

Final Decision Notice/Finding of No Significant Impact for the Taylor Park Vegetation Management Project

USDA Forest Service
Gunnison Ranger District
Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests
Gunnison County, Colorado

Introduction

The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) has recently formally adopted a set of core values that we believe are representative of who we are, or more pointedly perhaps, who we aspire to be. Long we have been guided by our motto, *caring for the land and serving people* and our Mission, to *sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations*. Yet, though our values were embedded in these guideposts they were not explicitly defined in a way that allowed us and the public to assess more discretely how we measured up to the ideals we espouse as an agency. These values: *service, interdependence, conservation, diversity and safety* are intended to shape how we think and act. I introduce these values to the reader to allow, through development of this project and through its implementation, measurement of not only the project's success by its outcomes, but also our level of achievement in realizing our goal of being a values-based, purpose-driven, and relationship-focused organization, and in doing so, living up to the enormous honor and responsibility inherent to public land management.

This Decision Notice documents my decision and rationale for approving the proposed project on the Gunnison Ranger District (the District), Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests (GMUG). The project area is the greater Taylor Park basin. My decision is based on and supported by the February 2020 *Taylor Park Vegetation Management Environmental Assessment* (EA).

Background

Throughout roughly the past 30 years, Colorado national forests have endured significant impacts from a variety of insect and pathogen outbreaks. In many pointed cases across the state, spruce beetles and mountain pine beetles have demonstrated that, under the right conditions and in sufficient numbers, they can fundamentally transform the structure, composition and function of large forests, across millions of acres, in a relatively short amount of time. Casual observers have witnessed the widespread mortality evident in the lodgepole forests along the Interstate 70 corridor and U.S. Highway 40, the incredible die-off of spruce forests in southern Colorado, and the extensive loss of aspen throughout the state, which demonstrate how rapidly environments can change under the right conditions.

These changes alter how Americans will experience and benefit from Colorado national forests for multiple generations. Further, these changes usher in questions and concerns about what steps public managers are taking to ensure that the health and productivity of our national forests are sustained. They provide forest managers, forest stakeholders, and the general public an incentive and an opportunity to step back and consider the future together, acknowledging that the change

we have experienced together across many of Colorado’s national forests has been profound and ultimately not something we may have chosen together if given the opportunity. It is worth noting that these changes are inherently natural, and may have been inevitable due to evolving conditions, past practices, and a variety of other factors. However, the future of our remaining healthy forests is very much something we can shape.

Through this analysis, the future forest was envisioned working together, in shared understanding, designed to engage the larger community in planning, but also, as importantly, through implementation and beyond. The history of forest management planning, in particular as it is governed by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), has often been one of conflict, noting there is inherent tension built into the multiple-use management system. NEPA processes, especially those related to timber management, have long been a source of division amongst the public and, candidly, internally amongst USFS staff. Forestry or as the dictionary defines it: *the science or practice of planting, managing, and caring for forests*, involves cutting, removing, and marketing trees. Though forestry has long been a proven mechanism for enhancing and maintaining forests as forests, a positive driver for economic health for communities across the country and here in western Colorado, as well as a benefactor to public lands, ecologically (if practiced sensibly) the practice remains difficult for people to accept, because the process of logging is disruptive, scenically intrusive, and difficult to judge for effectiveness, noting the full benefits of such actions often do not present visibly for a generation or more. Still, forestry remains one of the most impressive tools land managers exercise to ensure the benefits national forests provide—such as clean air, soil and water; abundant habitats for wildlife; and opportunities for recreation—persist.

Thus, acknowledging the natural concern many people who are not foresters maintain toward forest management, the public process that guided this decision was designed to generate trust, accountability, and shared stewardship between the USFS and both a supportive and skeptical public. Further, the collaborative process that governed this effort was in direct response to the community’s request to collaborate. My definition of collaboration is *creating something together you could not have created on your own*. This decision is exactly that, a representation of pioneering ideas and addressed concerns that generated a product the USFS would have not likely advanced on its own.

Additionally, the adoption of an adaptive management approach that engages both citizen science as well as the impressive resources at Western Colorado University’s (WCU) Center for Public Lands and Masters in Environmental Management and Ecology programs allows the timber industry and environmentalists, homeowners, businesses, wildlife advocates and recreation enthusiasts to actively participate in helping the USFS accomplish our stated objectives, while also designing room for real-time improvements through the likely 10 to 20 years of implementation.

Lastly, the decision as follows is rooted in our best scientific understanding and leverages traditional approaches to forestry while also stepping out and embracing innovative ways of managing forests that only years ago were fairly unimaginable both internally and in the wider public mind. It is designed to achieve outcomes that strengthen scientific understanding, grow support for forestry as an acceptable tool for management, bring Americans closer to the action, and involves them more fully in the stewardship of their public lands. Ultimately, the most important result from this work is delivering on the purpose and need for the effort, namely: a

healthier and more resilient forest, and vibrant and sustainable communities and economies that depend on it.

Need and Purpose for Action

The NEPA requires disclosure of the purpose and need for action for my decision. Thus, in relation to issues described broadly above and in the face of present stressors such as abundant populations of mountain pine beetle, spruce beetle, dwarf mistletoe among other insects and pathogens, I find there is a need to adaptively manage forest vegetation through sustainable forestry, prescribed fire, and using other non-commercial, mechanized, and hand treatment methods.

The purpose of this project is to increase the forest's ability to respond to multiple and interactive stressors including but not limited to: climate change; drought; insect attack; or disease while promoting community and visitor safety through reducing fuel loading in the wildland-urban interface and surrounding areas. The secondary purpose of this project is to provide wood products for the local economy that relies on wood fiber harvested sustainably from public lands. The expected long-term outcomes of this project are improved forest health and resiliency to environmental stressors; minimized hazardous fuel loading, decreased fire severity and potential in the wildland-urban interface and surrounding areas; and increased benefits to local economies dependent on the presence of the National Forest System lands of the Gunnison Ranger District.

To enhance efficiency and leverage management tools authorized by Congress designed specifically to address the issues facing the Taylor Park basin, this project was developed under the authority of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (P.L. 108-148). It is eligible as an authorized project under this law because it is located within the area designated as experiencing or at risk of experiencing insect and disease infestations on the map proposed by the Governor of Colorado and developed collaboratively with interested members of the public.

The project will implement management direction identified in the Forest Plan, by responding to goals and objectives, and would move the planning area toward desired conditions (III-1 through III-5). Specifically, the Forest Plan goal for vegetation is to “manage vegetation in a manner to provide and maintain a healthy and vigorous ecosystem resistant to insects, diseases and other natural and human causes.” The EA documents the analysis of Alternative 1, Alternative 2, and a no-action alternative.

Decision and Rationale for the Decision

Based upon my review of all alternatives, and after extensive dialogue with engaged members of the public and organized communities of interest, I have decided to implement Alternative 2 as described in the EA with the specific exclusion of the Contingency Treatment Areas (CTAs) and an update to the watershed management objective's yellow-light trigger.

Regarding the CTAs exclusion, as part of the pre-decisional administrative review process, commonly known as the objection process, it was brought forward by individual objectors that the analysis supporting the inclusion of the CTAs was not sufficient to satisfy requirements under NEPA. As part of the administrative review process a team of outside USFS experts reviewed the objectors' position and ultimately agreed. The administrative review team found that the analysis of the CTAs was not adequate and recommended clarifications and additional analysis would be needed to proceed with this component of Alternative 2. This finding, though unfortunate was not improbable as the CTAs were a new concept that was inspired by the Spruce

Beetle Epidemic and Aspen Decline Management Response (SBEADMR) project. The idea was to provide for better adaptability in conjunction with the adaptive implementation process to potential changed conditions that could occur during the life of the project, such as: beetle outbreaks, wildfire, and windthrow events. Innovative strategies like the CTA concept that create options for the USFS to apply discretion at scale inevitably invite skepticism and concern from social corners that are naturally skeptical of USFS intent especially as it relates to timber harvest. Yet, this scrutiny is welcome, the administrative review process is designed to invite criticism of USFS decisions, and it is my role to hear these concerns and address them if possible, in a way that lives up to the values discussed at the beginning of this document. Thus, through negotiations with the objectors, it was agreed that the removal of the CTAs would strengthen the project and allow it to proceed without impediment from additional analysis or post-decisional litigation.

For the purposes of implementation and for clarity, my exclusion of the CTAs, as described on pages 28, 29 (Table 5), 32 (Figure 9), 33 (Tables 8 and 9), and 53 of the EA, effectively limits treatments approved through this decision to the anticipated treatment polygons (17,714 acres) and hazard tree removal (2,229 acres)¹ as described in Alternative 2 and displayed in the [Taylor Park Vegetation Management Final Decision Map](#) (Decision Map) on the [project webpage](#) (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=53662>).

Although treatment areas are mapped with our best available data, there are nonetheless discrepancies and errors in the existing data sets. During implementation, actual treatment boundaries may vary and include areas adjacent to approved mapped treatment areas to help ensure that the purpose and need of project is achieved. Areas beyond these discrepancies (e.g. formerly part of the CTAs) would require separate, future, NEPA analysis.

Alternative 2 was generated from comments presented during the preliminary environmental analysis comment period, through meetings with the Taylor Park Adaptive Management Group (AMG) and interested stakeholders, and in collaboration with the Science Team. This alternative will practice sustainable forestry to improve forest health using:

- Commercial harvest means, or the sale of timber to private industry or stewardship partner through timber contract or stewardship agreement;
- Non-commercial means such as mechanized treatment actions (e.g., mulching, hand felling and piling) on parts of the forest that are not capable of generating a commercial output;
- Prescribed fire treatments as necessitated by site-specific conditions to reduce fuels in wildland-urban interface areas or to allow natural fire processes to affect landscape; and
- Adaptive implementation to facilitate use of the correct treatment based upon current vegetation conditions. The EA provides a matrix of potential treatments that could be applied once treatment-specific resource surveys have been completed. This flexibility allows the Forest Service to be more responsive to rapidly changing forest conditions if and when they occur. Science provided through the Science Team allows real-time monitoring to facilitate understanding and drive changes to the project, when and where needed.

¹ Mapping errors of hazard tree removal polygons were identified through the administrative review process. Correction of these errors reduced the acreage from 2,340 acres to 2,229 acres. This has been updated through the errata to the EA (Appendix 1 herein).

By selecting this alternative, we make it a priority to drastically reduce the miles of temporary roads needed for the project and extend the life of the project up to 20 years. The focus on temporary road reduction responds to widespread concern about managing temporary roads, particularly after implementation, in the face of growing motorized recreation pressure in the greater Taylor Park area. I am dedicated to ensuring that temporary roads are effectively decommissioned. By using partners and internal resources, these routes will be monitored and adjustments made if illegal uses occur.

The extended timeline reflects the significant amount of work that needs to be accomplished before contemplating implementation of the broad-scale prescribed fire actions considered in the EA, including the creation of fuel breaks, executing fuel reduction work, and establishing safe ignition areas. This work will be completed primarily through the commercial and non-commercial work analyzed in this decision. Additionally, in total, Alternative 2 includes a stand-replacing prescribed fire component on 4,180 acres and hazard tree removal on potentially 2,229 acres, increasing the project's actionable acres to 19,943.

When compared to the other alternatives, this alternative is more refined and detailed with its proposed actions. The activities included in the proposed action are listed in Tables 4 through 6 (with the exclusion of CTAs) and depicted in Figure 8 of the EA. Polygons approved through this decision for treatments are displayed in the [Decision Map](#) on the project webpage.

This alternative, including all project design features described in Appendix A and the implementation process with continued public engagement in Appendix E of the EA, will help to meet the desired future condition and goals as described in the Forest Plan under general direction including vegetation management, cultural resources, wildlife resources, forest products, water quality, fire, insects and disease, and soil resources (Forest Plan, 1991, pp. III-2 through III-5). As documented in the EA, this alternative meets requirements under Ecological Restoration and Resilience (Forest Service Manual 2020), the Healthy Forest Restoration Act, Western Bark Beetle Strategy, and the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy.

As noted above I am also updating the yellow-light trigger for the watershed management objective on page 22 (Table 1). Through the administrative review process, it was apparent that there was confusion between the yellow and red-light trigger's adaptive actions. Both actions included "discontinuing treatments" and could have the same result. To help add clarity, I am updating the yellow-light trigger from "discontinue or reduce acres of treatment in watershed so 25% threshold not exceeded" to "reduce acres of treatment in watershed so 25% threshold not exceeded".

Additionally, I have included an errata to the EA (Appendix 1 herein) that corrects editorial errors discovered through the administrative review effort.

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered two other alternatives in detail: the No-Action Alternative and Alternative 1. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in the EA on pages 25 through 33, and Tables 7 through 9.

No Action

Under the no-action alternative, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area. This alternative represents no attempt to actively respond to the issues I have

described above, the purpose and need for action, or concerns identified during public scoping for this project. The no-action alternative would not improve conditions in the project area or move them toward meeting Forest Plan management standards, guidelines, and desired conditions.

Alternative 1

Alternative 1 identified areas for the suite of treatments listed in Table 2 of the EA. The total acres of treatments (14,949 acres) would occur over a 10-year lifespan of the project. This alternative included implementation options where management actions would be determined after implementation phase surveys were conducted to account for changed or unanticipated conditions on the ground. Management options (or prescriptions) are listed in Appendix B of the EA. Alternative 1 did not include a prescribed fire component other than slash pile burning.

Public Involvement and Scoping

The proposed action was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions for the GMUG on April 17, 2018. The proposal was provided to the public and other agencies for comment during a scoping period from April 19, 2018 through May 21, 2018. Scoping is a process to determine the “scope” of the issues needing consideration and analysis as the EA is being developed. In addition, as part of the public involvement process, the District held a public meeting on June 21, 2018, in Tincup, Colorado, to present the proposed project to interested members of the public and solicit additional comments. In analyzing the submitted scoping responses, we identified 148 individual comments and grouped them into five key issues (see pages 11 through 13 of the EA).

One request frequently voiced at the public meeting was the desire to develop a Taylor Park-specific Adaptive Management Group (AMG) to amplify and formalize public engagement in development of the project. The AMG concept is borrowed from an ongoing landscape-scale project in the GMUG titled the *Spruce Beetle Epidemic and Aspen Decline Management Response* (SBEADMR). SBEADMR also works with an AMG, brought together a Science Team, and took a similar adaptive management approach in designing the project, so specific actions would be based on ground-level conditions acknowledging that conditions can change between project planning and implementation. Forest staff are managing both efforts to ensure consistent delivery of benefits to the American people, including but not limited to the use of best available scientific information.

In response to this public request, on December 10, 2018, the formation of the Taylor Park specific AMG and Science Team was initiated through a partnership with WCU. By leveraging the unique resources of both the faculty and students at WCU’s Center for Public Lands, the AMG’s formation was conducted in a professional, widely accessible, and efficient manner. The initial meeting in December 2018 provided information on what an AMG is and what the role of the AMG would be in the development of the project and through its implementation. During this meeting, the decision to have a 30-day public comment period on the initial project draft analysis was made.

The 30-day comment period for the preliminary analysis began April 5, 2019. Following the comment period, requests to modify elements of the proposed action resulted in three main areas of concern: temporary roads, watershed health, and economic viability of potential commercial timber sales.

On May 20, 2019, the District met with the preliminary AMG members, who were essentially self-selected as present, interested members of the public, to discuss comments and potential

actions or changes to the proposed action. At this meeting, it was determined that the GMUG would collaborate with the Science Team in developing a new alternative (see Project Alternative Development section of the EA). WCU faculty and USFS Rocky Mountain Region Research Station scientists comprise the team and they ensure that the project is informed by the best available scientific information and that students can benefit from participating in real world land management project development.

On July 24, 2019, we held a public field trip to provide learning opportunities about what proposed treatments could look like and what constitutes a potential treatment area. The trip visited examples of poor forest health conditions representative of the purpose and need for action, as well as examples of desired forest health conditions resulting from actions similar to those described in the preliminary analysis. This event was well attended, garnering 40 individual participants representing preliminary AMG members, local elected officials, the Science Team, GMUG staff, and members of the interested general public.

On September 6, 2019, the formal AMG signed a memorandum of understanding to formalize their participation in the development of the project and solidify their commitment to engage in implementation and monitoring through the life of the project as able. A testament to WCU's recruitment and facilitation effort, this group of dedicated citizen stewards represented a broad spectrum of the community and forest-related values and interests.

On December 4, 2019, the GMUG staff presented the completed Alternative 2 and preliminary analysis results. The AMG and the public expressed a desire for updated materials to be published for an informal review and feedback opportunity. As such, on December 6, draft updated narrative of the purpose and need, alternatives, maps, and Appendices A, B, and E were published.

On February 10, 2020, the AMG met again, prior to the formal pre-decisional administrative review (commonly known as the "objection process") to discuss feedback received from AMG members and the public with the intent to resolve any remaining issues.

All AMG meetings were, and will remain in the future, open to the public and were advised through local periodicals, USFS and WCU social media, and through direct outreach via both WCU's and the District's public contact list.

Ultimately, this project's public engagement process was designed to deepen willing participants' connection not only to their national forests but also, as importantly, to the management actions the USFS takes to sustain them for current and future generations.

Finding of No Significant Impact

As the responsible official, I am responsible for evaluating the effects of the project relative to the definition of significance established by the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (40 CFR 1508.13). To decide on significance, I reviewed and considered the EA and documentation included in the project record, and I conferred with an interdisciplinary team of resource specialists to better understand key issues identified through their expertise and via public comment. Based on these considerations, I have determined that the selected alternative as modified by my decision will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. As a result, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. My rationale for this finding is as follows, organized by subsection of the Council on Environmental Quality definition of significance cited above.

Context

For the proposed action and alternatives, the context of the environmental effects is based on the environmental analysis in the EA. The project area is limited in size (about 6 percent of planning area) and project activities are limited in duration. Effects will be restricted to NFS lands within the District. The selected alternative will not affect regional or national resources.

Intensity

Intensity is a measure of the severity, extent, or quantity of effects and is based on information from the effects analysis of the EA and the references in the project record. The effects of this project have been appropriately and thoroughly considered with an analysis that is responsive to concerns and issues raised by the public. The agency has taken a hard look at the environmental effects using relevant scientific information and knowledge of site-specific conditions gained from field visits. My finding of no significant impact is based on the context of the project and intensity of effects using the 10 factors identified in 40 CFR 1508.27(b).

1) Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on the balance the effects will be beneficial.

Both beneficial and adverse effects are disclosed in the EA. I have reviewed these findings and have determined that none of the actions will result in significant effects to natural or cultural resources. I considered both adverse and beneficial effects in reaching my conclusion; the beneficial effects were not used to offset or compensate the adverse effects in making the determination.

Beneficial effects of the chosen alternative include: increased resilience to stressors such as bark beetles, dwarf mistletoe and climate change; reduction of fuels to acceptable levels and meeting fire and fuels management objectives; providing wood products for the local economy; and removal of hazard trees from open public roads.

Adverse effects of the chosen alternative include temporary impacts to air, watershed, soils, wildlife, and scenery. These effects are minimized by use of the project design features (see EA, Appendix A) and best management practices. All anticipated adverse effects are short-term and limited in their geographic extent and the intensity of their impact to resources.

2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

After considering the analysis in the EA, I conclude that implementing the chosen alternative would not significantly affect public health and safety because of the limited scope and beneficial nature of the actions to the human environment. While proposed activities may cause short-term effects to air, soil, and water quality from prescribed fire, smoke, and road dust generated during prescribed fire operations and commercial timber hauling, these effects are anticipated to be short-term and limited in nature. Further, the proposed design features will mitigate any potential effects to public health or safety. The proposed activities will not result in significant adverse effects to public health or safety (EA, Appendix A).

3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

Upon review of the EA, I concluded that the selected alternative will not have a significant effect on any unique characteristics and ecologically critical areas in the District. Measures have been incorporated to protect cultural resources that exist in the project area. Project design features (EA, Appendix A) specify avoidance of wetlands in project vegetation treatments. While temporary roads for project implementation would affect a small amount of wetlands, these effects would be temporary. Project activities will not cause a permanent land use conversion. No other unique characteristics or ecologically critical areas as described in 40 CFR 1508.27(3)—park lands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers—exist in the area. The selected alternative will have no adverse effect on the District, sites, highways, structures or objects listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, and there is no loss of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. The selected alternative is also not likely to adversely affect any ecologically critical areas important to any Management Indicator Species, Migratory Bird Species nor any Threatened, Endangered or Sensitive Species found in the project area (EA, wildlife analysis, pages 98 through 110).

4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

The term “controversial” in this context refers to cases where substantial scientific dispute exists as to the size, nature, or effects of a major Federal action on some human environmental factor, rather than to public opposition of a proposed action or alternative. The proposed treatments are supported by science and research, and have been successfully demonstrated in the field. It is my judgment that although it is likely some members of the public disagree with various components of the project and have raised concerns related to the proposed action, there is no unusual or high degree of scientific controversy related to the effects of this project. The opposing opinions related to timber harvest, temporary roads, use of prescribed fire, and protection of wildlife and other natural resources were addressed during identification of issues, development of project design features, the analysis process, and are discussed in the EA and the project record at length. The project record demonstrates a thorough review of relevant scientific information.

5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The effects of the proposed activities, including prescribed fire and vegetation management are well-documented both by the Forest Service and by other scientific, commercial and agency research (see specialists’ analyses and project record). They are not highly uncertain, nor do the effects involve unique or unknown risks and are not significant.

6) The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

Similar vegetation treatments have been applied nationally, regionally, and across the GMUG with success for many years. The proposal is limited to the described treatments in the Gunnison Ranger District, and it is not expected to establish a precedent for future actions. It complies with the direction provided in the Forest Plan. Any future actions proposed outside considered actions in the EA and approved in this decision will be subject to future public involvement and a separate environmental analysis under the NEPA.

7) Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

The decision was evaluated in the context of other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions. This action does not individually, nor when considering other activities within the area affected, cumulatively result in significant effects. This determination is based on the discussion of cumulative effects in the EA. This determination is also based on the predicted effects from the level of overall change that would occur as a result of the proposed project activities. After reviewing the EA and project record, I am satisfied that none of the cumulative effects of my decision are significant.

8) The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant cultural or historical resources.

All proposed treatments have been reviewed by USFS heritage resource personnel who are qualified archeologists. The action will have no significant adverse effects to these resources because standard protection measures would eliminate or minimize direct and indirect effects. Standard protection measures will be carried out as set forth in the two Programmatic Agreements between the USDA Forest Service, the Colorado State Historic Preservation Officer, and Grand Mesa Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests Regarding the Implementation of Prescribed Broadcast Burning Program and Amendment Number Four for the Programmatic Agreement Regarding the Implementation of Bark Beetle Management Hazardous Fuel and Tree Reduction Programs and Management of Cultural Resource Programs Within Hazardous Tree Environments (USDA 2010, 2017). Additional project-specific consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office may be required at the implementation stage for specific treatments not covered by these agreements. Furthermore, this analysis is in conformance with regulations of the National Historic Preservation Act, 1966, as amended (1992: P.L.102-575); the National Environmental Policy Act (1969), and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 (16 USC 470 mm).

9) The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) list of threatened, endangered, and proposed species that may occur in the GMUG was reviewed to determine potential federally listed wildlife and plant species that may occur in the analysis area. The effects of the project on threatened and endangered species are summarized in the wildlife and USFS sensitive plants analysis sections of the EA, and detailed analysis is documented in the biological assessment. The determinations are listed in the following table:

Table 1. Species effects determination

Species	Determination of Effect
Canada Lynx	May affect, but is not likely to adversely affect
North American Wolverine	No effect
Northern Goshawk	May impact individual northern goshawks but is not likely to cause a trend toward Federal listing or a loss of viability
Boreal Owls and Flammulated Owls	May impact individual boreal owls and/or flammulated owls but is not likely to cause a trend toward Federal listing or a loss of viability
Olive-Sided Flycatcher	May impact individual olive-sided flycatchers but is not likely to cause a trend toward Federal listing or a loss of viability.

Species	Determination of Effect
Amphibians (Boreal Toad, Northern Leopard Frog)	May impact individual boreal toads and/or northern leopard frogs but is not likely to cause a trend to Federal listing or loss of viability
Bats (Spotted Bat, Hoary Bat and Fringed Myotis)	May impact individual spotted bat, hoary bat and/or fringed myotis but is not likely to cause a trend toward Federal listing or a loss of viability
American Marten	May impact individual American martens but is not likely to cause a trend toward ward listing or a loss of viability.
Pygmy Shrew	May impact individual pygmy shrews but is not likely to cause a trend toward Federal listing or a loss of viability.
Round Leaf Sundew Lesser Panicked Sedge, Chamisso's Cottongrass, Slender Cottongrass, Simple Bog Sedge, Dwarf Raspberry, Sageleaf Willow, Blueberry Willow, Narrowleaf Peatmoss, Baltic Sphagnum and Lesser Bladderwort	May impact individual populations of round leaf sundew, lesser panicked sedge, Chamisso's cottongrass, slender cottongrass, simple bog sedge, dwarf raspberry, sageleaf willow, blueberry willow, narrowleaf peatmoss, Baltic sphagnum and lesser bladderwort but is not likely to cause a trend toward Federal listing or a loss of viability.
Peculiar Moonwort and Colorado Tansy-aster	May impact individual populations of peculiar moonwort and Colorado tansy-aster but is not likely to cause a trend toward Federal listing or a loss of viability.
Park Milkvetch	May impact individual populations of lesser park milkvetch but is not likely to cause a trend toward Federal listing or a loss of viability.
Smooth Northern Rockcress and Ice Cold Buttercup	No Impact would occur to smooth norther rockcress and ice cold buttercup.

The USFS initiated consultation with the USFWS on November 20, 2018 (for Alternative 1) and December 12, 2019 (for Alternative 2) regarding the effect determinations under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (page 89, EA). On December 31, 2018 (Alternative 1) and January 22, 2020 (Alternative 2), the USFWS issued concurrence with our determination that the proposed actions would not likely adversely affect any species listed as endangered or threatened under the Federal Endangered Species Act.

Table C-1, Appendix C, and Table 35 in the EA, include federally listed and USFS Sensitive Species, or their habitats, that are located in the GMUG. No determinations were reached that found that any of these species were likely to trend toward Federal listing as threatened or endangered as a result of the actions.

10) Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. This decision is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Forest Plan. The project was developed taking into consideration the best available science and encouraged collaboration with the public.

Conclusion

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA and specialist reports, I have determined that the chosen alternative will not have significant effects 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.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

National Forest Management Act

This decision is consistent with the intent of the Forest Plan's long-term goals and objectives listed on pages 10 and 11 of the EA. The project was designed in conformance with the forest plan standards and incorporates appropriate forest plan guidelines for Management Areas 2A—Semi-Primitive Motorized Recreation (pp. III-100 to 104), 2B—Roaded Natural and Rural Recreation Opportunities (pp. III-105 to 109), 3A – Semi-primitive non-motorized recreation (pp. III-110 to 113), 4D—Aspen Management (pp. III-120 to 123), 6B—Livestock Grazing (pp. III-145 to 149), and 7A—Timber Management on Slopes Under 40 Percent (pp. III-150 to 154). All these management areas allow for vegetation management activities.

Administrative Review

This decision is a project-level decision and was subjected to a 30-day administrative review process (commonly called “objections”) where we received three timely objections. The objections were processed in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations at 36 CFR Part 218, parts A and C. Objections were reviewed by a team of specialists outside of the forest.

As part of the objection resolution meetings offered under 36 CFR 218.11 and in response to the findings of the team and the ARO, I removed the CTAs and added clarity to the watershed management objective yellow-light trigger adaptive action. These changes have been made and are described under the Decision and Rationale for the Decision section. Furthermore, as instructed by the ARO, additional clarity will be added to the record, in consultation with the USFWS, regarding the potential for proposed treatments to convert an additional 373 acres of lynx habitat to stand initiation structural stage (SISS). This is a result of an analysis error identified by objectors and will be addressed prior to implementation and documented in the project record.

Additional issues were raised by the objectors but upon review were determined to be adequately addressed in the EA or project record and thus no changes were warranted. Findings from the pre-decisional administrative review process are documented in the Objection Response letters in the project file and on the [project webpage](#).

Implementation

My decision is effective immediately. Implementation is estimated to begin during the summer of 2020 subsequent to completion of the record correction described in the Administrative Review section. For further information concerning the Taylor Park Vegetation Management Project, contact Pamela R. King at pamela.r.king@usda.gov.

Approved by:

MATTHEW M. McCOMBS
District Ranger
Gunnison Ranger District
Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests

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Appendix 1: Errata

Taylor Park Environmental Assessment Errata Sheet

April 30, 2020

This document reflects revisions made to the *Taylor Park Vegetation Management Environmental Assessment* or *Taylor Park EA* to correct editorial errors.

Text Corrections:

Under Road Decommissioning, page 25, change first sentence of first paragraph:

From: “All roads constructed for this project would be decommissioned within **five** years of the close of the associated sale.”

To: “All roads constructed for this project would be decommissioned within **three** years of the close of the associated sale.” [emphasis added for clarity].

Also, under Road Decommissioning, page 25, change second paragraph:

From: “Furthermore, existing roads used for the project implementation that are not identified as NFS roads would also be decommissioned within **five** years of the close of the associated commercial sale.”

To: “Furthermore, existing roads used for the project implementation that are not identified as NFS roads would also be decommissioned within **three** years of the close of the associated commercial sale.” [emphasis added for clarity]

In Air Quality analysis, page 64, third paragraph, change last sentence:

From: “Currently, Gunnison County is in attainment and compliance for the NAAQS criteria pollutants (<https://www.epa.gov/green-book>)”

To: “Currently, Gunnison County is in attainment and compliance for the NAAQS criteria pollutants (US EPA 2019a).”

In Air Quality analysis, page 64, fourth paragraph, second sentence, change citation at end of sentence:

From: “(US EPA 2019)”

To: “(US EPA 2019b).”

In Appendix E. Implementation Process and Public Engagement, p. 235 Change Step 2):

From: “Define contingency areas”

To: “Define potential treatments”

In References, pages 143-152:

Change: Gibson, K.E. 2004. Mountain Pine Beetle Management. Chapter 4.2. *Forest insect and disease management guide for the northern and central Rocky Mountains*. USDA Forest Service, Northern Region, State and Private Forestry. 16 pp.

To: Gibson, K., S. Kegely, and B. Bentz. 2009. Mountain pine beetle. *Forest insect & disease leaflet 2*. USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region, Portland, OR. 12 pp.

Change: Kegley, S. 2011. Douglas-fir Beetle Management. In F. H. Protection, *Forest Insect and Disease Identification and Management*. USDA Forest Service.

To: Furniss, M.M. and S.J. Kegely. 2014. Douglas-fir beetle. *Forest insect & disease leaflet 5*. USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region, Portland, OR. 12 pp.

Change: US EPA. 2019. EPA.gov. Descriptions of Class 1 Areas. Accessed online at <http://www.data.gov/>

To: US EPA. 2019b. EPA.gov. Descriptions of Class 1 Areas. Accessed online at <http://www.data.gov/>

Additions to References:

US EPA. 2019a. Colorado Non-Attainment Areas for Criteria Pollutants 2019. [addition from correction of website to citation for Air Quality analysis, page 64, third paragraph, last sentence correction]

Present in EA References, but appended to Westerling A.L. and B.P. Bryant. 2008 [i.e. needs to be separated and placed in correct location alphabetically]:

Archibald, R. 1979. Forest Fires and Pine Marten in the Yukon. Yukon Wildlife Branch, *Proceedings of Workshop "Wildlife and Wildfire."* Whitehorse, Yukon, Nov. 27-28, 1980. Pages 190 – 195.

Cited in text but missing from References:

Blakely, R.V., E.B. Webb, D.C. Kesler, R.B. Siegel, D. Corcoran, and M. Johnson. 2019. Bats in a changing landscape: linking occupancy and traits of a diverse montane bat community to fire regime. *Ecology and Evolution*, 2019,9 pp. 5324-5337.

Fall, P.L. 1997 Fire history and composition of the subalpine forest of western Colorado during the Holocene. *Journal of Biogeography* 24, pp 309-325.

Romme, W.H. 1982. Fire and landscape diversity in subalpine forests of Yellowstone National Park. *Ecological Monographs*: 52:2, February 1982, pp. 199-221

Schultz, C. & M. Nie. 2012. Decision-making triggers, adaptive management, and natural resources law and planning, *52 Natural Resources Journal*: pp 443 – 521

Correction to Hazard Tree Data and Text

In Alternative 2, page 29, Table 2, Acres for Hazard Tree Removal:

From: 2,340

To: 2,229

In Timber Recourses analysis, page 44, Table 14, Treatments of Alternative 2, Acres of Roadside Hazard Tree Felling:

From: 2,340

To: 2,229

In Scenery Resources analysis, page 136, Hazard Tree treatments paragraph:

From: “This treatment would cover 2,340 acres.”

To: “This Treatment would cover 2,229 acres.”