

## Finding Of No Significant Impact/Decision Record (FONSI/DR)

### Agua Fria Grassland Fuels Reduction Project Environmental Assessment No. AZ-020-2004-005

**Introduction:** The BLM Phoenix Field Office has analyzed a proposal to amend the *Black Canyon Tobosa Grassland Prescribed Burn, 1993* to provide for thinning stands of juniper on the Agua Fria National Monument by mechanical means, and piling and burning, or lopping and scattering, the resulting slash in preparation for future management-ignited broadcast burning. Additionally, existing burn blocks E, J, L, and Q would be modified slightly to allow for better use of terrain features. The proposed juniper thinning and burn block modifications are described and analyzed in the attached Environmental Assessment (E.A. # AZ-020-2004-005).

**Finding Of No Significant Impact:** Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the attached environmental assessment (EA # AZ-020-2004-005), public involvement throughout the development of the analysis, and all other information available to me, it is my determination that impacts are not expected to be significant; therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required.

**Rationale for Finding No Significant Impact:** As per 40 CFR 1508.27 [setting forth considerations for determination of the "significance" of impacts] the proposed action and no action alternative have been analyzed with respect to the context and intensity of environmental impacts on regional and local interests. Both beneficial and adverse impacts have been considered. Potential adverse effects would be limited to acceptable levels by standard operating procedures and the inclusion of resource-specific mitigation measures where appropriate. The proposed action and no action alternative will not affect public health, public safety, or unique historic or cultural resources of the area; are not expected to be controversial; do not establish a precedent, or represent a decision in principle, about a future consideration; and are not related to any other proposed actions representing cumulatively significant effects. No cultural sites listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or any threatened or endangered species or critical habitat for such species, will be adversely impacted. The proposed action and no action alternative are consistent with Federal State and local laws.

**Decision:** It is my decision to select and implement the proposed action. The proposed action updates and supplements the use of management-ignited broadcast prescribed burning on the Agua Fria National Monument by including the use of thinning stands of juniper with chainsaws or small wheeled tractor-mounted saws prior to lopping, piling, and burning, or lopping and scattering, the resulting slash. Burn blocks E, J, L, and Q will be modified in size to allow for better use of terrain features during broadcast prescribed fire fuel treatments.

**Rationale for Decision:** The BLM Phoenix Field Office has conducted prescribed burning since 1993 to reduce fuels and restore native semi-desert grasslands on Black Mesa, Perry Mesa, Sycamore Mesa, and adjacent areas now comprising the Agua Fria National Monument. Management-ignited fires have been successful in stimulating tobosa grass growth and vigor;

increasing the production of other native grasses and annual forbs; increasing ground cover for wildlife; reducing invasive woody plant species such as mesquite, acacia, snakeweed, juniper, and cacti; and reducing hazards posed to wildland firefighters by fire starts that occur seasonally along the adjacent Interstate 17. Some areas of the AFNM contain relatively dense stands of invasive brush and juniper trees that inhibit the growth of grasses, and that are difficult to burn given the low intensity ground fires that result from the light fuels in these areas.

The proposed action will be effective in restoring grass cover to these grassland areas, and in re-introducing fire into these fire-dependent grassland ecosystems. By reducing the density of juniper trees within specified burn blocks, grasses and other species will increase in density and allow for the future use of broadcast prescribed burning. This in turn will contribute toward achieving the grassland restoration and maintenance objectives of the existing prescribed fire program: "to reduce woody species abundance, increase ground cover, increase perennial grass vigor and production, increase annual grass/forb production, and improve pronghorn habitat suitability."

Additionally, making minor modifications to the boundaries of burn blocks E, J, L, and Q will allow fire personnel to better utilize terrain features in igniting and managing broadcast burns.

A letter describing the proposed project and inviting comment was mailed to agencies, interest groups, and citizens that have indicated interest in being informed about projects occurring on the AFNM. During a 30-day public comment period, eight comment letters were received and considered during the development of the proposed action. These comments resulted in changes to the proposed action as documented in the attached environmental assessment. Notably, "biologic methods" using livestock grazing in certain circumstances, and chemical methods, were dropped from the proposed fuel treatment and grassland restoration techniques under consideration.

This action will not have a direct or indirect adverse impact on energy development, production, supply and/or distribution.

**Mitigation/Stipulations:** The following stipulations will be implemented to protect sensitive resources:

- Prescribed and or managed fires, and pile burning, will be conducted in accordance with prescriptions in order to protect human health and safety, achieve resource objectives, and minimize adverse impacts to sensitive resources.
- These prescriptions will include the following guidelines to avoid impacts to cultural resources, endangered species, and otherwise sensitive wildlife habitats:
  - a. No more than one-half of the watershed of any stream occupied by endangered fish will be treated in a single year.
  - b. Treatments applications will avoid canyon slopes and riparian areas to allow vegetative filtering of ash and sediments.

- c. If significant rainfall events occur immediately following treatments, endangered fish populations will be monitored for mortality.
- d. Broadcast fire will be used only after June 1 to avoid adverse impacts to pronghorn fawning.
- e. The BLM will continue to conduct cultural resource inventories to identify possible ancient agave fields and other sites that should be avoided by fire initiation or surface disturbing activities.
- f. Cultural resource specialists will participate in planning and monitoring prescribed burns.
- g. Minimum impact suppression techniques will be used to control prescribed burns as well as wildfires.
- h. The BLM will evaluate and implement site-specific protection measures to mitigate adverse impacts. Such protection measures could include using foam or retardant to protect historic structures; removing fuels around vulnerable sites; creating fire breaks that would protect sites; or covering vulnerable rock art in fire retardant fabric.
- i. The effects of prescribed burns on prehistoric agave fields would be mitigated through the avoidance of ignition or surface disturbances; the exclusion of such zones from burn area; or the use of fire breaks.
- j. Burn pile size and distribution will be limited to ensure generated heat does not sterilize soils.
- k. Burn pile locations will be inspected by cultural resource specialists to ensure avoidance of archaeological sites.
- l. Ground-disturbing treatment methods will require site-specific evaluations of potential impacts to cultural resources. Such evaluations would also apply to any areas proposed for biological treatment, using grazing practices that would involve livestock concentrations that could damage sensitive sites.
- m. Fuels management activities will be conducted so as to avoid surface disturbance at known archaeological sites. Temporary marking or on-site monitoring may be implemented to ensure effective site avoidance.
- n. Fires will not be intentionally ignited on known cultural resource sites.

**Authority:** This decision is issued pursuant to 43 CFR 9210, "Fire Management." This decision is in conformance with the fire management objectives of the *Phoenix Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement, 1988* and the *Approved Arizona Statewide Land Use Plan Amendment for Fire, Fuels and Air Quality Management and Decision Record, 2004*, which amended the RMP to allow, among other management actions, that "in areas suitable for fire where conditions allow, BLM will allow naturally ignited wildland fire, use prescribed fire and a combination of biological, mechanical and chemical treatments to maintain non-hazardous levels of fuels, reduce the hazardous effects of unplanned wildland fires and meet resource objectives." 705

**Filing of Appeal and Petition for Stay:** Any party to this decision whose interests are adversely affected by this decision may appeal to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations at 43 CFR 4.410-4.415. Per 43 CFR 4190.1, the BLM Phoenix Field Office has not determined that vegetation, soil, or other resources on the public lands are at substantial risk of wildfire due to drought, fuels buildup, or other reasons, or at immediate risk of erosion or other damage due to wildfire; therefore, the appeal may be

accompanied by a petition for stay of the decision in accordance with 43 CFR 4.21, pending final determination on appeal. The appeal and petition for stay must be filed in the office of the authorized officer, as noted below, within thirty (30) days from receipt of this decision:

Bureau of Land Management  
Phoenix Field Office  
ATTN: Field Manager  
21605 North 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Phoenix, AZ 85027

The appellant has the burden of showing that the decision appealed from is in error. The appeal shall state the reasons, clearly and concisely, why the appellant thinks the decision is in error.

In accordance with 43 CFR 4.21(b)(1), a petition for stay, if filed, must show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

- (1) The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied;
- (2) The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits;
- (3) The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted; and
- (4) Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

The appellant requesting the stay bears the burden of proof to demonstrate that a stay should be granted. The appellant shall serve a copy of its notice of appeal and petition for stay on each party named in the decision from which the appeal is taken, on the Interior Board of Land Appeals, and on the appropriate office of the Solicitor (see 43 CFR 4.413) at the same time the original documents are filed with this office.

**Contact:** For additional information concerning this decision, contact Clay Templin, Acting Agua Fria National Monument Manager, or Bruce Olson, Fuels Specialist, of this office at (623) 580-5500.

  
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Teresa A. Raml  
Field Manager

4/13/05  
Date:

cc (by certified mail):

**Greg Watts**  
**P.O. Box 1788**  
**Black Canyon City, AZ 85324**

**Arizona Antelope Foundation**  
**ATTN: Jim Unmacht, President**  
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**Phoenix Zoo**  
**ATTN: Jeff Williamson, CEO/President**  
**455 North Galvin Parkway**  
**Phoenix, AZ 85008**

**Sonoran Audubon Society**  
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**Red Mountain Mining, Inc.**  
**ATTN: Dale Longbrake, President**  
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**Arizona Game and Fish Department**  
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**Tyler Kokjohn**  
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**Sierra Club**  
**ATTN: Julie Sherman, Monument Protection Organizer**  
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**Flagstaff, AZ 86001**

**USDA Forest Service, Tonto National Forest**  
**Cave Creek Ranger District**  
**ATTN: Delvin Lopez, District Ranger**  
**40202 N. Cave Creek**  
**Scottsdale, AZ 85262**

**USDA Forest Service, Prescott National Forest**  
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