

United States Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Elko/Wells Resource Management Plans Proposed Fire Management Amendment and Environmental Assessment BLM/EK/PL-O3/026-1610/9211

Based on the environmental assessment (EA) for the proposed fire management amendment to the Elko and Wells Resource Management Plans (BLM/EK/PL-03/026), I have determined that the proposed action, as described in the EA, will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required prior to approval of the proposed plan.

This finding is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27) with regard to the context and the intensity of impacts, as discussed in the EA.

Context

The proposed plan focuses on the management of fire on 7.5 million acres of public lands that are intermixed with about 3.5 million acres of private lands in northeastern Nevada. The intensity and size of wildfires have increased compared to pre-settlement conditions, and wildfires pose a significant threat of risk to life, property, and resources. Vegetative communities have high fuels loads that are highly flammable, especially at the height of the fire season in July and August. The proposed plan prescribes a strategy for responding to fires and reducing hazardous fuel loads at a landscape level. It delineates communities at risk at the wildland/urban interface and throughout the district. Development of the proposed plan involved participation by persons, agencies and organizations with differing values. The proposed action addresses issues for fire management with an objective of improving the condition of public lands throughout the region.

Intensity

1) *Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.*

The analysis recognizes the beneficial role of fire in maintaining natural ecosystems, and problems to overcome adverse impacts associated with the increased frequency, size, and/or intensity of wildfire under current conditions. Strategies are proposed to avoid or reduce adverse impacts, to include increased invasion by weeds in native communities and loss of habitat diversity and forage. For many resources, the proposed action is expected to reduce adverse impacts due to reduction of hazardous fuels loads, resource-focused response strategies, and new procedural guidelines. The proposed increase in fuels treatment projects is expected to promote a healthy vegetative response to result in improved rangeland conditions and fire resiliency. Beneficial effects include improved rangeland, watershed and habitat conditions, including increased biodiversity and a return to more naturally functioning ecological systems over time.

2) *The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.*

The proposed action incorporates current guidelines and procedures for fire management and the protection public health and safety, and the safety of wildland firefighters.

3) *Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.*

Fire management activities have no potential to affect characteristics of the only designated "area of critical environmental concern" (ACEC) in the planning area, the Salt Lake ACEC. The proposed plan incorporates applicable procedures for the protection/and management of historic and cultural resources and other ecologically critical areas in the planning area.

4) *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.*

The effects of wildland fire and bummed area rehabilitation and hazardous fuels reduction projects, to include mechanical, chemical, biological and prescribed fire treatments, are well known and documented. To the degree such treatments are proposed to reduce adverse impacts and meet resource management objectives, effects not likely to be highly controversial.

5) *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.*

All fire management actions are subject to applicable procedures to prevent undue environmental harm and risk. The effects of implementation of the proposed plan are subject to evaluation and monitoring to address any uncertainty.

6) *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*

Overall, the methods of vegetation treatment activities, including fuels reduction, are scientifically accepted methods to employ to avoid significant effects and meet resource management objectives of the plans that would be amended. As a standard procedure, all fire management actions would continue to be subject to monitoring and further analysis to ensure they do not establish a precedent for future actions and do not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

7) *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*

All resources are evaluated for cumulative impacts in the EA, and no significant impacts are identified. As a standard procedure, cumulative impacts would continue to be subject to further review as actions are proposed, and on an area-specific and case-by-case basis.

8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the NRHP or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.*

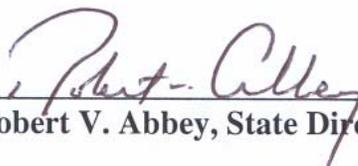
The proposed plan incorporates standard operating procedures to protect significant cultural resources against adverse effects in response to the occurrence of a wildfire, as well as in planning rehabilitation of burned areas and hazardous fuel reduction projects.

9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the ESA of 1973.*

Three threatened or endangered fish species occur in the planning area (Lahontan cutthroat trout, Independence Valley speckled dace and Clover Valley speckled dace), and no critical habitat has been designated for these species. As noted in the EA, BLM prepared a biological assessment that concludes the proposed action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, these species or their habitat.

10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

The proposed plan has been developed and reviewed to ensure its consistency with current and interagency plans and requirements of Federal, State and local agencies, as well as tribes in the area. It is standard procedure for future fire management projects to undergo additional environmental review, and that any permits required for the protection of the environment be obtained.



Robert V. Abbey, State Director, Nevada

10-14-03
Date

Attachment:

Proposed Elko/Wells Resource Management Plans Fire Management Amendment and Environmental Assessment