

**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)
DOI-BLM-CO-N05-2016-0057-EA**

PROJECT NAME:

Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area (HMA) Fence Reconstruction and Water Redevelopment Projects

LOCATION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION:

Legal Description:

Duck Creek Fence Reconstruction: Township 1 South, Range 98 West,
Sections 9 and 16;

Corcoran Spring Redevelopment: Township 2 North, Range 97 West,
Section 33;

Applicant: DOI, Bureau of Land Management, White River Field Office

NEPA Document Number: DOI-BLM-CO-N05-2016-0057-EA

Project Area:

In general, the project area for the Duck Creek Fence Reconstruction is the HMA boundary. The proposed fence section is aligned as closely as possible to the current HMA boundary. The fence has been located where it will be the most effective and results in the least impacts to other resources. The project area does not include fencing located within the interior of the designated HMA boundary. The perimeter of the designated boundary is estimated at 137 miles and is located approximately 20 miles west and south of Meeker, Colorado within the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM's) Northwest District of Colorado.

The Corcoran Spring Redevelopment project is located within the boundary of the HMA within the area locally referred to as Rocky Ridge. The HMA encompasses approximately 190,130 acres of federal, state, and private lands. The analysis area is located within portions of the Yellow Creek Grazing Allotment for both projects.

BACKGROUND

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), White River Field Office (WRFO) is proposing to reconstruct one new section of fence that will improve management of wild horses within the Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area (HMA) and to address resource concerns associated with wild horses gaining access to areas outside of the designated HMA boundary. The HMA boundary consists of a 137 mile perimeter. At this time, the WRFO proposes to

reconstruct one new section of fence near the area of Duck Creek. The current fence is no longer adequate to keep wild horses from traveling outside the HMA because it has been damaged and/or destroyed so that it is no longer functional, and because there are not effective topographic barriers to deter wild horses from leaving the HMA.

The Corcoran Spring development was originally constructed in the late 1970s for wild horses to utilize in the HMA. The spring development lacked maintenance and fell into disrepair over time. In 2012, due to drought conditions, Corcoran Spring was ultimately reduced to a “mud pit” by wild horses and wildlife trampling the spring in attempts to use the limited water supply. The BLM WRFO trucked in water to supplement Corcoran Spring and placed the water into a water tank in the area. BLM WRFO staff determined that the wild horses (and wildlife) in the area would not utilize the tank because it was an artificial watering system. In order for the wild horses and wildlife to obtain water, the BLM WRFO staff mimicked a spring by allowing the water to trickle out of the tank into an area that was dug by hand.

Additional Background Information

During the 2012 and 2013 field seasons, WRFO staff started conducting field reconnaissance of the HMA boundary for functionality, as well as for verification of fence location to aid in updating grazing allotment boundary mapping which also included the use of aerial photography and spot checking locations. The field reconnaissance also included checking other associated fencing associated with the HMA.

Of the 137 mile HMA perimeter, approximately 40 miles remains in need of reconnaissance work by BLM WRFO staff during future field season(s). The completion of the remaining reconnaissance work is based on upcoming staff availability. The field reconnaissance also includes checking of any other fencing adjacent or within the HMA. There may be additional sections of the HMA requiring some form of fencing work (either repair or new construction) and any new sections of fencing will be analyzed under a separate National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document. This environmental assessment (EA) considers only one distinct fence section near the Duck Creek proposed new fence line (see Map 1) and the Corcoran Spring redevelopment (Map 2).

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I have reviewed the Environmental Assessment (EA), DOI-BLM-CO-N05-2016-0057-EA, Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area (HMA) Fence Reconstruction and Water Redevelopment Projects. Based on the interdisciplinary analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the attached environmental assessment, and considering the Council on Environmental Quality’s (CEQ) significance criteria in 40 CFR 1508.27, I have determined that the impacts associated with the implementation of the Proposed Action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required as per Section 102 (2) (C) of NEPA.

Context

The proposed project areas are site-specific actions directly involving the BLM administered public lands that do not in and of itself have international, national, regional, or state-wide importance. The proposed projects are located in two different locations within or adjacent to the

Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area boundary. The Proposed Action is the installation one section of fence line and a water redevelopment in specific locations within the analysis area. The BLM proposes to initiate the fence line construction starting approximately August 16, 2017 or later when the funds and or volunteers get appropriated to 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.

The Proposed Action is expected to meet the BLM's objectives for wild horse management of maintaining a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple use relationship consistent with other resource needs. This EA considers both beneficial and adverse impacts of the proposed fence section and the water redevelopment, as well as other alternatives, and the impacts that may result under each alternative. The Proposed Action is expected to address both the human and wild horse safety concerns as well as reduce the number of wild horses that gain access to areas outside of the Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area. The Proposed Action utilizes a common means of wild horse management throughout Colorado and other states.

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

With successful construction of the proposed fence there would be a positive impact to public health and safety in that wild horses would have limited access to the public transportation system (County Roads) located outside of the Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area. The current open range situation has allowed horse access onto heavily used public road ways. The potential effect on public health and safety would also protect the health and safety of the wild horses.

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.

There are no wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas present, no park lands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, or Wilderness Study Areas within the proposed project areas. Archaeological site clearances were conducted along the placement location of the fence line prior to the construction of this section of fence. Mitigation for any cultural resources discovered in the area that would be affected by fence construction will be implemented as outlined in the analysis. The Proposed Action has taken into consideration any potential affect to unique characteristics such as historic or cultural resources.

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

Wild horse management has occurred since 1971. The White River ROD/RMP recognizes wild horse management in the Piceance-East Douglas HMA for 135-235 wild horses. The Proposed Action will continue to aid in that management by keeping wild horses off of heavily utilized public road ways as well as keeping the wild horse herd within the boundary of the Piceance-East Douglas HMA. Thus, the Proposed Action is similar to what has been previously recommended for wild horse management and is not expected to generate controversy.

The effects of the Proposed Action on the quality of the human environment are not considered to be highly controversial, and are well known and understood. Some segments of the public hold the opinion that wild horses should be able to utilize all public lands and advocate removal of livestock. However, that is outside of the scope of this EA and inconsistent with management direction provided in the RMP.

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

The Proposed Action has no known effects on the human environment which are considered highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks, as demonstrated through the effects analysis in the EA.

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 action is compatible with future considerations of actions required to improve wild horse management in conjunction with meeting the objectives for habitat within the Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area.

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

The Proposed Action is not related to other actions with individually significant, but cumulatively significant impacts. Future projects occurring within the proposed project areas would be evaluated through the appropriate NEPA process and analyzed under a separate site-specific NEPA document.

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 has no potential to adversely affect properties listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, and would not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

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.

The Proposed Action has taken into consideration any potential affect to any threatened or endangered (T&E) species or habitat determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act. However, for the candidate species of greater sage-grouse the proposed fence alignments would have no direct influence on their habitat. For the listed T&E plant species *Physaria obcordata* (Dudley Bluffs twinpod), the fence line route and water redevelopment , as proposed, ensures no resource conflicts will take place on such habitat. However, the proposed reconstruction of the Duck Creek fence will impact the *Physaria congesta* (Dudley Bluffs bladderpod); that is why design features have been implemented to mitigate the impact to this resource. Due to an active

Cooper's hawk nest construction of the fence will not be allowed until after August 16 of the year when the project will be constructed, otherwise, no proposed endangered or threatened animal species are known to make appreciable use of the project areas.

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

The Proposed Action would not violate or threaten to violate any Federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. The Proposed Action is in conformance with all applicable regulations in Title 43 of the Code of Federal Regulations. The Proposed Action would not violate the Migratory Bird Treaty Act or the Endangered Species Act. All practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm and unnecessary and undue degradation of the public lands and their resources are incorporated into the Proposed Action.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:

Field Manager: _____

Date Signed: _____