

Worksheet
Determination of NEPA Adequacy (DNA)
U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

OFFICE: Applegate Field Office

NEPA NUMBER: DOI-BLM-CA-N020-2023-0026-DNA

PROPOSED ACTION TITLE/TYPE: Nelson Corral Sage-steppe Restoration Project

LOCATION/LEGAL DESCRIPTION:

The project area is in northeastern Lassen County, Mount Diablo Base and Meridian:

Nelson Corral - Township 37N, Range 12E, Sections 1 and 2; Township 37N, Range 13E, Sections 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9; Township 38N, Range 12E, Sections 13, 14, 15, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 34, and 35; Township 38N, Range 13E, Sections 19, 20, 21, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, and 34.

APPLICANT: This is a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) initiated project

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

The Applegate Field Office (AGFO) is proposing to implement a juniper reduction project within the Nelson Corral Allotment. This project aims to improve habitat for sage steppe obligate species through the removal of juniper and the treatment of hazardous fuels totaling 13,790 acres on public lands located in northeastern California (**Appendix A - Maps**).

The goal of this project is to improve connectivity and habitat conditions for mule deer and other sage-steppe obligate species by promoting the development of early seral grass and forb species such as Idaho fescue (*Festuca idahoensis*) and tapertip hawksbeard (*Crepis acuminata*), as well as mid-seral species such as big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata* spp.), antelope bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*), and Utah serviceberry (*Amelanchier utahensis*). This would be accomplished through the removal of late seral species such as juniper (*Juniperus* spp.) and would reduce vertical fuel loading and hazardous fuel accumulation using prescribed fire. This project would also aid in the release of curl-leaf mountain mahogany (*Cercocarpus ledifolius*) and quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) through the removal of competing conifers to stimulate growth and to reduce competition for scarce resources.

The overall goal of this project is to improve and restore the ecological health (i.e., resilience and resistance) of sites currently threatened by juniper invasion to provide for improved wildlife habitat for ungulates such as mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) and pronghorn (*Antilocapra americana*), as well as sage-steppe obligate species such as greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), sage sparrow (*Artemisiospiza nevadensis*), and sage thrasher (*Oreoscoptes montanus*). In areas that are classified as historical juniper woodlands, juniper would be retained and no treatments would be planned. Individual old growth trees found throughout the treatment area would also be retained. Additionally, pockets of juniper would be retained to provide sufficient hiding and thermal cover for mule deer and pronghorn where there is not sufficient cover provided by quaking aspen stands or curl-leaf mountain mahogany savannahs.

To accomplish these goals, treatments would focus on reducing juniper canopy cover through hand (i.e., lop-and-scatter/cut-and-pile) or mechanical (i.e., chip/haul or machine piling) treatment methods by at least 75% and reducing post-treatment surface fuels by at least 50% within the identified treatment areas (**Appendix B – Treatment Classification**).

In areas of low juniper canopy cover, trees would be felled and lopped-and-scattered to a height less than three feet. In contrast, in areas of higher juniper canopy cover, trees would be cut into short lengths and the boles and limbs piled and later burned. Treatments would be completed using contractor personnel and the piles burned using BLM fire personnel in the fall or winter.

In areas where mechanical treatment is permissible and the potential for biomass removal exists, juniper would be skidded to a landing to be chipped and transported to a nearby biomass facility at the Honey Lake Power plant near Susanville, California. Mechanical equipment such as feller-bunchers, skid steers, and rubber-tired skidders would be used in areas with canopy cover exceeding 6% and slopes less than 30%.

Under the mechanical treatment option, landings and temporary roads would be constructed to facilitate the removal of biomass material from the treatment units. Improvement and maintenance activities would include grading, brushing, and water barring of existing roads. Temporary roads would be closed following treatment operations to prevent further use. Mechanical treatments would be confined to within one mile of existing roads.

If biomass removal treatments are not economically feasible, juniper trees would then be felled and mechanically piled using feller bunchers or skid steers to create compact piles of two to ten trees each. Piles would then be burned when conditions are deemed appropriate to do so.

The desired post-treatment vegetative conditions for greater sage-grouse (GRSG) and sage steppe obligate species can be found in **Appendix C – Habitat Monitoring Objectives**.

Grazing rest requirements in cut-and-pile areas would include one full year of rest and rest through the critical growth period of the following grazing season after completion of juniper reduction treatments.

To meet mandatory rest requirements, the following measures would be utilized within the Nelson Corral allotment: rest would be achieved using frequent herding, placement of salt and mineral blocks away from the treatment area during turn-out, or other off-site livestock pasture opportunities. If such measures are unsuccessful to meet rest requirements, rest would be achieved through pasture closure or shifts in the current pasture rotation. Treated areas would be reopened to livestock grazing once the allotted time has elapsed. The BLM will work in close coordination with permittees to facilitate compliance with rest requirements and monitor outcomes.

Where possible, the BLM and/or contractor will work in close coordination with permittees to schedule project activities outside of the permitted grazing season of use. Fences would be inspected frequently by BLM or contractor for damage from project activities. If damage is detected BLM or contractor shall promptly make any needed repairs to return fence to a fully functional condition.

Treatment areas would be maintained within ten years of the initial treatment to remove small trees missed during the initial cutting and re-sprouting from stumps. Maintenance actions would involve the use of chainsaws or other handheld equipment such as loppers or clippers to lop-and-scatter re-sprouting or young juniper trees within the treatment areas.

The treatment areas would be opened for the purposes of fuelwood collection. Appropriate signs would be posted within the designated fuelwood cutting area. Individuals collecting fuelwood would adhere to the stipulations outlined in the Applegate Field Office Special Forest Products CX (DOI-BLM-CA-N200-2018-0005-CX) that is hereby incorporated by reference.

The projects are located within the Applegate Field Office Sage-Steppe Habitat Restoration Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA; DOI-BLM-CA-N020-2015-EA-0004) area and is hereby incorporated by reference. The projects are located within areas designated as General Habitat Management Area (GHMA) and Other Habitat Management Area (OHMA) for GRSG as identified in the Nevada and Northeastern California Greater Sage-Grouse Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment (ARMPA; USDOI 2015) and is hereby incorporated by reference. This project would adhere to the following Required Design Features (RDFs) for areas designated as GHMA and OHMA for greater sage-grouse, consistent with Appendix C of the ARMPA:

- **RDF Gen 2:** Avoid constructing roads within riparian areas and ephemeral drainages. Construct low water crossings at right angles to ephemeral drainages and stream crossings (note that such construction may require permitting under Sections 401 and 404 of the Clean Water Act).
- **RDF Gen 12:** Control the spread and effects of nonnative, invasive plant species (e.g., by washing vehicles and equipment, minimize unnecessary surface disturbance). All projects would be required to have a noxious weed management plan in place prior to construction and operations.
- **RDF Gen 19:** Instruct all construction employees to avoid harassment and disturbance of wildlife, especially during the GRSG breeding (e.g., courtship and nesting) season. In addition, pets shall not be permitted on site during construction (BLM 2005b).

This Proposed Action incorporates the Standard Resource Protection Measures (SRPMs) outlined in the Applegate Field Office Sage-Steppe Habitat Restoration PEA.

Additionally, proposed treatment activities would not occur within specifically designated archaeological sites to avoid potential impacts; these sites would be designated in treatment area-specific maps prior to the commencement of work in treatment activities.

B. Conformance with the Land Use Plan (LUP) and Consistency with Related Subordinate Implementation Plans

LUP Name: Alturas Field Office Resource Management Plan

Date Approved: April 2008 as amended in September 2015.

Other Document: Sage-Steppe Ecosystem Restoration Strategy Final Impact Statement

Date Approved: December 2008

Other Document: Applegate Field Office Sage-Steppe Restoration PEA.

Date Approved: February 2018

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

- The Applegate Field Office Sage-Steppe Restoration PEA references and is tiered to the 2008 AFO RMP and the 2008 SSER FEIS. The Proposed Action is covered in the 2015 Nevada and Northeastern California Greater Sage-Grouse Approved RMP Amendment to the Alturas (AFO) RMP.
- Applegate Field Office Sage-Steppe Restoration PEA 2018.

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 Applegate Field Office Sage-Steppe Restoration Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) analyzed the project areas within the 645,000-acre focus area. The Proposed Action is consistent with the Proposed Action alternative identified and analyzed in the Applegate Field Office Sage-Steppe Restoration PEA. Furthermore, the Proposed Action is consistent with the objectives and management actions related to juniper treatment projects implemented through the 2015 Nevada and Northeastern California Greater Sage-Grouse Approved RMP Amendment to the AFO RMP as analyzed in the FEIS.

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 PEA analyzed an appropriate range of alternatives given the purpose and need for the project. Two alternatives were analyzed in detail: (1) Proposed Action and (2) No Action. Additionally, three alternatives were considered by the BLM staff but dismissed from detailed analysis due to not meeting the purpose and need (See EA, section 2.3 page 18). The selected alternative is Alternative 1, the Proposed Action as described in the Applegate Field Office Sage-Steppe Habitat Restoration PEA, which identified a range of different treatments across the landscape. No new environmental concerns, interests, resource values, or circumstances have arisen since the PEA was published in February of 2018 that would indicate a need for additional alternatives.

The Proposed Action is also consistent with the objectives and management actions related to juniper treatment projects implemented through the 2015 RMP amendments to the AFO RMP as analyzed in the FEIS.

3. Is the existing analysis valid considering 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?

Yes. The Proposed Action was reviewed for conformance with the RMP amendments for GRSG in the AFO RMP. The analysis contained within the PEA was carefully reviewed with the RMP amendments for GRSG, which added additional objectives and management actions to the RMP. The review determined that hand cutting of juniper within or near GRSG habitat is consistent with the direction of the RMP amendments. Effects analysis in the PEA regarding impacts to native sage-steppe wildlife remains adequate and no species were found during field surveys that required additional analysis. Furthermore, the environmental and cumulative effects regarding impacts to wildlife, vegetation, soils, and cultural resources due to the implementation of the Proposed Action is within the scope of the analysis completed under the Applegate Field Office Sage-Steppe Habitat Restoration PEA. This is not anticipated to result in any significant impacts. The Proposed Action is not expected to contribute to noxious weed invasions and SOPs from the Applegate Field Office Sage-Steppe Habitat Restoration PEA are adequate to ensure that the implementation of the Proposed Action does not result in any new noxious weed infestations.

Based on archaeological surveys, the Proposed Action is not expected to have any adverse effects to cultural resources and the treatment type for the project is appropriate based on the known resources within the project area. Areas of cultural concern within the project area have been identified and designated within the treatment area. Effects of the Proposed Action are within the scope of what was anticipated in the PEA.

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?

Yes, the Applegate Field Office Sage-Steppe Restoration PEA described the environmental and cumulative impacts within the focus area. The project area includes greater sage-grouse habitat and other areas identified as at risk of juniper or invasive annual grass encroachment. The effects to resources within the treatment areas due to the implementation of the Proposed Action, are expected to be similar those effects described in the PEAs and EA.

The project area is located within GRSG habitat (GHMA and OHMA) as identified in the Nevada and Northeastern California Greater Sage-Grouse Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment (USDOI 2015; ARMPA). Although there are no active and/or pending leks within four miles of the project area; the proposed treatments would occur in greater sage-grouse breeding, brood-rearing, and winter habitats and as such are subject to the following seasonal restrictions identified in the ARMPA:

- **Treatments and maintenance operations would be permitted annually between March 1 to May 14 and September 16 to October 31.**

The seasonal restrictions may be modified due to documented local variations (e.g., higher/lower elevations) or annual climatic fluctuations (e.g., early/late spring, long/heavy winter), in coordination with Nevada Department of Wildlife and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (USDOI 2015).

Additionally, any active raptor nest found will be reported to the Wildlife Biologist and project activities ceased within a 0.5-mile buffer until surveys indicate that project activities would not disturb nesting/breeding activities. The project area would be surveyed prior to the implementation of the project.

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

Yes, the proposed treatment areas went through extensive public scoping prior to and during the development of the EAs. Collaboration included representatives from Tribes, Federal and State agencies, local governments, landowners, permittees, other interested persons, community-based groups, and other nongovernmental organizations.

On August 17, 2023, the AGFO sent out a scoping letter for the Nelson Corral Sage-steppe Restoration project. The current Proposed Action was presented to the public in the form of a scoping letter to determine if the public had any information to offer regarding the discreet treatment areas now under consideration. No comments were received that required further

consideration. On December 15, 2023, the DNA was posted for a 15-day public review period.

E. Persons/Agencies/BLM Staff Consulted

Table 1. Persons, agencies, and/or BLM personnel that was consulted on the project.

Name	Title	Resource/Activities
Craig Drake	Field Office Manager	Authorizing Officer
Kevin Kunkel	Assistant Field Office Manager/Supervisory Range Management Specialist	Rangeland Management, Livestock Management, Noxious Weeds, Planning
John Morris	Wildlife Biologist	Wildlife Resources
Devin Snyder	Archaeologist	Cultural Resources, Paleontology, Native American Concerns
Adam Butler	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Visual Resources
Megan Oyarzun	GIS Specialist	DNA Review
Arlene Kosic	CASO Sage-grouse Program Lead	DNA Review
George Jolicoeur	Fuels Specialist	Fuels Specialist
Andrew Mueller	Forester	Project Lead/ DNA Preparation/ Forestry
Jennifer Mueller	Biological Sciences Technician (Wildlife)	Special Status Plants

Conclusion (If you found that one or more of these criteria is not met, you will not be able to check this box.)

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

Signature of Planning and Environmental Coordinator

Signature of the Responsible Official

Date

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.

APPENDIX A: MAPS

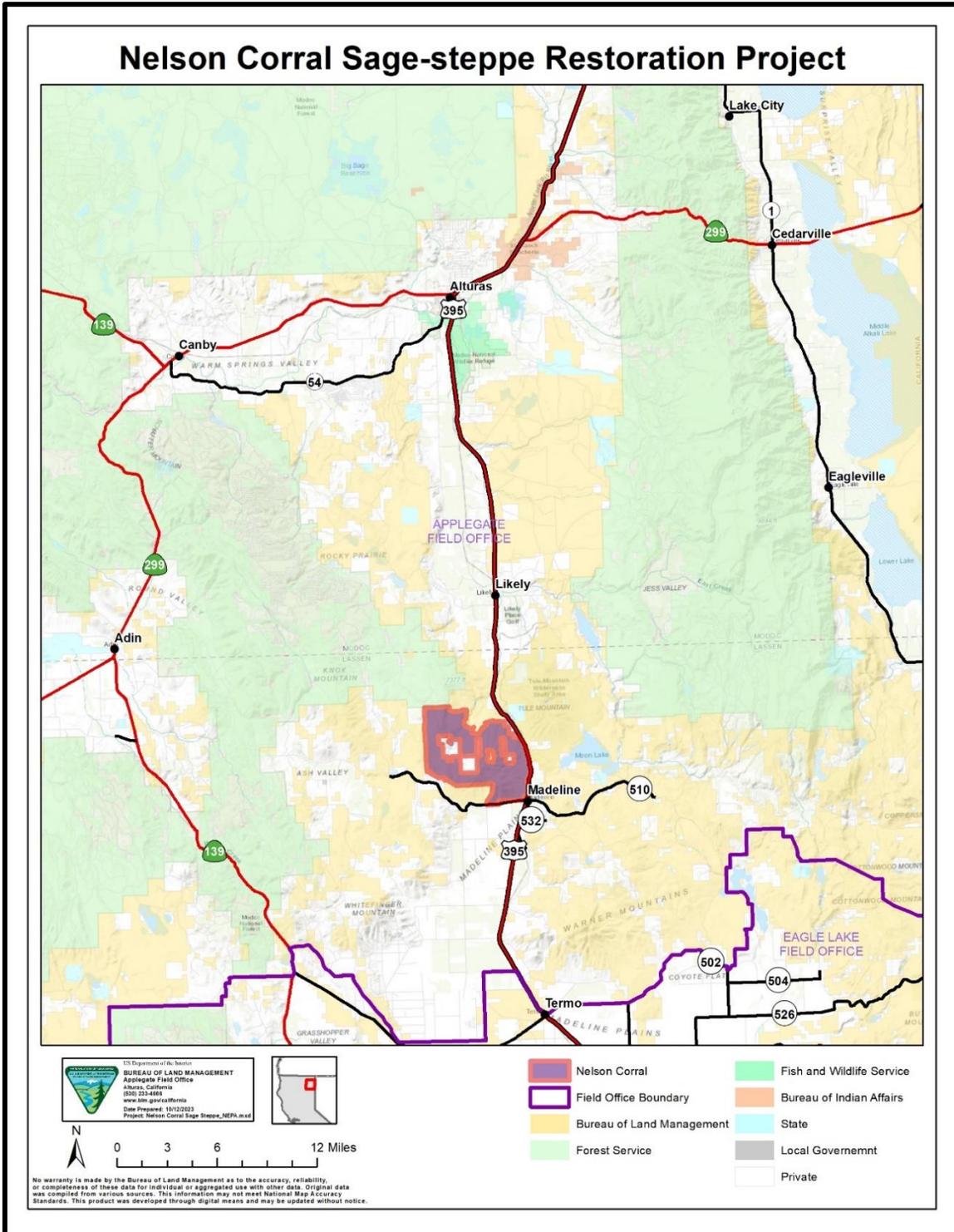


Figure 1. The Nelson Corral project is located northwest of Madeline, CA on public lands located in northeastern California.

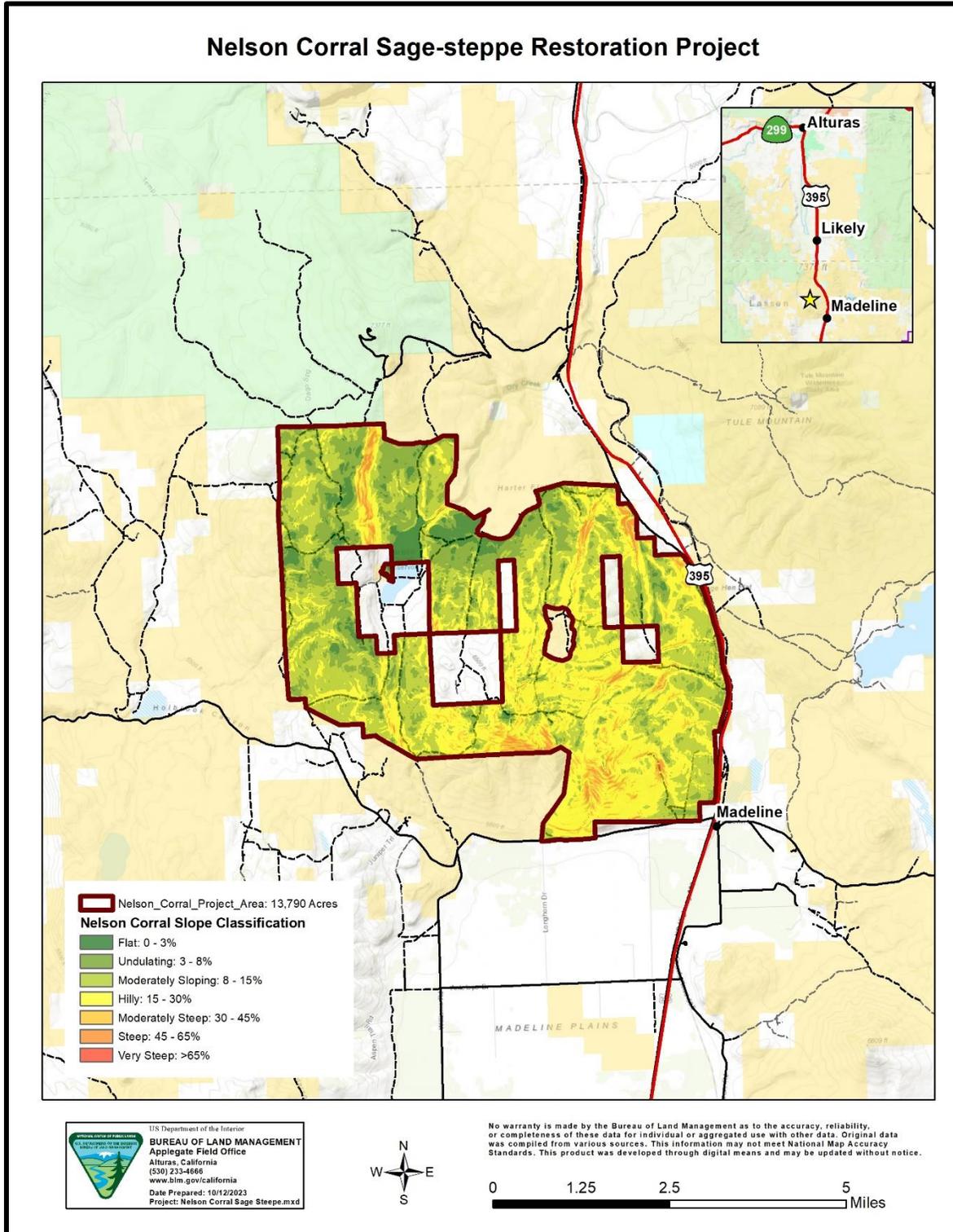


Figure 2. Slope classification for the Nelson Corral project located northwest of Madeline, CA.

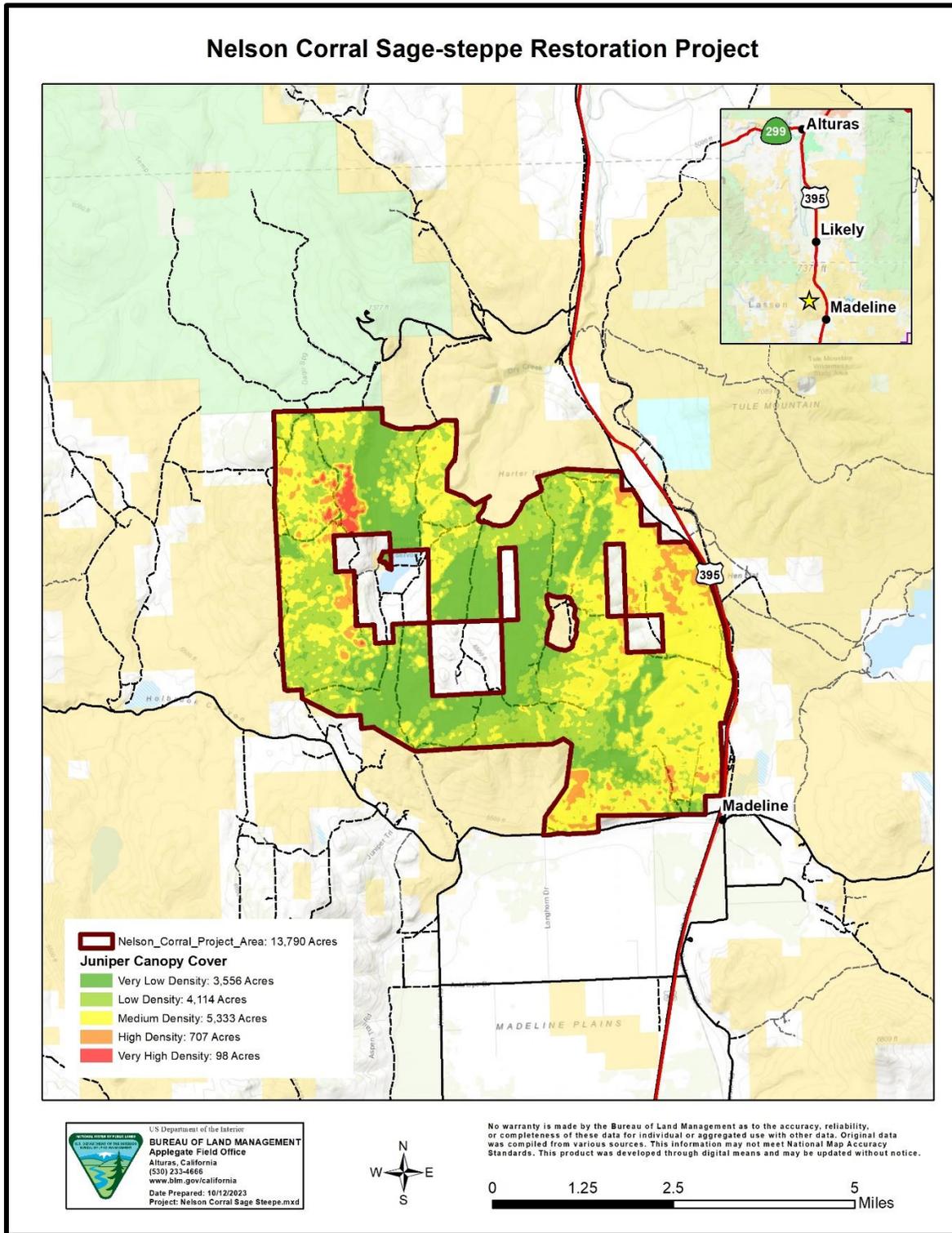


Figure 3. The Nelson Corral project consists of very low (0-1%), low (1-5%), medium (6-15%), high (16-30%), and very high (31 - 50%) juniper canopy cover.

APPENDIX B: TREATMENT CLASSIFICATION

Table 2. Summary of primary treatment types by project area within the Nelson Corral Sage-steppe Restoration project area.

Project Name	Treatment Classification	Treatment Type	Acres
All projects	Hand	Lop-and-scatter/Cut-and-pile	500
All projects	Mechanical	Chip/haul – Machine pile	13,390

APPENDIX C: HABITAT MONITORING OBJECTIVES

Table 3. Summary of pronghorn and mule deer habitat monitoring objectives for all projects (NRCS, 2008).

Project Name	Habitat Classification	Factor: Component/ Desired Condition
All projects	Pronghorn (kidding)	Plant Community: Dwarf sagebrush dominated/big sagebrush – bunchgrass Plant Diversity: ≥ 20 forb species, ≥ 5 shrubs, and ≥ 5 grass species
All projects	Winter Range (Mule Deer)	Plant Community: Mixed upland browse plants; mountain mahogany; juniper woodlands; or aspen stands Plant Diversity: ≥ 10 forb species, ≥ 5 browse plants, and ≥ 4 grass species

APPENDIX D : STANDARD RESOURCE PROTECTION MEASURES

The following resource protection measures will be implemented prior to or during cutting operations:

Cultural Resources

For cultural properties listed, recommended eligible, or unevaluated as to their eligibility to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP):

AGFO Archaeology staff will brief crew personnel responsible for carrying out juniper removal on cultural resource avoidance areas within defined project boundaries before project implementation occurs. In the event of an *Inadvertent Discovery*, crew personnel will be responsible for following the protocol outlined in the *Inadvertent Discovery* section.

Prior to project initiation, cultural resource avoidance areas will be flagged, including a 10-meter protection buffer area surrounding the resource for additional protection purposes. Flagging color will be designated in each project contract.

All downed trees within cultural avoidance areas will be burned in piles or limbed and scattered with no dragging of materials allowed on-site.

In cultural resource avoidance areas with constructed rock features, juniper within a 45-foot (15 meter) radius of a rock feature or concentration of rock features will either be avoided or directionally felled at the discretion of an archaeological monitor and the personnel responsible for conducting juniper removal. An archaeological monitor should be physically present on-site during the removal of juniper surrounding constructed rock features.

Juniper surrounding historic structures will be felled to avoid further damage of the structures. Historic structure protection measures should be undertaken within a 45-foot (15 meter) radius of each structure. If directional falling is not possible, then trees will be avoided.

An archaeological monitor should be present on-site during such activities.

Any cultural resource sites that include petroglyphs, midden, or are identified by AGFO Archaeology staff as potentially significant will be monitored during hand treatment activities at the discretion of AGFO Archaeology staff.

Historic arborglyphs, generally found in aspen stands, will be preserved in place, will not be cut or damaged and burnable materials will be removed within a 15-foot (five meter) radius to avoid impacts of prescribed burning. The radius surrounding the arborglyph(s) may increase depending on slope and aspect. Cut juniper will be piled no closer than 15 feet from arborglyphs, and no more than five feet high to avoid heat damage to the tree or carving. Heat resistant wrap and/or colorless foam may also be used in order to protect the tree.

Cultural Resources - Inadvertent Discovery

In the event of an inadvertent discovery of un-flagged and/or previously undocumented cultural resources during implementation of an undertaking, the following procedure shall be undertaken: AGFO Archaeology staff and the Field Office Manager shall be immediately notified by personnel responsible for project implementation. All work shall cease immediately at the site of discovery and all other work that may damage the cultural resource shall also cease. AGFO Archaeology staff shall assess the situation and, in consultation with the Field Office Manager, may prescribe the emergency implementation of appropriate physical and administrative conservation measures as enumerated in BLM Manual Series 8140. AGFO Archaeology staff shall notify the California and/or Nevada State Historic Offices of Preservation as needed in order to develop an agreement on the appropriate course of action, and such agreement shall reflect the intent of BLM Manual Series 8140.28B. The agreement shall be memorialized in writing and documented in project files. AGFO Archaeology staff shall document implementation of the agreed-upon steps and shall report the discovery event and the manner of its resolution in the annual accomplishment reporting required under the 2019 California Statewide Protocol Agreement with California Bureau of Land Management and California and Nevada State Historic Preservation Officers.

Fire Management

The AGFO IDT will review and approve all burn plans for implementation of prescribed fire (pile burning) in the project area.

Fuel Wood Removal

Areas excluded from fuelwood and post removal will be signed to indicate that woodcutting is not allowed.

Hydrology

Entry into wet spring areas will be limited to hand treatments with chainsaws and pile burning. During the dry summer months some access to spring areas may be allowed only after on-site inspections occur to ensure minimal impacts. Crossings over ephemeral stream channels will be identified by the Contracting Officer Representative (COR) and be limited to dry, rocky, and stable areas. Crossing channels with mechanized equipment will be at locations that are stable and naturally armored with rock. Stream channels will be crossed at right angles and number and width of crossings will be limited to areas that have cobble and naturally occurring rocky areas to protect the channel. A minimal number of passes over dry stream channels will be allowed and will be monitored by the project COR.

Livestock Grazing

Compliance with rest requirements will be based on utilization limits. If utilization within treatment areas is 20% or greater, the rest period will be extended by an additional season and temporary fencing to protect treatment areas or allotment/pasture closure will be implemented during rest periods. Utilization monitoring will take place throughout the season of use in conjunction with cattle compliance monitoring. If monitoring results indicate that utilization is

60% or greater in the non-rested portion of the allotment, livestock will be moved to another pasture or removed for the remainder of the grazing season.

Noxious Weeds

Activities associated with treatments that are prone to noxious weeds, such as temporary roads, landings and skid trails will be monitored post treatment for new occurrences for three years. To minimize the potential spread of noxious weed species, equipment associated with treatments will be pressure washed prior to engaging in project activities and before transport to new work areas.

Old Growth Juniper

The project inspector will brief contractors on old-growth identification and instruct that old-growth trees are not to be cut.

Recreation

Contractors shall be informed about high use recreational areas and time periods to minimize interaction with the recreating public.

Riparian Areas

No mechanized equipment within 250 yards of wetlands and riparian areas. Removal of junipers in wetlands and riparian areas will be limited to hand treatments with chainsaws and pile burning. Seasonal timing restrictions may be applied to allow treatments during periods when drier conditions occur.

Trees cut in meadow or wetland areas will be scattered a minimum of 20 feet from the meadow/wetland/riparian zone edge, unless leaving some material is determined to be beneficial by the IDT. When moving trees, they will be limbed and removed off-site without dragging. Burn piles near meadows/wetlands will be constructed outside of the perimeter of the wetland vegetation (meadow edge) and will be placed to avoid adverse ecological impacts.

Soils

Damage to high shrink-swell soils will be prevented by limiting compacting activities to periods when soils are sufficiently dry to resist damage from the activity.

Water bars on temporary roads and scattered juniper material will be used to reduce sedimentation during high rainfall and or snowmelt.

Special Status Plant Species

Range Staff will flag Special Status plant species avoidance areas prior to project implementation.

Wildlife

Juniper trees will be retained if wildlife nests, cavities or other wildlife-associated activity are observed. Any active raptor nest found will be reported to the Wildlife Biologist and project activities ceased within a 0.5-mile buffer until surveys indicate that project activities will not disturb nesting/breeding activities.

Visual Resources

In VRM Class II and III areas, Phase I juniper will be cut into small enough segments, so the tree trunks and limbs are not readily visible above surrounding shrubs and grasses. If cut juniper trees are large enough to be visible among shrubs and grasses, tree trunks and limbs will be cut, piled, and burned. Management activities may be evident however the overall potential impact of project proposal would attract little to no attention to the casual observer, would remain relatively unobtrusive and limited in scale.