DECISION RECORD

Environmental Assessment NV-052-03-239 for the Bunkerville-Mesquite Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project JE25

Decision:

The decision is the authorization of the actions identified under Environmental Assessment NV-052-03-239 for the Bunkerville-Mesquite Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project JE25, located in Clark County, Nevada.

Rationale:

1. Implementation of the proposed actions will enable the BLM to restore native riparian vegetation on selected eco-sites within the Virgin River flood plain. The proposed action will provide many benefits, including: noxious weed infestation control; restoration of the natural low-frequency, long-return interval fire regime; mitigation of hazardous fuels conditions and their imminent threat to the Virgin River aquatic and riparian environment and to the communities of Mesquite and Bunkerville; restoration of floral/faunal species and community-level biodiversity; restoration of riparian and aquatic habitat suitability for wildlife, including migratory birds and federally-listed threatened/endangered species; increased surface groundwater availability; and improved water quality, via decreases in the amount of soil salt run-off into the Virgin River.

2. The proposed actions identified in EA NV-052-03-239 are in conformance with the Las Vegas Resource Management Plan (Record of decision signed October 1998), under the following management objectives: Water Resource Management, WT-2 (reduce salt yields impairing river water quality); Riparian Management, RP-1-f (integrated weed management: control tamarisk and re-vegetate with native species); Vegetation Management, VG-2a (rehabilitate disturbed habitat sites); Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, AC-2 (protection); Fish and Wildlife Management, FW-3-g (protect riparian areas and migratory bird habitat), FW-3-h (enhance biodiversity); Special Status Species Management, SS-1-a (improve Virgin River aquatic and riparian habitat by replacing tamarisk with native vegetation); Fire Management, FE-2-a (implement hazard reduction priorities, including invasive species infestations).

3. The *no-action alternative* was not selected because an imminent hazardous fuels threat to the Nevada-listed Communities At Risk, Bunkerville and Mesquite, would remain extant. The no-action alternative would not protect human life and property values from wildfire impact, in the urban wildland interface formed by the City of Mesquite and Bunkerville Township. The no-action alternative would result in continued degradation of the aquatic and riparian environment, due to the failure to remove the infestation of invasive noxious tamarisk.

4. The decision to allow the proposed actions does not result in any undue or unnecessary environmental degradation.

Record of Decision:
Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in Environmental Assessment NV-052-03-239 for the Bunkerville-Mesquite Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project JE25, I have determined that impacts are not expected to be significant and an environmental impact statement is not required. Due to the presence of listed threatened and endangered species populations and designated critical habitat segments within the immediate project area, all activities associated with Project JE25 over the ten-year duration of the project will comply with the minimization measures identified in Environment Assessment NV-052-03-239 (see attached list).

Recommended by: _____ _____
Tim Rash
Supervisory Fire Ecologist
Date

Approved by: _____ 8/26/03
John Jamrog
Assistant Field Manager, Recreation
and Renewable Resources
Date

Hazardous Fuels Project JE25: Project Design Specifications/(minimization measures)

1. In the field, BLM and FWS personnel will jointly identify and GIS the year-1 treatment plot within the Mechanical Treatment Area of Zone 1. Depending on time constraints and logistics, this effort may be extended to identify the entire plot scheme for Zone 1, which is estimated to extend through no later than project year-3.

2. Starting in FY04, all Hand-treatment acres in Zone 1 will be surveyed for the presence or absence of the Southwestern willow flycatcher, using the FWS approved protocols. The surveys will occur in three successive years, during the May-July peak nesting period, and will be conducted by qualified personnel contracted by the BLM Las Vegas Field Office. No fuels treatment action will occur on any such plot, unless three successive years of negative SWFL occurrence data has been recorded. Once the survey criterion is met, another restriction will apply to any tamarisk stand that possesses SWFL-suitable canopy characteristics. Such stands can only be removed on a **no net loss**, acre-for-acre basis. All such acres cleared of tamarisk must be offset by an equal number of acres that have been restored to SWFL suitability, anywhere inside the JE25 project area.

3. Any survey data indicating new SWFL-occupied sites will be verified and then updated on the JE25 Treatment Category Map, and GIS layer. If the report source does not show the location as a GIS polygon but rather as a point, the new SWFL site will be defined to extend in a 200-foot radius from the reported point location.

4. Mechanical treatment of unburned tamarisk will be scheduled outside the Southwestern willow flycatcher breeding season in Nevada, which is May 1 through September 15.

5. Annual coordination meetings with the FWS Southern Nevada Field Office will be held specific to Project JE25, over the length of its duration. The meetings will be in January. FWS and BLM will agree to a format for recording and formalizing the meeting results, for inclusion in the official casefile records of both agencies. The meetings will serve as the forum for adaptive management assessments, with all aspects of the project open to potential re-evaluation and modification (up to and including annual treatment acreage targets, and the remapping of Treatment Category boundaries based on new information). If new, less-intrusive, fuels reduction techniques become available these may also be evaluated for possible trial or full-scale implementation. One possibility is prescriptive (goat) grazing, which in 2003 was just field-tested on tamarisk stands located on private land along the Muddy River, in Southern Nevada.

6. To prevent chemical/sediment run-off, a minimum 30-foot buffer strip will remain untreated along the edge of all open water bodies, including both banks of the Virgin River. No mechanical, hand-clearing or chemical treatment activity will occur within the 30-foot buffer strips.

7. Masticated tamarisk "mulch" will be left in place in order to provide dust abatement; enhanced soil stabilization; decreased run-off/siltation; absorption and retention of over-sprayed herbicide, and insulation of the surface soil horizon from solar heating.

8. Buffer structures (silt fences, straw wattles, etc) will be installed on individual treatment plots to remediate run-off impacts, where fish monitoring studies indicate such a need.

9. No native trees will be cut, shredded, crushed or otherwise intentionally impacted by this action. Patches of native, non-halophytic shrubs (minimum patch diameter 15-feet) will be avoided from mechanical treatment. Tamarisk within these avoidance areas will be cut by hand tools or chainsaws and then backhauled.

10. Wherever protective fences are deemed necessary to insure success of the revegetation effort, layout will be

designed to minimize any clearing of native vegetation. Only ATV equipment will be used during fence construction that occurs on the wet terrace or semi-wet terrace positions of the floodplain.

11. Non-toxic marking dye will be added to the Garlon solution to insure adequate coverage and to avoid redundant spraying of individual target plants.

12. Weather reports will be monitored. Chemical applications will not occur within 24-hours of forecasted precipitation, nor whenever ground level wind speeds exceed 10 mph.

13. To minimize triclopyr volatilization, Garlon use will occur in late fall and early spring or when air temperatures are between 60-90° F.

14. Mixing of chemicals/equipment transfer will occur on tarps, 200-feet from the daily high water mark, in order to catch spillage and to minimize exposure to non-target areas.

15. Containers/equipment will be handled per the Garlon label instructions. Spills will be responded to in accord with the Las Vegas District Hazardous Materials Incident Contingency Plan (1992).

16. Access will be by existing road. Vehicles will not exceed 25 mph on unposted dirt roads.

17. Except during mechanical treatment operations, the use of full-sized vehicles will be avoided in favor of ATV equipment for *all* project needs (seeding, harrowing, materials delivery). On dry terrace treatment plots a greater degree of latitude may be exercised.

18. No excavation or earthmoving will occur that would trigger the Section 404 Clean Water Act permit process with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

19. Monitoring will be conducted to detect initial presence or post-treatment recruitment of invasive or noxious weed species, including tamarisk. Monitoring and control efforts will comply with BLM Manual 9025.8 and the Nevada Weed Management Strategy.

20. Actions will conform to terms & conditions of Biological Opinion File no. 1-5-97-F-251.