



**United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**

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Round Fire Burn Area Rehabilitation

Categorical Exclusion Documentation
(DOI-BLM-CA-C070-2016-0015-CX)

A. Background

BLM Office: Bishop Field Office, 351 Pacu Lane, Suite 100, Bishop, CA 93514

Lease/Serial/Case File Number: N/A

NEPA Document Number: DOI-BLM-CA-C070-2016-0015-CX

Applicant: BLM, Bishop Field Office

Project Title: Round Fire Burn Area Habitat Rehabilitation

Project Location: Round Fire Burn Area (Legal Land Description: T5S, R30E, parts of Sections 24, 25 and 36; T5S, R31E, parts of Sections 19, 30 and 31; and T6S, R31E, part of Section 4; Mount Diablo Base & Meridian); Bishop Resource Management Plan, Owens Valley Management Area; Mono County, California (*see* Map 1).

Project Description and Rationale, Including any Stipulations:

The proposed action is to implement post-fire re-vegetation treatments to augment the natural recovery of native vegetation within the perimeter of the Round Fire. Proposed treatments would occur on BLM administered public lands in Mono County, California that were burned by the Round Fire in February 2015. The proposed treatments would work toward re-establishing the native plant community within the burned area.

The Round Fire burned intensely, consuming nearly all vegetation within its path. Prior to the fire, the burned area was dominated by mature bitterbrush stands which provided crucial habitat for migratory mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) on the Sherwin portion of the Round Valley winter range. The majority of the bitterbrush that burned was antelope bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*), which typically does not re-sprout following intense fire. Natural recovery is expected to be slow and the proposed re-vegetation treatments are intended to create islands of bitterbrush and other native vegetation that would provide cover and forage for wintering deer, as well as provide a seed source to facilitate rehabilitation of adjacent fire impacted areas.

A cultural resource records search was conducted for the vicinity surrounding the proposed project area. This effort identified one previously completed cultural resource survey in the project vicinity. None of the resources previously identified during that survey are within the footprint of proposed project. The entire project area was also examined using intensive pedestrian survey. One previously unidentified archaeological resource was located and recorded during this effort. The findings and determinations of this survey are detailed in Cultural Resources Inventory Report CA-170-16-13. The proposed project area was modified to avoid any potential impacts to the newly identified resource.

Re-vegetation Treatments

Seedling Planting:

Seedlings of bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*), big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentate spp.*), and other locally adapted species would be planted into the burn area. It is anticipated that 4,000 to 15,000 seedlings would be planted. Seedlings would be planted in 1 to 5 acre “islands” or planting areas. Seedlings would be planted at a density of approximately 200 to 600 seedlings per acre. It is anticipated that approximately 10 to 20 acres would be planted with seedlings (*see* Map 2).

Out-planting would generally occur during the fall (late September to early December) or in the spring (February to May) but may occur anytime favorable weather conditions exist. Planting would be done by placing seedlings into holes approximately 4 to 6 inches in diameter and up to 12 inches deep. Holes would be dug with hand held tools (shovel, motorized auger, etc.). Excavated soil would be placed back into the hole around the seedling root wad.

Protective mesh tubing (*e.g.* Vexar) may be placed around individual seedlings to protect them from herbivory. Protective tubing would be removed when it is no longer needed or may be allowed to disintegrate (less than 5 years). Temporary (up to 5 years) electric fencing may also be constructed around the planted “islands” in order to protect seedlings. Fences would be constructed by pounding t-posts into the ground and running electrified strands of wire between the t-posts. Electric fences would be charged by batteries and small solar panels placed next to each fence. Warning signs would be placed on electric fences for public safety.

Seedlings would be hand watered at the time of planting. It is anticipated that subsequent watering would also be needed. Subsequent watering may occur using any of the following methods or a combination of them:

1. Hand watering of individual seedlings. Water would be brought to the site each time watering is conducted. Water would be pumped from a portable tank and carried in buckets to individual plants.
2. Broadcast watering of planting areas from a truck mounted water tank. Planting areas would be watered by spraying water from a larger tank.

3. Drip watering of individual plants or planting areas. A temporary (up to 5 years) water tank would be placed at the site and plastic tubing would be run to individual plants or planting areas. The tank would be filled from a truck mounted tank as needed.

Ground Seeding:

Locally adapted native seed would be sown into or on top of the soil. Up to 55 acres within the burn area would be seeded. Seeding would be conducted using any of the following methods or a combination of them:

1. Seed would be spread by hand and allowed to work into the soil naturally.
2. Rakes (McLeod or similar hand tools) would be used to rake the soil surface. Seed would then be spread into the raked area and the removed soil would be raked back over the seed. Soil surface disturbance would generally not exceed a depth of 3 inches.
3. Seed would be dispersed into the seeding area using a UTV/ATV. Seed would be worked into the soil by dragging a harrow or similar device behind a UTV/ATV. Soil surface disturbance would generally not exceed a depth of 3 inches.

Work may occur anytime favorable seeding or planting conditions exist, except when prohibited by the stipulations outlined below.

Stipulations

1. If previously unidentified cultural resources (artifacts) are encountered during project implementation, project activities would be stopped and the Bishop Field Office archeologist would be notified. The project would be modified in consultation with the Bishop Field Office archeologist to ensure protection of those resources before project work would be allowed to continue.
2. All planting and seeding would utilize native seed and plants that are adapted to the project area.
3. Vehicular access would be restricted to existing roads. Cross-country travel with a UTV or ATV would only be allowed during planting or seeding activities.
4. To avoid the importation or spread of invasive noxious weeds or non-native invasive plant species all tools, equipment and materials required for project implementation would be washed prior to transport to the project site.
5. Project implementation timing would adhere to Bishop Resource Management Plan seasonal protection criteria designed to avoid adverse disturbance effects to wintering mule deer between 11/1 and 4/30. If treatment activities are planned during this period, Bishop Field Office staff would monitor the area one day prior to work. If deer are observed in the project area at that time, or during project implementation, activities

would be delayed or modified in consultation with the Bishop Field Office wildlife biologist to avoid adverse disturbance effects to wintering mule deer.

B. Land Use Plan Conformance

The proposed action is subject to the *Bishop Resource Management Plan* (RMP), approved March 25, 1993 (USDI BLM, 1993), as amended by the *Bishop Fire Management Plan* (FMP). The proposed action has been reviewed and found to conform to the Bishop RMP, as amended, because it is clearly consistent with the terms and conditions of the applicable land use plan as defined at 43 CFR 1601.0-5(b and c) and as required by 43 CFR 1610.5-3(a).

While the proposed action is not specifically provided for in the RMP, it is clearly consistent with the RMP which provides that:

“Vegetation will be a key element in the plan and management will be directed toward the achievement of desired plant community goals” (Area Manager’s Guidelines, 4, pg. 9).

The proposed action would occur in the Owens Valley Management Area and also conforms to, and is consistent with, the following management area specific land use plan guidance:

“Protect crucial mule deer and tule elk habitats with the following measures:” (Owens Valley Management Area, Decisions, pg. 45):

“- Seasonal Protection of the Round Valley, Goodale and Monache mule deer winter range from 11/1 to 4/30.”

“- Manage deer winter ranges to provide at least 70% of the bitterbrush in mature or younger age classes, and to provide enough annual growth to support 5,400 deer on the Round Valley winter range, 4,000 deer on the Goodale winter range, and 1,000 deer on the Monache winter range.”

“Enhance wildlife and watershed conditions with the following Desired Plant Community (DPC) Prescriptions:” (Owens Valley Management Area, Decisions, pp. 45 - 46):

“- Meet DPC goals on 4,071 acres (25%) of sagebrush-bitterbrush to provide cover and forage for mule deer and tule elk.”

C. Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

This action is categorically 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 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 Review of Extraordinary Circumstances).

Based on the information provided in this categorical exclusion documentation, other information incorporated by reference, and recommendations from staff; I find that there is no potential for significant impacts associated with this proposed action and that no further analysis pursuant to the NEPA is required.

D. Signature

/s/ Steven Nelson

04/18/2016

Steven Nelson
Bishop Field Manager

Date

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 this Categorical Exclusion Documentation and the attached Review of Extraordinary Circumstances. This Decision Record will include a description of administrative remedies that may be available to those who believe they will be adversely affected by a decision to implement this proposed action.