



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Cedar City Field Office
176 E DL Sargent Dr. Cedar City, UT 84721
<https://www.blm.gov/office/cedar-city-field-office>

February 3, 2025

Dear Reader,

The Cedar City Field Office (CCFO) of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is initiating the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) scoping process for the Indian Peak Range Watershed Restoration Plan. In accordance with NEPA regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508), BLM is preparing an environmental assessment to analyze the potential effects of proposed vegetation treatments on approximately 550,000 acres of BLM-managed lands. A map of the analysis area is attached for reference.

Project Background

The Indian Peak Range Watershed Restoration Plan focuses on public lands in the northwesternmost area of the Cedar City Field Office. The project boundary includes the Indian Peak Range and Needles Range mountains, which run north to south, along with their associated watersheds that flow into Hamlin and Pine Valleys to the east and west.

This area has been identified as a priority due to concerns about habitat conditions for Greater Sage-Grouse, upland big game species, and wild horses. To better understand current ecological conditions, forecast future trends, and develop conservation strategies, BLM partnered with the Nature Conservancy to conduct a landscape-scale ecological assessment in the Hamlin, Indian Peak, and Mountain Home areas. This assessment evaluated how much the vegetation and ecosystem have changed from what would naturally occur under historical conditions.

Of the 27 different vegetation types mapped in the assessment, fifteen were identified for potential treatment based on size, degree of ecological change, and their ability to support wildlife habitat. Five were classified as moderately changed from historical conditions, nine were highly altered, and one had relatively low departure from expected conditions. Active management scenarios¹ have been identified to help restore these areas and improve habitat suitability, particularly for species such as the Greater Sage-Grouse.

The assessment found that the primary causes of habitat decline in the area include the encroachment and spread of pinyon pine and juniper, loss of sagebrush and basin wildrye, spread of invasive annual grasses and other non-native plants, loss of aspen and fire-tolerant ponderosa pine, and increased fuel loads that contribute to changes in natural fire cycles.

The purpose of the Indian Peak Range Watershed Restoration Project is to prevent further ecological degradation and restore key habitat areas before conditions become more difficult or costly to address. Based on the ecological assessment, the proposed project would focus on improving watershed conditions and habitat by reducing tree encroachment, reestablishing native plant species in historically suitable areas, and using natural disturbance techniques such as prescribed fire and mechanical treatments to restore ecological function. Maintaining ecosystem health at current or

¹ Active management scenarios refers to making strategic interventions to influence the future state of the landscape.

improved levels increases the likelihood of long-term success and reduces the need for costly² rehabilitation efforts in the future.

Summary of the Proposed Action

CCFO is proposing vegetation treatments across eight different vegetation communities identified in the assessment. These include ponderosa pine and mixed conifer, pinyon-juniper woodlands, quaking aspen, grasslands, riparian areas, mountain brush, sagebrush, and scrublands. The goal is to restore areas that have experienced significant ecological change and return them to more desirable conditions.

Proposed treatment methods include manual techniques such as hand thinning and cutting; mechanical methods such as mastication, harrowing, chaining, rangeland aeration, and mechanical ripping; targeted herbicide applications; and prescribed fire, including both broadcast burning and pile burning. The selection of treatments will depend on site-specific conditions such as terrain, vegetation type, and the level of ecological change.

Comment Opportunity

The CCFO is seeking input from the public, Tribes, and other stakeholders during this initial scoping phase to identify key issues, concerns, and opportunities that should be considered in the development of the environmental assessment. Comments submitted during this process will help refine the proposed action, identify potential alternatives, and determine the scope of the analysis. Comments should be as specific as possible to assist in the analysis.

The scoping comment period will be open from February 3, 2025, to March 5, 2025. Interested parties may submit comments through the BLM ePlanning website at the following link: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2035996/510>.

Following the completion of the draft environmental assessment, there will be an additional opportunity to provide input during a 30-day public comment period. Additional maps and documents may be made available at that time. BLM recommends regularly checking the ePlanning website for project updates.

Thank you for your interest in this project on public lands.

Sincerely,



Jacqueline J. Russell
Field Manager

Enclosure: Indian Peak Range Watershed Restoration Plan Analysis Area Map

² Cost is defined as personnel time and efforts as well as price of treatment and type used.