

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Little Snake Field Office
455 Emerson Street
Craig, CO 81625-1129

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

EA NUMBER: CO-100-2005-023 EA

FUELS PROJECT NUMBER: EA 83

PROJECT NAME: Snake River Fuels Project

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: T10N, R97W, Secs. 14-16, 22-24, 25-27, and 34-36
T9N, R97W, Secs. 1-4, 9-16, 21-28, and 33-36
T8N, R97W, Secs. 1-3, 10-14, 24, and 25
T10N, R96W, Secs. 30-32
T9N, R96W, Secs. 5-9, 15-36
T8N, R96W, Secs. 1-22 and 27-30
See Attachment 1

PROPONENT: Northwest Colorado Stewardship and BLM

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW: The Proposed Action is subject to the following plans:

Name of Plans: Little Snake Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision (RMP);
Fire Management Plan for the Northwest Fire Management Program (FMP)

Dates Approved: April 26, 1989 (RMP); July 9, 2002 (FMP)

Results (RMP): The Proposed Action is located in Management Units (MU) 2 (Northern Central), 3 (Little Snake River), and 16 (West Red Wash). The management objectives for MU 2 are to provide for the development of oil, gas and geothermal resources. The management objectives for MU 3 are to improve soil and watershed values, increase forage production, and enhance livestock grazing. The management objectives for MU 16 are to protect and restore the riparian ecosystem. The development of other resource uses/values within this unit is allowed consistent with the management objectives. The Proposed Action has been reviewed for conformance with this plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3).

Results (FMP): In accordance with the National Fire Plan of 1999, public agencies are directed to take actions to reduce hazardous fuels, especially in those areas where communities and human development are at risk from wildfire. The Little Snake FMP, which was developed due to a required action in the Little Snake Resource Management

Plan, identifies areas where fuels reduction treatments are desired and needed. Inherent to complying with these plans is also the need to reduce fuels to help protect life, property, and natural resources. Reducing hazardous fuel loading will reduce fire behavior intensity and the range of environmental conditions under which fire can actively spread. This will allow fire suppression forces to be more effective and provide a safer fire environment to work in. The FMP defines a strategy for managing and prioritizing wildland fire and prescribing vegetation treatments for hazardous fuels reduction and resource benefits. The FMP serves as a programmatic analysis for hazardous fuels reduction, vegetation treatments, and vegetation treatments to benefit resources.

Currently the area in which this project is proposed are managed as “C” and “D” polygons (see Attachment 2). “C” polygons are those where fire is desired but where there may be social, political, or ecological constraints to be considered. “D” polygons are those where fire is desired and there are few or no constraints for its use. The completion of fuels treatment projects in this area may allow more latitude than treatments in other areas. The Snake River Allotment is covered by two “C” polygons and one “D” polygon. The goals and constraints of each polygon as they relate to the Proposed Action are listed below:

C4- Bald Mountain Basin	
Fire Management Objectives	-Create a mosaic of vegetative age classes in sagebrush. -Enhance big game severe winter range and sage grouse habitat.
Fire Management Constraints	-Limit fires to smaller mosaic burns and do not burn during sage grouse breeding period. -Burn less than 10% of entire polygon over ten years. -Average fire size to be less than 200 acres. -Limit heavy equipment use to existing roads and trails in juniper stands to protect cultural resources. -Be aware of hazards related to oil and gas production facilities.
C9- Sandwash Wildlife and Upper Sandwash/Sevenmile Draw	
Fire Management Objectives	-Create a mosaic of vegetative age classes in sagebrush. -Protect sage grouse leks and winter range by maintaining grass forage base. -Use prescribed fire and mechanical treatments to create a mosaic of vegetative age classes.
Fire Management Constraints	-Do not burn during sage grouse breeding period. -Burn less than 25% of entire polygon over ten years. -Hold fire size to less than 500 acres between 4/1 and 6/30 in sage grouse production areas. -Burn less than 10% of sage grouse production areas over ten years.
D1- West Little Snake and Disappointment	
Fire Management	-Create a mosaic of vegetative age classes in sagebrush,

Objectives	pinyon-juniper, and mountain shrub.
Fire Management Constraints	-Evaluate burned areas in pinyon-juniper to determine if reseeded is necessary for weed prevention. -Be aware of hazard related to oil and gas production facilities.

BACKGROUND: The project area for the Proposed Action is located approximately 12 miles northwest of Maybell, Colorado on the Snake River Allotment #04206.

For the purposes of this project, the Snake River Allotment will be divided into the following polygons: Sevenmile Ridge, East End, Ninemile Hill, Smith Ridge, East Panhandle, and Godiva (see Attachments 1 and 2).

Sevenmile Ridge (Attachment 3a): This polygon is 6,912 acres. Topography is rolling ridgetops and benches dissected by steep canyons. Elevations range from approximately 6,300 feet to approximately 6,900 feet. Vegetation is diverse with intermingled juniper woodland, Wyoming big sagebrush, and saltbush plant communities. Extensive areas of sagebrush within the polygon were mechanically treated (brushbeat) in 1998. Due to problems with the contractors technique, many of the treatments were unsuccessful or marginally successful. In many areas the sagebrush was not cut low enough to ensure full mortality of shrub species. Re-introducing fire into these communities would ensure that the plant diversity goals of the original brush treatments, as well as improved nutrient cycling, would be achieved.

The western portion of the polygon is within the C9 (Sevenmile Draw) fire management polygon and the eastern portion is within the D1 (West Little Snake) fire management polygon. Eight of the treatment areas are located within C9.

Smith Ridge (Attachment 3b): This polygon is 10,326 acres. Topography ranges from rolling ridgetops to steep, broken country. Elevations range from approximately 6,300 feet to approximately 6,800 feet. The polygon includes extensive juniper woodlands surrounded by Wyoming big sagebrush and saltbush plant communities. Many of the juniper woodlands have become dense, late seral stands and have expanded into surrounding sagebrush communities. This area has been the target of aggressive fire suppression and has not seen significant wildfire since at least the 1950's (D. Visintainer, pers. comm.).

The western portion of the polygon is within the C9 (Sevenmile Draw) fire management polygon and the eastern portion is located within the D1 (West Little Snake) fire management polygon. All but two of the treatment areas are within D1.

Ninemile Hill (Attachment 3c): This polygon is 9,096 acres. Topography ranges from level floodplains to steep, broken country dissected by canyons and cliffs. Elevations range from approximately 5,800 feet to approximately 6,600 feet. This polygon is located within the C4 fire management polygon. Vegetation present include Wyoming big sagebrush, bitterbrush, juniper woodland, saltbush, riparian, and floodplain communities. Basin big sagebrush has established,

through lack of fire, along some of the larger drainages within the polygon, limiting plant diversity, soil stability, and watershed quality.

The entire polygon is within the C4 (Bald Mountain Basin) fire management polygon.

East Panhandle (Attachment 3d): This polygon is 3,023 acres. Topography is rolling with elevations ranging from 6,300 to 6,500 feet. The polygon is dominated by Wyoming big sagebrush communities with interspersed areas of bitterbrush. Many of the draws that intersect the polygon have become dominated by basin big sagebrush, limiting plant diversity, soil stability, and watershed quality.

The entire polygon is within the C4 (Bald Mountain Basin) fire management polygon.

North Godiva (Attachment 3e): This polygon is 5,323 acres. Plant communities within this area are diverse with extensive salt desert communities at lower elevations and sparse to dense juniper woodlands, Wyoming big sagebrush-perennial grass, and codominant sagebrush-juniper at higher elevations. Elevations range from 6,200 to 7,200 feet. A review of fire history indicated that no significant natural or prescribed fires (greater than 0.5 acres) have occurred since 1980. Young junipers have established throughout extensive areas of sagebrush-grass communities. Sagebrush has also moved towards late seral conditions in many areas.

The entire polygon is within the C4 (Bald Mountain Basin) fire management polygon.

South Godiva (Attachment 3f): This polygon is 1,340 acres. It is dominated by a Wyoming big sagebrush-perennial grass plant community with junipers prevalent along major drainages. Young junipers have established throughout the sagebrush-grass community on the flat benches between drainages. Elevations range from 6,700 to 7,000 feet. A review of fire history indicates that no significant natural fire (greater than 0.1 acre) has occurred within this polygon since 1980. Lack of fire is allowing junipers to establish beyond historically fire-protected sites and into sagebrush communities on level ground.

The entire polygon is within the C4 (Bald Mountain Basin) fire management polygon.

NEED FOR PROPOSED ACTION: Fire suppression over the last 40 years has resulted in an increase in density and size of juniper stands and decadence of sagebrush communities. Plant diversity is decreasing in many areas throughout the allotment as a result of fire exclusion. The resultant loss of diversity within herbaceous and woody components of the plant communities is resulting in a decrease in forage productivity, habitat quality, and community resilience to drought and heavy wildlife use. Without control of junipers, invaded sagebrush communities will decrease as they out compete other plants for water and their allelopathic effects suppress recruitment of grasses and forbs. The buildup of heavy fuels in some areas has also resulted in a condition where uncontrolled wildfire could occur at a catastrophic level, resulting in large areas undergoing hot burns and further impeding the presence of diverse and healthy plant communities and leading to severe impacts to soils, wildlife, and micro-organisms.

PUBLIC SCOPING PROCESS: The Northwest Colorado Stewardship (NWCOS), a local group made up of citizens interested in public land issues, indicated its desire to identify and participate directly in various proactive projects in Moffat County to improve the health and sustainability of plant, soil, and watershed values. NWCOS worked closely with BLM to identify a project that would work toward this goal and serve as a pilot for future collaborative projects. NWCOS indicated its desire to address juniper encroachment and sagebrush decadence resulting from fire suppression on the Snake River Allotment. To prepare for this effort, NWCOS members participated in a workshop held by the Nature Conservancy to gain an understanding of fire's role in the ecosystem and how it affects the various plant communities in the selected project area. BLM, Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW), Colorado State Extension, and Dean Visintainer (the grazing permittee) worked closely with members to understand current conditions, formulate resource goals, and select the proper areas and methods for treatment.

Throughout formulation of the Proposed Action, interested NWCOS members have been active participants. The NWCOS group as a whole has received updates as the planning and NEPA process have progressed.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES: This project would begin in 2005 and be implemented in a stratified manner through 2015 as workload and funding allow. The Proposed Action would reduce juniper encroachment, increase diversity within juniper woodlands, improve forb and grass abundance and cover along drainages, and increase sagebrush age class diversity using prescribed fire and mechanical methods. In addition, the Proposed Action would re-introduce fire into the ecosystem to improve shrublands and juniper stands by creating a mosaic of seral stages. For proposed fire treatments, an approved burn plan would be used to specify fuel, weather, personnel, and other parameters. Refer to Attachments 3a-f for specific treatment areas.

Sevenmile Ridge Polygon: Small (40-100 acres), burns would be conducted in this area. Burns would be limited to 60% black of the area within the treatment areas (all treatment areas are shown in Attachment 2). Due to light fuel loadings of both shrub and herbaceous components, burns in Wyoming big sagebrush may need to be conducted under hot, dry conditions, but may be burned earlier (with exceptions, see below) if conditions in a given year provide sufficient fuel. Burning under these conditions would more closely replicate conditions under which these areas would burn under natural conditions. Wyoming big sagebrush treatments would not commence until the 1998 brush beatings on Sevenmile Ridge meet the minimum criteria for sage grouse nesting habitat as defined by Connelly et al. (2000) (shown below). Once the Connelly guidelines for nesting habitat are met in the old treatments, 11% of the polygon would be treated in this manner over a ten year period.

Burns would include areas dominated by basin big sagebrush in Sevenmile Draw. Basin big sagebrush would be burned during March or April. These burns would begin at the upper portion of the draw. One quarter of the drainage length would be burned at a time, with subsequent burns (moving down the drainage) conducted every two to three years thereafter. Connelly guidelines would not have to be met prior to commencing basin big sagebrush treatments.

This polygon contains approximately 4,000 acres of sagebrush dominated communities. Of this, approximately 750 acres, or 19%, of sagebrush communities (basin and Wyoming) would be treated. It is not expected that burns under extreme conditions would be problematic in terms of control due to isolation from human settlement and lack of fuels in surrounding areas. If burning is determined to be unrealistic due to lack of fire management resources or other concerns, mechanical treatments of these areas would be acceptable. If mechanical treatments are used, 40% of big sagebrush within the 750 acre treatment area would be left as islands within each treatment area, creating a mosaic pattern.

To conform with polygon constraints, individual treatments would be less than 500 acres and treatments within sage grouse production areas would be considerably less than 10% of total production areas. Wyoming big sagebrush burn treatments 3 and 5 are partially within or immediately adjacent to sage grouse production areas and would not be treated during the sage grouse nesting period between April 15 and June 15. These two treatments would also avoid slopes exceeding 10%. None of these treatments would be within pinyon-juniper woodlands or near oil and gas production facilities.

Smith Ridge Polygon: A combination of prescribed fire and mechanical treatments would be used in sagebrush communities in order to create/maintain age class diversity of the herbaceous component of these communities. In areas that would be burned, burning would be limited to 60% of each treatment area. In areas that would be brushbeat, 40% of each treatment area would be left as untreated islands, creating a mosaic pattern.

Burning would also occur within juniper dominated communities. If burning is determined to be unrealistic due to lack of fire management resources or other concerns, mechanical treatments of these areas by hydroaxe would be acceptable.

This polygon contains approximately 509 acres of juniper dominated communities of which 78 acres, or 15%, would be targeted for treatment. This polygon also contains 4,126 acres of sagebrush dominated communities of which 214 acres, or 5%, would be brushbeat and 141 acres, or 3% would be burned.

All treatments would be staggered over a ten year period. The Connelly guidelines for sage grouse nesting habitat would not have to be met within the polygon prior to treatment. Burning would occur during the spring if fuel loadings allow, but may occur later if drier conditions are deemed necessary for fire to carry through the treatment area. As with sagebrush burns in the Sevenmile Polygon, burning may need to occur during hot, dry conditions. It is not expected that burns under extreme conditions would be problematic in terms of control due to isolation from human settlement and lack of fuels in surrounding areas. Juniper burns occurring in treatment areas 4, 5, and 6 would not occur on slopes steeper than 25%.

Ninemile Hill Polygon: Basin big sagebrush in draws east of the Little Snake River would be burned. These burns would be done in a stratified manner with draw burns in other areas of the allotment. These burns would begin at the upper portion of the draws. One quarter of each drainage length would be burned at a time, with subsequent burns (moving down the drainages)

conducted every two to three years thereafter. Burns would target the removal of 50 to 80% of basin big sagebrush over ten years.

By burning basin big sagebrush in draws in a stratified manner, management objectives and management constraints of this polygon can be met. Individual burns would be less than 200 acres and by stratifying the burns, a mosaic of age classes would be created. Burns in treatment area 2 which are within or adjacent to sage grouse production areas would not occur during sage grouse nesting, April 15 to June 15, and any needed equipment would not be transported through juniper stands off of existing roads or trails. The lower ¼ mile of target treatment area 2 would not be burned between November 16 and April 15 to prevent disturbance to a winter bald eagle roost.

East Panhandle Polygon: Basin big sagebrush burns would begin at the upper portion of the draws. One quarter of the drainage length would be burned at a time, with subsequent burns (moving down the drainages) conducted every two to three years thereafter.

Burns would also occur in Wyoming big sagebrush communities among existing mechanical treatments. Burns would not occur until existing mechanical treatments have reached the Connelly guidelines for sage grouse nesting habitat, then burns would be staggered over a ten year period. Burns would be conducted to favor a mosaic pattern by allowing no more than 60% of big sagebrush to be burned within each target treatment area. This polygon contains approximately 2,400 acres of sagebrush dominated communities of which 165 acres, or 7%, would be burned.

All burns except Wyoming big sagebrush treatments 1 and 2 would not be conducted during sage grouse nesting which occurs from approximately April 15 to June 15. Big sagebrush burns 1 and 2 are outside of sage grouse production areas and may be burned during nesting season. All individual treatment areas would be less than 200 acres and designed to create a mosaic pattern.

North Godiva Polygon: Approximately 226 acres of encroaching juniper, 118 acres of juniper woodland, and 57 acres of Wyoming big sagebrush would be targeted for treatment. A combination of prescribed fire and mechanical treatments would be used in sagebrush and juniper dominated communities. Individual tree removal by hand or hydroaxe would be targeted in areas of juniper encroachment with cut trees left in place. Mechanical methods would be used in sagebrush communities and burning would be used in juniper dominated communities.

This polygon contains 3,291 acres of juniper dominated communities of which 118 acres, or 28%, would be treated; 789 acres of juniper encroachment of which 82 acres, or 10%, would be treated; and 1,049 acres of big sagebrush dominated communities of which 57 acres, or 5%, would be treated. As elsewhere, burning may need to occur during hot, dry conditions in the juniper communities. It is not expected that burns under extreme conditions would be problematic in terms of control due to isolation from human settlement and lack of fuels in surrounding areas. If burning is determined to be unrealistic due to lack of fire management resources or other concerns, mechanical treatments of these areas would be acceptable.

No burning would occur on slopes steeper than 10% on juniper burn treatment polygons 1-4. All fires would be less than 200 acres. All equipment access through juniper stands would be restricted to existing roads and trails.

South Godiva Polygon: Because treatments on the South Godiva Polygon are restricted to mechanical removal of encroaching juniper, none of the constraints for the C4 polygon would apply.

Individual tree removal by hand or hydroaxe would occur in areas of juniper encroachment. Within this polygon, approximately 350 acres would be targeted, or 26% of the polygon would be treated. Cut trees would be left in place.

All areas: To insure plant recovery, all treatments would be rested from livestock grazing through two growing seasons following treatment.

Post-treatment seeding: To enhance plant community recovery, reduce erosion potential, limit invasive weeds, and ensure that treatment goals are met, all brush beatings and burns may be seeded during the first late fall or early winter following treatment. Seeding would be broadcast. Existing brush beatings in the Sevenmile Ridge and East Panhandle Polygons would also be seeded. These seedings would be implemented whether or not Connelly guidelines for sage grouse nesting habitat are met. The following native seed mixtures and rates for each plant community are listed below:

Plant Community	Treatment Polygons Present	Species	Rate (lbs. PLS/ac)
Juniper	Smith Ridge North Godiva	bluebunch wheatgrass	4
		thickspike wheatgrass	4
		Indian ricegrass	2
		blue flax	1
Sagebrush/grass	Sevenmile Ridge Smith Ridge East Panhandle North Godiva	western wheatgrass	4
		bluebunch wheatgrass	4
		thickspike wheatgrass	4
		Indian ricegrass	2
		blue flax	1
		winterfat	2
Basin sagebrush	Sevenmile Ridge Ninemile Hill East Panhandle	western wheatgrass	4
		slender wheatgrass	4
		four-wing saltbush	1

These mixes constitute recommended species and rates. Species and rates may be altered based on site-specific conditions, but only native species will be used.

Sage grouse considerations: All treatments within a two mile radius of leks (specified above) would not receive treatment between March 15 and June 15. Mechanical treatments and prescribed burns can be used to improve sage grouse habitat where the sagebrush canopy exceeds 30% and the herbaceous understory is lacking. However, careful consideration of treatment areas is needed to ensure the best sage grouse habitat is not treated and that the removal of sagebrush does not exceed habitat requirements for sage grouse. Connelly et al. (2000) recommends that no more than 20% of nesting habitat should be treated within a 30 year period, and that no more than 20% of winter habitat should be treated within a 20 – 30 year period. The following guidelines would be used to ensure the goal of sage grouse habitat improvement is achieved.

Sage grouse habitat requirements (adapted from Connelly et al. 2000):

Habitat Type	Shrub Height	Shrub Canopy	Grass/forb Height	Grass/forb Canopy
Nesting	12-32 in	15-25%	> 7 in	>15
Brood-rearing	16-32 in	10-25%	variable	>15
Winter	10-14 in	10-30%	n/a	n/a

Connelly, J.W., Schroeder, M.A., Sands, A.R. and Braun, C.E. 2000.Guidelines to manage sage grouse populations and their habitat. Wildlife Society Bulletin, 28(4):967-985.

Migratory bird considerations: Mechanical treatments would not occur between May 15 and July 15 to prevent accidental destruction of active migratory bird nests.

Oil & gas considerations: To ensure compliance with the Northwest Colorado Fire Plan requirements concerning fire near oil and gas facilities as well as the need to ensure maximum safety, an annual meeting would be held between LSFO fire staff, oil and gas staff, and range staff during the winter *prior* initiation of each year’s phase of the project. This meeting would occur whether or not burn treatments are planned for that year. The purpose of this meeting would be to update the fire and range staff of current and proposed well sites, pipelines, and other facilities in the area that need to be avoided. As development occurs over the life of this treatment project, spatial, temporal, or methodical modifications to treatments may be necessary to ensure maximum safety with oil and gas facilities.

Weed considerations: All equipment that would be used in mechanical or prescribed fire treatments would be washed prior to entering the project area(s). All treatment areas would be monitored by BLM to detect any introduction or establishment of new weeds. Weed monitoring would be incorporated into a post-treatment monitoring plan.

Recreation considerations: BLM project coordinators would attempt to contact hunters in the field if treatments are to occur during big game hunting seasons and inform them of the treatments and their locations. All existing roads and trails would be left open to motorized vehicle travel following completion of each treatment.

Cultural Resource Considerations: It would be the responsibility of the BLM project lead to contact the cultural resource specialist as to what polygons are being planned for that year. Cultural reports will be maintained in the project file as well as in the cultural resource files. Specific terms and conditions and/or stipulations will be developed and provided to the project lead. Cultural resource section and Section 106 process for all burn plans would be completed before the treatment is allowed to proceed.

The phased project approach for cultural resource Section 106 requirements will mitigate adverse effects, significant impacts and data loss, (NHPA Section 106, 36 CFR 800.9; Archaeological Resource Protection Act 1979; BLM/Colorado SHPO Protocol 1998; NEPA/FLPMA requirements) to an acceptable level for eligible and need data cultural resources that may be identified in these treatment areas.

No treatment would be allowed to proceed without the completion of appropriate cultural resource Section 106. The level of Section 106 survey and review would be dependent upon the method of treatment as follows:

Sagebrush burns: Project areas would be field reviewed looking for any historic wooden structures, homestead, corrals, etc. that could be present. If these are identified, the areas would be protected from the burn activities and avoided. Project areas would undergo a cultural resource records review at the Little Snake Field Office to see that Class III survey and/or on-the-ground project area reviews has been done in the project area. Identified cultural resources would be avoided. Known cultural resources that are need-data or eligible to the National Register of Historic Places would be avoided by all proposed activities. Project areas that would have equipment parking, staging areas, fire control hand lines, or dozer lines, would have a Class III survey on those specific areas.

Sagebrush mechanical: These polygons would have mosaic brush beating carried out within the polygon boundaries. These project areas would have a review of existing cultural records and a field review. A project area field review would look for any historic or prehistoric wooden structures, homestead, corrals, etc. that could be present. Known cultural resources that are identified in the records review, eligible or need-data, would be avoided. Project areas that would have equipment parking or staging areas would have a Class III survey on those specific areas.

Juniper hydro axe and burn: These project areas would have a review of existing cultural records. The entire polygon would have a Class III survey carried out and eligible or need-data cultural resources would be avoided. Burn plans would develop protection for these cultural resources.

Juniper encroachment cutting: The project areas would have a review of existing cultural records prior to the field review of the polygon. These polygons would have the encroachment/invasive juniper trees removed by cutting these trees by hand with saws, loppers, or chain saws. No mechanical equipment larger than a hand held chain saw would be used.

Encroachment or invading juniper trees are defined as those trees that are not in dense woodland stands of mature trees and further characterized as isolated trees or an open group of trees, with sagebrush present between the trees, eight (8) feet tall or shorter. Care needs to be taken that juniper mature trees that have survived previous fires are not included in this definition. Mature trees may be removed but only after case by case cultural field review of the trees. Encroaching/invading tree areas versus woodlands areas are easily identified from aerial photography of the project polygon. Trees that would be spared would be flagged prior to project work starting.

Because of the ten year life span of this project, it is not possible to do all the cultural resource Section 106 process as currently described in BLM Manuals and the Colorado State Protocol (1998). Consequently, as the project proceeds, cultural resource reports will be developed for each of the treatment areas as they are identified.

The following standard stipulation would apply:

The operator [BLM] is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the operations that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing historic or archaeological sites, or for collecting artifacts. If historic or archaeological materials are encountered or uncovered during any project activities, the operator [BLM] is to immediately stop activities in the immediate vicinity of the find and immediately contact the authorized officer (AO) at (970) 826-5000. Within five working days, the AO will inform the operator [BLM] as to:

- Whether the materials appear eligible for the National Register of Historic Places;
- The mitigation measures the operator will likely have to undertake before the identified area can be used for project activities again; and

Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(g) (Federal Register Notice, Monday, December 4, 1995, Vol. 60, No. 232) the holder of this authorization [BLM] must notify the AO, by telephone at (970) 826-5000, and with written confirmation, immediately upon the discovery of human remains, funerary items, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony. Further, pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(c) and (d), you [BLM] must stop activities in the vicinity of the discovery and protect it for 30 days or until notified to proceed by the authorized officer.

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE: The proposed treatments would not occur.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT/ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES/MITIGATION MEASURES

CRITICAL RESOURCES

AIR QUALITY

Affected Environment: There are no special designation air sheds or non-attainment areas nearby that would be affected by the Proposed Action.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action: Prescribed and wildland fires are a source of air pollution emissions including particulate matter, volatile organic compounds, and carbon monoxide. Fire activities would be conducted in accordance with existing laws that protect air quality. Specifically, all fire activities would comply with the applicable air quality regulations required by FLPMA, the Clean Air Act, and the Colorado Air Quality Commission. By complying with applicable air quality standards and regulations, impacts to air quality would be short term and considered acceptable.

The prescribed fires that are proposed in the Basin Sage and Sage Burn Treatments are typically smaller than uncontrolled wildfires occurring during peak burning conditions. Prescribed fires are conducted under more mesic conditions and therefore, usually involve less total combustion than wildfires. This equates to less overall smoke production. Also, prescribed fires are conducted under atmospheric conditions that will promote air pollutant dispersion. The cumulative affect of prescribed burning coupled with other mechanical fuels treatment would be the reduction of wildfire events that produce more negative impacts to air quality.

The proposed mechanical treatments should not impact air quality other than localized short term dust production.

Environmental Consequences, No Action Alternative: Fuels would continue to accumulate within sagebrush and juniper communities. Substantial long term consequences exist as a result of the increasing risk for large scale uncontrolled wildfires. Uncontrolled wildfires tend to produce more smoke as a result of more fuel consumption, their larger size, and longer burning duration. Wildfires would not necessarily burn under ideal dispersion conditions.

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Ole Olsen 3/16/05

AREA OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

Affected Environment: Not present.

Environmental Consequences, common to all alternatives: Not applicable.

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Jim McBrayer 2/28/05

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Affected Environment: Cultural resources in this region of Colorado range from Paleo-Indian to Historic. For a general understanding of the cultural resources in this area of Colorado, see *An Overview of Prehistoric Cultural Resources, Little Snake Resource Area, Northwestern Colorado*, Bureau of Land Management Colorado, Cultural Resources Series, Number 20, and *An Isolated Empire, A History of Northwestern Colorado*, Bureau of Land Management Colorado, Cultural Resource Series, Number 2. The project areas have undergone a review of known cultural resources that are in the area. Currently no known cultural resources are going to be affected by the proposed projects. However, this may change due to the project specific on-the-ground reviews and other cultural resource surveys that will take place when the specific projects are scheduled to be undertaken by the BLM.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action: The proposed projects would be phased in over the next ten years. Class III cultural resource survey and/or on-the-ground project area reviews would be undertaken as the specific project areas are scheduled to have the proscribed treatments carried out. BLM would be responsible for carrying out the appropriate level of cultural resource record review, field work, final report, and cultural Section 106 for each treatment polygon. Appropriate survey and avoidance as described would avoid adverse impacts to cultural resources.

Environmental Consequences, No Action Alternative: Any burns in plant communities within the proposed project area would occur by natural ignition. Site specific surveys for cultural resources would not occur. Adverse impacts could occur to individual cultural resources under wildfire conditions that would be more easily avoided if burns are implemented under the Proposed Action.

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Henry S. Keesling 4/4/05

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Affected Environment: There are no minorities or low income populations in the vicinity of the Proposed Action.

Environmental Consequences, common to all alternatives: None

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Phillis Bowers 1/19/05

FLOOD PLAINS

Affected Environment: Floodplains are associated with the Little Snake River and other low gradient streams within the affected area. Upper Sevenmile Draw, the two unnamed tributaries to the Little Snake River within the Ninemile Hill Area, and the unnamed headwater tributaries of Shaffer Draw and Red Wash within the East Panhandle Area contain basin big sagebrush.

Low frequency flooding that would be depicted by 100-year and 500-year floodplains could be identified for the Little Snake River but these designations would have little relevance to the Proposed Action.

Environmental Consequences, common to all alternatives: Only the basin big sagebrush burn treatments would have any direct impact to floodplain function within the small tributary systems. This would be caused by removal of vegetation that would reduce the energy of flowing water. The other sagebrush and juniper burn treatments would add additional surface water flow and sediments to floodplain areas, but the restricted size of these treatments and yearly spacing of treatments would keep the influence of these treatments on floodplains to an acceptable level. The mechanical treatments would have the least impact on floodplains. Floodplains along the Little Snake River would not be impacted.

The stratified methodology of beginning the burning treatments from the top of the drainage and only burning about one-quarter of the total proposed length in a given year in each polygon should not cause excessive modification of the floodplain functions.

Small floodplains associated with Sevenmile Draw and the unnamed drainages have fences, stock ponds and unimproved roads associated with them. No threat to human safety, life, welfare, or property would result from implementing either of the alternatives.

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Ole Olsen 3/16/05

INVASIVE, NONNATIVE SPECIES

Affected Environment: Cheatgrass, whitetop, halogeton, Canada thistle, and other biennial thistles are known to occur on this allotment. There is the potential for noxious weeds, such as dalmatian toadflax, knapweeds, and others, to exist and spread in these areas.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action: It is not anticipated that the Proposed Action would increase cheatgrass, or halogeton occurrence or cause new weed infestations due to the post-treatment seeding and rest measures proposed. The existing herbaceous community, when released from competition from over story vegetation and rested from livestock grazing, should increase and proliferate, enhancing desirable species competition with cheatgrass and other invasive species. Seeding of the project areas should serve to further enhance the existing

herbaceous community. By ensuring that all equipment used in the mechanical or prescribed fire treatments is washed prior to entering the project area, the chances for introduction of new weeds would be greatly reduced. Post treatment monitoring for weed establishment would ensure that any new weed populations can be treated before they spread.

Environmental Consequences, No Action Alternative: None

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Curtis Bryan 2/28/05

MIGRATORY BIRDS

Affected Environment: The Snake River Allotment provides both foraging and nesting habitat for a variety of migratory birds. This large allotment contains a number of habitat types, including sagebrush shrublands, saltbush flats, greasewood stands, riparian woodlands and juniper woodlands. Two sagebrush obligate species listed on the USFWS's Bird of Conservation Concern List, sage sparrow and Brewer's sparrow, nest in the area. Burrowing owls may nest in the prairie dog colonies scattered throughout the allotment. The allotment contains potential habitat for mountain plover, although no nests have been documented in the area. Ferruginous hawks, golden eagles, and prairie falcons are known to nest on public lands within the allotment.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action: The Proposed Action would mimic natural disturbances and improve the overall vigor and health of the ecosystem. Nesting of migratory birds may be disrupted and nests could be lost if treatments were conducted during the nesting period (May 15 to July 15). Mechanical treatments should be delayed until July 15 to prevent the accidental destruction of active nests. Burning in the spring is desirable for achieving vegetation objectives and, as fire is a natural disturbance, prescribed burns may be conducted in the spring and early summer months. Although this may interfere with a limited amount of breeding activity, it would have no measurable influence on the abundance or distribution of breeding migratory birds at any landscape level. Prescribed burns conducted in the early spring or fall would not interfere with migratory bird nesting.

None of the treatments are located in close enough proximity to disturb nesting raptors. The Proposed Action would not impact mountain plover or burrowing owls, as these species tend to nest in areas unsuitable for fire or mechanical treatments. Minimal impacts to migratory birds may occur through habitat alteration. Although some sage-obligate species would use semi-open stands of sagebrush, thinning the sagebrush may temporarily displace individual birds by reducing the amount of available habitat. However, removing juniper trees in the project area would help improve sagebrush stands and would benefit sagebrush obligate species.

Environmental Consequences, No Action Alternative: None

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Desa Ausmus 3/25/05

NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS CONCERNS

Affected Environment: A letter and project map describing the project was sent to the Uinta and Ouray Tribal Council and the Colorado Commission of Indian Affairs on April 5, 2005. No comments were received (Letter on file at the Little Snake Field Office). This project requires no additional notification.

Environmental Consequences, common to all alternatives: None

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Henry S. Keesling 4/4/05

PRIME & UNIQUE FARMLANDS

Affected Environment: Not present.

Environmental Consequences: None

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Ole Olsen 3/16/05

T&E SPECIES - SENSITIVE PLANTS

Affected Environment: There are no BLM sensitive plant species within or in the vicinity of the proposed projects.

Environmental Consequences: None

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Hunter Seim 3/3/05

T&E SPECIES – ANIMALS

Affected Environment: Bald eagles are known to winter along portions of the Little Snake River, using large, mature trees as roosting and perching sites on private land. Upland habitats adjacent to these water ways are used as scavenging areas primarily for winter killed mule deer and elk. There are several bald eagle winter roosts located along the Little Snake River within the Ninemile polygon. The lower portion of Treatment 2 in this polygon is located near a bald eagle winter roost site. The project area does not contain woody riparian forests suitable for yellow-billed cuckoo nesting.

The Snake River allotment provides habitat for several BLM sensitive species. There are numerous white-tailed prairie dog towns scattered throughout the treatment polygons. Many of these towns were eliminated by plague in the early 1990's and are in various stages of recolonization. Active prairie dog towns provide habitat for burrowing owls and black-footed ferrets. White-tailed prairie dog colonies are scattered throughout the area. In most areas, shrubs are scattered in prairie dog colonies and these are not areas that would be targeted for treatments. The entire project area provides habitat for the greater sage grouse. Sage grouse nesting areas are mapped as a two mile radius around a lek site. Portions of the East Panhandle, Sevenmile, Smith Ridge and Ninemile polygons are within mapped sage grouse nesting habitat. However, only a few identified treatment areas fall within mapped nesting habitat in the East Panhandle and Sevenmile polygons. The Ninemile and East Panhandle Polygons also provide winter habitat for sage grouse. There are no leks located in the project area, however, there are several leks adjacent to the project area.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action:

Sevenmile Ridge Polygon: Wyoming big sagebrush burns in this polygon were designed for sage grouse habitat improvement. Connelly et al. (2000) does not recommend burns in Wyoming big sagebrush because “fire can be difficult to control and tends to burn the best remaining nest and early brood-rearing habitats (i.e. those areas with the best remaining understory).” However, sagebrush stands targeted for prescribed burn in this polygon are in poor condition, with little understory and are not providing high quality habitat in this current state. Treatments in these sagebrush stands would create a mosaic pattern, increase the herbaceous component of the ecosystem and improve sage grouse habitat. Prescribed burns should be conducted in the winter or early spring months, prior to nesting (mid-April) or after chicks have hatched and are mobile (mid-June). Burning in March or April should not impact breeding as the treatments are over two miles away from the closest lek. If burning proves too difficult due to the lack of fine fuels, mechanical treatments would not be conducted between April 15 and July 15, which reflects both the sage grouse nesting period restriction and the migratory bird restriction which overlap.

Treatment sizes range from 57 to 103 acres. These are appropriate sizes for sage grouse habitat improvement, providing the treatments are staggered. Removing too much sagebrush in a short time would have negative impacts to grouse. Seeding after treatment would ensure the re-establishment of grasses and forbs, and also improve habitat for sage grouse. The 1998 brush beatings are still heavily infested with weeds and seeding would improve sage grouse habitat.

Most of the 800 acres of sagebrush brushbeat in this area in 1998 were not cut low enough to meet the treatment objectives. These treatments are still important when evaluating the overall habitat conditions for sage grouse. The Proposed Action would treat an additional 750 acres of Wyoming big sagebrush within the polygon. Collectively, these treatments would impact 39% of the sagebrush communities in the Sevenmile Ridge Polygon. Delaying burning or brush beating of Wyoming big sagebrush until the Connelly guidelines for sage grouse nesting habitat are met in the 1998 treatments would prevent the removal of too much sagebrush on a landscape level.

Burning basin big sagebrush along the draws would improve habitat for sage grouse. After the sage is removed, grasses and forbs would re-establish along the draw and potentially some small riparian areas would be created. This may provide brood-rearing areas for sage grouse nesting in the polygon.

If treatments do occur near prairie dog towns, the removal of shrubs would likely benefit prairie dogs, making colony expansion easier. The Proposed Action would not impact future black-footed ferret or burrowing owl use of the prairie dog colonies.

Smith Ridge Polygon: No treatments are located in sage grouse nesting habitat for this polygon. Wyoming big sagebrush burns and mechanical treatments in this polygon were also designed for sage grouse habitat improvement. Total acreage consumed by fire would be limited to 60% within each target treatment area. If mechanical treatments are used, at least 40% of the sagebrush in each polygon would be left as islands. This would create a mosaic pattern, increase the herbaceous component of the ecosystem and improve sage grouse habitat. The areas targeted for treatment would be small (40-100 acre) and staggered over time. This would be appropriate for sage grouse habitat improvement. Seeding after treatment would ensure the re-establishment of grasses and forbs, and also improve habitat for sage grouse.

The proposed juniper burns would improve habitat for sage grouse by removing encroaching trees and returning the area to a sagebrush/grass community.

Ninemile Hill Polygon: The proposed action would have 'no effect' to bald eagles. The prescribed burn would target basin big sagebrush along a small draw, and would not impact any riparian vegetation along the river. Treatments would not be conducted from November 16 to April 15 on the lower ¼ mile of treatment 2 to prevent disturbance to wintering bald eagles. The proposed action would not impede utilization of foraging areas.

The Proposed Action would not impact sage grouse winter or nesting habitat as no Wyoming big sagebrush is targeted for treatment. Burning basin big sagebrush along the draws would improve habitat for sage grouse. After the sage is removed, grasses and forbs would re-establish along the draw and potentially some small riparian areas may be created. This would provide brood-rearing areas for sage grouse nesting in the polygon.

East Panhandle Polygon: Wyoming big sagebrush burns in this polygon were also designed for sage grouse habitat improvement. Sagebrush stands targeted for prescribed burn in this polygon are in better condition with a good understory. Approximately 600 acres of sagebrush was mechanically treated in this polygon in 1996. The Proposed Action would treat the sagebrush stands left from the original treatment. The East Panhandle burns would not be conducted until the 1996 brush beatings meet habitat requirements for nesting sage grouse. This would ensure that nesting habitat is available in the polygon after treatment occurs and ensure continuity of available quality habitat as the 1996 treatments change over time. Prescribed burns would be conducted in the winter or early spring months, prior to nesting (mid-April) or after chicks have hatched and are mobile (mid-June). Burning in March or April should not impact breeding as the treatments are over one and a half miles away from the closest lek. If burning proves too difficult

due to the lack of fine fuels, mechanical treatments would not be conducted between April 15 to July 15, which reflects both the sage grouse nesting restriction and the migratory bird restriction which overlap. The total acreage consumed by fire would be 60% within each treatment polygon and would increase the herbaceous component of the ecosystem and improve sage grouse habitat. Seeding after treatment would ensure the re-establishment of grasses and forbs, and also improve habitat for sage grouse.

Burning basin big sagebrush along the draws would improve habitat for sage grouse. After the sage is removed, grasses and forbs would re-establish along the draw and potentially some small riparian areas may be created. This would provide brood-rearing areas for sage grouse nesting in the polygon.

North Godiva Polygon: No treatments are located in sage grouse nesting habitat for this polygon. Wyoming big sagebrush burns were designed for sage grouse habitat improvement. These burns would create a mosaic pattern and increase the herbaceous component of the ecosystem. Burn size ranges from 23 to 47 acres. These are appropriate sizes for sage grouse habitat improvement, providing the treatments are staggered. The sagebrush parks in this polygon are healthy, but contain numerous young juniper trees. As junipers invade sagebrush stands, habitat quality for sage grouse declines and this type of ecosystem is often avoided. The Proposed Action would improve habitat for sage grouse by removing encroaching trees and returning the area to a sagebrush/grass community.

South Godiva Polygon: The sagebrush parks in this polygon are healthy, but contain numerous young juniper trees. As junipers invade sagebrush stands, habitat quality for sage grouse declines and this type of ecosystem is often avoided. The Proposed Action would improve habitat for sage grouse by removing encroaching trees and returning the area to a sagebrush/grass community.

Environmental Consequences, No Action Alternative: Allowing these habitats to continue to progress towards climax conditions would decrease habitat quality for sage grouse. Big sagebrush cover would increase, decreasing the understory of forbs and grasses that are an important component of sage grouse habitat. This alternative would have no impact on bald eagles.

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Desa Ausmus 3/25/05

T&E SPECIES – PLANTS

Affected Environment: There are no federally listed threatened or endangered plant species within or in the vicinity of the project area.

Environmental Consequences, common to all alternatives: None

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Hunter Seim 3/3/05

WASTES, HAZARDOUS OR SOLID

Affected Environment: Fire engines, pickup trucks, ATVs, and other support vehicles would be present during project activities. Fuel, oil, and coolant are potential hazardous materials that could be introduced to the project vicinity.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action: If a release does occur, the environment affected would be dependent on the nature and volume of material released. If there are no releases, there would be no affect on the environment. Consequences would be dependent on the volume and nature of the material released. In most every situation involving hazardous materials, there are ways to remediate the area that has been contaminated. Short-term consequences would occur, but they can be remedied, and long-term impacts would be minimal.

Environmental Consequences, No Action Alternative: None

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Duane Johnson 2/28/05

WATER QUALITY – GROUND

Affected Environment: The area affected by the Proposed Action has some ground water aquifers containing meteoric water. The ground water quality in the areas range from potable to useable in aquifers within porous formations, mostly sandstone and conglomerates.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action: The Proposed Action would be beneficial to ground water quality. The Proposed Action would be conducted in accordance with existing Colorado laws for water quality. Specifically, all permit activities must comply with the applicable water quality regulations in The Colorado Water Quality Control Act, and they would be in conformance with the classifications and numeric standards for water quality established by the Colorado Water Quality Control Commission.

Environmental Consequences, No Action Alternative: None

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Fred Conrath 3/1/05

WATER QUALITY – SURFACE

Affected Environment: The Little Snake River segment which flows through the affected area needs to have water quality sufficient to support Aquatic Life Warm 2, Recreation 1a and Agriculture. Tributary water to the Little Snake River within this segment needs to have water quality sufficient to support Aquatic Life Cold 2, Recreation 2, and Agriculture. These tributary waters are designated Use Protected.

The Little Snake River in Colorado was listed in the Colorado Nonpoint Assessment Report of 1989 for having elevated sediment and nutrients. In addition, the Little Snake River was on the 1996 303d list as an impaired water body because of elevated sediment levels. More stringent criteria have since been required for water bodies to be listed on the 303d list and this river segment has been moved to the Evaluation and Monitoring list.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action: The Proposed Action would have some short term effects to the water quality of ephemeral streams in the project area during times of runoff. These effects would result from the basin big sage burns, big sage burns, and juniper burn treatments. Increases in sediment, nitrogen, phosphorous, and cation production are likely in the first couple of years after treatment. These increases would be minor and short lived, returning to pre-treatment levels in a couple of years. The small and controlled management of these burns would keep sediment and nutrient yields from increasing to harmful levels. The effects of the proposed action would be short lived and not out of the natural variability of the area.

Environmental Consequences, No Action Alternative: By not implementing the Proposed Action the risk of a large, landscape scale fire would be increased. If this happens, the effects would be the same as under the Proposed Action, but could be large enough that the impacts would be noticeable. If a large fire doesn't occur, there would be no impact to the water quality under this alternative.

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Ole Olsen 3/17/05

WETLANDS/RIPARIAN ZONES

Affected Environment: Two springs or seeps exist within the project area. Eightmile Spring (BLM No. 70-42) occurs in upper Sevenmile Draw within basin big sage burn treatment. Range project No. 204803, a livestock and wildlife impoundment is built below this seep. The impoundment is not built across the draw but is built below a tributary and adjacent to the normal stream flow in Sevenmile Draw.

Olive Spring (BLM No. 68-26) occurs in the Ninemile Hill area but it is not within or downstream of the proposed treatment polygons. It occurs in a small tributary drainage of

treatment polygon 2. It was evaluated for supporting riparian resources in 2004 and received a preliminary rating of functioning properly. The riparian system occupies 0.02 acres.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action: Basin big sage burn treatments in upper Sevenmile Draw would be expected to increase any potential alluvial recharge of Eightmile Spring. The big sage burn treatments would have little to no effect on Eightmile Spring.

Environmental Consequences, No Action Alternative: The spring sources and riparian habitat supported by them would remain unaffected.

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Ole Olsen 3/16/05

WILD & SCENIC RIVERS

Affected Environment: There are no designated or proposed wild and scenic rivers in the vicinity of the Proposed Action.

Environmental Consequences: None

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Jim McBrayer 3/28/05

WILDERNESS, WSAs

Affected Environment: Not present.

Environmental Consequences: Not applicable.

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Jim McBrayer 2/28/05

NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS

RANGE MANAGEMENT/RANGE IMPROVEMENTS

Affected Environment: All of the proposed treatments would be within the Snake River Allotment #04206, permitted to the Visintainer Sheep Company. This allotment is permitted for 75 AUMs of horses, 4,001 AUMs of sheep, and 2,006 AUMs of cattle for a total of 6,082 AUMs of permitted use. Horse use is December 1 through June 1; sheep use is November 1 through

April 30; cattle use is September 1 through May 31. Until at least the 2008 grazing season, only 837 AUMs (all horses and cattle) are to be used due to high elk numbers. Use areas during this interim period are confined to the Bald Mountain area and along the Little Snake River.

There are extensive range improvements on this allotment. The vast majority of improvements are water developments in the form of ponds and small reservoirs. The entire allotment boundary is fenced, but there are essentially no interior pasture fences.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action: Due to the high levels of current voluntary non-use, impacts to existing livestock operations due to rest requirements following treatment are expected to be minimal. The current areas that livestock are being confined to are not areas targeted for treatments. Additionally, the ten year horizon for the Proposed Action and the flexibility provided in which treatments are done in which years gives ample opportunity to coordinate with the permittee to ensure that treated areas receive required rest from livestock use.

Most water developments are within the lower saltbush plant communities that are not targeted for treatments. However, for each area that is targeted for treatment, every effort will be made to avoid and eliminate impacts to existing improvements.

Environmental Consequences, No Action Alternative: There would be no impact to grazing operations or existing range improvements under this alternative.

Mitigation Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Hunter Seim 3/10/05

REALTY AUTHORIZATIONS

Affected Environment: A 10' ROW for a powerline (COC 36301) runs roughly parallel to the Moffat County Road 21. This powerline is located near two proposed basin big sagebrush burn treatments but on the opposite side of the Little Snake River.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action: No facilities within the proposed project vicinity would be adversely affected by the Proposed Action. Distance, separation by plant communities lacking fuel to carry fire, and other features such as the Little Snake River would effectively buffer any authorized facilities from impacts due to burns or mechanical treatments.

Environmental Consequences, No Action Alternative: None

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Phillis Bowers 1/19/05

RECREATION AND TRAVEL MANAGEMENT

Affected Environment: The analysis area exists within the Extensive Recreation Management Area. Most of the recreation use in this area consists of off highway vehicle use, primarily in the spring, and big game hunting, primarily in the fall. Other forms of recreation use also occur, such as wild horse and wildlife viewing, equestrian use, hiking, and dispersed camping.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action: The projects have the potential to disrupt hunters and impact OHV use and motorized roads and trails. Contacting hunters during big game seasons, if treatments occur during those times, would minimize disruption to hunting activities.

Environmental Consequences, No Action Alternative: None

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of Specialist and Date: Rob Schmitzer 3/7/05

SOILS

Affected Environment: Several soil types are present within the area proposed for prescribed burning of Wyoming big sagebrush, basin big sagebrush, and juniper. Generally soils within the draws that are proposed for basin big sagebrush burning are deep and exhibit low to moderate runoff rates. The slopes of these soils are usually less than 5% but some slopes may be as high as 10 to 12%. The rate of water runoff is mostly dependent on the degree of slope. These soils are generally nonsaline and nonsodic.

The soils within the treatment areas for prescribed burning of Wyoming big sagebrush also have few limitations in most treatment polygons. These soil types exhibit medium to very high runoff rates and range in slope steepness from 3 to 65%, although most of the soils are on slopes less than 15%. These soils are shallow to deep. Shallow soil depths and steepness of slope account for the very high runoff rates.

The soils mapped within the treatment areas for prescribed burning of juniper are generally shallow to moderately deep, are mapped on slopes ranging from 5 to 65% and have moderate to very high runoff rates.

The following table describes some of the soils that are present within the big sagebrush burn and juniper burn treatment areas that have some limitations or properties that should be considered in planning the prescribed burns. Very high ratings for the runoff class are related to slope steepness and soil thickness.

Soil Name	Saline-Sodic	Slope	Runoff Class	Depth (Inches)
Castee loam	4 mmhos/cm--5 SAR	3-12%	Medium	60+
Lilsnake-Sandwash loams (Lilsnake)	2 mmhos/cm—0 SAR	3-20%	Very High	10-20
Lilsnake-Sandwash loams (Sandwash)	2 mmhos/cm—2 SAR	3-10%	Medium	20-40
Rentsac-Moyerson complex (Rentsac)	4 mmhos/cm—0 SAR	25-65%	Very High	10-20
Rentsac-Moyerson complex (Moyerson)	8 mmhos/cm—3 SAR	25-65%	Very High	10-20
Yellowwash-Piezon complex (Yellowwash)	16 mmhos/cm—0 SAR	5-15%	Very High	7-20
Yellowwash-Piezon complex (Piezon)	2 mmhos/cm—0 SAR	5-15%	Medium	20-40

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action: Big sagebrush burn, basin sage burn, and juniper burn treatments would expose soil and subject it to wind and water erosion until sprouting vegetation provides enough ground cover to slow water runoff. Many forb and grass species are capable of re-sprouting following fire if the temperature intensity is not too severe. Live soil roots would help to bind the upper soil surface and reduce potential soil erosion. The intensity of the prescribed burning would vary on these burn treatments depending on the fuels burned and the resulting soil temperatures. The degree of intensity would increase in the following order: big sagebrush burns, basin sage burns, and juniper burns. Much of the understory within the big sagebrush burns would survive prescribed burning. A desirable understory of perennial grasses and forbs does not presently exist within the basin sage burn treatments, but the seeding of these areas would accelerate the colonization of new desirable native plants. Juniper burn treatments would kill most of the remaining understory that is present and seeding, as proposed would provide desirable plant cover.

Soils that have erosion concerns are the Yellowwash-Piezon, Lilsnake-Sandwash, and Renstec-Moyerson complexes. Prescribed burn treatments for big sagebrush and juniper are located on one or more of these soils in the Sevenmile, Smith Ridge, and North Godiva Polygons. As planned, avoiding slopes over 10% on the Yellowwash-Piezon and Lilsnake-Sandwash soils and steep slopes over 25% on the Renstec-Moyerson soils, in conjunction with post-treatment seeding would greatly reduce erosion potential by understory removal on these soils.

The mechanical treatments described in the Proposed Action would result in very little short term influence to soils since there is little to no soil disturbance and the mulched woody debris would help protect soils. The mulch created by the treatments would limit soil exposure to rainfall and wind while also slowing overland water flow. This, combined with an expected increase in desired perennial vegetation would result in less soil erosion in the long term.

Environmental Consequences, No Action Alternative: There would be no change from the current situation to soils under this alternative. Perennial understory vegetation is expected to continue to decline, which would accelerate the rate and amount of pedestalling and flow patterns resulting in an overall increase in soil erosion.

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Ole Olsen 3/21/05

VEGETATION

Affected Environment:

Entire Project Area (Snake River Allotment #04206): This area contains a number of plant communities that differ greatly in dominant species, structure, and ecological function. The two most prevalent plant communities are sagebrush dominated and saltbush dominated communities which comprise 37% and 32% of the allotment, respectively. Saltbush communities are most common in the lower elevations. Sagebrush communities are interspersed with saltbush at low elevations and become more common as elevation increases towards Sevenmile Ridge and Godiva Rim. Other important communities are juniper and juniper-sagebrush found at mid to high elevations, greasewood found at mid and lower elevations but most prevalent along the floodplains of the Little Snake River, and bitterbrush found at higher elevations especially on Godiva Rim. These communities account for 8%, 7%, and 1% of the allotment, respectively. A number of other plant communities exist on the allotment, but they are either on private land along the Little Snake River or present at trace levels.

The sagebrush dominated communities are primarily composed of Wyoming big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata wyomingensis*), Indian ricegrass (*Oryzopsis hymenoides*), Sandberg bluegrass (*Poa sandbergii*), needle-and-thread grass (*Stipa comata*), and wheatgrasses (*Agropyron* spp.). Saltbush communities are dominated by shadscale (*Atriplex confertifolia*), Nuttall's saltbush (*A. nuttallii*), winterfat (*Ceratoides lanata*), Sandberg bluegrass, and Indian ricegrass. Bitterbrush communities are dominated by antelope bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*) along with many of the grass and forb species found in other shrub-dominated communities.

Greasewood (*Sarcobatus vermiculatus*) and juniper (*Juniperus scopulorum*) communities tend to have lower diversity than other shrub or woody plant dominated communities due to these species' competitive ability to consume large amounts of water. Juniper in particular can be invasive into grass and sagebrush communities when fire has not occurred over long periods. This is occurring around most juniper-dominated communities on the allotment.

Sevenmile Ridge Polygon: This polygon is composed primarily of sagebrush-grass plant communities interspersed with saltbush and juniper communities. Saltbush is located in the lower elevations below Sevenmile Ridge and juniper exists as sparse stands on steeper slopes except in the northern portion of the polygon where it exists in denser stands on shallower slopes. Basin big sagebrush (*A. tridentata tridentata*) exists along Sevenmile Draw and its larger

tributaries. Upland Wyoming big sagebrush communities within this polygon are relatively low in fuel loadings.

Smith Ridge Polygon: This polygon consists of a good representation of all plant communities described for the entire allotment with the exception of mountain shrub and bitterbrush.

Ninemile Hill Polygon: This polygon is primarily composed of saltbush, sagebrush-grass communities surrounding draws dominated by basin big sagebrush.

East Panhandle Polygon: This polygon is similar to Ninemile Hill except it lacks saltbush communities.

North Godiva Polygon: This polygon is representative of all communities found within the allotment. The top of Godiva Rim consists primarily of sparse to dense juniper stands surrounded by sagebrush-grass plant communities.

South Godiva Polygon: This polygon is composed primarily of a sagebrush-grass community that is undergoing encroachment by juniper.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action: The Proposed Action would improve plant diversity, foster community resilience, and increase forage productivity. The manner in which these effects would be realized would differ greatly depending on the plant community treated, size of treatment, current community condition, and method of treatment. Specific consequences by treatment method would be as follows:

Brushbeating: Mechanical removal of the shrub component would greatly enhance the competitive ability of grasses and forbs. The resulting increase in the non-woody component of the community would enhance the resilience of the site to grazing, insects, and drought through increased diversity and vigor in the grass and forb component. The ability of the site to produce usable forage for livestock and wildlife would be enhanced. In ten to twenty years, the sagebrush would begin to reestablish.

Fire in Wyoming sagebrush communities: Fire is important in releasing energy and invigorating nutrient cycles in these communities. In sagebrush dominated communities, the effects of burning on various species differs greatly. Fire readily kills sagebrush while many forb and grass species are only slightly damaged or relatively unharmed. It is expected that mortality of all sagebrush plants would be 95-100% for all age classes regardless of season burned. Other species expected to decrease following fire are broom snakeweed, *Eriogonum* spp., and Idaho fescue. Species that would be expected to not be harmed (little change in abundance) include Indian paintbrush, penstemon, tapertip hawksbeard, Indian ricegrass, bluebunch wheatgrass, needle-and-thread, prairie junegrass, and squirreltail. Plants that would be expected to benefit directly (increase) as a result of fire are arrowleaf balsamroot, deathcamas, horsebrush, rabbitbrush, lupine, Sandberg bluegrass, thickspike wheatgrass, and western wheatgrass.

In sagebrush communities, season and size of burns are critical to ensuring that the goals of improving forage productivity and species diversity are met. Mosaic burns, a proposed, are the most preferable with most target burn areas being 50 acres or less.

Fire in basin sagebrush communities: Basin sagebrush is an aggressive competitor for light, water, and nutrients along ephemeral draws within the project area. Removal of basin sagebrush by fire would allow grass and forb species to rapidly recolonize these areas. Response would be expected to be rapid as basin sagebrush is present on deeper, seasonally wet soils. Increased presence of grasses and forbs would improve watershed quality by reducing erosion and increasing sediment retention. Increased diversity resulting from basin sagebrush removal would also enhance overall community resilience.

Fire in juniper woodlands: Fire is one of the greatest influences on the distribution of juniper woodlands. Fire readily kills juniper trees that are less than four feet tall. Larger trees are generally only killed when greater than 60% of the crown is scorched. Therefore, only those stands where either crown density or understory vegetation is sufficient to carry a juniper killing fire would be targeted for treatment by fire. Where fire results in substantial juniper mortality, increased diversity in the form of grass, forb, and shrub species would be expected due to increased light availability and elimination of juniper allelopathy. If invasive species are kept in check by seeding, these treatments would result in areas dominated by native bunchgrasses and forbs within 2 to 5 years followed by shrub dominated communities within 15 to 25 years. Juniper could be expected to re-dominate these sites in 40 to 70 years.

Mechanical treatments in juniper woodlands: Impacts from this type of treatment would be similar to the use of fire. Mechanical removal of juniper by hydroaxe or hand-cutting would remove allelopathic effects and decrease light competition that suppress grasses, forbs, and shrubs. Within juniper dominated woodlands, mechanical tree removal can be more successful where low understory fuel loadings or distance between tree crowns precludes effective carry of fire. Post-burn recovery in areas treated mechanically may be somewhat slower, however, due to lack of energy and nutrient release. Hydrophobic litter layers on the soil surface, an effect of juniper presence that is destroyed by fire, would also remain longer with mechanical treatments.

Hand removal of encroaching juniper in shrublands: Juniper encroachment in shrublands adjacent juniper woodlands is a strong indicator of a shrub community reaching higher seral stages due to lack of disturbance. Hand removal of juniper in these areas would have no impact on the surrounding shrub community, it would continue to exist in a late seral stage, but the increasing effects of lowered diversity from juniper invasion would be arrested. By not treating these areas with fire, the Proposed Action would be ensuring that landscape diversity goals are met by allowing the area as a whole to continue to contain areas of intact late seral sagebrush communities.

Environmental Consequences, No Action Alternative: Fuels would continue to accumulate within sagebrush and juniper communities. Juniper woodlands would continue to expand into adjacent shrublands, resulting in decreased diversity and community resilience throughout the area. Ephemeral drainages containing basin big sagebrush would continue to be lower in

diversity and be at risk for erosion. Elevated levels of sediment release into the watershed would continue to be possible.

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Hunter Seim 3/10/05

WILDLIFE, AQUATIC

Affected Environment: The Little Snake River runs through the project area and provides habitat for a variety of non-game fish species. Portions of the Little Snake River downstream are known to support the Colorado pikeminnow during spring runoff. The river and associated riparian vegetation also provide habitat for the Great Basin spadefoot toad and other amphibians. Two springs or seeps exist in the project area. These springs or seeps and the associated riparian vegetation also provide habitat for aquatic wildlife.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action: Riparian vegetation in the project area would not be targeted for treatment, and therefore, there would be no impacts to aquatic wildlife habitat. Slight increases in run-off may occur in ephemeral streams. This would be short lived and would not impact aquatic species. Burning basin big sagebrush along the draws would increase grasses and forbs and potentially create some small riparian areas. These areas would provide limited habitat for aquatic wildlife.

Environmental Consequences, No Action Alternative: None

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Desa Ausmus 3/25/05

WILDLIFE, TERRESTRIAL

Affected Environment: The project area is rich and diverse, providing several different habitat types for terrestrial wildlife. The area provides habitat for a variety of animals, including mule deer, elk, antelope, small mammals, birds and reptiles. All polygons provide winter habitat for elk, deer, and pronghorn antelope during moderate winters. The Ninemile Polygon provides winter habitat for pronghorn during severe winters and the Godiva, Ninemile and East Panhandle Polygons provide severe winter habitat for elk. The Sevenmile and Smith Ridge Polygons also provide calving areas for elk.

Environmental Consequences, Proposed Action: The Proposed Action would improve plant diversity and increase forage production. Both mechanical and prescribed fire treatments would lead to an increase in the herbaceous component and would improve the overall health and vigor of the ecosystem. In sagebrush communities, season and size of burns are critical to ensuring that the goals of improving wildlife habitat are met. Mosaic burns, a proposed, are the most preferable with most target burn areas being 100 acres or less. This type of treatment would

leave islands of sagebrush intact, ensuring enough browse is available for wintering big game species. The treatment areas would be dominated by grasses and forbs and would attract elk, possibly impacting vegetation recovery.

Environmental Consequences, No Action Alternative: None

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Desa Ausmus 3/25/05

OTHER NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS: For the following elements, those brought forward for analysis will be formatted as shown above.

Non-Critical Element	NA or Not Present	Applicable or Present, No Impact	Applicable & Present and Brought Forward for Analysis
Fluid Minerals		FC 3/1/05	
Forest Management	JHS 3/28/05		
Hydrology/Ground		FC 3/1/05	
Hydrology/Surface		OO 3/21/05	
Paleontology		RE 3/15/05	
Range Management			JHS 3/10/05
Realty Authorizations			PB 1/19/05
Recreation/Travel Mgmt			RS 3/7/05
Socio-Economics		PB 1/19/05	
Solid Minerals		RE 3/15/05	
Visual Resources		JM 2/28/05	
Wild Horse & Burro Mgmt	VD 1/18/05		

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY: The project area undergoes impacts typical of rangelands throughout northwest Colorado. The area is crossed by numerous unpaved roads, both maintained and unmaintained. These roads serve as public access throughout the allotment for big game hunting, wildlife viewing, grazing management activities, and natural gas production activities. All of these activities affect the health of the various plant communities within the project area.

Currently, elk numbers in the area are extremely high, with a growing population of year-round resident elk. This is putting increasing pressure on forage species, impacting the understory of grasses and forbs throughout the area. Livestock use is greatly reduced due in large part to the high elk numbers. Until at least 2008, only cattle are allowed to graze in the area and are confined to areas along the Little Snake River and Bald Mountain.

Past and present natural gas exploration and production have removed native vegetation, but these areas are limited and localized. In 2004, a 2D seismic project was conducted in the southwestern portion of the project area. Surface impacts were light and dispersed, but it signifies increased interest in gas production potential in the area.

One of the single most expressed impacts of human access and activity in the area is weeds, particularly halogeton. Soil and plant community disturbance along areas of concentrated activity, such as roads, have opened opportunities for establishment of invasive annual weeds.

Past vegetative manipulation projects are also present. Mechanical treatments of Wyoming big sagebrush are present on Sevenmile Ridge and in the East Panhandle area. These treatments were conducted in the late 1990's. All activities in the Proposed Action would be among and in addition to these treatments.

It is not expected that future activities within the project area would differ greatly from the activities of the past thirty or forty years. Recreation and natural gas exploration and extraction may increase over the next ten or twenty years, but this area does not have the level of interest in these activities that other areas in the region have. Livestock grazing is expected to continue, but at greatly reduced levels, depending on the fate of the elk populations. DOW is aware of the elk problems in the area, but it is unknown at this time what actions, if any, may be taken to address the issue over the next few years.

STANDARDS:

PLANT AND ANIMAL COMMUNITY (animal) STANDARD: Information from the Little Snake Landscape Assessment conducted in 1998 indicate that the wildlife habitat standard is marginally being met. This assessment found that a mosaic of sagebrush of varying age classes was lacking in the landscape. The Proposed Action would improve habitat for wildlife species by creating landscapes composed of several plant communities that vary in successional stages and patterns. The Proposed Action would meet this standard.

Continued lack of fire, especially coupled with high elk populations, would lead to degradation of habitats due to decreased forage diversity and availability. Assuming continued absence of wildfire from this area, the No Action Alternative would not meet this standard.

Name of specialist and date: Desa Ausmus 3/25/05

SPECIAL STATUS, THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES (animal) STANDARD: Information from the Little Snake Landscape Assessment conducted in 1998 indicate that the special status species standard is marginally being met. This assessment found that winter and breeding habitat for sage grouse are of poorer quality than what is preferred for healthy populations. The Proposed Action would enhance healthy, sustainable, native plant and animal communities in the area, therefore improving habitat for sensitive species and meeting this standard. The Proposed Action would likely improve upland vegetative conditions making this area more productive for sage grouse, providing habitat guidelines are followed.

Continued lack of fire, especially coupled with high elk populations, would lead to degradation of habitats for sage grouse due to decreased forage diversity and availability and declining cover quality. Assuming continued absence of wildfire from this area, the No Action Alternative would not meet this standard.

Name of specialist and date: Desa Ausmus 3/25/05

PLANT AND ANIMAL COMMUNITY (plant) STANDARD: Information from the Little Snake Landscape Assessment conducted in 1998 indicate that the plant community standards within the proposed project area, while not at full potential, are being met. In general, species composition and diversity are sufficient to meet this standard. There are some localized areas that contain significant amounts of undesirable plant species. Although some of these species are not native and/or perennial, they do provide canopy and litter cover that aid in the prevention of soil erosion. The Proposed Action would improve species and age class diversity throughout sagebrush and juniper woodland communities within the area. The proposed treatments would create diversification in seral stages, improve nutrient cycling, and open up niches for a greater number of desirable species. The Proposed Action would meet this standard.

Continued lack of fire, especially coupled with high elk populations, would lead to degradation of diversity, vigor, and nutrient cycling. Assuming continued absence of wildfire from this area, the No Action Alternative would not meet this standard.

Name of specialist and date: Hunter Seim 3/10/05

SPECIAL STATUS, THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES (plant) STANDARD: There are no federally listed threatened or endangered or BLM sensitive plant species within or in the vicinity of the Proposed Action. This standard does not apply.

Name of specialist and date: Hunter Seim 3/3/05

RIPARIAN SYSTEMS STANDARD: There are no riparian areas that would be affected by the Proposed Action. This standard would not apply.

Name of specialist and date: Ole Olsen 3/21/05

WATER QUALITY STANDARD: The water quality standard for healthy rangelands would be met with implementation of either the Proposed Action or No Action Alternatives. Runoff from snowmelt and summer storms would drain from the treated areas into stream segments that are presently supporting classified uses. No stream segments are listed as impaired.

Name of specialist and date: Ole Olsen 3/21/05

UPLAND SOILS STANDARD: The upland soil standard for healthy rangelands would be met with implementation of either the Proposed Action or No Action Alternatives. Prescribed fire

would increase soil movement for the first couple of years until adequate surface cover returns. Over the long term organic matter in the soil would increase due to more herbaceous plant cover and roots which will help to restore infiltration and percolation rates. Mechanical treatments would not disturb or expose enough soil to present a soil erosion problem. Herbaceous vegetation would also increase with these treatments.

Name of specialist and date: Ole Olsen 3/21/05

COMPLIANCE PLAN:

The project area will be monitored for compliance with the stated terms of the Proposed Action. Treatments will also be monitored for secondary environmental effects to evaluate the overall success of the treatment. Secondary effects from the vegetative treatment such as species composition, ground cover, and erosion will be monitored by the fuels program or by individual specialists a minimum of 3 years post treatment, or until resource objectives have been achieved. Monitoring methods will include a photo series and species list.

All contracted mechanical treatments will be supervised by a qualified contracting officers representative to insure compliance with terms of the contract and to insure fuel reduction objectives are met. Mechanical treatments performed by agency personnel will be inspected by personnel from the fuels management program.

PERSONS/AGENCIES CONSULTED: Uintah and Ouray Tribal Council, Colorado Native American Commission, Colorado State Historic Preservation Office, Dean Visintainer (permittee, Snake River Allotment), Roy Roath (Colorado State University Extension), Jane Yazzie (NWCOS member), Sandy Orglioso (NWCOS member), Brad Petch (CDOW), Wes McStay (NWCOS member), Dale Beckerman (LSFO fire), Dale Skidmore (LSFO fire).

SIGNATURE OF PREPARER: /ss/ J Hunter Seim

DATE SIGNED: 6/22/05

SIGNATURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEWER: /ss/ Duane Johnson

DATE SIGNED: 6/22/05

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)
EA CO-100-2005-023

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

1. Beneficial, adverse, direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts have been disclosed in the EA. Analysis indicated no significant impacts on society as a whole, the affected region, the affected interests or the locality. The physical and biological effects are limited to the Little Snake Resource Area and adjacent land.
2. Public health and safety would not be adversely impacted. There are no known or anticipated concerns with project waste or hazardous materials.
3. There would be no adverse impacts to regional or local air quality, prime or unique farmlands, known paleontological resources on public land within the area, wetlands, floodplain, areas with unique characteristics, ecologically critical areas or designated Areas of Critical Environmental Concern.
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.
6. This alternative does not set a precedent for other actions that may be implemented in the future to meet the goals and objectives of adopted Federal, State or local natural resource related plans, policies or programs.
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 surveys, and through mitigation by avoidance, no adverse impacts to cultural resources were identified or anticipated. There are no known American Indian religious concerns or persons or groups who might be disproportionately and adversely affected as anticipated by the Environmental Justice Policy.

9. No adverse impacts to any threatened or endangered species or their habitat that was determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act were identified. If, at a future time, there could be the potential for adverse impacts, treatments would be modified or mitigated not to have an adverse effect or new analysis would be conducted.

10. This alternative is in compliance with relevant Federal, State, and local laws, regulations, and requirements for the protection of the environment.

DECISION AND RATIONALE:

Having considered the alternatives and associated impacts, it is my decision to implement the Proposed Action for the Snake River Project as described in the Environmental Assessment (EA) CO-100-2005-023. The Proposed Action was selected over the No Action Alternative because it will improve plant community diversity, resilience, and the overall health of the ecosystem.

This action is in conformance with objectives and land use plan allocations in the 1989 Little Snake Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision (ROD) and the 1986 Final RMP/EIS and the 2002 Fire Management Plan for the Northwest Fire Management Program. The Proposed Action is in conformance with objectives and would help achieve standards for rangeland health identified in 1997 in the Standards for Public Land Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing in Colorado.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL: /ss/ David E. Blackstun

DATE SIGNED: 6/22/05