

USDI, Bureau of Land Management
Three Rivers Resource Area, Burns District
Hines, Oregon 97738

Finding of No Significant Impact
for
Wyoming Sagebrush Beating for Wildfire Fuel Breaks
Environmental Assessment
OR-025-03-05

This proposal is in conformance with objectives and land use plan allocations in the 1992 Three Rivers Resource Management Plan (RMP). The proposed action would maintain and help protect important habitats for Bureau Special Status Species (SSS) (Bureau of Land Management (BLM) policy 6840), including sage-grouse. Sections of the Three Rivers RMP are mentioned in the Environmental Assessment (EA) (Page 2); specifically "This proposal is in compliance with management direction established in the Record of Decision for the Three Rivers Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/FEIS (Chapter 2, Fire Management Plan Decisions, August 1992)), Greater Sage-Grouse and Sagebrush-Steppe Ecosystem Management Guidelines (2000), and BLM Manual 6840 policy (Bureau Special Status Species)."

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the EA and all other information, I have determined that the proposal and alternatives analyzed do not constitute a major Federal action that would significantly impact the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not necessary and will not be prepared. This determination is based on the following factors:

1. Beneficial, adverse, direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts discussed in the EA have been disclosed. The physical and biological effects are limited to the Three Rivers Resource Area. About 2 percent (12,000 acres) of the project area (600,000 acres) would be brush-beat over a 4-year implementation timeline. Approximately 27 percent (160,000 acres) of the area has been burned by wildfire in the last 20 years, with the majority of this area now dominated by cheatgrass. While the risks of increased opportunities for weed introduction would be elevated in the short term (<5 years) with implementation of this alternative, the overall benefits which are likely to result from reducing the potential of large wildfires in the area far outweigh those risks. Further, the brush-beating would allow for some age class diversity within the sagebrush community, while protecting the area from large-scale fire disturbances which negatively impact all of the individual resources, including Bureau SSS of wildlife such as the sage-grouse.
2. Public health and safety would not be adversely impacted.
3. There would be no adverse impacts to wetlands, floodplains, areas with unique characteristics or ecologically critical areas.
4. There are no highly controversial effects on the environment.

5. There are no effects that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risk. Sufficient information on risk is available based on information in the EA and other past actions of a similar nature. The EA (Page 2) describes project design elements that reduce potential consequences to a minimal or nonexistent level; it states "Vary the width of brush beating from 12 to 50 feet on either side of road depending on sagebrush density and height, topography, and road features to create fuel breaks which are likely to improve fire suppression activities. Total width of the mowed strips within one mile of a sage grouse lek and in sage grouse winter areas would be restricted to 12 feet on either side of the road. Mowing within 2 miles of a sage grouse lek during March and April would be conducted only from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM.

"Project areas would be surveyed for pygmy rabbit occurrence prior to mowing and no mowing would occur within ¼ mile of pygmy rabbit habitat containing typical pygmy rabbit burrows.

"Project areas would have site-specific botanical clearances done prior to implementation; these can be accomplished year by year to coordinate with the project timeline. If new populations of Bureau SSS plants or noxious weeds are discovered, mitigating measures would need to be developed and considered prior to implementation. The noxious weed mitigating measures include, but are not limited to, treatment prior to any brush-beating to ensure that no mature weeds are beaten and noxious weed site avoidance.

"Ensure that brush-beating equipment (including trailers used to haul the equipment and vehicles driving out to the project sites) are clean prior to being brought to the project site."

6. This alternative does not set a precedent for other projects that may be implemented in the future to meet the goals and objectives of the Three Rivers RMP, 1992.
7. No cumulative impacts related to other actions that would have a significant adverse impact were identified or are anticipated.
8. Based on previous and ongoing cultural resource surveys, and through the mitigation of avoidance, no adverse impacts to cultural resources were identified or anticipated.
9. No adverse impacts to any threatened or endangered species or their habitat that was determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act was identified. If at a future time there could be the potential for adverse impacts, guidelines or stipulations would be modified or mitigation measures would be developed or a new analysis would be conducted.
10. This alternative is in compliance with relevant Tribal, Federal, State, and local laws, regulations, and requirements for the protection of the environment.
11. There are no known adverse impacts that would occur to energy development, production

or distribution.

12. Consequences to migratory birds are minimal because according to the EA (pg.6) "Use of one tractor for one month in the spring would affect 0.4% of the total project area habitat for these birds. Implementation of the proposed action, including the spring brush beating is likely to benefit the species in the long term."

____ Signature on File _____
Joan M. Suther
Three Rivers Resource Area Field Manager

____ 7/24/2003 _____
Date