

Determination of NEPA Adequacy (DNA)

U.S. Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management

Royal Gorge Field Office

3028 E. Main

Cañon City, CO 81212

OFFICE:

PROJECT NUMBER: DOI-BLM-COF020-2016-0041DN

CASEFILE: (if applicable)

PROPOSED ACTION TITLE/TYPE: Midland Hills Healthy Lands Initiative Vegetation Treatments and Route Rehabilitation

LOCATION/LEGAL DESCRIPTION:

6th Principal Meridian, Colorado

T. 13 S., R. 78 W.,

secs. 19, 30, and 33.

T. 14 S., R. 78 W.,

secs. 11, 14, and 15.

T. 13 S., R. 79 W.,

secs. 12, 13, 24, and 25.

APPLICANT (if any):

A. Description of the Proposed Action and any applicable mitigation measures

The proposed projects are a part of a multi-disciplinary and collaborative effort involving Royal Gorge Field Office forestry, recreation, range, wildlife, and fuels staff as part of the Healthy Lands Initiative (HLI). This initiative encourages BLM managers to set priorities to manage resources across landscapes. The landscape-level approach allows for project work to occur in areas that are being affected by pressures such as community expansion, wildfire potential, expanding recreation uses, and the need for invasive weed treatment, wildlife habitat enhancement and improvement and the overall improvement of watershed health. The proposed work in the Midland Hills area falls within the Arkansas River Main Stem Project Area within Arkansas Headwaters HLI Focal Area. This will include vegetation treatments and route and dispersed recreation site rehabilitation. See Overview Maps: [Vegetation Treatments](#) and [Recreation Site and Route Rehab](#). The projects proposed within this focal area are being implemented in an effort to enhance and retain ecosystem components. Some major objectives that have been identified for this HLI focal area include the following:

- Promote herbaceous plant diversity and reduce soil erosion.

- Enhance forest health and diversity.
- Reduce sediment production to the river.
- Reduce wildlife conflicts on adjacent private lands.
- Reduce or alter fuel arrangement in the area to help reduce the risk catastrophic wildfires.
- Promote forage production on public lands for both wildlife and permitted livestock.

Vegetation Treatments

The Midland Hills area has been identified as an area in need of vegetation treatments for numerous reasons including forest and range health improvement, fuels management, and wildlife habitat enhancement.

Public land health standards were assessed in these areas in 2007 by the RGFO interdisciplinary team. At the time of the assessment, the areas identified in the proposed treatment areas were identified as at risk for not meeting standards due to the increasing canopy coverage and density of the piñon-juniper woodlands. The area exhibits a lack in species diversity, excessive bare ground, and soil erosion. The assessment also identified a need to improve wildlife habitat and reduce the risk of wildfire by reducing the density of piñon-juniper in the area.

In 2009, a community wildfire protection plan (CWPP) was completed for the Mount Harvard Estates (MHE) area as an addendum to the Chaffee County CWPP. This subdivision is bordered by BLM lands on the north and the south. The Mount Harvard Addition was also included in the Chaffee County CWPP. Objectives developed in this plan included requesting the BLM to improve wildfire mitigation for MHE by treating the adjacent BLM land. Overall land assessments were completed for the area during the development of the CWPPs. This assessment considered fuels hazard, ignition risk, and values at risk to determine overall wildfire risk rating. Lands around MHE had a rating of high.

Within the proposed treatment areas, a variety of treatment prescriptions and methods will be utilized to achieve desired conditions. While all of the vegetation treatments provide multiple benefits, each treatment is designed for a primary purpose (e.g. Fuels management, wildlife habitat enhancement, forest health, or range land health). Because the primary purpose for the projects differ, the final result of the treatments may have a different look, and in many cases can produce different results in terms of understory vegetation response, residual fuel loadings, and arrangement and spacing of reserve trees. A combination of methods including but not limited to hand thinning, mastication, pile burning, and chemical treatment (of invasive species or undesirable species) can be utilized within the treatment areas. These treatments will improve mule deer winter range habitat, improve forest health, provide the public with fuelwood opportunities, treat noxious and invasive plants, and treat fuels within the wildland urban interface.

Treatment Units 1-5 and 8 are areas that have been identified as areas that will be treated primarily for wildlife habitat improvement. (See Maps: [Units 1-4](#), [Unit 5](#), and [Unit 8](#)). The high

canopy cover and multistoried stand structure found in late stages of succession certainly improves big game thermal and security cover (Gruell 1980). However, the dense canopies also shade out early seral shrubs and grasses that usually have high forage value for many ungulates. Production of palatable shrub forage in old, fire excluded stands may be less than 1 percent of that found in young post-fire communities. The lack of disturbance reduces winter range and forage quantity and quality, eventually reducing deer populations (Habeck 1985). Wildlife management objectives incorporated into projects are to create a mosaic of seral stages that will support healthy big game population within wildlife seasonal ranges. An important characteristic of mule deer to consider is they tend to be dispersed across the landscape, expressing less gregarious behavior, and have high site fidelity to seasonal ranges. Therefore, for deer, the goal is to create a high edge to open ratio by treating numerous small patch sizes (~3-12 acres) over large areas, and to maintain security cover near roads and anthropogenic development. The creation of openings will improve habitat, forage for wildlife and livestock, and will improve forest health.

Treatment Units 6, 7N and 7S are project areas that are adjacent to subdivisions with houses and other critical infrastructure. See map: [Units 6, 7N and 7S](#). Treatments in these units are designed to reduce the risk of crown fire. Overall reduction of the number of stems per acre, the creation of breaks in the continuous canopy, the removal of ladder fuels, and increasing the live crown base height will be incorporated into the treatment prescription. Secondary benefits of this treatment will include improved forest health, and increased production of grasses, forb, and shrubs in the understory, and improved habitat and forage for wildlife.

The following measures will be applied in all treatment areas for all treatment units:

1. Locate, flag, and protect any property survey monuments including brass cap monuments, bearing trees, fences, any monuments associated with mining claims in the area, or other infrastructure that may exist in the project area.
2. All machinery will be washed prior to being brought on site. The disturbed areas will be inspected and treated as needed for noxious weeds for two growing seasons after the project is completed.
3. Large machinery for mechanical treatment will stay more than 50 feet from riparian and wetland areas and not work off road when ground conditions are saturated. When possible, work by large machinery will be conducted when the ground is frozen. When treatments occur within SMZs, slash will be kept out of the SMZ and directional falling of trees away from the SMZ will be required.
4. Fueling of machinery will be conducted at designated fueling sites. No more fuel than is necessary for daily operations will be stored on site. If fuel volumes in excess of 25 gallons are released to the environment in a spill, the BLM project administrator will be notified and appropriate cleanup measures taken.
5. If gasoline powered equipment is used for construction, an adequate spill kit and shovels would be onsite during project implementation. The project proponent will be responsible for adhering to all applicable local, State and Federal regulations in the

- event of a spill, which includes following the proper notification procedures in BLM's Spill Contingency Plan.
6. Determine public and private boundaries of the treatment areas prior to project implementation.
 7. Minimize off-road travel while performing and supervising the operations. New vehicular travel routes will be rehabilitated and closed, especially where they connect to the existing roads and trails. Existing roads and trails will be used as much as possible by agency and contractor personnel to eliminate development of new routes and trails.
 8. Projects will be designed to blend with topographic forms and existing vegetation patterns to screen the project as much as possible.
 9. Slash piles will not exceed 20 feet in diameter by 15 feet in height, and will be located where they can be burned effectively in suitable weather conditions while not threatening the crown of reserve vegetation.
 10. Manipulation of green vegetation will be avoided from May 15th thru July 15th to avoid the taking of migratory birds.
 11. In ponderosa pine and mixed conifer habitats, surveys will be completed to detect raptor nests and roosts and migratory bird cavity nest sites. Raptor nests and roosts will be protected from harvest and damage during project implementation. Trees that contain cavity nests will be retained.
 12. The RGFO will reserve the right to impose additional timing restrictions based on concerns related to bark beetle infestations. When possible, work in piñon/juniper forest type will take place between September 1st and April 1st to avoid the Ips bark beetle flight period, avoiding increased beetle activity within and adjacent to treatment areas.
 13. Mechanical treatments will not take place on slopes greater than 35%.
 14. Smoke from prescribed fire use will be monitored. All burn plans will contain a monitoring plan. Monitoring may consist of visually tracking smoke plumes by persons on the ground or in aircraft and by installing PM10/2.5 particulate monitors at sensitive receptors.
 15. Surveys will be conducted to locate occurrences of Royal Gorge stickleaf, Brandegees wild buckwheat, dwarf milkweed, and golden blazing star if suitable habitat exists. If possible, areas where these plants are located will be avoided.
 16. Local research will be conducted to locate private survey records that apply to the project area.

17. Surveys for goshawk and Townsend's big-eared bat will be completed before project implementation if suitable habitat exists.
18. Wildlife trees (snags, roosts, etc.) will be protected from damage and retained for wildlife use.
19. Contract stipulations addressing fences and gates will be addressed for range allotment management purposes.
20. If needed, consultation with Colorado Parks and Wildlife will occur for recently treated areas regarding the allocation of additional forage and/or application of temporary grazing restrictions.
21. Treatment specifications for units 1-5 will require a 100 foot buffer off roads to serve as a visual screen for wildlife and to minimize off road use.

Recreation Related Work:

Rehab existing single track routes, north of CR 304 at the Midland Trail head (See Map: [Route Rehab North of CR 304](#)) and the route between CR304 and 6032A (Broken Boyfriend) (See map: [Broken Boyfriend](#)). Both routes have not been identified as a designated system road in the Fourmile travel management plan. The existing route sections are in areas where vehicles have caused a loss of vegetation and will be rehabilitated as needed. Work will include adding rock to deep cuts, raking top soil, and covering with mulch or duff and seed. To facilitate seeding, physical structures or signs will be installed to prevent further use and to minimize erosional effects of water. This work will be accomplished with the use of hand tools or mechanized equipment where appropriate.

In addition, the Proposed Action would install posts or rocks to contain dispersed camping sites along route 376 as shown on [map](#). Posts or rock would be placed in a manner to contain vehicles and prevent further erosion issues associated with the loss of vegetation.

B. Land Use Plan (LUP) Conformance

LUP Name: Royal Gorge Resource Management Plan	Date Approved 5/13/1996
Other Document	Date Approved
Other Document	Date Approved

The proposed action is in conformance with the applicable LUP because it is specifically provided for in the following LUP decisions:

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

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

List by name and date all applicable NEPA documents that cover the proposed action.

Vegetation Manipulation Management: Chaffee and Lake County Planning EA

DOI-BLM-CO-200-2013-0050 EA

Fourmile Travel Management Plan: CO-200-2002-0034 EA, 03/18/2002

List by name and date other documentation relevant to the proposed action (e.g., biological assessment, biological opinion, watershed assessment, allotment evaluation, and monitoring report).

Public Land Health Standards

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 EA covered the impacts of vegetation treatments using the above methods and locations. A site specific onsite review was completed for the proposal and the proposal is within the parameters of those analyzed in the approved EA.

The Proposed Action related to route rehabilitation is similar to the Fourmile TMP decision record and is essentially in the same analysis area of the existing NEPA documents listed above. The Proposed Action facilitates the rehabilitation of routes and the containment of the footprint of dispersed camping to reduce erosion and other impacts. The proposed changes improve sustainability and encourage better water drainage.

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. The range of alternatives analyzed in the Vegetation Manipulation Management: Chaffee and Lake County Planning EA are appropriate with respect to the new proposed action. This EA included the proposed action, the no action alternative.

Under the proposed action treatment methods include the use of mechanical and hand tools, and prescribed fire (pile burning, broadcast burning, etc.). Any single project may not exceed 1000 treated acres per year, and cumulatively, projects may not exceed 2500 treated acres per year within the planning area. However, unplanned vegetation disturbance (e.g. wild-/natural fire, blow downs) will not be incorporated into the 2500 acres ceiling. In addition, areas may be opened for Special Forest Product (SFP) harvesting. Local demand for SFP includes transplants, post and poles, Christmas trees, and fuel wood. Removing the vegetative materials to be used as biomass would be beneficial for the treatment areas, reduce prescribed burning costs, and

provide the community with a renewable energy source. The harvesting of SFP requires a permit and special mitigations to protect roads and land resources.

If needed, existing roads used to remove forest products will be maintained and improved. No new permanent roads will be created by specific projects. All temporary roads created for access and forest product removal will be closed upon completion of the treatment. Road closures will be done with natural surrounding materials such as large rocks or logs, tank traps, and buck and rail fences where appropriate. Roads will then be posted as closed to vehicle access. All road closures will be coordinated with current and future travel management plans. No private roads will be used for removing forest products unless approved by the owner. Treatments and hauling of forest products will be done when the ground is either frozen or dry to prevent soil and road damage. Operators will be required to stop work during the wet periods.

Under the no action alternative, forest health, fuels reduction, or wildlife habitat treatments will not occur. Forest health will continue to decline with trees dying due to competition with neighboring trees for limited soil moisture. The bark beetle risk in all coniferous forest types is expected to increase as tree densities increase, forests age, and with the occurrence of drought. Aspen will continue to be replaced by conifers throughout the area, a phenomenon seen throughout Colorado. Fire adapted species such as ponderosa pine and aspen will continue to be replaced by shade tolerant and fire intolerant species. The dead and/or dying trees will add to fuel loads, increasing the potential for a catastrophic wildfire threatening life, private property, and infrastructure. The no action alternative fails to consider the need to protect adjacent land owners, protect the area from potential beetle infestations, promote the growth of declining aspen stands, improve habitat for wildlife species and work towards a healthier forest.

Three alternatives were analyzed in the Fourmile Travel Management Plan #CO-200-2002-0034EA. Alternative A was the No Action alternative and included all 253 miles of routes including user created routes, on the ground as of 2002. Alternative C reduced motorized access. Alternative B was the Proposed Action that included all forms recreational opportunities and travel types (motorized and non-motorized). The final decision was to implement the Proposed Action alternative authorizing a blend of motorized and non-motorized routes. The new Proposed Action will improve sustainability of the routes identified in the existing NEPA document.

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 new information and new circumstances would not substantially change the analysis of the new proposed action?

The information remains valid and germane to the Proposed Action. There is no new information related to the proposed action.

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?

The proposal is within the parameters of the impacts identified in the EA, and the cumulative impacts analysis remains unchanged.

The proposal is within the parameters of the impacts identified in the EA. The current action improves trails analyzed in the Fourmile Travel Management plan. The cumulative impacts discussion remains unchanged from the NEPA document. The action is expected to have a positive effect on cumulative impacts as it seeks to rehabilitate and better manage existing routes.

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

Scoping was conducted by issuing a press release and by posting this project on the Royal Gorge Field Office website to initially identify issues. In addition, the Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) and the United States Forest Service (USFS) were consulted. No comments or issues were received. Continued communication has been occurring with the local HOA who has expressed full support of fuels treatments around the subdivision. During pile burning operations, fire managers will continue working with local subdivision, USFS, Chaffee County fire officials, and local fire departments prior to and during the implementation pile burning activities.

The public involvement and review remains adequate for this action. The public involvement and interagency review for the Travel Management Plan included public notices, public meetings, stakeholder interviews, and coverage by local and regional news media outlets. A citizen’s group was formed and submitted a Citizens Proposal. Interagency review was accomplished at the local, state and regional level with other Federal agencies, state agencies, and counties and municipalities. The Fourmile TMP analysis and decision was accomplished mainly between the Forest Service, Salida Ranger District and the BLM, Royal Gorge Field Office and their associated public lands.

E. Persons/Agencies /BLM Staff Consulted

INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM REVIEW			
NAME	TITLE	AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY	Initials/date
Matt Rustand	Wildlife Biologist	Terrestrial Wildlife, T&E, Migratory Birds	MR, 7/1/2016
Jeff Williams	Range Management Spec.	Range, Vegetation, Farmland	JW, 7/6/16
Chris Cloninger	Range Management Spec.	Range, Vegetation, Farmland	N/A
John Lamman	Range Management Spec.	Weeds	JL, 07/07/2016
Dave Gilbert	Fisheries Biologist	Aquatic Wildlife, Riparian/Wetlands	DG 5/16/16
Stephanie Carter	Geologist	Minerals, Paleontology, Waste Hazardous or Solid	---

Melissa Smeins	Geologist	Minerals, Paleontology, Waste Hazardous or Solid	MJS, 7/01/2016
John Smeins	Hydrologist	Hydrology, Water Quality/Rights, Soils	JS, 6/10/16
Ty Webb	Fire Management Officer	Air Quality	TW, 7/5/16
Sean Hines	Cadastral Surveyor	Cadastral Survey	SJH, 06/24/2016
Linda Skinner	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Recreation, Wilderness, LWCs, Visual, ACEC, W&S Rivers	LS, 6/13/16
John Nahomenuk	River Manager	Recreation, Wilderness, LWCs, Visual, ACEC, W&S Rivers	-----
Jeremiah Moore	Forester	Forestry	JM, 6/14/16
Monica Weimer	Archaeologist	Cultural, Native American	-----
Michael Troyer	Archaeologist	Cultural, Native American	MDT 7/6/2016
Jeff Brown	Realty Specialist	Realty	JGB 6/14/2016
Steve Cunningham	Law Enforcement Ranger	Law Enforcement	SC 6/10/16
Glenda Torres	Natural Resource Specialist Fuels	Fuels	GT 6/9/16
Tyler Webb	Fire Management Officer	Fire	TW, 7/5/16

Other Agency Represented:

REMARKS:

Cultural Resources: Although cultural resources were found near the area of potential effect [see reports CR-RG-83-44 N, CR-RG-90-04 P, CR-RG-90-20 P, CR-RG-02-22 P, and CR-RG-16-60 P], and sites determined to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) were found, none will be adversely impacted by the proposed action. Specifically, 5CF.576 and 5CF.578 were listed as ‘needs data’ when originally recorded in 1990 due to the possibility of intact subsurface cultural components. The most recent inventory (CR-RG-16-60 P) determined that it is very unlikely that subsurface components exist and, if so, would be limited to a small portion of the site that will falls outside the proposed project boundary. Moreover, the remnant elements of the Midland Railroad (5CF.354 and associated point numbers) are considered eligible, but will not be impacted by the proposed action. Therefore, the proposed project will have no impact on any historic properties (those eligible for the NRHP).

Native American Religious Concerns: No possible traditional cultural properties were located during the cultural resources inventory (see above). There is no other known evidence that suggests the project area holds special significance for Native Americans.

Threatened and Endangered Species: There are no occurrence records of threatened, endangered, or sensitive (special status) species with the bounds of the project area. A field survey of the proposed disturbance areas was conducted in June of 2016 for special status species and nesting raptors. Nesting raptors were surveyed using the Kennedy-Stahlecker-Rinker method. No indications of special status species or nesting raptors were observed; therefore, the Proposed Action will not result in impacts to special status species.

Migratory Birds: To be in compliance with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) and the Memorandum of Understanding between BLM and USFWS required by Executive Order 13186, BLM must avoid actions, where possible, that result in a “take” of migratory birds. Pursuant to BLM Instruction Memorandum 2008-050, to reduce impacts to Birds of Conservation Concern (BCC), no habitat disturbance (removal of vegetation such as timber, brush, or grass) is allowed during the periods of May 15 - July 15, the breeding and brood rearing season for most Colorado migratory birds. The provision will not apply to completion activities in disturbed areas that were initiated prior to May 15 and continue into the 60-day period.

An exception to this timing limitation will be granted if nesting surveys conducted no more than one week prior to vegetation-disturbing activities indicate no nesting within 30 meters (100 feet) of the area to be disturbed. Surveys shall be conducted by a qualified breeding bird surveyor between sunrise and 10:00 a.m. under favorable conditions.

Abandoned Mine Lands: The project area encompasses an historic mining district where the BLM has already installed physical safety closures on several abandoned mine features in the area. However, not all features are closed; often we find more abandoned mine features that may have dangerous openings as we spend more time in an area or as we clear vegetation. Please use caution in the area and report any open mine features.

MITIGATION:

CONCLUSION

DOI-BLM-CO-200-2016-0061 DN

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

SIGNATURE OF PROJECT LEAD: /s/ Glenda Torres, Natural Resource Specialist-Fuels

SIGNATURE OF NEPA COORDINATOR: /s/ Martin Weimer

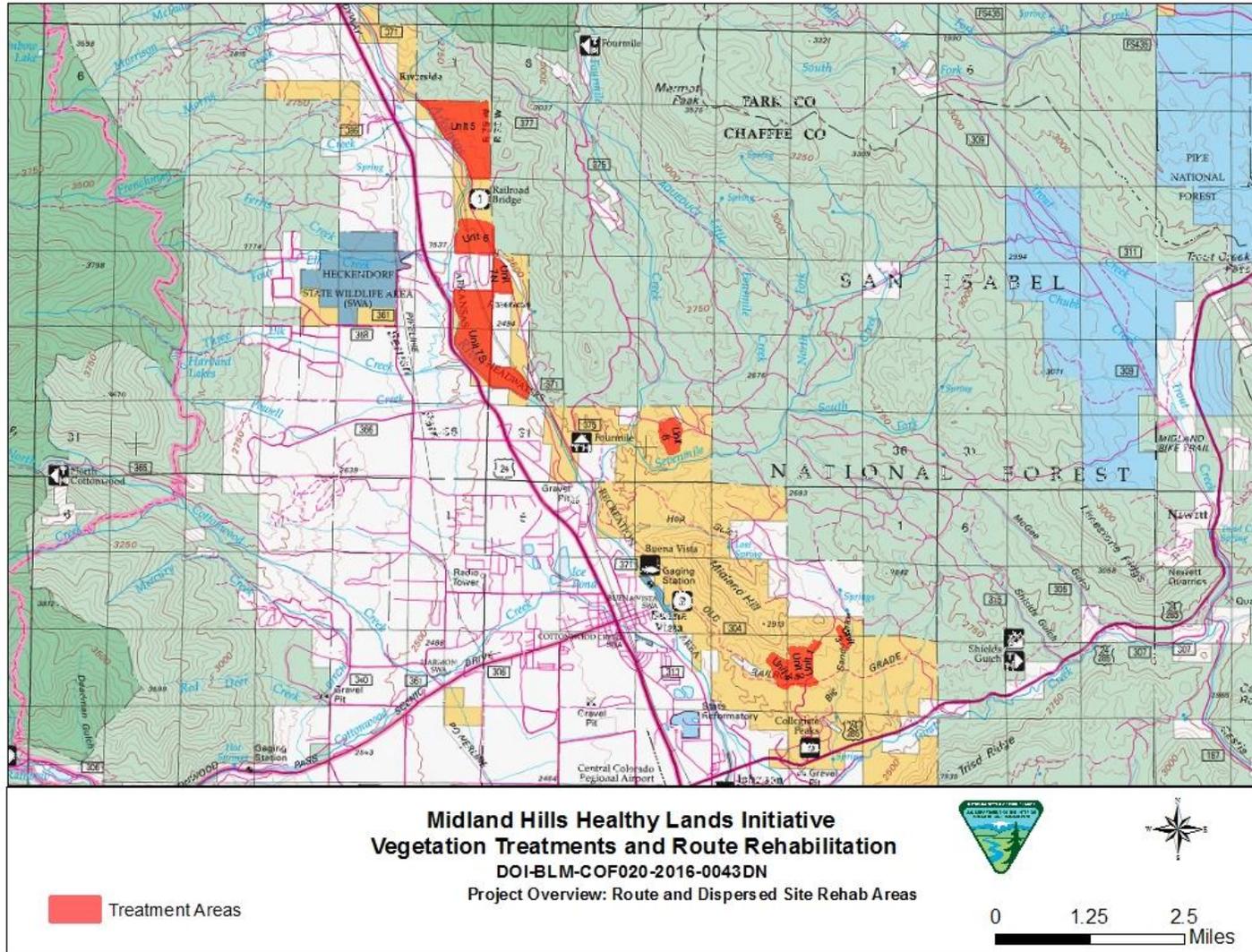
SIGNATURE OF NEPA SUPERVISOR: /s/ Tyler S. Webb, Fire Management Officer

SIGNATURE OF THE RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL: /s/ Keith E. Berger
Keith E. Berger, Field Manager

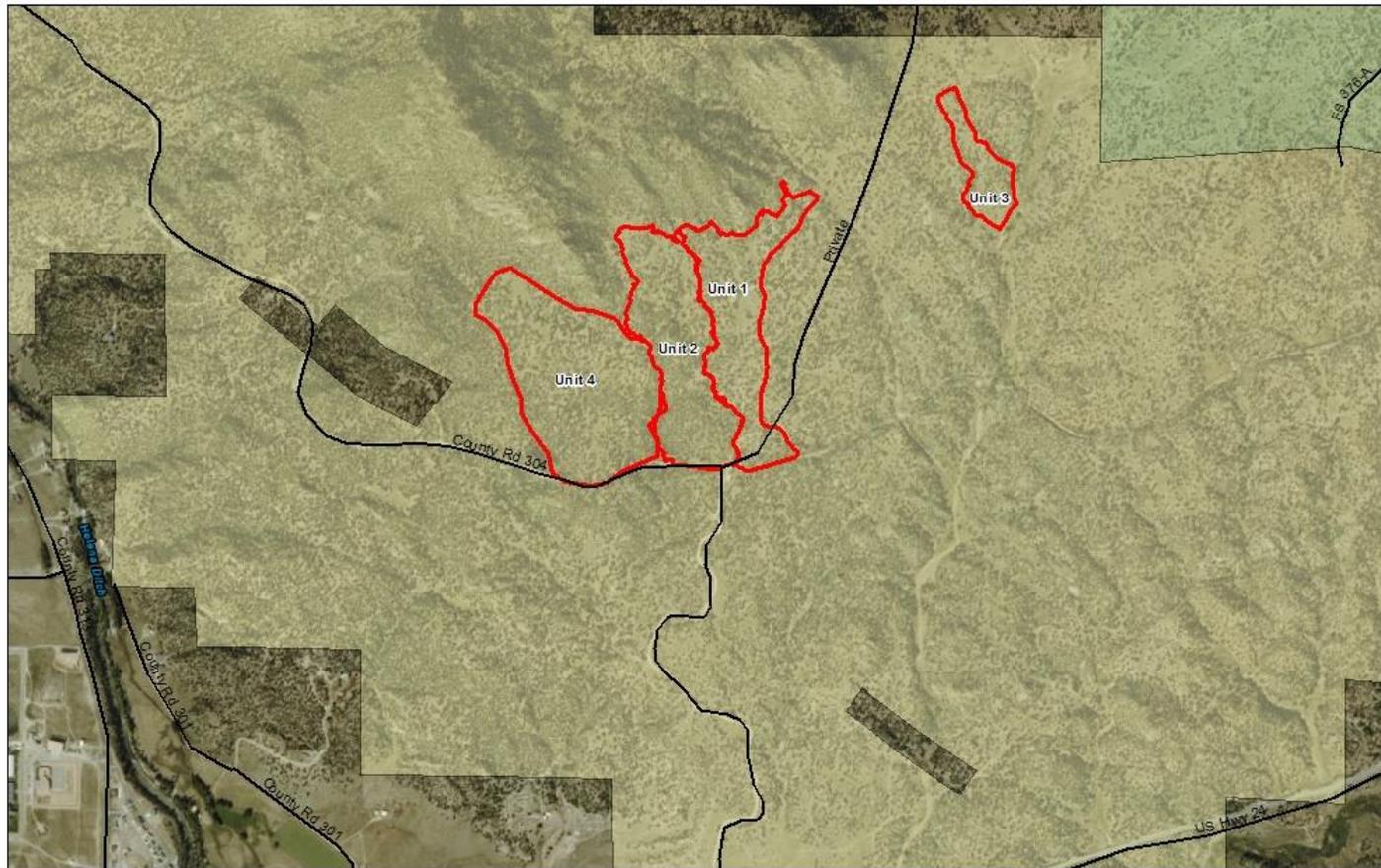
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Note: The signed Conclusion on this Worksheet is part of an interim step in the BLM's internal decision process and does not constitute an appealable decision. However, the lease, permit, or other authorization based on this DNA is subject to protest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

HLI Overview Map: Vegetation Treatment Areas:



HLI Proposed Vegetation Treatments: Units 1-4



Midland Hills Healthy Lands Initiative Vegetation Treatments and Route Rehabilitation

DOI-BLM-COF020-2016-0043DN

Units 1, 2, 3 & 4

- Roads
- Treatment Areas
- BLM
- USFS
- Private
- State



HLI Proposed Vegetation Treatments: Units 5

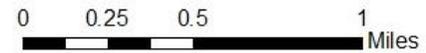


Midland Hills Healthy Lands Initiative Vegetation Treatments and Route Rehabilitation

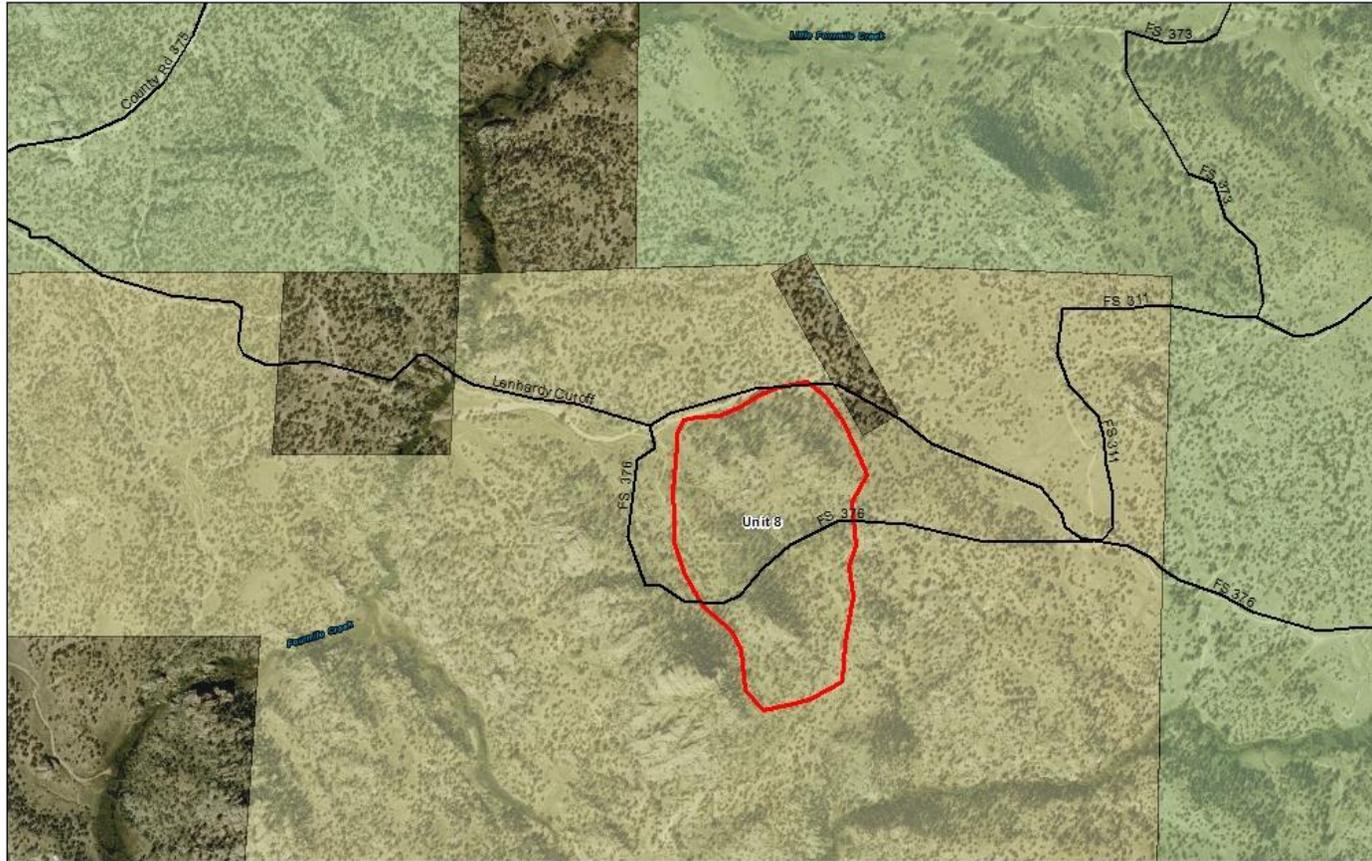
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Unit 5

-  Roads
-  Treatment Areas
-  BLM
-  USFS
-  Private
-  State



HLI Proposed Vegetation Treatments: Unit 8



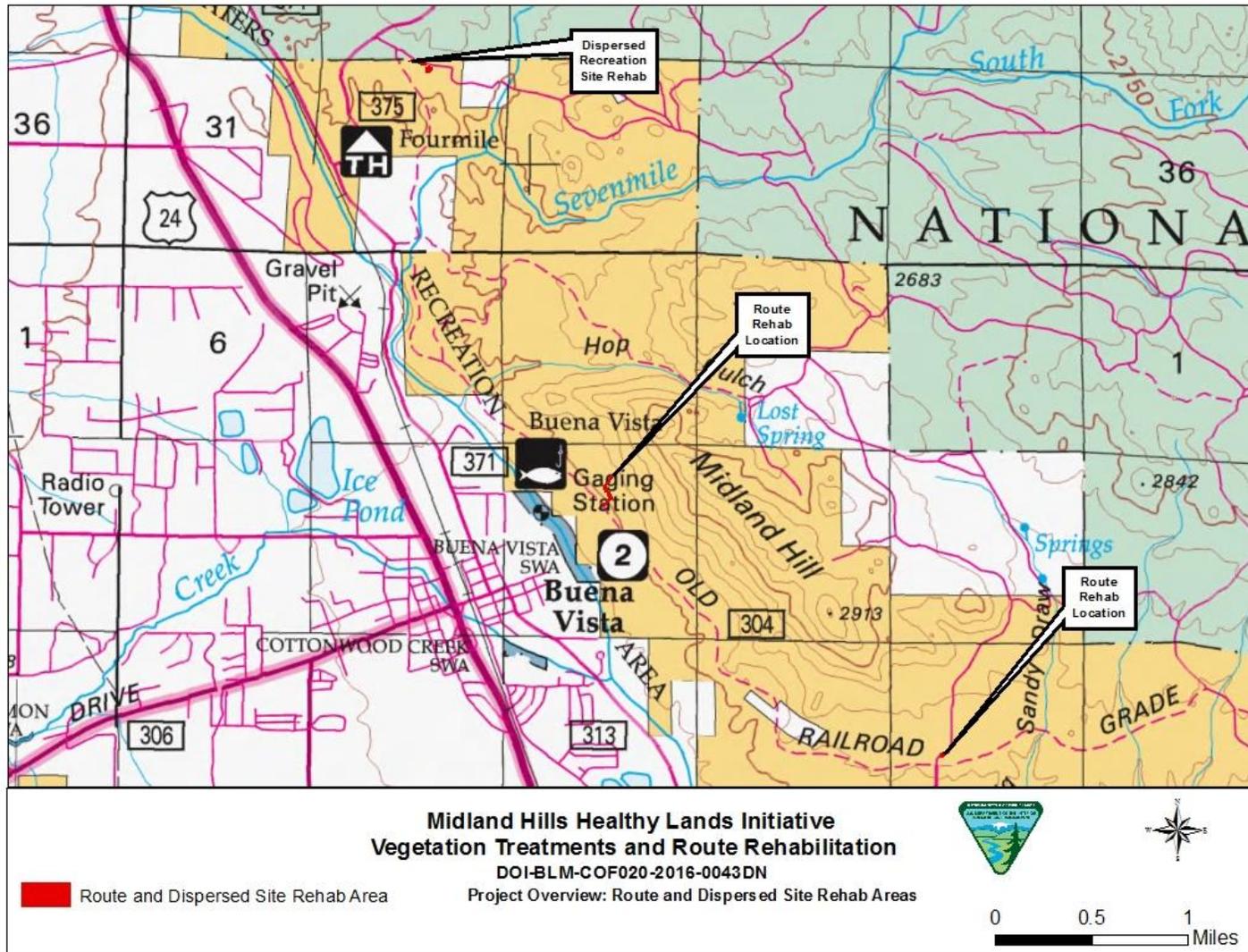



Midland Hills Healthy Lands Initiative
Vegetation Treatments and Route Rehabilitation
 DOI-BLM-COF020-2016-0043DN
Unit 8

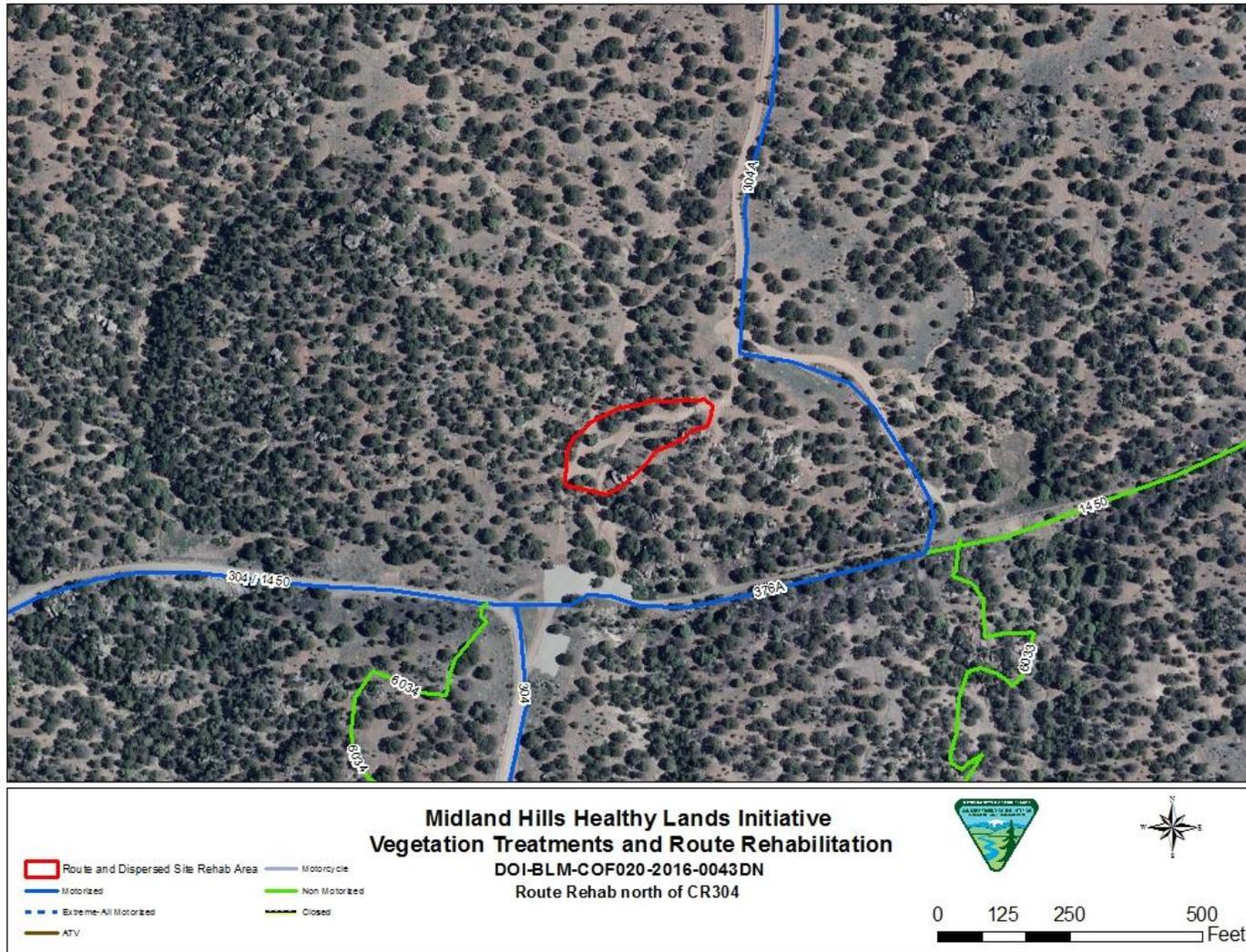
— Roads	■ USFS
■ Treatment Areas	■ Private
■ BLM	■ State



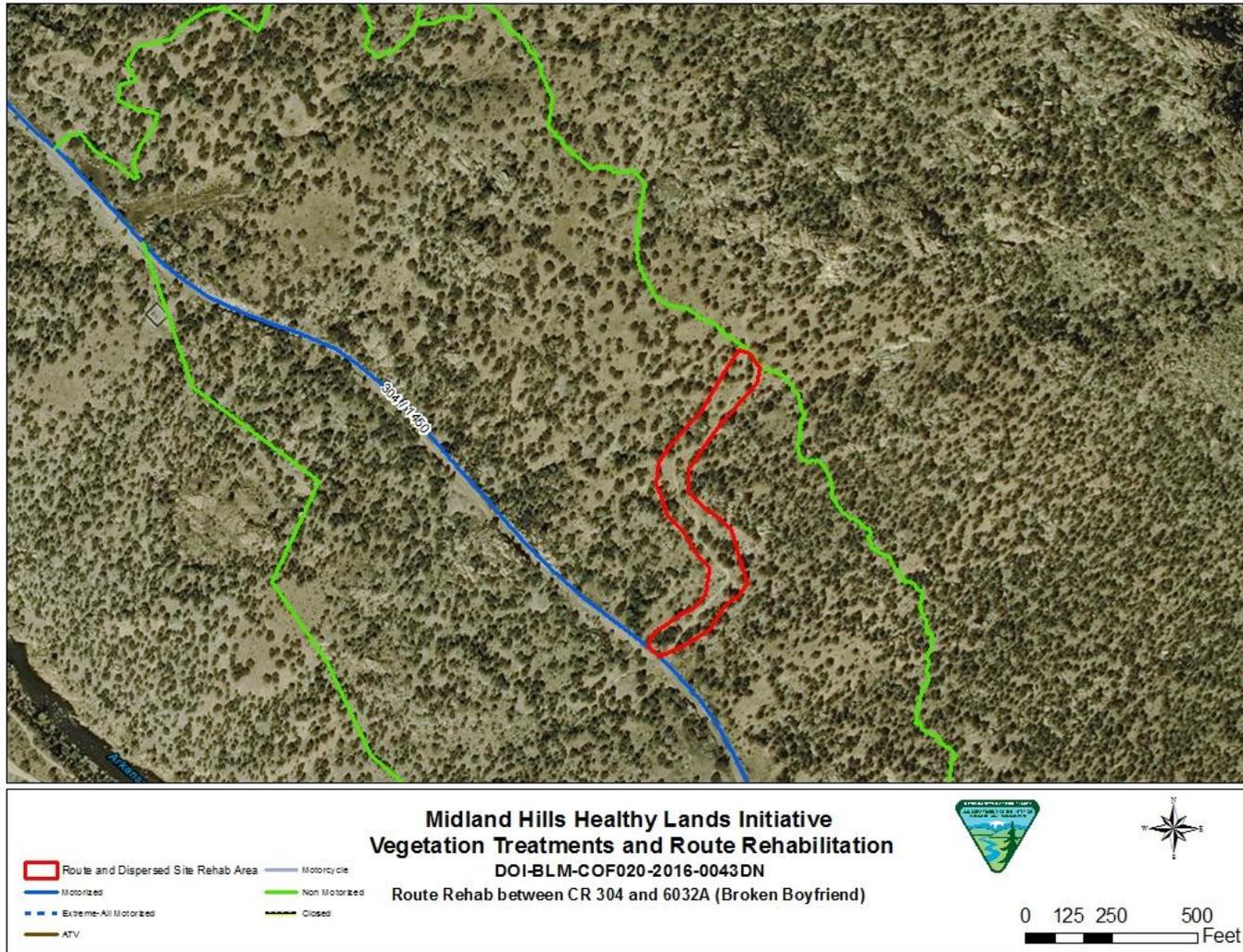
HLI Overview Map: Route and Dispersed Recreation Site Rehab Locations:



HLI Proposed Route and Dispersed Recreation Rehab Areas: North of CR 304



HLI Proposed Route and Dispersed Recreation Rehab Areas: Broken Boyfriend



HLI Proposed Route and Dispersed Recreation Rehab Areas: Along 376

