

DECISION MEMO
Vernon Management Area Pinyon/Juniper Thinning

USDA Forest Service-Uinta National Forest
Spanish Fork Ranger District

I. DECISION

A. Description of Decision

My decision is to proceed to thin 40 acres within an 80 acre area of pinyon/juniper trees encroaching into sagebrush/grasslands. The project area is in sections 22 and 27, T9S, R6W, Tooele County. (See attached map).

B. Purpose of the Decision

The purpose of the pinyon/juniper thinning is to enhance sagebrush habitat for the greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*). The thinning will also promote a healthy watershed through the promotion of herbaceous vegetation and a decrease in bare ground. The greater sage grouse is a Forest Service sensitive species, and has been petitioned for listing as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act with the Fish and Wildlife Service. There are only two populations on the Uinta; one in Strawberry Valley and one in the Vernon Area of the forest. The need is to provide quality habitat to preserve the health and continued success of the Vernon population.

II. REASONS FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THE DECISION

Decisions may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment when they are within one of the categories identified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 7 CFR part 1b.3 or one of the categories identified by the Chief of the Forest Service in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15 SECTIONS 31.1, 31.1b or 31.2, and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect.

A. Category of Exclusion

The project is within the FSH 1909.15 31.2 (6) category of exclusion that includes “Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction.”

B. Relationship to Extraordinary Circumstances

1. Steep Slopes or Highly Erosive Soils

There are no steep slopes or highly erosive soils within the decision area. The decision will not affect steep slopes or highly erosive soils.

2. Threatened and Endangered Species or their Critical Habitat

The Endangered Species Act requires that federal activities do not jeopardize the continued existence of any species federally listed or proposed as threatened or endangered or result in adverse modification to such species' designated critical habitat.

As required by this Act, potential effects of this decision on listed species have been analyzed and documented in a Biological Assessment (File Record). There are no Threatened or Endangered Species in the project area. The only species located within the vicinity of the project area is the Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*). Implementation of this project will have no effect on this species. Since the activities will not occur within habitat of any other threatened or endangered animal or plant species, no effects are expected to occur on listed species.

3. Floodplains, Wetlands, or Municipal Watersheds

Floodplains: Executive Order 11988 requires federal agencies to avoid adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of floodplains.

Due to the low scale and intensity of the project's activities, this decision will not have any negative impact in the floodplain where it will be implemented.

Wetlands: Executive Order 11990 requires federal agencies to avoid adverse impacts associated with destruction or modification of wetlands. This project's activities are not located within wetlands.

Municipal Watersheds: This project will not have any adverse effects on municipal watersheds.

4. Congressionally Designated Areas

This project is not located in or near Wilderness or within a Wild or Scenic River corridor. No congressionally designated areas will be affected by this decision.

5. Inventoried Roadless Areas

There are no inventoried roadless areas in the project area.

6. Research Natural Areas

The project is not within any proposed, candidate or designated Research Natural Area.

7. Native American Religious or Cultural Sites, Archaeological Sites, or Historic Properties or Areas

No effects to heritage resources are expected as a result of this project.

III. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Scoping was conducted through letter contacts with, agencies and other known interested parties and through listing the project in the quarterly notice proposed actions. See the project file for comments received.

IV. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY AND/OR RELATED TO THEIR LAWS AND REGULATIONS

My decision will comply will all applicable laws and regulations. I have summarized some pertinent ones below:

National Forest Management Act – This Act requires all projects and activities be consistent with the Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. This project and decision are consistent with the current Plan and with the proposed revision.

Endangered Species Act – See Section II, Item B2 of this document.

National Historic Preservation Act – See Section II, Item B7 of this document.

Archaeological Resources Protection Act – See Section II, Item B7 of this document.

National Environmental Policy Act – This Act requires public involvement and consideration of potential environmental effects. The documentation of this decision supports compliance with this Act.

V. ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OF APPEAL

This decision is not subject to a higher level of administrative review or appeal.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This decision may be implemented immediately.

VII. CONTACT PERSON

Further information about this decision can be obtained from Karen Hartman of this office (801) 798-3571.

VII. SIGNATURE AND DATE

I have concluded that this decision may be categorically excluded from documentation in and environmental impact statement of environmental assessment, as it is within one of the categories identified by the Chief of the Forest Service in Forest Service Handbook 1909.15 section 31.2, and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect. My conclusion is based on information presented in this document and the entirety of the planning record.

WILLIAM A.R. OTT
District Ranger

Date