

**Finding of No Significant Impact
For the
Canyon-Big Timber Land Health Environmental Assessment
DOI- BLM-ID-I040-2011-0001-EA**

Introduction and Background

In 2010, an interdisciplinary team (IDT) assessed the following eight Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health on BLM administered lands in the Canyon-Big Timber (CBT) Watershed Assessment Area: 1) Watersheds, 2) Riparian areas and wetlands, 3) Stream channel/floodplain, 4) Native plant communities, 5) Seedings, 6) Exotic plant communities, other than seedings, 7) Water quality, and 8) Threatened and endangered plants and animals. The assessment covered uplands, riparian/wetland areas and forested habitats and was conducted in accordance with the 4180 Land Health Standards Manual. The CBT Assessment Report was completed and released to the public in 2010.

Following the assessment, the BLM completed the Canyon-Big Timber Land Health EA (DOI-BLM-ID-I040-2011-0001-EA) which analyzed and disclosed environmental impacts of implementing five management alternatives on the BLM administered lands in the CBT area. The EA included management alternatives to address resource issues identified in the CBT Assessment Report. This document incorporates by reference the Canyon-Big Timber Land Health EA.

Management alternatives are aimed at improving land health. The alternatives fully analyzed in the EA were developed by the BLM in consultation with the grazing permittees, local landowners, conservation groups, state agencies and other federal agencies. Because livestock grazing is authorized on public land, grazing allotment boundaries were used to delineate the CBT Land Health EA analysis area. Additional information is available in the CBT Assessment Report and the CBT Land Health EA which are available at the Salmon Field Office or on the Internet at <https://www.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/projectSummary.do?methodName=renderDefaultProjectSummary&projectId=7903>.

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

I have reviewed the CBT Land Health EA including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant environmental impacts, and reviewed and thoroughly considered public comments regarding the EA. I have also reviewed the ten Intensity Factors for significance listed in 40 CFR 1508.27 and have determined that the proposed action (Alternative 3), along with the design features and terms and conditions described, does not constitute a major federal action affecting the quality of the human environment or causing unnecessary or undue degradation of the natural environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement has not been prepared.

Implementing regulations for the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (40CFR 1508.27) provide criteria for determining the significance of effects. ‘Significant’, as used in NEPA,

requires consideration of both context and intensity. The bold and italicized text are repeated from 40CFR 1508.27 for completeness and an explanation follows for relevance to the decision.

(a) Context. *This requirement means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human, national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. For instance, in the case of a site-specific action, significance would usually depend upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Both short- and long-term effects are relevant (40 CFR 1508.27):*

This project does not have international, national, region-wide, or statewide importance. The analysis has shown that the project significance is local in nature and that the changes in grazing management, crossing authorizations, range improvement projects and vegetation manipulation projects will have no significant impact on existing resource values.

(b) Intensity. *This requirement refers to the severity of impact. Responsible officials must bear in mind that more than one agency may make decisions about partial aspects of a major action. The following are considered in evaluating intensity (40 CFR 1508.27).*

(1) *Impacts that may be both beneficial and/or adverse.*

The analysis documented in EA DOI-BLM-ID-I040-2011-0001-EA did not identify any individually significant short- or long-term impacts. *The Affected Environment And Environmental Consequences* section of the EA (pages 52-176) describes the direct and indirect impacts of the proposed action and each alternative. The proposed action would change livestock management in three grazing allotments to be consistent with the BLM's Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health and to ensure progress is made toward achieving the objectives of the proposed action. In addition, numerous grazing management changes, including changes to grazing period, active preference, livestock numbers, % public land, removing sheep grazing and the construction of range improvement projects would be implemented. These changes will enhance upland and riparian herbaceous plant vigor, increase plant production and residual cover, and restore riparian vegetative vigor and diversity on public land within the watershed. These changes are also expected to maintain or improve sagebrush habitat conditions for sagebrush obligate species, and enhance habitat for big game and many other wildlife species. Functional-at risk and non-functional riparian and wetland habitats are expected to trend toward proper functioning condition under these livestock management strategies. Improved riparian habitat will benefit wildlife and fish. The *Cumulative Impacts Of Alternatives* section (pages 176-209) describes the impacts associated with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions that have occurred, or are likely to occur, in the area.

(2) *The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.*

The environmental analysis documented no major effects on public health and safety from any of the actions described in the proposed action or any alternatives. The EA described potential impacts to air quality as including emissions from vehicles/equipment during project implementation and from burning of natural and activity fuels following completion of vegetation manipulation projects. The EA concluded that impacts are anticipated to be very localized (roughly project boundaries), of short duration (hours to one-two days) and low intensity (regulatory air quality standards met), and therefore are being considered negligible.

For water quality, the EA describes limited impacts that influence water quality from grazing activities. The EA concluded that issuing grazing permits would improve water quality conditions on several allotments over current conditions.

(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.

The environmental analysis documented no major effects on unique geographic features of the area. The EA explains that cultural resource permit renewal reviews were previously completed and concurred in by the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office for individual allotments considered in the EA between FY 2000 and FY 2007. In FY 2010, Section 106 inventory and mitigation procedures were conducted in response to all proposed actions set forth in the EA. The EA concluded that Cultural and Historic Resources are present but would not be impacted. There are no prime and unique farmlands located within the project area. FEMA identified floodplains would not be impacted by the proposed action or alternatives because they are not present. There are no Wild and Scenic Rivers within the CBT area, and no Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. The EA concluded that reissuing ten-year term grazing permits within the Eighteenmile WSA would not exceed the non-impairment standards for the WSA and would not impact the naturalness, solitude, primitive and unconfined recreation, or special features making it unsuitable for Wilderness designation. The EA also concluded that the proposed action would not impact the scenic quality or recreation opportunity of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail.

(4) The degree to which the effects on the quality or the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

Multiple efforts were made to consult and coordinate with individuals and organizations during the development of the alternatives analyzed in the EA. In May 2009, Idaho State Department of Agriculture, IDL, Committee of High Desert, Idaho Conservation League, Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, Western Watersheds Projects, IDFG and permit holders in the CBT area were notified that the SFO was going to begin assessing the area. Starting in May 2010, the BLM led multiple scoping trips in the CBT area to discuss issues and objectives and to start forming alternatives to address them. The tours were attended by various permittees and the Natural Resource Conservation Service. In addition, information was received from the IDFG, IDL and the SCNF during the summer of 2010 to help develop alternatives. On October 20, 2010, the project was uploaded to the BLM E-Planning site. Also in October, the Salmon FO began consulting with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). On December 2, 2010, a public open house was announced which took place on the 16th of the same month in Leadore, Idaho. Fifteen individuals signed in at the open house, some just gathering information and others commenting on the proposal as it was developed at the time. Written feedback or requests for more information were received from the IDL, Idaho Conservation League and Western Watersheds Project. Further information was then placed in the SFO Website on January 12, 2011, again asking for comments by February 11, 2011. Individuals who had already contacted the office were then notified and asked if they needed further information to complete their comments. On January 13, 2011, a letter was sent to individuals and organizations interested in proposed actions within a WSA; this letter also requested feedback by the 11th of February. Additional information was then provided to the SFO from Idaho Conservation League and

Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation. None of the above public or agency comments, and nothing in the analysis of the EA, indicated that the effects on the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

(5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The environmental analysis did not identify any effects on the human environment which are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. Grazing has occurred in this area prior to the Taylor Grazing Act, 1934, and is a compatible land use. Grazing management and land treatments similar to those proposed by this decision have been completed in other parts of the SFO, including post-treatment monitoring. Different grazing management strategies have been in place throughout the SFO for decades. This grazing management has given the BLM and public good knowledge of anticipated effects from livestock grazing, range improvements, and proposed treatments. Therefore the effects of the proposed action on the human environment are not highly uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risks.

(6) The 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 does not set precedent or represent a decision in principle about a future management consideration. The proposed action includes adjustments to existing grazing management, construction of range improvements and vegetation manipulation projects. These proposals were considered cumulatively and analyzed in the *Cumulative Impacts Of Alternatives* section (pages 176-209). No significant cumulative impacts were identified within the EA. Implementation of this decision would not trigger other actions, nor will it represent a decision in principle about future consideration. The activities are not connected to any other future actions.

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

The EA documents the connected and cumulative impacts with the scope of the analysis area. The analysis did not identify any known significant cumulative or secondary effects. Outside this project area, additional standards and guidelines assessments, determinations and subsequent decisions have been made, resulting in changes in livestock management actions, stocking levels, and seasons of use. In addition to livestock grazing, vegetation management, wildland fire, land use conversion and infrastructural development were all identified as past, present, and foreseeable future activities. The cumulative effects of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions are considered and disclosed in the *Cumulative Impacts Of Alternatives* section (pages 176-209) of the analysis. No individually or cumulatively significant impacts were identified in the EA in combination with all of these activities

(8) The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

The proposed action and alternatives would not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The EA noted that Cultural Resources were present but would not be impacted because cultural resource permit renewal reviews were previously completed and concurred in by the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office for individual allotments considered in the EA between FY 2000 and FY 2007. In FY 2010, Section 106 inventory and mitigation procedures were conducted in response

to all proposed actions set forth in the EA. The proposed action would not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic 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 of 1973.

The implementation of Alternative 3 has been consulted on with the USFWS for bull trout and bull trout critical habitat, and with the NMFS for Chinook salmon, Chinook salmon designated critical habitat, steelhead trout and steelhead trout designated critical habitat. The Biological Assessment (BA) was submitted to the USFWS on September 16, 2011 and included activities on the 16 grazing allotments described in the CBT Land Health EA. The BA determined that 11 allotments fell within the category of “may affect, but not likely to adversely affect” bull trout and its designated critical habitat. The remaining 5 allotments were determined to cause “no affect”, therefore consultation was not required. The BA determined that there would be “no affect” to Canada lynx. The USFWS acknowledged the “no effect” determinations and concurred with all the BLM’s “may affect-not likely to adversely affect” determinations in October, 2011. Following that concurrence, as a result of BLM internal guidance and policy changes, BLM amended the BA, and the USFWS agreed that the changes to the BA do not alter the original affects determination, and no further consultation pursuant to section 7(a) of the ESA is required.

Following informal consultation, a final BA was submitted to the NMFS on September 16, 2011. The BA determined five proposed grazing permits, for five separate allotments, would have “No Effect” on ESA-listed resources. The allotments receiving “no effect” determinations were Bull Creek, Dump, Purcell Creek, Spring Canyon, and Leadore. The regulations implementing section 7 of the ESA do not require NMFS to review or concur with “no effect” determinations. The Biological Opinion (BO) was primarily focused on the potential effects to steelhead on the Jakes Canyon and Leadville Allotments. NMFS shared a draft Opinion with BLM staff on December 19, 2011, with a final BO received by the BLM on April 26, 2012. NMFS concurred with the BLM’s determination that all the other allotments and associated actions would be “not likely to adversely affect” Snake River spring/summer Chinook salmon, Snake River Basin steelhead, and their designated critical habitats. Regarding the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation And Management Act, the BO concluded that “The proposed action and action area are described in the BA and the preceding Opinion. The action area includes habitat which has been designated as Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) for various life stages of Chinook salmon. Because the habitat requirements (i.e., EFH) for Chinook salmon in the action area are similar to those of the ESA-listed species and because the conservation measures included as part of the proposed action are adequate to address ESA concerns, they are also adequate to avoid, minimize, or otherwise offset potential adverse effects to designated EFH. Therefore, conservation recommendations pursuant to MSA (305(b)(4)(A)) are not necessary.”

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

The environmental analysis documents that the proposed action is consistent with Federal, State, and local laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

I find that implementing Alternative 3 does not constitute a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment in either context or intensity. I have made this determination after considering both positive and negative effects, as well as the direct,

indirect and cumulative effects of this action and reasonably foreseeable future actions. I have found that the context of the environmental impacts of this decision is limited to the local area and I have also determined that the severity of these impacts is not significant. This document is adequate and in conformance with the Lemhi Resource Management Plan (RMP), as amended and as required by 43 CFR 4100.0-8.



Linda R. Price
Salmon Field Manager



Date