness characteristics includes actions and stipulations for how those actions are to be performed that were analyzed in the SGPMEA and the effects to lands with wilderness characteristics from the proposal fall within the range of effects of Alternatives 1 and 3 analyzed in the SGPMEA.

Additionally there are no current environmental concerns, interests, or resource values that cause the proposal to fall outside the range of alternatives analyzed in the HDSSREA.

3. Is the existing analysis valid in light of any new information or circumstances (such as rangeland health standard assessment, recent endangered species listings, updated lists of BLM sensitive species)? Can you reasonably conclude that all new information and new circumstances would not substantially change the analysis of the new proposed action?

Yes. The existing analyses are valid because there is no new information or circumstances that would make them invalid. An updated Wilderness Characteristic Inventory has been conducted on the tracts in the HDSSREA that would receive juniper thinning. Project design elements in the HDSSREA and the SGPMA are consistent with applicable VRM management classes. This project proposal is consistent with the VRM Classes as analyzed in the EA and would leave old growth and big trees in the landscape within the thinning units.

The project area was reviewed for potential to provide juniper wood products consistent with MOU BLM-OR931-1408 and it was determined that the size and remote location of the material that would be produced precluded potential use of juniper products.

4. Are the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects that would result from implementation of the new proposed action similar (both quantitatively and qualitatively) to those analyzed in the existing NEPA document(s)?

Yes. All of the effects that would result from this action are similar to those analyzed in the HDSSREA on pages 13-20 and in the SGPMA on pages 25-76. The proposed action is similar to that analyzed in the HDSSREA and the SGPMA and there are no other actions that would have different cumulative effects with the proposed action than those disclosed in the HDSSREA and the SGPMA.

5. Are the public involvement and interagency review associated with existing NEPA document(s) adequate for the current proposed action?

Yes. The HDSSREA included a 30 day scoping period and a 30 day comment period and the EA, FONSI, and the subsequent decision were posted on the BLM's public web site on April 15, 2011 and mailed to agencies, local governments, organizations, and interested public. The SGPMA included a 30 day scoping period and a 30 day comment period and the EA, FONSI, and the subsequent decision for vegetation treatments was posted on the BLM's public web site on May 13, 2014.

- This project has been listed on the Prineville BLM's web site since May of 2015.
- Coordination with the Natural Resource Conservation Service and grazing permittees is ongoing.

## E. Persons/Agencies/BLM Staff consulted

<u>Name</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Resource represented</u>
Monte Kuk	Wildlife Biologist	Wildlife
Guy Chamness	Fuels Specialist	Fire/Forestry
Cari Taylor	Rangeland Management Specialist	Range
Emily Lent	Rangeland Management Specialist	Range
Berry Phelps	Recreation	Recreation, Visuals, Wilderness
Ryan Griffin	Archaeology Technician	Archaeology
Terry Holtzapple	Archaeologist	Cultural and Paleontology
Sarah Canham	Botanist	Special Status Plants, Invasive Plants
Teal Purrington	Environmental Coordinator	NEPA
Bill Dean	Assistant Field Manager	Manager

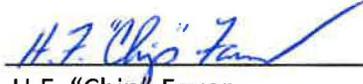
Note: Refer to the EA/EIS for a complete list of the team members participating in the preparation of the original environmental analyses or planning documents.

### Conclusion

Based on the review documented above, I conclude that this proposal conforms to the applicable land use plan and that the documentation fully covers the proposed action and constitutes BLM's compliance with the requirements of the NEPA.

### Signature

Responsible official: \_\_\_\_\_

  
H.F. "Chip" Faver  
Field Manager, Central Oregon Resource Area

7-14-15  
Date

Note: The signed Conclusion on this Worksheet is part of an interim step in the BLM's internal decision process and does not constitute an appealable decision. However, the lease, permit, or other authorization based on this DNA is subject to protest or appeal under 43 CFR Part 4 and the program specific regulations.

### Contact Person

For additional information concerning this review, contact: Monte Kuk, Wildlife Biologist, Prineville Field Office, 3050 NE 3rd Street, Prineville, OR 97754, telephone (541) 416-6712, mkuk@blm.gov.

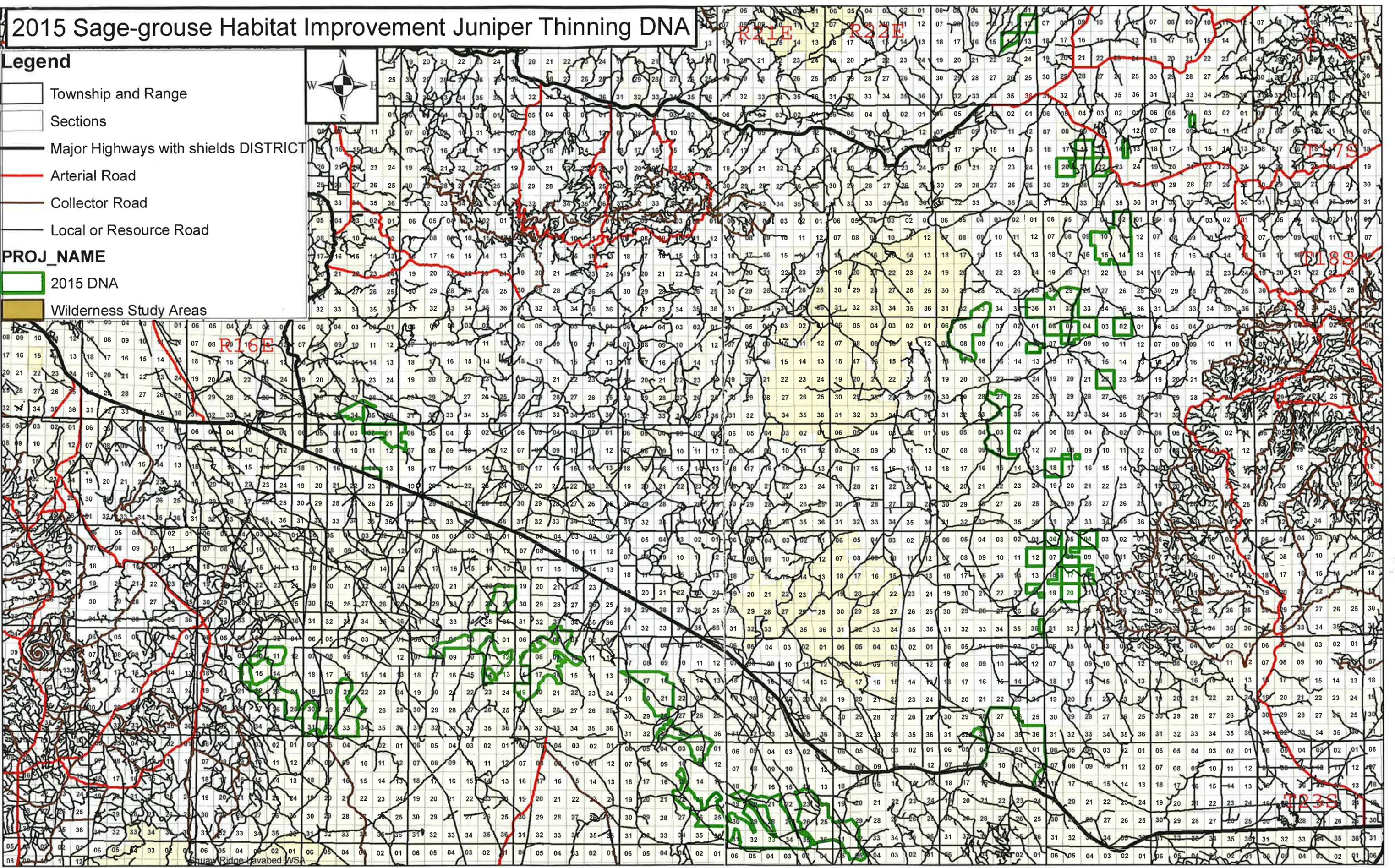
# 2015 Sage-grouse Habitat Improvement Juniper Thinning DNA

**Legend**

- Township and Range
- Sections
- Major Highways with shields DISTRICT
- Arterial Road
- Collector Road
- Local or Resource Road

**PROJ\_NAME**

- 2015 DNA
- Wilderness Study Areas



Squaw Ridge Lavabed WSA