

Forest Service, United States Department of Agriculture





Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management



January 2008

Environmental Assessment Decision Notice And Finding Of No Significant Impact

Tamarisk Treatment Project



Bureau of Land Management Price Field Office, Carbon County, Utah

Manti-La Sal National Forest Ferron/Price Ranger District Sanpete County, Utah

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
DOCUMENT STRUCTURE	1
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT	1
PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION	1
PROPOSED ACTION	2
PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT	4
ISSUES AND ALTERNATIVES	4
ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION	5
ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES	5
CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION	6
DECISION NOTICE	8
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT	9

INTRODUCTION

Document Structure

The Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management, as a cooperating agency, have prepared this Environmental Assessment in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations. This Environmental Assessment discloses the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts that would result from the proposed action and alternatives. The document is organized into four parts:

- Environmental Assessment: This section includes the Purpose and Need for the project, and the agency's Proposed Action for achieving that purpose and need. This section also details how the Forest Service informed the public of the proposal and how the public responded. This section also includes Issues and Alternatives: describing issues identified during scoping, as well as alternative methods for achieving the stated purpose. These alternatives were developed based on significant issues raised by the public and other agencies. How well the alternatives address the purpose and need is also addressed; Environmental Consequences: describes the environmental effects of implementing the proposed action and other alternatives. The affected environment is described, followed by the effects of the No Action Alternative that provides a baseline for evaluation and comparison of the other alternatives that follow.
- Agencies and Persons Consulted: This section provides a list of preparers and agencies consulted during the development of the environmental assessment.
- **Decision Notice**: This section presents the decision to be implemented including mitigation and monitoring measures.
- *Finding of No Significant Impact*: This section considers the environmental effects described in the EA along with a determination of effect on the quality of the human environment.

Additional documentation, including more detailed analyses of project-area resources, may be found in the project planning record located at the Ferron/Price Ranger District Office in Price, Utah.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Background Information

Tamarisk or salt cedar is the common name for *Tamarix aphylla*, *T. chinensis*, *T. gallica*, *T. parviflora*, and *T. ramosissima*. Tamarisk has been documented as an introduced species since the early 1800's. Later it was used as an ornamental tree or shrub and has been distributed as a wind break in this country as early as 1905. From the 1920's until the 1960's Tamarisk experienced an explosion in its presence from a mere 10,000 acres to well over 1 million acres. The spread of tamarisk has not stopped dominating the riparian areas throughout the South and Southwestern US. While tamarisk is best suited to elevations below 5,000 feet, the species are being found in higher elevations (Joes Valley Reservoir).

Tamarisk has a deep, extensive root system that extends to the water table, and is also capable of extracting water from unsaturated soil layers. Tamarisk has a primary root that grows with little branching until it reaches the water table, at which point secondary root branching is profuse.

Tamarisk has a competitive advantage over native species (e.g. cottonwood and willow) in areas where salinities are elevated or water tables depressed, conditions characteristic of disturbed riparian environments. Tamarisk can obtain water at lower plant water potential and has higher water use efficiency than native riparian trees allowing it to out-compete native species.

Treatment of Tamarisk infestations includes the use of fire, some form of mastication, cutting and or treatment with herbicides. Success rates have varied widely and are almost always dependent on re-treatment of infected areas. Attachment 1 shows the spatial relationship between the two project areas on Forest Service and BLM (Bureau of Land Management) lands.

The defined project area (Attachment 2) on BLM lands consists of approximately 165,000 acres. While the project area is expansive the actual impacts from the proposed action will be significantly less. Treatment areas are non contiguous patches (usually less than 1 acre each) of tamarisk that are mainly found in the bottom of drainages like Buckhorn Draw. It is estimated that the actual affected area is approximately 1200 acres. Approximately 60 acres would receive direct treatments as outlined in the proposed action.

The Joes Valley project area (Attachment 3) comprises approximately 7,900 total acres. The affected area will be approximately 1 percent of the project area. The occurrence of tamarisk in the Joes Valley reservoir area is limited to small clumps with an affected area of approximately 5 acres.

Purpose and Need for Action

Historic photographs and field surveys have indicated that Buckhorn Draw and Joes Valley reservoir areas were free of tamarisk until the last 30 years, while the rest of the southwest has been dealing with the continued infiltration of this pervasive family of shrubs,. Over the past 30 years the infestation of tamarisk in the project area has increased. In order for the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to impede the spread of tamarisk it is imperative to act now. The purpose of the proposed project is to eliminate or severely curtail the spread of Tamarisk, from the Joes Valley Reservoir area and the Buckhorn Draw drainage.

For Buckhorn draw the goal is to restore and preserve natural conditions and preserve existing natural conditions by eradicating nonnative tamarisk. The control of nonnative tamarisk that is invading Buckhorn draw and its tributaries would allow natural systems to recover. Native plant and animal species would return to areas now dominated by tamarisk. Beneficial impacts would include the restoration of native flora species that may have a positive impact on the retention of native flora species that may have a positive impact on the retention of neotropical migrants, and many native insect and mammal species.

Tamarisk has just started to gain a foothold in the area surrounding Joes Valley Reservoir. It is imperative to implement an eradication program now to prevent an infestation from occurring, where it would dominate native vegetation, use valuable water, and spread to uninfected areas.

The Boy Scouts of America (BSA) have offered to provide the workforce to remove tamarisk in the spring of 2008. A tamarisk removal project of this magnitude would not be feasible without

the volunteer efforts of BSA. The Joes Valley and Buckhorn Draw areas have the potential to become free of tamarisk because they are both on the outskirts and updrainage of the local invasion. Removal of tamarisk in these areas has the potential of setting back the invasion of tamarisk by 30 years, as verified by historical photos.

Proposed Action

The action proposed by the Forest Service and the BLM to meet the purpose and need is:

- In June, 2008, mobilize approximately 60 twenty person crews comprised of volunteers, BLM and forest service employees.
- Utilize chain saws and hand saws (boys scouts will be limited to the use of hand saws) to cut the tamarisk as close to the ground as possible.
- Apply herbicides (Habitat and or Garlon) under the direction of certified applicators with hand held pump or backpack sprayers with hand wands, spray bottles and or paint brushes.
- On Forest Service administered lands will have the option to pile and burn the tamarisk that has been cut down.
- On BLM administered lands cut tamarisk will be lopped, scattered and or mulched.
- Those areas that are designated as Wilderness Study Areas would have all standards associated with the USFS and or BLM applied to prevent any activity that would cause the designation or possible designation to change.



Figure 1
Boy Scouts and Federal employees working on a previous Tamarisk eradication Project



Figure 2
Federal employee applying herbicide on Tamarisk stump with pump sprayer.



Figure 3
Tamarisk Stump treated with herbicide shows the aerial extent of the application.

Each tamarisk tree or shrub would be cut down by handsaw or chainsaw, the slash would either be moved offsite, scattered, burned, or chipped, then herbicide would be applied directly onto the cut stem in order to prevent the tamarisk plant from sprouting. The herbicide would be applied by hand either using a brush, a small spray bottle, hand held pump sprayer or a pump back pack type sprayer with a hand wand.

Public Involvement

Through discussions with the responsible officials for the BLM and the USFS, stakeholders were identified and a scoping letter was mailed on April 4, 2007. A legal notice of proposed action was published in the *Emery County Progress*, Castle Dale, Utah, on March 27, 2007. One response was received as a result of these attempts to inform the public. The comment received was supportive of the project and expressed interest in the method of application for the herbicide.

Issues and Alternatives

During scoping the Forest Service did not identify any significant issues. The Bureau of Land Management utilized their EA critical elements checklist to scope the project and determined that there weren't any significant issues. Significant issues were defined as those directly or indirectly caused by implementing the proposed action. Non-significant issues were identified as those: 1) outside the scope of the proposed action; 2) already decided by law, regulation, Forest Plan, or other higher level decision; 3) Not germane to the decision to be made; or 4) conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence. The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations require this delineation in Sec. 1501.7, "...identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review (Sec. 1506.3)..."

Issues considered but not carried forward for analysis

1. Air Quality: Potential particulate matter generated by access to and from the project area on the gravel roads would be resolved by the standard practice by Emery County of applying magnesium chloride on the roads.

- Aquatic Life potential for the herbicide to impact aquatic life in the rivers and in the Joes Valley Reservoir. This was not carried forward as an issue. Compliance with the manufacturer's application instructions coupled with the requirement that all herbicide applications are either conducted by certified sprayers or under their direct supervision would prevent any impacts to aquatic life.
- 3. Areas of Critical Environmental Concern: The relevant and important scenic values associated with the San Rafael Canyon ACEC would not be compromised by the removal of tamarisk in certain portions of the ACEC. Tamarisk in no way contributes to this value.
- 4. Wild and Scenic Rivers: No tamarisk removal is planned within the San Rafael River corridor. In the event that some removal takes place within the corridor, the river's cultural, scenic; recreation, historic and wildlife values would not be affected by any component of the activity. Since no surface disturbing activities or other construction are proposed along the river corridor, the tentative classification given this eligible river would not be compromised -the degree of development along the river would not change. The proposal would in no way obstruct the free-flowing character of the stream.
- 5. Wilderness or Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs): This action would not impair any wilderness characteristics within the Sids Mountain WSA or Mexican Mountain WSA. Removal and eradication of tamarisk along the boarders of these WSAs would improve the overall naturalness of the area. While chainsaws may be used short distances within the WSAs in the Buckhorn Wash area, opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation in this area would not be affected. These characteristics are not available in this portion of the WSAs given the presence of a well established and used county road within the confines of Buckhorn Wash.

Alternatives, Including the Proposed Action

Alternative 1

No Action

Under the No Action alternative, the tamarisk will not be treated and the infestation will continue. Tamarisk will continue to dominate and drive out native species as it has in other areas surrounding the San Rafael Swell and the Manti – La Sal National Forest. The purpose and need for action would not be met.

Alternative 2

The Proposed Action

The proposed action as previously described in this EA, responds to the purpose and need.

Environmental Consequences

The proposed action responds to the goals and objectives outlined in both the Manti-La Sal Land and Resource Management Plan and the BLM Price Field Office Resource Management Plan. The proposed action helps move the project area towards desired conditions described in those

plans. It is consistent with general direction for the reduction or eradication of noxious weeds. The Forest LRMP calls for the control of noxious weeds (a plant species that is undesirable; conflicts, restricts, or otherwise causes problems with the management objectives (page E-12)) through the forest goals "Control noxious weeds and poisonous plants in cooperation with Forest users and State and local agencies." (page III-3 and 11); and with general direction for noxious weeds "Control and reduce noxious weeds and poisonous plants, using integrated pest management techniques and strategies; including the use of herbicides, biological control agents, and/or mechanical or hand Treatments" (page III-25).

Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Impacts

Alternative 1

Implementing this alternative will not have any immediate change to the overstory. Without the change to the overstory native species of grasses, forbs and shrubs (willows) will not have a chance to re-establish. This will also continue the encroachment of tamarisk. It is anticipated that the continued encroachment of tamarisk will cause the habitat to change from one dominated by native species to one dominated by tamarisk.

Alternative 2 (Proposed Action)

- Removal of the over story created by the existing tamarisk shrubs. Opens the understory
 to additional sunlight. Indirectly the loss of the overstory will facilitate the increase
 growth of native grasses, forbs and shrubs (willows).
- As per the BE/BA prepared for this project, the proposed action would have no effect on any federally listed threatened, endangered, proposed or candidate wildlife, fish, amphibian, or plant species. The project would have no impact to any Region 4 Forest sensitive wildlife, fish, amphibian, or plant species. The project would have no impact to any Manti-La Sal National Forest management Indicator Species (MIS) or to any Utah Partners in Flight Avian Conservation Strategy Priority Species. The biological assessment and evaluation of the project area is contained in the project file.

Consultation and Coordination

The Forest Service and BLM consulted the following individuals, Federal, State, and local agencies, tribes and non-Forest Service persons during the development of this environmental assessment:

ID TEAM MEMBERS:

Mesia Nyman District Ranger

Kevin Albrecht Natural Resource Specialist

Karl Ivory BLM Wildlife Biologist

Michael Davis Environmental Coordinator

John Healy Range Management Specialist

Charmaine Thompson Archaeologist

FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENCIES:

Bureau of Land Management

Bureau of Reclamation

Emery County

Emery County Public Lands Council

DECISION NOTICE

After review of public comments, the analysis disclosed in the environmental assessment, information in the project file, and the determination of finding of no significant impact, it is my decision to implement the proposed action (alternative 2). This includes the following actions:

- Mobilize approximately 60 twenty person crews comprised of volunteers and forest service employees.
- Utilize chain saws and hand saws (boys scouts will be limited to the use of hand saws) to cut the tamarisk as close to the ground as possible.
- Apply herbicides (Habitat and or Garlon) under the direction of certified applicators with hand held pump or backpack sprayers with hand wands, spray bottles and or paint brushes.
- On Forest Service lands will have the option to pile and burn the tamarisk that has been cut down.
- On BLM lands cut tamarisk will be lopped, scattered and or mulched.
- Those areas that are designated as Wilderness Study Areas or considered eligible for designation as a wild and scenic river will have all standards associated with the USFS and or BLM applied to prevent any activity that would cause the designation or possible designation to change.
- Within 5 years treated Tamarisk stumps may be re treated as needed by application of either Habitat or Garlon with a hand pump or by paint brush.

Each tamarisk tree or shrub would be cut down by handsaw or chainsaw, the slash would either be moved offsite, scattered, burned, or chipped, then herbicide would be applied directly onto the cut stem in order to prevent the tamarisk plant from sprouting. The herbicide would be applied by hand either using a brush, a small spray bottle, hand held pump sprayer or a pump back pack type sprayer with a hand wand.

I have considered that the San Rafael River is currently eligible for Wild and Scenic River (WSR) designation. I have concluded that none of the actions approved in this Decision Notice will have a detrimental effect on the possible designation of the San Rafael River as a wild and scenic river.

In addition, I have also considered the effect of this project on lands that have wilderness character, Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) and/or Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs). Based on the documentation provided and the input from the ID team it is my conclusion that the effects from implementation will be positive by taking steps to restore the natural environment in Buckhorn Draw.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

After considering the environmental effects described in this document, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action. I have based my finding on the following:

(A) Context

(1) Actions will be limited to those actions disclosed in the EA. Further, my decision is consistent with direction in the 1986 Manti-La Sal National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended. General Direction for control of noxious weeds (page III-25) would be followed. The action is also determined to be consistent with the BLM's San Rafael Resource Management Plan.

(B) **Intensity Factors**

- (1) My decision will not result in any significant adverse effects [40 CFR 1508.27 (b)(1). All practicable and reasonable mitigation and monitoring to avoid or minimize adverse environmental and social harm have been incorporated. I believe the intensity of disclosed beneficial and adverse effects is reasonable, acceptable, and typical of tamarisk eradication by using hand treatments (cutting and herbicide application). None of the impacts documented in the EA have the potential to cause irreparable, adverse damage to the environment. None of the impacts documented in the EA have an intensity that could result in uncommon or unique beneficial result to the human environment.
- (2) There will be no significant effects on public health and safety [40 CFR 1508.27 (b) (2). Public health and safety is integral to the purpose and need for action. Based on the analysis and disclosure of effects in the EA, I have determined that there are no significant adverse effects on public health or safety.
- (3) My decision will not result in any significant effects on any unique characteristics of the geographic area, historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas. [40 CFR 1508.27 (b) (3)]. No project activities will occur within any inventoried roadless areas or research natural areas.
- (4) The Selected Alternative will not result in any effects that are likely to be highly controversial [40 CFR 1508.27 (b) (4)]. Public involvement efforts indicated support from UDOT and the general public.
- (5) The Selected Alternative will not result in any highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks [40 CFR 1508.27 (b) (5)]. Utilization of hand saws or chain saws with a follow-up application of herbicide has a proven track record of being successful. Herbicides use according to the

Page 9 of 16

manufacturers' documentation has proven to be safe and effective. Based on this, I find effects which are highly uncertain or that involve unique or unknown risks to be low, and therefore not significant.

- (6) My decision does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects nor does it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. [40 CFR 1508.27 (b) (6)]. This action is fully consistent with Manti-La Sal Land and Resource Management Plan. Based on this, I find the degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or to represent a decision in principle for the future to be low, and therefore not significant.
- (7) The analysis documented in the EA discloses that my decision will not result in any significant cumulative effects [40 CFR 1508.27 (b) (7)].
- (8) My decision will not adversely affect sites or objects listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor will it cause the loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources. [40 CFR 1508.27 (b) (8)]. This determination is made based on evolutions made by the cultural resource staff for the Forest Service and the BLM.(see project record)
- (9) My decision will not adversely affect threatened or endangered species or their habitats. [40 CFR 1508.27 (b) (9)]. A biological evaluation and assessment has been prepared for this project and is part of the project file. Based on its content, I find the actions approved in this decision will have no effect on any federally listed threatened, endangered, proposed or candidate wildlife, fish, amphibian, or plant species. The project would have no impact to any Region 4 Forest sensitive wildlife, fish, amphibian, or plant species. The project would have no impact to any Manti-La Sal National Forest management Indicator Species (MIS) or to any Utah Partners in Flight Avian Conservation Strategy Priority Species.
- (10) My decision is consistent with Federal, State, and local laws and requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. [40 CFR 1508.27 (b) (10)]. The analysis did not identify any adverse effects that threaten a violation of Federal, State, or local laws designed to protect the environment. The Forest Plan requires consistency with Federal, State, and local laws in project implementation. Therefore, if the effects disclosed in this analysis are consistent with the Plan then they would also not threaten a violation of law. Based on this information, I find the activities approved in the decision will not have a significant impact nor violate a Federal, State, or Local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.
- (11) Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, and Departmental Regulation 5600-2 direct federal agencies to integrate environmental justice considerations into federal programs and activities. I have reviewed the effects of the selected alternative and I do not believe this alternative would have any disparate impacts on individual groups of peoples or communities. Implementation of any of the alternatives will produce no adverse effects on minorities, low-income individuals, Native Americans or women. No civil liberties will be affected.

(C) Compliance With Other Laws

National Forest Management Act

National Forest management must be consistent with Forest Plans prepared under authority of the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), 16 U.S.C. 1604 and 36 CFR 219. The Act requires the Secretary of Agriculture to assess forest lands, develop a management program based on multiple-use, sustained-yield principles, and implement a resource management plan for each unit of the National Forest System.

Best Available Science

Upon review of the documentation and discussions with the Interdisciplinary Team Leader and team members I have determined that the applicable science information has been properly considered, interpreted and the risks identified. Contrary science was not raised during the scoping or applicable comment periods. It is my opinion that the use of existing FS manual direction, protocols, and best management practices represent the best available science.

Endangered Species Act

The Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, provides a program for the conservation of threatened and endangered (TE) plants and animals and the habitats in which they are found. The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) currently maintains a list of 1,264 TE species. (See BA/BE in project record).

National Historic Preservation Act

The National Historic Preservation Act created the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) to advice on matters involving historic preservation. The ACHP is authorized to review and comment on all actions licensed by the Federal government which will have an effect on properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NHRP), or which are eligible for such listing. Notification of this proposed action with Native American tribes occurred through the quarterly schedule of proposed actions. Joes Valley Reservoir project area will not have an effect on cultural resources. Further consultation with the SHPO (State Historic Preservation Office) is not required (36 CFR 800 3(a)(1). Within the Buckhorn Draw project area the BLM has made the determination that the affected area will not have an effect on cultural resources. Through and existing memorandum of understanding with the SHPO no additional consultation is required. (See Project Record).

Clean Water Act, Floodplain Management (Executive Order 11988), and Protection of Wetlands (Executive Order 11990)

The Clean Water Act employs a variety of regulatory and non-regulatory tools to sharply reduce direct pollutant discharges into waterways, finance municipal wastewater treatment facilities, and manage polluted runoff. These tools are employed to achieve the broader goal of restoring and maintaining the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the nation's waters so that they can support "the protection and propagation of fish, shellfish, and wildlife and recreation in and on the water." Executive Orders

11988 and 11990 require that executive agencies take special care when undertaking actions that may affect wetlands or floodplains, directly or indirectly, by avoiding the disruption of these

areas wherever there is a practicable alternative and by minimizing any environmental harm that might be caused by federal actions.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act implements various bilateral treaties and conventions between the U.S. and four other countries for the protection of migratory birds. Under the Act, taking, killing or possessing migratory birds is unlawful (See BE/BA and the Wildlife Report).

Environmental Justice (Executive Order 12898)

Executive Order 12898 requires all federal agencies to take actions, to the extent practical and permitted by law, to make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human effects of its programs policies and activities on minority populations and low income populations in the United States and its possessions.

FOREST SERVICE IMPLEMENTATION DATE

If no appeal is filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of this decision may begin on, but not before, the 5th business day following the close of the appeal-filing period (36 CFR § 215.15). If an appeal is filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of appeal disposition (36 CFR § 215.2). In the event of multiple appeals of the same decision, the implementation date is controlled by the date of the last appeal disposition.

FOREST SERVICE ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 215. Appeals must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14. Only individuals or organizations who submitted comments or otherwise expressed interest in the project during the comment period may appeal. Appeals must be postmarked or received by the Appeal Deciding Officer within 45 days of the publication of this notice in the *Emery County Progress* newspaper. This date is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Timeframe information from other sources should not be relied on. Incorporation of documents by reference is not allowed. The Appeal Deciding Officer is Forest Supervisor, Howard Sargent. Appeals must be sent to: Appeal Deciding Officer, Intermountain Region USFS, 324 25th Street, Ogden, Utah 84401; or by fax to 801-625-5277; or by email to: appeals-intermtn-regional-office@fs.fed.us. Emailed appeals must be submitted in rich text (rtf), Word (doc) or portable document format (pdf) and must include the project name in the subject line. Appeals may also be hand delivered to the above address, during regular business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

For additional information concerning our decision or the Forest Service appeal process, please contact us at either the Forest Service Ferron/Price District Office at 115 West Canyon Road, P.O. Box 310, Ferron, Utah 84523, 435-384-2372 or the BLM Price Field Office, 125 South 600 West, Price, Utah 84501, (435) 636-3600

MESIA NYMAN

Ferron/Price District Ranger

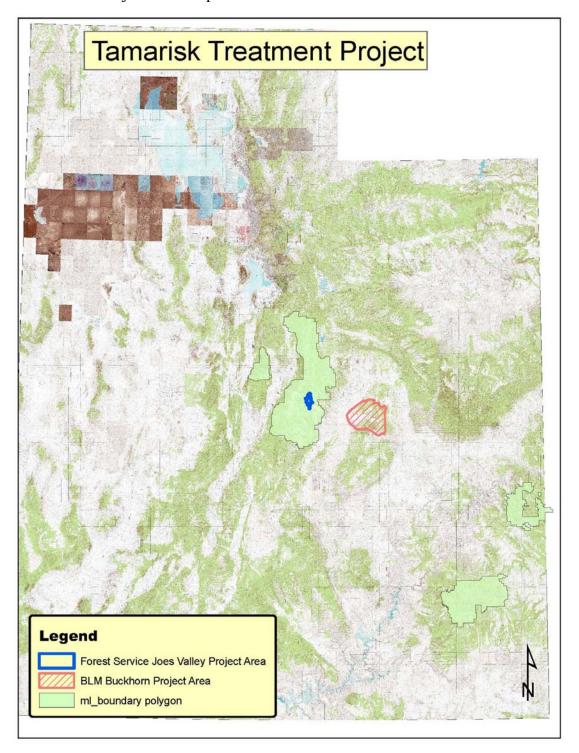
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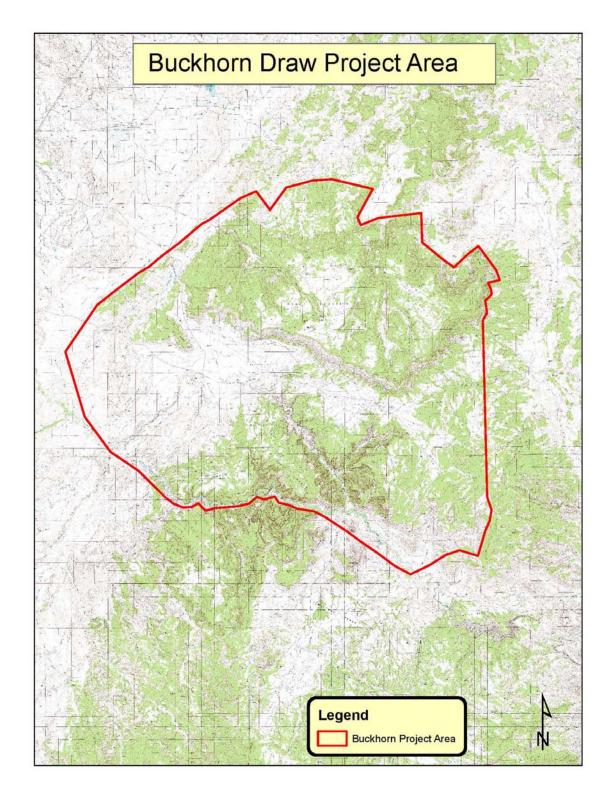
Price Field Office Manager

DATE

Attachment 1 – Project Area Map



Attachment 2 Bureau of Land Management Price Field Office Buckhorn Draw



Attachment 3

