

**NORMAL FIRE REHABILITATION PLAN SUPPLEMENT
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
BUFFALO FIRE (X-286)
BLM/EK/PL-2001/069**

Introduction:

This Supplemental Environmental Assessment (EA) tiers to the Elko Field Office FY 2000 Normal Fire Rehabilitation Plan Environmental Assessment (NFRPEA) BLM/EK/PL-2000/037.

The Proposed Action includes the following NFRPEA Treatments: 1 (Construction and Repair of Fence to Facilitate Grazing Closure), 2 (Planting of Multiple Species Seed Mixtures), 5 (Dozer Line Rehabilitation), 6 (Road repair), 7 (Wild Horse Gather), 8 (Non-native Invasive Weed Species Control), and 10 (Cultural Resource Site Stabilization and Rehabilitation). The format of this Supplement EA follows the outline in the Emergency Fire Rehabilitation Handbook, BLM Manual Handbook H-1742-1, dated July 27, 1999, and is consistent with the draft Interagency Burned Area Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Handbook, Version 1.0, dated June 14, 2001.

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Project Area Description:

A. Fire Description:

The fire was started by a lightning strike and was reported on August 12, 2001. The fire was declared controlled on August 18, 2001. The Buffalo Fire burned a total of 21,188 acres, which

encompasses 16,639 acres of public land administered by the BLM and 4,549 acres of private land in Elko County, Nevada. The Squaw Valley, Spanish Ranch, and Midas Allotments were affected by the fire. The fire impacted 12,404 acres of public land and 2,820 acres of private within the Squaw Valley Allotment, 4,054 acres of public land and 1,343 acres of private land within the Spanish Ranch Allotment, and 181 acres of public land and 386 acres of private land within the Midas Allotment. No structures were burned.

B. Vegetation and Soil Description:

The dominant vegetation within the burned area consisted of Idaho fescue, bluebunch wheatgrass, Sandberg's bluegrass, bottlebrush squirreltail, mountain big sagebrush, Wyoming big sagebrush, low sagebrush, and rabbitbrush. Riparian species included willows, aspen, sedges, rushes, and grasses.

Elevations range from approximately 5,369 feet to 7,400 feet above mean sea level (AMSL). Mountain slopes range from 4 to 40 percent with elevations from 6,000 to 7,500 feet AMSL. Soil include stony loam, very gravelly, extremely gravelly loam and cobbly loam. These soils are shallow and well drained. Potential erosion from water ranges from slight to moderate and potential erosion from wind is slight. Hill slopes range from 15 to 50 percent with elevations from 5,500 feet to 7,000 feet AMSL. Soil includes very gravelly loam and cobbly loam. These soils are shallow to moderately deep and well drained. Potential erosion from water ranges from moderate to high. Potential erosion from wind is slight. Fan piedmont remnants slopes range from 2 to 15 percent with elevations from 5,000 feet to 5,500 feet AMSL. Soil include loams, cobbly loams and gravelly loams. These soils are moderately deep and well drained. Permeability is moderately slow to moderate and runoff is medium. Potential erosion from water and wind are slight. The soils after the fire were not hydrophobic.

The range sites are: 25X12 Loamy Slope 12-16", 25X14 Loamy 10-12" (deep and well drained), 25X17 Clay Pan 12-16", 25X18 Claypan 10-12", and 25X24 Mountain Ridge.

Proposed Project Treatments:

A. Revegetation:

1. Rangeland Aerial/Broadcast Seeding:

Squaw Valley Allotment: Approximately 700 acres in the upland portions where the fire burned with more intensity would be aurally seeded with thickspike wheatgrass, Secar bluebunch wheatgrass, and western yarrow. When possible, seed would be broadcast on snow to aid in germination and reduce seed consumption by rodents and birds. Seeding this area would provide soil stabilization, forage for wildlife and livestock, and reduce the potential for the invasion of non-native invasive weed species.

2. Wildlife Aerial/Broadcast Seeding:

Squaw Valley Allotment: Approximately 3,379 acres in the upland portions of the burn would be aerially seeded with Wyoming big sagebrush, basin big sagebrush and western yarrow. Of this total, 2,879 acres would be seeded within selected ephemeral drainages, draws, and swales throughout the burn area. An additional 500 acres would be seeded within a 1,500 acre block (every third swath equivalent) on the west side of the burn south of Frazer Creek. These actions would help rehabilitate mule deer summer and intermediate range and sage grouse habitat. When possible, seed would be broadcast on snow to aid in germination and reduce seed consumption by rodents and birds. The purpose of the seeding is to provide forage for livestock, wild horses, and wildlife, particularly critical winter range forage for pronghorn antelope, mule deer, and sage grouse and to reduce the potential for the invasion of invasive non-native weed species.

Spanish Ranch Allotment: Approximately 134 acres in the upland portions of the burn would be aerially seeded with Wyoming big sagebrush, basin big sagebrush, and western yarrow within selected ephemeral drainages, draws, and swales throughout the burn area. The same methodology would be used as stated above for the Squaw Valley Allotment. The purpose of the seeding is also the same as stated above for the Squaw Valley Allotment.

3. Watershed Aerial/Broadcast Seeding:

Squaw Valley Allotment: Approximately 251 acres would be aerially seeded with Great Basin wildrye, streambank wheatgrass, thickspike wheatgrass and Canby bluegrass. When possible, seed would be broadcast on snow to aid in germination and reduce seed consumption by rodents and birds. The purpose of this seeding is to promote vegetation response within the drainages, which would reduce erosion and stabilize banks over time.

4. Non-native Invasive Weed Species Control:

During the 1998 BLM inventory of the Elko District for noxious weeds, scotch thistle, Canada thistle, hoary cress, and black henbane were discovered within the perimeter of the Buffalo Fire.

During a recent (September 2001) field inspection, scotch thistle was discovered on both private and public lands administered by the BLM along Scraper and Frazer Creeks. Scotch thistle and hoary cress are present along the access roads to the Buffalo Fire. Treatments would be done on approximately 5 acres of scotch thistle, hoary cress, black henbane and other noxious weed species found to be present on the public lands. Monitoring would be done on 18,000 acres of public lands within the burn. The vehicle wash-down location would be monitored for noxious weeds. The location of the wash-down site was on the Midas Road, which is designated as an Elko County road.

Long term monitoring (3 years) of existing weed locations would be conducted to determine the effectiveness of the proposed treatments and any new infestations would be treated and

monitored, as necessary. By treating prior to seed set and maturation, the spread of noxious weeds within the burned area would be controlled.

B. Structures:

1. Construct New Fence for Resource Protection:

Squaw Valley Allotment: Approximately 4.8 miles of fence would be constructed between the Squaw Valley and Spanish Ranch Allotments. Approximately 5.6 miles of temporary fence would be constructed on the east end of the Buffalo Fire, and approximately 7 miles of temporary fence would be constructed on the south end of the fire. After monitoring and evaluation of the burn, the BLM, in consultation with the affected parties and public, would determine whether or not this fence would become a permanent pasture fence or to remove the fence. The purpose of this fence is to protect the burn and seedings from livestock and wild horses, which would allow the vegetation to re-establish. If it is determined to make the fence permanent, a permanent riparian pasture would be created within this allotment.

Spanish Ranch Allotment: Approximately 4 miles of temporary fence would be constructed on the north end of the Buffalo Fire within the Spanish Ranch Allotment. The purpose of this fence is to protect the burn and seedings from livestock and wild horses, which would allow the vegetation to re-establish.

2. Repair Existing Fence for Resource Protection:

Approximately 3 miles of permanent fence would be repaired or reconstructed between the Spanish Ranch and Little Humboldt Allotments. Approximately 3 miles of permanent fence would be repaired or reconstructed between the Squaw Valley and Midas Allotments. The purpose of this fence repair or reconstruction is required in order to maintain the integrity of the allotment boundary fences and to provide for proper rangeland, livestock, and wild horse management.

A broken gate post would be repaired on the fence that bisects the Scraper Springs Road near Scraper Springs. This gate post was broken by a dozer during fire suppression.

C. Erosion Control Treatments:

1. Dozer Line Rehabilitation:

Approximately 43 miles of dozer line would be seeded with crested wheatgrass and intermediate wheatgrass. A safety zone, which is located off a two-track road on the way to Frazer Creek, would be seeded with crested wheatgrass and intermediate wheatgrass. This safety zone, which was missed during dozer line rehabilitation at the end of the suppression action, would be recontoured with a dozer by pushing back berms and rock material, regrading disturbed areas,

and re-establishing any drainages. These areas would be drill seeded, where possible, and broadcast seeded using a dozer where the terrain is too steep or rough to use the drill. The purpose of seeding the dozer line and safety zones is to reduce the risk of erosion, stabilize the soil, and to encourage revegetation.

3. Road Repair:

Approximately 12 miles of the Scrapper Springs Road would require wetting, regrading, and graveling in order to re-establish the roadbed, re-establish drainage, and to prevent widening of the existing road or the development and establishment of new roads or travel routes parallel to the existing road. Two cattleguards would be installed on the Scrapper Springs road one on the north end at the fence crossing and one on the south end at the fence crossing.

D. Site Preparation: None

E. Other:

1. Wild Horse Gather:

An emergency wild horse gather would be conducted to remove up to 250 wild horses from the burned area. The purpose of the wild horse gather would be to protect the burn and seedlings from wild horses, which would allow the vegetation to re-establish. There are currently 1,675 wild horses within the Rock Creek Herd Management Area (HMA) and the proposed appropriate management level (AML) as outlined in the Rock Creek Allotment Evaluation, is 250. Because the HMA is several times over the proposed AML, wild horses would be removed from the burn area, rather than relocated. The gather should not take place until the fence is constructed, otherwise the horses would return to the burn.

2. Cultural Resource Site Stabilization and Protection:

Cultural resource inventories have been completed on approximately 14 miles of dozer line on the Buffalo Fire. Cultural resource inventories would be conducted on the remaining approximately 29 miles of dozer line, the safety zone, aspen exclosure fences, road repair, and new temporary or permanent fence construction. The cultural resource inventories would be conducted prior to the implementation of the proposed rehabilitation action for the dozer lines, safety zone, aspen exclosure fences, road repair, and fences. Any cultural resources discovered during these inventories would be avoided.

Cultural resource inventories along 14 miles of the dozer line during and after fire suppression located two lithic scatters, a tin can, and an old mine waste dump (associated with the Midas Mining District) that were damaged by the construction of the dozer lines during suppression. Those sites, along with five other lithic scatters and a rockshelter known from earlier inventories within the burned area, would be revisited, further documented, and evaluated in terms of their

eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places. The purpose of inventoring the dozer lines and proposed new fences is to assess and document any damage to cultural resource sites that occurred as a result of the suppression activities and to prevent damage to these sites from the rehabilitation efforts.

3. Existing Fence Removal

On Frazer Creek, four existing enclosures were burned. These enclosures would not be repaired or reconstructed. The remaining fence materials for these four existing enclosures would be removed. The purpose of removing these fence materials is because they pose a threat of creating harm to wildlife, livestock, and wild horses.

4. Aspen Stand Protection and Monitoring:

Three aspen stands within the perimeter of the Buffalo Fire are in areas that are easily accessible by livestock and wild horses, and were in a declining condition prior to the fire. Three proposed enclosures are planned for these aspen stands. Permanent enclosure fences would be constructed around these three aspen stands in order to provide protection from livestock and wild horses and help to insure their successful recovery. Monitoring the aspen regeneration would be conducted for a period of three years to assess any impacts to the regeneration in case future protective measures are necessary to successfully regenerate the stands.

5. Water Quality Monitoring:

Water quality and soil loss would be monitored along Frazier Creek for three years. Water quality would be monitored at two locations, one near the beginning of perennial flow and one near the boundary of the fire during spring runoff, mid-summer flows and low flows in the fall. Water quality parameters such as pH, temperature, turbidity, suspended solids and phosphate would be monitored to analyze the effects of the fire on this stream which provides habitat for Lahontan cutthroat trout (LCT). This stream would also be examined for excessive erosion and changes in stream channel after large precipitation events and spring runoff.

Consideration of Critical Elements and Resources:

The following critical elements of the human environment are not present or are not affected by the proposed action or alternative:

- ACECs
- Environmental Justice
- Farmlands (prime or unique)
- Wastes (hazardous/solid)
- Wild and Scenic Rivers
- Wilderness

Critical elements and resources brought forward for analysis:

A. Air Quality:

The burned area would be susceptible to wind erosion until revegetation occurs. Wind erosion can increase Particulate Matter #10 (PM#10) emissions causing exceedence of PM #10 air quality standards which can negatively affect human health. In addition, airborne dust can cause visibility and safety problems on roads in the area. The proposed vegetation, erosion control, and site preparation treatments would encourage regrowth of vegetation, thus reducing future potential air quality impacts.

B. Cultural Resources:

Prior to the Buffalo Fire, six cultural resource inventories were completed within the fire perimeter. These inventories covered a total of 60 acres and recorded five lithic scatters and a rockshelter. Some of these lithic scatters are very large with hundreds of chipped-stone artifacts exposed on the ground surface. Site CrNv-12-3784 is a lithic scatter which appears to be located on a fence that burned within the Buffalo Fire. Three small lithic scatters (CrNv-12-4109, -4120, 4121) also appear to be located within the fire. Another lithic scatter (CrNv-12-4122) may have been impacted by a dozer line. All of these sites have been documented on IMACS forms, but the quality of the existing data lacks adequate and detailed documentation for the evaluation of their eligibility to the National Register of Historic Places. These earlier inventories establish that site densities are very high in some locations with in the perimeter of the Buffalo Fire.

Since fire suppression approximately 14 miles of dozer fire lines have been inventoried by the BLM archaeologists. A tin can, two additional lithic scatters and an old mine waste dump, associated with the Midas Mining District, were damaged by the dozer line construction. These sites would be revisited in order to complete the documentation needed to make an eligibility determination for the National Register of Historic Places.

Archaeological sites and cultural properties in this area must be afforded protection whenever possible. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act mandates that the federal government would account for cultural resources in its projects and undertakings, including fire rehabilitation efforts. Ground disturbing activities such as dozer line rehabilitation and fence construction could damage cultural sites. Therefore, areas designated for potential ground disturbance would be inventoried for cultural resources before the disturbance occurs in accordance with the State Protocol Agreement between the Nevada BLM and the Nevada State Office of Historic Preservation (SHPO). At a minimum, to reduce potential impacts to cultural resources, activities that involve mechanized surface disturbance of less than 10 cm depth would generally have transect spacing of 100 meters. A more intense inventory would be used for highly sensitive areas. When surface disturbance is greater than 10 cm, then 30 meter transect intervals would be used.

All cultural resources discovered or relocated would be plotted on maps and at a minimum would be recorded on the Nevada IMACS short form. Resources except those previously determined not eligible, by the BLM and SHPO, or that have been fully mitigated, would be flagged for avoidance and avoided during rehabilitation activities. Flagging would be removed as soon as possible to minimize the potential for looting and vandalism.

C. Native American Religious Concerns:

By law, policy and executive order, BLM is required to undertake a good-faith consultation process with regional Native American tribal and band governments prior to projects that might affect Native American sacred areas, Traditional Cultural Properties or other traditional values. Native Americans would be consulted as appropriate prior to any ground disturbing activities or herbicide treatments. When the BLM obtains information identifying Traditional Cultural Properties or other areas having traditional or religious significance, then the BLM would insure that reasonable measures are taken to avoid impacts to these areas of concern to Native Americans.

D. Threatened, Endangered, Candidate, or Sensitive Species:

No threatened or endangered plant species are known to occur in the burn area.

Lahontan cutthroat trout (LCT), a federally listed threatened species, occurs in 3.8 miles of Frazer Creek in the canyon reach above the county road crossing. Fire suppression activities including retardant drop, water extraction, and line construction were not conducted near Frazer Creek. The Frazer Creek watershed burned with high intensity in some reaches, and had a low burn severity in other reaches. Riparian vegetation, including aspen, willow, grasses, sedges, and rushes, remains intact in many reaches of the stream. Potential indirect impacts to the Frazer Creek drainage include excessive sediment loading from overland runoff, increases in stream temperatures in some reaches, scouring associated with flooding, and increases in pH as a result of ash influx. Elevated pH levels can cause depletion of stream oxygen, while increased sediment can clog fish gills, destroy spawning habitat, increase water temperature, and accelerate channel adjustment.

The following recommendations would help reduce adverse impacts to LCT:

1. Aerially seed the burned portions of the Frazer Creek drainage with perennial grasses and forbs (refer to watershed aerial seeding project treatment). These species would accelerate stabilization of eroding watershed drainages and help reduce future sediment loading to the stream channel.
2. Reconstruct or construct perimeter pasture and allotment fences (refer to proposed fencing project treatments).

3. Remove old riparian enclosure fences along Frazer Creek.
4. Close the Frazer Creek watershed within the Squaw Valley Allotment to grazing as specified within the fire closure.
5. Continue the current stream and riparian habitat monitoring program on Frazer Creek to allow for comparison of post-fire impacts to previous baseline information. Where determined necessary, collect water temperature and water quality data to evaluate fire impacts to LCT and develop future management recommendations.

The area provides habitat for golden eagles, burrowing owls, Swainson's hawks and ferruginous hawks, which are State of Nevada Listed Species. The area also provides summer/brood-rearing and winter habitat for sage grouse, a BLM Sensitive Species. Nevada BLM policy is to provide State of Nevada Listed and BLM Sensitive Species with the same level of protection as is provided for candidate species to prevent further listings as threatened or endangered. Although the suspected causes of sage grouse decline are numerous, loss of habitat, including loss by fire, ranks at the top of the list. Rehabilitation of sage grouse habitat, and the prevention of invasion by fire prone annual weeds such as cheatgrass, is a wildlife priority of both the BLM and Nevada Division of Wildlife. The proposed seeding treatments and rest from grazing pressure are designed to help restore sagebrush habitat and/or reduce the impacts from the invasion or re-invasion of fire prone annual weeds. The artificial seeding of big sagebrush species and later successful establishment of these species from this effort would ensure that these species are on site as future seed sources, as well as cover and forage, in the event that natural sources were lost due to the fire and natural recovery is slow (See Migratory Bird Section below). Sage grouse would be able to more fully utilize the burn area with big sagebrush cover. Otherwise, many areas on the burn would likely be avoided until a semblance of shrubs naturally re-establish.

E. Migratory Birds:

The proposed restorative actions are located in a sagebrush habitat type. The Nevada Partners in Flight Bird Conservation Plan identifies the following bird species associated with this physiographic region: sage grouse (obligate), black rosy finch, ferruginous hawk, gray flycatcher, loggerhead shrike, vesper sparrow, prairie falcon, sage sparrow, sage thrasher, Swainson's hawk, burrowing owl, calliope hummingbird, Brewer's sparrow, Western meadowlark, black-throated sparrow, green-tailed towhee, Brewer's blackbird, horned lark, and lark sparrow.

Maintaining complete, diverse sagebrush communities is integral to conservation efforts for these species. Wyoming and basin big sagebrush vegetation types generally do not naturally respond well to block burn configurations, such as large areas observed on the burn, where only relatively small intact stands still exist. Basin big sagebrush seed banks (viable residual seed dispersed last fall and winter) were likely lost in many areas as a result of the fire within the large blocks. Wyoming big sagebrush seed banks usually do not persist after the summer following seed dispersal in unburned areas, let alone burned areas. Recruitment would be slow from intact

stands without rehabilitation. The proposed action to seed the area with a seed mix that includes a forb species and two big sagebrush species would help to provide wildlife cover and forage and compete with any potential site-specific establishment of exotic annual plant species. This should provide beneficial impacts to these species and is consistent with the conservation measures listed in Section 3(e) of the President's Migratory Bird Executive Order.

F. Wildlife:

The subject area provides mule deer intermediate range (October 15 - November 15 and March 15 - April 15 emphasis) and summer range (April 16 - October 14 emphasis). The availability of intact intermediate range areas provide for cover and food prior to movements to and from winter range areas. The area also provides pronghorn antelope intermediate range and summer range. Overall, there are approximately 100 bird species, 70 mammal species and several reptile and amphibian species that can be found in sagebrush habitats on the allotment with many more additional species also found in the vicinity of riparian and meadow habitats on a seasonal or year-long basis. The area provides habitat for many of these species.

Wildlife was adversely impacted by the Buffalo Fire primarily through temporary loss of habitat through removal of vegetation by the fire. The proposed rehabilitation treatments include resting the area from livestock grazing and seeding with a wildlife seed mix to help restore critical forage and cover more quickly.

G. Grazing:

The proposed closures to grazing within the burned area would protect seeding efforts and aid in natural revegetation of burned public rangeland, while reducing the potential for future noxious weed and cheatgrass infestations. Grazing closures would also improve future forage conditions for both livestock and wildlife. However, grazing closure and relocation of livestock would have some short term adverse impacts on ranchers in the area who normally use the allotments for grazing. The actual animal unit month (AUM) losses suffered by ranchers have not been determined at this point. Through field inventories and monitoring, GIS analyses, and consultation, cooperation, and coordination with individual permittees, specific rest periods and other grazing management options would be identified to reduce impacts to ranchers where possible.

H. Non-native Invasive Weed Species:

Fire suppression efforts, including use of engines and other mechanized vehicles, is likely to have introduced noxious weed species seeds and spread cheatgrass in the burned area. It is unknown whether or not the vehicles and equipment were washed down for noxious weeds prior to arriving on this fire complex. In order to reduce the potential impacts of an invasion of noxious

weeds, Integrated Weed Management techniques would be implemented including chemical treatments, and subsequent monitoring. When noxious weeds are discovered to have invaded the burned area and/or the wash site, herbicide treatments would be implemented to reduce the spread of the noxious weeds. Monitoring and noxious weed treatment would help to prevent or reduce noxious weed infestations within the perimeter of the Buffalo Fire.

I. Water Quality (surface/ground):

Increased water erosion may occur due to lack of vegetation to slow runoff and stabilize soils. This may cause a temporary increase in sediments delivered to Frazer Creek. In addition, the high severity of the burn in the Frazer Creek drainage has left ash along the banks of the creek which may be washed into the stream after the first large runoff or flood event. Ash delivered to the creek may increase the pH levels for a short time and should return to normal after it has been flushed from the system. Frazer Creek was visited on August 30 and September 6, 2001. On these dates, pH was tested and it had elevated levels of 8.7 to 9.0 for about 100 yards, but then lowered again to 8.1 to 8.3. Data from August 2, 1977 shows pH levels for Frazer Creek at one location was 8.0 and at another location was 8.3. Water quality would continue to be monitored at two sites on this stream to determine if the ash and sediment have a negative effect on Lahontan cutthroat trout (LCT).

Contamination of Frazer Creek may be harmful to LCT and other aquatic species. Normal pH levels for fish should be between 6.5 and 8.5. Along some sections of the stream, the soils were heated severely and root matter and soil stability were destroyed. These areas may experience more bank erosion. The existing poor condition of this stream may accelerate erosion from runoff. The proposed watershed seedings and rest from grazing would allow for a faster recovery of vegetation to reduce any future erosion within the watershed.

J. Wetlands/Riparian Zones:

Frazer Creek, Buffalo Creek, Scrapper Springs Creek, and other riparian areas in the burned watersheds were impacted by the Buffalo Fire through loss of vegetation. Willows, aspen, and perennial shrubs along streams should resprout naturally if grazing is prevented during the sensitive early growth stages. The proposed fencing and rest from grazing would enable these riparian species to regrow faster and return the riparian wetlands to a proper functioning condition. The proposed wildlife seeding would allow for faster revegetation of riparian areas and stabilize soils while slower growing natives recolonize the area.

K. Floodplains

The floodplain along Frazer Creek and other drainages are lacking vegetation to filter sediment and slow runoff. This may cause erosion in the drainage bottoms. Watershed seedings and rest from livestock would encourage revegetation of riparian and floodplain areas.

L. Wild Horses:

This fire is located within the Rock Creek Herd Management Area for wild horses. Prior to the Buffalo Fire, 234 wild horses were counted within the area that burned in this fire. As mentioned above, there are 1,675 wild horses currently inhabiting the Rock Creek HMA and are spreading beyond the boundary of the HMA. A wild horse gather is scheduled for the summer of 2002. It is proposed that the Rock Creek HMA be gathered down to 40 percent below AML or 150 head.

For the purpose of protecting the Buffalo Fire, approximately 235-250 wild horses would have to be gathered and removed from the burned area and before the regularly scheduled gather. This action would have to take place as soon as the temporary fence is completed and before the first growing season; presumably in January or February of 2002. A capture plan and appropriate NEPA document would be prepared prior to the emergency action.

M. Forestry:

Several aspen stands were burned in this fire. The proposed fencing and rest from livestock and wild horse use should enable the majority of these aspen stands to regenerate by suckering to reproduce healthy aspen stands. Those stands are in relatively steep and rocky country which makes the regeneration fairly inaccessible to livestock. Three stands however, are in areas that are easily accessed by livestock and were in a declining condition prior to the fire. Installing permanent exclosures around those three aspen stands would help insure their successful recovery. Three proposed exclosures are planned for these aspen stands. Monitoring the aspen regeneration is also proposed for a period of three years to assess any impacts to the regeneration in case future protective measures are necessary to successfully regenerate the stands.

N. Visual Resources:

The Buffalo Fire is located within Visual Resource Management (VRM) Classes III and IV. The Buffalo Fire is located within VRM Class IV, except for the Scrapper Springs area. The Scrapper Springs area is located within VRM Class III. The Class III VRM objective is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be moderate. Within Class III VRM areas, management activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Changes should repeat the basic elements found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape. The Class IV VRM objective is to provide for management activities which require major modification of the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape can be high. Within Class IV VRM areas, management activities may dominate the view and be the major focus of viewer attention. However, every attempt should be made to minimize the impact of these activities through careful location, minimal disturbance, and repeating the basic elements.

Both the fire itself and fire suppression activities such as creation of dozer lines, have resulted in visual impacts to the area. Changes in these classes should be subordinate to the existing

landscape. Revegetation efforts are designed to blend into the background without attracting undue attention and aid in restoring the area to a more characteristic landscape. Construction of new fence would create a new linear feature into the landscape but would meet the Class III and IV VRM objective.

N. Cumulative Impacts:

Cumulative impacts for proposed Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation treatments are discussed in the programmatic FY 2000 Normal Fire Rehabilitation Plan Environmental Assessment (NFRPEA) BLM/EK/PL-2000/037, which is available for review at the BLM, Elko Field Office.

References:

United States Department of Agricultural. Natural Resource Conservation Service (formerly Soil Conservation Service). 1997. Soil Survey of Northwest Elko County Area, Nevada, Parts of Elko And Eureka Counties.

Project Cost Summary: (the cost summary information can be found in the Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Plan 2001 and Accomplishment Report for the August 2001 Fire Complex.)

Project Maps: (project maps can be found in the Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Plan 2001 and Accomplishment Report for the August 2001 Fire Complex.)

Cost/Risk Assessment: (the cost/risk assessment can be found in the Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Plan 2001 and Accomplishment Report for the August 2001 Fire Complex.)

Native/Nonnative Worksheet: (the native/nonnative worksheet can be found in the Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Plan 2001 and Accomplishment Report for the August 2001 Fire Complex.)

**NORMAL FIRE REHABILITATION PLAN SUPPLEMENT
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
AND
DECISION RECORD
BUFFALO FIRE (X-286)
BLM/EK/PL-2001/069**

Finding of No Significant Impact:

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in Normal Fire Rehabilitation Plan Supplemental Environmental Assessment BLM/EK/PL-2001/069, I have determined that the proposed action will not have significant impacts on the human environment and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

Decision:

It is my decision to implement the Normal Fire Rehabilitation Plan (NFRP) Supplement as described in the Environmental Assessment for the Buffalo Fire BLM/EK/PL-2001/069. The Buffalo Fire burned a total of approximately 21,188 acres, which encompasses 16,639 acres of public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management, Elko Field Office, and 4,549 acres of private land were burned during this fire within Elko County, Nevada. Approximately 12,404 acres of public land and 2,820 acres of private land were burned within the Squaw Valley Allotment. Approximately 4,054 acres of public land and 1,343 acres of private land were burned in the Spanish Ranch Allotment. Approximately 181 acres of public land and 386 acres of private land were burned in the Midas Allotment. Approximately 700 acres of public land that burned will be seeded with thickspike wheatgrass, Secar bluebunch wheatgrass, and Western yarrow in upland areas on Squaw Valley Allotment. Approximately 1,260 acres of public land that burned will be seeded with Great Basin wildrye, streambank wheatgrass, thickspike wheatgrass, and Canby bluegrass in watershed areas on Squaw Valley Allotment. Approximately 3,379 acres of upland areas that provide mule deer summer and intermediate range, and sage grouse habitat will be rehabilitated throughout the burn area by aerially seeding Wyoming big sagebrush, basin big sagebrush, and western yarrow.

The Buffalo Fire is located within the Rock Creek Herd Management Area for wild horses. An emergency wild horse gather is proposed to remove up to 250 horses from the Rock Creek Wild Horse Herd Management Area in order to protect the burn and seeding treatments.

Within the Squaw Valley Allotment, approximately 17.4 miles of fence will be constructed. Approximately 4 miles of fence will be constructed within the Spanish Ranch Allotment. These fences will protect the burn from livestock and wild horses, while initiating the construction of future pasture fences and allotment boundaries. Approximately 6 miles of allotment boundary fences will be repaired or reconstructed, in order to maintain the integrity of the allotment boundary fences and provide for proper rangeland, livestock, and wild horse management.

Three exclosures will be constructed in order to protect three aspen stands that burned in this fire from livestock and wild horses. These exclosures will also insure the successful recovery of these aspen stands. These aspen stands will be monitored for 3 years.

Monitoring for noxious weed invasion in the burned and disturbed areas will be conducted and treatments will be applied when weeds are detected. Approximately 5 acres of scotch thistle, hoary cress, black henbane and other noxious weed species found to be present on public land will be treated. Cultural resource inventories will be completed on the remaining 29 miles of dozer line, safety zone, new fences, and proposed road repair.

Post-fire grazing management, including the period of time needed for closure, will be determined based on monitoring and achievement of site specific resource objectives. Post-fire grazing management, including the period of time needed for closure, will be determined based on BLM/Permittee agreements, monitoring, and achievement of site specific resource objectives.

Rationale:

Implementation of the proposed action described in the NFRP Supplement EA for the Buffalo Fire will protect soils in the burned area, including preventing potential loss of soil due to wind and water erosion; will reduce potential invasion and establishment of noxious weeds and cheatgrass; will provide quality forage for livestock and wildlife; and will facilitate meeting established standards and guidelines for livestock grazing.

The Elko Resource Management Plan (RMP) is silent for the proposed action. The proposed action is consistent with the objectives of the RMP and is consistent with federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and plans to the maximum extent possible

Monitoring:

Post-treatment monitoring studies will be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed treatments and to determine the time frame for re-opening lands for grazing.

Helen Hankins
Elko Field Manager

Date