

## **Project Name:** Pump Gulch – State Bridge Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat Restoration

**Proposed Action.** Encroaching pinyon and juniper trees would be removed from the 530-acre Pump Gulch mechanical unit, the 187-acre Pump Gulch lop and scatter unit, the eight and 17-acre Pump Gulch mechanical units, and the 2,005-acre State Bridge lop and scatter unit. Sagebrush, other shrubs, grasses, and forbs would be relatively undisturbed, protecting soils from erosion and maintaining or improving the herbaceous understory. Conditions would be improved in greater sage-grouse priority habitat management areas (PHMA) and general habitat management areas (GHMA) as well as in mule deer and elk summer, winter, and severe winter ranges. Reducing the density of conifers would disrupt fuels continuity and decrease the intensity of future wildfires, thereby reducing potential negative impacts of wildfire to PHMA and GHMA.

The project would build on previously implemented habitat restoration work and make significant progress toward meeting the landscape level goal of connecting occupied greater sage-grouse habitats in the Windy Point and Sunnyside areas. Previous work includes removing pinyon and juniper trees along County Road 43, in the South Cliffs area, in the Deer Pen and Winter Ridge areas, and in the State Bridge area.

**Mechanical Units.** Encroaching pinyon and juniper trees would be mechanically removed by contractor-furnished hydro-ax or similar large equipment (e.g, Fecon Bull Hog) where feasible in the Pump Gulch mechanical units. Pinyon and juniper trees inaccessible to a hydro-ax or other large equipment due to large rocks, steep terrain, delicate soils, or other limitations would be hand-cut by contractor and/or interagency fire crews except where trees need to be retained to protect soils. Trees in drainages that are needed for soil protection would be flagged prior to project implementation. Felled trees would be lopped and branches scattered below the residual sagebrush height. Gambel oak, sagebrush, and other brushy vegetation would not be removed. The habitat restoration work would be maintained by hand-cutting conifers that sprout after the initial treatment.

**Lop and Scatter Units.** Encroaching pinyon and juniper trees with a diameter at breast height (dbh) of six inches or less would be hand-cut by contractor and/or interagency fire crews in the Pump Gulch lop and scatter unit and State Bridge treatment unit. These trees are generally less than 100 years old and therefore unlikely to be culturally modified. Felled trees would be lopped and branches scattered. Slash would be cut below the residual sagebrush height. Trees are smaller and less dense in these units than in the Pump Gulch mechanical units, so heavy mulching equipment would not be necessary. Because conifer density in these units is low and trees are relatively small, slash created by this work would not be contiguous across the unit and would not increase wildland fire risk. Areas within the State Bridge unit would be identified and prioritized for habitat restoration, but the entire unit would not be treated. If trees larger than 6 inches dbh are identified for removal, cultural surveys would be completed in these site specific areas. The habitat restoration work would be maintained by hand-cutting conifers that sprout after the initial treatment.

## **Project Design Features.**

- The contractor will drive the hydro-ax or other heavy equipment off-route within areas identified for treatment, removing all parts of the tree to a stubble height of 6" or less except where adjacent rocks would damage equipment.
- No new motorized vehicle routes are authorized to be constructed as a result of the proposed action.
- Hand crews will keep vehicles on existing routes.
- If motorized vehicle use or equipment create worn spots in vegetation or soils, the locations will be rehabilitated (e.g., covered with woody material or seeded).
- Wheeled motorized equipment will not be operated when conditions are muddy or soil moisture is high enough for the vehicles to leave ruts over 4.0 inches deep.
- Woody vegetation will be reduced to a mulch material with a minimum of 80% of the woody material less than 1" in diameter and 6" long. The mulch will be scattered evenly across the soil surface and not remain in piles greater than 8" deep.
- Hand crews will cut slash below the residual sagebrush height.
- The contractor will be responsible for power-washing or comparable cleaning of all equipment and vehicles used on the project prior to entering the project area to ensure that noxious weed seeds are removed. BLM will require a pre-work inspection to ensure compliance.
- The contractor will post signs (1/8-1/4 mile either side of work area) on public access roads and trails warning visitors of dangerous heavy equipment use in the area. These signs will be checked daily to ensure they are in place. The signage will be coordinated with and pre-approved by the BLM project inspector.
- The project inspector will be informed of any objects or sites of cultural, paleontological, or scientific value such as historic or prehistoric resources, graves or grave markers, human remains, ruins, cabins, rock art, fossils, or artifacts. The objects shall not be damaged, destroyed, removed, moved, or disturbed. Any person who knowingly violates this may be subject to fines and/or imprisonment (Public Law 16-95; 16 U.S.C. 470).
- The Public Land Survey System (PLSS) condition in this area is categorized as low risk according to the latest Geographic Coordinate Data Base listing. As directed in 43 CFR 3809.420(b)(9) and CRS 18-4-508, evidence of the PLSS and related Federal interest boundaries will be located and marked for protection prior to any ground-disturbing activity. The BLM Cadastral Surveyor in coordination with the project manager has conducted research to identify local survey records that apply to the project area and has identified local survey evidence to be located and marked for protection. Boundaries near private lands have also been determined to avoid treatment on private lands.

**No Action Alternative.** Encroaching pinyon and juniper trees would not be removed from the project area. No change from current management would occur.

**Alternatives Considered but Not Analyzed in Detail.** A hand-cutting alternative that did not include the use of heavy equipment (e.g., hydro-ax, Fecon Bull Hog) was considered. It was determined that hand-cutting trees in the Pump Gulch mechanical units would be extremely difficult due to the size and density of many of the encroaching pinyon and juniper trees, would result in a much longer duration of disturbance from equipment and humans (months rather than weeks) than the Proposed Action, and would produce large quantities of limbs and trunks from trees greater than six inches dbh that could take several years to break down. Conversely, the

Proposed Action would result in work being completed in a much shorter amount of time, and the mulch produced by heavy equipment would break down more quickly and be less visible (i.e., scattered and not remaining in piles greater than eight inches deep) than large tree limbs and trunks that could be visible above the sagebrush. Therefore the hand-cutting alternative was not analyzed in detail.

# Pump Gulch Sage Grouse Restoration Project Area

Legend	
<b>Treatment Type</b>	
	Lop and Scatter
	Mechanical
	Township & Range
	Full-Size Vehicle
	FootHorse Only
	Administrative Route
	Bureau of Land Management
	Private
	State

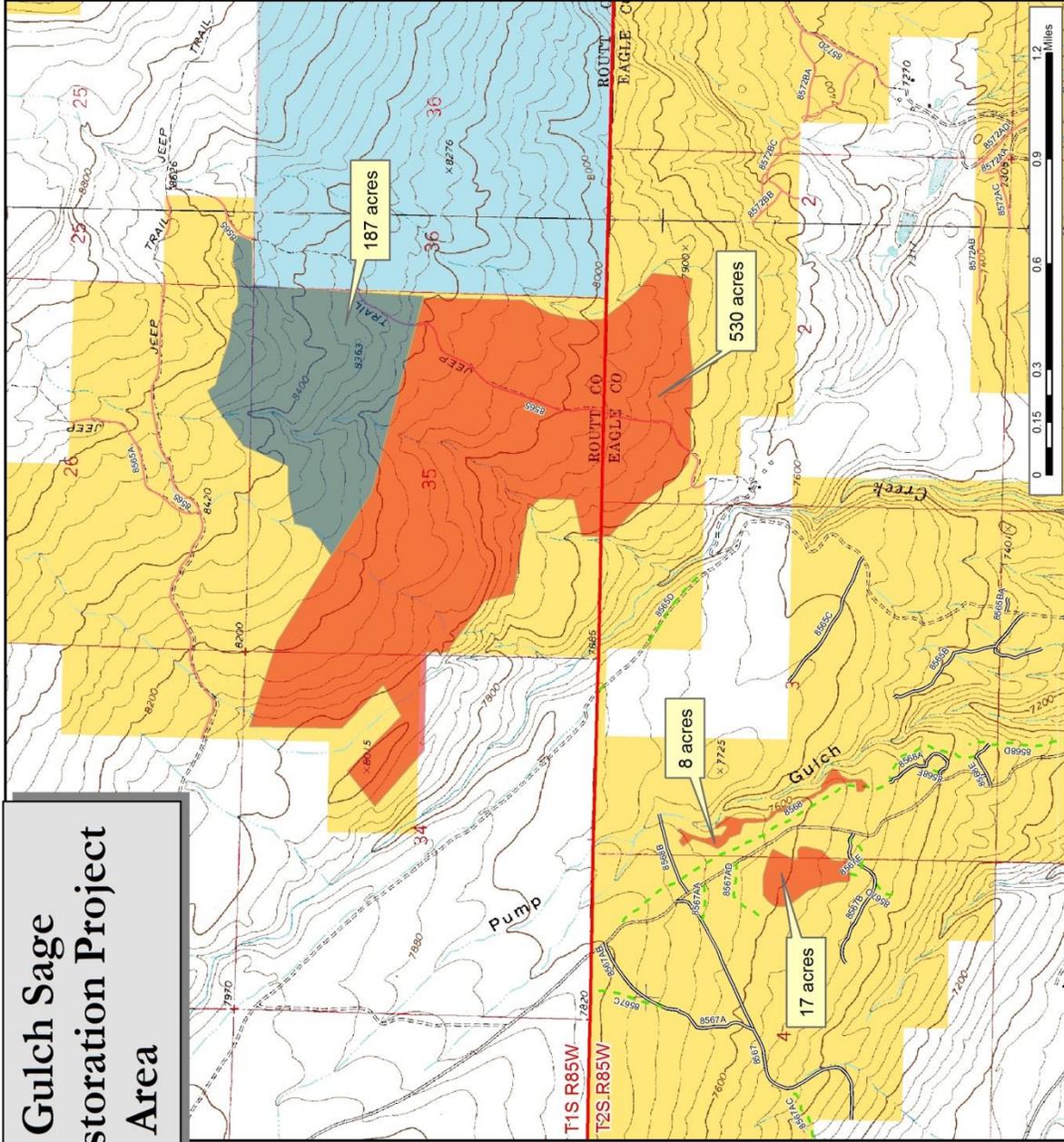
Vicinity Map



Date: 4/22/2016  
 Bureau of Land Management - UCRIFMU  
 2300 River Frontage Road, Silt, CO 81652

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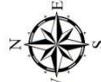
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# State Bridge Sage Grouse Restoration Project Area

- Legend**
- Treatment Unit - 2,005 acres
  - Township & Range
  - Full-Sized Vehicle
  - Mechanized
  - Foot-Horse Only
  - Bureau of Land Management
  - Private

Vicinity Map



Date: 4/28/2016  
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