

**DECISION MEMO**  
**China Camp Sage Grouse Habitat**  
**Improvement and Fuels Reduction Project**  
**USDA, Forest Service**  
**Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest**  
**Bridgeport Ranger District**  
**Mineral County, Nevada**

**PURPOSE AND NEED**

The purpose of this project is to restore and enhance suitable sage grouse nesting and brood-rearing habitat and reduce the fuel load within the pinyon pine stands surrounding these habitats. This would be accomplished through several different treatments, including; removing and thinning expanding pinyon pine within sage grouse nesting and brood-rearing habitats, restoring potential brood-rearing habitat by reducing the expansion of pinyon pine, wild rose, and rabbitbrush within the meadow system present in the project area.

Pinyon pine found within the project area is categorized in Phases I and II, which does provide for an understory of shrubs and grasses. These areas are expanding into occupied sage grouse habitat and are located approximately one mile from documented, active, lek sites. The sagebrush surrounding these areas provides suitable nesting and brood-rearing habitat for sage grouse.

This project is recommended by the Mt. Grant Population Management Unit (PMU) through the Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Plan for Nevada and Eastern California (June 2004). Expansion of pinyon pine was listed as a risk to sage grouse because of the loss of suitable and potential nesting and brood-rearing habitat for sage grouse. This area currently has two active leks and provides suitable nesting cover for sage grouse.

**LOCATION**

The proposal is located in the China Camp area south of Forest Service Road 028 (T 6N. R 27E. Sections 17, 19, 20, 29, and 30).

**DECISION**

It is my decision to approve and proceed with the China Camp Sage Grouse Habitat Improvement and Fuels Reduction Project, approximately 700 acres.

**Pinyon Pine Removal**

Thinning of pinyon pine within approximately 595 acres of the project area would reduce the expansion of pinyon within sage grouse nesting and brood-rearing habitat. This would also decrease the fuel loading and the potential for large wildland fire within this area. Thinning would be conducted using mechanical or hand-thinning methods, and pile burning of the removed material would occur in designated burn piles.

Complete removal of pinyon pine would occur in two areas within the project area. Approximately 70 acres along stream corridors and approximately 10 acres around a spring source would be treated with complete removal. The removal of this pinyon pine in the stream corridors would allow for the restoration of corridors between nesting habitat and brood-rearing habitat within the meadow system found in the project area. Removal of pinyon pine around spring sources would increase the water availability to the meadow system and surrounding areas. Methods for removal of pinyon pine within these areas will include a combination of mechanical/hand removal and prescribed fire.

No new roads will be constructed, as there are enough roads within the project area to provide access for hand crews.

### Meadow Restoration

The meadow system present within the project area totals approximately 30 acres. To reduce the presence and expansion of pinyon pine and sagebrush into the meadow system, a combination of mechanical treatment and prescribed fire would occur in this area.

In addition, within the 30 acre meadow system, wild rose expansion will be treated using a combination of mechanical treatment and prescribed fire.

No new roads will be constructed, as there are enough roads within the project area to provide access for hand crews.

### Project Design Features

The following project design features will be implemented to minimize potential effects to cultural resources:

- Post treatment monitoring will be conducted by the project archaeologist in the project area.
- Pre and post treatment photo points will be established and photos taken during the mitigation procedures.

## **TRIBAL CONSULTATION**

Tribal consultation has been completed for this project. The China Camp Sage Grouse Habitat Improvement and Fuels Reduction Project has been discussed with several nearby Tribes in the last year. Meetings with the Yerington Paiute Tribe on 7/12/2007, the Washoe Tribe on 4/21/2008, and the Tuolumne Me-Wuk on 7/18/2008 yielded no concerns with this project. No formal discussions have been held with the Bridgeport Indian Colony because the California Bureau of Indian Affairs dissolved their Tribal Council.

This area is less than 1 percent of the pinyon pine which is available for pinyon nut gathering on the Bridgeport Ranger District. Habitat for wildlife species such as mule deer, sage grouse and neo-tropical migratory birds will be maintained throughout this project, as the project targets only pinyon trees that have invaded into the area with lack of disturbance (Wildlife Specialist Report, Sept. 2008). The area will still provide nesting habitat for neo-tropical migratory birds. Sagebrush species will not be treated, allowing for the continuation of foraging, nesting and cover habitats for mule deer and sage grouse.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

A Scoping Document/Notice of Proposed Action was sent to all individuals and government agencies on the District mailing list on June 6, 2008.

No comments were received during the comment period. The project has been listed in the quarterly Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions since the third quarter 2008.

The project was discussed during the annual operating instruction meeting with the affected permittee who has the term grazing permit on the allotment where the project is located. The permittee also participated in a field trip on July 30, 2007 with agency personnel.

## **FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS**

This project is tiered to the Record of Decision for the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Toiyabe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. There are no known threatened, endangered, or sensitive plant or animal species in the area that would be adversely affected by this

proposal (see BE located in the project file), nor are there any wetlands or floodplains that would be negatively affected. This proposal is in compliance with the National Clean Water and Clean Air Acts. In addition, this project complies with Executive Order 13186 because the analysis meets agency obligations as defined under the January 16, 2001, Memorandum of Understanding between the Forest Service and Fish and Wildlife Service designed to complement Executive Order 13186 (see Migratory Bird Specialist Report in the project file). Local level planning and collaboration involved individuals that had knowledge and interest in the resources.

### **REASONS FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THIS ACTION**

It is also my decision that this project is categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Impact Statement or an Environmental Assessment for the following reasons:

- A. **The proposed action falls within Section 31.2(6) of the Forest Service Environmental Policy and Procedures Handbook (FSH 1909.15) as amended 07/06/2004:**  
*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. The analysis in this project file and previous experience with these types of activities indicate that there would be no adverse effects upon extraordinary circumstances. The mere presence of one or more of these resource conditions does not preclude use of a categorical exclusion. It is the degree of the potential effect of a proposed action on these resource conditions that determines whether extraordinary circumstances exist. These extraordinary circumstances include:
1. Steep slopes or highly erosive soils.  
*None of these exist in the project area.*
  2. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species.  
*A Biological Evaluation was prepared. According to the BE, this project will have minimal, if any, effect on sensitive plant or animal species and will not lead to a trend towards federal listing for any sensitive species. There are no Threatened or Endangered species or their habitat in the project area.*
  3. Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.  
*The analysis in this project file shows that the proposed action will not adversely affect floodplains or wetlands. There are no municipal watersheds within the project area.*
  4. Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or National Recreation Areas.  
*None of these exist in the project area.*

5. Inventoried Roadless Areas.  
*None of these exist in the project area. No road building or intensive mechanical activity will occur.*
6. Research Natural Areas.  
*None of these exist in the project area.*
7. Native American religious or cultural sites, archeological sites, or historical properties.  
*An Archeological Survey was conducted and is on file at the District Office. No significant impacts will occur to cultural resources as a result of the project. Tribal consultation has been conducted and Native American voiced no concerns.*

### **ADMINISTRATIVE APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES**

This decision is not subject to administrative appeal.

### **IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

This project may be implemented immediately upon publication of the legal notice in Reno Gazette Journal. For further information regarding this proposal please contact Annamaria Echeverria, District Fuels Specialist, at (760)-932-5803.

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**CHERYL F. PROBERT**  
**District Ranger**  
**Bridgeport Ranger District**

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**DATE**

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