NORMAL FIRE REHABILITATION PLAN SUPPLEMENT
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
AND
DECISION RECORD
BISHOP FIRE (X-159)
BLM/EK/PL2001/052

Finding of No Significant Impact:

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in Normal Fire Rehabilitation Plan Supplement Environmental Assessment BLM/EK/PL2001/052, 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 Bishop Fire BLM/PL2001/052. Over 1508 acres of public land managed by the Bureau of Land Management Elko Field Office and 1378 acres of private lands were burned by the fire. Over 360 acres will be aerially seeded with Wyoming big sagebrush and 6 miles of dozer line will be rehabilitated. Approximately 5 miles of new fence will be constructed to facilitate grazing closures and 11 miles of dozer and fence lines will be inventoried for cultural resources. Five acres of Russian knapweed will be treated with herbicides. Monitoring for future noxious weed invasion will be conducted after rehabilitation and treatments will be applied if weeds are detected. 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.

Rationale:

Implementation of the proposed action described in the NFRP Supplement EA for the Bishop 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 Wells Resource Management Plan 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 reopening lands for grazing.

_____ _____

Helen Hankins Date
Elko Field Office

NORMAL FIRE REHABILITATION PLAN SUPPLEMENT
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
BISHOP FIRE (X159)
BLM/EK/PL-2001/052

Introduction:

This Supplement Environmental Assessment (EA) tiers to the Elko Field Office FY 2000 Normal Fire Rehabilitation Plan Environmental Assessment (NRFPEA) BLM/EK/PL2000/037. The Proposed Action includes NFRPEA Treatment # 1 (Grazing closure), 2 (Planting of multiple species seed mixtures), 5 (Dozer line rehabilitation), 8 (Invasive, nonnative weed species control), and 10 (Cultural resource site stabilization and protection). The format of this Supplement EA follows the outline in the Emergency Fire Rehabilitation Handbook, BLM Manual Handbook H-1742-1 dated 7/27/99.

List of Preparers:

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Project Area Description:

A. Fire Description:

The fire was started by a lightning strike and was reported on July 3, 2001. It burned over 1508 acres of public land and 1378 acres of private land. Three grazing allotments were affected: the Town Creek Allotment, the Holborn Allotment, and the HD Allotment. The fire impacted 19% of the Town Creek Allotment and less than one percent of the Holborn and HD Allotments. No structures were burned by the fire.

B. Vegetation and Soil Description:

The burned area ranges in elevation from 6,000 ft to 6,500 ft. Vegetation in the burned area was comprised of low sage, black sage, Basin big sage, Idaho fescue, bluebunch wheatgrass, and Sandburg's bluegrass.

Soils within the burned area occur on hillslopes and fan piedmont remnants. Soils on the 15 to

30% hillslopes are shallow over bedrock and have very gravelly loam surfaces over gravelly to extremely gravelly clay loam or clay subsoils. These soils have rapid runoff and moderately slow permeability. Wind erosion hazard is slight and water erosion hazard is slight to moderate. Soils on the 2 to 15% fan piedmont remnants are deep or moderately deep over an indurated hardpan. They have medium runoff and very slow to moderately slow permeability. Textures are loams or silt loams, with or without gravel, and subsoil textures range from silty clay loam to clay. Water erosion hazard is slight to moderate, and the wind erosion hazard is slight.

Although public safety from blowing dust on Highway 93 is a concern, no water erosion treatments are being proposed in Section 22. Soils in this portion of the burned area occur on 2 to 8 percent slopes. The water erosion hazard is slight, and the fire did not burn very hot here, so mud and debris flows are not expected to be a problem that would affect public safety on Highway 93. Soils on steeper slopes above Bishop Creek Reservoir have a greater water erosion hazard and rapid runoff. Much of the area that would be suitable for watershed treatments occurs on private land. The only resource threat from water erosion would be further sedimentation of Bishop Creek Reservoir which is already full of sediment. Seeding the dozer lines and closing the area from grazing should be sufficient treatment to reduce the risk of excessive amounts of sediment reaching Bishop Creek Reservoir.

Proposed Project Treatments:

A. Revegetation:

1. Wildife aerial seeding:

Approximately 360 acres would be aerially seeded in swaths (every other swath) within a 720 acre block with Wyoming big sagebrush. Seed would be distributed on snow, where possible, to aid in germination and to reduce seed consumption by rodents and birds. The purpose of the seeding is to provide forage for wildlife, particularly crucial winter forage for pronghorn antelope and mule deer. The seeding would also reduce the potential for invasion of noxious weeds and cheatgrass.

2. Invasive, Nonnative Weed Control:

Five acres of Russian knapweed would be treated with herbicides. If noxious weeds are detected after fire rehabilitation efforts, appropriate Integrated Pest Management (IPM) control measures will be implemented to control the invasion. In particular, dozer lines and adjacent areas would be targeted for noxious weed monitoring and subsequent treatment if weeds are detected.

B. Structures:

1. Fencing:

Approximately 5.2 miles of new fence would be constructed to allow closure of burned areas to grazing for a period to be determined by post-rehabilitation monitoring. These fences are needed to protect the proposed seeding treatments and to allow for vegetation to become reestablished.

C. Erosion Control Treatments:

1. Dozer line rehabilitation:

Approximately 6 miles of dozer lines would drill or aerial seeded with crested wheatgrass and Siberian wheatgrass to reduce erosion and encourage revegetation. Seed would be aerially applied between late October through December. If possible, seed would be broadcast on snow to aid in germination and reduce seed consumption by rodents and birds.

D. Site Preparation: None

E. Other:

1. Cultural resource inventories:

Cultural resource inventories would be conducted along the approximately 6 miles of dozer line and 5 miles of fence line. These inventories would identify any cultural resources that might need to be protected during rehabilitation treatments.

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
Floodplains
Wastes, hazardous/solid
Wetlands/Riparian Zones
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. Hazardous conditions have already been created along Highway 93 from blowing dust and ash impairing visibility for motorists. The Nevada Department of Transportation has been contacted regarding this safety issue. Message boards have been placed along the highway in both directions warning motorists of this dangerous situation. This hazard will diminish following rain storms and winter snowfall. The proposed vegetation, erosion control, and site prep treatments would encourage regrowth of vegetation, thus reducing future potential air quality impacts.

B. Cultural Resources:

The Bishop Fire occurred within an area known to archaeologists as the Central Great Basin which has been inhabited by humans for approximately 12,000 years. Archaeological sites and cultural properties in this area must be afforded protection whenever possible. Section 106 of the Natural 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 drilling, dozer line rehabilitation, and fence construction could damage cultural sites. Therefore, areas designated for mechanized seeding and other ground disturbance would be inventoried for cultural resources before the disturbance occurs in accordance with the State Protocol Agreement Between BLM, Nevada 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. More intense inventory would be used for highly sensitive areas. If surface disturbance is greater than 10 cm, then 30 meter transect intervals would be used.

All cultural resources discovered or relocated will 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 BLM and SHPO, or that have been fully mitigated, would be flagged for avoidance and avoided during rehabilitation activities. Flagging would be placed to minimize the potential for looting and vandalism and removed as soon as possible.

C. Invasive, Nonnative Species:

Fire suppression efforts, including dozer line construction and use of engines and other mechanized vehicles, is likely to have introduced cheatgrass and spread noxious weed species seeds into the burned area. The existing 5 acres of Russian knapweed are likely to increase after wildfire. In order to reduce the potential impacts of the spread of noxious weeds, the existing weeds need to be treated with herbicides and monitoring should be conducted after rehabilitation treatments are completed. If noxious weeds are discovered to have reinvaded the burn area, additional herbicide treatments would be needed to reduce the spread of the noxious weeds. The proposed monitoring and noxious weed treatment would help to reduce noxious weed impacts in the Bishop Fire area.

D. Native American Religious Concerns:

Native Americans would be consulted as appropriate prior to any ground disturbing activities or herbicide treatments. If traditional cultural properties or other areas having traditional or religious significance to Native Americans are discovered as a result of this consultation, then BLM would insure that measures are taken to avoid or reduce impacts to these areas of concern to Native Americans.

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

The sage grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) has been designated by the BLM Nevada State Director as a sensitive species and therefore afforded the same protection as a candidate species. 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 BLM and the Nevada Department of Wildlife. The proposed seeding treatments and rest from grazing pressure are designed to restore sagebrush habitat and/or reduce the impacts from the invasion or reinvasion of fire prone annual weeds.

F. 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, lark sparrow, green-tailed towhee, Brewer's blackbird, horned lark, and lark sparrow.

The greatest threat to these sagebrush-dependant migratory bird species is type conversion of sagebrush communities. Maintaining complete, diverse sagebrush communities is integral to conservation efforts for these species. Low elevation sagebrush sites, such as the project area, are vulnerable to conversion to cheatgrass types following wildfire. The proposed action to reseed with aggressive perennial grasses to prevent cheatgrass from dominating the site, coupled with secondary efforts to re-establish sagebrush on the stabilized site (as necessary) 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. Visual Resources:

The proposed project treatment area is within Visual Resource Management Class IV and changes in this class should be subordinate to the existing landscape. Both the fire itself and fire suppression activities such as creation of dozer lines have resulted in visual impacts to the area.

Revegetation efforts are designed to blend into the background without attracting undue attention and aid in restoring the area to a more characteristic landscape. Reseeding the fire area and dozer lines would serve to reduce the visual impacts in the area. Construction of new fence would create a new linear feature into the landscape but would meet Class IV requirements.

G. Wildlife:

Wildlife was adversely impacted by the Bishop 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, aerial seeding with sagebrush, and seeding dozer lines. These treatments would benefit wildlife by helping to restore critical forage and cover more quickly.

H. 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 will also improve future forage conditions for both livestock and wildlife. However, grazing closure and relocation of livestock will have some short term adverse impacts on ranchers in the area who normally use the allotment for grazing. The actual 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 will be identified to reduce impacts to ranchers where possible.

I. Water Quality, surface/ground:

Bishop Creek is a perennial and intermittent stream that is located approximately one half mile north of the western portion of the burn. Bishop Creek is tributary to the Humboldt River which is an impaired water for high levels of turbidity, total phosphorus and iron. There are no perennial streams within the burned area. The proposed dozer line seedings and grazing closure should be sufficient to prevent water quality degradation downstream. High runoff volumes, and associated sediment, following a large precipitation event would have little impact on water quality. Most of the sediment would be deposited in the reservoir (which is already silted in), and would not make it downstream.

Project Cost Summary: (the cost summary information can be found in the Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Plan and Accomplishment Report for the Elko 14 Fire Complex.)

Project Maps: (project maps can be found in the Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Plan and Accomplishment Report for the Elko 14 Fire Complex.)

Cost/Risk Assessment: (the cost/risk assessment can be found in the Burned Area Emergency

Rehabilitation (BAER) Plan and Accomplishment Report for the Elko 14 Fire Complex.)

Native/Nonnative Worksheet: (the native/nonnative worksheet can be found in the Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Plan and Accomplishment Report for the Elko 14 Fire Complex.)