

**UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Bureau of Land Management
HiLine District
Malta Field Office**

**Decision Record
Cottonwood Riparian Area Tree Planting
DOI-BLM-MT-M010-2016-0007-EA**

DECISION RECORD

It is my decision as the authorized officer to approve the proposed Cottonwood Riparian Area Tree Planting described as Proposed Action from DOI-BLM-MT-M010-2016-0007-EA.

Mitigation and Monitoring

To assure compliance with the approved action, the project will be monitored during regularly scheduled field inspections.

Terms/ Conditions/ Stipulations

Dormant cottonwood saplings, approximately 1” diameter, will be collected from Hammond WPA, approximately 9 miles downriver from Cottonwood.

Holes for the cuttings will be created utilizing one of two methods: a waterjet stinger or an 8” diameter auger hole.

The cuttings will be buried up to 8’ deep along with a 7.5’ PVC pipe that is perforated on the bottom 18”. The intent of this method is to be able to water the trees through the PVC pipe until roots are established. By providing water at a depth of seven feet, they can grow roots that connect with a permanent water table in a relatively short amount of time. (Test plantings at Judith Landing and Dark Butte in 2013 and 2014 have resulted in trees that are able to survive without additional care after one or two years’ time).

The auger holes will be backfilled with a mud slurry and concentration of root-growth hormone. Each tree will be individually protected from beaver and deer with protective fencing. Cottonwood cuttings would be planted between winter and bud break in the spring (late March or early April).

Maintenance will be needed for one to two years post planting by providing water to the trees bi-weekly in April, May, and June, and weekly in July, August, and September.

The project area will be broken down into two planting zones. Up to 75 trees would be planted in Zone I in spring 2016 and will be provided supplemental water for two growing seasons. Zone II will be planted with up to 125 cuttings in spring 2018 and will be provided supplemental water for two growing seasons. This will cut down on the amount of time and water required for supplemental watering per growing season.

Project activities will not be performed during periods when the soil is too wet to adequately support equipment/vehicles. If equipment/vehicles create ruts in excess of 3 inches deep, operations will cease until the soil is adequately dried and the need for supplemental watering is apparent.

Plan Conformance and Consistency

The public lands in the project area are managed according to decisions in the HiLine Approved Resource Management Plan (ARMP) approved 2015. The proposed action is in conformance with the appropriate RMP because the site has been identified as appropriate for public use in the approved RMP.

A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was prepared for the EA and determined that the proposed action will not have significant effects on the quality of the human environment or cause unnecessary or undue degradation of the natural environment.

Alternatives Considered

No Action: No supplemental planting or watering would take place within the Cottonwood Riparian Exclosure. Aging trees would continue to die out and new trees would only grow as a result of natural processes.

Proposed Action – Tree Planting and Supplemental Watering: BLM will plant 100 to 200 dormant cottonwood cuttings throughout the exclosure area to replace dead and old trees that have reached the end of their life cycle using the following methods:

Rationale for Decision

An objective of the HiLine Approved RMP is to maintain, restore, or improve riparian and wetland areas to achieve a healthy and productive ecological condition that provides benefits and values within site capability.

The proposed action is in conformance with the appropriate RMP because the proposed action meets the exception criteria for actions in GHMA as described in Appendix B.

Authorities

Title V of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of October 21, 1976 (90 Stat. 2776; 43 U.S.C. 1761) (FLPMA) provides the BLM with authority to approve certain surface management actions on public lands.

Potential impacts of the riparian area enclosure were analyzed and approved via the NEPA process in document MT-066-86-69.

Appeal Opportunities

The decision may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations contained in 43 CFR Part 4. Public notification of this decision will be considered to have occurred on February 24, 2016. Within 30 days of this decision, a notice of appeal must be filed in the office of the authorized officer at (address of the authorized officer). If a statement of reasons for the appeal is not included with the notice, it must be filed with the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of Hearings and Appeals, U.S. Department of the Interior, 801 North Quincy St., Suite 300, Arlington, VA 22203 within 30 days after the notice of appeal is filed with the authorized officer.

If you wish to file a petition for stay pursuant to 43 CFR Part 4.21(b) (or cite applicable programmatic rules for petition for stay), the petition for stay should accompany your notice of appeal and shall show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

1. The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied,
2. The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits,
3. The likelihood of irreparable harm to the appellant or resources if the stay is not granted, and
4. Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

If a petition for stay is submitted with the notice of appeal, a copy of the notice of appeal and petition for stay must be served on each party named in the decision from which the appeal is taken, and with the IBLA at the same time it is filed with the authorized officer.

A copy of the notice of appeal, any statement of reasons and all pertinent documents must be served on each adverse party named in the decision from which the appeal is taken and on the Office of the Field Solicitor, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2021 Fourth Avenue North, Suite 112, Billings, Montana 59101, not later than 15 days after filing the document with the authorized officer and/or IBLA.

/s/ Vinita Shea
Vinita Shea, Malta Field Manager

February 24, 2016
Date